

Chapter 3

Previous Archaeological Work at Paithan

A considerable number of archaeological sites have been excavated and published in the western Deccan and the region surrounding Paithan. Although none was specifically aimed at investigating Early Medieval levels or the Early Historic/Early Medieval transition, many quite significant Early Historic sites have been explored in some detail (Fig. 1.1). In fact, it was H. D. Sankalia and his colleagues from Deccan College Pune who initiated this work with the excavations at Brahmapuri in the mid-1940s (Sankalia and Dikshit 1952), continuing with Nasik, Maheshwar and Nevasa through the 1950s (Sankalia and Deo 1955; Sankalia *et al.* 1958, 1960). At around the same time, excavations had been taken up at Baroda (Subbarao 1953) and at Prakash in the Tapti Valley (Thapar 1967). From then until the early 1970s, there was an almost constant stream of excavations at sites such as Kayatha (Wakankar 1967; Ansari and Dhavalikar 1975), Kaundapur (Dikshit 1968), Nagara (Mehta and Shah 1968), Paunar (Deo and Dhavalikar 1968), Ter (Chapekar 1969), Pauli (Deo and Joshi 1972) and Bhokardan (Deo and Gupte 1974), with Pauni also having been reexcavated in the 1990s (Nath 1998), highlighting the fact that the quantity of excavations appears to have trailed off in recent years. In addition to the Early Historic levels that they revealed, many of the excavation projects mentioned above uncovered some evidence of Medieval occupation, although this is for the most part 14th century and later as a lack of evidence is reported at many sites from the Early Medieval period. This is a phenomenon which appears to be partly due to problems on chronology and interpretation but may also have some validity as an indicator of a general lack of urban continuity through this period (Sharma 1987; Kennet 2004b, 2013).

Given the number of Early Historic excavations that have been carried out in the region, the lack of any synthetic regional analysis of the results is notable. This seems partly to be due to problems with chronology, which is still very poorly defined, making it difficult to link phases of activity at different sites with any reliability, and partly due to the way in which the data are presented, making intersite comparisons dif-

ficult. Nonetheless, the excavated sites that have been published do act as a useful repository of comparative information which has been drawn on in different places in the present volume. Meanwhile, systematic field survey and mapping of rural settlement of the type that has been standard practice in Europe, the Mediterranean and the Near East since the 1950s are still relatively rare in India, and unfortunately, no such projects have been undertaken and published in the vicinity of Paithan that might help to contextualise the site within its broader landscape, with the exceptions of Shaw's work in the vicinity of Sanchi, some distance to the north (Shaw 2007) and recent work in Vidarbha reported on in Chapter 15 of this volume.

At Paithan, previous to the excavations reported in this volume, there had already been at least three campaigns of excavation, two of which have been published. The first was conducted by the Archaeological Department, H. E. H. The Nizam's Government under the directorship of Syed Yusuf, beginning in May 1937 (Yusuf 1938, 1939). The second was undertaken in 1965 in advance of the construction of the nearby Jayakwadi dam and was directed by Dr M. G. Dikshit of the Department of Archaeology, Government of Maharashtra. Dikshit undertook a rescue survey in the area that was to be submerged and also opened a small trench in the vicinity of the Narasimha Temple on top of the ancient mound in order to check the stratigraphic sequence (Dikshit 1973). A third, limited excavation was carried out at Paithan in 1995 by the Department of Archaeology and Museums of the Government of Maharashtra in collaboration with the Department of History and Ancient Indian Culture of the Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, Aurangabad at the Son-Tekadi mound, but the results of this excavation are not published.

The two published excavations both revealed deep occupation sequences of four to six phases and throw some light on the history of occupation at the site. Their results are summarized below.

Yusuf's 1937 excavations

The first excavations at the site began in 1937 when four trenches were opened by Yusuf on the northern bank of the Godavari (Yusuf 1938, 1939). The location of his trenches is shown in Fig. 1.4. In some places, these were excavated to a depth of 7.5 m. The excavations identified six *strata* or layers of occupation, which can be summarized as follows according to Yusuf's report:

- Sixth *Stratum*. This layer, dated to the Satavahana period on the basis of coins, was characterised by a monumental architectural phase with the richest cultural assemblage of the sequence. Two rectangular brick structures were uncovered side by side, with a narrow passage between them; the walls of these structures are said by Yusuf to have survived to a height of 1.06 m. These structures are the two Early Hindu temples that became a key focus of the present excavations (see Chapter 4). To the south, at a slightly greater depth, a length of drain was discovered, constructed of very large bricks (10 × 24 × 62 cm) and no lime mortar. Three cylindrical brick structures, each 1.37 m in diameter, were found in line with the drain. Copper-alloy coins of the Satavahana kings, including a conglomerated lump of 10 square coins, with the emblem of the Bodhi tree stamped on one face, were found with traces of a cloth wrapped around them. Numbers of individual similar square coins came from the same layers. Barrel-shaped, globular and discoid terracotta beads are reported as having been found in large numbers at a very low depth in the trench, which is probably intended to mean this period.
- Fifth *Stratum*. This layer appears to represent a gap in occupation or a major re-levelling of the site. It is up to 2.4 m deep and contained only a few minor antiquities of the Satavahana period. Above this layer, the collapsed structures of the fourth *stratum* were found. At this point, there is some ambiguity in Yusuf's description about the number of structural layers and their relationship to the Fifth *Stratum*.
- Fourth *Stratum*. This is a large destruction layer, possibly associated with a flood according to Yusuf. Building remains were found tilting, slanted or collapsed over the remains of the Fifth *Stratum*, which caused Yusuf to suggest that they had been destroyed by flood water. Antiquities included Tughluq and Bahmani coins, which suggest a date of late 14th or 15th century.
- Third *Stratum*. This layer contained antiquities and silver and copper coins of the Mughal Period.
- Second *Stratum*. This layer can be dated to the 18th and 19th centuries as it yielded coins of the Asif Jahi monarchs together with other objects. No details of the nature of occupation are given.
- First *Stratum*. This is the topmost layer consisting of buildings constructed in stone and lime, and brick and mud, found together with British silver rupees, gold and silver jewellery, copper and pottery utensils.

Despite bringing to light the historical importance of the site, excavations were not continued the following year and the disruptions caused by the outbreak of the Second World War meant that the project was never resuscitated. Yusuf's results are further discussed in Chapter 14.

Dikshit's 1965 excavations

Dikshit's 1965 excavations in the vicinity of the Narasimha Temple on top of the ancient mound revealed a four-period sequence (Fig. 1.4; Dikshit 1973). These periods are summarized from Dikshit's report as follows:

- Period I. In these layers, two supposedly early Satavahana coins with a Gaja-Lakshmi motif were found together with glass beads, crystal ear-reels, legged querns, a fine bone or ivory lion capital, kaolin figurines of a nude goddess and an ivory kohl applicator. Small fragments of worn Northern Black Polished ware (NBP) were also found in the upper levels. This period is dated by Dikshit roughly to 300 BC–AD 100, probably based on the coins and NBP, although this is not specified by him.
- Period II. At this level, thick deposits of mud and silt came to light to a depth of 1.22 m. These are interpreted by Dikshit as flood deposits, but it is unclear whether this is correct. This period is dated c. AD 100–500, but no evidence is presented to support this date and it is not further discussed.
- Period III. A portion of a brick temple in a ruined condition came to light in these levels. The plinth and *jangha* were built of very large bricks, but the size is unfortunately not stated. Iron objects and slag were found in the foundations of the structure. This phase is tentatively ascribed to the Rashtrakuta

period (AD 600–800), but no evidence is cited to support this date.

- Period IV. A disturbed layer in which an underground chamber of a house, approached by a flight of steps in the walls, was found. The finds included crude and poorly fired pottery, generally of the common red variety. The period is dated AD 1700–1800 but again, no supporting evidence is given.

These two excavations throw some useful light on the history of occupation at Paithan, although it is not very precise and the evidence for the interpretations given by the two authors is not always clear. The presence of Satavahana coins is of no surprise and would appear

to confirm Satavahana-period occupation at the site. In fact, both excavations report Satavahana coins in the lowest excavated levels, which suggests that – in these two particular locations at least – this may have been the earliest period of occupation. However, in neither case is the excavation report detailed enough to be certain that traces of earlier occupation were not also present. Both excavations also report a thick layer of abandonment or ‘flood deposits’ immediately above these levels, which is then followed by Medieval and post-Medieval occupation levels. The significance of these results, along with a reinterpretation, is discussed in more detail in Chapter 14.