

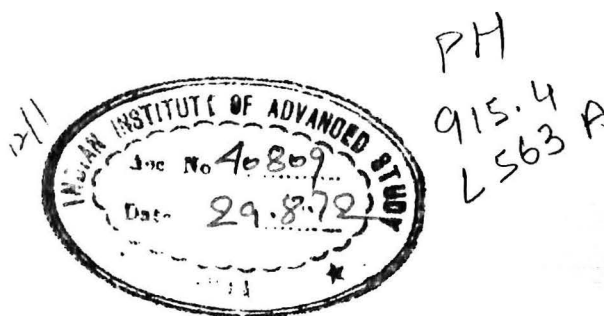
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A Suggested Dating for the Antiquities of the Nilgiri Plateau, South India

The Nilgiris – Blue Mountains – are located in the westernmost portion of the Madras State where it shares boundaries with Mysore and Kerala. Lying at a height of over 2000 m, the plateau which they form has a salubrious climate coupled with great scenic beauty. Further affording good fishing and hunting, the region was clearly predestined early to become and long remain a popular resort of British officialdom. Parallel to the outdoorsman's attractions was the interest aroused by the presence of some of India's least known and most colorful tribal peoples. In the last century alone, some eighteen monographs, not to mention numerous articles, were published in which the Todas, Irulas, Kurumbas, Badagas and Kotas figured prominently. Most of these studies were in the circumstances more notable for their enthusiasm than their accuracy. In the spirit of the times, one truly charming frontispiece of a work published in the early years of the 19th century transfigures a Toda family into the subjects of a Greek idyll¹. (Fortunately, these same people later received more balanced treatment in a book which stands as a classic of ethnography².)

The numerous burial cairns and barrows which are distributed throughout the region and are easily recognized were, of course, not neglected by these officials of antiquarian bent. Many were clumsily opened and occasionally some reference to the work found its way into print. However, the first serious approach to the puzzle which these burials presented was made by James Wilkinson Breeks, Commissioner of the Nilgiris. Working under Government orders, he opened nearly four dozen in the year 1871–72, with the goal of obtaining display objects for the Madras Central Museum. Breeks seems to have been scrupulous in recording the details of his investigations, but he regrettably died while preparing his report. It is thanks to the very considerable efforts of his widow that the work was completed and promptly published³. Despite its understandable deficiencies, particularly omissions, the report is of high interest and serves as the basis for this present study. The most serious

impediment in Breeks' publication is the poor illustrative material. Line-drawings of the finds are not provided, and the inadequacy of the photographer employed by the author is quite evident. This difficulty is partially surmounted in a later publication by R. Bruce Foote, who catalogued the Madras Museum's share of the Breeks Collection⁴. Foote's photographs are quite good, if too few, so that the larger part of the collection remains unillustrated. Unfortunately, like Breeks', Foote's descriptive statements are very brief, and fail to include measurements and other relevant information about the antiquities⁵.

Objects from the Nilgiri burials have also found their way to London and Berlin. A catalogue, as yet unpublished, of the British Museum's share of Breeks' Nilgiri Collection has been prepared by Miss Iqbal A. R. Naik⁶. Included in it are some objects from the Nilgiri burials which were recovered prior to Breeks' work. I have myself been entrusted with publication of the Berlin holdings, now lodged in the Museum für Indische Kunst (Preussischer Kulturbesitz) Berlin. These objects were brought to Berlin in about 1876 by Dr. Fedor Jagor who apparently collected independently of Breeks, though the history of this collection is obscure⁷.

The immediate questions which the Nilgiri antiquities raise are two. The first has to do with their dating and is the concern of this paper. The second enquires into the ethnic associations of the burials. Answers to both have several times been put forward, but they all ultimately depend upon conjecture rather than demonstration. Clearly, the problem of the date of these objects is the prior one. Any ethnic identification must correspond to its solution. The Todas have most often been associated with the burials, and following them, the Kurumbas, but other peoples, not now inhabiting the Nilgiris, have also been proposed, among them the Indo-Scythians (Sakas) and even Druids. The suggested datings have also run a wide gamut, starting at the upper end in the third millennium B.C.⁸ and reaching down through

¹ Henry Harkness, *The Neilgherry Hills* (London 1832).

² W. H. R. Rivers, *The Todas* (London 1906).

³ James W. Breeks, *An account of the Primitive Tribes and Monuments of the Nilgiris* (London 1873).

⁴ R. Bruce Foote, *Catalogue of the Prehistoric Antiquities* (Madras 1901).

⁵ Dr. S. T. Satyamurthy, Director of Government Museums, Madras, kindly permitted me to examine and photograph objects from the Madras collection. A close inspection of the iron implements was impossible however, because of the conservation methods practised in the last century, which consisted of heavily covering the objects with wax.

⁶ I. A. R. Naik, *The Culture of the Nilgiri Hills from its Catalogue Collection at the British Museum* (Unpublished MS. 1966).

Miss Naik (Mrs. N. Wagle) most generously put her MS. at my disposal. I am beholden to her for thus enabling me to become familiar with the British Museum collection.

⁷ Prof. H. Härtel, Director of the Museum, initially suggested this study and has kindly provided me with every facility necessary to its pursuit.

⁸ A. Aiyappan, in: Prince Peter of Greece, *Possible Sumerian Survivals in Toda Ritual*, in: *Bull. Madras Government Mus., Nov. Ser. 6 Fasc. 1* (1951) (General Section).

the turn of the era into quite recent times. The modern appearance of some of these objects has not escaped attention and has led Fergusson, among others, to date them between 500–1000 years ago⁹. The majority of scholars place their origin somewhere in the first millennium A.D.¹⁰.

This unusually wide divergency of opinion emphasizes a particular difficulty in dealing with these Indian, and indeed all oriental, antiquities. The formal conservatism with which objects of daily and certainly ritual use are treated and the recurrent employment of unchanging, favored ornamental motifs over long periods sharply limits their reliability for establishing a precise dating. In addition, no dependable typological-chronological framework to which even a single one of these objects might be referred has ever been established for Indian archaeology. Certainly this is the major reason why the dating of the Nilgiri burials has proved so elusive a matter for one hundred years. The positive aspect of this tendency towards stability in artifact form is that the specifics are not only local manifestations, but rather are often extended over a wide geographical area. This circumstance makes possible the cautious use of comparisons which are of necessity sometimes drawn from distant places.

An occasional hazard, not always recognized, to the correct dating of the Nilgiri burials is the unwarranted association of these with the so-called South Indian megalithic complex. In the loose sense in which the term is used, the Nilgiri burials are also "megalithic". However, the assemblages of the two groups are in all essentials different. The chronology of the latter complex, now on a sound footing as the result of controlled excavation, is a quite distinct problem with no immediate bearing on the Nilgiri finds¹¹.

The Nilgiri burials are of the cairn type. Stone circles frequently enclose these, but on occasion, they alone define a burial area. The cairns appear either as simple rubble heaps, or when more carefully constructed and intact, they have the shape of draw-wells. Beneath the covering, at the ground surface level, lie thin, rectangular stone slabs. Below these, at depths varying between 30–100 centimetres are urns containing scant post-cremation human remains. Two or more urns are in some instances found together, with the implication of multiple burials. Presumably the cairns were opened for the introduction of burials subsequent to the first, although it may be that they were only erected after the burial spot was no longer to be used. Funeral 'Beigaben' frequently surround the urns as well as being found inside them. Breeks remarks that a number of the burials had previously been disturbed, but all follow the same established pattern and contain

comparable finds. A further interesting observation that Breeks makes, though its significance remains to be explained, is that the burials of certain parts of the plateau appear richer in funeral objects than others. He traces this through four divisions of the region, to find that the diminishing order of objects agrees precisely with the traditional valuation of the agricultural land, i.e. the part richest in funeral objects also provides the best farming soil, the next richest corresponds to the next best soil and so on.

The funeral equipment can be classified as follows:

- A. Pottery
 - 1. actual pots of various sizes and shapes
 - 2. plain, concave lids
 - 3. lids surmounted by figures
- B. Bronze vessels
- C. Implements and Weapons
 - 1. iron
 - 2. copper/bronze
- D. Jewelry
 - 1. iron
 - 2. copper/bronze
 - 3. gold
 - 4. stone
- E. Miscellaneous Objects

The pottery is made of a micaceous clay tempered with sand. It commonly has a surface color which ranges between light red and buff; the black, uneven core-color suggests incomplete firing. All the pots appear to have been wheel-turned, their shape being subsequently perfected by paddling. Some pots, particularly the complex ones, show signs of luting at the juncture of body and neck, implying that they were constructed in two stages. A commonly occurring shape, and one which persists today in the region is the 'chatty' (Fig. 1). This served as the burial urn itself as well as being present in smaller size as a burial 'Beigabe'. Another vessel used as a container for the cinerary remains was a form with widely flaring mouth and a carinated, semi-ovoid body (Fig. 2). A ribbed-neck bottle and a multiple-pot type (Fig. 3, 4) are some of the more elaborate forms found in these burials along with an occasional bead-spouted pot (Fig. 5). Footed vessels or bowls with a raised central boss, both important characteristics of the bronzes, are entirely lacking in ceramic material. Decorative devices include the incision of zig-zag patterns, cross-hatching, chevrons and the like as well as use of barbotine, circular punches and finger-tip impressions.

The 'chatties' and multiple-pots are often supplied with a dome-shaped ledged lid which fits into the vessel's mouth. Characteristic for the Nilgiri group are lids topped by figures, although plain lids are also present. All the figures are made of the same material as the pots them-

⁹ J. Fergusson, *Rude Stone Monuments* (London 1872) 484.

¹⁰ Breeks himself does not suggest any date, but Foote (op. cit., Pag. ix) leans toward the upper extreme. Miss Naik dates the finds 700–1100 A.D. (op. cit., Pag. 143).

¹¹ The lensiform, etched carnelian beads shown by Foote (op. cit., Pag. ix, Tab. XIII Num. 844) are wrongly ascribed to the Nilgiri collection. They are characteristic of the Southern Indian megalithic complex.

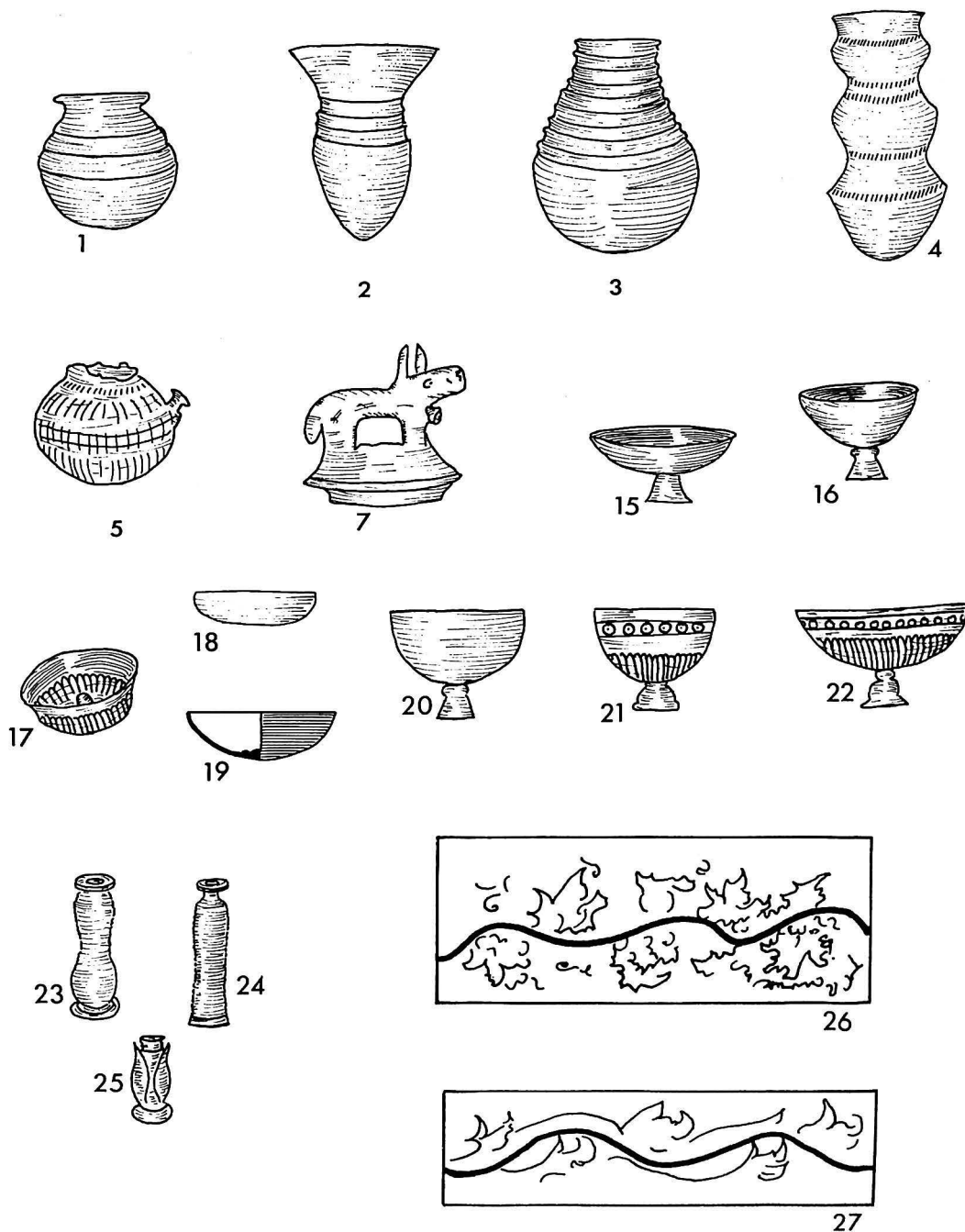


Fig.

1. Breeks³, Tab. XL:b.
2. *ibid.*, Tab. XXXIX.
3. *ibid.*, Tab. XXXVI.
4. *ibid.*, Tab. XXXVI:b.
5. Berlin Collection, Catalogue Num. I 808.
7. Breeks³, Tab. XXXVI:g.

15. *ibid.*, Tab. XLI:e.
16. *ibid.*, Tab. XLI:j.
17. *ibid.*, Tab. XLI:g.
18. *ibid.*, Tab. XLI:d.
19. Sankalia²⁵, Fig. 51: a.
- 20-21. Al'baum²⁰, Fig. 133.
22. *ibid.*, Fig. 132.

23. Naik⁶, Catalogue Num. 212.
24. Sankalia²⁵, Fig. 51:e.
25. Naik⁶, Catalogue Num. 200.
- 26-27. *ibid.*, Fig. XVI.

Fig. 6, 8-14 befinden sich auf den folgenden Seiten



Fig. 6

selves. Zoomorphic (Fig. 6), anthropomorphic and a few phyllomorphic and other objects are represented. Being crudely, often only schematically modelled, it is not always possible to recognize the potter's intention. Among the zoomorphic figures appear: buffalo, horse, deer (?), sheep, bird, monkey, camel (?), snake, humped bullock, elephant, bear (?), pig (?), leopard (?), cock, sambur, dog (?), boar (?) and stag (?).

These figures are frequently shown with small punched circles on the body. In the case of the snake and the leopard (?), this might be understood as an attempt to render the skin or fur pattern, or, on the bovines, to show a painted decoration such as is commonly applied today. However, this spot motif also appears on the body of a figure which seems indisputably to represent a dog, an animal unlikely to be decorated in this manner¹². It seems probable that these markings, at least sometimes, represent merely the modeller's distaste for plain surfaces.

It is not possible accurately to state the frequency of occurrence of each species since the relevant information fails. Foote points out that the buffalo was perhaps singled out for attention¹³. The latter are often represented, but my own rough count shows the generalized bird figures also to appear frequently. Nonetheless, the inference that buffalo-herding was an important activity of these people has been drawn by several authors. That these were domestic buffalo is evident from the modelled bells and garlands which some examples have suspended from the neck (Fig. 7)¹⁴. One or two of the lids show addorsed animals, called "fantastic creatures" by Foote, although their derivation is less a matter of local fancy than faithfulness to an established style originally at home farther westward.

The human figures are representations of both sexes and include infants-in-arms. They are shown in a curious slouched standing posture, seated on stools, or occasionally mounted on horseback. The body covering of both sexes consists only of a simple skirt supplemented for females by ornaments such as bangles, arm-bands and anklets. Both sexes wear necklaces and sometimes a bandolierlike cross-belt (Fig. 8). Dress and ornament are indicated by incised lines and barbotine appliqué. Some of the human figures are also decorated with punched spot-marks, perhaps referable to tatooings, but more probably again the intention is to fill space. Foote very pertinently observes that the clothing here shown is incompatible with the rigorous Nilgiri climate¹⁵. The male figures are often seen to wear a fully clipped beard and mustache and both sexes have hair-styles swept backwards to a peak. Not clearly distinguishable from this particular fashion are what appear to be pointed



Fig. 8

caps worn by some of the figures (Fig. 9). One or two of the more carefully modelled male representations show what may be another head-dress type, viz., a skull cap (Fig. 8). The attitudes in which the figures are frozen are only a few; the women support a small pot on the head with an arm (Fig. 10), a naked man walks with

¹² Brecks³, Tab. XXXVII:d.

¹³ Foote⁴, Pag. ix.

¹⁴ Ibid., Pag. viii.

¹⁵ Ibid., Pag. x.

the aid of a stick, others merely sit. Among the seated figures are mothers nursing infants and one shows a nude male with prominent genitals (Fig. 11). The cavalier figures sometimes enable the recognition of a dagger tucked into the waist-band, but beyond this no further details such as horse-trappings are identifiable. Neither saddle-cloth nor saddle are encountered (although there may be an indication of the latter on one horse-and-rider figure)¹⁶, nor are there stirrups.

Lastly to be mentioned here are the few miscellaneous figures depicting plants such as the sunflower, and trees, as well as an upright tapered post or 'stambha'. This, with what look to be four sconces near the top, brings to mind the lamp-holder which the Jains and Hindus of this region associated with their monuments.

What now, are the clues to chronology which this material affords? Unfortunately not many, for the first thing to be acknowledged of these ceramics is their present



Fig. 9

uniqueness (with an exception to be mentioned later). One may confidently predict that further controlled investigation of the Nilgiri burials, together with intensive work elsewhere, will eventually establish secure typological and chronological connections. For the time being however, the Nilgiri group stands alone.

To begin with the pottery, we note that double and triple pots appear as early as the chalcolithic period and continue into the Christian Era in South India, but it is doubtful whether these can meaningfully be related to the more sophisticated Nilgiri types. More relevant, since the multiple pots are evidently not utilitarian in purpose, appears the custom of stacking 'chatty'-like pots at Hindu wedding ceremonies. But this provides no basis for a dating. A further observation that might be made, though again with no chronological significance and no implied



Fig. 10

cultural connection, is the very close resemblance of the jar shown in Fig. 2 to certain Greek baskets used in wine-making.

Domed lids in themselves have no fixed chronological reference point, and the 'chatty' in its simplicity is also of no help. The only faint clue that the vessels themselves thus far afford lies in the spouted pots. So far as I can determine, this particular spout type, with a beaded end and bulging throat does not appear in India until the early centuries of the Christian Era. It is documented at Navda Toli VI which is dated rather loosely from the first to sixth centuries A.D.¹⁷, and is known from numerous other sites, particularly in the early historical pottery called Lustrous Red Ware.

The tradition of figuring birds, animals and humans on pottery lids is old in the Orient. Funeral urn lids surmounted by birds appear in the Caucasus, for example, in the early first millennium B.C., but in India itself, comparable types first occur in the South in the centuries preceding the Christian Era. At Adichanallur for example, metal bottle-stoppers of the bird-type come from urn burials. In North India, closely similar objects derive from the Parthian levels at Taxila. However, the variety of different animals in the Nilgiri menagerie, and especially the human figures, again emphasizes the uniqueness of the group. In any case, the generalized bird forms can hardly serve as reliable dating pointers. The cavalier figures permit a more optimistic view. Inevitably, the confrontation of a mounted man wearing a pointed cap (Fig. 12) calls to mind the Central Asian nomads. In the Indian context, this means Sakas, Pallavas and Kushanas, and represents a time span of some six centuries. This can however be narrowed down to more useful limits by reference to some better-dated occurrences of horse-and-rider terra cottas. Cavalier figures are considered typically Iranian and appear in Iran early in the first mil-

¹⁶ Naik⁶, Tab. XII:a.

¹⁷ H. D. Sankalia, *The Excavations at Maheshwar and Navdatoli, 1952-53* (Poona 1958) Fig. 89, Num. 753.

lennium B.C. They become common, however, during the Parthian and Sassanian Periods¹⁸. Correspondingly, they occur as a popular theme in India during the Gupta Period (fourth to sixth centuries A.D.). V. S. Agarwal, in quoting from the Vishnudharmottara provides the key to the understanding of the Nilgiri horsemen, for although these certainly recall the steppe riders, they cannot be taken to depict them, the characteristic pant garment being absent¹⁹. The Vishnudharmottara prescribes that "the horseriders should wear the Northern dress" – in this case at least the cap – this simply being the current mode for horse-men. As Agarwal observes, the riders shown on some of the Ajanta paintings also wear pointed caps. Relevant also, is the information on the Iranian horsemanship of this period derived from Sassanian silver plate and stone sculpture. The horses seem not to have been regularly saddled, and stirrups, a Central Asian invention of the fourth century, are not represented. Both the Ajanta and the Nilgiri evidence is consistent with this picture. Historically, the western influences here suggested can be derived from the Saka principalities which survived in Western India as late as the time of Chandragupta II (i. e., fourth century A. D.). Their hegemony extended at least to the northern Konkan region, thus easily linking them with the Deccan and Southern India²⁰.

A type of horseman terra cotta which thematically though not stylistically is comparable to the Nilgiri examples comes from Ahichchhatra IIb in Uttar Pradesh. This level dates between 550 and 650 A. D.²¹. Riders wearing Scythian caps have also been recognized at the North Indian site of Kumrahar near Patna. There, the terra cottas stem from Period III, dated 100–300 A. D.²². Actual representations of mounted Kushanas wearing the typical cap and long pants have, not unexpectedly, been found at Begram, in eastern Afghanistan, originating there in the fourth century. Ghirshman remarks on the large quantity of these horsemen terra cottas, at Begram considering this to be a mark of their religious importance. The images are found wherever the Iranian nomads passed, and they represent, in Ghirshman's interpretation, either a protective divinity or an ancestor-deity²³. Such an explanation, when applied to the Nilgiri specimens, aids greatly in understanding their apparent traditionalism.

Before leaving these figures, there are two further points to be considered. The first has to do with the skull cap worn by the man in Fig. 8. In a well-known scene from Cave I at Ajanta, a group of bearded men in similar caps and otherwise foreign dress are being received in audience by a royal person. The scene is thought to portray the ambassadors of Chosroes II to the court of Pulaskin II (ca. 625 A. D.). The painting itself, according



Fig. 11

to Percy Brown, dates to 628 A. D. Also at Ajanta, in Cave I, and elsewhere can be seen persons wearing crossed 'yajnopavitas', sometimes joined to an additional chest-band and adorned with a jeweled clasp in the center. The likeness with the Nilgiri human figures, shown to be wearing criss-crossed shoulder-to-waist bands, is evident. Thus, although the usual standby of archaeological dating – the comparative study of pottery forms – has hardly afforded a beginning, the human figures associated with the vessels point to a dating in the Gupta Period. These ceramics are surely locally produced. This is a conclusion drawn not only on general grounds that would reasonably ascribe an indigenous pottery industry to this region, but also because the industry appears without parallels elsewhere.

The bronzes, on the other hand, seem rather to be imports. The vessel forms, as will be seen, are quite different from those in ceramic, and there is no indication that the two industries, metal and ceramic, in any way influenced each other. Moreover, the workmanship of the bronzes demonstrates a degree of skill which can only be ascribed

¹⁸ P. Ackerman, *Cult Figures*, in: A. U. Pope (Ed.), *A Survey of Persian Art – I* (London 1938–39) 219.

¹⁹ V. S. Agarwal, *Terra cotta Figurines of Ahichchhatra*, District Bareilly, U. P., in: *Ancient India* 4 (1947–48) 153.

²⁰ D. C. Sircar, *The Saka Satraps of Western India*, in: R. C. Majumdar (Ed.), *The History and Culture of the Indian People* – II. The Age of Imperial Unity (Bombay 1960) 178, 181.

²¹ Agarwal¹⁹, Pag. 153.

²² A. S. Altekar, *Report on Kumrahar Excavations, 1951–1955* (Patna 1959) Tab. XXXVI 3:1–4 and Fig. 31:8, 12.

²³ R. Ghirshman, *Bégram* (Cairo 1946) 75 (= *Mém. de la Délégation Arch. Française en Afghanistan*, 12).

to accomplished smiths. Such craft-specialists could hardly have been settled in the Nilgiris which afforded only a very limited outlet for their wares. Either the bronzes were purchased from itinerant smiths or from the bazaars in the lowlands.

The bronze vessel forms are conveniently summarized as consisting of: a) footed bowls, b) flat-base bowls with interiorly raised central boss, c) plain and decorated bowls, cups and shallow trays and d) kohl bottles. The bowls in the first category are raised on elongated trumpet bases, to which they are luted. The bodies generally



Fig. 12

are hemispherical, but some have a shallow, more open-mouthed shape. One outstanding and quite unique vessel is oval as seen from above, and stands beautifully poised on its graceful high foot (Fig. 13, 14, 14a; top, bottom with foot removed, and side views respective). In most instances, the trumpet base has sides whose smooth upward slope is uninterrupted (Fig. 15). However, on a few specimens (Fig. 16) depicted by Breeks, there is a noticeable flanging near the end to which the bowl is attached.

The omphalos vessels in the Breeks Collection appear in only a single, somewhat variable form – that of a wide-mouthed bowl, deep and with flared rim (Fig. 17). About one-half dozen of these, not all well preserved, were recovered from the burials. Lastly, there are several differently shaped, plain vessels. Among them are small hemispherical cups, small and large bowls, large basins and 'thali'-like trays (Fig. 18). Neatly executed flutings on body and stand are common on the vessels of the first two categories. In addition, line decorations may ornament the bronzes along the rim, body, or bottom of either surface. The boat-shaped footed bowl is decorated in this manner in all these places.

In mentioning the ornamental motifs, it will be convenient to include here the designs appearing on the metal implements and weapons, as well as on the bronze vessels. Lotus flowers appear both as buds and with imbricated spread petals, after the fashion of the medallions common

in Buddhist stone sculpture. There are floral scrolls which lack definition, but something like the acanthus leaf can be recognized in at least one instance. A few other simple designs such as bowls, volutes and the palm leaf, together with space-filling oblique lines seem to exhaust the small repertoire.

The composition of several of the bronzes has been analyzed, with the determination that the copper-to-tin ratio was approximately 7:3. This is the alloy proportion which at an early date was universally accepted as most suitable for bronze vessels. Again, for this group of 'Beigaben', it will be necessary to cast a rather wide net in order to draw in some datable parallels. Surviving ancient bronzes are very rare in India, for once these household objects became old and worn, they were melted down and the metal was reworked. Nonetheless, the outlook is better here than it was for the ceramic comparisons.

The occurrence of the omphalos bowl in South India, unusual as it is, in itself has only vague chronological significance. The general type, associated with the Bactro-Greeks in Northern India and notable in the Parthian levels at Taxila, appears already in 300 B. C. in Eastern India and characteristically continues there until at least

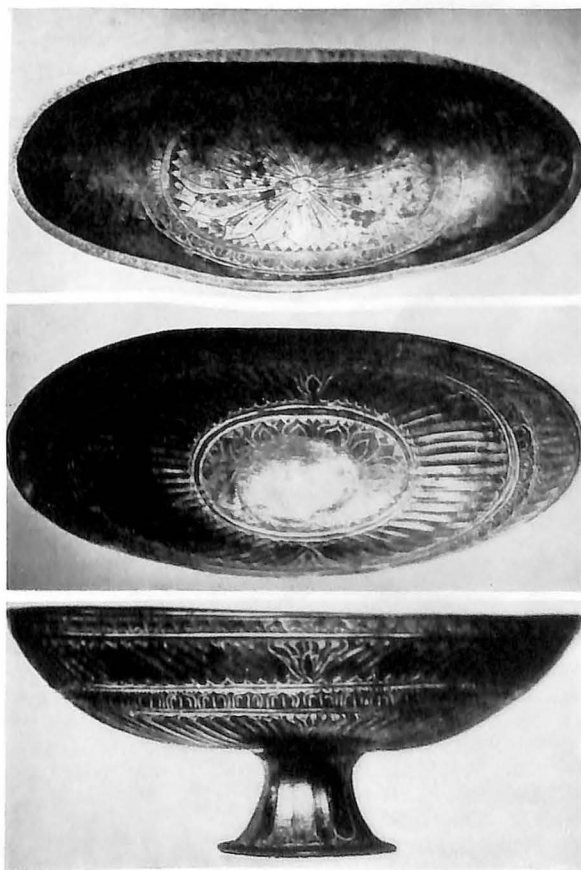
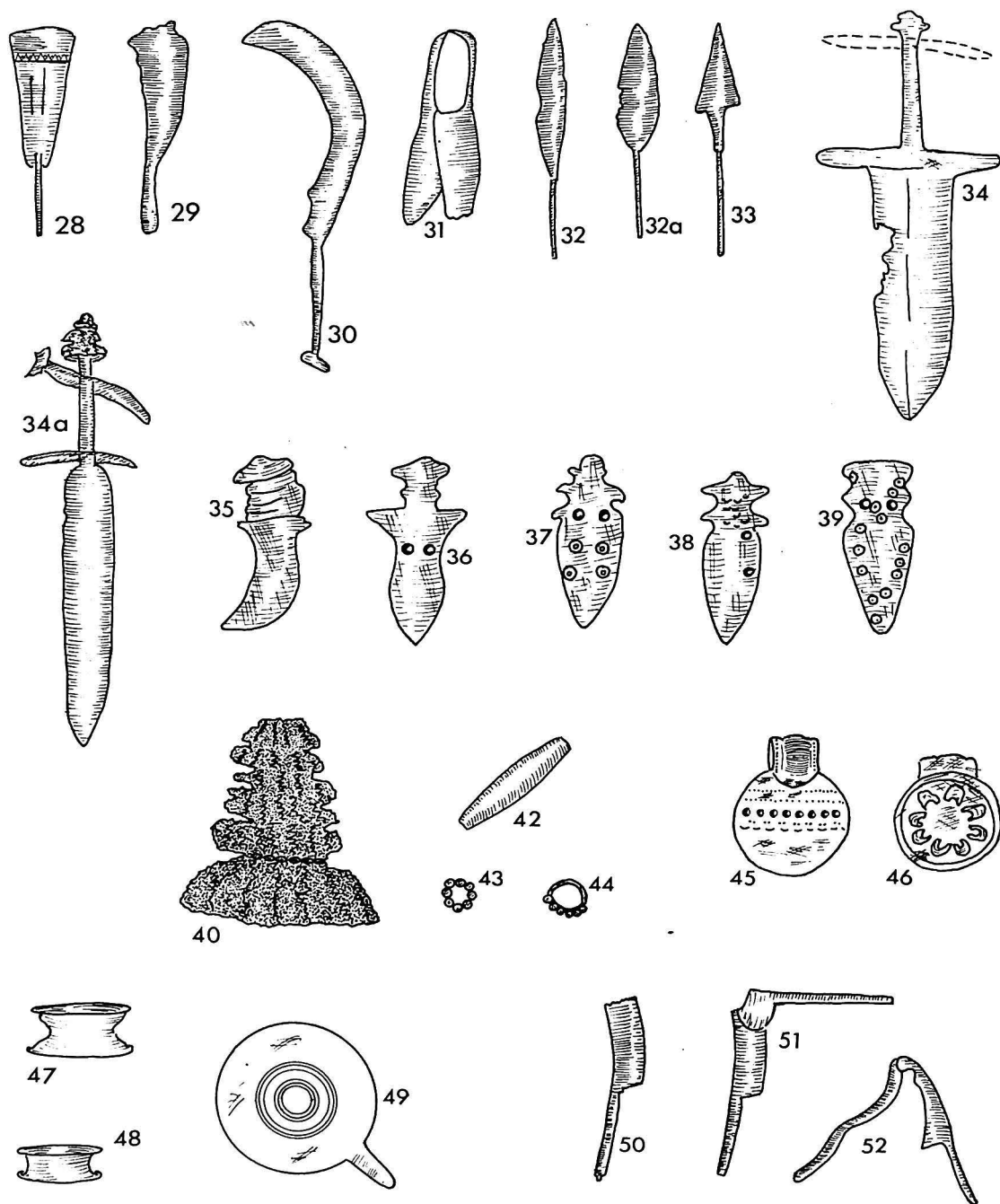


Fig. 13, 14, 14a



- Fig.
 28. Brecks³, Tab. XLIII, Num. 43.
 29. *ibid.*, Tab. XLIII (no number).
 30. *ibid.*, Tab. XLIII (no number).
 31. *ibid.*, Tab. XLIII, Num. 243.
 32. *ibid.*, Tab. XLIII, Num. 233.
 32a. *ibid.*, Tab. XLIII, Num. 114.
 33. Naik⁶, Catalogue Num. 237.
 34. Brecks³, Tab. XLIII: 277.
 34a. Brecks³, Tab. XLIII, Num. 112.
- Fig.
 35. Foote⁴, Tab. II, Num. 236.
 36. Sankalia¹⁷, Fig. 109:3.
 37. Waheed Khan³¹, Tab. XX.
 38. Rydh⁴⁵, Tab. 81:23.
 39. Sankalia et al.⁴⁰, Fig. 169:11.
 40. Foote⁴, Tab. XIV, Num. 821.
 42. *ibid.*, Tab. XIII, Num. 829.
 43. Naik⁶, Catalogue Num. 212.
 44. Foote⁴, Tab. XIV, Num. 826a.
- Fig.
 45. Naik⁶, Catalogue Num. 202.
 46. Sankalia/Dikshit⁵⁷, Tab. XXVI B:1.
 47. Naik⁶, Catalogue Num. 194.
 48. Sankalia²⁵, Fig. 51:b.
 49. Naik⁶, Catalogue Num. 201 a.
 50. Brecks³, Tab. XLIII.
 51. Sankalia/Dikshit⁵⁷, Tab. XXIX B:3.
 52. Aitcheson⁶³, Pag. 234, Fig. 105.
 Fig. 41 befindet sich auf Seite 11

350 A. D., and possibly later still²⁴. One of the rare excavated bronze omphalos dishes with ring surrounding the boss is reported from Nasik (Fig. 19), in Maharashtra²⁵. Unfortunately, the report does not make clear its date, but placement in the fourth or fifth century A. D. should be nearly accurate. This coincides with the dates for a ceramic group recently discovered in Central Afghanistan, in which a round omphalos bowl, fluted in obvious imitation of a metallic model, and set on a delicate trumpet foot, figures prominently. This group has been designated as Kushano-Sassanian²⁶.

It is this Sassanian connection again, I believe, which provides a reliable dating clue. Now and again, the boat-shaped vessel has made its appearance in the ancient Orient, and the form was also realized in the Greek 'kymbion' vessel. But not until Sassanian times did it really become popular. Amongst the Sassanian metalwork objects "... there are various oval or boat shapes, including one on a high flaring foot similar to that developed on the phial, which ... may have been used for drinking, though this foot might equally have served to hold the bowl for ritual presentation or libation"²⁷. Oval, fluted bowls were also used to hold flowers in Sassanian Persia, and this same fashion diffused eastward, as is evident at Begram, and again at Ajanta²⁸. Ghirshman pictures such a boat-shaped, footed bowl in silver in his lavishly illustrated book entitled "Iran". It is decorated with repoussé work and dates to the late Sassanian Period, i. e., sixth to seventh centuries A. D.²⁹.

Along with this shape, shallow and hemispherical drinking bowls of bronze or silver, both with the typical flared foot (much like the Central Afghanistan ceramic types) were fashionable in the Iranian world. Examples of the types are shown in the wall paintings at Balalyk Tepe in Central Asia (Fig. 20, 21), dated in the fifth and sixth centuries, which can profitably be compared with similar shapes in the Ajanta paintings, particularly in Caves XVII and II (respectively 500 and 625 A. D.)³⁰. Similar shapes actually appear in the ceramics of South India as early as the third century³¹.

A pleasant little arrangement in some Sassanian metal cups informed the drinker when they were empty. A tiny bone ball was set into a pocket in the stem or foot which

was free to tinkle when the pressure of the liquid was removed. This pocket (Fig. 22), I suppose, is the origin of the flare noted on a few of the Nilgiri footed bowls (Fig. 16). Both Dalton and Orbelli lend their authority to the belief that Sassanian metalwork strongly influenced the Indian artisans. "Sassanian silver plate", writes Dalton, "travelled great distances in the paths of commerce", and particularly affected workmanship in the areas ruled by the Kushanas³². Orbelli, in fact, supposes that actual Sassanian copies were made in ancient India – a conjecture which the Nilgiri bronze vessels seem to confirm³³. The possibility of direct contacts between peninsular India and Sassanian Iran in 625 A. D. has already been mentioned. Whatever the authenticity of this Persian Embassy, which some scholars view sceptically, it is agreed that Sassanian influence in India was strongest at an even earlier date, in the fourth century A. D.³⁴.

On this evidence, it seems reasonable to associate the Nilgiri bronze bowls with the same date. The objects in the last category of bronzes, namely, the kohl bottles, probably fall in line with this. They appear in two variations. The one, evidently made on a lathe, is decoratively ribbed and curving (Fig. 23). The excavated site at Nasik again provides an analogue. The object is made of copper and although called a handle by the excavator, it looks very much like the kohl bottle in Fig. 24. Again, the Nasik date is not clear, but some time in the fourth to fifth century would seem correct³⁵. The other type from the Nilgiris shows the mouth of the bottle emerging, like a filament, from enfolding lotus petals which originate in a low, flared pedestal (Fig. 25). This idea recalls some of the spouts on Indian pottery which similarly issue either from flowers or open-mouthed animals. The type is very popular at Rajghat, in the north, from the fifth century onward³⁶. The motif is also exactly represented on a variety of lamp-stands which have a wide geographic distribution in India, and apparently cover a correspondingly wide time range. Certainly the type was still being made in the last century.

Neither do the ornamental designs mentioned above readily lend themselves to a precise dating, since they too persist for very long periods. At the least, however, it can be claimed that their appearance in no way runs

²⁴ B. B. Lal, Śiṣupalgārḥ 1948: An Early Historical Fort in Eastern India, in: *Ancient India* 5 (1949) 62–105.

²⁵ H. D. Sankalia, Report on the Excavations at Nasik and Jorwe, 1950–51 (Poona 1955) 109 and Fig. 51:a.

²⁶ L. S. Leshnik, Kushano-Sassanian Ceramics from Central Afghanistan, in: *Berliner Jahrb. f. Vor- und Frühgesch.* 7 (1967) 311–334.

²⁷ J. Orbelli, Sassanian and Early Islamic Metalwork, in: A. U. Pope (Ed.), *A Survey of Persian Art – II* (London 1938–39) 747 (note by P. Ackerman).

²⁸ Orbelli²⁷, Pag. 749 (note by P. Ackerman); J. Hackin, *Recherches archéologiques à Begram* (Paris 1939) Tab. LX (= *Mém. de la Délégation Arch. Française en Afghanistan*, 9); J. Griffiths, *The Paintings in the Buddhist Cave-Temples of Ajanta – I* (London 1896) Fig. 53, Pag. 18.

²⁹ R. Ghirshman, *Iran – Parthians and Sassanians* (London

1962) 203 and Fig. 242; L. I. Al'baum, *Balalyk Tepe*, Tashkent (1960) Fig. 132, 133, Pag. 179 and 180.

³⁰ Griffiths²⁸, Tab. 6, 19, 23, 59.

³¹ A. Waheed Khan, *A Monograph on Yelleshwaram Excavations*, Hyderabad (1963) 12 and Tab. XXIII B.

³² O. M. Dalton, *The Treasure of the Oxus* (Edit. 3, London 1964) Tab. XXV.

³³ Orbelli²⁷, Pag. 728, Nota 3.

³⁴ D. C. Sircar, *The Kushanas*, in: R. C. Majumdar (Ed.), *The History and Culture of the Indian People – II. The Age of Imperial Unity* (Bombay 1960) 152; J. Hackin, *The Eastward Extension of Sassanian Motives*, in: *Bull. Amer. Inst. of Persian Art* 4 (1935) 5.

³⁵ Sankalia²⁵, Pag. 109, Num. 481.

³⁶ A. Ghosh (Ed.), *Indian Archaeology – A Review, 1957–58* (New Delhi 1958) 51 and Tab. LXIX A.

counter to the central dating which we are aiming at, viz., the Gupta Period. The diaper pattern on the boat-bowl, representing lotus leaves, is well-established in early Indian sculpture, where it is very frequently used to decorate statue bases. Scrollwork, appearing on the blades of daggers, is ill-defined (Fig. 26, 27), but reminiscent of border decorations on the painted panels in Cave XVII at Ajanta³⁷. There is, of course, a certain danger in seeking to establish too exacting parallels since the designs on the implements are only incidental and, though competently executed, hardly can be said to have been given close attention by the bronze-smith. Still, the researches of two French scholars on the evolution of the Amaravati art style have significance for our study. They observe, after discussing the various scrollwork motifs, which now consist of flowers with leaves, now of flowers with animals, or solely of leaves, that in the Gupta Period it is this latter type which generally appears³⁸. Further, we learn that in the following stage of the Amaravati style, the leaves no longer are naturalistic, as on these Nilgiri patterns, but appear belabored and stylized. The flow of the scroll becomes discontinuous rather than smoothly undulating, as are the Nilgiri designs.

The lotus medallions (Fig. 13) which appear on the bronze bowls likewise fall well within the range of comparable balustrade carvings at Amaravati. A relative chronology for these has also been established by Mlle. Auboyer, but being based on differences which are not apparent in the Nilgiri specimens, is not applicable here. A few of the motifs, such as the simple diagonal hatches and the loops are quite old, traceable back, in fact, to the chalcolithic period, but they are also employed today.

The utensils from the burials afford some hints as to the economic activities of the people in question. In largest part, the metal used is iron, but bronze (or copper) also occurs, especially in chisels, which appear in a splayed form (Fig. 28) as well as in a long bar; also, there are bill-hooks, sickles of various sizes, and razors (Fig. 29). All of these are tanged, and in the case of one sickle (Fig. 30), the tang terminates in a button-end. Individual specimens of shears (Fig. 31) and a socketed adze were also recovered. The complete absence of hoes, common for example in the earlier so-called "megalithic" burials of the South, is notable. After the razors, which presumably were the personal possessions of males, sickles occur most frequently. In India, this implement has always served as a universal cutting tool, and it would be incorrect to suppose that its use is restricted to agricultural work. In point of fact, there is nothing in the entire assemblage which unambiguously points to the practice of agriculture. It is surely pertinent to recall that pastoralism is the major economic form in the region today. One swallow does not make a summer, but the presence of shears prob-

ably is an indication of sheep-herding. (The animal terra cottas include sheep and many buffalo – a fact which has led most authors to associate these people with animal husbandry). The bill-hook, today a common tool of basketry workers, is likely to have also been used in a similar way in former times. But its more usual function would have been to hack out the jungle's thick undergrowth. Some of the broader blade bill-hooks might be considered choppers.

These are all simple tools whose forms were worked out much before the turn of the era (that of the shears, however, later than the others), and soon became stabilized. They do deliver us a single hint, nonetheless.

The shears in this collection differ in no essentials from representatives of the type which are known from many other places, as distant even as Rome. None other are reported from India itself, but a pair assigned to the third century A. D. comes from Begram, Afghanistan. An elongated, but similar type is also known from Pakistan (Balambat), where it is given a much higher antiquity, reaching into the Achaemenian period³⁹.

The Nilgiri weapons are confined to the occurrence of a few short swords, in form equalling the Roman gladius, and several wide-blade, double-edged daggers, fitted with double-guards and a pommel on the hilt. The arrowheads, which vary in form and size, are shown in Fig. 32, 32a, 33. All of these weapons are tanged, and at least one of the daggers appears to have the pommel, single guard, tang and blade cast as a single piece (Fig. 34)⁴⁰. It is made of iron. The others have fitted, more elaborate, tiered pommels and independent guards (Fig. 34a). To this group of weapons must also be counted a short, broad, curved dagger, like the modern 'jambiya', shown in a terra cotta model (Fig. 35), but otherwise not represented here⁴¹. This is the sole exception to the straight blades which are otherwise the rule.

It would be a surprising coincidence if the development of the Nilgiri-short sword proceeded independently of its Roman analogue. Indeed, the type also appears in the assemblage of the South Indian megalithic burials, but there is reason for thinking these also to reflect Roman influence. This then, establishes a reliable terminus post quem in the first century A. D., when Roman trade with South India flourished. But as will by now be apparent, we are aiming at a somewhat later period. To a point, a comparative study of the daggers will in fact land us there, in the fourth to sixth century. The Nilgiri type with double guard appears sufficiently characteristic to allow a dating within narrow margins. The weapon itself has never been reported from beyond the Nilgiris, but it is depicted at Ajanta, again in Cave XVII⁴². It will be recalled that this cave dates to ca. 500 A. D. This dating is confirmed by a singular pendant type

³⁷ Griffiths²⁸, Pag. 8.

³⁸ P. Stern / M. Benesti, *Evolution du Style Indien d'Amaravati* (Paris 1961) 32 (= Publ. du Musée Guimet – Recherches et Docum. d'Art et d'Arch., 7).

³⁹ A. H. Dani, Report on the Excavation of Balambat Settlement Site, in: *Ancient Pakistan* 3 (1967) 273 and Tab. LII b:4.

⁴⁰ Brecks³, Tab. XLIII, Num. 227.

⁴¹ Foote⁴, Tab. II, Num. 236. ⁴² Griffiths²⁸, Pag. 15, Fig. 38.

which repeats, *en miniature*, the unique outline form of the double-guarded dagger. It occurs rarely in India however, being known in its true derivative form only from Maheshwar in Central India. Shown in Fig. 36, the pendant is of copper and dates some-where in the first to fifth century⁴³. A dagger pendant in soapstone is further reported from Yelleshwaram, where it is supposed to be of medieval date (Fig. 37). The chronology of this site is however most vague, and a placement in the second third of the first millennium would not, on the face of it, be inconsistent with the nature of the site⁴⁴. The Rajasthani site of Rang Mahal dates the type (Fig. 38) more narrowly, i. e., between 300 and 600 A. D.⁴⁵, and in an already somewhat degenerate form (Fig. 39), it occurs at Newasa V⁴⁶. The given dates for this level (first to third centuries) confirm the general time-span of this pendant type as lying in the first half of the first millennium A. D., with a central dating in the third to fifth centuries likely. Much earlier (fourth to third cent. B. C.), dagger pendants are known from Taxila, but are notably lacking the upper and lower hilt guard. Probably the pendant tends faithfully to reflect the current actual dagger form⁴⁷.

Speaking of the elaborate pommels which some of the daggers have, R. Bruce Foote pertinently remarks on their resemblance to the 'vimana'-tower tops at Tanjore (Fig. 40) (in its way, the pommel is, of course, a kind of finial), and Egerton also has called attention to the resemblance of the decoration on South Indian arms to the regional architecture⁴⁸. The Tanjore dates take us up to the end of the first millennium A. D., but certainly this is an extreme when applied to the Nilgiri group. Considering the other evidence, it will perhaps not be entirely unwarranted to suggest that this architectural style existed as well in earlier times. In discussing the double-guarded dagger, parallels have been drawn between the originals and various models. For the curved dagger, no Nilgiri original has yet been found, but the terra cotta model will serve in its stead. A comparison of model with model is provided, once again, in Cave XVII at Ajanta⁴⁹. A dagger, very close in form to the Nilgiri terra cotta, is shown hanging from a rider's waist. In the scenes of this date, all of the daggers are shown as the straight-blade type, with this single exception. In this instance, the cavalier with curved dagger is a royal personage, while the servants attending him bear the straight daggers. If this really has the social significance implied here, it would be interesting, but the matter needs further investigation. Perhaps it is merely chance that the Nilgiri assemblage shows a



Fig. 41

similar relationship, in which the actual daggers found were all of the straight-blade type, while the only clue to the presence of the 'jambiya' comes from a terra cotta model. This dagger form is sometimes taken to be of arabic origin. Its introduction to India need not have waited until the Arab invasions of the eighth century, however, since long before them, trade associations had been established. So far as the arrowheads are concerned, there exists no typological scheme which would help to order them. The types all have considerable longevity. Suffice it here to observe that all the Nilgiri types can be documented on the evidence from other sites, as extant in the Gupta Period.

The Nilgiri jewelry, like the toreutic, is clearly the product of very skilled craftsmen and probably not a local product. The few surviving ornaments include ear-rings, pendants, finger-rings, golden chains, beads of gold and agate and some other odd pieces (Fig. 41)⁵⁰. Granulation is a favored technique in gold ornamentation. The two chains depicted by Miss Naik differ slightly: the one is a simple link-in-link type and the other is composed of folded links. Again, the jewelry provides very little concrete dating evidence. A gadrooned golden bead from this collection could, for example, fit into any assemblage originating in the last 3000 years or more. Unexpectedly however, a rather simple type of agate bead, an elongated barrel shape (Fig. 42), proves to be a fairly reliable indicator. A specialist in the study of Indian beads observes that comparable specimens at Ahichchhatra (in Northern India) are confined to strata III and IV, respectively dating 100–350 and 350–750 A. D. At a Maharashtra site, Kolhapur, this type occurs in the late

⁴³ Sankalia¹⁷, Pag. 210, Fig. 109:3.

⁴⁴ Waheed Khan³¹, Tab. XX (in text [Pag. 36] incorrectly referred to as plate XIX, II).

⁴⁵ H. Rydh, Rang Mahal (Lund 1959) 162 and Tab. 81:23 (= Acta Arch. Lundensia – Series in 4°, 3).

⁴⁶ H. D. Sankalia et al., From History to Prehistory at Nevasa, 1954–56 (Poona 1960) 70 and Fig. 169:11.

⁴⁷ J. Marshall, Taxila (Cambridge 1951) 654 and Tab. 199 Num. 13.

⁴⁸ Foote⁴, Pag. xi; W. Egerton, Handbook of Indian Arms (London 1880) 81.

⁴⁹ Griffiths²⁸, Pag. 12, Fig. 20 (upper left corner).

⁵⁰ I have not had the opportunity to see any of these objects myself, and rely here on the descriptions given by Miss Naik and Foote.

Satavahana levels, dating it to ca. 200–300 A. D. For the small golden rings composed of semi-globular joined beads (Fig. 43), exact parallels can be found from the third century B. C. megaliths at Suttukeny (Souttoukeny) near Pondicherry⁵¹. This dating is, of course, out of context here and must be understood to demonstrate the antiquity of the type rather than the date of the Nilgiri finds. A finger-ring from the Nilgiris (Fig. 44) has its counterpart in one from Bhita which is assigned to the Gupta Period⁵². As a bracelet, the design recurs several times, and also at a late date in Cave I (628 A. D.) at Ajanta⁵³. Three golden ear-rings in the Nilgiri collection of the British Museum have petal-like forms radiating from a central square bordered by a granulated line (Fig. 41). The representation is again evidently that of the lotus, so popular and variable in Indian art. The design recalls the Indian 'kaustubha', itself related to the auspicious 'srivatsa' symbol of Vishnu. Hindu gods, especially in the iconography of Southern India⁵⁴, are often shown wearing a clap or pendant of precisely this kind, but I have not been able to establish a date for its first appearance.

Finally, in the category of jewelry, the golden disc pendant shown in Fig. 45 requires notice. Ornaments of similar kind were widespread in the ancient Orient since at least the early Iron Age. Generally, these tended to be elliptical in shape, although small round types are not unknown. The round shape as well as the size of the Nilgiri specimen on the other hand suggest a late coin model, and in fact, an actual coin used in just this way was found at Sisupalgarh, in eastern India⁵⁵. It is a Kushana coin dated to the late third century A. D. Some scholars would assign a gold coin actually recovered from one of the Nilgiri burials (prior to Brecks) to about 150 years later. Yet caution is indicated. This coin, now lost, has never been figured or adequately described in any publication. Accordingly, its date has never really been subject to verification. One Indian numismatist makes the point that it must at least post-date Augustus, whose coins are the earliest gold money in India. This aureus has two perforations, suggesting use as an ornament, and is placed by this scholar in the Roman Byzantine series⁵⁶. Further apparently comparable finds come from Kolhapur and Taxila. The Kolhapur pendant, terra cotta in this case (Fig. 46), is referred to the Satavahana Period, which

ends early in the third century A. D. The Taxila specimen is a coin amulet⁵⁷.

Coming to the last category, that of the miscellaneous objects, we may consider a circular bronze ring, hollow and externally grooved about the circumference (Fig. 47). Its purpose is unknown, but with its 11 cm diameter, it could well have served as a ring-stand for pottery. The type is again known from the pre-Christian-Era site of Adichanallur, yet Nasik, a site previously noted for providing datable analogues, here too affords a possible comparison. The object in Fig. 48 is made of copper, and thought by the excavator to be a bangle⁵⁸. Although it is rather smaller in size (6 cm diameter) than the Nilgiri piece, the comparison may not be altogether out of the way. The relevant dating seems to be in the fourth or fifth century. The Nilgiri collection further includes a flat, round bronze mirror with a brief tang which serves as a handle (Fig. 49). Similar specimens are known from chalcolithic sites in Baluchistan and Harappa, and much later re-appear in the Sakat-Parthian levels at Taxila⁵⁹. In South India, this same mirror type was found in the Adichanallur urn-fields⁶⁰. Evidently it has a long history and ranges far in India. Its usefulness for dating purposes is hence eliminated. The small blade shown in Fig. 50 is not described by Brecks, nor is there any indication whether it is of iron or bronze⁶¹. From the photograph provided, it seems at least possible that the distal end is broken off, and if so, a comparison with an areca-nut chopper from Kolhapur offers itself (Fig. 51)⁶². The missing piece would have shown the joint with the other arm of the implement. The Kolhapur object is assigned to the twelfth century, but the use of such choppers already in the fourth century is attested to by one, albeit more exotic in shape, from Ceylon (Fig. 52)⁶³. The identification is not sure however, especially since similar blades with the peculiar stepping at the tang have elsewhere been found (e.g. at Sankaram, Vizagapatam).

In this paper, I have, of course, not attempted to deal with each individual piece in the accessible collections. Only those objects which for one reason or another seemed notable or amenable to the comparative approach attempted here were selected for consideration. It is entirely possible, indeed likely, that future knowledge

⁵¹ J. M. Casal / G. Casal, *Site urbain et sites funéraires des environs de Pondichéry* (Paris 1956) Tab. XXX A.

⁵² J. H. Marshall, *Excavations at Bhita*, in: *Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report 1911–12* (Calcutta 1915) 92 and Tab. XXXII:8.

⁵³ Griffiths²⁸, *passim*.

⁵⁴ A. Rea, *South Indian Buddhist Antiquities* (Madras 1894) Tab. XXXV (= *Archaeological Survey of India – New Imperial Series*, 15).

⁵⁵ Lal²⁴, *Fig. 72 and Tab. XLVIII A*.

⁵⁶ G. N. Das, *Coins From Indian Megaliths*, in: *Bull. Deccan College Research Inst. [Poona] 10* (1949) 206.

⁵⁷ H. D. Sankalia / M. G. Dikshit, *Excavations at Brahmapuri (Kolhapur) 1945–46* (Poona 1952) Tab. XXVI, *Fig. 133* (= *Deccan College Monograph Series*, 5).

⁵⁸ Sankalia²⁵, *Fig. 109, Num. 472 and Fig. 51:b*.

⁵⁹ Marshall⁴⁷, *Tab. 182, Num. 208*.

⁶⁰ A. Rea, *Catalogue of the Prehistoric Antiquities from Adichanallur and Perumbair* (Madras 1915) *Tab. II:5*.

⁶¹ Brecks³, *Tab. XLIII* (unnumbered).

⁶² Sankalia / Dikshit⁵⁷, *Fig. 128 and Fig. 27, Num. 1758*.

⁶³ L. Aitchison, *A History of Metals – I* (London 1960) 234, *Fig. 105*.

will open the way to better use of the objects treated here in addition to the new use of others in the collections. The present evidence does lead us to a workable consensus omnium however. Disregarding the extreme dates, for which explanations have been offered, the clustering of dates in the third, fourth and fifth centuries A.D. is very apparent. The breadth of this span need not be disturbing, for there is no internal evidence which indicates the length of time these burial grounds were in use. Three centuries as an estimate does not seem too long. It is these same three centuries which encompass the ascendancy and flourishing of the Gupta Period. Surely it is not mere chance that the Nilgiri evidence conforms to these limits, for the Guptas lend their name to a cultural as well as a political period. Treated all of a piece, these finds, I suggest, fall squarely within this period.

In conclusion, a brief word on the ethnic identification of the people whom these burials represent. Hitherto,

all discussions of the problem have started with the assumption that they were an isolated group, or a group which soon become relatively isolated in its new Nilgiri habitat, to judge from the rather unique assemblage of burial goods. Their ultimate low-land origin is indicated by the scant dress worn by the terra cotta human figures. Now, recent finds of apparently comparable terra cottas from several parts of Ceylon give the problem a new perspective. Unlike the Nilgiri figures, these are surface finds and seem not to be necessarily associated with burials. The human figures are modelled in the same coarse, careless style and bear the same slightly comic, slightly grotesque tilted-disc faces. They are moreover, associated with terra cotta phalli⁶⁴. The significance of this new discovery has yet to be examined, but any subsequent theory of ethnic identification for the Nilgiri group cannot afford to ignore it. Eventually, the Ceylon sources may also be expected to yield more dating evidence.



Photographs

⁶⁴ P. E. P. Deraniyagala, Some New Records of the Tabbovamaradamaduva Culture of Ceylon, in: *Spolia Zeylanica* 29 Fasc. 2 (1961) 249–271, especially Tab. II, Num. 9 and 10, and Tab. I, Num. 5.

Fig. 6, 8, 9, 10 and 11 – Photographed by W. Giesenhagen and provided by courtesy of the Museum für Indische Kunst (Preussischer Kulturbesitz) Berlin.

12, 13, 14 and 14a – From Foote⁴.

41 – by the author, from display in the British Museum.