

SONARGAON History Jurisdiction Monuments

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The book is an outcome of the author's Ph.D. dissertation on a study of Islamic art and archaeology in the Department of Islamic History and Culture, University of Dhaka. The book is an empirical treatise on the history and monuments of Sonargaon 1338-1608.

Sonargaon is a historical place. It was a territory, a vast unit of *Sultanati Bangala*, its Capital city and an inland river port. Today Sonargaon is about 24 square miles in area, 27 km south east of Dhaka, spread on both sides of Dhaka-Chittagong highway, bounded on all sides by old Brahmaputra, Meghna, Dhaleshawri and Shitalakhya- a sort of triangle land. What is more, the Bara Bhuiyas defied Mughal suzerainty from Katrabo in Sonargaon.

The book consists of 9 chapters that include: introduction, identification of Sonargaon, early references and history of Sonargaon, Sonargaon during the Sultanate period and Isa Khan, architectural background of Muslim Monuments of Sonargaon, descriptions of selected monuments, identification of Katrabo, decoration of monuments, society and culture of Sonargaon and epilogue. There are 5 maps, ground plan and elevation of monuments are shown in 25 figures. Mosques and tombs are shown in photographs.

Chapter 1 deals with detailed identification of Sonargaon with its different names. Sultan Fakhruddin Mubarakshah was the first independent ruler of Sonargaon. Long before that it was a capital of the Sena ruler of the eastern area. Sultan Balban met the Deva ruler at Sonargaon. Sheikh Abu Tawwama established an Islamic centre for theology at Sonargaon in 1300. He was buried in the graveyard of Sonargaon Mograpara. The world famous traveler Ibn Batuta visited the independent Sonargaon and its busy port city in 1345, when Sultan Fakhruddin was the ruler. Iqlim Mubarakabad was towards west of Dhaka, where a gateway was renovated. Later on Sultan Iliyas Shah of Lakhnawti conquered Sonargaon and declared him Shah-i-Bangalah. Thus he united the three units or iqlims of state Bangalah viz. Lakhnawti, Satgaon and Sonargaon. But Sultan Iliyas's son Sikander Shah named it Iqlim Muzamabad.

All these are referred to in chapter 2. It was made the capital city and mint town by Sultan Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah, son of Sultan Sikandar Shah during 1373-93. Sultan Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah went to Pandua and ruled from there till his death. His Wazir Khan al Azam Khan Jahan son of Alaul Huq reached the southern part of Bangala and established the city of Khalifatabad. He was a great builder. Later rulers ruled Sonargaon from Gaur.

Chapter 4 describes the architectural background of the Muslim monuments of Sonargaon as part of Bengal. Sonargaon belongs to that deltaic region where the changing course of the rivers has resulted in the loss of many settlements and monuments.

The climate and geography has shaped the architecture of the region. Brick has been the chief building material made out of the soft clay collected from the deposit of the alluvium of the bank of the rivers. The typical architecture style is derived from the bamboo framework, the curvilinear form, described by Ferguson as the most elegant of modern invention. It was a blend of workmanship of Central Asia and local craftsmanship. Selected buildings, mosques, tombs and idgahs are the religious monuments described in chapter 5. It is the core chapter of the book.

Located on the south eastern part of Sultani Bangala or Iqlim Sonargaon is modern Bagerhat. Khan al Azam Khan Jahan built there the Shait Gumbad Masjid and established the mint city Khalifatabad in 1459. He also built his stone tomb on the bank of Thakur Dighi. Khan Jahan is also referred to in a gateway of Iqlim Mubarakabad, Dhaka in 1459. Within 200 yards south of Shait Gumbad Masjid is the Singer mosque. There are Bibi Begni, Ronvijoypur, Chunakhola and other mosques scattered in south Bangladesh. In the city of Sonargaon there are Mogra Para Masjid, Goaldi Masjid, Yusufshah Masjid and other relics of the Sultani period. There are bridges also.

Identification of Katrabo is covered in Chapter 6. Present Sonargaon town is a upazila consisting of eleven unions. The ancient city was much more extensive. Katrabo on the bank of Sitalakkha, the first capital of Isa Khan, was within this limit. Some traces of the famous fortified place on the eastern bank and Bahadur Khan Beel are traceable. The place is now known a Masummabad.

Chapter 7 deals with ornamentation of monuments. The brick-built monuments are bare and without plaster. Only floral terracotta designs were in use. Calligraphic ornamentation is in Knfic, Tughra Arabic and Persian letters. The domes are without any drum. The curved cornice form and round corner towers upto the roof are the most attractive part in all buildings. Mihrab decoration is also important. Tiles decoration in tombs and hammams are available.

The society and culture of Sonargaon has been discussed in chapter 8. The population of Sonargaon consisted of Hindus and Buddhists prior to the rule of Sultan Iliyas Shah.

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Among the immigrants in Sonargaon were many Sufis who built many mosques and madrasas. Many of the rulers themselves were educated and cultured. The learned religious leaders occupied high position in society. They imparted education of Fiqh and Hadith. A large number of Sufi settled in Sonargaon. The society of Sonargaon was divided into a number of classes.

Ancient Bengal was a large country. During the sultanate period the three administrative units or iqlims were Lakhnauti, Satgoan and Sonargaon. The most important iqlim was Sonargaon where there was the capital city, the cultural centre and inland port. Today's Bangladesh is mostly comprised of that Sonargaon.

The book, a research work based on field work by the writer and an elaborate bibliography consisting of references from 102 books, encyclopedias, and several journals is a store house of rich and rare data for future work.

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