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Excavations at Inamgaon, District Pune, Maharashtra, 1968–82

Though archaeological excavations in India are over 120 years old, still so far, no complete plan of a town or a village has been laid bare. Hence it was not possible to say how far and how long the old plans and practices continued or survived, though India is still largely a country of villages.

This lacuna has been filled up to some extent in western Maharashtra, around Pune, by the excavations conducted by the Deccan College at Inamgaon, since 1968 with grants by the University Grants Commission for successive trienniums (1968–82) through the University of Poona. Here the excavations were deliberately planned and executed because the conditions were ideal. There were no deposits of the historic period, as shown by several C14 dates of the charred remains from these phases or periods of the occupation, kindly supplied promptly by the Physical Research Laboratory, Ahmedabad and the Birbal Sahni Institute, Lucknow (*c.* 1600–700 B. C.).

From the beginning, the data recovery was contextual, so that as much light as possible might be thrown on the life of the inhabitants, such as the size of the family, food habits, craft specialization, religion, disposal of the dead. These objectives have been largely fulfilled, because an expert team of excavators as well as specialists and field supervisors has been built up.

The eleven year's work has not only given a fairly good idea of the village, 3500 years ago, but has shown how it underwent changes owing to new cultural forces or arrivals and climatic causes.

Later, a survey of the villages around the site at Wangdari, across the Ghod river, and the present Inamgaon showed that many important features in the layout of the present village – such as methods of house construction, grain storage – were exactly similar to those revealed in the excavated village. Thus Inamgaon is a good example, so far unique, of the current, increasing interest in ethno-archaeology. This but illustrates that India is a classic land where traditions still survive.

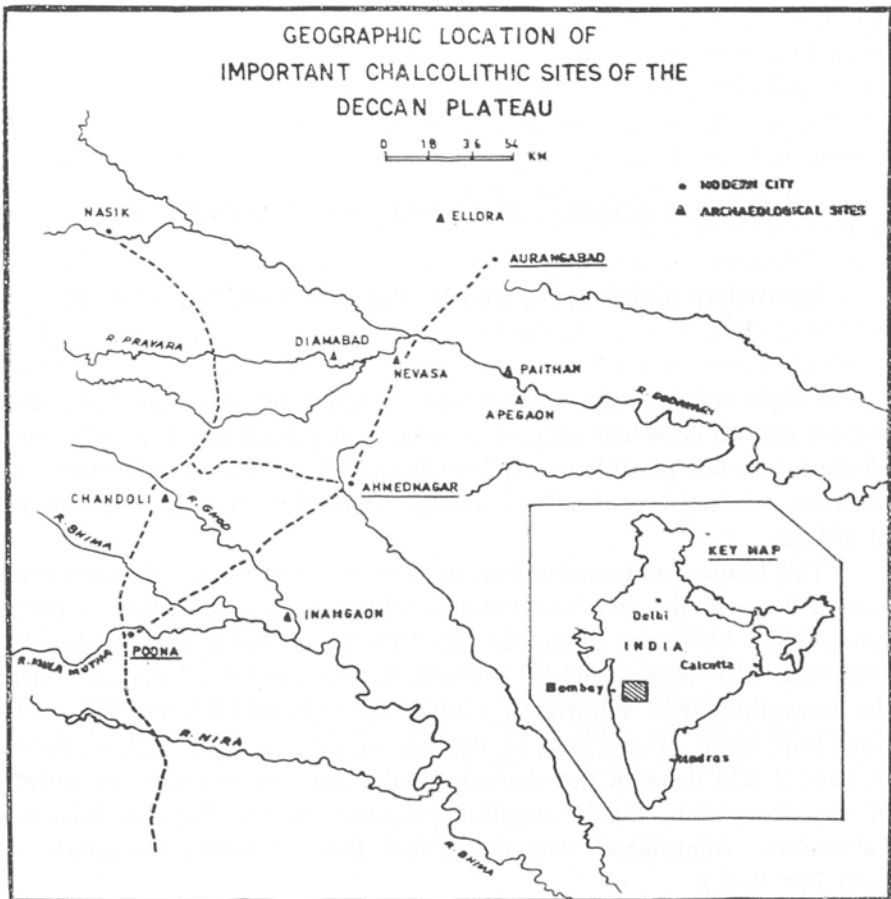


Fig. 1 - Map showing location of Inamgaon.

Since brief reports of the earlier work have appeared in *Expedition* and *Asian Perspective* an account of the last five years (1977-82) is given. Inamgaon is situated on the right bank of the Ghod river (pl. Ia; fig. 1), at a distance of 85 km from Pune. The ancient site is nearly 500 m east-west and 350 m north-south. This area now appears to have been cut up into five separate mounds. Of these, Mound I is the largest (fig. 2). During these five years over seventy houses and more than 200 burials were most carefully laid bare and their contents meticulously recorded, housewise.

These houses and burials are spread over the entire site and belong stratigraphically to three main periods, designated as I Malwa (c. 1600-1400 B.C.), II Early Jorwe (1400-1000 B.C.), III Late Jorwe (1000-700 B.C.). Irrespective of the thickness of the occupation debris which depends upon the location, whether the top of the mound, or on its slope, or near

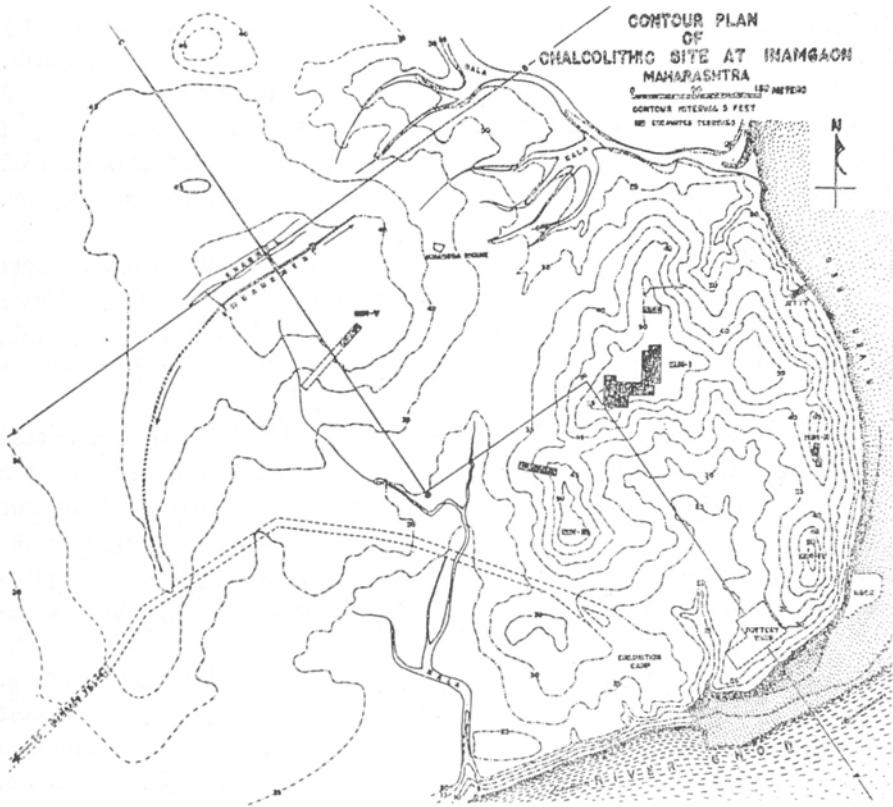


Fig. 2 - Contour plan of Chalcolithic site, Inamgaon.

the river bank, the earliest inhabitants settled on the black soil (pl. *Ib*). Their houses were circular, or rectangular, with their floor well rammed after covering the black soil with a thin layer of river gravel and yellow silt. This was the normal and most intelligent method of preparing the living floor, as attested by our excavations at Nevasa and Navdatoli. But this practice was not uniformly followed either in Period I or even in subsequent periods. And these variations or differences give us some idea of the varying social, and economic conditions of the nature (or temperament) of the inhabitants of a particular house. Thus House 108 has a well-rammed floor, while in 109 it was plastered as well. Houses 111-12 had the distinction of having well-demarcated boundaries and a lime-plastered floor, while House 113 had neither a floor or post-holes. Its oval shape reminds us of the present-day, temporary, grass huts. Even at this period, the houses were built close to each other (sq. E-3 (16)). Of these, one of the best, House 90 was rectangular (4.15 m × 2.90 m). It had a well made floor, with edges raised, so that rain water could not enter. House 87 was originally bigger

(6.50 m × 3.65 m) but was later made smaller (6.50 m × 3.35 m). Slightly later, there were rectangular houses, one circular house, and two courtyards.

Period II (Early Jorwe) (pl. IIa-b) is well represented by Houses 63 and 65. In the latter (65), the floor was made six times. Additionally it had a short mud wall with post-holes, and contained a three-armed *chulah* (fire-place). This does not seem to be a normal feature for cooking etc. at Inamgaon.

Some idea of planning in this early village may be had from the fact that in Houses 66, 68, 62-63, 70-71, all belonging to the Early Jorwe Period, there was a passage, about 4.90 m wide, running north-south, without any traces of a floor. Further, what might have been a lane is seen in House 72.

In the Late Jorwe Period (pl. IIIa-b), House 112 has well demarcated boundaries, and a lime-plastered floor. It had two courtyards, in one of which animals were probably tethered, as can be seen from the number of post-holes. House 105, a large rectangular one (pl. IIIb), was the scene of a tragedy. Not only was it found completely burnt, its wooden posts and grain charred, but in one corner was found a partially burnt skeleton of a child.

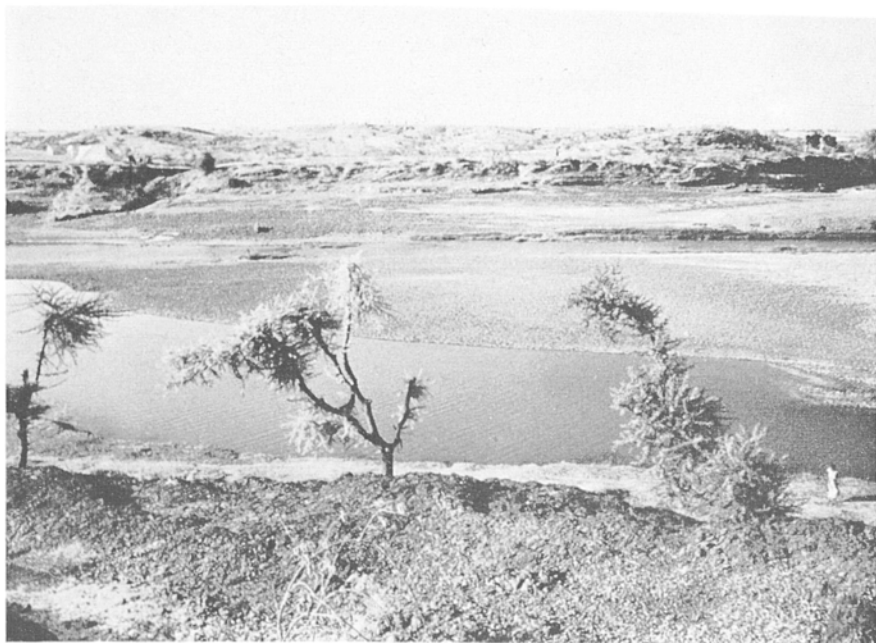
Though these houses contained a good deal of pottery for eating, drinking and storing food grains, water etc., and frequently or almost uniformly one or two twin Urn-burials of children, or at times extended burials of adults under their house floors, their other equipment was not uniform.

While fire-pits have been found in a number of houses in all the three occupation periods, the three-armed *chulah* (fire-place), either having a semi-circular clay border, with a hollow kept for inserting thin firewood sticks, or a *chulah* made by keeping three stones in a roughly semi-circular position, with the front open, occurs, but in a couple of houses.

Of more frequent occurrences are silos (pl. IVa), very often lined with thin lime plaster. In a couple of instances have been found small or large unbaked storage jars. Typical cases are cited and a few illustrated (pl. Vb) because these give an idea of the varied life of the inhabitants.

Silos were found in four houses. Each one of them had some interesting feature. Two large ones were located in the courtyard of House 86. Along their periphery there were a number of postholes, indicating that silos had roofs over them, exactly as the earliest one found in Bihar. The two silos in House 74 were also in a courtyard with postholes along the periphery.

The occurrence of an ill-baked female figure with punched decoration round her neck (pl. XIa), placed between three silos in House 69 suggests that these were fertility figures are supposed to protect the grain



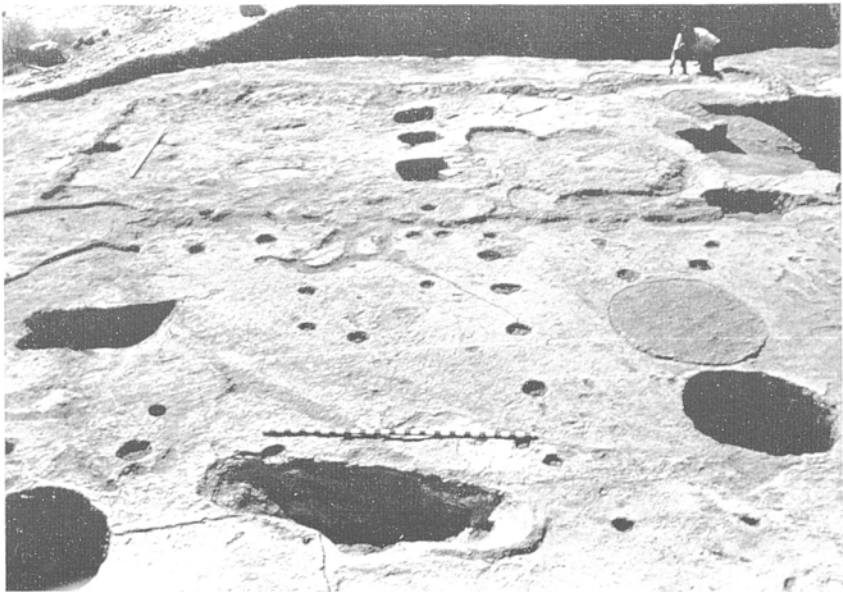
a) General view of the site, with the Ghod River in the foreground.



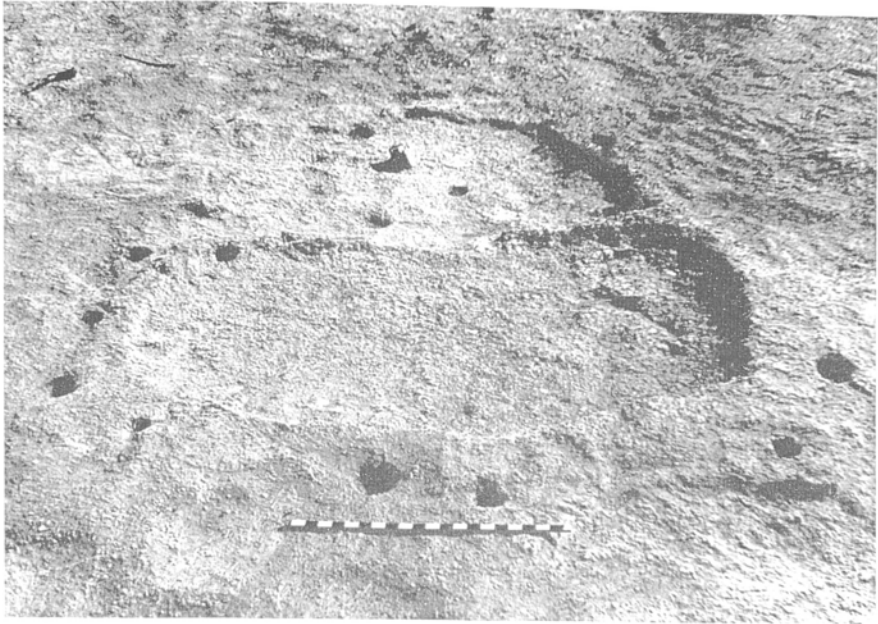
b) House No. 75, Period I.



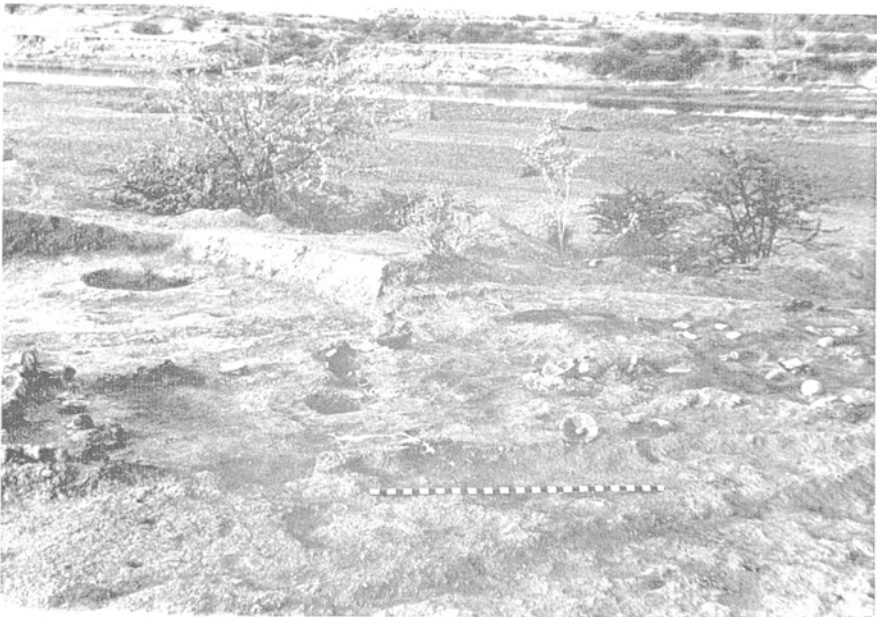
a) Houses 61 to 70, Period II, showing passage (lane).



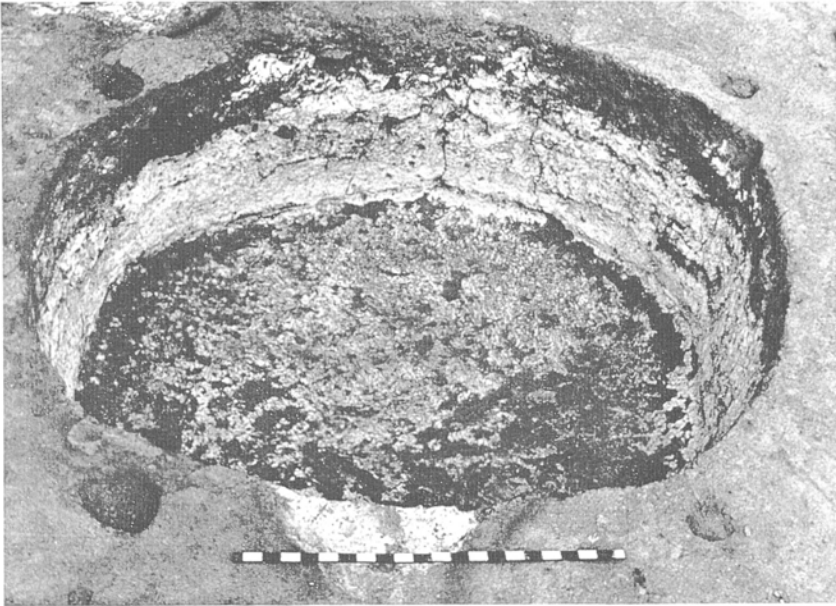
b) House No. 51, Period II, showing the base of a round mud platform on the right, and a silo.



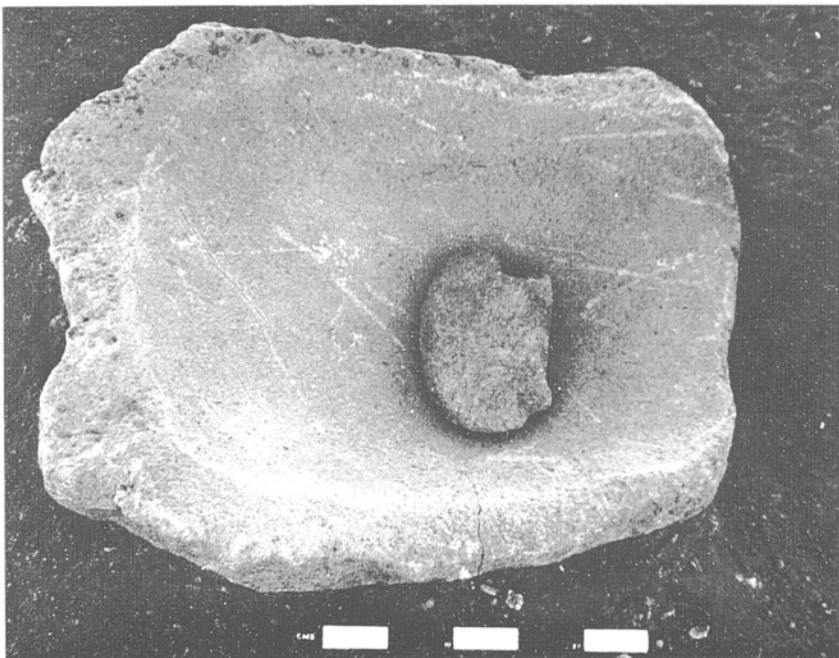
a) Lunate-maker's House, No. 109, Period III.



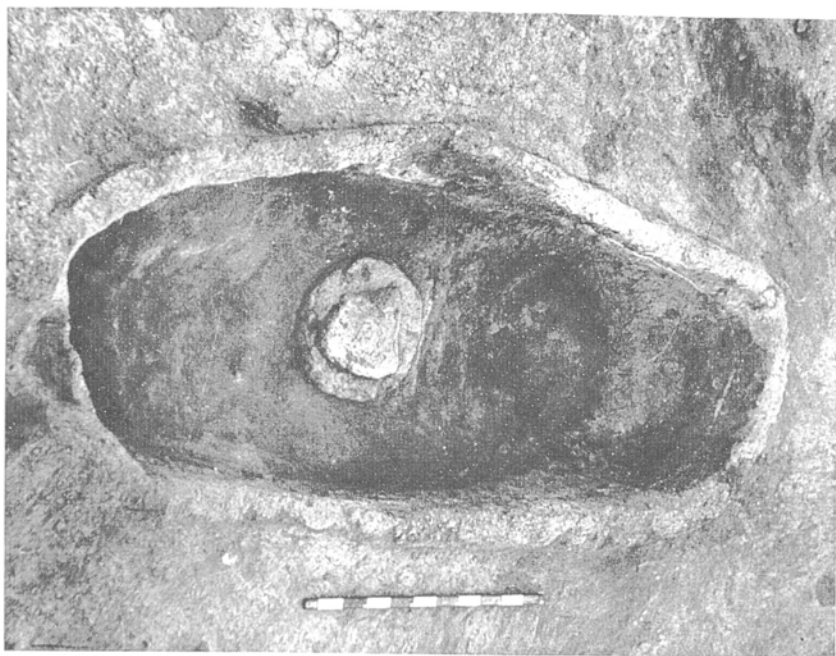
b) Burnt House, No. 105, Period III.



a) Silo plastered with lime, Period I.



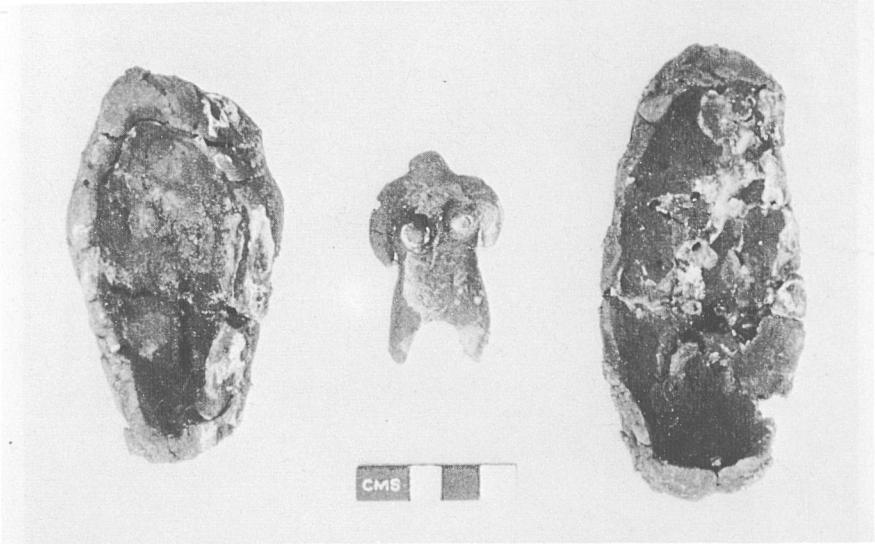
b) Saddle quern.



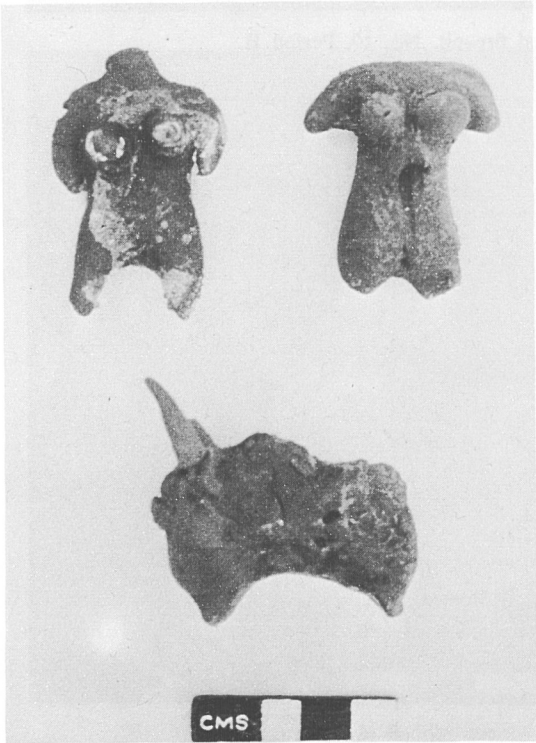
a) Clay-lined fire-pit, No. 10, Period II.



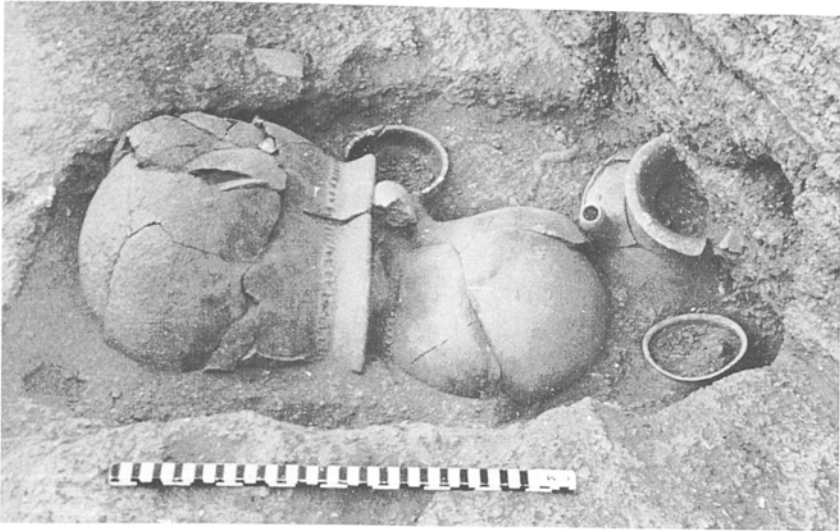
b) Storage jars.



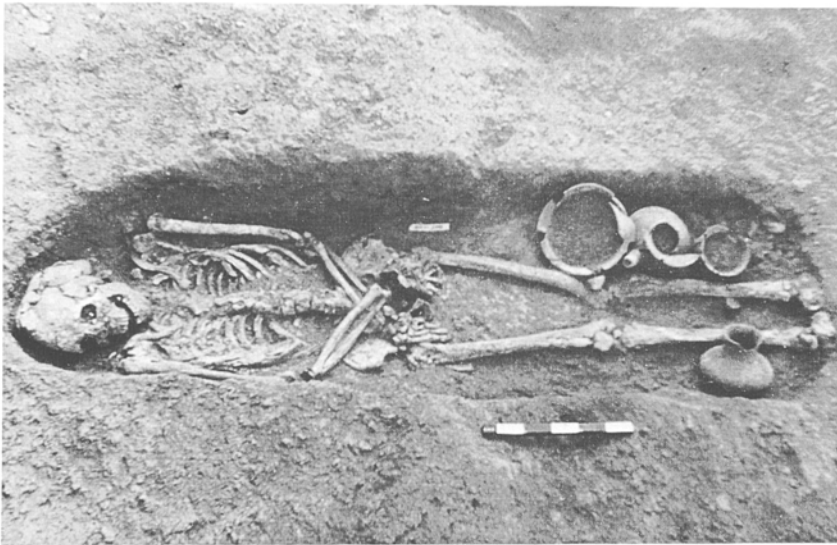
a) Clay box containing clay figure, Period II.



b) Clay figurines and bull, Period II



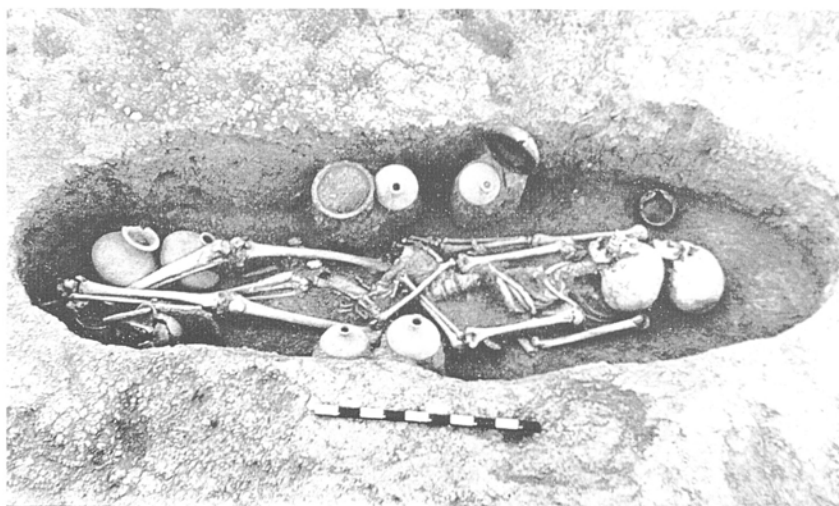
a) Twin burial, No. 9, Period I.



b) Extended burial, Period II.



a) Three- and four-urn burial, Period III



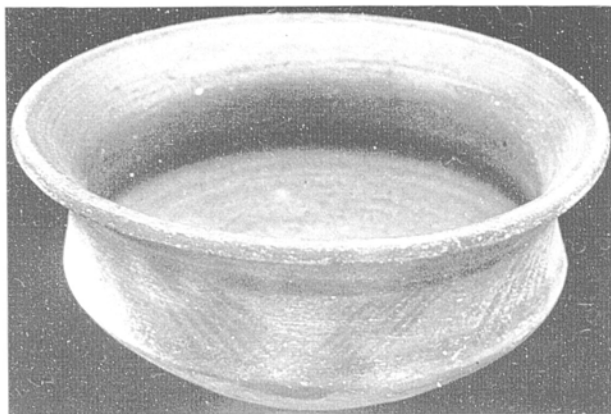
b) Double burial, Period III.



a) Spouted, carinated pot with flaring mouth, Jorwe Type, Period II.



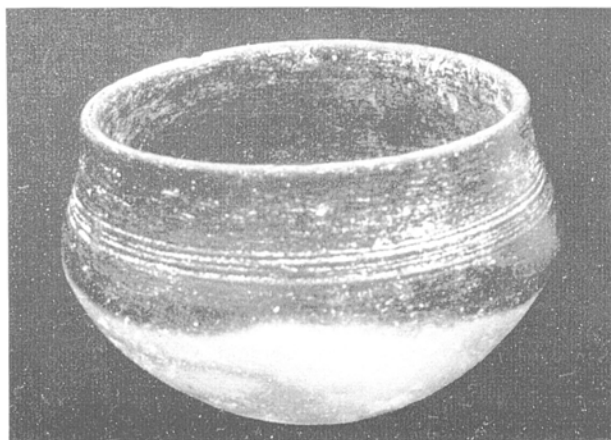
b) Narrow-mouthed spouted pot, Period III (New Type).



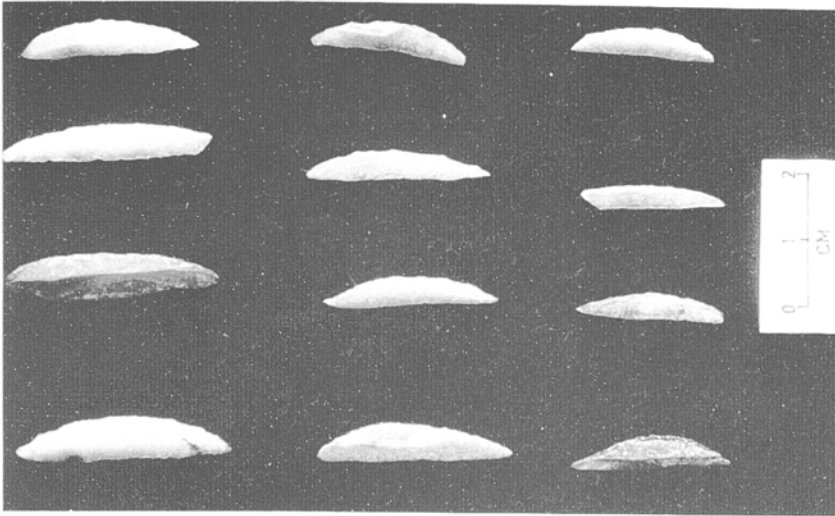
a) Concave-sided bowl,
Jorwe Type, Period II.



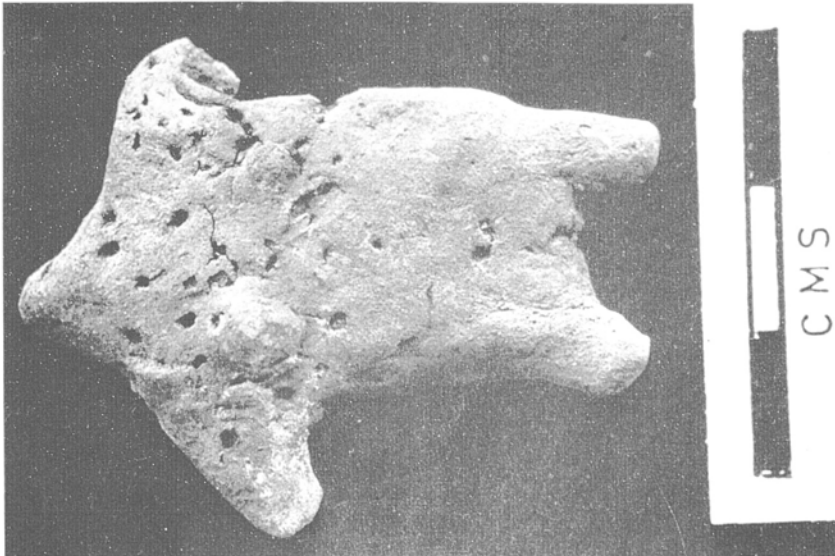
b) Convex-sided bowl, Pe-
riod III (New Type).



c) Bowl, Black-and-Red
Wre, Period III (Mega-
lithic).



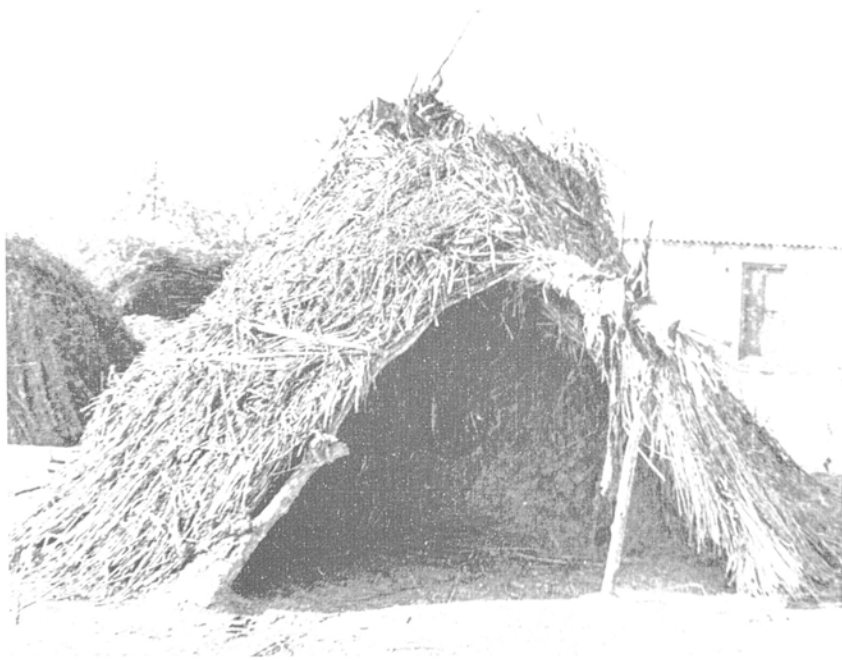
b) Lunates (of chalcedony)
from the Lunate-maker's House, No. 109.



a) Mother Goddess (terracotta figurine)
placed between three silos, House No. 69.



a) Present-day hut at Inamgaon.



b) Present-day hut at Wangadari.

stored in them. The grain stored in House 74 turned out to be barley. Usually this grain is stored in a silo today, but not wheat.

But these were not the only two methods of grain-storage. There were also bins. These are round or oval mud platforms, about 15 cm. above the floor. A large basket, woven out of a cane-like creeper is made and plastered with clay from within and without and placed or actually built over these platforms.

Storage jars also occur in all the three periods: The earliest was noticed in a rectangular house (4.15 m × 2.90 m). Two large ones were also of unbaked clay, with a rusticated body. The one in House 93 had a flat, base, whereas the two found in the Late Jorwe period were four-legged. One was found empty, but in the other an adult was buried in a sitting posture. Thus these large, unbaked, clay jars were used for storing dry things.

Saddle querns (pl. IVb) formed a normal complement of an Indian house, even until recently. But among the excavated houses, these occur in Houses 75, 93, and 107 only. Two saddle querns in House 93, along with a storage jar, a fire pit in a large, rectangular house of the Malwa-Jorwe Period suggest that the occupant was fairly well off or he had a large family and hence needed two saddle querns. Normally at this period only grain soaked in water overnight could have been ground, and made into a paste and not dry flour.

Usually a saddle quern is kept in the house in a working position, though in a small house, it has to be kept in a vertical position resting against the wall.

Normally, a saddle quern is associated with one flattish or plano-convex rubber stone, but in House 75, four rubber stones were found without any saddle quern. The exact significance of this cannot be understood, except as a guess that the resident of this house was either a dealer or maker of such rubber stones.

Some light is thrown on other aspects of the life of Inamgaon people, albeit it is not much.

Throughout this period, and even much later, cotton was spun on spindle-whorls. These were either specially made, or made out of broken pottery, by boring a hole in a sherd. Usually we find many, but during the last five years only one spindle-whorl, that too of pottery, was found in House 84. Thus it belongs to Period I. However, we can be sure that many more spindle whorls must have been in use, and probably every family spun its own yarn and wove itself, or gave it to a professional weaver.

Likewise every family must have had at least one hunter or an expert who could shoot with a sling ball. But so far only one sling ball – that of stone – has been found in House 79-80.

Though microliths – blades, flakes and cores – are found in all the houses, in small or large numbers, suggesting that this was a craft practised by every family, very interesting evidence was found in House 102. Here a resident of Late Jorwe Period seems to have specialized in making lunates only. Hence in the portion of the house a stone (quern) was fixed in the floor to serve as an anvil, and around it among the masses of flakes and chips were found more than 1000 lunates (pl. XIb). This by any standard is an impressive number, and one has to conclude that here is an excellent evidence for craft specialization, as at Shahr-i Sokhta, Sistan, in Eastern Iran.

In House 109, a sandstone quern was found on a specially made floor in a semi-circular area.

In House 13 was found a crucible-like object. This might be of a goldsmith.

Besides these household crafts, there was a potter or potters and a lime-maker. Two complete potter's kilns – one small, of Period I, and a large one of Period II have been found.

Though lime was occasionally used, as a thin coating in a silo was noticed in 1968, still its regular use seems to have been gradual. That it was used extensively, perhaps traded, during the last phase could be seen from a number of lime balls lying on the surface of Period I. Raw material in the shape of *kankar* (lime nodules) is available in plenty on the left bank, about a mile upstream.

Two clay, nude female figurines, one with head and the other without head, which could be seated on a bull were found in a clay box in 1973 (pl. VI). Evidently these are figurines of Mother Goddesses. Occasionally terracotta figures, both male and female were found, but not in a definite context, except in one case. As mentioned earlier, a terracotta figurine with a punctured decoration round the neck was found between three silos. So one can conclude that such figurines, both male and female were worshipped.

But the best evidence about the Inamgaon residents' belief in after-life is found in numerous (223) burials (pls. VII–VIII). The dead were invariably buried within the house, under the living floor. The children in two or three pots with a bowl or two and a spouted jar; adults in an extended position. Usually the head was placed towards the north, and the feet towards the south, with bowls and spouted pots. Perhaps some food and drink might have been placed (kept) in the vessels at the time of the burial, but from the position of the pots, it would appear that this was never the case, or not always possible. Hence only a provision was made for eating and drinking but actual provisions were not kept inside the burial pots, otherwise some traces might have remained.

Though house-burial was a normal procedure, many interesting departures or features have been noticed which throw light on the prevailing social conditions. These instances have been cited, as far as possible, period-wise. No. 129 is a typical child burial with the skeleton placed in two grey ware urns placed with their mouths in north-south direction, the grave goods consisting of a bowl and a spouted pot of Jorwe Ware.

In No. 127, the northern jar was of the painted Malwa fabric and the southern alone of the usual grey ware. Further, the rim of the painted pot was cut upto the neck. Still more interesting, nay a unique example, is provided by No. 128. Here a red storage jar was provided for burial. And it was so large that it could accommodate two grey-ware burial urns. But there were no grave goods at all! In No. 132, among the grave goods were two bowls of Malwa fabric with vertical sides, and two bowls of grey ware. In No. 130, a child was buried in a single grey-ware urn, which was placed vertically. Here we might infer that the child belonged to a poor family, which could not afford the normal equipment.

No. 125 may be regarded as a unique instance of a burial in the Early Jorwe Period. Here three persons were buried together. This might be due to the fact that there was some calamity – an accident, disease, or simple poverty. Similar might be the reason in No. 91, where a skull alone was found in a pit. No. 99 contained only a single urn with a bowl only. As opposed to these burials, probably of poor persons, or persons who had met with an accident, in No. 89 a fairly tall person (1.65 m or 5 ft 6 in.) was buried with his knees flexed and turned towards the right.

Normally, the legs are fully extended. But in this case, either the person died in this posture, or because he occupied an important position in the family or society, he was accorded this unique posture.

This burial also provided definite evidence that when a person died in a family and he or she was buried under the house floor, the family continued to live in the same house, after covering the burial pot and relaying the floor.

Usually, when a grown up person was buried in an extended position, his legs were chopped off. In No. 160, a teenage person was found buried in an extended position, but his legs were not chopped off. The normal custom or practice was not followed, because either the person was young, and also because not so tall that he would occupy more space for burying in an extended position, or there might be other reason, social or economic.

Burial No. 152 contained non-skeletal remains. It contained only a spouted jar with vertical neck and not flaring, as is normal. This might be regarded as a symbolic burial or an instance which illustrated how preparations were made for burying the dead, but due to some reason it was not utilized.

No. 83, an instance of Twin burial, is notable for the fact that both the urns were of equal size and the spouted pot kept in the urn had an unusual flaring mouth. Such a wide-mouthed pot was used, because here a smaller pot was placed within the bigger with the mouth towards the north-east. Further, the child's body was covered with grass. Thus, in every way this twin burial was different from the normal.

In the Late Jorwe Period we also find abnormal examples. In House 106, Burial 146, two persons were buried together, whereas in House 113, a child burial was found without the skull. No. 163 was a rare example of three-urn burial; further each urn was made differently. While the central urn was a handmade storage jar, the southern urn, the smallest of the three, was made of coarse red-and-grey pottery. Further, the skull was found crushed; while all this might indicate a hasty burial, the fact that there were seven funerary pots in the burial pit, of which one alone was of Late Jorwe fabric, and the rest of black-and-red ware is significant. These were the latest inhabitants and probably not well acquainted or well equipped with the Early Jorwe burial customs, or they were well off, and could afford to place seven pots in the burial pit. A still more positive sign indicating either a higher or a specialized status of the buried individual is suggested by Burial 113. Here a huge 4-legged clay jar was used for burying a person in sitting posture. A similar jar was found earlier (197-78), but was empty. This burial posture is used today by Lingayats, a sect which grew up in the 13th century in Karnatak.

The Chalcolithic settlement at Inamgaon lying as it appears today, off the beaten track in a perpetually semi-arid region of India, shows interesting contacts with Malwa (Central India) in the north and Andhra-Karnatak in the south, though while doing so, it maintained its individuality and gradually shook off the Malwa influence. This is best seen in its table ware as well as ordinary household pottery and the disposal of the dead. In the houses of the earliest period, dated c. 1600 B.C., we find the use of the typical Malwa style of pottery, particularly its fabric or surface treatment, and a few pottery shapes such as *lotas* (water vessels) and bowls. But for some reason, its other characteristic shapes – such as dishes, dishes-on-stand, and goblets (bowls-on-stand) with their rich paintings depicting nature scenes were totally excluded. The Inamgaon inhabitants had instead large – and small – spouted pots with flaring mouth and bowls with carinated belly. What we call '*Thalis*' (dishes) are totally absent. If they used such flat-based dishes, they might have used the grey-ware basins.

Later, in Period II, even this limited Malwa influence is practically absent, and disappears completely in Period III. All these conclusions, here stated so briefly, are based on a very thorough analysis of pottery,

and numerous potsherds which could give an idea of the shape of the vessel from each excavated house, and not on a general impression.

In Period III, while the typical pottery has smooth but not shining red-painted surface with simple geometric designs in black loses its fineness and the surface becomes coarser.

However, at this period another pottery, bowls of black-and-red ware, makes its appearance. These bowls had definitely entered the kitchen as they are found among the grave goods.

The exact date of introduction of the typical black-and-red ware is not known, but in our present knowledge, we might regard it as South Indian. In fact, such influence can also be postulated for the use of grey-ware pots with flaring mouth, and used for burying children, besides other purposes in the kitchen as the large number of these pots in every house testify.

Again spouted vessels in grey ware with almost teapot-like recurved spout occur in the Neolithic settlements at Tekkalkota and Chandravalli in Karnataka.

But again the people in Maharashtra, as shown by Nevasa, Daimabad and now Inamgaon, did not fully borrow these South Indian fabrics nor form, nor the polished axe. So far only a couple of such axes have been found at Inamgaon and also at Nevasa. Thus Inamgaon once again emphasizes the individuality of the Jorwe Culture, as a typical Maharashtra Chalcolithic Culture.

Contact with the sea is also indicated by a necklace of tiny sea-shells round the neck of a child in a twin burial of 1981-82.

Now Inamgaon emphasizes the importance the Jorwe people attached to such ornaments. However the material employed, viz. copper beads at Nevasa and Chandoli but paste and sea-shells at Inamgaon indicate the economic condition of the family.

Earlier heavy anklets or wristlets of copper had been found, and a few other objects. So copper was known, but its use was not much, because of its rarity.

This Chalcolithic settlement depended from the very beginning upon hunting such animals as deer, and cultivating barley; later sheep/goats, and wheat and finally lentil and two or three kinds of pulses. Increasing dependence upon non-vegetarian diet is reflected in the few well preserved adult skeletal remains.

One of the most important results obtained in these five years with the help of scientific studies, such as palaeobotany and palaeoanthropology, is that we now know that the latest inhabitants of Inamgaon were not economically backward, either in the matter of the size of their houses or of their food.

Further ethnographic studies of villages around the site, such as Wagdari and Inamgaon, show that though the prehistoric settlement faded out, possibly because of great climatic changes, it had left its legacy. This is best evidenced in the method of building hatched huts (pl. XII) and mud platforms for erecting storage bins.