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Excavation at Birchhabili Tila, Sikri

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Sikri is situated on an extension of the upper Vindhyan ranges on the bank of a natural lake, which has now mostly dried up and under cultivation. The ridge is composed of red sandstone formations. Rock shelters with paintings exist on the periphery of the lake. Stone Age tools, Ochre Coloured Pottery and Painted Grey Ware have also been found here. The excavation carried out by the Agra Circle of the Archaeological Survey of India at Birchhabilli Tila in Sikri village has brought to light the remains of a Jaina temple and sculptures. The total period of occupation at the site is around 1000 years, beginning from the Post-Gupta period up to Mughal period. The excavation has revealed a hitherto unknown phase at Fatehpur Sikri. This paper discusses important finds from this excavation and their historical importance.

The archaeological potential of Fatehpur Sikri region is well established in previous work that have been carried out since the times of Edward W. Smith. The Archaeological Survey of India carried out the excavation at eight different sites at Fatehpur Sikri under a joint national project with the Aligarh Muslim University; mainly concentrated on the problems relatively to town planning under the Mughals. The Archaeological Survey of India during the final two field seasons of this project (IAR 1987-88 and 1988-89) excavated a site near Hada Mahal which revealed a cultural sequence from Ochre

Coloured Pottery and Painted Grey Ware (Plate 1) period to the Medieval times. The cultural sequence revealed by this excavation suggests that there was a continuous human habitation in this region since Protohistoric period. The existence of rock-shelters with Prehistoric paintings in villages Rasulpur, Patsal, Bandrauli, Sonauti and Madanpura on the periphery of the ancient lake indicate the presence of Prehistoric men in this area. The microliths have been reported during exploration in the vicinity of these rock-shelters. At Rasulpur, the Agra Circle also discovered microliths recently. These discoveries pushed back the antiquity of this region to the Mesolithic period.

TOPOGRAPHY

Sikri has been mentioned in the *Mahabharata* as Saik in connection with Sahadeva's southern campaigns on the eve of the Pandava's *Rajasuya yajna*. Lexicons define Saik as a region surrounded by water. This denotes its original topography which included several lakes, reservoirs and low lying areas, including the Keola-Dev lake in the north-west and Goverdhana and Asta-Sakhi Kundas (Radha-Kunda and others) in the north, covering the entire western and southern Braja-Ksetra and connecting it with the legend of Krishna lifting the Goverdhana, which denotes his water-management system to save the region from Ativrsti (excessive rainfall). Abundance of water and greenery supported large-scale agriculture and

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dairy farming that is why it was named 'Goverdhana' (the region where cows abounded). In fact, a few events of the *Mahabharata* were enacted in this region, on the banks of the Jamuna, which has been changing its course since ancient times. As of this reason, Painted Grey Ware sites are found here. Sikri is derived from this root Saik. The inscription on the sculpture of Jaina Saraswati dated in V.S.1067/1010 A.D. mentions the place as 'Sekrikyā', which is also a similar derivative. Babur, who visited it on the eve of the Khanwah battle in 1527 A.D. mentioned as Sikri in his *Memoirs* and the lake as 'ocean like'.

LOCAL TRADITIONS

Ethno-archaeology, traditions and customs of the region were carefully studied. The site is highly venerated among the Sikarwar Rajput clan of this region. They definitely come to this place for mundane ceremony of their newborn children. This tradition carries the antiquity in Sruti also. Bir-Chhabili is a corrupt form of the probable name attributed to their Goddess (Devi).

EXPLORATION

The Fatehpur Sikri region is full of sculptures datable to the 9th century A.D. These have been discovered during the course of scientific exploration at sites like Chichana, Nadbai, Chauma Shahpur, Imlaoda, Patsal, Churiyari, Sikri, Dura, Kagarol, Mathura and Bateshwar. The exploration has yielded enough archaeological material to establish that not only Jaina temples were erected in this region but a large number of Saiva, Vaisnava and Sakta temples were also built and patronized by the contemporary rulers, who professed the *Chakravartin* concept and provided ample opportunity and protection to the believers of all sects and religions. The divine theory of kingship and *Chakravartin* concept of Medieval Age inspired the rulers of this region for such activities. Toleration and co-existence was a way of life in Medieval India, as it is evident from the cluster of temples of different faiths, e.g., in Khajuraho under the Chandellas, Gwalior under the Tomars, Sikri under the Kachchhapagatas, Delhi under the Chauhanas.

The village Sikri has remains of three/four temple sites where architectural remains, sculptures and ancient

relics are found, scattered in large number. Sculptures discovered during exploration suggest the existence of Vaisnava, Saiva, Sakta and Jaina Temples at Sikri during 9th-11th centuries A.D. Before carrying out horizontal excavation at the site, the area within a radius of 25 km in and around Fatehpur Sikri was scientifically explored to ascertain settlement pattern, topography, water management system and archaeological remains. The villages such as Chauma Shahpur, Imlaoda, Chichana, Churiyari, Jainpura, Jotana, Dura, Kagarol and Kiraoli were systematically explored. Those villages yielded architectural remains of temples, sculptures and other antiquities datable between 2nd century A.D. and 11th century A.D. The settlement pattern of this region also indicated existence of Vaisnava, Saiva, Sakta and Jaina temples during this period. To ascertain results of exploration and to throw more light on settlement pattern and cultural sequence, it became essential to excavate a site scientifically and the Birchhabili-Tila was selected for horizontal excavation due to its location on the bank of the lake and existence of architectural remains *in situ*. It is situated on the south-eastern bank of an ancient lake (mentioned as 'Moti Jheel' and 'Dabar Jheel' in Jaina literature) (Plate II). It was approximately 35 km in circumference and was formed (naturally between two branches of Upper Vindhyan ranges) by river Uttangan flowing in a south-westerly direction. Now it has almost dried up and is under cultivation.

During the field season of 1982-83, Birchhabili Tila was undertaken for excavation and a few Jaina sculptures and architectural remains were discovered. The *adhithana* of a temple was also partly exposed at its southern portion along with walls constructed of random rubble masonry. The tilla was deserted and was being used as a graveyard.

EXCAVATION

Excavation was resumed here during 1999-2000 to ascertain cultural sequence and settlement pattern of the site (Fig 1). The total area of the mound measures 2000 sqm and 44 quadrants were undertaken for excavation. Six quadrants were excavated up to the natural soil and the remaining was left due to occurrence of structures and habitation deposits of subsequent period.

(A) CULTURAL SEQUENCE

The excavation at Birchhabili Tila revealed a total habitational deposit of 6.5 m which has been divided into following cultural periods (Figure 2).

- | | | | |
|------|------------|---|--|
| I) | Period-I | - | Circa. 6 th to 9 th century A.D. |
| II) | Period-II | - | Circa. 9 th to 12 th century A.D. |
| III) | Period-III | - | Circa. 12 th to 16 th century A.D. |
| IV) | Period-IV | - | Circa. 16 th to 18 th century A.D. |

The periodization/classification of cultural deposits was determined on the basis of finds, dated inscriptions, pottery types, coins, structure, antiquities and other associated materials unearthed during excavation. The correlation of structures of different phases/period was done to study house plan, orientation and their probable use. Accordingly, different structural phases were identified on the basis of stratigraphy and material culture.

I) Period-I (Circa. 6th century A.D. to 8th century A.D.)

The cultural deposit of this period is 2.69 m. Interestingly, an isolated discovery of a partly broken neolithic celt of buff sandstone was an important find from this level. This is a stray find and it indicates the existence of a Neolithic site in the vicinity of Sikri. The neolithic celt has clearly visible working edge, fine finishing and polishing.

The structures of this period were revealed in trenches G-9, E-8, F-8, and F-9. These structures are made of random rubble masonry and mud bricks measuring 30x15x4 cm. Two mud brick walls visible in sections facing north and south of G-9 were unearthed below random rubble masonry structures of Period-II. These mud brick walls measure 1.15 m in length and run in east-west orientation, parallel to each other. The distance between these two walls is 3 m. In between these walls, another wall of random rubble masonry/brick bats was exposed in the same orientation. Besides this, a burnt brick wall (measuring 40x35 cm.) having four courses, was also exposed near northern mud brick wall. The size of the bricks is 31x16x5 cm. The complete plan of structures in

this period could not be ascertained due to limited working space in the trench.

Two structural phases of Period-I were identified in F-8. The structure in early phase comprises of two rooms. The larger one measuring 3.05x2.26 m and the smaller 2.3x1.8 m. The thickness of walls ranges from 45 cm to 50 cm. The complete plan of this structure could not be exposed because it runs below the structure of Period-II. In this phase one dressed red sandstone pillar was found lying on floor level to the east of above-mentioned structure. The pillar measuring 1.72x0.29x0.23 m (l x b x t) in dimensions, is plain and lies in a north-south direction. The area to the west of two-room structure was excavated up to the natural soil at the depth of 4.04 m. The structure of late phase in Period-I is comprised of one room measuring 2.68x0.7 m with 0.54 m width walls. The walls have random rubble masonry foundation and burnt bricks were used for superstructure. Two courses of burnt bricks (31x16x5 cm) were exposed. A hearth with brickbat lining was excavated towards the west of above-mentioned room. The dimension of the hearth is 45x25 cm and ash was found *in situ*.

Another mud brick wall running in east-west direction was also exposed in E 10. The length of this wall is 1.4 m and width 0.4 m.

In F-9, habitational deposit of Period-I was excavated below man-made pit of red sandstone slabs. An area measuring 95x65 cm was excavated up to a certain depth near the pit but natural soil could not be reached. The excavation in this area revealed successive floor levels with a thin habitational deposit on each level. The thickness of floors ranges between 2 cm and 7 cm. A rectangular shaped trough of mud was exposed in the section facing south resting on a floor level at the depth of 5.95 m. The colour of the floor was pinkish. An earthen vase partly buried in floor was found at this level. A thick deposition of ash was found south of this vase. The floor, even in nature, is made of lime, mixed with *kankar* and mud nodules.

In E-8, structures of two phases of Period-I were found running underneath the outer enclosure wall of Period-II. A mud deposit of 65 cm thickness was found below the enclosure wall of the temple of Period-II. This indicates that the temple of Period-II was constructed over

the habitation deposit of Period-I after leveling the ground properly. The structure of early phase consists of two rooms, walls whereof were found partly continuing in the sections. The structure of the late phase of Period-I runs in north-south orientation. The wall is made of random rubble masonry with a length of 2.55 m and thickness 60 cm.

Two stone-walls running in east-west and north-south orientation in Quadrant III of F-9, probably a room, were found below foundation of the temple of Period-II. One metre habitation deposit was found in this trench below the foundation of temple of Period-II. These walls are constructed of random rubble masonry. The length of wall, running east-west, is 1.45 m, while its width is 0.9 m. The length of wall running north-south is 0.85 m, while its width is 0.40 m.

The occurrence of above-mentioned structural remains and cultural deposits are datable between *Circa* 6th-8th century A.D. The structures exposed in E-8, F-8, F-9, and G-9 are contemporary and belong to the Period-I while structures found in trenches G-9 and F-9 are part of one structural complex.

(1) POTTERY

The pottery from Period-I is plain red ware, and black ware. Some sherds of red ware have decorations in applique technique. Mica dust has been used on this pottery for decoration. A few sherds of red ware were treated with golden colour slip and a band in black colour. The main shapes of pottery are vases & miniature pots (Figure 3), bowls & 'handi' (Figure 4), basins, dishes, 'lotas' storage jars, etc. A variety of designs were produced on the pottery by use of applique technique and nail-impressed designs. Adequately fired (Figure 5-nos. 3 & 4) sherds of red ware with fine texture were found with stamped decoration (Figure 5-nos. 1 & 2). An interesting potsherd displaying a horse figure in motion executed in low relief was also found (Figure 5, no. 7). A few pottery types such as sprinklers and extremely ornamented designs as found on Gupta pottery assemblage are absent from this period. This suggests occupation of this site during the late Gupta period.

(2) ANTIQUITIES

The discovery of a broken Ambika sculpture in red

sandstone datable to *Circa* 6th-7th century A.D. is of immense archaeological importance. The ornaments and drapery of the Devi is comparatively simple and in low relief. This suggests existence of a Jaina shrine at Sikri during the late Gupta period. Similar type of sculpture of Ambika was discovered from Kankali Tila, Mathura. The discovery of Ambika sculpture, red sandstone pillar and a two-letter Brahmi inscription on a piece of stone suggest existence of a Jaina shrine at the site during this period. The other noteworthy antiquities of this period are terracotta beads, tablets, moulds, slings balls, gamesmen, hopscotch, glass beads, glass and iron bangles, chisel and spearhead.

II) Period-II (*Circa* 9th century A.D. to 11th century A.D.)

This period is represented by remains of a Jain temple, sculptures, antiquities and other archaeological findings. The entire area was properly levelled and rammed before construction of a shrine over it. The area on south-western side of the mound indicates that rectangular stonewalls were constructed parallel to each other by providing cells like chamber below the platform. Similar type of structures was traced in some area exposed in south-eastern portion of the mound. The walls of these cells, like structures, run parallel to temple platform and perhaps were filled with earth to make the ground firm and stable to bear load of massive superstructure upon it. The evidence of such type of cells was not found on north-east and north-west portion of the mound.

(B) THE TEMPLE REMAINS (Figure 6)

1. The platform (base of *adhisthana*) of the temple is constructed of massive undressed stone blocks of sandstone regularly placed on each other towards north-east to south-west direction and measures 18 m in length and 4.5 m at rear and front side.

The platform of the temple is constructed with massive stone blocks of red sandstone locally available around Sikri. These undressed sandstone blocks were arranged for construction according to available size and shape. The height of platform on south is 2.8 m, on east 2.85 m, on west 2.8 m and on north is 2.71 m, above the foundation. The temple platform measures 4.5 m on south, 9 m on north. The length of the temple platform is

18 m. A projection has been provided on southern portion of the temple platform thus reducing its width from 9 m to 4.5 m. The platform is further covered with flat and massive sandstone blocks to provide smooth surface for the superstructure. The average size of these stone blocks is 2 m x 0.5 m x 0.2 m (lxbxt). These massive block/slabs of sandstone served as a firm and stable base over the platform. In later period, a large number of such slabs from the platform were found disturbed and reused at the site. The excavation revealed projections in east, west directions to provide space for steps to approach the shrine from lower platform. The northern projection on eastern side has a flight of steps. Another flight of steps was discovered near the lower step of the southern projection. A broken head of Parsvanatha sculpture was discovered near the lower step of this projection. The discovery of moulded and carved sandstone architectural parts from the site indicates the form and shape of the temple. Such remains as *kumbha*, *amalaka*, *pillar base*, *beki* were found in large quantity and are datable to 9th-11th centuries A.D.

2. Random rubble masonry wall was provided in between the exterior wall of the temple and base of *adhithana* probably to provide steps to reach main shrine.

A random rubble masonry wall was found running all around the *adhithana* parallel to the respective side. The length of this wall is 25 m and width is 16 m while its thickness is 65 cm. The purpose of this wall appears to provide structural stability to the shrine and space all around the temple.

3. Massive peripheral wall of shrine was found measuring 20 m in width (east to west) and 33 m in length (north to south). The thickness of the wall is 1.8 m.

The main shrine is enclosed by a massive random rubble masonry wall constructed with mud mortar and strengthened by well-dressed veneering stone. The average thickness of this wall is 1.8 m and extant height 1.66 m from the base level. A solid and well-rammed ground was prepared before construction of this wall below foundation. Massive undressed stone slabs were placed flat over rammed ground as base for superstructure. These slabs were found uniformly laid all around as a protection against sub-soil water and to prevent capillary action. This technique was used because of constant stagnation

of water in the lake close to the foundation. This arrangement was essential as a protection against sub-soil water and salt, two prime enemies of structure. The well-dressed veneering stones were fixed on the exterior of wall for strength as well as for effect. Some veneering stones still have evidence of rusted iron dowels *in situ* with grooves.

A projection measuring 5x3.8 m was found in the centre of northern wall, which was probably an entrance to the shrine. The whole construction of this projection is similar and utmost care was taken to place massive stone slabs before raising the superstructure. A flight of steps was also provided over this structure. A chamber adjoining this projection measuring 4.3x1.6m was also discovered. The exterior wall of this chamber has veneering stones. The floor of this chamber was laid by well-remmed brickbats.

4. The man-made pit of red sandstone slabs are covered with two massive stone slabs. Similar slabs were found, used as basal slab of walls and superstructure.

The important archaeological evidence of religious disposal of damaged mutilated sculptures was excavated here in the form of a man-made pit built of stone slabs (one of which being an architectural remains of the shrine). This pit was encountered at a depth of 3.52 m from the reference peg and with dimensions 1.33x0.72x1.12 m (lxbxh). The pit is constructed with red sandstone slabs, which are well dressed and seems to have been part of some structure. The stratigraphy indicates that a foundation trench was dug out before the construction of the pit. The pit is covered in two levels with massive stone slabs, which are generally used as basal slabs of temple boundary wall and temple *adhithana*. Only one prominent sculpture was excavated from this pit, which is the red sandstone sculpture of Ambika, the Yaksini of Neminatha (Plate 2). The sculpture was found in two pieces and in upside down position with the portion above neck broken. The deposit corresponding to the sculpture is 1.12 m and consisted of stone chips, broken sculptures and fragmentary potsherds. The broken sculptural fragments and fragmentary potsherds correspond to Period II, which indicates that the Ambika sculpture was buried in Period II. Although the sculpture was buried in Period II, it is stylistically of early period, as mentioned above.

The stratum immediately above the covering of this pit consists of various kind of broken sculptures buried in a haphazard manner. This activity corresponds to layers 4 & 5 of the corresponding trench and the sculptures found include, seated Jaina Tirthankaras, Kuntunatha, other fragmentary sculptures, portion of a *prabhavali*, etc. After this activity, the Period II people constructed a random rubble wall forming an enclosure above the buried sculptures. Then again the remaining sculptures were placed inside this inclosure. The sculptures were found placed in a haphazard manner right up to the top of this enclosure. It seems there were some more sculptures to be buried, as this is very well supported by the discovery of an Adinatha sculpture nearly 4 m to the east of this enclosure and outside it. The sculptures found above the red sandstone pit included images of Sambhavanatha, Risabanatha, Santinatha and Kuntunatha with inscriptions on pedestals (*padapitha*) in *kayotsarga* posture, 7 Tirthankaras (without *lanchana*) in *padmasana*, Yaksini images of Prachindi and Ambika with inscription, two broken Tirthankara heads, and fragments of other sculptures. Some Tirthankara images were placed in perfectly seated and upright position; many others were lying in haphazard manner. One seated Tirthankara image was found reused in a Period-III structure as part of masonry. A broken piece of this sculpture was found lying nearby which was joined together with the original one.

Thus the evidence indicates that the people of Period II after arriving at the site, immediately or little later of the demolition that took place at the site, might have considered disposing of the broken and mutilated sculptures for religious reasons. They dug a pit and constructed a small chamber of red sandstone slabs and placed the Ambika sculpture first and then covered it. The exact purpose of placing the Ambika sculptures only and covering it with massive stone slabs is not known. The reasons and causes for this act could only be speculated. After covering this pit, the Period II people started to place the remaining sculptures above this pit. It is important to note that they had dug out the earth for the construction of this red sandstone chamber only. The top portion of this pit could have been the working level of Period II. This could be deduced by the absence of foundation pit above this pit for the remaining sculptures. It seems the space in between the eastern arm and temple *adhithana* had been used effectively for placing these sculptures in an order and at one place.

(1) POTTERY

The ceramic types excavated from this period include red ware and black ware. The shapes of pottery are vases of medium and large size, jars, knife edged bowls, dishes, basins, miniature pots, terracotta lamps, spouted vases. The applique and stamped decoration on red ware continued in this period too, comparatively less in number (Figure 7).

(2) ANTIQUITIES

The antiquities of this period include large number of Jaina Tirthankara sculptures and subsidiary deities. The Jaina Tirthankara images discovered are Adinatha or Risabhanatha (Plate 3), Sambhavanatha, Kuntunatha, Santinatha, (Plate 4), Parsvanatha. The Yaksini images of Chandi or Pracandi, Yakshini of Vasupujya, Ambika, Yakshini of Neminatha, Chakresh-wari, Yakshini of Adinatha were also discovered. These Tirthankara have *lanchanas* and *astapratiharyas* according to the Jaina *sastras* and ancient literature like *Pratishthaasarangraha*, *Pratishthasaroddhara*, *Pratishthatilakam*, *Acaradina-kara*, *Vividhatirtakalp*, *Chaturvimsatika*, *Chaturvimsatistotra*, *Samaranganasut-radhara*, *Aparajithaprichha*, *Rupamandana*, *Manasara*, *Adipurana*, *Uttarapurana*, *Harivanspurana* and *Diparnava-Jinadarshan* (Plate 5). The discovery of Jain Srutidevi Saraswati is important owing to its uniqueness (Plate 6). It is different from the Hindu Saraswati and its iconography has been precisely laid down in Jain texts as '*Vastu*' and '*Pratima*'. Twenty-four Jinas (Tirthankaras) are consecrated with respective '*Yaksas*' and '*Yaksini*' with their identifying symbols, weapons and vehicles in a fairly large Jaina temple (*Chaityalaya*). Ten *Dikpalas*, nine *grahas*, eight *Pratiharas* and four *Pratiharis* are installed in larger Jain temples. Some Sakta icons like Kshetrapala, Manibhadra and Ghantakarna-Mahavira are used in still in larger temples, perhaps as a matter of compromise, and, in addition to them, Srutidevi Saraswati is also prescribed to be worshipped in such temples.

Her icon is prescribed that, she is youthful and fair complexioned, she has a halo and all ornaments from head to toe, she is four-armed and has '*varada*' and '*kamal*' in two right hands, and '*pustaka*' and '*mala*' in the other two hands. '*Hamsa*' is her vehicle. This sculpture fully and precisely responds to the textual prescription.

tion and in addition, it also has images of 'jinas' on its side panels, confirming, unequivocally, that it is the image of Jaina Saraswati, different from the Hindu Saraswati. It bears an inscription dated in Vikram Samvat 1067/1010 and (Figure 8). It is a unique sculpture discovered here for the first time and the like of which has not been found anywhere else, and it suggests, as the texts lay down, that it was consecrated for worship in a large Jaina temple at Fatehpur Sikri. The Srutidevi Saraswati in standing *tribhanga* posture, was fixed on a pedestal, placed against the wall (as is evident from its rough back side). The sculpture was found damaged at its foot and placed with face downward near a wall. The circumstantial archaeological evidence supported by the marks near foot suggests that the believers tried to remove the sculpture from its original position. The sculpture was placed carefully with its rough back to avoid visibility and hence remained little damaged. The image is unique when compared with the images of Saraswati so far discovered. The image (*chhavi*) is also unmatched (*adbhud*; wonderful). The *jatamukuta* of the devi embedded with lotus buds, decorated with *kirtimukhas*, *sankuchit-lat* on forehead, *kundala* in ear, *grevika* (ornament in neck), *kanthsri* (*shobha* of *kantha*), *vyjayantihara*, eyebrows stretched like bow, *ratnare nayan*, sharp and long nose, round chin, prominent cheek, thin lips are certain marvelous iconographic features of the devi.

A large number of headless Tirthankara images, seated in *padmasana* posture were found in black, white, and buff coloured stone. A fragment of an arm of a Tirthankara in marble and other sculptures such as *Yonipitha*, broken bull, *Yaksini* Ambika with her consort holding *Priyankara* were also found (Plate 7). Some noteworthy antiquities of this Period include terracotta moulds of human face and ornamental jewellery.

III) Period-III (Circa 12th century A.D. to 16th century A.D.)

The habitation deposit of Period-III was excavated in east, south and north of the shrine. The circumstantial archaeological evidence indicates that the site was deserted for some time and was subsequently re-occupied. The original material was lavishly re-used for constructional activities by the inhabitants. The walls constructed of random rubble masonry with mud mortar and pucca lime floors were provided in this period. The burnt bricks mea-

suring 21x16x5 cm were found used in constructions. Some structures in this period were found raised right over temple remains. The concentration of constructional activities during this period took place over outer periphery wall on the east and near boundary towards north. It is evident that residential complexes were constructed after temple fell into disuse.

Two noteworthy structures in east-west orientation located on eastern side deserve mention. One chamber having lime floor over brick pavement was exposed. The second structure appears to be a portion of a room with entrance on north. The remains of brick paved floor were exposed in this room. A small niche pierced on exterior wall was also found. The complete plan of these structures could not be ascertained because the remaining portion of original mound had been disturbed due to cultivation and human vandalism. A one roomed structure in southern direction was found having entrance from north. Dressed stones were re-used for construction near entrance.

(1) POTTERY

The main pottery types in Period-IV include red ware, grey ware and glazed ware. The shapes include vases, bowls, dishes, storage jars, *surahi* with long neck and lids (Figure 9).

(2) ANTIQUITIES

The noteworthy antiquities found from Period-IV are two circular copper coins, highly corroded and unidentifiable. Iron nails, knives, arrow-head, terracotta hopscotch, gamesmen, animal figurines, beads, sling balls, spindle whorls, copper bells, miniature pot, stone pestle and rotator quern were also found from this level.

IV) Period-IV (Circa 16th - 18th century A.D.)

The site was deserted during this period. This is evident due to absence of constructional activities and human habitation. A few sherds of Chinese porcelain ware were found from this level. Typical Chinese clouds were found depicted on a sherd boldly.

The site was deserted for a long period and was used as a burial ground. Some burials have platform, while

some are plain. One burial has an inscribed cenotaph.

(1) POTTERY

On the basis of discovery of a few Chinese porcelain sherds with typical design and decoration, it is ascertained that such ceramic was in use during this period.

(C) INSCRIPTIONS

The excavation at Birchhabili Tila revealed a large number of Jaina sculptures. Some sculptures have inscriptions (mostly on pedestals). The contents of these inscriptions are donatory and these form a good source of history of the period. The inscriptions are of following categories:

- 1) Donatory inscriptions mentioning date, name of the deity, name of the donor, locality and place.
- 2) Donatory inscriptions mentioning date and name of the donor.

Besides these, a fragmentary red sandstone piece bears two letters in Brahmi script. Palaeographically the script is datable to 2nd-3rd centuries A.D. This inscription probably is a broken piece from a bigger one.

The inscriptions found on pedestal of sculptures can be divided into following categories:-

- 1) Inscriptions found on pedestals of deities in standing postures, namely on the sculptures of Sambhavanatha, Risabhanatha (two in number), Santinatha, Kuntunatha and Saraswati.
- 2) Inscriptions found on pedestals of deities in *padmasana* posture, wherein names of deities are unknown, as their names are not mentioned in the inscriptions. One seated Jaina Tirthankara depicting long hair on the shoulder is definitely of Adinatha or Risabhanatha as generally depicted iconographically.
- 3) Inscriptions found on pedestals of subsidiary deities or Yaksinis found seated on their respective vehicles, namely Ambika and Chandi or Prachandi.

SCRIPT AND LANGUAGE

These inscriptions were sent to the Epigraphy branch of the Archeological Society of India at Mysore. According to the report received from them, two types of script were used in inscriptions, viz., Brahmi and Nagari. The lone fragmentary inscription is in Brahmi script while rest of the inscriptions is in Nagari script of 10th - 11th century A.D. The language of the inscription is Sanskrit and the local dialect.

Content and subject matter of the inscriptions (Annexure I)

The majority of these inscriptions are donatory in nature and records donor's name, date, *gotra* or family (*vamsa*) which they belonged to and name of the deity. The '*santi Vimalacharya vasatau*' and '*Saikrikyā*'. '*Saikrikyā*' obviously denotes Sikri and '*Vajrama*' has been identified as Kachchhapaghata ruler, Vajradamana. This shows that king Vajrama (Vajradamana) was ruling at Gwalior in 1010 A.D.

Inscriptions of the Kachchhapaghata dynasty found so far :

The inscriptions of three branches or three families of Kachchhapaghata family have been discovered so far. These are—

- (a) Dubkund stone inscription of the time of Vikramasimha³.
- (b) Gwalior stone inscription of Mahipala⁴.
- (c) Narwar copper plate inscription of Virasimha-deva⁵.

The Gwalior Branch: circa. 950-1100 A.D.

Lakshmana (C.950-75)-Vajradaman (C.975-95)-Mangalaraja (C.995-1015)-Kirttiraja (C.1015-35) - Muladeva alias Bhuvanapala and Trailokymalla (C. 1035-55) - Devapala (C.1055-75) - Padmapala (C.1075-80) - Mahipala alias Bhuvanaikamalla (C.1080-1100).

The Dubkund Branch (Circa. 1000-1100)

Yuvaraja (C.1000) - Arjuna (C.1015-35) - Abhimanyu (C.1035-44 A.D.)-Vijayapala (C.1044-70)-Vikramasimha (1070-1100 A.D.).

The Narwar Branch (Circa. 1075-1125 A.D.)

Gaganasimha (C.1075-1090)-Saradasimha (C.1090-1105)-Virasimha C.1105-1125)

The King Vajradamana was recorded to have ruled from C.975-995 A.D. This epigraph has thus extended his rule to 1010 A.D., which is extremely important information for the history of the Kachchhapaghata (later Kachhwaha) dynasty of Gwalior and Amer (Jaipur).

CONCLUSION

Epigraphically, the excavation at Sikri has provided significant material to throw light on its archaeology, though it has been carried out in a restricted area. These inscriptions show that the tradition of temple architecture continued in this region for more than 800 years. Most interesting of these is an inscription on the pedestal of a Saraswati image. It mentions King Vajrama who can be identified as Vajradamana, son of Laksamana of the Kachchhapaghata dynasty ruling at Gwalior. It can now be established on the basis of this inscription that the sway of the Kachchhapaghata dynasty extended to the Sikri region, which was located on ancient trade route passing through Mathura (Surasena), Sikri (Saik), Kagarol, Muchukunda and Gwalior (Gopagiri), across the Chambal (Carmanvati).

It appears that subsequently the Kachchhapaghata King Dulha-Deva or Dhola-Rai married to the Marwari daughter of the Badgujar chief of Dausa, and the Kachchhapaghata migrated to Amer (modern Jaipur) where they established a principality of their own and became famous as Kachhwahas. The Sikri region came under the possession of a branch of the Badgujars who, thereby, came to be known as 'Sikarwars'. These Rajputs were holding Sikri during the Sultanate period. Owing to continuous onslaughts of the Turkish armies, they gradually dispersed to Karauli and the nearby regions. But they still trace their roots to Sikri and regularly visit it for such basic rituals as 'mundana'. History of their period (C.13th to 15th century A.D.) is still buried underground.

It appears that there were Jaina, Vaisnava, Saiva and Sakta temples on the banks of the lake, at Sikri and the area around it in 10th -11th centuries A.D. Mahmud Gaznavi, the iconoclast, raided the area (Bulandshahr, Mahaban, Mathura, Bayana and Gwalior) in 1018-1019 A.D. and it is quite likely that he demolished these temples. But the sculptures, found here, bear dates around 1044 A.D. which shows that either he by-passed it without molesting its temples, or these were rebuilt after his return. It is more probable, however that these temples were destroyed by 'Alauddin Khilji (the Delhi Sultan who ruled from 1296 to 1316 A.D.) during his invasion of the Ranthambhor fort (1300-1301 A.D.). His mosque is still found in the adjoining village Sikri confirming his presence in the area. The fact stands out that whenever the Delhi Sultan (from 1194 to 1526) went on iconoclastic raids on Gwalior and Bayana, he passed through Sikri, on the way, and Sikri was thus a soft target of their depredations.

³ The inscription was discovered in 1866 by Captain W.R. Melville who was in charge of Gwalior Survey at Dubkund in the Shivpuri district of Madhya Pradesh. The inscription has been described and reported in Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Volume XXV, p. 168; Archaeological Survey of India Reports, Vol. XX (1882-83), p.99; Epigraphia Indica Vol.II (1894), pp.232. A detailed study of this inscription with translation is recently published in Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Vol. VII, Part 3 on the Inscriptions of Chandelas, Kachchhapaghata etc., by H.V. Trivedi in 1889, pp. 528-535.

⁴This inscription was reported by Alexander Cunningham in his Archaeological Survey of India Reports, Volumes II (1862-1865) pp. 357; edited by Rajendralal Mitra in the Journal of the Bengal Asiatic Society, Vol. XXXI (1862), pp. 400; re-edited by Kielhorn in Indian Antiquary, Vol. XV (1886), pp. 33 and edited recently by H.V.Trivedi in the Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Vol. VII Part 3 on the Inscriptions of Chandelas, Kachchhapagatas, etc., 1989, pp. 535-548.

⁵This inscription was translated by Fitz Edward Hall in the Journal of the Americal Oriented Society, Vol. VI (1858-60), pp. 542 and recently edited and updated by H.V.Trivedi in the Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Vol. VII Part 3 on the Inscriptions of Chandelas Kachchhapagatas etc., pp. 552-555.

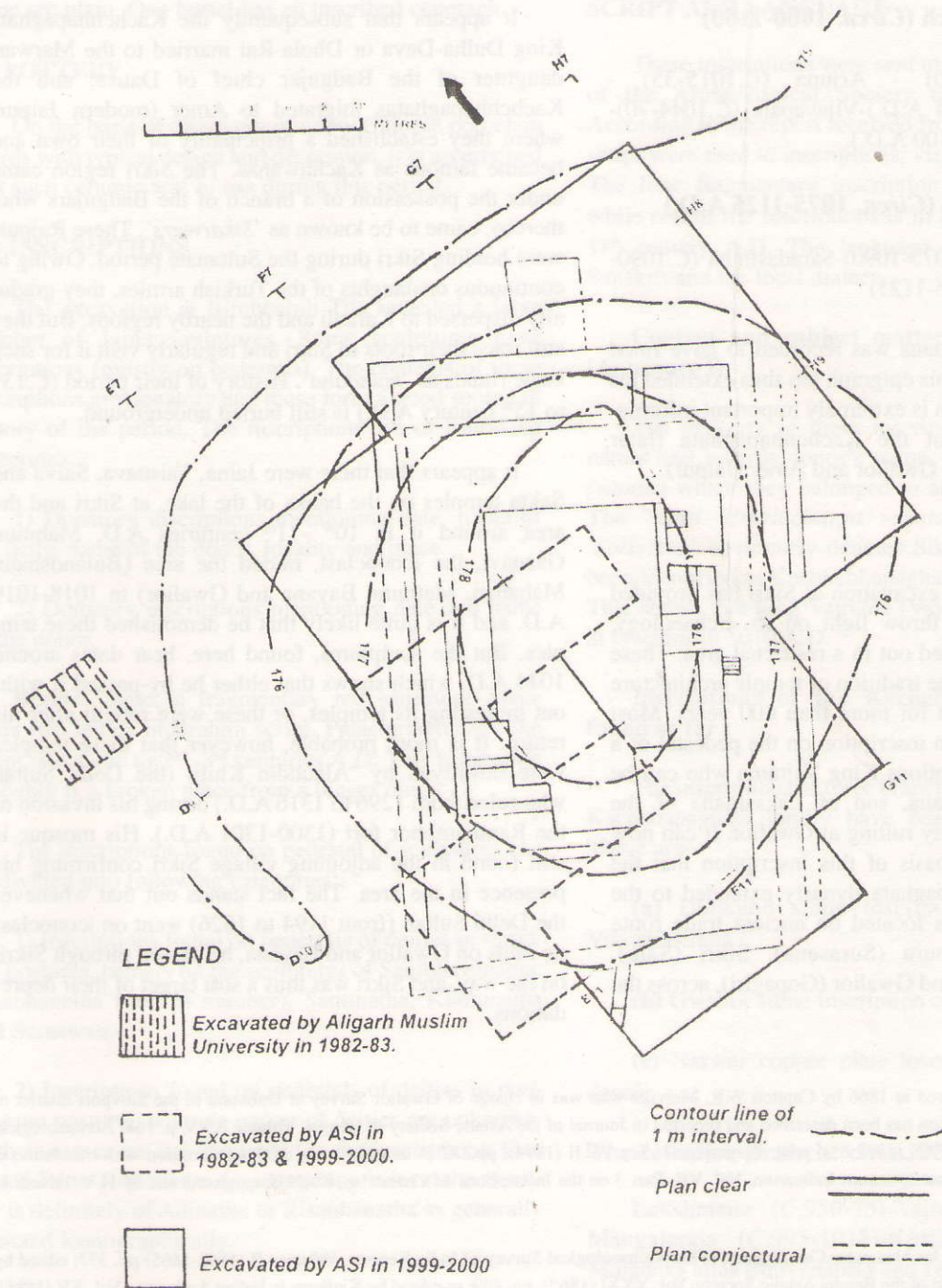


Fig. 1. Map showing the excavated trenches in the year 1982-83 and 1999-2000 at Birchhabili Tila, Sikri village, district Agra.

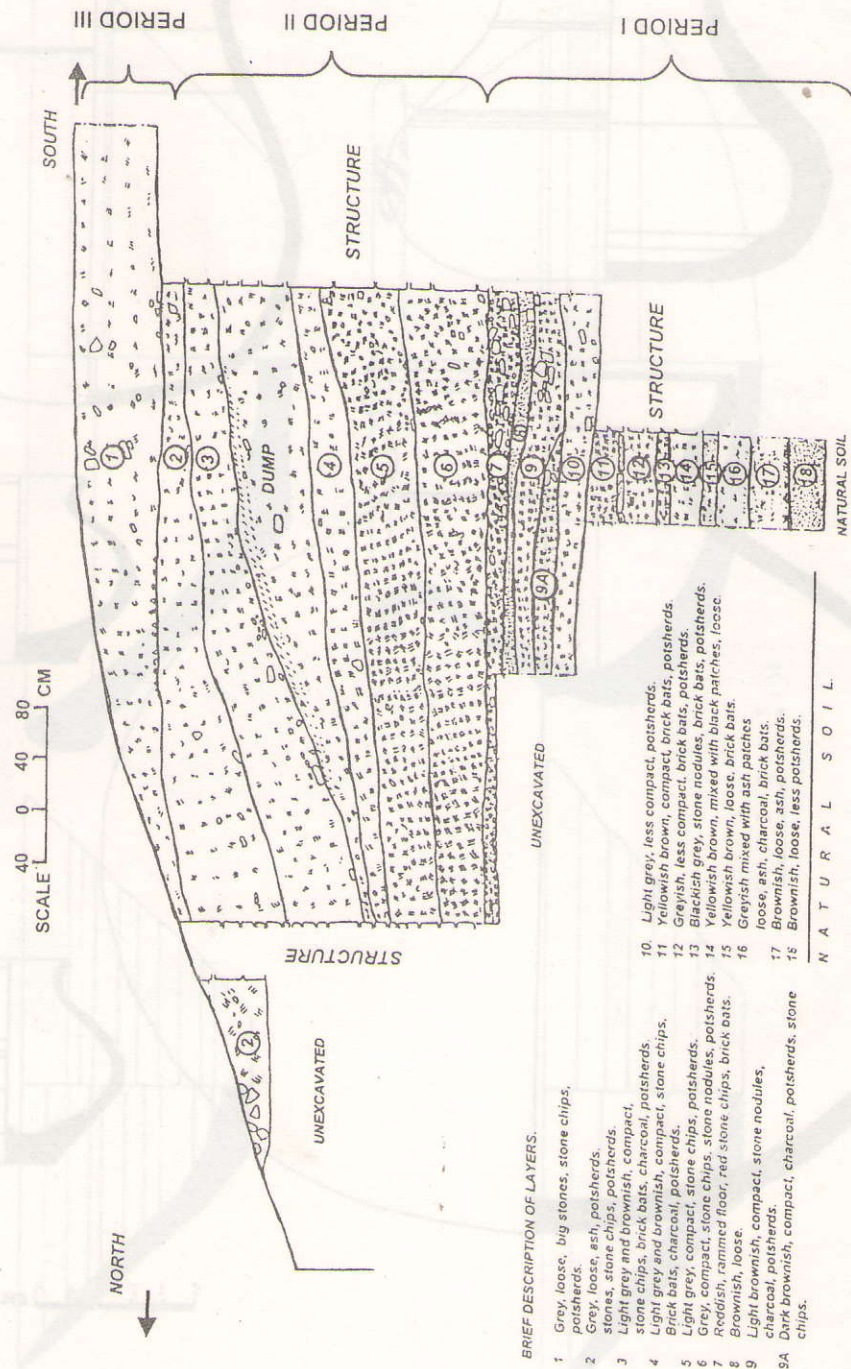


Fig. 2. Section of F-8, facing west, Birchhabili Tila, Sikri village, district Agra.

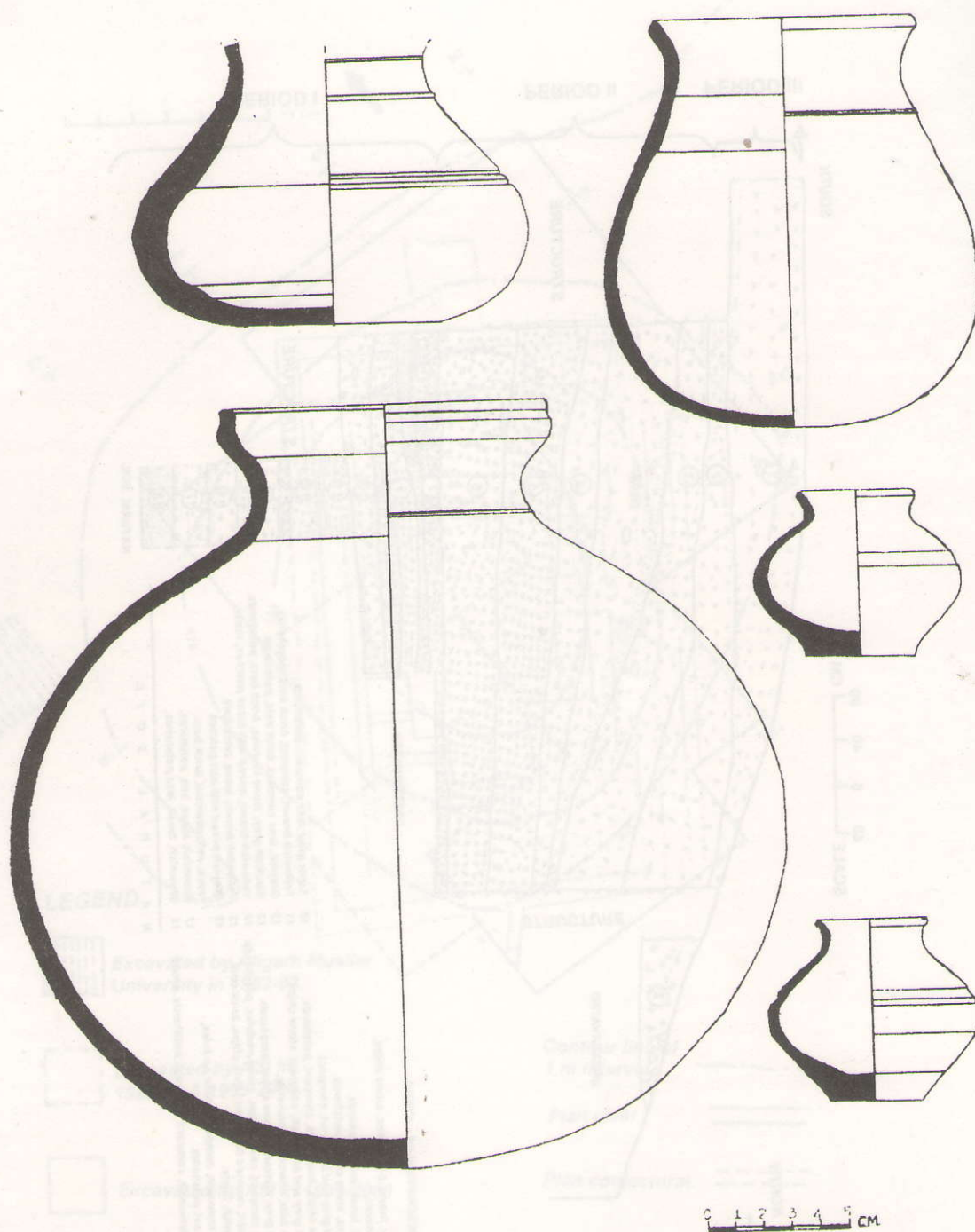


Fig. 3. Red ware, Period I, Birchhabili Tila, Sikri village, district Agra.

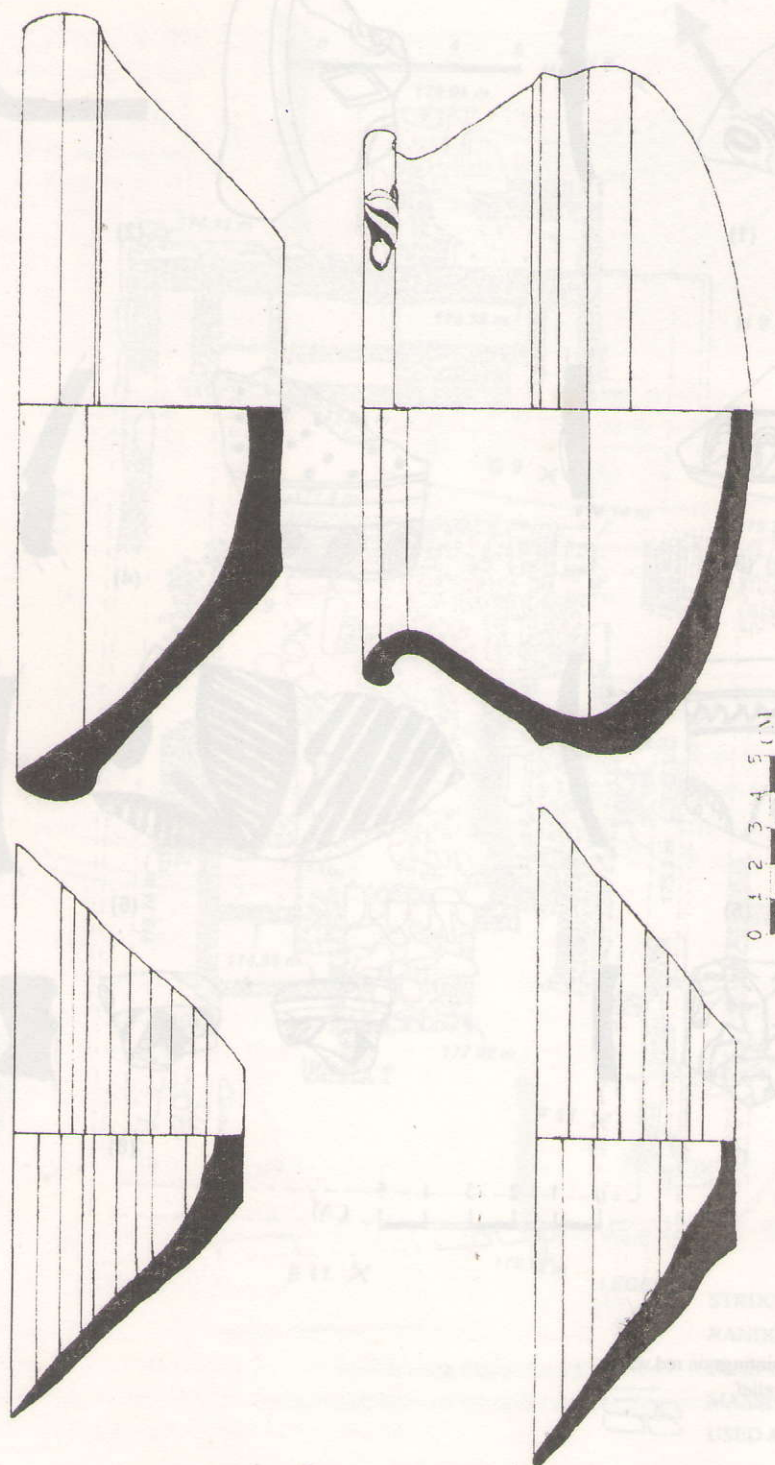
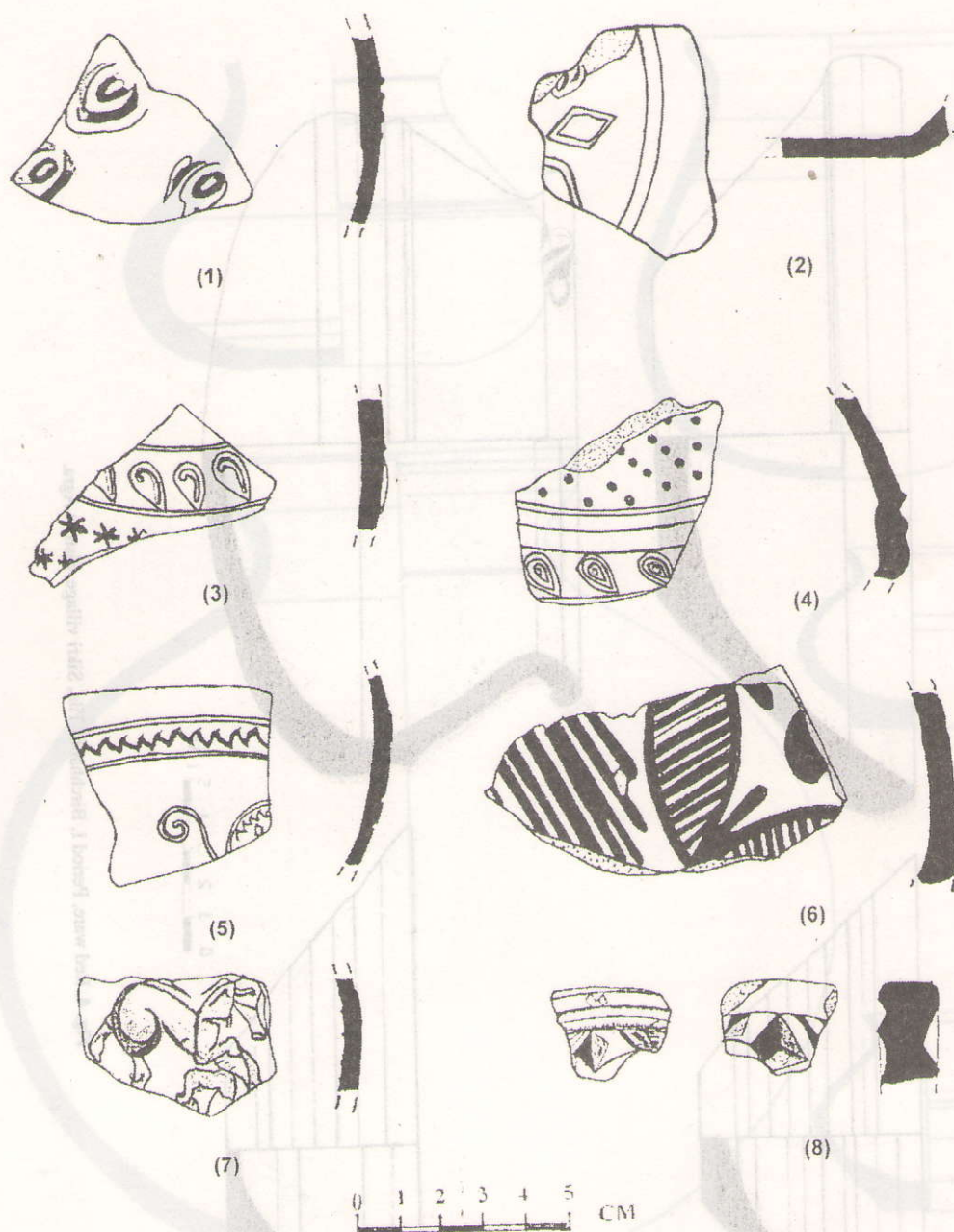


Fig. 4. Red ware, Period I, Birchhabili Tila, Sikri village, district Agra.



All are red ware sherds of Period I

(1) & (2)-Stamped decorations.

(5) & (8)-Incised decorations.

(6)-Decorated with black coloured paintings on red ware.

(7)-Depiction of horse figure in low relief.

Rest are decorated in appliqué.

Fig. 5. Decorative potsherds, Period I, Birchhabili Tila, Sikri village, district Agra.

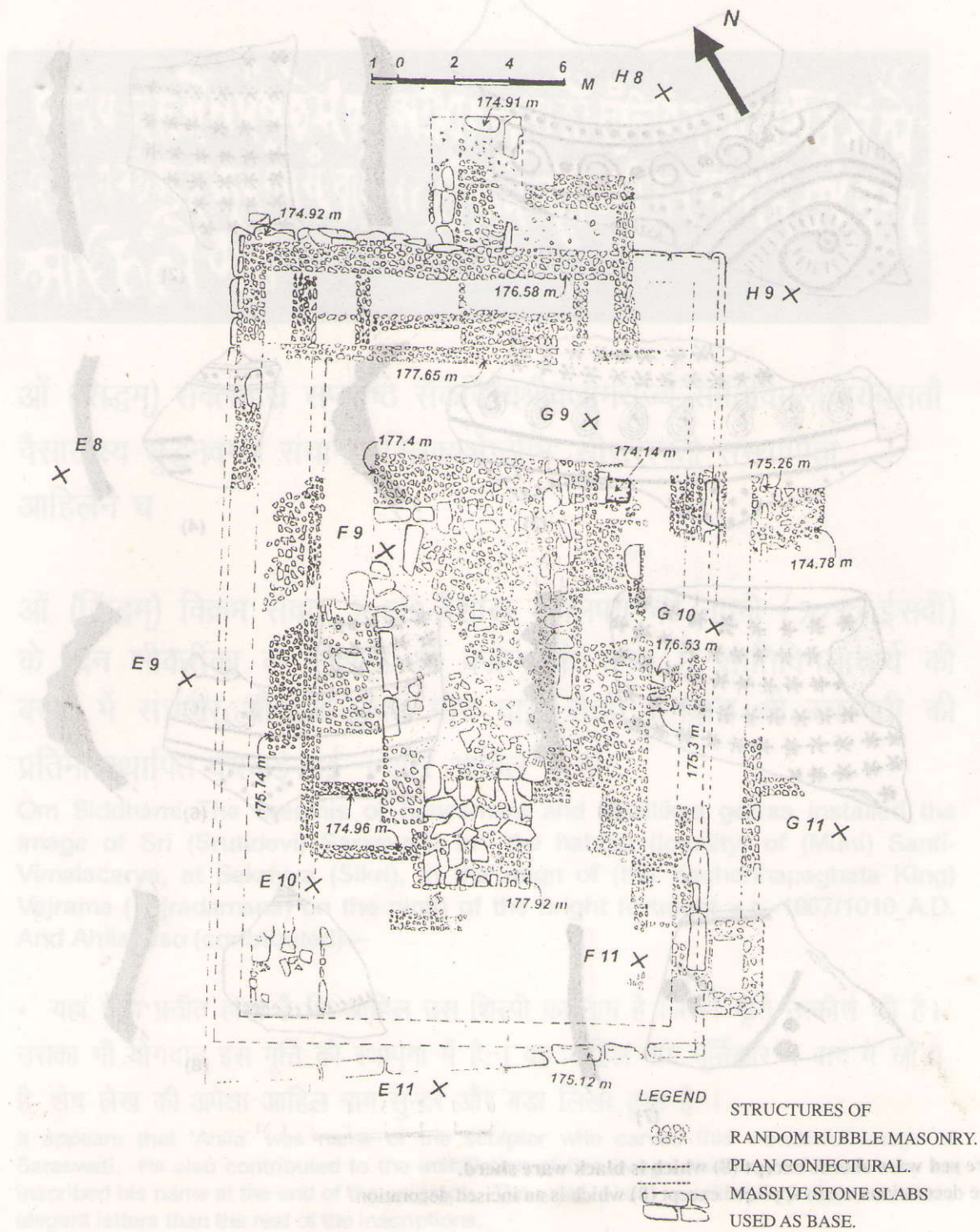
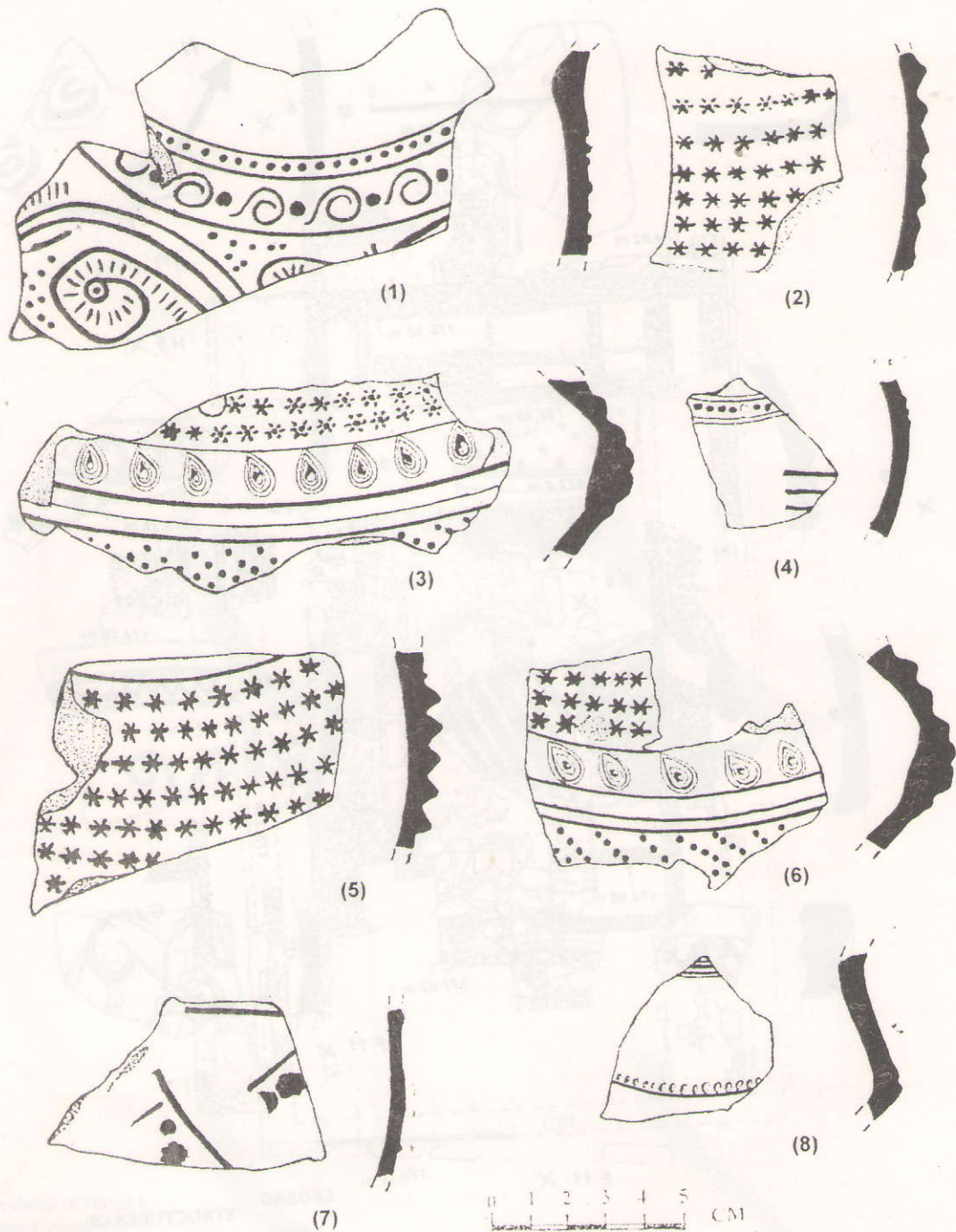
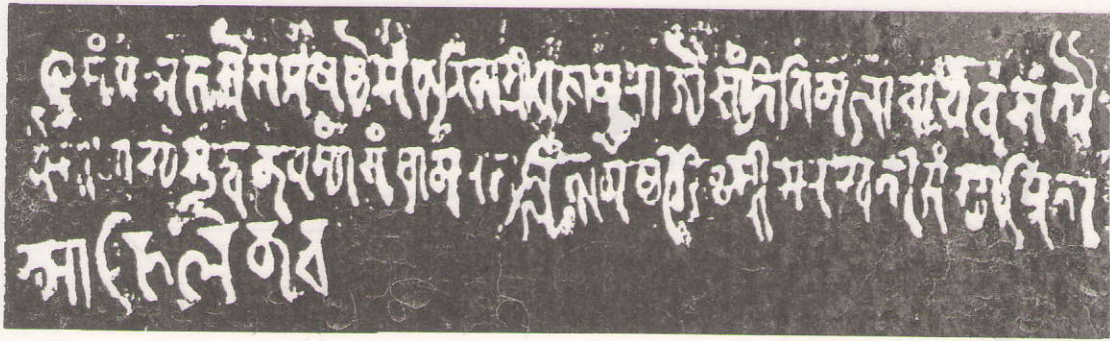


Fig. 6. Temple Plan, period II, Birchhabili Tila, Sikri village, district Agra.



All are red ware sherds except (8) which is black ware sherd.
All the decorations are in appliqué except (8) which is an incised decoration.

Fig. 7. Decorative potsherds, Period II, Birchhabili Tila, Sikri village, district Agra.



ओं (सिद्धम्) संवत्सहस्रे सप्तषष्ठे सैकरिक्यश्रीवज्रामराज्ये सांतिविमलाचार्यवसतौ
वैसाखस्य सुद्धनवम्यां संचामरभल्लिक्यर्शोष्ठीभिः श्रीसरस्वती संस्थापिता
आहिलेन च

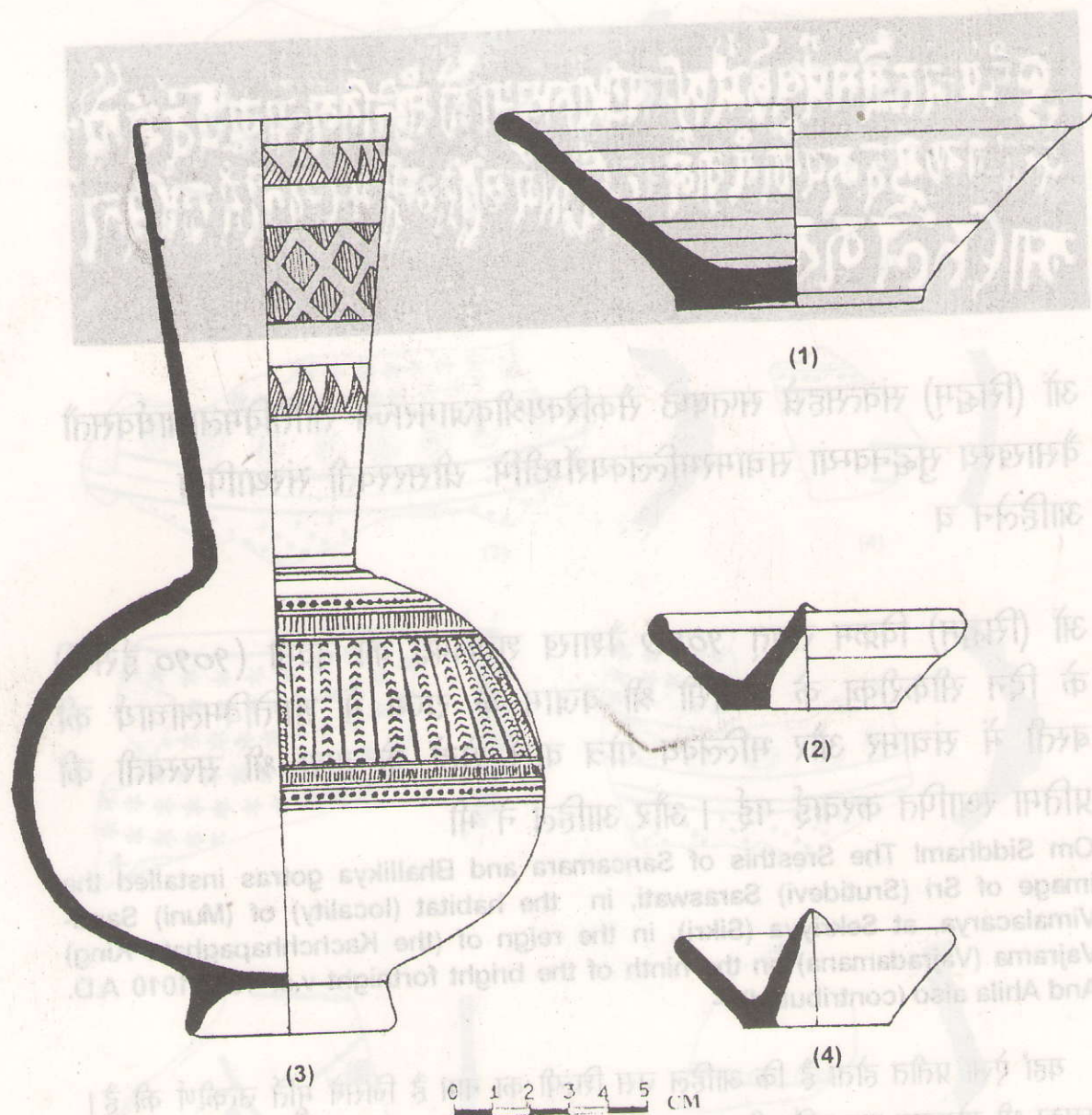
ओं (सिद्धम्) विक्रम संवत् १०६७ बैशाख शुक्लपक्ष की नवमी (१०१० ईसवीं)
के दिन सीकरीका के निवासी श्री वज्राम के राज्य में शांतिविमलाचार्य की
बस्ती में संचामर और भल्लिक्य गोत्र वाले सेठों के द्वारा श्री सरस्वती की
प्रतिमा स्थापित करवाई गई । और आहिल ने भी

Om Siddham! The Sresthis of Sancamara and Bhallikya gotras installed the
image of Sri (Srutidevi) Saraswati, in the habitat (locality) of (Muni) Santi-
Vimalacarya, at Sekriyya (Sikri), in the reign of (the Kachchhapaghata King)
Vajrama (Vajradamana) on the ninth of the bright fortnight v.s. 1067/1010 A.D.
And Ahila also (contributed)—

- यहां ऐसा प्रतीत होता है कि आहिल उस शिल्पी का नाम है जिसने मूर्ति उत्कीर्ण की है।
उसका भी योगदान इस मूर्ति की स्थापना में है । यह आहिल नाम मूर्तिकार ने बाद में जोड़ा
है, शेष लेख की अपेक्षा आहिल नाम सुन्दर और बड़ा लिखा हुआ है ।

It appears that 'Ahila' was name of the sculptor who carved this wonderful image of
Saraswati. He also contributed to the installation of this image, this way which is why he
inscribed his name at the end of the epigraph. The word 'Ahila' is written in longer and more
elegant letters than the rest of the inscriptions.

Fig. 8. Inscription found on pedestal (padapitha) of Sruti Devi Jaina Saraswati sculpture.



All are red ware except (3) which is a buff ware

Fig. 9. Pottery of Period III, Birchhabili Tila, Sikri village, district Agra.



Sharma *et al.* Pl. 1: Bichhbili Tila : General View



Sharma *et al.* Pl. 2: Bichhbili Tila : Ambika Yakshini



Sharma *et al.* Pl. 2: Bichhbili Tila : Risbhanatha



Sharma *et al.* Pl. 4: Bichhbili Tila : Santinatha



Sharma *et al.* Pl. 6: Bichhbili Tila : Sruti Devi Jaina Saraswati



Sharma *et al.* Pl. 5: Bichhbili Tila : Parsvanatha



Sharma *et al.* Pl. 7: Bichhbili Tila : Yaksini Ambika with Consort and Son