

## THE 1985 EXCAVATION AT NARHAN

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Archaeological excavations conducted during 1983-84 and 1984-85 at Narhan (26°19'N, 83°24'E), on the left bank of the Ghaghara River in district Gorakhpur, eastern Uttar Pradesh, have brought to light a sequence of cultures divisible into five periods ranging in date from the middle of second millennium B.C. to the 6th century A.D. (Singh et al. 1985). The periods are as follows:

- Period I : White painted black-and-red ware (black interior with white painted linear and geometric designs, red exterior).
- Period II : Black-slipped and associated wares.
- Period III : Red ware, thick grey ware, black-slipped ware and Northern Black Polished Ware.
- Period IV (Sunga-Kushana) : Red ware, burnt brick structures, ring-wells, terracotta figurines and sealings, C14 dates of  $2200 \pm 100$  B.P. (BS 564 and BS 582).
- Period V (Gupta) : Red ware and associated antiquities.

There are two mounds at Narhan. About two thirds of Mound 1 have been washed away by the Ghaghara River and the remaining one third is partly occupied by the present Narhan village, but an area measuring about 350 x 250 m. to the west of the village is available for archaeological investigation. Eight test pits, each of 2 x 2 m, were excavated here during March-May 1985 and these yielded remains of the first two periods. The later three periods are represented at Mound 2, locally known as Chandihar, which lies about 500 m. to the north-east of Mound 1.

In this paper we shall discuss the cultural assemblage of Period I and will try to ascertain its position in relation to the other sites of the region.

Period I at Narhan is represented by a deposit about one metre thick; this fact is interesting because at other sites with similar black-and-red ware the average thickness of the relevant layer is from 30 to 50 cms only. The black-and-red ware at Narhan, which is also painted with white designs, accounts for 58% of the total pottery of Period I, yet it accounts for less than 3% in the Neolithic levels of Koldihwa in Uttar Pradesh (its percentage in the Chalcolithic levels

at this site is not known). A similar situation obtains at Chirand. At Atranjikhera black-and-red ware and black-slipped ware together account for nearly 50% of the total.

The first settlers of Narhan lived in wattle and daub houses. Post holes and the marks of reeds in burnt clay lumps have been found, and mention may be made of a curious looking hearth, partly excavated in one of the trenches. Although the first settlers practised agriculture, meat was an important component of their diet as evidenced by the presence of charred animal bones, some of them having cut-marks. Animals represented in Period I include humped Indian cattle (Bos indicus), sheep-goat (Ovis-Capra) remains of a wild ruminant like deer or antelope (? Axis Sp.), and horse (Equus Sp.)

The small finds from period I include 63 pottery discs, of which four are perforated and might have been used as wheels for toy carts. There are also 15 bone points, nine terracotta dabbers and two balls, one each of terracotta and stone. A single stone bead was also found. The microlithic industries found at other sites like Chirand, Koldihwa and Sohagaura have not been recorded at Narhan so far, and Period I also has no metal.

The main pottery classes in Narhan I are the white painted black-and-red ware (58%), black-slipped ware with occasional white painting (8%), red-slipped ware (9%) and plain red ware (25%). The principal vessel forms in the black-and-red ware are bowls (67%), basins (11%) and vases (22%). A complete dish-on-stand of this ware has also been recovered and several pieces of such vessels have been found on the surface. More than 20% of sherds with fine and medium fabrics in the black-and-red ware are white painted.

The principal vessel forms in the black-slipped ware consist of bowls (84%), dishes (15%) and vases (1%). In the red-slipped ware the dominant categories are bowls (68%), followed by basins (23%), vases (7%) and dishes (2%). The red ware has bowls (50%), vases (30%), basins (16%) and dishes (4%).

#### COMPARISON WITH OTHER SITES

A comparative study of the cultural assemblages of this region which are approximately contemporary with Narhan I reveals that:

1. The white painting of the black-and-red ware at Narhan does not occur at Neolithic Chirand or Neolithic Koldihwa. At Chirand the black-and-red ware is hand made, while at Narhan it is all wheel made.
2. The white painted black-and-red ware of Narhan does share certain vessel forms with Chalcolithic Chirand, and such characteristic shapes as bowls, vases, dishes-on-stands and footed bowls are common at both sites. However, unfooted dishes in black-and-red ware, present in large numbers at Chirand, are totally absent at Narhan.

3. Although the cultural assemblages of Atranjikhhera and Narhan are essentially the same in terms of economy, architecture and small finds, the pottery assemblages of the two sites are rather different. Whereas 20% of the sherds of medium and fine black-and-red ware fabrics at Narhan are white painted, the Atranjikhhera black-and-red ware is essentially plain. It has been argued that the Atranjikhhera black-and-red ware resembles more that from Ahar and Gilund.
4. The black-and-red ware footed bowls with flaring rims and sharply incurved tapering sides at Narhan are comparable to similar shapes from Eran.
5. Although there are no radiocarbon dates for Narhan at the moment, the C14 dates from Chalcolithic Sohagaura, Chirand and Eran provide an indication that Period I at Narhan flourished in the second half of the second millennium B.C. The black-and-red ware continued to be made into the 8-7th centuries B.C. at sites such as Khairadih, Prahladpur, Rajghat, Kausambi, Sringaverpur and Sonpur, with new shapes like the dish added. In this later stage the painted component gradually decreased, and became totally absent in sites of the latest phase, such as Sravasti.

REFERENCE

Singh, P. and Makkhan Lal. 1985. Narhan 1983-5. Bharati (N.S.) 3:113-86.