

## SYNOPSIS

The proposed research entitled, **Overseas Cultural Contact: West Asia to the Indian Sub-continent with Special Emphasis on Western India (3rd-10th c. A.D.)** attempts to understand the contact with West Asia and its cultural impact on Western India. By and large, the complex cultural process of ‘Trade’ is usually perceived as the exchange of goods and commodities, which is very superficial; but, in reality, it is understood that there is much more in it than what is suggested by the tangible evidence. Trade facilitates an exchange of not only material objects but of vital cultural attributes, ideas, and innovations. The first attempts to understand the international trade dynamics related to the early historic period of India through archaeological excavations was made by Wheeler at Arikamedu (Wheeler *et al.* 1946) followed by many others (IAR 1979-80: 24). This resulted in to the extensive investigations on Indo-Roman trade, whereby, a great majority of the trade between places within the sub-continent and the Roman world which comes within the route of Rome and India was undermined. India formed a part of the greater network of Indian Ocean trade network which stretched all the way from South-East Asia to Europe. Post this phase of Roman contact, there is a partial decrease in the Roman trade (Warmington 1928) but there are also signs of continuation (Tomber 2005, Tomber 2007: 978 Table 1, Tomber 2009). The identification of previously reported Roman Amphorae from various archaeological sites of Western India typologically as Torpedo Jars (Tomber 2007) of West Asia; and also through diaspora directed excavations such as Sanjan (Gupta *et al.* 2004, Nanji 2011) one realises that the West Asian trade in India has possibly contributed immensely in its various cultural spheres. Thus, the then region of Western India (especially present day Gujarat and Maharashtra) and its contact with West Asia needs to be studied in greater detail to fully ascertain the social, economic, and political implications through reviewing study of material remains, and historical-textual accounts.

The research presented henceforth attempts to understand the nature and spatial-temporal contact of West Asia with that of Western India between the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. A.D. and 10<sup>th</sup> c. A.D. The timeline of the research period of the thesis has been delimited between the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. A.D. and 10<sup>th</sup> c. A.D., within which there is a change from the Sasanian period to the Early Islamic period in terms of West Asian polity.

The primary objective of the thesis is to understand the nature of the contact and the time-frame in which the cultural contact of West Asia to India took place with the help of archaeological and historical sources specifically related to Western India, such as archaeological materials (viz. ceramics), as well as art historic, epigraphic, numismatics, and textual evidence. Further, an attempt is made to understand the socio-cultural impact due to the exchange in Western India. This has helped in further understanding the influence that the two areas (West Asia and Western India) had over each other, through various interactions in the spheres of polity, society, economy, and religion.

Since pottery is often the most prevalent material evidence indicative of cultural interaction between West Asia to Western India between 3<sup>rd</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. (Gupta *et al.* 2004, Tomber 2007, Nanji 2011 Rawat 2011, Balvally 2013), a greater emphasis has been given to further understand, classify, analyse and record the West Asian ceramics and contextualise them with local areas. Previous studies have been successful in understanding the provenance of West Asian ceramics in West Asia (Mason and Keall 1991, Hallett 2000). Further scientific studies such as ceramic thin-section analysis is taken to further understand the petro-fabric and explored the possibilities of comparing with the results from previous works (Mason and Keall 1991, Tomber 2007, Krishnan 2011) with that of the researcher's investigations. This in turn has been most helpful in constructing the exchange mechanism and trade from West Asia to Western India and also to temporally date the contact.

To achieve the research goals a set of objectives and different methods of study have been adopted and in short the objective of research/problem of research may be summarised as follows:

#### Objectives

- Firstly Literature review was undertaken. These include primary sources (inscriptions, traveller's accounts) and secondary sources (art historic, reports, articles, and other publications) that are related to the research area. This was assessed in respect to the West Asian exchange and trade.

- Comprehending the political history of the regions and the vicissitudes that were significant in understanding the effects on the cultural exchange and exchange mechanisms
- Recording and Classifying the Glazed and Non-Glazed wares of West Asian origin found in Western India (from excavated and explored sites) using both traditional and petrographic methods
- Thin-section petrography was used to study the non-plastic inclusions of the Glazed and Non-Glazed wares to determine the mineralogy and texture of the non-plastic inclusions in the ceramic and to understand the manufacturing methods/techniques

## **Outline of the Chapters**

### **Chapter 1- Introduction**

The said chapter introduces the topic of West Asian trade and contact with the Indian sub-continent with special reference to western India and also the scope of the current work. Previous studies is utilised to comprehend and review the available data of the various scholars who dealt with the topic of trade and contact. The chapter also delineates the geographical features as well as resources of the region of Western India, and the role it played in coastal-inland interactions facilitated by an exchange of goods. This helped in situating the West Asian contact with Western India within the Indian Ocean Trade system.

### **Chapter 2 - Political History**

This chapter is devoted to familiarise the political history of Western India and that of West Asia between the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> c. A.D. This includes eulogies of the different political kingdoms as well as the data based on traveller accounts, epigraphy, and other written accounts which help in reconstructing the social exchanges within a set political time-frame.

### **Chapter 3 - Sites, Methods and Materials, Sampling**

The following chapter showcases a selection of sites within the temporal time-frame delimited for the thesis, the reasons behind the selection of these sites is explained and justified. Different methods are utilised for understanding the contact with West Asia which primarily includes carrying out surface surveys (site specific and region specific) and also studying and recording the ceramics and other West Asian materials, from different excavations so as to see the spatial-temporal distribution of the impact of the contact with West Asia. Following this, a sampling strategy was then adopted for the selection of samples from within the sample universe of the available West Asian finds. The methods would also include thin-section analysis, for further characterising the wares, and also to understand the provenance of these West Asian wares.

#### **Chapter 4 - Results**

The chapter hereby outlines the results of the strategies employed in the earlier chapters, and have been divided into three parts; Finds from Excavations, Finds from Explorations, and Thin-Section Studies. The finds from excavations part deals with different finds from the excavated sites. The Exploration results are further sub-divided into three different explorations which were undertaken namely at; Vallabhipur, Gulf of Kachchh (Jamnagar), and Lata-Maharashtra. The third part of the chapter deals with results of the thin-section studies of the representative West Asian ceramics found from both excavations and explorations.

#### **Chapter 5 – Discussions**

The chapter here manifests the results of the analysis undertaken aided by the cognisance of the earlier chapters to discuss the meaning and nature of the contact of West Asia with Western India.

#### **Chapter 6 - Conclusions**

The final chapter concludes the work undertaken in the thesis, to conclude over a theoretical framework to display the vicissitudes of the contact of West Asia with that

of Western India. The chapter also discusses the lacunae of the researcher's study and with that understanding its scope for future prospects.

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## STATEMENT – I

**(Statement showing the particulars, on which the work is based, the discovery of new facts and of new relationships between facts observed by others and how the work tends to help the general advancement of knowledge.)**

Indian Ocean trade and its cross cultural contact has been a major theme in archaeological studies since Wheeler's excavations at Arikamedu, in Tamil Nadu (Wheeler *et al.* 1946). These 'Roman' connects within western India were also established by later excavations on sites such as Nagara (Mehta & Shah 1968), Vallabhipur (IAR 1979-80: 24) which offered sites with what were then identified as Roman Amphora. But recent studies have reviewed these identifications (Tomber 2007, Balvally 2013) as being West Asian in nature. The major excavation responsible for the understanding of the corpus of West Asian material is from the site of Sanjan (Gupta *et al.* 2004) in south Gujarat, a site famous for being a site showcasing diaspora of a group of Persians who were later called Parsis. A novel attempt was made to organise the data from the often neglected phase of Indian archaeology i.e. Early Medieval, especially the ceramics (Nanji 2011). With the added new information and also an increased corpus of material from the excavations taking place in western India in the last two decades (Rawat 2011, Kharakwal *et al.* 2008, Gogte 2003, Shinde *et al.* 2007) it became imperative to synthesise and in some cases review and identify new data from fresh sites at a macro level. Apart from these aspects, the archaeological understandings literature was majorly 'site-specific' often lacking an over-all view of the periods in question. The region of Western India itself has been divided into two major divisions; Lata-Maharashtra and Gujarat as dependent on the political history of the period between 3<sup>rd</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> c. A.D. With these questions, an in exhaustive analysis of West Asian material was undertaken from select sites; Nani Rayan (Prathapchandran S. Personal Communication), Kanmer (Kharakwal *et al.* 2008, Vadnagar (Rawat 2011), Chaul (Gogte 2003), Nagardhan (Sontakke *et al.* 2016), Nagara (Mehta & Shah 1968), Vallabhipur (IAR 1979-80: 24), Siyot (Y. S. Rawat Personal Communication) along with separate exploration surveys from different regions within Western India.



**Following are the major findings of the work:**

1. Surface surveys were undertaken at ancient capital cities such as Vallabhipur which was explored and Torpedo Jars were found from the surface surveys from which a copper plate grant was also found (which is now being translated).
2. Hinterland surveys were taken up initially near the Gulf of Kachchh (Jamnagar) and later in Lata-Maharashtra region yielded previously un-reported Torpedo Jars (West Asian transport vessels) from 6 sites amongst the total explored and also other Early Islamic ceramics (8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> c. A.D.) from port sites such as Chaul and Sanjan.
3. The whole excavated assemblage from the excavated sites mentioned before were studied and all the different 'imported' ceramics from the early historic to the late medieval were identified, recorded and sampled, with special reference to the ceramics found between 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> c. A.D. belonging to West Asia. These include previously un-reported and un-identified ceramics which formed a part of the Indian Ocean Trade both in the Glazed and the Un-Glazed (type of Eggshell Ware) varieties belonging to Early Islamic as well as Late Medieval time frame.
4. A different ware type, namely; Sasanian Glazed Ware was defined and identified amongst the finds from excavated sites of Vadnagar and Kanmer during a revisit of the material remains (Balvally *et al.* 2018).
5. Sasanian and Early Islamic Ceramics from the Susiana region in Iran were studied from the collections of the Pottery Research Department (Iranian Centre for Archaeological Research, Tehran) as well as from the surveys of Robert McCormick Adams. This would offer a comparison and formed a reference material to compare with finds from South Asia.
6. Thin-section studies were undertaken to characterise petro-fabric of the wares sampled and to provenance some of the wares with the known thin-section groups. Using this method, the imported wares and its associated ceramics were grouped into petro-fabric groups followed by an explanation on group identities.

7. The study of the ceramics gave a spatial-temporal understanding of the direct and indirect contact with West Asia building on which a hypothesis over the contact was put forth in the discussions. The study of these finds was coupled with the reading of political history, architecture, art history, and historical sources to understand the impact of the contact with West Asia.

## **STATEMENT – II**

**(Statement indicating the sources of information and the extent to which the thesis is based on the works of others and the portion of the thesis claimed as original.)**

The study is primarily based on the West Asian ceramic finds from the region of Western India recorded and analysed from both excavated sites and also explorations between the periods of 2015-2019. The researcher here aims to elucidate the features of the contact of West Asia with that of Western India through a temporal-spatial understanding. Some scholars have published towards understanding the Early Historic-Early Medieval period dealing with different systems including Indian Ocean Trade (Dhavalikar 1999, Ray 1994, Ray 2008, Tomber 2008). Previous research has already identified sites from which West Asian material was reported (Gupta *et al.* 2004, Tomber 2008, Nanji 2011, Rawat 2011). The ceramic typologies by Kennet (2004), and Priestman (2013) have been instrumental in defining a corpus of material specifically related to Sasanian and Early Islamic ceramics within the Persian Gulf.

The portion of the thesis claimed as original includes the three explorations taken up at Vallabhipur, Gulf of Kachchh (Jamnagar), and Lata-Maharashtra regions from where new finds were made. This coupled with identifications and typo-technological study of the Sasanian and Early Islamic finds from the excavated sites was undertaken which led to greater understanding of the spatial-temporal context of these finds. Further, the thin-section analysis of the ceramics leading to provenance studies to understand the exchange mechanism is also claimed as an original part of the thesis.

**The following is the list of references which formed the basis for the formulation of concepts used in the thesis.**

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