

TERRACOTTA ART OF BENGAL

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With a Foreword
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The ram has been depicted in terracotta art mostly as toy-cart (Plate LI). This representation has been abundantly found at the major ancient sites of Bengal. As a mount, the animal is also shown along with Āgneyī or Svāhā (Plate XIV b). The Goat, (Plate XLVII e) a variety of this species, is also represented in terracottas.

A terracotta plaque from Chandraketugarh (Plate XLVII a) depicts a rhinoceros. The folds of the thick hide of the animal are shown most realistically. This is no doubt a specimen of *Rhinoceros saundicus* which are still to be found in Java. Though these animals lived in Sundarban from remote antiquity they have now become extinct in the jungles of littoral Bengal due to indiscriminate hunting. Their last specimen was killed in the last century.

The representation of monkey in terracotta art of Bengal is interesting. A plaque (Plate XXIX a) from Tamluk visualizing a scene from the *Chhaddanta Jātaka* portrays two monkeys playing on the branches of the tree. Here obviously the monkeys suggest the atmosphere of the forest. A scene of wrestling of monkeys (Plate XXXIX b) from Chandraketugarh is indeed most amusing and has perhaps no parallel in the terracotta art of India. The plaque, though small, will recall the combat between Vali and Sugriva as told in the *Rāmāyana*. A toy-cart from Chandraketugarh shows an unidentified deity with consorts on the back of an animal. The mount appears to be a tiger represented here with considerable formalization that seemingly conveys a folk-inspiration of antiquity. Besides these, there are other animals such as boar, crocodile, serpent, etc., depicted in the terracottas of Bengal. A boar head, probably envisaging *Varāha* (Plate LVc) i.e., the Boar-incarnation of Vishṇu and *Vārāhī*,⁸⁴ one of the *Saptamātrikās* (Plate LXII) are also represented in the terracotta art. These figures sculpted in life size come from Panna.

Crocodile toy-cart is abundant in north India but in Bengal this type is yet to be found. As already noted before, a terracotta

84. J.N. Banerjea, *Op. cit.*, 1956, pp. 185-85 and 504-5.

b. ELEPHANT QUADRIGA

Ht. 10.2 cm.

Tamluk

c. 2nd cent. B.C.

Tāmralipta Museum.

The front part of an elephant-drawn quadriga is shown in the plaque. The elephants are tied in a row and being goaded by an *aṅkuṣa*.

c. ELEPHANT

Ht. 9.5 cm.

Chandraketugarh

c. 1st cent. A.D.

Private Collection.

Though corroded the plaque clearly represents an elephant possibly trying to put down a plantain (?) tree by its head and front right leg (See page 99).

Plate XLVII

a. RHINOCEROS

Ht. 4.9 cm.

Chandraketugarh

c. 1st cent. A.D.

State Archaeological Gallery, West Bengal.

This mutilated plaque portrays a rhinoceros. Its voluminous mass is modelled realistically showing vividly the folds of its hide (See page 101).

b. DOE WITH HER FAWN

Ht. 7.5 cm.

Chandraketugarh

c. 1st cent. B.C.

State Archaeological Gallery, West Bengal.

This is one of the most realistic studies of animal form portraying a doe with her fawn in the act of fleeing (See page 100).

c. BULL ON SEAL

Ht. 3.5 cm.

Chandraketugarh

1st cent. B.C./A.D.

State Archaeological Gallery, West Bengal.



a



b



c



d



e