

# **PATALIPUTRA (PART-3)**

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# ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS

Major *Rennell* had for the first time in 1783 proposed the possibility of ancient Pataliputra being identified with modern Patna in his *Memoir of a Map of Hindustan*. *Buchanan* was the first to carry out a regular survey of Patna for its ancient ruins. During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century *Alexander Cunningham* and *J.D. Beglar* made several attempts to locate the sites mentioned by the two Chinese pilgrims but without any significant finding. During 1892-99, *L.A. Waddell* carried out exploration and excavation at various places in Patna including *Bulandibagh*, *Chhoti Pahari*, *Tulsimandi*, *Maharajganj* to the north-east of *Kumrahar* and at *Rampur*, *Bahadurpur* and *Prithipur* in the south of Patna (Waddell 1892, 1903). At *Bulandibagh*, *Tulsimandi* and *Maharajganj* Waddell brought to light remains of wooden beams of

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about 18" to 20" in diameter arranged in a double row and also wooden drains. He also discovered a colossal capital in Corinthian style. At Kumrahar, he succeeded in finding a broken Asokan pillar at its northeastern corner. In 1897-98, *P.C. Mukherji* also took up excavations at Lohanipur in Patna and came across a ditch extending to 76 m from east to west and also found punch-marked coins, coins of Chandragupta II and fragments of polished pillars .

In 1912 and onward years, *D.B. Spooner* of ASI re-excavated Bulandibagh and Kumrahar and at the latter site found all over the site remains of brick walls of the period Pillared hall ranging between the Gupta and post-Gupta period. Below these walls was encountered a layer of charcoal and ashes (about 30 cm thick) strewn with innumerable fragments of polished sandstone pillars

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occurring at a regular interval of 4.57 m (15 feet) from each other. Spooner found a total of 80 such pillar remains in eight rows with roughly ten heaps in each row. He surmised that there had existed a Mauryan pillared hall at the site resting on 80 or more pillars (72 pillar spots actually found by then) which in turn had been placed on a wooden support. According to him, the belt of ashes and charcoal indicated that before the date of the later brick structures the wooden superstructure of the building had been destroyed by fire which was also responsible for the rending asunder of the exposed parts of the pillars. He also postulated that with the decay of the wooden platform on which the pillars were resting, the pillars sank deep in the soft soil. In the absence of similar

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parallels in India, he favoured a similarity between Achaeminid hall of Persepolis and the Mauryan hall . At another site in the city area known as *Sardargaly* Spooner discovered several fragments of polished stone pieces. Again in 1926-27 the site of Bulandibagh was selected for archaeological excavation in order to determine the nature of wooden palisades. Here, the palisade of about 250 feet in length running in east-west direction was exposed. Two rows of upright pillars about 12 feet in height above the floor were seen placed at a distance of 14 feet 6 inches from one another. The space between the pillars was paved with wooden sleepers and their ends were socketed with upright pillars. In 1935 a similar structure was found at *Gosainkhand*, 800 m to the east of Bulandibagh .

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After an interval of 38 years Kumrahar was again selected for excavations, this time by the *K.P. Jayaswal Research Institute, Patna* (Altekar and Mishra 1959). The five seasons work at the site revealed that the habitation at Kumrahar was continuous from the Mauryan age down to AD 600. After that the site was abandoned until 17<sup>th</sup> century. It further exposed eight more pillars belonging to the Mauryan hall proper and four probably belonging to the entrance. It was proposed by the excavators that the hall was destroyed sometime around the early Sunga period and not during late Gupta period as proposed by Spooner. A good number of structural remains belonging to Buddhist monasteries dating from 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC to 6<sup>th</sup> century AD were exposed. A seal confirmed the name of a monastery-cum-sanatorium by its inscription

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reading *sri-arogyavihare bhikshusamghasya*. Other important findings included punch-marked coins, Kushan and Gupta coins, seals and sealings in Gupta character, beads of semi-precious stones and several terracotta objects. Excavations were again undertaken at different sites in Patna city, namely Mahabirghat, Shah-Kamal Road, Begum-ki-Haveli and Government Press Play Ground during 1955-56 . Out of the three important culture periods (I, II and III), the Period I was represented by Northern Black Polished Ware, black-and-red ware, grey ware, black ware and red ware. Terracotta belonging to the early phase of this period showed some archaic features like the ear, nose, hair shown by pinching out of clay, the mouth by a deep horizontal cut just above the chin, the legs and hands by stumps of clay and the fingers by notches.

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In some cases, the nostrils were shown by two holes. The impressed circles over the body indicated the navel and the breast portions. The female figurines from mid-to-top portion of Period I showed some advanced features where the face was prepared by mould while the other features like the ornaments, ears and hair were shown by the applique method. Some terracotta plaques entirely made of mould also made their appearance in the period. Among the animal figurines which were generally hand-modelled, horse figurines predominated. Punch-marked coins both in silver and copper and uninscribed cast coins were in circulation and they made their appearance from the mid level of period I. According to





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the excavators, the most noteworthy discoveries were of mutilated couchant bull and a number of carved stone pieces bearing the lustrous Mauryan polish. The Period II (150 BC to AD 300) was marked by the presence of red ware. In excavations, the deposit of this period was found to having numerous flimsy walls of brick (43 x 29 x 5 cm), terracotta ring-wells and numerous Sunga and Kushan terracottas, a gold amulet and Naigamesha figures. Period III at the site belonged to the Gupta and late Gupta periods after which, according to the excavators the site was abandoned till 17th century. Of the isolated Mauryan finds from Patna the most noteworthy are the two nude polished sandstone tortos of Jaina tirthankaras found at Lohanipur and the famous Didarganj Yakshi

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now housed at Patna Museum. Besides the findings from regular excavations, a large number of terracotta, pottery and other antiquities were obtained from various schemes of sewerage in Patna, especially in 1920s . The terracotta belonged to Maurya, Sunga, Kushan and Gupta periods and are now housed at Patna Museum. According to majority of scholars, the pillared hall of Kumrahar lying isolated at the southern outskirts of Patna can hardly be identified as a durbar hall of Chandragupta Maurya and a guess may be hazarded that it was the assembly hall of the third Buddhist Council convened by Asoka .

Thus Pataliputra witnessed excavations by a number of archaeologists and they successfully sequenced the archaeological finds by which we are able to know rich cultural heritage of this ancient city.