

## **Excavations at Kanjetar and Kaj on the Saurashtra Coast, Gujarat**

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### **Abstract**

Onshore excavations were undertaken at Kanjetar and Kaj around Kodinar in Gujarat. Kanjetar is located about 12 km southwest of Kodinar on the coastal region. This is a single culture site of the Harappan phase. Entire area has been agricultural land and presently the maximum habitation deposit is about 60 cm from the surface. The pottery is typical of Saurashtra Harappan type. Kaj is located about 10 km east of Kodinar on the bank of Modhwada Creek. The site is situated about 2 km east from the village Kaj and presently it is called at *Juna* Kaj. This site has a three-fold cultural sequence where the oldest habitation belongs to the Harappans, followed by the historical settlement and later medieval period. The location of the site indicates that the creek might have facilitated as a sheltered harbour. Interestingly, Roman amphorae were collected during onshore explorations from the site of Kaj. This article discusses the findings of the onshore excavations were undertaken at these two sites.

**Keywords:** Saurashtra coast, Harappan, Historical, Pottery, Harbour

## **Introduction**

Harappan archaeology dominated Indian archaeology over a half a century since the excavation of Lothal (Rao 1979) in the early sixties and intensive explorations on the part of the Indian side yielded a number of sites affiliated with Harappan civilization. A few major excavations of Harappan sites, such as Rangpur (Rao 1962-63), Rojdi (Possehl and Raval 1989), Nageshwar (Hegde *et al.* 1990), Surkotada (Joshi 1990), Kuntasi (Dhavalikar *et al.* 1996), Dholavira (Bisht 1997), Padri (Shinde 1992), and Bagsra (Sonawane *et al.* 2003) in Kachchh and Saurashtra region enhanced our understanding of establishment of Harappan settlements, their town planning, utilization of various resources and specialized craft. The present paper deals with archaeological investigation around Kodinar region of Junagadh district (Fig. 1).

## **Previous work**

The site has been referred as a coastal Harappan site in the literature related to Harappan archaeology and only a small report was published earlier (Rao 1962-63) on the excavation of Kanjetar. This report discussed Harappan ceramics and their shapes, but does not say anything about the structural activities. Ratnagar (2004) suggested it to be a halting station of the Harappan mariners on the Mid-Saurashtra Coast.

An onshore exploration in Kanjetar during 2008-09 revealed presence of two mounds; one is situated about a 500 m east of the village. It comprises habitation of the historical period where a rock-cut well was noticed (Gaur *et al.* 2009). The second mound is situated about 2 km west of the village of Kanjetar and about 1 km east of the port village of Dhamlej. This is primarily a protohistoric mound and entire area at present is under cultivation.

Other site at Kaj has been mentioned as a late Harappan site in the list of Harappan sites of Gujarat (IAR 1957-58:19) but no further work was undertaken in this area. Onshore exploration (2008-09) at Kaj yielded a large number of protohistoric pottery fragments besides a large amphora and a stone anchor (Gaur *et al.* 2009).

## **Kanjetar**

The site of Kanjetar is situated about 12 km southwest of Kodinar. From site the coast is less than one kilometre distance. A dry creek is noticeable on the eastern side of the village Kanjetar where another

historical period site was noticed. The entire site has been converted into an agriculture land and, thus most of the remains of habitation have been destroyed.

A trench measuring 2.5 x 5 m was laid on the southern most point of the site (which is under cultivation) to understand if anything related to maritime activity can be traced. The archaeological deposit could be found till 50 cm depth and then hard *kankar* layer (natural deposit) appeared. Two habitation layers were observed during the excavation - Layer 1 of loose soil (light brown in colour) with occasional gravel mix, and Layer 2 is of compact soil (dark brown colour) with more gravel mix. The major findings include various types of Harappan pottery. Due to limited excavation area no regular structural remains could be traced and a large number of scattered stones were found during the excavation. However, while discussion with the local farmers it was noticed that a lot of stone structures were destroyed while converting the site into agriculture land and were placed as boundary of the field.

The most interesting finds from the trench was skeletal remains of a child lying just over the natural bed. These were the skull, bones of each leg and a hand. There was no indication of any graveyard or cemetery. There are many animal skeletal remains including a columella of *Turbinella pyrum*.

#### *Stone tools*

During the surface explorations two stone tools each one of jasper and chert, and an unfinished tool of quartz (2.3 x 2.1 cm) were found. The flake tool (3 x 2.1 cm) made of red jasper has sharp edges (Fig. 2). The other tool was almost triangular scraper (3.4 x 2.8 cm) made of banded agate that has blunt edges and a positive bulb of percussion.

#### *Pottery*

The ceramics include sturdy Red ware similar to the mature Harappan pottery (Rao 1985), and varieties of bowls of fine ware similar to that of the Sorath Harappan type (Possehl and Raval 1989: 57). The important shapes include jars, bowls, dish-on-stand and a goblet. Besides above a few painted sherds were recovered - painted with black, dark brown or chocolate colour over red, orange, dull red or white surface (Fig. 3). The brief description of some of the pottery is given below.

### *Faunal Remains*

A total of 44 fragments of animal skeletal material were recovered from the excavation of which 30 were identifiable. The fragments moderately broken and few showed minor soil encrustations. Fresh breakages, probably from recovery process or transportation were noticed in a few cases. Such freshly broken fragments of a single bone were considered and numbered together as a single piece.

Table 1 Animal taxa identified at Kaj and Kanjetar

Species	Kanjetar	Kaj
<i>Bos indicus</i>	11	18
<i>Bos/Bubalus</i>	14	38
<i>Bubalus bubalis</i>	1	6
<i>Boselaphus tragocamelus</i>	0	1
<i>Capra hircus/Ovis aries</i>	1	6
<i>Antilope cervicapra</i>	0	4
<i>Canis familiaris</i>	0	1
<i>Canis sp.</i>	0	1
<i>Felis catus</i>	0	6
<i>Equus sp.</i>	0	1
<i>Gallus domesticus</i>	1	0
<i>Scylla serrata</i>	0	1
Total	28	83

All animals identified from KJR-2010 belong to domestic variety, which include cattle, buffalo and sheep/goat and a bird (chicken) (Table 1). Not a single wild animal was identified. Interestingly two human bones (portion of right and left radius bones of a single adult) were recovered that were broken into six pieces. These fragments perhaps have got transported within the settlement due to action of post-depositional factors. The faunal assemblage has a bone tool (point) made by splitting bone shaft of long bone of cattle.

### **Kaj**

The village of Kaj is situated about 10 km east of Kodinar town on the Dwarka- Bhavnagar highway. The ancient mound, locally called as *Juna Kaj*, is situated further 2-3 km east of the present village. On the eastern side there is a large freshwater body that serves as bird sanctuary where Siberian birds visit annually. The site (approximately 4 ha) is located very close to the creek and has been converted into agriculture land. Only an area of 100 x 100 m is remained undisturbed. However, proximity to sea

suggests that the site was located on the western bank of the creek and during high tide the sea water would be reaching up to Kaj and further on the northern side.

A trench measuring 2.5 x 5 m was laid in the undisturbed portion on the eastern corner of the site. Archaeological remains were traced up to 1.5 m depth and four different layers were identified (Fig. 4). Upper 1 m deposit belongs to Medieval period and remaining 50 cm was associated with protohistoric period. Though a few historical period artefacts were collected from the surface, no trace of such artefacts was found during the excavation. Perhaps early historic period site is located on the northwestern part of the present excavated site. A large quantity of Medieval period pottery, primarily Black ware was collected during the excavation including a couple of Medieval glazed ware sherds. The important shapes are jars, cooking vessels and lids. Though many Medieval copper coins (Fig. 5) were collected by local residents from the site, none was recovered from the stratified contexts.

The archaeological deposit of the protohistoric period is limited to 50 cm in this trench. The pottery comprised of typical Harappan types. Important shapes include bowls, carinated dishes and dishes-on-stand (Fig. 6). Many potsherds were painted with various colours such as black over red, white over red and purple over red. The pattern of paintings includes wavy lines, dotted circles and crossed lines.

Interestingly, in one of the agriculture field a handle of amphora was collected and later a large part of the amphora which was being used as water storage for hand washing in the field was observed. The discovery such artefacts suggests that Kaj was a Harappan port town and later related to Indo-Roman trade on the Saurashtra coast.

#### *Faunal Remains*

The faunal material from KAJ-2010 include both domestic and wild animals (Table 1). Except one crab (*Scylla serrata*) all other skeletal elements belong to mammals. The domestic mammals consist of cattle, buffalo, sheep/goat, dog and cat. The wild mammals identified were the nilgai and blackbuck. Interestingly one bone could be identified to that of Genus *Equus*; but the species could not be securely identified. Six fragments of the domestic cat were recovered that belong to a single animal. There were no cut marks on all these fragments but all were broken earlier, perhaps after their deposition. Presence of cattle of old age is evident from the worn out pattern of the teeth. The faunal assemblage like that of Kanjetar has a bone tool (serrated point) made using cattle long bone shaft.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

The Saurashtra coast has a number of small-sized Harappan sites that might have played important role in developing Urban Centres such as Lothal and Rojdi in the Saurashtra region. The area is rich with fertile agriculture land along this coastal belt besides punctuated creeks those facilitated sheltered harbour for maritime activities. But Kanjetar is a very small Harappan site. Except pottery, none of the Harappan elements were found such as seals, weights, terracotta cakes, beads, etc. which indicates that Kanjetar was not an urban centre, and may be categorized as a village settlement. The role of the site in overseas trade is not securely identifiable. The pottery of Kanjetar closely resembles with the Prabhas ware. The type site Prabhas is situated about 40 km west of Kodinar, a Chalcolithic site contemporary to the Harappan sites (Sankalia 1974: 381). The frequency of painted sherds is more than that found at Bet Dwarka (Gaur *et al.* 2005) and Bokhira (Gaur *et al.* 2006). Similarly, Kaj which was initially habited during the Harappan times and later during the historical and medieval periods has very interesting location. As mentioned earlier the location of site favours it as safe harbour and archaeological evidence indicate that site might have served as a trading post on the mid-Saurashtra coast during the historical and medieval periods as evidenced from the discovery of amphorae and stone anchors from the site. The pottery of protohistoric period is very similar to that reported from Kanjetar. On the basis of comparative ceramic study the time bracket for the protohistoric settlement at Kanjetar and Kaj may be between late 3<sup>rd</sup> and the early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C.

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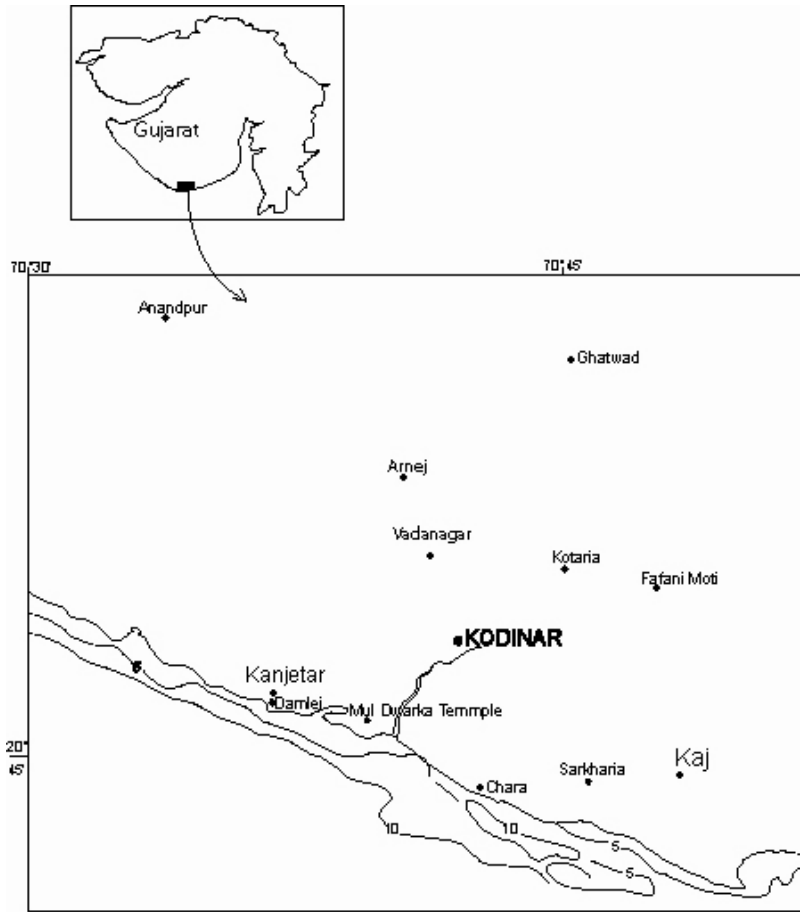


Figure 1 Location map of Kaj and Kanjetar

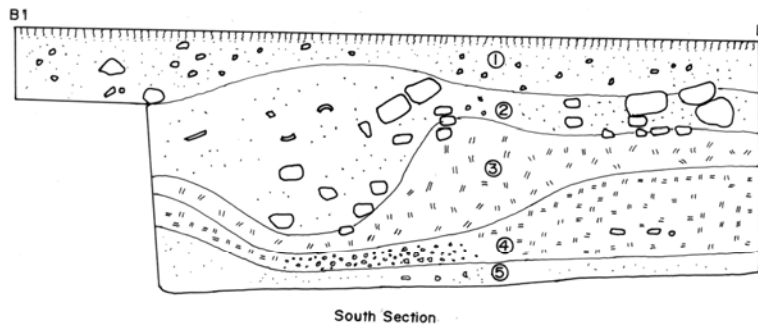


Figure 2. Jasper tool from Kanjetar





Figure 3. Protohistoric Pottery from Kanjetar



South Section

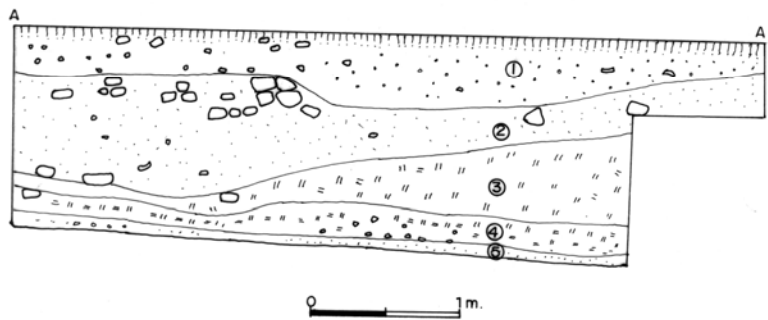


Figure 4. Section of Kaj archaeological site



Figure 5. Medieval period coins from Kaj



Figure 6. Protohistoric pottery from Kaj