

The Sinja Valley Excavation in 2000 A.D.*

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Our brief fieldwork season in October, 2000 was primarily directed towards the testing of the main ridge-top ruins and only summary inspection could be made earlier survey findings in the wider environs. However, even in this, our programme was curtailed. Due to Maoist insurgency the army had just been deployed in the region, and the local villages were divided whether they would allow the fieldwork to progress. Throughout our Nepalese HMG partner, Mr. U. Acharya (assisted by Mr. R. Kunwar), adroitly handled what was clearly very tense and potentially volatile circumstances with admirable perseverance and sensitivity.

Background

It was through his researches in western Nepal that Yogi Naraharinath first identified Sinja as probably being the site of the summer palace of the Mallas (1956/2013), and this interpretation was furthered by Tucci (1956 & 1962). Thereafter followed Joshi's summary investigations in the 1970s

(1971/2028), with the current fieldwork programme arising from Mr. T. Harward's more recent surveys within the region. Documenting decorated architectural fragments, sculpted remains, pipe-irrigation systems and an extraordinary array of small finds (e.g. copper alloy tablets and figurines), it was through his instigation that the Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) became involved in the area. In 1998 a preliminary season formally surveyed the earthworks and building foundations along the 'palace' ridges and documented other local findings (Evans, Gibson & Harward 1999). Most impressive amongst the latter are eight lion sculptures and a number of standing 'hero' stones (inscribed.)

Given local conditions and attitudes, in the course of the 2000 season it was initially decided to only 'regularize' the main north-south sondage of Joshi's earlier excavations on Terrace D (the traces of his cuttings and spoil heaps were much evident; fig. 1)¹ and in no instance were walls dismantled.

1. Seeming to consist of no more than a day's rapid 'wall chasing', his work was not officially sanctioned and no records or finds can be located from it.

* The Sinja Valley Project, The 2000 excavations, carried out by Cambridge Archaeological unit, University of Cambridge, UK. Department of Archaeology, HMG, Nepal, 2002.

Sinja- Earthwork Survey

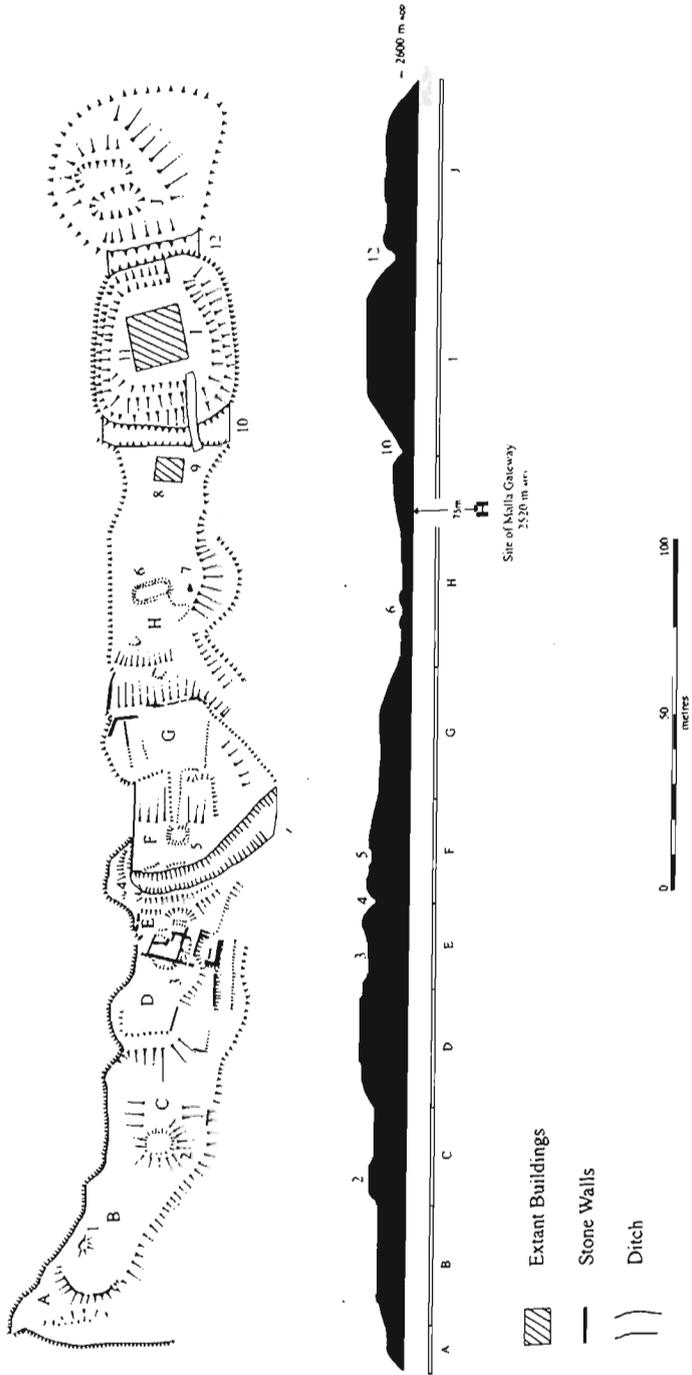


Figure 1

Eventually, however, we were able to proceed with greater confidence and could excavate meter-wide cross-trenches along the faces of main walls:

- North/South* – Trench II (13.00m long)
East/West – Trenches I, III & V (18.70m long, Trench VI denotes a sunken porch/alcove bordering the southern side of Trench II that had evidently been cleared by Joshi).

Through the cutting of bush, and the judicious probing and exposure of the tops of walls, we were able to determine the complex's plan across this swathe of the hill-side. In order to investigate the obviously 'artificially' levelled terrace summit bordering the western side of this complex, a 2.00 x 2.00m. trial exposure was made in its middle (Trench IV). In addition, the larger scale recording of the ridge's earthworks was completed, with the southern end of Terrace H and the two terrace knolls beyond that surveyed (I & J; the former is the moat-enclosed rise on which the Kanaksundari Temple sits; p1. I & fig. 1). Showing a c. 12.00m variation across the top of the ridge itself, the following features have now been identified:

- 1) Small mound with traces of walling along its eastern side
- 2) Sub-rectangular mound of rubble (6 x 7.00m), probably building-related
- 3) Main building range/ruin; site of Joshi's investigations and 2000 excavations
- 4) Large dry ditch, c. 7.00m across and 2.00m deep, with upcast rampart to north
- 5) 'Square' foundations (c. 5 x 5.50m), said to be the site of a former shrine to water god, Jalapa, approached by walled (largely robbed) sunken way from south
- 6) Outline of possible sub-rectangular structure (c. 5 x 10.00m)

- 7) Masonry 'block', possible wall corner
- 8) Rest house (extant)
- 9) Bridge access to Terrace I
- 10) Large rock-cut ditch c. 7.00m across and 2.00m deep
- 11) Kanaksundari Temple
- 12) Large rock-cut ditch, c. 6.00m across and 2.00m deep.

The excavations proved relatively uncomplicated. Typical of many alpine sites with acid soils, no complex strata or distinct floor surfaces could be recognised. This being said, masonry was found to survive to a height of 1.45m and cut features could be readily distinguished in the off-white marl/gypsum-derived geological sub-stratum. Whilst quantities of pottery (345 sherds), glass fragments (eleven) and some metalwork was recovered (three pieces), the paucity of bone is surely attributable to the acidity of the site's soils. Other noteworthy finds include three Tsa-Tsa statues/plaques. In the investigations, 45 features were distinguished (F. 1-45) - variously walls/footings, doorways, troughs and pits/silos - involving the recording of 52 excavation contexts ([no.]; <no.> indicates finds number).

The Terrace C and D Excavations

Effectively framing the excavations, the arrangement of the main building range will here be summarily outlined before progressing to the site's chronological sequence. Its upstanding masonry extends continuously over 11.00 x 25.00m, from the flat top of the ridge down its upper southwestern flank. Representing a 'complex architecture' and involving a minimum of 11 separate rooms/spaces (presuming contemporaneity of its components and omitting any upper storey arrangements or only 'slight' non-masonry room divisions), along the length of the range four main 'units' or 'cells' were identified (from east to west; fig 2):

A) A 9.00 x 7.50m 'square' (west wall, F. 1; south F. 21 & 22; east, F. 23; pl. II); a southern doorway was located in the southeastern corner (F. 32; pl. III & IV) and there are internal room divisions (F. 24 & 38); three walls extend south from the cell's southern wall (F. 2, 19 & 31).

B) This extends; in total, over 4.20 x 9.50m. The northern wall (F. 5) clearly abuts the side of Cell A and seems integral with its western wall, F. 6, that extends for c. 2.30m beyond the southern 'front' of Cell A, at its southern end it appears to return westwards (as F. 9). It may well be the case that the west wall F. 6 was either itself, or incorporated (i.e. built upon), an earlier terrace wall that was only later utilised within this as a building (see F. 29 below). A southern wall had evidently been added sub-dividing its length (F. 3; just before the front of Cell A). This has a doorway at its western end, at the point of its junction with (abutting) wall F. 6.

C) This is a complicated multi-roomed building (F. 7, 13-15), extending over 6.-6.90 x 9.50m and includes a southern 'alcove'/porch (F. 8 & 9); its complication, in part, arise from that it seems to also incorporate an earlier terrace.

D) Extending for 5-5.50m west downslope from Unit C (7.45m long), no excavations occurred within this area and its walls were only recorded in plan (F. 34 & 35).

The eastern side of this range stopped 2.50-6.00m short of the very steep slope of the ridge-side at this point. Its edge is here supported by discontinuous lengths of walling (F. 40, 41 & 45) and, in the north, one appeared to flank the side of a stone stairway leading up to Terrace D (F. 42); the levelled interval between the ridge-side and the building range apparently served as a pathway route along the ridge.

Attesting to both the demise and scale of these buildings, much stone rubble has tumbled down the

western ridge-side below this complex. This does not seem to have extended around the northern end of the terrace ('D' *et al*), though there - after an interval of c. 5.00m - a c. 20.00m length of terrace wall continues the line of the west wall of Cell D (F. 35). Beyond that, locally there is much rubble below the square platform ('2') on Terrace C and, too, down the side of Terrace F by the earthwork imprint of the small square shrine ('5'; fig 1).

Early/ 'pre-Range' Features

Within the northern end of Trench III a large pit had clearly been dug out by Joshi, with its 'fill' only consisting of subsequently tumbled-in stone and collapsed soil (i.e. for the most part was open/void; F. 10, fig. 3). This had a bell-shaped profile (probably exaggerated through post-excavation weathering), so that while its top was c. 0.70m in diameter, with depth its sides undercut by 0.20-.30m. It was c. 1.20m deep from the top of the natural. However, paving slabs - angling in relationship to the pit's edge - within the undisturbed brown silty loam soil horizon above this level must mark the true level of its top (0.20 - .25m higher), making the pit c. 1.45m deep in total.

This upper 'soil' horizon proved to be the fill (including stone and small brick/tile fragments) of a SE-NW oriented trough (F. 25) in which pit F. 10 had been set. Only the near-vertical eastern side of this linear cut was visible (0.80m + wide). Exposed over a distance of 4.50m, and continuing beneath the northern wall of Building Cell B (F. 5), beyond which it returned westwards, this flat-based cut deepened along its axis; beside pit F. 10 it was c. 0.10m deep whereas under wall F. 5 it was 0.40m deep.

Just south of pit F. 10, a short length of drystone wall (F. 39; two courses high - 0.15m - and one stone/0.14m wide) was found to extend along the length of this cut for c. 1.00m. While possibly the stub of an otherwise robbed-out wall, it lacked any kind of

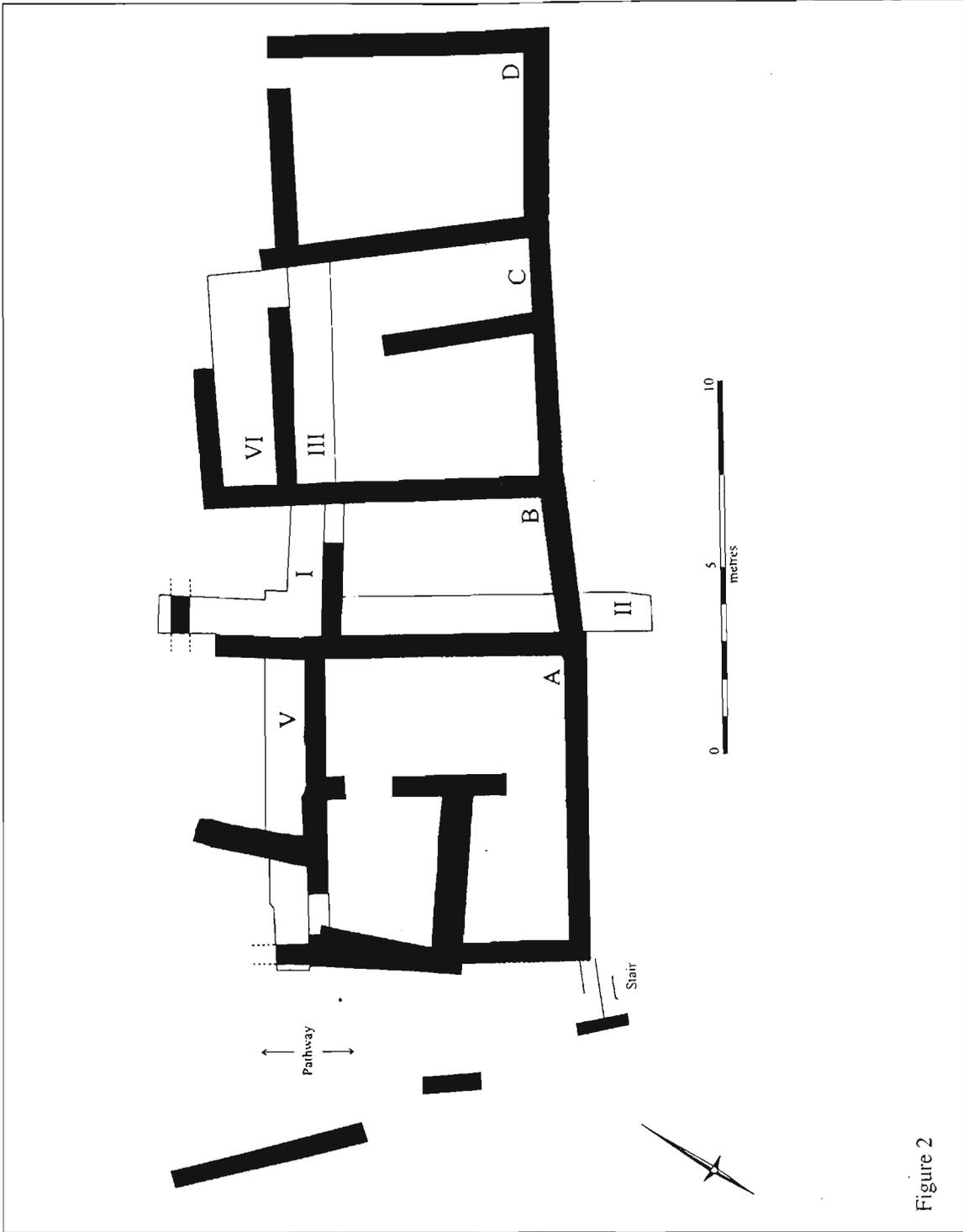


Figure 2

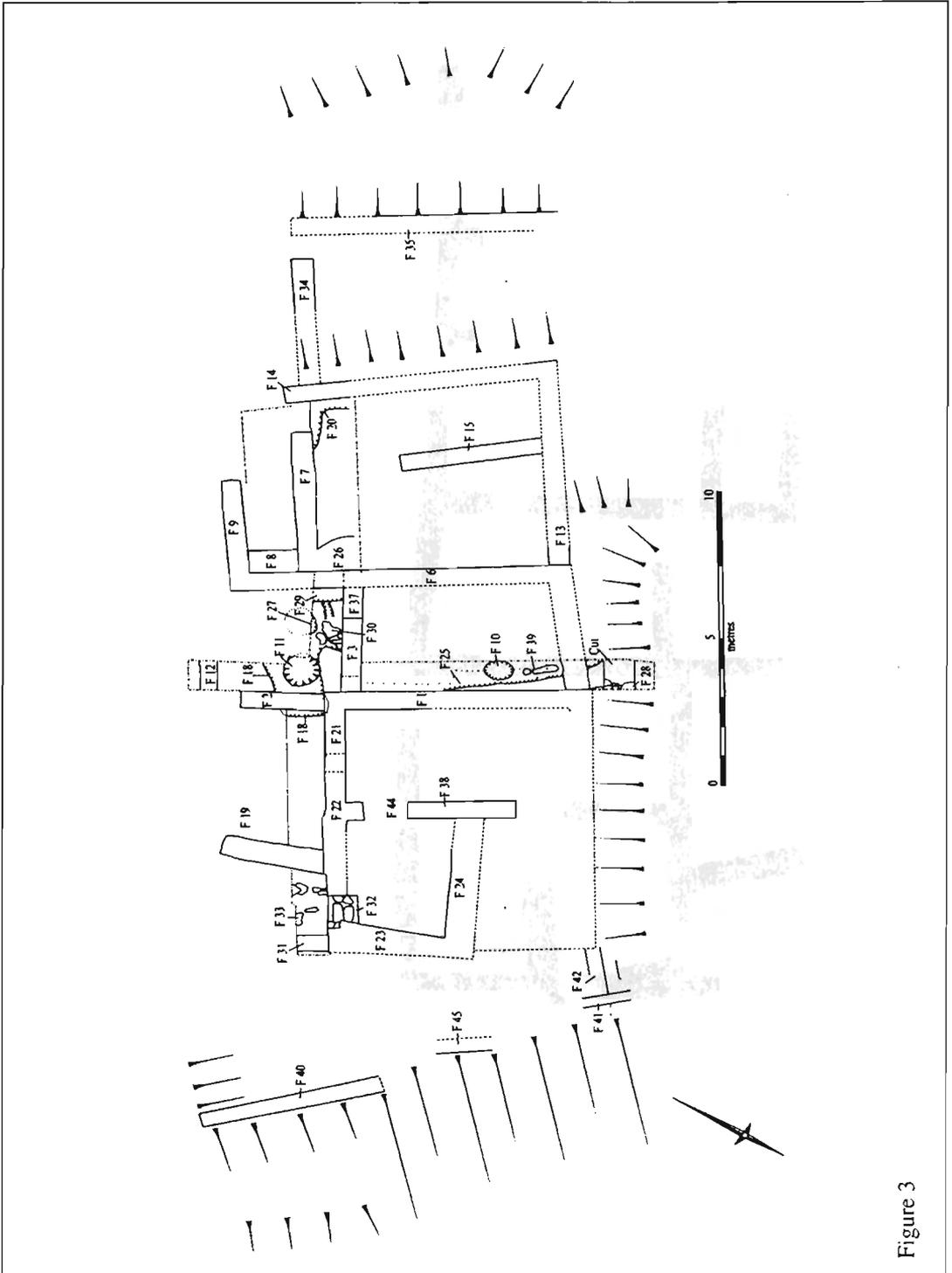


Figure 3

footing or rubble core and seems, possibly, to relate to a stone-lined drain.

A similar pit/trough arrangement was excavated over the southern end of the trench, just beyond its junction with Trench I. There, a void pit, F. 11 (1.00m top diameter, undercut by 5-10cm with depth; fig. 4), 1.65m deep (1.50 below top of natural), lay within a northeast-southwest oriented flat-based linear trough, 1.60m wide and with a maximum depth of 0.30m (F. 18). Crossing Trench II (and returning northward within Trench I), this continued beneath wall F. 2 and terminated in a 'squared' butt end immediately beyond the eastern side of that wall (it was also definitely sealed by the corner of Building Cell A - F. 1/21).

In the section exposed beneath the western face of F. 2 (Trench II east side), a large stone slab (10cm thick) was found set in the upper fill of F. 18 suggesting stabilisation anticipating the construction of the wall. Alternatively, this might instead relate to a more general stone paving laid within this cut. 3-5cm thick, stones up to 0.10-.20 x .10 - .20m in size had been set to support and wedge a series of very large schist slabs (0.20 - .40 x .50 - .70m) that had been set to ring around and slightly overhand the lip of pit F. 11 (p1. VI). When first excavated, balanced upon this edging and sealing the pit (and responsible for its void interior) was a large sub-circular capstone, c. 0.60m across. Aside from these stones, trough F. 18 was filled with mid brown silty clay (with flecks of charcoal and burnt clay).

Within Trench I, trough F. 30 appeared to conjoin and be a northward return of the F. 18 cut. Some 0.12m deep (east side), it too held a paving of large stone slabs which were there set within grey/black scorched silts with flecks of charcoal and burnt clay fragments ([031]). An east-west oriented trough (0.25m wide and 5-10cm deep), ran west from this paving.

Along the southern edge of this Trench (0.60m west of pit F. 11) was found the northern edge of another substantial pit (F. 27). 0.15m+ x 0.50m+, this was more than 0.30m deep (its base could not be achieved). It appeared to be backfilled with large/medium stones with brown clay silt and lenses of re-deposited natural. The [031] scorched silts sealed and bedded down into the upper fill of this feature, for which there would seem to be two possible interpretations. F. 27 may represent a backfilled pit or large structural feature (i.e. posthole); alternatively, it may also have been a 'great' pit comparable to F. 10/11 but which has had its sealing paving removed and been in-filled.

At the northern end of Trench II was found a complicated early masonry feature, F. 28. Only found at the end of our excavation, this proved difficult to distinguish and trace. With our time running out, it clearly was not defined or understood in its entirety, and this was not abetted by the fact that 'cleanly' re-deposited natural seems to have been backfilled within its associated robbing trenches. Two components were identified. The first of these, which was by far the more obvious, was an northwest-southeast oriented wall footing. This consisted of two well-laid horizontal courses of large stone slabs/blocks (4 x 17-26 x 17-38cm) set in mid brown friable mortar with flecks of burnt clay. Above this bedded the same soil layer but with lense of mid brown loam and uncoursed stone inclusion; this evidently attests to the robbing of F. 28's upper courses.

The second component appears to be a largely robbed-out east-west return wall that extends westward. Below the level of the northwest-southeast footing, two courses of roughly laid large stones project west beyond its edge and a robbing trench (filled with re-deposited natural with lenses of dark brown silt loam with traces of burning and charcoal fragments) extended across the width of the trench.

Though the alignment and sides of its cut were not satisfactorily defined, this was definitely truncated by wall F. 5 and there can be no doubt of the 'early' attribution of this masonry (i.e. pre-main building range.)

One other possibly early masonry footing was identified. This was found at the extreme eastern end of Trench I where a footing was revealed off-set (by 0.35m) below the line of wall F. 6 (Building Cell B west wall). There, large stone blocks (c 15 x 15 x 20cm) were laid in rough courses in a cut down into the natural, where they were packed with re-deposited natural and lenses of brown/grey silt. Whilst normally given this masonry's situation one would associate it was an off-set foundation of wall F. 6, this seems unlikely as the burnt horizon associated with the F. 30 trough in that trench ([031]) extended as a 5cm thick layer over the top of F. 29 and continued under wall

F. 6. This, thereby, indicates that they could not be contemporary. Instead, it is likely that the F. 29 footing related to F. 26, a masonry build along the western side of wall F. 6 and whose phasing/constructional relationship to it was unclear. 0.70m wide (though 'bowing' to 1.50m width in the north of Trench III), due to the stepping in of that trench only the upper 0.80m of F. 26 was exposed; it is presumed to go down to the natural strata and be c. 1.35m high/deep. Although possibly involving some degree of post-usage collapse, the build of this wall was irregular, involving uneven coursing and square stone blocks (5 x 10-15 x 15cm), and appeared to be terrace- rather than building-related. Yet it might, alternatively, relate to the provision of a 'second' load-bearing wall - specifically for Cell C (F. 6 relating to Cell B) - and this is an interpretation that will be further discussed below.

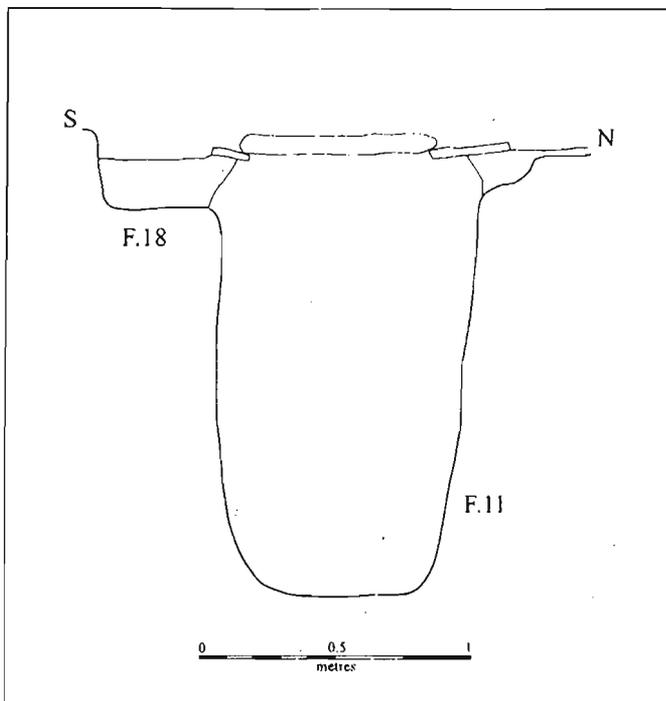


Figure 4: Reconstructed profile of F. 11 pit-cistern

The Sinja.....

Originally stone-slab capped and presumably void, the large pits, F. 10 and 11, probably both functioned as grain silos and are comparable to those still used within houses in the region today. They may relate to cuts F. 18, F. 25 and F. 30, with the latter including what was probably a length of stone drain (F. 39). The main question surrounding these features is their phasing attribution. Certainly they seem to pre-date the constructions of second cell/unit of the main building range (Building Cell B). Whilst it is conceivable that they were contemporary with the original square building (Building Cell A), this seems unlikely given that the alignment of their associated troughs/channels lies off of that structures, and that F. 18 extends beneath its southwestern corner.

Based on plan alignments, complicated building-sequence relationships would be postulated, relating the alignment of these troughs to the western and central walls of Cell C (F. 14 & 15), and together see these as constituting a large early structure whose eastern walls have been robbed out. Yet, this is too tenuous a basis of associated and, surely, the more direct interrelationship of wall F. 28 and trough F. 25 (the latter apparently) returning westwards in relationship to that wall) seems the more plausible. All that can simply be said is that there is evidence of earlier usage (but still with brick/tile in association) that we do not understand. This, of course, is not surprising given how little of this pre-range occupation was exposed. It does, however, warrant mention that the robbing of this structure seems to have been quite thorough, and that the scorching associated with its deposits could suggest that some manner of catastrophe was responsible for its demise.

The Building Range

The range's masonry must be considered of modest proportions and its walls are only c. 0.60-.65m wide. Generally bonded in a brown mud mortar (with lateral 'build divides' in its coursing),

though using slabs up to 0.40m length, most of the stonework is much smaller - 4-5 x 15-20cm. Larger block-like pieces, up to 15cm wide, are generally used as footings. However, apart from in the main downslope/terrace walls that have deep trench-built foundations (F. 6 & 14 and the western end of F. 7 - see below), these are only one course deep/high. Reflecting upon its scale (and limited 'grandeur'), if we add to this that the complex was not constructed in one episode, but that it sequentially extended down the slope, then it seems all the less 'monumental'.

Being internally sub-divided into three, the eastern building cell ('A') has the most obviously complex arrangement of rooms (though 'C' may have a comparably complicated structure; fig 6.2). It only appears to have been gained from its southeastern doorway (F. 32), from which a square room was accessed (A1). From there, doorway F. 44 opened onto a large western room (A2 - 3.10 x 3.20m). It is from the latter that its 'square' northeastern or 'back' room (A3) seems to have been reached, though it is possible that this may have had a separate exterior entrance onto the long-ridge pathway. It warrants mention that this building may have originally only had two north-south oriented 'long' rooms. The front southeastern room (A1) appears as if it may have been a later addition and certainly the off-alignment orientation of its walls indicates extensive modification (F. 23 & 24), whose alignment complements that of F. 19 later added to the cell's front.

The cross-/width-span of Building Cell A's rooms (3.10-3.50m) is no greater than any of the other building units; the width of 'B' and the long eastern room of Cell C also being 3.50m across. Only the span of Building Cell D is greater (4.50m), but as this was unexcavated internal divisions may have escaped detection.

Three exterior doorways were located along the southern front of the range:

In the southeast corner of Building Cell A (F. 32, c. 1.00m wide; pl. IV); in front of which there was evidence of a stone threshold paving (F. 33).

In the western end of wall F. 3 of Building Cell B (F. 37, 1.00m wide)

In the western end of wall F. 7 of Building Cell C (F. 36, 1.05m wide) giving access to the front porch recess (Trench VI).

1.00-1.05m wide with formal stone 'jambs' (i.e. dressed wall ends) and thresholds (i.e. stone slab bases), these contrast with two more ragged openings in the southern walls of Building Cells A and B (respectively in F. 21/22 and F. 3). These were both only 0.50m across and went through the full depth of the wall's fabric (i.e. down to natural), and were evidently cuttings made in the course of Joshi's investigations. (Note a 1.00m 'gap' was also recognised between the two southern rooms within Building Cell A. This, F. 44, was however only distinguished in the plan of the upper fabric - 1.10m wide - and was not exposed in depth. Similarly unexcavated, we cannot be certain that the gap in the western end of the southern Cell D wall was a doorway; its position seems appropriate, but at only 0.75m width it seems narrow.)

At the western end of Trench I an arrangement of large stone slabs was found set against the side of wall F. 6 (F. 43; pl. V). There, bedding upon a layer of mid brown clay loam with flecks and small fragments of fired clay and charcoal ([G20]), and partially supported by a large stone block projecting from (and embedded within) F. 6, a large schist slab (4cm x 0.40m x 0.55m) lay horizontal 0.12m below the surviving top of wall F. 6 ([O19]). Immediately bordering its northern side was set a vertical slab, 0.50m long/high (6cm thick and 0.26m wide), whose top projected 0.15m above the level of the wall. It is difficult to know what to make of this arrangement. On the one hand, it may relate to either a box-shrine

or 'shelf' (perhaps associated with food preparation as many bones were recovered from this area). Alternatively, it might attest to some manner of raised threshold access between Building Cells B and C. Unfortunately, wall F. 6 did not survive to a sufficient height to determine whether there was a raised doorway across it (it would have to be higher than the other doorways recovered). Given, however, the relationship of Cell C's eastern wall (F. 8/26; see below), the former interpretation seems the more likely.

There would seem to be a number of ways in which to interpret the slight wall footings in the eastern end of Trench V (F. 31) and the southern end of Trench II (F. 12):

- 1) They effectively revet a yard - from the raised long-ridge pathway along the east side of the building and against the foot of the cross-ridge dyke/rampart system ('4') in the south.
- 2) They define some manner of covered porchway extending the length of this building unit (Building Cells A & B).
- 3) They represent the true extent the range's original 'core' (Building Cells A & B), in which case the southern east-west wall (F. 12) would probably continue west to the line of F. 6.

The relationships here are further complemented by the fact that the three walls extended from the front of the Cell A core do not seem contemporary. F. 2 and F. 31 essentially complement the original Cell A alignment, F. 19 west of the doorway, lies much more west-over-south and appears to relate to later modifications of Room A1. Given this, the third of the above options seems the more plausible; F. 12/31 represent a structurally integral extension of the Building Cell A core (relating to Cell B), but which later - with the addition of wall F. 19 - may have been altered into a covered porch.

The arrangement of the walls at the southern end of Building Cell C also proved complicated. Inserted against F. 26 and standing as much as 1.45m high (0.65m wide), wall F. 7 was clearly part of the same build as (i.e. continuous with) the western wall of this cell, F. 14 (p1. VII & VIII). Over its westernmost 1.25m, this was carried on an off-set trench-built footing (c. 0.60m deep) 'regularizing' or terracing the ground slope. At its western end a doorway (F. 36), with a large threshold slab (6cm x 0.75m), was found to be raised by c. 0.15m in relationship to the cell's interior. This gave access into some manner of sunken alcove porch to the south. Corresponding to the area of Trench VI (cleared by Joshi), as defined by the southern length of wall F. 6 and its western return (F. 9), this was 1.40m wide and 5.50m long and continued across the southern front of the cell. At the eastern end of this alcove was exposed wall F. 8. Like F. 26, this seems to abut F. 6 and while their interrelationship is uncertain it definitely post-dates wall F. 7. Its top lies 0.30m below that of F. 6, and 0.75m wide ('bowing' slightly along its length), this was exposed to a depth of 0.90m +; the base was not seen).

How are we to understand the complex relationship of these elements? Wall F. 7 clearly represents the southern front of that unit, which was accessed via the reduced alcove porch on its southern side (the Trench VI masonry), which itself was probably gained by the south and west. This arrangement was clearly dictated by the need of downslope access into Building Cell C. What, in particular, complicates the layout of this cell is the provision of a 'second' eastern wall (in relationship to F. 6 of Cell B) and that it seems to have conflicting stratigraphic associations - F. 26 predating F. 7 which the F. 8 length post-dates. Although more complex phasing sequences can be (and have been) explored - for example, the southern alcove post-dating the construction of the main bulk of this cell (or that F. 8

was the foundation of a downslope stair) - far more reasonable is to see F. 8 and F. 26 as relating to a 'second' load-bearing wall beside F. 6 that was built sequentially with and integrally to Cell C's walls. From this it could be inferred that the roof of Cell C could not have been pegged into the western wall of Cell B (F. 6) and that another wall was needed to carry its weight. It warrants mention that if F. 8/26 does represent secondary load-bearing provision, then that it extended into the front 'alcove' would suggest that this reduced southern porch was also roofed. Whether there the roof lay at the same height as the Building Cell A/B front (i.e. presenting a continuous/unified facade) - in which case Cell C may have been two-storeys - or the alcove had a lower roof height (i.e. unlikely to project above that of the main bulk of Cell C), is unknown.

Later Activities

Aside from the scars of Joshi's excavations, the only feature that seems to definitely relate to post-building range-usage was wall F. 4. Built torevet the southern side of Terrace D, and extending on top of the northern wall of Cell A, this essentially consists of a 'line' of drystone rubble, c. 0.35m high and c. 0.95m wide.

Trench IV

This 2.00 x 2.00m sondage was excavated within the middle of the wall-revetted terrace ('D') north of the main site with the express purpose of establishing whether this rise was artificial (i.e. 'mounded'). Natural soils were there encountered at a depth of only 0.15-20m, and that no trace of any buildings or occupation was recovered (i.e. no surface finds) would suggest that this could not be the case. Two 'bulbous' cut features were, however, exposed within the trench (F. 16 & 17; fig. 5). The one appeared to be stone-packed and was thought to be a grave, leading to the possibility that the entire terrace

is a cemetery. Unfortunately, because of the sensitivity surrounding the fieldwork, we could not further investigate these features. Reviewing the trench plan it is certainly possible that, at least the north of these (F. 17), was instead a backfilled wall-robbing trench and, if so, could be contemporary with the early walls in the northern end of Trench II.

Terracing and Building Reconstruction

The schematic elevation shown in Figure 6 is conventionalised according to proto-typical models of Himalayan vernacular architecture (i.e. terraced with flat roofs). We did not, of course, 'sound' the depth or arrangement of Cell D. Given topographic

slope and the scale of its walls, the elevation presumes a comparable drop of floor level as between Building Cells A/B and D, and therefore, implies a 3.50m difference in height along the length of this range. The reconstruction shows a four-storey terraced building arrangement. This rests on the presupposition that, by the scale of its walls and square plan, that Building Cell A was two-storeys and - presuming that ridge-side view was an important factor - each cell thereafter dropped by a storey. This may, however, be reconstructed by too convenient principals. By the same precepts ('square' plan, sub-division and scale), Building Cell B could also have been two storeys high.

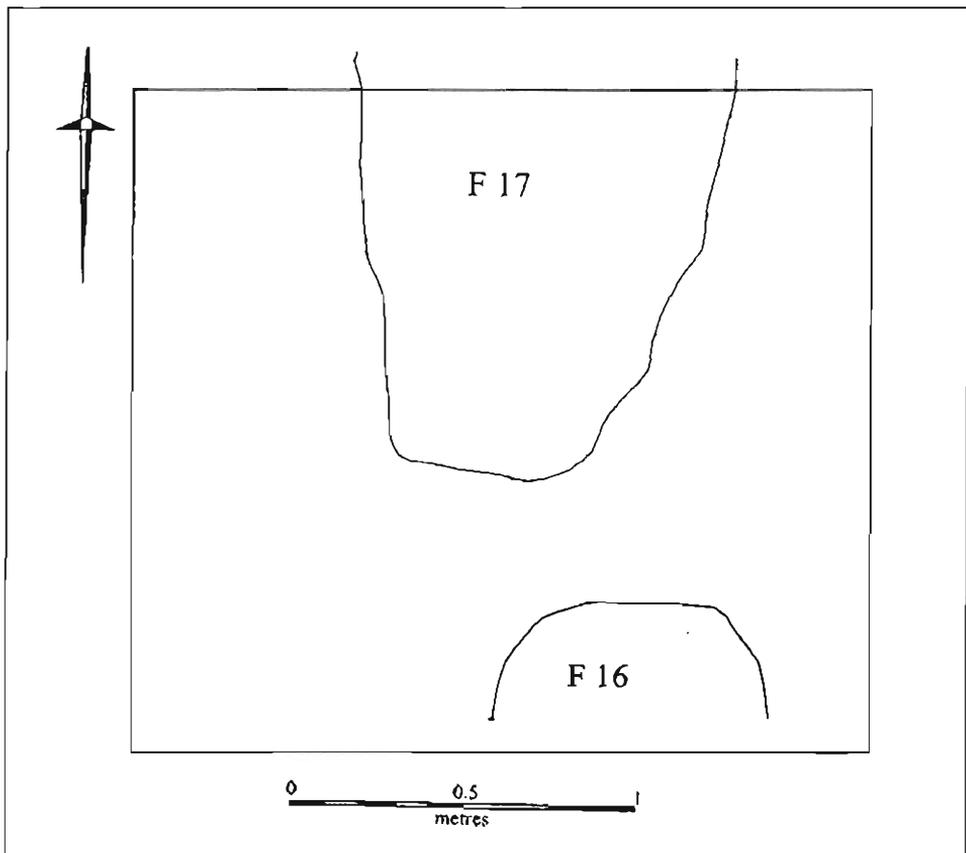


Figure 5: Trench IV features

Whilst both alternative schema and phasing sub-divisions are possible, in Figure 6.1 and 6.2 a basic 'growth model' of the range's development is presented. First, there must have been the core of the three room-divided Cell A 'square', presumed to have stood two storeys high. Subsequently a 3.50 and 3.00m wide single-story 'surround' was respectively added to its western and southern sides (all its walls abut/post-date the Cell A core; fig. 6.1). This must have been a unified 'single' building ('A/B'), which may have had exterior access from the east side of the its southeastern room (AB1) - directly onto the eastern pathway - a southern entrance being prohibited by the fact that it would have opened directly onto, and been 'crammed' by, the line of the great ditch system rampart.

Thereafter sees the western downslope addition of Cells C and D (fig. 6.2). Here, the fact that F. 8/26 seems to represent a second load-bearing wall (in relation to F. 6) and that the Cell C's roof was evidently not therefore pegged into the fabric of 'A/B' would indicate that it was itself a separate building (without further excavation whether Cell D was an adjunct of C or another discrete building cannot be determined at this time). The northeastern portion of Building A/B also goes through later modification, though there is no necessary relationship between this and the development of Buildings/Cells C and D. The fabric/alignment of Room A1 was modified and wall F. 19 - on the same orientation - was added to its southern front. Cutting off the eastern end of Room AB1, whether it and Room AB2 still then operated as closed units (presumably with an inserted southern entrance, however awkward *viz.* the rampart) or instead had been altered into a open roof-covered porch, is unknown.

Phasing

Given how many ambiguous relationships and 'possibilities' were apparent in our investigations, it

should not be surprising that much uncertainty surrounds the site's sequence. Whilst recognising these caveats, here employing the principles of Occam's Razor a minimalist schema is proposed for this area (alone) of the ridge-top occupation:

Phase I - The F. 28 'building'. It is difficult to determine whether the pit/silo and associated trough system should be attributed to this phase or that which came after (or, even, an intervening occupation); the orientation of the 'troughs' does not match that of the Phase II range. Given their alignment, it is conceivable that some of the downslope Phase II walls may have had their origin in contemporary terraces (e.g. F. 14).

Phase II - The Building Range, which can itself be sub-divided:

- i) Cell A (F. 1, 21-23), possibly with contemporary yard-terracing along its western side (F. 29); subsequent addition of single-storey surround on western and southern side (Building A/B; F. 5, 6, 3, 12 & 31)
- ii) Addition of Building/Cell C on west side (F. 7, 13, 14, 15 & 26) with sunken 'alcove' porch (F. 8 & 9); addition of Cell D (F. 34 & 35) and alterations to southeast corner Building A/B (F. 19 *et al.*)

Phase III - Destruction of building range; later use of ridge-top, including the construction of terrace wall F. 4.

In terms of the excavated sequence - apart from that other occupation episodes may well either sub-divide Phase I or intervene between it and Phase II - the main point of ambiguity focuses upon the interrelationship between the Phase I silos/troughs and the F. 26/29 terrace wall (the latter possibly, though, relating to Building C's load-bearing needs). Whereas the latter seemed to truncate the F. 30 trough system, the Phase I scorched horizon extended over

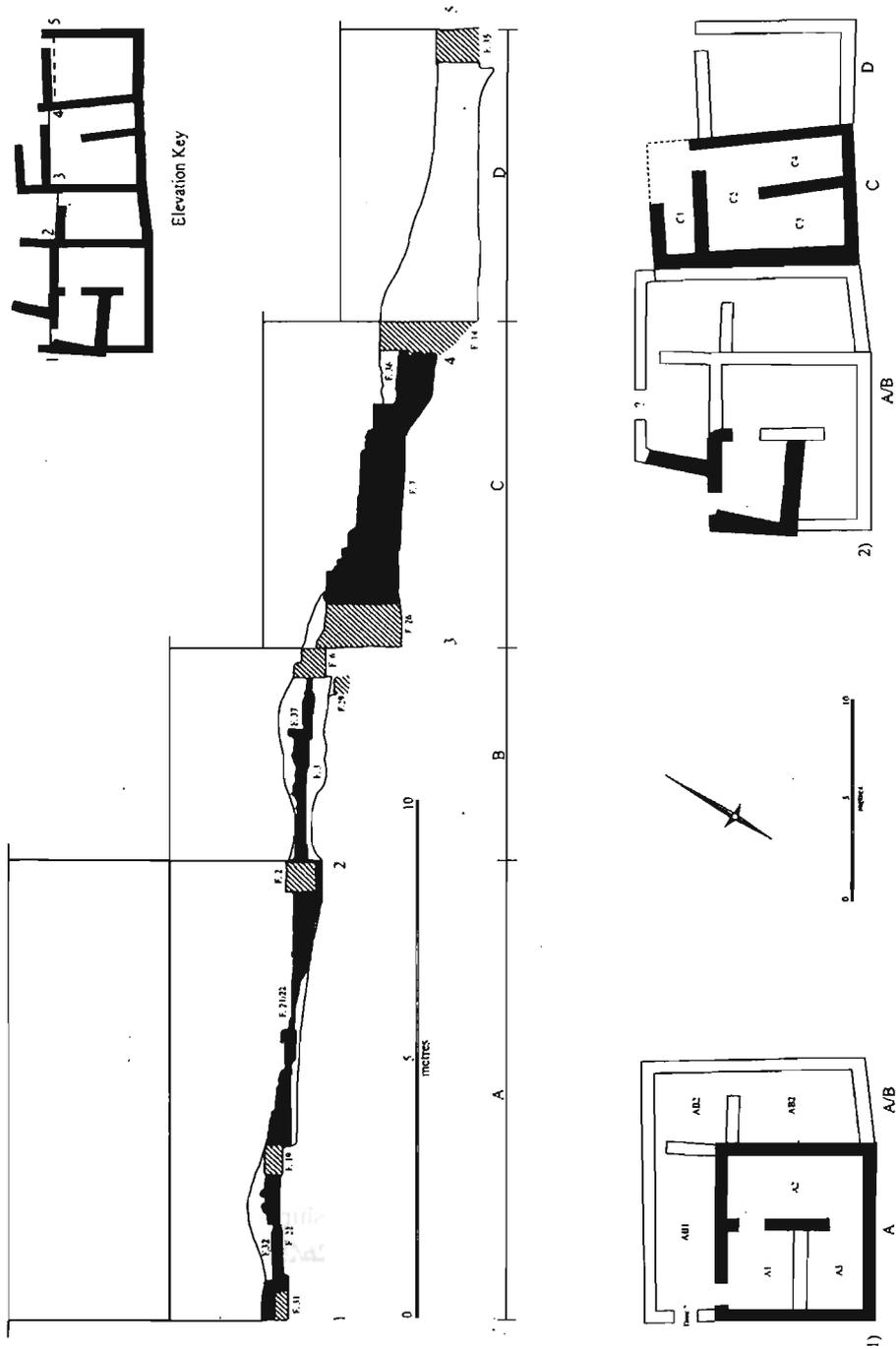


Figure 6: Reconstructing the Range

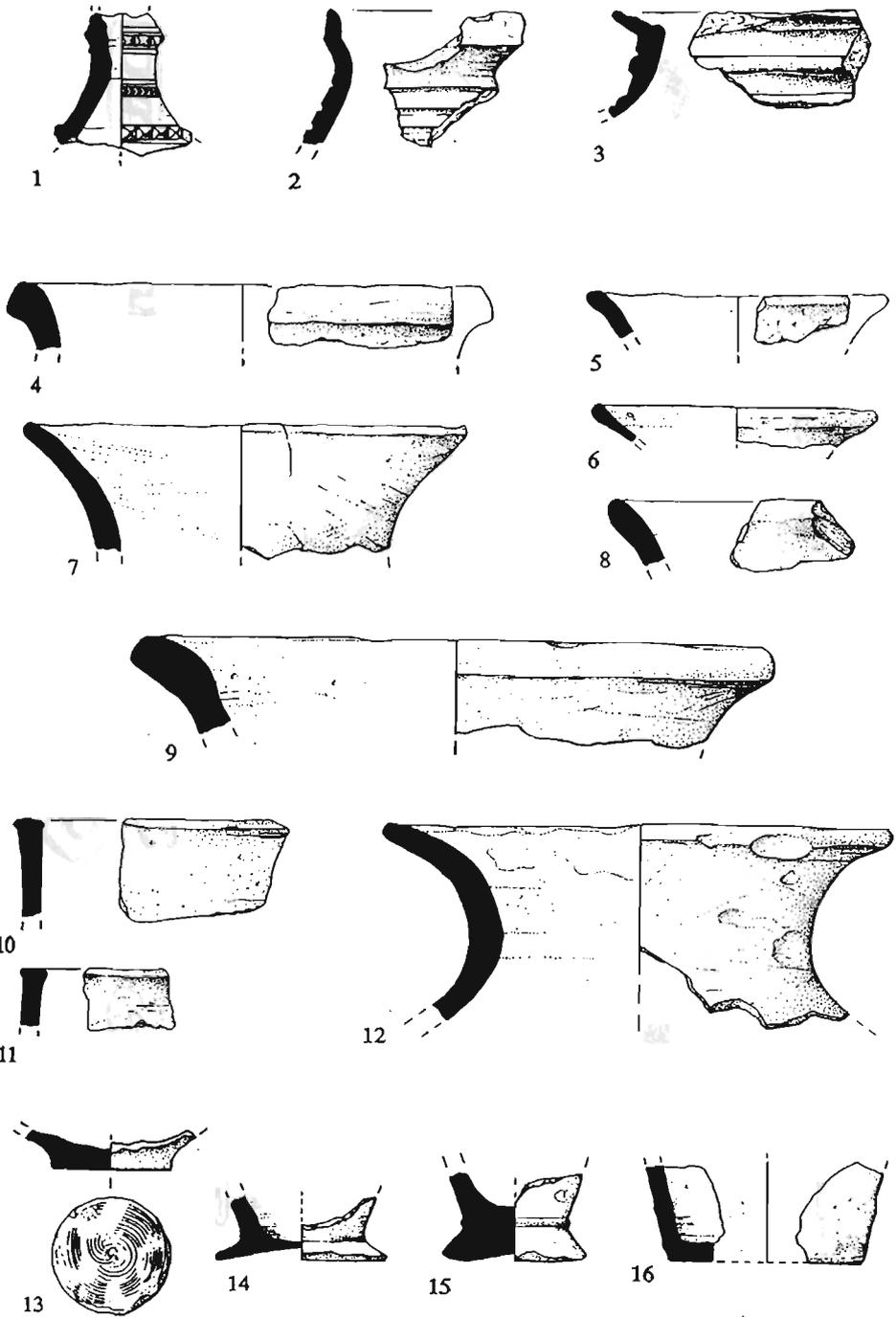


Figure 7

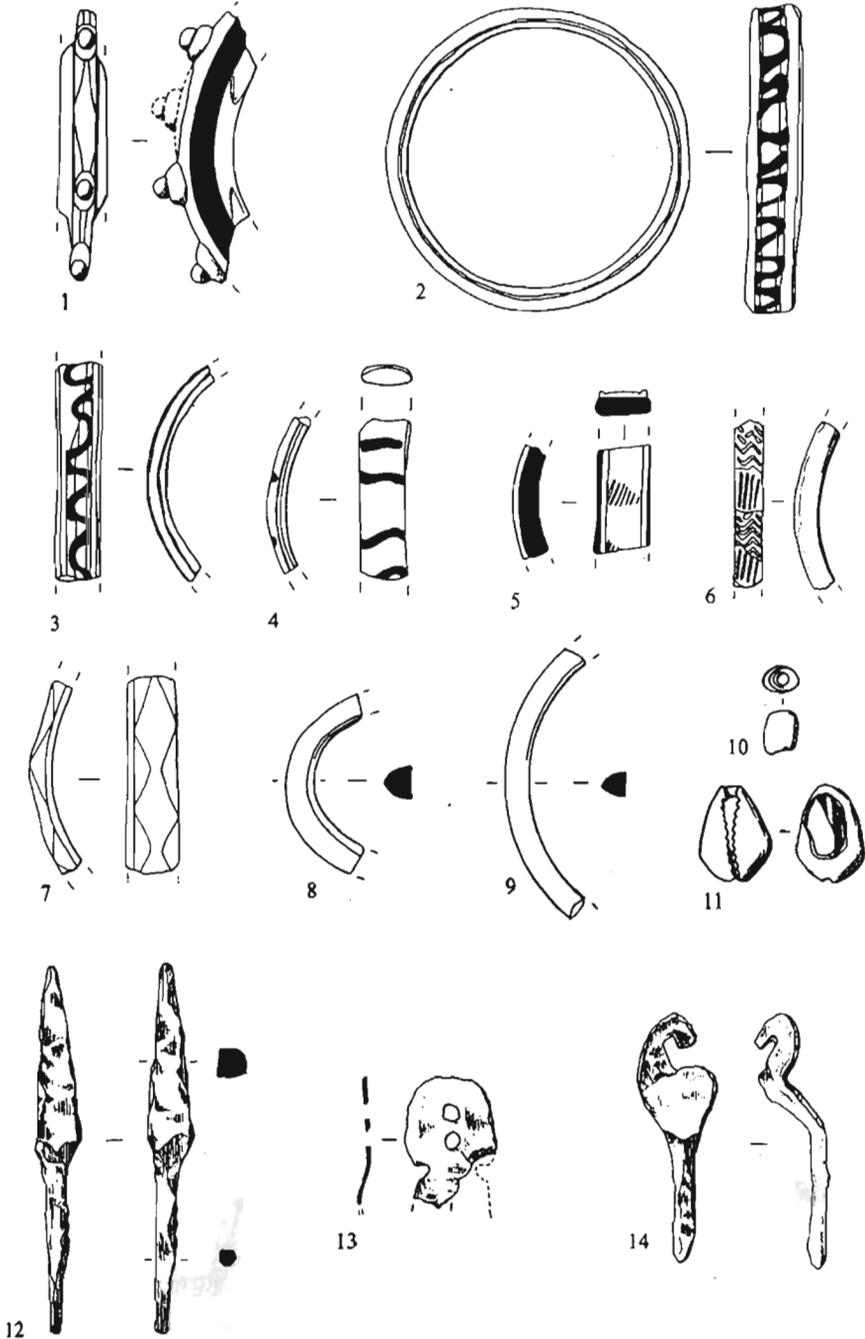


Figure 8

and sealed the F. 29 masonry. The evidence seems contradictory; in the schema above it is presumed that the F. 29 terracing related to Phase II activities, but this is obviously an issue that will only be resolved by further excavation.

Artefact Assemblages

The pottery assemblage recovered consists of 345 sherds. Although it is not sufficiently large to allow detailed statistical analysis, a number of general comments can be made following an examination with a 10x hand lens. Four fabrics were recorded:

Fabric A - Uniform mid-dark red/brown colour. Smooth feel. Irregular sorted inclusions of quartzite up to 1mm. Larger sherds show irregularity of firing.

Fabric B - Uniform orange-red colour. Smooth feel with occasional burnish. Mica and quartzite inclusions up to 1mm.

Fabric C - Uniform dark red colour. Smooth feel with burnished outer surface. Mica inclusions <0.5mm but larger possible organic inclusions either leached out or burnt out during firing.

Fabric D - Dark grey black colour. Smooth feel. Mica inclusions <0.5mm. Appears reasonably well sorted.

All of the pottery is hand-formed (i.e. without the use of centrifugal force) and there was little refinement in the sorting of the clay prior to the manufacture of the vessels. This is evidenced by the frequency of blowouts by the incorporation and use of inappropriate inclusions during firing. The majority of fractures are hackly, with very occasional laminated fractures. It is likely that these were fired in bonfire clamps as is witnessed still in Bhaktapur in Kathmandu valley today.

A discussion of vessel form is difficult due to the condition of the assemblage collected. No complete vessel profile was recovered; the majority

of vessels appear to be open jars with the occasional spout (fig. 7.1), and the bases are flat (fig. 7.13 & .16) or with the occasional pedestal (fig. 7.14 & .15). The decorative motifs on the pottery are extremely limited and consist of incised lines particularly on the shoulder of vessels' horizontal grooving and occasional impressed lozenge shapes probably stamped. An attempt at burnishing is apparent on a number of vessels.

Illustrated Pottery (fig. 7): Decorated spout - [005], Tr. III; 2-12) rims - 2: [029] Tr. III; 3: [003] Tr. II; 4: [028] Tr. V; 5: [031] Tr. I; 6: [002] Tr. II; 7: [001] Tr. I; 8: [002] Tr. II; 9: [028] Tr. V ; 10: [003] Tr. II; 11: [001] Tr. I; 12: [003] Tr. II; 13-16) bases - 13: [038] Tr. V; 14; [002] Tr. II; 15: [002] Tr. II; 16: [002] Tr. II.

Illustrated Small Finds (fig. 8):

A) Glass

- 1) Decorated bracelet fragments with red ground/core with applied green and ochre bands and raised blue-on-white 'knobs' (<11> [026]; Tr. I/II)
- 2) Complete decorated bangle/bracelet with applied decoration (red curvilinear pattern - blackened on figure - with green strips; <7> [005]; Tr. III)
- 3) Decorated bangle/bracelet fragment (as 2; <9> [005]; Tr. III)
- 4) Decorated bangle/bracelet fragment with applied linear pattern (alternating red and green lines - both blackened on figure - on ochre ground/core; <18> [039]; Tr. V)
- 5) Decorated bangle/bracelet; dark green core with applied blue exterior surface with oblique opaque white line motifs (<19> [001]; Tr. I)
- 6) Decorated bangle/bracelet fragment with dark blue ground/core with opaque white

line inlay line pattern alternating between chevron and vertical/longitudinal line 'panels' (the latter vertical patterns being on an applied red coat; <19> [001]; Tr. I)

- 7) Faceted red bangle/bracelet fragment (<19> [001]; Tr. I)
- 8) 'Ring' fragment, opaque white coat of dark reddy core (the latter exposed on interior surface (<19> [001]; Tr. I)
- 9) Dark blue bangle/bracelet fragment (<3> [001]; Tr. I)
- 10) Green glass bead, 6mm diameter (<10> [005]; Tr. III)

B) *Other*

- 11) Cowrie Shell (?)bead with pierced hole (<17> [031]; Tr. I)

C) *Ironwork*

- 12) Square-section object, 70mm long with tapering head/point above shaft; possibly an arrowhead or awl/punch (<14> [027]; from scrub clearance area of Cell D)
- 13) Broken fitting; circular top with holes for attachment (17 x 24mm+; <4> [005]; Tr. III)
- 14) Object with angularly flattened head (15mm across) attached to shaft; key or, more probably, a latch (<5> [005]; Tr. III)

D) *Clay - Tsa-Tsa (fig. 9):*

- 1) Circular plaque fragment (c. a quarter), 36mm thick and c. 6.5cm in diameter. Rough rounded back and impressed flattened face; the latter is divided into five concentric ring with an impressed dot exterior border. No pattern is apparent within the central ring/core, common to the remainder are four-tier stupa images. In the fourth ring these alternate with spread-eagled 'stick figure' images; the second ring includes a single image of a cross-legged seated figure (<16> [028]; Tr. V).

- 2) Damaged flat plaque (5.7 x 7.7cm x 22mm) with central image of a stupa with ?Chained line flanking both sides ending in flower motifs; there is writing on either sides (<12> [026]; Tr. I/II).

- 3) Complete, though damaged, conical/pyramidal statuette; 7.5cm high, with rough rounded base (7.4cm in diameter) with faceted upper body/cone and smooth finished apex (<15> [031]; Tr. I).

Overall the pottery assemblage is remarkably uniform and there is nothing to suggest a high status component. Unfortunately given the state of knowledge of the region's pottery studies, the assemblage cannot be more closely dated than to a general 'Medieval' ascription (?14-15/16th centuries).

Of the other finds recovered, the only category that seems to offer any basis of tighter assignment are the three Tsa-Tsa statuettes/plaques (fig. 9), thought to be of 14th century date (U. Acharya, pers comm.). Otherwise, of the site's small finds, noteworthy are an iron arrowhead, a key or latch and a perforated fitting (fig. 8.12-14), and cowrie shell bead (fig. 8.11). As mentioned above, the quantity of its glass pieces seems remarkable. Apart from one possible window pane fragment (?intrusive) and a bead, these are decorated bangle/bracelets (nine). While it is conceivable that some of the latter were introduced through the Joshi's diggings (?fig. 8.7 & .9), most are unmistakably 'old' and, therefore, may tell of the building's residents.

Dating Evidence

Two radiocarbon dates were obtained:

- 1) F. 28 ([041]) - 630±60BP/Cal. AD 1270-1420 (2 sigma)
- 2) [031] - 210±60BP /Cal. AD 1650-1680 and Cal. AD 1740-1810 and Cal. AD 1930-1950 (2 sigma)

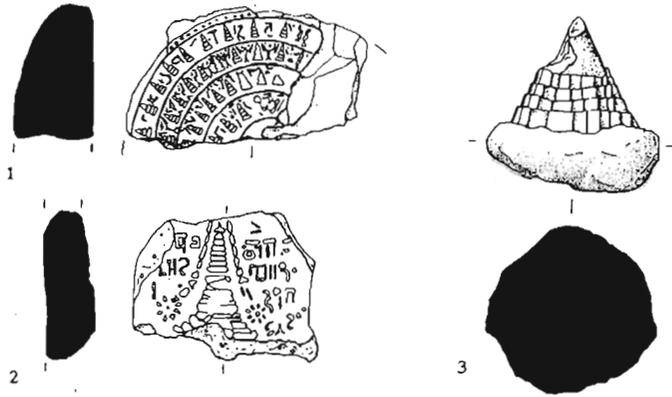


Figure 9: Tsa-Tsa statuettes/plaques

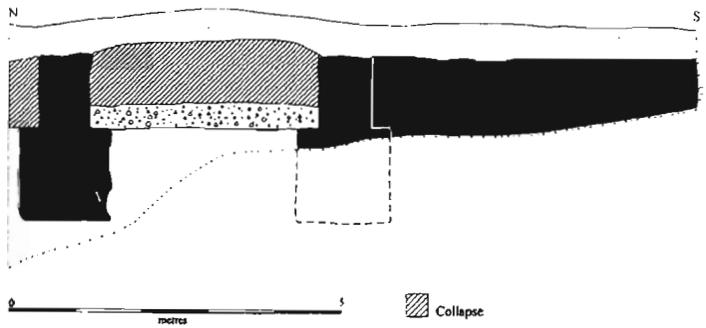


Figure 10

The Malla Gateway. Above (Fig-10) sketch plan

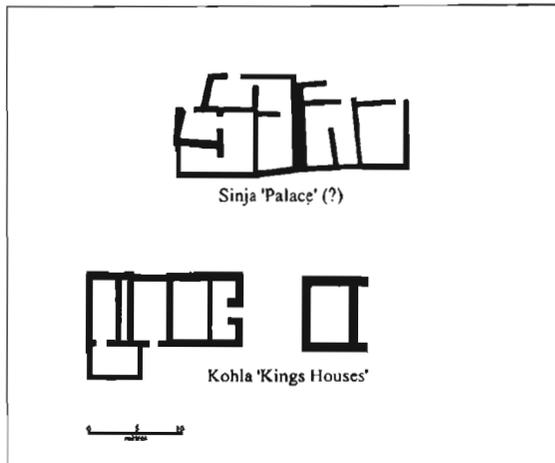


Figure 11

Although obviously too few determinations to anchor the sequence with assurance, the dates suggest that only the fragmentary Phase I remains potentially relate to the Malla investment of the ridge. The second date ([031]) derives from the burnt deposit in Trench I and must relate to the Phase II building range, and indicate would seem to be consistent with the attribution of most of the site's finds assemblage (17/18th century).

The Malla Gateway

On our last afternoon in Sinja we were called to view stonework exposed in the backside of a house terrace alongside the main pathway down from the ridge (fig. 1). This proved to be truly monumental, though unfortunately our departure schedule did not permit its detail recording (fig. 10; p1. IX). Exposed in section were two great walls flanking a robust metalled surface (3.40m across and 0.40m thick). The walls *per se* stand 1.10m high and are 0.80m wide, and consist of large well-laid/regularly coursed slabs (5-18 x 15-30cm) bonded in a red mud mortar. These are carried on massive footings (1.20m wide and 1.40m deep), built of large roughly dressed blocks (8-10 x 30 x 60cm). Walling was observed to extend for c. 5.00m south from the parallel walls.

Given its careful construction, the size of the stone and the absence of brick/tile within its fabric, this certainly seems more 'ancient' (and massive) than the up-slope building range. It would appear to relate to some manner of tower gateway with a gravelled surface passing through it and with a conjoining room/building coming off of its southern side. Large and 'fancy dressed' stone was also observed incorporated within the fabric of the house of the site's present occupants (i.e. the stone being 'derived'/robbed) and, taken as a whole, the evidence suggests that what is there exposed is the gateway approach into the main Malla palace complex. If so, and given

the evidence of the main excavations, this could suggest that its core lies on the south end of the ridge, perhaps beneath the area of the Kanaksundari Temple (fig. 1.11).

Sitting across much of the width of the ridge-top at this point, the extant temple is, in effect, isolated by very large dry moats (c. 6.00m across and 2.00m deep) and, across which, access is bridged. Extending over the width of the ridge and cutting off long-ridge movement, together they delineate a compound of 40 x 50m (fig. 1.I). This has the appearance of a defended enclosure, and these earthworks seem unlikely to relate to the temple (i.e. pre-date it). If attributable to the Malla occupation, then given written accounts, it seems unlikely that it would have been confined to this area alone. By the discovery of the probable Malla gateway - which if associated with the ditched compound suggests that 'imposing' defence was a concern - then it is logical to presume that the earlier palace complex extended north to, at least, the great ditch and rampart line separating Terraces E and F. But this, of course, it has been argued faced southward and encloses 'something' to the north. If a valid interpretation, this raises the possibility that the entire length of the ridge was then utilised.

Discussion

The relationship of this building range to the dyke/rampart system along its southern side is uncomfortable (fig. 1.4) and it is difficult to see the two as being contemporary. Accordingly, the range would have to of been subsequently set against the rampart and evidently made use of the earlier defensive earthwork to provide a measure of security. Although the arcing layout of this great ditch could suggest that it enclosed occupation along its south side (i.e. Terrace F), the arrangement of its rampart on the northern side indicates that what was actually

protected lay in that direction. If so, it could theoretically have been associated with the Phase I F. 28 building (and the square platform ? tower on Terrace C; fig. 1.2). Given this, and the difficulties of distinguishing re-deposited natural within the robbing cuts at the northern end of Trench II, we cannot be absolute assured of the negative evidence of Trench IV as regards the possibility of early occupation across Terrace D's obviously levelled crown.

When compared, for example, to the two structures attributed as 'King's Houses' at the 11-13th century settlement at Kohla, Kaski District (Evans 1999), the Sinja range is not that substantially larger (fig. 11). It is, however, more complex in the number and arrangement of its rooms. Yet its layout is not particularly sophisticated; it is without corridors so that all 'backspace' was gained by through-room access alone.

If leaving aside for the moment issues of dating, could this be a late manifestation of the palace of the Mallas ?² Assembling the available sources, Pandey describes its appearance in the 14th century:

The King ruled the state from his four-storeyed white-washed moon-complexioned magnificent palace of imposing dimensions of Semja which was strongly protected by ramparts and ditches on all the sides and was perpetually resplendent with the fragrance of the sweet-smelling flowers and echoes of the songs of amorous ladies of delicate fancies on

the flowing rhythms of various musical instruments of the artists. A huge banner, marked with the emblem of Garuda fluttered in the air on the palace (Pandey 1997: 144,139).

Not surprisingly, the evidence of our limited excavations is ambiguous. As noted above, the pottery seems remarkably uniform. It does not itself suggest trade and, apart from the sea-shell bead (and, possibly, the glass), there is no real indication of long-distance connections within the site's assemblages. This being said, its finds seem unusual on a number of accounts. There is the number of Tsa-Tsa statuettes recovered from such limited excavations, and the quantity of glass, particularly bracelets, obviously attesting to women in residence (? 'ladies') - seems remarkable. Equally, is the absence of a range of domestic items, such as stone mortars and rubbers, that otherwise could have been expected. The latter strands of evidence might attest to a 'special' residence, but one - at least within the portions of the site we investigated - seems without long-distance trade connections.

Against this, does the range's architecture offer clearer evidence ? Again, unfortunately not. On the one hand, it is not particularly monumental or sophisticated, and nor is it substantially larger than many of the more complicated conjoining houses standing in the Valley's villages today. Yet such judgements are, of course, entirely dependent upon what expectations one would have of a palace in such a remote area (and the 'measure' of contemporary

2. Although largely dismissed by 'foreign' scholars as an attempt by the Thakalis of north-central Nepal to link themselves to the Thakuri past - and thereby aspire to Nepalese caste hierarchies - their oral traditions and written clan histories relate their origins from Sinja and the Malla kingdom (Fisher 2001: 47, 50-51). One strand revolves around the controversial story of the Hansa Raja, the son of the Hindu Thakuri king of Sinja who wandered the Himalayas until he settled at the town of Thini in Thakalis territory. The moot point being whether these high-caste roots relate Hansa Raja as the ancestor of all or only some of the Thakalis. Important in terms of sub-sector migrations and the roots of kingships in Nepal in general, Fisher relates the apparent discovery of the crown and spectre of the Hansa Raja in the storeroom of the clan house of the Pompar *ghyu* of the Sherchan sub-clan. He describes a collection of 'rusted and pitted sword blades, an innocuous metal alloy helmet, and a two-and-a-half foot-long club' (2001: 204-5). Obviously unimpressed by what he saw (and going onto to ironically play on the idea of the crown as Cevantes shaving bowl as the helmet of Mambrino), this anecdote striking elucidates the potential for the displacement of material culture with the movement of peoples. Could the vestiges of the latter days of the Malla have migrated east and be mouldering in the clan houses of the Thakalis ?

domestic buildings). In terms of the descriptions of the palace at Sinja two points warrants emphasis. Firstly, is the mention of its whitewash finish. So rendered, there would have been no need to employ large well-finished masonry - but only modest materials as in the range - as these would have been masked. Secondly, is the mention that the palace stood to four-storeys. The range we investigated stood no more than two. Yet, by the terracing of its buildings/cells down the western slope, viewed from that perspective it would have appeared four storeys high. On top of this, Pandey's mention of the Malla palace's protective ditches and ramparts could have direct correlates with the ridge's earthworks, but then, so too, would these be found on less aspiring fortified hill-tops in the region.

Weighing the evidence - the occurrence of lion sculptures and evidently 'ancient' irrigation systems in the area, the ditched enclosure surrounding the Temple's rise, the discovery of the 'monumental' gateway and the radiocarbon dating of the Phase I walls in our excavations - it does seem reasonable to identify the ridge-top site as the summer palace of the Mallas. Against this, the standing masonry remains of the main Phase II building complex is evidently much later. Whether a 'modest palace' or the grand abode of an aspiring local, it must post-date the Malla occupation.

Acknowledgments

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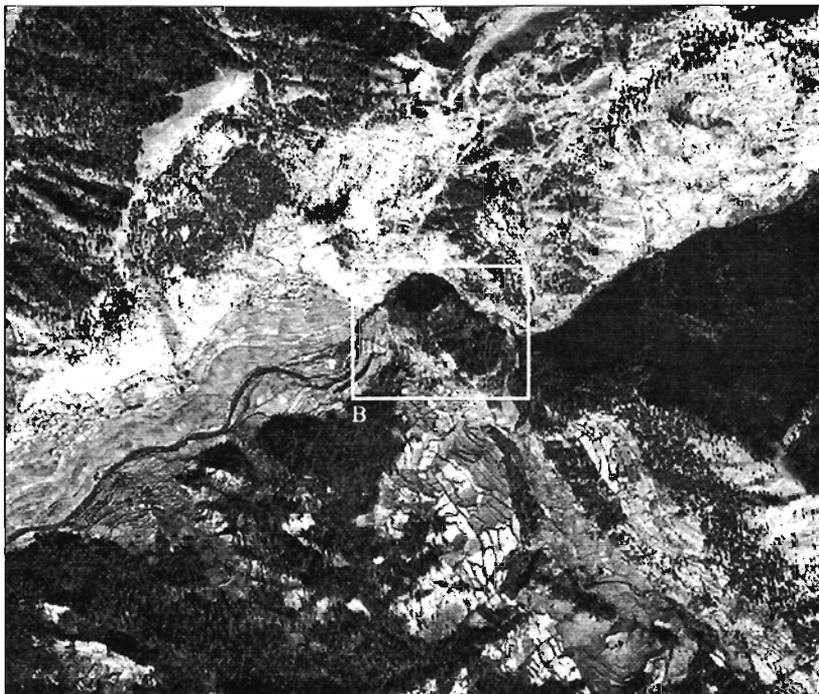
Archaeology, HMG Nepal and, particularly, its various Director Generals, Dr. Amatya, Mrs. Pradhan and Mrs. Rana - it is inspiring to work with such colleagues. We, and Tim Harward, also thank N. Pandey of Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu and D. Sharma for their expertise, advice and guidance.

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The graphics within this report are the work of Marcus Abbott and Andrew Hall of the Cambridge Archaeological Unit.

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A



B Plate 1-(A) Satellite image of Sinja Environs; (B) Detail of 'Palace Ridge'
(note location of temple; cf. fig 1)



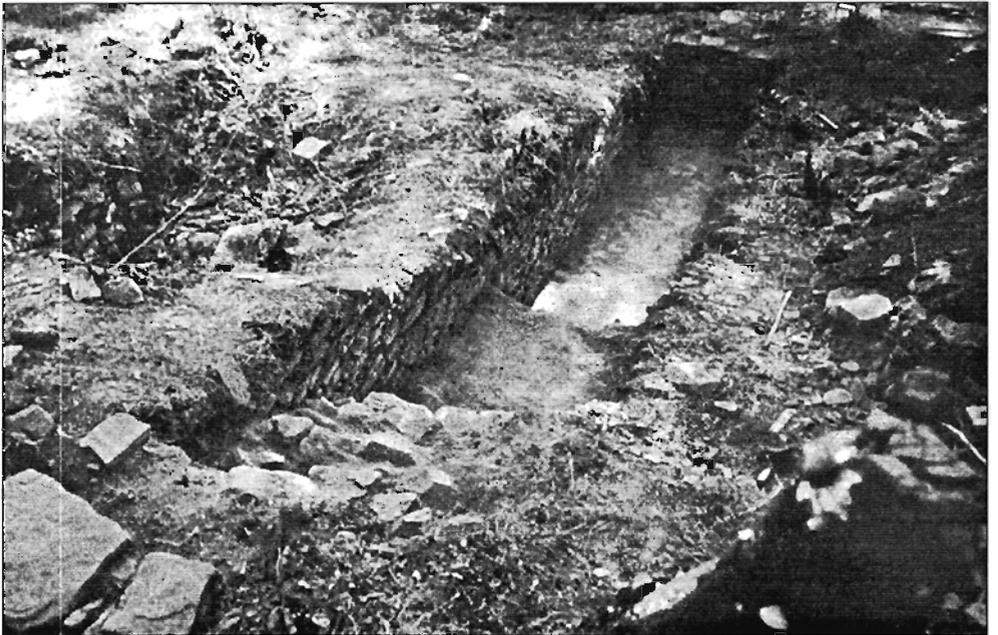
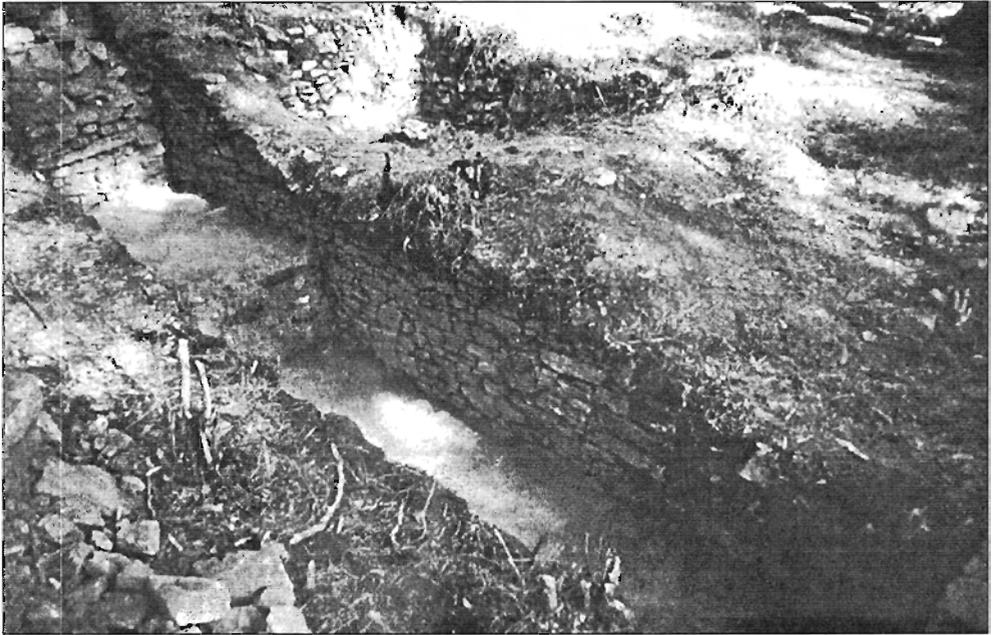
Plate (11) Looking southeast along the length of Trench II and the western exposure of wall F. 1
(in foreground abutted by wall F.5)



Plates (III & IV) Top, looking north to southern front wall of Building Cell A (F.21/22), with doorway F.32 left and later wall F.19 extending south into central foreground; below (III), detail of doorway threshold F. 32 (cell A; Trench V)



Plates (V & VI) Top, looking west to F. 43 'box slab' arrangement set against the foot of the wall F.6 (Trench I): below (V), the F.11 pit-cistern with central capstone removed with paving slab 'lip' in situ (Trench II)



(VII & VIII) Trench III (Cell C) - Top, looking southeast with wall F.6/26 exposed at east end of trench (the corner of the southern 'alcove' F.8/9 is visible upper right): below (VII), looking west with wall F.7 exposed left and F. 14 in background



Plate (IX) photograph of north wall.
Note the quality and size of the masonry