

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

A NOTE ON THE ANIMAL REMAINS FROM NEOLITHIC LALJAL CAVE, DEBPAHAR, BINPUR, MIDNAPORE, WEST BENGAL.

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It was my privilege to identify a small collection of animal remains, collected by a team of explorers of the State Archaeology Department, Govt. of West Bengal from a cave at Laljal (c 22° 44"50'N 86°41"20'E), Debpahar, 50 km N.W. of P.S. Binpur, District Midnapur, West Bengal (see Map). The remains though meagre, are significant from the archaeozoological point of view, as they are found contemporary with the Neolithic phase in the area and are associated with plundered burial, iron spear head, potsherds, ringstones, few microliths and charcoal.

According to Shri Sudhin Dey, the leader and exploration assistant, the material is estimated to be as old as 1000 to 1200 B.C. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that the people in this part of settlement very likely reached the post Neolithic phase as evidenced by similar but little improved artifacts unearthed from pre-moriyan phase of neighbouring Tomluk (Banerjee, in press) in the same district.

The material is composed of remains of fresh water river turtles (plastron pieces); tail quill of Indian porcupine, teeth of wolf-like animal; broken molar tooth of pig (young one) and a number of teeth of domestic cattle. These remains were collected on 17.10.81, from a depth between 80 cm to 1.07 meter. The material was closely associated with some Neolithic artifacts and human bone fragments. A list of the fauna collected during the excavation is given below :

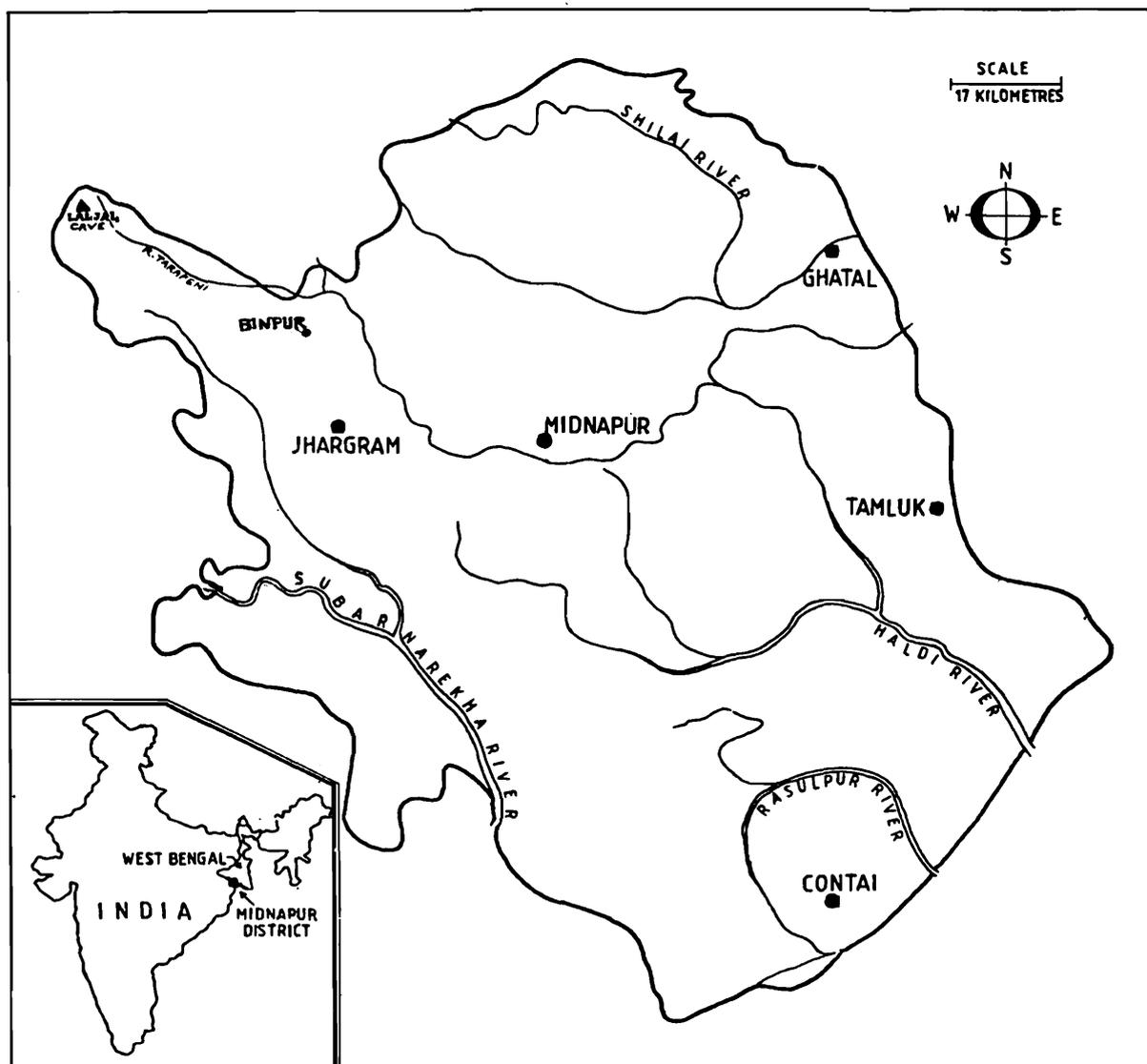
Class REPTILIA
Order TESTUDINES
Family TRIONYCHIDAE (fresh Water turtle)

Trionyx gangeticus Cuvier four pieces of plastron.

Class MAMMALIA
Order RODENTIA
Family HYSTRICIDAE (Indian porcupine)

Hystrix indica Kerr a piece of tailquill

Order CARNIVORA
Family CANIDAE (Some canid specimen)



Map showing the location of Neolittue Laljal Cave

Canis sp. indet Lower right 3rd incisor; upper right canine; upper right 2nd premolar; lower left 4th premolar (carnassial); upper right 1st molar (carnassial); upper left canine

Order ARTIODACTYLA

Family SUIDAE (Indian pig)

Sus scrofa cristatus Wagner damaged upper 2nd molar of a young one.

Family BOVIDAE (cattle)

Bos indicus Linnaeus lower left premolar; upper left molar; upper left premolar.

The remains as a whole are very few, but it is beyond doubt that the identified animal species were all local and indigenous. The turtles and pig, perhaps were used as a dietary supplementation to these Neolithic men in the area, whose used up artifacts or implements were recovered from the same spot. The canid teeth (Figs. 2a, b, c) assumed to be of some wolf-like animal, indicate the presence of such carnivores within the vicinity of human pursuit and presumably were attracted by the carcasses or refused food stuff. Among other remains, the tail quill of a porcupine (Fig. 5 and 5a) containing a needle hole, is very interesting, specially for its occurrence among the potsherds, ringstones and microlithic flakes. It is presumed that this object was probably used as a needle by the people. It may be mentioned that the tail-quill, in contrast to the body-quill, is always hollowed, so that an aperture on its wall (Fig. 6) would permit a string for stitching. The cattle remains (Figs. 1a, b, c) are represented by some premolar and molar teeth. These teeth belong to fully adult specimens, representing domesticated stock.

Though it is not possible to comment on the local fauna as a whole or on the then prevailing animal husbandry practices based on such scanty material, yet from close association of these material with the iron spear head (hunting), charcoal (use of fire) burial (cremation of dead) it is reasonable to infer that the area in and around the cave, was inhabited by some well established Neolithic people, already in possession of the domesticated cattle. Food animals like the river turtle (Fig.3) or pig (Fig. 4) were of uncommon at the site and might have been used as food. The finding of tail quill of Indian porcupine with a needle hole is interesting and has few parallels in the archaeological sites in India.