



Archaeological Landscape of Mayong in the Kalang-Kapili Valley of Assam

RESEARCH PAPER

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ABSTRACT

Mayong in Morigaon district of Assam is known as a land of black magic, witchcraft, sorcery and tantric practices, spiritual healing and indigenous medicinal system since the medieval period. The area is also extremely rich in terms of archaeological remains and sites of historical importance. With an objective of documenting and mapping the archaeological landscape of the region, an extensive field survey was undertaken during 2020–21. This survey has resulted in the discovery of diverse archaeological remains including polished stone tools, early and late medieval rock-cut sculptures and temple ruins, specimens of sculptures belonging to the Pala-Sena period, archaeological mounds with pottery, brick and terracotta architectural pieces, metal objects belonging to Vajrayana religious sect, inscriptions, engravings, mason marks, ancient stone quarrying, battle ground, ramparts, cannons and cannon balls, water tanks, manuscripts, bronze and bell metal sculptures, Vaishnavite *Satras* (monasteries), *Naamghars* (prayer halls) and *Thans* (sacred places). This paper discusses these archaeological remains and their relevance for understanding the ancient cultural development in Mayong and the Kalang-Kapili Valley.

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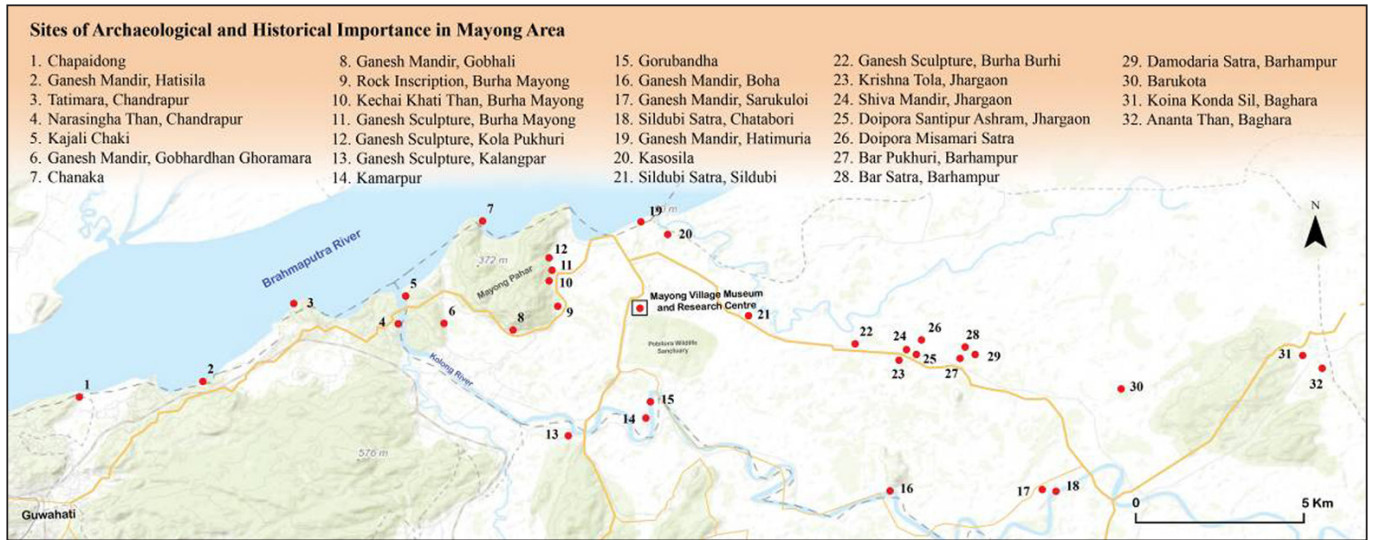
Mayong is well known as a land of black magic, witchcraft, sorcery and tantric practices (Gurung 2020, Kalita 1992, Kumar and Ansari 2020, Nanda 2014, Nath 2010, 2017, Saikia 2015, Saikia 2017). It has been also a centre of spiritual healing and indigenous medicinal system since the medieval period. This mystic land is located in the administrative district of Morigaon in Assam, at a distance of approximately 45 km from the city of Guwahati. The area is bounded by several rivers such as the Brahmaputra in the north, confluence of the Kalang-Kapili-Digaru rivers in the west, Kalang (also spelt as Kolong) river in the south and Manaha lake and Pakaria (also spelt as Pokoria) stream in the east. The area also includes hill ranges like the Mayong Pahar, long stretches of grasslands, thick forests and animal habitats including the wildlife sanctuary of Pobitora, vast alluvial plains of Brahmaputra and its tributaries like Kalang and the Pakaria, wetlands and beels (lakes) and palaeo-river channels. The Kapili (also spelt as Kopili) originating in Meghalaya plateau flows through Karbi Anglong, Dima Hasao, Nagaon and Kamrup joins the Kalang which is the major river system in the area. The Kalang, in fact a spill channel, bifurcates from the Brahmaputra river itself as a distributory stream at Jakhlabandha in Nagaon, joins with the Kapili at Dusuti Mukh. Another river Kiling (known as Umiyam in Meghalaya) also joins this Kalang-Kapili in Dharamtul area. This entire watercourse of Kalang-Kapili rivers is most commonly known as the Kalang river. The Digaru river originating in Meghalaya also merges with the Kalang river near Kajali Chowki.

Historically the Mayong area has been ruled by traditional kings since the 16th century CE which has been authenticated by a historical manuscript, titled *Mayong Rajvangsawali*, maintained by the present traditional king Taranikanta Konwar Singha. The historical account of the region can be found in several other writings which include *Mayongar Itihas* by Lokendra Hazarika (2011) and *A History of Mayong* by Dhanya Ram Roy (2017), based on historical data, folklore, oral traditions and archaeological sources. There are various theories regarding the origin of the word 'Mayong' and the origin and lineage of the traditional kings (Roy 2017). The *Mayong Rajvangsawali* records Soinatva Singha as the first king of Mayong who came to the area from Dimapur-Maibong region and was a descendent of the Dimasa-Kachari kingdom (Roy 2017). The initial capital was established at Chanaka, later shifted to Burha Mayong and subsequently to Raja Mayong. The large amount of pottery deposit at Burha Mayong signifies the importance of the area as remnant of an ancient human settlement.

Systematic survey and documentation of the archaeological sites and remains conducted in Mayong is scarce. Some of the archaeological sites of the region were surveyed and recorded by Barmah and Medhi (2012–13) and the Guwahati Circle of Archaeological Survey of India (IAR 2008–09). The Burha Mayong rock inscription is protected by the Directorate of Archaeology, Govt. of Assam. There is a detailed report on the antiquities from the upstream of the Kapili river focusing the areas of Hojai, Lanka and Nagaon (Nath 1994).

With an objective of documenting and mapping the archaeological landscape of the region, an extensive field survey was conducted as part of the project on "*Restoration, Conservation and Documentation of the Manuscripts, Artefacts and Photographs in The Museum and Research Centre in Mayong and its Vicinity*" during 2020–21. The field survey provided fresh understanding of the known archaeological sites and also yielded several new sites (**Figure 1**). The diverse archaeological remains discovered in the area include polished stone tools, early and late medieval rock-cut sculptures and temple ruins, specimens of sculptures belonging to the Pala-Sena period, archaeological mounds with pottery, brick and terracotta architectural pieces, metal objects belonging to Vajrayana religious sect, inscriptions, engravings, mason marks, ancient stone quarrying, battle ground, ramparts, cannons and cannon balls, water tanks, manuscripts, bronze and bell metal sculptures, Vaishnavite *Satras* (monasteries), *Naamghars* (prayer halls) and *Thans* (sacred place). Several of the individual architectural members and stone sculptures, which once formed a part of some ancient temples in the vicinity, are currently housed within the premises of modern shrines located in the area. The major water tanks or *pukhuris* of the region are Barhampur Bar Pukhuri, Bamuni Pukhuri, Uh Pukhuri, Gorumara Pukhuri (Lakhi Pukhuri) and Kola Pukhuri.

The Mayong Village Museum and Research Centre houses two polished stone tools (**Figure 2**) from Hiloikhunda area of Mayong which indicates Stone Age Neolithic occupation in the area. Neolithic artifacts are commonly found in south Morigaon and Kamrup, mostly in uplands and hilly landscapes (Hazarika 2017, 2019). Moreover, several grinding stones and pestles are recorded which were used for preparation of ingredients or substances by crushing and grinding



them into a fine paste or powder. Mayong region is well known for traditional herbal medicines and these kinds of grinding stones and pestles are in use for ages. So it is difficult to place these artefacts with an exact date; as these might belong to any time of the historical period.

Figure 1 Map showing the locations of major archaeological and historical sites of Mayong and its adjacent area.



Figure 2 Neolithic tools from Mayong.

In the course of this systematic field survey conducted in and around Mayong, nearly three dozen significant archaeological and historical sites have been identified for mapping and detailed investigation. Mapping of the sites resulted in visualising different patterns of site locations and ancient cultural landscape (*Figure 1*). Whereas concentration of rock-cut images has been mostly observed in the Mayong Pahar area, habitational deposits have mostly been found on the alluvial banks of the Brahmaputra and the Kalang rivers, particularly on the banks of palaeo-river channels (present day *beels*). Connecting the dots of these archaeological sites could probably suggest a kind of ancient route linking the river Brahmaputra with the fertile banks of the Kalang, Kapili, and the Pakaria rivers in the Morigaon-Nagaon area. Below are discussed the major localities with archaeological and historical remains.

CHAPAIIDONG (26°12'49.18"N, 91°50'41.15"E)

Chapaidong, located close to Bonda in Guwahati, is a rocky hillock situated on the bank of the Brahmaputra. It is an important granitic stone quarry site with extensive evidence of ancient stone extraction. Whereas quarrying (*Figure 3*) is evident in the entire hill range, more than 35 split rock-boulders with wedge marks have been observed on the southern side of the hill. Along with wedge marks, various mason marks have also been recorded at the site (*Figure 4*). However,

the absence of any further artistic work on the split rock boulders suggests that the work of sculpting and decorating the rock pieces for using as architectural members was not performed at the site. The rock pieces were probably transported to other ancient stone temple sites where these were used for making sculptures and architectural members of various sizes. The extensive early medieval temple sites spread across the Brahmaputra river valley, points towards the requirement of massive stone quarrying in the past (Sanathana and Hazarika 2019a).



Figure 3 Evidences of ancient stone quarrying and wedge marks in Chapaidong area near Bonda.



Figure 4 Mason marks in Chapaidong area near Bonda.

A rock-cut Ganesha image observed on the eastern slope of the hill is reinstated with cement and red colour. This makes it difficult to identify the style and age of the sculpture. Though potsherds are few in numbers in the vicinity, a few pieces of ring-wells (**Figure 5**) have been recovered from the site.



Figure 5 Fragments of terracotta ring well found in Chapaidong area near Bonda.

GANESH MANDIR, HATISILA (26°13'08.82"N, 91°53'16.66"E)

The Hatisila Ganesh *Mandir* is located on the left side of the Guwahati-Mayong road at Chandrapur. Due to its scenic location on the bank of Brahmaputra and adjoining rocky hillocks, it has become a popular picnic spot in the region. The entrance to the temple of Lord Ganesh, located in a natural cave or rock-shelter, resembles the trunk of an elephant. Thus, the cave is worshipped as Hatisila (*Hati* meaning elephant and *Sila* meaning rock) Ganesh. However, the images worshipped inside the cave are of recent times. The granitic rocks at the site of the temple have been extensively quarried. Wedge marks similar to the ones observed at Chapaidong and Rajaduar area of North Guwahati (Sanathana and Hazarika 2019a), created during the process of manual quarrying can be seen on the rock boulders. Due to weathering, it has not been possible to clearly identify a rectangular engraving or petroglyph with several lines at the site.

TATIMARA, CHANDRAPUR (26°14'46.83"N, 91°55'11.16"E)

An engraving of an eight spoked wheel has been observed on the hill ridge on the bank of the Brahmaputra at Tatimara, in the Chandrapur circle of the Kamrup (Metro) district. The wheel (*Figure 6*) is shown on a pedestal and can be compared to the Buddhist Dharmachakra. Since the engraved stone is located on the river section which remains underwater during the rainy season, the engraving is getting eroded caused by the strong water current. Interestingly, a similar engraving of a wheel has also been observed in the Kasosila area of Mayong.



Figure 6 Engraving of *Dharmachakra* in Tatimara on the bank of Brahmaputra.

NARASINGHA THAN, CHANDRAPUR (26°14'21.30"N, 91°57'22.59"E)

Narasimha *than* is located on the right side of the Guwahati-Mayong road, close to Kajali, before reaching the bridge on the river Kalang. The shrine has several sculptures, which have been cemented together on a platform and housed in an enclosure. The local community worships these images as the Narasimha *avatar* of Lord Vishnu. According to local popular belief, the sculptures had been brought from the Kajali Chowki Narasimha *than*. However, none of the iconographical features of these images indicate the attributes of Narasimha. The sculptures and the architectural members belong to the early and late medieval period. The broken *anga shikhara* belongs to the early medieval period and is identical to the ones that can be seen at the other early medieval temple sites of Assam like the Nilachal Hill, Manikarneshwar (Sanathana and Hazarika 2019a), Umananda, and Madan Kamadev. The flying nymph, restored by using cement can be of early medieval period. Two well decorated horse like sculptures have been placed vertically on the cement platform. Stylistically, these images appear to be of the late medieval period. Another sculptural piece showing a hand in *abhayamudra* is also a part of this grouping. Based on the stiffness in the depiction, it can be dated to the late medieval period.

KAJALI CHOWKI (26°14'56.34"N, 91°57'32.02"E)

Kajali Chowki or Kajali Chaki is located at the confluence of the rivers Kalang-Kapili and Digaru with the Brahmaputra. As per the local legends, the Ahom King, Swargadeo Pratap Singha, constructed several ramparts in this locality in 1617 CE and the fortified site was used as a military outpost by the Ahoms during their battle against Mughals in 1771 (Bora 2021). As per the reports of the Directorate of Archaeology, Govt. of Assam, the site has yielded evidence of fortification in terms of the existence of the remnants of dykes, ramparts and ditches (<https://archaeology.assam.gov.in>, accessed on 20 December 2020). During 2010, hundreds of cannon balls (**Figure 7**) were discovered in a section of the mound located in close proximity to the confluence. Presently, the mound is a State Protected Monument under the Directorate of Archaeology, Govt. of Assam. Though the site can largely be datable to the late medieval period, some Pre-Ahom kaolin potsherd, commonly known as Ambari ware in the Brahmaputra valley, has been observed in the road cutting sections. The type of the pottery and the decorative pattern observed at Kajali Chowki, are identical to the Ambari variety of pottery found in Guwahati city (Hazarika et al. 2017, Hazarika et al. 2020, Hazarika et al. 2022). Additionally, it has been observed that private collections of cannon balls and manuscripts are in possession of a large number of households in Kajali village. Another locality, Hiloikhunda is also known for the discovery of cannon balls and a place for making *hilo* (cannon) in the past. Assam in the medieval period is known for warfare with cannons and gun powder is believed to be produced locally with traditional method (Hazarika and Sharma 2016).



Figure 7 Cannon balls from Kajali Chowki, housed at the Mayong Village Museum and Research Centre.

GANESH MANDIR, GOBARDHAN GHORAMARA (26°14'21.84"N, 91°58'20.38"E)

The Gobardhan hill is located in the Chandrapur block in West Mayong. In the Ghoramara area, situated on the eastern side of the Gobardhan hill, the image of a rock-cut Ganesha (**Figure 8**) can be observed shown sitting in *ardhaparyankana*, with his left leg folded at the hip, touching the thigh of the right leg which is hanging and the heels slightly raised above the pedestal. The left upper hand is shown holding the *parasu* (axe), while the right upper hand is holding the *ankusha* (goad). The right lower hand is placed on the right thigh and the left lower hand is holding the *modhak* (sweet dish). The trunk of Ganesha is shown munching the *modhak*. Iconographically the image is similar to the Ganesha images found in Ghobhali and Chanaka in Mayong; however, stylistically this Ganesha can be dated to the late medieval period. A temple is constructed at the site and the image, painted with red colour, is worshiped by the villagers.

CHANAKA (26°16'30.49"N, 91°59'08.78"E)

Chanaka is a village situated on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra, which can be approached through a scenic road along the banks of the river. The village is approximately 7 km from Mayong Village Museum and Research Centre and is surrounded by rocky hills on its southern sides. Early medieval temple remains such as *amalakas* and decorated architectural



Figure 8 Rock-cut Ganesha sculpture, Ganesha Mandir, Gobardhan Ghoramara.

members can be observed lying scattered in the premises of several villagers at Chanaka. The major archaeological evidences are spread in two localities.

Locality 1: The Locality 1 contains the evidence of early medieval period, i.e. three rock-cut sculptures (**Figure 9**) and some temple architectural remains. These are situated on the foothill, just on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra. The rock-cut images include a sculpture of Uma-Maheshwar and two of Ganesha. A shrine has been built around the Uma-Maheshwar image. Stylistically the image is similar to the one found at the *Kechai Khaiti Than* and belongs to the East Indian School of Medieval Art, i.e. Pala style. A Ganesha sculpture has been sculpted very close to the boulder containing the Uma-Maheshwar image. However, this image is damaged and only the outline is visible. Another Ganesha image has been sculpted on a large boulder facing the Uma-Maheshwar sculpture. Stylistically these Ganesha images can be dated to the early medieval period.



Figure 9 Rock-cut sculpture of Uma-Maheshwar and Ganesha at Chanaka.

Locality 2: The second location which contains a rock-cut Ganesha (**Figure 9**) of the late medieval period along with a few potsherds and a couple of miniature sacrificial pots, is situated at a distance of nearly 200 m from the first locality.

The site of Chanaka has also yielded a good number of potteries. An interesting discovery from the site is a replica of a 'Nangol' (plough) which appears to be made for ritualistic or ceremonial

purpose (Figure 10). It must have been made as a votive object for better agricultural return. Along with the plough, the 'Juwoli', the beam or the shaft placed over the neck of the bulls for pairing during ploughing has also been found. Plough is considered to be the attribute of Balarama or Balabadhra, the elder brother of Krishna and deity associated with agriculture. Ancient Assam has a connection with Balarama as the first inscription of Assam, the Umachal rock inscription states the creation of rock cut temple for Balaram. Hence, this votive plough might be linked with a Balarama cult in the past.



Figure 10 Votive Nangol and Juwoli made of iron from Chanaka.

GANESH MANDIR, GOBHALI (26°14'13.43"N, 91°59'47.30"E)

This site with a rock-cut image of Ganesha (Figure 11) is located on the foothill of the Mayong Pahar by the road side, on the left side of the Guwahati-Mayong road. The site is situated close to the stone inscription at Burha Mayong (Burha meaning old), the earliest capital of the kingdom of Mayong and also to the Kechai Khaiti Than. A small stream flows in its vicinity which is used



Figure 11 Rock-cut sculpture of Ganesha, Gobhali.

by the villagers for various purposes. A couple of years back, a shrine had been constructed around the image. There exists a popular belief among the local population that whenever a villager loses cattle, the lost cattle can be found immediately if *puja* is offered at the shrine (Roy 2017). Stylistically this Ganesha can be dated to the early medieval period.

ROCK INSCRIPTION, BURHA MAYONG (26°14'43.43"N, 92°00'43.32"E)

This is a protected monument by the Directorate of Archaeology, Government of Assam, located on the left of the Guwahati-Mayong road. The rock inscription appears to be containing three inscriptions in a series, each measuring 85 × 47 cm, 40 × 112 cm and 270 × 30 cm respectively. It has six lines on the left, fifteen lines in the middle and five lines on the right, all placed horizontally. The inscription which is one of the longest inscriptions discovered in the region so far, measures 395 cm in length and 112 cm in breadth. The contents of the inscriptions are yet to be deciphered and are probably datable to the medieval period.

Estampage (*Figure 12*) has been taken on the inscription by the team with due permissions from the Directorate of Archaeology and deciphering the writing is the process. However, due to erosion in the rock surface and the shallow nature of the engraved letters, many of the words are not legible. Surface scattering of potsherds are visible in and around the site.



Figure 12 Obtaining estampage at rock inscription of Burha Mayong.

KECHAI KHAITI THAN, BURHA MAYONG (26°15'15.25"N, 92°00'32.40"E)

The Kechai Khaiti *Than* at Burha Mayong, is a well-known shrine in the Mayong area. It is located at the foot of the Mayong Pahar, on the left side of the Guwahati-Mayong road. The site contains early medieval rock-cut sculptures of Uma-Maheshwar and Ganesha (*Figure 13*) and a late medieval shrine dedicated to goddess Kali. There are twelve sacrificial seats placed in the *Than*, believed to be in honour of the twelve deities of the local Karbi community. As per local legends, during medieval period human sacrifice was in vogue during the time of the *Pujas* (Roy 2017). In addition to humans, cocks, ducks, pigeons and goats were also sacrificed in Kechai Khaiti *Than*. Seven iron swords used during sacrifice and a shield made of animal skin, have been preserved in this shrine. The names of these seven swords are: (i) Narabali, (ii) Ranthali, (ii) Dowar-dowari, (iv) Rajphuri, (v) Saharphuri, (vi) Shel Konwar, (vii) Bhi Konwar and (viii) Phul Konwar (Roy 2017). In the vicinity of the *Than*, potsherds have been observed on the surface, road cutting section, and in agricultural fields. A small stream flows next to the shrine.

The rock-cut image of Uma-Maheshwar or Hara-Gauri is sculpted on a granitic rock boulder. Here, Shiva and Parvati are shown in *digambara* (naked) form, in an embracing posture. Stylistically the image is of East Indian School of Medieval Art, i.e. Pala style. The four handed Ganesha is shown sitting in the *ardhaparyankasana* (*Maharajalilasana*) position and stylistically this Ganesha can be dated to the early medieval period just like the Uma-Maheshwar image of the Kechai Khaiti *Than*.



Figure 13 Rock-cut Images of Uma-Maheshwar and Ganesha, Kechai Khaiti Than, Burha Mayong.

GANESHA SCULPTURE, BURHA MAYONG (26°15'28.55"N, 92°00'36.13"E)

A late medieval Ganesha image (*Figure 14*) has been recorded at Burha Mayong. This image is sculpted on a rock boulder surrounded by thick vegetation, in the midst of a paddy field near the Mayong Pahar. Iconographically and stylistically the image is comparable to the image at Gobhardhan-Ghoramara. Here Ganesha is shown holding a *pasha* on the right upper hand and a *parasu* on the upper left hand. He is seen holding a rosary and a bowl of *modhak* in his lower right and left hands respectively. Ganesha's mount, Mushika, has been depicted at the bottom.

GANESHA SCULPTURE, KOLA PUKHURI (26°15'42.99"N, 92°00'32.57"E)

An image of Ganesha (*Figure 14*) in *uttanapada bhangi* (squatting posture) has been located in the Kola Pukhuri area of Burha Mayong, at the foot of the Mayong Pahar. The presence of an image of Ganesha in *uttanapada* posture provides us an important clue about the prevalence of tantric practices in the region during the late medieval period. The outline of a rock-cut Shivalinga (*Figure 14*) has also been observed beside the Ganesha image.

Adjacent to the rock-cut images, two archaeological mounds with large deposits of pottery and terracotta objects, stretching from the slope of the hill for nearly 300 m to the south have been recorded. Unfortunately, the entire landscape has been heavily altered and damage has been caused to the mounds. Most parts of the mounds have been flattened by the villagers for cultivation of paddy or for digging ponds for fish farming. Currently, the remnants of the archaeological deposits can only be observed in sections and courtyards of several households located on the elevated areas of the hill slopes. A freshly cut section of the mound yielded a deposit (*Figure 15*) of nearly 40 cm thick pottery, spread horizontally for about 15 m towards the eastern side of the rock-cut image of Ganesha. Another section (*Figure 16*) contained a pottery deposit of 80 cm height. The pottery types observed in these sections are Red ware and Kaolin ware. Potsherds with beater and cord marks have also been documented in these sections. Several terracotta dabbers used for making pottery are recorded at the site. At certain locations, the recorded height of the mound was almost 120 cm, suggesting a prolonged period of human habitation.



Figure 14 Rock-cut Ganesh sculptures of Burha Mayong and Kola Pukhuri and Shivalinga from Kola Pukhuri.



Figure 15 Pottery deposit in a section of an archaeological mound, Kola Pukhuri.



Figure 16 Pottery deposit in a section of an archaeological mound, Kola Pukhuri.

GANESH SCULPTURE, KALANGPAR (26°12'00.44"N, 92°00'56.77"E)

A Ganesha sculpture has also been located at Kalangpar in the Hahara area lying on the southern bank of the Kalang river. The image has been sculpted on a large boulder close to the hill slope, situated in the vicinity of Kalangpar Sub Health Centre. Since the lower portion of the image has been lost due to erosion, the attributes are not clear. However an outline of the trident and a *pasa* can be seen in the upper hands. The Ganesha image is shown seated in *Maharajalilasana* posture, with multiple subsidiary deities sculpted around the deity. These deities are not identifiable due to erosion. Two rock-cut canvases, devoid of any sculptural representation, are also noticeable on a boulder adjacent to the Ganesha image (*Figure 17*).



Figure 17 Rock-cut sculpture of Ganesha and rock-cut canvas, Kalangpar.

KAMARPUR (26°12'27.43"N, 92°02'34.99"E)

An archaeological mound, measuring nearly 3 m in height and spreading over 20 sq m, can be seen in the Kamarpur locality near Gorubandha village in Mayong. Presently a Vaishnavite *Naamghar* and a Kali temple have been constructed on the mound. Pottery of simple Red ware have been frequently unearthed in the vicinity while ploughing the fields and carrying on other domestic activities.

GORUBANDHA (26°12'37.50"N, 92°02'39.03"E)

Gorubandha lies adjacent to Kamarpur on the bank of the Kalang. At this place pottery can not only be observed in the river sections, river bed and the sections and slopes of the ponds, but also on the surface (**Figure 18**). Two localities have been identified in the village where in-situ pottery deposits are apparent. A linear horizontal pottery deposit, approximately 1 m in depth from the surface, has been observed all along the section of the Kalang river. A deposit of pottery comprising of plain Red ware and Kaolin ware has been recorded from a private pond in the Gorubandha village from where a few samples have been collected for the Mayong Museum and Research Centre. A few unique circular bricks and terracotta dabbers for making pottery have also been recorded in the deposit.



Figure 18 Pottery deposit at Kalang River Section and in section of a water tank, Gorubandha.

DHAMKHUNDA MALOUBASTI (26°12'33"N, 92°00'38"E)

Dhamkhunda is located in Pachim Mayong area, ahead of Kamarpur. Fragments of some decorated ritualistic objects acquired from Dhamkhunda Maloubasti area are now housed at the Mayong Village Museum (**Figure 19**). These can be identified as ritualistic objects belonging to Vajrayana sect of Mahayana Buddhism. The objects are intricately designed and must be a part of a ritualistic altar. A Vajrayana Buddhist deity (probably *Kalabhairava* in dancing posture) has been depicted at the centre of the object.



Figure 19 Metal ritualistic objects from Dhamkhunda Maloubasti.

GANESH MANDIR, BOHA (26°10'51.12"N, 92°07'41.80"E)

Boha or Baha is one of the important and popular pilgrimage centres of Assam. The site is known for its colossal image of a monolithic rock-cut Ganesha (*Figure 20*) which is usually referred to as the biggest Ganesha image in Assam. This sculpture of Ganesha is nearly 10.5 feet in height. The site is located on the bank of the river Kalang.



Figure 20 Colossal rock-cut Ganesha image, Ganesh Mandir, Boha.

Unlike other Ganesha sculptures from the Mayong area, the deity is shown with a *jatamukuta* and is shown sitting in *ardhaparyankasana* (*Maharajalilasana*) posture. The Ganesha, depicted with large ears (*Chamara karna*), is shown wearing ear rings. The deity is shown in *ekdanta* form where the image of one of his tusks is broken. While Ganesha's upper right hand is in *abhaymudra* and the upper left hand is holding a *parasu* (axe), his lower right hand is placed on the right knee holding a rosary and his lower left hand is holding a *modhak* (sweet dish). The trunk of Ganesha is shown munching the *modhak*. Ganesha is also shown wearing a snake (*naga*) as his sacred thread. A *Mooshika* is depicted just below the right foot of the deity. This sculpture is different from the other Ganesha sculptures recorded in Mayong and may be stylistically dated to the early medieval period. A similar colossal Ganesha sculpture can also be seen in Dirgheswari in North Guwahati. Interestingly there are two colossal rock-cut images of Ganesha at the site of Basundhari than in Nagaon resembling the Boha image stylistically as well as artistically.

GANESH MANDIR, SARUKULOI (26°10'51.82"N, 92°11'01.91"E)

Two sculptures (*Figure 21*) have been documented at Sarukuloi, an area in the vicinity of Chatabori, in the premises of the Ganesh Mandir. The first sculpture is that of a four-handed Ganesha shown sitting in *savyalalitasana* posture on a lotus, holding a *parasu* (axe) on the upper right hand and an *ankusha* (bull-hook or elephant goad) on the upper left hand. However, both the lower hands are broken. The *Keertimukha*, along with two lotus flowers, can be seen at the top of this image, while two female attendants are seen on either side of it. Artistically this image appears to be of the Pre-Ahom period. Based on the posture, the second sculpture appears to be that of *Andhakasuravadhamurti* of Shiva. But due to the erosion and red colour applied to the image, it is difficult to identify the icons and attributes. Here Shiva is shown with four hands, amongst which one hand holds a trident pinning the body of Andhakasur. A panel of such *Andhakasuravadhamurti* can also be seen in the DouL Gobinda temple at North Guwahati (Sanathana and Hazarika 2019a).



Figure 21 Sculptures of *Andhakasuravadhamurti* of Shiva and Ganesha, Ganesh Mandir, Sarukuloi.

SILDUBI SATRA, CHATABORI (26°10'50.52"N, 92°11'10.82"E)

There are two *satras* in the Mayong region, both having an identical name, Sildubi. While one of these *satras* is located at Sildubi village near Raja Mayong, the other is located in the Chatabori village. The *satra* at Chatabori was established in 1925 by Satradhikhar Bhairav Chandra Goswami and named as the *Mayong Shildubi Satra*. This *satra* houses several architectural members of early medieval temple remains (*Figure 22*), the major ones being pieces of *amalaka*, *Brahmakamala* or the *Vishwakamala*, generally depicted on the ceiling of the sanctum. In addition to this, the *satra* also houses the bust of Vishnu (Surya?), and an architectural member containing a series of flying nymphs (*vidhyadharas*).

A few brass images of Vasudeva, Krishna, Lakshmi, Saraswati and a Salagram, worshipped as Janardana, are kept in the *Naamghar Manikut* (sanctum). A number of brass *sarais* and a wooden palanquin can also be seen in the *satra*.



Figure 22 Bust of a deity (Vishnu/Surya), cemented on a *Brahmakamala* and *Vidhyadharas* (flying nymphs) at Sildubi *Satra*, Chatabori.

GANESH MANDIR, HATIMURIA (26°16'29.47"N, 92°02'28.08"E)

The Hatimuria Ganesh temple is located on a hillock on the bank of the Brahmaputra, on the left of the narrow road leading to Kasosila. Evidences of pottery, rock-cut images and early medieval temple ruins, strongly points to the existence of early medieval settlement in the area. A well-executed, four-armed, rock-cut image of Ganesha (**Figure 23**) is iconographically similar to other Ganesha images found across the Mayong region. Here the four handed Ganesha is shown sitting in *Ardhaparyankasana* posture, where his left leg is folded at the hip, touching the thigh of the right leg which is hanging and the heels slightly raised above the pedestal. This posture is also known as *Maharajalilasana*. Stylistically this Ganesha can be dated to the early medieval period.

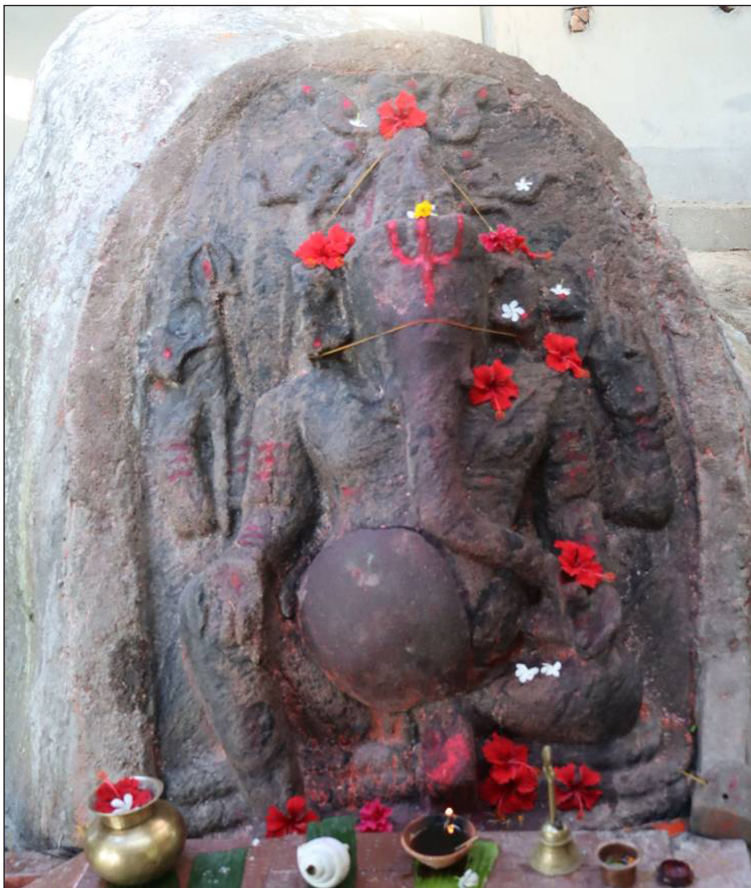


Figure 23 Rock-cut Ganesha sculpture, Ganesh Mandir, Hatimuria.

It is difficult to identify the deity of another rock-cut image, vandalised by orange paints and vermilion being poured on it. However, on the basis of the outline near the legs it may be presumed that the image is that of Ganesha, seated in the *Ardhaparyankasana* posture. Other notable findings from the site include an architectural member with linear as well as geometric designs and the sculpture of a *Bharavahak* (weight bearer) (**Figure 24**). Similar images of weight bearers have also been observed in the Kamakhya temple complex in Guwahati.



Figure 24 Rock-cut Ganesha sculpture, image of *Bharavahak* (weight bearer) and an architectural member with linear and geometrical design at Ganesh Mandir, Hatimuria.

KASOSILA (26°16'13.83"N, 92° 03'1.95"E)

Kasosila or Kachashila is located on a hillock on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra river, at its point of confluence with the Pakaria river. Based on the presence of two rock-cut images (*Figure 25*) of Uma-Maheshwar, it can be considered as one of the important Shaivite centres of the region. The Uma-Maheshwar or the Hara-Gauri images found in Kasosila have been subjected to severe erosion. These images appear to be an attempt to replicate the images at Chanaka and Kechai Khaiti *Than* as the artistic features and sculpted depth of these images do not match the other images of the region. According to the Mayong Rajavamsavali, these images were sculpted during the reign of King Saracha Chandra Singha (Roy 2017: 108). An engraved motif of a lotus inside a circular design, usually observed on the ceiling of the sanctum-sanctorum in the early medieval temples of Assam, can also be seen at the site. Several of the terracotta sculptures, decorated bricks and a large number of pottery pieces were collected by Lokendra Hazarika and displayed in the Mayong Village Museum and Research Centre.

One interesting find from the site is a broken terracotta sculpture of *Vidhyadhara* (flying nymph) of which only the bust portion of the image is surviving. The nymph is shown wearing a cap, *karna kundalas* (ear rings), necklace with tortoise pendent and a *kamarabanda* (belt). Similar *Vidhyadhara* images were popular during the Gupta period. Another significant find from the site is a terracotta sculpture of a Shivagana in skeleton form shown in dancing posture. The image is made with moulding method. Similar terracotta sculpture is displayed in Assam State Museum at Guwahati. The image must be of sage Bhringi, an important member of Shivagana. Typically, Bhringi is shown with three legs and skeleton like body. However, the third leg is not shown here. As per the Puranic accounts, Bhringi is given great importance during the Shiva *tandava* dance, as he possesses the power to instruct Shiva to start or stop the *tandava* dance. His importance is explained by Adi Shankaracharya, in the 51st stanza of his work 'Shivananda Lahari' which says that '*Bhringhicha natanothkatah Karamadi-grahee sphuran Madhava*' explaining that Shiva obeys the orders of Bhringi during the *Tandava* dances.

Moreover, the site has yielded several decorated and undecorated bricks which must have been a part of a brick temple existed in the region (*Figure 26*). The decorated ones include flower petals like design, semi-circular flower motif with five petals, flower buds, combination of creepers and a flower. Some of the bricks are hollow inside.

Mention may be made of an intact ancient decorative brick (*Figure 27*) in which a series of triangular pattern can be observed on the borders where as a stupa like motif is depicted at the centre. The central motif appears to be containing the *medhi*, floral *anda* and *harmika* with *chatra* on the top.



Figure 25 Rock-cut images of Uma-Maheshwar and an engraving of lotus motif inside a circular design at Kasosila, Mayong.



Figure 26 Terracotta sculptures from Kasosila.



Figure 27 Decorated Terracotta bricks from Kasosila.

By the riverside, on the left of the road leading to Kasosila from Hatimuria, close to the Kali Mandir, lies a boulder containing a few engravings along with a single line inscription (Figure 28). The engravings include a *Dharmachakra* with eight spokes shown on a lotus pedestal, a *trishul* with an axe attached to it, a mace and a *vajra*. In and around the locality potsherds can be noticed lying scattered on the surface.



Figure 28 A boulder containing the engravings and the Estampages of the engravings of (A) Mace, (B) *Dharmachakra*, (C) *Trishula*, (D) *Vajra* and (E) an Inscription, Kasosila, Mayong.

SILDUBI SATRA, SILDUBI (26°14'31.44"N, 92° 4'43.56"E)

As per local legends, the Sildubi Satra was founded in Saka 1663 (1741 CE) by Shiromonideva, the grandson of Damodardeva, a Vaishnavite saint. Several pieces of architectural members (Figure 29) belonging to an early medieval temple have been observed in the premise of the *satra*. Amalakas, ceiling parts with *Brahmakamala* depiction, decorated as well as non decorative members can be seen in the *satra* along with some bronze images and *salagrama*.



Figure 29 Early medieval temple remains, Sildubi Satra, Sildubi.

GANESH SCULPTURE, BURHA BURHI (26°13'56.02"N, 92°06'57.77"E)

A vandalised rock-cut Ganesha sculpture can be noticed at Burha Burhi hillock, situated on the Mayong-Morigaon road. Based on the outline of the observable attributes of the surviving image, the image may be considered to be of early medieval period. Multiple tiny sockets on the top and the slopes of the boulder may have been used for constructing a superstructure over the image with perishable materials like bamboo. Potsherds can be seen on the surface, in and around the village.

SHIVA MANDIR, JHARGAON (26°13'45.77"N, 92°08'06.30"E)

Jhargaon, a daily market place, is situated on the Mayong-Morigaon road. The recently built Shiva Mandir at Jhargaon has yielded evidences of the ruins of an early medieval temple. Architectural members and dressed stones, once a part of an early medieval temple, can be seen scattered around the temple compound. Steps leading to an adjacent wetland or a *beel* have been constructed by placing the ruins of an early medieval temple. The sanctum of the recently built temple which contains a few architectural members like *amalaka*, *yonipitha*, pillar base, fragments of the temple plinth and columns from the ruins of the ancient temple, have now become objects of worship for the local community. Evidences of pottery have been observed in a few sections and on the surface (*Figure 30*).



Figure 30 Architectural members of an early medieval temple, used as steps at Jhargaon Shiva temple and section containing pottery.

KRISHNA TOLA, JHARGAON (26°13'35.82"N, 92°07'57.82"E)

A few pieces of architectural members and potsherds have been recorded in Krishna Tola, south of the Shiva temple at Jhargaon. Three pieces of early medieval temple ruins placed one above the other, are worshipped by the locals. Due to the vermilion applied to these pieces, it has become difficult to trace the designs sculpted on them. Additionally, pottery remains have also been observed at this place in the road cuttings, as well as on the surface and the slopes of the *beel* or water bodies.

DOIPORA SANTIPUR ASHRAM (26°13'42.44"N, 92°08'07.48"E)

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The Ashram or hermitage at Doipara was established by Sri Sri Mahada Nanda Goswami, also known as Mahada Gosain. He was a freedom fighter, a social-cultural activist, a writer and the former *Satradhikar* of the Doipora *satra*. During India's freedom struggle against the British, Sri Sri Mahada Nanda Goswami was involved in a case famous for the derailment of a train at the Panikhaitee Rail Station. A few architectural members like an *anga-shikhara*, *amalaka*, and a circular *yonipitha* have been observed in the Ashram compound, located in close proximity to the Shiva temple at Jhargaon. These architectural pieces probably belong to the early medieval temple located in the compound of the Shiva temple at Jhargaon which contains a large concentration of architectural ruins. A few of these architectural members have been placed under a tree and worshipped. A terracotta lamp stand found at the Ashram has been preserved in the Mayong Museum and Research Centre. Old trees planted by Mahada Gosain are an attraction to the Ashram. Pottery is visible on the surface.

DOIPORA MISAMARI SATRA (26°13'43.20"N, 92°08'25.39"E)

The Doipora Misamari *Satra* is located further ahead of the Jhargaon Shiva temple on the left of Mayong-Morigaon road. Several architectural members and sculptures of early medieval temple ruins have been noticed in the vicinity of the Doipora Misamari *Satra*. Amongst these members, a lintel with a depiction of Ganesha on the *lalatabimba* or the central portion of the lintel, a section of ceiling belonging to the early medieval temple sanctum with a depiction of *BrahmakamalaI* or a motif of an inverted lotus and an architectural piece containing the portrayal of *vidhyadharas* or flying nymphs, have been housed in a cemented platform constructed in the *Satra*.

Near Doipora Misamari *Satra*, a fragment of elephant band, usually depicted on the plinth of early medieval temples along with *vidhyadhara* images, have been observed in a house. Additionally, a fragment of a Vishnu sculpture belonging to the Pala-Sena School of Art is in possession of an individual named Sri Nipun Goswami. The lower portion of the left side of the image which is intact depicts a *Gajasimha* or a stylised lion mounted on an elephant along with Goddess Saraswati (*Figure 31*).



Figure 31 Depiction of elephant, early medieval temple corner stone and a fragment of a Vishnu image in which the image of Saraswati is only remaining, found in the vicinity of Doipora Misamari *Satra*.

BARHAMPUR BAR PUKHURI (26°13'40.44"N, 92°09'12.78"E)

Barhampur village is located towards the east of the Shiva temple at Jhargaon and is located on the left of the Mayong–Morigaon road. This village is dotted with places of historical importance such as the Bar Pukhuri, the Bar *Satra* and the Damodaria *Satra*. Numerous dressed, as well as undressed architectural members, of the early medieval temples can be seen lying in the Bar Pukhuri, or a large pond. These pieces are being used for bathing and washing clothes in several

locations around the pond. A section of lintel with a Garuda on the *lalatabimba* or the central portion of the lintel and a *peeth* or a plinth with a socket having a deity fixed to it are found on the banks of the pond (*Figure 32*).



Figure 32 Door lintel and sculpture *pitha* (plinth) and depiction of Garuda on the *lalatabimba* of door lintel, Barhampur Barpukhuri door lintel with the depiction of five divinities, Barhampur Bar Satra.

BARHAMPUR BAR SATRA (26°13'47.46"N, 92°09'13.84"E)

A unique piece of early medieval door lintel (*Figure 32*) with the depiction of five divinities has been observed in the vicinity of the *Satra*. Unfortunately, the image has undergone severe erosion and the deities are unidentifiable. These may have been the portrayal of the *Panchayatana* system of *puja* (worship) popularised by Adi Shankara, which consists of the worship of five deities like Shiva, Vishnu, Devi, Surya and an *ishta-devata* (cherished divinity) such as Kartikeya or Ganesh. The other architectural pieces housed at the *Satra* are also in a dilapidated condition.

BARHAMPUR DAMODARIA SATRA (26°13'42.56"N, 92°09'16.51"E)

The Damodaria *Satra* belongs to the Damodaria tradition of the Vaishnavite sect of Assam. According to the date engraved on its wooden roof (15th century CE); it is possibly one of the earliest *Satras* of Assam. Many ancient manuscripts have been preserved in the *Satra* and stored in wooden boxes. One such box has the depiction of the story of Gajendra *moksha* from the Bhagavata Purana. The manuscripts, along with the wooden boxes used for storage, as well as other wooden artefacts were found in a dilapidated and endangered condition (*Figure 33*). These have been conserved and restored as a part of the INTACH-Gerda Henkel Stiftung project. A few miniature bronze images have also been observed in the sanctum of the *Satra* along with a *Shaligrama* stone (fossilised shell).

Three sculptures (*Figure 34*), two of Vishnu and one of Surya, belonging to the Pala-Sena School of Art, have been recovered by a person residing close to the Barhampur Damodaria *Satra*, while digging a pond/tank in his backyard. Both the Vishnu images have identical iconographic features. However, the leg portion of the Surya image is broken. The image of Surya has similar attributes like the one discovered at Cotton University campus (Sanathana and Hazarika 2019b). All the three images display the major Pala-Sena sculptural features like the decorated stele, a pointed panel at the top, a projected pedestal, a lotus seat (*purnavikasita padma*) and an ornamented *keertimukha* on the top.

BARUKOTA (26°12'59.43"N, 92°12'32.64"E)

Barukota or Ghagua is a locality situated on the left of the Mayong–Morigaon road and is approachable from Konwar Gaon. In addition to some architectural members belonging to



Figure 33 Barhampur Damodaria Satra, architectural members placed along with other worshipping items in the sanctum and illustrated wooden boxes for storing manuscripts.



Figure 34 (A and B) Intact images of Vishnu and (C) broken image of Surya belonging to Pala-Sena School, Barhampur.



Figure 35 Sculpture of Vishnu and three door jambs of early medieval period and Bronze image of Bala-Krishna with a ball of butter, Barukota.

the early medieval period, the *Sankari Kristi Chora* in Barukota houses an image of Vishnu belonging to the late medieval period. The Vishnu sculpture is seen in an upright or *sthanika* posture holding *padma* and *sudarshana chakra* in his upper hands. Though the attributes on the lower hands are not visible, it may presume to be the *sankha* (conch shell) and the *gada*. Two minor divinities are shown on either side of Vishnu, who is encircled by *vanamala* (garland) (**Figure 35**).

A bronze image of a Bala-Krishna (baby Krishna) eating a ball of butter was recovered by a villager while working in the paddy field in the vicinity (**Figure 35**). Similar images which have been reported from Orissa, Bengal and other parts of Assam like Mornoi in Goalpara (Barman 2017). Image of Bala-Krishna was popular in eastern India during 17th and 18th century CE.

KOINA KONDA SIL (26°13'41.47"N, 92°16'21.37"E)

Koina Konda Sil is natural rock-shelter cum cave in the Baghara area in Morigaon, located half a km west of the Baghara Secondary School. As per legends, once the prince of Mayong was returning home after his wedding with the princess of Baghara, they encountered a fierce storm and were forced to take shelter in these rock caves. Unfortunately, due to heavy landslides they could not come out of the caves as the boulders which had rolled down, blocked the exit from the caves. This incident resulted in the sad demise not only of the newly married couple, but also of all those who had accompanied them for the wedding. Since it is believed that the mourning of the bride is frequently heard in the area, the rock has been named as *Koina Konda Sil*, meaning the rock where the bride cries. No notable archaeological features, except a few wedge marks, have been recorded on this rock. A few scattered pieces of potsherds have been noticed during exploration.

ANANTA THAN, BAGHARA (26°13'25.23"N, 92°16'45.80"E)

Ananta *Than* is one of the prime religious centres of Baghara, located at a distance of 8 km from the district headquarter of Morigaon. It is believed by the local community that the *Than* was established by the Baghara king, Jayadhwaja Singha, in 1412 *saka* era (1490 CE). This is authenticated by a copper plate land grant which mentions the land being donated by the king to the Brahmins (Patar and Deka 2007). As per the legend, Jayadhwaja Singha, the local king, had once dreamt of God and subsequently while going for a deer hunt, he came across two images which later came to be popularly known as Ananta Murti and are at present being worshipped in the newly constructed shrine known as Ananta *Than*. However, though the two images (*Figure 36*) are popularly called Ananta Murti, based on their iconographic features, they can safely be identified as the images of Manasa. Ananta being a synonym for a snake must have been the reason for these images being called as Ananta.

Stylistically these images belong to the Pala-Sena period. Both the images are identical in terms of iconography and style, though they differ in size. The bigger one measures nearly two feet in height while the second one measures one foot. Manasa, depicted as a woman, is covered

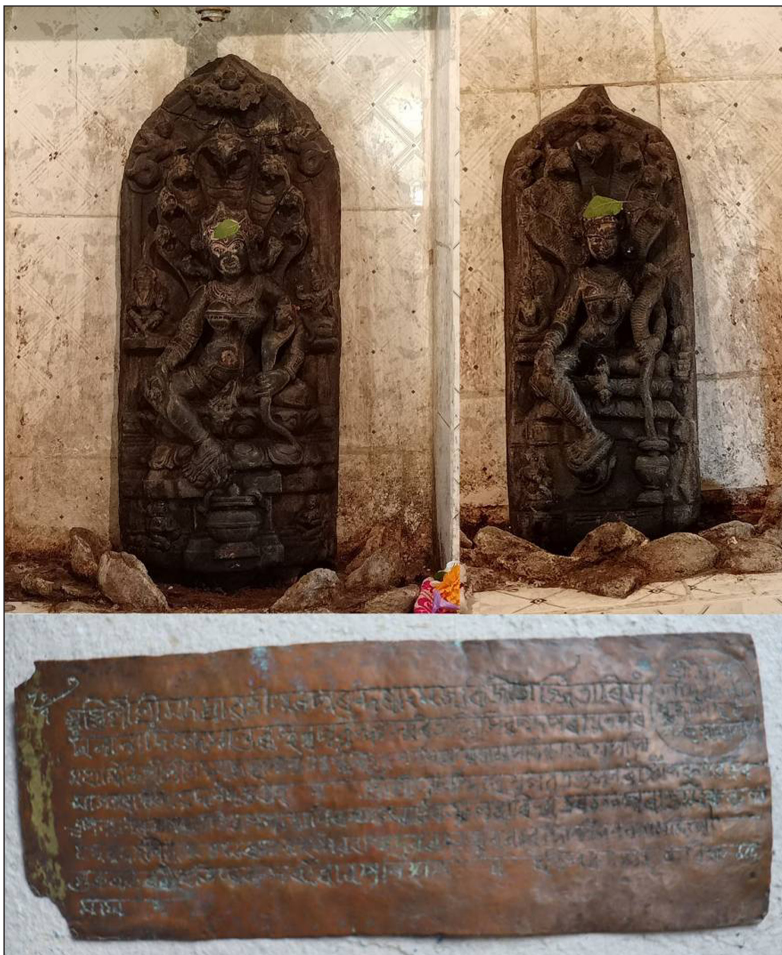


Figure 36 Sculptures of Manasa, belonging to Pala-Sena period and copperplate land grant, Baghara.

with snakes and is shown sitting on a lotus or standing on a snake. She is sheltered by a canopy formed by the hoods of seven cobras. Though she is sometimes depicted with a child on her lap, at the Ananta *Than* she is shown holding a snake in her lap. It must be the zoomorphic form of her son, Astika. A pot of nectar is shown on the plinth of the sculpture. Manasa worship is mainly prevalent in Eastern India even today. In case of Assam, similar images have been collected from Hatimura in the Jakhlabandha area of Nagaon district which is an adjacent to the district of Morigaon are on display at the Assam State Museum.

POTTERY

Pottery is commonly observed in most of the archaeological sites of Mayong area. These are usually found scattered on the surface, in the rain gullies and road cuttings or sections while digging of earth for various purposes by the locals. Primary stratigraphic deposits of pottery are also noticeable at Gorubandha, Jhargaon, Raja Mayong and Burha Mayong areas. At certain locations, pottery deposit of up to a meter height has been recorded at Burha Mayong whereas some 40–50 cm thick layer of pottery has been observed all along the river section of Kalang in Gorubandha area.

As most of the ancient sites are now being converted to temples and shrines, many construction activities are taking place in and around the sites, for example at Jhargaon, Kola Pukhuri and Burha Mayong. The pits dug for further construction around Jhargaon Shiva temple yielded broken as well as intact pottery pieces. Red ware and Kaolin ware are the two major kinds of the potteries found in the area; however, a few samples of Grey wares have also been observed. These are of both handmade and wheel made variety.

Pitchers, bowls, dishes, plates, globular vessels, spouted vessels, miniature pots, simple and knobbed lids, decorated stands, some unique decorated pots with appliqué designs are the major forms of ceramics found in the Mayong area (Figure 37, 38 and 40). A good variety of decorations and stamped impressions which include a diverse beater impressions, stamped impressions, incised designs, appliqué designs and combed patterns are found on the potsherds (Figure 39). Stamped decorations are usually found on the deluxe wares and beater marks on the cooking wares. Many of these designs, beater marks and stamped decorations resemble the pottery found at Ambari and other adjoining sites in Guwahati (Hazarika et al. 2017, Hazarika et al. 2020, Hazarika et al. 2022). The similarity is due to the close proximity of Mayong with Guwahati. Apart from potsherds, a good number of terracotta dabbers (Figure 40) have been recorded at Burha Mayong and Gorubandha areas suggesting pottery making activity in these areas.

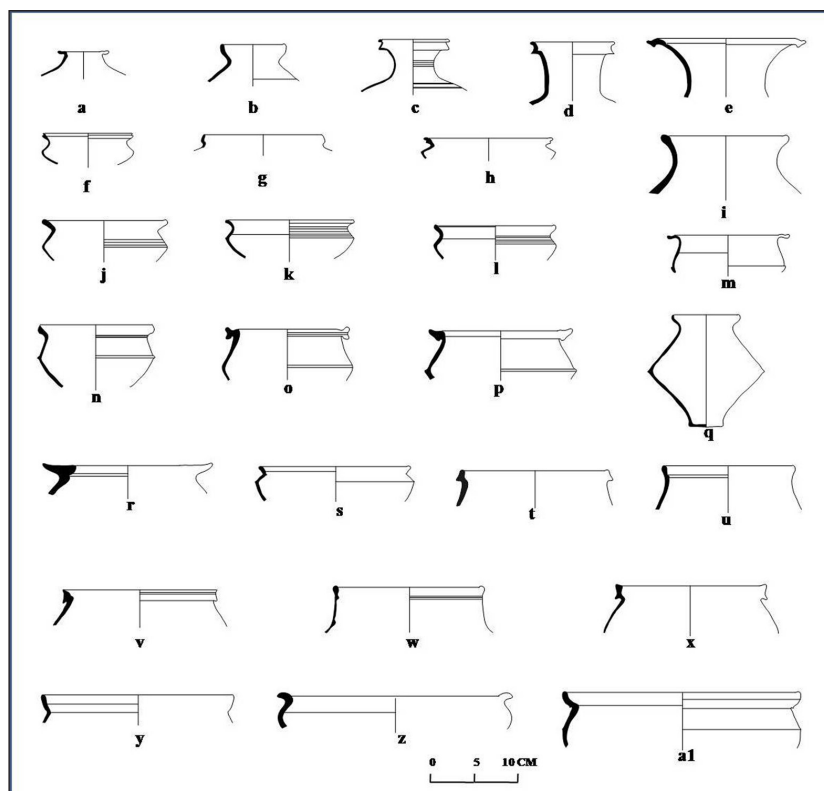


Figure 37 Varieties of pitchers (a – e, i, q), and globular vessels (f – h, j – p and r – a1) recovered from Mayong area.

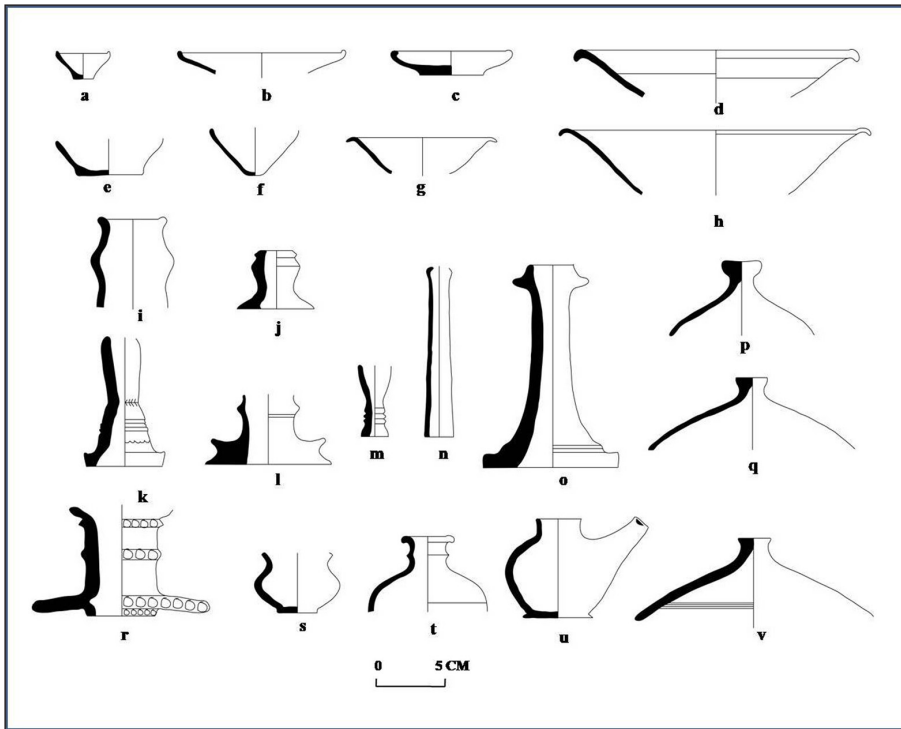


Figure 38 Varieties of bowls and dishes (a – h), decorated stands (i – o and r), lids (p, q and v) and miniature pots (s, t and u) recovered from Mayong area.



Figure 39 Beater impressed, stamped impressions and engraved varieties of pottery from Mayong area.



Figure 40 Decorated stands, spouted vessels, miniature pots, decorated pots with appliqué designs and dabbers from Mayong area.

The pottery varieties found at the sites of Mayong in terms of type, fabric, and patterns of decoration are identical with the ones unearthed and observed from the sites of Guwahati such as Ambari, Ghoramara, and Cotton College campus (Hazarika et al. 2017, Hazarika et al. 2020, Hazarika et al. 2022). The presence of decorative patterns prevalent in Ambari potteries like stamped and incised varieties has also been observed in the potteries of Mayong. Though the

assemblage of stamped potteries is lesser in number in the sites of Mayong, potsherds with the motifs of geometric designs like ovals, triangles, dots, chevrons, diamonds, circles, and sun-like motifs are present. These pottery evidences does insinuate the extent of Ambari culture which requires further methodical investigation concerning its chronology.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The sites scattered mostly along the slopes of the Mayong Pahar as well as on numerous other hillocks and alluvial plain in the area, provide us a glimpse of the diversity in the archaeological vestiges. The area of Mayong was once an important region of the cultural landscape of early and late medieval Assam. The archaeological sites and material cultural remains also indicate the strategic role played by the Kalang-Kapili river as military and trade routes during the medieval and colonial periods.

Abundant in granitic rocks used for making rock-cut sculptures, the area has a high concentration of rock-cut sculptures in Assam, besides, Guwahati and Goalpara regions. Early medieval rock-cut sculptures of Assam and their iconographical and stylistic features are identical to the sculptures used in construction of temples at that time. Interestingly majority of the early medieval temples of the valley contain rock-cut images on the rock-boulders in and around the temple premises. The rock-cut images of late medieval period are without much elaborate decorations and detailed iconographic features. Artistically they are less decorated and differ from the early medieval sculptures. There are a good number of rock-cut sculptures belonging to both these periods are found in the Mayong region.

Rock-cut structures were not only a part of the religious landscape in the past, but must have also been some sort of territorial markers. The available ruins of large number of architectural members in certain localities like Jhargaon, Barhampur and Chanaka, points to the fact that these may be the remnants of some temple building activities in the past. The images of Ganesha and Uma-Maheswar have mostly been depicted in the rock-cut sculptures suggesting the prevalence of Shaivism and Shaktism in the area during the early and late medieval periods. Moreover, a few engravings and metal objects also suggest the presence of Buddhism, along with Tantrism, in Mayong in the past. The *Satras* and *Naamghars* bear testimony to the prevalence of Vaishnavism in the late medieval period.

The pottery deposit discovered in and around these sites indicates the nature of past human habitation along the foothills or slopes of the hills and in the alluvial plains of the Kalang. The pottery wares discovered in this area are mostly plain and beater-impressed Red ware, Kaolin ware and occasionally, stamped Red ware. These wares can be classified either in the religious or the utilitarian category. For example, the wide mouthed globular bowls, on the exterior of which are often found evidence of fire, can be classified as cooking vessels.

Moreover, based on affinities in the typo-technology of pottery particularly pottery types, wares, patterns and fabrics, sculptural tradition and temple remains, Mayong can be considered as an extension of the overall cultural development in Guwahati during the early medieval time. The archaeological remains discussed so far also suggest that Mayong also witnessed the cultural growth at par with the Brahmaputra valley.

Besides the stone, terracotta and metal objects discovered from the above mentioned sites, the Museum has various other ethnographic objects of bamboo, wood and metal objects. Apart from some colonial coins, there are a total of 252 cowrie shells in the museum collection. Cowries were considered as an alternative coinage during the early and late medieval Assam.

The chronological phases, based on the cultural materials discovered in the region of of Mayong, can be categorised as follows:

Phase I – Neolithic Period: Based on the findings of two Neolithic stone artifacts from the region, a sporadic Neolithic occupation may be proposed. The areas south of Mayong, particularly the uplands of Morigaon and Kamrup districts are well known for a Neolithic occupation.

Phase II – The Early Medieval period: This may be termed as the second phase based on early medieval temple ruins, rock-cut sculptures, sculptures of the Pala-Sena period, certain engravings and evidences of stone quarrying and pottery. The rock-cut sculptures of Uma-Maheswar at Kechai Khaiti *Than* and Chanaka are the perfect examples of the artistic development of this time period. Moreover, the sculptures of Vishnu and Surya, recorded near the Barhampur Damodaria *Satra* and two Manasha images from Ananta *than* belonging to the Pala-Sena School of Art are also of this time period.

Phase III – Late medieval period: This may be termed as the third phase based on late medieval rock-cut sculptures, ramparts, cannon balls, land grants and manuscripts. There are many rock-cut Ganesha images of this period, particularly at Gobardhan Ghoramara, Chanaka, Kola Pukhuri and Burha Mayong.

Phase IV – Pre Modern period: This may be identified as the fourth phase based on bronze images, the presence of Vaishnavite *Satras* and *Naamghars* along with other related artefacts, manuscripts and items of the colonial period.

The highest concentration of archaeological sites can be noticed in and around Mayong Pahar, the southern bank of the Brahmaputra and the banks of the Kalang river. Majority of the cultural artefacts discovered so far are religious in nature. However, most of the valuable archaeological sites are in an endangered condition due to establishment of new villages, change in the course of the rivers and over-exploitation of the rocks for construction activities in recent years. Systematic documentation of the archaeological remains in the region undertaken by the team has proven to be useful for mapping of all known and recently discovered sites and for understanding the history of Mayong.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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