

A NOTE ON THE DOMESTIC MAMMALIAN REMAINS FROM
CHALCOLITHIC KOTASUR, DISTRICT BIRBHUM,
WEST BENGAL

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While digging a pond in the village Kotasur (c. 22°55'N and 87°45'E), dist. Birbhum, West Bengal, in 1982, a few bones of domesticated mammals along with some broken potteries and terrakotta figurines had been unearthed from a depth of four metres below the earth surface. The material was collected by Shri Prafulla Kumar Panda & Shri Srinivash Pal, two residents of the locality, and brought to the notice of the District Magistrate. It was by the kind courtsey of the D. M. that we received a request to collect and identify the material.

The terrakotta figurines include a pot-belly Yaksho, motifs of two well decorated elephants and one humped bull. Shri Sudhin Dey, a Senior Archaeologist in the Directorate of Archaeology, Government of West Bengal, opined that the age of antiquities may be attributed to between 1st Century B. C. and 2nd Century A. D. Though the site was originally assigned to Chalcolithic period by the aforesaid department, Shri V. Sen of the Archaeological Survey of India reported the occurrence of sherds of black & red ware, a doubtful piece of northern-black polished ware and a few waste flakes from the site (Ghosh, 1962-63).

The faunal material mentioned in the present study is tabulated below :

<i>Genus/Species</i>	<i>Material</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
<i>Equus</i> sp. (Horse/pony)	Right lower 2nd premolar	This is a lophodont tooth with a squarish and molariform crown.
<i>Sus scrofa</i> (The Indian pig)	Broken right mandible with 3rd premolar and 1st, 2nd molars	The mandible has lateral bulging, sectorial premolar and bunodont molars, the last having less eroded tuberculated cusps.
<i>Bos indicus</i> (The Humped Cattle)	(i) Left mandible with 4th milk premolar and 1st molar	The mandible is narrow, laterally flattened with selenodont teeth.

<i>Genus/Species</i>	<i>Material</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
	(ii) Distal fragment of left humerus	
	(iii) Distal end-fragment of radio-ulna with condylar portion chopped off	
	(iv) Right radio-ulna without distal end	
	(v) Fragment of condylar portion of right radius	
	(vi) Two pieces of left metatarsal	
	(vii) Left metatarsal without proximal end	
<i>Bubalus bubalis</i> (The Water Buffalo)	Left upper 2nd molar	The molar is thick-walled, eroded, its broad crescentic islands having little corrugated & extended horns with adequate cementum.
<i>Elephas maximus</i> (The Indian Elephant)	Lower left 3rd molar	The molar is broad and high, with transversely arranged oppressed enamel ridges, having 10 lamellae. The tooth is a little smaller than that of an average fully adult elephant.

DISCUSSION

The remains represent five species of domestic mammals, of which two were draught animals—the pony and the elephant. Since when the pony was introduced in West Bengal is not precisely known. However, it is believed that the Equids were first tamed around 5,000 years B. P. somewhere in eastern Europe, more exactly in southern

Ukraine (Bibikova, 1967). The true caballine horse (not Asinine) entered the Indian subcontinent with the the Aryan invaders, and supplanted at least the elephant, if not the camel in major areas of northern India around 2,000 B. C. The indigenous species of *Equus*, i.e., Asiatic Wild Ass and allied forms like the Gorkhur, Kiang, etc., were never reported to be domesticated in the Orient. The elephant, however, was domesticated in the country long before the entry of horse, even prior to the Indus Valley Civilization. This finds support from the fact that bony remains and a number of seals from Mohenjodaro depict the motifs of tame elephants, which are indicative of their domestication (Zeuner, 1963). Numerous archaeological sites and stratified zones in West Bengal have unveiled the remains of both tame and wild elephant (*Elephas maximus*) respectively. The latter was unearthed from the upper Pleistocene Dhuliapur and Jamtholgora in Midnapur district by the State Archaeology Department in 1969 and subsequently identified by Shri M. Ghosh. Besides deploying in transport or war, elephants were also exploited for the extraction of ivory. The first author reported on the ancient ivory crafting in West Bengal on the basis of sawed or whittled bone-fragments unearthed from the old sites in West Bengal (Ghosh, 1984). While discoursing on elephants in captivity and domestication, Oliver (1984) quoted "Bengal" as one of the centres for capturing local Indian wild elephants.

The three other species, namely, pig, cattle and buffalo, were obviously meant for the flesh and milk. This suggests that the inhabitants of the area used to maintain pig, cattle and buffalo as dairy animals and the pony and elephant as draught animals for the sustenance of a settled life during that period. Of course, the cattle had also been used in transport in early days. A brief discussion on the ancestry and probable centres of domestication of the species quoted above has recently been made by Badam (1984).

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