



Mahasthangarh is one of the earliest urban archaeological sites so far discovered in Bangladesh. The village Mahasthan in Shibganj thana of Bogra District contains the remains of an ancient city which was called Pundranagara or Paundravardhanapura in the territory of Pundravardhana.

Mahasthangarh is one of the oldest and the most important archaeological attractions in Bangladesh. 'Mahasthan' means 'great sanctity' and 'garh' means fort. Mahasthangarh is the remains of the ancient city of Pundranagar. It was the capital of the Maurya, Gupta and Sen kingdoms.

History:

Mahasthangarh (Bengali: মহাস্থানগড় *Môhashtangôṛ*) is one of the earliest urban archaeological sites so far discovered in Bangladesh. The village Mahasthan in Shibganj thana of Bogra District contains the remains of an ancient city which was called Pundranagara or Paundravardhanapura in the territory of Pundravardhana. A limestone slab bearing six lines in Prakrit in Brahmi script, discovered in 1931, dates Mahasthangarh to at least the 3rd century BC. The fortified area was in use till the 18th century AD.

Together with the ancient and medieval ruins, the mazhar (holy tomb) of Shah Sultan Balkhi Mahisawar built at the site of a Hindu temple is located at Mahasthangarh. He was a dervish (holy person devoted to Islam) of royal lineage who came to the Mahasthangarh area, with the objective of spreading Islam among non-Muslims. He converted the people of the area to Islam and settled there.

Mahasthan means a place that has excellent sanctity and *garh* means fort. Mahasthan was first mentioned in a Sanskrit text of the 13th century entitled *Vallalcharita*. It is also mentioned in an anonymous text *Karatoya mahatmya*, circumstantially placed in 12th–13th century. The same text also mentions two more names to mean the same place – Pundrakshetra, land of the Pundras, and Pundranagara, city of the Pundras. In 1685, an administrative decree mentioned the place as Mastangarh, a mixture of Sanskrit and Persian meaning fortified place of an auspicious personage. Subsequent discoveries have confirmed that the earlier name was Pundranagara or Paundravardhanapura, and that the present name of Mahasthangarh is of later origin.

Mahasthangarh, the ancient capital of Pundravardhana is located 11 km (6.8 mi) north of Bogra on the Bogra-Rangpur highway, with a feeder road (running along the eastern side of the ramparts of the citadel for 1.5 km) leading to Jahajghata and site museum. Buses are available for Bogra from Dhaka and take 4½ hours for the journey via Bangabandhu Jamuna Bridge across the Jamuna River. Buses are available from Bogra

to Mahasthangarh. Rickshaws are available for local movement. Hired transport is available at Dhaka/ Bogra. Accommodation is available at Bogra. When travelling in a hired car, one can return to Dhaka the same day, unless somebody has a plan to visit Somapura Mahavihara at Paharpur in the district of Naogaon and other places, or engage in a detailed study.

It is believed that the location for the city in the area was decided upon because it is one of the highest areas in Bangladesh. The land in the region is almost 36 metres (118 ft) above sea level, whereas Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, is around 6 metres (20 ft) above sea level. Another reason for choosing this place was the position and size of the Karatoya, which as recently as in the 13th century was three times wider than Ganges.

Mahasthangarh stands on the red soil of the Barind Tract which is slightly elevated within the largely alluvium area. The elevation of 15 to 25 metres above the surrounding areas makes it a relatively flood free physiographic unit.



Heritage:

Dating back to at least the 4th century BCE, Mahasthangarh is the earliest urban archaeological site that has been discovered in Bangladesh.

Several historical sites are located within the rampart wall, including a mausoleum (Mausoleum of Shah Sultan Mahisawar Balkhi), a temple site (Bairgir Bhita), remnants of an ancient palace (Parshuram's Palace) with an ancient well (Jiyat Kunda) as well as residential blocks in the eastern rampart area.



One of the highlights of Mahasthangarh is Govinda Bhita, where remnants of two Buddhist temples can be visited. The main temple was erected in the 6th century and next to it is a slightly smaller temple, which was built in the 11th century.



Opposite Govinda Bhita, near the north side of the citadel is the Mahasthan Archaeological Museum. The museum is quite small but has a well-maintained collection of pieces recovered from the archaeological site. These include the statues of Hindu and Buddhist gods and goddesses, terracotta plaques depicting daily life, as well as some well-preserved bronze images found in nearby monastery ruins that date back to the pre-Pala period. There are even some fragments of ring-stones which were used for rituals in the Mauryan period.



Attractions:

There are many sightseeing places there. Close the fortress there are many excavated and un excavated mounds there.

The excavated mounds inside the fortress area

Bairagir Bitha-The construction took place in 4 eras. The excavation have disclosed some base remains of temples. It was able to restore 2 sculptured sand stone pillars.

Khodarapathar Bitha- Stones engraved with the sublime Buddha and the followers in Anjali were restored.

Parsuramer Prasad-It contains remnants of 3 periods

1.8th Century findings has stone of Visnupatta during Pala period.

2. 15-16th century contains some lustrous fragment of Muslim origin.
3. Between 1835 and 1853 2 coins of British East India Company were found.

Mankalir Dip –Some remnants which were identified there are terracotta plaques, bronze Ganesh, bronze Garuda were identified base remnants of the 15 domed mosque.

The excavated mounds outside the fortress are

Govinda Bitha- It is situated on opposite of site museum. From 3rd to 15th century remnants of 2 temples have been disclosed.

Totaram Panditer Dhap-It is located in village of Paharpur. Architectural remnants of a destroyed monastery have been found.

Gokul Medh: People also know it as Behular Basar Ghar or Lakshindarer Medh. It is located 3km to south of Bogra-Rangpur Road in Village Gokul. It disclosed a terraced platform with 172 rectangular cells.

Skander Dhap: It is located on village Baghapur 3.5km to south of the fortress area on Rangpur Bogra Highway. A sandstone named Kartika was found there and a sandstone was exposed.

Khulnar Dhap: Named after Khullana spouse of Chand Sagar it is located in village Chengispur m west of north-west corner of the fortress area.

Bhimer Jangal: It stems from north east of Bogra and advances towards north to a place named Damukdharer bit. This place has more of a military feature that is protect the country from east.

Jogir Bhaban: It is located 3miles on west of khetlal road in Bagtahali. The holy places there are located in south east corner of an area.

Arora: It is located in Arora village and it stands on Masandighi.

Teghar: It is located in north of Chadina hat.

Rojakpur: While advancing west from Gokul to Haripur a traveler had to pass through west arm of the latter village. In Bogra khetlal road close

to Chadnia hat, West Haripur and on south of Somrai Bil we can find the village of Rojakpur.

Mathura: Located on east Bumanpara it extends to the east garh. The village Mathura is located on the north.

Mahastangarh museum: It is small and well preserved museum inside Mahasthangarh. It consists of affluent surroundings. Statues of hindu gods, terracotta plaques and some well restored bronze images which are usually from Pala period. The gardens there are lucrative. It is closed on Sunday and Monday mornings and each day lunch break is from 12:30-2:30pm. The main entrance is close to the fortress area.