

## **Recent archeological excavation in Kapilvastu by Ismeo**

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Last winter the Nepali-Italian team began its activity in the Kapilvastu District, which is crowded sites belonging to different cultural horizons. They are much more numerous than commonly believed or even reported in the literature and archaeological mapping of the district is urgent. Our work focused on Gotihawa and Sisania, two of the three sites which have been assigned to us by the Department of Archaeology and the Lumbini Development Trust.

Gotihawa is a well-known site because of the presence of the stump of an Ashokan pillar rising near a stupa. At the end of the last century the latter attracted the attention of Major Waddell, who cut a trench running from its centre to the pillar. We availed ourselves of this opportunity and re-opened the old trench, digging deeper as to reach the natural soil-about one and a half meter from the top of the monument. A part of the stupa was cleared as well from the upper, disturbed layers and its bricks were exposed.

The cultural sequence that was observed could be appreciated in full few months ago, when the results of scientific analyses were at last available in particular those of C14 analyses, relating to a very good sample of charcoal found in one of the lower levels of the deposit. The sequence, as we suspected, goes to remarkably early times. The sample has been dated by the Beta Analytic Laboratory (Florida, USA) to BP 2600 ± 60; the one-sigma calibration results are 815-780 BC, a very early date for this area; and such as to make a clean sweep of any that no early levels are to be found in the region where the Buddha was born lived.

The sequence can be summarized as follows: above the natural soil there are fragments of a cord-or mat-impressed ware of Neolithic tradition whose earliest specimens go back here to the 10<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century B.C. They are, however, not associated to Neolithic tools. This industry continues through time up to the appearance of the Northern Black Polished ware, characterizing a cultural horizon which is well known from a great number of sites of the Ganges Valley, among which Vaishali can be taken as an example. All these sites are reported to have started in about the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. at Gotihawa; the upper NBP levels are characterized by the presence of animal bones, probably relating to ritual meals.

The stupa, built in Mauryan times, is made of wedge-shaped, baked bricks phases have been observed a third one, made with a different technique, being at present only conjectural. According to our evidence, the stupa remained under worship until Gupta times.

We hope to be able next season, to examine the Ashokan pillar and in the future to expose the whole sacred (and presumably monastic) area.

As to Sisania, it is a large mound SE of Taulihawa, close to the border. No excavations were carried out there, but a thorough collection of surface materials was made. There is ample evidence as for instance, iron slags and glass wastes pointing to the existence, in Kusana times, of an important craft centre there. Analyses of the glass materials have already

been carried out, and are such as to give us valuable information on the position, Sisania held among the production centres of the time. Other artifacts, such as wares and terracotta excavations are needed to detect the nature of its lower levels. This is a challenging task, but one which we hope to carry out in the future.