

INTRODUCTION

In this study I shall present a description of the vast and still mostly undocumented archaeological and art historical remains at Oṃkāreśvar-Māndhātā (subsequently: OM).¹⁶ Besides generally adding to the scanty knowledge of the ‘early medieval’ period in India,¹⁷ it specifically focuses on one of the rare extant historic cities in the Narmadā valley which simultaneously represents the only known full-fledged (and still largely preserved and excavatable) fortified city of the Paramāras of Dhāra. The study summarizes and illustrates the results of several surveys undertaken to trace, document and map as many historic artefacts as possible in order to draw a rather comprehensive, yet preliminary picture of the Paramāra city at Māndhātā.¹⁸

The idea for this survey arose from a map of OM which I prepared on the basis of satellite imagery obtained from Google Earth.¹⁹ The latter’s history function enabled me to stitch together a detailed map of the island and its surroundings from about 80 satellite images taken on March, 17, 2001. This map depicts OM on a scale of approximately 1:3000 a) prior to the construction of the Oṃkāreśvar dam, b) prior to the numerous encroachments and building activities that occurred during the last decade, and c) almost at the peak of the dry season. These particularities and the map’s comparatively high resolution, which is unfortunately impossible to reproduce here (its print size is 55x94 cm), facilitated to trace not only the course of the remaining fort walls, but showed also many interesting details, lines, spots and structures, that elicited my curiosity resulting in the idea to conduct a systematic survey of the remains at OM. In the field I was able to trace almost all of these objects, which turned out to be various structural remains, most of which indeed seem to go back to Paramāra

16 A very brief description of sculptures found along the pilgrim’s path on the island has more recently been published by Tamara SEARS (2014b).

17 See HAWKES 2015: 95–96.

18 It is very likely that archaeological excavations at the site would yield evidence of pre-Paramāra occupation.

19 The utility of data from Google Earth for archaeological research in India has been demonstrated with regard to the early historic site of Śiśupālgaṛh in Orissa by Tilok THAKURIA & *al.* (2013).

times. Viewed together and set in context all these remains render a relatively clear picture of the structure of the fortified city, Māndhātṛdurga,²⁰ which existed at Māndhātā about a millennium ago. Moreover, the multitude of artefacts are of considerable importance especially with regard to the development of Paramāra art and architecture.

The scope of the present catalogue is necessarily limited by the fact that it is confined to surface finds. But it is not merely the lack of substantial archaeological investigations which allows only for a 'preliminary catalogue', but also the vastness and variety of remains, which give opportunity for a number of specific studies, especially with regard to Paramāra art – architecture and sculpture alike – of which OM bears vast treasures. For an assessment of the state of research concerning the antiquarian remains at OM see the respective section in my earlier paper.²¹ Many of the remains presented here are still unpublished or even undocumented, and those that have been described before have never been put in the larger context in which they actually stand.²²

20 This name occurs in the Māndhātā copper-plates of Jayasimha-Jayavarman II, dated *Vikrama samvat* (VS) 1331 *i.e.* 1274 CE (eds. SIRCAR 1962, TRIVEDI 1978: 209–227 and MITTAL 1979: 291–314). In a manuscript of the *Rgvidhāna* dated 1707 CE the name 'Māndhātāpura' is found (AUFRECHT 1864: 382(a), No 449), and in an undated *stotra* on the twelve *vyotirlingas*, the place is called 'Māndhātātripura' (WEBER 1853: 347, No. 1242).

21 NEUSS 2013: 118–121.

22 Comparatively few artefacts or monuments from OM have been published in a couple of more general architectural or iconographical studies (see NEUSS 2013: 120, fn. 17). For a list of known historic photographs of OM and its remains, see Appendix 1, Tables 3–7, p. 112ff. The largest number (76) of photographs from OM are held by the American Institute of Indian Studies, Gurgaon (AIIS), see Appendix 2, p. 117ff. The collection is accessible at the 'Digital South Asia Library', <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/images/aiis> (search term 'Mandhata').

In the course of a survey of the Paramāra temples of Mālvā in the season 1985–86, a team of the ASI Bhopal headed by B.L. Nagarch also visited OM. But during this survey only temples already known were visited and no new discoveries reported (*IA-R* 1985–86: 134–135).

More recently, the DAAM, Bhopal, has published *Known and Unknown*, a three-volume work which professes in its subtitle to represent an *Encyclopaedia of Historical Monuments of Madhya Pradesh*. Volume II (RAG 2012) also covers the present Khaṇḍvā district and contains information on some monuments at OM. Far from being comprehensive even the sparse information given on the few monuments dealt with is almost worthless. The texts contain, I am compelled to state, much irrelevant nonsense, grave mistakes and misrepresentations and at times do not even correspond with the attending illustrations. Nevertheless, as some of the monuments that I describe below are mentioned here for the first time, I shall give respective references to this volume at the appropriate places.

Physical features of OM and distribution of monuments

Let us begin with a bird's eyes view of the island and its surroundings. Map 1.1 served as the guide for my survey and forms the basis of almost all the maps found in this work. As already stated, it shows OM on March 17, 2001, in the dry season.²³ At that time, about two thirds of the total settlement area was located on the south bank of the river Narmadā in the village known as Godarpurā (Plate 1.1), a name which is nowadays very rarely used. The village is regarded to fall into two parts that are divided by a ravine through which a small stream, the Kapilā, flows. This rivulet forms a famous confluence or *saṅgam* with the Narmadā where even the Paramāra king Arjunavarman took a holy bath in 1215 CE.²⁴ The part to the east of this ravine is called Brahmāpurī, and that to the west Viṣṇupurī. The remaining one third of the settlement was situated on the rivers' north bank along the south-western slope of Māndhātā hill, *i.e.* one of three hills which the island comprises, and is now called Śivpurī (Plate 1.2, Map 1.2).²⁵ Another small settlement is found at the so-called *saṅgam* at the extreme western end of Māndhātā island, where the two branches of the Narmadā river join.

The physical features of OM were summarized by James FORSYTH some time in the 1860s thus:²⁶

The island covers an area of about five-sixths of a square mile. Towards the northern branch of the river the slope is not very abrupt in most places, but its southern and eastern faces terminate in bluff precipices 400 or 500 feet in height. It is cleft in two by a deep ravine running nearly north and south, the eastern end containing about one-third of the whole area. The southern bank of the Narbadā opposite Māndhātā (called Godarpurā is as precipitous as Māndhātā, and between them the river forms an exceedingly deep and silent pool, full of alligators and large

23 In the field I used b/w paper copies comprising ten A4-Sheets (2x5), resulting in a total map size of 55x94 cm.

24 See NEUSS 2013: 131.

25 The settlement pattern has changed considerably in recent years and many areas on the island (mainly those adjacent to the circumambulatory path, the *parikramāpatha*), which appear rather deserted in this map are now populated. Moreover, large patches of land on the island have apparently illegally been encroached upon by pseudo-religious organizations which have constructed rather extensive conglomerates of temples, monasteries and auxiliary buildings, gardens etc., all neatly fenced in. Most of these have in 2014 again been demolished by the Government for illegal construction. As to be expected, the debris has unfortunately not been removed, but just been left in place (*cf.* Plate 44.2).

26 Though published in 1870, FORSYTH's account was probably written on a long tour in the Central Provinces during 1862–64.

fish, many of which are so tame as to take grain off the lower steps of the sacred gháts. The rocks on both sides of the river are of a greenish hue, very boldly stratified, and said to be hornstone slate. (FORSYTH 1870b: 257–258).

In view of a structured illustration of the location and distribution of historic remains, I shall follow the traditional division of OM into five major areas which corresponds with the physical characteristics of the island and its surroundings. I shall also retain the traditional designations for these areas, as shown in Map 1.3.²⁷ Given the amount and extent of the remains and the immediate task at hand of cataloguing them, this approach appears to me as the most practicable one. At the same time, however, it should be borne in mind that certain monuments in different areas may genetically be linked, by chronology, dynasty, style and workmanship, ritual or otherwise. In the prevailing absence of detailed comparative studies which lie beyond the scope of this work, this is perhaps most obvious in the case of the extensive remains of fort walls, which are found both on Māndhātā and Mucukund hills as well as at Godarpurā and to the west of it (Map 1.4).

²⁷ A remark on these names seems appropriate here. Two of them have now become obsolete; while the name ‘Mucukund’, attested to by FORSYTH (1870b: 261) is now forgotten, although the ruins of a small tribal fort on a hill situated on the north bank of the Kāveri (which is in reality the older northern channel of the Narmadā, see *ibid.*: 258–259) is locally called *mucukund kā qilā* (Mucukund’s fort), the name ‘Godarpurā’ is still known, but not in use any more. The designation ‘Panthiā’ refers to a vanished village on the north bank of the Kāveri, whose original site is now occupied by the power house of the Oṃkāreśvar dam.