

Archaeological Excavation at KHINGAR and DZARKOT

- Chandra Prasad Tripathee

The Department of Archaeology, HMG Nepal and the Coufield Meisezahl Institute for High Asian Studies, Bonn reached into an agreement to launch an archaeological research project in the high mountain region of western Nepal. As desired in the agreement a "Nepal-German project on high mountain Archaeology" is organized and under this project various research groups of different discipline are involved. Within this project a joint archaeological research team represented by the writer of this paper as counterpart from the Department of Archaeology Nepal and Dr. Hans Georg Hüttel from KAVA the German Institute of Archaeology, Bonn was involved in Archaeological excavation at KHINGAR and DZARKOT in Muktinath valley of Mustang district during 1991 & 1992 seasons.

The main objective of the excavation is to reveal the cultural sequences of Muktinath valley and correlate them with the fortresses and "Cave cities" of that part of Mustang district as well as to acquire scientific archaeological datas regarding the settlement history of the high Himalayan belt.

To meet the above mentioned objective, the joint archaeological team selected two archaeological sites KHINGAR and DZARKOT for excavation.

Dr. H.G. Hüttel explained the team members about the potentialities and exploration datas of the sites on which the selection was based¹. Among the two selected sites excavation of 1991's season was concentrated only in the mound KHINGAR. The general introduction and the contour map of the mound had been drawn-out. The system adopted for laying out the trenches as well as a short description about the achievements of the excavation of 1991 season had already been published². It will be worthless to repeat the same here again. Therefore, a brief note about the excavation works and achievements of the season of 1992 has been given here

In this season, a very small scale digging was done in DZARKOT but main concentration was again in KHINGAR. All the three trenches opened last year in KHINGAR were dugdown to the level of virgin soil and the excavation revealed very interesting archaeological datas like structural remains, potteries, antiquities and various features in stratigraphic layers and plans.

The structural remains exposed in KHINGAR showed us atleast three settlement phases in the mound. A careful study of the structural phases gives the idea that the settlers during the 1st phase

of the settlement, just constructed a fort or strong fortified structure in centre of the mound. Some portions of the fortified structure were broken down and the rest were reused while they constructed smaller houses during the IInd phase of the settlement. In the IIIrd phase the settlement was extended to almost all possible areas of the mound and the fortification walls were erected all around. Thus it seems that from the beginning to the medieval period the settlement in KHINGAR became larger and larger, developing to a huge fortified village.

A large number of potsherds of different types and shapes were discovered from the trenches. Though the scientific datas (Lab-results of T/L analysis) are still to come, the typological studies of shapes, fabrics and type of the KHINGAR were generally suggest three different phases correlating the architectural phases of the mound. Most of the potteries are of local origin but few foreign (imported from South) origin. Sherds were also recorded. The ratio of foreign potsherds increase in the IInd and the IIIrd phases, compared to the Ist phase. The potteries of local origin are exclusively handmade and coarse fabric with basket marks and rug impression on the body.

The scientific explanation of the KHINGAR ware will come out after the laboratory report of T/L analysis and other studies of the types and fabric techniques which will help us to establish the ceramic type and cultural sequences of this mound.

The antiquities found in KHINGAR excavation are very few and they help for dating the site, but some noteworthy findings are terracotta miniature, holy water vessel, fragment of a brick-tile with Tibetan inscription, which may read as "Om Mane Padme hum" as well as some terracotta and precious-stone

beads. These antiquities have provided various informations about the ritual and religious practices of ancient KHINGAR people in different stratified layers.

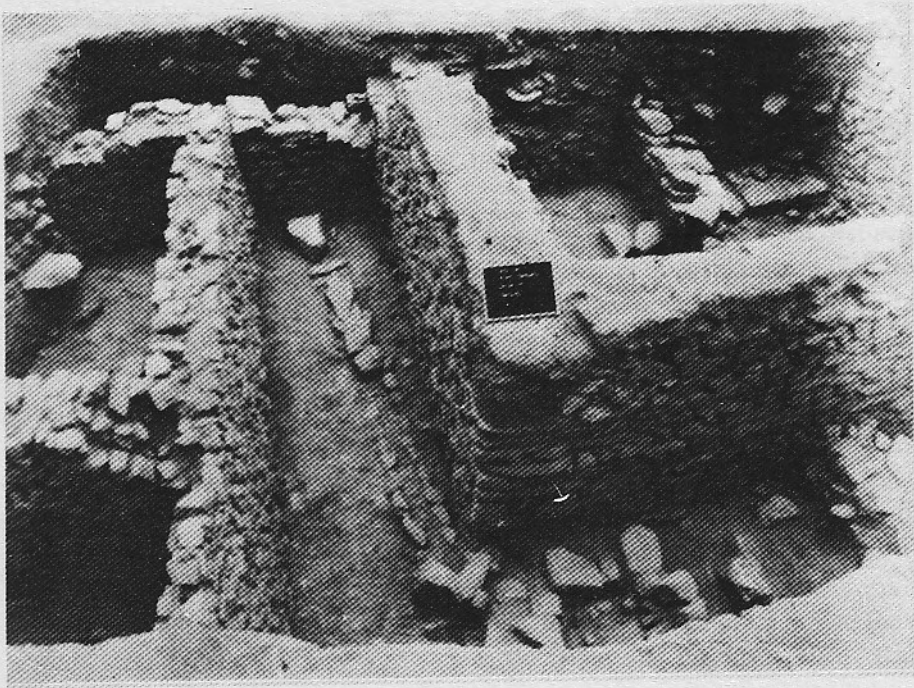
In DZARKOT, the team laid down a small trench measuring 8 x 4.50 m just in front of the ruined castle. The excavations reveal the surprising result that the big castle was constructed just on the top of the mound without any foundation. Antiquities found in the trench are very few and do not provide any important information of the site and the castle. Though the notable number of potsherds were collected from the excavation the diagnostic value is very poor. The excavation shows trace of the old 'entrance' and enough evidences to reconstruct the collapsed part of the castle. Further more excavation is necessary to acquire sufficient archaeological information of the site and castle.

To conclude, the two seasonal archaeological works done in KHINGAR and DZARKOT are very significant in view of the target to meet the objective set earlier. In DZARKOT, further excavation is suggested and more study is necessary. In KHINGAR the study team got a multi-layered settlement of at least three phases. They provide a well stratified cultural sequences for Muktinath valley. The excavation of the KHINGAR mound has yielded enough datas for medieval archaeology of the Himalayan belt. Thus in the near future the archaeological site KHINGAR may rank as the model site for the Himalayan Archaeology of Nepal.

1. Hüttel, H.G, 1993: Excavation at Khingar Mound 1991. Ancient Nepal No.134, Kathmandu.
2. Hüttel, H.G. Ibid.



Ruins of DZARKOT Castle and Excavation Trench behind it.



Structural View exposed in the Trench KHN-BXXI