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Copper Hoards: Types, Distribution and Archaeological Significance with Special Reference to Bahadrabad and Nasirpur, Haridwar, Uttarakhand

Dr. Amit Kumar

Assistant Professor (History) Guru Jambhashwer University of Science & Technology, Hissar,Haryana.

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ABSTRACT

Copper Hoards represent one of the most distinctive archaeological phenomena of the Protohistoric period of the Indian subcontinent. They comprise a wide variety of copper weapons, agricultural implements, household objects and enigmatic anthropomorphic objects. More than a thousand copper objects have been reported from different parts of India, with significant concentrations in the Ganga-Yamuna Doab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and other regions. The present study examines the major types and geographical distribution of Copper Hoard artefacts, with particular reference to Bahadrabad and Nasirpur in Haridwar district of Uttarakhand. The study discusses weapons such as antennae swords, hooked swords, simple swords, spearheads and harpoons, as well as agricultural and industrial implements including flat axes, shouldered axes, bar celts and chisels. It also examines anthropomorphic objects and copper rings, whose functions remain partly controversial. Bahadrabad is particularly significant because of its location near the Solani River and its association with Ochre Coloured Pottery (OCP) and Copper Hoard material. Nasirpur is important for its recovery of Copper Hoard weapons and implements during canal excavation. The study further considers the wider relationship between Copper Hoards, OCP and Late

Harappan traditions, especially in the Upper Ganga-Yamuna and Ghaggar regions. The evidence suggests that Copper Hoards should not necessarily be regarded as a completely homogeneous archaeological culture; rather, their regional typological variations point towards a complex phenomenon involving technological development, cultural interaction and changing patterns of material use.

Introduction

The discovery of copper weapons and implements from different parts of the Indian subcontinent has attracted considerable archaeological attention. These objects can broadly be classified into three functional categories: weapons associated with warfare and hunting, agricultural and productive implements, and domestic or household objects. Weapons include arrowheads, antennae swords, hooked swords, spearheads, lance heads, parasu or hatchets, harpoons, double axes and hooked spears. Agricultural and productive implements include axes, flat axes, shouldered axes, lugged shouldered axes, celts, bar celts or bar axes, chisels, socketed axes and other tools. Household objects include knives, razors, rings, anthropomorphic objects and fish hooks.

More than a thousand copper objects have been discovered since the early discoveries at Bithur in the Kanpur region. Because these objects were frequently recovered in groups or hoards, they came to be known collectively as "Copper Hoards." One of the largest reported assemblages is the Gungeria hoard in Madhya Pradesh, which consisted of 424 copper objects and 102 thin sheets of silver. The principal objects included anthropomorphic forms, harpoons, antennae swords, rings and celts (Lal, 1971–1972).

Scientific observations cited in the source material indicate that the objects were generally manufactured from comparatively pure copper, although small quantities of alloying elements were also observed. Both open and closed moulds were employed in their manufacture. Copper Hoard objects have been interpreted as weapons, tools and possibly ritual objects. Celts and axes may have functioned as tools, harpoons and antennae swords as weapons, bar celts may have been associated with mining, and anthropomorphic objects may have had ritual significance (Lal, 1971–1972).

The present paper focuses particularly on the types and distribution of Copper Hoard artefacts, with special reference to Bahadrabad and Nasirpur in Haridwar district, Uttarakhand.

Objectives of the Study

The principal objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the major typological categories of Copper Hoard artefacts.
2. To analyse the geographical distribution of Copper Hoards.
3. To examine the probable functions of different Copper Hoard objects.
4. To assess the archaeological significance of Bahadrabad and Nasirpur.
5. To examine the relationship between Copper Hoards and Ochre Coloured Pottery.
6. To consider the possible relationship between Copper Hoards of the Upper Ganga-Yamuna region and Late Harappan traditions.

Research Methodology

The present study is based primarily on the archaeological material and references contained in the supplied source. A descriptive, typological and comparative approach has been adopted. Copper Hoard objects are examined according to their morphology, dimensions, geographical distribution and probable functions.

Special attention has been given to Bahadrabad and Nasirpur because both sites are located in the Haridwar region near the Solani River and are associated with Copper Hoard material. The study also compares evidence from Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and other regions in order to understand the broader distribution of Copper Hoard technology.

Bahadrabad

Bahadrabad is situated in Haridwar district of Uttarakhand near the Solani River, a tributary of the Ganga. The site was excavated by the Archaeological Survey of India in 1951–1952. Subsequently, Y. D. Sharma excavated the site in 1958–1959. The copper implements recovered from the site were not initially associated by Sharma with the OCP layer. The site also produced pottery forms regarded in the source material as having Harappan affinities, including a dish-on-stand with a short stem, a pedestal bowl and basins. Later, B. B. Lal associated the site with the OCP and Copper Hoard cultures on the basis of pottery similarities and the occurrence of Copper Hoard weapons and implements (Lal, 1971–1972).

Bahadrabad is consequently important for understanding the relationship between OCP and Copper Hoard material in the Upper Ganga region. Its geographical position near the Solani River also places it within an important riverine landscape connected with the Ganga system.

Nasirpur

Nasirpur is also situated in Haridwar district of Uttarakhand near the Solani River. Copper Hoard weapons and implements were recovered from the site during canal-digging activities.

The importance of Nasirpur is particularly evident from the variety of Copper Hoard artefacts associated with it. These include hooked swords, spearheads, harpoons, flat axes, shouldered axes and chisels. The occurrence of both weapons and implements indicates that the site forms an important part of the wider Copper Hoard distribution in the Haridwar region.

Geographical Distribution of Copper Hoards

Copper Hoard objects have been reported from a very extensive geographical area. The source material lists sites in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Bengal, Odisha, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The reported distribution extends from Shalozan in north-western Pakistan to Kallur in Karnataka, with Shavinipatt in Tamil Nadu representing a southern occurrence and Bhagrapir in Odisha an eastern occurrence (Lal, 1971–1972).

On the basis of artefact typology, the distribution can broadly be divided into three zones:

Zone A: Bengal, Bihar and Odisha

This zone is characterised by flat celts, shouldered celts, bar celts and double axes.

Zone B: Uttar Pradesh and Haryana

This zone is characterised particularly by anthropomorphic objects, antennae swords, hooked swords and harpoons. It also includes flat celts, shouldered celts and bar celts found in Zone A.

Zone C: Rajasthan

Rajasthan is characterised principally by flat celts and bar celts.

D. P. Agrawal suggested that copper objects from other regions, including the north-western parts of the subcontinent, may also be considered within the Copper Hoard cultural phenomenon (Agrawal, 1971).

Weapons of War and Hunting

A large number of Copper Hoard weapons have been reported from different regions of India. Most have been recovered from archaeological explorations and excavations, while some have occurred in association with OCP and a smaller number with Harappan sites.

1 Arrowheads

Explorations and excavations at Ganeshwar and its vicinity yielded a rich collection of copper weapons and implements, including approximately 400 arrowheads. Some arrowheads lack holes and tangs and bear a superficial resemblance to certain Harappan examples. The source material indicates that wooden shafts were attached to the arrowheads and associates their use with fishing and hunting. Stratified examples are reported from Bagor and Ganeshwar in Rajasthan and Navdatoli in central India.

The occurrence of large numbers of arrowheads indicates that copper technology was employed in practical hunting and fishing activities in addition to other uses.

2 Antennae Swords

Antennae swords are among the most distinctive Copper Hoard weapons. They are named after the antenna-like bifurcation at the hilt end. They are predominantly reported from the Ganga-Yamuna Doab, with additional examples from Modhera in Gujarat and Kallur in Karnataka.

D. P. Agrawal suggested that antennae swords may have been used for killing or wounding large game. According to the source material, they were cast with the antennae as an integral part and possessed long blades, short hilts and sharp median ridges. Their lengths range approximately from 42 to 75 cm (Agrawal, 1971).

The antennae swords can be divided into two principal types. Type I is comparatively large, ranging from 56.9 to 76.6 cm in length and weighing between 1,238 and 2,380 grams. These possess long, broad and leaf-shaped blades with a prominent midrib and are particularly associated with the Middle Ganga-Yamuna Doab.

Type II is smaller, ranging from approximately 40.5 to 47.5 cm and weighing on average about 458.87 grams. It possesses a shorter leaf-shaped blade, a more distinct midrib and a shorter grip of approximately 4 cm. The source further divides Type II into low-angle, high-angle and middle-angle varieties (Lal, 1971–1972).

3 Hooked Swords

Hooked swords resemble antennae swords, but instead of antennae they possess a forked hook at the stem. Fifteen examples are reported from sites including Shahabad, Kanpur, Unnao, Saharanpur, Nasirpur, Niorai, Manpur, Beharia, Bahadrabad, Saipai and Sarthauli in western Uttar Pradesh. Their lengths range between approximately 43.6 and 47.0 cm. The blades possess a sharply profiled midrib and highly concave sides, while the hook bends towards the middle of the grip.

The occurrence of hooked swords at both Bahadrabad and Nasirpur is particularly important for understanding the distribution of this distinctive weapon type in the Haridwar region.

4 Simple Swords

Simple swords consist of a long blade and tang. Their length varies approximately between 30 and 50 cm. The blade has a prominent midrib, sharp cutting edges and a pointed tip.

5 Spearheads

Spearheads are reported from Shahabad, Kanpur, Nasirpur, Khera, Madanpur, Saipai, Unnao, Sarthauli and Sheorajpur in Uttar Pradesh. Although some are more than 28 inches long and possess relatively long blades, the source material classifies them as spearheads rather than swords. Their probable uses included hand-to-hand fighting, throwing and hunting. They possessed a midrib and a tang to which a wooden shaft could be fitted. Both leaf-shaped and pointed varieties are reported.

6 Harpoons

Harpoons constitute another important category of Copper Hoard weapons. Examples are reported from Shahabad, Bisauli, Bithur, Amroha, Sitapur, Rajpur, Nasirpur, Beheria, Niorai, Saipai, Narnaund in Haryana and Bhadla in Punjab.

A harpoon from Bandarkala in Uttar Pradesh is reported as measuring 31.7 cm in length, 9.6 cm in breadth and 2.4 cm in thickness, with a weight of 885 grams. It is described as triple-headed, with a midrib and two holes on either side for attachment to a wooden shaft.

7 Parasu or Hatchet

Parasu or hatchets range approximately from 7.6 to 16.5 cm. The source distinguishes them from double axes and regards them as an independent type. They possess two bilaterally opposed cutting edges, one at

each end of a bow-shaped blade. The cutting edges are broader than the middle portion and are usually convex. A wooden handle was presumably fitted at the centre.

A specimen from Sarthauli, Uttar Pradesh, is reported as measuring 17.29 cm in length and 22 cm in breadth. Its edge was not sharp and hammer marks were visible on its surface (Gaur, 1987).

8 Disc

A copper disc with a plain surface and chisel marks around its periphery has been reported from Orai in the Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh. It measured 7.5 cm in diameter and 0.4 cm in thickness and weighed approximately 160 grams. Another disc or scale-pan was found at Rewari in Haryana and measured 5.6 cm in diameter and 0.08 cm in thickness. The precise function of these discs remains uncertain.

9 Double Axe

Double axes are comparatively rare in Copper Hoard assemblages. Ten specimens have been reported from Bhagrapir in Odisha. The double-axe motif was widespread in prehistoric western Asia and may have had religious associations. Similar motifs also occur on Indian Chalcolithic pottery.

The Bhagrapir specimens are large and heavy, approximately 40 cm wide, and their edges range between 1 and 3 cm in thickness. Their exact practical function remains uncertain. The source suggests that some may have been hafted at the centre and used in warfare, hunting or forest clearance for agriculture (Gaur, 1987).

Agricultural and Productive Implements

A considerable number of Copper Hoard implements may be associated with agricultural and productive activities. These include different varieties of axes, bar axes and other tools. K. N. Dikshit observed that axes were commonly used by agricultural communities for clearing forests and preparing fields (Dikshit, 1979).

1 Flat Axe or Celt

More than three hundred specimens of flat axes or celts have been reported from different parts of India. They generally possess broad, splayed cutting edges and sides that converge towards rounded or rectangular butt ends.

The source identifies four sub-types:

1. Long flat celts of irregular variety;

2. Triangular flat axes or celts with straight cutting edges;
3. Triangular flat celts or axes with crescent-shaped cutting edges; and
4. Oval flat axes or celts with rounded cutting edges and butt ends.

These forms have been reported from numerous sites, including Nasirpur, Bithur, Shahabad, Kanpur, Unnao, Amroha, Sitapur, Rajasthan, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Karnataka (Dikshit, 1979).

The widespread occurrence of flat axes demonstrates that they constituted one of the most common Copper Hoard implements.

2 Shouldered Axe

Shouldered axes derive their name from the shoulders located between the working edge and the butt. They generally possess a circular working edge and a straight butt.

Shouldered axes have been reported from Shahabad, Kanpur, Unnao, Hardoi, Bahadrabad, Balua, Bithur, Dhaka, Gandhali, Madanapur, Manpur, Pariar and Nasirpur in Uttar Pradesh, as well as from Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar and West Bengal.

Their presence at both Bahadrabad and Nasirpur reinforces the importance of the Haridwar region within the distribution of Copper Hoard agricultural implements.

3 Bar Axe or Bar Celt

A bar axe or bar celt consists of a nearly parallel-sided bar. Its length generally ranges from approximately 1.5 to 2 feet and its breadth from 4 to 6 cm. It has a rectangular section, flat bottom and convex upper surface. The cutting edge is generally crescentic and is produced by beveling the upper surface.

The source notes similarities between these copper bar celts and stone celts from the hilly regions of southern Bihar, West Bengal and northern Odisha. On this basis, it has been suggested that copper bar celts developed from stone prototypes when metal began to replace stone. Gungeria bar celts range from 30 to 60 cm in length, while examples are also known from Shahabad, Hami, Chhota Nagpur, Kamdhara and Narnaund (Agrawal, 1971).

4 Chisel

Copper chisels possess sharp convex working edges, while their butt ends are flat, thick and straight. Examples have been reported from Sitapur, Shahabad, Saharanpur, Kanpur and Nasirpur in Uttar Pradesh and Rewari in Haryana. The source suggests that some chisels may have been used for mining ore. A chisel from Bithur is reported as measuring 14.5 cm in length, 3.5 cm in width and 1.2 cm in thickness, with a weight of approximately 300 grams.

Household and Enigmatic Objects

1 Anthropomorphic Objects

Anthropomorphic objects are among the most distinctive and enigmatic forms within Copper Hoard assemblages. They have been reported from numerous sites in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Bihar and Gujarat.

These objects resemble human figures. Their head portions are generally thickened through hammering, while the lower limbs are comparatively plain and the arms are generally incurved and externally sharpened. They appear to have been cut from plain copper sheets. Because of their anthropomorphic appearance, they are often interpreted as ritualistic objects. However, their possible use as throwing weapons remains a matter of controversy. Their length ranges between approximately 23 and 30 cm, their breadth between 30 and 43 cm and their average weight is reported as approximately 5 kg.

The anthropomorphic objects demonstrate that Copper Hoards cannot be understood solely in terms of practical tools and weapons. Their form and unusual dimensions raise questions concerning ritual, symbolic and social practices.

2 Rings

Copper rings were manufactured by bending a circular copper rod until its ends met. Rings have been reported from Mainpuri, Bahadrabad, Aulbani, Kiratpur, Bargoan, Bhadla, Rewari, Pauli, Mitathal, Gungeria, Pondi, Bargunda and Agavibani.

The source material notes that copper rings are known from Ganeshwar and that rings associated with Copper Hoards have also been reported from Bhagrapir in Odisha. D. P. Agrawal suggested that standardised weight may have been an important criterion for identifying rings associated with Copper Hoards (Agrawal, 1971).

Copper Hoards and Ochre Coloured Pottery

The relationship between Copper Hoards and Ochre Coloured Pottery is one of the important issues in the archaeology of the Upper Ganga plain. The supplied source indicates that Copper Hoards and OCP occur over a broad geographical area and that OCP-associated communities lived in relatively simple village settlements.

The source describes houses constructed using wattle-and-daub techniques, with thatched roofs. Burnt plaster, mud clots and impressions of reeds and bamboo are cited as evidence for such structures.

The association of OCP with Copper Hoard tools has been reported from several sites in Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. However, the source also emphasises that research on this relationship remains ongoing. The archaeological significance of Sanauli is highlighted because Copper Hoard and OCP material were found together there, potentially providing important evidence for understanding their interrelationship.

The wider scholarly literature has examined the OCP settlement of the Ganga-Yamuna Doab and its archaeological associations (Dikshit, 1979; Lal, 1971–1972). The relationship should therefore be understood as an important archaeological problem rather than as a conclusively established cultural equation.

Copper Hoards and the Late Harappan Tradition

The relationship between Copper Hoards, OCP and Late Harappan traditions is particularly significant in the Ghaggar basin. The supplied source notes that copper tools similar to those of the Upper Ganga basin have been reported from the Ghaggar region and are generally associated with Ochre Coloured Pottery.

Mitathal, Bhiwani and Narnaund are specifically mentioned as sites yielding typical Copper Hoard tools. The source associates this region with Late Harappan occupation during the second millennium BCE.

The typological similarities between Copper Hoard tools and OCP/Late Harappan pottery have led to the proposal that the OCP tradition of the Ganga-Yamuna Doab may have antecedents in the Late Harappan pottery tradition of the Ghaggar basin and subsequently developed as a more independent cultural expression.

This interpretation is important because it highlights the possibility of cultural interaction and transformation across north India rather than viewing archaeological traditions as completely isolated entities.

Discussion

The archaeological evidence presented above demonstrates that Copper Hoards constitute a technologically and functionally diverse phenomenon. The assemblages contain weapons, agricultural implements, productive tools, household objects and enigmatic anthropomorphic forms.

The distribution of particular artefact types reveals significant regional variation. Uttar Pradesh and Haryana are particularly associated with anthropomorphic objects, antennae swords, hooked swords and harpoons, while Bengal, Bihar and Odisha are characterised by flat celts, shouldered celts, bar celts and double axes. Rajasthan is particularly associated with flat celts and bar celts.

The weapons indicate that copper technology was used in hunting and warfare. Antennae swords, hooked swords, spearheads and harpoons represent specialised forms of weaponry. At the same time, axes, celts and chisels demonstrate that copper was also used for productive activities, including agriculture, forest clearance and possibly mining.

The presence of anthropomorphic objects complicates a purely utilitarian interpretation. Their unusual forms, substantial weights and possible ritual associations indicate that Copper Hoard assemblages may also have had symbolic dimensions.

Bahadrabad and Nasirpur are particularly significant in this context. Both are located near the Solani River in Haridwar district, and both have yielded characteristic Copper Hoard material. Bahadrabad contributes especially to the discussion concerning OCP and Copper Hoard associations, whereas Nasirpur provides evidence for a broad range of weapons and implements.

The evidence therefore suggests that the Copper Hoard phenomenon should not automatically be regarded as representing a single, homogeneous archaeological culture. Instead, the similarities among artefacts may reflect shared technological traditions, while regional differences may indicate local adaptation and interaction.

Copper Hoards constitute an important archaeological phenomenon of Protohistoric India. Their extensive geographical distribution and diverse typology demonstrate the increasing importance of copper technology across different regions.

The evidence examined in this study shows that Copper Hoard artefacts served multiple purposes. Antennae swords, hooked swords, spearheads and harpoons were associated with hunting and warfare, while flat axes,

shouldered axes, bar celts and chisels were used as productive implements. Anthropomorphic objects and some other forms remain difficult to interpret and may have possessed ritual or symbolic significance.

Bahadrabad and Nasirpur are particularly important for understanding the Copper Hoard phenomenon in the Haridwar region. Bahadrabad is significant for its association with pottery showing Harappan affinities and its subsequent association with OCP and Copper Hoard material. Nasirpur is important because copper weapons and implements were recovered from canal excavation and because the site contains several characteristic Copper Hoard types.

The regional distribution of artefacts indicates that Copper Hoards were not completely uniform. Different regions exhibit different combinations of weapons and implements. At the same time, the association of Copper Hoards with OCP and the possible relationship between OCP and Late Harappan traditions indicate wider processes of technological and cultural interaction.

The evidence from the Upper Ganga-Yamuna region, particularly Bahadrabad and Nasirpur, therefore contributes significantly to the understanding of early copper-using communities in northern India. However, several questions concerning chronology, cultural identity, technological origins and the precise functions of certain objects remain open. Further excavation, secure stratigraphic evidence, scientific metallurgical analysis and chronological studies are required to establish a more precise understanding of the Copper Hoard phenomenon.

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