

Children Playing and Learning: Crafting Ceramics in Ancient Indor Khera



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INTRODUCTION

SEVERAL YEARS AGO WHEN WE WERE WRITING CHAPTERS for ancient Indian history school textbooks, a colleague asked if there was any archaeological evidence on children that could be included in these chapters. We thought hard but were unable to come up with any archaeological work that actively engaged with children in ancient India. We wondered why there was no work and realized that we ourselves had actually thought little about the issue until then. In the summer of 2007, while we were excavating at the ancient site of Indor Khera, we started finding miniature vessels and began to speculate as to who could have made them. Several months later when we began a more detailed study of terracotta finds, the attributes of these miniature vessels suggested to us that these could have been made by children. In trying to substantiate this hypothesis we undertook the exercise to see how children as “novice crafters” (taken from Baxter 2008) had been studied elsewhere.

It is only in the last decade that a considerable body of research has focused on children through material culture. Interest in children has to an extent emerged as an offshoot of studies on gender and archaeology, the latter itself having received attention only within the last two decades. Some of the ways that children have been made visible by archaeologists is through representation, bioarchaeological data, and the identification of some miniature objects as toys. Among the several themes that have been investigated are identifying stages of childhood, aspects of health and nutrition, child raising practices, socialization into adult roles, learning, children at work, and the meaning of childhood (Ardren 2006; Ardren and Hutson 2006; Baxter 2005, 2006, 2008; Kamp 2001*a*, 2001*b*, 2002, 2006; Kamp et al. 1999; Park 1998, 2006; Smith 2006).¹

Often, miniature objects are associated with children as toys, which may or may not always be valid. Miniature objects can be used in other ways, such as grave offerings, as ritual and votive artifacts, or as containers for unguents and

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pigments (Baxter 2005:47–48; Park 1998, 2006). The term “miniature” itself has been debated, with one definition being “a smaller version of another object differentiated only by size and often the resulting lack of a commensurate function with the larger object” (Baxter 2005:47). However, another study discusses how miniature forms could serve the same purpose as full-sized objects (Park 2006). It has also been reiterated that small objects that do not have larger size counterparts should not be categorized as miniatures (Baxter 2005). Yet, rather than limiting the term miniature to smaller reproductions alone, we feel that it can be extended to the smallest in a range of sizes even when they are not imitations of full-sized ones. This could well be the case with a craft working area wherein we may find vessels of different sizes that may represent learning stages within the ceramic craft (Kamp 2001*b*).

Much of the work that has been initiated on gender and children has not found resonance so far within South Asian archaeology, although some issues of gender, particularly through representation in the form of Harappan terracotta human figurines, have had nuanced readings (Clark 2003). Archaeologically, infants and children are visible directly through burials. Raczek’s (2003) study of burials in the context of the late Deccan Chalcolithic suggests that while the practice of infant burials continued throughout at Inamgaon from Malwa to Late Jorwe (1600–700 B.C.), at other sites it was not the case. The persistence of infant burials at Inamgaon has been suggested to indicate the need of families to uphold certain traditions in the face of considerable subsistence and societal changes. However, at the other late Deccan Chalcolithic sites such as Chandoli, Daimabad, Nevasa, Songaon, and Walki, burial practices for infants and children were probably following those of adults, where either burials were located offsite or what may instead have been practiced were exposure of bodies or cremation combined with the immersion of ashes in the nearby river. More indirectly, the presence of children has been visualized through toys. Practically every excavation report of Neolithic, Chalcolithic, Bronze Age, and Iron Age sites in the subcontinent includes categories of artifacts that are invariably interpreted as children’s toys such as marbles, “toycarts,” “hopscoches,”² and so forth. However, children have rarely been considered active agents in the production of material culture. There is little discussion about the way toys would have been used by children, the spaces/places of children’s activities, as well as how these would have impacted the distribution patterns of artifacts in general.

In the context of children, two particular aspects will be explored here based on the evidence from the site of Indor Khera in the Upper Ganga Plains in India, which is being currently excavated by the authors. This article, framed in three parts, will deal with learning frameworks within craft production and the social spaces specific to children’s activities and things. The first section will discuss some of the archaeological work that has been done on children as learners in craft. In the second section, we will sketch out the excavations in a particular part of the mound of Indor Khera where deposits from between 200 B.C. and A.D. 300 were exposed. The basis for this chronological frame will be referred to as well as the evidence for houses and terracotta finds from this area. This in turn has allowed us to elucidate children’s activities, spaces, and learning patterns within ceramic manufacture, which is dealt with in the final section.

CHILDREN AS NOVICE CRAFTERS

One of the promising areas for studying children in archaeology has been through craft working. Largely, the discussion in this section will focus on the ceramic craft; compared to other crafts, much more archaeological, ethnoarchaeological, and ethnographic work has been done on ceramics. Moreover, this particular craft is also directly relevant for our study. It is well recognized that craft knowledge and traditions are transmitted from one generation to the next. This would be the case with productions both in workshop situations as well as that taking place at the household level where craft techniques would be disseminated from master crafters to apprentices. It is in both contexts that children as learners and novice crafters become significant.

Largely, there are two major mechanisms of learning a craft. One comprises the imparting of formal verbal instructions and demonstrations while the other consists of observation and imitation (Kamp 2001*b*). Early stages of learning may also start with auxiliary activities in the craft. When most ceramic production, for example, takes place within the house, one sees the involvement of the potter's family, including women and young children, who help with the decoration of unglazed ware and other tasks such as preparing clay, carrying, and shifting vessels at various stages of the manufacturing process (Kamp 2002:28; Rye and Evans 1990:168). Several ethnographic studies in South Asia focusing on ceramic production at the household level concentrate on the male crafter with women and children performing the subordinate but necessary tasks such as clay procurement and preparation, decorating finished vessels, and so forth. Often, when molding of vessels is required, this is a task that is done by women (Roux and Corbetta 1989:8). Similarly, the molding of ceramic figurines is a technology that would have permitted crafters of various ages, including children, to participate in their production (Lopiparo 2006:169). A specific case study on apprenticeship in ceramic manufacture focusing on the stages by which small boys began to use the wheel for making ceramics found that boys began learning between the ages of eight and eleven, due to the physiological reason of being able to reach the center of the wheel by then. However, they were actively helping in the craft even in early childhood with clay preparation, beating operations, and moving the pots during the drying process (Roux and Corbetta 1989:10).

It has also been suggested that "craft learning may be sequential, starting with easier forms then proceeding to more complex, may occur in quite unstructured contexts, apparently viewed to some extent as play, and may start in the guise of fun at a young age" (Kamp 2001*b*:430). It is possible that children as young as two to five years old could start the learning process (Kamp 2001*a*:13). While many of the aspects regarding learning processes may not be visible in material culture, what in fact may be identifiable are artifacts made by beginners in that particular craft. While the role of children in ceramic manufacturing, stone tool knapping and weaving has been studied, relatively much more work has been done in relation to ceramics. We have found the studies by Kamp (2001*a*, 2001*b*) and Kamp et al. (1999) to be particularly useful in identifying novices in ceramic manufacture at Indor Khera and which need to be discussed in some detail.

A reasonable assertion has been made that since novices may not have the requisite conceptual knowledge or motor skills for ceramic production, this may then result in imperfect products or unusual forms or decoration. Novices may perhaps be unable to make large, regular, or evenly walled vessels. Lack of mastery by beginners in the techniques of clay preparation and tempering, drying, and firing may also show up in some of the end products. Several criteria have been listed to illustrate the difference in skills between novices and experts. Small size of vessels, the pinch pot technique, asymmetry in vessel profiles, uneven thickness of vessel walls, rough finish, and small drying cracks may be associated with novices. In contrast, large vessels, well-coiled or beaten vessels, symmetry of vessel profiles, even wall thicknesses, smoothed and burnished surfaces, and lack of cracks suggest the work of experts (Kamp 2001*b*:430–431).

Similarly, the products of novices may differ in shape from those usually manufactured. These may reflect the lack of internalization of cultural expectations or incomplete “conceptual mastery of style forms or principles.” The products of learners may show a lack of access to high-quality raw materials or the technological inability to process the raw materials. It is also important to realize that while children learning a craft would be beginners, not necessarily all novices are children. Further, identifying the gender of beginners may be difficult in the archaeological record.

The age of crafters may be problematic but is possible to assess archaeologically. Kamp (2001*b*) has pointed out that certain errors may be age related, such as inexpert workmanship, inadequate sealing of coils, and asymmetry of designs. Another way by which the age of crafters can be assessed is from the fingerprints left on ceramics and terracotta figurines. Kamp shows that with age, because the surface area of the finger expands, this can be measured through ridge breadth measurements, defined as “the width of a single ridge and valley pair.” Her study involved an experimental work conducted on individuals of different ages to investigate the relationship between ridge breadth and age (Kamp 2001*b*; Kamp et al. 1999). Several criteria were then used to ascertain the age of producers of ceramics and terracotta figurines dated between A.D. 1100–1250 from the Sinagua region of northern Arizona (Kamp 2001*b*:434–447). The parameters of small size, crudeness and lumpiness, inexpert workmanship as seen from lack of surface smoothness, the presence of fingerprints and nail marks, asymmetrical profiles, and lack of proportion and missing limbs for animal figurines were used in the case of figurines.

As far as ceramics are concerned, size variation was used as one criterion to distinguish three categories of full-size, small size, and miniature vessels. Other criteria used were cracks, finishes, rim and wall thicknesses, as well as fingerprint measurements. Full-sized vessels indicate the work of experts as listed above. In contrast, miniatures suggest the work of novices, particularly when combined with characteristics of low-skilled work. Small-sized vessels showed a bit of both high-quality and low-quality workmanship. These may suggest a gradual process of learning from miniature to small to large vessels. Thus, figurines and miniature vessels served as toys as well as steps to initiate children into technical processes of working with clay, such as adding tempering materials, shaping vessels and figurines, drying them, and firing. Adults may also have assisted with some of these steps, particularly with firing.

Most archaeologists agree with the criteria, such as small size, and imperfect forms and decorations, which have been used to identify the work of children. An interesting point raised by Smith (2006) is that deviations from the norm in decorations need not necessarily imply a lack of conceptual mastery, but may in fact reflect innovation on the part of children. Her argument is that children as learners, when introducing innovations in decorative motifs, should not be viewed as passive imitators, but as active participants in the learning process. In her study of the prehistoric matrilineal Huron society in Canada, Smith (2006:71) suggested that while children would have learned from their mothers and grandmothers, they also influenced each other. Kamp (2001a:27) has also made the point that children can learn from other children.

Children as innovators can also be seen ethnographically in the craft of weaving, as in the case of the Maya community in Honduras, from the 1970s to the 1990s. Often with larger societal changes, such as incorporation into a market economy, shifts can take place in learning frameworks, from being highly supervised and focusing on replication to crafting more or less independently and through trial and error. The shift was thus from conservatism in designs and techniques to innovation (Baxter 2008:168–169).

Other crafts where children have been identified as learners include lithic production and weaving. The evidence of poor-quality worked flint pebbles found alongside fine blade production suggests the presence of crafters of varying abilities. Archaeological evidence for novice lithic crafters can be seen from the locations of craft where poorly worked lithics are found peripheral to the work of master crafters and from the use of poor-quality raw materials. Often, the work of inexpert knappers does not result in usable tools (Baxter 2008:168). Thus, the products of beginners may be identified as those that show inexpert craftwork or deficiencies in manufacture, are often small in size, use simple techniques and poor-quality raw materials, show variability or a lack of standardization, and may skip certain technological steps.

This discussion has shown the potential of searching for children in the context of craft working. While much archaeological as well as experimental and ethnoarchaeological work has been done in South Asia, on techniques, locations of craft, as well as the issue of specialization, this has mainly been done in the context of Harappan craft. For other periods, much less work on craft is available and what is striking is that children themselves have so far remained invisible. In this context, the excavations at Indor Khera have provided an opportunity to initiate studies on locating children in craftwork. In the following section, an overview of recent excavations at Indor Khera is given, so as to contextualize children as learners in ceramic manufacture.

INDOR KHERA

The excavations undertaken at Indor Khera in the summer of 2007 will be discussed in this section. Summary information on the site, its location, the chronology, and the evidence in the form of structures and terracotta finds will be presented. However, a more detailed discussion can be seen in Varma and Menon (n.d.). The discovery of craft quarters at the northwestern edge of this settlement,

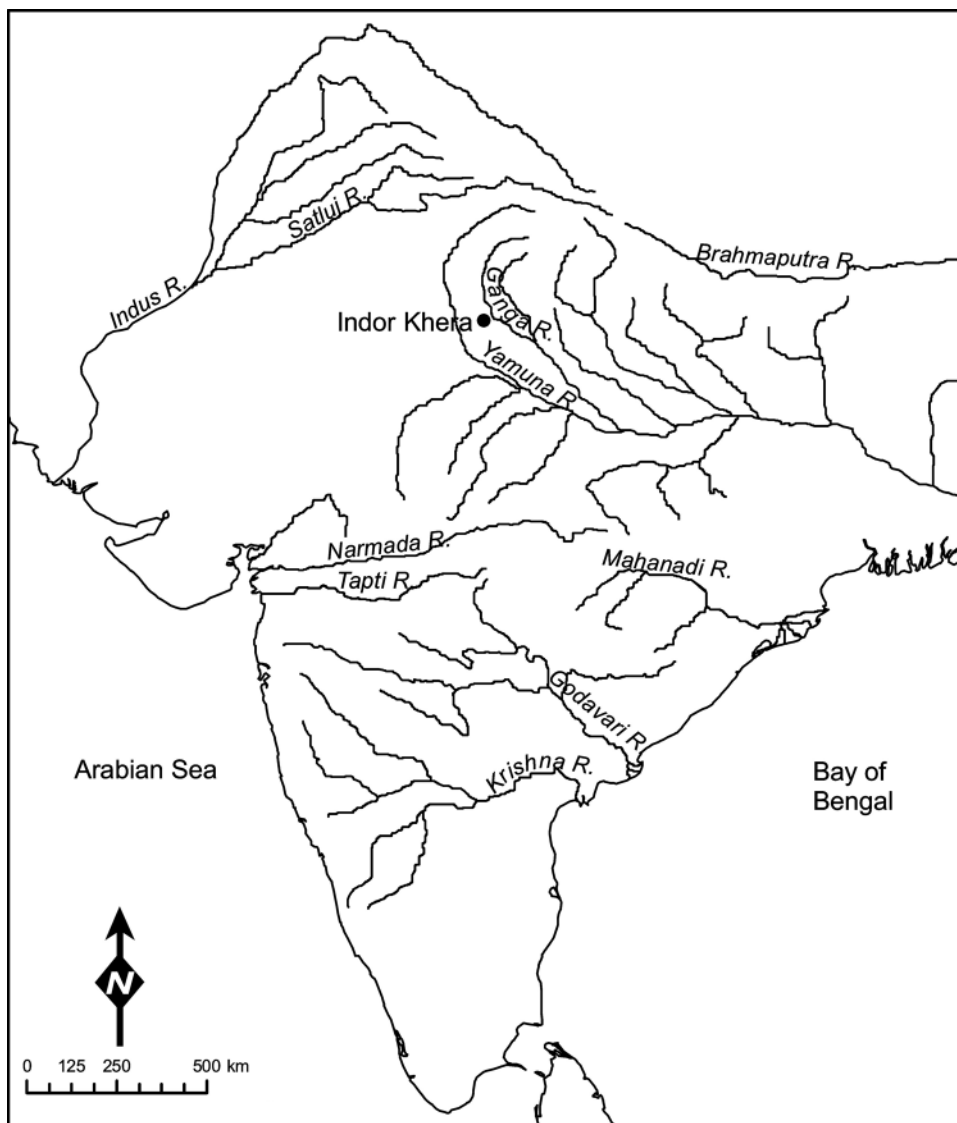


Fig. 1. Location of Indor Khera.

in particular a potter's house, and different phases of domestic architecture comprise important evidence for the period dated between 200 B.C. and A.D. 300.

The site of Indor Khera ($28^{\circ}14'57''\text{N}, 78^{\circ}12'48''\text{E}$) is located in Tehsil Debai, District Bulandshahr, Uttar Pradesh on the Chhoiya Nadi, also called Nim Nadi. Indor Khera lies between the rivers Kali Nadi and Ganges (Fig. 1). The site is about 10 km from the Ganges River. The mound measures 285 m (north-south) \times 428 m (east-west) with a maximum height of 17 m, with the present-day village of Indor extending over the entire eastern, northwestern, and south-eastern portions of the mound and the adjacent area.

Trial soundings taken at the site of Indor Khera indicated the potential for further excavation. Two of the trial cuttings gave us tentative dates from the tenth/eleventh to the thirteenth/fourteenth centuries A.D., while the third sounding was dated from 1000 B.C. to A.D. 100 (Menon et al. 2008; Menon and Varma n.d.). It is important to note that this apparent gap between A.D. 100 and the tenth century A.D. was not due to a break in occupation, but because the intervening periods have so far not been investigated. The intention, thus, was to excavate in an area that would enable us to bridge this gap. For this reason, we chose the north-western area of Indor Khera where there is a flat exposed ridge halfway down the slope of the mound. This ridge has been created by the cutting away of the mound in this area by local villagers.

As mentioned in an earlier article (Menon et al. 2008), exposed fortification walls particularly in the northern, eastern, and southern parts of the mound are visible today. The fortification walls were made of baked bricks, with dimensions ranging from $38\text{--}43 \times 22\text{--}23 \times 5.5\text{--}6$ cm. In the eastern part of the mound, the walls are comprised of an inner and an outer wall, with cross-walls. However, in the other parts of the mound, only one wall with cross-walls or revetments has been observed. Just north of this ridge and about 2 m lower, an exposed fortification wall and cross-walls are visible in an adjacent house. Given the alignment of the exposed walls, we expected these fortification walls to continue southward, that is, in the area of the ridge. Excavation squares were, thus, laid in such a way so as to get an idea of the occupation deposits both inside and outside the fortifications.

As the area under the present village was not going to be excavated, only the unoccupied parts of the site were gridded on a 10×10 m grid. The layout of squares followed this grid. As can be seen from Figure 2, the northernmost point on the north–south reference line is G0. This also marked the southern limit of the present-day village in this part of the mound. South of G0, each consecutive east–west row of 10×10 m squares was labeled as A, B, C, and so forth. In turn, the squares to the west of the north–south reference line were labeled as A1, A2, A3, A4, and so forth. Those squares to the east of the reference line were labeled as ZA1, ZA2, and so forth. Each 10×10 m square was subdivided into four subsquares of 5×5 m, with a cutting area of 4×4 m each. These subdivisions were in turn labeled. For example, the 10×10 m square B1 had four 5×5 m subsquares, labeled as B1a, B1b, B1c, and B1d, with B1a as the northwest subsquare and the others following in a clockwise direction.

The following squares and subsquares were excavated in this area: A1d, B1a, B1b, B1c, B1d, B2b, B2c, C1a, C2a, and C2b. The reason why in some places only parts of subsquares could be opened was due to the encircling ridge or the edge of the mound. Hence, the cutting areas of A1d, B1b, B1c, B2b, and B2c were 4×2 m, while the subsquares had a cutting area of 4×4 m (Fig. 2). The excavations were carried out to varying depths: A1d to 40 cm; B1a, B1c, and B1d to 176 cm; B1b to 115 cm; B2b to 52 cm; B2c to 60 cm; C1a to 60 cm; C2a to 50 cm; and C2b to 60 cm.

Chronology

We were able to date the deposits in these trenches on the basis of pottery and coins. From square B1 were found stamped potsherds, sprinkler forms, tiny sherds of wares with a black slip or polish and a red core, and sherds of fine gray ware.

While the Kushana copper coins were found from the upper deposits, the few sherds with black slip or polish and the copper punch-marked coin were found from the lower levels. According to Gupta (1996:22), copper punch-marked coins are found from the post-Mauryan period from the Magadh-Anga, Mathura, and Mewar regions. Thus, on the basis of all the evidence taken together, we have dated the deposits in this excavated northwestern area of Indor Khera from about 200 B.C. to A.D. 300.

Structures

Walls in all cases were oriented in the cardinal directions. These were constructed both of mud-bricks as well as burnt bricks. It is possible to recognize that these walls were constructed in different phases, which will be discussed shortly. Structures were traced in B1a, B1b, B1c, B1d, C1a, A1d, B2b, and B2c.

Walls/structures of two phases were found in B1a. Belonging to a later phase (Phase II) were two east-west-oriented walls, 242 cm apart, composed of mud-bricks (Walls 11 and 12). The well-preserved mud-bricks varied in size from 38–42 cm in length, 22–24 cm in width, and 5–6 cm in thickness. The extant length of Wall 11 was 200 cm while that of Wall 12 was 176 cm. Wall 11 is better preserved and comprised of eight courses, while in the case of Wall 12 about four courses were clearly discernible. Walls were raised with courses of header bricks, making the width of Wall 12 about 38–42 cm. Under the mud-brick courses of Wall 11 is a facing of mud-bricks, below which are two courses of baked bricks. Between these two walls was detected a paved platform (105 cm east-west \times 110 cm north-south) on a mud-brick base. On excavating farther down between Walls 11 and 12 an ashy patch that can be seen in Figure 3 was found. Both Walls 11 and 12 meet up in the east with a north-south-oriented baked brick wall (Wall 13). This latter wall appears to have been built in an earlier phase (Phase I), which continued to be used into the later phase. The width of Wall 13 is unknown as it goes into the west-facing section of the subsquare. However, the excavated remains show a double row of stretcher bricks making the extant width at least 80 cm. Wall 13 runs through the entire length of subsquare B1a and part of B1d. The sizes of the baked bricks vary from 36–44 cm in length, 22–24 cm in width, and 5–6 cm in thickness. The bricks in the northeastern part of B1a abutting Wall 11 also reveal remains of a mud plaster.

Projecting courses of baked bricks (Wall 14), varying in size from 38–42 cm in length, 22–24 cm in width, and 5–6 cm in thickness, were recovered below Wall 12. These appear to be part of a Phase I structure, which extends southward from subsquare B1a into the northern part of B1d. About 70 cm south of these projecting courses of baked bricks is another baked brick alignment of header bricks (Wall 15) extending eastward into Wall 13 found in B1a. These bricks had dimensions of 40 \times 22–24 \times 5–6 cm (Fig. 3). Nine courses of bricks were recovered with headers and stretchers in alternate courses. The area of 70 cm between Walls 14 and 15 was filled with a packing of mud and brickbats. In the northern part of B1b, burnt brickbats laid flat were recovered covering an area of about 120 \times 180 cm. These appear like a brick paved area or platform belonging to Phase I.

In the center of B1d was excavated a paved platform (measuring 118 cm north-south \times 70 cm east-west) of Phase II with thick mortar underneath which

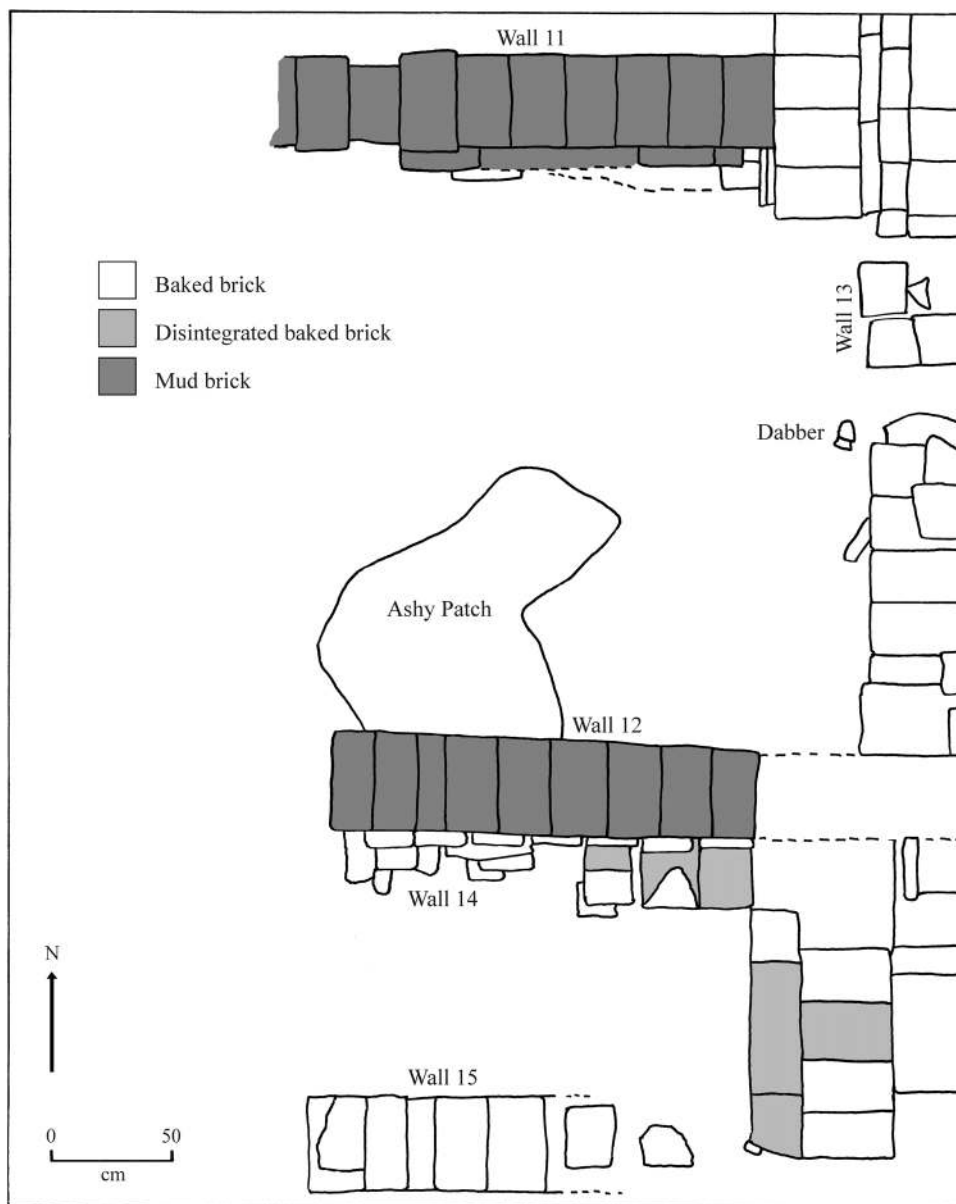


Fig. 3. Plan of House 1 at Indor Khera.

there were mud-bricks. To its north was an ashy patch measuring 118 cm north-south \times 170 cm east-west. Almost the entire area of the rest of subsquare B1d was comprised of a loose gray deposit. In B1c and B1d were recovered walls of several phases. Belonging to Phase III was an east-west-oriented wall (Wall 10) of baked header bricks, with dimensions of $42 \times 24 \times 5-6$ cm. Wall 10 extended 538 cm in length with a width of 42 cm. In some places two courses were recovered, while in others three courses of bricks could be discerned. Wall 7 is a Phase IV, east-west-oriented wall of baked bricks. It is conjectured that Wall 7 with

four courses of header bricks may have had a length of 534 cm and a width of 22 cm. One intact brick in the western end of subsquare B1d was noted to have dimensions of $38 \times 22 \times 5-6$ cm. Two parallel north-south walls (Walls 8 and 9), 300 cm apart, extended southward from this east-west wall, perhaps forming a room. Of these, the western wall, Wall 8, 224 cm in length, extended south to the end of the subsquare, while of the eastern wall (Wall 9), only three bricks were extant. The end of Wall 9 was not discernible as it was cut by a wall from a later period (Phase V), an east-west baked brick wall (Wall 1) in B1c. Of the three bricks, one was marked by four grooves in an arc formed perhaps by the fingers, to enable better jointing of bricks. Wall 1 measured $230 \times 40-42$ cm. Of this wall 17 courses were extant. The wall was constructed with header bricks with dimensions of $38-42 \times 22-24 \times 5-6$ cm.

In C1a were excavated two baked brick walls (Walls 2 and 3), one oriented north-south and the other oriented east-west, with the two meeting at right angles, perhaps comprising part of a room. The width of the walls is about 40 cm. The length of Wall 3 in C1a is 200 cm while that of Wall 2 extended over the length of the subsquare. The brick sizes varied from 38-40 cm in length, 22-24 cm in width, and 5-6 cm in thickness. Six courses of header bricks in Wall 2 were recovered below which was a light brown compact deposit. Five courses of header bricks were recovered of Wall 3. To the east of Wall 2 was excavated a baked brick and brickbat platform that extended the length of the subsquare and had an extant width of 164 cm. The walls in C1a belong to Phase V.

In A1d, an east-west wall (Wall 4), made of yellow-colored mud-bricks was found, of which only a few bricks were clearly visible but traces of the wall were found both west and east through the entire length of 4 m. Wall 4, belonging to Phase V, was raised of header bricks with dimensions of $36 \times 24 \times 5-6$ cm. Abutting Wall 4 toward the southwest were traces of a yellowish compact deposit perhaps representing a paved platform, of which the surviving portion measured $90 \times 48 \times 5-6$ cm of now disintegrated mud-bricks.

B2b was opened up to investigate whether the walls recovered in B1a extended westward. The same burning activity that was visible in the northwestern corner of B1a with alternate lenses of gray ash and black charcoal was seen to continue in the southeastern corner of B2b. A baked brick alignment of 90×24 cm of five courses (Wall 5), belonging to Phase V and oriented in an east-west direction, was found in the northeastern corner. Several fallen bricks were found to the south of this structure. A north-south-oriented brickbat alignment (Wall 6), belonging to Phase V, of 30×70 cm, was found in the northern part of B2c.

Thus five phases of structural activities were discerned in this area. To the first phase, Phase I, belonged Walls 13, 14, and 15. Our reading is that perhaps Wall 13, with a width of at least 80 cm, is part of the remains of a fortification wall. Walls 14 and 15 with their brickbat and mud packing appear to be cross-walls abutting Wall 13. What have been excavated are the upper levels of the fortifications. The fortification wall and cross-walls were probably built before 200 B.C. The deposits that we have excavated probably date to a phase when expansion led to occupations just outside the fortification walls. This explains the construction of mud-brick Walls 11 and 12 of Phase II, which were built against Wall 13. These two walls represent part of a house (House 1), probably a room, with dimensions of 240×200 cm. The deposits within this room were excavated and

recorded separately and will be discussed below. Wall 10 belongs to Phase III. To Phase IV belong Walls 7, 8, and 9, which again form a room of a house (House 2). This room measured 300 cm and at least 240 cm. A compact yellow deposit probably represents traces of a mud floor. To Phase V belong Walls 1–6. Of these, Walls 2 and 3 are part of a room of a house (House 3), with dimensions of at least 276 × 200 cm.

Terracotta Finds

A number of terracotta artifacts of a variety of types were recovered. These have been tabulated in Table 1. As mentioned above, artifacts found within a room of

TABLE 1. QUANTIFICATION OF TERRACOTTA FINDS FROM EXCAVATIONS IN THE NORTHWESTERN PART OF INDOR KHERA

MATERIAL	OBJECT	COUNT	
Terracotta	Bead	11	
	Arecanut bead	28	
	Unfinished bead	3	
	Bangle fragment	6	
	Button	3	
	Disc	15	
	Plaque	1	
	Small vessel	3	
	Reel	5	
	Shuttle	1	
	Stamp	2	
	Dabber	4	
	Coil	4	
	Lump	4	
	Human figurine	6	
	Animal figurine		
	Bull	7	
	Horse	1	
	Humped animal with teats	1	
	Marble	24	
	Wheel	15	
	Toy cart	1	
	Perforated object	10	
	Potsherd disc	59	
	Unidentified	11	
		Handmade objects (possibly made by children):	
		Miniature rounded object	1
		Miniature bowl on stand	1
		Miniature bowl	18
		Miniature dish	2
		Miniature box	1
		Miniature cylinder	1
		Unfinished miniature vessel	13
Clay	Handmade objects (possibly made by children):		
	Miniature perforated object	1	
	Miniature lump	1	

TABLE 2. QUANTIFICATION OF TERRACOTTA FINDS FROM WITHIN HOUSE 1 AT INDOR KHERA

MATERIAL	OBJECT	COUNT
Terracotta	Arecanut bead	1
	Pendant	1
	Figurine (possibly animal)	1
	Potsherd disc	1
	Dabber	2
	Vitrified lump	2
	Inscribed lid	1
	Handmade object (possibly made by children):	
	Unfinished miniature vessel	5

House 1 were excavated and documented separately and these have been listed in a separate table (Table 2).

The evidence consists of tools such as dabbers and stamps, unfinished objects such as beads, miniature vessels and unfired clay objects, as well as debitage including vitrified lumps and coils of clay. Several terracotta animal figurines were found in this area. These are made by the same technique of hand modeling. The bull figurines were fired in reducing conditions while the horse and the humped animal with teats were oxidized. The finds of numerous animal figurines suggests that these were made here. While the animal and human figurines were hand modeled, the terracotta plaque, on the other hand, was molded. This represents the face of a woman with part of an elaborate headdress visible. Several of the terracotta artifacts found fall into the category of toys, which may have been made and used here. These include marbles, wheels, and a toy cart, with the latter two categories of artifacts representing miniature replicas that probably reflect the work of skilled adult crafters. Apart from these are other miniature objects, including vessels that appear to have been made by children, which are discussed in detail below.

Although the room in subsquare B1a was excavated and recorded separately, the deposits to its south, in B1d, were contemporary. This explains the similarity of the finds within the room to some of those in Table 1, such as unfinished miniature vessels, dabbers, and vitrified lumps. This suggests that the room in B1a and the area to the south, that is in B1d, were part of a potter's house (House 1). This is also corroborated by the traces of a paved area found in B1d, south of the room as well as a substantial ashy patch suggesting a firing area. The sections in B1d also show multiple episodes of firing reflected in an 88 cm thick, loose ashy gray deposit with alternating bands or lenses of pink, white, and black. Certain finds within this structure, such as the arecanut bead, terracotta pendant, glass ornaments, iron objects, and copper antimony rod suggest everyday objects, and hence a living cum working area. In the same context can be mentioned the inscribed lid that was recovered, which is unfortunately not legible. The presence of children discussed in the context of Table 1 is evident within this house from the miniature vessels that they were in the process of making but which were left incomplete.

TABLE 3. EVIDENCE OF CHILDREN AT WORK AND AT PLAY AT INDOR KHERA

NO.	SQUARE	LENGTH (mm)	BREADTH (mm)	WIDTH/ HEIGHT		WEIGHT (g)	DESCRIPTION
				(mm)	(mm)		
1	B1a-c-d	28.2	26.0	6.0-8.0	6.0	6.0	Rounded red object, with one side pinched in center to form a point. Uneven width may indicate an object left unfinished.
2	B1c	17.0	16.3	11.2	3.0	3.0	Red bowl with rounded base, made of well-levigated clay. Pinch marks removed by smoothening. Slightly chipped on opposite sides of rim. Relatively well made.
3	B1c	21.9	19.7	11.0	4.0	4.0	Shallow unbaked clay bowl, highly friable and chipped.
4	B1d	32.2	26.9	17.4	11.0	11.0	Thick-walled (7.6-9.7 mm) misshapen red bowl with uneven base. Made of clay that was not well levigated. Mat impressions on a portion of the reverse.
5	B1a-c-d	22.7	19.3	17.0	5.0	5.0	Shallow thick-based black bowl with uneven rim. The thick base indicates incomplete pinching to form the vessel.
6	B1a-c-d	29.8	28.5	14.4	7.0	7.0	Conical black bowl with flaring rim. The bowl, made by pinching, has an uneven shape and pointed base.
7	B1d	18.1	20.0	6.3	2.0	2.0	Oval-shaped red bowl with uneven rim. The base is made by pinching and retains the indentation of a finger, but no fingerprints are visible.
8	B1d	34.3	32.5	12.9	9.0	9.0	Wide red bowl with sides showing pinch marks. Inner base has been smoothened and shows no finger marks. A hole in the inner base and the outer base has come off post-firing, suggesting the clay was not well prepared.
9	B1a-c-d	37.0	32.2	16.0	9.0	9.0	Wide black bowl of uneven shape with flaring, jagged rim made by pinching. The base was perhaps intended to be pointed giving a conical shape to the vessel, but has been left incompletely pinched. Similar to No. 6.
10	B1a-c-d	35.4	30.2	12.5	7.0	7.0	Wide black bowl of uneven shape with flaring, jagged rim made by pinching. The small base is rough, uneven, somewhat flat, giving a conical shape to the vessel. There are crack marks on the vessel. Similar to Nos. 6 and 9.
11	B1d	24.8	23.0	10.9	6.0	6.0	Straight-sided black bowl made by pinching. The rim is jagged and chipped at one end. Unevenly flat base.
12	B1d	29.0	25.6	13.4	10.0	10.0	Black bowl with slightly incurved rim made by pinching. The walls retain indentations of fingers but no impressions. The base is slightly rounded.

(Continued)

13	B1d	28.5	28.2	21.8	16.0	Thick-walled bowl, with walls 7.3-mm thick. The base (24.7 mm) is smaller than the mouth. Made by pinching, the bowl has a gently outwardly flaring rim. Red with black patches.
14	B1d	35.8	34.5	18.5	17.0	Thick-walled shallow red bowl with walls 8.9-mm thick. Made by pinching. The bowl has a slightly rounded base and is made of friable clay with mixture of chaff. Several holes also indicate that the clay was not well prepared.
15	B1a-c-d	34.2	32.3	6.0-8.0	8.0	Perforated object made of unbaked clay. The perforation is off-center, pierced from one side. The object has a rough surface with several tiny holes.
16	B1a-c-d	31.0	30.8	16.3	6.0	Thin-walled (1.7-3.5 mm) conical-shaped black bowl with flaring rim. Made by pinching, the bowl has a pointed base that is off-center, making it unstable. Chipped at one section of the rim.
17	B1a-c-d	40.9	40.1	10.8	14.0	Red dish with straight walls roughly 2.2-mm thick. Made by pinching, the rim is slightly uneven but the vessel is relatively well formed, although there are crack marks. Part of a fingerprint is visible.
18	B1c	38.0	37.2	16.4	20.0	Thick-based black bowl with slightly outwardly flaring uneven rim and walls 3.4-6.2-mm thick. The bowl is made by pinching with the inner base smoothed. Crack marks on outer side and base.
19	B1c	37.8	33.0	14.2	19.0	Shallow black bowl made by pinching. With uneven walls 5.8-9.1-mm thick. With flattened base, the bowl is incomplete as one side of the rim has been left incompletely pinched.
20	B2b	23.6	22.2	13.8	8.0	Red bowl made by pinching, with walls 3.2-mm thick. The outer walls show pinch marks but no impressions. The bowl has a flattened base, with a faint finger impression. The walls are uneven with one end higher than the other. Slightly chipped at one end of rim.
21	B1a-c-d	52.0	48.7	11.0	24.0	Red dish with outwardly flaring rim. The inner and outer surfaces of the dish show crack marks. Inner rim at one end is slightly chipped. Relatively well made.
22	B1d	13.5	12.7	17.3	3.0	Cylindrical-shaped red object with a slight depression in both ends.
23	B1a	19.3	18.8	10.3	3.0	Red bowl made with relatively fine clay by pinching. The bowl is of uneven shape and base.
24	B1c	38.6	37.0	39.2	43.0	Object like a bowl on a stand. Made by pinching, the object is very rough and uneven and unevenly fired red and black. The straight walls are 7.1-8.3-mm thick at the top but taper down to the stand portion which is 23.9-mm thick. The stand flares unevenly at the base (26.5-30.0 mm), which is broken. The profile of the vessel is slanted toward one side.

(Continued)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

NO.	SQUARE	LENGTH (mm)	BREADTH (mm)	WIDTH/ HEIGHT		WEIGHT (g)	DESCRIPTION
				HEIGHT (mm)			
25	B2c	29.3	28.7	12.2		12.0	Almost square-shaped red box with straight walls 2.5-mm thick and a flat base, made by pinching. The box-shaped object has two well-rounded holes (with diameters of 1.8 mm) deliberately made, one transversely halfway along the outer base of the box and the other in the inner base of the box. Relatively well made.
26	B1c	31.7	30.9	16.5		14.0	Black lump-like object, with a slight depression in the center. The base is uneven. Probably this represents a lump intended to be formed into a miniature vessel but left with only a depression made. Appears to have been accidentally partially fired.
27	B1a	20.1	18.7	11.5		4.0	Red lump with slight depression in the center on one side. This perhaps represents the initial stage of pinching out a miniature bowl. Slightly chipped at one side of the depression.
28	B1c	16.4	16.2	8.9		2.0	Round black lump, flat on one end and uneven on the other. May represent the work of a child beginning to pinch out a miniature bowl or playing with clay.
29	B1d	16.9	13.3 (extant)	9.3		2.0	Broken black lump, flat on one end and rounded on the other. May represent the work of a child beginning to pinch out a miniature bowl or playing with clay.
30	B1c	16.1	14.0	10.6		2.0	Black highly friable, rough lump with a depression in the center. The base is uneven with a point. The slightly flaring rim is jagged. The lump perhaps represents the initial stage of making a miniature vessel.
31	B1a-c-d	28.2	24.2	11.9		8.0	Grayish oval lump perhaps representing the work of a child beginning to pinch out a miniature bowl or playing with clay.
32	B1a-c-d	25.1	24.8	9.8		6.0	Red circular lump, perhaps representing the work of a child beginning to pinch out a miniature bowl or playing with clay.
33	B1a-c-d	25.0	23.3	13.3		9.0	Black circular broken lump, perhaps representing the work of a child beginning to pinch out a miniature bowl or playing with clay.
34	B1c	28.4	27.6	19.3		14.0	Red rounded lump with chaff inclusions, perhaps representing the work of a child beginning to pinch out a miniature bowl or playing with clay. The clay appears exactly like the material used to make the dishes Nos. 17 and 21.
35	B1d	19.0	17.6	3.7		>1.0	Red lump that perhaps represents the work of a child trying to pinch out a miniature bowl or playing with clay.

(Continued)

36	B1a-c-d	51.7	46.0	12.9	31.0	Black lump, flat on one end and slightly rounded on the other, probably representing a child beginning to pinch out a miniature dish or playing with clay.
37	B1d	27.8	27.0	9.1	6.0	Red lump with a transverse perforation. The perforation (2.7 mm) is roughly made. Perhaps an attempt to make a pendant.
38	C1a	22.2	19.6	8.6	4.0	Grayish lump with a slight depression on one surface. The lump perhaps represents the initial stage of making a miniature vessel.
39	C2b	15.5	15.2	11.2	2.0	Red rounded lump with one end flat, perhaps representing the work of a child trying to pinch out a miniature bowl or playing with clay.
40	B1a	33.6	32.0	10.7	10.0	Rounded grayish lump of not very clean clay, slightly convex on one surface. It has indistinct fingerprints on both surfaces. It perhaps represents the work of a child trying to pinch out a miniature bowl or playing with clay. It was found within House 1.
41	B1a	26.1	23.1	6.2	3.0	Red flattened lump, perhaps representing the work of a child trying to pinch out a miniature bowl or playing with clay. It was found within House 1.
42	B1a	14.1	11.6	4.0	>1.0	Gray flat unbaked rounded lump of clay, perhaps representing a lump made by a child while playing with clay. It was found within House 1.
43	B1a	19.9	17.0 (extant)	7.5	3.0	Gray rounded broken lump, somewhat flat on one surface, convex on the other. It perhaps represents the work of a child trying to pinch out a miniature bowl or playing with clay. It was found within House 1.
44	B1a	21.9	20.7	5.4	2.0	Red round lump with one side flat, the other slightly convex. The edges of the lump are rough and jagged. It perhaps represents the work of a child trying to pinch out a miniature bowl or playing with clay. It was found within House 1.
45	B1c	28.5	23.5 (extant)	9.1	5.0	Red rounded broken lump with one side flat, the other slightly convex. The flat side has a slight indentation but no finger impressions. It perhaps represents the work of a child trying to pinch out a miniature bowl or playing with clay.

CHILDREN AT WORK AND AT PLAY IN A POTTER'S HOUSE

The discussion above indicated that there may be several ways of identifying the work of children in ceramics through experimentation, learning, and play. Aspects such as miniature size of products, deficiencies in manufacture (such as inexpert preparation of clay or formation of vessels and objects), and simplicity of techniques may indicate children's activities. Drawing on this kind of evidence, we were able to identify certain artifacts that suggest they were made by children at Indor Khera (Table 3).

It is evident from Table 3 that the vessels are tiny, falling into the miniature category. Out of the 44 items listed in Table 3, 22 are discernible vessels, comprising bowls, dishes, a square box, and a bowl on a stand (Figs. 4–6). Since most of the vessels are not symmetrical, the length and breadth measurements rather than diameter are presented. The majority, 18 in number, are bowls, while the rest comprise two dishes, one square box and one bowl on a stand. The rim diameters of bowls, derived by averaging the length and breadth measurements, range from a maximum of 37.6 mm to a minimum of 16.6 mm. Similarly, the diameters of the two dishes are 40.5 mm and 50.3 mm, while the diameter of the bowl on a stand is 37.8 mm. Of the remaining 22, three (Nos. 1, 15, 22) are indeterminate objects while 19 (Nos. 26–44) are lumps probably representing initial stages of making miniature vessels and objects or indicating children playing with clay. Many of these lumps are tiny with measurements ranging from 32.8×10.7 mm to 12.8×4.0 mm (Fig. 7).

Central to the identification of children's work has been the issue of size, with miniature forms associated with children. It is well understood that archaeological contexts should provide clues about the functions of artifacts, in this case regarding those that are miniature in size. One such context can be a craft working area wherein miniature forms may have a particular meaning. These miniature ceramic vessels need not necessarily be replicas of full-sized forms. In a learning context, the initiation of a novice who often is a child begins with pinching small pieces of clay into rough shapes. These initial experimental efforts result in forms that are not necessarily mirrored in those produced by adult or expert crafters. As pointed out earlier, this may be due to less developed motor skills or inadequate perceptions of ceramic styles.

As can be seen from Table 3 and Figures 5 and 6, certain miniature vessels (Fig. 6*d*, Table 3: No. 4; Fig. 5*h*, Table 3: No. 8) exhibit the use of clay that has not been well prepared. A thick-walled shallow bowl (Fig. 5*a*, Table 3: No. 14) is a highly friable specimen revealing an excessive admixture of chaff. The majority of vessels are hand-modeled using the pinching technique, which is well known as one of the simplest techniques of shaping ceramics and one used by children beginning to learn the craft. This can be seen from the finger indentations on several examples. However, largely no fingerprints are identifiable. Thus, the kind of analysis undertaken by Kamp (2001*b*) and Kamp et al. (1999) is not possible at least so far as the miniature vessels recovered at Indor Khera are concerned.

The asymmetrical forms of these miniature vessels are another indicator of child crafters. Several specimens reveal uneven walls such as a thick-walled bowl (Fig. 6*d*, Table 3: No. 4) from 7.6–9.7 mm, a thin-walled conical shaped bowl (Fig. 5*k*, Table 3: No. 16) from 1.7–3.5 mm, a thick-based bowl from 3.4–6.2 mm

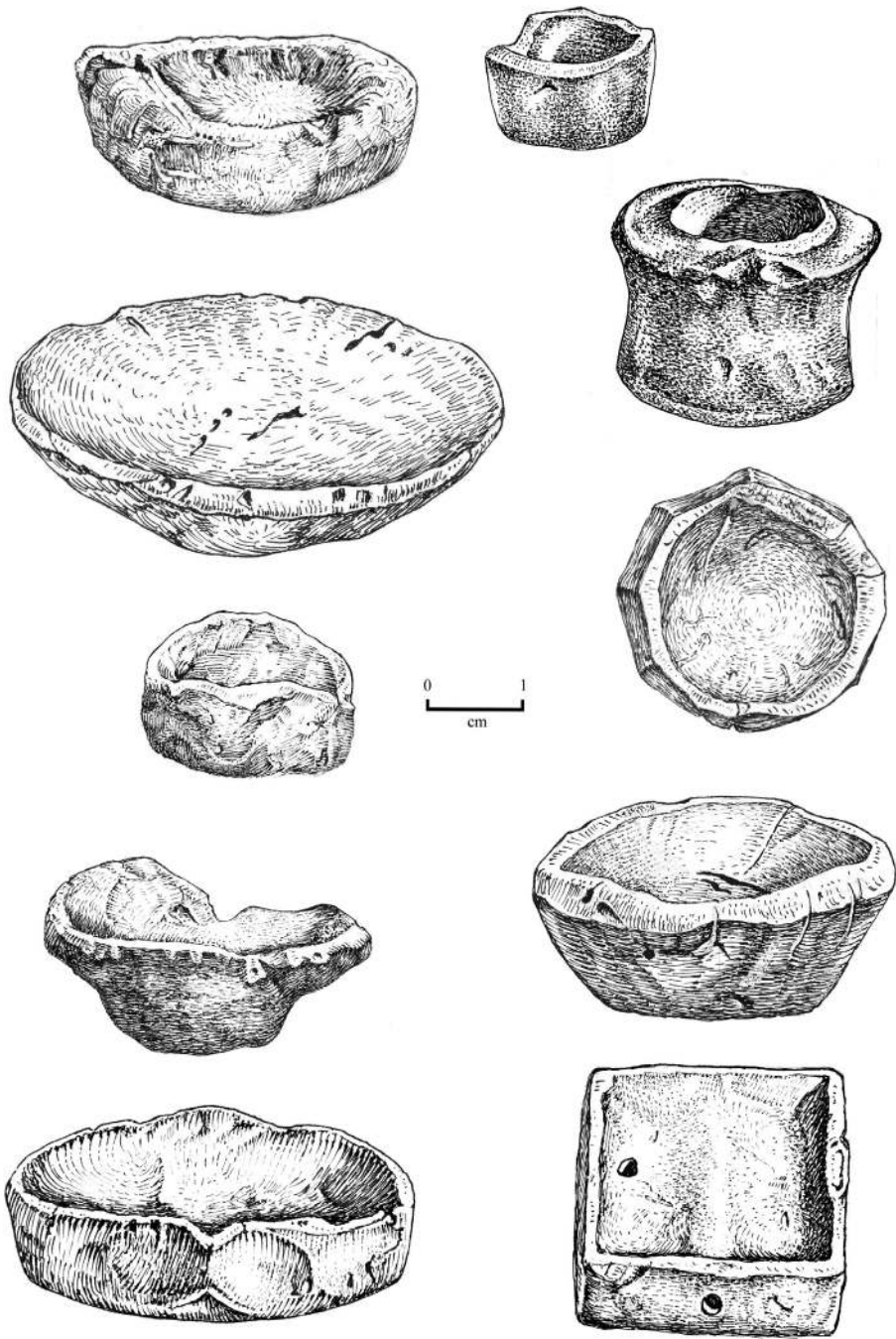


Fig. 4. Variety of miniature vessels made by children at Indor Khera.

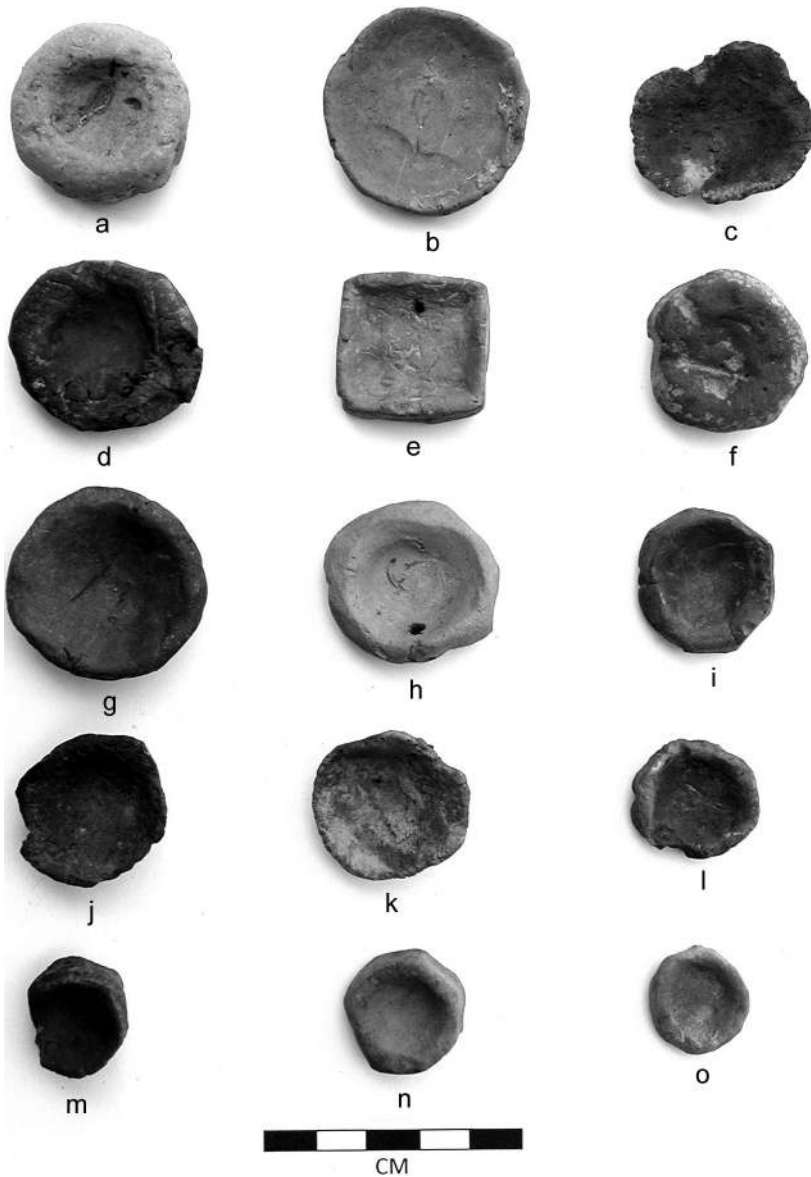


Fig. 5. Efforts of children at Indor Khera to make miniature vessels.

(Fig. 5g, Table 3: No. 18), a shallow bowl (Fig. 5d, Table 3: No. 19) from 5.8–9.1 mm, and the bowl on stand (Table 3: No. 24) with walls ranging from 7.1–8.3 mm. Uneven heights of walls can be seen in a bowl (Fig. 5n, Table 3: No. 20) with one end higher than the other. A number of vessels have thick bases (Fig. 5m, Table 3: No. 5; Fig. 5g, Table 3: No. 18) that suggest a lack of skill in vessel formation. Other vessel bases are unevenly formed (Fig. 6d, Table 3: No. 4; Fig. 5c, Table 3: No. 10; Fig. 5l, Table 3: No. 11; Fig. 6e, Table 3: No. 23) and in some cases are pointed and unstable (Fig. 5j, Table 3: No. 6; Fig. 6c, Table 3:

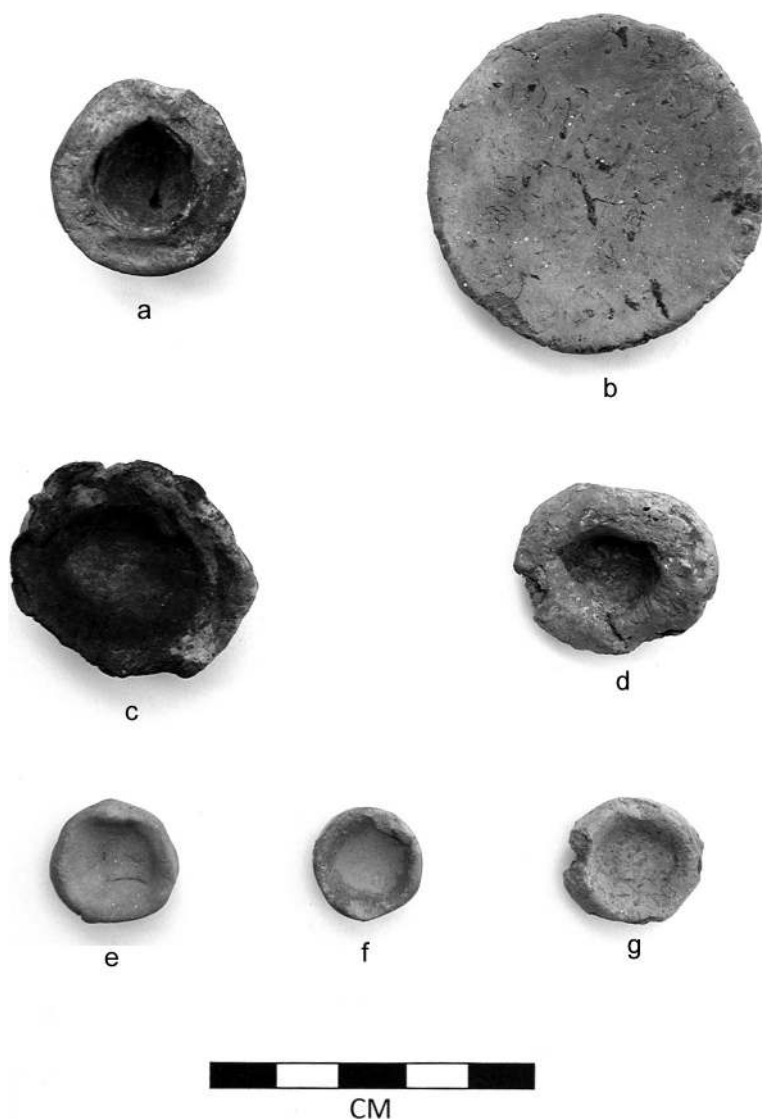


Fig. 6. Range of skills exhibited by children at Indor Khera while making miniature vessels.

No. 9; Fig. 5*k*, Table 3: No. 16). Inexpertly formed rims resulting in uneven and jagged shapes can be seen in several bowls (Fig. 5*m*, Table 3: No. 5; Fig. 5*o*, Table 3: No. 7; Fig. 6*c*, Table 3: No. 9; Fig. 5*c*, Table 3: No. 10; Fig. 5*l*, Table 3: No. 11).

Inadequate drying of miniature vessels has resulted in crack marks that can be observed in a bowl (Fig. 5*c*, Table 3: No. 10) and both the dishes (Fig. 5*b*, Table 3: No. 17; Fig. 6*b*, Table 3: No. 21). As far as firing is concerned, there is an even distribution of vessels fired in oxidized and reduced atmospheres. It is unlikely that children would be firing their own products, but they would have assisted

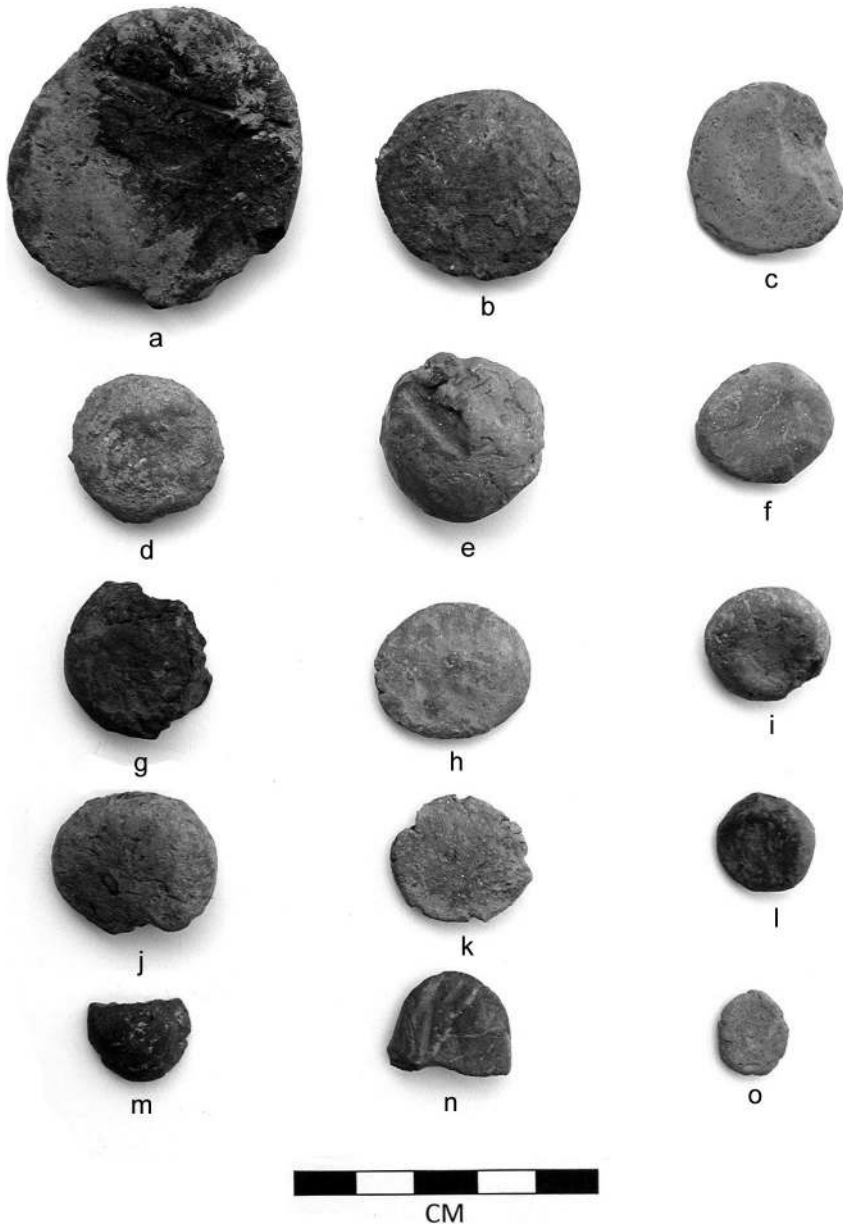


Fig. 7. Terracotta lumps suggesting children at play in Indor Khera.

adults in the process. It appears that not much care had been taken in firing these miniature vessels. Two miniature vessels show black patches on a red background. On the whole, the reduced examples are also friable suggesting inadequate clay preparation and drying, as well as careless firing. A few objects are left unfired such as the perforated object (Table 3: No. 15) made of unbaked clay, with a rough surface and several tiny holes.

As mentioned earlier, 19 lumps were found that have been suggested to represent initial stages of making vessels and objects. Many of these are circular rounded lumps, having a slight depression in the center, or flat on one surface and unevenly convex on the other. Five such lumps came from House 1. A gray flat unbaked rounded lump of clay (Table 3: No. 42) from House 1 suggests a tiny bit of clay shaped by a child. Thus, given the context of a potter's house, it is possible that children may have been given small bits of clay to play with. These children may also have been watching adults at work as well as assisting them. The learning process would have combined observing, assisting, experimenting, and playing with clay.

Clearly, there are variations in the levels of skill exhibited by these miniature objects. While largely these are roughly made, a few, like the bowl (Fig. 6f, Table 3: No. 2), dishes (Fig. 5b, Table 3: No. 17; Fig. 6b, Table 3: No. 21) and the small square box (Fig. 5e, Table 3: No. 25) are relatively better made. These variations suggest a progressive development of skill among child crafters and may reflect age differences. While children as young as two to five years of age could have started playing with clay, the rough shaping of simple vessel forms, such as the small bowls found at Indor Khera, may have been done by children between five and eight years old. It is also significant that the majority of the discernible vessel forms made by children at this ancient site are bowls. This is probably the easiest shape to make using the pinching method and has been ethnographically documented in the subcontinent. The initial stage of working with ceramics for a boy or a girl is the making of an earthen lamp (in form resembling a small bowl). Only after this stage are children initiated into clay preparation. Further learning stages in ceramics appear to be demarcated according to gender, with boys given a small wheel to learn throwing as well as the beating of vessels and girls learning to paint (Saraswati 1979:33). Some of the other tasks associated with the ceramic craft, such as molding, slipping, and polishing, however, do not seem to be gender specific. Thus, it is probable that the miniature vessels and lumps recovered from Indor Khera reflect the work and play of both small boys and girls.

CONCLUSION

While children as active agents have been visualized in archaeological work outside the Indian subcontinent, such studies are singularly lacking in the case of South Asian archaeology. This is a preliminary study that has tried to locate children within learning frameworks showing them as active producers of material culture. The miniature vessels found in a potter's house indicate the particular spaces that were used by children in ancient Indor Khera. The specific attributes of these miniature vessels such as small size, asymmetrical shapes of largely the single form category of small bowls, with uneven rims, walls, and bases, with drying cracks and uneven firing suggest that these were the work of children, perhaps between five and eight years old. Further, tiny bits of clay could have been given to children, perhaps as young as two to five years of age, to play with as indicated by the find of numerous small lumps, some with depressions and others flattened. Although a few of the relatively better made vessels seem to indicate incremental skills, what are perhaps absent are the intermediate stages between the products of novices and skilled crafters. The latter is an aspect that still remains to be investigated.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ENDNOTES

1. Our intention is not to provide a comprehensive bibliography of the work done on the archaeology of children but to point out some of the main areas that have been explored. For fuller reviews, see Ardren 2006, Baxter 2005, Baxter 2008, and Kamp 2001a.
2. Ardren (2006: 7) has pointed out that children's experimental efforts can include the reuse of discarded objects. For example, the reuse of broken potsherds could be indicated through the category of "hopscoches," which are common to several archaeological reports.

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ABSTRACT

It is only in the recent decade that distinct archaeological studies on children have emerged. One of the ways in which children have been made archaeologically visible has been in the context of craft and learning frameworks where they have been perceived as active agents in the production of material culture. Archaeologically, the work of novice crafters can be discerned through attributes of small size, asymmetrical forms, and other deficiencies in manufacturing techniques suggesting inadequate conceptual frames as well as less developed physical skills. The deposits recovered during the excavations in the northwestern part of the ancient site of Indor Khera have been dated between 200 B.C. and A.D. 300. The excavations have revealed in an early phase a potter's house within and around which several miniature vessels with similar characteristics were found, perhaps the work of children. Further, numerous tiny terracotta and clay lumps indicate that to begin children might have been given small bits of clay to play with. It appears that the ceramic craft may have involved a gradual learning process that included play, observation, and experimentation. **KEYWORDS:** children, ceramic production, learning, playing, miniature vessels, Indor Khera, Upper Ganga Plains, India.