

Kṛimilā: A Forgotten Adhiṣṭhāna of Early Medieval Eastern India

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Abstract

In a recent course of exploration in the area identified as *Kṛimilā Adhiṣṭhāna* of early medieval period by D.C. Sircar is near modern town Lakhisarai, a district headquarter of Bihar. It is situated around 125 kilometers east of Patna, the state capital. It is well connected by rail and road; Patna Howrah main line and NH 80 passes through the place. The longitude of city is 86°06' east and latitude is 25°10' north. The area around 25–30 square kilometers of the city has large number of historical monuments, particularly Buddhist Stupas and Brahmanical temples. Beglar and Cunningham explored the area and reported the antiquity of the region in 19th century. They have identified existence of Buddhist Stupa and Brahmanical temples in the area. In 1950s and 1960s D.C. Sircar and subsequently R.K Choudhary visited the region and reported few inscriptions of early medieval period. An extensive exploration conducted by me, has revealed many interesting facts undisclosed about the early medieval historiography. There are more than thirty big mounds which are unexcavated lying between Valgudar and Rampur in Lakhisarai district of Bihar. Recent exploration has yielded six image inscriptions and more than 100 Buddhist as well as Brahmanical sculptures. Stylistic analysis of these sculptures suggests us the early medieval dates, and different phases of construction activities. The whole area falls around 30 square kilometers, which has more than thirty mounds, more than twenty ponds and three lakes. Few brick structures over the mounds are exposed due to natural calamities or encroachments by the local people. Overall survey of the area and decipherment of the found inscriptions, suggests us about an existence of a large religious and administrative centre of early medieval eastern India.

Keywords

Viṣaya, Adhiṣṭhāna, Inscription, Stupa, Mound, Sculpture.

Introduction

Kṛimilā, as an administrative centre of eastern India, was a *viṣaya* (district headquarter) of Śrī nagara *bhukti* (Pāṭaliputra) during early medieval period.¹ Mention of Kṛimilā *viṣaya* occurs in several inscriptions of early India. In this regard, Nālandā plate of Samudragupta, Bihar inscription of Gupta period, Naulagarh inscription² can be mentioned. This centre continued as a political centre of early medieval eastern India during the rule of Palas, proved by the citation of Kṛimilā as *viṣaya* of Śrī nagara *bhukti*, available in Devapala's Munger copper plate. However, A. Cunningham, who explored this area in the later half of nineteenth century, was inclined to place it around third century BC.³ The actual location of this *viṣaya* has been identified by D.C. Sircar at modern village Valgūdar, near Lakhisarai.⁴ This village is 3 kilometres west of modern town Lakhisarai, a district headquarter in the modern state of Bihar. Lakhisarai is 125 kilometres east of Patna on the National Highway 80 (Mokamah–Sahebganj). The place is also well connected by railways. Lakhisarai is a flag railway junction on the western bank of river Kiul on Delhi–Howrah main line. On the western bank of this river is an important railway junction, Kiul, which is 1 kilometre east of Lakhisarai. The longitude of city is 86°06' east and latitude is 25°10' north (Map 1).

Lakhisarai is situated on the confluence of three important rivers, namely, Ganga, Haruhar and Kiul, and three ancient cultural zones of Aṅga, Magadh and Mithilā. The present stream of river Ganga is around 5 kilometres north of Valgūdar. Earlier scars of river channel are still visible at the site;⁵ moreover, the typical micaceous white sand of river Ganga, found from the dried channels, prove beyond doubt that these channels once belonged to the Ganga. Through river Ganga this centre was connected to ancient Pāṭaliputra and Varanasi in the west, and Munger, Champā and Tāmralipti in the east. No less important in this respect is the river Haruhar, because it connects the entire Magadh region and Chhotanagpur plateau. The river Haruhar originates near Nālandā as one of the branches of important river Falgu (ancient Nilānjanā). Both the rivers Haruhar and Kiul are perennial in nature and connected to the early historical places of south Bihar. As far as river Haruhar is concerned it connects Lakhisarai with early historical centres like Itakhori, Bodh-Gayā, Gayā, Kurkihār, Ghosrama, Rajgir, Nālandā in south, ultimately merging with Ganga near the site. River Kiul is also important in this regard, because it connects the site with southeast region of Bihar. Historicity of this river is mentioned in Buddhist text *Aṅguttara Nikāya* and Brahmanical text *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* as river Kṛimikalā.⁶

¹ Sircar, *Studies in the Geography of Ancient and Medieval India*, p. 248.

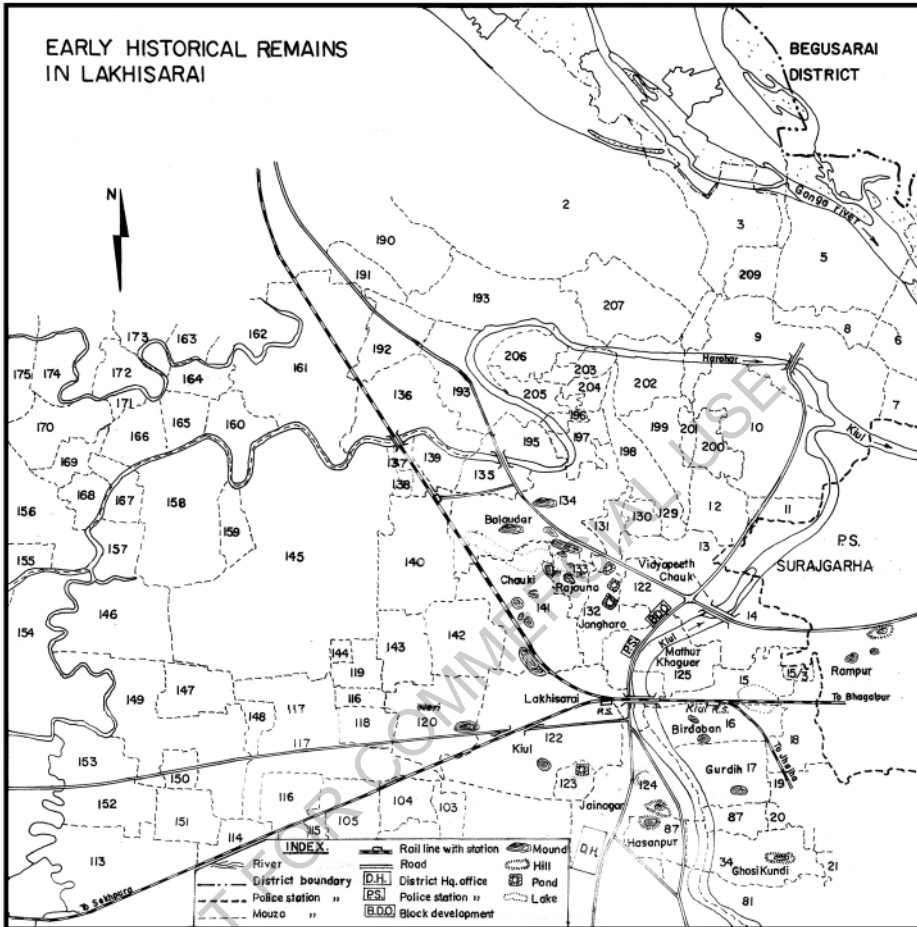
² Choudhary, *Select Inscriptions of Bihar*, pp. 22–23, 90.

³ Cunningham, *Archaeological Survey of India Report*, Vol. III, pp. 151–56. (He identified adjacent village Rajaona as *Lo-in-ni-lo*, mentioned by Hsuan-t-Sang in his travel account.)

⁴ Sircar, *Studies in the Geography of Ancient and Medieval India*, pp. 250–52.

⁵ Cunningham, *Archaeological Survey of India*, Vol. III, Plate XL. Figure 1 shows the existence of scar of the river.

⁶ Tripathi, 'Sahridaya', *Bihar Ki Nadiyan*, p. 71.



Map I. Early Historical Remains in Lakhisarai

Source: Author's own.

Disclaimer: This map is not to scale and does not depict authentic boundaries.

The network of the railways, in all probability, replaced or substituted the ancient roads, and the confluence of three riverine routes sufficiently indicates the spatial importance of the site.

The historical as well as the geographical significance of this place is further enhanced by the existence of Naulagarh, an early historical site, situated on the northern bank of this confluence, exactly opposite of Lakhisarai. Naulagarh might have been used as river port, because several important rivers of north Bihar are connected to Naulagarh. Particularly during the early medieval period in north Bihar (north of river Ganga) we get numerous black stone sculptures at various early medieval sites, that is, Dumra, Akaur, Uchchait, Mahisi, Kapilesvara, Balirajgarh, Kopagarh, Andhra Tharhi,

etc. Availability of this material in north Bihar for making sculptures in this period poses a serious question because topography of north Bihar suggests existence of only flat plain land. In all probability, black stone used for the making of sculpture was procured from Rajmahal region of southeast Bihar and to carry stone slab for the making of sculptures certainly river routes were used.⁷ Further, Lakhisarai is also situated between Nālandā and Vikramśilā, the two religio-educational centres of early medieval Bihar. Another significant aspect is the location of this place as it is situated on the old Pāṭaliputra–Tāmralipti route via Champā (Map 2).

Earlier Research

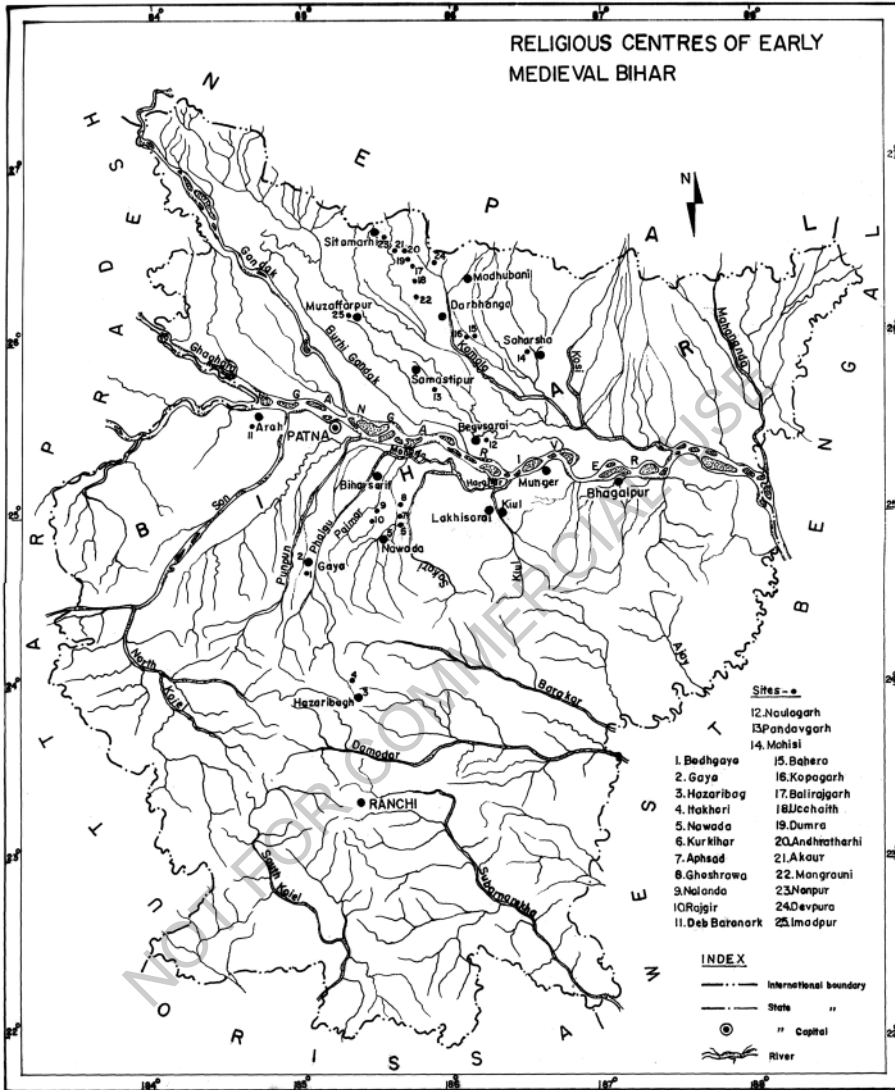
The antiquarian remains of Lakhisarai region had drawn attention of British scholars like Beglar, Buchanan and Cunningham in late nineteenth century. They have conducted preliminary survey of the area and identified *stupa* and temples at Valgūdar, Rajaona, Chowki and Jaynagar.⁸ These are the names of modern villages and are within the municipal area of the town, and falls within the radius of 15 square kilometres. A. 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 Rajaona southwards up to Jaynagar along the western bank of river Kiul, a distance of nearly 6 kilometres and had a width of 1.5 kilometre.⁹ Cunningham identified *Lo-in-ni-lo* as Rajaona mentioned by Huan-t-sang. Huan-t-sang in his travel account mentions that he visited this place, where he saw a Buddhist monastery and *stupa* erected by Aśoka in third century BC and a large lake, 5 miles in circuit, to the north of the *stupa*. Cunningham identified this *stupa* and monastery. There he found images of Buddha seated under a *Bodhi* tree, made of black basalt stone with an inscription on it, and an image of Bodhisattva Padmapāni or Avalokiteśvara. The images recovered from the mounds have been shifted to the Indian Museum. These mounds have been identified near the modern village Rajaona, which is around 1 kilometre south of Valgūdar. Nearly 200 yards southwest of these mounds, significant number of Brahmanical remains were discovered, which have been described in some details by Cunningham in his report. To the east of the village near the Buddhist mounds is a small sized mound, where Cunningham noticed images of Hara-Gauri and Gaṇeśa. Presumably, the mound conceals remains of a Śiva temple. Majority of the Brahmanical remains are located in south of the village Rajaona. There are some low square mounds and a large mound to their west called locally as Chowki. Near the low square mounds, Cunningham noticed one large and three small figures of four-armed Viṣṇu and it is not unlikely that they may represent site of a Vaiṣṇavā temple.¹⁰

⁷ Kumar, 'Market Centres in Early Medieval Bihar', pp. 131–44.

⁸ Patil, *The Antiquarian Remains of Bihar*, pp. 12, 185, 209, 427.

⁹ Cunningham, *Archaeological Survey of India Report*, Vol. III, pp. 151–62.

¹⁰ Cunningham, *Archaeological Survey of India Report*, Vol. III, pp. 151–56.



Map 2. Religious Centres of Early Medieval Bihar

Source: Author's own.

Disclaimer: The map is not to scale and does not depict authentic boundaries.

The large mound at village Chowki was excavated by Cunningham and he found remains of a Śiva temple. In course of his excavation, he discovered two very interesting pillars of stone, 160 square cm. and ornamented with bas-reliefs and inscriptions. These inscriptions are written in shell letters, which were in use during seventh–eighth

centuries AD in northern India.¹¹ However, based on Huan-t-sang's visit and the dates of this inscription we can safely assume that the Brahmanical deities as well as the Śiva temple belonged to a period around seventh–eighth centuries AD. Another interesting feature of the pillars is the sculptures on the four sides of the pillar, which have been described in detail by Cunningham. 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 are a seated goddess attended by an umbrella bearer and other three figures probably in supplication. Underneath this group are two inscriptions, one reading *Śrī-Bhima Kṣudra* probably in letters of seventh–eighth centuries and the other reading *Ratna prā*, (iii) the image of Śiva on mount Kailāsa with three attendants and a female deity with crocodile kneeling before her, who according to Cunningham represents the river goddess Gaṅgā or the goddess Pārvaṭī or Saṭī of the famous Puranic legend of Dakṣa's sacrifice, (iv) the images of a god and goddess seated and attended by a female figure. The letters of this inscription is of seventh–eighth centuries AD. Cunningham mentions some more mounds at the place indicating ruins of Śaivite religion. North of the Śiva temple mound, he saw a lofty square mound with two statues of the goddess Kālī and Gaṇeśa; while to the further west of it he noticed another very large mound of around 40 metres in length from where bricks were used during the construction of railway line. In the village itself, Cunningham found 'a small mound with a Liṅga and a figure of *Ṣaṣṭhī* and *Bhavānī*, with a long slab of *Navāgraha*. Beglar reports discovery of fine image of *Pārvaṭī* with an inscription'.¹²

Cunningham's exploration was mainly directed towards identification of the Buddhist ruins with those mentioned by Hsuan-t-sang. After the preliminary work of the British explorers, the centre has continuously drawn attention of scholars even after Indian independence. But most of them have confined themselves in deciphering the inscriptions found in chance discoveries from the area. In this regard, an inscription from Valgūdar deciphered by D.C. Sircar is important, which mentions the name of a *viṣaya* Kṛimilā (administrative unit) of Gupta period and he argues that Valgūdar was the centre of Kṛimilā *viṣaya*.¹³ In one inscription deciphered by Sircar it is mentioned that in the Dharmapala's state at Kṛimilā *viṣaya* Madhu Śreṅka (a guild of probably honey collectors) in honour of Dharmapala has founded a *Dēvadhmmāyam* (religious centre).¹⁴ In this inscription, Kṛimilā is mentioned as *Ādhiṣṭhāna*, and this word has been taken to mean as centre for administration, a city or town.¹⁵ Another significant inscription from Valgūdar gives us very important information about the date of Pala ruler Madanapāla in which we learn that during the 18th regnal year of his rule a Nārāyaṇa image was installed by two Paramavaishnava Bhaṭṭ brothers Śrī Sukim Bhaṭṭ and his brother Śrī Abhi Bhaṭṭ with their father, in the Saka era 1083 (AD 1161). Hence,

¹¹ Patil, *The Antiquarian Remains of Bihar*, pp. 427–29.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 429.

¹³ Sircar, 'Three Inscriptions from Valgudar', *Epigraphia Indica*, pp. 137–45.

¹⁴ Choudhary, *Select Inscriptions of Bihar*, p. 23.

¹⁵ Sircar, *Indian Epigraphical Glossary*, p. 7.

from this inscription we can conclude that Madanapāla ascended the Pala throne in AD 1143. and ruled at least for 18 years that would be until AD 1161. In this inscription also, the place name Kṛimilā is prominently mentioned.¹⁶ Analysis of these inscriptions and literature suggests that this place flourished at least from Gupta period and continued to be an important religio-administrative centre till thirteenth century AD. An inscription of twelfth century AD from this place mentions donation by the daughter-in-law of an oil maker for religious purpose.¹⁷ These significant inscriptional evidences from this place, particularly the donations by the merchant community and existence of guild during the Dharmapala period, raise many questions about the post-Gupta historiography.

In the later half of the twentieth century again this region has drawn attention of historians and archaeologists after a significant development took place in March 1977 when a large Śiva *Liṅga* was accidentally discovered by a cowherd while playing on the mound at Chowki. *Liṅga* is made of black basalt and the colossal size (height of the *Liṅga* is 2.40 metres and the circumference of *arḡha* is 7.20 metres) aroused considerable excitement among the masses for religious purpose and scholars for studying the historicity of this place. In this regard recent work carried out by B.K. Jamuar is significant. He explored Chowki and the adjacent village Rajaona and provided a detailed description of sculptures from these two villages.¹⁸ He has discussed in detail about the style date and stone used in making of sculptures found in these two villages. While discussing he did not consider the stylistic variations as compared to sculptures of other parts of eastern India. The regional variation in style is even acknowledged by Frederick M. Asher¹⁹ and S. Huntington.²⁰ According to Huntington 'sub-regional styles and peculiarity in making sculptures in this region'. She further suggests 'the transitional nature of aspects of the art of Monghyr District and Anga in general, between the schools of Bihar and Bengal'. Interestingly, Jamuar while visiting Chowki must have travelled through Valgūdar, because road to reach Chowki and Rajaona starts from Valgūdar and on the junction itself there are three large mounds on both sides of the road. The modern village Valgūdar is also situated on two large mounds. But he has not written a single sentence about the mounds nor about the numerous Brahmanical and Buddhist sculptures lying around the mounds at Valgūdar. Although, Jamuar has mentioned exploration report of Cunningham and D.C. Sircar's studies of Valgudar inscription, but he did not consider the significance of antiquarian remains in the neighbourhood of Chowki and Rajaona. This region has been explored by D.K. Chakrabarty, but again confined to only three villages, Valgūdar, Rajaona and Chowki.²¹ In the 1980s this region has been visited by Frederick M. Asher,²² and he, after analysing sculptures and stone pillars lying around the region and a few preserved in various museums, has argued that 'generally images that bear dated inscriptions

¹⁶ Choudhary, *Select Inscriptions of Bihar*, p. 93.

¹⁷ Bautze-Picron, *Art of Eastern India*, p. 36.

¹⁸ Jamuar, 'Rajaona: An Archaeological Study'.

¹⁹ Asher, *The Art of Eastern India, 300–800*, pp. 53–54.

²⁰ Huntington, 'Pala and Sena Schools of Sculpture', pp. 123–24.

²¹ Chakrabarti, *Archaeological Geography of the Ganga Plain*, pp. 160–79.

²² Asher, 'Sculptures from Rajaona, Valgudar and Jaynagar, Evidence for an Urban Centre'.

are found in close proximity to the centres of learning and commerce, where written records and the calendar were especially important' and concluded that this centre was a metropolitan city between eighth and twelfth centuries AD. In his course of survey, Asher has analysed 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 of Valgūdar, Rajaona and Jaynagar, or in other words from the western bank of river Kiul to eastern bank of river Haruhar. While declaring this as an urban centre he did not provide any data pertaining to economic activities on large scale and mercantile character or existence of market at the centre. Available evidences of economic activities, either donations made by family members of oil makers or existence of a *śreni* of honey collectors, could be interpreted as existence of economic class associated and dealing with agrarian communities. In addition, Asher tried to establish *tīrtha* at the fringes of the centre, which is Nongarh, 10 kilometres south of district headquarter. Contrary to his arguments, D.C. Sircar, on the basis of deciphered inscriptions, recognised this centre as a *Devadhamāyam*. Asher has discussed about existence of Śiva and few other Brahmanical sculptures from the village Rajaona. He has not taken note of Cunningham's report about the existence of *stupa* at Jaynagar. Moreover his identification of village Kiul is also not correct, for village Kiul is situated between the villages Kawaia and Rajaona. Cunningham identified *stupas* at villages Kawaia, Kiul and Jaynagar; all these villages are situated on the western bank of river Kiul. Although, Asher agrees that artifacts found from modern villages Valgūdar, Rajaona and Jaynagar are essentially contiguous without apparent or clearly defined boundaries. Antiquarian remains of eastern bank of river Kiul have been ignored by Asher, which have been explored by Cunningham and he suggested existence of a *stupa*, which was excavated by him at village Bridavan near Kiul railway station. Another significant aspect which has not been taken into consideration by any of these modern scholars (Jamuar, Asher and Chakrabarty) is that all the three villages Valgūdar, Chowki and Rajaona are situated on mounds and the people of these villages are migrants. They settled in this region in late nineteenth century or early part of the twentieth century and they chose these mounds to settle to protect themselves from flood. In Valgūdar village one can see clearly three big mounds, the whole Chowki village is settled on a big mound and likewise at Rajaona there are three large mounds over which people of the village have constructed houses (Figure 1).

Recent Work

A comprehensive exploration of the area recently (2005–07) by the author has yielded the existence of a large settlement, starting from Valgūdar, which is north-western limit of the exploration, 6 kilometres east up to the modern village Rampur, between these two villages is village Garhi. Again, 6 kilometres from Rampur towards south is Ghosi-Kundi and in between these two villages is an important railway station of east-central railways Kiul. From Kiul station further 3 kilometres south Ghosi-Kundi is situated. In between Kiul and Ghosi-Kundi is village Bridavan. The southeastern limit of village Ghosi-kundi is village Neri; in the southwestern limit which is



Figure 1. Mound at Valgūdar

Source: Author's own.

5 kilometres in between Ghosi-Kundi and Neri, remains of early habitations have been noticed at hills of Jaynagar, at village Kawaia and Kiul. From Neri, Valgūdar the western limit is around 4 kilometres north. In between Neri and Valgūdar are villages Rajaona and Chowki.

During the course of exploration, two more inscriptions have been collected. One of the inscriptions is on a Buddha statue at Temple Buddha (Figures 2a, 2b and 2c) from Valgūdar. The inscription is in Sanskrit language, can be paleographically dated eleventh–twelfth century AD, that speaks ‘*Ye dharma hetu prabhāva tesam hetum tathāgata thavara tesam vaya nīroddha—*[mutilated] *evam vādi mahāśramaṇa*’ (For the welfare of dharma and Thatāgata, Thavarā has donated the statue in place of Mahāśramaṇa). Size of the statue is 75 centimetres by 45 centimetres; it is in possession of a local villager (R.P. Singh) at Valgūdar.

Hardly 100 metres south of Valgūdar is a lake, which has been mentioned by Huan-t-sang and identified by Cunningham, and on the southern bank of lake stand the earlier identified sites, *stupa* and temples of Rajaona and Chowki. There are no less than 10 big mounds ranging from 30,000 square metres to 5,000 square metres in size and in between there are six large ponds. Unexcavated mounds are lying between Neri and Valgūdar, and remain unprotected and unguarded by any agency of the government. Recent exploration has yielded one image inscription from village Rajaona (Figures 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d & 3e) where inscription is engraved on the pedestal of a headless Buddha



Figure 2a: Temple Buddha Image



(2b)



(2c)

Figures 2b and 2c: Inscriptions on the Pedestal of Temple Buddha Image

Source: Author's own.



(3a)



(3b)



(3c)



(3d)



(3e)

Figures 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d and 3e: Buddha Image Inscriptions from Rajaona

Source: Author's own.

statue made of black stone. Buddha is sitting in *Bhūmisparśa mudrā*, measuring 1.10 metre × 0.78 metre. The inscription is of two lines, paleographically it can be dated to eleventh–twelfth century AD, and the language is Sanskrit. It reads, ‘*De yadhammaya yavara śata Kṛimilā Ādhiṣṭhāna*—[mutilated]’; second line is mutilated but few words are readable which say, ‘*Śrīmad Rāmpāl pravarddamana vijaya rājya sam*’. This speaks about donation at Kṛimilā Ādhiṣṭhāna by Yavara in Ramapāl’s year of victory. Besides this, more than 100 Buddhist as well as Brahmanical sculptures were identified during recent exploration in this village. Stylistic analysis of these sculptures suggests us early medieval dates, and different phases of construction activities.

Therefore, these findings of one image inscription at Valgūdar and another at 100 metres south at Rajaona suggest existence of Buddhist *stupa* or monastery at both the places. There are three large mounds at Valgūdar and few more broken images of Buddha lying around the mounds. These evidences are enough to conclude that area around Valgūdar Brahmanical as well as Buddhist religious centres existed during the early medieval period. The place could have been a political or administrative centre as well.

Recently, the construction of a temple on a mound at Chowki, and road construction work, demolished a mound in Rajaona village from where large number of (19) sculptures of Brahmanical deities were dug out in an unscientific manner, damaging many of them in the process. All the sculptures are made up of black basalt stone and stylistically dateable to a period between seventh century AD and twelfth century AD. From these collected sculptures, a sculpture of Viṣṇu, 1.05 metre × 0.67 metre in size, is worth mentioning. (Figure 4).

The remaining images include Brahma, five-faced *Śiva Liṅga*, Sūrya, Pārvaṭī, Gaṇeśa, Durgā and Kuber with an inscription inscribed in shell letters. One 2.10 metres × 0.45 centimetre broken Ramayana panel probably of tenth–eleventh century also came out from the mound. All the sculptures are stored without any conservation in a storehouse of the temple complex. This temple again is constructed on a large mound from where in March 1977 the huge *Śiva Liṅga* was discovered. During the construction work, which is still going on, more than 100 ornamented pillars of black stone were dug out mercilessly resulting in breaking of several pillars (Figure 5).

Few stone pillars are more than 30 to 90 centimetres thick in diameter and 2 to 3 metres long and are of great artistic value. Again all the pillars are stored in the temple complex. Surprisingly, Archaeological Survey of India has given permission for the construction of the temple and the local District Magistrate is the chairperson of the committee.

Most important finding is of 10 *Āmlakas* of *Śikhara* from adjacent mound (Figure 6) and large number of ornamented pillars. *Āmlakas* of *Śikhara* and large number of ornamented pillars are enough to conclude that at this place there must have been a temple complex. Interestingly iron nails were used for joining the stone pillars (Figure 7).

During recent exploration of the area around 100 sculptures of Buddha and various Brahmanical, that is, Śiva, Pārvaṭī, Kuber with an inscription engraved in shell letters, Durgā and Gaṇeśa, and three panels, two Ramayana panels and one on figures of



Figure 4. Viṣṇu Image from Chowki

Source: Author's own.



Figure 5. Broken Stone Pillars from Chowki

Source: Author's own.



Figure 6. Āmlakas from Chowki and Rajaona

Source: Author's own.



Figure 7. Nails Inserted in the Stone Pillars for Joining Them

Source: Author's own.

soldier on the horse back with spear and one 1.05 metres thick and 2.10 metres long lintel made of same stone have been identified. In this lintel, a socket is there for attaching it with other parts of the structure. Pillar is still lying in the modern temple complex (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Pillar Having Socket for Attaching with the Structure

Source: Author's own.

Another ornamented pillar is shown in Figure 9.

These pillars dug out from the Śiva temple complex have been discussed by Asher²³ and he is inclined to place them in the Gupta period. But the recent findings from this complex give a different picture altogether. The ornamentation available on the pillars and sculptures from this place cannot be dated so early because of antiquarian remains of sixth–seventh century found from neighbourhood site, that is, Apsad where the sculptures and pillars are simple and plain. Stylistically, findings from this complex could not be placed before seventh–eighth century AD. In this cluster particularly in villages Rajaona and Chowki, there are few more sculptures of great artistic value and these sculptures were not described by any of the scholars. Mention should be made of one Mahishāsūrāardinī of thirteenth century AD from Chowki and Gaṇēśa and Revant from Rajaona (Figures 10, 11, 12a and 12b).

²³ Asher, 'Sculptures from Rajaona, Valgudar and Jaynagar, Evidence for an Urban Centre', pp. 227–46.



Figure 9. Ornamented Pillar from Chowki

Source: Author's own.



Figure 10. Mahishāsūramardini from Chowki

Source: Author's own.



Figure 11. Gaṇeśa from Rajaona

Source: Author's own.



Figure 12a. Revant from Rajaona



Figure 12b. Revant Details

Source: Author's own.

The total area where antiquarian remains are lying is around 30 square kilometres and provides evidence of settlement and religious monuments. At 22 places remains of ancient mounds are identified and surveyed in course of exploration. At few places particularly at Valgūdar, Jaynagar and Ghosi-Kundi, brick structures are exposed either due to natural reasons or due to encroachments. Bricks of all places measure the same, that is, $45 \times 25 \times 7.5$ centimetres. We could identify three clusters comprising total of 22 mounds of various sizes on the basis of their distributional pattern. All of them belong to early medieval period.

Cluster 1

The first cluster is in the area between village Neri and Valgūdar. Neri is located 4 kilometres south from Valgūdar. Between these two places villages Rajaona and Chowki are situated.

Cluster 2

The second cluster starts from village Kiul to Jaynagar, and in between is Kawaia. The distance of this cluster is around 2 kilometres southeast from the Cluster 1. In this

cluster Beglar and Cunningham had conducted preliminary survey and published a report and last descriptive reference was submitted by Samaddar.²⁴ From Cluster 2 at Jaynagar, ruins of a fort is reported by Buchanan.²⁵ He identified the existence of a 'court, which was surrounded by chambers of rampart, the walls being 8' in thickness of king Indradyumna', perhaps a local ruler. Beglar also testifies the existence of this ruler in twelfth century.²⁶ The earlier explorers (Beglar, Buchanan and Cunningham) have reported religious centre belonging to Buddhist as well as Brahmanical religion. Here two parallel ridges of rocky hills exist and in between these two is a valley where Cunningham claimed to have found the remains of a town. Here he had noticed two parallel mounds, which according to him were ruins of houses on a long street or bazaar.²⁷ At present, the whole area between the hills has been occupied and a modern village with the same name of Jaynagar is there. The modern village is occupied by the people who have migrated from different places of adjacent region and constructed their houses on the ancient remains of this place. The modern village is not more than 200 years old. Ancient remains like potsherds are strewn over the vacant plots and on both sides of the road which connects this village with the district headquarter.

On both the hills, running east-west, remains of historical monuments still exist. On the top of southern hill, remains of a brick-built *stupa*, and over the hill remains of brick and stone structures can be seen. Cunningham identified these remains as 48 square metre Buddhist monastery. One cave with stairs is there on the southern hill. Remains of a Śiva temple on the northern hill have been reported by the Buchanan.²⁸ Presently the remains of Śiva temple are difficult to identify because there is no antiquity available, neither brick nor sculpture. All around the hill there are numerous tanks, which according to a local tradition are 72, but Cunningham was able to identify only 18.²⁹ Presently, only five tanks could be identified. Few image inscriptions also have been reported from the area. Eye copy of one inscription is published.³⁰ In this inscription, it is inscribed that during the 35th regional year of Gaura king Palapala, a woman from Champa made donation for Śramaṇasaṅghanam. Probably the name of donor woman was Utakben Bhattārika and she had installed a sculpture of Purneśvarī at this place. Another inscription refers to 19th regional year of Madanapāla on a Buddha image.³¹

In the village Kiul, Cunningham noticed a small tank and the foundation of a Buddhist temple with several Buddhist sculptures lying nearby its ruined site. To the west of the village, he noticed another tank called Sansār *pokhar*, which still exists. To the south of this place, hardly 50 metres away, is Kawaia. This place as has been

²⁴ Patil, *The Antiquarian Remains of Bihar*, pp. 185–87.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Cunningham, *Archaeological Survey of India Report*, Vol. III, p. 159.

²⁸ Patil, *The Antiquarian Remains of Bihar*, pp. 185–87.

²⁹ Cunningham, *Archaeological Survey of India Report*, Vol. III, p. 159.

³⁰ Choudhary, *Select Inscriptions of Bihar*, p. 94.

³¹ Cunningham, *Archaeological Survey of India*, Vol. III, p. 125, Plate XLV.

described by Cunningham also is situated on a large and extensive mound, abounding in old bricks and broken images of Buddhist as well as Brahmanical deities.

At present, the whole area is encroached and it has become part of the modern town Lakhisarai. Recent exploration could only identify few sculptures, one stone seat of 1.80×1.20 metre in size and 3.75 centimetres thick, lying in the house in a nearby village, Hasanpur (Figure 13).

One very interesting 1.80×1.50 metre iron gate has been located in the same village (Figure 14), which was brought down from the hills by the local people.



Figure 13. Stone Seat from Hasanpur

Source: Author's own.



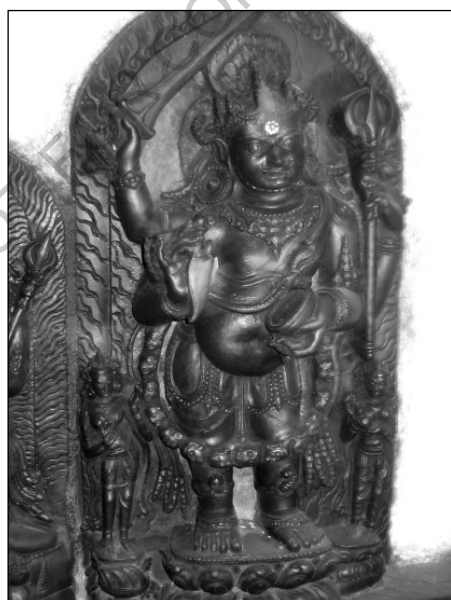
Figure 14. Iron Gate from Hasanpur

Source: Author's own.

Two images of Kālabhairava made of black stone are 10.5×3.75 centimetres in size (Figure 15a and 15b).



(15a)



(15b)

Figure 15a and 15b. Kālabhairava

Source: Author's own.

Four images of female deity of various sizes ranging from 1.20×0.75 metre to 0.75×0.45 metre, sitting on lotus seat and lion, are depicted underneath the image. In all the images, the deity is carrying a child in her lap (Figures 16a, 16b, 16c and 16d).



(Figures 16a, 16b, 16c & 16d continued)

(Figures 16a, 16b, 16c & 16d continued)



(16c)



(16d)

Figures 16a, 16b, 16c and 16d. Female Deity from Kawaia presently kept in a temple 'Badi Math', Kawaia, Lakhisarai

Source: Author's own.

In all the sculptures, the deity is carrying a child in her lap and seated on lotus seat with her legs locked. Figures 16(a) and 16(c) can be identified without any confusion as Durgā. But regarding the identification of Figure 16(b) and 16(d), one identical sculpture of female deity in Dacca museum has been identified by N.K. Bhattasali

as Buddhist deity Hārītī,³² it is pointed out that Hārītī's representations have usually two arms and a child in her lap. Sculptures discovered from this place certainly leave further scope for detailed iconographic study of these sculptures. If we consider Figure 16(d) a sculpture of deity Hārītī, it reminds us the story of a local deity worshipped in Magadh region as Jarā that was later appropriated by Buddhist religion as goddess Hārītī and the popularity of the cult has migrated to China, Japan and Korea. This cult became popular in north and western part of India during the period of Huan-t-sang.³³

Another interesting female deity sculpture found from this cluster in which deity is carrying a child in her left lap and on the right side, Gaṇeśa is depicted. On the pedestal there is an inscription (Figure 17).



Figure 17. Female Deity Punnesvaray from Kawaiya Presently Kept in a Private Collection at Balika Vidyapeeth, Lakhisarai

Source: Author's own.

³² Bhattasali, *Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmanical Sculptures in the Dacca Museum*, pp. 63 ff, Plate XXV.

³³ Banerjea, *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, pp. 380–81.

Interestingly on crown of the deity, South-East Asian influence of art is evident. This influence is found on few more sculptures from this place. Artistically, sculptures from this place are altogether different from the Cluster 1 sculptures. Sculptures from this cluster are more or less similar to the sculptures found in East Bengal and preserved at Dacca museum. Most of the sculptures found from this cluster are examples of fine ornamentation and artistic expression on stone.

Female deity sculpture of Figure 17 has been identified as local deity Purṇeśvarī.³⁴ One identical sculpture has been taken to Victoria and Albert Museum, London. On this sculpture name of the deity, Purṇeśvarī, is mentioned and another is lying here (Balika Vidyapeeth, Lakhisarai); both the sculptures have inscription incised on the pedestal³⁵ and are examples of high quality of artistic activity in this region.

Cluster 3

Third cluster starts roughly 500 metres east on the eastern bank of river Kiul. This cluster begins from modern village Ghosi-Kundi (2 kilometres south from modern railway junction Kiul). In Ghosi-Kundi, again on the hill top, remains of one brick structure exists, which is 110 metres in circumference and exposed. This perhaps is the remains of a *stupa* and the brick size is $37.5 \times 25 \times 7.5$ centimetres. This hill is situated on the western bank of river Kiul. The exposed remains of circular structure at the hill and the size of bricks require a thorough study (Figure 18).

Another important place in this cluster is village Bridavan, which is 1.5 kilometres south of Kiul station and on the eastern bank of river Kiul. On the bank of the river, Cunningham noticed a mound 30 feet high, known as *gadh* or Bridavan. From this place, he refers to a few Buddhist sculptures made of steatite and a *stupa*. An important discovery from this place was the 2,700 seals made of lac. Over these seals Buddhist figures and an eleventh century inscription were inscribed. Cunningham sank a shaft in the centre of this mound and discovered, at a depth of 1.80 metre, the remains of a small chamber, containing a steatite relic casket, shaped like *stupa*, and a headless image of ascetic Buddha, also made of steatite. Inside the casket were found a golden box with bone piece, broken silver box and a green glass bead. He also exposed traces of arched chamber of bricks in the eastern portion of the mound.³⁶ All the three mounds mentioned by Cunningham still exist. Only on one mound, a school has been constructed recently. Few Buddha statues are in the custody of local people.

Another place in this cluster is village Rampur which is roughly at a distance of 4 kilometres from the village Bridavan. In between these two villages, there are several ponds and one lake. Adjacent to the village Rampur is village Garhi, from where a broken inscription inscribed on Buddha image has been found. The present modern

³⁴ Asher, 'An Image at Lakhisarai and its Implications'.

³⁵ *Ibid.* (inscription is mentioned in the article).

³⁶ Cunningham, *Archaeological Survey of India Report*, Vol. III, pp. 156–59.



Figure 18. Remains of Stupa at Ghosi Kundi

Source: Author's own.

village is situated on two big mounds and it is difficult to take measurement of those mounds. One kilometre east of village Garhi is Rampur from where recent survey has yielded few broken images of Buddha and Brahmanical deities. Actually, the village is situated on the three large mounds and it is difficult to take the measurement accurately. But during survey on the basis of landscape assessment three large mounds, two ring wells and images of a few Brahmanical deities now in the private collection have been found. Few pieces of broken stone bricks of early medieval period have been identified from this place. One image of Hanuman and one of Durgā in private collection are among the important findings from this village. Image of Durgā (Figure 19) can be again dated on the basis of style, around seventh–eighth century AD, and stylistically this sculpture is similar to the sculptures from Nālandā region.

In this sculpture, Durgā is seated on the lion and she has eight hands out of which six hands are broken, and it is not clear what she is carrying in those hands. Only two hands, in one sword and in another a *chakra* is clear. The stelae are square and plain without much ornamentation. This again is different from the sculptures from the Cluster 2 and these kinds of sculptures are available in phase one of Cluster 1.

The structural and sculptural remains scattered in the three clusters in an area of 30 square kilometres is much more larger than what Asher has suggested. Towards south



Figure 19. Durgā from Rampur

Source: Author's own.

around 10 kilometres is Nongarh,³⁷ to east again around 10–11 kilometres is Sringirikh³⁸ and around 12 kilometres towards north-east we have evidence of Nandapur *vitti* (sub-divisional headquarter).³⁹ Nandapur was a *vitti* during Gupta period and from here Viṣayapati named Chatramaha has donated land. There is every possibility that this *vitti* was a subdivision under Kṛimilā *viṣaya*, due to their close proximity and contemporary existence. One more significant aspect of this grant which could be taken into account is that in this copper plate inscription, name of the governor or king is not mentioned.⁴⁰ We have another evidence for existence of a local ruler Ranaka Yasahpala.⁴¹ These are enough evidences to conclude an existence of a vibrant cultural and perhaps an administrative centre in the early medieval period.

Certainly, a settlement of this large scale requires a strong material background. This question obviously needs an answer. Only extensive excavation can provide answer to these questions.

³⁷ Cunningham, *Archaeological Survey of India Report*, Vol. III, pp. 160–62.

³⁸ Patil, *The Antiquarian Remains of Bihar*, p. 552.

³⁹ Majumdar, *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXIII, pp. 52–56.

⁴⁰ Sircar, *Aspects of the Cultural History of Ancient Bihar*, pp. 19–21.

⁴¹ Sircar, *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. XXX, 1952–53, pp. 82–84.

The early medieval phase of Indian history has been the subject of intense study and research in recent years. However, in these studies, eastern India, more specifically the Bihar region, has received less attention mainly because, the region, in comparison to the peninsular India of the corresponding period, suffers from a relative paucity of source material. The material remains found in the Lakhisarai region amply indicate that the situation is not that hopeless and it is possible to obtain a more comprehensive picture if the area is studied thoroughly and immediate exploration and excavation are carried out by competent agencies in at least a few important sites. If and when this is done, the region is bound to provide clues to resolve many vital issues in early medieval historiography of eastern India.

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