

# A Sigillography Study of Hastinapur

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## Abstract

In the recent excavation of Hastinapur during the 2021–22 field season by Archaeological survey of India gave its new perspective on the historical significance. So many different artefacts and objects are found to describe the site. In this paper the Sigillographic study is represents the administrative, economic, and cultural life of the settlement as well as variety of motifs and inscriptions suggests not only local craft specialization but also wider interactions with contemporary cultural and political centres. Their functional use in different aspect of social belief and the wide range of prosperity was reflected in the study. There are 21 sealings were discovered at the site, and only one of them had a seal legend, according to a recent assessment. 21 sealings that were issued from ancient Hastinapur are published here.

**Keywords:** Hastinapur, Excavation, Seal and Sealing, Brahmi, Prakrit, Administrative, Social belief.

## Introduction

Hastinapur archaeological site is located (Lat. 29° 09' 30.21" N, Long. 78° 00' 24.57" E; 234m MSL) in Mawana Tehsil, Meerut District, Uttar Pradesh. The excavation during the 2021-22 field season offered additional dimensions to Hastinapur's history and archaeology. Hastinapura means "The City of Elephants" in Sanskrit, which is Hasti (Elephant) Pura. The name Hastinapur appears in the Mahabharata, Puranas, Buddhist, and Jaina scriptures as the capital of the Kuru Kingdom. According to local history and the epic Mahabharata, King Hastin founded the city of Hastinapur. It is a sacred site for the Hindu and Jain pantheons. Three Jaina Tirthankars, namely Santinatha, Kunthunatha, and Arahnatha, attained enlightenment here. The existing archaeological site is also known as Raghunathji's mound and Ulta-khera. It rises around 18 metres above the surrounding plain and is located on the right side of the Budhi Ganga. The Ganga River currently flows approximately 5.5 kilometres east of the archaeological mound.

The excavation during the 2021–22 field season gave Hastinapur's history and archaeology a new perspective. According to the results of the current dig, the settlement began at the PGW cultural level and persisted uninterrupted until the mediaeval era. Additionally, it has been noted that the advancement and depth of material civilisation occurred between 600 BCE and 600 CE. The site's initial urbanisation occurs during this time. In this area of the hinterland, the settlement was among the first urban hubs. As evidenced by the discovery of

imperial variety silver punch mark coins, Indo-Greek coins, and seals and sealings during excavation, the city's primary genesis and expansion were its potential as a landscape, surrounded by lush alluvial soil, and connected to historic trade routes. According to Ahichchhatra, Barnawa, and others, it was a significant settlement in the early historic period and one of the region's administrative and commercial hubs.

## Legends Associated with the Site

Hastinapur is mentioned in Buddhist, Jaina, and Brahmanical texts. The Mahabharata claims that Hastinapur was named for the Paurava dynasty's ruler Hastin, who is also credited with its founding. It is very certain that the place's link with King Hastin led to the creation of the name Hastinapur, which is also supported by Jaina tradition. Ajamidha and Dvimidha are Hastin's two sons. Brihad-Vasu, Nila, and Riksha were born from the former. Nila and Brihad- Vasu established the kingdoms of north and south Panchalas, respectively, with capitals at Ahichchhatra and Kampilya (present-day Kampil), while Riksha remained in power at Hastinapura. When Drupada ruled the latter nation during the Mahabharata era, he wed his daughter to Pandu's sons. Here, Santinatha, Kunthunatha, and Arahnatha—three Jaina Tirthankars—attained enlightenment. Draupadi Ghat and Karan Ghat (a swimming site) are two locations on the Budhi-Ganga river. Although no visible construction remnants can be seen here, the locals adore these Ghats and treasure the memories of the Mahabharata characters.

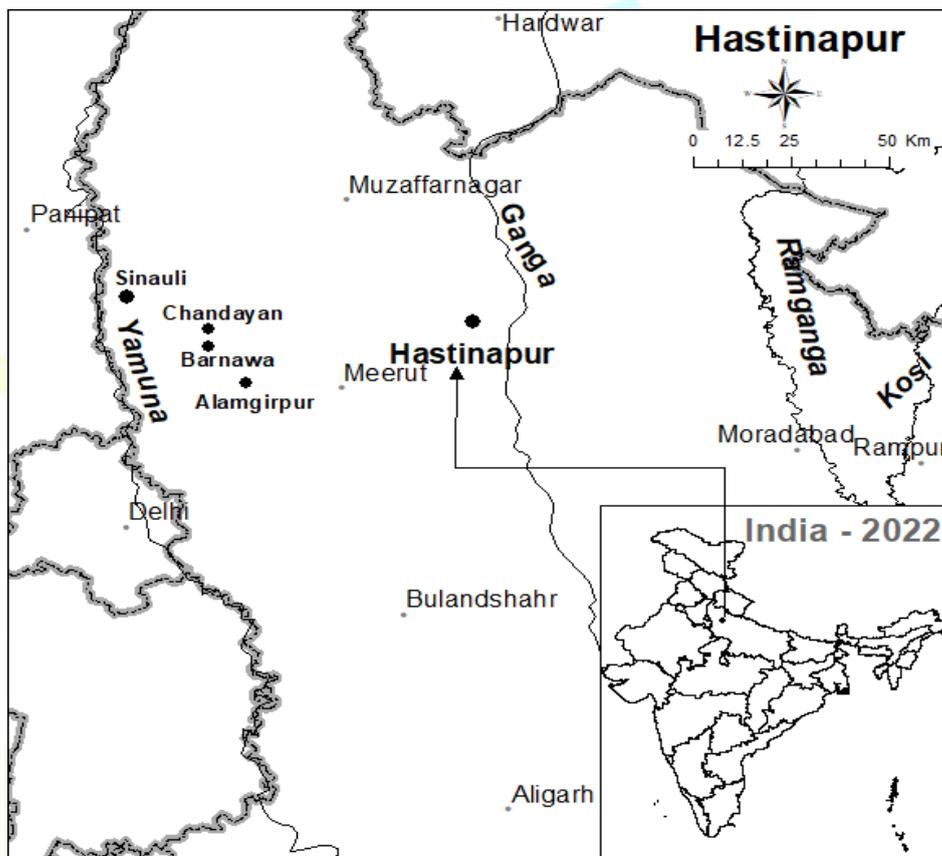


Fig.1: Map of archaeological site Hastinapur

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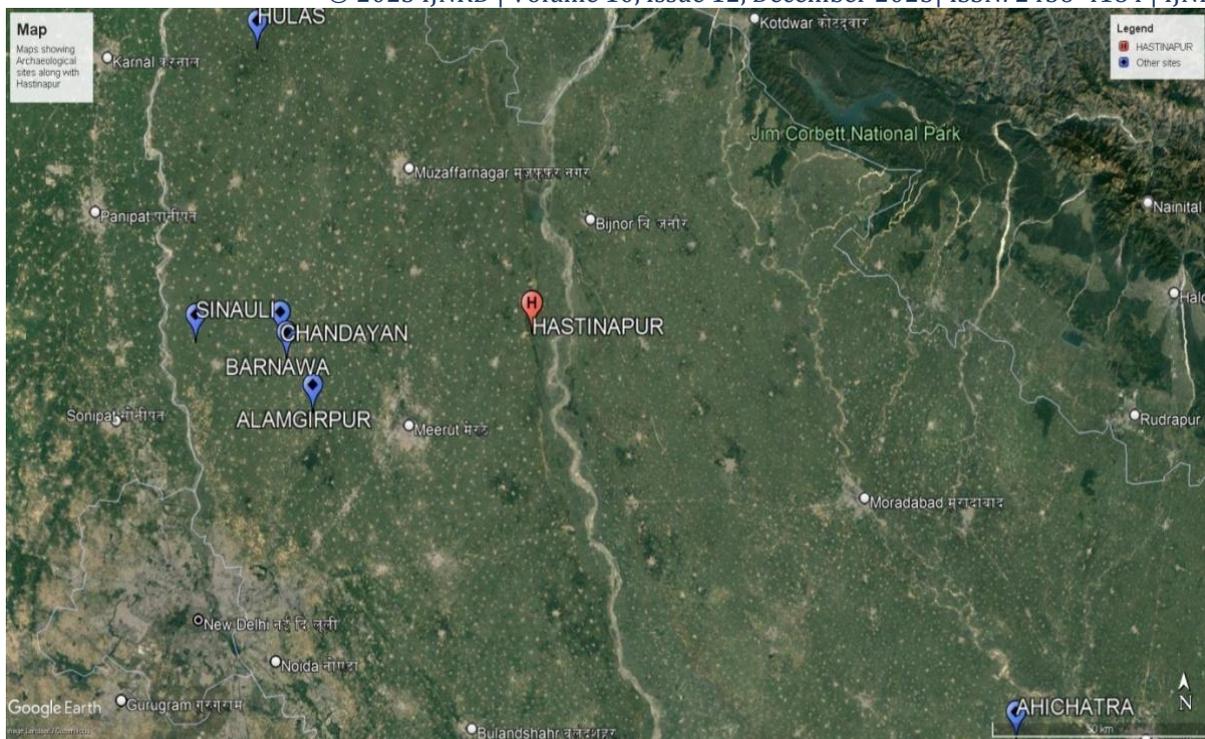


Fig.2: Google location of Hastinapur site with Surrounds sites

## Previous archaeological investigation

Following the excavation carried out by B.B. Lal of the Archaeological Survey of India in 1950–1952, the region gained notoriety for the first time. Seventy years have passed since then, and no new construction has been done on this location. Five occupational levels, with a pause between each Period, were discovered during the first excavation in 1950–52: -Ochre Coloured Pottery Culture (pre-1200 B.C.), Painted Grey Ware Culture (c. 1100 to 800 B.C.), Northern Black Polished Ware Culture (c. early sixth to early third century B.C.), Sunga- Kushana Period (c. early second century B.C. to the end of third century A.D.), and Mediaeval Period (c. late eleventh to early fifteenth century A.D.) are the first, second, and third, respectively, periods. The Ochre Coloured Pottery Culture's cultural time period has been determined by this excavation. Antiquities like as punch-marked coins, terracotta figurines, ceramics, and a few iron objects—well, brick constructions of various sizes—are among the excavation's most significant discoveries.

## Archaeological Excavation (2021-22)

Ulta-Khera and Raghunathji are two archaeological mounds where the current excavation is being conducted. The protected area contains four mounds; however, the spade work has been completed in Ulta-khera (Lat. 29°09.547 N Long. 78°00.412 E MSL.219.5m), which is near the trench that was previously excavated in 1950–52. Its elevation over the surrounding plain is roughly 18 meters. The excavation work was done in the A4, XA5, A5, A6, and A7 trenches, as well as in trial pits 1 (the mound's northern end) and 2 (the eastern end of the previously excavated trench from 1950–52). Every trench, with the exception of Tr. A4,

XA5, and A6, reached natural soil. The A5 trench (219.19m MSL to 210.28m MSL) has encountered a maximum depth of approximately 9m cultural deposit, whereas the A7 trench (215.86m MSL to 209.80m MSL) generated approximately 6m cultural deposit.

## Excavation and Stratigraphy

The major excavation conducted within an area, covering 35 m. length x 15 m. width having north-south orientation. Trench A7 Qd. IV has been taken as index trench which yielded 10 cultural layers above the natural sand dune.

**Layers-** Maximum number of 10 to 11 layers has so far been exposed in Trench A5 and A7 including the virgin layer.

#### **Layer (1)**

The layer is semi-compact in texture in hardness and composed of soil mixed with sand. It The layer yielded pottery and terracotta discs, rusted iron objects, stone polishers, pounder, pestle, grinding stone, terracotta dabber, terracotta sling ball, terracotta bead, hopscotch, brick pivot, dabber fragment, glass bangle fragment, stone bead, silver and copper coins etc.

#### **Layer (2)**

The layer is semi-compact to compact in hardness and contains potsherds brickbats. The layer has yielded antiquities stone polisher, grinding stone, terracotta dabber, bone point, terracotta bead, copper, bone and iron finger rings, iron sickle, chisel, terracotta smoking pipe, broken animal figurines etc.

#### **Layer (3)**

The layer is semi-compact to compact in hardness and the layer is found mixed with light yellowish-brown patches and ash patches. It contains potsherds, animal bones and antiquities like broken, terracotta and stone discs, terracotta sling balls, skin rubber (scrubber), broken terracotta spinning instrument, iron arrowhead, ring, etc.

#### **Layer (4)**

The layer is semi-compact in texture and uniform in nature and contains potsherds. The layer has yielded antiquities stone polisher, bone point, terracotta bead, copper antimony rod, perforator, bone and iron tools, iron sickle, terracotta seal and sealing, copper coins, broken animal figurines, terracotta female figurine etc.

#### **Layer (5)**

The layer is semi-compact in texture and uniform in nature and contains potsherds, roof tiles and other and other artefacts.

#### **Layer (6)**

The layer is semi- compact in texture and the texture of the grain size are very fine to fine and contains terracotta roof tiles, brick bats, brick, potsherds red ware of variant colour and few sherds of red slipped ware having black painting design of horizontal bands and leaf shaped decoration.

#### **Layer (7)**

The layer is semi- compact in texture and grain size having very fine some sherds of red slipped ware with horizontal bands decoration on it.

#### **Layer (8)**

The layer is semi- compact in texture with fine grain. The ceramic assemblage of the layer is red ware of plain as well as decorative design, few red ware sherds have incised and mat impressed decoration.

#### **Layer (9)**

The painted grey ware is a dominating ceramic within the assemblage, typological variation is more in the pottery assemblage of this layer which includes grey ware, black slipped ware, black polished ware, black and red ware, micaceous red ware, red ware with few specimens of ochre coloured red ware resembles with the characteristic of so called OCP found in this region.

#### **Layer (10)**

The layer is semi- compact in texture with silt and traces of sand patches. The pottery assemblage of this layer consists of painted grey ware, micaceous red ware followed by few sherds of red ware.

#### **Layers (11)**

The layer have not yielded any cultural material and completely sand deposit. The auguring method has been used to know the thickness of sand deposit below layer 11; the deposit only revealed sand starting from 209.80m MSL and still continued below 200m MSL. The same method also applied in the northern slope of the mound at 207m MSL and has yielded similar type of deposit.

Section of Tr.A7 Qd.i and iv  
(section facing east)

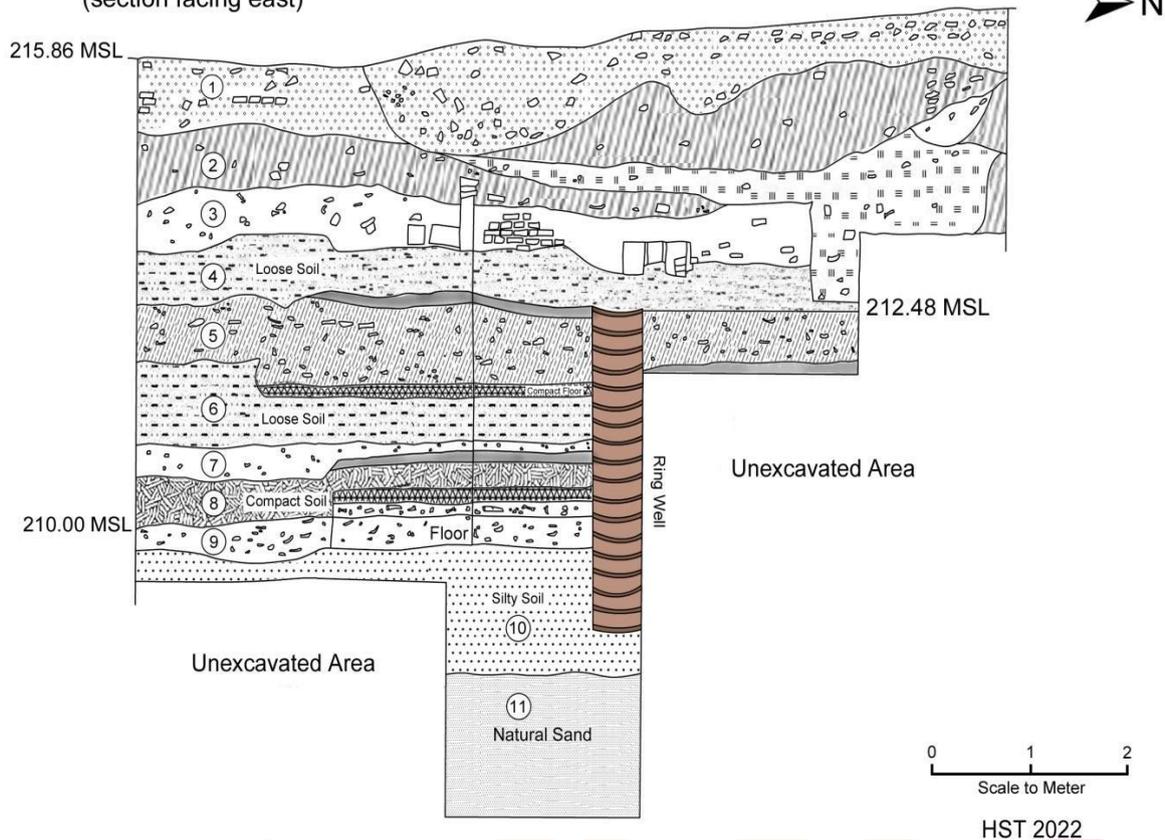


Fig.3: Stratigraphy of Hastinapur

## Cultural sequence

The physical environment of Hastinapur in the fertile plain of river Ganga attracted the attention of sedentary farming communities in *circa* 3000-3500 BP. The excavation revealed seven cultural periods of human settlement without any hiatus. The cultural sequence of the site divided into phases by studying the presence and absence of material remains retrieved from the excavation. The 9m to 10m meters habitational deposit divided into; -

Period I: Painted Grey Ware Culture Period (layer 9 and 10) Period II:

NBPW Culture Period (layer 8)

Period III: Mauryan Period (layer 7)

Period IV: Sunga-Kushana Period (layer 5 and 6) Period V: Gupta

Period (layer 3 and 4)

Period VI: Gurjara-Pratihara Period (layer 2)

Period VII: Late Rajput or Medieval Period (layer 1)

## Seal and Sealing

A seal is a stamp bearing device with legend and symbols. Also used as a symbolic representation of exchange of goods and services as well act as ideological transactions between God and Man. The history of seals and sealing goes back to Harappan period and its continuity is still existed in the modern world. It's one of the manmade objects have long history and unveiling the story of men's past history, religion, administration and many more. Seals and sealings can be categorized under three groups i.e. Seals and sealings with only symbolical representation, Seals and Sealings with legends (only script), Seals and sealings with symbols and legends. It may be produced from clay, terracotta, bone,

ivory, stone and metal. The earliest literary reference about seals and sealing's found in Kautilya's Arthashastra.



Fig.4: Seal and Sealing



Fig.5: Seal and Sealing

The excavation revealed terracotta and clay sealings with only legend, sealing with symbol and legend, sealing with only symbol in stratified context. The percentage of sealings is more in early historic context. Generally, the sealings from Mauryan to Kushana level have only legend and devoid of any symbols, while the sealings of Gupta period have both symbol and legend. Few sealings have only symbols particularly found from Kushana to early Gupta period. The weight of sealings ranges between 5.88 gm to 26 gm with diameter of 3.8 cm to 1.8 cm.

### Table on distribution of Seal and Sealing

S.L NO	Object	Material	Shape	Colour	ACC No	Layer	Depth	Measurement
1	Sealing	Terracotta	Oval	Very pale brown	1336	1	218.52 MSL	W=11 gm D= 2.9 cm T=1.2 cm
2	Sealing	Terracotta	Ellipses	Pale brown	626	4	214.05 MSL	W= 9 gm L=2.58 cm B=2.12 cm T=1.3 cm
3	Sealing	Terracotta	Circle shape	Grey	712	4	214.65 MSL	W= 6.44 gm D=2.3 cm T=0.9 cm
4	Sealing	Terracotta	Circle	Very Dark grey	841	4	214.10 MSL	W= 5.88 gm D=2.5 cm T=1 cm
5	Sealing	Terracotta	Circle	Brown	842	4	214 MSL	W=7.69 gm D= 2.6 cm T=1 cm
6	Sealing	Clay	Semi-circle	Pale Brown	913	4	214.36 MSL	W=10 gm D= 2.6 cm T=1.7 cm
7	Sealing	Terracotta	Ellipses	Brown	923	4	214.42 MSL	W=8.51 gm D= 2.7 cm T=1.2 cm
8	Sealing	Terracotta	Semi-circle	Very dark grey	926	4	214.20 MSL	W=6 gm D= 1.8 cm T=1.5 cm
9	Sealing	Clay	Ellipses	Very pale brown	1640	4	216.20 MSL	W= 16.30 gm D=3.4 cm T= 1.5 cm
10	Sealing	Terracotta	Circle	Very dark brown	749	4	214.03 MSL	W=7.06 gm D=2.42 cm T= 0.9 cm

11	Seal	Terracotta	Ellipses	Brown	549	4	215 MSL	W= 8.60 gm D=3.3 cm T=2.1 cm
12	Sealing	Terracotta	Circle	Strong Brown	547	5	214.89 MSL	W= 7.43 gm D=2.8 cm T=0.9 cm
13	Sealing	Terracotta	Ellipses	Pale brown	550	5	215 MSL	W= 34 gm D=3.22 cm T=2.2 cm
14	Sealing	Terracotta	Circle	Black	553	5	214.41 MSL	W= 11 gm D=3 cm T=1.2 5cm
15	Sealing	Terracotta (broken)	General Oval	Reddish brown	562	5	214.76 MSL	W= 9.5 gm D=1.1 cm T=2.8 cm
16	Sealing	Terracotta	General Oval	Strong brown	833	5	214.28 MSL	W= 9 gm L=2.58 cm B=2.12 cm T=1.3 cm
17	Sealing	Terracotta	Ellipses	Strong brown	828	5	214.32 MSL	W=7.20 gm D=2.6 cm T=1.05 cm
18	Sealing	Terracotta	Circle	Very pale brown	1258	7	213.34 MSL	W=10 gm D= 2.5 cm T=1.3 cm
19	Sling Ball	Terracotta	Spherical Shape	Brown	1405	9	211.75 MSL	W=18 gm D= 2.5 cm T=2.5 cm
20	Sealing	Terracotta	Ellipses baked	Very pale brown	1574	3	217 MSL	W= 18 gm D=3.3 cm T= 1.2 cm
21	Sealing	Terracotta	Circle	Strong brown	1103	5	213.14 MSL	W=26 gm D= 3.8 cm T=2.2 cm

### Description of Seal and Sealing :-

1. It's a semi-circular shaped terracotta sealing (ACC No 926) of very dark grey in colour and having rough surface. The sealing is semi- oxidized in nature, chipped from reverse. The weight of sealing is 6 gm with diameter of 1.8 cm and thickness is 1.5 cm. The reverse side have irregular humped. The surface



is worn-out from obverse

having a symbol in a shallow depression. The symbol is not properly readable which can be resembles with Roman alphabet “D”.

2. Terracotta circular sealing (ACC No 841) is very dark grey in colour with coarse rough surface having four letter of Brahmi legend in obverse in

a circular shallow depression. One side of outer edge is broken having a black rough section. The weight of sealing is 5.88 gm with diameter of 2.5 cm and thickness 1 cm. The letters are written in a single line in Brahmi legend in Prakrit language. The first letter is read as *O* followed by *Ta*, *Ka*, *Sa*. The stroke and palaeography style of script probably belong to the Mauryan to post Mauryan period.



3. The roughly circular shape terracotta sealing (ACC No 1103) is Strong brown in colour. The weight of the sealing is 26 gm with diameter of 3.8 cm and thickness is 2.2 cm. The sealing with coarse rough surface is worn-out from obverse and finger-impress on reverses, also having some small crakes on the surface. The script is obliterated on obverse only a conch symbol is visible. The seal is chipped from edges on the obverse surface and found associated with Gupta period cultural level.



4. The terracotta sealing (ACC No 833) of oval shape and strong brown colour with fine surface having four letter of Brahmi script in obverse in a shallow depression. The weight of sealing is 6.41 gm with breadth 2.1 cm, length 2.35 cm thickness 1.08 cm. In the obverse letters are written in a single line Brahmi legend in Prakrit language. The first letter is *O/Pa* followed by *Ta*, *Ka*, *Sa*. The stroke and palaeography style of script probably belong to the post Mauryan period.



5. The terracotta spherical shape brown colour sling ball (ACC No 1405) with smooth fine surface well baked bears Brahmi legend and Ujjain symbol. The weight of sealing is 18 gm with diameter of 2.5 cm and thickness is 2.5 cm. The Brahmi legend is in eye shape depression in Sanskrit language. The letters are written in a single line. The first letter is – *Ga/Go*, followed by *Mi*, *Ta*, *Sa*. On other side of the surface there is a circular shape depression with Ujjain symbol. The stroke and palaeography style of script probably belong to the Mitra period dated to c 2nd century BCE.



6. The terracotta circular shape clay sealing (ACC No 1258) with smooth surface. The weight of sealing is 10 gm with diameter of 2.5 cm and thickness is 1.3 cm. The sealing having three Brahmi obscure legend and dharma chakra on stand on the obverse side. It can be dated to 1<sup>st</sup> -2<sup>nd</sup> cent. BCE.



7. It's an ellipses shape terracotta brown colour sealing (ACC No 923). The weight of sealing is 8.51 gm with diameter of 2.7 cm and thickness is 1.2 cm. The sealing have fine surface having letter of Brahmi legend in obverse in a shallow depression. The legend in Sanskrit language are written in a single line with a symbol of fire alter. The first letter is - *Ba*, followed by *ha*, *la*, *Sya*. The reverse have finger- impress. The sealing on palaeographic ground can be assigned to Gupta period.



8. The terracotta sealing (ACC No 749) of circle shape and dark brown colour having weight of sealing is 7.06 gm with diameter of 2.42 cm and thickness is 0.9 cm. Sealing have rough surface having legends in Brahmi, in obverse. The letters are written in a single line. The seal having four letter in Brahmi script in the shallow smooth depression in the obverse side and in the reverse have convex surface having smooth surface with finger-impress with little amount of black - brown patch. The first letter is *O* followed by *Ta*, *Ka*, *Sa*.



9. The terracotta sealing (ACC No 828) of roughly circular shape and Strong brown colour with weight of 7.20 gm, diameter of 2.64 cm and thickness of 1.05 cm. The sealing has fine surface having four letters of Brahmi script in Prakrit language in obverse. The obverse letters are written in a single line. In the reverse have convex surface having smooth surface with finger-impress. The first letter is *O* followed by *Ta*, *Ka*, *Sa*.



10. The terracotta seal (ACC No 842) of circular shape is brown colour with weight of 9 gm with length 2.58 cm and thickness 1.3 cm. Sealing fine surface having four letters of Brahmi script in obverse in a shallow circular depression along with a partially visible circular line on boundary. The obverse letters are written in a single line. The seal having four letters in Brahmi script in Sanskrit language in the shallow smooth



depression in the obverse side and in the reverse have convex smooth surface with finger- impress.

The first letter is *Pa/O* followed by *Ta, Ka, Sa* and some 'X' shaped symbol on top. There are two letters of Brahmi numeric in written in the bottom. It's stand with 0 - or

1. On the reverse the smooth surface having a finger-impression all around.

11. The oval shape pale brown colour sealing (ACC No 626) having weight of s 9 gm with breadth 2.5 cm, length 2.58 cm and thickness is 1.3 cm. Rough surface irregular textured seal having four letter of Brahmi script in Sanskrit language in a shallow depression in obverse side and in convex reverses side having solidify mud patches in the surface. On the reverse the



smooth surface having a finger-impress line all around. The first letter is *Pa/O* followed by *Ta, Ka, Sa*.

12. The terracotta circular shape and grey colour sealing (ACC No 712) with smooth fine surface. The weight of sealing is 6.44 gm with diameter of 2.3 cm and thickness is 0.9 cm. With some gentle cracks on the outer edge. The obverse surface is worn-out having two rows of Brahmi legends in a circular shallow depression with legend '*Varunaputasa*' and can be dated to 1<sup>st</sup> -2<sup>nd</sup> cent. BCE. Its important evidence retrieved from the ritual pit associated with a Yaksha image made of copper.



13. The terracotta circle shape of strong brown colour sealing (ACC No 547).

The weight of sealing is 7.43 gm with diameter 2.8 cm, thickness 0.9 cm. sealing having rough surface in both sides with some small gentle cracks along with peripheral zone. The worn-out surface having an inscription on it with a partially visible circular thin out line. The Brahmi legends are written in three rows. The first row having two conch symbols with two horizontal lines in a very worn-out condition. In the second row the legend read as Sri Vishnugu (pta) in Sanskrit language and late Brahmi characters of 6<sup>th</sup> century CE.



14. The Ellipses shape pale brown colour sealing (ACC No 1640). The weight of sealing is 16.30 gm with diameter 3.4 cm, thickness 1.5 cm. The clay sealing with smooth surface in obverse of rough surface in reverse. It also has some gentle cracks peripheral zone along with two critical cracks on the top portion of the seal. In the obverse side the Brahmi legends and paduka (feet) symbols depicted in a shallow depression with oval shape outline. The legend can be read as Manorathadeva.



## Conclusion:

In summary, this paper describes the significance of seals belonging to the different period is a major finding of this excavation what put the Hastinapur in a valuable archaeological source that illuminates the administrative, economic, and cultural life of the settlement. The variety of motifs and inscriptions suggests not only local craft specialization but also wider interactions with contemporary cultural and political centers. Their functional use in different aspect of social belief and the wide range of prosperity was reflected by deciphering the sealings. The variety of inscriptions and the stylistic pattern of writing decode the value and the significance of some particular of that period. The artigence and the craftsmanship is also

been evaluate the priceless cultural and ritualistic aspect of Hastinapur at that time. Thus, the sigillography study of Hastinapur bridge the material and textual records, reinforcing the site's identity as both a political center and a sacred landscape remembered in literary tradition. They thus represent a vital element in reconstructing the lived realities and symbolic world of ancient Hastinapur.

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