

Archeological Activities In Lumbini 1976-77

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Historical Prelude

Lumbini, situated at present in the western Tarai of Nepal, was a pleasure-garden entertained by the people of Kapilavastu and Devadal (even before the time of Lord Buddha) In Buddhist literary accounts Lumbini was called Pradimoksha blessed with blooming Sal trees and mass of beautiful flowers where bees of the five different colours hummed. Sweet wrablings of various birds and other natural scenery in Lumbini was comparable to the Chittalata grove of Indra's paradise in heaven

Suttanipata, an earliest Pali text mentioned that "The wisdom-child that Jewel so precious, that cannot be matched, has been born at Lumbini, in the Sakya land for weal and joy in the world of men."

The authentic history of Lumbini, however, started with the pillar inscription of Mauryan Emperor Asoka. The real impetus for the aesthetic development of Lumbini is seen infused by Lord Buddha himself during the last days of his life

According to Mahaparinibbana - Sutta, Lord Buddha was seen eloquent enough to speak about the purity and contemplative virtue of Lumbini and advised all the faithful followers and ordinary devotees to visit Lumbini. A true Buddhist visiting Lumbini even once in his life, shall reside in the happy realms of heaven and cross the riddles of birth and death. Thus, Lumbini, after the birth of Lord Buddha, remained not only as a pleasure garden or a resort for recreation it also developed as a pilgrim's village or the place of aesthetic contemplation even before the time of the visit of Asoka to this place.

Gautama Buddha's attachment to Lumbini may be due to the fact that it was in this place where Buddha immediately after appearing from the right side of his mother, Mayadevi, took seven steps towards north and looking in all directions, he declared his solemn determination that "I am the foremost of all creatures to cross the riddle of the ocean of the existence; this is my last birth and hereafter, I will not be born again"

In Divyavadana, it is mentioned that when the Mauryan Emperor Asoka "wanted to visit, honour and mark by a sign, for the benefit of remote posterity all the spots where the Blessed Buddha has sojourned," venerable Upagupta, the spiritual guide of emperor Asoka, conducted him to Lumbini and pointed the spot where Sakya Muni Buddha was born. The Emperor, with overwhelming joy and deep devotion, prostrated before the Lucky Tree, under which the Lord was born. Asoka consecrated the spot and installed the commemorative pillar with the clear legend that "It is Lumbini Village where the Blessed Lord was born".

One famous devotee, who visited Lumbini after the Mauryan Emperor Asoka, was Fa-hien. He came to Lumbini in the earliest decade of 5th. century A.D. from China. Fa-hien saw the Sakya Puskalani, where the Queen Mayadevi took oath before giving birth to Gautama Siddhartha. He also saw the Lucky Tree, under which Gautama was born.

The second important pilgrim from China to visit Lumbini was Hiuen-Tsiang. He visited the site in 7th. century A.D. and has given more description of the ancient remains in Lumbini. He saw the Sacred Tree, Sakya Tank and various stupas and shrines built to mark the event occurred at the time of the birth of the infant Gautama. Hiuen-Tsiang has described the Asokan pillar, surmounted by the Horse Capital which was broken in the middle and falled down the ground because of the thunder stroke. A little far from the Asokan Pillar, Hiuen-Tsiang has marked the Telar River which was a pool of oil produced by the gods to purify the body of Mayadevi after the birth of the new born Siddhartha.

Up to 12 or 13 century A.D. Lumbini was

frequented by several important pilgrims of Tibet and the Malla Kings of western Nepal. They have recorded their visit in the existing Asokan Pillar at Lumbini. The decline of Buddhism in India after the advent of the Muslims caused the obscurity of Lumbini along with Bodhgaya, Sarnath, Kushinagar, etc. The famous Buddhist monasteries like Nalanda and Vikramashila were raided and the renowned monks had to migrate. Buddhism was considered as a passive religion and all sites associated with life of Lord Buddha were badly neglected and shrouded into the bushes. They were buried under the debris for a long time.

Since about the last decade of 18th. century A.D., some of the then ruling British scholars in India were fascinated by the rich cultural heritage of the East. They were attracted towards the ancient history and archaeology of this region. The enthusiastic scholars like Sir William Jones and others were able to form "Asiatic Society" in Calcutta in the year 1784 A.D.

James Prinsep, a dedicated scholar, helped archaeology to free itself from its antiquarian and literary affiliations. He was able to decipher one of the earliest scripts of India. The path of James Prinsep was followed by Sir Alexander Cunningham, who organised a country-wide survey of archaeological remains in India. He wrote Ancient Geography of India and relocated the famous Buddhist sites like Sravasti, Bodhgaya, Kushinagar etc. But unfortunately the then administration in Nepal did not allow the foreigners to explore the cultural centres in the Nepalese Tarai and caused various problems for serious archaeological research. The archaeological investigations conducted by the then British Government was focussed mainly in Indian territory and the famous Buddhist sites like

Kapilvastu, Rama Grama and Lumbini are calculated to have been situated in Gorakhpur and Basti Districts of U.P., India.

The unscientific deductions and the hypothetical bearings of the location of Kapilvastu, Rama Grama and Lumbini in Gorakhpur and Basti Districts of U.P. were ridiculed since 1895-96, when General Khadga Sumsher and Dr. A. Fuhrer discovered three Asokan Pillars in Niglisagar, Lumbini and Gotihawa, situated in the western Tarai of Nepal.

The exciting discoveries and the magnificent achievements of General Khadga Sumsher and Dr. A. Fuhrer encouraged the then British Government of India to commission Mr. P.C. Mukerjee to fix the exact location of Kapilavastu. As per direction P.C. Mukerjee came to Nepal in 1898 A. D. and confirmed Araurakot (near Niglisagar) as the neta town of Kanakamuni Buddha, Lumbini, the birth place of Gautama Buddha and Gotihawa as the native town of Krakuchhanda. He also explored the entire zone and came to the final conclusion that "In the whole region only Tilaurakot can claim to be the exact site of Kapilavastu as being situated in the right position and fulfilling all other conditions". P.C. Mukerjee published the structural plan of Lumbini for the first time in his monumental archaeological report of 1901 A.D.

Early Archaeological Activities in Lumbini

The major works of excavation in Lumbini were conducted under the patronage of General Keshar Sumsher in 1933-39 A. D. The unscientific technique of archaeology employed in the excavation had caused a great damage to the site. He exposed the structures in levelling methods which resulted many subsidiary monuments to be wiped out. He did not care to maintain the working level of each

edifices. Thus structures found at present in Lumbini are very difficult to be dated and correlated with other subsidiary structures (see Plate No. 1.B.) However, he cared for some utilitarian works like providing a high platform around Mayadevi Temple, and enlarging the Sakya Tank with successive terraces and brick veneer.

The first scientific excavation in Lumbini was carried out by the Department of Archaeology, H.M.G. Nepal, in the year 1970-71 A.D. The aim of this excavation was to locate the site of ancient "Lumbini Graman" as mentioned in the Asokan Pillar to the west of Mayadevi Temple.

The site fixed for the purpose of checking the habitation was the southern mound (around the old Guest House). The excavation of 1970-71 A.D. has indicated that the earliest human habitation in the said area of Lumbini must have started in N.B.P. period. However, the site seems to have got more prominence only after visit of Asoka, during the 3rd. century B.C.; the site seems to have been occupied by the people for the first time from the time of Lord Buddha. The successive human deposit recorded in the southern mound of Lumbini dates from 6th. century B.C. to Gupta period on the basis of the antiquities and findings. The sequence of culture was divided into 10 successive layers and the pottery types discovered were mainly N.B.P. wares in the lowest levels and red wares in the upper stratum.

A trace of the mud wall and a terracotta ring well, which could not be exposed more than 16 circles due to the rise of sub-soil water table, were entoured in the lowest level. A circular burial containing some portion of the human skull, one iron sickle, and a few bones of bird and animals were found kept in a larger number of pots which were mainly full of encised designs. A terracotta

plaque mould of Lord Buddha in the Earth Touching posture was discovered in the excavation. The terracotta plaque mould of Lord Buddha is dated to the Gupta period.

Recent Archaeological Activities:

Conservation:

The structures hallowed in the memory of Lord Buddha from the earliest time up to Mediaeval period are seen scattered in Lumbini around the area, covering 16081 square yards. Most of the important and interesting edifices are, however, enclosed and protected within the barbed wire since 1970-71. Many of them are seen still dilapidated and disintegrated not only by the tropical climate of the Terai but also due to the constant brick robbings by the ignorant villagers for making ovens (to perform the praxis vow called "Kara Gharana").

To avoid further damage to the history of the people, who on their part offered different types of architectures as a homage to the memory of Lord Buddha, immediate action to prevent further destructions was called for. Thus the main aim of the archaeological activities in Lumbini since 1975 was to restore rather than to expose the monuments. Excavation in Lumbini is mainly carried out to complete the restoration activities.

His Majesty King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev, along with other senior Royal Members, inspected the recent archaeological activities in Lumbini with keen interest. Members of the archaeological team were greatly inspired and encouraged by the kind visit of His Majesty King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev.

In our recent archaeological activities, we have been able to repair many succiduous

monuments around the east, west, and northern side of the Mayadevi Temple. A very big brick shrine and some dilapidated walls of the eastern side of Mayadevi Temple were taken for conservation. On western side two votive stupas flanking the famous Asokan pillar were restored. Towards the northern side of Mayadevi temple a group of sixteen stupas (see Plate No. 2 A,B) which had almost lost its original features was reconstructed to its original shape. In this side there are five stupas built in a row (see Plate No. 1 A). The first stupa from the east was already ruined up to the core. It was rebuilt to its original shape and size. The second stupa, datable to the Maurayan period (see Fig. No. 4) was disintegrated by the tropical climate of Terai. Its top was repaired and made watertight. The third stupa was comparable to the second stupa in its shape and size (see Plate No. 3 A,B) But during the Kushana period it was encased within the round shape by adding clay and brick bats all around. One more round stupa of the similar shape and size was built next to it on ground to give the uniform look. Both of these stupas were ruined up to the core. They were also repaired and brought to their original shape. The top course above the ground of the fifth stupa was totally lost. Its existence below the present ground surface was traced during 1975. Therefore, above the present ground level it was reconstructed with Mauryan brick bats available in the site. In the process of conservation, the weeds and vegetation, overgrown in the entire archaeological area, were cleared by scrapping the ground.

Extensive scrappings, around the site of Mayadevi Temple, revealed new structures which were hitherto unknown in the architectural history of Lumbini (see Fig. No. 1) To include the new structures of archaeological significance, a revised structural plan of the mo-

numents around Mayadevi Temple was prepared in the year's work (see Fig No. 2).

Excavation;

The work of excavation was mainly concentrated towards the north-western corner of Mayadevi Temple. At the distance of about 30 feet north of Asoka Pillar a rectangular room of the size 15'4" north south and 12'5" east west was found at the depth of 2' feet below two courses of burnt bricks of the size 17'x8"x5" (see Fig No. 3) The texture of the brick is very rough and contain much husks and straw. The sealing layer of it contains a row of Mauryan brick bats looking like the rammed floor. The associated pottery below this rammed floor-like layer is typical N. B. P. wares and some degenerated gray wares. As the sealing layer above this chamber contains a platform-like Mauryan structure of the size 5'9"x5" built with three courses of the bricks of the size 15'x10"x3", the probable date of this structure is tentatively assumed as pre-Mauryan.

At the distance of 5' feet north from the present white complex of Mayadevi Temple, a square based stupa of Mauryan period was discovered. This stupa was cut from the top up to the depth of 3'x2'8" possibly during the operation of 1933-39 AD. The floor of this stupa contained a gold casket of cylindrical type in association with some charred human bones and other ritual offerings (see Plate No. 4 A,B) only the lid part of some vessels, which during the expositions of 1933-39 A.D. is removed or broken into pieces. Thus the inner contains scattered over the ground and collected at present.

Lumbini being primarily a pilgrim village, and our excavation being limited to the already explored and relatively disturbed area,

antiquities in large quantities was not expected. However, in the course of the one season's work, important antiquities like fragments.. Horse Capital, a beautiful terracotta sculpture of Bodhisattava, and three terracotta human heads and a plaque of Dharmachakra panel, etc, were found

Illustrations of the remarkable antiquities;

- a) Five pieces of Maurayan polished chunar sand stone (Plate No. 5 A) which might be the fragmentary parts of the Asoka's.. Horse Capital surmounted over the present inscribed pillar as mentioned by the famous Chinese pilgrim Hiuan - Tsang who visited Lumbini during the 7th century A.D.
- b) Among three terracotta human heads.. (Plate No. 5 B) the one on the top is crudely moulded and datable to the Kushana period. It is 3½" in size and badly damaged to the left side of the face. The other two terracotta heads put in a row are that of early Gupta period, The hair-dressing of the right figure is in the style of deep curls called "Dupikakuntala" Its thick lips without any bold depression at the two corners of the lips and in the middle of the chin can be seen as the evidence of the transition phase. The facial details of the other figures is worn out. However, the turban like hair dressing is notice able.
- c) A terracotta sculpture of Bodhisattava (Plate No. 6 A) is endowed with real grace and elegance of the Gupta period. It was found in a bust size of 12½' in height The figure is slim, dress transparent, the right hand is raised in protection pose.. Its facial expression reveals spiritual cont-

entment and celestial happiness. The face is elongated with straight nose, smooth cheeks, and thick lips, with depression at the corners. The two sides of the chin is separated in the middle. The eyebrows take a sharp curve. The forehead is bright and prominent, and the crown with one crest is decorated with dotted design in a technique of applique.

- d) The terracotta Dharmachakra (Plate No. 6 B) with 32 spokes was found in the eastern side of Mayadevi temple. This piece must be a part of a big panel. Among other associates of the panel are two animals; one possibly representing a bull and the other deer.

Conclusion:

His Majesty King Birendra is very much interested to see the full-fledged development of Lumbini soon. The great interest and enthusiasm of His Majesty the King is reflected in the following passage. "Although Gautama Buddha was born in Nepal He [belonged essentially to the whole world and to all times." Thus the development of internationally renowned Lumbini will be undertaken according to the Master Plan".

I am deeply obliged to Mr. Ramesh Jung Thapa, Director, Department of Archaeology H.M.G., Nepal, and Mr. Loka Darshan Bajracharya, Chairman of the Lumbini Development Committee, to appoint me as officer in-charge of the Archeological Project in

Lumbini. I would also like to express my deep gratitude to my technical assistants, Mrs. Sarala Manandhar, Miss Rehana Banu, Mr. Hari Man Amatya, Mr. Dev Ratna Ranjitkar and Mr. Sanu Raj Shakya who always rendered their enthusiastic cooperation during the entire period of the Project. The published photographs are to the credit of Mr. Sanu Raj Sakya and Mr. China Ratna Tamrakar.

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Books consulted:

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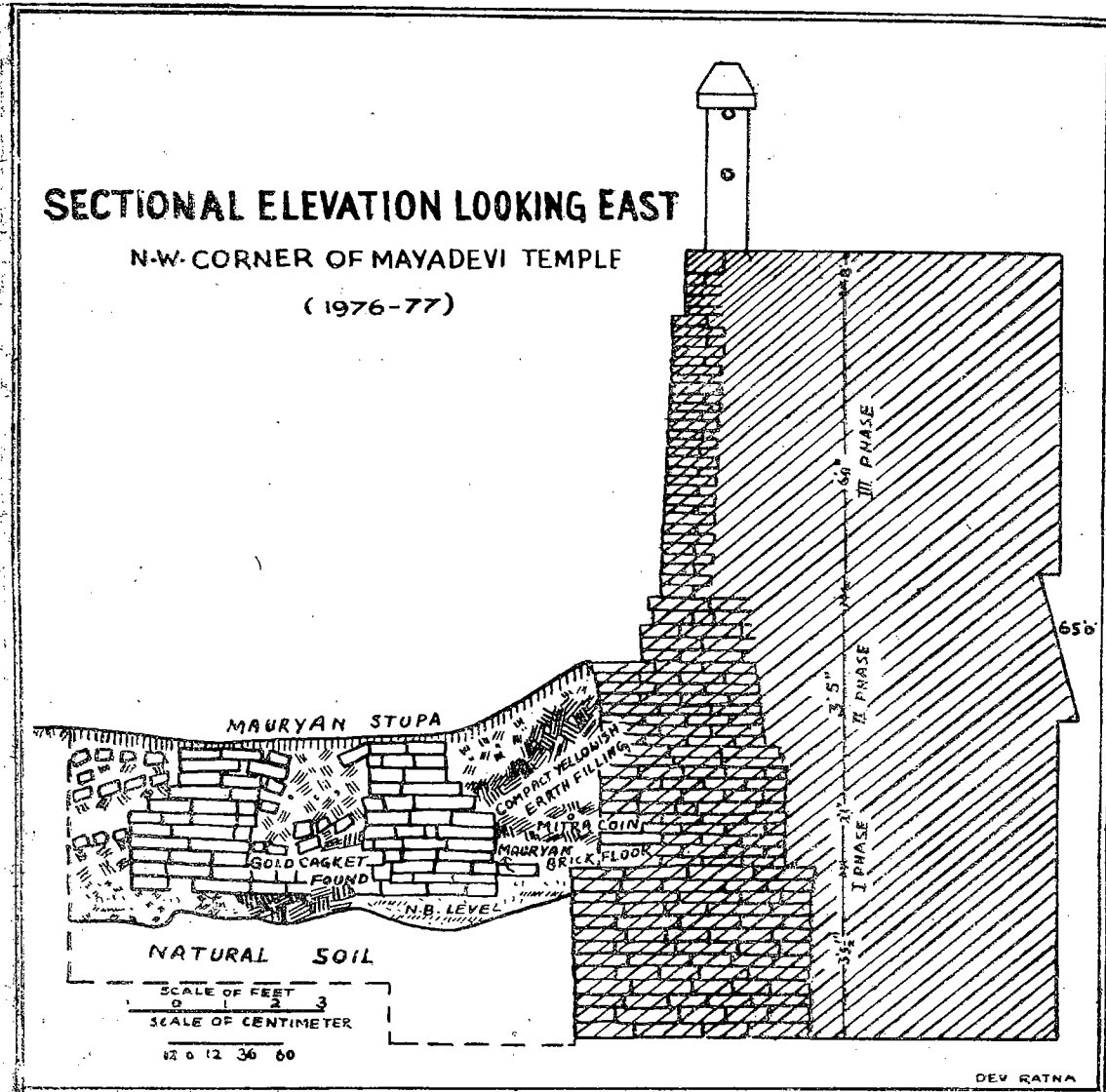
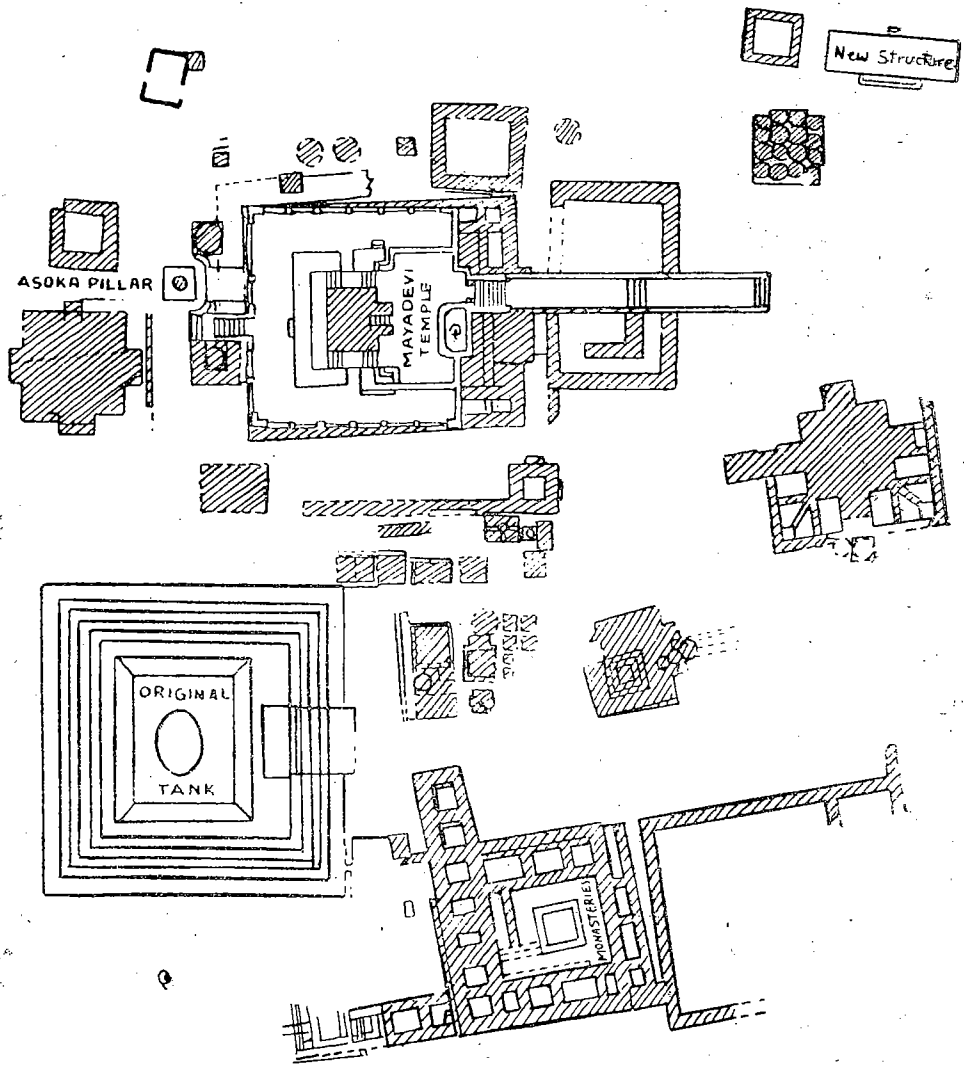


Fig. No. 1

ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS AROUND MAYADEVI TEMPLE (PLAN REVISED IN 1976-77)



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REVISED BY
H. M. AMATYER & DR. RANJITKAR

Fig. No. 2

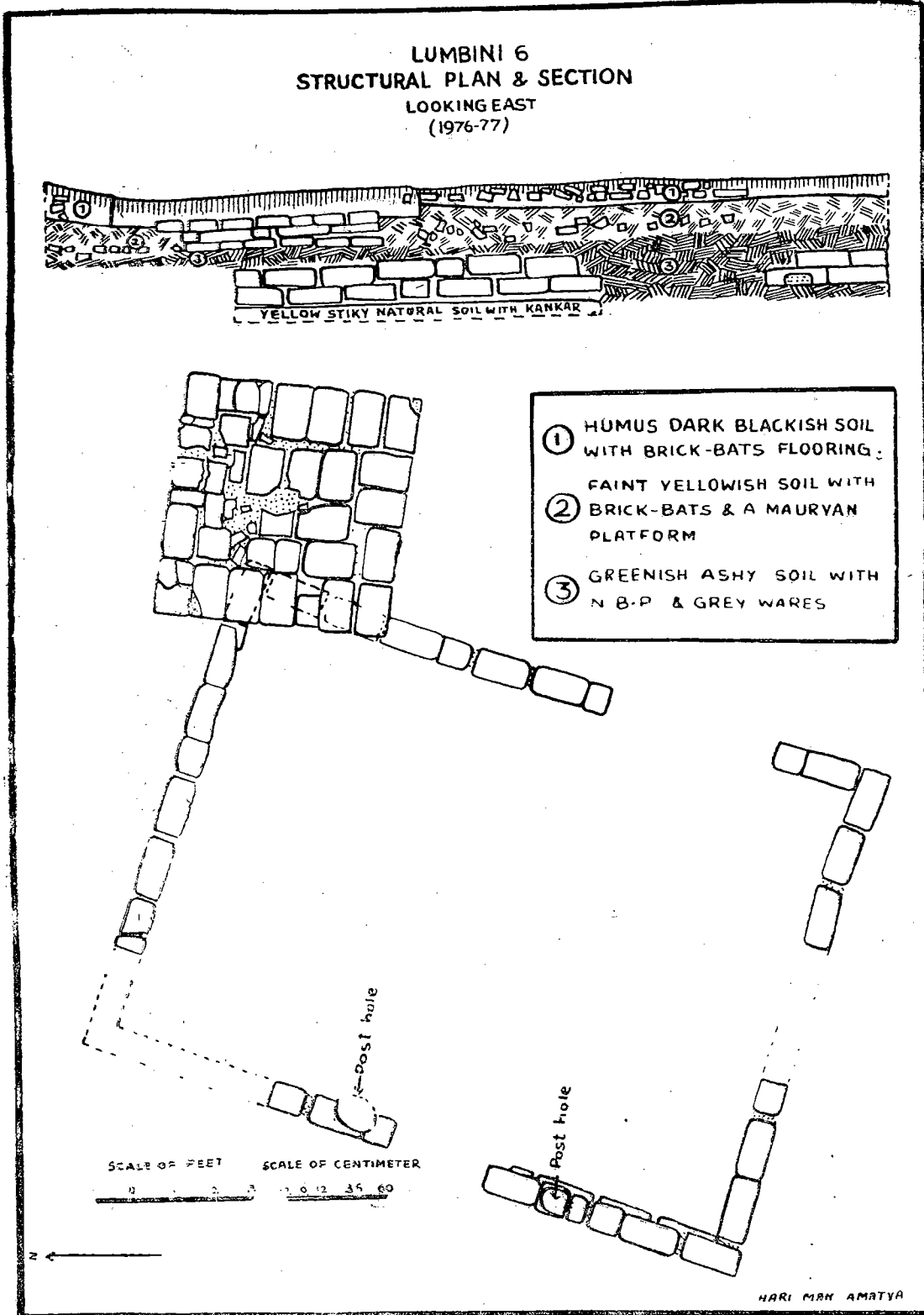
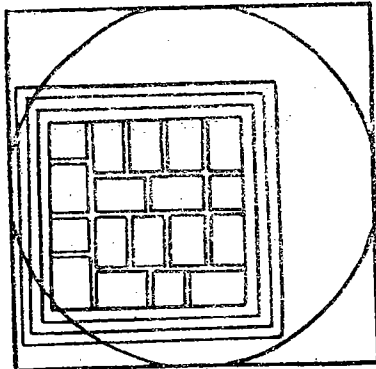
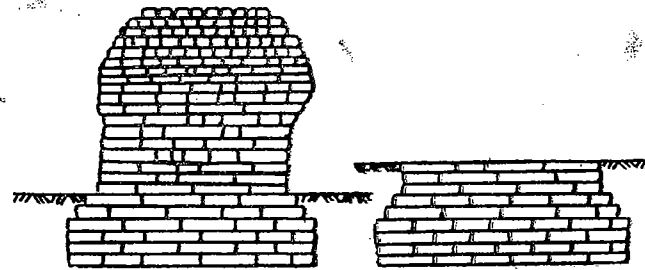
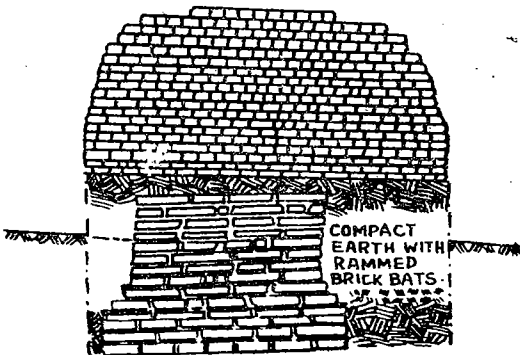
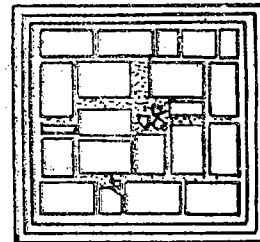
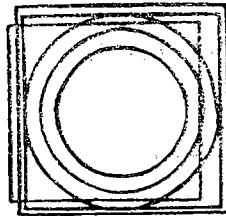


Fig. No. 3

PLAN & ELEVATION OF MAURYAN STUPA
ENCASED DURING KUSHAN PERIOD, NORTH OF
MAYADEVI TEMPLE

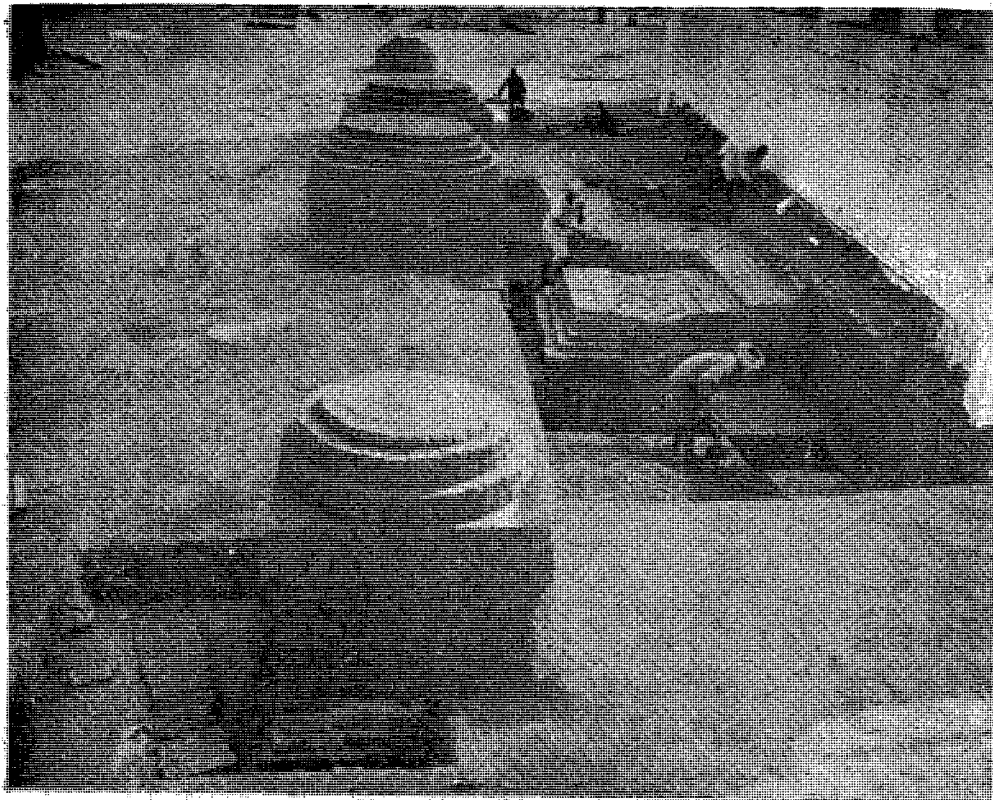


PLAN & ELEVATION OF MAURYAN STUPA
NORTH OF MAYADEVI TEMPLE

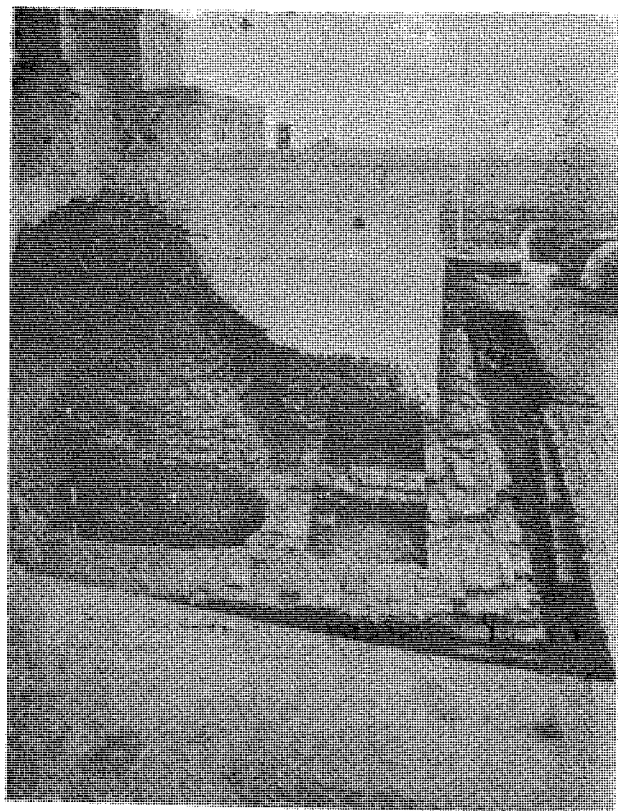


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SCALE OF METRE 0 1 2 3 4 5 DEVRATNA (1976-77)
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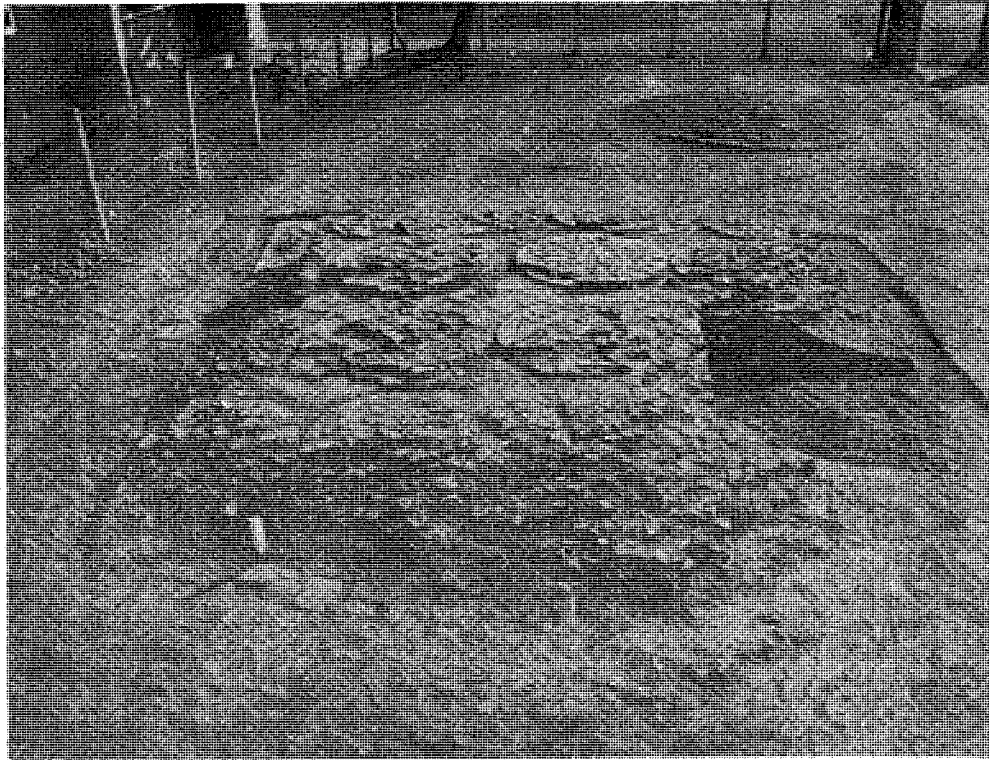
Fig. No. 4



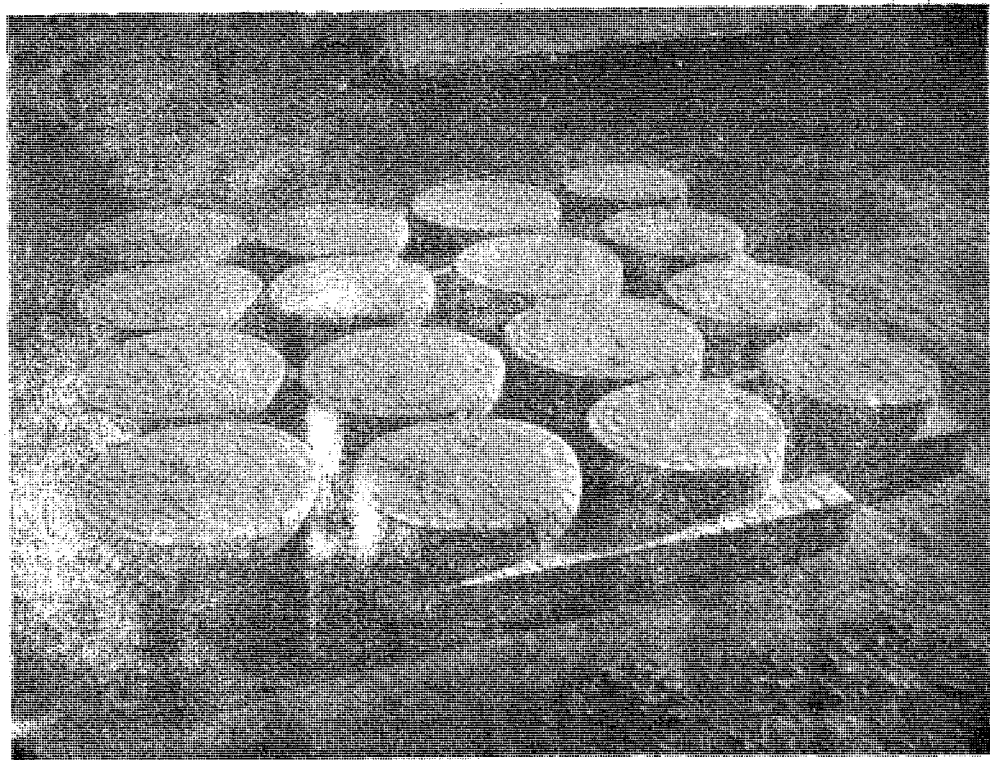
A. Archaeological activities in the north side of Mayadevi Temple



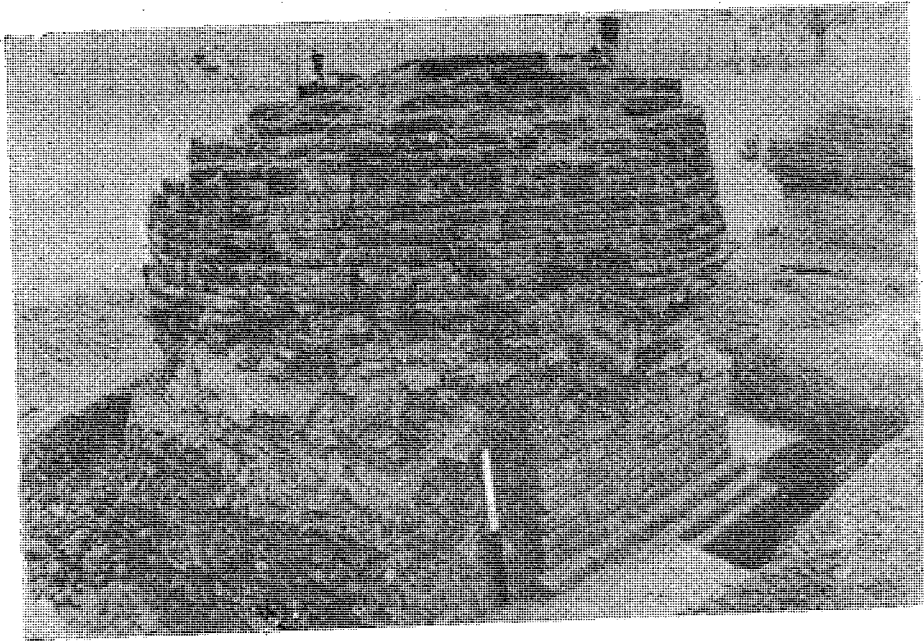
B. Present Mayadevi Temple built over the earlier subsidiary structure, view from the north east



A. A group of sixteen votive stupas before conservation



B. A group of sixteen votive stupas after conservation



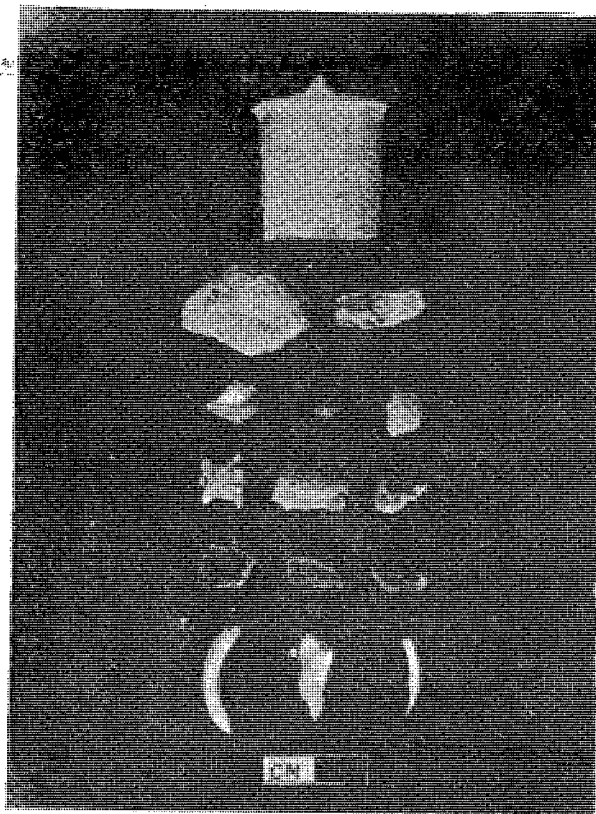
A. A votive stupa showing two periods of construction



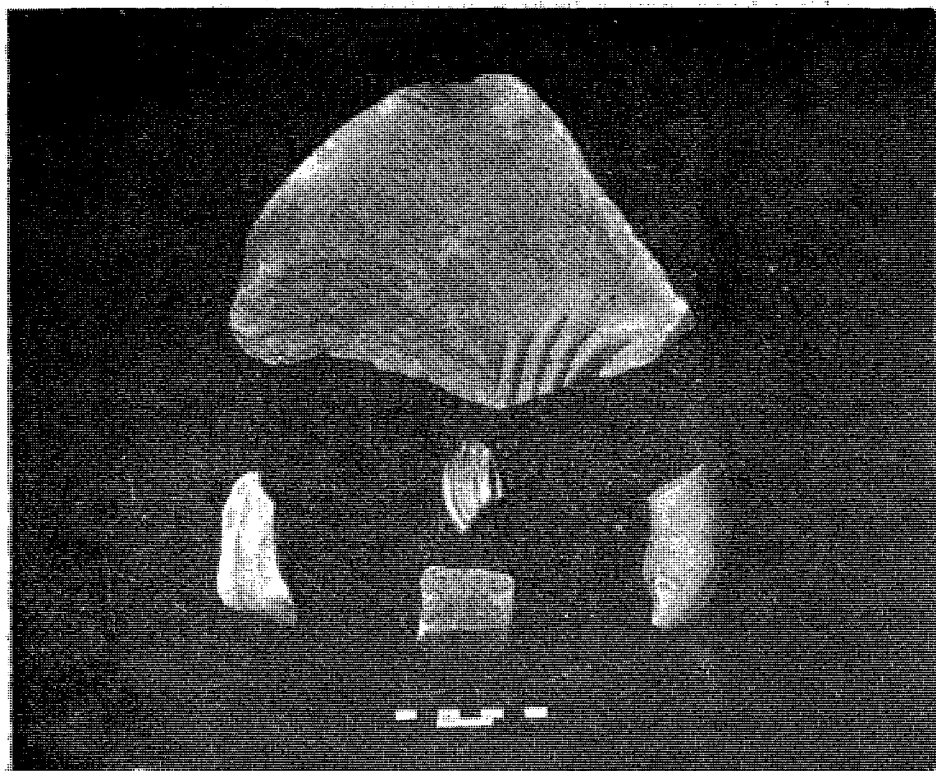
B. A votive stupa showing two periods of construction after conservation



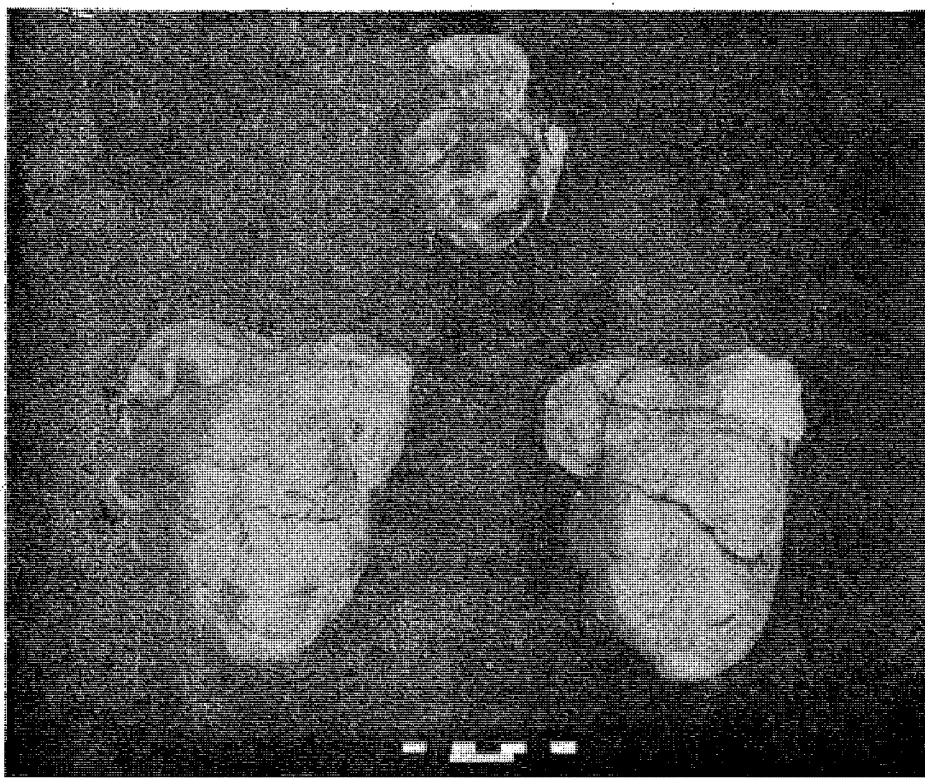
A. Gold Casket found in the floor of the Mauryan stupa



B. Gold Casket with associated findings



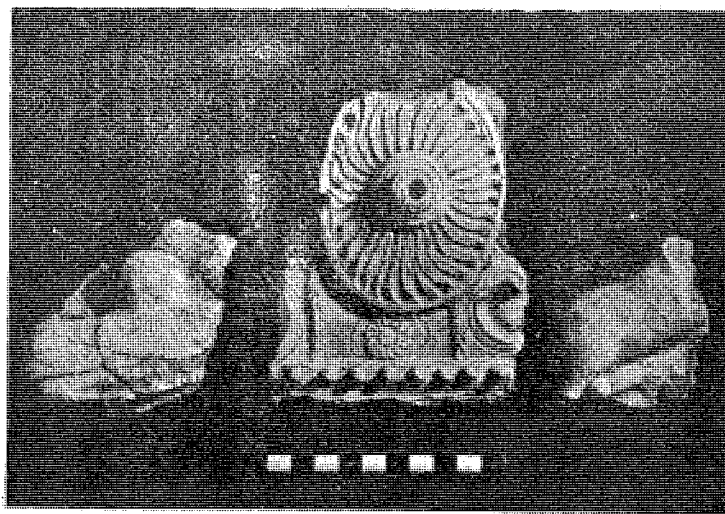
A. Five pieces of Chunar sand stone:
possible fragments of Asoka's Horse Capital



B. Human terracotta heads [Kushana and early Gupta period]



A. Terracotta sculpture of Bodhisattava [Gupta period]



*B. Terracotta plaque of Dharmachakra
(Gupta period)*