

Harappa Excavations 1986-1990

A Multidisciplinary Approach to
Third Millennium Urbanism

Edited by Richard H. Meadow

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Cover art: Bowl on Stand H88-1002/192-17 associated with Burial 194a
in Harappan Phase Cemetery (see Figure 13.18).

A Short History of Archaeological Discovery at Harappa

Gregory L. Possehl

The University Museum, University of Pennsylvania

Since the first publication of material in 1872, the site of Harappa has provided a principal focus for protohistoric archaeological investigations in the Punjab region of northwestern South Asia. The current University of California, Berkeley, project is here put into the context of earlier work at the site and into the context of the history of archaeology in the Greater Indus Valley as a whole.

Harappa has been the most frequently investigated of any of the ancient settlements of the Harappan cultural tradition. Since Sir Alexander Cunningham first excavated at the site in 1872-1873, there have been not fewer than 26 "seasons" of work at the site. This does not include the "digging" done by Deputy Superintendent of Police T.A. O'Connor in 1886. I have placed "seasons" in quotation marks since I am using this term to cover relatively short but important periods of work at sites as well as sustained campaigns lasting several weeks. In fact, if one considers only number of seasons and not extent of excavation, there appears to have been considerably more work at Harappa than at Mohenjodaro, the next site in this regard. Table 2.1 makes this point.

Discovery of the ancient cities of the Indus was based on excavations during the 1920s at Harappa and Mohenjodaro (Possehl 1982), but it took 48 years for work to commence at Harappa following Cunningham's first report of an Indus seal from the site. The published documents indicate that this object was a key to maintaining scholarly interest in the site. Everyone with a professional interest in ancient Indian history at that time knew of this find and of the other seals as they were published. The fact that the script was neither Brahmi nor Kharoshthi was taken by them to indicate at least the possibility

that there was a literate civilization in the subcontinent prior to the Mauryan Dynasty. Even if Cunningham's speculation were true that the seal was non-Indian because the animal depicted on it is not a zebu, the place of origin for this unknown system of writing was a prize considered to be worth seeking.

When work began at Harappa, with Rai Bahadur Daya Ram Sahni's excavations on both Mound AB and Mound F (Sahni 1920-21), the digging was done on quite a large scale. Sahni's first trench on Mound F was 152 meters (500 feet) long and 4.9 meters (16 feet) wide, and his work continued at that scale. These are very substantial exposures by modern standards and are an indication of the fact that Sahni and his contemporaries in Indian field archaeology were far from meek when it came to sinking a spade into a site.

The publication of the excavations at Harappa has not been complete, but the Vats (1940) volumes, for the work between 1920-21 and 1933-34, covers a great deal. There were four seasons of excavation at the site following Vats's departure that have not been published, save for very short notices, but I am told (George F. Dales, personal communication) that there are field records for some of this work that could be used to fill in gaps in the history of excavations at Harappa.

Table 2.1: Number of Excavation Seasons (to 1991) of selected sites of the Harappan Tradition.

Site	Seasons	Site	Seasons
Harappa	26	Banawali	5
Mohenjo-daro	15	Hulas	5
Mehrgarh	11	Sarai Khola	5
Kalibangan	10	Prabhas Patan	5
Sanghol	9	Balakot	4
Lothal	8	Shortugai	4
Mundigak	8	Ghazi Shah	4
Rojdi	8	Nindowari	3
Noh	7	Pabumath	3
Allahdino	6	Surkotada	2
Daimabad	6	Bara	2
Nausharo	6	Chanhu-daro	2
Rangpur	6	Jhukar	2
Rehman Dheri	6	Desalpur	1
Amri	5	Kulli	1
Balu	5	Mehi	1

The most recent excavation at the site by the University of California, Berkeley, Harappa Project, has been undertaken in conjunction with Pakistan's Department of Archaeology and Museums. This program of excavation and analysis has incorporated a diverse staff from a number of institutions. Their preliminary reports on the five years of work at the site have been substantial, well-illustrated documents.

The pace of archaeological work at Harappa that emerges from these notes and observations has a place of considerable historical interest in both the story of South Asian archaeology and the history of the discipline in general. Rather than engaging in what would be a rather long narrative I have condensed this history to a chronological listing with annotations outlining what I believe to be the highlights of this history.

Archaeological Discovery at Harappa: a Chronology

1826: Charles Masson is the first European visitor to subsequently report on Harappa. He suggests that the site is Sangala, the capital of King Porus, whom Alexander the Great defeated in 326 BC (Masson 1844, Vol. I:452).

1831: Sir Alexander Burnes visits Harappa. He is the second European to recognize it as an archaeological site of importance. Burnes also visits the site of Amri in Sindh as a part of his exploration of the Indus River (Burnes 1834, Vol. III:137).

1853: Sir Alexander Cunningham makes his first visit to Harappa. He finds the mounds in good condition (Cunningham 1875:108).

1856: Sir Alexander Cunningham makes his second visit. The mounds are still in good condition (Cunningham 1875:108).

1872-73: Sir Alexander Cunningham makes his third visit. He notes that the mounds have been subjected to brick robbing, and he conducts a small excavation. He publishes a plan of the site (Figure 2.1) and selected artifacts including a unicorn seal belonging to a Major Clark. Because the bull on the seal has no hump, Cunningham suggests that it is non-Indian in origin (1875:108).

1884: Mr. J. Harvey, Inspector of Schools, Multan, purchases an inscribed bar seal from an agriculturist at Harappa on November 21, 1884 (Dames 1886). The date that Mr. Harvey acquired the seal is given as "December 1885" in Fleet (1912:700).

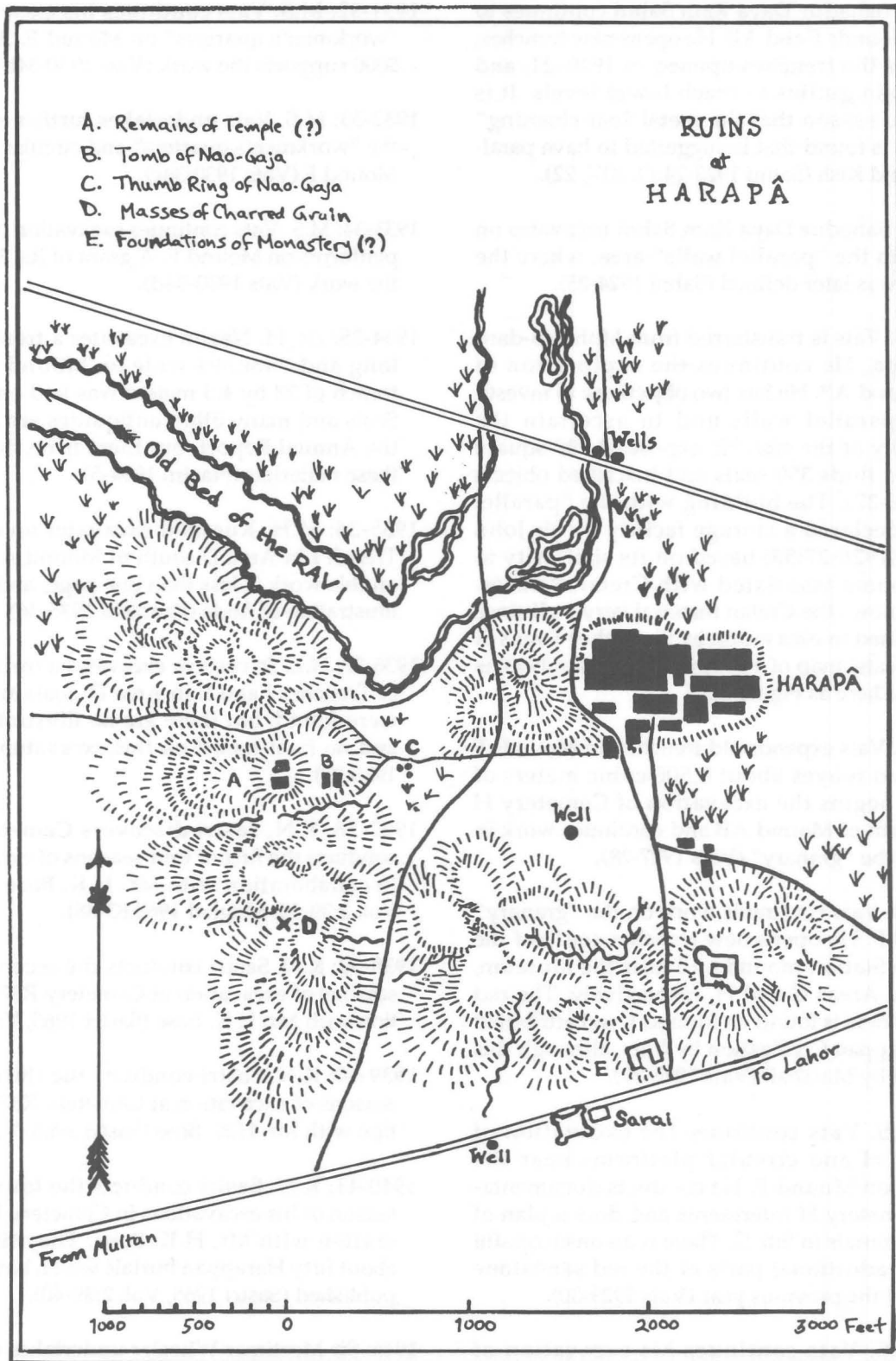
1886: Mr. T.A. O'Connor, District Superintendent of Police, digs up a unicorn seal at Harappa in, or shortly before, August 1886. This seal is given to M. Longworth Dames and published by J.F. Fleet (1912) along with the Cunningham and Harvey seals.

1909: Pundit Hira Nanda Sastri is sent to Harappa in January, 1909, by Dr. J.Ph. Vogel, Officiating Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India at the time. Sastri reports that the mounds are not likely to repay excavation (Sahni 1920-21:9).

1914: Sir John Marshall sends Henry Hargreaves to assess the mounds for excavation. Hargreaves is not enthusiastic about excavation but recommends that work begin on Mound F at the northern end of the site near the old bed of the river Ravi (Majumdar 1939:99).

1916-17: Rai Bahadur Daya Ram Sahni visits Harappa in December 1917. He prepares a site plan and begins the process of bringing the site under the protection of the government. He notes that brick robbing continues at the site (Sahni 1916-17).

1920-21: Rai Bahadur Daya Ram Sahni excavates on Mounds F and AB, as indicated on Cunningham's 1875 site plan. On Mound F, where what has been called the "granary" came to be exposed, he puts in a trench 152 meters (500 feet) long and 4.9 meters (16 feet) wide. On Mound AB he finds a building which incorporates stone with supposed "Mauryan polish." He finds two more seals that are said to be in pre-Mauryan contexts (Sahni 1920-21).



Redrawn after A. Cunningham by J.M. Kenoyer, 1991

Figure 2.1: "Ruins of Harapā" redrawn after Cunningham (1875).

- 1923-24: Rai Bahadur Daya Ram Sahni continues to excavate Mounds F and AB. He opens new trenches, or expands the trenches opened in 1920–21, and uses the rain gullies to reach lower levels. It is during this season that the metal “ear cleaning” implement is found that is suggested to have parallels at Ur and Kish (Sahni 1923-24:Pl. XIX, 22).
- 1924-25: Rai Bahadur Daya Ram Sahni excavates on Mound F in the “parallel walls” area, where the “granary” was later defined (Sahni 1924-25).
- 1926-27: M.S. Vats is transferred from Mohenjo-daro to Harappa. He continues the exploration of Mounds F and AB. He has two objectives: to investigate the parallel walls and to ascertain the stratigraphy of the site. He exposes 4,690 square meters and finds 350 seals and inscribed objects (Vats 1926-27). The building with the “parallel walls” is declared a storage facility by Sir John Marshall (1926-27:53) based on its similarity to storage rooms associated with Cretan Palaces. Marshall knows the Cretan material very well since he was trained in excavation by Sir Arthur Evans at Knossos. [Vats’ map of Harappa (from Vats 1940) is reproduced here as Figure 2.2.]
- 1927-28: M.S. Vats expands old trenches on Mounds F and AB and moves about 8,500 cubic meters of earth. He begins the excavation of Cemetery H burials south of Mound AB and continues work in the area of the “granary” (Vats 1927-28).
- 1928-29: M.S. Vats continues work on the “granary” on Mound F. He opens new trenches south of the Old Police Station mound and near the Museum, designated Areas G and H, respectively. The red sandstone torso is found on Mound F and attributed to the Harappan Civilization by Vats, although this is disputed by Marshall (Vats 1928-29).
- 1929-30: M.S. Vats continues the excavation of Cemetery H and circular platforms near the “granary” on Mound F. He conducts documentation of Cemetery H interments and does a plan of skeletal materials in Site G. There is an unsuccessful search for additional parts of the red sandstone torso found the previous year (Vats 1929-30).
- 1930-31: M.S. Vats continues his excavation of Cemetery H as well as Area J on the Mound AB. A grant of Rs. 20,000 supports the work (Vats 1930–34a).
- 1931-32: M.S. Vats continues his excavation at the “workmen’s quarters” on Mound F. A grant of Rs. 5000 supports the work (Vats 1930-34b).
- 1932-33: M.S. Vats undertakes further excavation of the “workmen’s quarters” and circular platforms on Mound F (Vats 1930-34c).
- 1933-34: M.S. Vats continues excavation of the circular platforms on Mound F. A grant of Rs. 3000 supports the work (Vats 1930-34d).
- 1934-35: Dr. H. Nazim excavates a trench 27 meters long and 9 meters wide on Mound F. A second trench of 28 by 4.5 meters was laid on Mound AB. Seals and many other antiquities are published in the Annual Report, but there is no final report on these materials (Nazim 1934-5).
- 1935-36: M.H. Kuraishi excavates an extension of Trench I in Area D south of Mound AB. His report on this work is less than one page, and there are no illustration of finds (Kuraishi 1935-36).
- 1936-37: H.L. Srivastava excavates a further extension of Trenches I and II in Area D. Seals and terracottas were found, but there are no illustrations of seals and no final report on this excavation (Srivastava 1936-37).
- 1937-38: K.N. Sastri discovers Cemetery R37 and conducts the first of four seasons of excavation there in collaboration with Mr. H.K. Bose (Sastri 1965, Vol. 2:39-40; Mughal 1968:83-88).
- 1938-39: K.N. Sastri conducts the second of his four seasons of excavation at Cemetery R37 in collaboration with Mr. H.K. Bose (Sastri 1965, Vol. 2:39-40).
- 1939-40: K.N. Sastri conducts the third of his four seasons of excavation at Cemetery R37 in collaboration with Mr. H.K. Bose (Sastri 1965, Vol. 2:39-40).
- 1940-41: K.N. Sastri conducts the fourth and final season of his excavations in Cemetery R37 in collaboration with Mr. H.K. Bose. They find a total of about fifty Harappan burials which have never been published (Sastri 1965, Vol. 2:39-40).
- 1946: Sir Mortimer Wheeler undertakes excavation of the “defenses” on Mound AB as well as in Cemetery R37. He excavates a trench connecting Cemetery R37 with Cemetery H. Cemetery H habitations are

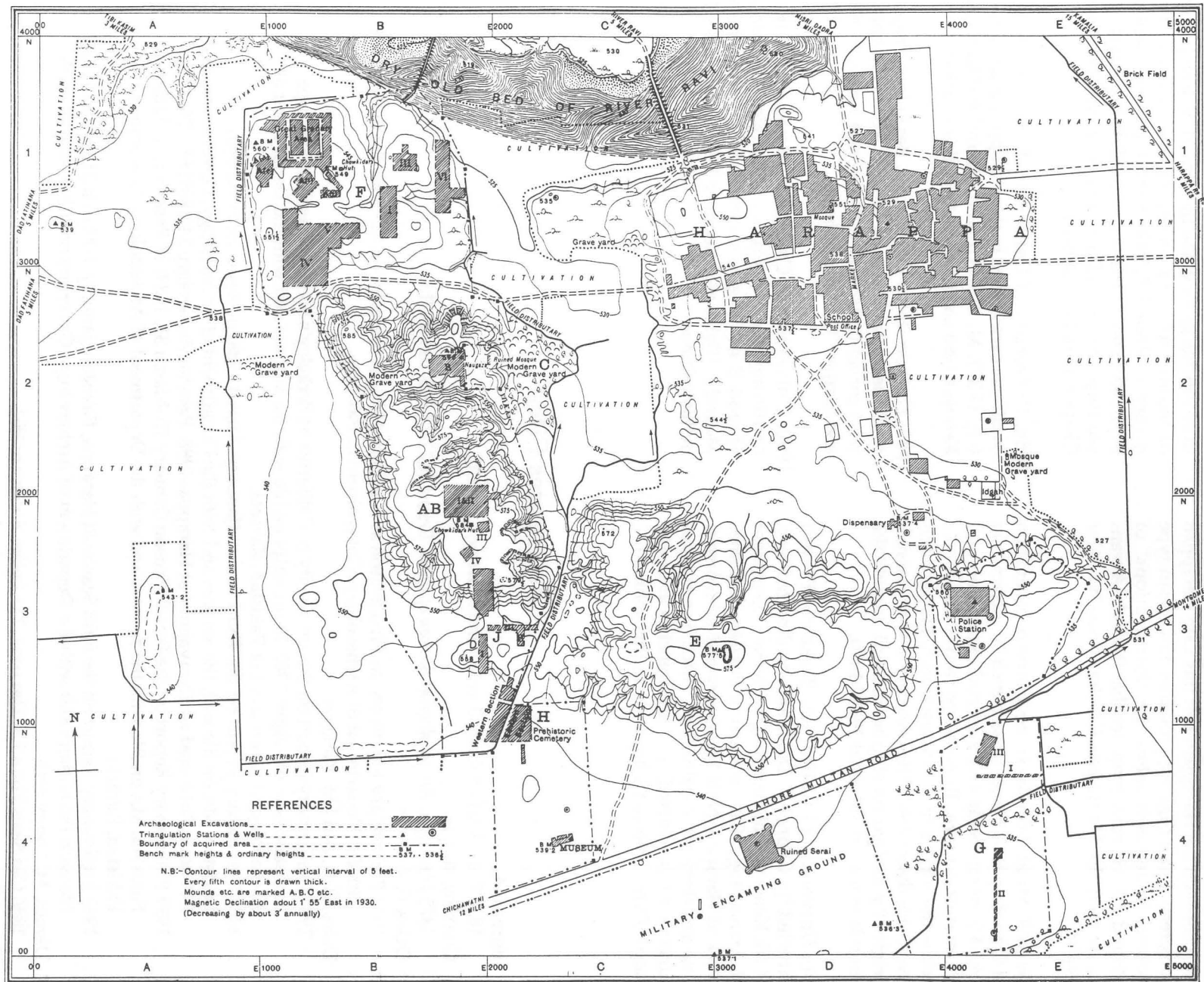


Figure 2.2: Plan of Harappa from Vats (1940).

- found in the vicinity of the west “gates” and “terraces,” demonstrating the stratigraphic relationship between the Harappan and this Late Harappan cemetery. Deep digging produces Kot Dijian type pottery in deposits below the “fortifications” of Mound AB. Wheeler proposes that the Indo-Aryans destroyed the Harappan Civilization (Wheeler 1947).
- 1966: M.R. Mughal conducts one season of excavation in Cemetery R37. He lays one trench 30 meters long and 4.5 meters wide and a second excavation unit six meters square. Burials are found one meter below the surface in the square trench. Eleven interments are discovered. The cemetery was apparently originally located on sloping ground outside the bounds of the city (Mughal 1968:63-68).
- 1986: University of California, Berkeley, Project directed by George F. Dales and co-directed by J. Mark Kenoyer, collaborating with the Department of Archaeology, Government of Pakistan, resumes work at Harappa. New laboratory and administrative quarters are established, intensive surface surveys are conducted, and test trenches are excavated (Dales 1986 and Chapter 13 in this volume).
- 1987: University of California, Berkeley, Project begins excavations in the Harappan phase cemetery (R37), in an erosion gully in the the central eastern portion of Mound AB, and on top of the northwestern corner of Mound E. Palaeoenvironmental studies begin and conservation and analytical procedures are implemented (Dales and Kenoyer 1987 and Chapter 13 in this volume).
- 1988: University of California, Berkeley, Project continues excavations in the Harappan phase cemetery (R37), Mound AB, and Mound E (Dales and Kenoyer 1988 and Chapter 13 in this volume).
- 1989: University of California, Berkeley, Project continues excavations on Mound AB and in northwest corner of Mound E (Dales and Kenoyer 1989 and Chapter 13 in this volume).
- 1990: University of California, Berkeley, Project continues excavations on northwest corner of Mound E and begins excavation on south side of Mound E (Dales and Kenoyer 1990 and Chapter 13 in this volume).

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