

EXCAVATED TERRACOTTA OBJECTS FROM THE MEGALITHS OF MALAMPUZHA, DT. PALAKKAD, KERALA

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ABSTRACT

A detailed analysis of the terracotta objects retrieved from an Iron Age-Early Historic megalithic burial at a plot near Malampuzha dam, District Palakkad of Kerala is presented in this paper. The salvage archaeology was done by Archaeological Survey of India, Chennai Circle. Through the salvage excavation conducted at this site, about 40 Terracotta objects, made in different styles, were found. They are mainly handmade; but a few are partly moulded. Human and zoomorphic figurines and plaques with various features occur in this collection. The terracotta objects appear to have been buried as a part of burial ritual. This paper gives all the details of those objects.

Keywords: Megaliths, Kerala, Terracotta Art

The salvage excavations conducted at a plot near Malampuzha dam (Lat. 10° 49' E Long. 76° 41' N), Palakkad District of Kerala have unearthed variety of urn burials by Late B.Narasimhaiah and L.S. Rao of Archaeological Survey of India, Chennai Circle in 1996, after its accidental discovery by the local people.¹ Several terracotta figurines around forty in number were associated with these burials, especially with the small urn burials. Most of them are *appliqué* and the other variety is solid or hollow round type. Majority of them are handmade, while a few seem to be partly mould-made and handmade. These *appliqué* type figurines were supposed to be attached to the urns as a decorative element. They include human, animal and composite types. Majority of the terracotta figurines were ill fired. One of the excavators, Ajit Kumar mentioned that most of the round type terracotta was found intentionally broken from the site. But the purpose still remains enigmatic, but it could be a part of ritual tradition followed during those periods to amputate the body parts. Or it might be broken due to the ravages of time, since most of them are hand moulded and ill fired.

A catalogue of the terracotta objects retrieved from Malampuzha, Palakkad District is presented below.

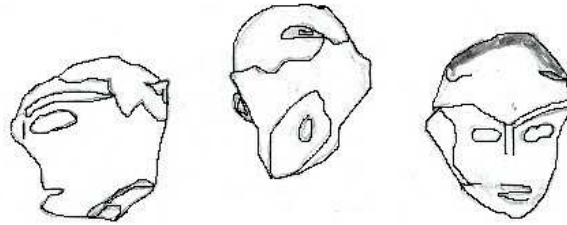
1) Acc No: MPZ/95-1

Size: 3.6 cm x 4.5 cm x 0.5 cm; Colour: Buff red; Firing: Well fired; Clay: medium to fine; Type: Terracotta human head

Description:

Head of a human, crude and slightly eroded facial features, thin and prominent eyebrows, nose partly broken from middle to the edge. Upper lip is broken completely; while the lower one is partially broken. Right side has a bulge denoting the ear; front side of the head is shown without hair, while hair is shown as some irregular projection on the back side of the head. It is a solid type.

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1(Acc no: MPZ/95-1)

Fig. 1. Terracotta Human Figures

2) Acc No: MPZ/95-8

Size: 6.00 cm x 4.5 cm x 0.5 to 1.00 cm; Colour: Buff red; Firing: ill fired; Clay: medium to coarse; Type: Terracotta fragmentary head of human

Description:

Back side of head of a human figurine is fragmentary. *Appliqué* braided hair-do with a long braided hair in the centre and with small braids on the either side. On top of the head, small dot type patterns denoting the beaded decorations can be seen.



2(Acc no: MPZ/95-8)

Fig. 2. Head of a Human Figurine

3) Acc No: MPZ/95-5

Size: 3.6 cm x 4.8 cm x 0.5 cm; Colour: Buff red; Firing: Well fired; Clay: medium to fine; Type: Terracotta human head

Description:

A solid head of a male with lozenge-shaped eyes, a long sharp pointed nose, thick lips and open mouth. Two curved *appliqué* designs on the back side of head indicating hair. Two small apertures are seen on either side of head.

3.(Acc no: MPZ/95-5)

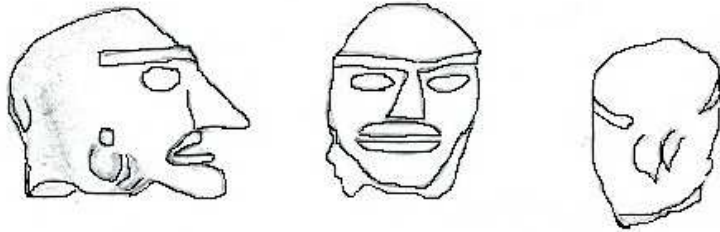


Fig. 3. Head of a male

4) Acc No :MPZ/95-10

Size: 4.5 cm x 3.7 cm; Colour: Buff red; Firing: Well fired; Clay: medium to fine; Type: Terracotta Male Torso

Description:

Male torso, fragmentary, right side completely missing, while on upper left side a portion of upper arm can be seen. Above the upper arm, is placed an almost oval shaped fragmentary ear ornament. A fragmentary waist band or part of a lower garment is present. Primarily made as hollow and then luted together and a solid material has been inserted inside.

4(Acc no MPZ/95-10)

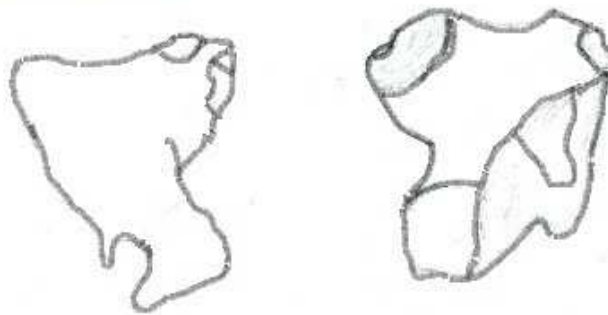


Fig. 4. Male torso

5) Acc: No MPZ/95-11

Size: 13.00 cm x 12.00 cm x 1.5-3.3 cm; Colour: red; Firing: Well fired; Clay: medium to fine; Type: Terracotta Male Torso

Description:

Fragmentary torso of a male warrior, portion of left upper arm is seen, while the right one is completely broken and missing. On the upper hand, *keyura* is seen. Broad chest, wearing a designed dress of deep dot made out of incisions are extended and reaching towards the back side of the body. A kind of lower garment is also seen.

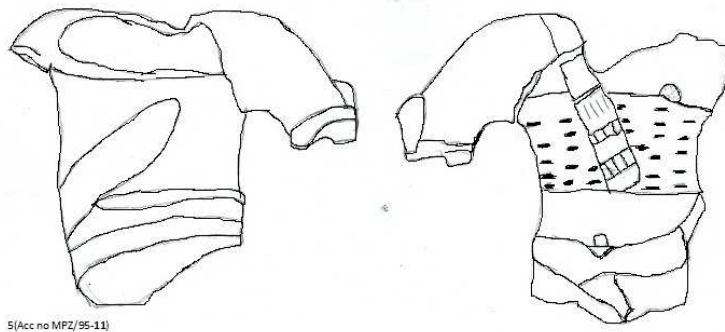


Fig. 5. Torso of a male warrior

6) Acc No: MPZ/95-16

Size: 5 cm l x 8.2 cm b x 0.2 cm to 1.00 cm; Colour: red; Firing: ill fired; Clay: medium to fine; Type: Terracotta Human relief

Description:

Plaque, with a relief almost looks like a seated female with thick-sized legs kept wide apart. The features are not clearly visible. It is supposed to be a kind of *lajja gauri* figurine.

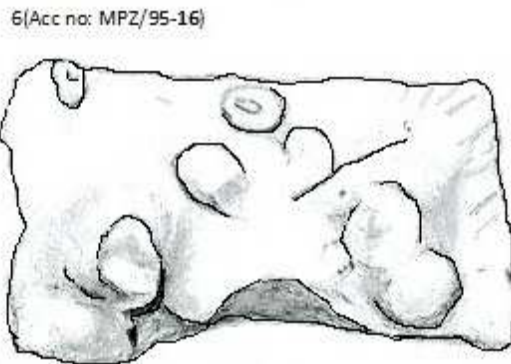


Fig. 6. Portion of a Plaque

7) Acc No: MPZ/95-19

Size: 7.00 cm X 9.5 cm X 1.5 cm; Colour: red; Firing: Well fired; Clay: medium to fine;
Type: Terracotta Human Head

Description:

Fragmentary Plaque with a human figurine of which head and part of right hand can be seen. Facial features such as broad eyes, sharp nose, thick lips; left side ear is complete; while on the right, it is partly broken. Hair can be seen as strands, combed backwards.

7 (Acc no MPZ/95-19)

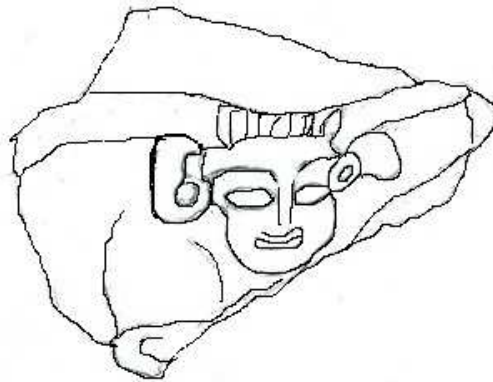


Fig. 7. Plaque, with a human figurine,

8) Acc No: MPZ/95-23

Size: 13.5 cm X 8.00 cm X 0.2 cm to 1.00 cm; Colour: red; Firing: Well fired; Clay: medium;
Type: Terracotta Plaque with Human and Horse

Description:

Figurine of a human (female?) in relief and an animal (horse?), the features of human includes almost oval shaped face with elongated eyes, broad nose and thick lips. Ears are not clearly visible and are totally missing on the right side. Head is without hair. Both hands up to lower arm are seen, palms missing, two slight projections are seen on either side of the chest, possibly denoting breast. Hip is wider and seems like wearing a lower garment, having a linear design. Legs are not shown. On the left side of the figurine, an image of horse head is seen with round eyes, slightly opened mouth, spiky hairs on head. Incised marks seen on the neck part.



8(Acc no MPZ/95-23)

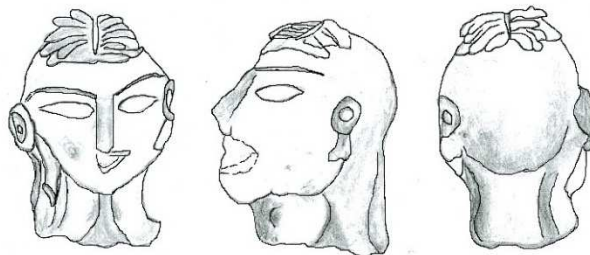
Fig. 8. Human and Animal Figurines

9) Acc No MPZ/95-27

Size: 9.20 cm X 8.5 cm X 5.00 cm; Colour: red; Firing: Well fired; Clay: Medium to Fine;
Type: Terracotta Head

Description:

Head of a male, with sharp eyebrows, which are seen eroded, thick sharp pointed nose, mouth part is fragmentary, lips missing. Thick grooved ears with ear ornaments hanging, and is partly broken on the right side, at the bottom; while it is eroded on the left side. Strands of hair are seen on the centre of the head with a cleft in between, where back side of the head is without hair (bald or shaven).



9(Acc no MPZ/95-27)

Fig. 9. Human Head

10) Acc No: MPZ/95-29

Size: 11.00 cm X 6.50 cm X 5.00 cm; Colour: red; Firing: Well fired; Clay: course to medium; Type: Terracotta Head

Description:

Head of a figurine, male, with thick, long and sharp eye brows, long and broad eyes, thick lips, which are of *appliqué* in nature, parrot beaked nose, thick *appliqué* ear on right side; while the left is missing. Circular and semi circular floral decorative pattern on the forehead. Square shaped lips; thick size of a torque is seen on neck, which is broken at the front side. A collar type projection is seen on the neck.

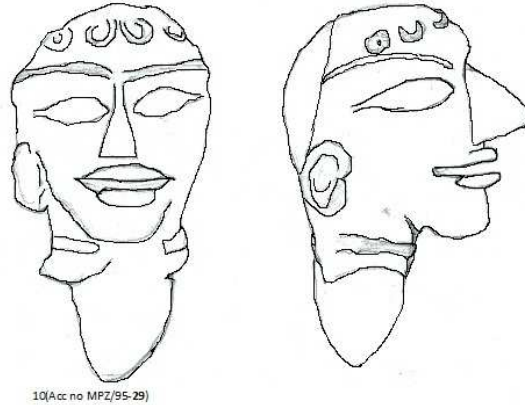


Fig. 10. Human Head

11) Acc No: MPZ/95-30

Size: 9.7 cm X 7.5 cm to 1.5 to 2.5 cm; Colour: red; Firing: Partially ill fired; Clay: Fine to medium; Type: Terracotta Bust

Description:

Hollow bust of a human figurine, female, with facial features such as thick eye brows, thin bulged eyes, nose and lips. Long ears are eroded, but with hanging ear lobes, pierced lobes on top and bottom of ears which are joined each other. The left ear is decorated with an oval shaped ear ring, while the right side is missing. Full bosom. Neck adorned with a thick torque having a hook type pendant. Hair is in thick strands, combed backwards, which is more towards left side, while part of the head down backwards on right side is plain. Hands are broken and missing completely. Clay particles seen on the core.

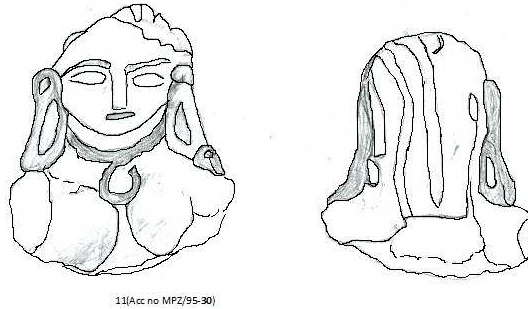


Fig. 11. Bust of Human Figure

12) Acc No: MPZ/95-31

Size: 14.4 cm X 7.7 cm X 0.2 cm to 2.0 cm; Colour: red; Firing: Well fired; Clay: medium to coarse; Type: Terracotta female torso

Description:

Fragmentary female torso, left hand is broken completely and missing, while the right hand is broken from the elbow, which is solid, while the whole body is hollow. A slightly thick projection can be seen on the neck, somewhat pointed breast is slightly eroded due to the ravages of time. A thick neck ornament is seen hanging and placed over the breast. An almost square shaped suture of 1.5 cm width is seen on the frontal bottom, while on the back side an oval shaped suture can be seen.

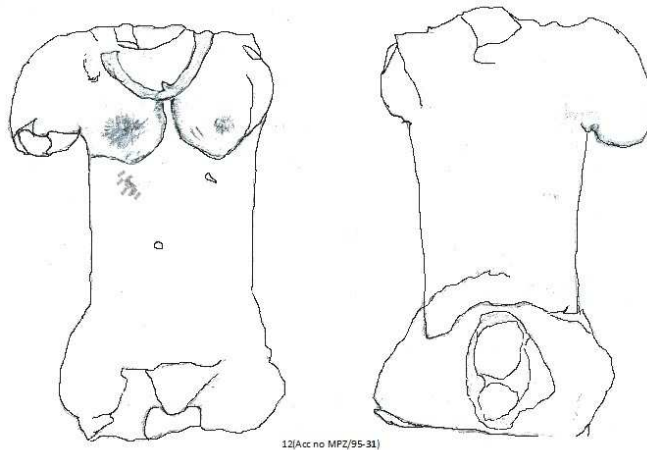


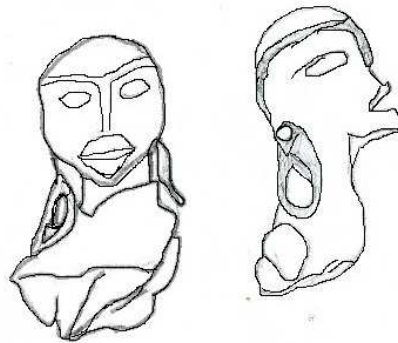
Fig. 12 Female Torso

13) Acc No MPZ/95-32

Size: 7.7 cm X 4.5 cm to 1.5 cm; Colour: red; Firing: Well fired; Clay: medium to fine;
Type: Terracotta female Bust

Description:

Bust of a human figurine, almost oval shaped face having long broad bulged eyes, broad nose, thick eyebrows and oval shaped chin. Upper lip is thick, while the lower is missing completely. Pierced holes seen on either side of head denote ears and long, oval-shaped ear ring is seen on both the ears. Head is tonsured. Fragmentary portion of the right side upper arm can be seen.



13(Acc no MPZ/95-32)

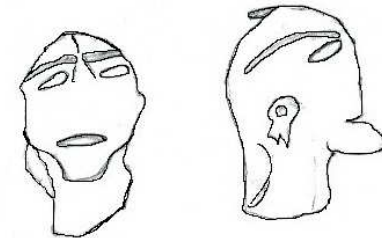
Fig. 13. Bust of a Human Figure

14) Acc No: MPZ/95-34

Size: 6.00 cm X 3.7 cm X 1.00 cm; Colour: red; Firing: Well fired; Clay: medium to fine;
Type: Terracotta

Description:

Bust of a human figurine, facial features like *appliqué* elongated eyes, thick eye brows which are extending to the back side of the head. Head has a partition seen in the centre with a tuft of hair in the back side. Partly broken ear on the right side while a pierced hole remains in the place of the ear on the left side. Nose is broken and completely missing. Mouth is wide open; has protruding square shaped chin.



14(Acc no MPZ/95-34)

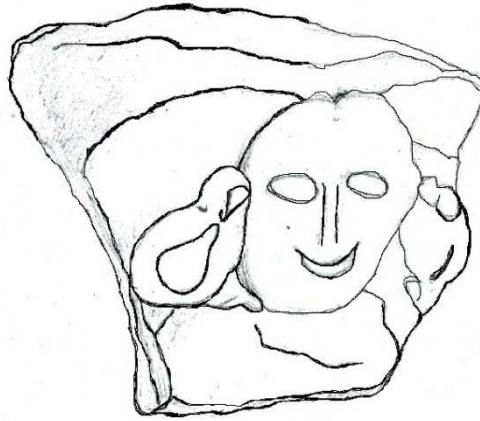
Fig. 14. Human Head

15) Acc No: MPZ/95-35

Size: 5.5 cm x 7.00 cm x 1.00 cm; Colour: red; Firing: Well fired; Clay: Course to medium; Type: Terracotta human Bust

Description:

Plaque, with a human figurine, eroded facial features such as broad eyes, and sharp nose, the left ear is eroded, while the right ear is elongated and complete. A crescent shaped hood can be seen on top of the head.



15(Acc no: MPZ/95-35)

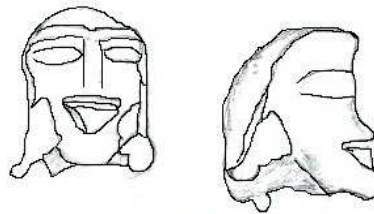
Fig. 15. Human Figurine

16) Acc No: MPZ/95-38

Size: 6.2 cm x 4.7 cm x 2.6 to 3.4; Colour: red; Firing: Well fired; Clay: medium to fine; Type: Terracotta human head

Description:

Head of a human figurine with almost roundish face having broad elongated eyes and thick eyebrows. Nose is broken and missing, leaving a slight depression on its part. Mouth is open with a partly eroded upper and partly broken lower lip. Chin is square in shape. Ears are seen on both sides. Hair is shown as plain combed backwards.



16 (Acc no: MPZ/95-38)

Fig. 16. Human Head

17) Acc No: MPZ/95-42

Size: 10.00 cm X 7.5 cm X 6.00 cm to 2.4 cm; Colour: red; Firing: Well fired;
Clay: medium to fine; Type: Terracotta human head

Description:

Head of a human figurine, male, fragmentary, almost oval shape face having long bulged eyes, thin, but sharp projected eye brows which join up in the centre. Long curved, parrot beaked nose. Head is plain on right side, while hair has 7 to 8 strands or braided hair-do towards the left side of head. Round suture on both side of the cheek which is 0.2 cm thick inside and depth of 10 cm. Nose is pinched or *appliqué* type.

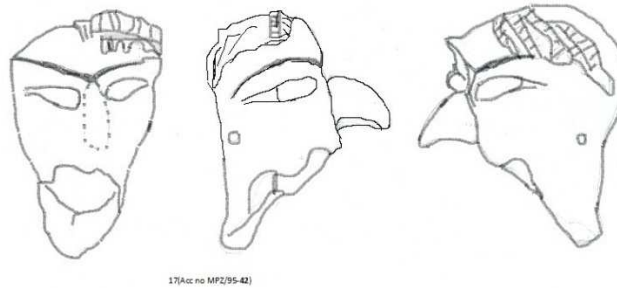


Fig. 17. Human Head

18) Acc No: MPZ/95-45

Size: 6.5 cm X 5.5 cm to 1.2 cm; Colour: red; Firing: Well fired; Clay: medium; Type: Terracotta human hooded head

Description:

Hooded head of a human figurine, fragmentary and facial features such as broad nose, long broad eyes and thick lips. Ear is seen on the left side, while it is broken and missing on the right. Strands of hairs can be seen, over that a thick curved hood and on the flat backside incised groove marks can be seen.



Fig. 18. Human Figure

19) Surface finding

Size: 9.2 cm X 11 cm X 1.5 cm; Colour: red; Firing: Well fired; Clay: medium to fine;
Type: Terracotta human head

Description:

Plaque, with bust of a human figurine, fragmentary, seems like the figurine of an old person. Facial features such as sharp, bulged, and broad eyes, aquiline nose, opened mouth with *appliqué* lips, which are missing, with a round chin. Ears complete with ear lobes can be seen.



Fig. 19. Bust of a Human Figure

20) Acc No: MPZ/95-6

Size: 5 cm x 6.5 cm x 0.2 to 1.00 cm; Colour: red; Firing: Well fired; Clay: medium to fine;
Type: Terracotta animal head

Description:

Plaque, depicting head of a goat (?). Eyes are shown as roundels, wide opened mouth, ears partially broken on left side, while almost complete on right side. Square shape chin is broken on right side. A leaf shaped design is seen on the right side of the image.

20(Acc no: MPZ/95-6)

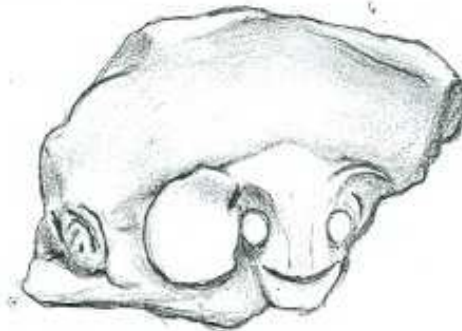


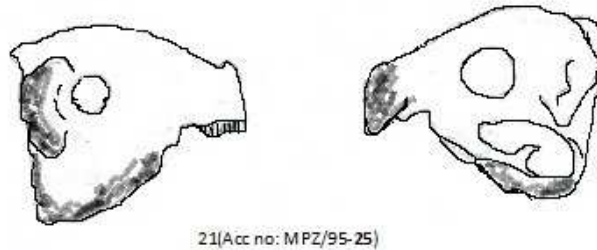
Fig. 20. Animal Figurine

21) Acc No: MPZ/95-25

Size: 5.5 to 3.4 cm x 4.5 cm x 1.00 cm; Colour: red; Firing: Well fired; Clay: medium to fine; Type: Terracotta animal head

Description:

Head of an animal, fragmentary, slight snout with teeth on upper jaw, while lower jaw is missing, round eyes, were demarcated by incised lines. Ears are flat and oval shaped. Hollow inside.



21(Acc no: MPZ/95-25)

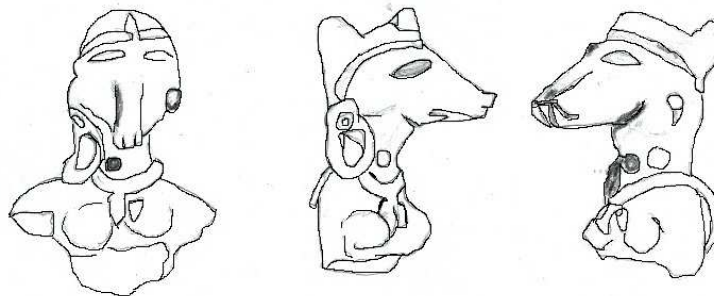
Fig. 21. Head of an Animal

22) Acc No: MPZ/95-12

Size: 9.00 cm x 5.6 cm x 3.4 to 3.7 cm; Colour: red; Firing: Well fired; Clay: medium to fine; Type: Terracotta animal head

Description:

Bust of a female bovine, composite, face having a thick long snout, elongated eyes, thick eyebrows, above that in the middle having a projection in the forehead and horns like projection can be seen. On the left side of the face, a long earlobe seen, while on the right side, it is absent, but a pierced hole is seen. Two roundels seen on the neck among which one is missing, but a scar is seen. Neck is adorned with a thick necklace with a pendant seen in between the full breast, which is partly eroded.



22(Acc no: MPZ/95-12)

Fig. 22 Bust of a female figure

23) surface finding

Size: 6.5 cm x 4.5 cm x 2.2 to 3.50; Colour: red; Firing: ill fired; Clay: medium to fine;
Type: Terracotta Human Bust

Description:

Eroded, human bust, facial features is completely unclear, but with an oval chin. Below the chin a projection is seen, it is possibly a part of hand, which could be in folded hands.

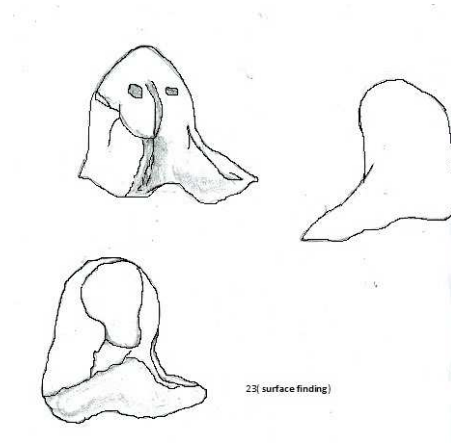


Fig. 23. Human Bust

24) Acc No: MPZ/95-3

Size: 4.9 cm x 3.00 cm x 1.5 cm to 2.00 cm; Colour: red; Firing: Well fired; Clay: medium to fine; Type: Terracotta Human bust

Description:

Bust of a human figurine, facial features like, protruding elongated eyes and eyebrows; eyebrows were extending to the sides of the head. Head is shown tonsured. Nose is broken and lost. Ear is indicated by a pierced hole. Only the left ear is shown with an ear ring, which is large, elongated and extending up to the lower neck. Slight depression can be seen on the back side of neck.

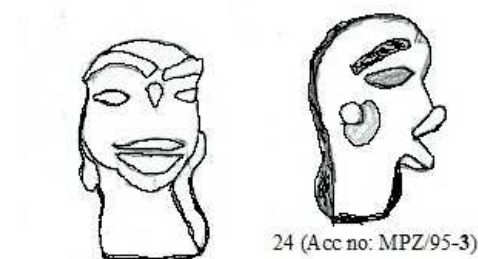


Fig. 24. Bust of a Human Figure

25) Acc No: MPZ/95-4

Size: 5.5 cm x 4.5 cm x 1.5 to 2.3 cm; Colour: red; Firing: ill fired; Clay: medium; Type: Terracotta Human head

Description:

Solid human head, slightly eroded facial features, with broad nose, long elongated eyes, upper lip is completely eroded, while the lower can be seen. Parts of left side ear are seen while the right ear is full and complete. A thick stalk like part below the head denotes neck part.

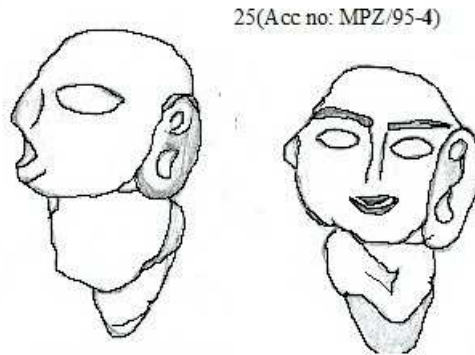


Fig. 25. Human Head

26) Acc No: MPZ/95-9

Size: 6.9 cm x 5.8 cm x 0.4 to 1.00 cm; Colour: red; Firing: ill fired; Clay: medium to coarse; Type: Terracotta Human bust.

Description:

Bust of a human figurine, facial features are almost eroded. Face is broad and with elongated eyes, broad nose and thick lips. Round shaped pierced holes can be seen on either side of the head denote the ears.

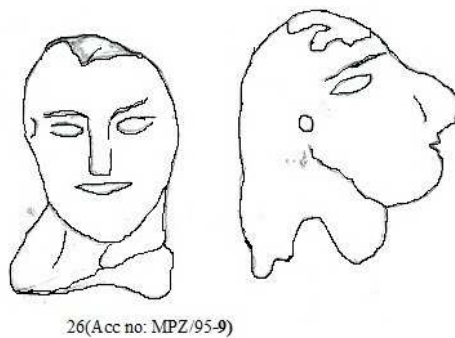


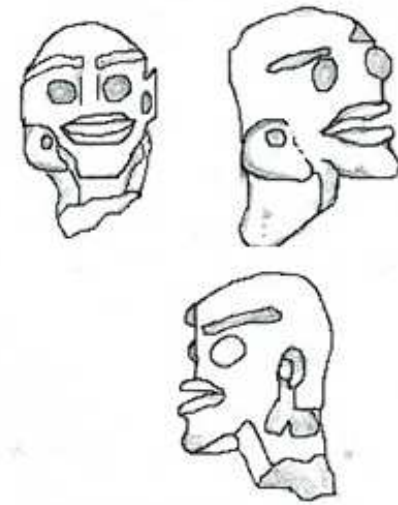
Fig. 26. Human Head

27) Acc No: MPZ/95-17

Size: 3.9 cm x 2.5 cm x 1.5 cm; Colour: red; Firing: ill fired; Clay: Fine; Type: Terracotta Human head

Description:

Human head, two *appliqué* roundels to depict the eyes, thick eyebrows, wide opened mouth with protruded and thick lips, and square chin. Ears on either side, and on the left a bifurcated hanging ear ornament can be seen.



27[Acc no: MPZ/95-17]

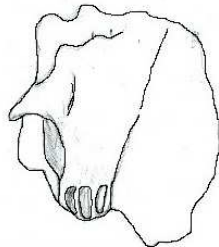
Fig. 27. Human Head

28) Acc No: MPZ/95-24

Size: 7.00 cm x 6.00 cm x 0.8 to 1.00 cm; Colour: red; Firing: ill fired; Clay: Fine; Type: Terracotta Human feet

Description:

Fragmentary human feet, shown with nails, coarse to medium fabric and is ill baked, mica can be seen on it.



28[Acc no: MPZ/95-24]

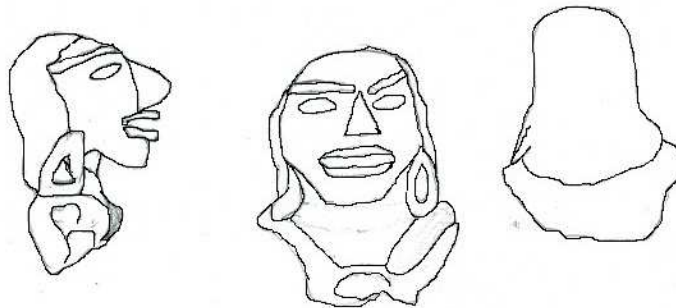
Fig. 28 Human feet

29) Acc No: MPZ/95-33

Size: 6.5 cm x 4.5 cm x 0.5 to 1.2 cm; Colour: red; Firing: ill fired; Clay: Fine; Type: Terracotta Human bust

Description:

Bust of a human figurine, fragmentary, with crude facial feature. Face is broad with elongated protruded eyes, thick even eyebrows, broad almost curved nose widely opened mouth with thick lips, square chin. Hanging ear lobes can be seen. Hair is shown as plain flat *appliqué*, combed towards back side. An upper garment seen running over the left hand shoulder reaches up to the chest. Back side is plain.



29(Acc no: MPZ/95-33)

Fig. 29. Bust of Human Figure

30) Acc No: MPZ/95-39

Size: 7.0 cm x 5.00 cm x 2.5 cm to 3.00 cm; Colour: red; Firing: well fired; Clay: medium to Fine; Type: Terracotta Human head

Description:

Head of a human figurine, fragmentary, with elongated eyes reach either side of the head, thick eye brows were joint together in the centre, and broad *appliqué* nose is missing, left a scar over there. Upper lip is missing; mouth opened, with a shallow horizontal depression, lower lip is shown but is eroded. The broad square shaped chin, which has a partition in the bottom centre, is projected outwards. Ear is missing on the left side, while on right it is shown as an *appliqué* roundel. Back side of the head is plain.

30 (Acc no: MPZ/95-39)

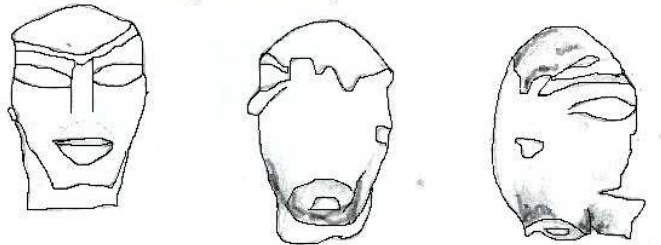


Fig. 30. Head of a Human Figurine

31) Acc No: MPZ/95-40

Size: 5.5 cm X 6.2 cm x 1.00 to 2.00 cm; Colour: red; Firing: ill fired; Clay: coarse to medium; Type: Terracotta Lower part of Human Figurine.

Description:

Fragmentary lower portion of a seated human figurine, thick legs and feet missing. The figurine is shown wearing a lower garment, which reaches below the knee. Trunk Portion is missing. Back side of the body is plain. Luting marks can be seen on both sides.

31(Acc no: MPZ/95-40)

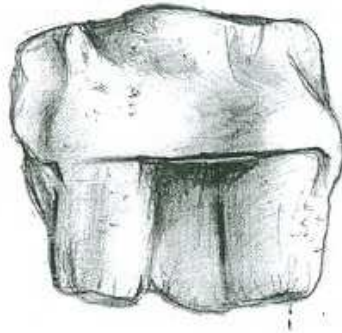


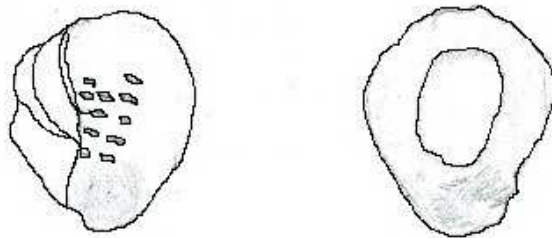
Fig. 31. Portion of a Human Figure

32) Acc No: MPZ/95-43

Size: 4.00 cm X 3.2 cm x 1.00 to 2.00 cm; Colour: red; Firing: ill fired; Clay: coarse to medium; Type: Terracotta Back side of Human head

Description:

Fragmentary back side of a head of a human figurine. Part of the eyebrow can be seen reaching the backside of head. Incised linear dot designs shown as a part of hair decoration on the left side, while head is plain towards right side.



32(Acc no: MPZ/95-43)

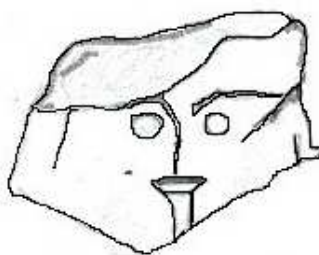
Fig. 32. Broken part of a Human figure

33) Acc No: MPZ/95-21

Size: 4.6 cm X 5.0 cm x 0.8 to 1.5 cm; Colour: red;Firing: ill fired; Clay: medium to fine;Type: Terracotta face of Human Figurine.

Description:

Human face, simple, engraved roundels depicting eyes, undefined nose, mouth opened, and with an elongated square chin. Back side is plain.



33[Acc no: MPZ/95-21]

Fig. 33. Human Head

Table No. 1 The terracotta figurine :Fragments from Malampuzha

Type/Part	no.	
Male figurine:	Torso	2
	Bust	1
	Head	25
Female figurine:	Torso	1
	bust	1
	Relief	1
Animal figurine:	3	
Composite figurine: (Animal and Human)	1	
Unidentified figurines	8	
Lower body portion	1	
Feet	1	
Total	45	

Conclusion

Terracotta objects are commonly found from the Neolithic period in South India. However they are more frequent from the Early Historic context in South India.²

The detailed study of the terracotta figurines from the megaliths reveals their variation in styles, features, as well as techniques. The facial features of this terracotta figurine indicate their crude workmanship. The protruded, broad and bulged eyes, thick lips and broad nose suggest the indigenous ethnic groups, while the sharp features like aquiline nose, lozenge shaped eyes, thick lips exhibit the more to a far native possibly middle eastern types. They indicate the mixed nature of the megalithic population.

The purpose of the terracotta objects remains appear to be related to the burial rituals and rebirth. But the availability of these terracotta figurines in the megalithic context is unique, because they are not normally found in many of the sites of this period. The terracotta figurines might have been prepared just before the burial, indicated mostly by their ill fired nature. A few ethnic groups of Kerala still bury ill fired terracotta figurines and place them along with the dead body, according to the local people in Thrissur District. The craftsmanship or the creative skill of the artist is noteworthy. More than religious symbols, they also represent the art prevailed during that time. The decorative designs depict a well developed art of that period. Unfortunately, very few sites are known for the availability of terracotta objects in Kerala. Recently some terracotta objects were unearthed from Thrissur region without any stratified context. In the wider arena of megalithic period, the presence of different human types in a specific area at a single time is very remarkable. It throws more light on the megalithic cultural context, and however, it needs more detailed studies to understand their ritual significance.

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End notes

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- ¹ Ajit Kumar. Unique Terracotta Figurines from Megalithic Urn Burials at Malampuzha, District Palaghat. *Puratattva*, 34.
- ² Nagaswamy, R.1987. Ancient Terracottas of Tamil Nadu. *Essays in Memory of Shri. S. P. Singhal*, (ed.) Devendra Handa, Delhi:Caxton Publications; Rajan Gurukkal and Raghava Varier. 1999. *Cultural History of Kerala, Vol-1*, Tiruvanthapuram: Kerala Dept. of Cultural Publications; Ghosh, A. 1989. *Encyclopaedia of Indian Archaeology, Vol-1*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt., Ltd.