Chapter 5.

The Conclusion

5.1 Conclusions from Balathal

The seven seasons of excavations at the site of Balathal, the large amount of data recovered from them, and the analysis of that data, have led to a number of tentative conclusions vis-à-vis the settlement, the reasons for the establishment of a site at this location, the main activities at the site, the way of life of its inhabitants and the reasons for its abandonment.

5.1.1 The two distinct phases of occupation during the Early Historic

As discussed in Chapter 4, in the Early Historic period at Balathal there are two different phases. These phases were architecturally, artefactually, ceramically, and chronologically different. The Chalcolithic occupation at Balathal represents Period I, and the Early Historic phase represents Period II. Period II is further divisible into two phases or sub-periods, namely Period IIA and Period IIB. Period IIA was the first phase of Early Historic occupation. It was the period in which the settlement was established and grew into a prosperous village. In Phase IIB the settlement was smaller and less prosperous.
5.1.2 Exploitation of the natural setting and resources

Having established the presence of an Early Historic inhabitation, one needs now to look into the region in which the Early Historic inhabitants settled, to better understand the reasons for its establishment. Palaeoclimatic studies clearly show that the area had the same kind of climate 2500 to 2000 years ago as is seen today (see 1.4.8). The site was located on the bank of a large shallow lake. The area was rich in forested lands yielding ready sources of wild plant foods, timber and fuel. The area falls in a semi-arid region and in all probability had extensive grass cover ideal for the grazing of domesticated animals. It was rich in minerals and other resources and it fell on the direct route from northwestern India to northern Rajasthan, southern Rajasthan and thence to central and western India.

5.1.3 The purposes for the settlement and existence of the site

Having established the presence of Early Historic inhabitation and the conducive environs one needs now to look into the reasons for its establishment. The settlement was located here for a wide number of reasons. The first is the perennial source of water, essential for human and animal consumption, farming, and industrial activity. Secondly, the area was particularly conducive to farming and pastoralism. Thirdly, it had in its vicinity an ample supply of wood for construction and for fuel. Fourthly, it was situated close to the iron ores of Iswal so as to obtain pre-smelted iron for purposes of reworking. Fifthly, the site lay on the natural trade route that ran from the north India to central and western India.
5.1.4 War: A possible reason for the destruction of the first phase of habitation during the Early Historic period (Period II A)

The site of Balathal was a flourishing village engaged in the production of agricultural surplus. The entire site was destroyed by a fire a considerable time after it had been established and was flourishing. Was this fire an accident of some sort or was this intentional? If intentional, could it have been an act of war?

If the site was destroyed as an act of war the immediate question that arises is, who were the perpetrators? In all probability the perpetrator were the Indo Greek forces led by Appolodotus.

Sometime between 185 and 167 B.C. the Indo Greek king Demetrius sent his collateral ruler Appolodotus and his general Menander to invade the Indian heartland. Appolodotus came down the Indus from Taxila, turned east towards Bharuch and then proceeded north via the great road to Ujjain, Vidisa, and Kausambi. Menander took the great road east from Taxila, across Punjab and Delhi, to Pataliputra. They eventually met at Pataliputra and subsequently returned together to Bactria. In the course of his move north from Ujjain Appolodotus attacked and laid siege to the city of Madhyamika (Nagari) (Tarn 1951: 129-82).

It is difficult to prove whether there was an attack on Balathal in the course of the campaign against Madhyamika. There are no direct evidences of war visible. No mutilated bodies, infact almost no human remains at all. The only evidences are the complete destruction of the
site due to fire and the distribution of arrowheads and spearheads randomly strewn across the site.

All other evidence is circumstantial. The first is that the site is not the only one in the vicinity with such evidence. The site of Avra in Madhya Pradesh (which lies on the route from Ujjain to Nagari) also has strata yielding artefacts similar to those seen at Balathal and was witness to a similar destruction, by fire. In addition, the presence of Appolodotus in this region is further supported by the discovery of one of his coins at Ahar, only 35 km west of Balathal.

The evidence is by no means clinching but yet it cannot be dismissed. There is an abrupt end to the prosperous Early Historic village, which was later replaced by a smaller village/farmstead. This itself indicates some sort of major upheaval in the area.

5.2 Early Historic Conclusions

Excavations at Balathal have firmly established that Mewar was settled for the first time after the end of the Chalcolithic settlement by iron using people who were farmers and craftsmen and had strong affiliations to the Ganga valley. These people had a thorough knowledge of agriculture and animal husbandry, they built permanent dwellings of wattle and daub and wood, were experts in the production of iron implements, manufactured and traded in various goods, and had contacts with various parts of north, and central India.
These people settled in Mewar around end of the 5th-the beginning of the 4th century B.C. and quickly established a presence in the entire region. Prior to this period there is as yet no evidence of a settled way of life after the disappearance of the Chalcolithic Aharians, around 1400 B.C. In the 4th century B.C. the whole of northern and central India was the domain of the Sisunagas and the Nandas.

To understand or even postulate the possible political rulers of the region in which Balathal lay during the 4th century B.C. it is imperative to briefly review the entire political history of northern and central India during the Early Historic period.

In the total absence of any literary sources pertaining to this part of Rajasthan in the period from 600 B.C. to 150 B.C. the only basis of reconstructing the prevalent polity is circumstantial evidence and conjecture. Southeastern Rajasthan is not truly a geographical zone by itself as much as it is an extension of the Malwa Plateau. According to the Buddhist text Anguttara Nikaya the reigning polity in Malwa from the 6th century B.C. onwards was the Janapada of Avanti, then ruled by the Haihayas (Bhargava 1996: 15). Towards the latter part of the 5th century B.C., after the end of the Haihaya dynasty, a king known as Chanda Pradyota Mahasena (founder of the Pradyota dynasty of Avanti) ruled Avanti. He was a contemporary of Ajatasatru of Magadha and was known for his conquests and battles. He waged war against the Gandhara Janapada (Taxila) and was the cause of the strengthening of the defenses of Rajagriha (modern Rajgir), the capital of Magadha, which he attacked even during the reign of Bimbisara (580-550 B.C.) (Raychaudhuri 1950: 204-5). Throughout the reign of Ajatasatru and his successors,
Avanti and Magadha vied for supremacy (Bhargava 1996: 17). The next great king of Magadha was Sisunaga, founder of the Sisunaga dynasty. He ascended the throne in 422 B.C. (Raychaudhuri 1950: 228). He defeated Avantivardhana the king of Avanti and added it to the domains of Magadha (Bhargava 1996: 20), thus forming the first real empire in India - the Magadhan Empire (Bhargava 1996: 20; Raychaudhuri 1950: 221). Thus in the 4th century B.C. Avanti became an integral part of the Magadhan Empire (Raychaudhuri 1950: 146). The Sisunagas in their turn were overthrown by Mahapadma Nanda, the first king of the Nanda dynasty in 357 B.C. (Nilakanta Sastri 1967: 13; Bhargava 1996: 20). Mahapadma Nanda had a formidable army and annexed the kingdoms of Kosala, Kasi, Kalinga, Asmaka, Avanti, Kuru, Panchala, Vatsa, Mithila and the kingdoms of the Surasenas and the Vitihotras (who ruled eastern Malwa) (Bhargava 1996: 23; Raychaudhuri 1950: 233-34). He not only conquered these states but also did away with the ruling Kshatriya dynasties and established a direct central rule (Nilakanta Sastri 1967: 11). For this the Puranas called him "...the destroyer of all the Kshatriyas (sarva-Kshatrantaka) and the sole monarch (ekarat) of the earth (Raychaudhuri 1950: 233)." Mahapadma Nanda thus carved out an Empire made up of almost all of modern day north and central India and parts of northeastern Pakistan, from (undivided) Punjab to Bengal and from Haryana to Maharashtra (Raychaudhuri 1950: 235).

This was the Empire whose fame and awe stopped the armies of Alexander from entering the plains of India (Raychaudhuri 1950: 262), and was in turn conquered by a force of arms around 320-310 B.C. by Chandragupta Maurya, founder of the Maurya dynasty. Chandragupta Maurya further extended the borders of his Empire in the south all the
way to Tirunelvelli in Tamil Nadu and in the west till the seacoasts of Gujarat and Maharashtra. To the north he defeated Alexander's heir, Seleucus Nikator in 312 B.C. and annexed the Ariana territories of Gandhara (Taxila). Thus by 312 B.C. Chandragupta Maurya had created, with the exception of Kalinga (modern Orissa), what we know today as the Mauryan Empire. (Bhargava 1996: 40)

Chandragupta died sometime after 301 B.C. and was succeeded by his son, Bindusara. Bindusara was an able king and held his enemies at bay with his force of arms as is apparent from his Greek appellation Amitrochates, which translates into Sanskrit as Amitraghata - the destroyer of foes, or Amitrakhada - the devourer of enemies (Nilakanta Sastri 1967: 166). Bindusara died somewhere around 270-275 B.C. and was succeeded after a gap of four years by his son, Asoka. During the reign of his father Bindusara, Asoka was the viceroy of the Mauryan provinces of Gandhara (Taxila) and Avanti (Ujjain) (Thapar 1961: 21-2; Nilakanta Sastri 1967: 209). Asoka was crowned either in 265 B.C. (Nilakanta Sastri 1967: 206) or in 268-9 B.C. (Thapar 1961: 25). He was a good king and favoured Buddhism. His only great conquest was that of Kalinga in the ninth year of his reign (Thapar 1961: 35; Nilakanta Sastri 1967: 211). The carnage wrought by his army so sickened him that he forsook war and adopted the path of peace by converting to Buddhism (Thapar 1961: 36-9). He was the first king in Indian history to leave behind a large corpus of literary data in the form of edicts carved on rocks and pillars throughout the regions under his sway. Asoka died in 233-2 B.C. He was followed in quick succession by between four and ten rulers (the various sources are at odds with one another here) whose rule lasted about 50 years. The last of the Mauryas, Brhadratha, was killed by his general, Pusyamitra Sunga who
took over the reins of the Mauryan Empire and began the Sunga dynasty in 181-80 B.C. (Thapar 1961: 196).

Taking into consideration the above-mentioned history of the surrounding regions and India as a whole we can arrive at some postulates with a high probability of accuracy. These are:

1. The region of Mewar was an extension of the domain/province of Avanti.
2. This region was probably noticed as fit for extensive exploitation during the campaigns of Chanda Pradyota Mahasena against Taxila, as he would have traversed through Mewar since it lies on the shortest route north.
3. Mewar was probably first colonised around 400 B.C. during the reign of the Sisunagas.
4. The site came into prominence and flowered during the reign of the Nandas around 380 B.C. and continued to flourish during the reign of their successors the Mauryas and subsequently the Sungas.
5. It was a production centre for leather and reworked iron.
6. It was an important site on a trade route running from Central India to Gandhara and Bactria.
7. The first phase of Early Historic occupation at Balathal came to an abrupt end by fire around 180 B.C., probably as a result of the invasion of Appolodotus.

These facts are further strengthened by a perusal of the Arthashastra, a text on polity written at the time of Chandragupta Maurya by his mentor and guide, Kautilya. Kautilya also known as Chanakya and
Vishnugupta, was a resident of Taxila. His work, the Arthashastra is a highly idealized text on how an ideal monarch should run an ideal kingdom.

As per the text of the Arthashastra it is clear that the region was settled in all probability due to its natural resources. The Arthashastra is very clear that, "The prosperity of the state and its inhabitants cannot be maintained unless new territory is acquired by settlement of virgin lands. (Rangarajan 1987: 15)". One of their major industries of the State was the mining and smelting of iron, and the making of various implements from the same. The Arthashastra also clearly mentions that the mining of iron and the manufacture of weapons were the sole prerogatives of the government (Rangarajan 1987: 84). Even the work of the smith was regulated by the state (Rangarajan 1987: 84).

The variety and number of objects found at Balathal give rise to the probability of a trade route passing through the region of Mewar and linking the North with Central India. The Arthashastra clearly mentions trade, "...as the third pillar of economic activity (Rangarajan 1987: 86)." It also discusses the various foreign regions and the items thereof, in the north it mentions Gandhara and Bactria (furs and horses), and Kapisa and Harahura (Afghanistan and Scythia) for Wines (Rangarajan 1987: 87). Not only are there similarities between the artefacts from Balathal and Taxila (the capital of the province of Gandhra) but there are also probable remains of grape from Balathal.

Further evidences of trade are circumstantial. Amethyst, which is a common raw material for beads at Balathal and other coeval sites in northern India, is found mainly in the vast Deccan Trap deposits of
Maharashtra. The same is the case for crystal and citrine. These materials could only have been present in the quantities seen at Balathal if there was a regular trade mechanism operative between the source area, the manufacturers and the consumers at Balathal.

5.2.1 Comparative chronology vis-à-vis: Rajasthan

At the present stage it is very difficult to propose a comparative chronology for Rajasthan. The Early Historic sites excavated either belong to a much earlier period (as is the case at Noh and Jodhpura) or are much later (as is the case at Bhinmal and Rangmahal). The sites with a similar repertoire of artefacts have either been excavated on a very small scale (as at Ahar) or have yet to appear in report form (as is the case with Nagari and Sunnari).

What can be said on the basis of the data obtained from the excavations at Balathal is that the region we know today as Mewar was a land devoid of any permanent settlements during the early phase of the Iron Age in India. It was also untenanted during the Janapada period (the 6th century B.C.) and was populated for the first time by settled agro-pastoralists only around 450/400 B.C.

The only site, which has yielded data similar to that from Balathal, is the site of Rairh (Puri 1940). But even here the analysis of the data is extremely difficult as the excavation is not reported in much detail and the dating is based on artefacts found prior to the excavation (Puri 1940: 39). At the most one can say that both Rairh and Balathal were co-extant during the same period and show similar artefactual trends.
The general conclusion thus is that once populated southeastern Rajasthan became an important region producing iron, finished iron goods and leather. It also became a major player in trade between the northern reaches of the Nanda and Mauryan Empires and the province of Avanti and through it central India. Trade also saw influences from the Mathura region vying with those from Avanti.

Major activities were probably heavily curtailed by the invasion of the Indo Greeks who in all probability settled the tribe of the Sibis [also known as the Sivis or Siboi (Greek)] at Madhyamika after their successful conquest of the city (Tarn 1951: 170). This is substantiated by the fact that in Period IIB the site loses its importance and exists only as a small farmstead.

5.2.2 Comparative chronology vis-à-vis: Northern and Central India

The comparative chronology of Balathal vis-à-vis Northern and Central India is a bit complicated. To understand the artefactual co-relations one has to first review the entire chronology of the NBPW. Almost all the sites in the Ganga valley that yield NBPW have their lowermost horizon automatically dated to the 6th century B.C. due to the dating of the lowermost levels of the NBPW at Hastinapura by Lal (1956:12) to the 6th century B.C. This was done by Lal on the assumption that the overlying (Sunga/Kushana) deposit was of the 1st century A.D. and thus the six metres of deposit below had to be at least six hundred years older. All the subsequent excavations used this lower limit, irrespective of the size of their deposits and any other datable materials. Thus we have levels that are labelled Mauryan and those below them Pre-Mauryan/600-
300B.C. Thus we have almost no excavated material that has thus far been specifically assigned to the reign of the Sisunagas or the Nandas.

Subsequently a number of sites had their strata yielding NBPW dated by C14 dating. The results all seem to give a much later date than that postulated by Lal at Hastinapura. The (uncalibrated) dates are:

1. Atranjikhera  460 B.C.
2. Kausambi    435 B.C.
3. Kayatha     430 B.C.
4. Rajghat     490 B.C.
5. Rupar       415 B.C.

Surprisingly all these dates point to a date of no earlier than the 5th century B.C. for the NBPW, thus leaving us with the piquant problem of assigning the NBPW not to the 6th century B.C (or earlier) but probably to the Sisunagas and their immediate predecessors the scions of Bimbisara.

Now that the problem of the Chronology of NBPW is taken care of, we can turn our attention to the artefactual assemblage from Balathal. The ceramics from Balathal are almost completely mirrored at Hastinapur III (Abhijit Dandekar pers. comm.) and with the ceramic assemblages of corresponding sites from the Ganga valley. Ceramic markers common to both sites include pear shaped pots in RW, carinated pots with inverted tapering rim and rounded base in RW and FGW, FGW dishes, B&RW dishes, BSW dishes and sherds of NBPW. Similar vessels are seen in the pre-Mauryan levels at Bagor, Rairh, Avra, Tripuri, Ujjain, Atranjikhera,
Kausambi, Pataliputra, Rajghat, Sonkh, Tilaura-kot, Vaisali, Rupar and Prakash. They are also seen in the Mauryan levels from Ahar, Kakarehta, Nagda, Tripuri, Ujjain, Ahichchhatra, Atranjikhera, Kausambi, Pataliputra, Sonkh, Sonpur, Sravasti, Tilaura-kot, Vaisali, Rupar, Taxila, Nasik and Prakash.

Artefacts similar to those seen at Balathal are seen in the pre-Mauryan levels at Avra, Nagda, Tripuri, Ujjain, Kakarehta, Hastinapura, Kausambi, Pataliputra, Rajghat, Sonkh, Tilaura-kot, Vaisali, Rupar, Taxila, Dhatwa and Nagara. Selected artefacts from Balathal match those seen in the Mauryan levels from Ahar, Rairh, Sambhar, Avra, Kakarehta, Kayatha, Maheshwar and Navdatoli, Nagda, Tripuri, Ujjain, Ahichchhatra, Atranjikhera, Hastinapura, Pataliputra, Rajghat, Sonkh, Sonpur, Sravasti, Tilaura-kot, Vaisali, Rupar, Taxila, Nagara, Kaundinyapura, Nasik, Pauni and Prakash.

These specific artefacts used as type fossils include headscratchers, skinrubbers, 4-legged querns, coins of the elephant and hill type, hexagonally faceted bitruncated beads of amethyst, citrine and crystal, globular carnelian beads etched with white dots, globular and biconical carnelian beads etched with bands of intersecting pentagons, faceted bicones of crystal, and, appliqued and plain glass bangle fragments (see 4.4 and 4.5).
5.3 Balathal: A Pre-Mauryan/Mauryan settlement in Southern Rajasthan

The above mentioned parallels in the artefactual assemblage of Balathal with those from a number of sites in Northern and Central India along with the C14 dates from the site of Balathal clearly establish Balathal as a pre-Mauryan/Mauryan site.

5.4 Discussion on the need and directions for further research

Excavations at the site of Balathal have yielded a plethora of data pertaining to a period unknown hitherto in southern Rajasthan (Mewar). This period is also very sketchily understood in its own heartland. There is a crying need to excavate horizontally and vertically a number of sites in Rajasthan and in the rest of India so as to fully understand the phenomenon of Empire building in a period prior to that of the Mauryas and to understand the India that was known to Alexander and the Achaemenids.

There has been little or no work done on the Early Historic period in southern Rajasthan. Whatever little has been done has either been inadequate or remains unreported. The site of Nagari, for example, could yield a wealth of data pertaining to the periods under study. It is the hope of this author that a series of extensive and intensive excavations will be carried out in the study area so as to fill up the gaps in the Early history of Rajasthan and add new chapter to its glorious history.