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Krimila: A Forgotten Nagar of Early Medieval Eastern India

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Krimila: A Forgotten Nagar of Early Medieval Eastern India*

Abstract

The post-Gupta era witnessed the deterioration of the urban economy as a result of the marginalization of trade and currency network. The period marked the emergence of feudalism and with time, land grants became one of the major features of this social system. This changing pattern of agrarian economy affected the contemporary urban economy as well. The earlier urban centres of Bihar declined or disappeared by the beginning of the 7th century A.D. The new towns that emerged during the period had a distinctive nature compared to earlier urban centres and revolved around two functions, political and religio-educational. An attempt to identify such centres in different parts of Bihar underlines either their ecclesiastical or politico-administrative basis, they were either religion centred or fortified administrative nuclei. Kṛimilā Adhsthāṇa, an early medieval religious-cum-administrative centre of eastern India is located around Lakhisarai of Bihar. This region has drawn attention of ancient travelers and scholars. A large number of sculptures of Brahmanical and Buddhist deities, some with inscription have been discovered during the recent archaeological explorations of this area. Shreds of evidences of settlement and existence of religious monuments are found here. This paper is an effort to understand Krimila through the recent extensive explorations.

Keywords: *Buddhism, Brahmanism, Krimila, Inscriptions, Monasteries*

*This paper is a revised version of the lecture delivered at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi on 28 February 2017.

Introduction

The emergence of regional identities marked the Post-Gupta social formation. Right from the times of the Guptas, and more so during the post Gupta period the process of the origin and evolution of states which was till then confined to the upper and middle valleys of the Ganga, came to acquire a regional dimension. At around the same time, there was similar activity in other parts of the sub-continent too. Large-scale agrarianisation preceded this, which in turn led to the beginning of regional economies of varied patterns during this period. In eastern India, despite sub-regional variations there emerged a cultural idiom with its own identity.

The three sub-regions of eastern India—Bihar, Bengal, and Odisha—went through different developmental processes. While much of Bihar, the mid-Ganga valley, had previously been the core area of economic development, the Bengal sub-region had not fully area still had to undergo this process of the exploitation of natural resources. Despite the Magadhan intrusion into these abovementioned areas and the emergence of localized state systems, economic development was only marginal.

The dominant theory on the decline of the urban centres in the Gupta period needs to be re-evaluated necessitated by (newer findings) data on the urban centres in eastern India viz., Bihar, Bengal, and Odisha.¹ Empirical data pertinent to the upper and middle valleys of the Ganga has been developed into an explanatory model (Professor B D Chattopadhyay in his book *Making of Early Medieval India* provided data from Upper Ganga valley and western India). There are a couple of questions that arise from this model: i) can this empirical data-based model be granted pan-India validity? and ii) did these formations crystallize from the Gupta period?

A casual survey of the available archaeological data from Bengal would substantiate this argument. The functional nature of urban centres changed over this period. While most ancient (pre-Gupta?) urban centres were either commercial or administrative, during the Gupta period this character changed, but continued to exist. Most of them became either religious or fortified administrative nuclei. This change of character itself speaks of their disassociation from commercial activities of the market. The claim regarding the existence of external trade in early medieval eastern India is hardly convincing. This is attested by the fact that the fortunes of both the early seaports of that time, Tamralipti and Saptagrama declined. Seemingly, the expanding agrarian economy along with the on-

¹R.S. Sharma, "Decay of Gangetic Towns in Gupta and Post Gupta Period," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 33 (1971), pp. 92-104. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44145318>.

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going process of state formation in the area sustained the urban centres that also emerged as the centres of community activities in different regions².

Responses to these queries shall, no doubt, assume centrality in any discourse related to the making of early medieval India³. Such an exercise must explain the concern that all region - specific developments must be linked to the broader processes of the concurrently dominant social formation if they are to have any bearing on the attempts to construct our past. Denying this reality is to deny the pattern of cultural evolution that is a common denominator of all societies. If regional cultures evolved solely rooted to their respective spatial context then why is it that such a process begins during the same period, that is, the 5th and the 6th centuries. Was there a simultaneous social re-structuring?

Moreover, how to rationalize for those elements of regional cultures, too intelligibly articulated to be ignored, that were disseminated from the mid-Ganga valley? The construction of an “alternate mode” of analysis, therefore cannot afford to disengage itself from the dominant historical process of the times. It is with these concerns at the centre stage that the present paper seeks to explore the twin issues of the differential pattern of urban growth in north India during the Gupta period and the factors responsible for the emergence of cultural nuclei (the contemporary urban pattern is one of its manifestations) in the erstwhile peripheral regions⁴.

Data from archaeological surveys often brings to the fore a significant chronological dimension of the habitational pattern of the early Indian urban centres of the Gupta times. Despite suggestions to the contrary, these settlements do not admit a history of housing that can fit into any format that is universally applicable and chronologically standardized urbanization. However, the dominant position in the current debate on the urban decline in early India ignores this variant chronological decline scheme to underpin the hypothesis of the emergence of homogeneous and chronologically uniform feudal formation the Gupta / post - Gupta period. In Indian historiography, this dichotomy between urban tradition and feudal formation has received such absolute relevance that complete negation of urban form becomes a logical deduction in the context of feudal production mode.

²V.K. Thakur, “Regional Patterns of Early Medieval Formation in India: A Study of Gupta Towns,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 58th session, Bengaluru, (1997), p. 2.

³B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 2-37.

⁴V.K. Thakur, “Regional Patterns of Early Medieval Formation in India: A Study of Gupta Towns”, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 58th session, Bengaluru, (1997), p. 2. *Op. Cit.*

Is there such an intense antagonism between feudalism and cities? Does one negate the other so comprehensively? Or does it distinctly underline a pattern of urban decline that was both qualitative and quantitative in nature? What is then the specific form of opposition between the two? Marx, in his seemingly Eurocentric definition of the feudal city's specificity reveals the dynamics of the relationship: "The history of classical quantities is the history of cities, but of cities founded on landed property and agriculture: Asian history is a sort of undifferentiated unity of city and countryside (the largest cities must be regarded here as royal camps, as works of artifice created above the economic construction proper); the Middle Ages (Germanic period) begins with the land as the seat of history, the further development of which then moves forward in the opposition between town and countryside; the modern age is the urbanization of the country, not the realization of the town as in ancient times."⁵ This opposition need not be construed as a complete negation of towns in the feudal complex. The construct of an inherent antagonism between feudalism and towns as well as the latter's separation from the countryside finds an echo in the writings of Weber, Braudel and Sjoberg who delimit the town as an institutional expression of power. Taking cue from Weber, Philip Abrams situates the town in a larger social context called the complex of domination, which is marked by a struggle to constitute and elaborate power. Such a concept of domination and power associated with the medieval European cities played a crucial role in explaining the cultural and economic basis for capitalism's origins. The projection of these "non feudal islands in the feudal seas" as the prime mover towards capitalism underlines this position. However, the more recent writings on them do not speak in terms of an absolute antagonism between feudalism and towns, rather they underline these settlements' changing functional nature. The urbanization process is now being sought to be located within the feudal system, and the medieval towns are seen as integral to its development. Significantly, it has been suggested that the feudal patterns of social control have restricted economic expansion within cities and, instead of seeking the urban origins of capitalism one should look for its rural roots. Therefore, a feudal society does not deny the very tradition of urbanization, it only deprives the city of meaningful economic initiatives. The suggestion that some of the early cities declined and became pilgrimage centres underlines a similar functional change.⁶

Survey of the available archaeological data and inscriptions of a forgotten early medieval *adhithana*⁷, (big religious or administrative centre) Krimila, would vindicate this pattern

⁵*Ibid.*,

⁶A. Kumar, "Changing Faces of Town in Post Gupta Bengal," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, (2005-06), pp. 173-182.

⁷D.C. Sircar, *Indian Epigraphical Glossary*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsi Dass, 1966), p. 7.

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of social formation. Krimila *adhithana*, a politico-religious centre of early medieval eastern India, has been identified by D.C. Sircar as being at Valgudar, near Lakhisarai' district headquarter in the modern state of Bihar situated 125 km. east of Patna on the national highway 80 (Mokamah-Sahebgung). The place is well connected by railways also. Lakhisarai is a flag railway junction located at a distance of one km. east on the eastern bank of river Kiul on the Delhi-Howrah mainline. Kiul is also an important railway junction of east-central railways. The longitude of the city is 86°06' east and latitude is 25°10' north. Lakhisarai is situated at the confluence of three important rivers—Ganga, Haruhar and Kiul, and three ancient cultural zones of Anga, Magadh, and Mithila. The existing morphology of river Ganga is around five kilometer north. However, earlier traces of the river are still visible at the site.¹ Moreover, traces of white sand of the Ganga is also found here. While the geographical and the historical significance of the river Ganga is well known to us no less important is river Haruhar, because it connects with all the early medieval institutions of south Bihar).The river Haruhar originates near Nalanda as one of the branches of another important river Falgu. Besides Ganga, both the rivers Haruhar as well as Kiul are perennial and connected to the early historical places of Bihar. (Haruhar connected Nalanda, Rajgir and their nearby sites and also connects Kurkihar, Gaya and Bodh Gaya. Kiul connects Indpe, Krimila, and several early medieval sites of Jamui district.) Before merging with the Ganga Haruhar connects Patliputra and Varanasi in the west, Munger, Champa and Tamralipti on the east. River Kiul also is important in this regard, because it is connected with the southeast region of Bihar. (Kiul connects Lakhisarai with Indepe, Nongarh, Kumair, Lachuar and several other centres of Jamui district of Bihar.) This river is mentioned in the Buddhist texts, where it is mentioned as river *Krimikala*. On the western bank of this river in Krimila at *Chaliya Parvat* Buddha spent his 13th, 18th and 19th rainy seasons.⁸ Near the district headquarters of Lakhisarai, river Kiul passes between two hills, one on the western bank and another on the eastern bank. The geographical location of this site is therefore of great historical importance as it is situated on the northern bank of this confluence of the early historical site of northern Bihar Naulagarh. This place may have been used as a river port because Naulagarh, located right opposite Lakhisarai on the northern bank of this confluence, was again connected with almost all the major rivers of northern Bihar. From the time of the Pala rule in north Bihar (north of river Ganga), we get plenty of black stone sculptures from various sites i.e. Dumra, Akaur, Ucchaith, Mahisi, Kapilesvara, Balirajgarh, Kopagarh, Andhra Tharhi etc. North Bihar topography suggests that there is only plain land. Black stone used to make sculpture may have been obtained from the southeastern region of Rajmahal. Certainly, a riverine route was essential to carry stone slabs for sculpture. The significance of the location of these two

⁸A. Kumar, "Recently Explored Buddhist Monuments at Krmilā Adhithāna: Its Implications," in *Archaeology of Buddhism: Recent Discoveries in South Asia*, ed. Sanjay Garg (Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2016), pp.167-180.

places Valgudar and Naulagarh, one on the southern side and the other on the northern side, and their connectivity with the major southern and northern rivers of Bihar leads to this conclusion. Further, Lakhisarai is situated between Nalanda and Vikramshila, the two religio-educational centers of early medieval Bihar. A significant aspect is its location on the old Patliputra-Tamralipti route that goes via Champa.⁹ Claudine Bautze-Picron also mentions the ancient connectivity of this place. This connectivity extends north to Simraongarh in Mithila, a place located on the route coming down from Nepal to Bihar and visited by Dharmasvamin in the early 13th century on his way to Bodh Gaya. Lakhisarai appears thus to be located at the crossing of at least two roads, one going towards Nepal (and Tibet), and another going eastwards. Places of evidences of Buddhist presence have been discovered along these roads, some belonging to the 11th and 12th centuries C.E., i.e. contemporary to the material uncovered at Lakhisarai.¹⁰ From the western bank of river Kiul, one can move down towards Jamui in the plateau country or towards Sheikhpura on the way to Rajgir-Nalanda or the Nawada plateau of Gaya region.¹¹ The hills/ hillocks existing in this region belong to Chotanagpur highland. Chotanagpur highland is predominantly represented by granite, granite gneisses (with associated schists). The age of granite gneisses ranges from archaean to proterozoic age. The southeastern part of Chotanagpur highland is represented by archaean schists including iron ore series and Kolhan series. The north-eastern part of the highland is represented by the Rajmahal traps. The northern part of the highland is represented by alluvium. Patches of Gondwana formation, Laterite, Vindhyan, Archaean lavas and basic igneous intrusive rocks are also found in the study area.¹²

The antiquarian remains of Lakhisarai region in past has drawn the attention of British administrators such as Beglar, Buchanan, A. Cunningham and Wadell in late 19th century.¹³ They conducted a preliminary survey of the area and identified stupas, ancient temples at Valgudar, Rajaouna-Chowki, Jainagar, Kiul, Birdavan, Nongarh and Uren.¹⁴

⁹A. Kumar, "Krimila: A Forgotten Adhithana of Early Medieval Eastern India," *Indian Historical Review* 38, 1 (June 2011), pp. 27-48.

¹⁰Claudine Bautze-Picron, "Lakhisarai: An Indian Site of Late Buddhist Iconography, and Its Position within the Asian Buddhist World," in *Silk Road Art and Archaeology 2*, (Kamakura, Japan: The Institute of Silk Road Studies, 1991-92), pp. 240-283.

¹¹Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *Archaeological Geography of Ganga Plains: The Lower and The Middle Ganga*, (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), pp. 160-90.

¹²R.P. Singh, *Geomorphological Evolution of Chotanagpur Highlands*, (Varanasi: National Geographical Society of India, 1969).

¹³L.A. Waddell, "Discovery of Buddhist Remains at Mount Uren in Mungir (Monghyr) District and Identification of the Site with a Celebrated Hermitage of Buddha," *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, no.1 (1892).

¹⁴D.R. Patil, "The Antiquarian Remains in Bihar," *Historical Researches Series*, Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, Patna (1966), pp. 185-186, 209, 447.

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Cunningham surveyed the area first in 1871 and again visited it in 1879-80. Beglar surveyed the whole area in 1871-72. According to Cunningham's report, a large town or city existed here at the confluence of river Kiul, old Ganges and Haruhar. It extended from Rajaouna southwards up to Jainagar, along the western bank of river Kiul, a distance of nearly four miles and had a width of a mile or so. Cunningham identified *lo-in-ni-lo* mentioned by Xuanxang at Rajaouna. Xuanxang mentions that he visited this place, where he saw a Buddhist monastery and stupa erected by Ashok in 4th century B.C.E., and a large lake, five miles in circuit, to the north of Stupa. Cunningham identified this stupa and Monastery. Here he found images of Buddha seated under the *Bodhi* tree, made of black basalt stone with an inscription on it, and an image of Bodhisattva Padmapani or Avalokitesvara. The images recovered from the mounds have been shifted to the Indian Museum at Delhi. Close to two hundred yards south-west of these mounds, the site has yielded a significant number of Brahmanical remains that Cunningham described in his report with some detail. To the east of the village near the Buddhist mounds is another small mound where images of Hara-Gauri and Ganesh were noticed by Cunningham. Presumably, the mound conceals remains of a Shiva temple. Majority of the Brahmanical remains are located in the south of the village Rajaouna as has been mentioned above. Some low square mounds and a large mound to their west called locally as *chowki*—where Cunningham found the remains of a Shiva temple—are also found. Here, Cunningham noticed one large and three small figures of four-armed *Vishnu* and it is not unlikely that they represent sites of a Vaisnava temple. Cunningham discovered two very interesting 16 ft. stone pillars during his excavation. These were square and decorated with inscription and bas-reliefs. These inscriptions are written in shell letters, which were in use during 7th -8th century C.E., in northern India. Based on Xuanxang's visit and the dates of this inscription we can safely assume that the Brahmanical deities, as well as the Shiva temple, belonged to a period around 7th - 8th century C.E. Cunningham has described the sculptures on all the four sides of the pillars. The sculptures include (i) two fighting figures with a prostrate figure beside them and two short inscriptions in perpendicular lines beneath them, (ii) a bust of a female figure and underneath it is a seated goddess attended by an umbrella bearer and three figures probably in supplication. Underneath this group are two inscriptions: one is the *Sri-Bhima Kshudra* probably in 7th-8th century script and the other in *Ratnapra*; (iii) there is the image of Shiva on Mount Kailasa with three attendants and a female deity with crocodile kneeling before her, who according to Cunningham represents the river goddess *Ganga* or the goddess Parvati or Sati of the famous puranic legend of Daksha's sacrifice; (iv) the images of a seated god and goddess attended by a female figure. The inscription on this pillar is in the 7th -8th century script. Cunningham mentions some more mounds at the place indicating Shaiva ruins. North of the Shiva temple mound, he saw a lofty square mound with two statues of the Goddess Kali and Ganesh; while to the further west of it, he noticed another very large mound of around 400ft. in length from where bricks were

stolen during the construction of railway line. In the village itself, Cunningham found “a small mound with a *linga* and a figure of Shasthi and Bhavani, with a long slab of *Navagraha*. Beglar reports the discovery of a fine image of Parvati with an inscription.¹⁵

However, the exploration of Cunningham was mainly aimed at identifying the Buddhist ruins with those Xuanxang mentioned. After the British scholars' preliminary work, the centre also occasionally drew Indian scholars' attention, but they limited their efforts to decipher the area's chance discoveries. In this regard, an inscription from Valgudar (Valgudar) deciphered by D.C. Sircar is important, which mentions the name of a *Vishya*, Krimila (Administrative unit) of Gupta period and he argues that Valgudar was the centre of Krimila *Vishya*.¹⁶ Krimila *Vishya* is mentioned in other inscriptions also. In this regard, the Nalanda plate of Samudragupta, the Bihar inscription of Gupta period, Naulagarh inscription of Pala period and two inscriptions discovered from Valgudar and its adjacent area are significant. One inscription mentions that in Krimila *vishya*, the merchants' guild (*Madhu srenika*) has founded a religious centre (*devadhammayam*) in honour of Dharmapala. In this inscription, Krimila was mentioned as *adhithana*, and this word has been taken to mean as a centre of administration i.e. a city or a town. Another inscription from Valgudar gives us very important information about the Pala ruler, Madanpala. We learn that during the 18th regnal year of his rule a Narayana image was installed by two Paramavaishnava Bhatta brothers Shree Sukim Bhatta and his brother Shree Abhi-----Bhatta along with his father, in the Saka era 1083. Hence, from this inscription we can conclude that Madanpala ascended the Pala throne in 1143 century C.E. and ruled at least for 18 years that would be 1161 century C.E. This inscription also prominently mentions Krimila.¹⁷ The Munger copper plate inscription of Devepala mentions Krimila *Vishya* in Srinagar *Bhukti* (Pataliputra has been identified as the centre of Srinagar *Bhukti*). Contemporary texts also mention Krimila as a *nagara* and this place was founded by a local ruler of Usinagar; this Usinagar remains unidentified.¹⁸ Analysis of these inscriptions and literature suggests that this place flourished at least from Gupta period and continued as an important religio-administrative centre up to 12th century C.E.. Another significant aspect is of donations by the merchant community and the existence of guilds during the Dharmapala period. It raises many questions about the post-Gupta historiography.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 427-429.

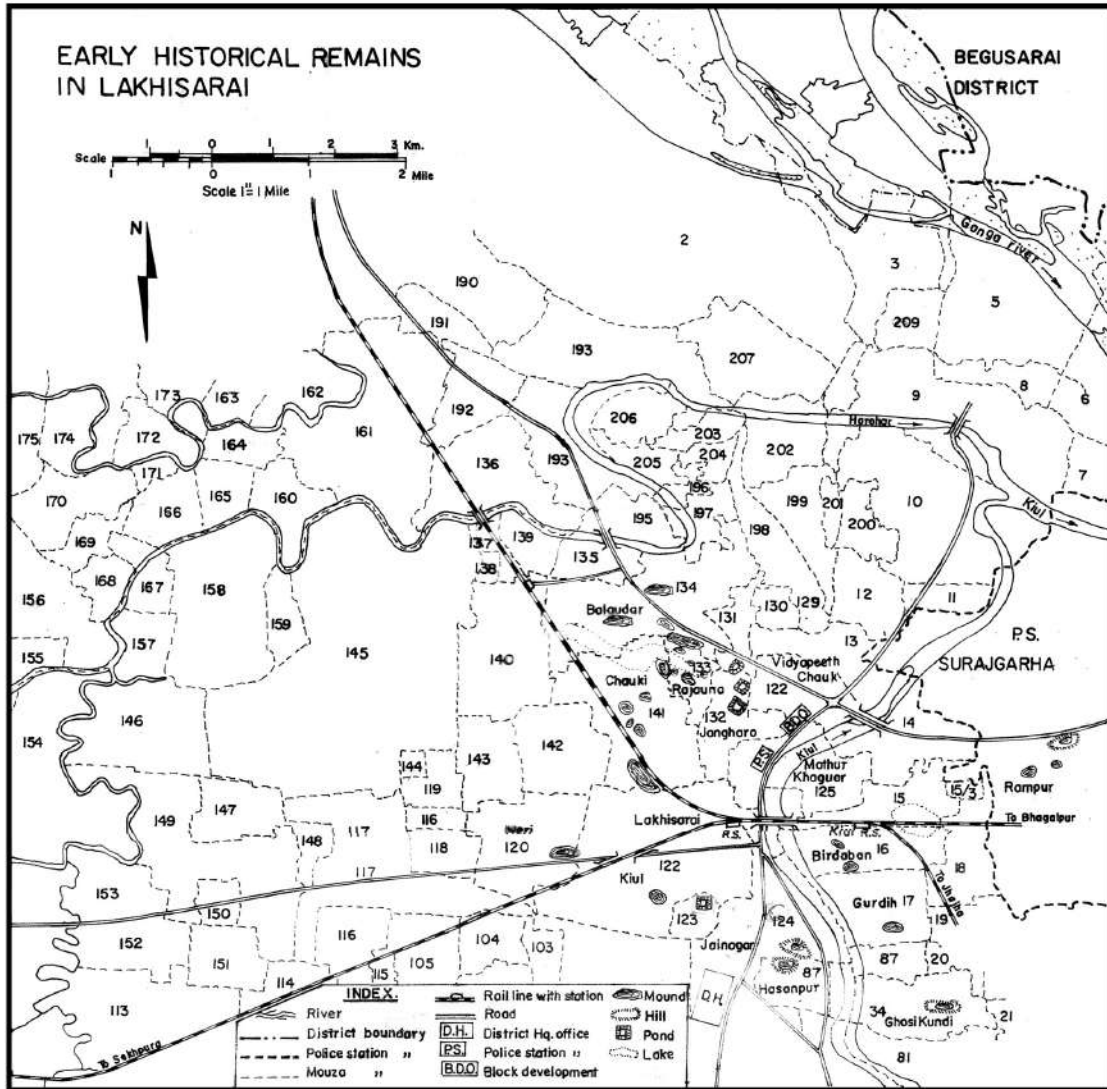
¹⁶A. Kumar, “Krimila: A Forgotten Adhithana of Early Medieval Eastern India,” *Indian Historical Review* 38, 1 (June 2011): pp. 27-48. *Op.Cit.*

¹⁷A. Kumar (2011), *Op. Cit.*

¹⁸A. Kumar, “Recently Explored Buddhist Monuments at Krimila Adhithana: Its Implications,” in *Archaeology of Buddhism: Recent Discoveries in South Asia*, ed. Sanjay Garg (Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2016), pp. 167-180. *Op.Cit.*

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Map-1



This area was again explored by F.M. Asher in the latter half of the 20th century. He concluded that this was an urban centre during the 8th-12th centuries A.D. after analyzing the sculptures and stone pillars lying around the region and a few sculptures preserved in different museums. Asher analyzed the artifacts of three modern villages situated between the rivers Haruhar and Kiul. He did not cross the river Kiul and had restricted himself in the villages Valgudar, Rajaouna and Jainagar or in other words the western bank of river Kiul and up to eastern bank of river Haruhar. While declaring this as an urban centre he has not provided any data about economic activity or existence of market at the centre. Besides, he tried to establish *tirtha* at the fringes of the centre, which is

Nongarh, 10 K.M. away from the main centre¹⁹. These scholars have confined themselves to the monuments, which were situated mostly on the western bank of river Kiul. Although, Asher agrees that artifacts found from modern Valgudar, Rajaouna and Jainagar are essentially contiguous without apparent or clearly defined boundaries.²⁰

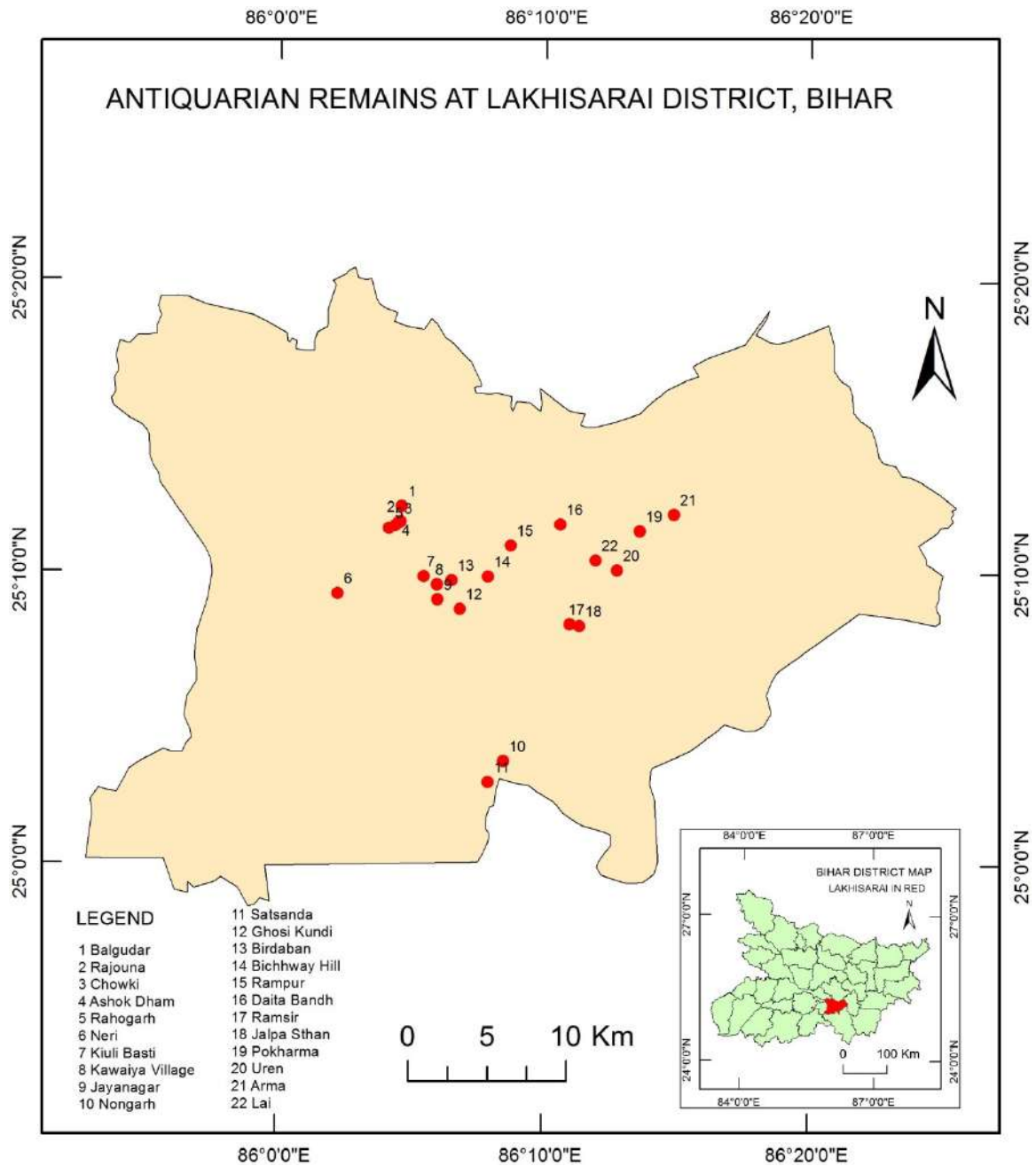
A comprehensive field survey of the area in recent times has yielded existence of a large settlement in continuity, starting from Valgudar, which is the north-western limit, to ten kilometers eastern limit village Siadpura, where Daitabadh is located, (fortification wall of the town), this ancient embankment could have been the eastern limit of the ancient city of Krimila. Again, six kilometres from Daitabandh is village Ramsir and Jalappasthan. Around ten kilometres east of Jalappasthan is Neri mound. Between Jalappasthan and the mound there are different stupas, viharas and Brahmanical temple remains in Sringarpur, Bichwe, Birdavan, Ghosi-Kundi, Jainagar, Kiul, Kawaiya and Neri. The hills of Chotanagpur Plateaustarts southward from Ramsir village, hence this hill could have been the natural boundary of Krimila *nagara*. Between these two points (Valgudar and *Daitabandh*), within an area of 72 square km, a large number of finished, unfinished early medieval sculptures, fragments, architectural remains and more than fifty five mounds of various sizes have been identified. In between the mounds, there are ponds and several lakes, and at a few places, particularly at Valgudar, Jainagar, and at Ghosi-Kundi, Bicchwe, Uren and Nongarh brick structures are seen exposed—either due to natural reasons or due to encroachments. As many as 85 mounds of various sizes are scattered.

¹⁹Fredrick M. Asher, "Sculptures from Rajaouna, Valgudar and Jaynagar: Evidence for an Urban Center," East and West, Vol. XXXVI, no. 1/3 (1986), pp. 227-246.

²⁰*Ibid.*

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Map-2.



During a recent exploration, the whole area as mentioned above was divided into four clusters. Cluster one is the area between two rivers, Haruhar and Kiul; Cluster two starts from village Ghosi Kundi and extends up to village Rampur; Cluster three is the area around Daitabandh; and Cluster four is the peripheral area surrounding the core area of

the ancient city of Krimila. Places such as Pokhrama, Arma, Uren, Sringeririshi and Nongarh are significant and are important to mention here.

Cluster I

This cluster starts from the modern village of Valgudar. A large number of Buddhist and Brahmanical sculptures are found lying in the open field or are in private collections of local people. Some sculptures have been taken away to various museums of India and abroad out of which a few of them have been studied and published in national and international journals. There are hundreds of sculptures that remain unnoticed. To understand the political, social, and economic significance of this region, it is required that the region be studied in its totality and not of isolated sculptures only based on either their style or religious significance. The differences in style identity and period of the sculptures in the three clusters were not taken into account in earlier studies.

Valgudar occupies three mounds. A large number of black and red ware potsherds are found scattered within the village. A big mound on the south-east side of the village was dug for road construction and it revealed an ancient brick structure. Nearby, fragments of Buddha made of black basalt have been found under a tree.

Picture of Valgudar Mound



Image 1



Image 2

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Fragments of Sculptures near this mound.



Image 3



Image 4



Image 5

Less than a hundred meters south of Valgudar, there is a lake, that has been mentioned by Xuanxang and later identified by Cunningham. On the southern bank of the lake are the earlier identified sites of the stupa and temples of Rajaouna and Chowki. There are not less than ten big mounds ranging from 5000sq. meter to 30,000 sq. meters. In between mounds, there are six large ponds.

Unexcavated mounds lie between Neri and Valgudar unprotected and unguarded by any agency of the government. Recent explorations have yielded several Buddhist and Brahmanical sculptures made of black stone. All the sculptures are of the early medieval period. A few of them are inscribed. One headless statue of seated Buddha in *Bhumisparsha mudra* in Rajaouna bears an engraving. The inscription in Sanskrit is found on the pedestal of the statue in two lines; again paleographically it can be dated to 10-11 century A.D. The dimensions of the sculpture are 3'8" x 2'6" and the size of the inscription is 26.5"X 2.7". It is difficult to read the inscription as it is too small (.5") and also mutilated. It is fairly clear that it refers to "*De yadhammayayavarasatakrimilyaadhithana*------(mutilated), the second line is ----- (mutilated) *SrimadRampalpravavdamanevijayarajyasam*. This suggests a donation in the victories at *Krimila adhithana* by Yavara.

Picture of inscribed Buddha from Rajaouna



Image 6

Apart from this, there were hundreds of Buddhist as well as Brahmanical sculptures found during recent excavations. Preliminary studies of the sculptures seem to suggest these mostly belong to the early medieval period and show variation in style. A recent temple construction on a mound at Chowki, and road construction work led to demolishing a mound in Rajaouna from where a large number of sculptures was dug out in an unscientific manner, damaging many. All the sculptures are made of black basalt stone and stylistically dateable to a period from 7th century A.D. to 12th -century C.E. Among these, a 3'6" x 2'3" Vishnu image is worth mentioning. The remaining images include Brahma, five-faced Shiva linga, Surya, Parvati, Ganesha and Durga and an image of Kuber with an inscription in shell letters. One 6' 8"x2'6" broken Ramayana panel probably of the 10th-11th century also was dug out from the mound.

All these sculptures are stored unprotected in a storehouse of the temple complex. This temple again is constructed on a large mound from where a few years ago the local people dug out a huge Shiva linga (8' height 24' *argha*). During the abovementioned construction work, which is still on, more than a hundred ornamented black stone pillars were dug out carelessly damaging them. The pillars are of great artistic value. The most important finding is twelve *amlas* of *sikhara* from adjacent mounds. This is enough to conclude that at this place there must have been a temple complex built of stone.²¹ Iron hooks found inserted may have been for joining the pillars. One 3'6" thick and 7' long lintel made of the same black stone has been identified.

Pictures of Rajaouna and Chowki



Image 7



Image 8



Image 9

²¹R.K. Chattopadhyay, Kumkum Bandopadhyay, and Shubha Majumder, "Recent Study of Sculptural and Architectural Remains from South Bihar Plain: A Case Study of Rajaona-Chowki Region," *Journal of Bengal Art* 20, (2015), pp. 205-228.

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Image 10



Image 11



Image 12



Image 13



Image 14



Image 15



Image 16



Image 17



Image 18

Behind the newly constructed temple (Ashokdham) there is an unexcavated mound called Rahogarh. From this mound fragments of a few black stone sculptures and a burnt brick structure have been identified. Black and red-ware pots sherds are scattered all around the mound. Hardly a kilometer and a half towards the south there is another unexcavated mound called Neri *tila* near the village Jokmaila.



Image 19



Image 20

From Neri *tila*, hardly five hundred meters towards southwest three important sites—Kiul, Kawaiya (these two sites are now fully occupied as the modern town of Lakhisarai) and Jainagar are situated. All these sites were surveyed and reported by Beglar and Cunningham. The last descriptive reference was submitted by Samaddar. A Few inscribed sculptures were reported by Cunningham and later on by Frederick M. Asher.²² In the recent course of exploration in the Kawaiya and Jainagar a few profusely decorated

²²A. Kumar (2011), *Op. Cit.*

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and artistically carved black stone sculpture of early medieval period have been found. The sculptures belong to both Brahmanical as well as Buddhist religions.



Image 21



Image 22



Image 23



Image 24

Jainagar, one of the most important sites of the Krimila region, is situated 5 k.m. southeast of Rajaouna-Chowki and 500 meters south of Kawaiya mound, on the western bank of river Kiul.

Jainagar, ward no. 33 of the modern town of Lakhisarai is situated between two hillocks, Lalpahari and Kalipahari. Cunningham reported the existence of a market in Jainagar, Lalpahari was also extensively explored by A. Cunningham, and in his report, he has mentioned that on the top of this hill a Buddhist vihara existed. According to Cunningham Jainagar was surrounded by 18 *ganda* (18x4=72) ponds²³. Around 25 ponds around this place exist even now. On top of Lalpahari, in 2015, local

²³*Ibid.*

inhabitants in a chance digging came upon ancient structural remains including a bastion on the south-east corner of the structure. On the other side (Eastern bank) of the river, opposite Lalpahari is the mound of Ghosi Kundi and Bichwe. At Ghosi Kundi the ancient Chaliya Parvat (Anuguttar Nikaya) has been identified, where Buddha was said to have spent his 13th, 18th and 19th *vassavasa* or the monsoon retreat. The site of Lalpahari falls under the geographical jurisdiction of Krimila *adhishtana*.

Archaeological excavation at Lalpahari was conducted from November 2017 to 30th April 2018 jointly by Dr. Bijoy Kumar Choudhary, Executive Director, Bihar Virasat Vikas Samiti and Dr. Anil Kumar, Professor and Head of the Department of AIHC & Archaeology, Visva Bharati University, Santiniketan. The site has a recently constructed temple which houses an interesting panel of black stone carved with the images of dancing Avalokiteshvara and Manjushri (according to Claudine B. Picron).²⁴ The stylistic affiliation of the panel is inclined towards the early medieval period.



Image 25

A diligent and systematic excavation has exposed structural remains of a burnt brick of Buddhist monastery on a stone masonry foundation with several unique structural features of early medieval eastern India. During the excavations in the southeastern corner and in the northeastern corner, two bastions attached with the main structure were exposed. Possibility of a third bastion also exists according to the structural design of the monastery. This is a structural site, which is constructed of bricks and consists of the lime-plastered floor. The bricks used are of different sizes and in some cases of different moulding which shows that these were made according to the requirement of the structure; there are a substantial number of decorated bricks as well. The different sizes of the bricks are 26×21.5×5.5 centimeters, 33×25×7 centimeters, 36×25×8 centimeters, 37.5×29×9 centimeters. In the southeastern corner of the site,

²⁴Claudine Bautze-Picron, 2018, Personal Conversation.

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which was already exposed, there is an evidence of two round bastions like structures, probably for the security of those residing inside the monastery. On the adjacent trench towards the north, there is an entranceway where a lintel of black stone is fixed to the floor joined with iron clamps, which is clearly visible. The lintel measures 363 centimeters in length and 30.5 centimeters in width. In the very same quadrant, attached to the eastern section, we observe a decorated black stone pillar laying horizontally which measures 49.3 centimeters in length and 12.5 centimeters in width. The decoration seems like a replica image of a monastery/temple with a vivid projection of the superstructure. In the very same quadrant, we observe two post holes, which measure 13x13 centimeters each, and the distance between the two postholes is 169 centimeters.



Image 26

The embankment at Lal Pahari is a strongly-built small rectangular monastery made of ashlar fine masonry and burnt bricks, with stone blocks used in laying the foundation. The ground is rocky, shallow foundation trenches were made. The monastery was secured perhaps from all the four corners by 3 circular bastions in each corner. In the first session of excavations, 2 bastions in north-east and 2 in the south-east corner have been exposed. From the architectural features of the cell, there is a possibility of the existence of a third bastion running diagonally from the central bastion.

These bastions are built of burnt bricks and their floor is lime plastered, which are attached with the corner cells of the structure through lime plastered angular floors. The

burnt (kiln-fired) bricks are of fine quality, and both, normal standard bricks and moulded bricks are used in brick masonry for the beautification of the front yard. At times, even cut (wire-cut) bricks are used to add to the beautification. The quantity of bricks that has collapsed from the bastion wall suggests that the original height of the monastery would have been at least two meters more than what is visible to us now.



Image 27

The structure, probably rectangular, is situated in the east-west axis. 8 trenches were fully excavated from the southern eastern limit of the structure to the northeastern limit. A plain moulding is continuously running, approximately 1 meter above the surface, on the outer wall. At the same level with the moulding, maintaining a gap, the water channels are projected from the outer wall. On the north eastern side between two bastions, there is a sculptural *Gaja-vyala* style *pranali* (gargoyle).



Image 28

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The central part of the eastern side, between the bastions, is projected outwards. At the centre of the eastern side stairs are leading inside the structure probably was the entrance. Immediately under the stairs, on the outer wall, there is a moulding made of black stone. The platform adjacent to it has nail marks, and a part of stone remained which indicate the stairs were made above the moulding.

The entrance is flanked by a series of cells. The cells, in general, have one elevated painted platform and have a small inner chamber. The platform is painted black with an alternate yellow, white and red border.

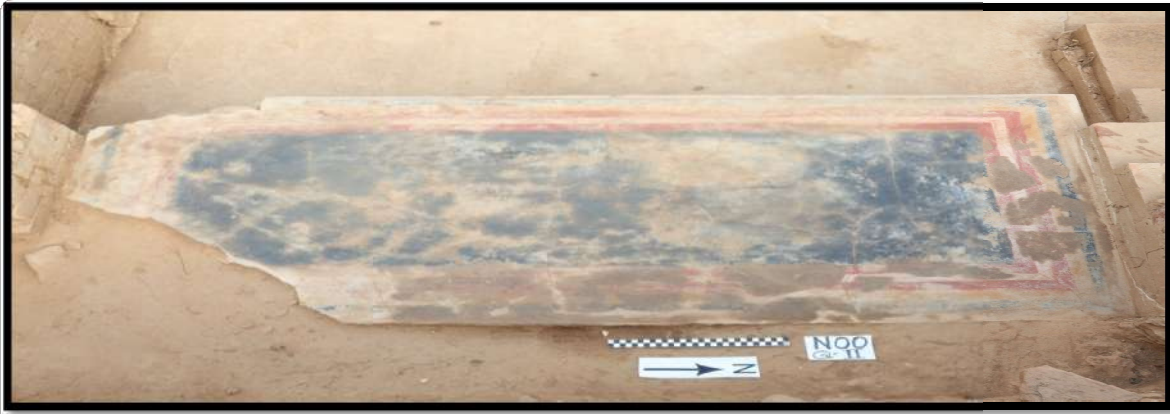


Image 29

The inner chamber has a small platform and it has a channel which leads to the drainage of the structure. The floors are mostly rammed, but a few plastered floors are still found in situ. The cells adjacent to the bastion has a path which leads to the bastion. On the southeastern side between two cells, which leads to the adjacent bastion, there is a flight of stairs which leads to another separate cell with rammed floor. So far, 10 cells has been excavated in which most of the cells have lime plastered floor out of which 3 cells are interconnected with door frames. In all the inter-connected as well as independent cells, evidence of doorframes have been observed.

Outside the structure towards the western side, there is yet another separate structure. This is a room that has a channel, which probably leads to the underground cell or room; it is yet to be excavated.

Picture of Cavern



Image 30

Besides this, the important feature of this monastic structure is excavated sanctum chambers in the corners, made of granite. So far, three sanctum chambers, 2 in the southeast and 1 in the southwest corner along with well carved out black stone drain has been excavated. Existence of sanctum chambers in the corner of the monastery is not something unusual in this region, as similar kind of a structure has also been observed in Vikramshila *mahavihar*.

Sanctum Chamber



Image 31

The architectural features of this monastic institution indicate that this structure was constructed with excessive protective measures (3 bastions in each corner, interconnected cells and all the cells having doors). The location of this monastery further indicates that this was located on the western side of the *Chaliya Parvat* (on which stupa is identified and excavated by A. Cunningham. From this place, Cunningham has reported about the discovery of relic casket).²⁵ In the recent course of explorations in

²⁵D.R. Patil, *The Antiquarian Remains in Bihar*, Historical Researches Series, (Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, 1963), pp. 209-210.

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the area, circular structural remains are visible, towards the north-eastern direction at 1.5 km aerial distance, on another hillock, the Bichhwe Hill Vihara. This structure has 27 open cells, which have been recently explored and reported.

Pic of Hills

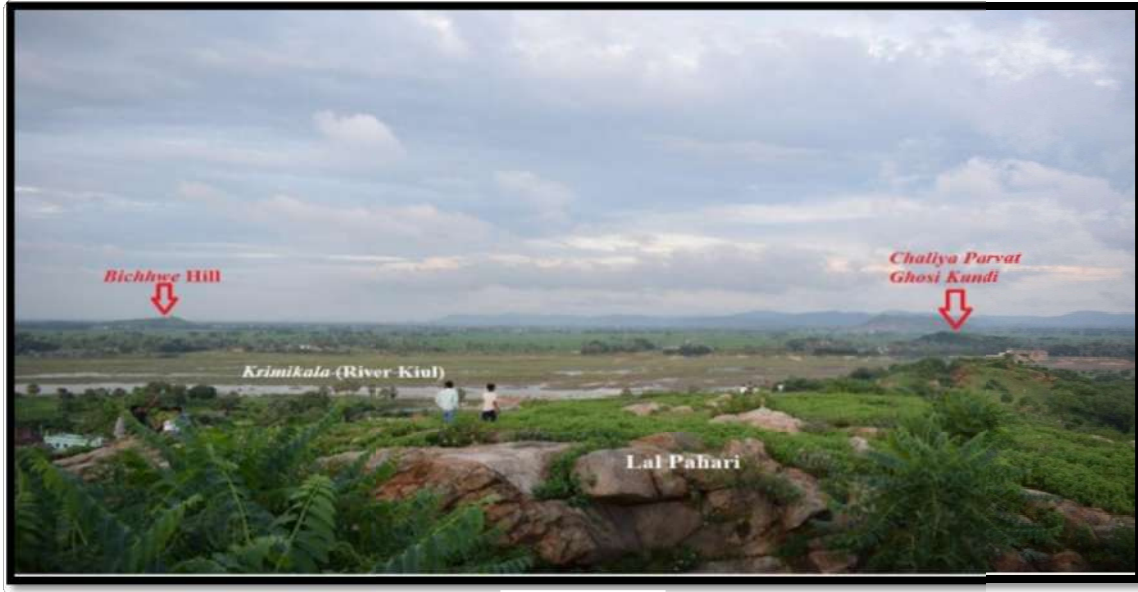


Image 32

To summarize, in the centre there is a stupa and towards the north-eastern direction, a vihara with open cells and towards the west at Lalpahari, a monastery which, with excessive protective measures corroborates the inscriptional evidence found from this hill depicted over an image of *Singhnadavalokeshwara*, during the colonial period. The said inscription was reported first by A. Cunningham²⁶ and has further been interpreted by Goureshwar Bhattacharya²⁷.

Earlier this sculpture was in Berlin Museum and during Second World War, it has been taken to Russia as war booty by the Russian army. Presently it is kept in the State Hermitage Museum St. Petersburg. The inscription reads that an elderly Nun, Vijayashri Bhadra received donations from Mallika Devi (perhaps the wife of the Pala ruler, Sura Pala).²⁸ Further excavations of the site may reveal many more new dimensions of early medieval historiography related to a later phase of Buddhist history, particularly the role of women in Buddhist monastic institutions.

²⁶A. Cunningham, *Archaeological Survey of India: Report for the Year 1871-72*, Vol. III, Plate XLV, (Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1966).

²⁷Jinah Kim, "Unheard Voices: Women's Roles in Medieval Buddhist Artistic Production and Religious Practices in South Asia," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 1 (2014), p. 210. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41348774>.

²⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 199-232.

Cluster II

The cluster starts roughly 500 meters east from the Jainagar site. On its east is the eastern bank of river Kiul. This starts from village Ghosi-Kundi to village Rampur; in between lay Birdava, Bicchwe, and Sringarpur. Ghosi-Kundi is opposite Lalpahari. On the hilltop, a brick structure of 110 meters in diameter is exposed. This perhaps is the remains of a stupa. The exposed remains of a circular structure at the hill and the size of bricks require a thorough study.



Image 33

Another important place in this cluster is village Bridavan, which is 1.5 kilometres south of Kiul station and on the eastern bank of the river Kiul. On the bank of river, Cunningham noticed a mound 30 ft. high, known as *gadh*²⁹ in Bridavan. Unfortunately, during the recent course of explorations, we could not get any mound or *gadh* of this height here. Until the cadastral survey in 1901, Ghosi Kundi, a newly settled village then, was under the Birdavan mouza (revenue village). After the cadastral survey of this region, these two villages were separated into two different mouzas. Cunningham explored and excavated these places before the cadastral survey.

Cunningham refers to a few steatites and a stupa with Buddhist sculptures. The 2700 seals made of lac were an important discovery also. On the seal were inscribed Buddhist figures and an 11th- century inscription. Cunningham sank a shaft in the centre of this mound and discovered at a depth of 1.80 meters, the remains of small chamber, containing a steatite relic casket, shaped like a stupa, and a headless image of the ascetic Buddha, also made of steatite. A golden box containing a piece of bone, a broken silver box and a green glass bead were found inside the casket. In the eastern part of the mound,

²⁹D.R. Patil (1963), *Op. Cit.*

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he also exposed traces of the arched chamber of bricks.³⁰ All three mounds mentioned by Cunningham still exist. Only on one mound, a school has been constructed recently. A few Buddha statues are in the possession of local people.

Another important finding in this cluster is from the hill between Srigarapur and Bicchwe. The height of the hill is about 125 meters, over which twenty-seven cells made of post - Gupta bricks have been discovered. These cells are of various sizes, 14/9', 12/8', 11/9', 8/6' and 6/4'. Along with these cells a 90 meters long and 30" thick brick wall running from east to west is visible. Scientific and proper excavation of this place by competent archaeologists may expose several similar chambers (cells) that appear like the remainder of a great Buddhist Vihara. In the centre of the hillock, a 40'/27' courtyard is also identified.

Pictures of Brick Structure on the top of the Bicchwe Hill



Image 34



Image 35



Image 36

Besides these remains, there is a cave of 17/4 meter in size, facing the Ghosi Kundi stupa towards the south west. Inside the cave, there are two chambers, 8/8' and 12/11', and height 7'. The walls of these chambers are polished smooth. In the middle of this hill facing the north, there are pieces of evidences of petroglyphs and a few inscriptions engraved on the rock of the hill. Paleographically these inscriptions are dated 9th Century C.E. and the language is Sanskrit.

Petroglyphs

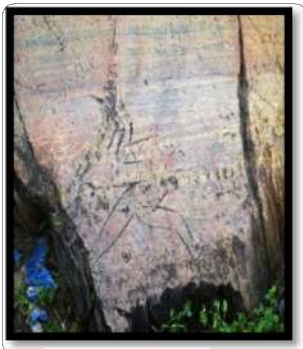


Image 37



Image 38



Image 39

³⁰*Ibid.*

Existence of petroglyphs gives us sufficient indications about the early settlement of human being in this region. Inscriptions engraved near these petro glyphs were definitely a later activity. Inscriptions are in early *Siddhamatrika* characters and Sanskrit is the language. Paleographically they are datable to about 9th century A.D. and suggest very interesting facts of history. In these inscriptions, we get evidence of stonecutter and artisan.



Image 40

Inscription A

The inscription reads:“Sutradhara Purasya, in early Siddhamatrika character and Sanskrit language. Paleographically it can be dated to 9th century A.D. It seems to record the name of the artisan as Pura”.³¹



Image 41

Inscription B

Reads: Sūtradhāra Sā|vatsya. The inscription is in early nāgarī characters and in the Sanskrit language. Palaeographically this can be dated to about 9th century A.D. The inscription refers to the name of an artisan as Sā|vata.

³¹Inscriptions were deciphered by S. Krishnamurthy, Asst. Epigraphist, O/O, The Director (Epigraphy), Archaeological Survey of India, Mysore, Karnataka.

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Inscription C

Reads: ür~ Madha=a (line 1), üakadha. (line 2).
Of same date, script and language.



Image 42



Image 43

Incription-D

Reads: (line 1) Jatīdhavallaüilaklūí**a Kaviputra/ (line 2) LīkhÍyantaGahakēlnaí. Same date, script and language. The inscription seems to refer to a stone-cutter (ilak@**a) named Jatīdhavalla, son of certain Kavi. The second line probably refers to the name of the engraver as Gahaka.

At the bottom of this hill, towards the north, a Vishnu image is engraved. Stylistically this image can be dated to 9th -10th century A.D.



Image 44

Besides these engraved images, per glyphs and inscriptions, at the bottom of the hill there are a few sculptures of Brahmanical deities which are kept in a temple called “Ramesvaradham”. Sculptures of Ganesha, Mahishasurmardini and a Shiva linga are

installed inside this temple and worshipped by the local people. Stylistically these sculptures suggest their dates as 8-9th century C.E.



Image 45

All the sculptures are made of black basalt stone and except the Linga and Ganesh sculpture all others are 2.5' in size.



Image 46



Image 47

During the exploratory work of this area (Bicchwe hill and the villages of Bicchwe Sringarpur), a few potsherds of early medieval period were also collected. This is an indicator of human settlement at this site.

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Image 48

In this cluster, another modern village Rampur is located on two big mounds, from where a large number of early medieval bricks and potsherds were collected during the course of exploration. This village is approximately two kms north from Bicchwe hill, in between the hill and this village there are six ponds and two small lakes. Adjacent to this village there is another modern settlement Garhi, which is less than one kilometer west from Rampur. From Garhi a broken Buddha image with inscription has been reported earlier.³² Modern habitation has fully occupied the mounds.

At village Rampur, three large mounds, two ring wells and images of a few Brahmanical deities now in private possession have been found. A few pieces of broken stone bricks of the early medieval period have been identified from this place. An image of *Hanuman* and one of *Durga* in private collection are among the important findings from this village. Stylistically the Durga sculpture is similar to the sculptures from Nalanda region and can be dated 7th-8th century C.E. In this sculpture, Durga is seated on the lion and she has eight hands. Out of which six hands are broken and it is not clear what she was carrying in those hands. Only two hands with a sword in one and a *chakra* in another is clear. The seal is squarer and plain without much ornamentation.

³²R.K. Choudhary, *Select Inscriptions of Bihar*, (Patna: Motilal Banarsi Dass, 1958), p. 23.



Image 49

Pictures of Modern Settlement on Ancient Mounds at village Rampur



Image 50



Image 51

Cluster III

Daitabandh, which could have been the boundary of this ancient city (nagar) is four kilometres east from the village Rampur. Presently, this ancient embankment is fully occupied and a road is constructed to the embankment. The road starts from a modern village Saidpura and goes up to Jalappasthan. According to locals, this embankment originated from the southern bank of river Ganga (presently it is four kilometres north

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from this place). It means this embankment was catering as an eastern boundary of the ancient city of Krimila, on the north side river Ganga and on the south the boundary extended till the hills of Chotanagpur plateau starts. Along with this embankment, on the western side, there are two important settlements, i.e. Ramsir and Jalappasthan. From both these settlements Buddhist and Brahmanical artifacts, structural remains, post-Gupta bricks and early medieval potsherds (black and redware) were collected.

Mahishsurmardini (Black Basalt from *Jalappasthan*, 1.22MetersX 0.762 Meters)



Image 52

From the same site, black basalt stone architectural members were also identified that are kept in a local temple (modern) complex.



Image 53

A kilometre north from the Jalappasthan, there is a village called Ramsir; the village is settled over two big mounds and there are three big ponds surrounding it. Inside, at three places, remains of sculptures are lying unguarded. At one place, an exceptional sculpture of Amitabha is lying in the open field. A rare piece of a votive stupa, of 1.38 meters in height is kept in open. A few broken pieces of structural remains made of black granite stone are stored inside this place of worship.

Votive stupas from Ramsir



Image 54



Image 55

Amitabh from Ramsir



Image 56

Pokhrama:

The modern village of Pokhrama is located on the eastern side of Daitabandh, three kilometres north from Kajra railway station. This village is about 12 kilometres from the

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modern district headquarter of Lakhisarai. The village is settled on the two big mounds and two big ponds surround this village. The potsherds scattered over the mound suggests us Gupta and post Gupta period settlement. The existing population has migrated from north Bihar, and this modern settlement over the mound is not more than 200 years old. Inside the village, at three places we could see black coarse granite broken sculptures of Buddha. In modern times this village is locally famous for its modern sun temple, inside the complex there is an early medieval black stone *Shiva linga* with *arghya*. Locals told us that many broken images of Buddha were found here while constructing this temple and they put all those sculptures in the foundation of this modern temple. Inside the village, there is a *thakurbari*; within this religious complex, there are four broken sculpture of Buddhist deities and an *arghya* of Shiva linga belonging to the 10-11th century C.E. A few Buddhist sculptures made of black granite stone are also found lying near a big pond east of this village. They lie unprotected and unguarded.

Sculptures at Pokhrama:



Image 57



Image 58

The monumental remains are found scattered in three clusters in an area of 30 sq. kilometres in and much larger than what Asher has suggested with the surrounding periphery of several important centres of the contemporary period. South around 10 KM. is Nongarh³³, east is Lai³⁴, Arma³⁵, Pokhrama, Uren³⁶ and 10-11 kilometers is

³³A. Cunningham, *Archaeological Survey of India Report*, Vol. III, (Varanasi: Indological Book House (1966), pp. 160-62.

³⁴D.C. Sircar, *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXX, (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1987), pp. 82-83.

³⁵Claudine Bautze-Picron, "Lakhisarai: An Indian Site of Late Buddhist Iconography, and Its Position within the Asian Buddhist World," in *Silk Road Art and Archaeology 2*, (Kamakura, Japan: The Institute of Silk Road Studies, 1991-92), pp. 240-283.

Sringirikh³⁷ and around 12 KM. north east we have evidence of NandapurVitti.³⁸The material remains unmistakably pointing to the existence in the early medieval period of a vibrant cultural and perhaps a large religious and administrative center. Asher in his conclusion called it a metropolitan city, generally based on images that bear dated inscriptions are found in close proximity to learning and business centers where written records and calendar were particularly important.³⁹This argument about this center is not very convincing because there is hardly any evidence of commercial activity from this place. Of course, such a large - scale settlement requires a strong material background. After the extensive field study of the whole area between Haruhar river and Daitabandh this question may be addressed by stating that unless there was a strong material background behind the existence of this huge culturally vibrant centre, it was impossible to survive at least for the whole early medieval period. Besides this hypothesis one can argue that the confluence of three important rivers provided fertile hinterland for rich agrarian background, also we have evidence of guild and industrial evidence for manufacturing black stone sculptures⁴⁰ provides us with enough evidence for its strong material background. Only extensive excavation can provide an answer to these types of questions.

In recent years, India's early medieval phase has been the subject of intense study and research. However, eastern India, more specifically the Bihar region, has received less attention in these studies, mainly because the region suffers from a relative lack of source material compared to peninsular India of the corresponding period. The remains found in the Lakhisarai region amply indicates that the situation is not so hopeless and that a more comprehensive picture can be obtained if the area is thoroughly and immediately explored and excavated at a few important sites at least, by competent agencies. When

³⁶D.R. Patil (1963) *Op. Cit.*, 585-86. R. K. Chattopadhyay and Rajat Sanyal, "Contexts and Contents of Early Historic Sites in the South Bihar Plains: An Archaeological Perspective," in *Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia*, eds. G. Sengupta and Sharmi Chakraborty (New Delhi: Pragati Publication, 2008), pp. 247-80. A. Kumar, "Latest Archaeological Finds at Lakhisarai: Fresh Light on the Reconstruction of Early Medieval Indian History" *Prajna-bharati*, Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, (2016): 196-208. Gautami Bhattacharya, R.K. Chattopadhyay, Ashish Kumar and Niraj Kumar Mishra, "Archaeological Investigation at Uren (Urain), District Lakhisarai, Bihar," *Purattatva*, No. 47, (New Delhi, 2017): pp. 195-204.

³⁷D.R. Patil (1963), *Op.Cit.* p. 552. K. Bandopadhyay, "Shringirishi –An Archaeological Reconnaissance," *Pratna Samikha* 2, Kolkata (2011), pp. 103-111.

³⁸D.C. Sircar, *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXIII (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1935-36), p.52.

³⁹Frederick M Asher, "Sculptures from Rajaona, Valgudar and Jaynagar: Evidence for an Urban Center," *East and West*, Vol. XXXVI, no. 1/3 (1986), pp. 227-246. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29756765>.

⁴⁰A. Kumar, "Latest Archaeological Finds at Lakhisarai: Fresh Light on the Reconstruction of Early Medieval Indian History," *Prajna Bharati*, Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute (2016), pp. 196-208.

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this is done, the region is bound to provide clues to resolve many vital issues in early medieval historiography of Bihar.
