

Archaeological Activities In Nepal Since 1893 A.D. To 2002 A.D.

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Nepal lies between the latitudes 26°22 and 30°27 N. and longitudes 80°4' E. and 88°12' E.. It has China on the North and India on East, South and West. The climate is sub-tropical Monsoon type. Its area is 147181 square kilometers, which comprises of 19% Himalayan, 64% Mountainous and 17% plain land (Tarai).

Before the finding of the dated Samvat 107 (185 A.D.) inscription of the Jaya Varma sculpture, Samvat 381 (459 A.D.) inscription found at the Pashupatinath was considered earliest. But prior to that Mandeva Inscription of Changu Narayan, Samvat 386 (464 A.D.) was accepted as earliest known inscription of Nepal. Now the inscription of Jaya Varma dated 185 A.D. (see Pl. I) enhances authentic evidences, which was previously missing and it pushes back the epigraphical documentation of Lichhavi period in Kathmandu valley nearly three hundred years ago. But actually the earliest evidences are inscriptions from Niglisagar and Lumbini which are dated 3rd century B.C.

The period which has no recorded history is called prehistory, where relics left by illiterate man form the sole source of information. This is the

earliest part of the history of our ancestors, whose traditions, legends and literature are not available. They were hunters, fishers and food gatherers and did not know the use of copper and iron. Their main tool was stone. They might have used wood but since they are perishable, hence are rarely found. What is available now, is only stone tool and since stone tools were the only prominent object in this period, this age is known as the stone age.

In March 1893 A.D., the discovery of a Priyadarsi pillar by Major Jaskaran Singh of Balarampur, at Bairat, a deserted site in Pargana Kolhwa of Tehsil Nepalgunj was announced, which news went the round of newspapers in the spring of 1893 A.D., which raised great hopes in the antiquarian world (Mukherjee: 1969:2). The pillar was later correctly located at Niglisagar by A. Fuherer in 1895 A.D. Then dawned the era of archaeological discoveries in Nepal. Khadga Samser discovered another pillar at Lumbini in 1896 A.D. In 1899 A.D. P.C. Mukherjee, an Indian engineer explored and excavated the base of the pillar at Lumbini. He identified the fortified mound at Tilaurakot district with ancient Kapilvastu the capital of Suddhodhan.

Kaiser Samsar also took a lot of interest in archaeological activities in Lumbini in 1933 to 1934 A.D. but it was not done in a scientific manner. Keeping in mind the need and importance of archaeology, HMG of Nepal established DoA in 1953 A.D. with the goal to extend its activities in the field of excavation, exploration, documentation and preservation of the archaeological and historical important monuments, objects, sites, etc. HMG of Nepal published the first Ancient Monuments Preservation Act 1956 A.D. in the official gazette. (Pradhan:1983:1).

The first prehistoric exploration in the Kathmandu valley was carried out in 1961 A.D. by R.V.Joshi. He did not yield stone artifacts either of Palaeolithic or microlithic type, but a couple of specimens collected from the Godawari river near Balkhu are extremely doubtful and not at all convincing to establish the presence of Early man in the valley. It was in 1962 A.D. the first excavation at Tilaurakot was undertaken by DOA in collaboration with Archaeological Survey of India. The explorations of the Tarai in the regions of Lumbini (see Pl. II) and Tilaurakot carried out sporadically since the first regular efforts by P.C.Mukherjee in 1899 A.D., have not so far yielded any evidence that could be dated earlier than the seventh century. B.C. The excavation at Banjarahi near Lumbini in 1964 A.D. by S.B Deo and again in 1967-71 A.D. by DOA have not helped substantially to push the date of the earliest occupation of the site beyond the seventh century B.C. Subsequently, again the site was excavated by T.N. Mishra, DoA in 1966 and 1967 and briefly by Japanese team of the Rissho University of Tokyo under the leadership of Professor Kuba in 1967 under a five year agreement with His Majesty's Government of Nepal.

During the excavation in 1966-71 at Tilaurakot, the remains of Kapilvastu, the Shakya capital have been identified. A 22 feet wide moat and a 10 feet wide defense wall has encircled the citadel. Excavation have uncovered the Eastern and Western Gateways

and a structural complex (see Pl. III) in the center of the site. The earliest pottery is painted gray ware of the eighth and seventh century B.C. followed by Northern Black Polished and Red ware, Terracotta Human and Animal Figurines, Beads, Bangles, objects of metal including Punch mark and cast coins, Seals, sealings and numerous other objects have been found.

The area is extended to 1700 feet length and 1300 feet breadth. These evidences are very important to identify Tilaurakot as Kapilvastu. But more scientific area excavation has to be carried out at it. Actually excavation work is destruction if it is not recorded scientifically and if the report is not published in time. Unfortunately this author has not read the excavation report of Rissho university yet because it is not available in the Department Of Archaeology.

The subsequent excavation in the Kathmandu Valley at Manamaneswor near Hadigaon and Lazimpat carried out in 1965 A.D. by S.B.Deo indicated that the earliest habitations in the areas began in the early centuries of the Christian era. Further explorations carried out in the valley by Department Of Archaeology did not yield earlier traces of human activities in the part than was known already. The excavation done in 1966 A.D. by N.R.Banerjee at Dhumvarahi of Kathmandu confirmed the earlier sequence of excavation obtained from Kathmandu valley. But the excavation carried out by ISMEO with Department Of Archaeology at Satya Narayan Temple, Hadigaon(1984-89 A.D.) indicated the earliest habitation activity in the Kathmandu valley from the first century B.C.

The excavation at Satya Narayan and Natesvara sites of Hadigaon has broadly revealed two periods. Period I, Circa first century B.C. to third century A.D., which has reported a Mathura type of weight, depicted a scene of Lord Krishna slaying a horse demon Keshin (Keshin vadh) and a Kushan coin. Period II has been attributed to the sixth century A.D. to the seventh century A.D. (Verardi, 1992, 11).

The Department of Archaeology had excavated at Bhediaryi of Morang District in 1970 A.D. (see Pl.

IV) and identified it as a temple remaining of Sunga period. No report and antiquities are available because they were destroyed when Singhadurbar caught fire. But one who visits the site can see artifacts belonging to the Bhediari like terracotta figures of Sunga period, Redware potteries, male and female T.C. figurines, stone weight, quern, a beautiful T.C. female head of Kushan period, T.C. and semi precious beads, burnt rice at the house of K.K. Yadav. He has been collecting the artifacts because he wants to keep safely those important artifacts in the museum.

In 1969, Dr. N.R. Banerjee and J.L. Sharma reported about the discovery of Neolithic implements, celt from Makawanpur, Budhanilkantha in the bed of Vishnumati and Panauti and axe from the Katukisewar (Dang) and Gwar Khola (Dang). (Banerjee and Sharma: 1969:53/58).

J.L. Sharma has also reported Neolithic tools from different parts of Nepal like Axes from Charikot, Jugugaon (Khopasi) and Lubhu, Celts from Charikot, Kottanri, Morang (Jhapa Baijnathpur village), Chisel from Charikot and Northern region. (Sharma: 1983:1-5). Five axes, one celt and one chisel have been collected only from Charikot. Likewise, Celt, and Chisel are reported from Bijauri Dang and Shankhuwasabha of Bana and Jaljala village also. In this way, number of Neolithic have been recorded but they are all stray findings, neither of them are from the stratify. But they are important for further study and exploration. Tools described by N.R. Banerjee of Kottanri (Danda) were river worked and not man made artifacts (Corvinus: 1994, 2).

Prof. Dr. Schetenko explored at Chitwan and Budanilkantha (Kathmandu) in 1978 A.D. He compared the Palaeolithic implements found from the latter place with Mongolia, China and Soviet Russia.

The discovery of a Ramapithecus tooth from Tinaukhola (Butwal) in 1980 A.D. by Nepal-U.S.A.

Scientific Exploration was significant. This upper molar was dated 9.0-9.5 M.Y. old. It's the oldest hominoid specimen in Asia (Shah & Shrestha: 1992, 69).

The Chronology of Prehistoric Site in Western Nepal

The Geo archaeological Project in Nepal was funded by the German Research Council and assisted by the Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu and Department of Archaeology. The project was conducted by Dr. Gudrun Corvinus who discovered a large number of prehistoric sites from the Palaeolithic to Neolithic periods in western Nepal.

She has credit to recognized Nepal on the Prehistoric map of the Indian sub-continent while doing research work since 1985 to 1994 A.D.

During the ten years period, Corvinus discovered more than fifty sites with occupation sites, factory sites, small localities and activity spots of Early man in the Dang Valley.

The earliest occupants were people with Handaxes. Only two site has been found, one from Dang and other at the Himalayan front near the Narayani river mouth into the plains- Satpati. The Handaxe from Jhajri of Gadari, Dang found in the basal gravel is the oldest period of the Dun valley dated seven million year B.P. (Prof. S.N. Rajguru).

The large flake core industry from the basal gravel in Tui valley at Brakuti is enigmatic. The Arjun 3 site in Deokhuri comprises flakes, blades, scrapers and a point made from quartzite cores which were prepared in a levallois like fashion.

The flake chopper core scraper industry from the upper silt levels of the older surfaces of Dang Deokhuri valley are found abundantly.

Microlithic industries are found made of chert. It contains small flakes, bladelets, and tools consist of backed lunets, thumbnail scrapers and few geometric forms at Ammapur in Tui valley.

Neolithic remains from Gadari, Basantapur, Bhitabang and Brakuti are very little. Polished stone axes, small flakes, a well made lithic arrow head and

potsherds of cord marked pottery are from Dang and Tui valley.

The Handaxes discovered from the Gadari, Dang shows the resemblance of Sohan industry of India (Corvinus:1990, 11).

Gudrun Corvinus has also discovered site of the Patu in Siwalik hill of Kamala, Rato Khola in the Mahottari district of eastern Nepal. Patu industry is predominantly a cobble (pebble) industry with heavy choppers and corescrapers for heavy duty. Patu industry is of macrolithic character which has no affinities to India but called Hoabinhian culture of South East Asia Mesolithic culture of Early Pleistocene age.

Lower molars of *Bos Nomadicus* found from Bhadrabas (Kathmandu) in 1984 A.D. belongs to upper Pleistocene period. Vertebrate fossils collected by M. Fort and V. Gupta in 1979 A.D. from Nakhu Khola belongs to the lower Pleistocene period. Gupta has correlated the Nakhu Khola fossils with the fossils found from Kashmir in the upper Karewa and Pinjor formation of the Siwalik group (Mishra: 1995,58).

A lower molar of an elephant was discovered by Gopalji Nepali in 1995 A.D. from Naikhandi pakha Chowk near Katuwalidaha, Pharping. It might be very interesting for palaeontologist to study palaeoenvironment in Nepal.

Ismeo has been involved in Nepal in explorations and excavations since Hadigaon (1984-1989). It has already excavated at Deopatan (Pashupati) in 1990, 1993 which is dated first century A.D., Dhumvarahi in 1984, 1992 dated sixth century to ninth century A.D., Patan Archaeological Garden in 1991 dated ninth tenth century A.D. and Simaraongadh in 1991 dated tenth to thirteenth century. Simaraongadh was an important medieval place which had labyrinth (Chakravyuha) design of defence system. Tibetan monk Dharma Swami (1236 A.D.) and Italian Father Cassiano of Macerata (1745 A.D.) have described about the Simaraongadh in their accounts. Now ISIAO has been excavating at

the Gotihawa and Sisahnia since 1994 A.D. Gotihawa stupa has been identified as the Nirvana stupa of Krakuchhand Buddha.

The joint team, consisting team leader Prof. Randi Haaland, university of Bergen and members from DoA and Tribhuvan University surveyed in 1993 A.D. about thirtyfive sites in the Dang Deokhuri. Among them three sites named as Gidhiniya, Raniapur and Majghatuwa all in the Tui valley watered by Babai Khola have been excavated between Jan.-Feb. 1995 A.D. Large number of lithic artifacts scrapers, coreflakes, blades and Mousterian points have been discovered (Mishra:1995,58).

The investigation and excavation conducted under joint Nepal German archaeological research project for prehistoric remains in the caves of Chokhopani (Tukuche), and Phudzeling, Mebrak, Khinga, Dzarkot and Garabdzong of Muktinath (Lower Mustang) in 1992-1997 A.D. have also yielded important evidences such as Kaligandaki valley was inhabited from nearly three millennium and the finds show that there was connection with Indian Sub-continent as well Tibet and Central Asia. The artifacts collected from the burials of the Chokhopani are carnelian beads, shells, faience, copper bangles, copper anthropomorphic, bodkins (stone needle), channeled spouted bowls, cord decorated pottery, storage jar etc. in display of Kapilvastu museum and a child mummy excavated from the cave of Muktinath is now in Archives, but very soon it would be displayed in National museum.

In 1993 A.D. while digging clay for brick work a copper anthropomorphic figure was discovered from Jagatpur village near police station of Kailali district. (see Pl. V) Unfortunately, the site could not be excavated for the more evidences.

The leading newspaper of Nepal like Gorkhapatra daily (2048.10.8) and Dristi weekly (2048.11.19) had published the news about digging the burials for "Pulik" (semi precious stone bead) in the various districts (Bhojpur, Udayapur, Khotang, Tehrathum) of Eastern Nepal. It drew attention of

DoA and sent the team for investigation. The team reported that there are burial chambers made of dressed stone slabs with ritual burial pots, semi precious stone beads, ornamented legged stone quern and pestle, T.C. animal figures, iron etc. But no skeleton has been reported. According to the findings, the culture was called Megalithic.

Besides this, in the forest of Belkatari which is on the bank of river Kosi, Palaeolithic tools have been reported.

The joint team of DoA, Lumbini Development Trust and Japan Buddhist Federation started excavation at the temple of Mayadevi, Lumbini in 1994 A.D. and discovered the marker stone (see Pl. VI) which was kept for marking the birth place of Buddha. There was an announcement in 4th February 1996 A.D. on the occasion of discovery of the sacred place of the Nativity of Shakyamuni Buddha in Lumbini.

DoA had carried out excavation at Argauta of Salyantar of Dhading district in 1997 A.D. The site is reported the Lichchhavi Period where foundation structure of habitation, Mananka coin, pottery and remains of the tank has been found. The alignment of structures are also located in the surface very clearly. (see Pl. VII) Three Chaityas in the Salyantar are similar to the Lichchhavi Chaityas in Kathmandu. Neolithic tool, an axe is also reported from here.

In 1997 A.D. The Unesco team had conducted geophysical surveys at Ramagrama Stupa in Nawalparasi district. While conducting the geophysical investigation with Resistivity survey (Earth Resistance) and Magnetometer survey (Fluxgate Gradiometre). Magnetometer survey showed some very distinctive anomalous picture of a monastic complex on the North West of the main stupa (Shrestha : 2001,1) . DoA, then planned to excavate here in 1997 A.D. and this year is fourth season's field work going on. Among the numerous findings, coin of Kaniska, gray ware, and Mouryan brick structure are the most significant reported from the excavation. It is believed to be the only intact

stupa with relic of Buddha. (see Pl. VIII).

Dr. Ramesh Dungal has also reported three Microlithic tools from the cave of Hatiya village 's Tatopani area near a natural hot water in Sankhuwasabha district of Eastern Nepal in 2000 A.D. The tools seem scraper, point and arrow head, but needs more study on it.

The Kohla Project was carried out by DoA and Cambridge Archaeological Unit of Britain in 2000 A.D. The excavation was done in Kohla area of Kaski and Lamjung. Reported findings are pottery, obsidian piece, turquoise, fossil coral beads and iron. The settlement excavation showed that Kohla community has connections with northern. It is dated Circa 1000 year old.

Likewise, Sinja of Jumla was also excavated by the joint team of DoA and Cambridge Archaeological Unit of Britain in 2001 A.D. The report has not come out yet.

The team of DoA discovered a fossilized tree at Bhaise, Kalika village committee in Kaski District in 2001 A.D. The half diameter of the tree is 3 m. and its height is about 5 m. It probably belongs to Carboniferous to Jurassic period which is three hundred million years old according to the report (Shrestha, 2001,1).

The Department of Archaeology has recently done archaeological excavation in 2001 A.D. at Kichak Vadh in Jhapa and at Khoksar in Saptari, both district in Eastern Nepal. Pottery and wall structure has been reported from the Kichak Vadh whereas, Khoksar was first reported by K.L. Jhosi as remains of a temple (see Pl. IX) in 1998 A.D. It would be too early to remark, so let's wait till the final report of both excavated site comes out.

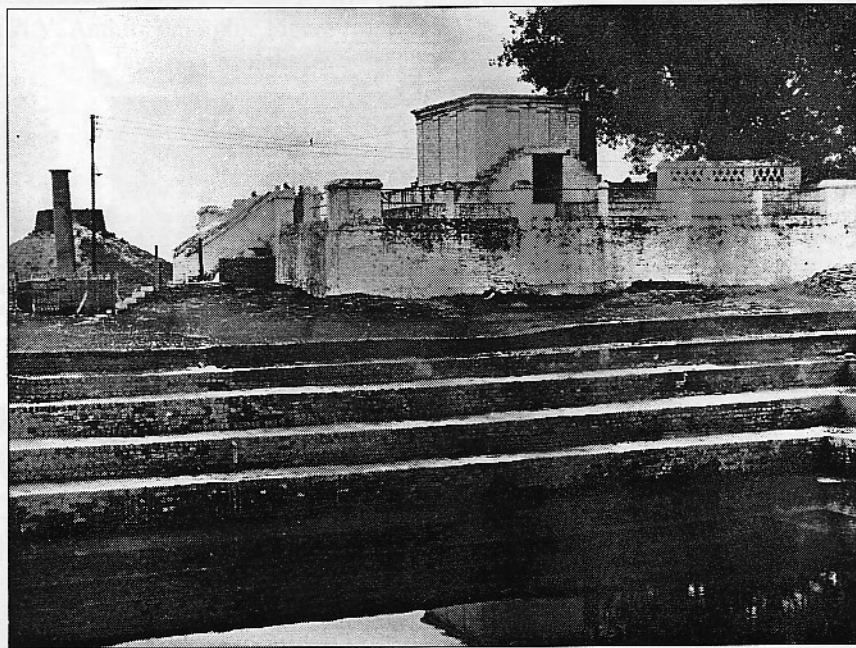
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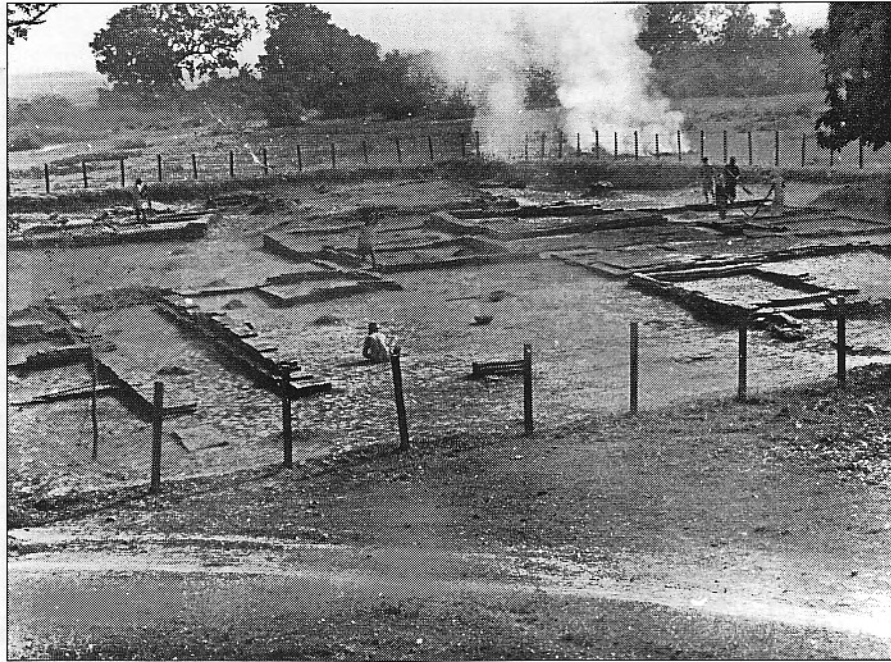
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Pl I. Sculpture of Jaya Varma dated Samvat 107
(184/185 A.D.)



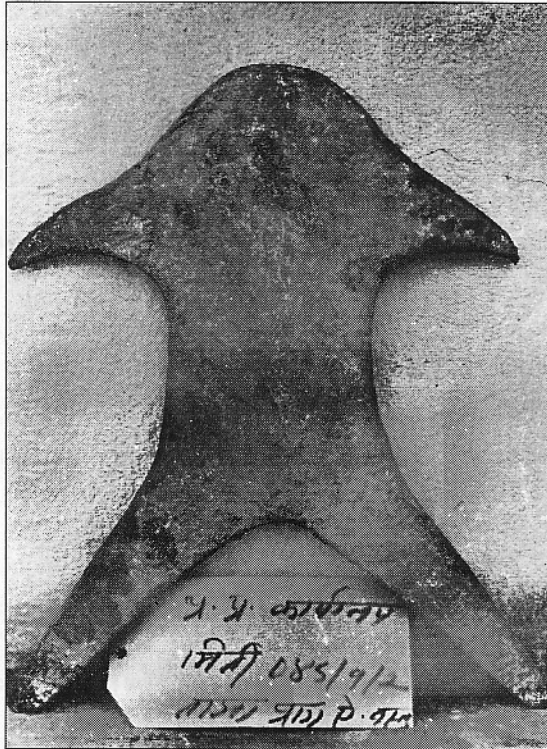
Pl. II, Lumbini Pillar and Mayadevi Temple .



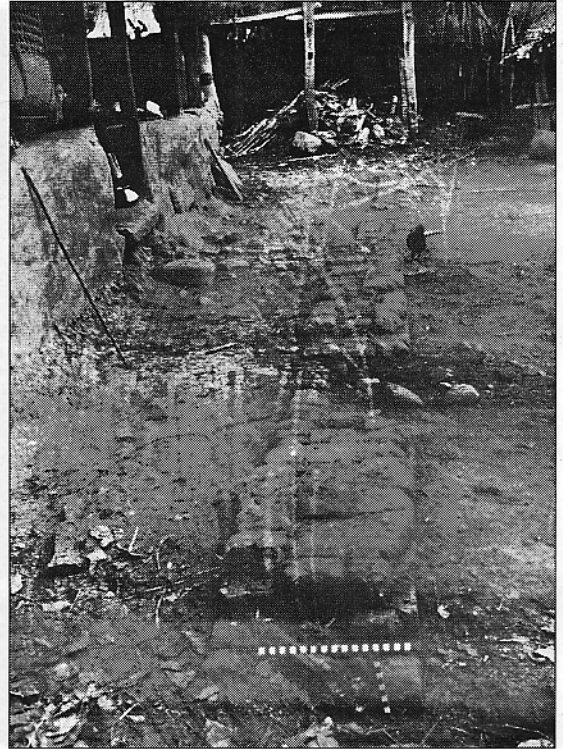
Pl. III. Structural Complex of Kapilvastu.



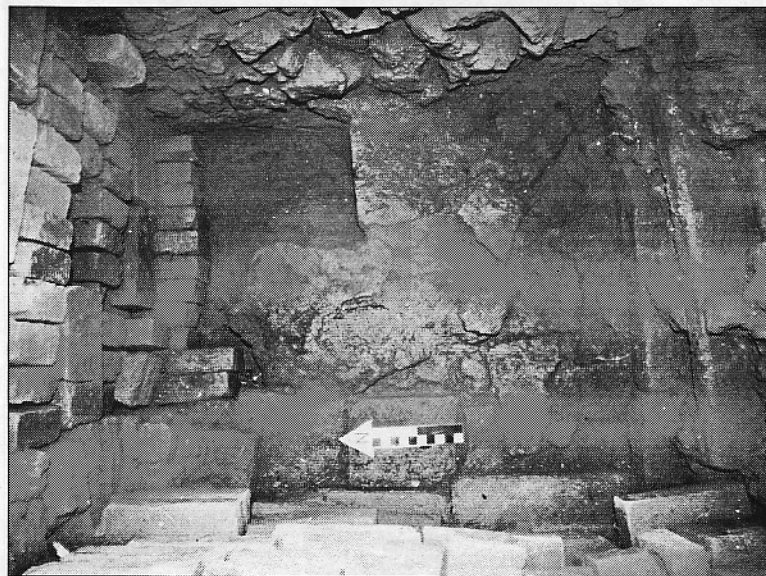
Pl. IV. Bhediari Mound, Morang.



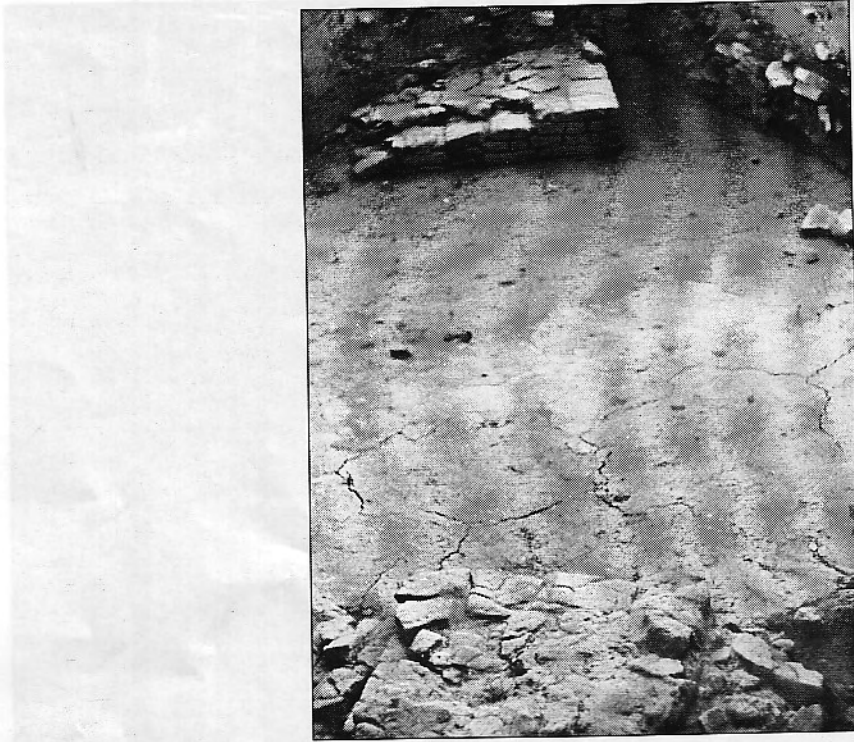
Pl V. Anthropomorphic Figure from Jagatpur, Kailali



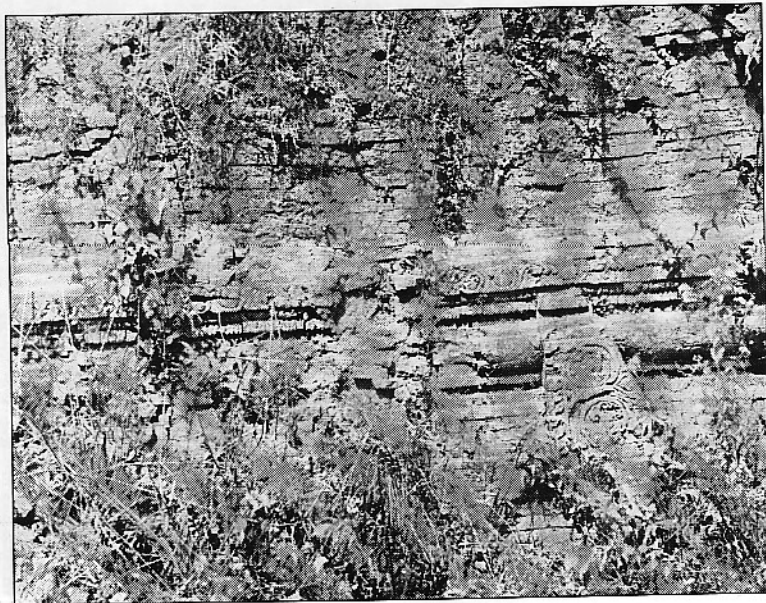
Pl. VII. Alignment of the structure clearing visible on surface Salyantar, Dhading.



Pl. VI. Marker stone indicating the birth place of Buddha.



Pl. VIII. Excavated Site of Ramgram, Nawalparasi.



Pl. IX. Khoksar, the ruin of Temple.