

RESEARCH PAPER

Exposed Fragments, Buried Features: Evaluating the Surface Archaeology of Ahar

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The present paper is a detailed report of a systematic archaeological surface survey carried out by the author at Ahar, District Bulandshahr, Uttar Pradesh. The paper discusses the methodology, findings and the results of the survey project and also attempts to reappraise the archaeology of the site on the basis of the new sets of data generated by the present survey by comparing the results with the findings of the explorations or excavations conducted at the same site in the past.

Introducing the Site

Ahar (**28°28'18.5"**, **E 78°14'64.3"**) a small town or a large village, is a remote place, located about 17 km north of Anupshahr town and about 45 km east of Bulandshahr (**Fig. 1**). The present day habitation is perched on the top of a large mound and along its fringes on the right bank of the Ganges River. Ahar is a place of considerable historical and archaeological importance and the most impressive aspect of the site is its dynamic landscape and the material culture spread across it. The site stands unequalled in size and is one of the largest and structurally or topographically composite mounded archaeological sites in the area. The main mound of Ahar measures c. 740 m (NS) × 825 m (EW), and rises about 10–12 m above the surrounding areas. The main mound of Ahar is almost completely inhabited except for certain portions, which are used either for agricultural purposes or as dumping places for trash or garbage as well as for drying and stacking cow-dung cakes.

To the south-west of the village or main mound, lie a group of shallow mounds or elevations marked by an average relief of 3–4 m above the surrounding plain and are generally covered by thick vegetation and grass (**Fig. 2**). Some of these mounds show structural activity with pottery and other archaeological material scattered on their surface while some appear to be natural formations composed of sediments deposited by the river in the past and are completely devoid of any cultural material. Some of these smaller mounds are used by the locals as graveyards and for other ritualistic purposes. A shallow oval shaped mound measuring 45 m (NS) × 38 m (EW) with a very low relief of 2 m above the surrounding area lies to the south of the village along the Ahar-Anupshahr road. This mound was excavated by M.S. Vats during the 1920s and has the ASI blue board placed near it, declaring it as a protected site.

Close to this mound is a large dried up water body, locally known as Rukmini Kund or Rukmini Taal. The area between these smaller mounds is divided into arable patches or parcels of land, which are subjected to intensive agricultural activities throughout the year.

Just outside the village in the south-east direction is the famous Hanumangarhi Temple, situated on the top of a small circular mound. Around the temple, a large scatter of potsherds and brickbats can be seen lying around. There are two other famous temples at Ahar, that of Sid Baba and Avantika Devi, which are located quite far from the village in the floodplain area of the Ganges.

Brief Overview of the Previous Investigations and Research at Ahar

The landscape of Ahar has over the centuries continued to attract visitors, researchers and archaeologists from far and wide, a handful of whom have provided interesting accounts and descriptions regarding the site and its material culture. Whatever is known about Ahar is based on oral traditions and the brief and fragmentary accounts of people who had visited the site from the 19th century onwards. For the period prior to the 19th century, there are a few oral testimonies or legends that may allude to earlier times, if held without proper scrutiny. The earliest known reference to Ahar occurs in the account of A.C.L. Carlley (1879 [2000]: 27–36), who visited the place during the course of his investigations into the area. Carlley ascribes to Ahar great antiquity and romantic interest, wherefrom Krishna is believed to have carried off his bride Rukmini. Carlley has also provided a rough picture of the extent of the site and has described the material culture which he found scattered on the surface. He also makes a mention about a mutilated stone bearing a “defaced” inscription in Kutila characters (*ibid*: 36).

Those who visited the site after Carlley or who have written about the antiquity of the place gave similar descriptions of the site and its environs in their respective accounts. F.S. Growse, who visited the site in 1844,

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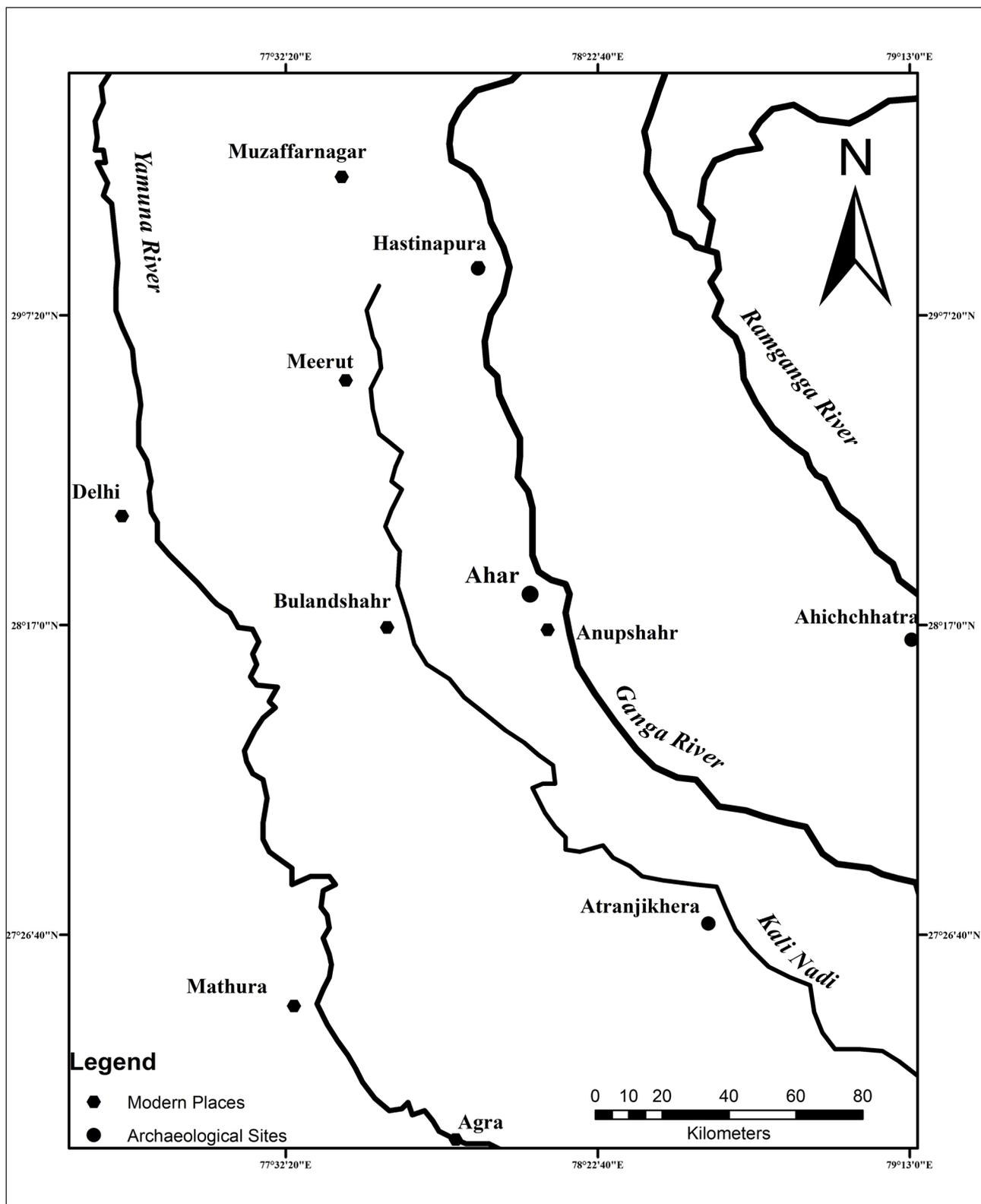


Figure 1: Map Showing the Location of Ahar.

reported several sculptural fragments lying in the streets and also about a mutilated pillar base with a carving of a snake encircling it, which he retrieved from a section of a mound (Growse 1884: 35). Nevill (1922: 73) mainly discusses the discoveries made by Growse at the site and the material recovered by him. Führer (1891[1969]: 3), on the basis of the location and antiquity of Ahar has tried to relate it to the capital of the Pandavas which was

established after Hastinapura was swept away by flood. He also mentions an inscription of Mahipala Deva of Kanauj written in Kutila characters, dated to 980 A.D. All these accounts give sporadic and usually brief information about the site and none of them actually adds any new information to the already existing corpus.

After Growse's visit, Ahar did not come under archaeological scrutiny until the 1920's, when after a hiatus of

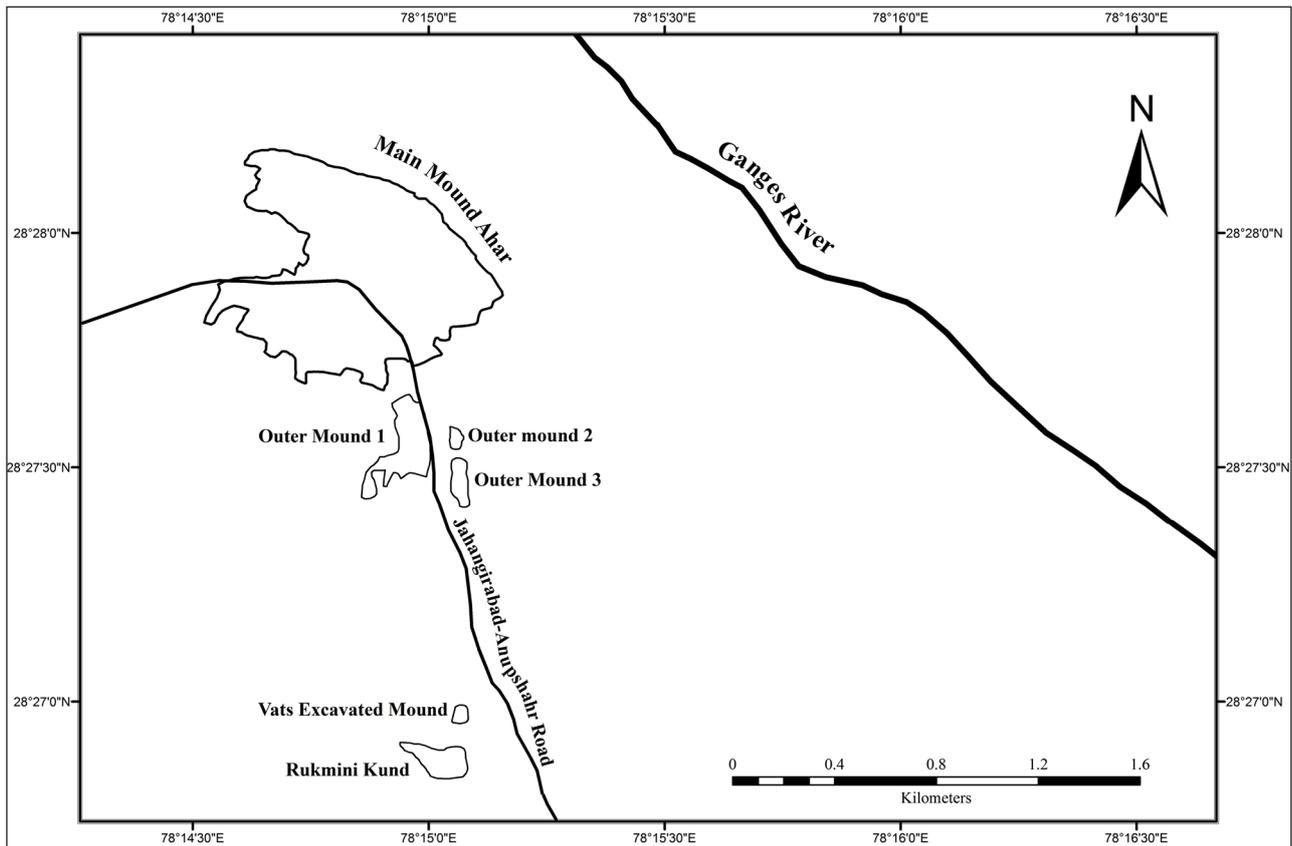


Figure 2: Map showing the Main Mound and other Mounds at Ahar.

almost 40 years, M.S. Vats (1928 [1990]: 56–58) visited the site in 1924–25 and made investigations. Apart from exploring the area, Vats carried out limited or small-scale excavations at the site and on the basis of the material recovered tried to devise a tentative chronology for the site which we will look at presently. However, at present it is very difficult to figure out the precise locations of the trenches sunk by Vats, except for those on a small oval-shaped mound at the outskirts of the village.

During the subsequent explorations of Ahar by R.C. Gaur and his team, the site has been reported as containing deposits of Grey Ware (GW), Red Ware (Sungakushana) and medieval pottery (M) (*IAR 1970–71*: 37). However, Ghosh (1989: 5) has mentioned “Ochre Colour Ware (OCW) and Grey Ware” being reported from Ahar. This seems to be an error or a wrong entry made by Ghosh in the *Encyclopaedia*, as there is no such reference pertaining to OCP or OCW being reported from Ahar in *IAR 1970–71*, which is the source he has cited for the information. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, writing about Ahar, labelled it as a place of significant importance and identified it with Tattanandapura – a fully developed township of the Upper Ganga Basin. According to him, Ahar was an important settlement or center during the Early Medieval period and before emerging as a fully developed urban center, it was a focal point in local commerce and inland trade (Chattopadhyaya 1997: 134–135). Similarly, Dilip Chakrabarti during his investigations in the area visited Ahar and provided a rough account of the site’s morphology and layout. He, on the basis of the area occupied, identifies Ahar as a major center as well as attests to the

presence of Kushana period bricks at the site (Chakrabarti et al. 2004: 68, Chakrabarti 2007: 119).

Objectives of the Present Work at Ahar

After going through the literature cited above, it was felt that the archaeological site of Ahar and its environs had not been properly or systematically investigated. In view of this fact, a reconnaissance survey was carried out at Ahar during which preliminary investigations were made and grab samples of pottery scattered on the surface were collected. The idea was to familiarize oneself with the landscape and the material culture spread across it. After an analysis of the material (mainly pottery) collected during the recce, it was decided to study the archaeological site and the surrounding areas in a more systematic and detailed manner by means of a systematic surface survey and collection programme. There are many other important archaeological sites in the area, but Ahar took the attention of the present researcher owing to its rich, diverse and relatively well preserved archaeological record and it proved to be an ideal scenario for conducting systematic archaeological research.

A multi-stage survey programme was designed and executed in three phases in order to generate a new dataset to answer several questions and overarching queries regarding the site and its environs. Some of the major goals or objectives of the survey project were:

- To identify and understand the spatial patterning, density and distribution of surface material (ceramics and other artefacts or features) across the landscape

as well as to gain an idea about various transformative processes that correspond to the patterning visible in the archaeological record. Apart from that the aim was to determine or assess the spatial extent of the site on the basis of the distribution of ceramic and artefact scatter

- To study and understand the relationship between the main settlement and the smaller mounds surrounding it, and
- To ascertain the occupational or chronological sequence of the settlement of Ahar as well the evolution of the site over time.

Sampling Strategies and Survey Methodology

Archaeological surface survey has become an integral or a fundamental part of the archaeological research (Gallant 1986: 403) and has made archaeologists place increasingly higher premiums on the utility of the data generated through it. Nance (1983: 289) points out that as surveys became a more sophisticated feature of archaeological investigation, various techniques were developed and refined over time for carrying out survey projects more efficiently and with a higher data output. In the recent past, survey has started to outpace excavations and is treated at par as a method for drawing inferences about the past (Plog et al. 1978: 383). For an archaeological survey to succeed and produce accurate and unbiased results, the survey strategy must be tailored in accordance with its aims and objectives (Schiffer et al. 1978: 1). Surveys can be systematic or unsystematic or at the same time can be intensive or extensive in nature, depending upon the specific aims and objectives of the survey project. The methodology adopted by a survey project is mediated by a number of factors and these factors are in turn characterized by the types of survey, sampling strategies, coverage area and the scales of observation, etc. All these factors have a direct bearing on the results of the survey programme (Schiffer et al. 1978, Banning 2002: 22–25). While discussing about the intensity of surveys, Tartaron (2003: 31) maintains that both intensive and extensive approaches are useful to generate important information while carrying out a survey. The methodology used by Tartaron (2003) for the Nikopolis Project carried out in Greece incorporated both extensive and intensive methods of survey as a part of a multi-scalar survey strategy in order to study the landscape at various levels of intensity using transects and quadrats and to reveal the overall characteristics of the region.

Generally, surveys are either ‘full-coverage’ surveys or use some sort of sampling strategy to address the research objectives and aims. Fish and Kowalewski (1990: 2) being the main proponents of the ‘full coverage survey’ strategy are very critical of the sampling techniques employed by various archaeological projects and point out towards the bias in sampling techniques. Although, full-coverage surveys are useful for covering vast areas, but it is not always feasible or practical to survey large areas or landscapes at a higher level of intensity or resolution with the limited resources at one’s disposal (Gallant 1986: 405). In such cases, different sampling techniques are used to generate

a representative or statistically valid characterization of a survey area. Sampling strategies are fundamental to archaeological surveys as is reflected by a huge corpus of literature discussing and debating upon the sampling techniques in different regions of the world. Sampling is done to extrapolate information about a large area from a part of it (Read 1986: 47) or in other words, to generate data which should be representative of the whole. There are various techniques of sampling, such as systematic, random, and stratified random schemes which are generally used by archaeologists. These sampling techniques with their potentialities and limitations as well as other factors affecting the survey results have been discussed at length and elaborated upon in a number of textbooks and articles (see Drewett 1999: 42–50; Banning 2002: 113–124; Tartaron 2003: 23–45; Schiffer et al. 1978; Plog, Plog and Wait 1978). The usefulness and potential of these sampling techniques has been tested and proven by various survey projects such as by Chevelon Archaeological Research Project (CARP) carried out in northern Arizona (Read 1986). The sampling strategy used by the project involved stratifying the survey region into different ecological zones and to obtain samples for each zone in a systematic manner. Thus, it can be said that sampling methods (both probabilistic and non-probabilistic) are useful means to obtain archaeological information about a large region or landscape by generating a representative sample of the whole at minimum cost and energy.

For the present survey project, several important factors were taken into consideration prior to the fieldwork for the successful execution of the survey project. At first, the boundaries of the area within which the survey would be conducted were defined with the help of satellite imagery acquired from Google Earth and the Survey of India toposheets. While the satellite imagery proved quite useful to get an idea about the polymorphous landscape and the general layout of the site; the toposheets were of minimal use as they did not provide the required resolution. An area of 1.4 km² encompassing the main settlement of Ahar and its immediate hinterland was selected for the survey. Once the base map of the area to be surveyed was prepared, the area was measured on the ground either by using tapes or pacing. Surveys, as discussed above, are usually carried out either using transects or quadrats or a combination of the both (Drewett 1999: 44; Orton 2000: 85–90). During the survey at Ahar, an arbitrary grid square was blocked out and all the four cardinal points were established or marked out by using a handheld GPS unit (Garmin Etrex Vista hcx). The resultant area was divided into four equal sized quadrats measuring 700 m (NS) × 700 m (EW), which were labelled as A, B, C, and D (**Fig. 3**). Keeping in mind logistical and financial constraints, certain important decisions were made regarding the survey coverage and intensity. As the aim was to generate new datasets and to get a vivid picture of the patterning and distribution of archaeological remains across the site, a sampling strategy was formulated to produce a representative picture of the whole. It was practically not possible to cover the entire area or all the four quadrats with the same intensity; therefore, it was decided to survey one quadrat using

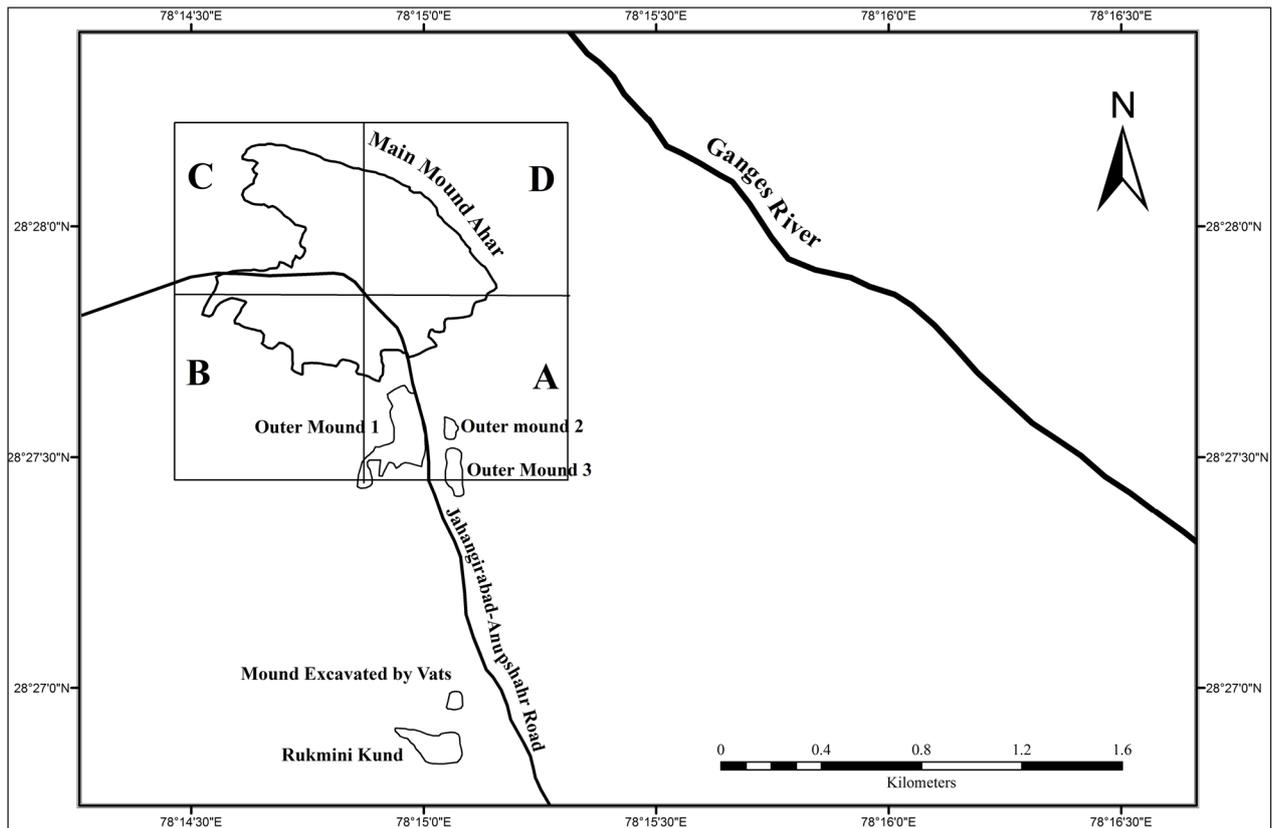


Figure 3: Map Showing the Four Quadrats.

systematic intensive sampling methods and the rest of the quadrats using random sampling strategy.

Quadrat A was subjected to an intensive surface survey and collection on the premise that the quadrat covers all the smaller mounds in the vicinity of the main mound of Ahar as well as a substantial part of the main mound itself. The 700 m² quadrat was gridded into 10 × 10 m sampling units or grid squares and it was decided to cover fifty percent of the resultant sampling units in Quadrat A. The other three Quadrats B, C, and D were surveyed using a systematic random sampling technique. In each of these three quadrats, a transect measuring 700 m (NS) × 6 m (EW) was randomly selected and was divided into 20 m × 6 m sampling blocks or units, which in turn facilitated the collection and recording process. In other words, each of the Quadrats B, C, and D, had 35 collection units.

The survey started by covering Quadrat A for which the sampling units were first plotted on a graph sheet which were numbered sequentially. The sampling units were then physically set up or established on the ground with the help of tapes, compasses and pin flags as boundary markers. A systematic sampling technique was followed according to which every alternate unit or square in a column was surveyed intensively, leaving the intervening unit unsurveyed. This selection strategy resulted in the formation of a chess-board like pattern. The rest of the three Quadrats B, C, and D were surveyed using the sampling strategy discussed above. However, in the case of these quadrats, all the contiguous sampling units were surveyed without leaving any gaps in between. Apart from surveying the stipulated number of sampling

units in each of the three quadrats, the remaining area was explored, but in an unsystematic or random manner (**Fig. 4**).

The selected sampling units in all the four quadrats were systematically surveyed and the details of each sampling unit surveyed were recorded in the field notebooks. GPS readings were taken for each unit at an interval of 50 m (NS) and also for all the ceramic scatters or other archaeological or architectural remains found. Architectural features or remains were documented in a detailed manner and were drawn or photographed. In order to reduce post-fieldwork analysis and processing, a systematic collection strategy was employed. Surface collections were made from every sampling unit, wherever found. The most ubiquitous of the artefacts encountered within the survey area was ceramics and brickbats. Fragments of stone sculptures and some terracotta artefacts were also found. During the survey, ceramics, artefacts and small sculptural pieces were collected; however, brickbats and other architectural remnants were not collected, but documented. Ceramics and other artefacts collected from every individual sampling unit were labelled and bagged accordingly and were carried back for further analysis and documentation. Apart from surveying the sampling units and transect blocks in the four quadrats, the remaining areas were scouted in an unsystematic or random manner which resulted in the location or discovery of various architectural features as well as other material remains, such as sandstone blocks (pillars), broken sculptural pieces, ancient wells and so forth (**Fig. 5**).

Section Scrapings

As a final step in the methodological sequel some of the already exposed sections/profiles of the main mound were surface scraped in order to understand the stratigraphy and occupational history of the site. Three sections/profiles were selected in three different areas of the site at varying altitude and were labelled as Section I, II, and III. The three sections were taken up for the study in a sequential manner and were documented, photographed and drawn to scale. The material from the sections (ceramics and artefacts) was collected for further analysis. The following sections briefly discuss the three sections and the resultant information.

Section I

Section I is located on the right side of the brick-paved road leading to the Ganges River to the North of the main mound. The profile of the main mound with a gentle slope overlooking the floodplain area offered an ideal condition for scraping as it had archaeological material (brickbats and pottery) protruding from it. A small strip measuring 3.30 m × 2 m was selected and cleared of the vegetation and overlying debris or run-off material. The upper portions of the section were difficult to scrape as they were crumbly and fragile. Several strata or layers were exposed containing potsherds, artefacts and other architectural debris. A large number of brickbats and worn-out bricks along with ash were found in the upper strata (probably a collapsed structure), but it was not possible to determine the size of the bricks as not a single intact or complete brick was recovered. Apart from that, several layers comprising of rammed potsherds and brick gravel separated by a yellow compact mud or clay representing a possible floor level were also exposed. Two desiccated bones and a corroded or rusted iron object was retrieved from one of these layers. The lower strata were composed of silt/loam and fine sand containing stray potsherds and were followed by sterile compact soil, which possibly goes down to the bottom of the mound. The original height or elevation of the mound in this area is about 13 to 14 m above the surrounding floodplain, but the stratigraphy revealed by scraping the section indicates that the cultural occupation or sequence starts from around 9 m onwards. The material recovered from the section includes ceramics, a terracotta marble, and four pieces of glass bangles.

Section II

Section II lies amid agricultural fields, to the north-west of the village. It is on the right side of the road from Ahar to Aurangabad or Taharpur. The area appears to be a part of the main mound, but has been flattened for agricultural activities. While going around the mound, a burnt-brick wall, along with some pottery was located at this place. The pottery had come up to the surface due to agricultural activities and water flowing through a small drainage or irrigation channel flowing nearby. In order to get a better idea about the possible structure and other archaeological material lying around, a small swath measuring about 2.80 m × 3 m was selected for surface scraping. After removing the overlying vegetation and

debris, layers containing pottery and other archaeological material were exposed. The most interesting find in this section was the brick wall showing two phases of constructional activity as can be delineated from the size of the bricks used. A total of twenty nine courses of bricks of varying dimensions were found with the upper twenty five courses of bricks with dimensions 24/25 × 22/23 × 5/6 cm and the lower four courses of bricks measuring 38/39 × 25/26 × 6/6 cm. There may be possibly more layers below the surface, which can be exposed only by excavating the area. Apart from the brick wall, the section revealed several strata bearing evidence or signs of cultural activity. The material recovered from the section consists mainly of pottery and a broken terracotta wheel. The pottery mainly came from the lower layers (possibly a dump) and was mixed with ash. Most significantly, the bricks measuring 38/39 × 25/26 × 5/6 cm forming the lower four courses of the structure were not found in any other part of Ahar (Fig. 6).

Section III

Section III is located on the left side of the main road bisecting the main mound near Harijan Mohalla. This part of the mound is highly disturbed as people living there have dug out the mound for clay and other building materials. These kinds of anthropogenic activities had exposed a substantial portion of the mound in which archaeological and architectural remains are clearly visible along with pottery scattered around. The area is used as a dumping ground by the people as well as for open defecation. Just like the two other sections, a narrow strip measuring 3.50 m × 3 m was cleared which gave a better look at the stratigraphy. A wall measuring 2.42 m long and 55 cm high with eleven courses of bricks, with dimensions of 33/34 × 24/25 × 5/6 cm was exposed. Bricks with almost similar dimensions are found in different parts of the mound and also in one of the smaller mounds. In one of the exposed sections of the main mound, bricks measuring 33/34 × 22/23 × 5.5 cm were found and the bricks found on one of the smaller mounds on the right side of the main road measures 38 × 23.5 × 6 cm and 33.5 × 22 × 5/6 cm. The material recovered from the section includes pottery and a broken terracotta animal figurine (Fig. 7).

Material Collected During the Survey

The systematic surface survey in and around the village of Ahar resulted for the first time in an intensive documentation of the cultural remains scattered across the area. The material recovered or collected during the survey can be broadly classified into ceramics, broken terracotta figurines, a dabber, a terracotta marble and fragments of stone sculpture along with a few pieces of glass bangles.

The Ceramic Assemblage from Ahar: An Overview

The ceramics collected during the survey were systematically analyzed and studied. The whole ceramic assemblage was at first sorted out by separating diagnostics (rims, bases, lids, spouts and so on), non-diagnostics (body sherds) and decorated sherds. The sherds were then

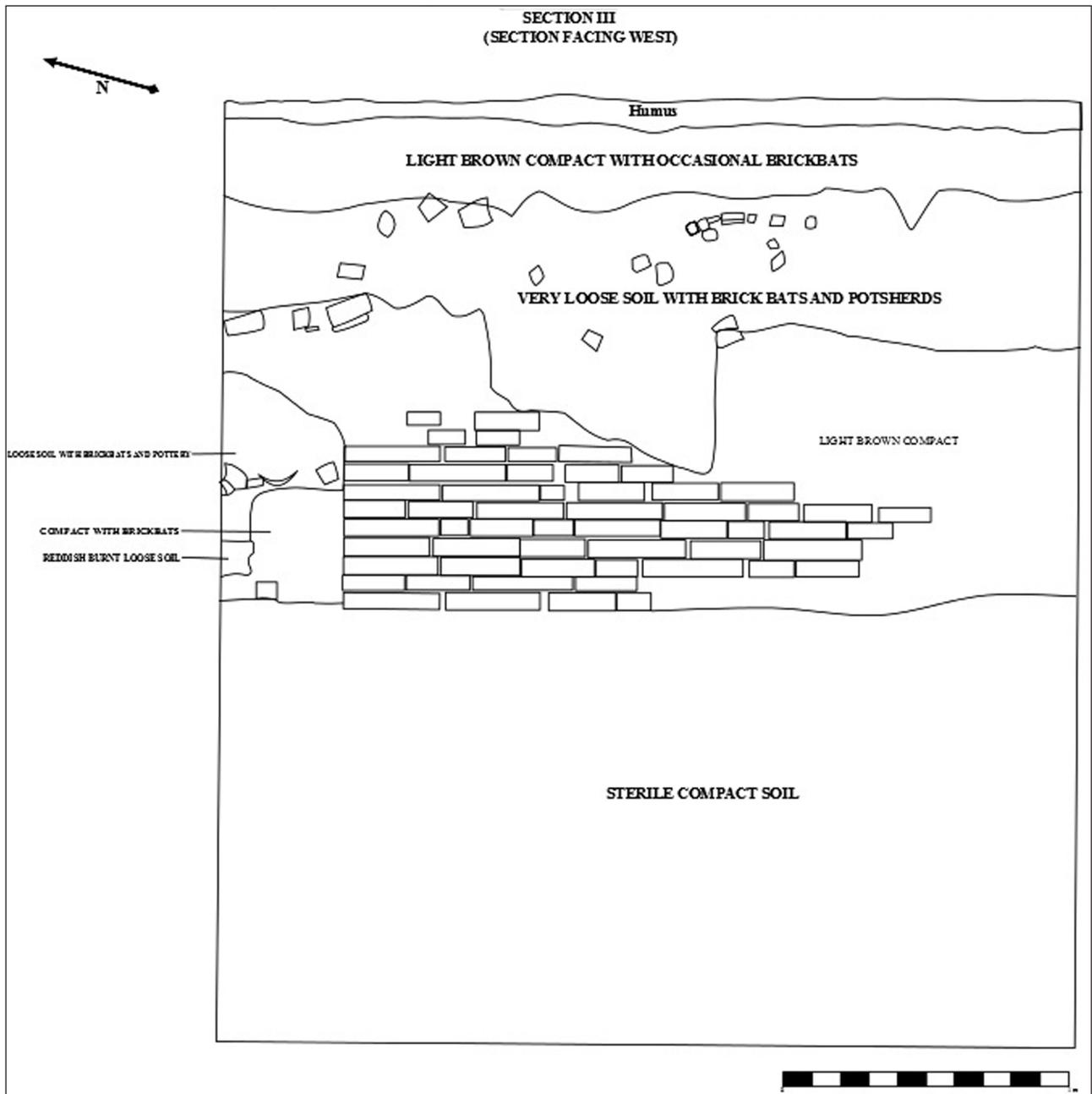


Figure 7: Stratigraphy of Section III.

i.e. "oxidised and reduced". The oxidised or Red Ware dominates the assemblage, which is followed by a small percentage of reduced sherds (mainly Grey Ware of medium fabric). The pottery is largely wheel-made and various types of marks on the surface of the sherds indicate that both fast-wheel and slow-wheel were in use. A small percentage of handmade vessels are also present in the assemblage. Sherds (both oxidised and reduced) exhibit different marks or traces such as paddle and anvil marks, striations or rills, luting marks, finger impressions, streaks or scraping marks and so forth, indicating the multitudinous techniques employed in the production of the vessels. The pottery (oxidised and reduced) comprises of slipped, unslipped and burnished/polished sherds, which can be placed under coarse, medium and fine categories.

The pottery is usually well-fired with a completely oxidised or reduced core. However, not all sherds appear

to be uniformly fired, as a large number of sherds exhibit defects or deficiency in firing technique. A few misfired or warped sherds were also found. Soot marks and fire-clouding was observed on a large number of sherds, generally on the oxidised sherds, which might be the result of either flaws in the firing techniques or the use of vessels for cooking activities. The majority of the oxidised sherds show visible inclusions or inorganic particles such as mica and sand that were naturally present. Apart from that husk/chaff imprints were noticed on the surface of some of the thick, handmade sherds or sherds with coarser fabric. The presence of all these inclusions indicates either flaws in the clay refining techniques or deliberate additions by the potter as a tempering material. Inclusions are mostly present in oxidised sherds, with a very small percentage of sherds within the reduced category showing such traits.

A large number of oxidised sherds (both diagnostics and non-diagnostics) exhibit varied decorative patterns

or designs. The decorative elements are usually present on the external surface of the vessels, whereas on the inner surface, it occurs in limited quantities. Decorations mainly include black painted bands and streaks, incised, applique, chequered-impressed, grooves, mica bands and mica-dusting, moulded and so forth. In the case of the reduced sherds, only incised and appliqué designs are present. A large number of sherds with scratches/cuts are also present in the assemblage, but this most probably is a result of various cultural and natural forces to which sherds are subjected and cannot be reckoned as a decorative element. A very small percentage of glazed sherds fall within the oxidised category and are of medium and coarse fabric. Most of the sherds are glazed on the inner surface with a few sherds glazed on external surface.

The quality of the glaze is not good and most of the sherds bear a crackled, non-shiny or matt surface glaze. However, some specimens have a very shiny and lustrous glaze along with floral and geometric designs in white and turquoise blue paint. The glaze is generally opaque except for a few sherds which contain a thin veneer of glaze and on some of the sherds, the glaze shows signs of peeling, crazing and spalling.

The main diagnostic shapes (both oxidised and reduced) from the site include pots, jars/vases, bowls, dishes, basins, lids, spouts, and base sherds having various attributes and features. The following are some of the specimen illustrations of the diagnostic shapes collected during the survey from the four quadrats and the section scrapings (Figs. 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14).

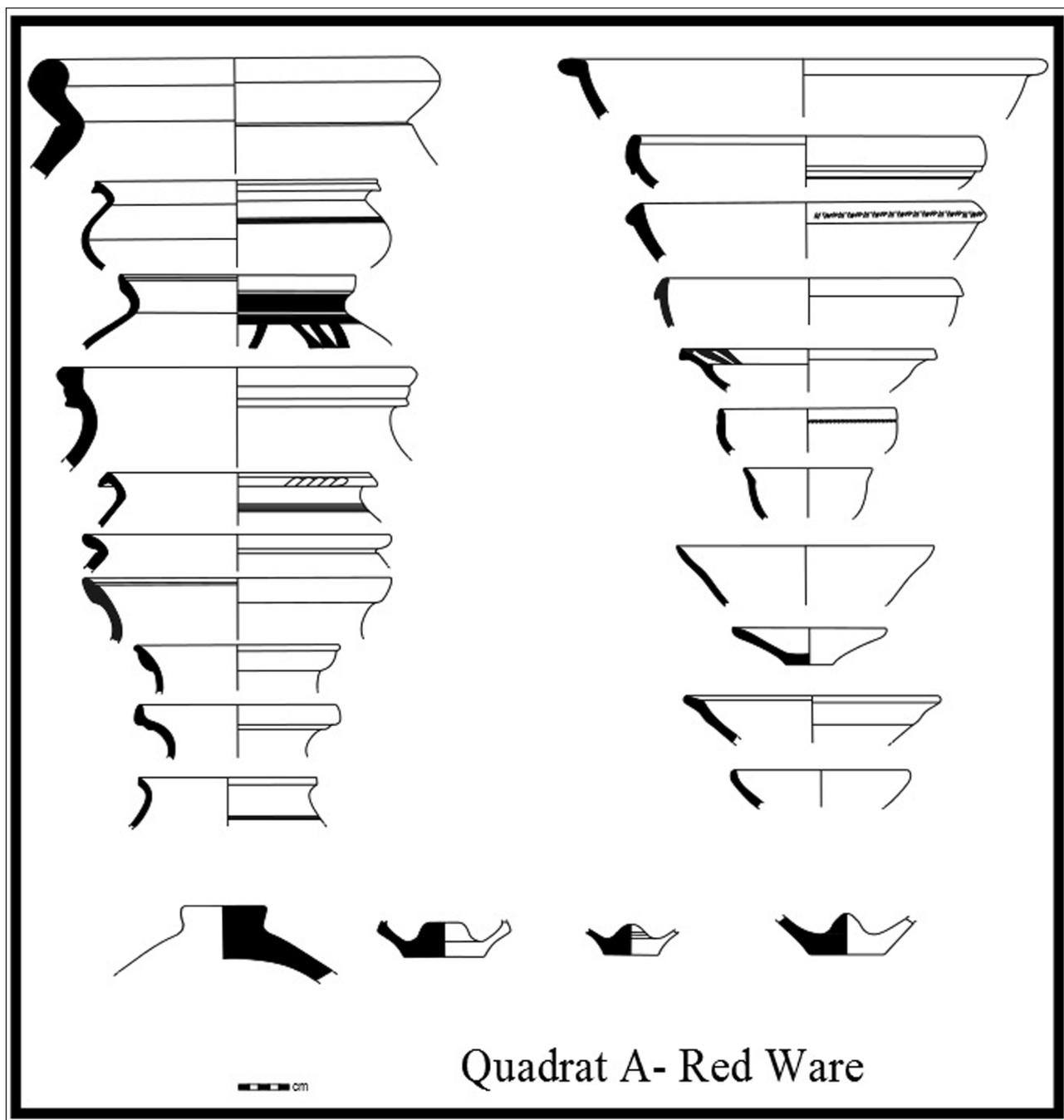


Figure 8: Red Ware from Quadrat A.

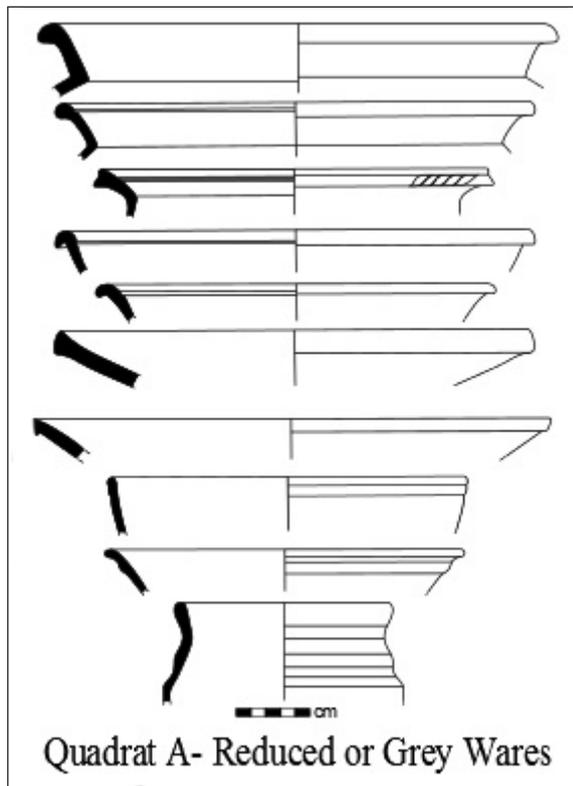


Figure 9: Reduced Ware from Quadrat A.

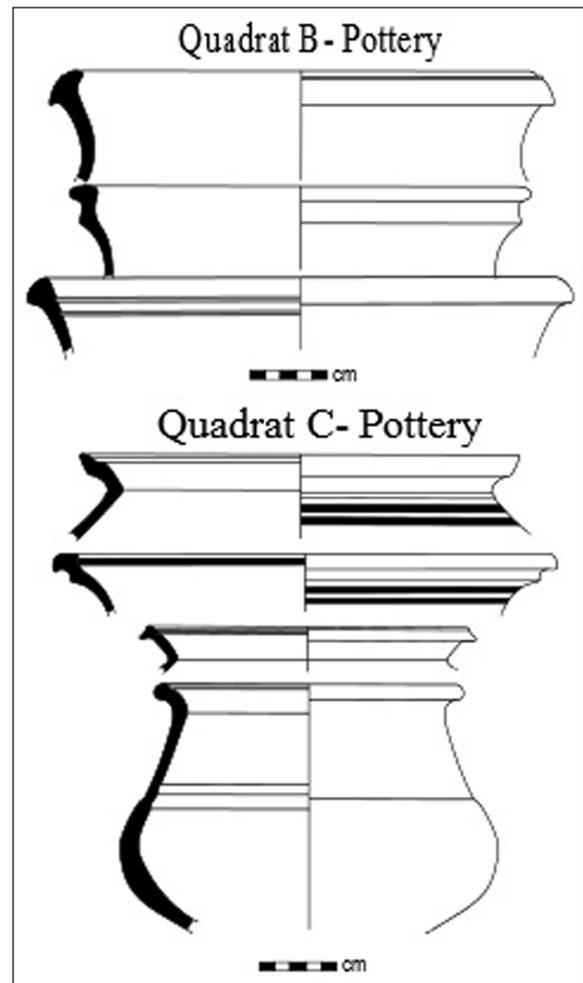


Figure 10: Pottery from Quadrat B and C.

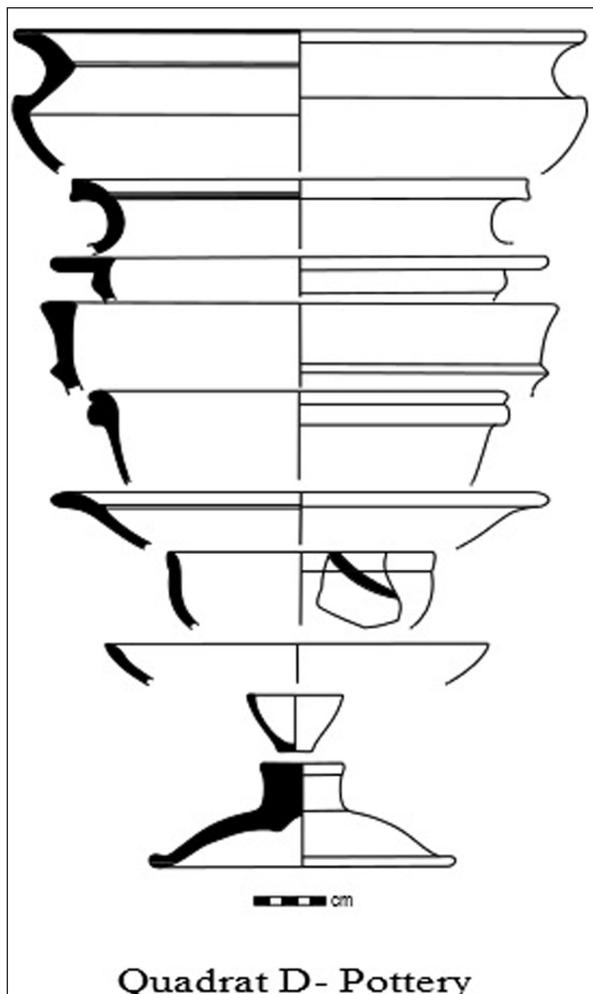


Figure 11: Pottery from Quadrat D.

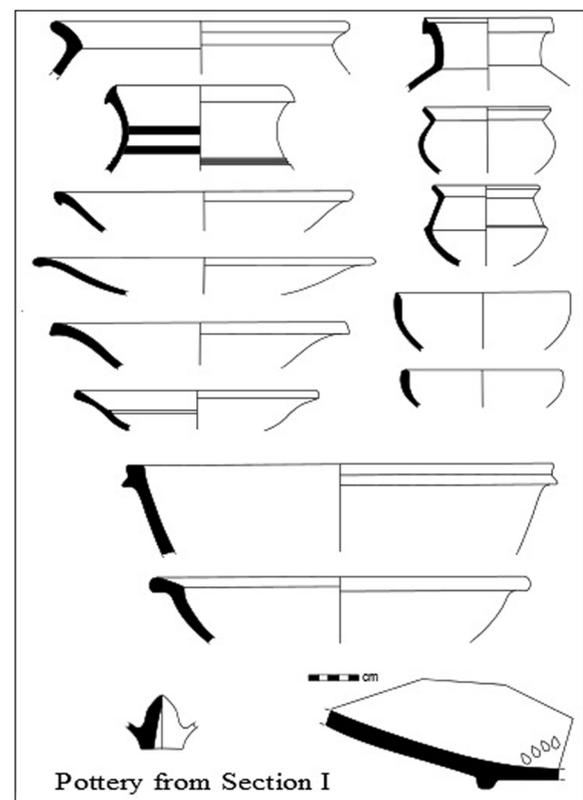


Figure 12: Section I, Pottery.

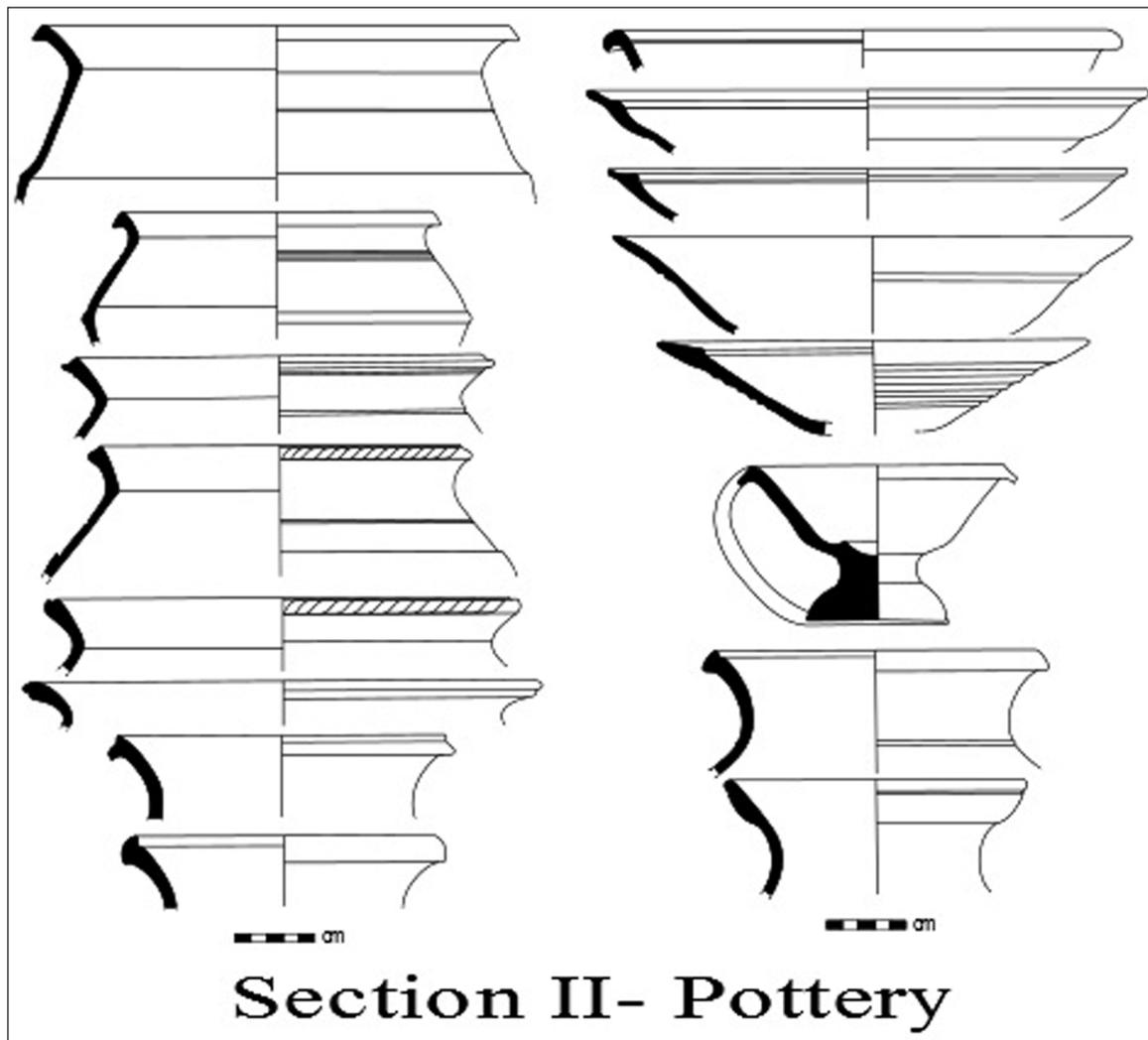


Figure 13: Section II, Pottery.

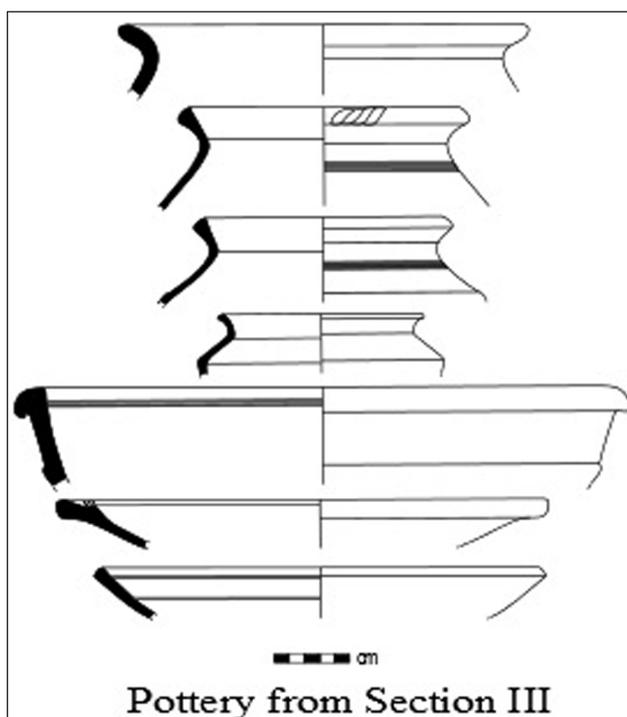


Figure 14: Section III, Pottery.

Terracotta Artefacts and other Material

Apart from ceramics, two broken terracotta figurines, a broken terracotta wheel, a terracotta marble, a broken dabber, and a few pieces of glass bangles were collected during the survey. Apart from that a few fragments of stone sculpture were also recovered from the survey area. No other artefact or material was found or collected during the survey (Fig. 15).

Chronology of the Site and Concluding remarks

M.S. Vats, on the basis of the datable material such as ceramics, coins and structural remains excavated by him at Ahar, tried to devise a chronology for the site and placed the occupational sequence between c. 10th century and 16th century CE (Vats 1928 [1990]: 56–58). However, Gaur reported the site as containing deposits of Grey Ware, Red Ware (Sunga-Kushana) and Medieval Pottery (IAR 1970–71: 37). Further, Ghosh (1989: 5) referred to the presence of OCP or Ochre Coloured Pottery and Grey Ware at Ahar. All the chronological dates assigned by these archaeologists are contradictory to each other as well as to the findings and results of the present survey in one way or the other. Both Vats and Gaur refer to the pottery of 12th–16th centuries CE from the site, but Vats in his report makes no

mention about the pottery belonging to the levels datable to the 1st–3rd centuries CE Chakrabarti (2007: 113) refers to Kushan period (1st–3rd centuries CE) bricks from a profile at Ahar. Similarly, the reference by Ghosh about OCP being reported from Ahar is contradictory to the other scholars. No specimen of OCP was found in the present survey.

In the present survey, the ceramics that were collected were systematically analysed and compared with the ceramics reported from several excavated sites in the region such as Ahichchhatra, Hastinapura, Sonkh, and Purana Qila. This analysis showed that the pottery from Ahar can be assigned to c. 4th century CE onwards. Typical or characteristic pottery forms or shapes akin to the 1st to 3rd centuries CE, such as incurved bowls, sprinklers, inkpot lids, or pottery bearing stamped designs were not found during the survey at Ahar. Pottery belonging to the period from the 6th century CE onwards is well represented in the assemblage with a few examples of pottery from 4th–5th centuries CE. The inferences that can be drawn on the basis of ceramics collected during the survey suggest that the occupational sequence at Ahar starts from c. 4th to 5th centuries CE and continues up to

the present (see **Table 1** for the chronology suggested by various investigators).

However, various sizes of bricks found at Ahar create a slight confusion in understanding the actual occupational sequence at the site. During the survey, remains of several architectural features with varied brick dimensions were found in different parts of Ahar. For example, in Section II, two types of bricks were noted with dimensions 24/25 × 22/23 × 5/6 cm and 38/39 × 25/26 × 5/6 cm. In Section III, a wall made of bricks measuring 33 × 24 × 5.5/6 cm was found. Bricks measuring 33 × 22.5/23 × 5.5 cm were found in an exposed section at the main mound of Ahar and in a modern structure, a single re-used brick measuring 37 × 24 × 5 cm was also found. Similarly, two bricks measuring 38 × 23.5 × 6 cm and 33/34 × 21/22 × 5/5 cm were also found in one of the smaller mounds on the outskirts of the village. At the same time, the ceramics found in the survey near these smaller mounds largely conform to the 6th–16th centuries CE. Thus, the smaller mounds are directly affiliated to the main mound and may represent the loci of activities taking place outside the main settlement.



Figure 15: Artefacts Recovered During the Survey.

Investigator	Ceramics	Bricks
Vats (1928 [1990]: 56–58)	10 th –16 th century CE	–
Gaur (<i>IAR 1970–71</i> : 37)	1 st century BCE–16 th century CE	–
Ghosh (1989: 5)	OCP, GW	–
Chakrabarti (2007: 113)	–	1 st –3 rd century CE
Present Survey	6 th century CE onwards	6 th century CE onwards

Table 1: Chronology of Ahar.

The variation in the size of the bricks at Ahar makes it difficult to establish the chronological sequence at the site. Most of the rectangular brick sizes are similar to brick sizes found from 1st to 3rd centuries CE levels at various excavated sites in north India, while the almost square bricks largely belong to the period after the 6th century CE. However, the ceramics collected from the site during the survey show none of the typical shapes and designs of the period dated from the 1st to 3rd centuries CE. The only conclusion one can draw from the enigmatic situation is that there might have been either a very flimsy occupation dated to between the 1st and 3rd centuries CE and the bricks from those structures were re-used during the subsequent periods or that, for various reasons, the pottery from the occupation of the 1st to 3rd centuries CE is absent from the surface data. If we are dealing with the latter situation, it indicates then the limitations of surface surveys and hence the necessity for sub-surface investigations.

Competing Interests

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

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