

A FIELD STUDY OF AN ANCIENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE AND ASSOCIATED MUSEUM: DEBALGARH-ANULIA

Field visit date : 30/12/2025

Course Name : B.A. History (Major)

Department : Department of History

College : Santipur College (*Affiliated to the University of Kalyani*)

University : University of Kalyani

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SUBMITTED BY : The Field Study Team (*The detailed list of student names, roll numbers, and signatures is provided at the end of this report*)

**UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF : Assistant Professor Dr. Sudipta
Sadhukhan Faculty Member, Department of History, Santipur College**

DATE OF SUBMISSION : April 10, 2026



CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the project report entitled "**A Field Study of an Ancient Archaeological Site and Associated Museum: Debalgarh-Anulia**" is a bona fide record of the field survey carried out by the students of B.A. History (Major), 5th Semester (Team list and signatures attached separately), under my supervision and guidance.

This report is submitted to the **Department of History, Santipur College** (affiliated to the University of Kalyani), as a part of the educational excursion and field study curriculum. I further certify that this is an original piece of collective work, and the observations and findings presented in this report are based on their actual visit to the site.



[Signature of the Supervisor]

Name of the Supervisor: Dr. Sudipta Sadhukhan

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to express our profound gratitude to all those who have contributed to the successful completion of this field study and project report.

First and foremost, we are deeply indebted to our esteemed project supervisor, **Assistant Professor Dr. Sudipta Sadhukhan** Department of History, Santipur College, for their continuous guidance, invaluable suggestions, and unwavering support throughout this research. Their profound knowledge and constant encouragement were instrumental in shaping this report.

We extend our sincere thanks to the administration and respected faculty members of the **Department of History, Santipur College**, for providing us with the necessary academic framework and the wonderful opportunity to undertake this educational field study.

A very special and heartfelt note of thanks goes to **Dr. Biswajit Roy**, whose relentless research, guidance, and dedication have been the main driving force behind the growth and recognition of this archaeological site. We are also extremely grateful to **Mr. Chittaranjan Biswas** (Curator and Founder) and the authorities of the '**Devgram Debalraja Puratattva O Lokosanskriti Sangha**' (Debalgarh Museum). We are deeply thankful to them for granting us access to their rich collection of artifacts, and for patiently sharing their profound knowledge regarding the local history of Debalgarh and Anulia.

Finally, we are thankful to all our classmates and the local guides in the Devgram region, whose cooperation, enthusiasm, and teamwork made this field survey a truly enriching and memorable experience.

Sincerely,

The Field Study Team

B.A. History (Major), 5th Semester

Santipur College

(Affiliated to University of Kalyani)

Date: April 10 , 2026

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5. Introduction

History is not merely confined to royal decrees, copper plates, or the pages of manuscripts; rather, it lies dormant within the stratigraphy of the earth's surface. Educational tourism and field studies are indispensable components of historical research, as they provide an opportunity to verify theoretical knowledge on the ground. The focal point of our field study is the Devgram-Anulia archaeological site, locally known as 'Debal Rajar Garh,' located in the Gangnapur police station area (Ranaghat-1 block) of Nadia district, West Bengal.

Situated approximately 75 kilometers north of Kolkata (23°09'30" N latitude and 88°39'32" E longitude), this region remained isolated from the mainstream history of Bengal for a long time. The Public Works Department (PWD) of the British government recognized Debalgarh as an important pre-Islamic (Pala-Sena era) architectural site in its 1896 record, "List of Ancient Monuments in Bengal". Recent geo-archaeological research and the discovery of numerous artifacts through local initiatives prove that this site is an ancient settlement dating back nearly 1,500 years. The artifacts unearthed from this area suggest that this ancient land, nurtured by the Ganges, Yamuna, and Marali rivers, was once a crucial riverine port of the Gangaridai civilization and later served as a highly significant military and administrative center for the Pala and Sena kings. The primary reason for selecting this archaeological site and the local museum is the unprecedented coexistence of artifacts from the Maurya-Shunga, Kushan, Gupta, Pala-Sena, and Sultanate periods, which can unveil a 'missing link' in the continuous history of Bengal.

6. Objectives of the Study

Our field study has multifaceted and analytical objectives, primarily standing on four pillars:

- **Determining the Historical Significance of the Site:** To verify on the ground the historical debate regarding whether Debalgarh is merely an ordinary fort associated with the memory of King Devapala, or if it was the actual center of Bakhtiyar Khalji's Bengal invasion in the 13th century and the lost capital of the Sena kings, 'Vijaypur,' or the ancient 'Nadia' described by Minhaj-i-Siraj.
- **Observing the Types and Characteristics of Artifacts:** To comprehend contemporary socio-economic conditions by examining the artistic and technological features of pottery from various eras, granite blocks, architectural ruins, and sculptures and coins from the Pala, Sena, and Sultanate periods found underground.
- **Understanding the Museum's Conservation Methods:** In the absence of a large government museum in Nadia district, to investigate how the locally established 'Debalgarh Museum' preserves, documents, and displays recovered artifacts using entirely indigenous methods.
- **Correlating Textbook Knowledge with Practical Experience:** To compare the descriptions of ancient forts, moats, or urban planning found in texts like Sandhyakar Nandi's *Ramacharitam* or Minhaj's *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* with the actual ruins of Debalgarh's massive moat and fort.

7. Methodology

The proper methodological application is essential for any objective research. For this project, we adopted a Mixed Methodology:

- **On-site Observation:** We directly observed the ruins of the 'C'-shaped fort wall (rampart) spread over an area of approximately 1 square kilometer, the moat, and the remains of high mounds or 'Nazar Minars' (watchtowers) at the corners of the fort. Measurements and architectural styles of the 15-20 feet wide fort walls and 30-40 feet deep moat were meticulously noted.
- **Analysis of Museum Catalogs and Information Plaques:** Information regarding the finding spots and periods was collected from the plaques attached to the artifacts preserved in the local museum and its catalog.
- **Interviews and Oral Traditions:** We gathered oral history from local folklore that has been passed down for generations (such as the tale of King Debal) and through interviews with the museum's founder, Mr. Chittaranjan Biswas, and researchers like Dr. Biswajit Roy.
- **Use of Primary and Secondary Sources:** We utilized research papers by Dr. Biswajit Roy and others (e.g., *Reconstructing Historical Landscape Based on Paleochannel Investigations...*), the 1896 PWD report, and various historical texts.

8. Description of the Archaeological Site

This chapter forms the core foundation of our field study. The Debalgarh-Anulia archaeological site is not just an ancient ruin; it is a living document ranging from the maritime trade of the Gangaridai civilization to the political transitions of medieval Bengal. A detailed description is provided below:

a) Location and Geographical Context

- **Current Location:** The Debalgarh archaeological site is situated in the Devgram and Anulia Gram Panchayat areas under the Gangnapur police station of the Ranaghat subdivision in Nadia district, West Bengal (23°09'30" N latitude and 88°39'32" E longitude). Its distance from Kolkata is about 75 kilometers.
- **Geo-archaeological Context:** This region is an integral part of the Ganges delta. Research by Dr. Biswajit Roy and others reveals that in ancient times, rivers like the Ganges, Yamuna (Parvati), Ichamati,



Gomati, and especially the 'Marali' and its tributary 'Hangar' flowed through this area. Although these rivers have now silted up and turned into 'paleochannels' (e.g., Nabor Beel), these river routes once transformed Debalgarh into a fortified deltaic city and an international riverine port.

b) History of Discovery

Debalgarh was not discovered in a single day; there is a long history behind its rediscovery.

- **Initial Documentation (1896):** The Public Works Department (PWD) of the British government recognized Debalgarh as an important pre-Islamic (Pala-Sena era) architectural site in its 1896 document, "List of Ancient Monuments in Bengal".
- **Local Discovery and Collection:** For a long time, local farmers found various statues, bricks, and coins while plowing or digging for house construction. In local folklore, it was known as 'Debal Rajar Garh'. In 2017, to save these 'in-situ' artifacts from oblivion, local enthusiast Mr. Chittaranjan Biswas established a museum named 'Devgram Debalraja Puratattva O Lokosanskriti Sangha' in his own home.
- **Modern Research (2010-Present):** Professor Dr. Biswajit Roy and his co-researchers initiated scientific geo-archaeological research of the site using satellite imagery, contour maps, and field investigations.
- **Excavation:** For a long time, neither the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) nor the State Archaeology Department had conducted any formal excavation, with almost all previously recovered artifacts being found on the surface or through shallow local digging. However, in a recent and significant development, the ASI officially commenced preliminary excavation work in a few parts of the site starting in February 2026. As this digging process is currently ongoing and in its early stages, the official reports and details of any newly unearthed findings have not yet been publicly disclosed.

c) Chronology

By analyzing the stratigraphy and characteristics of the recovered artifacts, researchers have determined a continuous chronology of Debalgarh, demonstrating nearly 1,500 to 2,000 years of uninterrupted human settlement:

1. **Maurya-Shunga Period (4th - 1st Century BCE):** Presence of Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW).
2. **Kushan and Gupta Periods (1st - 6th Century CE):** Evidence of Roman trade and Gupta gold coins.
3. **Pala-Sena Period (8th - 13th Century CE):** This period marks the 'Golden Age' of Debalgarh. The massive fort and numerous statues of deities belong to this era.
4. **Sultanate Period (Post-13th Century):** The discovery of silver coins proves that the settlement continued even after the fall of the Senas.

d) Major Artifacts

The artifacts unearthed from Debalgarh and Anulia can be broadly classified into five categories:

1. **Architecture:**

Fort and Moat: A massive 'C'-shaped earthen fort wall or 'Rampart' covering an area of about 1 square kilometer is present, which is 15-20 feet wide. To thwart enemy attacks, there was a 30-40 feet deep moat outside the fort.

Watchtower and Urbanization: Ruins of high mounds or watchtowers ('Nazar Minar') have been found at the northwestern corner of the fort. Additionally, ancient ring-wells, large burnt bricks from the Pala-Sena period, and granite stone blocks have been discovered underground, evidencing advanced urban planning.

2. **Coins:**

- As a symbol of ancient India's economic prosperity, a replica of Samudragupta's Ashvamedha sacrifice gold coin and several silver coins from the subsequent Sultanate period have been recovered.



3. **Pottery:**

- Indigenous smooth black pottery (NBPW) and Black and Red Ware have been found.
- **Amphora:** The most striking artifact is the fragment of a long-necked drinking vessel or 'Amphora,' bearing witness to Roman trade and proving that Debalgarh was connected to Mediterranean commerce.



Numerous water lamps, pitchers, and decorated bricks have also been discovered.

4. **Sculpture:**

Vishnu Statue: Several flawless black stone and sandstone statues of Lord Vishnu have been recovered as extraordinary examples of Pala-Sena art.

Goddess Tara: A finely crafted statue of 'Tara,' a prominent deity of Vajrayana Buddhism, has been found. Bronze Buddha statues have also been recovered.



Terracotta: An abundance of terracotta plaques, toys, and Yaksha-Yakshini figures have been found, brilliantly reflecting contemporary rural art.



5. Inscriptions:

Anulia Copperplate: Lakshman Sen's famous 'Anulia Copperplate' was discovered in this region (though the exact finding spot is somewhat debated). This copperplate clearly proves that the Anulia-Debalgarh region was an extremely important administrative center for the Sena kings.



e) Historical Significance

The historical significance of Debalgarh is not limited to the Nadia district; rather, it is immense in the context of rewriting the entire history of Bengal.

- **Political Significance (Bakhtiyar Khalji's Conquest):** This is the most groundbreaking aspect of the research. Many researchers believe that the inaccessible, forest-clad, and river-surrounded city of 'Nadia' or 'Vijaypur' (the Sena capital) attacked by Bakhtiyar Khalji, as mentioned in Minhaj-i-Siraj's *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, cannot be present-day Nabadwip. Based on geographical location, the sheer size of the ancient fort, and the presence of the Anulia copperplate, Dr. Biswajit Roy and others strongly assert that this 'Debalgarh' is indeed the lost capital of King Lakshman Sen. Furthermore, there is a strong possibility that it is also the provincial capital of King Vikramraj mentioned in Sandhyakar Nandi's epic *Ramacharitam*.
- **Social Aspect:** The recovered ring-wells, granite blocks, and the layout of the fortified city prove the existence of a secure and highly planned urban society that provided safety to citizens from external attacks.
- **Religious Aspect:** The simultaneous discovery of Brahmanical Hindu symbols ('Vishnu'), Buddhist symbols ('Goddess Tara' and stupa fragments), and later Islamic coins proves that Debalgarh was a unique center of peaceful coexistence among various religious communities and Bengal's syncretic culture.
- **Economic Aspect:** Situated on the banks of the Marali and Hangar rivers, it was a famous riverine port. The recovery of Roman amphorae and domestic-foreign coins proves that this settlement was a major economic hub for both inland and international water transport in ancient Bengal.



9. Study of the Museum

A critically important part of our survey was the observation of the locally established museum.

- **Establishment and Background:** For a long time, farmers discovered ancient bricks, statues, and coins while plowing or digging soil for housing. In 2017, to preserve these invaluable treasures, a local enthusiast, Mr. Chittaranjan Biswas, established a museum named 'Devgram Debalraja Puratattva O Lokosanskriti Sangha' in his own residence.
- **Classification of Displayed Artifacts:**
 - **Pottery and Daily Essentials:** Maurya-Shunga era smooth black pottery (NBPW), Kushan era decorated bricks, and fragments of Roman 'Amphora' testifying to international trade. Numerous water lamps, pitchers, and plates have been found.
 - **Metal Artifacts and Coins:** A replica of Samudragupta's Ashvamedha sacrifice gold coin and several Sultanate era silver coins, providing evidence of prolonged economic prosperity here.
 - **Sculptures and Stone Blocks:** Pala and Sena era black stone and sandstone Vishnu statues, terracotta Yaksha-Yakshini figures, and most notably, a finely crafted statue of the Vajrayana Buddhist deity 'Tara'. Moreover, the discovery of large granite blocks proves that advanced stone-working technology was known during that era.
- **Conservation and Display Methods:** There is no advanced chemical conservation system here like in government laboratories. The artifacts are primarily cleaned with water and brushes and displayed in glass showcases or on open shelves.
- **Educational Role:** It serves as an 'open-air laboratory' for school and college students of the district. Upon visiting, they receive hands-on elementary education in archaeology.



10. Observations and Analysis

- **Relationship Between Site and Museum:** The Debalgarh Museum relies entirely on 'in-situ' artifacts. That is, every single artifact here was unearthed from the soil of Devgram and Anulia. The archaeological site acts as the mine, while the museum serves as its showcase.

- **Historical Analysis and Comparison with Textbooks:**
 - **Ramacharitam and Vikramraj:** We read about the *Jayaskandhavaras* (military camps/capitals) of the Pala kings in our textbooks. Sandhyakar Nandi's *Ramacharitam* (1084-1155 CE) mentions the provincial capital of 'Vikramraj' during King Ramapala's reign, which researchers strongly believe to be this very Debalgarh.
 - **Bakhtiyar Khalji's Route:** Conventional textbooks state that Bakhtiyar Khalji attacked 'Nabadwip'. However, the geographical description of the impenetrable, forest-clad, and river-surrounded city of 'Nadia' mentioned in Minhaj-ud-din's *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* does not align with present-day Nabadwip. Rather, Debalgarh's massive moat, high fort walls, and geographical location prove that the primary target of Bakhtiyar's invasion was this secure capital, 'Vijaypur' or Debalgarh.
- **Urban Planning and Defense System:** The underground ring-wells and drainage systems indicate it was a meticulously planned city. The 15-20 feet wide brick wall and the deep surrounding moat are clear evidence of advanced military architecture of the time.
- **Religious Coexistence:** The simultaneous presence of Hindu (Vishnu statues), Buddhist (Vajrayana Goddess Tara and stupa fragments), and later Islamic cultural elements (Sultanate coins) in Debalgarh bears testament to the peaceful coexistence of different religious communities and the secular, syncretic culture of early Bengal.

11. Learning Outcomes

This field study has radically transformed our conventional notion of education.

- **Effectiveness of Field Studies in History Education:** We realized that history is not merely about rote memorization. Seeing the textbook concepts of 'forts,' 'moats,' or 'terracotta plaques' with our own eyes gave us a transparent understanding of past socio-economic conditions and architectural styles. Observing the dry paleochannels of the Marali or Hangar rivers taught us how shifts in river courses can entirely wipe out a civilization.
- **Enhancement of Observation Skills:** Our fundamental skills in deducing the time period of an artifact by looking at intricate granite carvings, brick structures, or a broken pottery fragment have sharpened. We acquired the vision to look for the deep history hidden behind an ordinary mound of earth.
- **Interest in Research and Teamwork:** Collecting data from primary and secondary sources, conversing with villagers, and coordinating (teamwork) with other group members fostered a profound research curiosity and improved our social communication skills.

12. Problems and Suggestions

Some distinct problems emerged during our survey, and the following recommendations are proposed to address them:

- **Problems:**

- **Early-Stage Government Excavation:** While it is highly encouraging that the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) finally initiated preliminary digging in February 2026, the work is still in its nascent stages. A comprehensive, large-scale scientific excavation report and the official documentation of the broader site are still pending public release.
- **Limitations in Conservation:** Due to the lack of modern chemical conservation methods, valuable terracotta plaques, metal coins, and statues are slowly deteriorating.
- **Unprotected Fort and Ongoing Destruction:** Due to a lack of awareness and because of agricultural and housing activities, earth is being dug out from the fort walls, daily destroying ancient structures. There is absolutely no infrastructure for tourists.

- **Suggestions:**

- The recently initiated ASI excavation work (started in February 2026) should be properly funded, sustained, and expanded to cover the broader archaeological zone. Furthermore, the official findings and stratigraphy reports should be documented and published for academic use as soon as possible.
- The Devgram Museum needs to be granted State Government recognition and provided with financial assistance to establish a chemical laboratory for artifact conservation.
- 'Carbon-14 Dating' must be performed on the recovered organic materials to definitively establish the chronological timeline.
- A 'Heritage Tourism Circuit' should be developed centering around Debalgarh and Anulia.
- A digital archive needs to be created, and this regional history must be incorporated into local school curriculums.

13. Conclusion

Summarizing the entire survey, it can be strongly asserted that the Debalgarh-Anulia archaeological site is a neglected treasure trove of Bengal's history. It is not merely a rural ruin, but a fortified capital spanning from the Maurya to the Pala-Sena eras and a vital nucleus for the maritime trade of the Gangaridai civilization. The indomitable passion for history shown by the common people of the 'Devgram Debalraja Puratattva O Lokosanskriti Sangha' has saved these invaluable resources from extinction. However, protecting this massive archaeological site is impossible for locals alone. The educational importance of this site in the study of history and archaeology is unparalleled. If extensive excavation and conservation processes are initiated at the government level, Debalgarh will inevitably force a rewriting of Bengal's history. This field study has unveiled a new horizon in our historical consciousness and paved a vast path for future research.

14. Bibliography

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Museum Catalogs and Oral Sources:

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9. Oral interviews of Dr. Biswajit Roy and Mr. Chittaranjan Biswas, and collected local folklore (the tale of King Debal).

OUR FIELD STUDY TEAM

(Signatures of the Participants)

We, the undersigned students of the 5th Semester History (Major) program, proudly participated in the educational excursion to the Debalgarh-Anulia Archaeological Site. This field study and the resulting project report are the beautiful fruits of our shared curiosity, teamwork, and immense passion for uncovering the lost history of Bengal.

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