Notes on the Vakatakas of the Central Provinces and Berar, and their Country, 4th to 8th Century A.D.

By T. A. Wellsted.

It is comparatively speaking only within recent years that any detailed attention has been paid to the Vakataka dynasty. Epigraphical research is gradually revealing the very important rôle played by these rulers in Gupta India and it is hoped therefore that the following notes may be considered of interest. The sites described below are linked by Gupta type brick remains and their period further determined by evidence afforded by sculptural and epigraphical material.

A number of the settlements of the Vakataka period are indicated on the general map of the district, Plate 5, fig. 1.

Of these the townsite at Mansar is the only one that has so far been investigated in any detail, but a general description of the group will not be out of place.

Khindsi, Bheugarh, and Ghughusgarh appear to be mainly outpost settlements situated on high ground commanding a wide view of the surrounding country.

At Khindsi there is the ruin of a rough-stone and brick fort on the hill top immediately to the west of the Sur river gorge and 300 ft. above the plain level. Below this, on the north side of the hill and now normally covered by the water in the irrigation reservoir is a settlement the extent of which it is impossible to determine.

In the preparation of these notes I gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness to the following gentlemen:

Dr. G. R. Hunter, of Nagpur University, who has taken a great deal of trouble in helping with literature and without whose interest and encouragement the investigations would not have been made;

Mr. K. N. Dikshit, of the Indian Museum, Calcutta, whose opinions and help in tracing literature have been invaluable;

Mr. W. V. Grigson, D. C. Nagpur, and Mr. M. A. Suboor, of the Nagpur Museum, whose information led to the reconnaissance of the Nandpur site;

Mr. G. Francis for a number of suggestions;

Messrs. Rahat Ali and J. Francis for much help in the preparation of field notes.

Similarly at Pavnâr in Wardha District site, with a high strong old fort overlooking a river. The identification of this place with Pravarapur of the Vakataka copperplates is highly probable, in which case it may be considered as the city founded by Pravarasena I, an early Vakataka ruler and the capital of the dynasty—K. N. D.
At Bheugarh no brick remains have as yet been located, but the hill which rises nearly 400 ft. from the plain is extensively terraced and fortified with drystone walling.

Ghughusgarh, where there are stone and brick remains, is 400 ft. above the river level and seems intended to guard the northern approach to Nandpur from the Satpura range, in the foothills of which it is situated.

Across the river from Nandpur and Ghughusgarh are scattered brick ruins in thick jungle, the full extent of which still remain to be determined.

Of the two major sites Mansar and Nandpur, the latter although apparently smaller, occupies a far stronger position and unlike the former has been extensively fortified.

Advantage has been taken of the hilly nature of the site to ring the town with massive drystone walling which whilst nowhere of any great height varies in width from 10 to 20 ft. at the top and is so placed that every use is made of the natural slope of the ground, with the result that an attacking host would be confronted with almost impossible slopes of considerably more than 100 ft. in some cases.

These fortifications are roughly in the form of an equilateral triangle, apex to the south, with the length of each side about 1 mile.

The site is bounded on the W.SW. by the Dhobigota nallah and on the E.S.E. by the Pench river and is obviously one of great strength.

Preliminary reconnaissance of the walled enclosure suggests that not all of it was used for erecting buildings and whilst part is definitely unsuitable owing to its hilly nature, it is possible that other apparently suitable spots, now blank, were once occupied by huts of flimsy type which must have perished without leaving any trace.

There seems at any rate to have been an overflow to the south bank of the Dhobigota nallah, as brick fragments are found in one or two fields there.

In the southern portion of the walled enclosure is the ruin of a large building, which, from its layout and unusual size, was possibly a palace. Whilst nothing now remains above ground beyond brick rubble the lines of the walls are easy to follow and are shown in the plan, Plate 6, fig. 2.

The existence of extensive ruins in association with the name Nandpur (Nandipura) is significant. One of the copper plate grants of Prabhavati Gupta, the Vakataka Queen Regent, was issued from Nandivardhana, which has been identified tentatively with Nagardhan, 4 miles to the south of

1 Poona plates. Ep. Ind., Vol. XV.
Ramtek. Brick fragments are certainly found in a field near Nagardhan but none appear to be of sufficient size to warrant the supposition that they are derived from the large 'Gupta' type bricks, about 18" x 9" x 3", such as occur so plentifully at Mansar, Khindsi, Nandpur, and Ghughusgarh. In fact the Nagardhan bricks appear to be recent and are indistinguishable from the brick debris at the modern fort in that village and there are thus stronger grounds for supposing that at Nandpur we have the remains of the ancient Nandivardhana, and not at Nagardhan as hitherto suggested.

The occurrence of 'Gupta' type bricks and the ruins of what was assumed to be a Buddhist monastery near Mansar were first noted many years ago but no proper examination of the area would appear to have been made. In 1928 a certain amount of interesting material came to light and led to the examination of the whole area surrounding Mansar tank, with the result that the traces of an extensive townsite were discovered.

The extreme limits of occupation were roughly 2 miles from east to west and 1½ miles from north to south, and whilst a large part must have been thinly settled, the evidence of close settlement to the east, south-east, and south of the tank is sufficient to indicate a town of some size. (Plan, Plate 7.)

During the course of investigations a number of carved stone fragments were found at surface on the hill slopes to the south of the lake. These are assignable to the early centuries of the Christian era and a few are shown in the illustrations, Plate 11. One of these, of some interest, is a fragment of stone, cut with characters of 5th century A.D., shown in Plate 6, fig. 1.

Much of the original layout of the site is now difficult to trace, particularly in the eastern portion traversed by the railway, from which ballast has been quarried for many years and where since investigations started almost all traces have gone, thanks to villagers, ballast work, and erosion.

In the middle section, monastery site and hill B on the plan, much more remains. Hill B was apparently overbuilt with temples and all surface finds of sculpture have come from

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1 R. B. Hira Lal, Inscr.: C. P. and Berar, No. 4.
Adopted also by K. P. Jayaswal, J.B.O.R.S., XIX, 1 and 2.
2 The Nagardhan bricks are almost exactly half size, large fragments are therefore almost indistinguishable from small fragments of 'Gupta' type brick, and unless great care is taken in examination, misleading conclusions are easily arrived at.
3 Two engraved seals have been found at Nandpur; one reading '—deva' and the other 'Rudradeva' in characters of the 3rd and 4th century A.D. They date therefore to about the time of Pravarasena I. Rudradeva may be the alternative name of Rudrasena I, the successor of Pravarasena, but the absence of any titles on the seal makes it unlikely that it was a royal one.
4 P.W.D. note 112 of 1906, and Nagpur Gazetteer, 1908.
5 Some of these are now in the Nagpur Museum.
there. Such as have been found exhibit considerable skill and mastery in execution and from the quantity and diversity of character must represent a very large number of images. The stone used is a fine-grained aluminous sandstone, easy to work and permitting a fine finish.

A notable feature of the town is the mile-long stone facing of the Mansar tank, drybuilt of large boulders and stone slabs, reaching its greatest development at the monastery site; this is shown in Plate 12.

In marked contrast to Nandpur there is at Mansar no evidence of fortification, though the surrounding hills appear to have been occupied by watch-posts. The western post (WO on plan) was possibly in signal communication with Bheugarh 8 miles to the north-west, the eastern post (EO on plan) may have been similarly in touch with Kindsi 6 miles to the east, whilst the main hill to the north and hill B to the south of the tank overlook the country for many miles. The old north road runs through the eastern end of the town and in view of the persistence of trade routes is almost certain to have formed one of the original lines of communication. It is traceable for a distance of nearly 20 miles.

This is a piece of raised ground at the eastern end of the tank and is nearly 11 acres in extent. In the centre is a large mound which rises to a height of 40 ft. above the level and resembles the ruined stump of a Buddhist stupa in its general appearance, an impression which is not confirmed by a close examination, which reveals traces of a rectangular building measuring 150 ft. × 85 ft. in the centre of the mound. It is possibly therefore the remains of a vihāra or even of a secular building with surrounding courts, but whatever its character, which can only be revealed by excavation, it obviously covered a group of buildings of great importance.

Until quite recently the site has been used by villagers as a brick quarry, so much so that it has been possible to obtain a very tolerable idea of the ground plan as revealed by this destruction. This is shown in Plate 8.

The site is so situated that it receives no drainage from outside, soil erosion thus playing a very small part in the silting of the courts, which must be due largely to the debris from the buildings. The inner court of nearly 3 acres is silted to a depth of at least 5 ft. and the outer court of over 7 acres to a depth of about 3 ft.

The width of the walls varies from 1½ to 4½ ft. and although walls are nowhere visible above ground, judging from the excavations made by villagers, wall heights of 11 or 12 ft. including foundations, still remain. Although so much damage has been done in the past there is evidence that considerable lengths of wall have escaped and even where bricks have been
quarried the foundations have probably escaped in many cases by the caving in of earth from the sides. The bricks used in this construction are of typical large size, measuring about $17'' \times 9'' \times 3''$, but are not strictly uniform, size variations of $\frac{1}{2}''$ or so in any of the dimensions being common.

The peculiar construction of a small brick lined depression exposed in a cutting at the Mansar manganese mine attracted attention and led to a careful examination. Part was undoubtedly lost due to mining work but enough remained to make the mode of construction quite clear. It is shown in plan and section in Plate 9, and its location at S in the town plan, Plate 7.

The centre of the depression was occupied by a complex of earthen pots, horse bones, charred wood, and earth. Most of the pots were in small pieces, hopelessly mixed up, and gave the impression of having been arranged in a heap, probably of several layers and then smashed by the force of earth from above. This rendered the separation very difficult but sufficient pots were obtained complete or in sufficiently large fragments to allow of the identification of 15 shapes (see Plate 10). From the quantity and character of the residue it is certain that several times this number of types were originally represented and the total number of pots were possibly a couple of hundred.

The following objects were recovered from the complex:

1. A fragment of porous, brick (?), of pumice-like appearance, flat on one side and rounded on the other; size $4\frac{1}{4}'' \times 2\frac{1}{2}'' \times 1\frac{1}{4}''$.

2. A dark-red stone implement, smooth but unpolished, with a semi-circular razor-like edge; size $1\frac{2}{3}'' \times 1\frac{2}{3}'' \times 1\frac{1}{2}''$.

3. A light-red stone implement, smooth and polished, with blunt edges; size $5'' \times 2\frac{1}{4}'' \times 1\frac{1}{2}''$.

4. A circular stone grinder, diameter $9''$, thickness $3''$, with a depression in the centre of the upper surface $2''$ across and $1\frac{1}{2}''$ deep.

5. A triangular brick, texture very fine and smooth, colour light brick-red, edges rounded, and from the centre of the base which at this point appears to have been pared away apparently by a knife after manufacture, three parallel lines running to the apex; size, height of triangle $5\frac{1}{2}''$, base $4\frac{1}{4}''$, thickness $\frac{3}{4}''$; lines depressed in the brick $\frac{1}{10}''$ and $\frac{1}{2}''$ apart.

6. A terra-cotta human figure of coarse texture, $2\frac{1}{2}''$ height possibly intended as a toy.

7. A copper toe (?) ring, made from a single piece of coarse wire in the form of a three-ringed spiral (probably modern).

8. Charred wood fragments.

9. Three circular stone discs, two $4''$ dia. by $\frac{3}{4}''$ thick, one $3''$ dia. by $\frac{3}{4}''$.

10. Horse bones, small fragments mostly badly decayed, but some teeth readily recognizable.
It was the uncovering of this and its destruction during mining work, due to ignorance, that led to the examination of the Mansar area, the results of which are given in these notes.

The location is shown at T in the town plan, Plate 7. This shaft reached to within 2 feet of the surface and extended downwards to the junction of the surface soil with bedrock 14 feet from the surface, its total height therefore was 12 feet.

Of square plan, with walls of single brick construction, the space enclosed was about 4½ sq. ft. The bricks were of large size, 18½" × 9½" × 3½". Near the bottom, making a lower chamber 15" deep, was a false floor of brick. The bottom of the lower chamber was also paved with brick and rested directly on bedrock.

In the upper part of the shaft was filled earth from which was recovered a small snake image of greenish soapstone and some pottery 1.

Beneath the false floor was a large spherical pot, 1 ft. in diameter containing ashes; with it also were several small pots. Altogether 17 complete pots were recovered, some of which are shown in the photograph, Plate 5, fig. 2.

It is presumably a burial shaft.

As the Vakatakas favoured Saivaism, the presence of a number of lingas at Mansar and elsewhere is to be expected. Less than 6 have been found, some apparently still occupying the ground where they were originally erected. At Khindsi there is another, now propped up outside a small shrine close to the irrigation embankment. It has obviously come from the settlement close by, now submerged by the reservoir. One has also been found at Nandpur. These 8 lingas are all very similar, about 5 ft. high with a rounded upper part of 1 to 1½ ft. joining directly to a square shaft.

On the whole, decay at Mansar has gone so far that excavation is not likely to yield much in the way of results, with two exceptions, the Monastery and Hill B sites, which are both very promising. At Nandpur the situation is somewhat different as the ruins have become jungle-covered, and being off the beaten track are likely to have escaped brick quarrying and destruction by villagers. Promising excavation sites here appear to be the supposed palace site and a large raised mound some distance to the north-east of it. At this latter place there are the remains of buildings on a square raised site, with a large linga embedded in the ground. It is presumably a

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1 British Museum: Acquisition No. 1987 of 1930.
temples area. Judging from the fragments visible in the soil it is likely to yield amongst other things a good deal of pottery. A claim has been put forward that at the time of Pravarasena I the Vakatakas ruled over the greater part of northern and southern India, with the capital at or near Ganj-Nachne in Central India and that only as a result of the rise of the Gupta Empire were the Vakatakas driven to seek their main fortune in the south. That this powerful empire should have been paralysed by the defeat of feudatories at the ‘battle’ of Kausambi and have remained in a state of inaction for at least one, probably two, years until the return from the south of Samudra Gupta and the subsequent ‘battle’ at Eran seems most improbable. If the Vakatakas had been paramount in the north it is hard to understand why, after Kausambi, in which they themselves were not involved, they were apparently unable to overrun Gupta territory and at the least seriously embarrass Samudra Gupta’s southern campaign. Failing that, at the ‘battle’ of Eran, with half the empire already lost, a final desperate effort to retrieve fortune would surely have been made, which would, on the defeat and death of Rudrasena I have resulted in complete collapse, bankruptcy of the State, and the revolt of the south. The remarkable recuperation under Rudrasena’s successor Prithivisena I shows the resources of the State practically intact and must indicate that whatever influence the Vakatakas may have had in the north the main strength of the empire was in the south.

As a result of the ‘defeat’ at Eran influence in northern India ceased but even so they appear to have been considered so important that their neutrality in the north, essential to the consolidation of the Gupta power, had to be ensured by the betrothal of Samudra Gupta’s grand-daughter to Prithivisena’s son.

Further, Vindhyasakti, founder of the dynasty, is recorded as a Naga general whose conquests were largely in the very territories afterwards recognized not only as integral and important parts of the Vakataka dominions but also to a great extent as the ‘home’ districts.

It is difficult to avoid the inference that what he conquered for his masters he kept for himself. It explains the administration of outlying districts from the Central Provinces and

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2 Witness the rapidity with which the Gupta Deccan province passed again under the Vakatakas and also their defeat of the Kadambas.
3 In view of the great power of the Guptas and the high importance, from the point of view of prestige, attached to the marriage of a daughter of an imperial house, the importance of this marriage appears to have received less attention than it deserves. Coming after the ‘defeat’ of the Vakatakas at Eran it is a remarkable tribute to the anxiety of the Guptas.
renders the location of the capital at Ganj-Nachne unlikely on account both of its northern position and its situation in feudatory territory. The last condition might perhaps be justifiable if the political position in the north was stable, which judging by the ease with which the Guptas rose to power it was not.

On the whole therefore the Vakatakas would certainly appear as rulers whose main strength lay in the south.

A suggestion has been made that the capital was near Ramtek and it certainly appears to have claims to consideration: situated in the Nagpur country in which as "home" territory the capital would be expected; roughly at the geographic centre of the sphere of influence; intimately associated with the known records; and with the traces of extensive settlements in the near neighbourhood, Ramtek must have occupied a position of great importance in the Vakataka empire.

1 G.I., No. 53 and 54; E.I., XVII, 12. Inscriptions of Vyaghradeva, feudatory.
2 J.I.H., VI, Vakataka Supplement suggests that the capital was near Ramtek at the time of Prabhavati Gupta and Pravarasena II.
3 Plate 1, No. 1 is a place map of the known records which analyse as follows:—

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Royal</th>
<th>1 each, Jubbulpore, Chhindwara, Seoni, Bhagalpur, Chamak, and Riddhapur</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feudatory</td>
<td>7, (Ajanta 3, Nachne 4).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 from Nandivardhana both near Ramtek. 

* Riddhapur plates were issued at, and the Mansar 5th century fragment was found near Ramtek. 

** Usually recorded as from Ramtek. Mr. Suboor of the Nagpur Museum informs me that it was actually found during the construction of the reservoir at Khindsi.

In view of the supposed predominance of the Vakatakas in the north it is disappointing that no record, even feudatory, has been found further north than Nachne.
Note.—Inscriptions. Since writing the above I have been fortunate in securing an entirely new Vakataka copperplate grant comprising four plates, ring and seal complete and in excellent preservation. Professor Mirashi of Nagpur University, who has kindly undertaken the editing of these plates and who hopes to publish them shortly, informs me that they record the grant by Pravarasena II, of a village to a Brahmin. The plates were issued from Narattangavari in the 23rd regnal year. The find-spot is about 8 miles south of Katangi in the Balaghat district, Central Provinces, 31 miles W.-S.W. of Balaghat and 34 miles N.E. of Ramtek. On the map of inscription find-spots its position would be roughly halfway between Ramtek and Balaghat and a little to the north of a line joining them.

Ramtek, C.P.,
4th July, 1934.

T. A. W.
Fig. 1. Place Map of Vakataka Inscriptions.

Fig. 2. Vakataka Inscriptions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANANTA</td>
<td>ANANTA II CHATOTWACHA CAVES</td>
<td>ROCK INSCR.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMRAOTI</td>
<td>RIDDHAPUR CHAMMAK</td>
<td>COPPER PLATE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAMTEK</td>
<td>KHANDSI NANDPUR MANSAR</td>
<td>CLOTSTONE</td>
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<tr>
<td>CUNINDWARA</td>
<td>DUBIA</td>
<td>COPPER PLATE</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEONI</td>
<td>SEONI (NEAR)</td>
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<tr>
<td>BALAGHAT</td>
<td>BALAGHAT (NEAR)</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
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<td>VUGBULORE</td>
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<td>NACHNE KE</td>
<td>NACHNE AGANI</td>
<td>ROCK INSCR.</td>
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<tr>
<td>TALAI</td>
<td>B. DURENA</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Poona plates of Queen Prabhavali Gupt, find spot unknown, but issued from Nandivardhana.
Fig. 1. Vakataka settlements near Ramtek.

Fig. 2. Potteries and Lingas discovered at Mansar.
Fig. 1. Fragment of Inscribed Stone found at Mansar.

Fig. 2. Nandpur Nandivardhana.
Section.

1. Terracotta
2. Grindstone
3. Porous stone
4. Red stone
4a. Implements
5. Copper ring.

PLATE 9.

Sstoffed

BRICK

6. Triangular Brick
7. Bones
8. Flat Stones
9. Pottery
x Charred wood.

18.12.1891.
Carved stone fragments found at Mansar to the south of the Lake.
Fig. 1. Monastery site from the North-east.

Fig. 2. Central Mound Monastery site from the West.

Fig. 3. Stone facing at Tank edge West side of Monastery site.