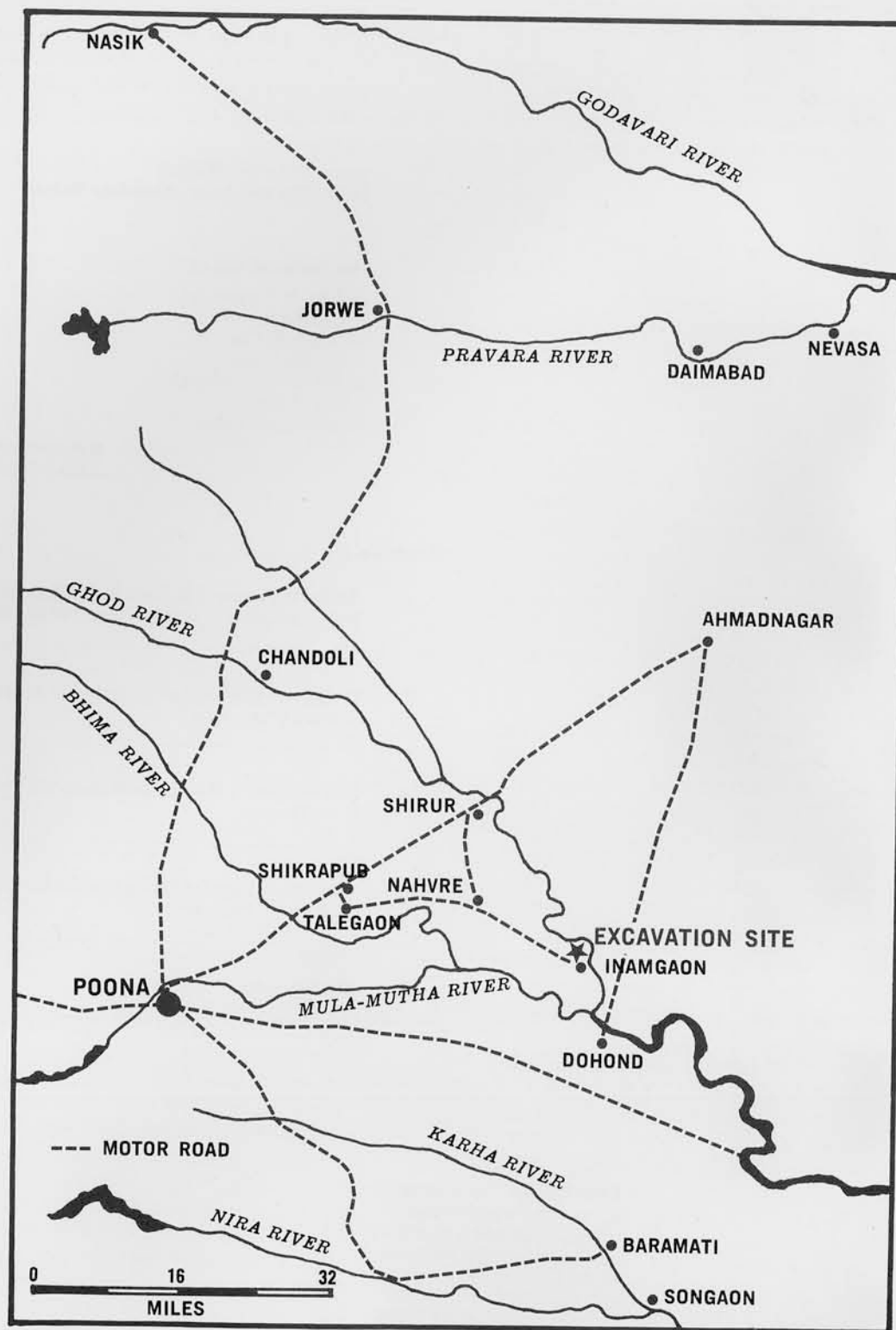


An Early Farmers' Village in Central India

H. D. Sankalia, Z. D. Ansari, M. K. Dhavalikar



The first prehistoric farming communities excavated in central India were found at the sites of Nasik, Jorwe and Nevasa (Sankalia and Deo 1955; Sankalia, Deo, Ansari and Ehrhardt 1960). These excavations gave us a broad outline of the distribution and nature of these prehistoric peoples. To fill this in we looked for a settlement where we could conduct intensive horizontal excavations directed toward an understanding of the house plans, community structure and subsistence pattern of the Jorwe people. With

this in mind we returned to the site of Nevasa in 1959-60. Unfortunately the early settlement there was much disturbed. The same was true for the single-period sites at Chandoli (Deo and Ansari 1965) and Songaon (Deo 1969). Thus our search for a suitable ancient settlement continued until the field season of 1967-68 when Inamgaon was discovered. The local peoples in the vicinity of this site have given the mounds no name, but it lies within the revenue limits of Inamgaon Village (Sirur Taluka, Poona District). The ancient village

lies on the right bank of the Ghod River about three miles from the modern settlement and just opposite the village of Wangdari in Ahmadnagar District.

Our first visit to Inamgaon in 1967 convinced us that it was undisturbed by later historical peoples since the surface was littered with only Malwa and Jorwe-style chalcolithic pottery, stone blades and cores, and occasional saddle querns. Here was just what we wanted—an entire prehistoric community undisturbed by the overburden and destruction of later centuries of occupation.

To address the problems in prehistoric population and subsistence we planned a long-term excavation. Work has already been going on for five seasons and much remains to be done. To gain an in-depth knowledge of individual houses the contents of each—sherds, intact pots, worked stone, beads, metal tools, etc.—were kept separate. These materials are useful in determining the kinds of activities which took place in the domestic area and for population estimates as well. This latter figure could, of course, be cross-checked against the actual dimensions of the houses. We have already arrived at some tentative conclusions as to family size, house type and subsistence pattern (Sankalia, Ansari and Dhavalikar 1973).

The main mound (INM-I) has some 4.36 meters (14 feet 3½ inches) of deposit. The other mounds (INM-II, III, IV and V) are comparatively lower but do help in assessing the duration of occupation at Inamgaon. For example, INM-II on the eastern periphery of the site has the remains of the earliest Malwa, or Central India, occupation directly on the surface. All the other mounds have Jorwe materials stratified above this earlier occupation, or resting on virgin soil. On Mound I Malwa pottery occurs in levels 17 to 14. There is then a shift, probably indicating a re-occupation by the folk who made Jorwe-type ceramics. The upper levels (1 through 6) on Mound I are characterized by some deviation in the Jorwe ceramic tradition in vessel shape and the quality of the ceramic fabric. Thus we have sub-divided this occupation:

- Period I: Malwa (ca. 1700-1400 B.C.)
- Period II: Early Jorwe (ca. 1400-1100 B.C.)
- Period III: Late Jorwe (ca. 1100-700 B.C.)

THE SITE AND ITS ENVIRONS

The site is located on the remains of a river terrace some 12.5 meters above the Ghod River. This terrace is brown silt deposited by the river over gravel during late Middle Pleistocene times. There is also a younger terrace of black silt at 9.15 meters, and two earlier gravels, each of which has Early and Middle Palaeolithic tools as well as heavily mineralized bones of animals such as *Bos namadicus*. At some distance to the east of the

mound there is also a site with Upper Palaeolithic type blades, flakes and cores made from the locally abundant white chaledony. Thus the region has a long history of human occupation.

The area around Inamgaon is now a treeless, barren, semi-arid bad land with deep gullies cutting through the heavy black soil. But conditions were much different when men first settled at Inamgaon. There was then some tree cover, erosion was much less pronounced than today and there was rich grassland for the domesticated animals. As late as only fifty years ago there was a mantle of scrub forests with deer and other ungulates grazing on these mounds. In addition to this ground cover, local superstition concerning the disturbance of ancient places has contributed to the preservation of the site.

TECHNIQUES OF EXPOSING A HOUSE FLOOR

For our research at Inamgaon to provide the answers to the questions we were asking, it was crucial for us to excavate individual dwellings and floor levels. We had first addressed this problem of exposing floors and very thin mud and reed screen walls at Navdatoli in Madhya Pradesh. The techniques developed there have been refined and applied on a large scale at Inamgaon. At these sites the houses have collapsed onto the floor and the house walls have been effectively destroyed. It is not, as is often the case in western Asia, that walls are standing and need only be cleared of wind-blown sand. Our sites, therefore, tend to present special excavation problems.

In the course of Deccan College's thirty years of excavation experience in India we have devised the following technique for exposing these mud and lime plaster floors. To locate the floor every lump of earth is examined as it comes out from under the pick. When a flat surface on one of these lumps is observed, picking is stopped and the loose earth cleared away. Careful, restricted digging is used to determine whether or not a floor level has actually been found. If the answer is positive, we clear away all of the earth above the floor except for approximately three inches. This area is then left to dry for a day



The ancient mounds at Inamgaon.

or two, thus causing the separation of the earth fill from the plastered floor. We find that by doing this the debris above can, in most cases in most areas, be lifted off the floor itself without exceptional difficulty. It still requires skilled work with a penknife and brush but by working from the edge the fill material can be removed bit by bit. At times the deposit sticks fast to the floor. This slows the work and necessitates the use of small pointed tools such as dental implements. As the work proceeds the exposed areas are recovered with fine, loose earth which helps to prevent development of cracks. During the entire clearing operation the excavator removes his shoes and generally lies flat on his stomach to more evenly distribute the weight of his body.

HOUSE PATTERN (PERIOD I)

Two types of dwellings were found in the Malwa (Period I) levels at Inamgaon: first, rectangular houses with mud and reed screen walls, a kind of wattle-and-daub, and second, pit houses. Two of the latter type come from INM-II and one from the main mound INM-I. The pits for these houses have a diameter of approximately 12.50 meters and are approximately 50 cm. deep. Around the periphery are post holes, usually about nine, for supporting the roof. In one of the houses a child burial in two red/grey urns was found in a small pit about 10 cm. from the floor. A few Malwa-style sherds and a small quantity of worked stone were found in this house. The largest and deepest pit house was found on INM-I. This house was 3 meters in diameter and 1.23 m. deep and had an entrance with a stair for descending into it.

The rectangular, wattle-and-daub house seems to be associated with the late phase of Malwa occupation at the settlement. A large house of this type (6.66 m. by 4.40 m.) was found on INM-I. Inside it were several interesting built-in fixtures. In the northeast corner of the structure there was a circular mud platform 1.9 m. in diameter and 10 cm. high. Today such platforms are used to support storage bins. The modern people thus elevate their grain storage and put sand and thorns in the bottom to protect the contents from rodents. In the northwest corner there was a huge storage jar partially buried in the floor. Near the western wall were four clay bowls with gently sloping sides and flat bottoms sunk in the floor. While it is difficult to ascertain their definite function, we do know that modern potters use such facilities for shaping the bottoms of large storage jars. It may not be wrong, therefore, to identify this as the house of a potter. A *chulah* or fireplace was found in the northwest corner of the house near the storage jar. This *chulah* is rectangular and only about 10 cm. deep. A kind of clay

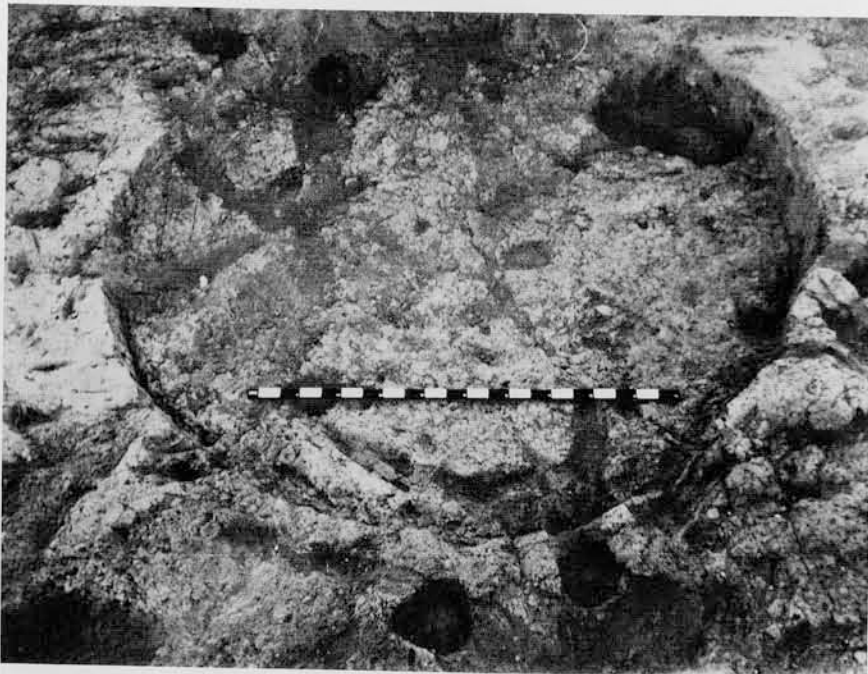
stem for supporting a cooking slab or pot was in the center. A saddle quern, set in the floor, was found in the southeast corner of the house.

A thin partition wall seems to have divided this house into two rooms. It seems unlikely that more than about five persons could have slept here with all of the built-in furniture.

Very few objects were found on the floor of this house but many things were recovered from the overlying layer which sealed the deposit. These are as follows:

Malwa Ware: 3 sherds of oval-shaped storage

Sunken floor with a twin-urn burial. Period I: Malwa.



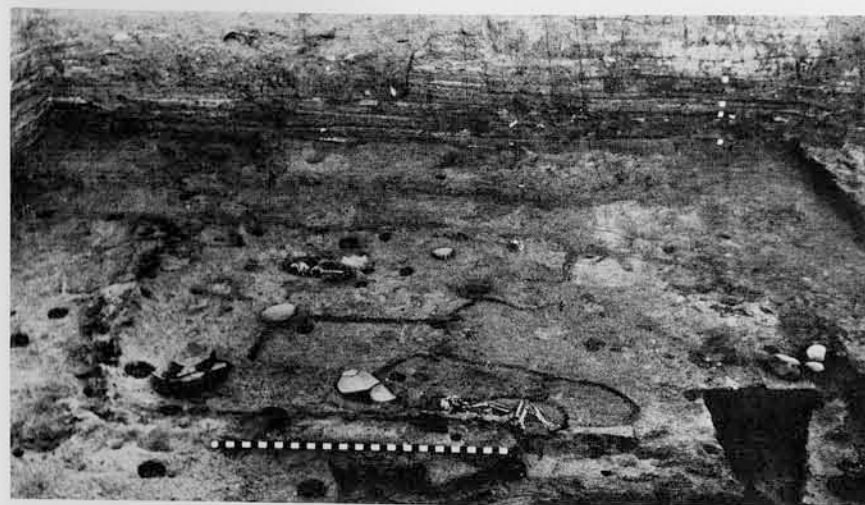
Malwa house. Period I.



Pit dwelling. Period I: Malwa.



Early Jorwe house. Period II.



jars with flaring mouth; 10 carinated pots with flaring mouth and possibly with a tubular spout; 3 vertical-sided bowls; 1 tubular spout; 1 small pot with globular body and high concave neck.

Red/Grey Ware: 15 globular pots with flaring rim; 7 flaring-sided and flat-based bowls, known locally as *kundas*; 7 convex-sided bowls with round base; 5 lids with knobs. *Handmade storage jars with oval body*: 1 plain; 1 with applique decoration.

Other objects: 3 small bone points; 1 lunate of chalcedony; 1 parallel-sided flake of chalcedony; 1 copper piece; 2 carnelian beads. Besides, bones of domesticated and wild animals were also found.

Grains:

Common English Name	Common Marathi Name	Botanical Name
Barley	Java, Satu	<i>Hordeum vulgare</i>
Lentil	Masur	<i>Lens esulenta</i>
Horse Gram	Kulthi, Hulga	<i>Dolichos biflorus</i>

HOUSE AND SETTLEMENT PATTERN (PERIOD II, EARLY JORWE)

The Early Jorwe levels at Inamgaon are about two meters thick and directly follow Period I without stratigraphic break. In fact there is considerable continuity in the occupation of this settlement from Malwa to Late Jorwe. The three cultural periods are distinguishable only through an appreciation of changes in house plan and the fabric, shape and painted designs on the pottery. So far, nine Early Jorwe houses have been completely exposed. All are rectangular and fairly large, the largest being 4.5 by 4.25 m., the smallest 2.75 by 2.57 m.

During this phase of occupation Inamgaon appears to have been a prosperous, orderly settlement. Houses were constructed to a set plan and spaced about a meter and a half or two meters apart. Metal is fairly common in these levels and in one house there was found a hoard of copper/bronze bracelets and bangles. The pottery in the Early Jorwe levels is better made than in the earlier Malwa occupation.

To what extent this prosperity is reflected in the food habits of these people is yet to be determined. However, we have recovered bones of several varieties of deer, goat/sheep, nilgai and pig, as well as several different types of food plants: barley (*Hordeum vulgare*), wheat (*Triticum* sp.), horse gram (*Dolichos biflorus*), lentil (*Lens esulenta*), pea (*Pisum arvense* sp.), grass pea (*Lathyrus sativus*) and a kind of pulse called *wal* (*Dolichos lablab*). These foodstuffs were stored in silos and huge bins made of wicker plastered with mud.

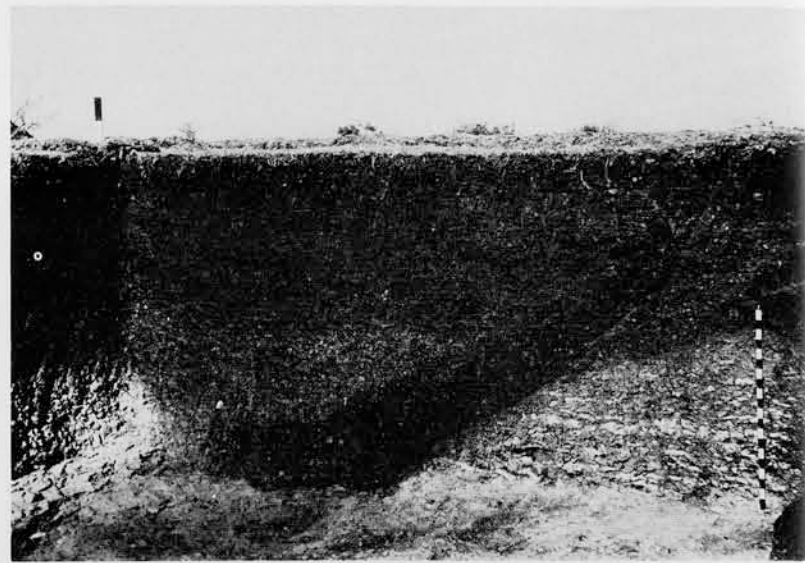
All of the above are winter crops and could have been grown by the dry farming

method as is done today in some parts of the Deccan. There is no evidence of canal irrigation or irrigation by well water. However, in this connection the discovery of a wall nearly a thousand feet long, built of large and small basalt boulders, and of a channel dug out of the trap rock and now filled with black soil, assumes great significance. While this channel and embankment were primarily to divert the flood water of the river to protect the main habitation centers, particularly those of Mound V, the water thus diverted may also have been used to irrigate the fields to the west. The potsherds found in the overlying soil indicate that both wall and channel were constructed in Period II.

It was also during this phase that a jetty was constructed in the northeastern corner of the settlement. Evidently there was sufficient water in the river for small boats to be plied on it. Drawings of boats on pottery were probably inspired by such scenes, rare indeed in this part of India.

HOUSE AND SETTLEMENT PATTERN (PERIOD III, LATE JORWE)

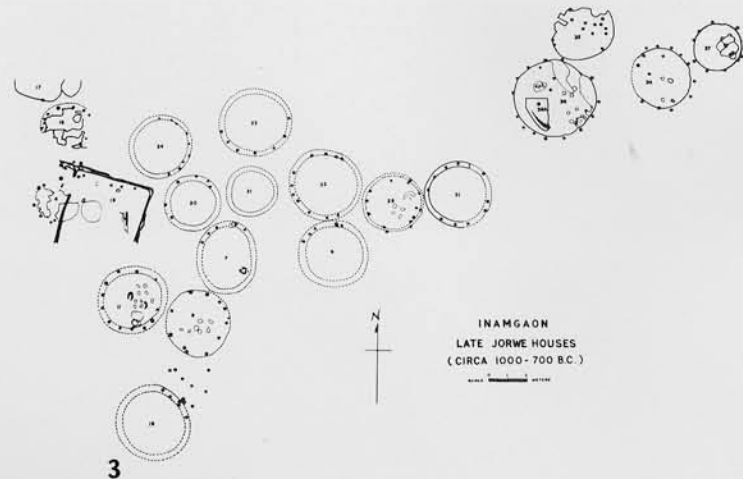
Most of the houses, some thirty-nine in all, have been exposed in the uppermost levels of the site. They are uniformly circular in plan and vary in diameter from 2.5 to 4.25 m. To judge from the excavated areas the Late Jorwe settlement was more nucleated than before, with houses close together. In some cases these round structures appear to have been provided with an open kind of verandah. It is not yet known just why these changes took place but closer clustering of houses may have been a necessary defense in the face of some external threat, or it is also possible that a group of several houses may have formed some kind of family or craft unit. These points are offered here as speculation but will be more extensively treated in our definitive report.



1



2



3



4



5

The ceramics in Period III are uniformly coarse and less well finished than heretofore. Bowls no longer have the crisp, elegant carination, tubular-spouted vessels, common before, decrease in number, and are replaced by channel spouts.

ARTS AND CRAFTS

Several important changes have been documented so far in both pottery making and lithic crafts. We would like to discuss these in a few short paragraphs.

A. The Malwa Ceramic Complex. Malwa-style pottery comes in three wares; black-painted red ware, coarse red ware and a red/grey ware.

The black-painted red ware is the most distinctive and therefore diagnostic ceramic. It is made of a fine orange to buff paste and is wheel thrown. It usually has a thick orange-red slip which is then decorated with purplish to brown-black paint. In addition to simple linear designs there are elaborate rows of plain and hatched triangles and diamonds. Concentric circles and loops also occur in great frequency.

In addition to geometric designs, animals, especially deer, and occasional humans should be noted. These are generally in registers or panels on the upper half of the vessel. The most common shape is quite like the modern Indian *lota* which has a globular body and high concave neck, at times with a flaring rim. Globular jars, bowls and pans are also common in this painted ware. It appears that most of the Malwa painted pottery was for use as a table ware.

The painted pottery is associated with vessels of a coarse red ware. This fabric was used in the manufacture of large storage jars, dough plates and basins with flaring sides.

A red/grey blotchy ware also occurs with the Malwa painted ware. Medium size globular pots with flaring rims, knobbed lids, and bowls of several shapes were made from this fabric. The globular pots were frequently used as containers for child burials and grave goods and it may be that this is only a funerary ware.

1 Section of the ancient channel. Period II: Early Jorwe.

2 Late Jorwe circular house. Period III.

3 Plan of the Late Jorwe house.

4 Early Jorwe jetty. Period II.

5 Early Jorwe spouted pot with painting of a boat. Period II.

B. The Early Jorwe Ceramic Complex.

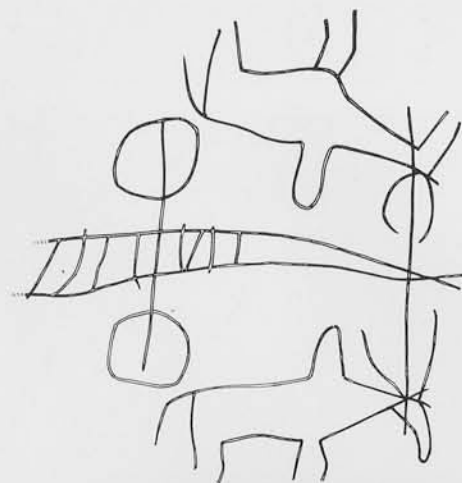
The Jorwe painted ware is made of a fine fabric with bright orange to deep red slip. The surface is smooth and is decorated with black painted designs. The design repertoire is dominated by linear and geometric forms, lines of slashes, wavy lines, triangles and diamonds. Animal motifs are rare. There is, however, an unusual pot with the depiction of a cart with two solid wheels drawn by a pair of humped bulls. And there are the pots bearing drawings of boats mentioned above.

Concave-sided, carinated bowls with round bottoms are common Jorwe forms. So too is the very distinctive tubular-spouted vessel with round bottom and high constricted neck.

The coarse red/grey ware of Period I continues in Period II.

C. The Late Jorwe Ceramic Complex. As we noted above, Late Jorwe ceramics are somewhat cruder than those of the early phase. The fabrics are coarser and shapes less crisp. The convex-sided bowl and channel-spouted basin are the type fossil forms for the Late Jorwe.

Two other fabrics are associated with Period III at Inamgaon. Coarse red/grey ware, which provides a strong line of ceramic continuity for the site and region as a whole, and the so-called black-and-red ware. Black-and-



1



2



4



5

- 1 Incised bullock cart on an Early Jorwe pottery vessel. Period II.
- 2 Early Jorwe potter's kiln. Period II.
- 3 Early Jorwe pottery. Period II.
- 4 Late Jorwe pottery. Period III.
- 5 Black-and-red pottery. Period III: Late Jorwe.



3



red ware is widely distributed in prehistoric times in India. The distinctive red exterior and black interior of the vessels were apparently achieved by "smoking" a basically red-ware vessel over a fire or within a reducing atmosphere. The ceramic is technologically similar in some ways to the black-topped red ware of predynastic Egypt.

D. The Lithic Industries. There are five different lithic complexes associated with the three occupational levels of Inamgaon: chipped stone blade industry; ground/polished stone industry; saddle querns and rubber stones, "bead making"; and hammer stones and sling balls.

The chipped stone blade industry was

apparently practiced by some member of all households throughout the life of Inamgaon. The material used was uniformly a chalcedony which is locally available in river gravels and from veins in the Deccan trap basalts. Thin, ribbon-like, parallel-sided blades were struck from short polyhedral cores using the so-called crested guiding ridge technique. A variety of un-retouched blades, penknife shapes, backed blades, serrated blades, lunates and points have been recovered in the course of excavation.

A detailed housewise study of these materials is under way but the preliminary impression is that stonework of this kind was a household industry. That is, each household

manufactured its own stone cutting/scraping tools. This conclusion is the same reached after a detailed study of the chipped stone from Navdatoli.

Ground and polished stone is, unlike the chipped material, quite rare. We have found a few pointed-butt axes, adzes and chisels. But polishing and grinding was obviously not practiced on a large scale and most likely not by every household. It may be that the dearth of ground stone was due to the fact that copper tools had largely replaced the ground prototypes. It is certainly not due to any shortage of raw materials for good fine-grained dolerite is available only four kilometers south of the site.

Saddle querns are quite numerous at Inamgaon. In comparison to other sites the Inamgaon examples are better dressed and larger. To facilitate grinding, the end from which the work was done was raised higher than the opposite end. In addition to being used as grinding implements for grains it seems likely that these querns were also used for grinding, polishing and sharpening ground stone tools.

Beads of semiprecious stone, generally carnelian, were made at Inamgaon. On the northwest corner of the site many nodules of

this material, which is locally available, were found associated with finished beads and others in various stages of manufacture. Although we have not found definite evidence at Inamgaon for the baking process which intensifies the yellow-red color of carnelian, this process can be reasonably inferred from the facts that many of the finished beads appear to have been so treated and that there was certainly some bead manufacturing taking place at the settlement.

Sling balls of lime are common at Inamgaon, especially in the Late Jorwe levels which have been most extensively exposed. There is a considerable range in the size of these objects: 482 to 36 grams and 6.7 to 3.3 cm. in diameter. We are calling them sling balls based on their size, the absence of use marks and the irregularity of the size which indicates that they were not weights in some system of measurement.

In the last phase of occupation on the westernmost area of the site we found an area within which lime was processed from the raw material into these balls. This included both the kiln and the general work area. It seems that at this stage there were more balls being produced at the site than could have been used by the inhabitants of Inamgaon

themselves. Thus we tend to think that they were traded with surrounding communities.

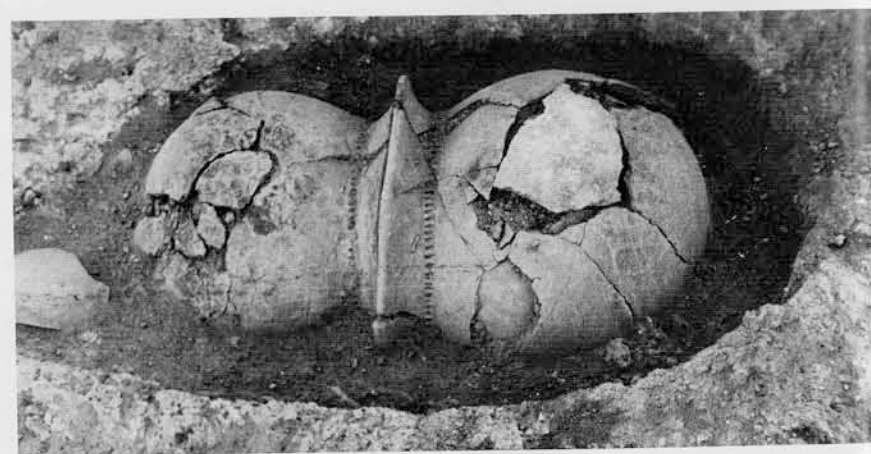
E. Bone, ivory, shell and metals. There is very little worked bone at Inamgaon; however, there is some ivory and shell. An elephant tusk was found in the Malwa settlement and ivory bangles and beads occur elsewhere in the site. Elephants are found in Middle and Late Pleistocene deposits in central India and were likely to have been in the vicinity of Inamgaon during the second millennium B.C. Tusks have also been found in central India at Chandoli, Nevasa and Maheshwar. The remains of conch shell columela and finished bangles indicate that these shells were imported whole into central India where they provided material for the local craftsmen. By far the greatest quantity of shell comes from the westernmost area of Mound INM-I and it may be that further excavation will demonstrate that this was the area of the site reserved for craftsmen.

Both gold and copper objects but no iron tools or weapons have been found at Inamgaon. The hoard of copper bracelets/anklets from Period II has already been noted. Such tools as chisels, pokers, axes and fishhooks have been found along with one lump of ore. The source for the ore has yet to be discovered and we are continuing the search. A few small gold barrel beads were also found. From a small crucible and a pair of copper tongs we infer that metal was worked at ancient Inamgaon.

RELIGION

An insight into the religion of the Inamgaon inhabitants is afforded by the extraordinary human and animal figurines found at the site. Human males and females as well as bulls and a few other animals were made from terracotta. At times these were baked, but most of them were not fired. Though the human figurines differ somewhat in size, they are substantially identical in form. All are standing figures with a featureless head, small outstretched arms and a flat or breasted chest. Inamgaon is the first site where male figurines occur in some abundance. Female figurines, both large and small, have been recovered from Nevasa.

At Inamgaon two figurines, a bull and a human female, have been found in a context which indicates that the ancient inhabitants of the site worshipped the Mother or Fertility Goddess. A nude, headless, standing female figure with a bull was found on the lid of a clay box which had been buried under the floor of a house. Inside the box we found a second female figurine similar to the first but this time with a featureless head. The figurine in the box was supplied with a separate stand to support it during use. The first, headless, figure had a shallow hole in her navel which



matches one on the spine of the bull. By placing a small stick in these holes the female can thus be made to lie prone on the back of the bull. This appears to us to be a very early representation of the concept of *vahana* (carrier) for a deity in India. Other animal-driven figures are found at Catal Huyuk as early as 6000-5000 B.C.

DISPOSAL OF THE DEAD

The earliest burial at Inamgaon is associated with one of the Malwa-phase circular pit houses. A child's skeleton was found interred in two pots of the grey/red ware

- 1 Clay figurine of a god.
- 2 Clay box with female figurine. Period II: Early Jorwe.
- 3 Clay bull and headless female figure with blind hole for mounting. Period II: Early Jorwe.
- 4 Twin-urn burial. Period I Malwa.
- 5 Early Jorwe adult burial. Period II.



H. D. Sankalia is former Chairman of the Department of Archaeology at Deccan College, Poona, in India. Trained at the University of Bombay and the University of London, where he received his Ph.D., Dr. Sankalia is the author of a host of books and scholarly articles on the prehistory of South Asia. He is currently retired from his chair as Professor of Archaeology; however, he is still active in writing, lecturing and guiding the research efforts of Deccan College.



M. K. Dhavalikar is Reader in Archaeology at Deccan College, Poona. A former officer in the Archaeological Survey of India, Dr. Dhavalikar was trained at its field school. He has broad experience in both the prehistoric and historic archaeology of South Asia. He is currently joint field director of the Inamgaon excavations.

Z. D. Ansari is Reader in Archaeology at Deccan College, Poona, where he received his Ph.D. Dr. Ansari has taken part in archaeological excavations since 1944 in all parts of India. He is currently the joint field director of the Inamgaon excavations.

Credit

All photographs courtesy of Deccan College.

which had been placed in a grave beneath the floor. The two pots were placed mouth to mouth and oriented in a north-south direction. The head of the child was in the northern urn, the lower portion of the body in the southern one. So far we have not discovered an extended burial in the Malwa occupation, but there has been only a very little area exposed in this phase.

In Periods II and III we have recovered both child and adult burials, all under house floors. The children were generally buried in two or more pots. Adults were buried in an extended position. Almost every one of the fifty-three burials was oriented north-south. The same is true of the 150 burials recovered from our earlier excavations at Nevasa and Chandoli. Also, as at Nevasa and Chandoli, in each case (except one in Period II) the feet were missing. Nearly all were provided with funerary vessels—generally carinated bowls and spouted jars. These vessels number from two to twelve and were probably intended to hold food and other material for the deceased in his next life.

While our analysis of these burials is not yet complete, it is significant to note that the number and quality of grave offerings vary considerably from burial to burial. We plan to pursue this matter since it may indicate social differences between these individuals.

CONTACTS

Except for the occurrence of a few sea shells, and some black-and-red ware in Period III, there is little to document contact between the inhabitants of Inamgaon and those around them. The black-and-red ware is characteristic of the Iron Age "megalithic" complex in Andhra, Karnatak, and Tamil Nadu, and it is likely that the black-and-red ware bowls in the Late Jorwe context at Inamgaon came from these areas. It should be noted in this regard that megalithic stone circles have now been found at the village of Pimpalsuti not far from Inamgaon.

CONCLUSIONS

The present stage of our research at Inamgaon suggests that it was a large, self-sufficient agricultural and pastoral settlement. The site was first settled at about 1600 B.C. and was abandoned about a thousand years later. In many respects, the place is quite similar to modern villages in the area today. The crops, domesticated animals, some of the architecture, all have vivid modern parallels. This situation provides a real opportunity for the archaeologist interested in the culture history of India to make significant strides forward in an understanding of life ways in this little known period of time. 