

Book Review

**Chauley, Milan Kumar and Manjil Hazarika (eds).
2021. *Archaeology in Northeast India - Essays
Celebrating 150 Years of Research – Recent Trends and
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The book under review is an edited volume on the archaeology of Northeast India having papers on all the eight states of the region. The book includes forty chapters contributed by young as well as senior scholars from the region and beyond. The papers are supported by maps, photographs, tables and line drawings. The volume is published to mark the 150 years of archaeological research conducted in the region. The papers include different archaeological cultures and chronological periods in the region apart from specific focus on art, architectural, iconographic and epigraphical evidences. Studies on the pottery, megaliths, stone tools and material culture are also major aspects included in the volume.

In the first chapter, Anker R. Sankhyan discusses about the Miocene hominoids and Pleistocene hominins and their implications for Northeast India. He further elaborates about the stone tools, bone tools and faunal remains found in Northeast India, reported both from exploration and excavation and their relevance in the context of South Asian prehistory. Subsequently, Gangotri Bhuyan and Queenbala Marak discusses about the prehistoric settlement pattern in Bibrage in West Garo hills. The discussion is based on the archaeological remains found at the site during their recent explorations. Some of the interesting questions raised by the authors are about the sites, chronology, technologies and their function. Tosabanta Padhan presents the results of his field explorations undertaken in West Garo hills, Meghalaya during 2015-2016. Several new sites were discovered during the course of exploration and a good number of artifacts were collected and discussed in the paper. The paper by Smita Devi Bora is based on the stone artifacts of Selbal valley of West Garo hills, Meghalaya. The author uses the statistical method Evennes index (Andrefsky 1998) to understand the distribution pattern of the artefacts in

the explored region. These papers have dealt on the prehistoric cultural scenario of the region.

The fifth chapter by Roger Blench elaborates on the ethno-linguistic background and Neolithic transition in Northeast India. He discussed about the different groups of languages such as Tibeto-Burman, Austro-Asiatic, and Tai-Kadai. He suggests that historical background of the region can be traced by the pattern of languages. He also mentions about an aceramic transition which needs further archaeological investigation to understand its chronology and geographic range. Anamika Gogoi Duarah discusses the discovery of a kitchen midden in the foothill of western Assam, at the site of Bambooti. The 45 cm cultural deposits of Bambooti have yielded celts, abraders, cord-impressed pottery and coarse, ill fired, plain hand-made pottery.

Akoijam Milan Meitei and Queenbala Marak write about traditional mortuary practices based on morphological and functional activities of the two villages. They highlight that the internal meaning of the deposition of the bones are same whereas the practice of stone mortuary differs. These kinds of ethnographic studies are extremely important for understanding the archaeological burial practices. Malsawmliana highlights about the engravings on megaliths in Mizoram. These engravings include figures of human, animals, weapons, tools and prestige goods such as necklaces, gongs and guns. The engravings of the figurines represent the meaning associated with the person in their previous life. Next, Salam Shyam Singh talks about the archaeological remains at Zote in Mizoram which include Neolithic tools, caves, megaliths and petroglyphs. Some of these depictions might be the members of the family and animals sacrificed for their dead ceremonies or could be for ceremonies performed for successful community hunting.

Utpala Das highlights the beliefs associated with megalithic tradition among the Khasis of Meghalaya. She has explored the sites of Umrit, Umchong, Umchopria, Borjirang and Nogwahimawlin in the region of Assam-Meghalaya border. Most of these megaliths are memorial in nature. Rumi Patar discusses the living Megalithic tradition among the Karbis of Assam. The megaliths erected by different communities of Northeast India have various purposes. Study of the ethnographic tradition of megaliths is an important aspect of Northeast Indian archaeology.

The volume also presents some papers on historical archaeology of the Brahmaputra valley. Bratatee Barman has written about archaeology of Assam during 200 BCE-1200 CE and discussed about the archaeological sources and historical records and problems associated within the region of the Brahmaputra valley. She mentions that the region needs scientific investigation of more sites with multidisciplinary approach. In another paper, Bedabrata Gogoi gives a detailed account on the commerce and connections of the early medieval Kamarupa during c. AD 500-1300. He highlights about the trade-routes from India to China via Assam and Myanmar including the culture, commodities and exchange of people that took place in the last 1000 years and how it shaped the economic character of the region.

Shreya Sharma in her paper discusses the archaeological remains of Buddhism in Tripura, particularly the *Vajrayana* tradition. Significant sites of the early medieval period in Tripura are Pilak, Shyamsundar Tila, Thakurani Tila, Pujakhola Tila, Boxanagar and Udaipur. Excavated sites like the Boxanagar and Shyamsundar Tila reveal monumental Buddhist architecture. These sites had connections with the *viharas* at Paharpur and Mainmati of neighboring Bangladesh. Wangam Somorjit has made a detailed exploration of *mandalas* in Manipur and discovered several sites like Maklang *Mandala*, Sekmai *Mandala*, Heikakmapal *Mandala*, Phurju twin *Mandalas* and Sangolmang *Mandala*, suggesting evidence of Buddhism. Some of the important artefacts from the region are gold bowls, cylindrical silver casket, and flat gold casket with a lid, gold musk skull, gold mask female skull and gold rider-less horse. All these artefacts were possibly used for the religious practices of Buddhism.

In this edited volume, there are specific papers on the Buddhism in Assam. Swagata Mukhopadhyay and Sukanya Sharma discuss about the alternative functional possibilities of the archaeological site of Sri Surya Pahar in Goalpara. The authors suggest that the site was not only used for religious purpose but also for other reasons such as regional networks for trade. Sofiul Islam Khan explored the art and archaeological remains of Goalpara and recorded the sites like Jogighopa, Barbhita, Dekdhowa, Dekaidol, Mahadev Pahar and Govindapur. These sites have yielded evidences of brick-built settlement area, brick enclosure wall, plinths of houses, rock-cut structures, temples and other architectural remains etc. The author also mentions that the terracotta relics are datable to 7th-8th century CE.

Rena Laisram has written on the dynamic interplay of art and religion of early Assam from 4th-12th centuries CE with special reference to iconography and iconology. She discusses about the sculptures of different periods of early Assam from which the Shiva is found to be the most popular among all the classes of people. The evidence of iconographic representation suggests the practices of Brahmanical faith along with Shaivism and Vaishnavism. In another paper, Geetanjali Devi and Dwipen Bezbaruah have presented an extensive study on the archaeological relics from temple vicinity of North Guwahati focusing the sites of Dirgheswari, Kanai Boroshi Bowa, Aswakranta, Manikarneswar and Rudreswar. On the other hand, Mrigakhee Saikia discusses about the history, culture and archaeological remains of the Kapili-Jamuna valley of Assam. Sculptures are made on stone and terracotta and are mostly depicting divinities as well as social and domestic life of the region. Besides the sculptures, the valley has temple ruins such as decorative parts, walls, doorjambs, lintel, ceilings, and pediment. The temples are mostly dedicated to Shiva, Vishnu, Surya, Devi and other deities. In another paper, Rahmita Phukan highlights the sculptures and icons of Ambari, particularly the Brahmanical deities such as Vishnu, Surya and Mahisasuramardini Durga. Sweta Mahanta discusses about the remains of Garh Doul which have been ascribed to the 7th-8th century CE. The structure seems to be of rooms or compartments indicating utilitarian purpose. Swadhinata Das has studied the sculptures of Deopahar in Assam. The sculptures of the site are unique depicting local

and regional features and characteristics. It has influence of sculptures of Orissa of 10th-12th century CE such as tight facial precision, smiling thick lips, and heavy body shape. The ruins of the site of Deopahar are also discussed by Mousumi Deka, particularly focusing the aesthetic beauty of the female sculptures.

Several scholars have written on the pottery tradition in the region. Preetee Sharma discusses the pottery technology of the Brahmaputra valley focusing the fabric during 7th-17th centuries CE, whereas Pankaj Singh, Priyanka Tamta and Sukanya Sharma have made a scientific study on the pottery from Bamuni hill in Tezpur. Aprajita Sharma studies the porcelains discovered in Northeast India and traces the linkages with the neighboring areas. Garima Thakuria provides an overview of pottery studies in the region and Hage Sonia presents the pottery making tradition among the Apatani community of Arunachal Pradesh.

Study of material culture among various communities is extremely important to develop ethnographic analogies for interpreting archaeological remains. In this regard, Taitemjen Tzudir has made an interesting study of the metallurgy of iron and brass technology of the early Konyak and Khiamnungan Nagas, whereas Nilam Nandini Sarmah elaborates on the use of perishable materials among the Nishis and Shertukpens of Arunachal Pradesh. Dhritiman Sarma and Antoni Perme have presented on the importance of beads in Adi society of Arunachal Pradesh.

Raktim Patar elaborates the oral traditions and historical evidences for understanding the ancient routes of migration of the Tiwas. These intangible evidences provide many clues for conducting archaeological explorations and locate the sites of historical importance. The paper by Nilanjana Gogoi deals with the visual context of sculptures of Satras of Assam and the paper by Subhra Devi provide the history of colour culture in Assam. Other than the above-mentioned papers, there are several promising papers, by Dipamjyoti Buragohain on the temples constructed during the Ahom period at Sivasagar in Assam, Ritika Sahu on the burial mounds known as the Maidam in Charaideo, Kritika Sarda on conceptualising ecomuseum for the Lepchas of Dzongu Reserve, North Sikkim, Worrel Kumar Bain on the importance of bamboo in the Dzongu Reserve area of North Sikkim and finally by Madhuri Saikia and Sukanya Sharma on the colonial architecture in the city of Guwahati.

Overall, the editors undertook a challenging task and presented a welcome addition for the students and the young researchers to understand the archaeology of Northeast India. The readers will be benefited from the diverse subject matters dealt in this book. The publisher Research India Press and both the editors deserve heartiest appreciation and congratulations for publishing this sourcebook with important and diverse topics and discussion on the Northeast Indian archaeology.

Reference

Andrefsky Jr., William. 1998. *Lithics - Macroscopic Approaches to Analysis* (Cambridge Manuals in Archaeology). New York: Cambridge University Press.