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## Further Discovery of a Plaque Representing *Rhinoceros Unicornis* from Dum Dum Excavation, West Bengal: An Observation

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The recent discovery near the historic house of Lord Clive, the then Governor General of the East India Company, at Dum Dum, Kolkata by the Archaeological Survey of India, Calcutta Circle, Kolkata during the seasons 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 for the first time established the early history of Dum Dum. The popular belief that the place came into prominence during the early days of the East India Company only is untenable because of the fact that the above excavation proved beyond doubt that the place was in occupation continuously from the second century B.C. to the eleventh-twelfth century A.D. The excavation has further proved that the area after a gap of a few centuries was in occupation again from c. fifteenth-sixteenth century A.D. that still continues today. The excavation was undertaken near the premises of the country house of Lord Clive that stands here now in a dilapidated condition. The plaque fixed on the front entrance of this historic house points out that in this country house Lord Clive lived between 1757-60 and 1765-67.

Of all the antiquarian finds and the terracottas recovered from the site deserve special mention. Typical terracotta human and animal figurines having the characteristic features of the periods beginning from the Sunga period onwards attract the attention of art-lovers.

The most remarkable find that deserves special attention is a terracotta plaque depicting a Rhinoceros made out of a single mould. The plaque depicts the animal having a small single horn on the snout, the skin folded into shields and studded with tubercles on shoulder, thighs and buttock. The realistic representation of the animal with minute details leave no room for doubt that the artists working in clay at Dum Dum were familiar with this animal. The plaque on stratigraphic ground is assigned to the Kushana period (c. first-third century A.D.). Almost parallel finds from Chandraketugarh had been met earlier from Period IV, coeval with the Kushana period (c. A.D. 100-300).<sup>2</sup> The site of Chandraketugarh, 23 miles north-east of Kolkata is an early historical site that yielded evidences of the occupation from the pre-Mauryan to the late Mediaeval period.

It is interesting to note that the single-horned Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) was common and widespread in the Indo-Gangetic plains and its neighbouring countries (Rao, 1957) but by the

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end of the seventeenth century it had completely disappeared from much of its range, except Nepal, Bengal and Assam. The present distribution is limited to some scattered patches of the Himalayan Terai (Chitwan-Rapti Valley) in eastern Nepal, northern part of West Bengal (Jalpaiguri District), Brahmaputra Valley of Assam (north Kamrup; Nowgaon, Sibsagar and Darrang Districts) (Mukherjee, 1982). That this animal once survived in the swamps of Sunderban in South Bengal till 1870 is a well-known fact. The discovery of the one-horned Rhinoceros skeleton from Calcutta has been reported in 1977 from Gobra, a place in eastern Kolkata by the palaeontologists of the Geological Survey of India. According to the report of the Geological Survey of India the one-horned Rhinoceros lived in the alluvial swamps and its surroundings at least one thousand years ago.

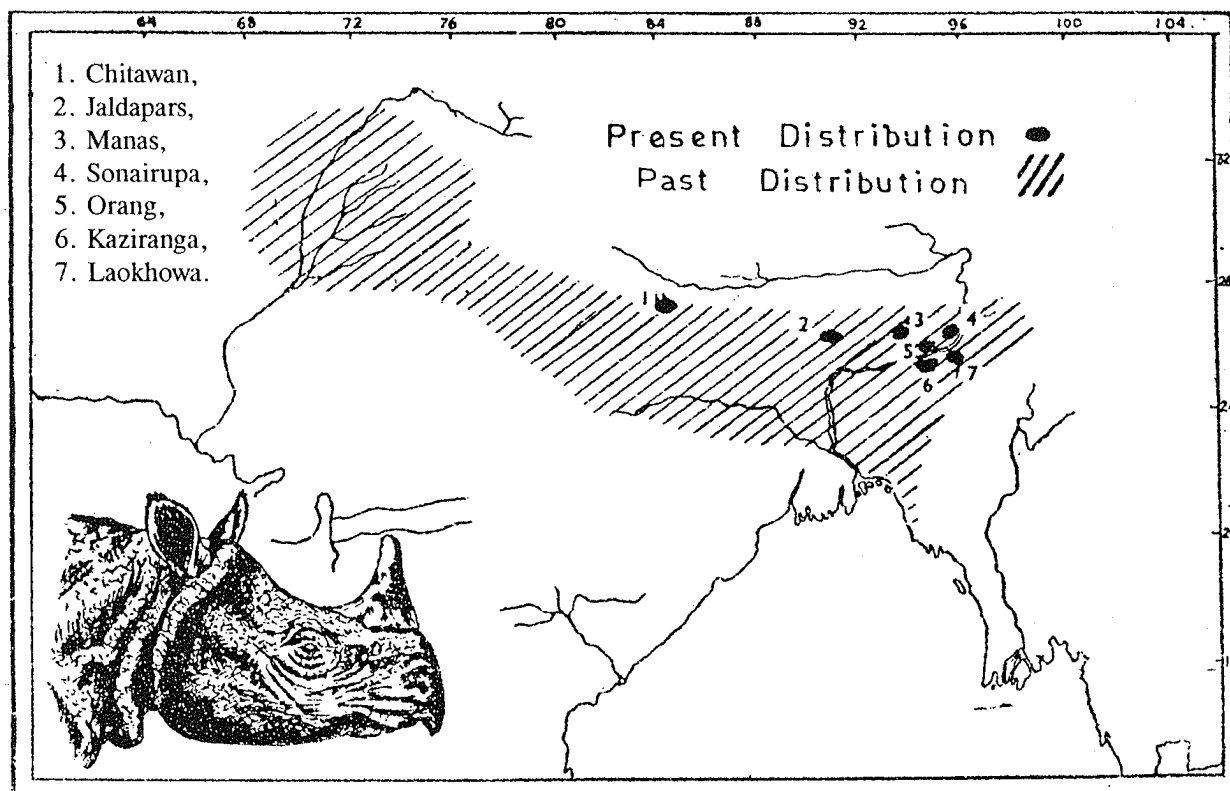


Fig. 1: The Great One Horned Rhinoceros.

Thus the discovery of plaques depicting the single horned Rhinoceros both at Chandraketugarh (Pl. 13.1) and at Dum Dum (Pl. 13.2) now falling within the district of North 24 Parganas presupposes that this animal flourished in this semi-marshy, humid land during the early Christian eras. The area under discussion once formed part of greater Sunderban region. Evidence of the discoveries of several Sundari and Garan trees at various parts of Kolkata during construction works including the construction of metro rail tracks at places like Curzon Park Tank (1815), Dhakuria Lake (1941), Salt Lake (1969), Park Street (1975) and other places point out that the major part of the city, especially the eastern zone once formed part of the mangrove forest of the Sunderban. Interestingly, a sample of the Sundari wood found in the Salt Lake area has been dated about five thousand years old on the basis of radio-carbon dating.<sup>5</sup>

**References**

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