

Kayatha Culture: Problems and Issues

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Abstract

The Kayatha culture is one of the most important Chalcolithic cultures of India and specifically of Madhya Pradesh. Its discovery raised questions among the scholars like its origin, extent, cultural significance etc. Quite a few number of Kayatha culture sites have been excavated which however complicated the understanding of the Kayatha culture even more rather than providing significant answers. The issues and problems associated with the Kayatha culture have been pointed out. Based on the issues and problems, a re-analysis of the Kayatha culture ceramics has been carried out and it has been proposed that Chocolate Slipped Ware should not be considered as the characteristic ceramic of the Kayatha culture. Instead the Red on Cream Variety of Red Ware should be recognised as the main parameter for the identification of the Kayatha culture.

Keywords: Chalcolithic, Kayatha culture, Explored sites, Excavated sites, Stratigraphy, Chronological Problems, Dating, Re-analysis.

Introduction

V.S. Wakankar of Vikram University, Ujjain carried out extensive survey in the Malwa region and identified various Chalcolithic sites. In his exploration, he found a Chalcolithic pottery hitherto unknown and termed it as the Nepawali Meen Ware (Wakankar 1967). His work showed the existence of an earlier culture but it was based on the surface collection and was not from a stratified context. It was against this background that he did the excavation at Kayatha from 1965-67 (Wakankar 1967) and brought to light a new Chalcolithic culture in the Malwa region termed as the Kayatha Culture. The earlier reported Nepawali Meen Ware was re- casted as Kayatha Ware (Wakankar 1967). In order to understand the distribution of Kayatha culture sites he carried out exploration in the Malwa region and reported sites pertaining to the Kayatha Culture (Wakankar 1967). Most of the sites are located in river valleys of Narmada and Chambal. The site of Kayatha was re-excavated by Z.D. Ansari and M.K. Dhavalikar of

Deccan College, Pune in collaboration with V.S. Wakankar of Vikram University, Ujjain in 1968 (Ansari and Dhavalikar 1975).

Both the excavations were important as they pointed out that an independent chalcolithic culture was prevalent in Central India in the second millennium BCE based on the radio carbon dates (Ansari and Dhavalikar 1975). Moreover the excavation also stretched the spread of Ahar culture in the Malwa region before which it's spread was thought to be confined only in Mewar region of Rajasthan based on the excavations at Ahar (Sankalia et. al. 1969).

Discovery of Kayatha culture led archaeologists to take up more sites for excavations to confirm the existence. A series of sites such as Azad Nagar (Wakankar 1976; Wakankar 1981), Pipilya Lorka (Krishna 1976; IAR 1983-84: 52-53), Runija (Wakankar 1980), Mandsaur (Wakankar and Bajpai 1981), Dangwada (IAR 1982-83:59-61), Kotra (IAR 1988-89:40-41; Trivedi 1991-92; IAR 1990-91:35-36; Pandeya 1990-91) were subjected to excavation. Except for Eran (IAR 1960-61:17-18; IAR 1961-62:24-25; IAR 1962-63:11-12; IAR 1963-64:15-16; IAR 1987-88:76-77; IAR 1997-98:114-115; Singh 1967; Pandey 1984) which was subjected to excavation prior to the identification of Kayatha culture shows that in the initial reporting Kayatha culture is missing whereas it appears in the reports after 1987 (Map No. 1).

The characteristic feature of the Kayatha culture is the ceramic assemblage which distinguishes it from the other Chalcolithic cultures which has been identified at the site of Kayatha. Wakankar (1967) identified four wares from the Kayatha levels viz. Kayatha Rough Coarse Ware, Kayatha Buff ware, Kayatha Sturdy Ware and Kayatha Incised Ware. He has further sub-divided the wares into different classes based on the surface treatment. Dhavalikar and Ansari (IAR 1967-68:24-25; Dhavalikar 1970; Ansari and Dhavalikar 1975; Dhavalikar 1997) however developed a different classification of the Wares and has described the ceramic assemblage as the Kayatha or the Chocolate Slipped Ware, Red on Buff Ware, Combed Ware and Handmade Ware. Except for the site of Kayatha, no other site has produced evidence of material culture in the form of antiquities. At the site of Kayatha, even though the excavation was of limited nature, a significant record of antiquities has been found. From one of the houses excavator

reports a copper cache containing 27 bangles found in two different pots of Red Painted Buff Ware. The cache has 20 complete bangles, 7 fragmentary and 5 inter-locked in a bunch. Apart from that two exquisite necklaces made of semi precious stones such as carnelian, agate, crystal and jasper has been found. Another cache discovered is of steatite beads found in a pot. The pot contains 40,000 disc shaped steatite beads. The list includes two copper axes as well (IAR 1967-68:24-25; Dhavalikar 1970; Ansari and Dhavalikar 1971; Ansari and Dhavalikar 1975; Dhavalikar 1997).

Problems and Issues

In researching Kayatha culture one can come across many problems. The first and foremost issue is of locating sites. Wakankar (1967) has reported a number of sites but the site details such as latitude and longitude, tehsil or district has not been mentioned. In this case, it is difficult to re-locate these sites and ascertain their relation with Kayatha culture.

Even though a good amount of sites pertaining to the Kayatha culture has been excavated, some basic intriguing issues are still unsolved. The major issue which persists even after so many excavations is of its chronological positioning in a regional and intra-regional framework. The sites excavated give puzzling evidence as regards to its chronological position. At the site of Kayatha there is an ambiguity about a sterile layer between the Kayatha and the Ahar levels. Wakankar (1967) after the initial excavations at Kayatha has reported a sterile layer which thins out to hardly an inch in the corresponding trenches. The sterile layer is reported to be is approximately 15 cm after the second season of excavation (IAR 1967-68,24-25; Dhavalikar 1970; Ansari and Dhavalikar 1971; Ansari and Dhavalikar 1975). Wakankar (1976) however after the second season reports that there is hardly any gap between the Kayatha Culture and the Ahar Culture. Though the sterile layer has been an issue the cultural chronology of the site has not been changed by any of the researchers which is Kayatha Culture followed by the Ahar and the Malwa Cultures respectively. A similar cultural sequencing is confirmed from the excavations at Dangwada (IAR 1982-83:59-61) and Kotra (Pandeya 1990-91).

The cultural sequence obtained at the site of Kayatha cannot be generalised as the other excavated sites have different chronological ordering such as at the site of Eran where Ahar and Malwa cultures preceded the Kayatha Culture (IAR 1987-88:76-77; IAR 1997-98:114-115) whereas at the site of Azad Nagar, the Malwa culture is succeeded by the Kayatha culture without any gap and the Ahar culture is conspicuous by its absence (Wakankar 1981). Even at the site of Mandsaur, the Kayatha culture appears after the Ahar culture (Wakankar and Bajpai 1981). In contrast to these cultural sequencing, at the site of Piplyalorka, Kayatha Ware has been found in a mix assemblage along with White Painted Black and Red Ware which is a characteristic feature of the Ahar Culture and Lustrous Red Ware (Krishna 1976). From the excavated sites and chronological positions Kayatha culture predates Ahar and Malwa cultures at the sites of Kayatha, Dhangwada and Kotra whereas it is post Malwa culture at the sites of Eran and Azad Nagar and at the site of Mandsaur it occurs after the Ahar culture. In this light it can be said that the placing and chronology of Kayatha culture on the regional basis is not strongly based and is a complete chaos and has no stratigraphical validation (Table No. 1). A similar view has been given by Shinde and Deshpande (2002). The above paragraph has been summarised in the following table.

Table 1

Site	Period I	Period II	Period III
Kayatha	Kayatha	Ahar	Malwa
Dangwada	Kayatha	Ahar	Malwa
Kotra	Kayatha	Ahar	Malwa
Eran	Ahar	Malwa	Kayatha
Azad Nagar	Malwa	Kayatha	
Mandsaur	Ahar	Kayatha	
Pipilya Lorka	Kayatha and Ahar		

Another issue related with Kayatha is of chronological bracketing. As stated earlier, Ansari and Dhavalikar (1975) based on the radiometric dates put the Kayatha culture in

the second millennium BCE whereas the recalibration done by Possehl and Rissman puts the Kayatha culture in a bracket of Ca 2450-2000 BCE i.e. third millennium BCE (Possehl and Rissman 1992).

As far as the cultural material is concerned the Kayatha culture sites are devoid of any construction activities save rammed floors and probably wattle and daub structures (Dhavalikar 1970; Ansari and Dhavalikar 1975; Dhavalikar 1997; Wakankar 1968-69; Wakankar 1976; Wakankar 1981).

In lieu of above information it is required to take systematic survey of the region to document Kayatha culture sites with all modern technologies such as geo-coordinates. Only then is it possible to understand the settlement pattern and distribution network.

To understand the problems of Kayatha positioning in regional chronology the most important step that needs to be taken is of a large scale scientific excavation of sites belonging to the Kayatha culture and specifically re-excavation of some of the multi cultural sites to determine the chronological sequence of the cultures on a regional basis. Based on the new and scientific excavations, the already excavated material should be looked into and the data should be reanalysed. Sites such as Pipilya Lorka and Mandsaur, Kayatha culture appears with the Ahar culture or succeeds the Ahar culture without any cultural gap are more problematic as ceramics which are the only distinguishing feature are similar for both the culture. The Chocolate Ware and the Combed Ware of Kayatha are akin in appearance to that of Tan Ware and Incised Ware of Ahar culture. In such conditions it is very difficult to segregate the characteristic ceramic of Kayatha from that of Ahar due to its resemblance with each other. At this stage the similarity is confined only to the slip colour and shapes. The only distinguishing feature of the Kayatha culture observed only at the site of Kayatha is the Red on Buff Ware which has not been reported from other sites. Hence, in all plausibility Red on Buff Ware looks to be a character of Kayatha culture in place of Chocolate Slipped Ware. The only reason to come to such a conclusion is based on the fact that Chocolate Slipped Ware has been found over a large area such as Rajasthan, Gujarat, Haryana etc as well as is a part of Early and Mature ceramic assemblage of the Harappans, the same can be said about Combed Ware and its similarity with Incised Ware from other cultures. In light of this

discussion Chocolate Slipped Ware and Combed Ware of Kayatha and of Ahar and Harappan are very similar and needs further analyses. In such conditions Chocolate Slipped Ware cannot be granted the characteristic ceramic of Kayatha culture and identification of these sites based on Chocolate Slipped Ware belonging to the Kayatha culture is not on firm grounds.

Re-analyses

On this very background an attempt has been made by the author to study the pottery assemblage from the site of Kayatha housed in the Deccan College repository in order to understand the culture in a better perspective. It was during this study it came to notice that some of the Wares were not reported in the excavation reports. Moreover some of the wares which were reported turned out to be completely different when seen in person. Hence the re-analysis of the Kayatha ceramics was taken up by the author. The re-analyses has been carried out on the basis of Ware types and its varieties and on morphological descriptions. For carrying out re-analyses the method employed is adopted from Shirvalkar (2013).

After the re-analyses, on the basis of the ware types, the Kayatha Culture ceramics has been divided into four main wares:

1. Red Ware
2. Chocolate Slipped Ware
3. Incised Ware
4. Violet Slipped Ware

The Red Ware, Chocolate Slipped Ware and Incised Ware have further been divided into different varieties on the basis of surface treatment and fabric.

Red Ware

Red Ware can be said to be the main ware. It has further been classified into three varieties:

1. Red on Cream Variety (Fig. No.1): This variety has been identified as Red on

Buff Ware by the excavators (Dhavalikar 1970; Ansari and Dhavalikar 1975; Dhavalikar 1990). However on re-examination, this particular ware has been put in a different category. It has been noticed that neither a buff colour slip or wash has been applied nor the fabric itself is buff in colour. This ware however has been found in very limited quantity in the assemblage. The ware has a cream colour wash or slip applied to it. The wash is sometimes so thin that the red colour of the ware is visible below it. Over this cream colour wash or slip, paintings in red have been executed. The paintings usually comprise of geometrical motifs such as bands drawn vertically, horizontally and sometimes even in a slanting way. Apart from these the *jali* pattern is another common motif which has been executed on the vessels. Another important motif which occurs very commonly in this variety is of a triangle. This triangle is done using red colour and it is not filled with any other colour due to which the wash or slip colour that is cream is visible.

It has been observed that in some cases this cream wash or slip is followed by red or chocolate colour slip. The slips have been applied in a manner that it gives it a bichrome effect.

In this ware a peculiar treatment was observed particularly for the bases. Some bases are given cream colour wash over which the rustication is done at the bottom. This rustication is not found in any other wares from Kayatha. The ware is made out of well levigated clay and is very thin in section. It is mostly well fired and is fast wheel made.

2. Red Slipped Variety (Fig. No. 2): A red colour slip has been applied to the vessels. The slip has been applied externally and sometimes extends to the internal side up to the throat. Except for the slip, no decoration has been done. It is both well fired and ill fired. Even the fabric varies and has both coarse and fine fabric in the assemblage. Fast wheel, slow wheel and luting techniques has been employed for the manufacturing of this variety.
3. Plain Red Variety (Fig. No. 3): This ware is devoid of any surface treatment. It is found in large number in the assemblage. Most of the pottery is ill fired as

evident from the section which is black in colour showing that the firing has not been done properly. The fabric is coarse in texture with a few exceptions where medium fine fabric has been used. Fast wheel and luting techniques has been employed for the manufacturing of this variety.

Chocolate Slipped Ware

The Chocolate Slipped Ware (Fig. No. 4) has been identified as the principle ware of the Kayatha Culture. On the basis of thickness of the body this Ware has been divided into Thick and Thin variety.

The slip in this Ware has been applied in such a way that different variants of the chocolate colour are seen on the pots. The colour varies from chocolate; light to dark brown and is also sometimes so dark that it appears to be black. Sometimes the slip has been applied in such a manner that variants of the chocolate colour are seen in the form of bands. This however could also be a result of firing in some cases. This ware has a Chocolate colour slip on the external side which sometimes extends to the internal side either up to the lip or the throat. The slip has not been applied all over the body. In most cases, it ends at the carination, below which either a slip of some other colour (mostly red) is applied or is left untreated. A few sherds have incised decorations instead of a slip. The ware is mostly fast wheel made. The firing ranges from some pots being well fired to some being ill fired. However most of the sherds analysed are either well fired or is medium fired. The fabric is medium fine to fine in texture although coarse fabric is also found.

Incised Ware

This is the second most important ceramic of the Kayatha Culture. The Incised Ware (Fig. No. 5) is basically a variety of the Red Ware but it has been treated as separate ware since it is a very important ware. Two types of incisions are noticed on the sherds. Some sherds are deeply incised whereas the others are lightly incised. The incisions on the Lightly Incised Variety are very superficial. The assemblage is dominated by the Lightly Incised Variety and the ones with deep incisions are limited in assemblage. The incisions are executed on the external side and are sometimes executed on the top of the

rim as well. It has been observed that both types of incisions are hardly carried out on the interior. The incisions are mostly in the form of wavy lines.

In case of bowls and basins, which are open vessels forms, a slip has been applied on both the interior as well as exterior. In this ware one finds two types of slip colour used such as red and chocolate. But in general this ware is dominated by plain surface or it is untreated. The fabric is medium fine to coarse in texture. The firing has not been done properly and most of the sherds are ill fired. The Ware is mostly made on fast wheel.

Violet Slipped Ware

This particular ware has been reported by Ansari and Dhavalikar (1975) as a painted variety of the Chocolate Slipped Ware. Although Wakankar initially reports wares with a mauve colour slip on it (IAR 1964-65:18-19) but he later changed the classification and considered it as Painted variety of Chocolate Slipped Ware (Wakankar 1967).

The ware was re-analysed and it is my opinion that it is a completely different ware. The ware has been applied with a purple or violet colour slip (Fig. No. 6). The slip is restricted only to the external surface. Sometimes the slip is not applied over the entire vessel and is accompanied by slips of other colours such as chocolate or red. Over the slip, paintings have been executed in black or chocolate colour. The paintings are normally bands of varying thickness. The clay used is medium fine to coarse in texture. The ware is well fired.

The re-analysis done on the Kayatha ceramics has brought to light certain new ceramic patterns and different views. The most important is the identification of two new ware types and re-identification of some earlier wares. The earlier Red on Buff Ware has been identified as Cream Slipped variety with paintings in Red i.e. Red on Cream variety. Also, what has been identified as the painted variety of Chocolate Slipped Ware is actually Violet Slipped Ware with paintings on it. This violet colour slip does not look to be a result of firing but it seems that this was done on purpose using different mineral colour. Moreover, in the assemblage, Handmade Ware was not found instead of that, Red Slipped and Plain Red variety dominates the assemblage.

Discussion and Conclusion

As discussed earlier, issues and problems are attested with the Chocolate Slipped Ware of the Kayatha Culture. It is difficult to accept this ware as a characteristic feature of the Kayatha culture due to its affiliations with Ahar and Harappan. Instead of that the Red on Cream variety should be treated as the characteristic Ware of the Kayatha culture. The other option is of Violet Slipped Ware which is also found exclusively from the site of Kayatha. These two ceramics have not been reported from any of the other so called Kayatha culture site and is a single site evidence. Moreover, the cultural material found from the site of Kayatha i.e. beads of semiprecious stones, steatite and terracotta, copper bangles and axes are only pertaining to the site of Kayatha.

The other sites of Kayatha culture are reported on the basis of Chocolate Slipped Ware whereas other identifiable cultural material such as Red on Cream Variety, Violet Slipped Ware, beads, copper artefacts etc are missing. If, one considers these parameters as the character of Kayatha culture then none of the sites reported so far as belonging to the Kayatha culture cannot be attributed to this culture. Hence the distribution or the map of Kayatha culture sites at this moment based on new hypothesis needs to be revised. At present, the site of Kayatha seems to be the only site which belongs to the Kayatha culture but as stated it is the single site evidence. In such conditions it is difficult to call this as a culture. Rather at this point it looks to be more a site based phenomena instead of regional phenomena.

This vacuum of identification needs to be understood by looking at other cultural material from the surrounding areas such as Rajasthan and Gujarat. The Kayatha levels from the site of Kayatha shows some similarities with the Harappan civilisation. Wakankar (1967) is the first one to state that the earliest settlers were Harappans at Kayatha. The shapes and designs of the ceramics has affinities with Harappan and Pre Harappan cultures of Rajasthan and Gujarat. Ansari and Dhavalikar (1975) have also given a similar view. They go on to say “the C-14 determinations clearly establish the Kayatha culture as a junior contemporary of the Harappans” (Ansari and Dhavalikar 1975:18). From the material culture studied, it seems to be a possibility that there was a diffusion of ideas from Early Harappan cultures, though it is not

possible to identify the area of diffusion or stimulus and show whether it was an ideological or physical migration. Whatever may be the reason at present one can state that Kayatha has ceramic similarities with the Harappan civilisation and Ahar culture. In bead technology it shows connections with Harappan civilization (Anasari and Dhavalikar 1975). Taking into consideration all the facts it is an important issue and further excavations and analyses will definitely shed light on whether it was an independent culture, site based local phenomena or is an outcome of certain cultural movement and amalgamation, wherein certain local traditions got incorporated into the assemblage.

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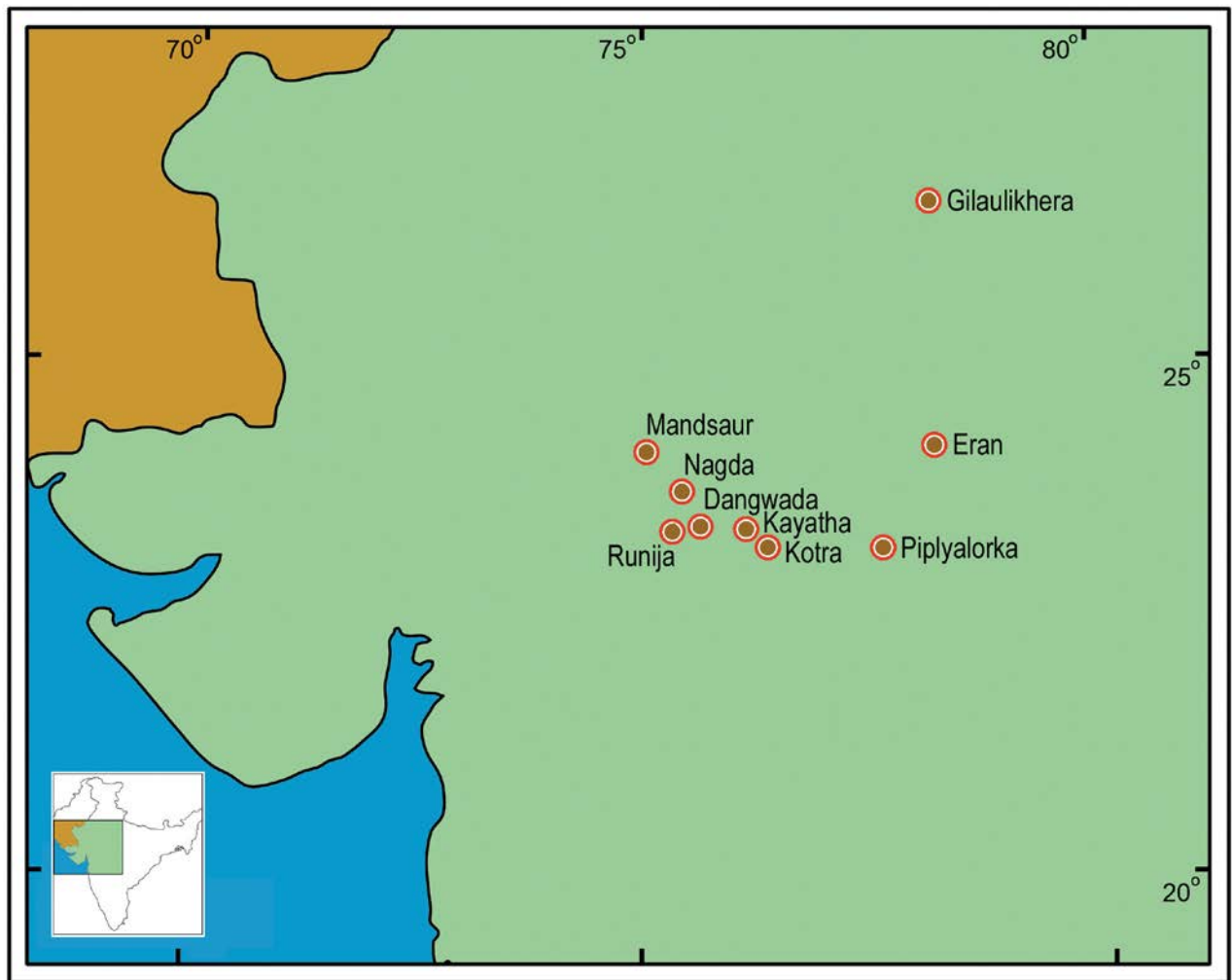
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Figures



Map. 1. Excavated sites of Kayatha Cultures

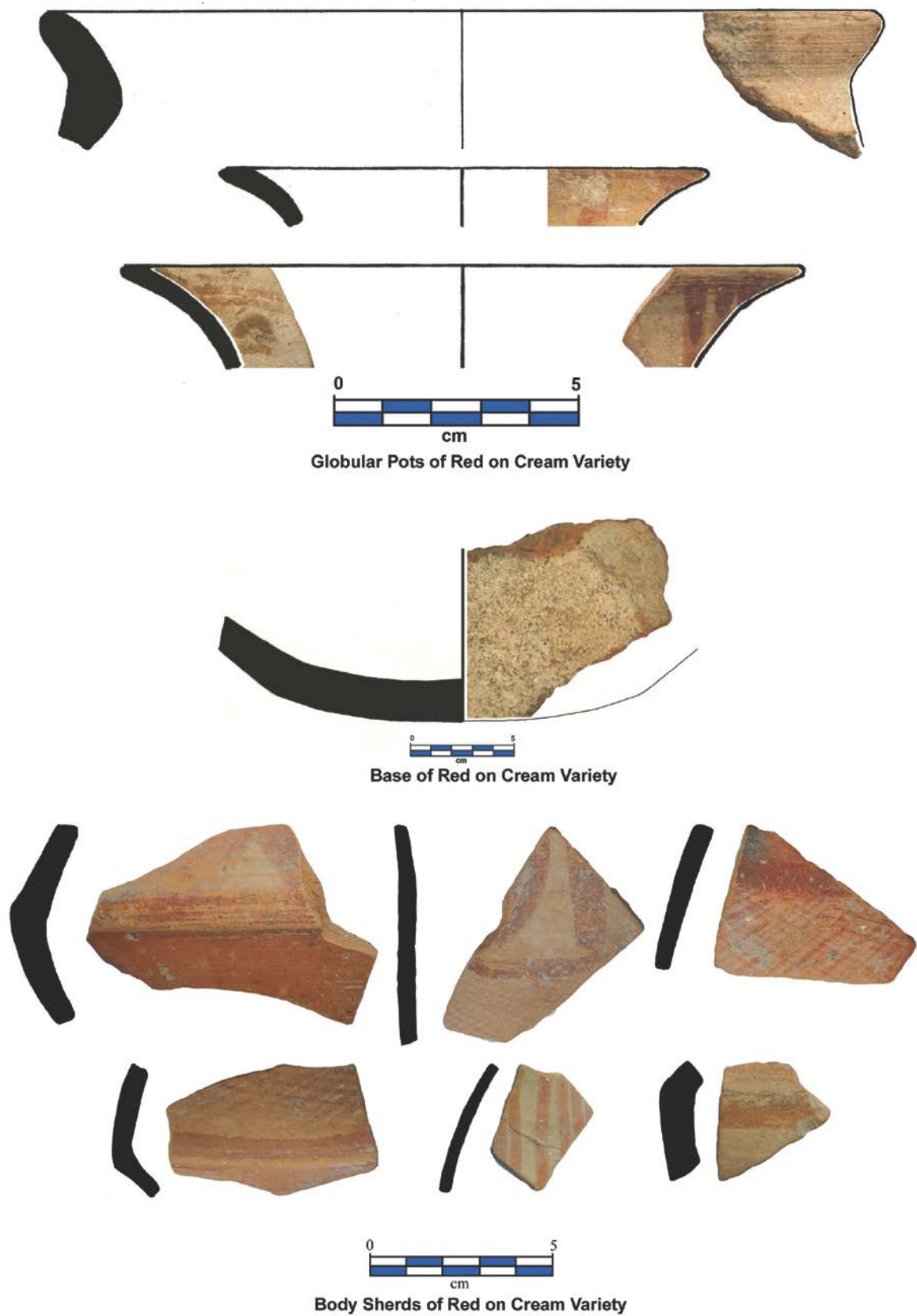


Figure 1. Red on Cream

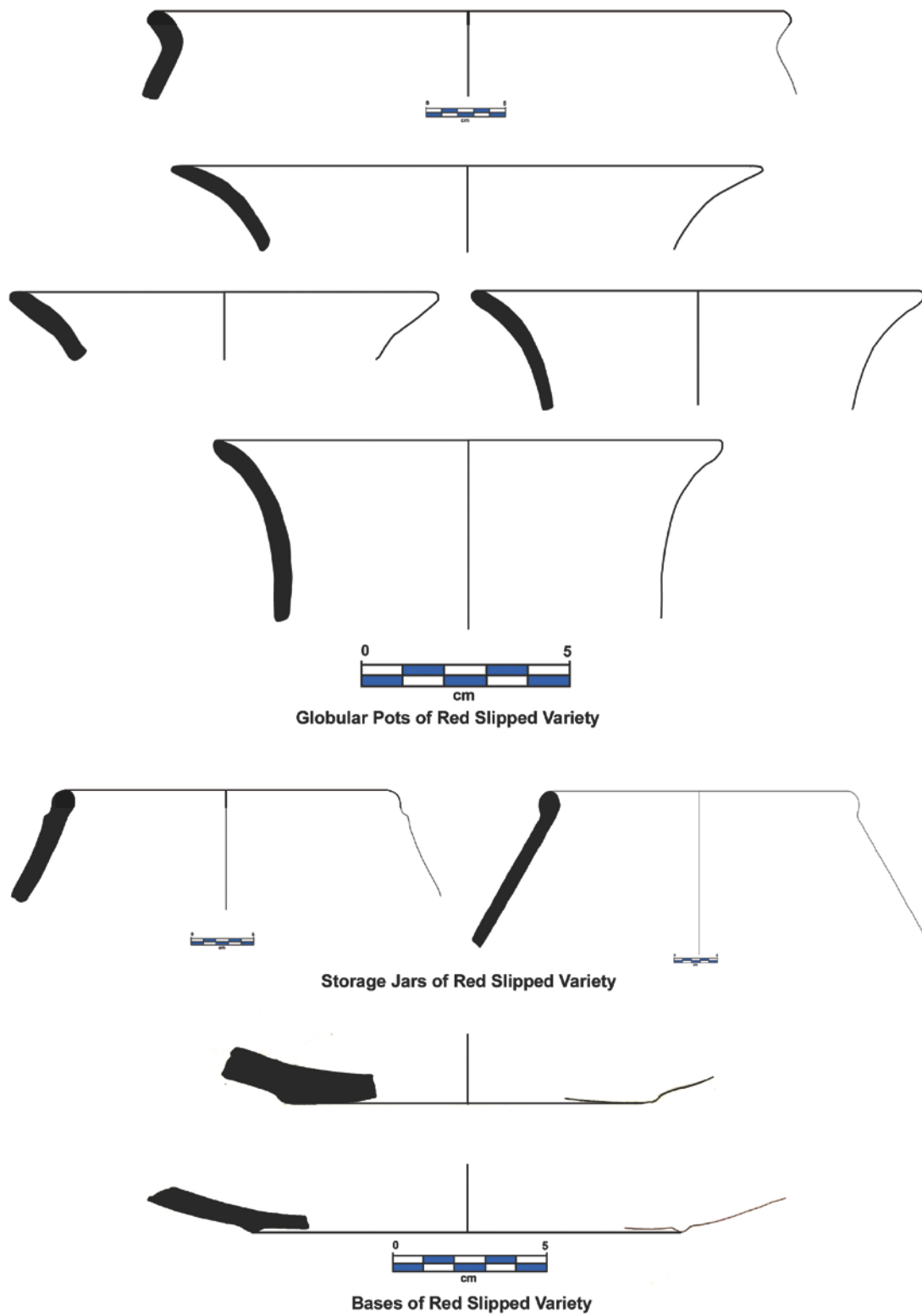


Figure 2. Red Slipped Variety

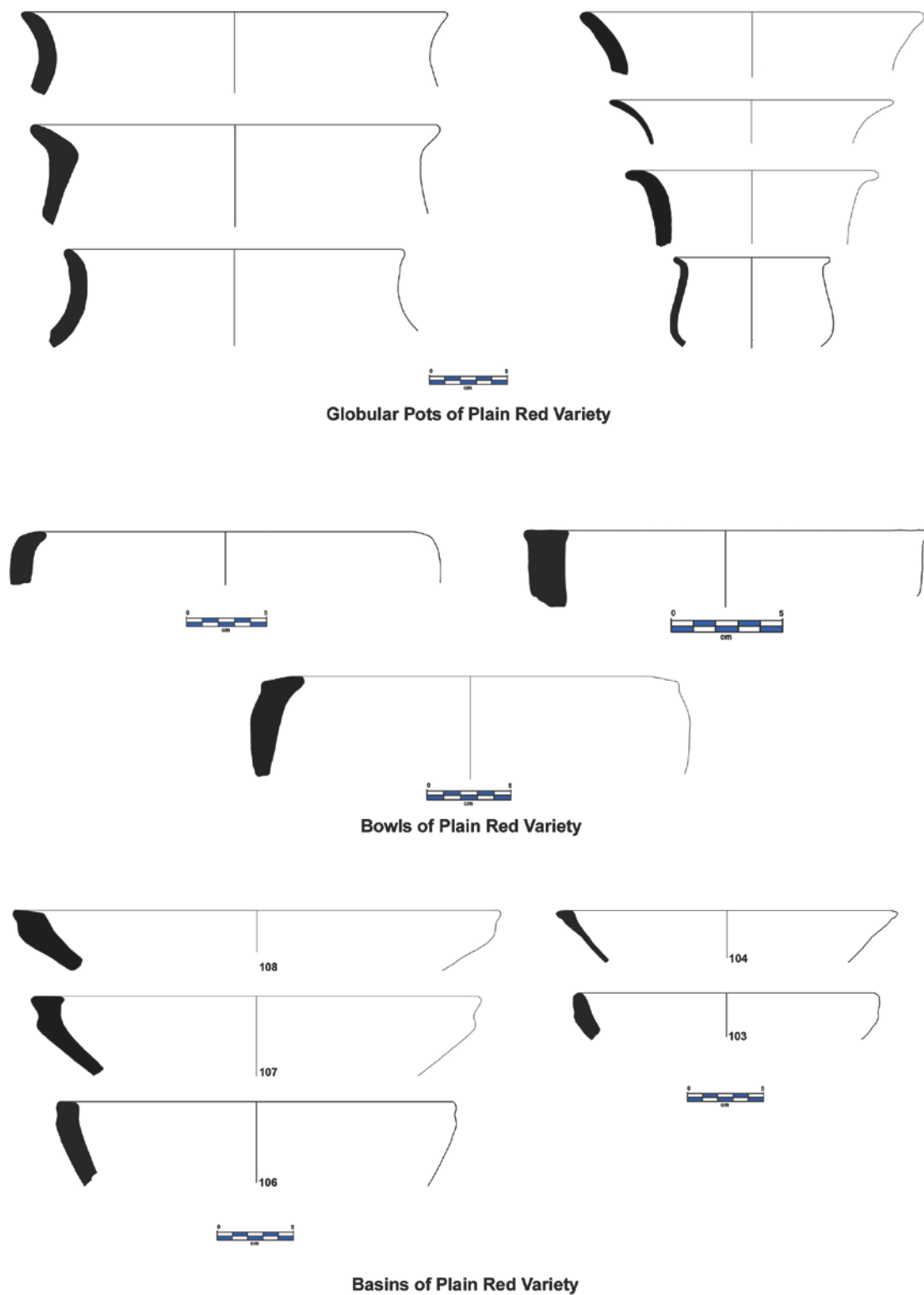
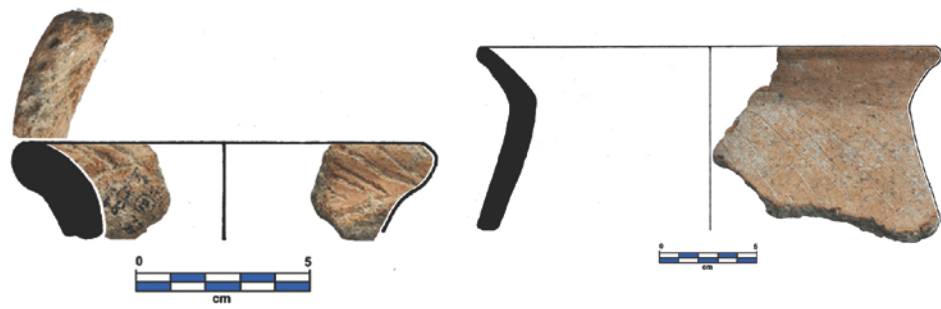


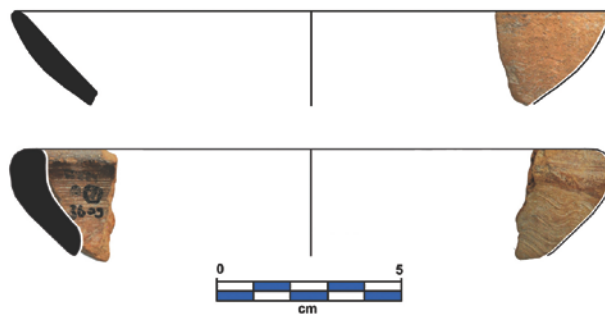
Figure 3. Plain Red Variety



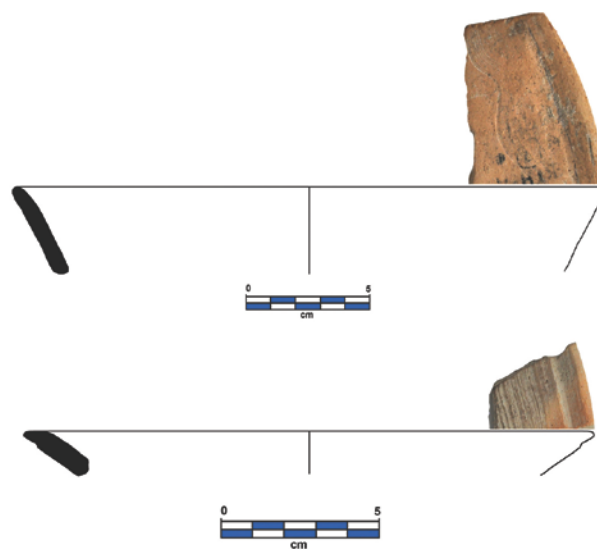
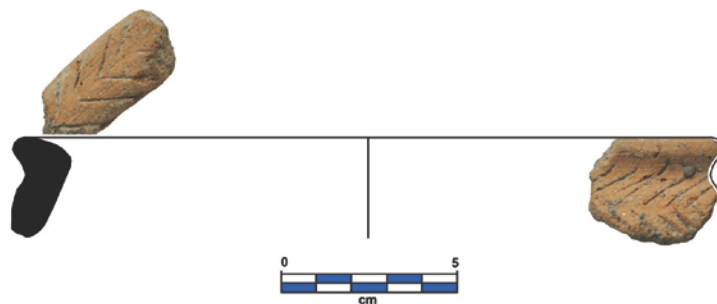
Figure 4. Chocolate Slipped Ware



Globular Pots of Incised Ware

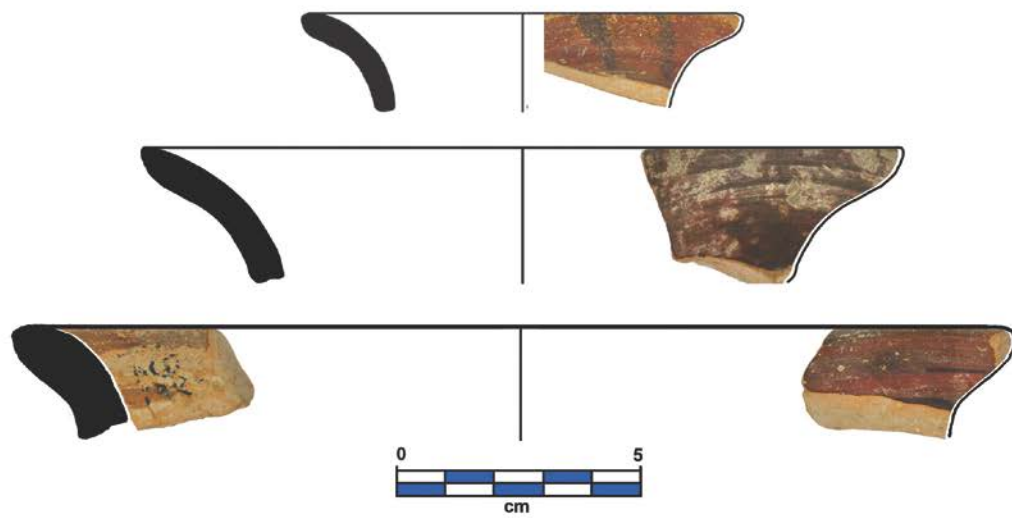


Bowls of Incised Ware



Basins of Incised Ware

Figure 5. Incised Ware



Globular Pots of Violet Slipped Ware



Body Sherds of Violet Slipped Ware

Figure 6.Violet Slipped Ware

