

A note on Chariot Burials found at *Sinauli* district *Baghpat* U.P.

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The Chariot Burials : Recently chariots were found by *S. K. Manjul*, Director of Institute of Archaeology A.S.I (Archaeological Survey of India), *Arvin Manjul*, Superintending Archaeologist, A.S.I and their team, during excavations at the site of *Sinauli, Baghpat* U.P. in 2018 (Fig. No. 01). This site was earlier excavated by *D. V. Sharma* and his team in the years 2003-04 & 2005-06, revealing a necropolis¹. The present excavations have yielded chariots buried with dead bodies, which gives totally new dimension to the associated culture and the old debate about use of horse in India. We will examine these points in the following pages:



Fig. No. 01: *S. K. Manjul* & *Arvin Manjul* with excavation team at *Sinauli, Baghpat* U.P. (Courtesy: Archaeological Survey of India)



Fig. No. 02: *S. K. Manjul* at the excavation site, *Sinauli, Distt. Baghpat U.P.* (Courtesy: Archaeological Survey of India)

The excavations at *Sinauli* has revealed four legged, lid covered coffins containing the bodies (Fig. No. 03). The lids of the coffins are profusely carved and covered with thin plate of copper (*patra*). Once such coffin is visible in the above figure on the upper left side. The coffin is laid roughly along west-east axis.



Fig. No. 03: Legged Coffin with carvings on the lid (Courtesy: Archaeological Survey of India)

Towards the feet of the body, two chariots were also buried. Its wheels are solid and studded with triangular pieces of copper (Fig: 04). The light frame of the carriage has a curved chassis made of rounded wood. In addition to the chassis being fixed to the covering of axel, there was a similar 'U' shaped wooden support for the carriage as shown in the figure above. A long shaft was fixed to the chassis. Joint has been covered with thin copper plate which is visible from the side in the figure (Fig. No. 04 & 05). The long shaft must have been attached to a transverse *yoke*. The upper end of the front side of the carriage helped the driver in remaining stable while the chariot was being driven. It appears that this chariot carried two persons.



Fig. No. 04: Chariot (Courtesy: Archaeological Survey of India)



Fig. No. 05: Closure view of chariot (Courtesy: Archaeological Survey of India)



Fig. No. 06: Another view of Chariot found in the burial at *Sinauli*, Distt. *Baghpat* U.P.



Fig. No. 07: Closure view of the lid of coffin (Courtesy: Archaeological Survey of India)



Fig. No. 08: Overview of the grave with double chariot burial (Courtesy: Archaeological Survey of India)



Fig. No. 09: Closure view of the Wheel of the Chariot (Courtesy: Archaeological Survey of India)



Fig. No. 10: In situ Carriage pole in another grave (Courtesy: Archaeological Survey of India)

Chariots in Sunga Sculptures : In a panel from *Bharhut* depicting *Muga Pakkha Jataka* dated 2nd century B.C., one can see a chariot driven by four horses on the lower left side and a grave digger on the lower right side (Fig. No. 11). According to this *Jataka* story, *Buddha* was once born in the house of a King (on the upper right side of the panel) after much persuasion by *Indra*. He was named *Temiya*. When he grew up, he was not interested in becoming a king so the king ordered him to be killed and buried. The charioteer *Sunanda* took him to the cemetery and started digging the grave (on the lower left side of the panel). On this *Temiya* explained to him that, he didn't want to become a king therefore he didn't take interest in the affairs of the kingdom. On hearing this, the charioteer became his disciple. He took *Temiya* to the king and queen. They also became his disciples and later on, he started preaching to the

people and had many disciples (on the upper left side of the panel). The details of construction are visible on the chariot shown in the following panel.



Fig. No. 11: *Muga Pakkha Jataka* carved on a panel at *Bharhut* district *Satna* M.P.

One similar chariot with spoked wheel can be seen in a panel from *Sanchi* (Fig. No. 12). It is dated to 1st-2nd century B.C.



Fig. No. 12: Chariot shown in a panel at Sanchi district Raisen M.P.

The Pottery found in Burials : The pottery recovered from *Sinauli* belongs to OCP culture. No Harappan pottery or any other pottery except OCP was found from the graveyard of *Sinauli*. The grave in question belongs to the OCP people who were late contemporaries of Harappans. The chariot is light and was made for carrying two persons. The pottery which was recovered from this place is similar to the OCP potteries which were found from *Barabanki*, *Faizabad*, *Sultanpur* axis in the east to *Bara*, *Kalibangan* axis in the west. The similarity between the potteries from east to west has been discussed in details by the author in the article 'Archaeological Gazetteer of *Aligarh* & *Hathras* Districts with special reference to OCP & Other Proto-Historic Cultures of Indo-Gangetic Plains'². The repertoire of common shapes from *Faizabad* to *Bara* is given in the following figure³ (Fig. No. 13-A). The typical Harappan pottery shapes like vessels with bulging bodies and stem bases, cylindrical jars, jars with S-profile, all with beaded & beaked lips, dish on stands with ledged rims, basins & Indus Goblet, tumblers and cups are not to be found among purely OCP sites which are found independently from mature Harappan sites even in western U.P. Although at some sites, we find the predominantly OCP

shapes mixed with mature Harappan pottery shapes. The area beyond the *Ganga-Yamuna* doab doesn't yield these (mature Harappan) shapes at all⁴ (Fig. no. 13-B).

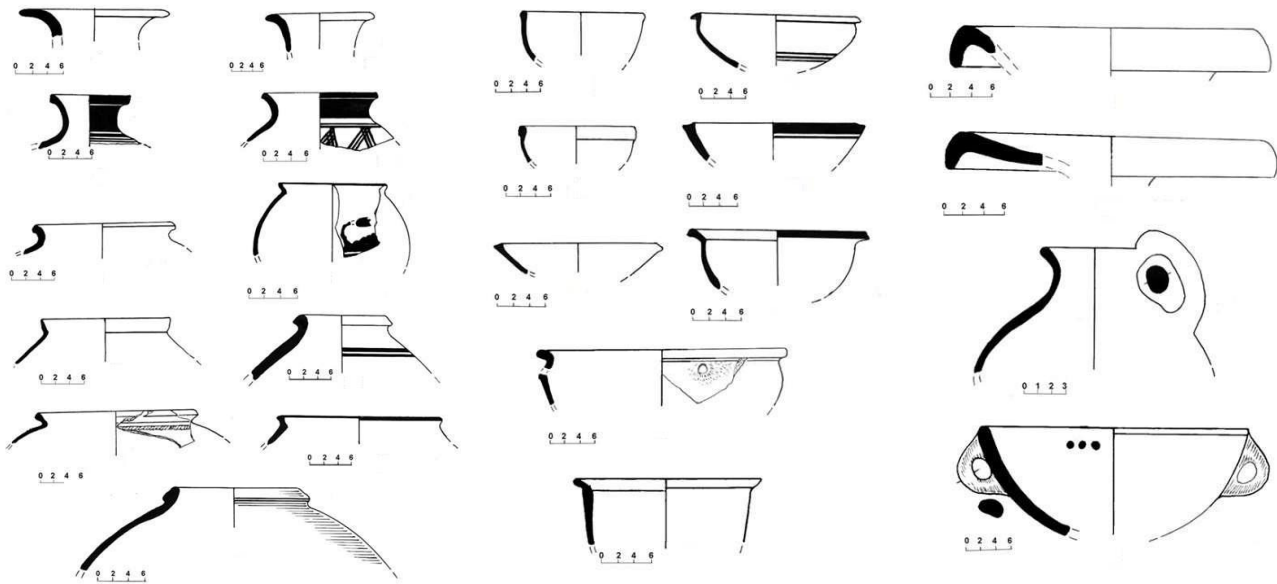


Fig. No. 13-A: OCP potteries

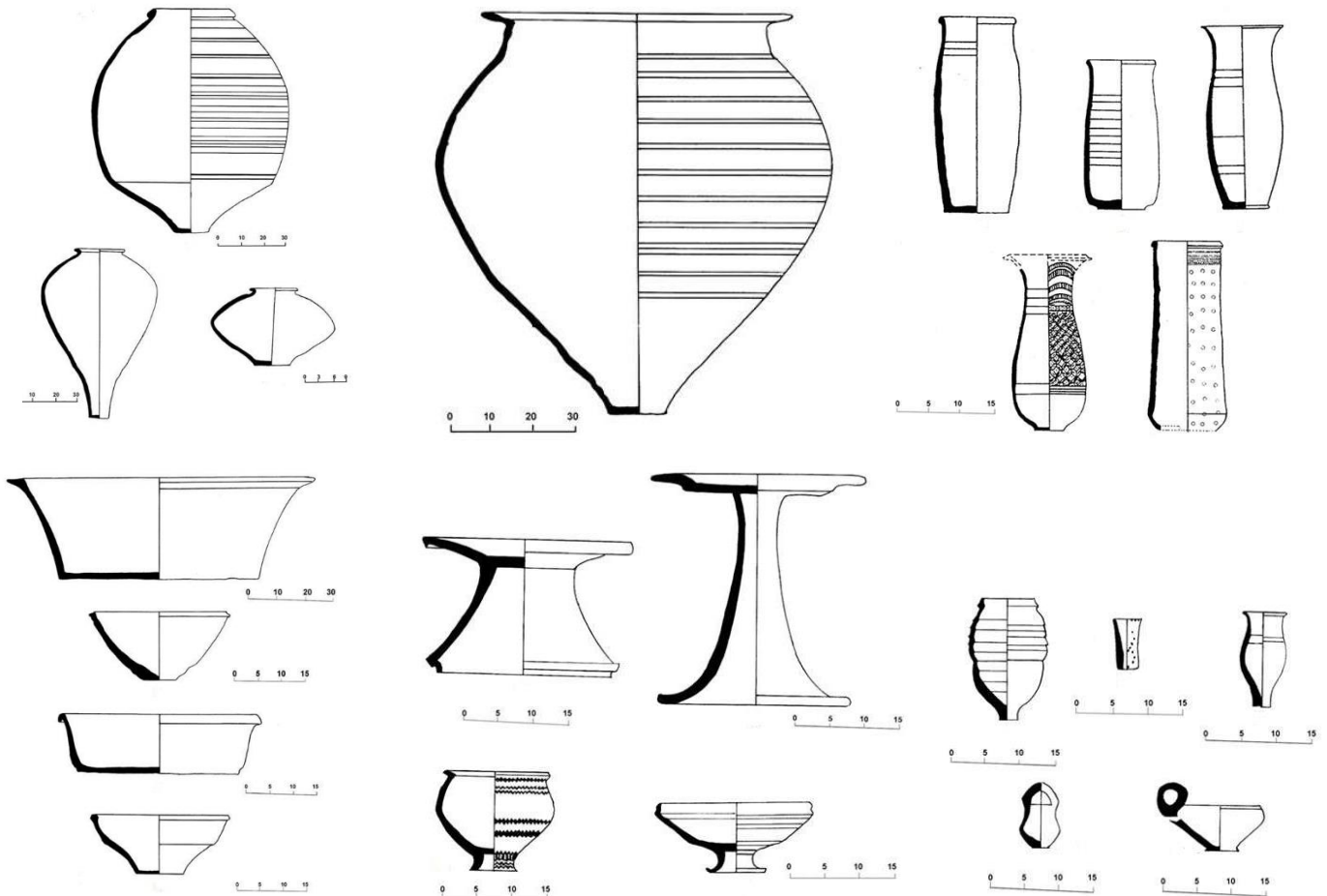


Fig. 13-B: Mature Harappan Potteries

The paintings⁵, the incised designs⁶, applique designs⁷ and rustication on the potteries surprisingly remain the same from east to west and from *Shivalikas* to *Yamuna*. In the east, OCP culture rubs shoulders with corded-ware tradition and in the west, it rubs shoulders with Harappans. It appears that in the hey days of Harappans, the OCP area was encroached upon by Harappan people that-is-why in Punjab, Haryana & Ganga-Yamuna doab, one finds Harappan antiquities mixed with OCP antiquities. The date for OCP sites come mostly from Punjab, Haryana, North Rajasthan and western U.P. They fall between 4th millennium B.C. to the early 2nd millennium B.C.⁸. Seeing the antiquity of sites in eastern U.P. which have yielded the dates for Neolithic going back to 9th millennium B.C. and looking at the antiquities found there, it is obvious that the pottery tradition in the eastern India is totally different from Harappans and OCP areas. One doesn't see the encroachment of the corded-ware tradition of east coming to the west. Similarly the pre Harappan potteries like those from *Qili-gul-mohammed/Mehrgarh*, *Haqra* and *Kotdiji* are not to be found in western areas of the OCP zone. Only the mature Harappans encroach upon the western part of this culture. From this, it is very obvious that OCP had a local beginning and will go back to 9th-10th millennium B.C., had it not been so this whole area would have yielded the Neolithic/ early Chalcolithic potteries from east (corded-ware tradition) or from west (*Qili-gul-mohammed/Mehrgarh*) mentioned above.

Copper Hoard Weapons associated with OCP : The highest number of copper hoard weapons were found from OCP area (Fig. No. 14), therefore, it is very obvious that these north Indians were manufacturers and users of these weapons.

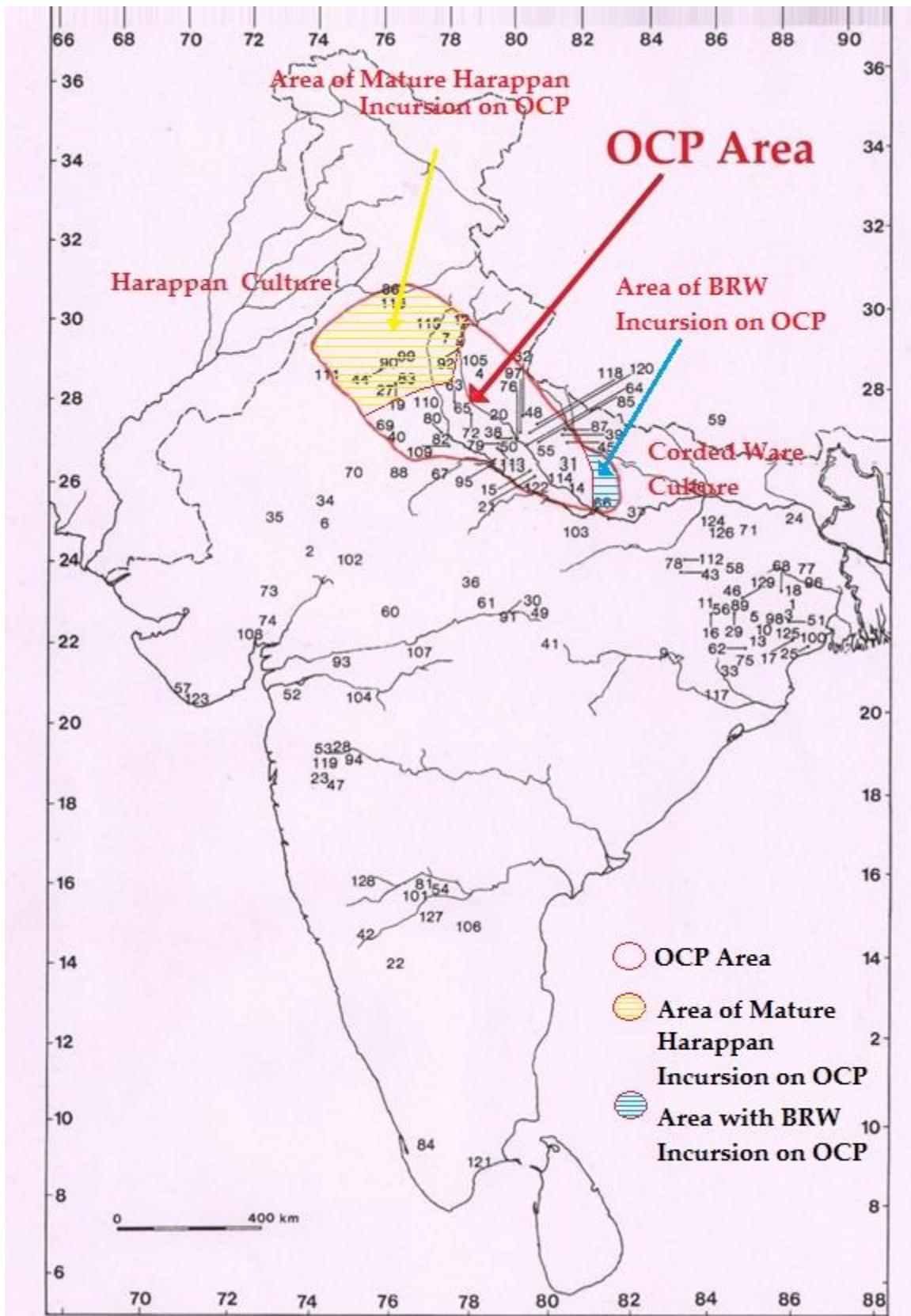


Fig. No. 14: Map showing the area of OCP from Faizabad to Bara

The antennae sword found in these burials (*Sinauli*) and other copper artefacts found from OCP sites in an archaeological context like *Saipai*, district *Etawah* U.P. and without archaeological context have proved that these weapons belonged to OCP people. The inspiration for these Harpoons came from Mesolithic harpoons shown in one of the rock paintings of *Chitrakoot*⁹ (Fig. No. 15).



Fig. No. 15: Mesolithic hunter wielding harpoon shown in rock painting of *Matiyahi*, *Chitrakoot* U.P.

These harpoons were later on replicated by the people belonging to Chalcolithic phase of OCP like the harpoons shown in figure^{10, 11} (Fig. No. 16 & 17).



Fig. No. 16: Harpoon from *Ahichhatra*



Fig. No. 17: Harpoon from *Bijnor* kept at Lucknow museum

Some of the rock paintings of *Chitrakoot* area show people wielding harpoons and copper Celts used by people belonging to OCP culture. The figure nos. 18-20 show some foot soldiers and horse riders wielding harpoons. This clearly indicates that these horse riders and foot soldiers can be associated with the people of OCP culture. The horse riders wielding harpoons indicate that OCP people were using horse for their war machineries.



Fig. No. 18: Rock painting from *Kabri Patthar* district *Chitrakoot* U.P.



Fig. No. 19: Rock painting from Geruhai district Chitrakoot U.P.



Fig. No. 20: Rock painting from Geruhai Pahad district Chitrakoot U.P.

This must have happened during the last phase of OCP because the horses were used in war machinery only after 2000 B.C. in Middle East. In some of the rock paintings, the copper hoard axes have also been drawn (Fig. No. 21-24).



Fig. No. 21: Battle axe from *Bedhak Chauri* district *Chitrakoot* U.P.



Fig. No. 22: Shouldered axe kept in *Kailash Deep Museum*
Meerut, U.P.



Fig. No. 23: OCP axe kept in *Lucknow Museum*
Lucknow, U.P.



Fig. No. 24: Shouldered axe from *Hastinapur* district *Meerut* U.P.

The Source of Horses for OCP culture: The people have wrongly assumed that the horse in India came from Central Asia. The western part of South Asia might have received the horses from Central Asia. In fact pre-historic sites of Afghanistan give the evidences of horse in Neolithic period. North India is far away from Afghanistan and Central Asia. The source which is very near North India is Tibet. Tibet has indigenous breeds of *Pony*. *Riwoche* pony is the ancient breed of horse belonging to Tibet. The shortest path from Tibet to India was crossing the *Himalayas* through the gorges of Trans-Himalayan Rivers and different passes. This route is roughly 150 kilometers long. The Himalayan tribe were a link between the Tibet and Gangetic plains. There was a long standing trade between the two areas. The discovery of ingots shaped like anthropomorphic figures at *Bankot* Uttrakhand India¹² and district *Mustang* Nepal¹³ proves that there was a regular trade between northern India and Himalayan/ Trans-Himalayan region for copper, copper artefacts and other goods. The *Bhotiyas* of *Kumaon-Garhwal* carried on trade between Tibet and Himalayan areas/ plains before 1947. The modern day *Tamatas* of *Kumaon* and *Tamrakars* of Nepal are copper smiths of Himalayan region and are ethnic survivors of ancient copper smiths. Coming to literature, it is evident that the chariot makers were known as *Sutas* during *Mahabharata* time. Their profession was very important because we see *Karna*, the son of *Adhiratha* (who was the charioteer of *Dhritarashtra* of *Hastinapur*) rose to become the minor king under

Duryodhana. Later on, the *Sutas* took up the job of narrating *Itihas*, *Puranas* and *Narasansas* to the people. This is very obvious from the fact that *Sutaji* is the narrator of *Mahabharata* and *Puranas*.

Conclusion: The chariots found at *Sinauli* belong to OCP culture. It belongs to late phase of OCP (around 2000 B.C.). The OCP people were using the copper hoard battle axes, harpoons and antennae swords. It appears that they were importing copper and finished copper objects from all over India. Some of the rock paintings of *Chitrakoot* reveal that *Vindhyan* area, south of river *Yamuna* was invaded by copper hoard people. At that time, OCP people were using horses also for their war machinery. From these rock paintings, it is very clear that the OCP people were using these during the late phase of OCP. The find at *Sinauli* reinforces this conclusion because the chariots buried there are horse driven light chariots used in wars, sports and game. These chariots continued to be used by the local people as evident by *Sanchi* and *Bharhut* panels.

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