

Chapter 5

The Excavation of Trenches B, C, D, E and F

Although the excavations around the two temples in Trench A were the main focus of the project, a series of smaller trenches was opened across the mound in order to investigate the depth and nature of the stratigraphy and the chronology of occupation on different parts of the mound. The aim was to delimit the extent of the Early Historic urban centre and to understand the extent of Early Medieval occupation. These aims were only partly fulfilled due to the difficulty of excavating trenches in the centre of the modern town. In the event, five further trenches were excavated, with only one (Trench F) being located outside the ASI protected area at the south end of the site. Trench locations are shown in Fig. 4.1. This chapter consists of reports of each of the excavations in each of these five trenches. Reference is made throughout to the context numbers, which are listed and described in Appendix I. For period dating and phasing, see Chapter 6.

Trench B

(Figs 5.1–5.4)

Trench B was excavated during the 1998 and 1999 fieldwork seasons. It is located to the south of Trench A (Fig. 4.1). The trench was originally 4 m × 4 m but was reduced in size during the excavation to 2 × 2 m.

The corner of a stone structure (401) came to light immediately below the surface in the south-east corner of the trench (Figs 5.2 and 5.4). Sixty cm below this, six stone pillar bases were uncovered cut into floor 413 underneath the upper layers of dumping and pitting activity (403, 404, 408, 409, 411, 425). Two of these bases were outside the limits of the trench, the other two are covered by wall 401.

Below this, a succession of uneven floors or surfaces (417, 427, 429, 439) came to light associated with pits filled with pottery and other rubbish as well as an ash deposit (428) and thick dumping deposits such as 437, 438. A pit (432/433) associated with these levels had a white plaster base. These deposits, and those above them, can be allocated to Period 4. No Period 3 remains were found in this trench.

From deposit 440, where the Period 2 levels begin, a lot of ash and evidence for fire and burning came to light in contexts 441, 442, 443, 444, 445, 446 and 447. A large pot was found covered with a thick, burnt mud coating (441) together with a smaller pot (445), both of which were associated with a black burnt deposit (443). A number of fragments of burnt clay were also recovered from the floor (450). All of these layers together suggest that, for a period of time, this area was given over to some sort of industrial process involving fire. Unfortunately, no evidence was uncovered that gives any more precise indication of what this process might have been. At this point, the size of the trench was reduced to 2 × 2 m in the south-east corner in order to speed up the excavation.

Below this 'industrial' activity, the nature of the deposits in this trench changes significantly. A sequence of 23 more or less horizontal floor levels was revealed, beginning with floor 450 (Figs 5.3 and 5.4). Apart from the uppermost two floors, 450 and 451, the rest of this sequence is allocated to Period 1. All floor levels had a gentle slope downwards towards the west. Most of the floors are made of thick, semi-compact silt and clay, but some of the lower floors are thinner and have traces of lime on them. Some are associated with pits and post-holes, and some with hearths, but the limited size of the trench did not allow the investigation of building styles or techniques or the nature of occupation throughout this period. A few coins were recovered from these levels.

Below the sequence of Period 1 floors, undisturbed natural soil (743) was reached at a depth of about 3.2 m from the surface. Natural soil seems to slope down towards the south-west. The archaeological deposits in Trench B are about 3.2 m in depth, with the Early Historic levels making up the lower 1.3 to 1.5 m of this.



Fig. 5.1: Trench B, view of the south and east sections of the trench at the end of excavation.

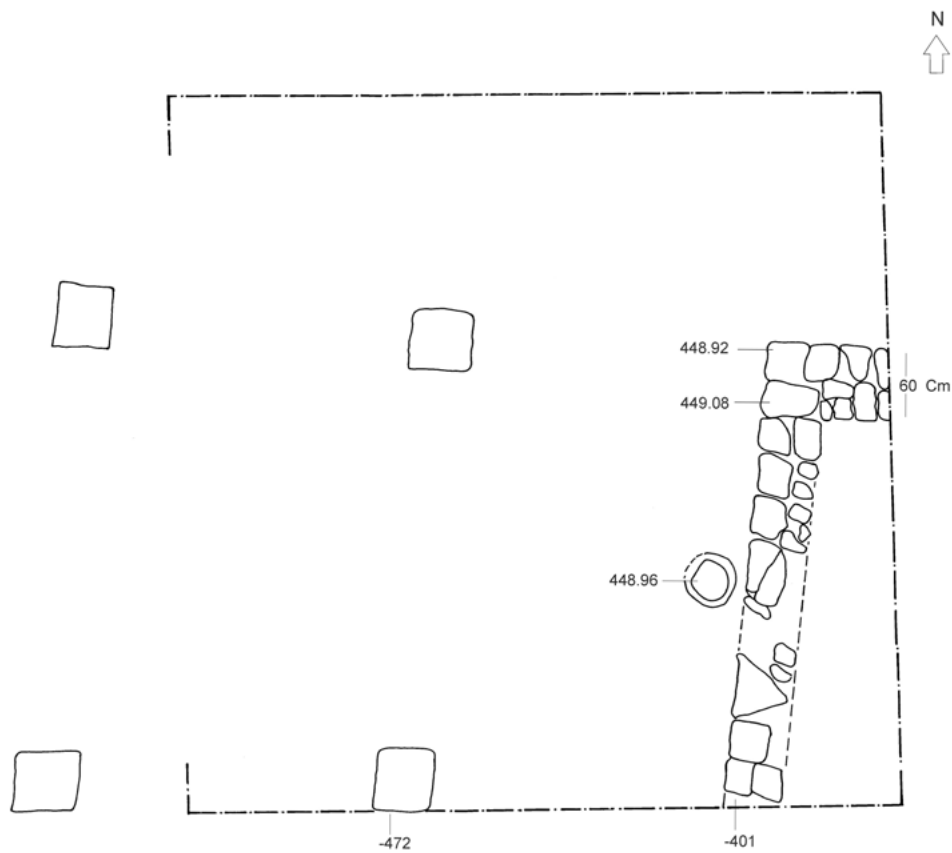


Fig. 5.2: Trench B showing wall 401 and related pillar bases to the west.

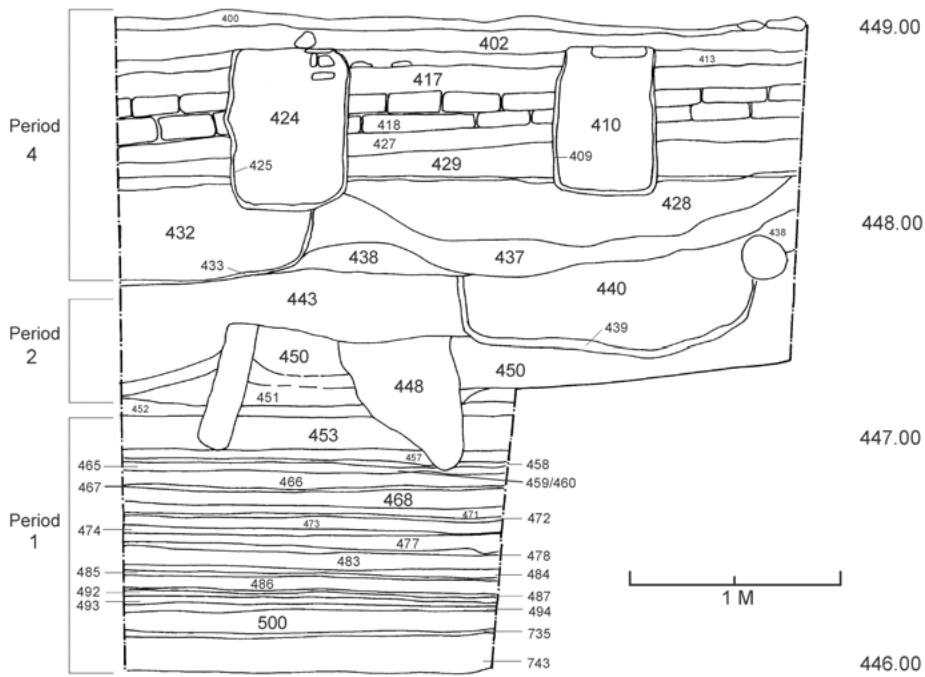


Fig. 5.3: Trench B, north-facing section.

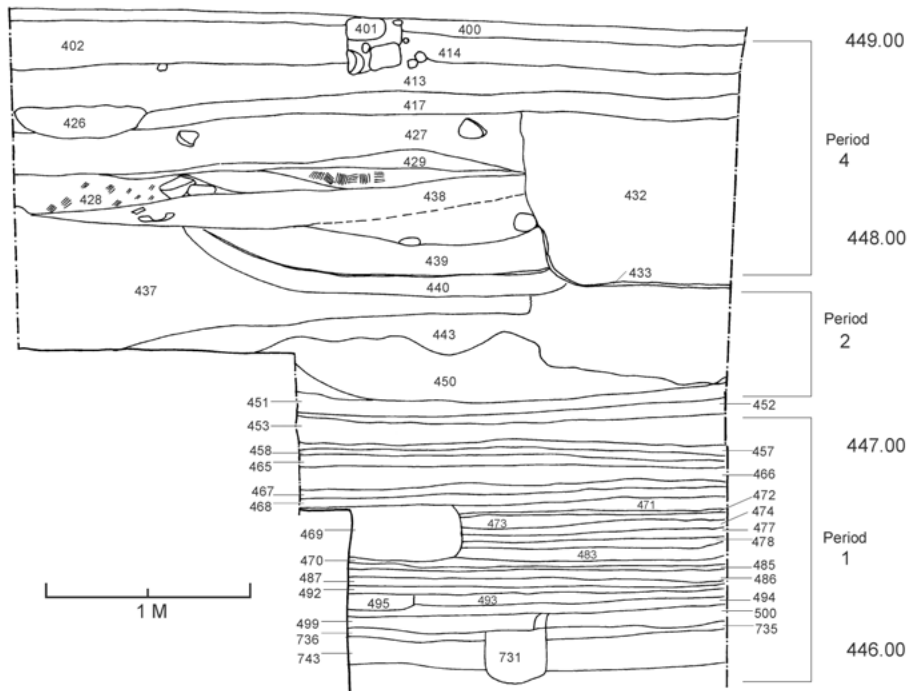


Fig. 5.4: Trench B, west-facing section.

Trench C

(Fig. 5.5)

In the 1996 season, a number of 5 × 5 m trenches were opened on the edge of the archaeological mound of Paithan towards the extreme south of the ASI protected area (Figs 4.1 and 4.2). This trench was excavated by J. Howell and A. Kumble in the 1996 and 1997 seasons. A summary report of the small finds and antiquities from this season is included in Chapter 10 of the present volume. It is impossible to incorporate the evidence from this trench into the periodisation proposed for the rest of the site due to the different methodology that was used. The following summary is intended only to give a sense of the nature of deposits in this part of the site and to suggest how these may relate to the site periodisation.

This area was chosen because it appeared to be free from the later Medieval structures and deposits that overlie the area to the north. At the edge of the mound, two brick ring-wells were visible in the cliff above the river bank and it was decided to expose these by cutting back the section and getting a preview of the entire archaeological deposit down to the natural soil. The trench was located in a low depression that appears to be enclosed within a low earthwork marking the location of a wall or rampart, probably of the Mughal period.

The coordinates of the five trenches according to the site grid are as follows: 130/450, 135/450, 140/450, 145/450 and 135/445. It is by these coordinates that they are referred to in the description below. Context numbers 1–41 were allocated during the 1996 season, and context numbers 42–203, during the 1997 season (see below).

The sequence elucidated by the trench is summarised below from the available excavation records:

Phase CI: The earliest phase is sealed by a large soil deposit, which includes a ditch and the material into which it is cut. In this phase, Thick Grey ware (Chapter 7) is present, but in comparatively small quantities compared to the wares that might be associated with the Early Historical period, including Red Polished ware. The principal types of finds were ceramic ‘areca nut’ beads, pendant loom weights, skin rubbers and copper-alloy coins (Chapter 10).

Phase CII: This includes a phase of structural activity overlying the deposits of the previous phase with a drain and earthen floors. The proportion of Thick Grey ware begins to drop in this phase, down to 12% of the

total amount of pottery collected. The most significant find from this phase is a lead *bullā*.

Phase CIII: The thick soil layer of this phase is cut into by numerous pits and shallow troughs, which do not appear to be structural. The pottery is mixed, with Thick Grey ware and other wares occurring in almost equal amounts. The finds include beads, bangles and kohl applicators, as well as ceramic pendant loom weights and cylindrical counters.

Phase CIV: This phase is the topsoil and recent intrusive activity on the site. The only structural activity in this phase is the ring-well found in trenches 130/450 and 135/450, which is the latest of the four ring-wells found in the excavations. The predominant type of pottery is Thick Grey ware, which represents more than 30% of the sample. The finds from these deposits are probably mixed and contaminated, but the most significant are a ceramic seal and one of the lead-scrolled objects.

As can be seen, all of these layers would be allocated to Period 3 or later according to the present periodisation due to the presence of Thick Grey wares, but the material from this trench was not included in the final analysis of pottery.

A significant feature of this part of the site of Paithan is the large number of circular brick or terracotta structures, commonly referred to as ring-wells. At least eight of these features can be identified in the eroding sections of the mound along the river bank. Most are cut from relatively high levels on the mound and do not appear to be deep enough to reach down to the water table. This brings into question their interpretation as a device for drawing up drinking water. Other interpretations that have been offered are that these structures are either soak pits for dispersing excess water, or silos for underground storage. The large number of ring-wells at Paithan have various designs, and the bricks or terracotta rings used in their construction are not of a uniform form or size.

In total, four ring-wells were discovered within the area excavated, two of which were exposed to their entire depth, which was in excess of 2.1 m. They were constructed in brick and bottomed out just below the top of the natural soil. A third brick ring-well was found within trenches 130/450 and 135/450 and was not fully excavated. The fourth ring-well is constructed from terracotta rings, only two of which survived. It was in a very fragmentary condition on the edge of the mound and was not excavated. With the exception of these ring-wells, no structural evidence was found in these trenches. In trench 135/445, a series of inter-cutting

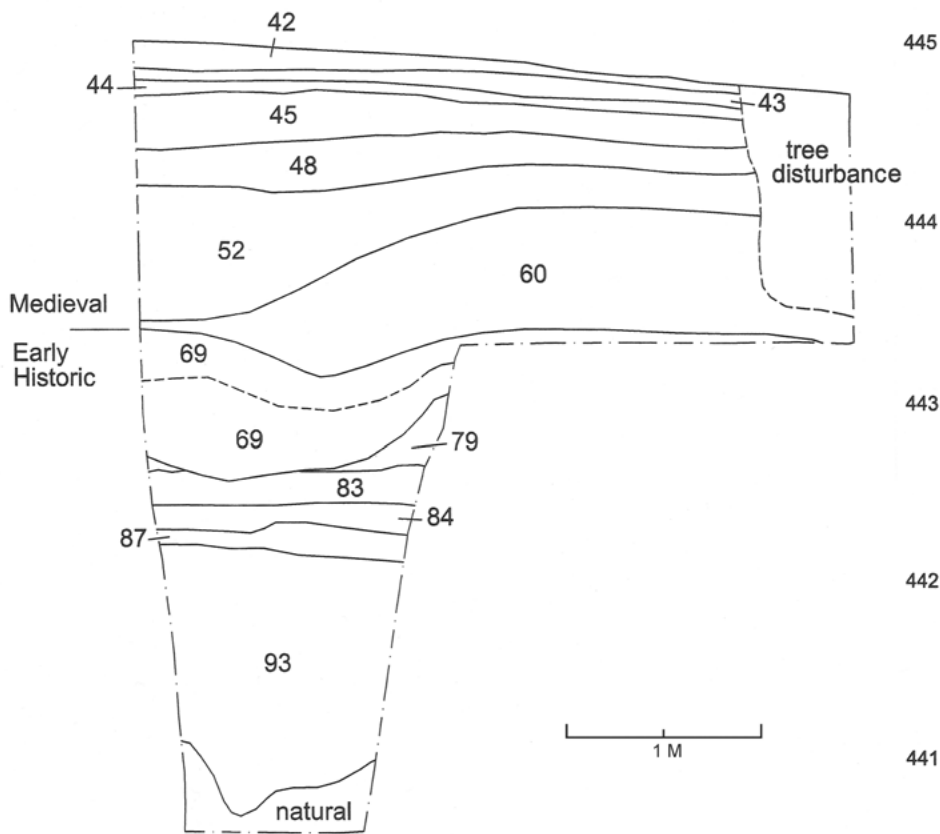


Fig. 5.5: Trench C section (155/450, south-facing).

features and later disturbances such as tree roots and animal burrows truncated all horizontal stratigraphy to a depth of 1.25 m.

During the 1997 season, a second area was located at the extreme south end of the site next to the 1996 excavations. Here, after the end of the 1996 season, students from the ASI Institute of Archaeology had undertaken a training excavation, opening a trench 35 × 5 m. In 1997, the same trench was cleaned and excavated down to natural across a 2-m-wide section in each of the seven sectors opened. This gave a 35-m-long section across this area of the site in which the sequence could be examined. In order to gain more information about the cultural assemblage, the baulks between the sectors were subsequently excavated. A series of terracotta and brick ring-wells and several pits were found cutting into the deposits, but no substantial structural activity was identified. The cultural material within the deposits can be dated to the Medieval and Early Historic periods. The deposits are interpreted

as resulting from dumping and extra-mural activities such as gardening, herding and well-digging probably close to the city of Paithan but certainly outside it.

An example of one of the trench sections drawn and excavated is shown in Fig. 5.5 (from Trench C, 155/450). Within this sequence, which is fairly typical of the whole area, layers 60 and above contained Thick Grey ware and would therefore be allocated to Period 3 or later under the present periodisation system. Below this, the layers can be allocated to Period 2, with the exception of the lowest layer (93), which is probably dated to Period 1.

Trench D

Trench D is situated at the northernmost limit of the ASI reserve area, 50 m north-east of Trench A close to the modern-day Muslim quarter of the town (Fig. 4.1). A small L-shaped trench was excavated here, either by

Dikshit in 1965 or by Yusuf in 1937, which seems then to have been enlarged in the more recent past by the clandestine robbing of building materials which has now been halted. Three metres of Medieval and post-Medieval overburden had been removed by these activities, providing an ideal location, at the very northern limit of the archaeological area, for investigating the Early Historic layers of the site.

Trench D1

(Fig. 5.6)

Trench D1 was excavated down to a similar depth to Trench D2 and the results were broadly similar. D1 was opened as a 4 × 4 m trench but was reduced down to 2 × 4 m almost immediately in order to save time.

The sequence revealed by this trench is quite unremarkable for its structural remains or evidence of human activity. Below a lime floor (752) in the upper-

most levels of the trench, two fairly deep deposits of compact black cotton soil and a loose silt layer with a large number of pottery sherds (753, 754) covered a further close sequence of four consecutive compact mud floor levels (759, 766, 767, 770) immediately above natural soil (777). Each of these floors was cut by a few post-holes or pits (e.g. 772), but none was associated with any brick structures. A large water storage jar (760/761) was found cut into floor 766, and evidence of burning and an ash filled pit were found associated with floor 759.

All of the deposits of Trench D1 have been allocated to Period 1 on the basis of the pottery that they contained, with the exception of floor 752, which is allocated to Period 2, and the loose wash on the surface (751) that is allocated to Period 3.

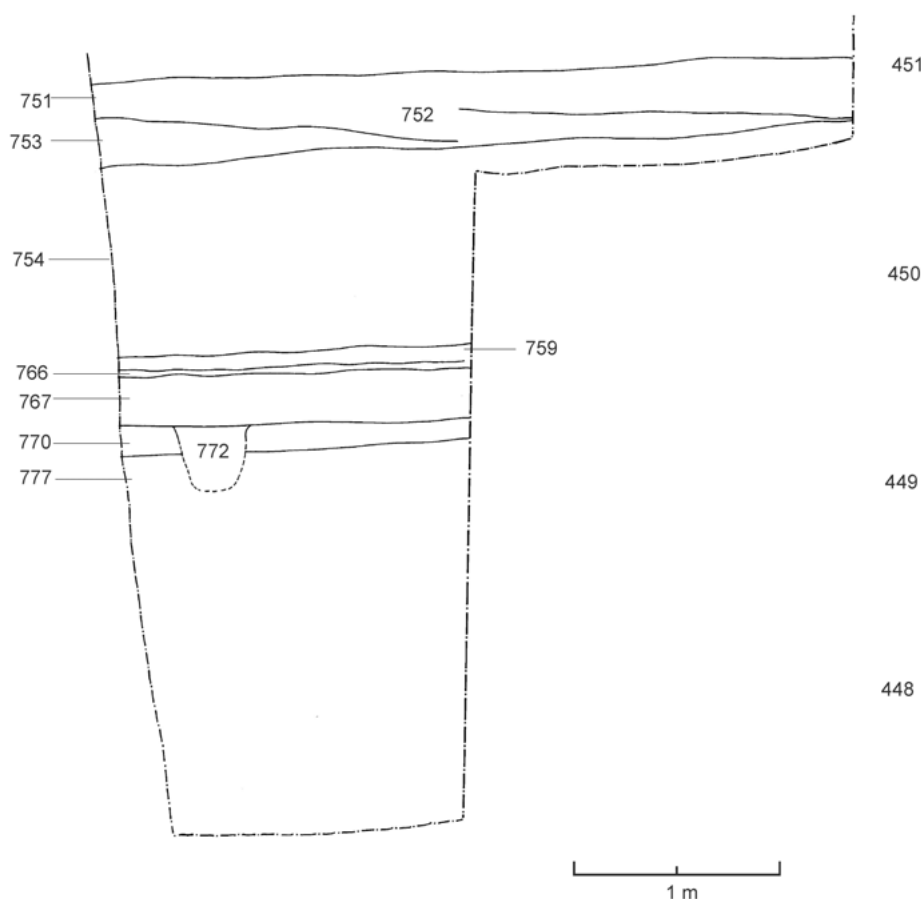


Fig. 5.6: Trench D1, east-facing section.

Trench D2

(Fig. 5.7)

The majority of the upper layers are dumps of pottery apparently deposited at different times when this area was inhabited during the Mughal and late Mughal times. Large town houses with cellars were built during this period by digging foundations into the Early Historic levels, thus explaining some reverse stratigraphy and a high degree of residuality in the finds from this area. Undisturbed archaeological layers occurred from around 450.00 m above site datum (711), whereas the height of the ground surface was 453.31 m.

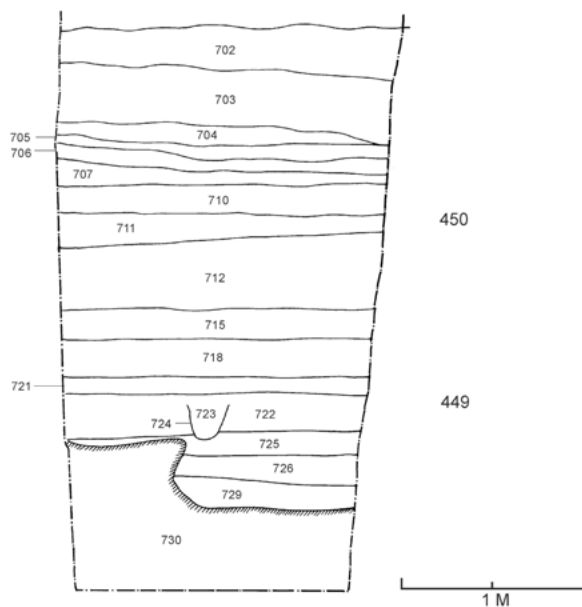


Fig. 5.7: Trench D2, south-facing section, as dug.

The earliest occupants settled down on the natural black cotton soil (730) in huts made of wooden posts with open fire places and with querns and mill-stones as part of the inventory of their daily lives. Bones were found associated with fire places where butchering and roasting perhaps took place. Eight or nine intact floor levels were encountered amongst the Early Historic period levels (711, 712, 715, 718, 721, 722, 725, 726, 729). A good number of bone points, arrowheads and beads of different material were also recovered from these layers.

The beginning of occupation seems to have been marked by simple living after which the economic standards gradually improved as signified by increased coinage, good-quality pottery, permanent hearths and rammed-earth floors.

The uppermost levels in this trench, down to floor 712, have been allocated to Period 2 on the basis of the pottery that they contained. Layers below this down to natural have been allocated to Period 1.

Trench E

Trench E is located just to the south-east of Trench A. Excavation was taken up to investigate the nature of the mounding here, which is considerably higher than the level of the surrounding area. A small 2.5 × 2.5 m trench was excavated to a depth of over 3 m, but natural soil was not reached. Excavation was stopped when it became clear that the mounding in this area is predominantly post-Medieval in date and consists largely of heavily disturbed or redeposited material. Fifty-five contexts were recorded, including pits, a few floors, one stone and one mud wall and a few hearths. Some Early Historic material came to light, but it seems mostly to be residual material from much later layers. No in situ Early Historic occupation was excavated here, although some of the lower levels encountered may be datable to the Early Medieval period. The trench produced some interesting and useful small finds that throw some light on the date of occupation of Paithan more generally. These are reported on in Chapter 8.

Trench F

(Figs 5.8 and 5.9)

Trench F (2 × 2 m) was opened up in the middle of the old town of Paithan on the top of the mound in an area known as the 'Nath Galli' (Fig. 4.1). The aim of the trench was to investigate the nature and chronology of the deposits in this area.

The trench was excavated to a depth of 3.5 m. The top 1.2 m of deposits consisted of later dumping (778). Below this, the deposits consisted of a series of clay floors with occasional post-holes, gravel spreads and hearths (784, 787, 788, 789). At a depth of 2.2 m (451.6 m above datum), a brick floor was encountered constructed of brick bats (790) and cut by two post-holes. This feature was by far the most substantial evidence of occupation encountered in the sequence here. Below the brick floor, further clay surfaces were found (846, 851, 852) before natural soil (853) was reached at a depth of 3.2 m (450.4 m above datum). The excavation continued into the black cotton soil that constitutes

the natural deposits of the river terrace to a depth of 15 cm.

The trench demonstrates that there does not seem to be a great deal of very substantial architecture of the Early Historic period in this particular part of the site, with the possible exception of the brick floor (790). The picture that is given is one of occupation on the river terrace dating back to perhaps as early as the 1st/2nd century BC, and from that point onwards, there is evidence of continual but not very substantial occupation.

The very lowest levels in this trench, pit 850 and floor 851 are allocated to Period 1 on the basis of the pottery that they contained. The rest of the sequence has been allocated to Period 2 with the exception of the surface layer (778), which contains material of Period 3.

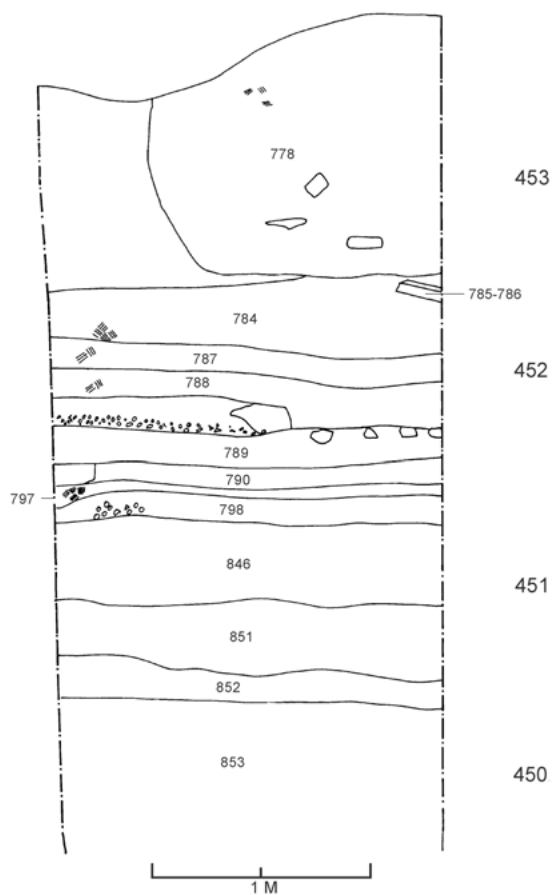


Fig. 5.8: Trench F, east-facing section.

Summary

The trenches reported on above have thrown some limited light on the history of occupation in certain parts of the mound, most notably in the ASI protected area, which is located towards the southern extent of what appears to be the main archaeological mounding of the site. Looking to the broader perspective, the results are unsatisfactory in the sense that they are too limited in size and number and do not give a clear and unambiguous picture of the development of occupation over the whole site. This is because of the difficulty of finding suitable excavation sites in the modern town, which today covers the highest part of the Early Historic mound.



Fig. 5.9: Trench F, view of the west-facing section.

The structural evidence from the Early Historic period has been shown to be very limited in all trenches, and in none of them can it be claimed that the archaeological deposits are consistent with a densely occupied urban centre of the Satavahana or Early Historic

period. Whether this reflects the nature of Satavahana/ Early Historic urbanism in this region or simply the fact that it was not possible to excavate trenches in the right locations on the mound remains unclear.

The results from these trenches, earlier work at the site, Trench A and the antiquities and coins from the site are brought together in Chapter 14, where the history of occupation at Paithan is considered.