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EXCAVATIONS AT DIMAPUR, NAGALAND AND THE ANTIQUITY OF THE KACHARI CIVILIZATION

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Abstract: *The Kachari Civilization, the most widespread civilization, temporally and spatially, in the Greater Brahmaputra Valley (Northeast India) and beyond, is the least studied on the subcontinent. Over two centuries ago, British colonials discovered remains of a fortified brick city in Dimapur, Nagaland, attributed to the Kachari Kingdom belonging to the medieval period, revealing a sophisticated arched gateway, carved sandstone pillars, temples, tanks, canals, and causeways, yet it remained uninvestigated by archaeologists until this project. Nothing was known beyond the few standing relics and their relations with the invading Ahoms. The site's destruction due to various construction projects prevented accomplishing the many desired objectives, chiefly to establish cultural and chronological sequences. Despite encountering overwhelming obstacles, this paper highlights new evidence, including ceramics and C^{14} dates, retrieved from the circumscribed excavations (extended trial trenches), revealing that Dimapur, the Kachari Kingdom's first capital, predates the advent of the Ahoms in 1228 by more than a millennium.*

Keywords: *Brick City; Carved Pillars; Ceramics; Rajbari Dimapur; Gateway; Kachari Civilization; Kachari Kingdom; Radiocarbon Dates*

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Introduction

Archaeological ruins in Dimapur, Nagaland, contain important monuments of a past civilization that lacked detailed investigation or excavation for centuries. Remains of ancient brick structures, including a temple, gateway, distinctive carved pillars, tanks, canals, and causeways, revealed evidence of a flourishing people, variously ascribed to the Kachari Kingdom during the early medieval period, whose remnants lasted until the arrival of the British in the early 19th century. Although the Kachari Civilization was already thriving centuries before the Ahoms appeared in the 13th

century (Fisher 1840; Grange 1840; Soppitt 1885; Johnston 1896; Gait 1926), the scarcity of written records and the lack of systematic investigations obscured its past, leaving the Kachari Civilization in a convoluted conundrum until this project. This author conducted trial digs in Dimapur and seven other prehistoric sites along the Nagaland-Burma/Myanmar border, the first archaeological projects ever conducted in Nagaland in 1979-1980 (Fig.1.1).

This excavation was a salvage operation because of the massive destruction throughout the site from construction projects. A novel strategy was adopted to address the complex nature of the site, intended to achieve specific objectives: retrieve cultural remains stratigraphically and fast. The primary purpose was establishing the antiquity of the ruins and assessing any undisturbed deposits or prehistoric materials underlying the historical bed. Once established, the cultural and chronological progression was expected to provide an index for future investigations.

Although "civilization" is either ill-defined or loosely used (Adams 1960; Clark 1969; 1974; Lamberg-Karlovsky 1972; Cohen 1974), it is retained here to describe the Kachari Civilization to highlight its adaptive strategies. Like the fertile crescent in which early civilizations grew along rivers—Mesopotamian (Tigris and Euphrates), Egyptian (Nile), Chinese (Hwang Ho/Yellow), and Harappan/Indus (Indus)—India's northeastern basin is no stranger to giving rise to early civilizations, fed by tributaries from which it grew; for example, the Kachari Civilization developed along the Brahmaputra River. Pre-Ahom inscriptions labeled the Brahmaputra as *Lauhitya* (Chatterji 1974; Lahiri 1991), a Sanskrit term, a corrupt version of Lohit or Lau-hit ya, meaning 'red,' the Kacharis/Dimasas called it *Dilao/Tilao* (Gait: 1926: 6). Each civilization developed independently (Burenhult: 1994: 13), which Cunliffe (1994: 9) aptly terms *sue generis*. The hydromorphic regimes 'underpinned' riverine urbanization (Macklin and Lewin: 2015: 228), generating an effective adaptation strategy by employing hydraulic technologies and providing sustainable ecosystems for drinking, irrigation, transportation, and other projects. Many hydraulic tasks can be accomplished alone or in tandem with land-surface-oriented schemes. During the pre- and early industrial periods, maritime transport provided the most efficient method of long-distance transport for trade and commerce. The Brahmaputra River and its major tributaries served as seafaring transportation arteries during the early medieval period (Ali and Lambert: 1946: 20; Shastri and Bhattacharya: 1958; Singh: 2009), with traces linked to the Dhansiri–Doiyang Rivers (Dutta: 2001: 92 & 2012: 2), yet adequate archaeological investigations is still lacking. It was a significant transportation system between Assam and Bengal during the colonial eras (Fisher 1840; M'Cosh 1837; Butler 1854; Stephens 1894). Civilization encompasses complicated spatial, temporal, and cultural processes involving a broad spectrum of elements outside this study's scope. Here, the importance of how the Kachari Kingdom developed along the fertile Dhansiri Valley is briefly outlined.

The Kacharis

The Kacharis were part of the great Bodo kindred, consisting of Dimasas, Koch, Mechs, Chutias, and other offshoots/related groups, generally identified as *Bodo/Boro/Bara-Garo*; the Kacharis called themselves "*Bara*" (Soppitt: 1885: 78-9; Peal: 1896L 21; Endle: 1911: 21). Kachari is retained here chiefly for its widespread usage. The Kacharis were believed to be the Brahmaputra Valley's one of the earliest or dominant inhabitants (Butler 1855, 4; Endle 1911, 4; Gait 1926, 278; Burman 1961, 2), as evidenced by the extensive use of Dimasa toponyms for rivers. Fisher (1840: 830) pointed out that while Koch Behar princes ruled Kamrup when the Ahoms arrived[1], Kachari rulers were the most powerful forces they encountered, who had dominated Assam one thousand years prior[2]. This Tibeto-Burman linguistic group, consisting of more than a dozen groups, spread from Bangladesh to Nepal (Shastri

and Bhattacharya: 1958: 10; DeLancey 2013) and spread over the Greater Brahmaputra Valley region for centuries; however, the dynamics of the Kachari Kingdom's ever-changing boundaries and the lack of adequate temporal and spatial accounts make it difficult to determine definitively. The early Kacharis' rule likely extended from the Meghna River and Sylhet (Bangladesh) to most of colonial Assam (Fisher: 1840: 829; Robinson: 1841: 399) and beyond (Banerji [1943] 1946). During the 13th century, the Kachari kingdom extended along the Brahmaputra's south bank from Dikhou to Kolong Rivers, encompassing the Dhansiri Valley and North Cachar Hills with its capital at Dimapur (Bhattacharjee: 1988: 222), which was already a metropolis by the 15th century (Chatterji: 1974: 123). Like the Ahoms, the Kacharis maintained chronicles (*Buranji*) predominantly about their warfare with the Ahoms and Nagas but these lacked critical information. Bhuyan (1951) provided a cursory synopsis of a Kachari Buranji, outlining the significant events of the Ahom-Kachari relations from the 14th century to the 18th century. Thus external sources, primarily from the Ahom Buranjis (Gait 1926; Bhuyan 1951; Bordoloi 1984), that chronicled their encounters during their invasion and territorial expansion and other accounts from contemporary rulers that included the Mughal invasions (Shakespear: 1914: 10-1), furnished crucial gaps in reconstructing the Kacharis' past, supplemented by indigenous traditions and narratives.

The Kacharis ascendancy during the pre-Ahom period is highly complicated, partly due to limited records (Endle 1911; Gait 1926) but mainly due to errors or conflicting information. Bhuyan (1940: 4), citing Hamilton's account (1807-1814), states that fractionalised rulers dominated the region during the nascent stages. Naturally, the Brahmaputra Valley—the epicentre—became a messy war theatre for survival, exacerbated by invasions. The region had remained tumultuous for centuries. In addition, the region also experienced persistent pendulum population migration throughout history. These converging events created colossal inconsistencies. The problems were compounded by transmitting faulty or erroneous information when neither the investigator nor the informant ever visited or met the people they were referring to (Nienu [2015] 2020, xix).The myriad demonyms of the various ethnic groups in the northeast, including the Kacharis, reflect this bewildering landscape, befitting Carlyle's phrase as 'a distillation of rumours.' For example, the *Kachari* word genesis remained uncertain, analogous to the word's origin, *Naga (*as in Naga tribes*)*. Rampant orthographic inconsistencies in older writings, partly due to the investigator's/informant's lack of local culture or geography, often carry pejorative connotations and appellations that are further magnified. Correct usages relating to this report, when applicable, are provided. Kacharis, including mostly non-Aryan groups, were referred to as belonging to the Mongoloid race (Peal: 1896: 21; Pargiter: 1897: 101; Gait: 1926: 4; Mills: 1926: 289; Burman: 1961: 1; Chatterji: 1974: vii-ff; Medhi: 1983: 70). Academic literature ceased using *Mongoloid* for its inappropriate appendages that are racist, denigrating, and offensive overtones and replaced it with East Asian or Oriental (used synonymously). Moreover, information based on stories steeped in legends can compromise facts and skew interpretations and conclusions. Examining all sources and facts more intelligently is vital in dealing with issues such as the Kachari Civilization in the remote past. Anything beyond these known sources has remained in the archaeological domains. Archaeological excavations bring an added advantage by solving prehistoric mysteries and helping redress the imbalance of limited historical sources; thus, archaeology becomes indispensable.

While kings or chieftains of Indo-Aryan descent probably ruled Kamarupa long before the 5th century, Lahiri (1991: 29-64) observed that many pre-Ahom inscriptions reveal non-Sanskrit derivatives, especially Kachari words, signifying their influence in the region. Moreover, the pre-

Ahom Assam chronology (5th to 12th centuries), conceived on inscriptions (Lahiri: 1999: 8), poses considerable gaps and discrepancies in spatially identifying specific kingdoms/dynasties. Dimapur became the epicentre of the Kachari Kingdom. The medieval city of Dimapur played a significant role in the rise of the Kachari Civilization. The Dhansiri Valley's ideal physical environment nurtured the Kachari Kingdom. Nevertheless, materials on Kachari's origins remain murky, partly due to a lack of adequate records but mainly due to a lack of detailed studies. Compared with South Asia's prehistoric or historical periods, archaeological research data on the Kachari Civilization remains sketchy, lacking critical information due to negligence.

Archaeological Site: A Brick City

Rajbari Citadel, the archaeological site, lies within the confines of the modern city of Dimapur, in the district of the same name, on the alluvial banks of the Dhansiri River, along the Dimapur-Kohima Expressway NH 29/129, formerly NH 39. Spread along the fertile Dhansiri Valley, toward the south western fringe bordering the present state of Assam, Dimapur, in which the archaeological site is located, is within the geographical coordinates of 25°30' and 26° N latitude and 93°30' and 94°15' E longitude at 148 m (Fig.1.2). Also see Figure 1.3, the Satellite map of Dimapur. Shakespeare (1914: 3) states that the Kachari Kingdom was 'in a high state of civilization with their capital at Dimapur,' while Banerji [1943] (1946) and Barkataki (1956) suggest that the Kachari civilization and culture were comparatively superior to their contemporaries, as manifested by standing monuments, excelling in art and architecture, built sophisticated canals, raised causeways, and complex system of reservoirs to irrigate their crops and other purposes. Undertaking large-scale projects such as irrigation networks or waterborne transportation, presupposes considerable knowledge, skills, labour and a centralised governing system for their effective management and control (Wittfogel: 1956: 153).

Dimapur city was built of burnt bricks, which the Ahoms called *Chedinchipen,* or "brick town" (Gait: 1926: 92). The remains of brick mounds are reportedly numerous further down in Assam (Dutta: 2012: 1). However, little is known about it beyond the scattered structural debris and crumbling pillars.

Wade (1805) was the first European to remark on Dimapur's ruins. Grange (1840) described the ruins during the expedition in 1839 but contained no images. Butler (1855: 24-6) produced three sketches of the ruins: Round Pillars, Squared Pillars, and the Gateway (Fig.1.4), revealing the Kachari Civilization's extraordinary achievements, characterized by superior architecture and distinctive carved megaliths. A more detailed representation of the ruins was furnished by Godwin-Austen (1874), showing pillars lying in a dilapidated condition (Fig.1.5), the gateway, and plans of the citadel, among others. The Citadel, approximately 550-650 m long, had gateways and fortifications built of bricks on all sides, except along the Dhansiri Riverbank, which either served as a natural defensive contraption or the brick walls eroded; however, it provided direct access to waterways. While traces of fortification walls were still visible on three sides, others have long since disappeared. The partially restored pillars are shown in Fig.1.6.

During the Kachari Kingdom's heyday, the Dhansiri Valley metropolis extended beyond Dimapur City. Workers digging new railway tracks around the Greater Dimapur and Rangapar areas in 1896-7 found remnants of contemporaneous occupation sites, buildings, temples, tanks, canals, and causeways (Shakespear:1914: 3), indicating the extensiveness of the Kachari Kingdom in Dimapur, an indigenously built metropolis. Thus, the Dimapur Metropolis was comparable in size to Washington, DC, i.e., 177 km². Although Dimapur was presumed to be the first capital of the Kachari Kingdom (Gait: 1926: 91; Bhuyan 1951), it was sacked in 1536 and shifted to Maibong, which was 45 km away (Shakespear:

1914: 33; Gait: 1926: 249); however, its initial occupation remained hidden until this excavation, now radiocarbon-dated to the 3rd century CE.

Mills (1933:3), a senior colonial administrator, admits that Dimapur ruins had remained unattended for centuries since they were discovered, only to be disregarded by the post-colonial authorities, as the accompanying images (Figs.1.7 a-c) portray the depth of destruction at Rajbari Citadel. Dimapur became a district in 1997. Previously, it was a subdivision of the Kohima District with an Additional Deputy Commission as its administrative head. In 1980, this author discussed the matter with him and requested that the construction projects be suspended until the issues were resolved; he declined, not being in the position of authority, besides lacking any regulatory measures for enforcement. The loss of the archaeological treasures in Dimapur cannot be measured purely in monetary value.

Dimapur, a sprawling city, is Nagaland's central commercial and industrial hub, providing easy access to air, trains, waterways, and road communication. Dimapur provided limited yet necessary maritime transportation (the Brahmaputra via Dhansiri-Doyang River, etc.) and surface links to remote places during the early days of colonial occupation, as did the Kacharis and Ahoms. From early to modern times, north eastern frontiers served as a gateway to the outside world—particularly China and the neighbouring countries (M'Cosh: 1836; Pemberton: 1835; Lahiri: 1992; Singh 2009), and Dimapur played a significant role. The British had already conceived the importance of Dimapur playing a strategic position from the onset of the occupation of the Naga regions in 1832. Air and land facilities in Dimapur were essential communication links for the Allies in the Indo-Burma operation theatre during WWII. The Allies operated an airfield in Dimapur and a two-lane road connecting Kohima and Imphal, the current capitals of states of Nagaland and Manipur, respectively—the same highway links to Burma/Myanmar. The Battle of Kohima in 1944, which victoriously ended WWII, was named Britain's Greatest Battle (MacSwan: 2013). Additionally, Dimapur served as the railhead station of a narrow-gauge track during the colonial occupation, opened for service in 1903 under the Assam–Bengal Railway, now upgraded to a meter gauge and renamed the Northeast Frontier Railway. Thus, Dimapur was also called the Dimapur-Manipur Road during colonial days. Dimapur provided ample access to neighbouring nations through land, air, and water.

Geological and Environmental Setting

Fluvial processes primarily control Dimapur's physiographic environment, directly impacting where the Kachari civilization developed. The two massive mountain ranges—Barail and Japvu (Oligocene–Miocene)—form a significant physical and geomorphologic structure of the Dhansiri River and its valleys on which the Rajbari archaeological site is situated (Nienu: 1983: 117-9). It lies within the Naga fold-thrust and belt, and a cratonic periphery formed when the Indo-Australian and the European Plates collided (Brunnshweiler: 1996: 136). The geology and soil formation of the Dhansiri Valley consists of ongoing modifications of Holocene and Pleistocene to Pliocene alluvium to older geosynclinals facies, which are entirely sedimentary (Oldham: 1883) but predominantly sandstone and shale (Nienu: 1983; 2020). The south-easterly Barail Mountain range changes gradually in the west, displaying a steep face towards the direction of the main watershed, where the continuity of the Barail Mountain range decreases, and the much-contorted clay shales and schists lay exposed. As the alluvium deposits terminate below the Chumukedima ridge, craggy hills emerge. Sandstones predominate where the elevation rises. These sandstones, which are massive and well-bedded, served as raw materials for Rajbari builders to produce gigantic pillars, now lying as heaps of ruins at the archaeological site (Nienu: 1983). Dimapur pillars weigh > 20 tons (20k/kg) each (Butler: 1855: 25) and are unique, nowhere found in Asia (Hutton: 1928:

229). River barges could transport these massive pillars for which the nearby Dhansiri River served the purpose well; the river is navigable, and quarry sites are within the river's easy reach. The possibility of deploying elephants for such colossal tasks cannot be dismissed.

Dhansiri River

The Dhansiri River originates from the Laisan Peak in the southwestern corner of the Barail Mountains in the Peren district, Nagaland, coursing approximately 355 km from the south to northwesterly directions before joining the Brahmaputra River. Dhansiri is the main river of the districts of Golaghat (Assam), Dimapur, Peren, and the newly created Chumukedima of Nagaland, covering a catchment area of 1,220 square kilometres. The Dhansiri-Doiyang[3]Valleys tethers west of the Upper Brahmaputra basin formation. Oldham (1883) suggests that the Jamuna River in Assam likely contributed to the Dhansiri alluvium drainage system in the distant past.

The Dhansiri-Doiyang rivers source areas feature a complex series of highly folded mountain ridges and widespread sedimentary rocks, predominantly sandstone and shale, and are densely forested. The dendritic-type watershed structure of the Dhansiri River, analogous to rivers in Nagaland, springs from high mountain ranges, scurrying through deep and steep gorges that are heavily laden with an unconsolidated mass of boulders, cobbles, and uprooted wood debris steeply piled, eventually producing gravels, sands, and silt/clay, enriching downstream valleys and making the alluvial fans exceedingly fertile, transforming into agriculture and other riparian operations as chief economic sources. The land, including hills, piedmonts, valleys, and wetlands, is best suited for cultivating rice, corn, cotton, sugarcane, tea, and many assorted crops, fruits, and vegetables, all of which are still grown by the Kacharis and other inhabitants of the greater Dhansiri-Doiyang Valleys. Out of Dimapur district's (pre-redistrict 2022 figures) total area of 92,700 ha, approximately 2073 ha is categorized as wetlands (NASTEC 2010). These river-fed wetlands are formed by the natural movement of Dhansiri across its floodplain, particularly during heavy rainfalls when the river erodes with massive loads moving laterally downhill. These low-lying flood plains of Dhansiri constitute one of the richest ecosystems in Nagaland, harboring exceptionally vibrant biotic life (Nienu: 1983; 2020). Analogous to the region's geographic proximities to the Bay of Bengal and the Himalayas—regulated by two major controlling features (the monsoonal regimes bringing heavy downpours during summer and cold winter months), Nagaland receives abundant precipitation averaging 1626 mm annually (230 rainy days), predominantly during May-September, often abruptly changes local stream levels, with some large rivers rising to as high as 10 m above normal levels in a few hours. The temperature averages 30°C, with a relative humidity of approximately 90 (Nienu 1983; 2020). Unlike those of the rugged hills, soils in Dimapur valleys are moist and warmer, favoring thick vegetational growth dominated by tropical and subtropical evergreen forests, providing ideal habitats for many wild animals, notably tigers, leopards, bears, elephants, rhinoceros, buffaloes, hogs, and deer, which are found in abundance (Fisher 1840; Butler 1855; Shakespear 1915; McCosh 1837) today as in the past.

Methodology

This excavation was a salvage operation because of the magnitude of destruction throughout the site. A novel strategy was adopted to address the complex nature of the site, intended to achieve specific objectives. The benchmark for excavation was based on the following determining factors:

- To obtain the longest sequence possible.
- To uncover any cultural deposits within the Rajbari complex.
- To obtain information regarding the structural remains and other activity patterns associated with the ruins.

- To understand cultural and natural processes contributing to the various formative stages of the Kachari culture.
- The area closest to the standing monuments served as the locus, which is also expected to provide additional information.
- Trenches were laid adjacent to, but farther away from, the Gateway, and it was assumed that the locality could have been used for habitation or other purposes.

Stratigraphy

Using a transit, compass, string, and pegs, a 10 m long baseline was established on a north-south axis and served as an orientation line should future excavation projects be conducted at the site. With the baseline selected, a datum point was set on the same baseline at an arbitrary end 10m north. Another 10 m line was established to cross the baseline at 90° and the datum point. The baseline was designated 10 m east, and the other line became 10 m north. These lines were subdivided into one metre square grid, initially 2x4 m, subsequently extended. A one metre square area was selected from the initial testing of the site, serving as the control pit.

Sieving was performed using 2 mm and 5 mm mesh screens. As the upper levels were not stratified in clearly definable archaeological horizons, another metre square was added horizontally and vertically to ascertain the nature of the deposit. Having confirmed the deposit's composition (unconsolidated debris fills), digging continued in arbitrary spits until a definite archaeological horizon was obtained towards the western sector, making the excavated area appear inverted L-shape. It contained a jumble of dark grayish-brown dirt, rock fragments, brickbats, burnt clays, iron fragments, and sherds scattered under non-cultural debris. It was a dumping place during the colonial occupation, mixed with secondary refuse; the site was heavily disturbed. Changes in the layer's composition occurred below 95 cm. Layers 2 and 3 contained coarse sandy loams with angular to sub angular blocky texture down to 1.6 metres. The soil was dry, friable, and non-sticky, showing a slight rusty brown colour. We retrieved sherds, burnt clays, brick bates, and iron fragments. Further digging revealed outlines of a large midden deposit, contemporary with stratum 2 (Fig.1.8).

The midden, which cuts through all three underlying strata (see Fig.1.8), was composed of ashy materials mixed with plenty of sherds and brickbats but lacked other cultural remains. Except for the midden, other deposits indicated the presence of rusty brown mottles in the clay. A lens of ash deposits, unconnected to the midden and devoid of cultural remains, was encountered between layers 3 and 4. This feature was observed throughout the exposed areas, suggesting a phenomenal event. Stratum 4, 1.85 m below the surface, revealed a yellowish-red layer of fine sandy loam, densely packed but friable and slightly sticky. Sherds and brickbats decreased quantitatively; brickbats were found mainly in the upper levels. Occasional traces of waterborne clays appeared on the lower horizon, making stratum five sterile except in the upper levels, which yielded a few sherds. The soils in stratum 5, to a depth of 2.1 m, contained compacted fine sandy loam that was highly sticky; when exposed to the sun, the high concentration of ferruginous and aluminium oxides made the soil hard, comparable to lateritic rocks. Waterborne clays increased appreciably, and a water table appeared underneath stratum 5, concluding further diggings.

Results

Given the project's limited nature, Rajbari excavations yielded considerable sherds but few other cultural assemblages. These have been discussed below

Ceramics

Approximately 200 sherds were collected down to layer 5. Ceramics from the Dimapur excavations are labelled Dimapur Rajbari Ware (DR Ceramic/

Ware) to avoid confusion when conducting future research in the region. The DR Wares are highly kaolinitic, an excellent raw material for quality ceramic production found in abundance locally; a tradition continues among the Kacharis living in Dimapur and adjacent areas. Similar traditions reportedly exist among the Hira and Kumar potters in several districts of Assam (Duary: 2007: 98; Thakuria: 2017: 701; Sarmah and Hazarika: 2018: 967). No complete vessels were recovered; however, a few rims and body sherds were sufficient to reconstruct their shapes, sizes, and other attributes (Fig.1.9, a-c). The sherds range from black and dull red to dark brown. A few fine sherds, without extraneous elements in the collection, were ostensibly used for ritualistic/ceremonial purposes, revealing superior texture and craftsmanship. Fine sherds range between 3 and 8 mm, while coarser varieties are 8 and 20 mm thick. Some sherds indicate the presence of slip and burnishing. A small percentage of sherds had high contents of mica that frequently glitter. With a few exceptions, coarse sherds are invariably tempered with quartz sands and gritty, while most sherds maintain a smooth surface finish. Larger vessels, primarily utilitarian, contain greater quantities and larger temper particles. This observation is absolute only in some cases since a small number of smaller vessels also contain coarse ingredients, but it seems to hold. This ceramic technology dates to the Indus/Harappan civilization (personal communication: G. Dales 1982, now deceased). Rajbari Wares are wheel-turned, except for a few handmade dark brown wares and spouts, lids, and handles, signifying advancement in ceramic production technology. Wheel striation marks are visible on the vessels' bases. This suggests that at this site, ceramic technology was brought to, rather than developed at, the site.

The DR ware's predominant exterior is creamy buff and yellowish red, followed by reddish brown, dark brown, gray, and black. A few dark brown sherds had dark gray interiors. Some utilitarian sherds had soot on the exterior. Standard designs include stamping, incision, crisscross patterns, wavy/zigzag, and groovy lines. Relieved horizontal grooves along the rims form the conventional motifs among the black wavelengths. DR vessels consist of small, medium, and large jars, bowls, basins, and other simple pots. Ring forms include a wide variety of everted, inverted, and out-turned combinations. Some sherds show carination. Large, wide-mouthed bowls/vessels predominate among the collections. Globular sherds with flaring rims were also found.

No comparable ceramic assemblages at other archaeological sites have been reported within the Dhansiri-Doiyang Valleys or elsewhere in the region. Any connection between DR Ware and Ambari Ware from Ambari Guwahati, Assam (Sharma: 2014, 2018, 2023; Hazarika *et al.* 2020) needs further investigation.

Miscellaneous Finds

Miscellaneous recovered items include five iron slags, three burnt clays, a vase, and stone fragments. A white porcelain vase, in repairable pieces with the words 'PROPERTY OF MARMITE COMPANY' embossed on its exterior base, was recovered at a depth of 50 cm, an object associated with the colonial era. Iron fragments and brickbats were recovered, mainly from the pits, but traces of brickbats were found down to layer four; no structural remains were encountered. Complete bricks were retrieved from the surface; however, no two bricks were alike, e.g., 20x13x5 cm, 20x12x5 cm. No other organic matter, bones, or any other artefacts were found. The ash lens traversing the entire excavated area yielded no cultural remains.

Radiocarbon Samples

Two charcoal samples from mid-level deposits yielded radiocarbon dates: CE 270-660 and CE 570-940 (calibrated).

Discussion

Cultural remains at the Dimapur archaeological sites were deliberately obliterated beyond a few standing monuments. This project employed

a well-conceived methodology, planning, and foresight, which is, to retrieve as many cultural remains as possible stratigraphically, including obtaining samples for dating within a limited time, and paid off with excellent results: retrieved ceramics and charcoal samples for dating. The evidence reveals that Kacharis were the original settlers. Artefacts, specifically characteristic ceramics, recovered from all stratigraphic levels indicate that the knowledge of ceramic production existed before Dimapur; technological changes, if any, were less evident. The two radiocarbon dates suggest that the Kacharis may have occupied Dimapur before the first century. Further research should validate its accuracy, including obtaining reliable chronometric data. Additional work in Dimapur and other notable Kachari sites in the north eastern region should discover latent treasures and connect the missing links. Any connection between DR Ware and Ambari Ware from Ambari and related sites, which yielded excellent ceramic collections in stratigraphic contexts, should be investigated. Kachari ceramics have relevance that extends well beyond material culture. The sterile ash lens, detectable throughout the excavated areas superimposed by layer three, suggests that the settlement was probably burnt down between 600 and 800 CE. Nevertheless, the nature of the destruction and temporal and cultural milieux need further investigation. Further excavations exposing the central hub of the citadel should confirm or reject this claim.

The north eastern region's widespread archaeological sites, particularly the Kachari-related sites, remain to be systematically investigated. Many projects will need interdisciplinary teams to help uncover and solve the complex nature of the treasures. Archaeological research is complex and often demands adequate funding and interdisciplinary team efforts that are handsomely rewarded, which was scarcely accessible during the 1970s and 1980s. Archaeologically, the region is primed for paradigm shift projects. New projects may need to apply radically different approaches to novel ideas when considered crucial, urgent, or high-risk, which can potentially contribute transformative data to our understanding of the region's bequeathed past. Archaeological research is urgently needed to focus on the material culture of the Kachari Civilization, which is critical to establishing spatial and temporal contexts and understanding the diachronous intra-group and intergroup dynamics during their rule. The Kachari Civilization, which lasted for centuries, experienced complicated internal processes and external pressures that demanded careful studies. Future research should be tailored to address critical issues such as these and related research aims.

The Dimapur excavation yielded limited radiocarbon dates from the mid-levels, dated to the third century, revealing the existence of the Kachari civilization in the Dhansiri-Doiyang Valley well beyond pre-medieval times. More chronometric dates from well-stratified sites are needed to establish proper chronological anchors. A meaningful direction for future research will require investigating key Kachari ruins throughout the northeast**;** however, comprehensive, supported research programs still need to be developed. Crucial cultural data are destroyed by widespread infrastructure projects, whether private or government undertakings on archaeological sites, compounded by unsound preservation methods. While government agencies must protect and preserve the monuments, providing adequate funding for excavation projects is the most urgent need. This research formed the impetus for future projects on establishing the Kachari Kingdom in the Dhansiri-Doiyang Valley and other related sites throughout the northeast.

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Illustrations

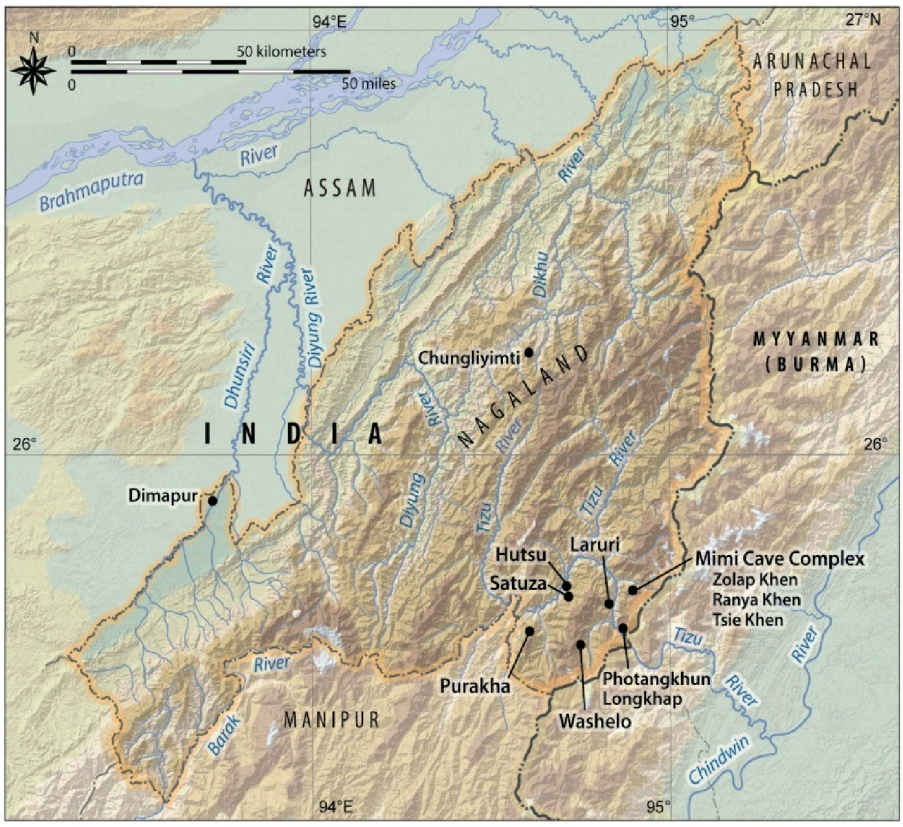

Fig. 1.1: Map showing Archaeological Sites in Nagaland (*Photangkhum Lonkhap, Zolap Khen, Ranyan Khen*, and *Tsie Khen sites were recently excavated by Jamir et al. 2017*)

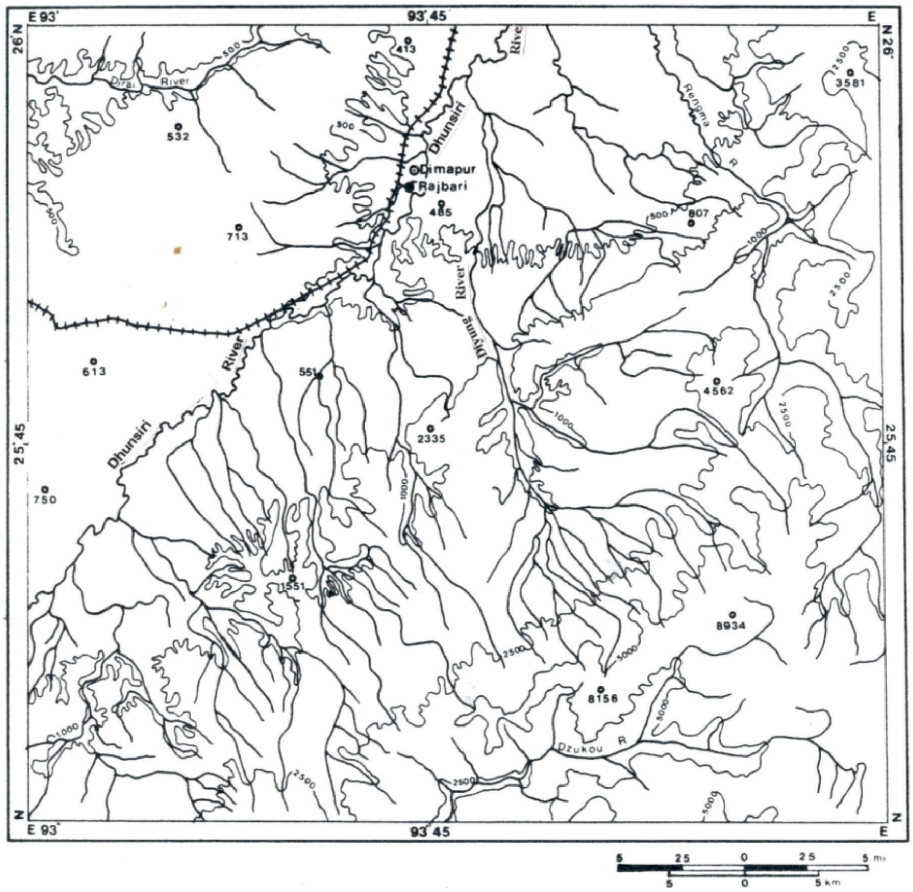

Fig. 1.2: Contour Map of Dimapur Terrain

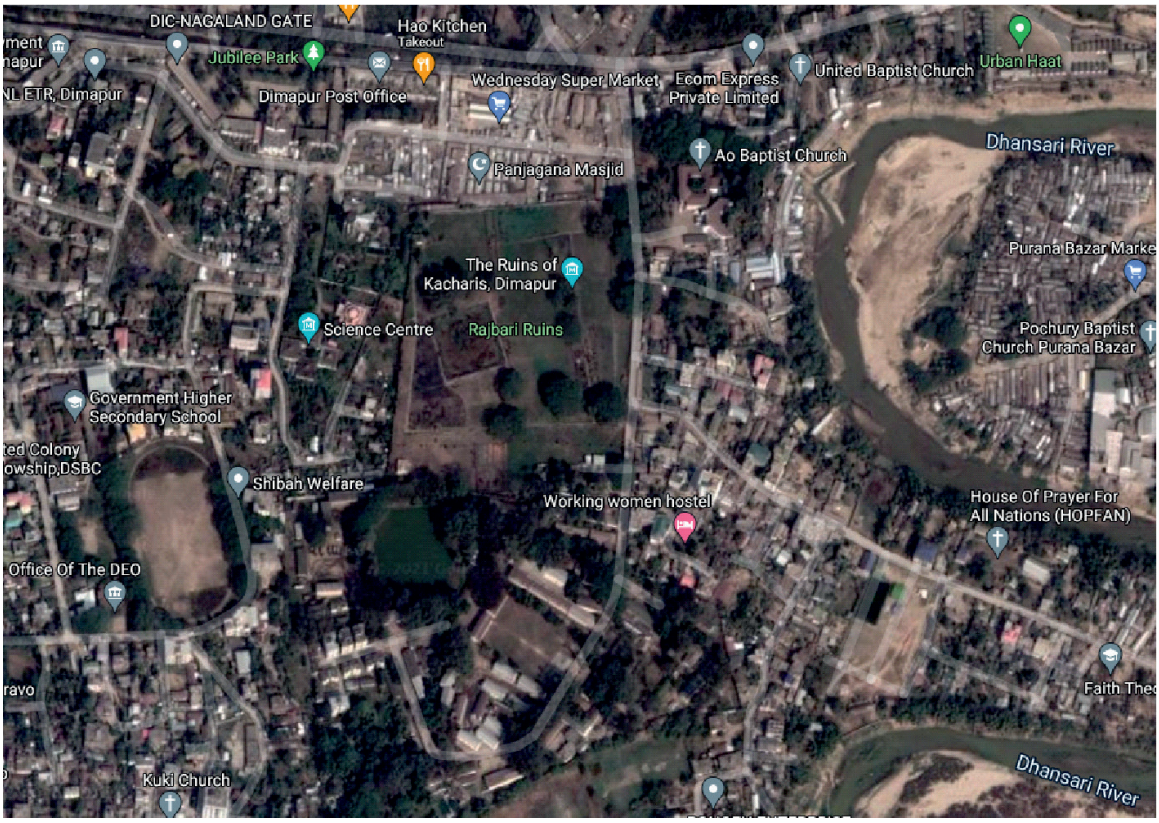

Fig. 1.3: Satellite Map of Dimapur City showing the site of Rajbari Ruins

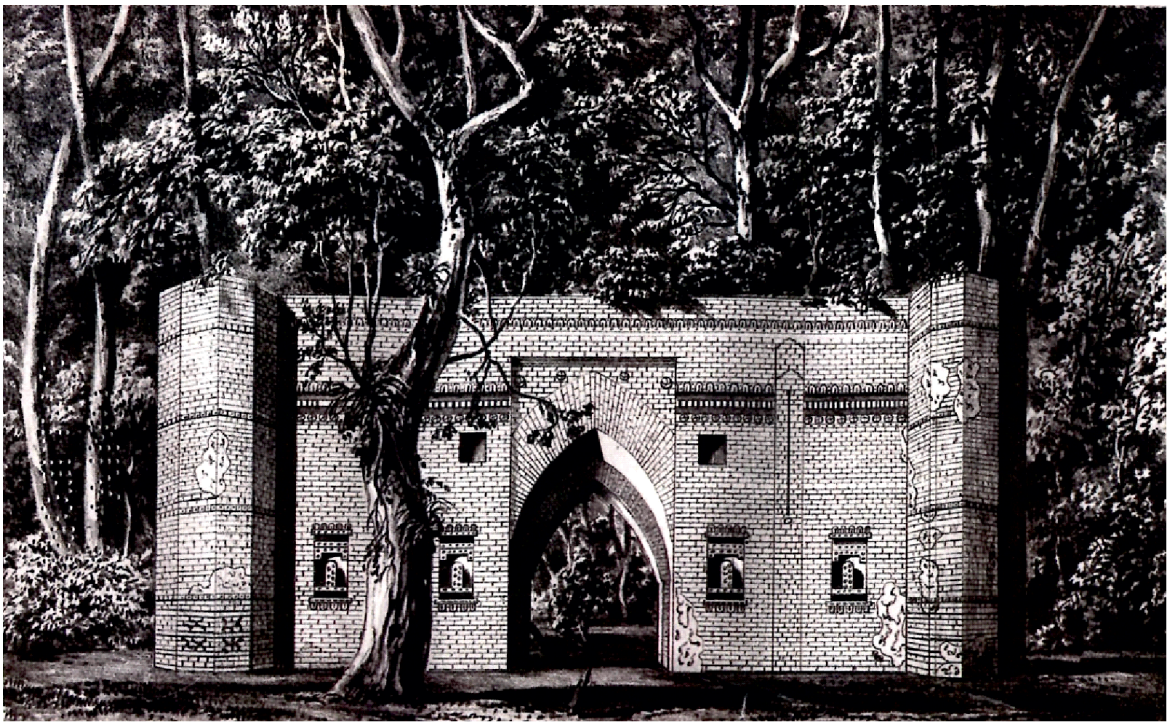

Fig. 1.4: Rajbari Gateway, Dimapur (Sketch: Butler, 1854)

Fig. 1.5: Dilapidated Pillars at Rajbari, Dimapur (Sketch: Godwin-Austen, 1874)

Fig. 1.6: Partially Restored Carved Pillars at Rajbari, Dimapur

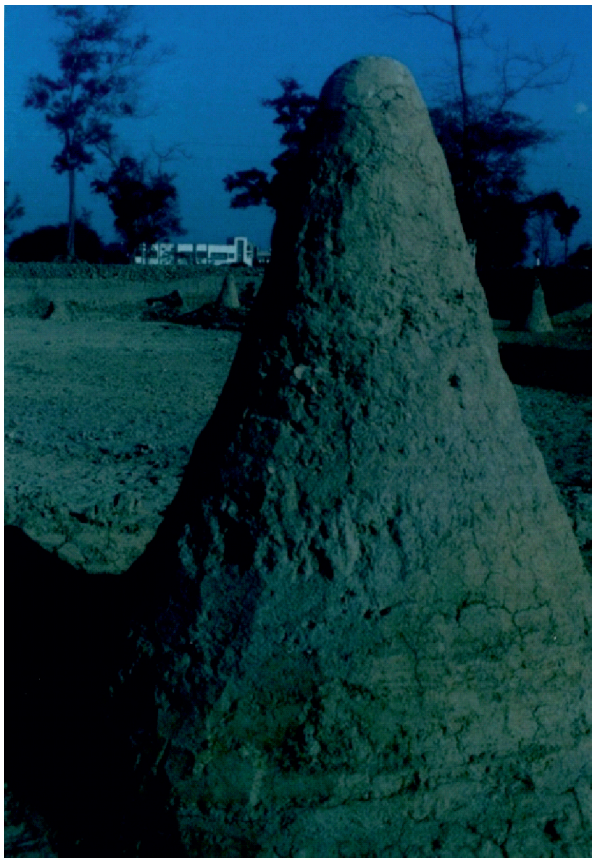

Fig. 1.7 (a): A view of Rajbari Mound's destruction in progress

Fig. 1.7 (b): Exposed section showing potsherds

Fig. 1.7 (c): Exposed section showing the remains of brick structures

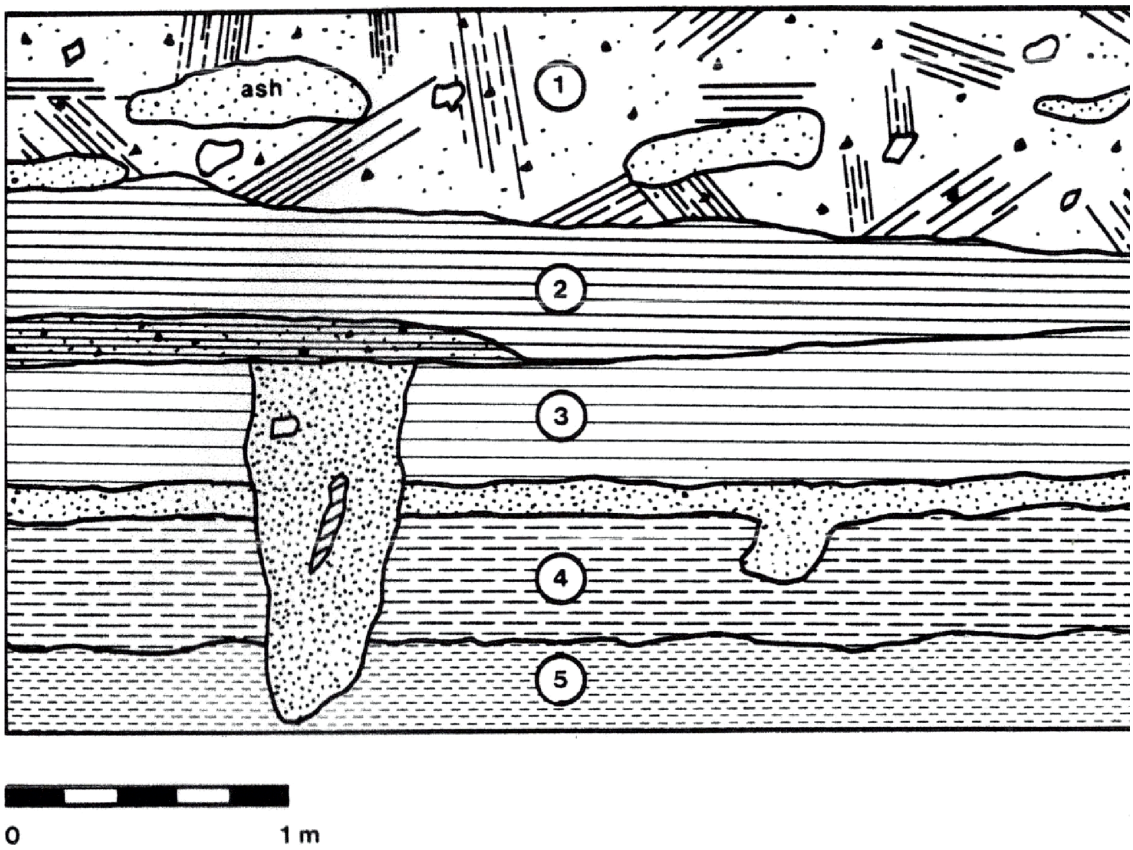

Fig. 1.8: Rajbari (Dimapur) Stratigraphy

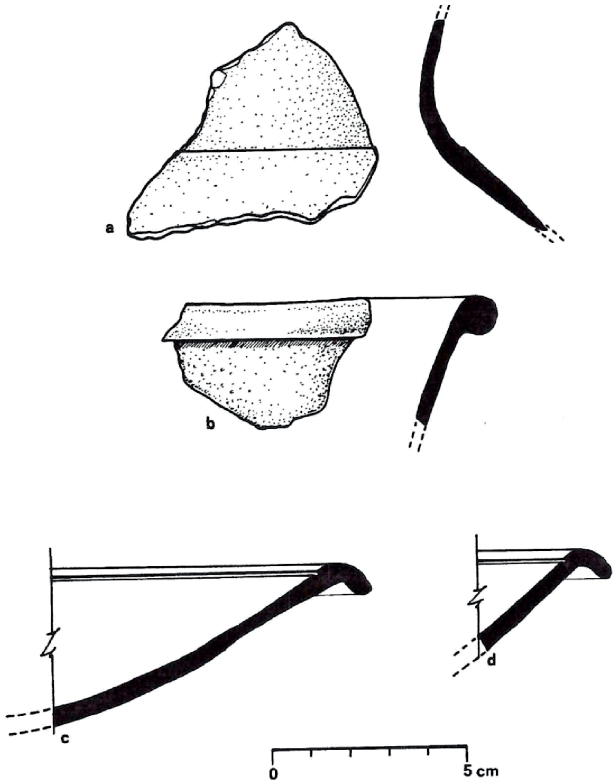

Fig. 1.9 (a): Dimapur Rajbari Wares—Redish-Brown

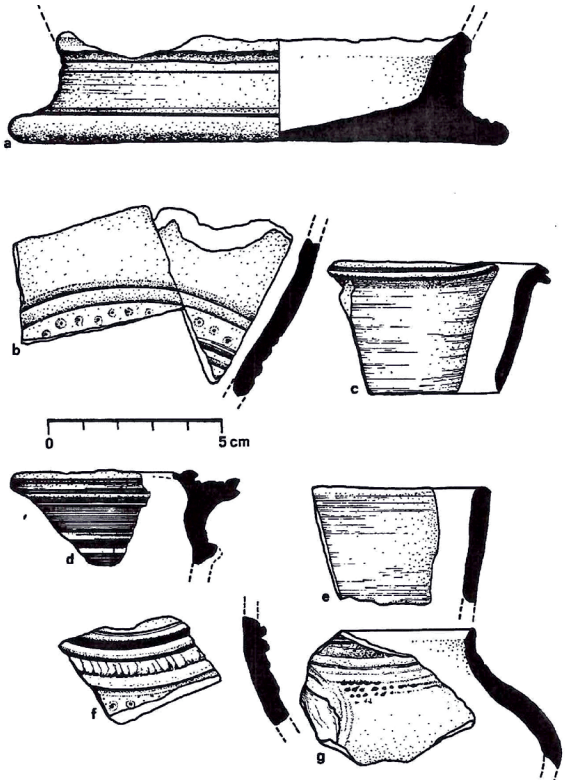

Fig. 1.9 (b): Dimapur Rajbari Wares—Black

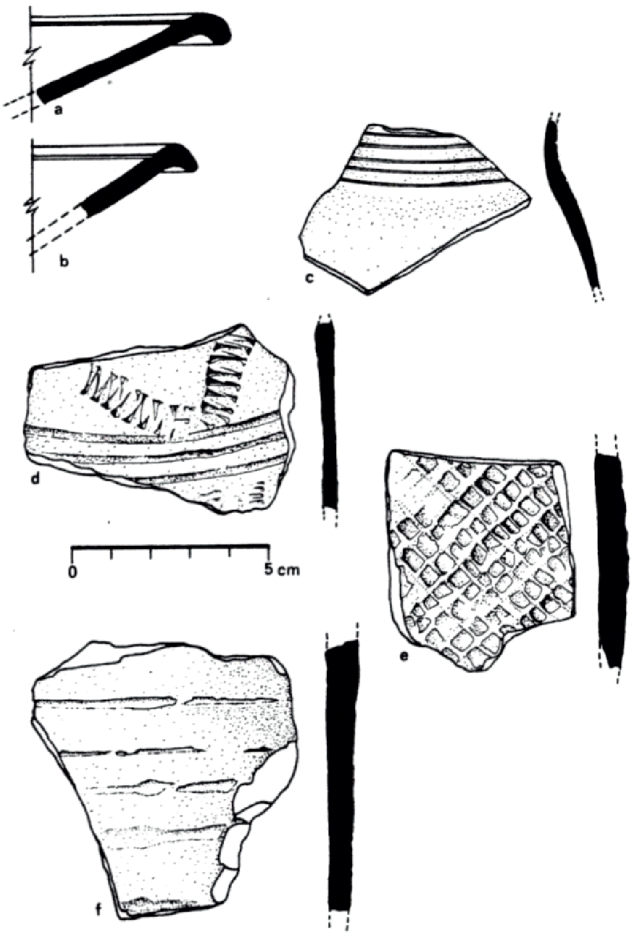

Fig. 1.9 (c): Dimapur Rajbari Wares: a-c—creamy buff, d & f – reddish brown, e—light darkish-brown

Notes

1. When the Ahoms entered the valley of the Brahmaputra in 1228CE the Palas of Assam were in power in Pragjyotisa-Kamarupa. The Koch kingdom emerged only in the 16th century under Biswa Singha (Editor).

2. State formation among the Kacharis had however not yet taken place (Editor).

3. *Dhunsiri* aspirated, as pronounced by the local Kacharis, is retained here [Dhansiri, corrupt version/ meaning]. Variously spelled, the following have the same meaning: *Dhunsiri* (Wade 1805; M'Cosh 1837; Grange 1839/1840), *Dhunseeree* (Jenkins 1834; Pemberton and Bayfield 1835; Butler 1855), *Dunseree* (Johnstone 1896), and *Dunsiri* (Godwin-Austen 1874; Oldham 1883). The Nagas living in Chumukedima and the adjacent areas called it *the Deema/Dima/Dhimsiri River* (Grange 1839, 468) and formed part of the Greater Dimapur geophysical environment. ***Diyung*** [Doyang, corrupt version]—a second-order river joining Dhunsiri, is retained here. Variously spelled as follows: Diyung (Grange 1839; Fisher 1840; Jenkins 1845) is retained here; *Dyung* (M'Cosh 1837); and *Deeyong* (Jenkins 1834; Butler 1855).

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