

Archaeological Discoveries in and around of Mahasthan

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Abstract

Mahasthan, or Mahasthangarh, is one of the earliest urban sites in Bangladesh, situated on the western bank of the Karatoya River, approximately 12 km north of Bogura town. This site spans the Shibganj and Sadar Upazilas of the Bogura district and is located between latitudes 24°50'N and 25°0'N, and longitudes 89°15'E and 89°30'E. The site itself is a rectangular fortified mound, measuring 1524 x 1370 meters. While prehistoric remains have been discovered in several regions of Bangladesh, such as the Lalmai-Mainamati region in Cumilla (formerly Comilla), the Chaklapunji Tea Garden in Chunarughat, Habiganj district, Chhagalnaiya in the Feni district, and Wari-Bateshwar in the Narshingdi district, the inscription found at Mahasthangarh represents the earliest archaeological evidence of written history in Bangladesh. This inscription dates back to the reign of the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka (c. 268 - c. 232 BC). Furthermore, numerous archaeological findings have been uncovered through explorations and excavations conducted in and around Mahasthangarh. This research aims to provide a detailed overview of these discoveries.

Introduction

Mahasthan (also known as Mahasthangarh) is situated on the west bank of the Karatoya river, approximately 8 miles north of Bogura (formerly Bogra) town (Map 1) and approximately 30 miles east of Paharpur. It consists of the ruins of a huge fortress or city about a mile square with brick mounds, old tanks, high embankments and other relics of antiquity clustered round it for a few miles south, west and north. The site of Mahasthan in Bogura district was first visited by Buchanan-Hamilton in 1808. The region around Mahasthan was further explored by C. J. O'Donnell (1875), E. V. Westmaccot (1875), H. Beveridge (1878) and Sir Alexander Cunningham (1879-80) and Cunningham identified Mahasthangarh with the site of Paundravarddhana, the capital city of the ancient *bhukti* or province.¹ During

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1. E. V. Westmaccot, 'On Traces of Buddhism in Dinajpur and Bagura', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XLIV, Part I, No. II, 1875, pp. 187-192; C. J. O'Donnell, 'Note on Mahasthan near

archaeological explorations and excavations conducted so far as the Mahasthan citadel and other sites in and around of Mahasthan (Map 2) have been yielded a large number of cultural remains. A brief description of these discoveries is given below:

Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW)

Northern black polished ware (Picture 1 & 2) has been reported from Mahasthan citadel, Ramsahar, Govinda Bhita, Arola Dhap, Suka Chunni (a part of Gokul highway to Kakla Dighi), Kachu Bil (a part of Gokul highway to Kakla Dighi), Tarer Bila (a part of Gokul highway to Kakla Dighi), Gokul Ice Cream Factory (a part of Gokul highway to Kakla Dighi), Padma Fakra (a part of Gokul highway to Kakla Dighi), Naudapara, Mankalir Kunda, Bairagir Bhita, Bhasu Vihara or Vasu Bihar (locally called Narapatir Dhap), Jogir Dhap (Mathura). The France-Bangladesh excavation team mentions that the production of Mahasthan NBPW covers a period from the earliest occupation of the site (c. the beginning of the 3rd century BC) until the 1st to 2nd century AD.²

Black and Red Ware (BRW)

The France-Bangladesh team has discovered a small number of black and red ware from Mahasthan citadel.³

Rouletted Ware (RW)

Another classical ceramic of early historic period is rouletted ware which has been reported from a large number of sites in Mahasthan such as Mahasthan citadel, Bairagir Bhita, Ramsahar, Govinda Bhita etc. The period of the rouletted ware from Govinda Bhita has been proposed to 300 and 200 BC.

Glazed Ware (GW)

The surface investigation carried out at Mahasthan citadel has led to the discovery of a sherd of glazed ware (Picture 3) which is the first of its kind in Bangladesh. Close similarity with glazed wares of Ed-Dur (UAE) of Sassanian period, Elephanta Island (Maharashtra) of early historical and historical context and Bhalar (Gujarat)

Bagura (Bogra), Eastern Bengal', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XLIV, Part I, No. III, 1875, pp. 183-186; H. Beveridge, 'The Antiquities of Bagura (Bogra)', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XLVII, Part I, No. I, 1878, pp. 88-95; Sir Alexander Cunningham, 'Report of a Tour in Bihar and Bengal in 1879-80 from Patna to Sunargaon', *Archaeological Survey Report*, Vol. XV, Delhi: Indological Book House, 1969 (reprint), p. 104; Prabhas Chandra Sen, 'Mahasthan And Its Environs', *Varendra Research Society's Monographs*, No. 2, Rajshahi, Bengal: Varendra Research Society, 1929, p. 2; Shah Sufi Mostafizur Rahman, 'Archaeological Investigation in Bogra District (From Early Historic to Early Medieval Period)', *Studies in Bengal Art Series*, No. 3, Dhaka: The International Centre for Study of Bengal Art (ICSBA), 2000, p. 20

2. Rahman, *Archaeological Investigation in Bogra District (From Early Historic to Early Medieval Period)*, 2000, pp. 133-146
3. Md. Shafiqul Alam and Jean-François Salles, *France-Bangladesh Joint Venture Excavation at Mahasthangarh: First Interim Report 1993-1999*, Dhaka: Department of Archaeology, 2001, pp. 169-170

of early historic period indicates Mahasthan glazed ware is early historical context. Recently, glazed ware has been collected from Bairagir Bhita (turquoise blue glazed ware), Chaubara and Maholi mounds near Mathura.⁴

Black-Slipped Ware

Black-slipped ware has been collected from Mahasthan citadel, Ramsahar, Govinda Bhita, Suka Chunni (a part of Gokul highway to Kakla Dighi), Skander Dhap, Kakla Dighi Dhap, Naria Dhap and Naudapara.

Dull Redware (DRW) and Grey Ware (GW)

Dull redware and grey ware are common in the assemblage and have been discovered from two trial trenches at Kanser Dhap and Govinda Bhita and surface collection from Mahasthan citadel, Bhasu Vihara, Kanser Dhap, Sajapur, Ramsahar and Chander Dhap. Besides these types of ancient ceramics, pink ware has been discovered from Bhasu Vihara.⁵

It is especially mentioned in this paper that ancient ceramics are scattered at a large number of sites in Mahasthangarh such as Bairagir Bhita, Salban Rajar Bari, Skander Dhap, Kanai Dhap, Naudapara, Deolar Dhap, Burir Than and Sannyasir Than, Yogir Dhap, Dolmancha, Devkunda, Basu Bania Saudagarer Bari, Bulur Chawk, Oza Dhanvantarir Bhita, Chander Dhap, Govinda Bhita, Gokarna Rajar Bari, Netai Dhopenir Pat, Pir Borhan Ali Saheber Mazar, Satya Piner Bhita, Gorna Dhap, Kakla Dighi Dhap, Kanser Dhap, Ramsahar, Khamar Bari, Chand Saudagarer Bari, Dhana Bhandar, Sajapur, Kanjir Hari Dhap, Lizanir Dhap, Malinir Dhap, Sirajnagar, Bhasu Vihara and so on.

Terracotta Plaques

A large number of terracotta plaques depicting various theme have been discovered in and around of Mahasthan. Such as mother and child, Sage Visvamisra accompanied by Ramachandra and Lakshmana, Hunch backed and crooked Manthara giving ill advice to Kaikeyee, Dasaratha lying ill on a beautifully decorated bed after banishing Rama in fulfillment of a promise, Visvamisra and Janaka blessing Rama and Sita, King Dasaratha's funeral procession, The Trio of Prosperity - Ganesha, Lokshmi, Kubera (?) from Kanai Dhap, Bamunpara⁶ (Picture 4; erroneously reported as Palashbari⁷); Gandharva offering flower, doe and

4. Rahman, Archaeological Investigation in Bogra District (From Early Historic to Early Medieval Period), 2000, pp. 153-156

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 59-131

6. Enamul Haque, 'The Art Heritage of Bangladesh', *Studies in Bengal Art Series*, No. 7, Dhaka: The International Centre for Study of Bengal Art, 2007, p. 78, plate 35

7. Gouriswar Bhattacharya, 'Essays on Buddhist Hindu Jain Iconography and Epigraphy', *Trio of Prosperity: A Gupta Terracotta Plaque from Bangladesh*, *Studies in Bengal Art Series*, No. 1, Dhaka: The International Centre for Study of Bengal Art, 2000, pp. 315-321, plate 31.1

fawn, Gandharva couple from Bhasu Bihar; more than one thousand pieces of terracotta, which are mainly broken parts of different images such as elephant, serpent hood female, a delicate female bust from Mangalkot; bust of a female figure, winged Yaksha, lady with weapons resembling hairpins, Yakshi, Yaksha, Yakshi holding a flower, *Apsara*, horse rider from Mahasthan citadel; Sunga plaques from Mankalir Dhap; *Mithuna* figure from Govinda Bhita; Pala plaques from Bairagir Bhita and Bhasu Vihara; Yakshi and Surya from Mahasthan region; upper part of Visnu from Kichak; a large size (65×47×47×6 cm) terracotta plaque, an inscription is inscribed at upper part and middle portion between the two deities from Bihar Dhap (Totaram Panditer Dhap) etc.⁸ Arguably, it is the largest terracotta plaque in Bangladesh. Furthermore, a small number of terracotta plaques have been collected from Gokul Medh (locally known as Behula Lakshindarer Basar Ghar, and popularly called Lakshindar Medh), Khadosh Rajbari, Malinir Dhap and Solagari Rajar Bari.

Terracotta Beads and Balls

A large number of terracotta beads and balls have been yielded from Mahasthan and its periphery. Such as Mahasthan citadel, Akrail, Arola Dhap, Salban Rajar Bari, Salban Rajar Kachari, Bihar Dhap, Ghuchi Dhap, Burir Than and Sannyasir Than, Chapachil Dhap, Madarir Than, Chinal or Chilul Dhap, Dumargaon, Bulur Chawk, Fakirpara, Khalipha Para, Gokarna Rajar Bari, Kakla Dighi, Pir Borhan Ali Saheber Mazar, Gorna Dhap, Shib Bari Dhap, Jarai, Jora Rajbari, Bagicha Dhap, Khadash Rajbari, Kholash, Kosas, Khanpur Dhap, Uchibari, Kanser Dhap, Chand Saudagarer Bari, Sajapur, Malinir Dhap, Dhar Mokam and Sher Mokam, Sirajnagar etc.⁹

Terracotta Discs

The Mahasthan region (Kakla Dighi, Pir Borhan Ali Saheber Mazar, Kanser Dhap) has revealed a few terracotta discs with plain circumferences. A terracotta disc is one

8. Haque, 'The Art Heritage of Bangladesh', 2007, pp. 75, 78-79, 158; Zulekha Haque, 'Terracottas of Bengal: An Analytical Study', *Studies in Bengal Art Series*, No. 11, Dhaka: The International Centre for Study of Bengal Art, 2014, pp. 46, 71-72, 93-94; Gouriswar Bhattacharya, 'Early Ramayana Illustration from Bangladesh', *South Asian Archaeology* 1987, Part 2, Maurizio Taddei (ed.), 1990, pp. 1043-1066; Mohammad Ali, 'Some Important Antiquities from Mangalkot Mound (Bogra)', *Journal of Bengal Art*, Vol. 1, 1996, pp. 103-108; Bhattacharya, 'Essays on Buddhist Hindu Jain Iconography and Epigraphy', 2000, pp. 265-272, plates 23.6-23.13, 23.15; Rahman, 'Archaeological Investigation in Bogra District (From Early Historic to Early Medieval Period)', 2000, pp. 180-185; Enamul Haque, *Bengal Sculptures: Hindu Iconography upto c. 1250 AD*, Dhaka: Bangladesh National Museum, 1992, p. 411; Md. Shafiqul Alam, Md. Abul Hashem Miah and Md. Abdul Khaleque, *Excavations at Bihar Dhap, Bogra, 1979-1986*, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh: Department of Archaeology, 2000 (first edition), pp. 29-32; Md. Shafiqul Alam, Dr. Habiba Khatun and A K M Shahnawaz (eds.), *Pratnacharcha-3*, Bangladesh: Dept. of Archaeology, June 2008, p. 75
9. Rahman, 'Archaeological Investigation in Bogra District (From Early Historic to Early Medieval Period)', 2000, pp. 185-189

of the material traits that commonly occurs at many protohistoric and historic sites of the subcontinent. Taking into account the Prahladpur evidence, Narain and Roy¹⁰ argued that these might have also been used as weights and measures.

Terracotta Ring-Well

A few terracotta ring-wells have been reported at Bairagir Bhita (Pala period level), Malinir Dhap (7 ring-wells), Kanser Dhap and Para Bara Chapar (10 more ring-wells). Bangladesh-France excavations have so far unearthed ten terracotta ring-wells in early historical levels (NBPW phase) from Mahasthan citadel. The existence of terracotta ring-wells from NBPW period to Pala period shows that ring-wells constituted an important aspect of civic amenities in the Mahasthan region.¹¹

Terracotta Seals and Sealings

Two hundred and fifty terracotta seals and sealings have been found from Bhasu Vihara. Terracotta seals have been discovered from Mahasthan citadel, Kanai Dhap, Bansbaria Dhap, Bihar Dhap and Govinda Bhita also. One of the seals from Mahasthan bears three stalks of a wheat plant united at the lower end in low-relief margin. The seal has been assigned to the Gupta period.¹²

Other Terracotta Findings

A limited number of terracotta objects have been found from Bihar Dhap (miniature earthen pots, oil lamps, toys, net sinkers, censer, saucer), Gorna Dhap (horses), Sajapur (toy horses), Dhar Mokam and Sher Mokam (net sinkers, toy horses), Govinda Bhita (net sinkers), Kanser Dhap (a dabber, a toy wheel, net sinkers) and Mahasthan citadel (pinnacle, ram carts, stopper/ear ornaments).

Sculpture

A large number of sculptures have been collected from Mahasthan and its surrounding. The gold plated bronze *Manjusri* from Kanai Dhap; Buddha or *Dhayani* Buddha, *Bodhisattva-Avalokitesvara*, *Tara*, *Manjusri*, *Akshobhya*, *Bodhisaktis*, bronze Lokanatha, standing stone Buddha from Bhasu Vihara; female figure in a ring stone, stylized female figure, fragmentary stone images from Mahasthan citadel; *Manjusri* and bronze *Bodhisattva* from Balai Dhap; a Buddhist stone image of *Amitabha* from Gokarna Siva Temple; a recumbent bull was

10. A. K. Narain and T. N. Roy, *The Excavations at Prahladpur, March-April 1963*, Varanasi: Banaras Hindu University, 1968

11. K. N. Dikshit, 'Excavation in Bengal', *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India, 1928-29, 1933*, pp. 89-93; Rahman, 'Archaeological Investigation in Bogra District (From Early Historic to Early Medieval Period)', 2000, pp. 189-190

12. N. Ahmed and S. Alam, *Bangladesh Archaeology*, Vol. I, No. I, Dhaka: Directorate of Archeology, 1979, pp. 16, 64-65; Dikshit, 'Excavation in Bengal', 1933, p. 28; N. Ahmed, *Mahasthan*, Dhaka: Bangladesh Govt. Press, 1975, p. 36; Rahman, 'Archaeological Investigation in Bogra District (From Early Historic to Early Medieval Period)', 2000, pp. 190-191

engraved is relief of the stone slab from Gokul Medh; *Dhayani* Buddha, *Bhumisparsa* Buddha from Khodar Pathar Bhita; two bronze figures of *Ganesa* and *Garuda*, Jaina apostle (*Goshala*) from Mankalir Dhap; a beautifully modeled head with eyelids, sharp nose and portraying lower lip, elegantly fabricated torso of a bare bodied female from Solagari Rajar Bari; stone *Karttikeya* from Skander Dhap, Visnu stone image from Narhatta; bronze image of *Dhyani* Buddha from Bihar Dhap; double-sided Buddha, stone *Gaja-Laksmi*, *Avalokitesvara* from Namuja; stone sculpture from Rajbari Mukunda; stone image of Camunda from Majgram; a sandstone Buddha image from Chota Tengra Dhap; two stone images (*Nairrta* and *Agni*) from very close to northern slope of mazar; black stone image of Surya from western side of mazar area; *Karttikeya* with Mahasena, Visnu, *Uma-Mahesvara*, dancing Ganesa, Sarasvati, snake-goddes (Manasa?) from Adamdighi¹³ are such examples.

Additionally, a small number of sculptures have been found from Biheegram (stone Visnu), Dhumargaon (stone Visnu), Kalandarpur (stone Visnu), Slimpur (stone Varaha-Avatar), Khetlal (stone Hari-Hara), Briddhigram (stone Krisna Legend), Sibbari (stone Ekamukhalinga), Sherpur (Surya, bronze Sadasiva), Chatingram (Kalyanasundara), Madhainagar (stone Bhairava), Sarsabaz (terracotta Mahisamardini), Paogacha (stone Idrani), Muroil (stone Sasthi), Patasi (Gauri with *Sadyojata* Siva), Chatingram (stone Brahma) and Mahasthan region (Visnupatta).¹⁴ It is observed that sculptures were limited in the early periods (e.g., a single piece of red stone torso belonging to the Kushana period from Skander Dhap) but increased many folds during the Gupta, Pala and Sena periods.

Semi-precious Stone Beads

Semi-precious stone beads (Picture 5) have been collected from Mahasthan citadel, Madarir Than, Bulur Chawk, Bairagir Bhita, Ramsahar, Jogir Dhap, Kanser Dhap, Govinda Bhita which were made by agate, carnelian, lapis-lazuli, chert,

13. A. K. M. Shamsul Alam, *Sculptural Art of Bangladesh*, Dhaka: Department of Archaeology and Museums, 1985, p. 64; Dr. Nazimuddin Ahmed, Mahasthan: *A Preliminary Report of the Recent Archaeological Excavations at Mahasthangarh*, Dacca: Department of Archaeology and Museums, 1981 (reprint, third edition), p. 53; Haque, 'The Art Heritage of Bangladesh', 2007, pp. 76-77, 79, 146; Rahman, 'Archaeological Investigation in Bogra District (From Early Historic to Early Medieval Period)', 2000, pp. 206-208; Mohammad Ali and Swapan Bikash Bhattacharjee, *Archaeological Survey of Bogra District*, Dhaka: Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, 1986, p. 91, plates 14 & 15; Ahmed, *Mahasthan*, 1975, p. 43; Haque, *Bengal Sculptures: Hindu Iconography upto c. 1250 AD*, 1992, p. 412; Enamul Haque & Adalbert J. Gail, 'Sculptures in Bangladesh: An Inventory of Select Hindu, Buddhist and Jain Stone and Bronze Images in Museums and Collections of Bangladesh', *Studies in Bengal Art Series*, No. 8, Dhaka: The International Centre for Study of Bengal Art, 2008, pp. 247-264, plates 28, 50, 151 & 153, 232 & 234-236, 262, 324 & 325, 396, 401, 410-411, 442, 450, 451, 475-476, 502
14. Haque, *Bengal Sculptures: Hindu Iconography upto c. 1250 AD*, 1992, pp. 420, 429, 432, 454, 464, 469, 472, 480, 490, 496, 525, 535, 550, 557 & 563

chalcedony, chalcedony-and-agate, crystal, garnet, jasper, marble, onyx, opal, faience and amethyst. The France-Bangladesh team has published a photograph of bird (duck?) shaped pendant. It is made of chalcedony. The chronology has been assigned to 3rd - 2nd century BC.¹⁵

Glass Beads

An assemblage of twenty-five glass beads (Picture 6) have been discovered from Mahasthan citadel. Some glass beads have been yielded from the surrounding sites of Mahasthan citadel such as Bihar Dhap, Bulur Chawk, Bairagir Bhita (gold foil glass beads, sandwiched glass beads, Indo-Pacific glass beads), Jogir Dhap, Ramsahar, Govinda Bhita and Kansar Dhap. The limited number of beads collected from the surface and the trial trenches at Govinda Bhita and Kansar Dhap suggest that a much larger assemblage will be found if the sites are subjected to more intensive exploration and horizontal excavation.¹⁶

Inscriptions

A stone inscription, c. 3rd century BC generally known as Mahasthan Brahmi inscription (Picture 7) was discovered by a farmer named Baru Fakir in the village of Mahasthan while ploughing in Mahasthan citadel on the 30th of November 1931. It is the earliest inscription in Bengal which was deciphered by D. R. Bhandarkar. Based on Orthography and similarity of other Ashokan inscriptions such as Kalsi and Sahasram Edicts, D. R. Bhandarkar said that the character of Mahasthan inscription is Brahmi of the Mauryan period and the language is Magadhi Prakrit.¹⁷

A. H. Dani mentioned in his book named 'Indian Palaeography' The Mahasthan inscription bears a close resemblance to the second epigraph from Ramgarh in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, except for the palatal *sa*, which is replaced here by dental *sa*. The form of this *sa* is very similar to that in the Dasaratha inscription. Both at Ramgarh and Mahasthan, the straight vertical (*danda*) is used as a punctuation mark. The main difference is in the forms of *ya* and *kha*. At Mahasthan alone *dha* keeps up the true shape of the Roman capital letter 'D', suggesting that its date is earlier than the time when the reverse variety became the common fashion. It may therefore be placed in the first half of the second century BC.¹⁸

15. Ahmed, *Mahasthan: A Preliminary Report of the Recent Archaeological Excavations at Mahasthangarh*, 1981, p. 31; Rahman, 'Archaeological Investigation in Bogra District (From Early Historic to Early Medieval Period)', 2000, pp. 191-195; Alam and Salles, *France-Bangladesh Joint Venture Excavation at Mahasthangarh: First Interim Report 1993-1999*, 2001, pp. 444 & 476 (MAH 95.2426)

16. Alam and Salles, *France-Bangladesh Joint Venture Excavation at Mahasthangarh: First Interim Report 1993-1999*, 2001, pp. 452-453; Rahman, 'Archaeological Investigation in Bogra District (From Early Historic to Early Medieval Period)', 2000, pp. 195-205

17. D. R. Bhandarkar, 'Mauryan Brahmi Inscription of Mahasthan', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXI (1931-32), p. 84

18. Ahmad Hasan Dani, *Indian Palaeography*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1963, pp. 55-57

According to Mukherji and Maity, Mahasthan inscription is Brahmi script of 3rd century BC and the language is Prakrt.¹⁹

To discuss the date of Mahasthan inscription, Paola G. Tinti says that the opinion of A. H. Dani is most probable. However, Tinti has wrongly mentioned the date of Mahasthan inscription which is the second half of the second century BC in lieu of Dani's referred date, the first half of the second century BC.²⁰

Besides this, east of the Mankalir Kunda and outside the fortification wall, a fragment of a stone inscription in Sanskrit script has been found which is of the 9th century AD.²¹

Coins

A considerable number of silver punch-marked coins (Picture 8) and copper cast coins have been discovered from Mahasthan citadel. During the excavation of France-Bangladesh team, they have unearthed a hoard containing ninety-three silver punch-marked coins. According to M. Hossain, Mahasthan punch-marked coins belong to the early Mauryan period. Recently, the France-Bangladesh team has assigned those excavated punch-marked silver coins from the end of the 5th to the middle of the 2nd century BC. One silver coin of Sultan Sikandar Shah, 1357-87 AD from Bihar Dhap; 18 coins (Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah to Yusuf Shah) from Govinda Bhita have been discovered.²²

The other coins so far reported from the Mahasthan region include a gold coin of Vasudeva I, a gold coin of Chandra Gupta II (Picture 9) and a silver coin of Mahendra Gupta.²³

Another significant group of material remains pertaining to the currency system from Mahasthan region are cowries. More recently during investigations cowries have been found at Dev Kunda, Shib Bari Dhap and Gorna Dhap in earthen pots.²⁴

19. R. Mukherji and S. K. Maity, *Corpus of Bengal Inscriptions Bearing on History and Civilization of Bengal*, Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1967, pp. 39-40

20. Paola G. Tinti, 'On the Brahmi Inscription of Mahasthan', *Journal of Bengal Art*, Vol. 1, Dhaka: The International Centre for Study of Bengal Art, 1996, p. 36

21. Sen, 'Mahasthan And Its Environs', 1929, p. 8

22. Alam and Salles, *France-Bangladesh Joint Venture Excavation at Mahasthangarh: First Interim Report 1993-1999*, 2001, pp. 229-243; Doctor N. Ahmed, *Mahasthan, Mainamati, Paharpur* (in Bengali), Dacca: Pratnatattava Odhidaptor, 1997 (third edition), p. 17; Rahman, 'Archaeological Investigation in Bogra District (From Early Historic to Early Medieval Period)', 2000, pp. 212-216; M. Mosharraf Hossain, 'Recent Discovery of Hoard of Punch-marked Coins at Mahasthangarh', *Journal of Bengal Art*, Vol. 4, Dhaka: The International Centre for Study of Bengal Art, 1999, pp. 477-483; Alam, Miah and Khaleque, *Excavations at Bihar Dhap, Bogra, 1979-1986*, 2000, p. 28

23. Beveridge, 'The Antiquities of Bagura (Bogra)', 1878, p. 95

24. Rahman, 'Archaeological Investigation in Bogra District (From Early Historic to Early Medieval Period)', 2000, pp. 213-216

Architecture

It has been found from the excavation that ancient mounds generally contain religious structures of kiln-burnt bricks. *Vihara* and temples have been discovered from Bhasu Vihara, Gokul Medh, Bihar Dhap, Sultan Saheber Dargah, Bairagir Bhita, Govinda Bhita and Godar Bari. Besides these, a pre-Mughal Jami Mosque (15 domes) has also been exposed from Mankalir Kunda. A large number of kiln-burnt bricks have been used in those structures.²⁵

It is worthwhile to mention that roughly 90% of the rural houses in Bogura district have mud walls and floors. Generally, the mud houses have roof of thatch and terracotta tiles, but nowadays it is being replaced by the corrugated tin sheet. It can be assumed from present-day housing that during the ancient period people might have built similar houses.

Bricks

During the exploration, a large number of kiln-burnt bricks have been found from Bairagir Bhita, Skander Dhap, Kanai Dhap, Naudapara, Burir Than and Sannyasir Than, Bismardan, Yogir Dhap, Dolmancha, Devkunda, Basu Bania Saudagarer Bari, Bulur Chawk, Fakirpara, Juran Tala, Oza Dhanvantarir Bhita, Chander Dhap, Hindu Para, Khanpur Dhap, Govinda Bhita, Gokarna Rajar Bari, Netai Dhapanir Pat, Pir Borhan Ali Saheber Mazar, Satya Piner Bhita, Gorna Dhap, Godar Bari Dhap, Kakla Dighi Dhap, Kansar Dhap, Ramsahar, Khamar Bari, Chand Saudagarer Bari, Dhana Bhandar, Rajbari Mukunda, Sajapur, Gazi Kalur Bari, Kanjir Hari Dhap, Lizanir Dhap, Malinir Dhap, Sur Dighir Dhap, Dhar Mokam and Sher Mokam, Sirajnagar, Bhasu Bihara, Sannyashir Dhap etc. The clay used for making bricks is alluvium of very fine clay which is easily available in Bogura district. A limited number of decorated bricks have been collected from Mahasthan citadel, Bihar Dhap and Bhasu Vihara. Besides bricks, stone was used for doorsills and pillars.²⁶

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25. Dikshit, 'Excavation in Bengal', 1933, pp. 89-93; Ahmed and Alam, *Bangladesh Archaeology*, 1979, pp. 53-63; Ahmed, *Mahasthan: A Preliminary Report of the Recent Archaeological Excavations at Mahasthangarh*, 1981, pp. 25-30, 44-45; Alam, Khatun and Shahnawaz, *Pratnacharcha-3*, June 2008, pp. 64-73; Ahmed, *Mahasthan, Mainamati, Paharpur*, 1997, pp. 14-16; Rahman, 'Archaeological Investigation in Bogra District (From Early Historic to Early Medieval Period)', 2000, pp. 64-68, 92-93, 96-98; Alam, Miah and Khaleque, *Excavations at Bihar Dhap, Bogra, 1979-1986*, 2000, pp. 8-27
 26. Alam, Miah and Khaleque, *Excavations at Bihar Dhap, Bogra, 1979-1986*, 2000, p. 33; Rahman, 'Archaeological Investigation in Bogra District (From Early Historic to Early Medieval Period)', 2000, pp. 59-131

Terracotta Tiles

Three pieces of broken tiles have been discovered from a trial trench at Govinda Bhita in the NBPW levels. Tiles have also been found at Kansar Dhap and trenches of France-Bangladesh joint excavations in Mahasthan citadel.²⁷

Mortars and Plasters

Mortar is the binding material between brick or stone while the plaster is the material used for coating walls and floors. The chemical analysis of mortar samples collected from Mahasthan shows that the mortar was nothing but clay. On the basis of common uses of clay mortar and plaster in the Indian subcontinent during the early historic and early medieval periods, these materials can be used for fixing the tentative chronology of the sites of Bogura district as the early historic to the early medieval period.²⁸

Metal Artifacts

A large number of metal objects (e.g., copper, bronze, iron and gold) have been yielded from the sites of Mahasthan region. A trial excavation at Govinda Bhita encountered two copper antimony rods. Recently, a bronze mirror has been discovered during the France-Bangladesh excavation inside the citadel. The earlier findings of the metal objects include copper rings, bangles, antimony rods, medallion, iron spearhead, knife, razor, a bird-shaped kohl container, nails, octo-ally bangles and gold amulet.²⁹

Skeleton

A human skeleton has been discovered inside the shrine of Gokul Medh.³⁰

Conclusion

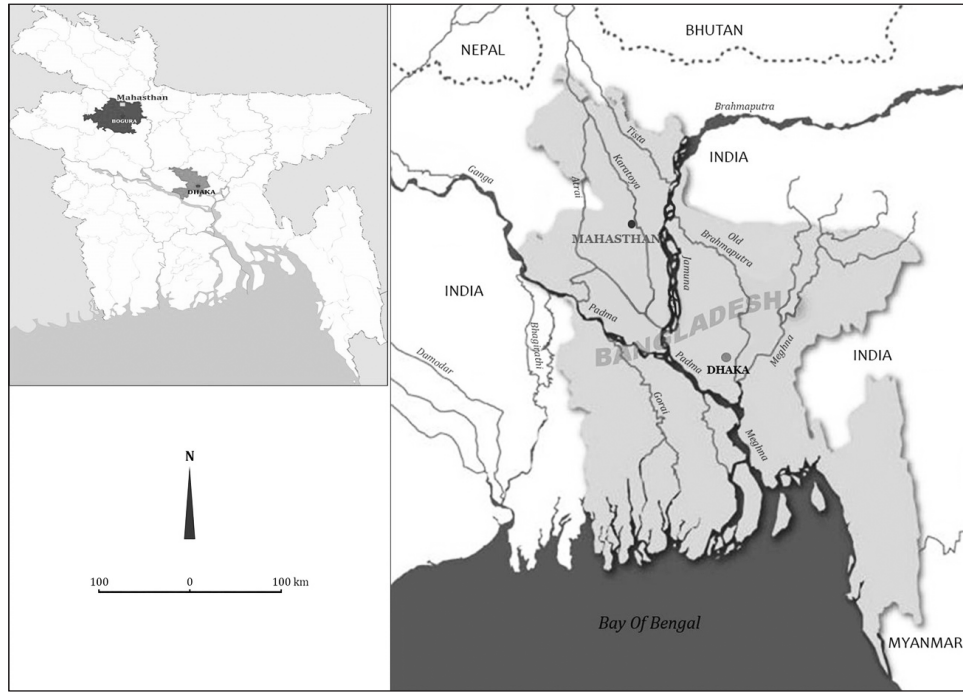
In the absence of direct evidence of Mauryan rule in Mahasthangarh, the presence of a Brahmi inscription, NBPW and rouletted ware are suggestive of the extension of the Mauryan hegemony over the Mahasthan region.

27. Rahman, 'Archaeological Investigation in Bogra District (From Early Historic to Early Medieval Period)', 2000, pp. 226-227

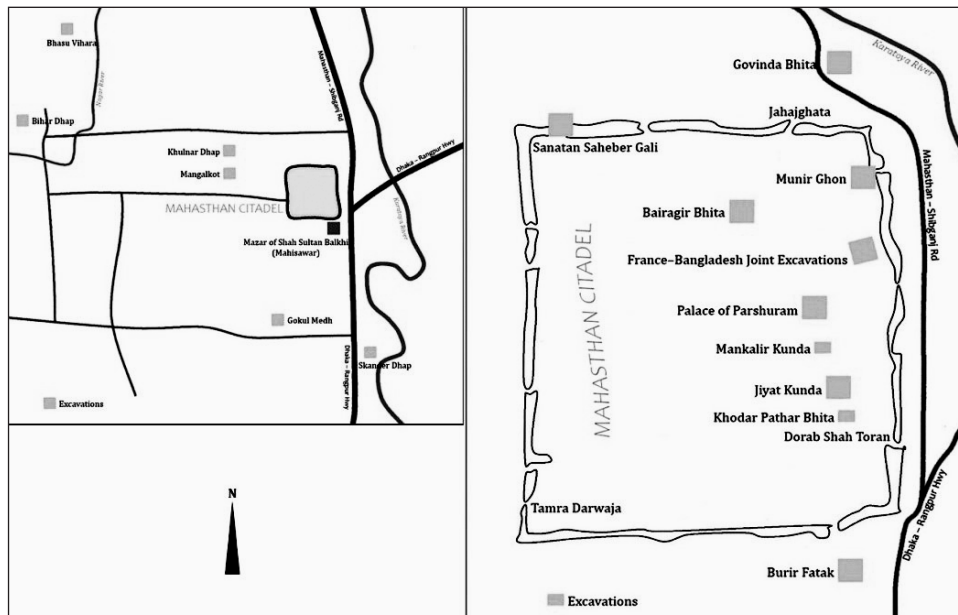
28. *Ibid.*, 2000, p. 226

29. Ahmed, *Mahasthan: A Preliminary Report of the Recent Archaeological Excavations at Mahasthangarh*, 1981, p. 37; Rahman, 'Archaeological Investigation in Bogra District (From Early Historic to Early Medieval Period)', 2000, pp. 216-217

30. Rahman, 'Archaeological Investigation in Bogra District (From Early Historic to Early Medieval Period)', 2000, p. 83



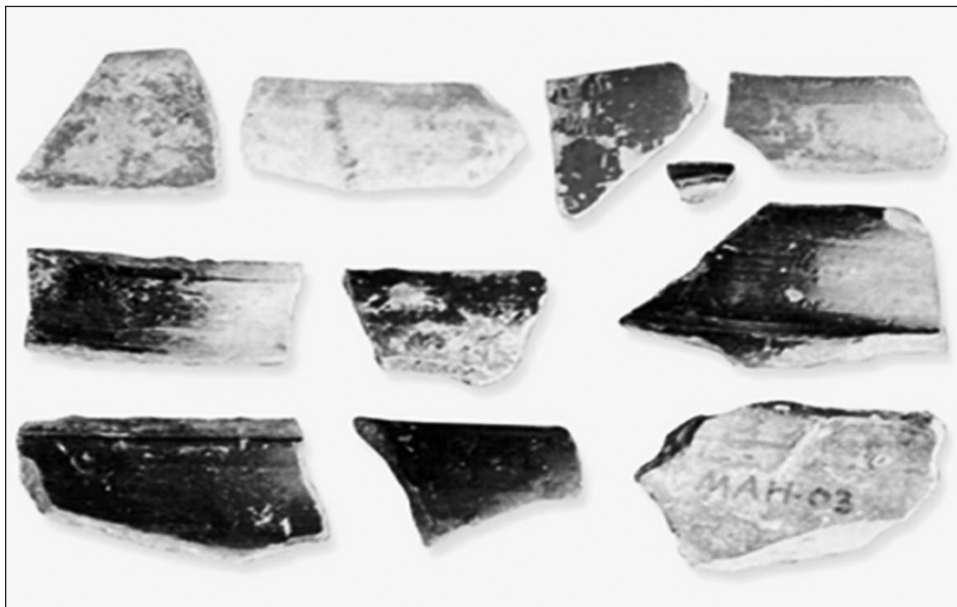
Map 1: Location of Mahasthan



Map 2: Important Archaeological sites in and around Mahasthan



Picture 1: Mahasthan Northern Black Polished Ware



Picture 2: Mahasthan NBPW Pieces



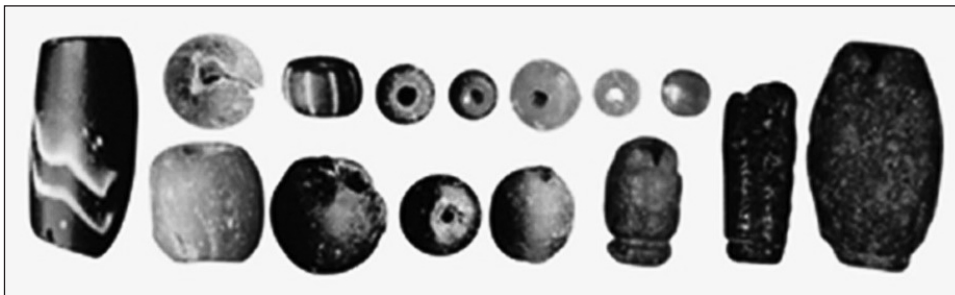
Picture 3: Mahasthan Glazed Ware



*Picture 4: The Trio of Prosperity – Ganesha, Lakshmi and Kubera (?),
Bamunpara, Bogura District*



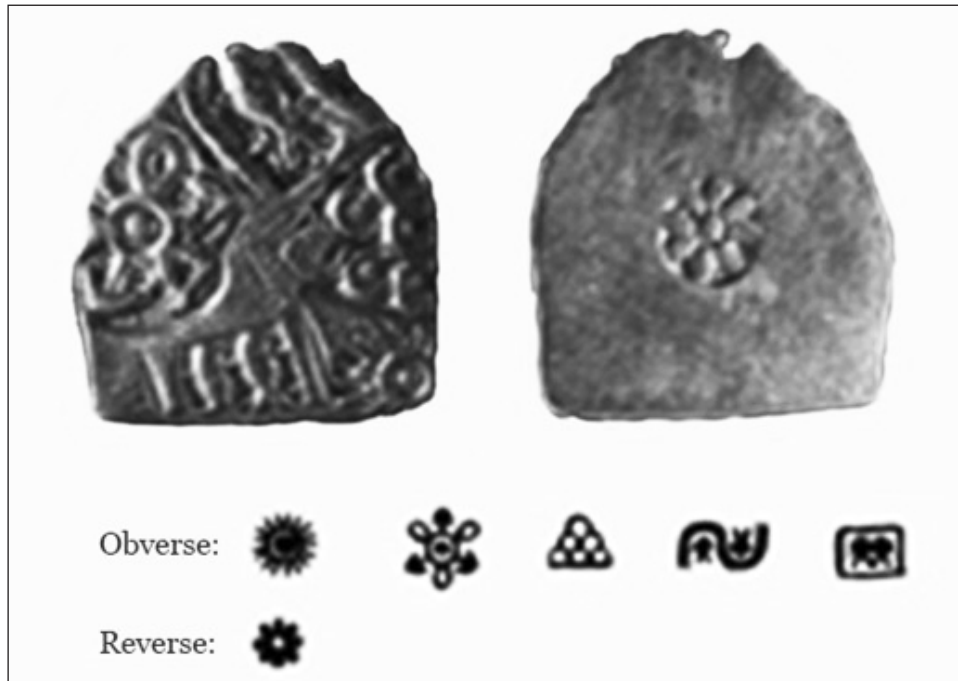
Picture 5: Mahasthan Semi-precious Stone Beads



Picture 6: Mahasthan Glass Beads



Picture 7: Mahasthan Brahmi Inscription



Picture 8: Mahasthan Silver Punch-marked Coins



Picture 9: Mahasthan Gold Coins