

Mainamati ruins

The supreme importance of epigraphical records in the reconstruction of history and chronology of a country is beyond any doubt. As original source material and authentic record of the past, particularly of contemporary events, their value and significance is self-evident. M. HARUNUR RASHID, in this fourth instalment of his article, writes on the archaeologically valuable materials recovered from the Mainamati excavations.

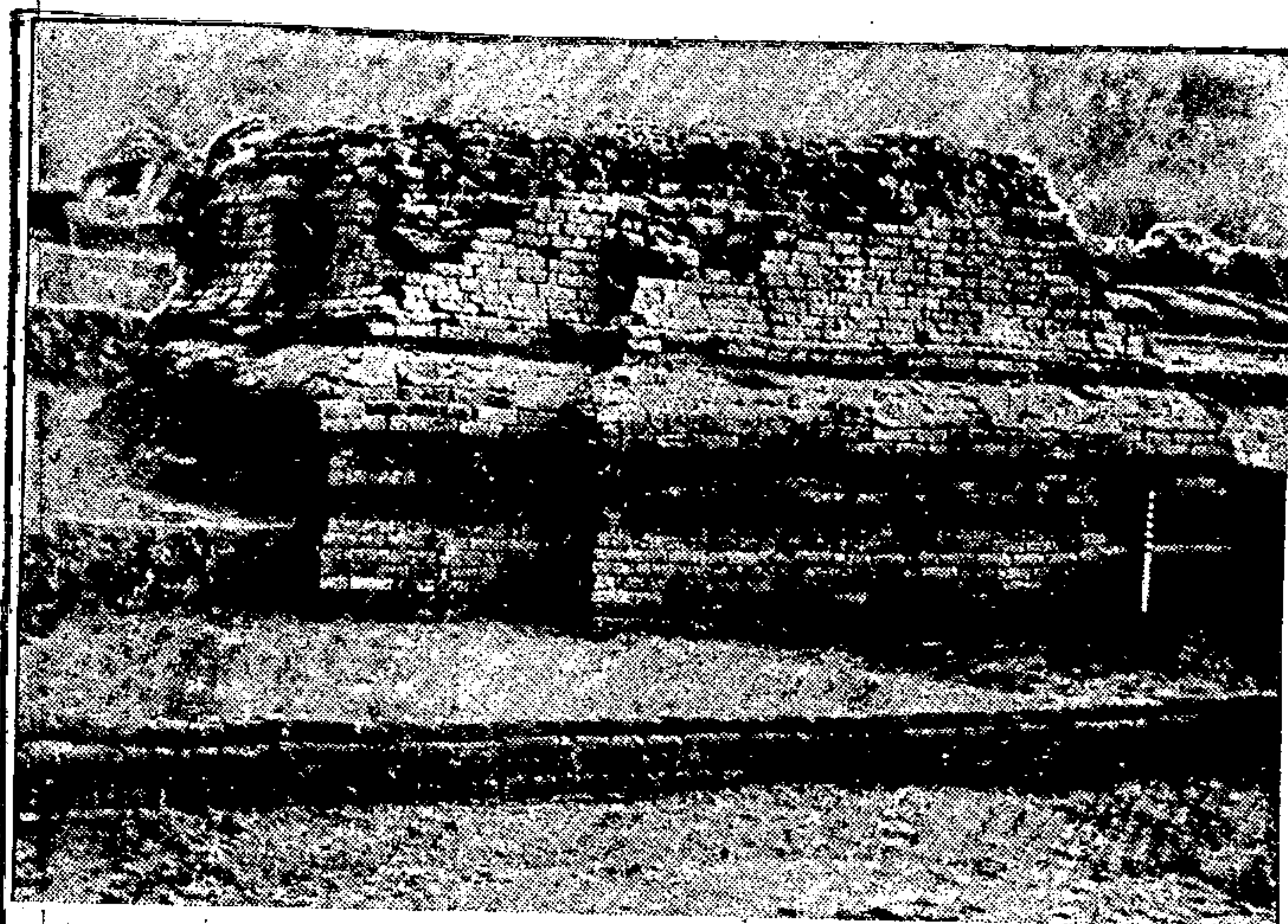
The pristine glory

The supreme importance of epigraphical records in the reconstruction of history and chronology of a country is beyond any doubt. As original source material and authentic record of the past, particularly of contemporary events, their value and significance is self-evident. Among these records the lengthy copper-plate grants are obviously the most important. No fewer than eleven such plates were recovered from the Mainamati excavations. These were issued by Khadga, Early-Deva, Chandra and Later-Deva rulers (7th — 13th century AD) some of whom are not known to history at all, while our knowledge about others was both incomplete and uncertain before these discoveries. Among the royalty introduced to history by these records are Sri-Balabhatta of the Khadga dynasty, also known from his three Mainamati gold coins; Sri-Santideva, Sri-Viradeva, Sri-Anandadeva and Sri-Bhavadeva four generations of the Buddhist Deva rulers of Devapavata (Mainamati); Sri-Ladahachandra and Sri-Govindachandra; the last two kings of the Chandra dynasty of eastern Bengal; and Sri-Viradharadeva, a local Hindu ruler presumably in some relationship with the Later-Deva dynasty of Damodaradeva and probably also with Harikaladeva of the Mainamati copper-plate. The three Mainamati plates of the Khad-

gas, the earliest-known Buddhist rulers of Bangladesh have added significantly to our knowledge of the dynasty, while the detailed information from the four Mainamati plates of the hitherto unknown Early-Devas is supplemented by only one other record, a second copper-plate grant of Sri-Bhavadeva, recovered from Comilla. Only the names of Ladahachandra and Govindachandra were known previously from short image-inscriptions. It is from their three Mainamati plates that we learn, for the first time, not only the correct genealogy and military exploits of the Chandras, but also the social, political, cultural and economic condition of their kingdom with a richness of detail not hitherto available. Viradharadeva's plate supplies interesting information regarding the history and geography of the region not much about himself or of his relations with others.

Ancient coins are an equally important source material for history, but their extreme paucity in early times and their total absence in pre-Muslim Bengal have long been a source of concern to scholars. The Mainamati excavations have now considerably improved the position by yielding more than 400 gold, silver and copper coins of various types including three hoards of 227 specimens. A proper assessment of

the value and significance of this collection requires a detailed study and cataloguing which is beyond the scope of this article. The Mainamati gold coins which include two Gupta, a dozen post-Gupta 'imitation', three Khadga and one Abbasid specimens, have been noticed by us elsewhere (Bangladesh Lalit Kala, Vol. I, No. 1, 1975, pp. 41-58). Here we make only a passing reference to the silver coins which are more important and representative; their total exceeds 350; this is many times larger than the entire collection of pre-Muslim coins from Bengal. This large collection from stratified levels includes such rare and significant specimens as the only known silver coin of Sasanka, a few specimens of the Early-Abbasid caliphs and of Arakan rulers including Dharmavijaya, many interesting specimens of the little known Akara dynasty of eastern Bengal, and a couple of hitherto unknown specimens of post-Gupta 'imitation' type. But the vast majority of these coins belongs to a particular class we would prefer to call 'Bull and Triglyph' from their distinctive motifs on the obverse and reverse. They bear a short legend



Salban Vihara, Mainamati: A votive shrine in the courtyard of the monastery with symmetrical projections, recessed corners and mouldings on walls.

which had been variously read earlier as Yarikriya, Ari-Kria, Patikera, etc. Almost the entire collection of these thin silver coins, loosely called 'Arakanese' from the locality of their first find, comes from eastern Bengal, and there is hardly any doubt about their indigenous character. On the basis of our studies and researches in UK during the sixties on the coins and epigraphs of eastern Bengal and Arakan, we successfully read the legend as Harikela (M. H. Rashid, The Early History of South-East Bengal, Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge University, 1968). The significance of the discovery and the correct reading of the legend of these coins for the historical-geographical determinations of that long lost kingdom and of other unidentified ancient places and cities of this region cannot be over-emphasised.

Very few copper coins — two or three only — were discovered at Mainamati which include a unique specimen of post-Gupta 'imitation' type. These are yet to be studied after proper chemical treatment.

Short dedicatory votive inscriptions of religious character found on the pedestal or back

of stone and bronze images and on thousands of terracotta, clay and baked-clay sealings rarely supply any information of direct historical importance. However, their contribution to religious and iconographical studies is often quite significant. The non-votive seals and sealings also do not supply much information beyond names of individuals and their religious predilections. Seals are few at Mainamati which include a red stone specimen belonging to one Padmadhara. Shorter inscriptions on pottery and similar other objects are of palaeographic interest only. Obviously records of this type are of lesser importance. But not the three-line inscription below the seated deer and Dharmachakra symbol, the royal emblem of the Early Deva dynasty, on a few terracotta sealings with identical impressions bearing the original name of Salban Vihara and of its royal builder; it reads: Sri - Bhavadeva - Mahavihara Arya-Bhiksu - Samghasya - "Of the community of monks of the great monastic establishment built by Sri Bhavadeva." Its importance is too obvious to need any comment.

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