

THE EXCAVATED REMAINS OF A BUDDHIST NUNNERY (MATHA) AT LALI PAHARI (JAINAGAR), DISTRICT LAKHISARAI, BIHAR: 2017-18

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A. Introduction

The archaeological site of LaliPahari (or LalPahari, the Red Hill, near Jainagar), is located in District Lakhisarai of Bihar on the left (western) bank the Kiul River, a tributary of the Ganga River. The site, a small fort atop the hillock, is about 125 km east of Patna, and around 5 km away from the Ashok Dham, a celebrated Shaivite temple complex place of modern time, and one of holy places and popular heritage destinations in the region. The fort was discovered sometime back in December 2016 when the soil on the hillock, called LaliPahari or LalPahari (Red Mountain) in Lakhisarai district, was being dug for building a stage there. Taking into account the importance of the site, excavations at the site were commenced in the current field session of 2017-18 jointly by the Department of Art, Culture and Youth, Government of Bihar, represented through Dr. Bijoy Kumar Choudhary, Executive Director, Bihar Virast Vikas Samiti, and the Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture And Archaeology, the Visva-Bharati University, a Public Central University at Santiniketan, West Bengal, Kolkata, represented through Dr. Anil Kumar, Associate Professor—as Director and Co-Director of the excavations respectively. Shri Nitish Kumar, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Bihar, inaugurated the excavation on 25 November 2017 for his profound interest in the heritage. Excavations at the site continued till end of June 2018 before the onset of *monsoon*, but which would be resumed in the next field session.

Diligent and systematic work at the site has resulted in rich archaeological finds, throwing a welcome light on hitherto little known aspects of Buddhism in Bihar—a moderate-sized and meticulously guarded brick fort complex having distinct structural and antiquarian remains, all falling within the date bracket of *circa* 11th/12th – 13th/14th century CE.

Secluded spot atop a hillock but not very far away from the contemporary urban concentration, carefully guarded fortified establishment, discovery of a large number of inscribed plaques showing Buddha in *Bhumisparsha Mudra*, an inscribed image of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara (now in the collection of Berlin museum) dating from of c. 11th century CE, and recording a meritorious gift made by an elderly Buddhist nun to the establishment, together corroborate the premise that the establishment at LaliPahari under reference is a holy Buddhist Nunnery (a *Matha*) settlement.

B. The site and its environment

The ancient site (Lat. 25°09'03.92" N; Long. 86°06'02.03" E) near Jainagar village in district Lakhisarai is situated above 79.35 MSL atop a small longitudinal hillock, on the left

bank of the Kiul river. The district of Lakhisarai, occupying an important place in the history of the Bihar state, was established on 3rd July 1994 after it was separated from the Munger district. Earlier, it was a sub-division of Munger district. The Lakhisarai district is surrounded by five other districts of Bihar, namely Patna, Begusarai, Munger, Jamui, and Sheikhpura in the northwest, northeast, east, south and west respectively (Figs. 1 and 2).

On the whole, the district has a diverse landscape ranging from hills to flood plains; the major geomorphic units are rocky upland, pediplain, alluvial plain and flood plains. The landscape surrounding LaliPahari is dotted with other small hillocks, protruding at some distances, giving the area a look of rugged land. The soils (Inceptisols, Entisols and Alfisols group of soils) are sandy to loamy with the pH value being on the alkaline side. Hydrogeologically, the district is divided into two parts (a) hard rock/ fissured formation—comprising rocks of Chhota Nagpur Gneissic Complex (CGC) and Kharagpur formation, which are composed mainly of granite gneisses, quartzite and phyllite, and (b) unconsolidated / porous formations—the Quaternary alluvium with variation in thickness of the alluvium mainly due to uneven bedrock topography and proximity of hillocks/hill ranges.

From drainage standpoint, the district forms a part of Phalgu-Kiul sub-basin of the Ganga Basin, comprising catchments of Ganga and Kiul river systems. The Ganga, Kiul and Harohar are three main rivers flowing through the district. While the Ganga flowing to the east touches the northern border of the district, the Kiul River flows to the north, almost bisecting the district and joining the river Ganga in the north. As the Kiul is a perennial river in the district, it continues to be a lifeline for the population inhabiting Jainagar and other surrounding villages and towns in the region. Even today, the river is the main source of water to villages and towns thriving in here.

The climate of the district is somewhat extreme in nature, i.e., quite hot during the summer and fairly cold during the winter. January is the coldest month when the mean minimum temperature comes down to approximately 4° C. The temperature rises from March and reaches its peak in May when the mercury touches about 45°C. The average annual rainfall of the district is 1170 mm and about 85% of the rainfall is by south-west *monsoon* during June to August which may even extend to September.



Fig. 1 Map of District Lakhisarai (Bihar)



Fig. 2 Google map showing location of LaliPahari on the western bank of the Kiul river, opposite Ghosikundi, north of the village of Hasanpur.

<https://www.google.co.in/maps/@25.1433927,86.1014595,2950m/data=!3m1!1e3>. 1.7.2018, 4.26 p.m.

The name of hillock, LaliPahari (meaning 'Red Hill'), owes this appellation to the fact that soils of the hillock is rich in iron, oxidation of which has resulted in turning the soil reddish-brownish. A little distance to the north of this hillock is another small hill called Kali Pahari (meaning 'Black Hill'), again a sobriquet attributed by the locals to the hill for its black colour which is possibly owing to occurrence of dyke, the sheets of rocks, in the composition of hill; the dyke is formed in a fracture in a pre-existing rock body that gains black colour (Figs. 3 and 4).

At the top of the hillock where remains of an old establishment are buried beneath the soil are some Eucalyptus trees. These exotic trees were planted some years ago as all of them are not a thick wood. Since these trees have no traditional links with the site and their presence at site is not only an interference with the view of the site, but also their growth is detrimental to buried fragile archaeological features as well as structures. It is learnt that an administrative decision has already been taken to remove these trees from the site by a competent agency as per law of the land.



Fig. 3 A panoramic view of the surrounding area along the western bank of Kiul river as seen from excavation site.



Fig. 4 Iron impurities/contents mixed soil of Lali Pahari (Jainagar), Lakhisarai rendering the surface a look of reddish brown.

C. Previous work

The ancient name of Lakhisarai is believed to be Krimila by some scholars as it is located on the banks of the Krimikala river (modern day Kiul River). It used to be an important centre of Buddhist religion in ancient times, and Lord Buddha is stated to have spent three *varshavaas* (rainy seasons) atop a nearby Chaliya hills. As Lakhisarai and the places around it were quite strategic in the early medieval (CE 550-1200) and medieval (CE 1200-1800) Periods, a large numbers of historical monuments including Buddhist monasteries and Brahmanical temples have been found in and around Lakhisarai. The significance of Lakhisarai is also due to its strategic location at the confluence of the Ganga, the Harohar and the Kiul rivers, which gave it significant edge over others in the inland river trade routes.

A great variety of Buddhist remains including religious sculptures and temple members are being recovered from a the region from a good number of villages of southern Bihar since the time of Francis Buchanan-Hamilton (1762-1829) and Marc Aurel Stein (1862-1943), who visited eastern India in the 19th century. Amongst various discoveries reported by them included inter alia seated or standing images of Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, and Tāra, then put under worship in modern places and temples, not necessarily as per the original scheme (Bautze-Picron 2014).

Extensive explorations and analysis of results by various scholars (Claudine 1991-92: 240-283; Kumar 2005-06: 173-182, 2011: 27-48, 2016: 167-180; and Chattopadhyay and Sanyal 2008: 247-80;) during the last three decades or so have brought the archaeological importance of the Lakhisarai district further into sharper focus. Consequently, in one of recent major developments, the Department of Art, Culture and Youth, Govt. of Bihar, had considered protection of six archaeological sites in Lakhisarai district, by the state, out of which five sites, namely LaliPahari (Jainagar), BichhawePahar, as monuments, and SatsandaPahar (Nongarh), GhosikundiPahar, and Laya as archaeological sites, now stand protected by the state of Bihar (vide website yac.bihnic.in).

D. Objectives

The objectives of excavation at LaliPahari (Jainagar) are to examine the archaeological resource on LaliPahari and the surrounding areas within a framework of defined research objectives, including the following:

- i) To ascertain the extent of the ancient habitation and the antiquity of the site,
- ii) to seek out a better understanding, and compile a lasting record, of the available archaeological resource, and
- iii) to analyse and interpret the excavation results, and disseminate and archive the information.

With a view to realizing the above mentioned aims and objectives, horizontal excavation method is being followed.

E. Layout of Excavation Trenches and the Pottery-yard

With a view to realizing the above mentioned objectives of excavation at the site simultaneously, horizontal excavation method is planned. For the purpose, during the current field season, a grid of 6 by 5 trenches (EW by NS), each measuring 10x10 m, is spanned across the highest contours of the site, which measures approx. 7109.93 sq. m atop the hillock, with the NE Peg being Reference Peg (RP). In the scheme, Trench N00 is made the central reference peg. For the present, the first series of eastern-most trenches, running NS, mark the easternmost limits of excavation. As the area excavation method is being followed here, the excavation can be extended in any cardinal direction, or diagonally, as per need of the excavation work. An overall referencing scheme of all the grids is very handy to find the Easting and Northing of any point on a map (Fig. 5).

The above grid method of excavation, called Wheeler-Kenyon method, is helpful in understanding and evaluating cross sections of fortifications, walls, floors and several other settlement features, and their relationship with each other. As exposing the layout of structures is another important objective of horizontal excavations, excavation of on-site and off-site features are expected to help understand and interpret the settlement contexts and environmental interactions. Though the baulks left in between two trenches obscure the view for the time being, and restrict the process of interpreting the ancient settlement layouts, they do contribute to the scientific understanding of stratigraphy, and help maintain control in large scale excavations strategy. At LaliPahari, working through baulks has greatly assisted in identification of different working levels, status of foundation trenches, floor levels, all of which have their own value to contribute to make hypothesis and interpret excavation findings.

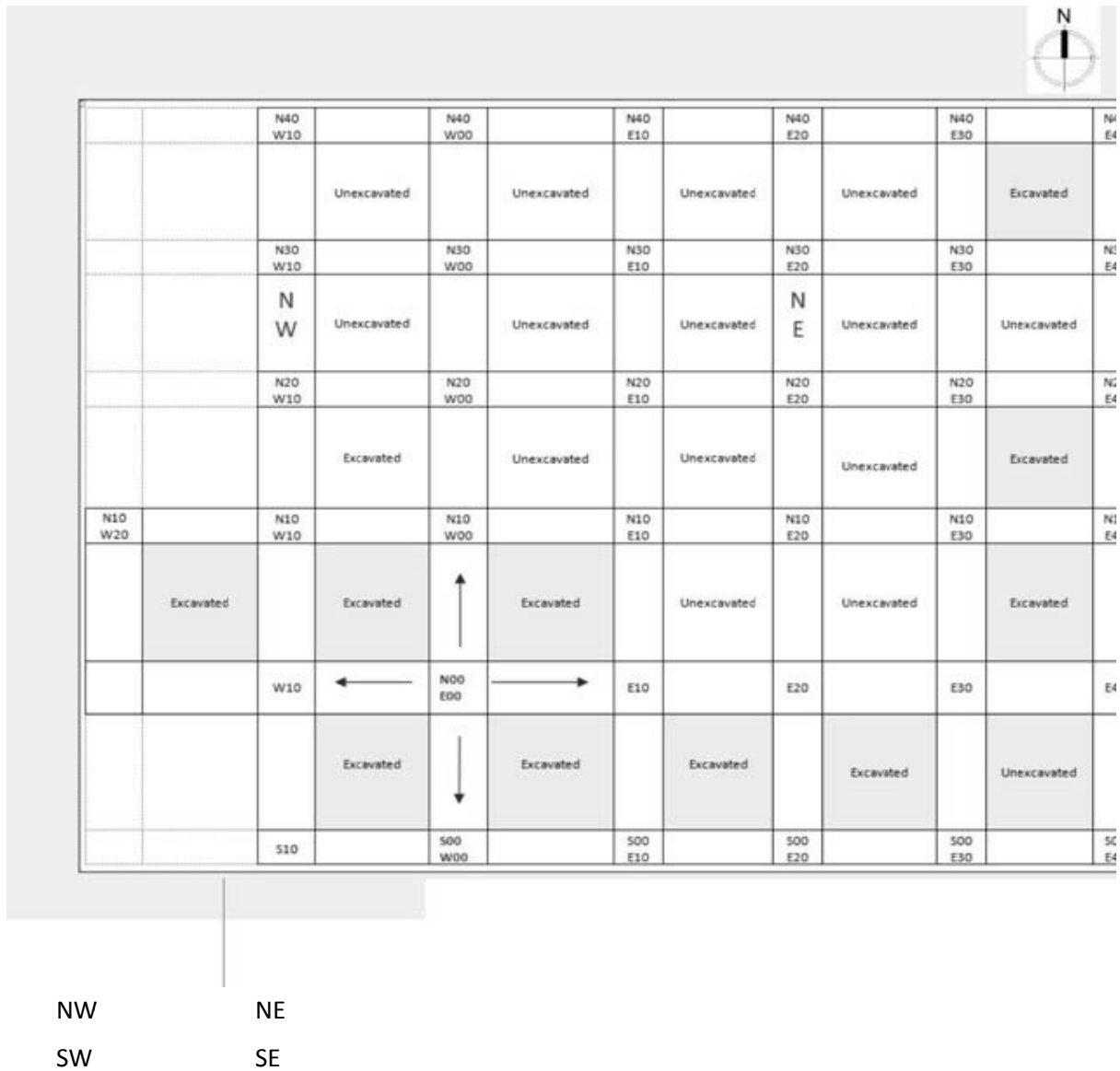


Fig. 5 A sketch drawing (Not To Scale) showing layout of Excavation Trenches (each square measure 10x10 m) at LaliPahari (Jainagar), District Lakhisarai: 2017-18, and position of on-going excavation. The shaded areas represent squares where complete or partial excavation has taken place. LaliPahari (near Jainagar), Lakhisarai, Bihar: 2017-18.

To the east of the area marked for excavation is a small built up area of two rooms, called “Krimila Rang Manch” constructed by the “Nagar Parishad” of “Lakhisarai”. These rooms are being utilized well by the excavators to temporarily house the important and fragile excavated finds which cannot be left open in the Pottery-yard. Pottery-yard is another well laid-out area which follows the plan of excavation trenches with further arrangement of keeping such excavated finds as pottery, stone pieces, bricks, faunal material including bones, soil samples, and so on (Fig. 6). It was seen that besides pottery markings, all the bricks that were recovered from excavation were well staked and some of them were even marked with symbols and number in order to indicate the exact location of the bricks. Such referencing will be very useful

in undertaking conservation work at the site as it will help to place back the bricks from where these have actually been recovered (Fig. 7).



Fig. 6 Laying of pottery-yard at the excavation site of LaliPahari (near Jainagar), Lakhisarai, Bihar: 2017-18. Co-Director of excavation (third from the left is with his students who were also field supervisors at the site) (after Choudhary and Kumar 2018)



Fig. 7 Bricks recovered from excavation as fallen debris are referenced as per bricks' 3D location and stacked in the pottery yard for future conservation works at site. On the foreground of the photograph is a lithic assemblage of mixed material, comprising debitage, production wastes and rejects, collected from the surface and excavations at evidencing production of finished objects, such as stone blocks and others, used in construction, at the site itself. (after Choudhary and Kumar 2018)

F. The excavations

The excavation at LaliPahari (Jainagar) has unearthed a small fortified Buddhist establishment, comprising a rampart wall reinforced by semi-circular bastions from outer side, a central entrance passageway through rampart wall from the east, an open central courtyard (a Buddhist Court?) connected to eastern entrance on the one hand, and with small rectangular/square residential cells on the other hand. The inner fortified area has provisions staying for all inmates, residential and visiting, and various service areas.

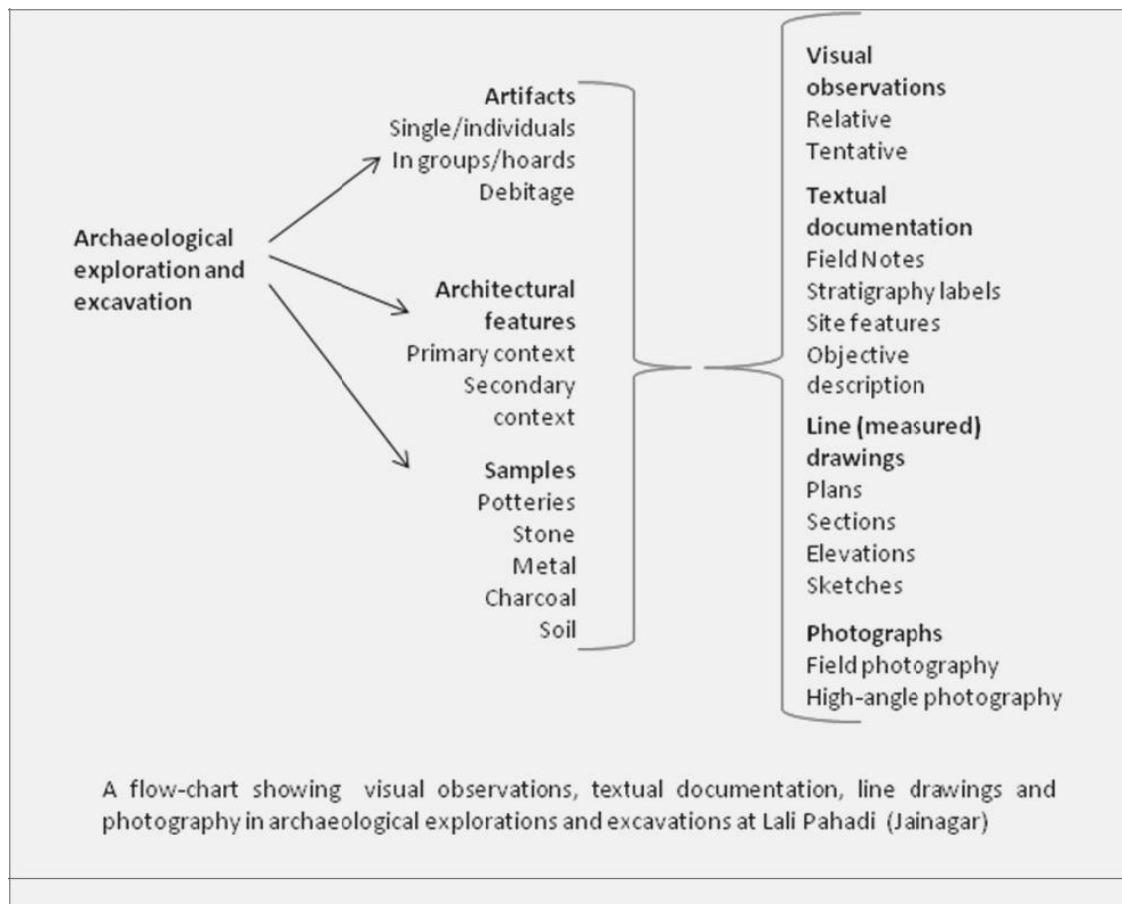


Fig. 8 A flow-chart showing documentation planning

As the major objective of the 2017-18 field season was to ascertain the extent and antiquity of the ancient settlement at LaliPahari, the excavations were planned to start from a point where already a semi-circular bastion and a part of the fort wall was exposed. This comes as the eastern limit of the settlement unless some new evidence of worship object, such as a stupa, or settlement activities outliving the fort, is brought to light. The results of the whole excavation unearth red in the form of structures, artefacts, and samples are textually documented and digitally photographed. The above flow-chart (Fig. 8) shows the documentation strategy of all visual and site features.

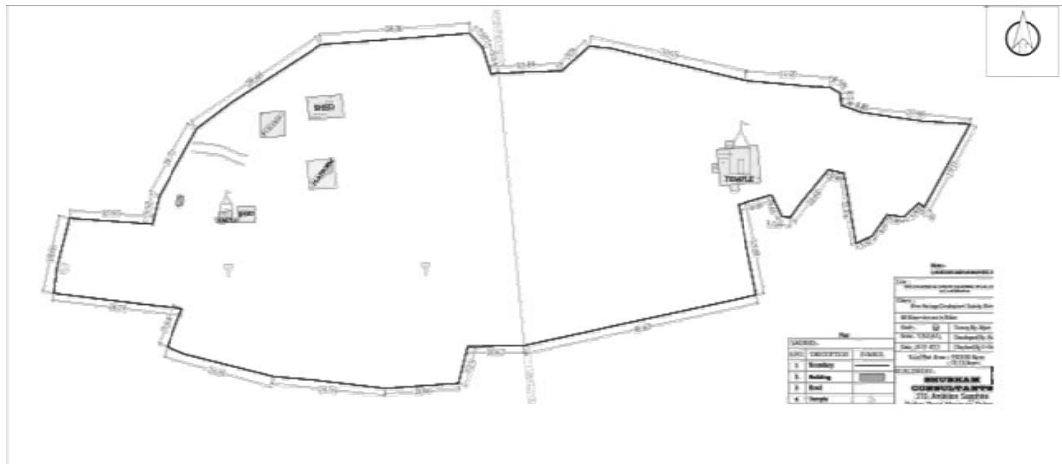


Fig. 9 The site plan of LaliPahari (Jainagar). The site is now notified as the state protected monument.

The hillock on plan is of an irregular shape, longitudinal length is more than double its width (Fig. 9). It is at the top of hillock where this settlement structures are under excavations. The top of hillock can be reached with the help of a modern flight of steps which are constructed at almost a mid point along hillock's southern slope. As soon as one reaches the top, a makeshift temple, a shoddy structure in ruins and some finished and unfinished stone objects are encountered which are lying there helter-skelter, but most probably are integral part of the hillock settlement. Over and above, there is a small one-roomed brick-built unfinished structure which is in the interim occupied by a local mendicant who has been living at the site for many years¹.



Fig. 10 A general view of the excavated trenches at LaliPahari (Jainagar), Lakhisarai, Bihar: 2017-18 (after Choudhary and Kumar 2018)

¹. In fact, the mendicant has been discharging the duty of watch and ward at the site and taking care of loose stone objects on his own. For security, the locals had name of mendicant superscribed on the face of one and two stone blocks.

Though the entire settlement area can be seen densely speckled with the bricks and brick-bats originating from the site, growth of Eucalyptus trees all over the surface area rendered problems in mapping. However, somewhere old pits were excavated by the locals for extracting bricks and other building material from the site, the efforts had exposed a few shallow sections. After the site was physically cleaned, documentation of all features of vandalism, and lay of the land was realized by way of sketches, pencil drawings and digital photography. The trenches were laid along the length of the hillock and excavation work commenced by engaging local work force (Fig. 10). Day-to-day responsibility to document progress of the work was assigned to the Post-Graduate students of the Public Central University at Santiniketan.

(i) Stratigraphy

The excavations have revealed a total occupational thickness of over 3 m across the highest site contours. As the building material here is invariably of burnt brick and stone, erosion of settlement remains after it was abandoned was ruled out. As to longevity of the site, considering the permanent nature of settlement, the enduring building material, total habitational deposit, and the stylistic variations in the findings unearthed, the habitation/occupation at this site does not seem to have continued beyond three/four centuries. However, further intense field work undertaken with this end in view could throw more light on this aspect.

In general, the bulk of material in all sections is earth strewn densely with bricks, brick-bats, and fragments of stone and pot sherds. The concentration of bricks is, however, not same all over; at some points it is dense enough, and at others, somewhat sparse. It will be an interesting aspect to study the behaviour of fall of earth in each trench in order to explain the possible cause of collapse of particular wall. On close observation of structural remains and association debris, that are so far exposed, it seems convincing that the settlement has undergone at least four major and minor building phases (Fig. 11).

Some parts of the site have no humus, and, therefore, remains of old structures at these spots are visible on surface. Sometimes these remains can be observed following an alignment. On close scrutiny, the length, width and direction of these can be ascertained and understood to some extent. At some places, cleaning the surface with hard brush can reveal more clear information. Following the same methodology, it is proposed to replicate the similar exercise on other nearby sites for taking up surface area study and perform site analysis in future field seasons in order to assess specific nature of the site.

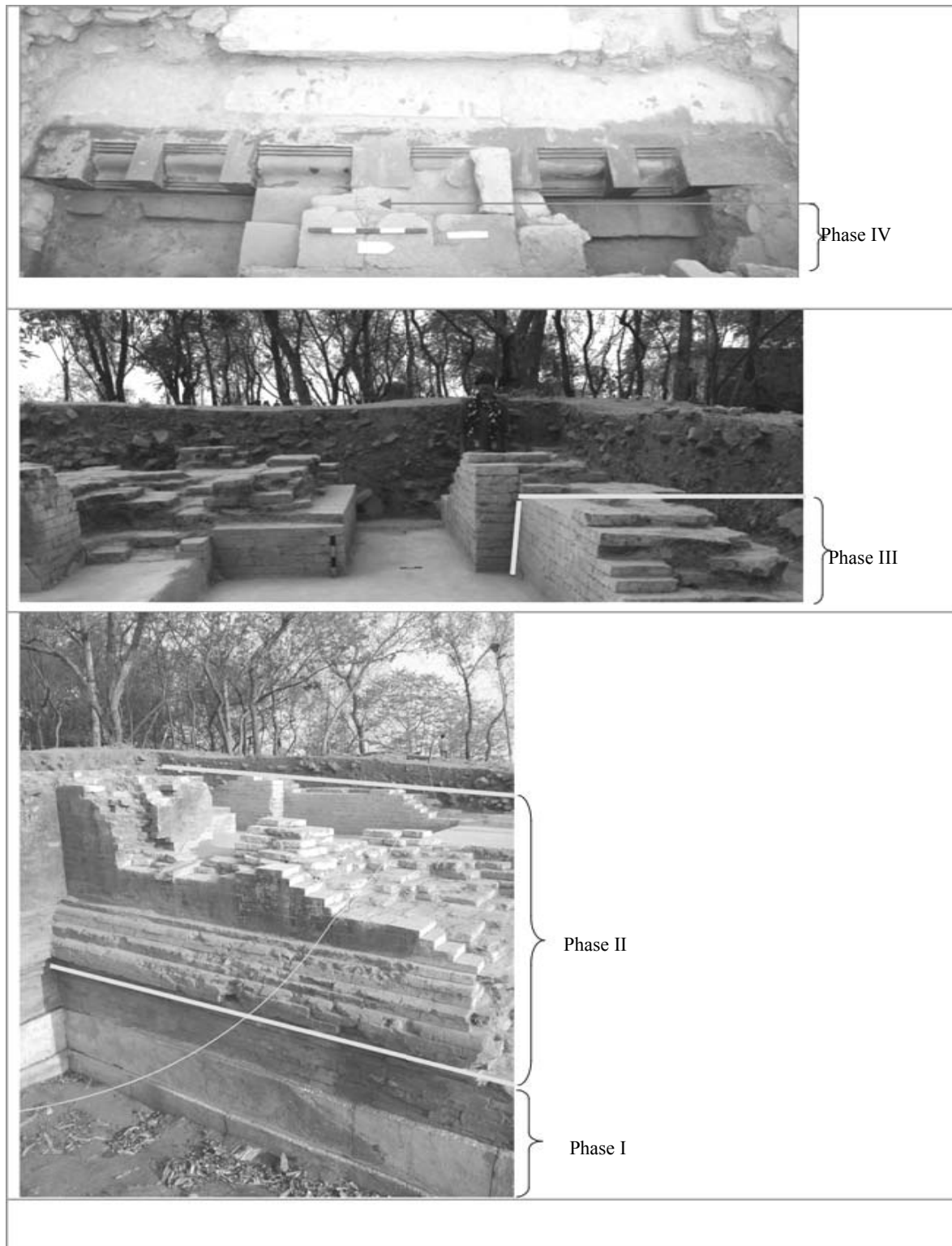


Fig. 11 Four successive major structural (Building) Phases as evidenced in excavations at LaliPari (Jainagar), Lakhisarai: 2017-18. (afterChoudhary and Kumar 2018)

(i) Structures

The rampart at LaliPahari is a strongly-built small rectangular fort made of ashlar fine masonry and burnt bricks, with stone blocks used in foundations. As the ground is rocky here, shallow foundation trench was used. The fort was secured in the middle of its run with semicircular, and at corners, with circular bastions as excavation of eastern arm of the fort has so far evidenced (Fig. 12). The burnt (kiln-fired) bricks are of fine quality, and both normal standard bricks and moulded bricks are used in brick masonry to provide special effects on the façade. At times cut (wire-cut) bricks are used to add to the special effect. As a rule, lime mortar is used in brickwork, stonework, floors and plastering, as also in are set in lime mortar. The quantity of bricks tumbled from the rampart wall suggest at least another two metre original height of the fort.



Fig. 12 A view of the southern mid bastion of the small fort showing two different phases of main constructions. The bastion was already exposed to the view before the excavation work started at the site (after Choudhary and Kumar 2018)

The admission to the fort is through an elaborately planned straightway passage, an “Eastern Entrance”, that gives way directly to an open courtyard (Fig. 13). It seems that the courtyard is a central unit of the whole plan of the fort from where access is provided to different inner units or areas of the fort, such as residential units, learning areas including manuscript collection areas, administrative areas, visitors' places, the service areas, and as a rule, worship areas for the monks or the nuns. Evidence would have it that the most important aspect of the open courtyard is congregation of faithful here every now and then in all Buddhist² religious

ceremonies. Discovery of a large number of terracotta plaques from excavations showing seated Buddha in *Bhumisparsha Mudra* clearly affiliate the fort with a place devoted to ideals and principles of the *Mahayan* (“Greater Vehicle”) or *Vajrayana* (“Thunderbolt Vehicle”) form of Tantric Buddhism worship that developed in India and neighbouring countries, notably Tibet. In the history of Buddhism, Vajrayana marks the transition from Mahayana speculative thought to the enactment of Buddhist ideas in personal life of humans³. In absence of evidence of any Tantric deity, it is difficult to associate this fort with any particular Buddhist faith.



Fig. 13 General view of the courtyard connected to a passageway from the east, and communicating with other dwelling and service units all within the fortified complex. The floor and walls of the entire constructions are fine finished with lime plaster. (after Choudhary and Kumar 2018)

To accentuate entrance to the fort from the east, a basalt stone sill with mouldings, which is, in fact a door lintel slab of some temple, is laid across the Eastern Entrance to the small fort. The sill, probably used in Phase III, was overlain by a piece of brickwork in building Phase IV (Fig. 14 a and b). It appears that the brisk structural activities were going on around the “Eastern Entrance” area. An interesting structure, a small three-side closed receptacle, meant for washing feet, etc. was excavated from here. In this receptacle, while the north-south slit was meant for receiving door-like device, the other slit, lower at level and running

2. Discovery of a large number of terracotta plaques from excavation here showing seated Buddha in *Bhumisparsha mudra* clearly affiliate this small fort with a place devoted to the Buddha ideals and principles, and Mahayan form of worship.

3. In Tantric Buddhism (Vajrayana), there are five primary Buddhas, Vairocana, Aksobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, and Amoghasiddhi; each is associated with a different consort, direction, aggregate (or, aspect of the personality), emotion, element, colour, symbol, and mount.

across the former slit in east-west direction was meant for draining out used water (Fig. 15). Example of another area for using water has come from a building complex of later phase where a water chute is fixed as out let to drain out the used water (Fig. 16).



14 a.



14 b.

Fig. 14 (a and b) A stone sill with mouldings (in fact a door lintel slab of a temple) lay across the Eastern Entrance to the small fort. The sill is overlain by a piece of brickwork



Fig. 15A small three-side closed receptacle (in the middle of photograph), possibly for taking a bath as the rectangular threshold has the longer groove along the sill is meant to receive a door, and the shorter running across to work as the outlet for used water. (after Choudhary and Kumar



Fig. 16 A stone chute attached to one of residential units to drain out the water used in one of units inside the citadel. Large rectangular stone slabs used in foundations and lower sections of the brick walls. LaliPahari (Jainagar), Lakhisarai, Bihar: 2017-18. (after Choudhary and Kumar 2018)



Fig. 17 An almost complete earthen vessel, red ware, lying on the floor of one of residential units excavated at LaliPahari (Jainagar).

From one of the trenches was discovered a complete specimen of water vessel of red ware that might had been put to different use including carrying and storing water (fig. 17).

Amongst the examples of spouts, of particular interest is an exquisitely cared *makarmukh*pranala (a gargoyle) of basalt stone, provided to the right (north) of the Eastern Entrance, which served as an outlet for the water used most probably in ablution within the citadel (Fig. 18).

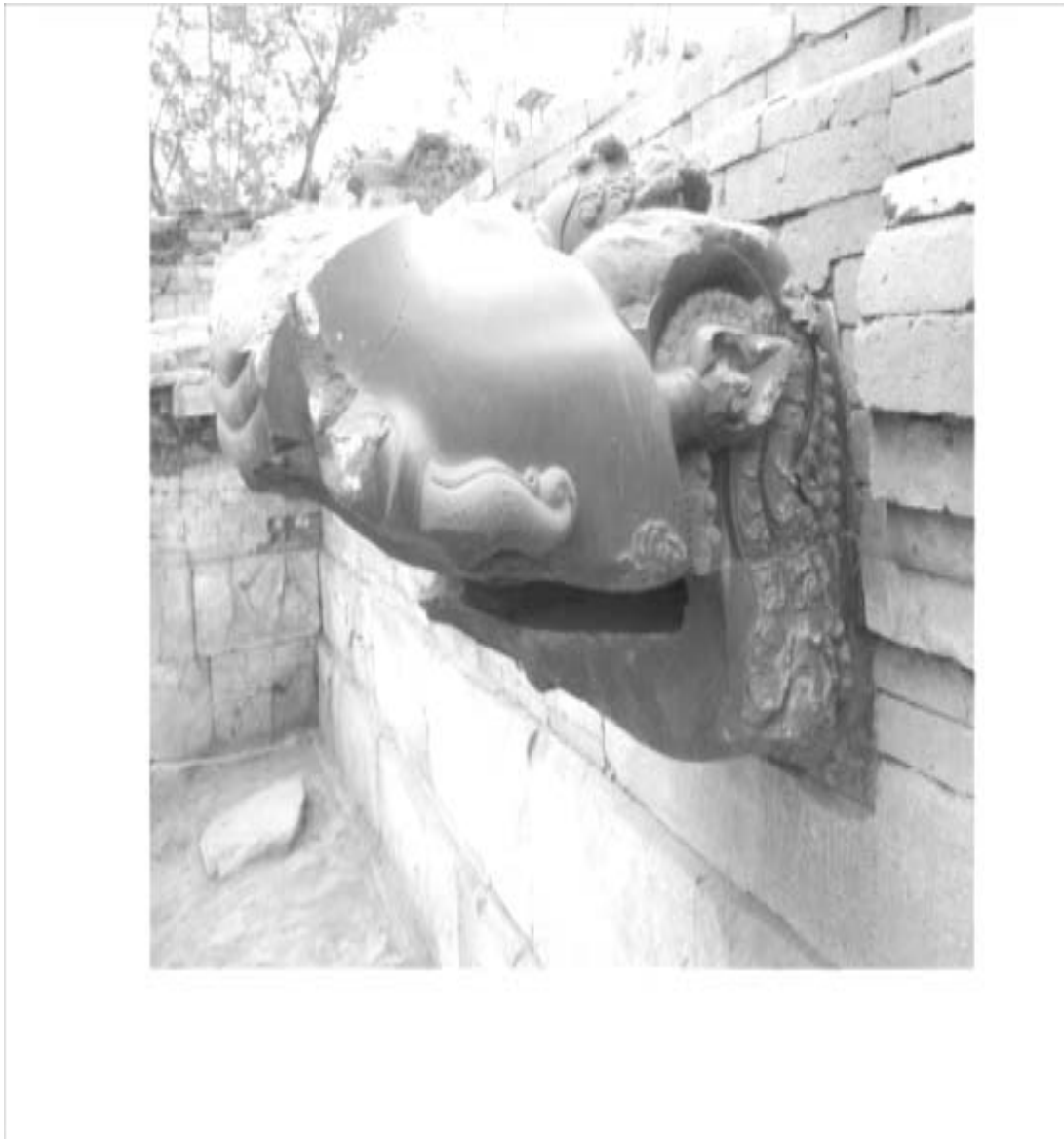


Fig. 18 An exquisitely cared makarmukh gargoyle of basalt stone, located to the right (north) of the Eastern Entrance, serving as an outlet for water used in ablution in the citadel (after Choudhary and Kumar 2018).

So far a solitary specimen of a pillar or pilaster made of basalt stone is documented from one of trenches close to the Eastern Entrance (Fig. 19). This pillar piece is slender in size and depicts, in outline, fine carving of a temple pillar, surmounting a shikhara which is topped by a finial (Fig. 19). That some interior units of the fort had roofs or side openings supported on pillar bases is suggested by a few pillar bases found in excavation *in situ* (fig. 20 a and b).



Fig. 19 A basalt stone pillar stuck in the section showing fine carving of a temple pillar, surmounting a shikhara topped by a finial as part of decorative scheme of the pillar. (after Choudhary and Kumar 2018)



a.



b.

Fig. 20 a. Stone pillar bases inside the small fort complex. b. A large stone rough-out in the middle of process to make it a pillar base?

The building material at the LaliPahari site is stone and burnt brick. To ensure firm stability of the structures, and also add to aesthetics, the stone were laid in foundations and used in lower sections of the walls (Fig. 21). Stone is also used at places where use of water was frequent, such as bathroom and drains.

Indication of a large scale of fire activity is evident in one of trenches from where a large quantity of ash mixed with charcoal is documented (Fig. 21). The fire seemed to be so flagrant that even some stones present within the ashy deposit could be observed to have undergone impact of burning and turned pitched black. From the scale of excavation as it is, it is difficult to ascertain whether it is a local phenomenon or was spread all over the site. Only future work at site could possibly throw some light on this aspect



Fig. 21 Ashlar fine masonry in lower sections of the fired brick walls. (after Choudhary and Kumar 2018)



Fig. 22 Evidence of a large scale conflagration in one of trenches at LaliPahari (Jainagar). (after Choudhary and Kumar 2018)

A large quarried stone found in one of trenches is another interesting finding. It has provided information on contemporary technique of stone cutting. The fine-chiselled stone blocks used in architecture of the fort complex were manufactured by following an indigenous technique. First, larger chunks of stones were quarried from the mother rock from the suitable spots, and then these chunks were transported to the site where final product was to be produced.

After determining the intended size, a line of fracture was created on the stone surface by scooping a series of dents, which would create a weaker line to facilitate breakage of stone along this line with a few final blows (Fig. 23).

Raw material for producing building stone blocks was available at the site of LalPahari itself in plenty (Fig. 24). A little east of the excavated area is a sort of rain gully which could originally be a man made quarry. It is not unlikely that the authors of the site were extracting stone form this spot, and the pit so created, in return functioned as a temporary reservoir atop the hillock. In order to lend credence to his surmise it would be desirable to conduct further research at the site and undertaking provenance studies.



Fig. 23 A large quarried stone found in a trench preserving a series of dents that created a cleavage to split the stone

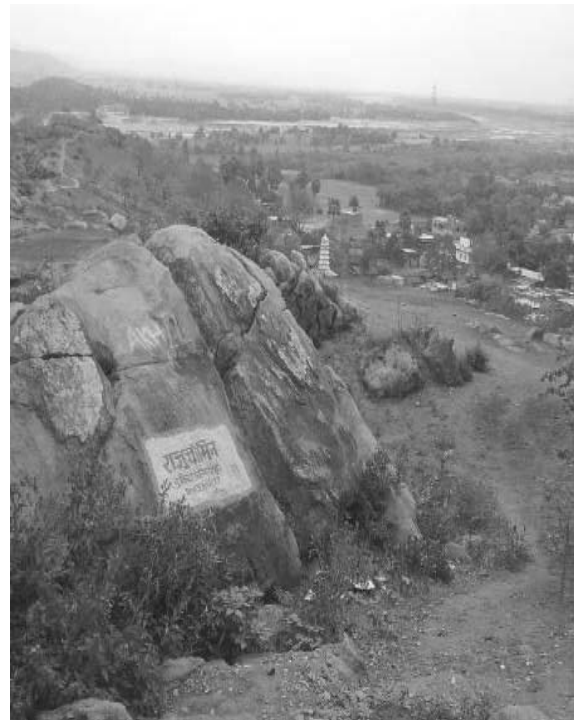


Fig. 24 Availability of raw material (stone) at the site of LaliPahari.

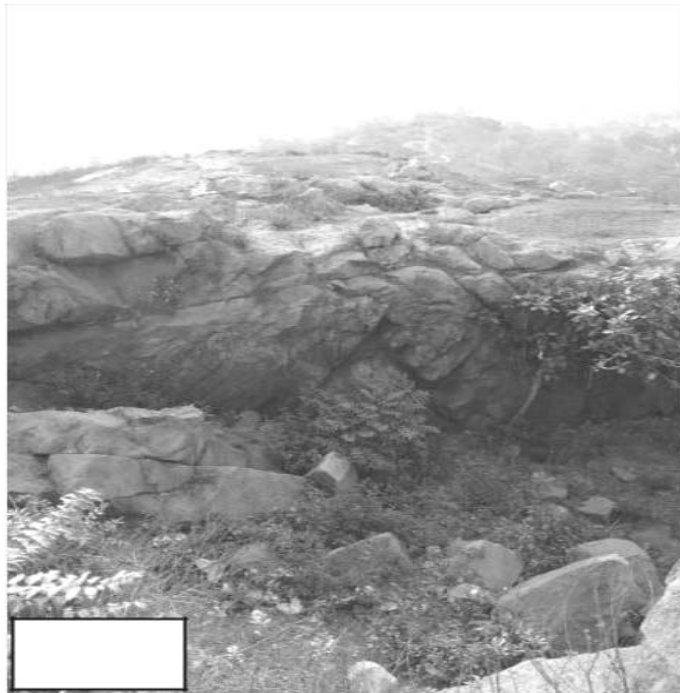


Fig. 25 A possible quarry place to the east of the excavated area which might had been exploited to extract stone as building material.



Fig. 26 A makeshift temple atop the hillock, having a thatched roof, enshrining a stone temple frieze showing the Buddhist deities.

There is a makeshift temple atop the hillock, with a thatched roof, enshrining a temple frieze of stone showing the Buddhist deities. This frieze was recovered from a near by location from the site itself (Fig. 26 and 27). The frieze, made out of black basalt, shows an exquisitely carved panel of Buddhist deities, Avalokiteshvara and Manjushri (Choudhary and Kumar 2018). Stylistically, the sculpture is datable to circa 11th -12th century CE. On the left side frieze is carved a stylized face of lion, and on the right side, a small mutilated sculpture of Ganesh (?) (Fig. 27 a, b and c).



Fig. 27 a. A fragmentary temple frieze enshrined inside a makeshift temple; b, stylized face of lion; and c. mutilated sculpture of Ganesh (?) (After Choudhary and Kumar 2017-18).

To the left of this temple is a shoddy brick-built hut of modern date, which was raised upon the remains of an older stone structure, and is now in ruins . These old stone structures form what looks like a stone compartment/cubicle, possibly underground (?), of finished granite blocks. Because the excavations are as yet inclusive, the nature and purpose of this cubicle is not known.

As the Kiul River flows to the east of the site, there is an ancient walkway going over the longitudinal ridge of the hillock connecting the site with the river bank and vice versa. It is likely at the meeting point of the walkway and the river bank, there was ferry point to go or come across the river. This trodden path had a transit spot on the eastern edge of the hillock where evidence of a temporary halt place can easily be noticed.

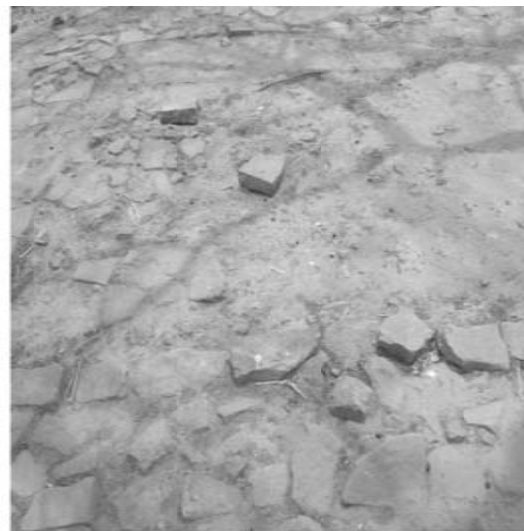


Fig. 28 walkway to reach from the site to the bank of Krimilariver and vice versa.

Fig. 29 Close-up of brickwork at the eastern edge of the walkway suggesting some transitory outpost activities.

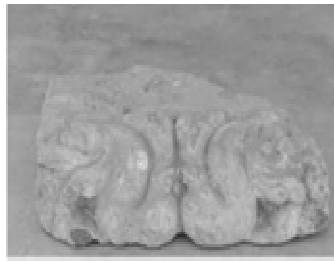
As to the dating of the site, on stylistic grounds of architectural style exposed, sculptural specimens of both of stones and terracotta model figurines recovered from within the site and without, and the palaeographic record preserved by some of these indicate the structural activities at Lali Pahari started around 11th – 12th century CE, which continued till the end of 13th – 14th century CE.

(v) Antiquities

The excavations have yielded a rich harvest of antiquities and artefacts. All stratified and unstratified antiquities and artefacts recovered were collected and documented. These have been numbered and accessioned as per the established standard practice. Further, these artefacts have also been catalogued as per the database fields provided by the National Mission on Monuments and Antiquities (NMMA), Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). The information so filled will be shared with the NMMA, ASI.



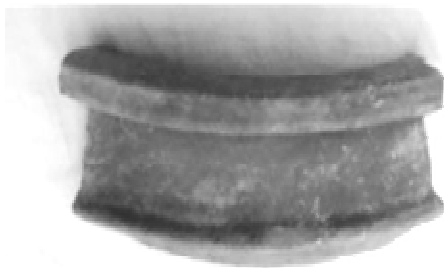
a. A moulded carved-cum-cut brick



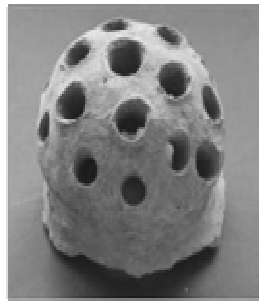
b. A moulded decorative brick



c. A common earthen lamp



d. A sherd of red ware jar



e. A miniature perforated vessel



f. An incised pot sherd



g. A glazed ware sherd



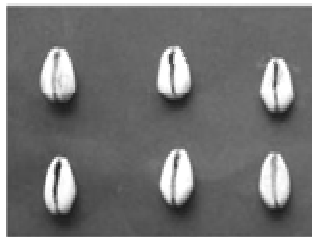
i. Miniature Votive stupa



h. A terracotta beads



k. Rusted iron nails



j. Cowry shells



l. A stone fragment **showing** parallel incised lines in one half

Fig. 30 Some select antiquities unearthed from excavations at LaliPahari (Jainagar), Lakhisarai, Bihar: 2017-18 (after Choudhary and Kumar 2018)

The fine bricks used in masonry are of both types, moulded carved and (wire-) cut (Fig. 30, a and b). Ceramic evidence is represented by typical medieval wares comprising both plain and decorated varieties of red, grey and black (?) wares, including glazed wares. The types included bowls, *handis*, perforated vessels (including one complete perforated miniature pot of red ware), *lota-s* (?), etc. Some pieces of miniature lamps without lips were also collected (Fig. 30, a to g). A red ware sherd preserved occurrence of mica dust having been sprinkled on the surface when the pot was hot on its surface.

Various types of antiquities were also unearthed during the course of excavation, amongst which particularly mention may be made of votive stupas, terracotta beads, decorative terracotta wheel-like models and circular discs, cowry shells (shell of *Cypraeamoneta*, used as a medium of exchange similar to coin money and other forms of commodity money here?), in addition to some specimens of fresh water molluscs, an appreciable number of iron nails, one iron-wired ring besides other house-related objects of daily use such as fragmentary knife pieces, hooks, pieces of iron ring attached to a hook for fastening wooden doors, fragments of decorative stone objects, and so on. (Fig. 30, h to i).

Among antiquities, the most interesting and significant finds are recovery of a good number of small clay sealing tablets which ascertain Buddhist affiliation of the site. All these sealings, having Buddhist affiliation, are simply small disks or lumps of clay which have been impressed with a seal-like device or a seal. Such seal is a form of stamp which was carved with an image and/or a text in reverse, so that when used upon the lump when it is leather-hard, the positive impression of image and/or text will be cast on the sealing. These stamps were made out of metal, stone, bone or wood. The clay sealings after being stamped were fired in order to harden these.



Fig. 31 A well-baked terracotta sealingshowing the stamped figure of Lord Buddha in Bhumisparsha Mudra, and a short inscription below (after Choudhary and Kumar 2018)

A sealing that I examined at the site is close to a triangle in shape, and well-baked, showing stamped figure of Lord Buddha in *Bhumisparsha mudra*, a seated posture 'touching or pressing the earth' (Fig. 31). This posture is more commonly known as the 'earth witnessing' *mudra* (a stylized and symbolic gesture), which is formed with all five fingers of the right hand extended to touch the ground, symbolizing the Buddha's enlightenment under the *Bodhi* tree, when he summoned the "Earth Goddess", to bear witness to his attainment of enlightenment. His right hand is complemented by the left hand, which is held flat with palm facing sky in the lap in *dhyana* (meditation) *mudra*. It is in this posture that Shakyamuni overcame the obstructions of Mara while meditating on 'Truth'. Below the figure of Lord Buddha is stamped a 4-lined inscription (a passage), which I could not read instantly at the site. However, the writings found on the sealing provide a glimpse of the script used in India and other places in Asia in early medieval times around *circa* 11th /12th CE.