


Paharpur and its Monuments



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PAHARPUR AND ITS MONUMENTS

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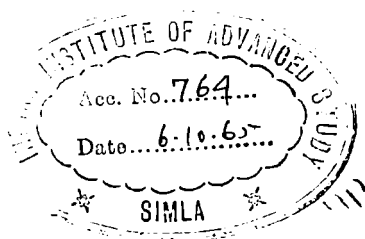
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CALCUTTA : : INDIA : : 1961

First published 1961



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Printed by V. N. Bhattacharya, M.A. at the Inland
Printing Works, 60/3 Dharamtala Street, Calcutta-13

EXCAVATIONS AT PAHARPUR

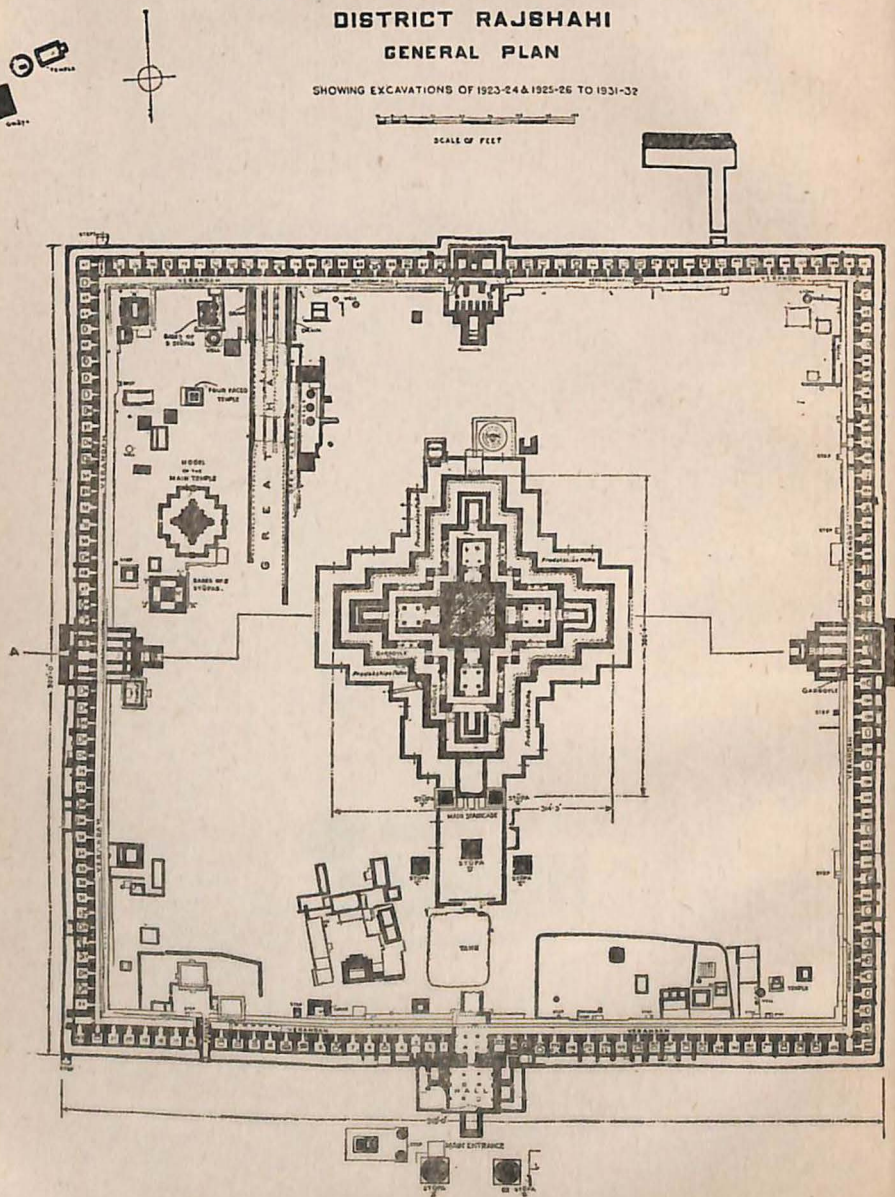
DISTRICT RAJSHAHI

GENERAL PLAN

SHOWING EXCAVATIONS OF 1923-24 & 1925-26 TO 1931-32



SCALE OF FEET



CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Preface	
List of plates	
Short Bibliography	
I. Topography and history	1
II. The Main temple	6
III. The Monastery	9
IV. Satyapir's Bhita	... 20
V. Art	... 23
Plates	End of Text

SHORT BIBLIOGRAPHY

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PREFACE

THE Buddhist temple surrounded by a monastic establishment at Paharpur is undoubtedly one of the most important and magnificent structures of ancient India. The mound under which this huge monastic establishment lay buried for ages together was definitely known from the beginning of the last century; but systematic excavation of this mound began only near about forty years ago. The results of this archaeological excavation are mainly embodied in the official publications of the Archaeological Survey of India among which special mention should be made of Rao Bahadur K. N. Dikshit's work entitled "Excavations at Paharpur, Bengal".

The main object of this work is to give a short, lucid and popular account of this monastic establishment. As it is primarily meant for the visitors to this ancient site, main attention has been paid to the description of the architectural remains. A small chapter on art has been added.

C. C. DASGUPTA

LIST OF PLATES

- I. General view of mound before excavation.
- II. General view of main temple after conservation.
- III. General plan of main monastery with temple in the centre (Fronts).
- IV. (a) General view of northern ante-chamber.
(b) General view of basement wall.
- V. General plan of Satyapir Bhita.
- VI. (a) Model of main temple.
(b) General view of Satyapir Bhita.
- VII. (a) Drinking of poison by Śiva.
(b) Stone image of Gaṇeśa.
- VIII. (a) Stone image of Yamunā.
(b) Stone image of Rādhā and Krishṇa.
- IX. (a) Stone image of Indra.
(b) Stone image of Balarāma.
- X. (a) Terracotta plaque showing elephant and mice.
(b) Terracotta plaque representing monkey pulling out wedge.
(c) Image of Śiva holding trident.

CHAPTER I

GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION

PAHARPUR (25.2' N.Lat., 89.3' E. Long.) is a tiny village within the district of Rajshahi in East Bengal. It is situated in the flat, alluvial plain of north Bengal which is not drained by any big and navigable river.

It is approximately situated three miles to the west of the railway station at Jamalganj on the main line from Calcutta to Siliguri on the Eastern Railway. There is an unmetalled road from the station to the mound by which this ancient monastic establishment may be approached either on foot or on cart.

HISTORY OF EXCAVATIONS

It was Buchanan Hamilton who, for the first time, described the ruins at Paharpur in the period between the years 1807-12. According to him the ruins were the most remarkable of its kind in this part of Bengal. His theory that it was a Buddhist stūpa was accepted by Westmacott. Later on Cunningham gave a short account of this monument (Pl. I). Then in 1919 it was declared by Government of India a protected monument. It was in 1922-23 that the University of Calcutta carried out excavation at this site; but on account of the financial stringency the University could not carry out further digging at this site. Then in 1925-26 the excavation at this site was carried out by the Archaeological Department and this work proceeded till 1934 when it was virtually stopped. By continuous digging for years together a magnificent

temple surrounded on four sides by a monastery at Paharpur and another Buddhist establishment at a place called Satyapir's Bhita which is situated at a distance of 300 yards from the eastern side of the monastery of the main temple at Paharpur have been thoroughly exposed (Pl. II).

GUPTA PERIOD

There is no evidence to show that there was a religious establishment or anything like that here till the Gupta age. The above conclusion may be arrived at from the close study of the copper-plate grant of the year 159. The purport of this grant is that a Brahmin named Nāthaśarmmā and his wife approached the District Officer (*āyuktaka*) of Puṇḍravarddhana and the City Council (*adhiṣṭhānā*=*dhikaraṇa*) headed by the Mayor (*nagara-Śreṣṭhin*) with the request that they would buy 1½ *kulyavāpa* of land situated in four villages with three *dināras*. The money which would be earned from this land would be spent in buying necessary articles such as sandal, incense and flower for the worship of the *arhats* and in constructing a rest-house in the *vihāra* for the Jaina teacher Guhanandin situated in Vaṭagohālī. Their request was agreed to. This grant was caused to be written on the seventh day of the month of Māgha in the year 159 which, if referred to the Gupta era, would correspond to c. 478 A.D. From the palaeographical point of view also it belongs to the 5th century A.D. It is known from other epigraphical evidence that north Bengal was under the regime of the Gupta monarchs in the 5th century A.D. Among the places mentioned in this grant only Puṇḍravarddhana and Vaṭagohālī may be identified respectively with Mahasthan and Goalbhita, a village adjacent to Paharpur. From this grant it is evident that there was a

Jaina *vihāra* adjacent to Paharpur and that this region was quite well-known in the Gupta age. But nothing is known about the Buddhist establishment here.

PĀLA PERIOD

When the Pāla dynasty was founded, peace and tranquillity prevailed throughout the length and breadth of Bengal and uncommon development of art, architecture and sculpture took place in this age. The Pāla emperors were Buddhist by religion and in the time of Dharmapāla and Devapāla many Buddhist *vihāras* and temples were made in Bengal. At Paharpur some terracotta seals bearing the name of Dharmapāladeva have been found. The inscription on these seals runs as follows. 1. Śrī-Somapure. 2. Śrī-Dharmapāladeva. 3. Mahāvihārīy-ārya-bhikshusaṅghasya, i.e., of the community of the venerable monks belonging to the great *vihāra* at the illustrious Somapura (founded by) the illustrious Dharmapāladeva. Paharpur is the modern site of ancient Somapura and Dharmapāladeva is no other than the second ruler of the Pāla dynasty, who reigned from A.D. 769-815. It would, therefore, appear that the great *vihāra* at Somapura was founded in the latter part of the eighth century A.D.

In the latter half of the 9th century A.D. there was a great conflict between the rulers of the Pāla and the Gurjara-Pratīhāra dynasties. During this period Bhoja I and Mahendrapāla of the Gurjara-Pratīhāra dynasty caused immense harm to the Pāla empire. On account of this foreign invasion the Pāla empire dwindled in brilliance; but its glory was revived when Mahīpāla I established the second Pāla empire. It has been recorded in the Tibetan work *Pag Sam Zon Zang* that Mahīpāla used

to offer his homage at the great *vihāra* at Somapura. It is understood from an inscribed Buddha image at Bodh Gaya that a Buddhist ascetic named Vīryendrabhadra who hailed from the great *vihāra* at Somapura visited the Buddhist *vihāra* at Bodh Gaya and made a gift of the image of Buddha on which this inscription was engraved. This inscription is not dated; but, judging from the palaeographical point of view, it should be ascribed to the 10th century A.D. That this religious establishment was a well-reputed institution of its kind even in the 12th century A.D. is evidenced from the Nalanda inscription of Vipulaśrīmitra. The purport of this inscription is that Vipulaśrīmitra who lived in the great *vihāra* at Somapura for a long time caused a temple of Tārā to be made at Somapura, repaired four cells and presented a gold ornament for the embellishment of a Buddha image. Another stone pillar inscription of the 12th century A.D. shows that the great *vihāra* at Somapura was very famous in that age. In this inscription it has been stated that Daśabalagarbha caused the pillar to be made for the gratification of the three jewels and for the desire of doing good to all good people.

After the reign of Mahīpāla I and his son Nayapāla there was again the decadence of the Pāla power and Bengal was successively invaded by the Chedi king Karṇa, the Chola king Rājendra I and the Kaivarta chieftain Dīvyā. Thereafter in the latter half of the 11th century A.D., Rāmapāla again brought back the lost glory of the Pāla family.

SENA PERIOD

In the last quarter of the 11th century A.D., the Pāla

dynasty succumbed to the more powerful Sena dynasty, the rulers of which were Brahmanical by faith. In this period the great *vihāra* at Somapura was evidently neglected. In the 13th century the Muhammadans invaded Bengal and it is quite probable that on account of this Muslim invasion into this province the great *vihāra* at Somapura was greatly mutilated and then abandoned for ever.

CHAPTER II

GENERAL PLAN

THE main temple at Paharpur is undoubtedly one of the most unique architectural specimens of ancient India. The general plan of the main temple is in the form of a cross having angles of projection between the arms of the cross and having three raised terraces. It is planned in such a way that there is no scope for its expansion horizontally but vertically. The projecting angles in the plan of the first floor are three in number between each arm of the cross while there are four projecting angles in the northern side, besides three similar ones on three other sides, on account of the presence of the main stair-case leading to the first terrace in the middle of the northern arm. (Pl. III).

BASEMENT-WALL

The basement-wall is probably in the same condition as it was originally. In the lowest course of the basement-wall stone basreliefs at most of the angles of the projection and in specially built recesses in the middle of the wall have been fixed. (Pl. IV, b). Above this course on the basement wall there is a projecting cornice consisting of a half-round moulding and two plain mouldings. Above this projecting cornice there is a row of terracotta plaques set in the recessed panels. Above this row of terracotta plaques there is another projecting cornice consisting of nine mouldings. The lowest course consists of a horizontal and wavy line, the second of the inverted stepped pyramid, the third of the lotus leaf and the remaining six courses are plain in design. After this

projecting cornice the plain ashlar wall measuring 3'6" begins. There is found again a projecting cornice consisting of nine mouldings. The lowest course consists of the inverted stepped pyramid, the second of a band, the third of the inverted stepped pyramid and the remaining six courses are plain. Above this projecting cornice there is another row of terracotta plaques set in the recessed rectangular panels. As the portion of the wall on which this row of terracotta plaques is set served as the retaining wall as well as the parapet of the first terrace, it bears a great deal of marks of wear and tear and is naturally greatly mutilated.

FIRST TERRACE

The pilgrims who used to visit the main temple approached it through the main entrance which is on the northern side of the monastery. Then they circumambulated the basement-wall on which there were two rows of terracotta plaques depicting gods, and goddesses, human beings, animals, foliage etc.

STŪPA "D"

When they came again to the northern side, they found to the south of the main staircase a rectangular courtyard with a square votive stūpa in the middle. On the eastern and western sides of this enclosed area there are two other square votive stūpas which probably belong to a later age.

MAIN STAIRCASE

After seeing these three stūpas they ascended the first terrace by the main staircase which is flanked by two square votive stūpas.

CIRCUMAMBULATORY PASSAGE

On the first terrace there is the circumambulatory passage. Here are found two rows of terracotta plaques set in the recessed panels on the inner wall of the passage separated from each other by the projecting mouldings.

SECOND TERRACE : CIRCUMAMBULATORY PASSAGE

There is a similar circumambulatory passage in the second terrace also. Unlike the first terrace no row of terracotta plaques is found here. Also there is a shrine with its antechamber on each cardinal point (Pl. IV, a).

There is no sufficient evidence to reconstruct the architectural shape of this edifice above the second terrace with precision. However there is some evidence to show that there was a passage at a height of 28' from the level of the antechambers to which access was made by the stairway in the southern antechamber. It seems highly plausible that the main place of worship was most probably at the top-most point of the temple.

CHAPTER III

GENERAL PLAN

UP till now there has been found no monastery in India which is so extensive as the monastery at Paharpur. It measures 922' \times 919' and has four rows of cells on four sides forming, as it were, four lines of a rectangle. In the middle portion of each side except the northern one there is a special block which consists of three cells and on the northern side the space mentioned above is occupied by a hall. This serves, as it were, the main entrance to this monastery. On the outer side of the establishment there is a rampart wall which runs continuously on all sides and in the inner side of the establishment there is a verandah which also runs continuously on all sides. There are altogether 177 cells excluding those which are in the middle of each side except the north where is the hall. Out of these 177 cells 45 are on the north and 44 on each of the three other sides. On the northern side there is also a staircase which led to the monastery. There are the remains of two stūpas on the south-eastern and the south-western sides of the staircase and that of a hall with steps, the significance of which is not known.

NORTH-EAST SIDE HALL

This monastery used to be approached by the help of a staircase leading to the hall measuring 50' \times 47'. There is evidence to show that this hall was renewed at least twice.

TANK

On entering the inner area through the hall one comes across a tank in which pilgrims visiting the temple perhaps washed their face and feet before going in.

ROOMS 1-23

On the north-eastern side of the monastery there are altogether 23 rooms in some of which there are antechambers and the remains of pedestals probably of images—a feature present in some of the cells on the other sides of the monastery as well.

POSTERN BETWEEN R. 15 AND 16

Between rooms 15 and 16 there is a gateway which is the only other of its kind besides the main entrance-gate which has already been described.

STRUCTURE IN FRONT OF R. 2 AND 3

In front of rooms 2 and 3 there is the foundation of a square structure.

STONE-PILLARS IN FRONT OF R. 4-6

Similarly in front of rooms 4-6 there are the remains of four stone-pillars just outside the verandah.

SHRINE IN FRONT OF R. 8-10

In the courtyard in front of rooms 8-10 are the remains of a shrine. Adjacent to this shrine there are traces of a few steps placed against the varandah.

COURTYARD IN FRONT OF R. 12-20

In front of rooms 12-20 there is a courtyard which is

covered on all sides except west where there is an opening. Within this courtyard there are the remains of two structures which are square in plan.

DISCOVERED ANTIQUITIES

In room 7 was found a fragment of a *prabhāvalī* of an image of considerable size with the creed of Mahāyāna Buddhism (*ye dhamma* etc.) inscribed on it, which goes to show that Paharpur was undoubtedly a Buddhist site. In room 8 was found a stone-image of Manasā. It is four-headed and seated on a double lotus with its right leg pending which rests on a lotus. It holds the bunch of leaves in the upper hand and *amṛita-kalasa* in the lower right hand. Its lower left hand embraces a child. It has the canopy of seven snakes. The cult of Manasā became widely prevalent in Bengal and Bihar from the Pāla age and it is highly interesting that an image representing this goddess has been found at Paharpur.

EAST SIDE: ROOMS 24-67

There are altogether 44 cells on the eastern side of the monastery. The cells on this side particularly at the extremities are more damaged than those on the other three sides.

CENTRAL BLOCK

There are central blocks in three sides except the north projecting towards the rampart-wall of the monastery. There were originally three rooms in the central block which constituted the shrine.

SQUARE STRUCTURE IN FRONT OF R. 27

In the courtyard in front of room 27 there is a square

structural remain which is in a very damaged condition. It is very difficult to form an idea about the purpose which this structure serves.

GUARD ROOM BETWEEN R. 28 AND 29

In the space between rooms 28 and 29 there is a room 4' square which was probably meant for the guard.

SQUARE STRUCTURE IN FRONT OF R. 28 AND 29

To the south of room 27 and in front of rooms 28 and 29 there is a similar square structural remain in a highly damaged condition.

TEMPLE IN FRONT OF R. 43 AND 44

In front of rooms 43 and 44 there is the remain of a rectangular structure which was originally a temple.

BASES OF FIVE STŪPAS IN FRONT OF R. 45-48

Further south and in the courtyard in front of rooms 45-48 are the remains of a structure whose architecture is interesting. It is a square piece of land surrounded on all sides by an enclosing wall. In the centre there is the base of a square stūpa and on the four corner-points there are the remains of the bases of four square stūpas. These stūpas are indicated I, J, K, L and M in plan. It is very difficult to surmise the significance of this building.

RECTANGULAR STRUCTURE IN FRONT OF R. 48

To the east of this building are the remains of a rectangular structure whose significance is not clear.

RECTANGULAR STRUCTURE IN FRONT OF R. 48 AND 49

To the due south of the building of five stūpas there is

the remain of another rectangular structure. As it is in a very damaged condition, it is very difficult to form an idea about its significance.

MODEL OF MAIN TEMPLE

After these and in the courtyard in front of rooms 49-53, the visitor comes across one of the most important structures, viz., a miniature replica of the central temple in which the ground plan of the main temple with its triple projection between each arm of the cross is faithfully reproduced with the additional feature of ascending steps on all the four sides. This model temple is bounded on all sides by wall having two projections between each arm of the cross and having an entrance-gate on the eastern side only (Pl. VI, a)

STRUCTURE IN FRONT OF R. 54

In the courtyard in front of room 54 and to the east of the model of the main temple there is the remain of a structure in utter ruins.

WELL IN FRONT OF R. 55 AND 56

To the south-east of it and in the courtyard in front of the space between rooms 55 and 56 there is a well which is probably old.

STRUCTURE IN FRONT OF R. 55-57

To the west of this well and in the courtyard in front of rooms 55-57 are the remains of another rectangular structure. In its left side there is a wall which divides it into two unequal divisions. It is so damaged that it is very difficult to form an idea of the purpose which this structure was intended to serve.

To the south-east of this structure and contiguous to it there is the remain of a structure consisting of four parallel walls. There is another similar structure to the west of it.

STRUCTURE IN FRONT OF R. 58 AND 59

In the courtyard in front of rooms 58 and 59 there is the remain of a rectangular structure of which one side on the west is lost.

FOUR-FACED TEMPLE

In the courtyard and to the west of this structure there is the remain of a temple. It seems that this temple had originally four gates on four sides. It is enclosed on all sides by a wall which is in the form of a square. To the east of this enclosing wall there is another enclosed space, the purpose of which is not known.

STRUCTURE IN FRONT OF R. 62 AND 63

In the courtyard in front of the space between rooms 62 and 63 have been found the remains of another structure which is also rectangular.

STRUCTURE IN FRONT OF R. 64-65

To the south of it and in the courtyard in front of rooms 64 and 65 the remains of another rectangular structure have been found.

DISCOVERED ANTIQUITIES

Among the antiquities discovered on this side the most important are the following : The bronze image of Buddha measuring 3.3" high and holding the right hand in the *varada-mudrā*. The second important image is that of

Kuvera. It sits on a pedestal in the *ardhaparyāṅkāśana* and rests its legs on a stool. The right hand is placed on the right knee and the left hand holds a *gadā*. It has a protruding belly. On the reverse is the Buddhist creed inscribed in the script of the 9th-10th century A.D.

SOUTH SIDE R. 68-111

There are altogether 44 cells on the southern side, some with pedestals and some without pedestals.

CENTRAL BLOCK

As in the case of the eastern side there is the central block consisting of three rooms with a surrounding passage.

STEPS IN THE EASTERNMOST POINT

In the easternmost point of this side there is a step which gave access to the top of the rampart-wall.

BASES OF FIVE STŪPAS

In front of rooms 73 and 74 there is the remain of bases of five stūpas enclosed on all sides by a wall which still remains in a damaged condition. So far as this structure is concerned, there is a great similarity between this and another structure which is situated in the courtyard in front of rooms 45-48. Three of these five stūpas are situated in one line and the other two are situated in a different line.

WELL NORTH OF BASE OF FIVE STŪPAS

To the north of this building there is a well whose internal diameter is 8'3".

To the north of this well and in front of room 75 there is a construction consisting of six parallel walls. It is interesting to note that a similar structure occurs on the eastern side also.

GREAT HALL

In front of rooms 76-78 there has been found the remains of a big hall termed the great hall in plan which appears to be a rectangular structure with its ends 120' long commencing from the southern verandah. No trace of its enclosing wall on the northern side has been found. On its western side there is an open platform. That this hall was a perfect specimen of architecture from the sanitary point of view is evident from the remains of drains on the eastern as well as western sides of this hall. Besides these drains are the remains of another drain in front of the open platform. To the west of this platform there are the remains of three wells. On either side of these three wells (which are in a line) there are two rooms. It seems that the great hall, the open platform, the three wells and the two rooms on two sides belong to one individual establishment, probably the dining section, the great hall serving as the dining hall, the two rooms as kitchen and the three wells for drinking water.

DISCOVERED ANTIQUITIES

On this side not many antiquities were found, the only object of importance discovered being a stone inscription of Daśabalagarbha found between rooms 107 and 109. The purport of this inscription is that a man named Daśabalagarbha caused this pillar to be made for the gratification of the three jewels and for doing good to all good people.

WESTERN SIDE: R. 112-155

There are altogether 44 cells on the western side, which are luckily better preserved than those on the other sides. No exit on this side was discovered.

CENTRAL BLOCK

There is the usual central block consisting of three rooms and surrounded by a circumambulatory passage.

STŪPA IN FRONT OF R. 112 AND 113

In front of rooms 112 and 113 there is the base of a stūpa. To the north of this stūpa there are the remains of two rectangular structures, one bigger than the other, in a very bad state of preservation.

In front of room 115 there are the remains of a step. To the north of this step and in front of room 117 there is another structure. Similar steps exist in front of rooms 122, 126, 135 and 144.

DISCOVERED ANTIQUITIES

Among the antiquities found on this side mention may be made of a bronze-image of Umā-Maheśvara. Śiva holds a *triśūla* in his upper right hand and a *padma* in his upper left hand and embraces Pārvatī with the other two hands. Pārvatī sits on Śiva's left lap, and holds a mirror in her left hand. Gaṇeśa can be discerned to the left of Śiva below and Kārtikeya to the right of Pārvatī. The respective *vāhanas* of Śiva and Pārvatī can be made out below their feet.

• NORTH-WEST SIDE R. 156-177

There are altogether 22 cells on the north-west side of the monastery.

In front of rooms 157 and 158 the remnant of a rectangular structure has been found.

To the left of this structure and in front of rooms 159 and 160 can be seen the ruins of a temple surrounded by an enclosing wall.

In front of room 160 there is the remain of a few steps. Similar examples of steps have been found on all other sides of the monastery.

In front of room 161 are the remains of a few steps and a well.

DAMP-PROOF STRUCTURE

There is a wall which begins from the verandah in front of room 162 and which forms a rectangular enclosure ending in the verandah in front of room 174. In the easternmost portion of this enclosure there are no structural remains of importance but in the westernmost portion there are some well preserved structures. There is a square brick-structure within this enclosure which is highly interesting. The lower part of this structure consists of three channels which are separated by wallings and closed on the top by brickwork. This served as the foundation of a room with verandah. It has been surmised that these channels were constructed in order to keep the structure over it free from damp. For this reason this structure has been called the damp-proof structure.

DISCOVERED ANTIQUITIES

Among the antiquities found on this side mention may be made of the bronze-image of Gaṇeśa.

SANDHYĀVATĪ'S GHAT

There are some structural remains outside the enclosure-

wall in the south-eastern side of the monastery. Here are found traces of an ancient bathing ghat. In this part of Bengal a story is current about this ghat which runs as follows. There was a king named Mahīdalana who had a daughter called Sandhyāvati. This royal princess became the mother of Satyapīra through immaculate conception. When her father heard this, he did not believe it. Satyapīra was born and gradually grew to be a great saint. Later on Satyapīra was destroyed by a terrible flood which swept the palace of his maternal grand-father in which he was residing. Sandhyāvati, the mother of Satyapīra used to take her bath every day at this ghat.

To the south-west of this ghat has been found the remnant of a rectangular room on the western side of which a small room projects out in the middle. This structure belongs to either the 14th or the 15th century A.D. Granting that this was a temple, the room projecting on the western side may have been the shrine.

Besides this structure a circular platform which was 24' in diameter with a brick-on-edge floor stood to the east of this building.

There is the remain of a structure outside the area in front of room 102. This structure is an open platform measuring 105'6" × 27'. This platform is about 10' above the ground level and cannot be reached from any place except the monastery. It appears that the top of the platform, though not even, was once provided with a concrete floor, as is apparent from its traces found here and there. There are a series of water-chutes along its southern face. There is no doubt that this structure was originally concerned with ablution as the elaborate arrangements for the removal of water would show.

CHAPTER IV

GENERAL PLAN

THE mound known as Satyapīr's Bhita is situated at a distance of 300 yards from the eastern side of the monastery. The original mound was not at all high, the central point of the mound being only 6 to 7 ft. high with the gradual sloping towards the sides, especially in the northern and the southern sides.

When this mound was excavated, all the remains were exposed. The compound wall on all the three sides except the north has been found. On the north there is a structure which is situated across the compound-wall on the southern side. The whole site appears to be trapezoidal in shape; the southern boundary-wall is about 140', the eastern boundary-wall over 250' and the western boundary-wall 300' in length. The most important structure within the compound of this site is the main temple (Pl. V).

ENTRANCE-HALL

The approach to the area and to the main temple was on the south which is the narrowest side. In front of the main temple and at a distance of 130' stood a building which served the purpose of an entrance-hall in the later age.

There is another building in the south-eastern corner. It consists of a central corridor flanked by three rooms on the south and north.

MAIN TEMPLE

The main temple consists of two parts, viz., the main

shrine or sanctum in the northern portion and a pillared hall on the south around which was carried the circumambulatory passage (Pl. IV, b). About 50 circular terracotta plaques with the figure of eight-handed Tārā and the Buddhist creed inscribed on them have been found in the courtyard of the main temple. On palaeographical grounds these belong to the eleventh century A.D. In the Nalanda inscription of Vipulaśrīmitra it has been stated that Vipulaśrīmitra built a temple of Tārā with an attached court and a tank at Somapura identified with Paharpur. Since the effigies of Tārā have been found in such large numbers in Satyapīr's Bhita and at no other place in Paharpur and since there is the presence of the superstructure of a temple at this site, the irresistible conclusion is that this temple was the original temple of Tārā referred to in the above inscription. No trace of the tank has been found. The court which has been found here may be ascribed to the monk Vipulaśrīmitra

VOTIVE STŪPAS

Besides this temple a number of votive stūpas which are either square or rectangular or circular have been found in this area. They number altogether 123. The largest stūpa is the circular one which has a diameter of 25' and is situated to the north-west of the main temple, while the smallest is also the circular one which has a diameter of 2'9" and is situated to the south-west of the enclosure.

DISCOVERED ANTIQUITIES

Among the antiquities found here mention should be made of a bronze statue of Jambhala and some glazed polychrome pottery with chocolate and white floral ornament

or white and green foliated leaves on a brown background. Similar pottery has not been found on the other local sites and for the matter of that on any other site in Bengal.

CHAPTER V

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

THE archaeological excavations at Paharpur not only brought to light one of the most magnificent monuments of ancient India but also some unique specimens of sculpture which fill up a great gap in the history of Bengal art. It seems that the evidence of the art of sculpture in Bengal dates from the Mauryan age. Some terracotta figurines have been found at several sites in Bengal, among which mention should be made of Gitagram. There is a resemblance in modelling between the specimens found at Gitagram and those found at other sites whose date has been definitely proved to be Maurya. Some other terracotta figurines found here and at Mahasthan have been ascribed to the Śuṅga age. Two sculptures of Sūrya, one from Kumarpur and the other from Niyamatpur, both in Rajshahi district, an image of Vishṇu found at Hankrail in Malda district and a colossal head found in Dinajpur district, betray Kushana influence and it is, therefore, highly probable that they are to be ascribed to the Kushana age. Further, certain sculptures which have been found are to be ascribed to the Gupta age. These sculptures are an image of Buddha found at Biharail in Rajshahi district, an image of Sūrya found at Deora in Bogra district and an image of Mañjurśrī found at Mahasthan in Bogra district.

STONE-SCULPTURE

The sculptures found on the walls of the main temple at Paharpur are mainly of two types, viz., stone-sculpture and

terracota plaque. Except for a few loose sculptures all the stone-sculptures which number 63 are reliefs fixed on the basement-wall of the temple. The beginning of the main temple at Paharpur should be ascribed to the age of Dharmapāla, the Pāla emperor; but it is important to note that all these sculptures fundamentally differ from those of the time of Dharmapāla.

BRAHMĀ

In the second-angle of the eastern quadrant is a sculpture 2' high and 8" broad, on which is represented Brahmā with matted hair and holding a *kamaṇḍalu* in his left hand while the right hand is damaged.

ŚIVA

One sculpture represents the incident of Śiva's life. Śive stands holding the handle of an umbrella with his right hand and having the *ūrdha-medhira* characteristic. On either side of him there are dwarfish figures who are possibly the *gaṇas*. The first female figure to the left of Śiva holds a cup in her left hand and has her right hand in the *varadamudrā* (bestowing attitude). To her left there is another female figure whom one small figure clasps round the waist. Besides her *Bhṛiṅgī* is represented as standing and the ascetic *Kushmāṇḍa* is carried by another figure. This probably represents the scene in which Śiva is offered the cup of poison churned out of the milk-ocean at the instance of the gods. In this case the female figure who carries the cup is earth-goddess and the other female figure Pārvatī (Pl. VII, a).

RĀMĀYAṆA SCENE

In the middle of the short wall facing east is another

sculpture which depicts a scene. Here is found one man carrying one stone on his head and two other stones in his two hands. In its right side there is the kneeling figure of a *nāginī*. It might represent the scene in which the monkeys are said to have bridged the sea between India and Lañkā. In this case the carrying figure is a monkey and the article carried are the stone-pieces. The kneeling figure on its right side remains unidentified. Or it might represent the incident in which Hanumān brought the mount Gandhamādana to save the life of Lakshmaṇa. In that case the male figure is Hanumān carrying the mountain on his head, and the female figure is the *nāginī* whom Hanumān is said to have encountered on his way to the mountain.

KṚISHṆA LEGEND SCENE

Another sculpture also represents a scene. Here is found one standing male figure having four hands and holding a mountain-like thing with two hands. By its left lower hand it holds a standing and smiling male child and by its right lower hand it clasps one female figure. There is no doubt that it represents the well-known story of Kṛishṇa holding the mountain Govardhana on his finger. The central figure is Kṛishṇa and the two attendant figures are possibly the denizens of Gokula who were saved by Kṛishṇa from the torrential rains sent down by Indra, by holding over them the mound Govardhana.

GAṆEŚA

One sculpture represents Gaṇeśa. It is made of grey-coloured sand-stone and measures 1'9" in height and 2'3" in width. It is a seated figure having four hands. In its upper right hand there is a bunch of leaves, in the upper

left hand the *triśūla*, in the lower right hand a rosary (*akshamālā*) and a snake in the lower left hand. On the pedestal is the crude representation of the mouse (Pl. VII, b).

RĀDHĀ AND KṚISHṆA

In the wall on south-east angle facing south there is a sculpture which represents two standing figures—one male and the other a female (Pl. VIII, b). The right arm of the male figure clasps the female figure whose left arm clasps the male figure. The female figure has a halo behind its head. This sculpture probably represents Rādhā and Kṛishṇa. It is undoubtedly one of the best sculptures that have been found at Paharpur.

YAMUNĀ

In the wall on south-east angle facing south there is the representation of Yamunā (Pl. VIII, a). It is made of basalt and measures 2'6" in height and 1'6" in width. In the centre is a female figure standing on a tortoise. It has two hands of which the left one touches the waist (*kaṭyavalambita*) and the right one holding a full blown lotus on which there is the swan is held upwards. On her left side is a male figure holding a *chhattra* over the head of Yamunā. There is a female figure on the right side standing on a fish and holding a *kamaṇḍalu* in her left hand. On the left side of the main figure in the upper horizon there is a full-blown lotus on which there are two swans.

BALARĀMA

On the wall in south-east angle facing south there is a sculpture in which there is a representation of the image of Balarāma. In it is found a male figure standing in the

middle and attended by two attendants—each on one side. It has a seven-headed serpent-hood. In its left upper arm it holds the *hala* (plough) (Pl. IX, b).

INDRA

On the wall in south-east angle, facing east is a stone image of Indra. It is a two-handed standing figure behind which there is an elephant. There is a halo behind the head of the main image (Pl. IX, a).

AGNI

There is a stone-image representing Agni. In his right hand Agni holds a rosary (*asksha-mālā*) and in the left a cylindrical object, possibly a kamaṇḍalu. The seven flames that characterise Agni can be made out in the background.

YAMA

On the wall in the south is the sculptural representation of Yama, with two attendants, one on either side.

KRISHṆA LEGEND SCENE

In the wall on the south-west angle facing south there is a sculpture of reddish sand-stone measuring 1'8" in height and 8½" in width. It shows in relief a man, probably Vasudeva, moving towards the left and holding a child, probably Kṛishṇa, in his hands. This at once reminds one of Vasudeva carrying the newly born Kṛishṇa to Gokula.

MAHĀBHĀRATA-SCENE

In the west wall there is another sculpture which possibly depicts one scene. It is made of whitish grey sandstone

and measure 1'8½" in height and 11" in width. In this sculpture is found a male figure. This male figure is fighting with another male figure who has a bow in his hand. This scene represents the abduction of Subhadrā by Arjuna as related in the Mahābhārata.

RĀMĀYAṆA-SCENE

On the west wall there is another stone-sculpture which possibly represents a scene. It is in dark sandstone and measures 1'7" in height and 12½" in width. In it is found one monkey on the left fighting with another monkey who is embracing a female figure on the right. There is a prostrate figure between the two fighting monkeys. There is a garland round the neck of the monkey on the left. This scene seems to represent the fight between Vāli and Sugrīva narrated in the Kishkindhyā Kāṇḍam of the Rāmāyaṇa. It has been stated in the Rāmāyaṇa that in the fight between Vāli and Sugrīva Rāma requested Sugrīva to wear a garland by which he would identify him. In that case the monkey on the left is Sugrīva and the monkey on the right is Vāli and the female figure is Tārā who was the bone of contention between two brothers. The prostrate figure seems to be Aṅgada, the son of Vāli.

TERRACOTTA PLAQUES

The terracotta-plaques which have been found at Paharpur were originally placed on the walls of the main temple at Paharpur. These plaques form the most numerous specimens of art found in Paharpur. The terracotta plaques which still lie *in situ* number approximately 2000 while those found loose in course of excavation would not be less than 800 in number.

ŚIVA

In many of these plaques Brahmanical deities are represented. On the first terrace verandah-wall on the south-west is the representation of Śiva seated on a lotus-seat, and holding up the triśūla (Pl. X, c). A second type of Śiva shows him standing with a spear in the left hand and a garland of skulls. A third type of Śiva shows him as multi-headed and bearing different weapons in his ten hands.

ŚIVA-LIṄGA

Among the representation of the Śiva-liṅga at least two can be made out. In one example is found the *liṅga* as a single cylindrical object standing on a rectangular pedestal with the surface decorated with a garland of flowers and banners flying by the sides. In the second specimen is the representation of a liṅga with three heads. The fourth face which should be in a *chaturmukha-liṅga* is not shown.

BRAHMĀ

On the south-west verandah-wall in the first terrace is the figure of Brahmā represented on a plaque. Brahmā has the usual four heads, one at the back being invisible and is seated on a cushioned seat holding a rosary in the right and possibly a vase in the left hands.

VIṢṆU

On the south-west side in the first terrace is the seated image of Viṣṇu. In this figure is found Viṣṇu seated in the *arddhaparyāṅkāśana* and having four hands.

GAṆEŚĀ

Gaṇeśā is represented on some of the terracotta plaques.

KṚISHṆA LEGEND SCENES

There are many terracotta-plaques in which the KṚishṇa legend is depicted.

RĀMĀYAṆA-SCENES

Besides there are some other terracotta plaques which represent scenes from the Rāmāyaṇa.

BUDDHA

There are certain terracotta plaques which represent Buddhist deities. On one is the representation of Buddha seated on the *vajrāsana* in the earth-touching attitude.

BUDDHIST PANTHEON

Other Buddhist deities who have been represented are Bodhisattva Padmapāṇi, Mañjuśrī, Jambhala and Tārā.

PANCHATANTRA-SCENES

The most important are some terracotta plaques which give us an idea of the folk art of Bengal. Stories narrated in the Pañchatantra have been depicted on some of the terracotta plaques. In one is found a monkey sitting on a beam of wood and holding the wedge in its right hand. This at once reminds one of the story of kilotpāṭī vānarāḥ narrated in Pañchatantra. The purport of the story is that a monkey came to grief by pulling out a wedge from a split beam of wood in a saw-mill (Pl. X, 6). In another plaque is found an elephant who has been trapped and three mice who are trying to loosen the trap. In Aesop's

Fables there is the story of the lion and the mouse in which one lion who has been trapped is released from the snare by a grateful mouse. In this case the purport seems to be the same, though here are represented an elephant instead of the lion and three mice instead of one mouse (Pl. X, a).

LOWER ANIMAL

The representation of the animal kingdom is almost complete so far as the fauna of Bengal is concerned. The animals represented are mainly buffalo, antelope, elephant, horse, camel, monkey, bull, goat, lion, bear, tiger, rhinoceros and jackal.

BIRD

Birds have also been depicted. The most popular of all the birds is the duck or goose. Besides this the parrot and the peacock are also represented.

FISH

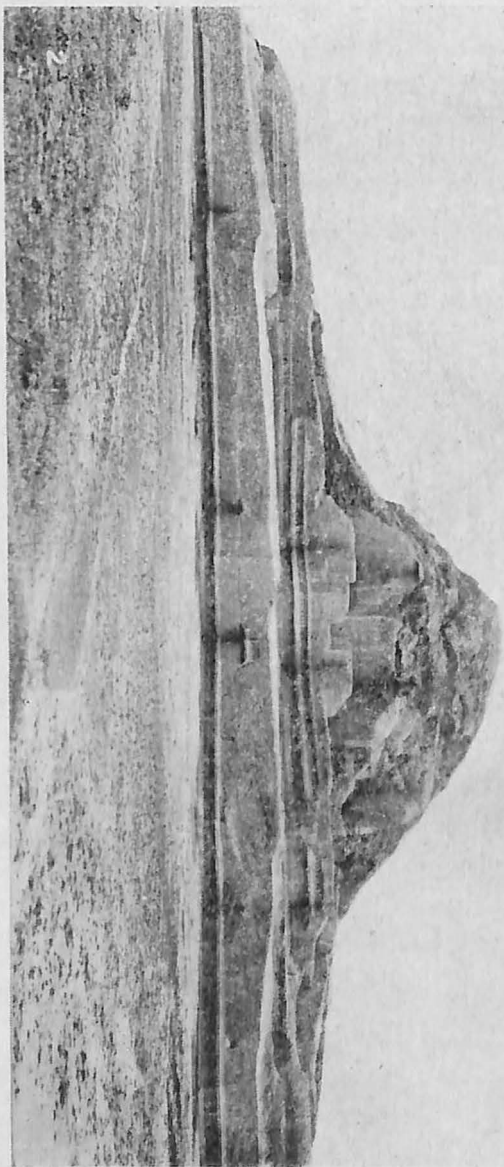
Fish has also been represented either with a chain in the mouth or in the symbolic way of two fishes crossing each other.

FLORA

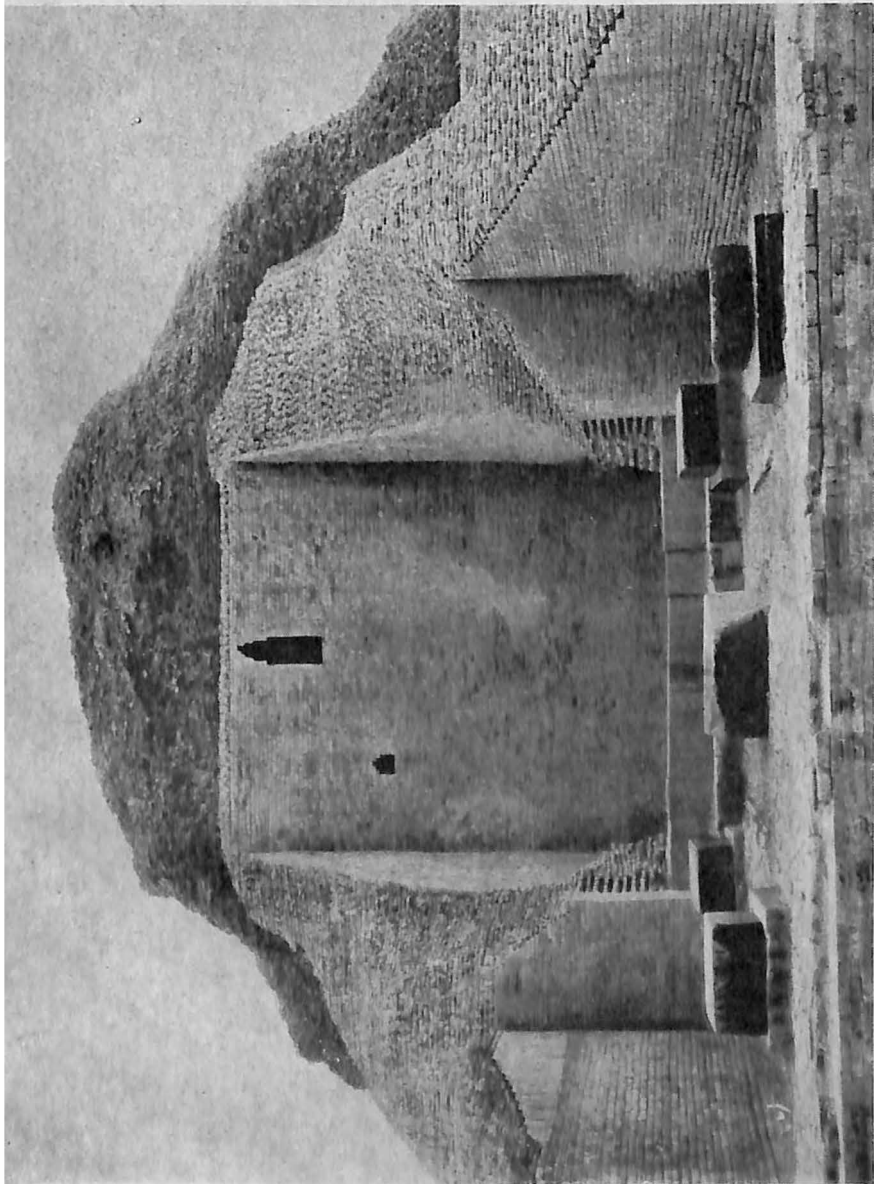
In comparison with the fauna on the terracotta plaques it must be admitted that the flora is very poorly represented. Prominent among the fauna are the plantain tree, the banyan tree and the lotus.



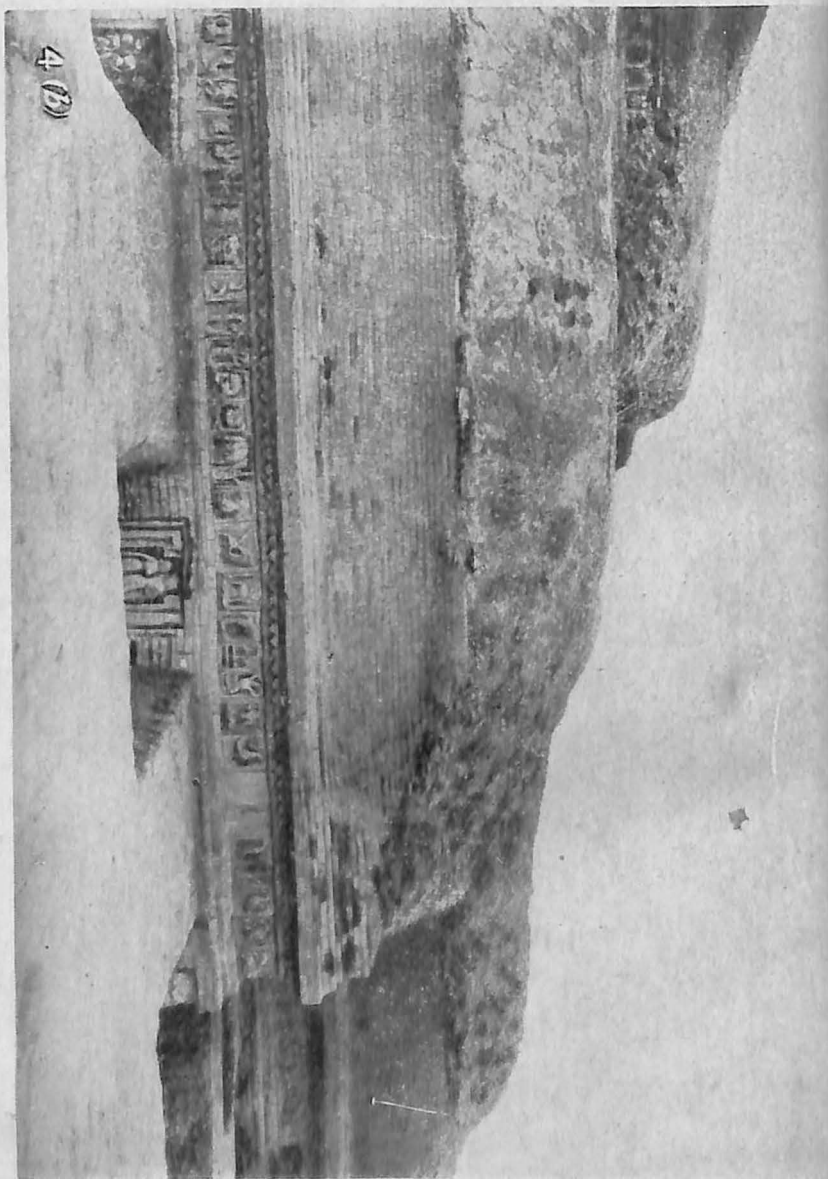
General view of mound before excavation.



General view of main temple after conservation.



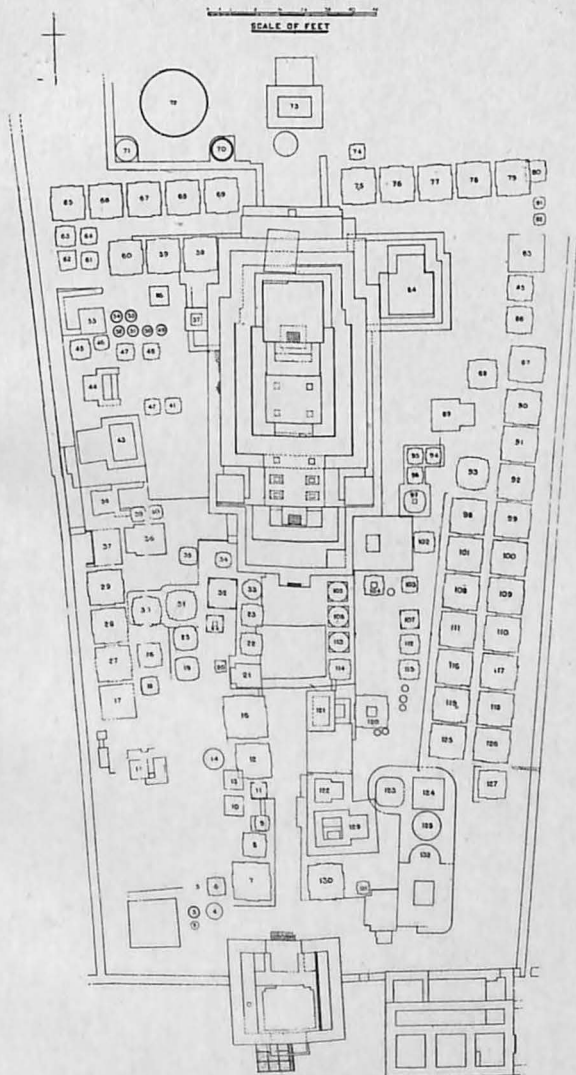
General view of northern ante-chamber.



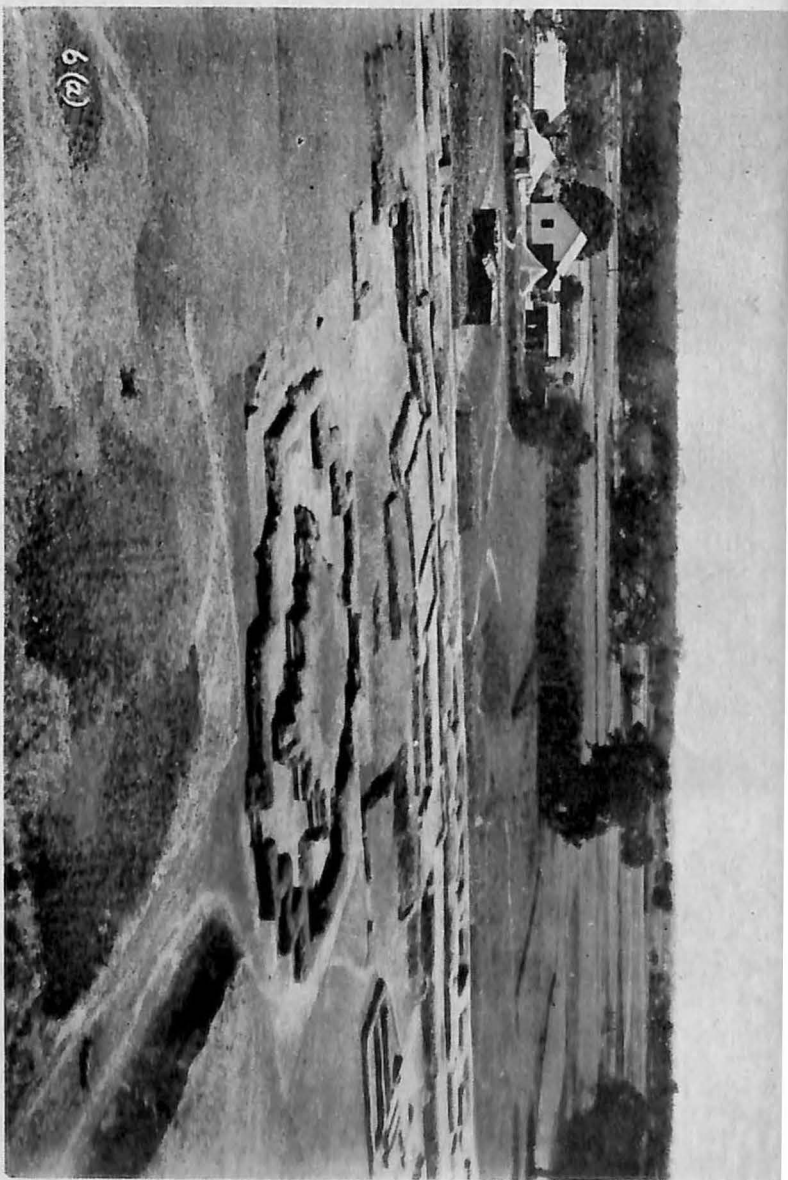
4 (B)

General view of basement wall.

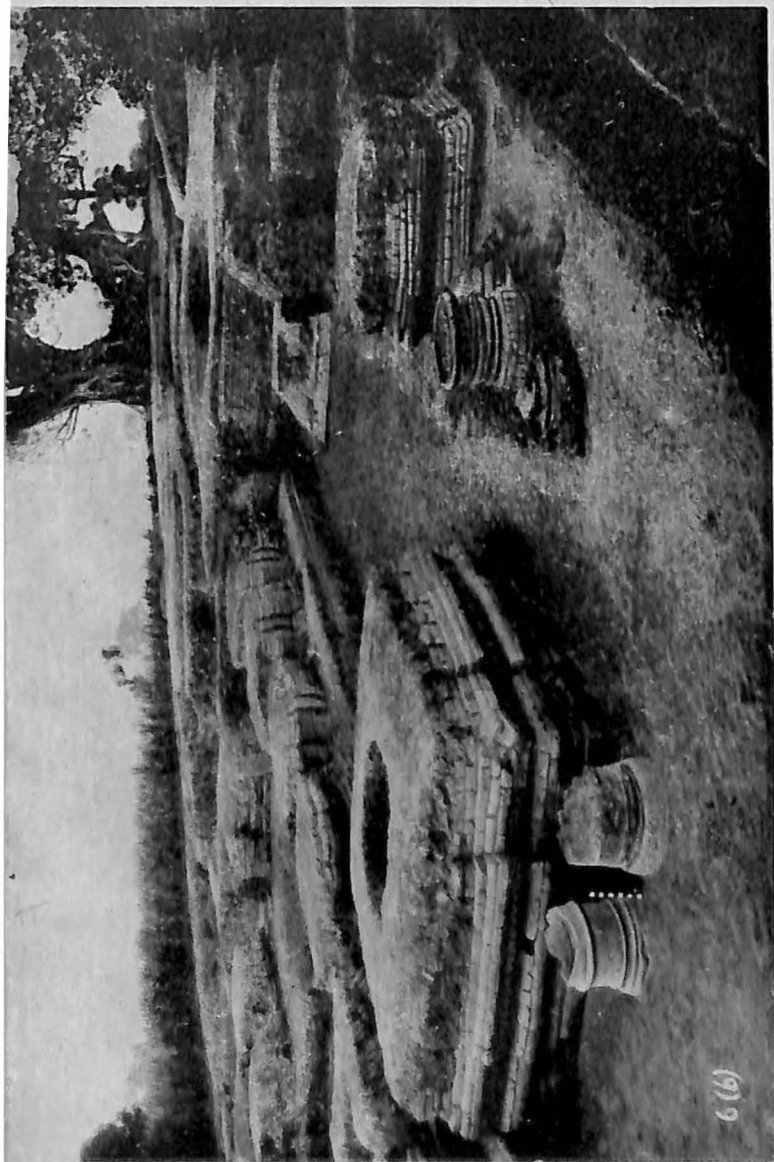
EXCAVATIONS AT SATYAPIR'S BHITA
PAHARPUR, DIST. RAJSHAHI



General plan of Satyapir Bhita.



Model of main temple.



General view of Satyapir Bhita.



Drinking of poison by Siva.



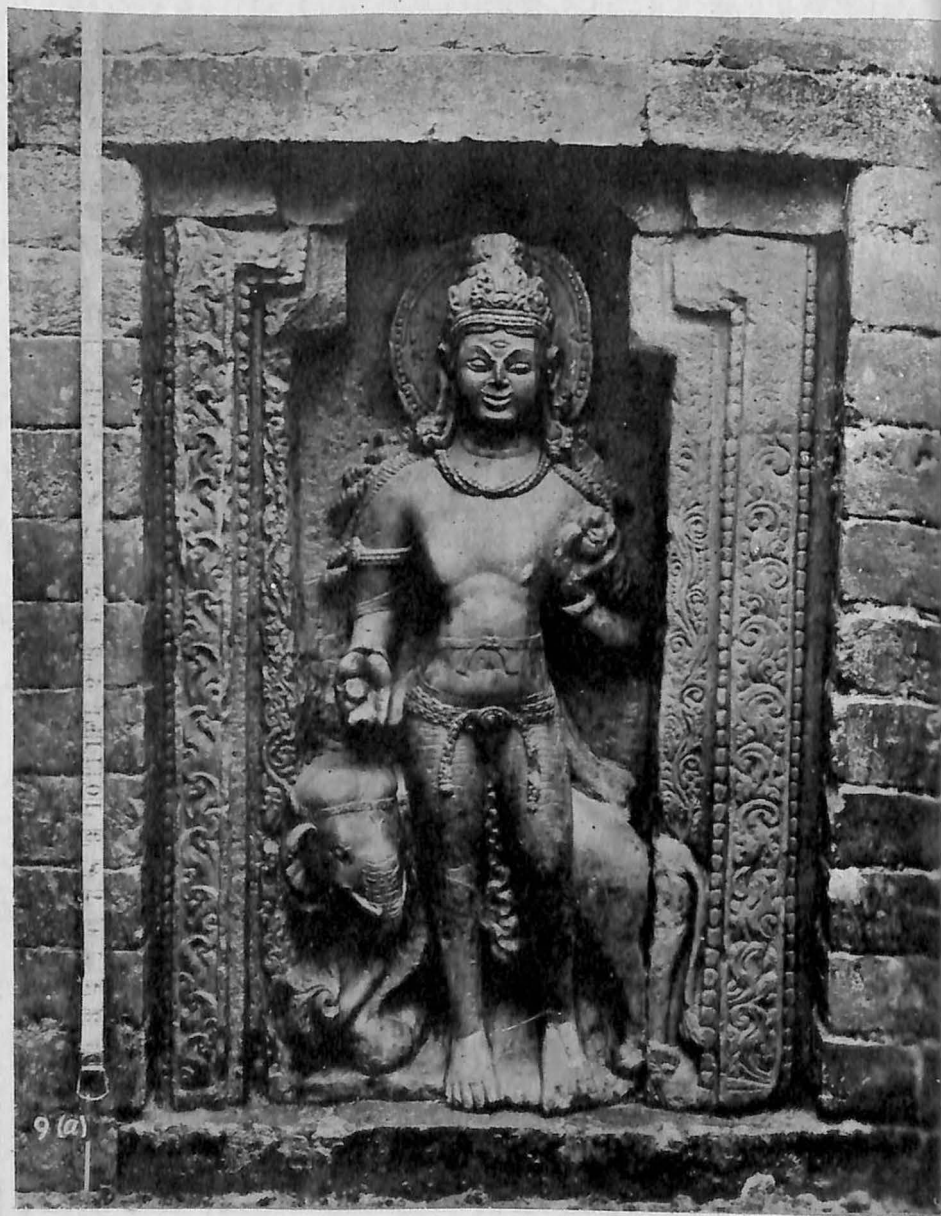
7(b)



Stone image of Yamuna.



Stone image of Radha and Krishna.

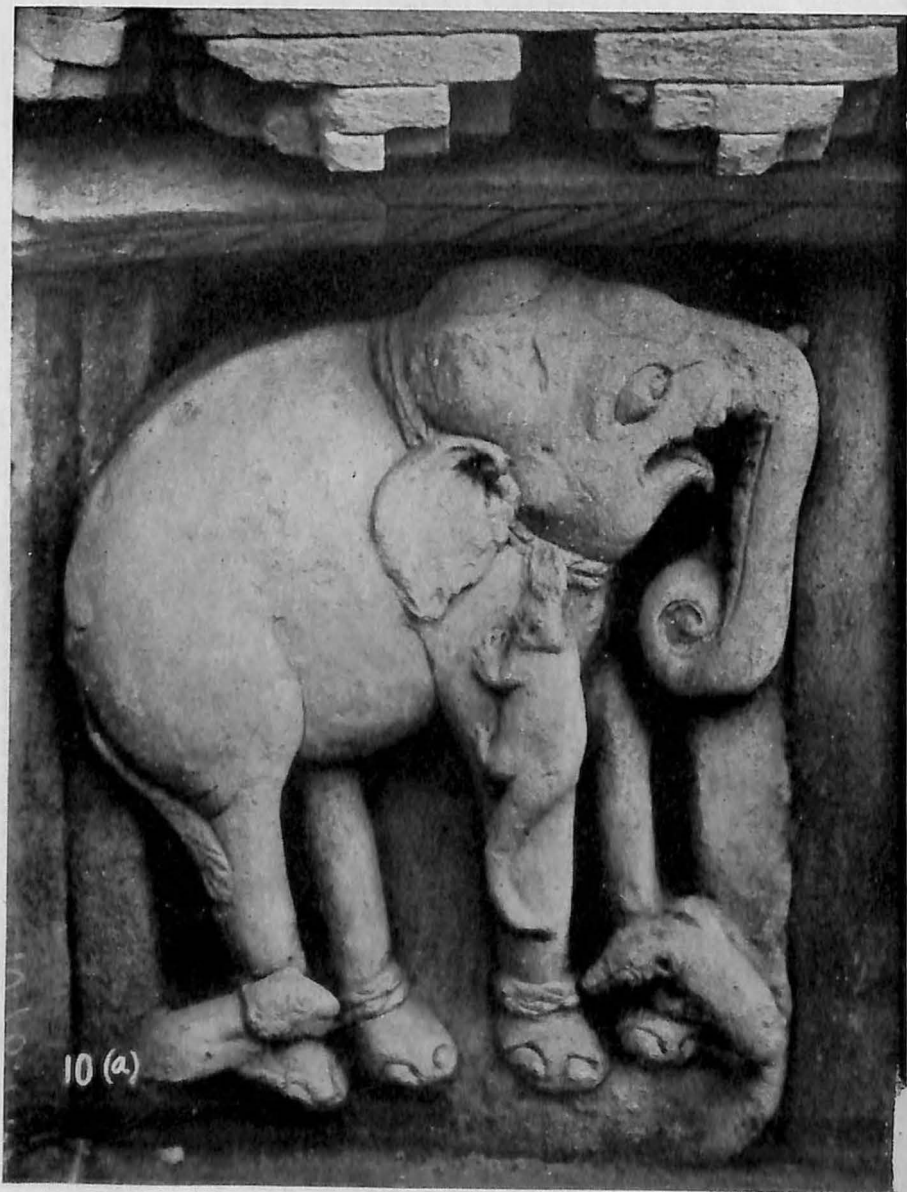


9 (a)

Stone image of Indra.



Stone image of Balarama.



Terracotta plaque showing elephant and mice.



Terracotta plaque representing monkey pulling out wedge.



Image of Siva holding trident.

