

‘Central Place’ aspects in Archaeology:
*A study of archaeological site in Uppåkra,
Southern Sweden and Mahasthangarh,
Northern Bangladesh*

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Abstract

The aim of this paper was to understand the central place aspects of Mahasthangarh and Uppåkra according to analyze the definition of central place theory based on political, economical and religious aspects in archaeological perspective. Mahasthangarh is located in the Northern part of Bangladesh identified as Early Historic (c. 500 BC to 550 AD) to Medieval Period (c. 550 AD to 1200 AD) site in Bangladeshi context. Uppåkra is located in the Southern part of Sweden known as Iron Age (c. 500 BC to 1000 AD) site in the Scandinavian perspective. Central place theory is basically a geographical theory that seeks to explain the number, size and location of human settlement in the urban system and it defines archaeological sites with a combination of political, economical and religious functions. In this paper the central place theory was applied on these two different archaeological sites to pursue the relevant factors of central place issues in archaeological context. A large number of archaeological materials observed from both sites that indicate the central place aspects of Mahasthangarh and Uppåkra. On the other hand the historical sources of Mahasthangarh indicate the aspects of central place. The timeline of Uppåkra and Mahasthangarh was almost similar and both sites have varied functions. The goal was not to sustain the similarity or differences of these sites rather than the attempt was to understand the central place aspects in archaeological context. Methodologically the contextual analysis and comparative method was followed to understand the theoretical view of central place theory in Mahasthangarh and Uppåkra. As a result, the cultural materials, special features and historical information indicate that the both sites witnessed more than 1000 years human activities as central place with political, economical and religious functions in a long term perspective.

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1. Introduction:

Archaeology is a study about abandoned culture which has already been disappeared. Nevertheless the archaeological site reveals considerable data to interpret the past society through material culture and written sources. Undoubtedly it is a big challenge for archaeologists to interpret the context of the past society. As part of my Masters thesis I have chosen two different archaeological sites of the world; one of them is located in the Northern part of Bangladesh known as Mahasthangarh and another site is located in the Southern part of Sweden known as Uppåkra to examine the central place aspects in archaeological context.

Central place theory is basically a geographical theory that defines the sites with combination of political, economical and religious functions. It also seeks to explain the number, size and location of human settlement in the urban system. In this paper the central place theory will be applied on two archaeological sites to pursue the relevant factors of central place issues which could help to create a possible understanding of central place in archaeological context. In Bangladesh, the site has yet not received sufficient academic concentration as like as Uppåkra. The main focus of my paper is to understand the central place aspects of Mahasthangarh and Uppåkra according to analyze the definition of 'central place' in archaeological perspective.

In Bangladeshi context the timeline of Mahasthangarh is around Early Historic Period (c. 500 BC to 550 AD) to Medieval Period (c. 550 AD to 1200 AD). Several personalities contributed to discover and identification the ruins of Mahasthangarh. That site was identified as a capital city. At present several mounds and structural remains indicate significant characteristics of Mahasthangarh. The present study concentrates on the political, economical and religious functions of Mahasthangarh on the basis of central place as revealed by archaeological data and historical sources.

Uppåkra is situated approximately 5 km south of Lund in the Southern part of Sweden. A large number of archaeological materials identified from Uppåkra. The site is mentioned as Iron Age (c. 500 BC to 1000 AD) settlement in the South Scandinavian context. Last couple of decades several researches carried out this place to analyze the social conditions of Uppåkra. A number of discussions arranged to

concentrate on political power and socio-economic relations as well as the composition of religious belief including the introduction of Christianity.

I intend to discuss the internal and external network of contacts of both Mahasthangarh and Uppåkra where intensive research carried out in the past decades.

1.1 Objective:

The aim of this paper is to push the exploration of the concept 'central place' and to refine the use in the field of archaeology on the basis of the chronological perspective of Mahasthangarh and Uppåkra. I am interested to examine the character of central place from political, economical and religious perspective through the cultural materials, special features and the historical sources of both sites. My intention is not to indentify the similarity or difference of the archaeological context of Mahasthangarh and Uppåkra rather than I would like to emphasize on the central place theory to assume about the possible context from archaeological perspective:

1. What is central place in the archaeological context?
2. What type of functions play role to identify a central place in archaeological context?
3. How the cultural materials, special features and historical sources indicate the function of a central place?

In Bangladeshi context, the theory has not been applied yet in archaeological context. But, a large number of archaeological materials noticed from Mahasthangarh. On the other hand the historical information of Mahasthangarh also indicates the central character of this site. Personally as a Bangladeshi citizen, I was interested about Mahasthangarh from my childhood. The site is basically known as second urban settlement in Indian sub-continental context. On the other hand during my Masters study at Sweden I participated for archaeological excavation at Uppåkra as my course work. A large number of publications were carried out on the issue of Uppåkra. And the exotic cultural materials of Uppåkra influenced me to concentrate on this site. Alternatively the timeline of Mahasthangarh and Uppåkra are almost similar and the both sites witnessed a long term perspective within political power, trade and

religious aspects. These issues encouraged me to select Mahasthangarh and Uppåkra as part of my Masters thesis.

Archaeological sites are generally consisted of various material and various functions. On the other hand central places can be consisted of aristocratic residences, production places and trading network. And my goal is to examine the central place theory in archaeological context to interpret the function of archaeological site. The central place theory also pursues the evidence which could be concerned to the centrality of a settlement. Simultaneously the reason to choose central place theory is that a central place can provide the administrative, political, judicial, cultural, social, religious and economic functions. I intend to focus on these factors through the archaeological materials and historical information of Mahasthangarh and Uppåkra.

My attempt is also to emphasis on the issues of previous researchers as how they discussed about the context before and how it could be interpreted. Simultaneously I am interested to focus on the scientific academic approaches of Bangladeshi and Swedish archaeological context as the two country's scientific environment is different. And finally I would like to emphasize on the possible factors which could influence people to create central place on the basis of two different archaeological sites.

2. Theory, Methodology and Sources

2.1 Theoretical aspects:

Last few decades a large number of discussions carried out on the issue of 'central place' concentrated on political power, socio-economic relations and religion. Central place theory is probably an attempt to explain the spatial arrangement, size, and number of settlements. Even though there is no consistent definition of the term 'central place'. As a student of archaeology I am interested to scrutinize this geographical theory in archaeological context of Mahasthangarh and Uppåkra to pursue the possible factors of the central place.

2.2 Central Place Theory:

The term 'central place' was first pointed by American geographer Mark Jefferson in 1931. Meanwhile, two German economic geographers Walter Christaller and August Lösch provided some new discussions about central place (Jefferson 1931 cited in King 1985, pp. 13, 14). Eventually the term 'central place' was exposed as a theory introduced by Walter Christaller in 1933. Christaller stated that centralistic order seems from nature itself and the attempt is to understand that nature of order in central place systems mentioned in his classic work *Die zentralen Orte in Süddeutschland* (Christaller 1933 cited in Beavon 1977, p. 2; Schenk 2010, p. 11).

The term 'central place' uses regularly and also have an idea of what it means. But, it seems hard to make a definition of 'central place theory' (Skre 2010, pp. 220, 224). It is a conceptual statement about the relative locations, numbers, and economic functions of the different-sized urban places in a region. The term 'central place' usually means a settlement that can be combined with political-administrative, religious-ecclesiastical, economic and cultural phenomenon. A central place as a settlement concentrates with functions that influence certain areas in its immediate surroundings. The aim of central place theory is to examine the relation of larger and smaller place (Udolph 2010, p. 49).

Central place theory pursues the relation of different-sized urban settlements and also focuses on the patterns, activities and functions of urban centre such as manufacturing, wholesaling, retailing as well as personal and business service. These activities plays very dominant role to define the function of a centre by the nature of the major economic actions within the city, town, or even the village area. Another view point of central place theory is that the population size of a centre increases simultaneously with the functional units. On the other hand centre can be consisted of industry and commerce, art and culture, political, economic and social power that distinguishes them from the rural countryside. Urban community can be described properly whereas rural is not easily determined that lift up question what is urban centre and what is not. The theory of central place also pursue the relation between town and country, between urban and rural society as well as the economic activities within the city, town or in a village (King 1985, pp. 10-11, 14-15). The theory of

central place also pursues the measurement of centres and towns. It describes the functions of urban communities as well (Bruggler 2010, pp. 16-18).

In Bangladesh the central place theory is still unfamiliar within the archaeological context rather than the term generally uses as 'urban area' instead of central place in archaeological perspective. On the other hand in Sweden the central place issue has been discussed since last couple of decades. A large number of archaeological materials reported from Mahasthangarh and Uppåkra and the both sites have varied functions. Mahasthangarh is consisted of the ruins of an ancient city. The fortified city was surrounded by a deep moat which could have been used for the defensive purpose. Simultaneously substantial architectural remains with brick built house, floors, post-holes, large quantity of terracotta plaques, beads, silver punch marked coins, Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) indicate the central place character of Mahasthangarh. On the other hand a number of gold objects, spectacular beaker and glass bowl indicate aristocracy and long distance trade of Uppåkra. As a special feature, the enigmatic house of Uppåkra represents the religious functions and also indicates the presence of aristocracy. I intend to apply the central place theory both on Mahasthangarh and Uppåkra to pursue the possible functions of the political power, trade and the religious functions through these cultural materials and special features. My attempt is also to analyze the previous researches as how was those discussed before or how it could be interpreted in the central place context. This paper will be carried out to identify possible factors by focusing on central place theory to understand the central place concept in archaeological perspective.

2.3 Sources:

A large number of archaeological findings discovered from both Mahasthangarh and Uppåkra. I intend to analyse the approach of central place theory in archaeological context by using those archaeological materials that may help to create a possible function of central place concept on basis of Mahasthangarh and Uppåkra. I would like to use those materials as the primary sources and I am also interested to use historical sources from Bangladeshi context as there are many written sources indicate the central place function of Mahasthangarh. Fortunately or unfortunately, there are almost nothing written sources in Swedish context to assume about Uppåkra though

the *Sagas* sometimes identified as written sources in the context of Uppåkra. Simultaneously the previous researches will be used as secondary sources in my paper. As a student of archaeology I am not interested too much to rely on historical sources in archaeological context. Even though there are many historical sources are available in the context of Mahasthangarh which could help to correlate the research for interpretation. I intend to analyse the political power, economic and religious function of Mahasthangarh and Uppåkra through the archaeological materials, previous researches and historical information.

2.4 Methodology:

Methodology is an important part undoubtedly in archaeological context by means to give the attention of different kinds of linguistic, social, political and theoretical process of knowledge development (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2010, pp 8-9). As I have chosen two different archaeological sites of the world which are located in different context as well. In Bangladeshi context, a large number of historical information is available to compare with the cultural materials and special features. So, I have chosen comparative method to observe the functions of Mahasthangarh basis on central place theory. Simultaneously I would like to apply the contextual method to focus on archaeological records regarding to understand the central place aspects in archaeological context. The archaeological practice and theory is not similar in Bangladesh and Sweden. My attempt is to observe the context of the archaeological materials and the academic scientific environment of Bangladesh and Sweden by following the contextual methodology. The comparative method and contextual analysis will be followed by the theoretical approach of central place in my paper.

3. Mahasthangarh: The Contacts of the Central place

The concentration of this part is on the cultural history and early settlement pattern of Mahasthangarh region. Mahasthangarh is the earliest urban archaeological site so far discovered in Bangladesh dated back to at least 3rd century BC. The village Mahasthan in Bogra district of Bangladesh contains the remains of an ancient city which was known as *Pundranagara* in the territory of *Pundravardhana*. The internal and external network contacts of Mahasthangarh will be discussed in a long term perspective where intensive research carried out last few decades. This region was a

part of *Pundravardhana*, one of the ancient *Janapada*¹ of Bengal which has also been suggested as second urban developed region in Indian sub-continental context during the Early Historic period till the Early Medieval period (Rahman 2000, pp. 7, 20).

According to a Chinese pilgrim, Hiuen Tsang who visited Mahasthangarh around 7th century AD described the place as *Pun-na-fa-tan-na*. The statement of Hiuen Tsang indicates Mahasthangarh as Pundranagara. Hiuen Tsang wrote,

“There are about twenty *sangharamas* (monasteries) with some 3000 priests (and) there are some hundred Deva temples, where sectaries of different schools congregate” (Smith 2001, p. 68, Rahman 2000, p. 20).

South Asian archaeology was basically introduced by European scholars during the British colonial period. And the place Mahasthangarh was identified in 1879 by a British scholar Sir Alexander Cunningham who is known as the father of Indian archaeology. Sir Alexander Cunningham identified the monastery of Bhasu Bihar from Mahasthangarh and the capital of *Pundravardhana* by following the statement of Hiuen Tsang. In the late 19th century an archaeological survey was carried out by Cunningham. On the other hand in 1931 an inscription was discovered from Mahasthangarh that also indicates Mahasthangarh as *Pundranagara*, the capital of *Pundravardhana* (Rahman 2000, p. 20).

Archaeologically Mahasthangarh is consisted of material culture, politics, trade, religion, philosophy and probably played a role as centre in the Northern Bangladesh region. Nevertheless Mahasthangarh has not yet received sufficient academic concentration to understand the social, political, economic organizations and religious aspects. The main focus of my paper is to understand the centrality aspects of Mahasthangarh according to analyze the definition of ‘central place’ where archaeologically have exotic and varied functions.

3.1 Geographical Location of Mahasthangarh:

Mahasthangarh is located North-West part of Bangladesh. The delta of Bangladesh is surrounded to the north by the Himalayas mountain ranges and to the east by the

1. The term *Janapada* is a compound term, composed of *Janas* ‘tribe’ and *Pada* ‘foot’. In the context of ancient Indian subcontinent the term ‘*Janapada*’ is being used as a ‘land of people’ which was ruled by a regional emperor.

Burmese ranges, belongs to a sedimentary formation called the Bengal basin, which covers Bangladesh and the western Indian Bengal. It is separated to the west and to the north-west by the Rajmahal Hills, to the north-east by Shillong Plateau and to the east by the Tripura Hills, northwards, and the Chittagong Hills, southwards.

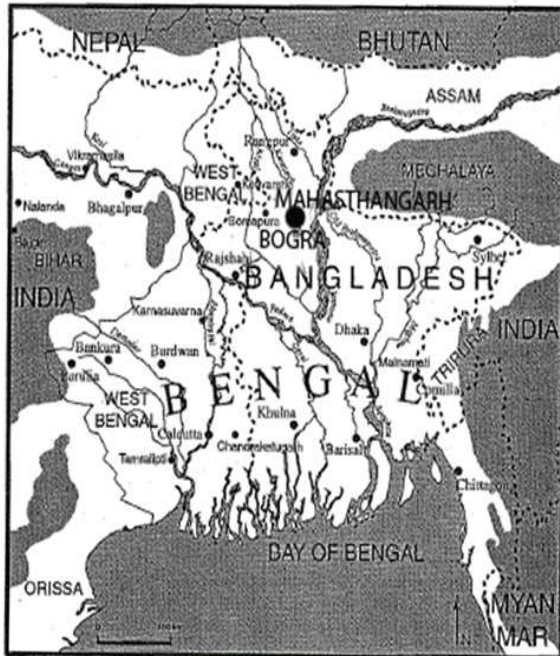


Fig.1. Map of Bangladesh,
Photo: First Interim Report 1993-1999.

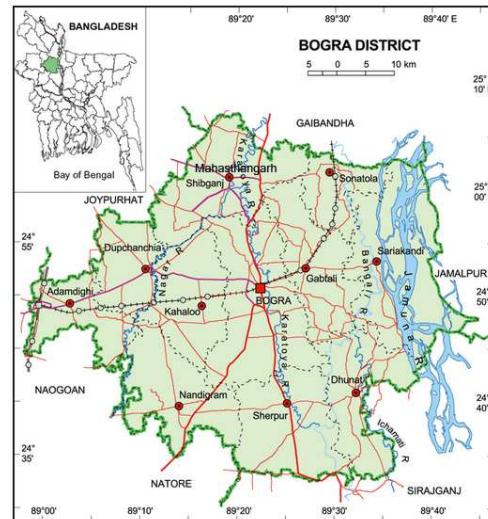


Fig.2. Location of Mahasthangarh
Photo: Banglapedia 2006.

There are different units in the Bengal basin e.g. in the north, the *Barind Tract*² and the *Madhupur Tract*³, safe from river flooding; in the centre, the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna river alluvial plains; in the south, the present delta, mainly formed by Ganges. This basin is a large alluvial plain formed by the coalition of three river deltas, the Ganges, The Brahmaputra (called ‘Jamuna River’ in Bangladesh) and their tributaries. At present three major rivers drain the Bengal basin i.e. the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna. The location of Mahasthangarh is

2. *Barind Tract* refers to the largest Pleistocene physiographic unit of Bengal Basin which covered approximate 7,770 sq km. It has long been recognised as a unit of Old Alluvium which differs from the surrounding floodplains. This physiographic unit is bounded by the Karatoya River to the east, the Mahananda River to the west and the northern bank of Ganges to the south. Bogra district is a part of the *Barind Tract*.
3. *Madhupur Tract* is a large upland area in the central part of Bangladesh. Geographically it is a terrace from one to ten metres above the adjacent Floodplains. Though in its present form it is of Pleistocene age its origin may be in the late Miocene when the Bengal Basin was being filled in rapidly.

surrounded to the east by the Brahmaputra and to the south by the Ganges River (Rahman 2000, p. 25, Jacqueminet, Allemand and Pedoja 2001, pp. 19, 25, 36).

It has been suggested that the Tista-Karatoya system was the major North-South axis of navigation between the Himalaya and the Bay of Bengal in the medieval and earlier periods. Historical information indicates that the north Bengal part along the Karatoya-Tista Rivers was conquered by Ikthyar al-Din Md Bakhtiar Khilji in 1205/1206 AD. Karatoya River played very important role in this adventure. The three main rivers; the Pundrabhaba, the Atrai and the little Jamuna from west to east, part of the Barind into four different units. The eastern rampart of Mahasthangarh showed evidence of destructions by river-flooding at different and undated periods (Alam and Salles 2001, pp 11-13).

The city Mahasthangarh has contact with two different geographical entities; the Barind high terraces and the Tista-Karatoya alluvial plain. It is necessary to know its present-day ecological setting e.g. physiography, geology, drainage systems, soils, climate, flora and fauna, raw materials for making tools, weapons and other objects and the resources for the subsistence to understand the transformation of the river system of Bogra district in a proper perspective. Some of the biggest rivers in the world are flown through the country that formed Bangladesh the largest delta in the world. This comprises nearly level ridges of Barind tract and lower part of the flood plain ridges and basins. It is highest in the basins and lowest on the ridges which indicate almost all the flood plain basins and depressions of north-east and south-east of Bogra and some valleys in the Barind tract (Jacqueminet, Allemand and Pedoja 2001, pp. 20, 36-37).

3.2 Archaeological context of Mahasthangarh:

Several archaeological explorations and excavation carried out last past decades in Mahasthangarh. The archaeological practice in that site was followed by cultural-historian thought from 18th century AD. As there are significant number of historical sources available in Bangladeshi context and most of the academic archaeological research was interacted between the material culture and historical sources. It has been claimed that 135 sites were located in an area of 2920 sq km in Bogra District that represents a massive archaeological sites in the Indian sub-continent. Several

isolated mounds known by the local names such as *Govinda Bhita Temple*, *Khodai Pathar Mound*, *Mankalir Kunda*, *Parasuramer Bedi*, *Jiyat Kunda* etc surrounded in the fortified city of Mahasthangarh. Even though Mahasthangarh has yet not received sufficient academic attention to examine the archaeological context. Last couple of decades was rather significant to carrying archaeological research in Mahasthangarh. New approaches, new methodology and new archaeological thought were composed in that period. The new research methodology and theoretical approaches replaced in the conventional form of archaeological context in Bangladesh during the last decade (Rahman 2000, pp. 58).

According to the joint venture excavation of Bangladesh and France team, 22 layers have been identified in Mahasthangarh during 1993 to 1999. The team suggest that the stratification of Mahasthangarh was consisted by natural soil which is used to call as *virgin soil* in Bangladeshi context, hardly composed, compact red soil of Pleistocene Formation. The Stratigraphical phenomenon of construction, destruction and reconstruction was probably continued in all the period right from the beginning of the site till its last occupation. Contemporary dwellers remove the bricks from the ancient remains and reuse them for their modern house, mostly applying the similar technique of construction with mud mortar. Unfortunately, it was not possible to make a complete sequence in the excavated area. So, it is necessary to make an inclusive study of the stratification of the site to understand the archaeological context in a large scale (Alam et. al 2001, pp. 212, 218).

In 1931 a stone plaque was discovered from the site, bearing an inscription in early Brahmi characters known as *Mahasthangarh Brahmi Inscription* indicates probable association with the Mauryan Empire (c. 3rd century BC). The inscription indicates that the place was a provincial capital of Mauryan Period. During 1907 to 1934 most of mounds were dug up and explore various antiquities that indicate Mahasthangarh was Buddhistic. The preliminary report of the first excavation in Mahasthangarh was published in the *Archaeological Survey of India Annual Reports* in 1928-29. After the partition of India in 1947, the Archaeology Department of the East Pakistan conducted sporadic excavations at Mahasthangarh. Unfortunately, there was no detailed report; only brief reports published in *Pakistan Archaeology* and *Pakistan Quarterly* and the material was incorporated in a small booklet. In 1960-61, official

excavations were conducted by the Pakistan Department of Archaeology and Museums. Short report was also made in the years 1965 and 1966. Nevertheless, no major excavation was done in the Mahasthangarh region during 1947 to 1971 (Salles and Alam 2001, pp. 1, 4, 9, Rahman 2000, pp. 20-22).

The joint venture Bangladesh-France excavation was started in February 1993 and it was resumed every season for a couple of months under an agreement between the Govt. of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and the Federal Republic of France in 1992 which introduced new aspects to Mahasthangarh Archaeology. During 1993-1999 the joint venture team revealed the cultural remains of various nature and periods ranging from the last quarter of 4th century BC to 13/14th century AD. The most significant objects were few pieces of Black and Red Ware which was discovered for the first time on the other side of Ganges. Other findings were ring stone, Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW), silver punched-marked coins, copper cast coins, bronze mirror, bronze lamp, semi-precious stone beads, ornaments of gold, silver, iron and glass, and large number of terracotta objects. All these objects reflect the socio-cultural, political, economical as well as religious aspects of Mahasthangarh for the last two and a half millennia (Salles and Alam 2001, pp. 4-8). It is noteworthy that the Bangladesh-French team is still continuing archaeological activities at Mahasthangarh.

Bangladesh-French joint excavation team excavated 11 levels at Mahasthangarh during 1993 to 1999. Charcoal sample has also been collected for radiocarbon dating during the excavation according to identify the age of the sites. The study of charcoal from archaeological excavations can also give specific information of the site about environment and use of available resources. Yet compilation of extensive analysis from a multitude of sites and periods can also produce knowledge about long-term changes in vegetation, development of the cultural landscape and agrarian economy. Regarding to the opinion of Bangladesh-France joint excavation team, the substantial occupation was probably carried out between the middle of the 4th century BC and the beginning of the 2nd century BC. According to the report of the team, the radiocarbon date from level 5 is 2210 ± 40 BP, calibrated date: 366-162 BC (highest probability. = -345, 262, 229, 203 BC). From level 7 two charcoal samples were removed from the destruction layer and submitted to radiocarbon analysis. One single radiocarbon date

is available and the result is 2100 BP \pm 25. The calibrated date indicates the period of 373 BC- 173 BC of Mahasthangarh (Bernard et al. 2001, pp. 74-114).

3.3 Dynastic chronology of Mahasthangarh

The boundary of the ancient city of Mahasthangarh was consisted of an earthen rampart topped by a series of baked-brick fortification. It has also been suggested that the chronological indicators such as ceramics are generally sparse on the surface of these sites and the population trends was changed over time (Smith 2001). Arguably, Mahasthangarh witnessed five dynastic chronological phases according to the cultural materials and the historical sources.

Dynastic chronology of Mahasthangarh:

Phase	Period	Timeline
I	Early Historic	c. 3 rd century BC to 2 nd century AD
II	Gupta	c. 3 rd century AD to 6 th century AD
III	Pala	c. 8 th century AD to 12 th century AD
IV	Sena	c. 12 th century AD
V	Early Islamic	c. 13 th century AD to 16 th century AD

The present situation of the villages of Mahasthangarh appears as a rural place of Bangladesh based on local agriculture. But the place is known as a major centre of ancient India. Nevertheless there are no serious hints to assume that Pundranagara was the centre of Gupta, Pala or Sena dynasty (Alam and Salles 2001).

4. Cultural Materials of Mahasthangarh

4.1 The Mahasthangarh stone inscriptions:

The Mahasthangarh stone inscription is also known as *Mahasthangarh Brahmi Inscription* and suggested as the first authentic source to examine the political context of Mahasthangarh (See fig. 3). The *Mahasthangarh Brahmi Inscription* is a small record of seven lines carved on a circular stone and part of that was broken. It has also been suggested that the inscription indicates the timeline of the Mauryan period (c. 3rd century BC). The language of the inscription is *Prakrit* and apparently the influence of *Magadhi* is visible. The name *Pundravardhana* was mentioned in that inscription

that probably indicates the old name of Mahasthangarh. A number of interpretations have been given by many scholars regarding to examine the Mahasthangarh stone inscription (Rahman 2000, pp. 208-209).

“It appears that some ruler of the Mauryan period had issued an order to the chief of the Pundranagara with a view to relieve the distress caused due to the famine” (Rahman 2000, p. 208).



Fig.3. Mahasthangarh Brahmi Inscription, Photo: Banglapedia 2006.

4.2 Ceramics from Mahasthangarh:

During the last century a large number of ceramics reported from various archaeological sites in Bangladesh. But, unfortunately no systematic study or classification for pottery has been done yet. So, it is very difficult to interpret a site by correlating with the ceramics. Nevertheless the joint mission of Bangladeshi and French archaeologists claimed that they have taken first attempt to make a systematic pottery sequence at Mahasthangarh. A large number of complete and semi-complete pots have been dug up from Mahasthangarh along with Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW), Rouletted Ware and Glazed Ware (Alam and Alam 2001, pp. 342).

4.2.1 Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW):

A large number of *Black Polished Ware* (BPW) identified from Mahasthangarh. The *Northern Black Polished Ware* (NBPW) was also reported from over 415 sites in various parts of Indian subcontinent represent a relation between Mahasthangarh and Ganges valley as well as indicates considerable progress of technology (Rahman 2000, pp. 133, 139). The fabric and style of NBPW also indicates an exotic production (*See Fig. 4*). The Northern Black Polished Ware is made by well clay with

little tempering material. It has been noticed that the core of the pots varies in colour from blackish to grey in some cases reddish varieties are also found. Unfortunately there is no depth study of ceramics carried out to understand the diagnostic feature of ancient pottery in Bangladesh.



Fig.4. NBPW pieces found from Mahasthangarh, Photo: Banglapedia 2006.

Nevertheless it has been suggested that the production of Mahasthangarh NBPW probably covers a period from the site c. 3rd century BC to 1st or 2nd century AD. Presumably scholars recommend that at least one NBPW production centre was at Mahasthangarh. The quality of Mahasthangarh NBPW also indicates as luxury ware and that was probably made specifically for the elite of the society (Rahman 2000, pp. 136, 145).

“NBPW from Mahasthangarh may be dated to c. 4th century BC to 1st century AD” (Alam & Alam, 2001, p. 344)

4.2.2 Glazed Ware:

Potsherd of Glazed Pottery also found from Mahasthangarh claimed as the first of its kind in Bangladesh (*See Fig. 5*). In the Indian subcontinent, potsherds in light buff colour with heavy turquoise glaze found from a number of sites including both the coastal regions and hinterland centres. Some Glazed Ware appears during 8th to 10th century AD from West Asian archaeological sites known as Islamic glazed ceramics. The ceramics are also found from a number of sites of Srilanka, South India, North India, China and Southeast Asia. The Glazed pottery indicates that Mahasthangarh was probably connected with other places in Bengal through the land and river routes.

The common types of pottery indicate a regional network outside of Bengal as well (Rahman 2000, pp. 153-154, 156).



Fig.5. Glazed Pottery, Photo: Banglapedia 2007.

4.3 Beads:

More than hundred of beads found from Mahasthangarh along with chert, carnelian, crystal, chalcedony, onyx, garnet, jasper, marble and amethyst. The shapes encountered at Mahasthangarh are globular, barrel circular, cylinder circular, barrel disc circular, oblate, barrel shape and oblate disc circular. Some polished beads are also observed on the majority of samples showing great skill of artists (Rahman 2000, p. 192, Boussac and Alam 2001, p. 427).



Fig.6. Stone Beads,
Photo: Banglapedia 2006



Fig.7. Glass Beads,
Photo: Banglapedia 2006.

Some stone beads of Mahasthangarh content of impressive colour (*See fig. 6*). These types of beads are also reported from some part of India and Southeast Asia. Stone beads are also appeared some sites of Ganges Valley such as Pataliputra, Vaisali, Kausambi and Sravasti are significant among them. Numerous beads from Mahasthangarh indicate the place as a bead manufacturing centre. Simultaneously beads represent a trade connection between Bangladesh and overseas countries. The

hypothetical networks also point to various technological innovations included art of bead making in Mahasthangarh (Rahman 2000, pp. 193-194).

On the other hand some glass beads and sandwich glass beads have also been discovered from Mahasthangarh (*See Fig. 7*). Large number of beads indicates a direct or indirect contact between Mahasthangarh and abroad through the river routes. The beads also indicate a probable beads manufacturing centre at Mahasthangarh. Arguably it is difficult to assume about the origin of these glass beads and further research is required to interpret the trading connection basis of Mahasthangarh beads (Rahman 2000, p. 205, Boussac and Alam 2001, p. 429).

4.4 Terracotta:

A large number of terracotta artefacts found from Mahasthangarh included terracotta plaques, terracotta beads, terracotta balls, terracotta discs and terracotta seals. The decorated terracotta plaques represent the religious aspects with narrative art. Some characters of *Ramayana*⁴ are also depicted in some terracotta plaques. Mythological perspective is also observed in those terracotta plaques. These terracotta are depicted both secular and religious themes. Last couple of decades many terracotta plaques have been dug up along with male and female figurine, lady with weapons and horse rider figure (*See fig.8 & 9*). The figures of the terracotta plaques are depicted with delicate ornamentation. Animal figure are also observed from Mahasthangarh terracotta (Rahman 2000, pp. 180-185).



Fig.8. Terracotta figure of Surya,
Photo: Banglapedia 2006.



Fig.9. Horse riding terracotta figurine
Mahasthangarh, Photo: Banglapedia 2006.

4. *Ramayana* refers as a *story of Rama*, it is an Indian epic from about 200 BC. It is believed to be written by *Valmiki*. This epic is edited by *Tulsidas* (1532-1623 AD).

The horse riding terracotta is facing right on a richly adorned horse walking. The realistic depiction of the horse, combined with the easy posture of the rider, gives the scene a lively character (*See fig. 9*). It is suggested that the sculptural remains from Mahasthangarh represent Brahmanical and Buddhist faith. Jaina religious evidence is also observed from the sculptural remains of Mahasthangarh. It is remarkable that the majority of the images found in the region have been recorded unscientifically that create problems to understand the context and find spots (Rahman 2000, pp. 187-188).

4.5 Punch-marked Coins:

Thousand of coins found from Bengal included silver punch-marked coins. Many of them belongs both to the local and imperial series. It is notable that the Bangladesh-French team discovered a silver hoard with coins in 1995 from Mahasthangarh mentioned as the first time found in Bangladesh. That hoard probably represents the timeline of Mauryan period (c. end of 4th century BC to early 3rd century BC). The hoard of Mahasthangarh indicates a monetary economy and exchange network. The location of Mahasthangarh beside the major river systems strengthens the idea of trade network as well (Boussac and Alam 2001, pp. 237-239, 243).



Fig.10. Punch-marked coins, Photo: Banglapedia 2006.

It may assume that the silver punch-marked coins of Mahasthangarh were part of the South Asian currency system. On the other hand the coins indicate the economical perspective of Mahasthangarh.

5. Trade network of Mahasthangarh:

Bangladesh is basically known as land of river. A great number of large and small River is flown almost all over the country. These rivers play significant role for irrigation as well as trade networking. As a land of river, most peoples live on

agriculture and majority people live in rural area of Bangladesh. Mahasthangarh is located just beside the Karatoya River. According to the map of 1787, Karatoya River was a major river in Mahasthangarh which was probably parted into several channels. One of the significant channels was probably flown by Atrai River as a main source. Another channel drained Mahasthangarh in Bogra District (Chakrabarti 1992 in Jacqueminet, Allemand and Pedoja 2001, p. 37).

The archaeological evidence indicates that Mahasthangarh was the earliest urban settlement in Bangladesh and provides some evidence of urbanization in Bengal. Presumably Mahasthangarh was a regional capital in the past regarding to the relations with the surrounding areas. The idea implies commercial routes between Mahasthangarh and Eastern India in relation with the river system.

The reason of urbanization might have been a configuration of lands; safe from flooding as well as human occupation seemed to be higher connection with the raising lands and draining. On the other hand there might have been a close relation between the Karatoya River and the Mahasthangarh region of Bogra district. The Karatoya River, a branch tributary of Brahmaputra River is flown beside Mahasthangarh Karatoya and simultaneously brought advantage in regard to water supply and transport facilities (Jacqueminet, Allemand and Pedoja 2001, pp. 19, 58). On the other hand it could be a threat for flooding. Regarding to the previous study of specialist, many alterations affected the Tista-Karatoya system in the past two millenniums especially in the past two centuries. In Bangladesh the fluvial dynamic is extremely active which affects the river courses. It might have been a significant route from Himalaya to the Indian Ocean and Mahasthangarh was probably related to the Gangetic valley (Salles and Alam 2001, pp. 12, 13).

The cultural factors such as political organization, trade and religion might have been played an important role to growing a settlement in Mahasthangarh. The settlements of Mahasthangarh were probably networked through the river and land routes. The archaeological evidences also indicate the external and internal network of Mahasthangarh. The enormous archaeological findings might have been stimulated the growth of urbanization and trade networks. That also indicates a possible political system like a civic body probably existed for controlling and managing the settlement system in Mahasthangarh. Presumably, Mahasthangarh was an important centre on

the route from Himalaya to the Indian Ocean and connected to the civilizations of the Gangetic Valley on the basis of cultural materials such as the NBPW, the terracotta plaques of the 'Shunga-style', the punch-marked coins and even a bronze mirror. It might have been a place of connection within trading systems oriented westwards to Ganges valley (Smith 2001, pp. 65). As historical information, the *Sanskrit* sources also mentioned a commercial exchange between Bengal and Tibet, Assam, Burma and China as well (Salles and Alam 2001, pp. 12, 13).

6. Conclusion:

It is difficult to understand Mahasthangarh as a capital-city rather than the archaeological materials and historical information indicates some possible function of a centre. The cultural materials such as the early Brahmi inscription, Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW), beads, terracotta and silver punch-marked coins indicate the Early Historic (c. 550 BC to 550 AD) timeline with the possible function to be called as central place on the basis of political power, trade and religious aspects of Mahasthangarh. The finds from Mahasthangarh shows a large settlement with long term continuity. This information also helps to assume the traditional image of Mahasthangarh as 'capital or 'central place' in the context of intensive craft and trade activities. But the trade and crafts were not very consistent in archaeological context. Nevertheless the existence of aristocratic luxury indicates a centre of ancient Bangladesh refer to the dynastic history and the period of the 'capital-city'.

“These data match perfectly the traditional picture of Mahasthangarh or Pundranagara being the 'capital-city' of a realm extending all over the Ganges valley, exhibiting a brilliant and new culture within the context of intensive craftsmanship and trade activities” (Bernard et al. 2001, p. 135).

The cultural materials and historical information of Mahasthangarh strengthen the idea of central place. But, I strongly believe that there is no ending of archaeological interpretation. It is not possible to reconstruct the whole context of Mahasthangarh rather than the more possible ideas and assumptions are required to examine the place basis of central place theory.

7. Central place aspects in Scandinavia:

The concept of central place in Scandinavian perspective developed last decade to examine archaeological settlement from the Late Iron Age. The concept focused on 'trade', 'economy', 'control', 'production', 'sacred' and 'power'. There are no written sources before 800 AD to specify locations of religious or political power in Scandinavian aspects. So, the concept of central place theory was applied through material culture regarding to examine the central place theory in Scandinavian perspective (Hedeager 2002, pp. 3, 6). And that is the big challenge for archaeologists to interpret a central place in Scandinavian context through the cultural materials and special features in archaeological context.

“A central place with sacred functions represents the whole universe in symbolic form; it is deliberately constructed as the ‘centre of the universe’ (Hedeager 2002, p. 2)”.

7.1 Uppåkra: The contacts of the central place

Uppåkra is located seven kilometres distance from the coastal area of Southern Sweden. The site was first recognized in the 1930s. The accumulated layer might have begun from Pre-Roman Iron Age (c. 100 BC) continued until the Migration Period (c. 500 AD). Introductory archaeological explorations and limited scale excavation were carried out during 1996-1999. The cultural materials and occupation layers of Uppåkra indicate that the site witnessed different building phases. The site is also noticed as elite settlement basis on social organization, special production, ruling group, trade and exchange networks. The manufacture of copper alloy ornaments of high quality indicates that the place was a central place during the Late Iron Age. The external contacts of Uppåkra might have been connected from Roman Iron Age (100 AD-400 AD) (Larsson 2002, pp. 19-20, 22; Stjernquist 2004, pp. 103, 104).

Uppåkra in Scania is suggested as the largest artifact-richest and long term settlement in Southern Sweden through the archaeological investigations in last few years. It is noticeable that the nature of Uppåkra site as a centre from its size, the largest Iron Age settlement in South Sweden and the various traces of craft. Archaeologists are also convinced that Uppåkra was an urban settlement and the site extends with thick

occupation layers and the site served as political, economic, and religious centre for a large part of the region.



Fig.11. Map of Sweden.
Photo: Google Map 2012.

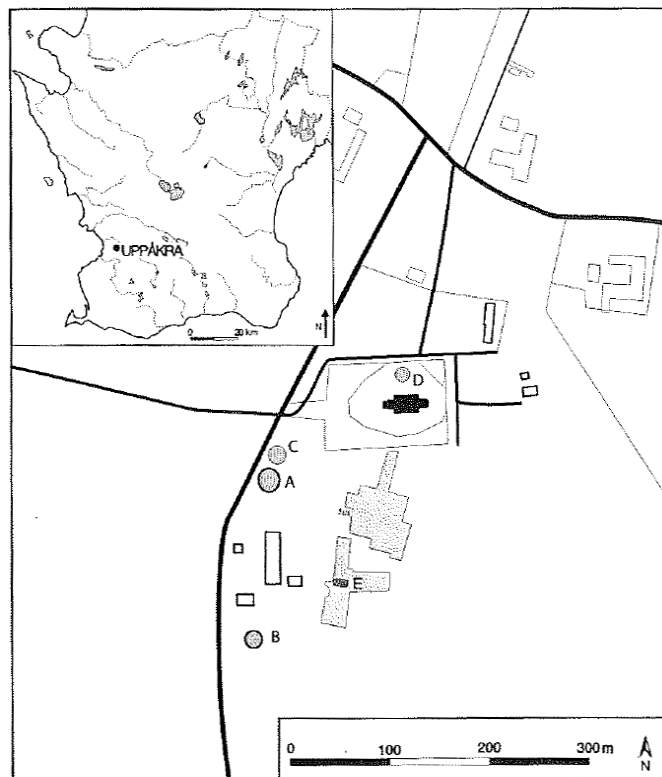


Fig. 12. Location of Uppåkra.
Photo: Larsson 2006, p. 249.

The geographical factors might have been played very significant role to attribute long-term continuity of Uppåkra such as the surrounded soil is fertile that could be one reason to chose this place as settlement. There might have been both land and sea communication routes between Uppåkra and other places. Presumably, the activities of Uppåkra continued more than 1000 years. And the site was probably abandoned with the foundation of Lund (Hårdh 2010, p. 108).

8. Cultural Materials and Periodical Context of Uppåkra:

As I mentioned in the beginning a number of cultural materials reported from Uppåkra from different layer and these materials indicate that Uppåkra witnessed six periodical phases. As we see in the below table that the timeline of Uppåkra started from the Pre-Roman Iron Age continued until the Viking Age.

Periodical context of Uppåkra

Phase	Period	Timeline
I	Pre-Roman Iron Age	c. 500 BC-BC/AD
II	Early Roman Iron Age	c. BC/AD-200 AD
III	Late Roman Iron Age	c. 200 AD-400 AD
IV	Migration Period	c. 400 AD-550 AD
V	Merovingian Period	c. 550 AD-800 AD
VI	Viking Age	c. 800 AD-1050 AD

On the other hand in 1990, Näsman mentioned that Uppåkra witnessed six stages from the Roman Iron Age to the beginning of the Viking Age. Luxury goods from Uppåkra indicate long-distance trade as well as specify the distribution of local production during that period (Näsman 1990). The archaeological evidence of Uppåkra indicates that the site was established during the Pre-Roman Iron Age c. 100 BC and continued until the Viking Age c. 1000 AD (Helgesson 2002, p. 32).

Näsman has shown that the trade context of the Early Iron Age as the first stage of his model consisted of gift exchange and luxury items. The model of Näsman and the cultural materials of Uppåkra strengthen the idea about the long distance trade and the distribution of local production. Presumably the tradition continued through the Migration and the Merovingian Period basis on cultural materials of Uppåkra (Näsman 1990). The periodical context of Uppåkra will be discussed in the next chapter based on the cultural material which is reported so far from Uppåkra.

8.1 Uppåkra in the Roman Iron Age and the Migration Period:

The weapon findings, precious metal and Roman imports in Uppåkra indicate nobility during the Early Roman Iron Age to the Late Roman Iron Age (Stjernquist 1977, p. 59; Lund Hansen 1987, p. 192; Hedeager 1990, p. 87). Several spectacular cultural materials found from Uppåkra dated back to first century AD. Glass with cut and polished decoration, various types of gold pendants, brooches, denars were significant among them. It has been discussed that the denars of Uppåkra probably came in the Late Roman Iron Age. The denars were found in an occupation layer along with decorated pottery from the Late Roman Iron Age. These findings indicate aristocratic

presence as well as a point to a contact network between Uppåkra and the surrounded world during the Roman Iron Age and the Migration Period (Hårdh 2002, pp. 34, 41).

“In the Late Roman Period there is a tendency that the social units become fewer and instead of rich graves certain types of central places develop, probably initiated by the nobility” (Näsman 1996, p. 60 in Helgesson 2003, p. 324).

The Migration Period is sometimes called as “the golden age” in Scandinavian perspective as a large number of golden objects found from Scandinavia dated back to the Migration Period. Some prestigious objects such as warrior’s equipment, mountings and jewellery also found along with those gold objects from the Migration Period. It has been suggested that the locality was dominated by the economical and political strategies of the ruling class. The prestigious objects might have been used by the upper class of the society. The archaeological material indicates that the place was located in a special position during the Migration Period. Presumably Uppåkra was a large Migration Period settlement in Scandinavia. Several fibulae, gold foil figures, sherds of glass beaker, mountings, indicate long-distance trade and central place for religious action (Helgesson 2002, p. 32).

Some warrior equipments found from Uppåkra dated between the Roman Iron Age and the Migration Period (Larsson & Hårdh 1998 in Helgesson 2002, pp. 33-34). These objects reflect to the military activity of the Migration Period as well as weapons, spurs, mountings found from Uppåkra indicate the activities of the Early Roman Iron Age and the Late Roman Iron Age until the early Migration Period (Helgesson 2003, p. 323).



Fig.13. Patrices for gold foil figures. Photo: B. Almgren, LUHM. 2:1 in Hårdh 2003, p. 47.

Gold, silver and gilded ornaments are also noticed from Uppåkra that expresses craftsmanship during the Migration Period in Uppåkra. The gold object especially gold bracteates and gold-foil figures indicate the characteristic of the central place. On the other hand sword pommel of silver pendant with gilded ornamentation from Uppåkra expresses probable connections to central Scania. Gold foil figures were also noticed from Uppåkra and that is exclusive and rare findings in south Scandinavian context (Watt 1999 in Hårdh 2003, p. 47). Other typical sign of Migration Period was cruciform brooches. These brooches found from some places of western Sweden, Norway and England (Hårdh 2002, pp. 42-43).



Fig.14. Gold objects of Uppåkra. Photo: Bengt Almgren in Larsson & Lenntorp 2004, p. 26.

The other indication of central place is some Roman copper coins found from Uppåkra probable timeline is 4th to 5th century AD. These coins could have been used for payment during the Migration Period. Probably the coins were imported and precious metal was used for special larger transactions. The tradition was probably continued between the Migration and the Merovingian periods (Hårdh 2003, pp. 28-32, 47). Roman coins, some glasses and ornaments indicate the concept of central place in Uppåkra with the contacts of continental Europe. It is noteworthy that the Roman bronze coins are very rare in south Scandinavian context. Brooches and mountings from Uppåkra also indicate close connections to Europe Continent especially Northern France to Northern Italy and Hungary. Other brooches also indicate a connection between Uppåkra and South Germany (Hårdh 2002, pp. 43-44).

On the other hand a number of gold foil figures found from the cult house in the central part of Uppåkra suggested the timeline between the Migration and the Merovingian Period (*See fig.15*).



Fig.15. Thick gold foil figures from Uppåkra. Photo: B. Almgren, LUHM (4:1) in Watt 2004, p. 198.

The gold foil figures are also known as *guldgubbar* refer to small figure of men or women or sometimes animal embossed scratched on gold foil. These embossed figures made with a high technical quality. The colour of the gold foil figure suggests that most of them were made of pure gold and few of them were made of an alloy with high gold content (Watt 2004, pp. 167-168, 170-171).

8.2 Enigmatic House of Uppåkra:

A house was found in Uppåkra during 2001 along with four big postholes. On the other hand several remains of house found in 2000 as well. Those remains dated back to the Roman Iron Age. The location of the house is in the centre of the settlement on the south direction (Larsson 2003, p. 20; Hårdh 2006, p. 254). Archaeological excavation revealed a complex sequence of layers from that house. A high timber-building with a stave-wall structure could have been built and re-built in several stages. The four big postholes of that house indicate that the posts would have been placed for the roof supports of the building. The imaginary posts of the house also indicate the house was used for a long time from the Roman Iron Age to the Viking Age (Larsson 2006, p. 249; Stjernquist 2004, p. 04).

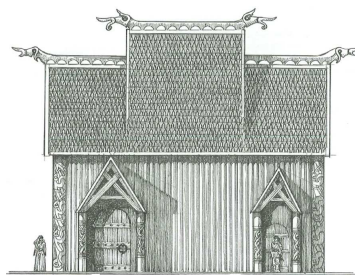


Fig. 16. Hypothetically reconstructed house 2 at Uppåkra. Drawn by Loic Lecareux in Larsson & Lenntorp 2004, p. 36.

It is very difficult to interpret the house of Uppåkra whether it is cult house or a hall (*See fig. 16*). Several different layers and findings excavated from Uppåkra. At the same time the radiocarbon dating indicate an early time period with the value 2080 ± 45 BP (Ua-22073). The calibrated date indicates the period of 210 BC-30 AD. So, it may assume that the earlier house level is probably connected to the Late Roman Iron Age and the Migration Period (Larsson and Lenntorp 2004, pp. 37, 38).

Some burial mounds were probably located to the west and north direction of the house and two burial mounds are still visible at Uppåkra. This kind of mounds often constructed in the Early Bronze Age and in the Iron Age. On the other hand some findings from the house layer indicate the date between the Migration Period and the Viking Age (Lindell 2001 in Larsson & Lenntorp 2004, pp. 39-40). Probably the ritual aspects of the house continued from prehistory to the Viking Age (Larsson & Lenntorp 2004, p. 41). The house also indicates political dominance lead by individual or a family (Herschend 1995, Nordberg 2003 in Larsson & Lenntorp 2004, p. 42). Norse cosmology and mythological aspects might have been involved to constitute the function of the house. One post of the house probably represented the tree of *Yggdrasil* as mentioned in Snorri's *Edda* (Larsson & Lenntorp 2004, p. 42).

A big blue and amber coloured glass bowl and a metal beaker was found close to the fireplace of that house (*See chapter 8.3*). Some damaged spearheads have also been reported from the house indicates as sacrifice weapon. These objects have been interpreted as religious or prestigious weapons as well as indicate very strong contact of centrality of this site (Hårdh 2002, p. 46).

8.3 Spectacular Beaker and Glass Bowl:

One of the spectacular finding from Uppåkra was a beaker excavated in 2001 from the so-called cult house that is made of copper alloy with rim and silver (*See fig. 17*). The bands of the beaker are coated with gold (Grandin 2004, p. 93; Hårdh 2004, p. 52).

The beaker is suggested as very unique object that expresses aristocracy and represents as Migration Period object. The iconographic style of that beaker indicates mythological aspects as well. This type of item was probably made for the elite class. The beaker also indicates skilful craftsmanship as well as expresses a central place

context with aristocracy, ceremonies, myths and legends. And probably the item was made locally (Hårdh 2006, pp. 254-257).

A number of silver beakers with embossed figure found with richest decoration from East Zealand dated to the Late Roman Age. The beakers express high skilled handicraft. Nevertheless it is very difficult to interpret those beakers whether made locally or by foreign artisans. But, the pictorial representations from the Early Roman Iron Age are very rare in Scandinavian context. Probably the changes were made through the impact of Roman culture during 3rd century AD. It has also been assumed that the pictorial inspiration probably appeared through Roman culture in South Scandinavia (Hårdh 2004, p. 65).

“The local connection of the beaker is obvious, among other things from the fact that their shape is based on local pottery types” (Hårdh 2004, p. 56).



Fig. 17. Uppåkra beaker. Photo: Bengt Almgren, LUHM, Lund in Hårdh 2004, p. 50.

Another magnificent object is a glass bowl excavated from Uppåkra in 2001 along with the metal beaker. The bowl was found from the so-called cult house (*See fig. 18*). The suggested date of the glass bowl is about 500 AD and the context of the glass bowl in the house is from the Late Migration Period. The function of the glass bowl indicates as drinking vessels or for storage or drinking set as status object or used for ceremonial purpose (Stjernquist 2004, pp. 103, 104, 111, 139).



Fig. 18. Uppåkra glass bowl. Photo: Bengt Almgren, LUHM in Stjernquist 2004, p. 111.

The so-called cult house, the beaker and the bowl indicate Uppåkra as a central place as well as give an idea about the skilful artisans and craftsmanship. The beaker and bowl might have been used by the elite peoples in the society. The beaker was probably used as drinking vessels for ceremonial purpose (Hårdh 2010, p. 102; Stjernquist 2004, p. 142).

8.4 Pottery of Uppåkra:

A number of pottery found from Uppåkra possibly indicate a contacts, craft and chronological aspects. The pottery of Uppåkra is varied from shape and ornamentation represents the local and regional changes. Pottery is one of the common artefacts that represent the existence of a site as well as range of human activities in a settlement. It also give an idea with wide range of different activities such as basic household function, cooking purpose, water storage, fermenting and food storage (Stilborg 2003, pp. 117-118, 120). In Scandinavian perspective, the basic chronology of pottery was made by Stjernquist in 1955. Stjernquist has worked out a comparable dating from a grave on Albäcksbacken, Maglarp parish in Scania (Stjernquist 1955, p. 90 in Stilborg 2003, p. 122).

“Clearly, almost all the pottery found at Uppåkra must have been made locally within a continuing craft tradition through the Roman Iron Age” (Stilborg 2003, p. 132).

Simultaneously Stilborg suggested that the area might have been dominated by a higher status people and the pottery was probably used by them. Presumably the pottery indicates that those were made in locally (Stilborg 2003, p. 133).

“I still believe that, taken together, they may be characteristic of the central place, but there are other factors as well, such as the local variation in the skill and professionalism of the potters, which will blur the ideal picture we would like to see” (Stilborg 2003, p. 133).

8.5 Uppåkra in the Merovingian Period:

The Merovingian Period gives a local impression based on the cultural material of Uppåkra. The findings of Merovingian Period also indicate trade contact from 8th century AD with Western Europe (Hårdh 2003, p. 49). Gold-foil figures, silver beaker, glass beaker along with a cult house also indicates the religious activity of the Migration Period in Uppåkra (Helgesson 2002, p. 32).

The metal detector findings from Uppåkra such as brooches indicate that the place witnessed Merovingian Period. Beak-shaped brooches were very common type during Merovingian Period in Scandinavian perspective. It has been suggested that the brooches were probably produced in a large scale during the Merovingian Period. These brooches indicate high skilled craftsmanship. Probably South Scandinavian social context was very centralized from 7th century AD (Näsman 1999 in Hårdh 2003, p. 48). On the other hand a beak-shaped brooch found in a grave from Önsvala that is very similar with beak-shaped brooch of Uppåkra. The beak-shaped brooch indicates a centralistic character of Uppåkra as product from surrounding region (Hårdh 2003, p. 48).

“Brooches probably produced in Uppåkra, are well known from cemeteries, not least in western Scania” (Hårdh & Larsson 2007 in Hårdh 2010, p. 101).

Very unfortunately the cultural layers from the Merovingian Period were severely damaged due to the agricultural activities at Uppåkra. Some objects such as brooches with mountings, ornamented fragments from Uppåkra indicate that Uppåkra was a centre of the Merovingian Period. The brooches of the Merovingian Period from Uppåkra is different in shape such as beak-shaped, equal armed, bird shaped, oval, round and S-shaped are significant among them. These objects reflex the Scandinavian metal handicraft during 7th to 8th centuries AD as well as indicate extensive local craft with regional connection (Hårdh 2002, p. 47).

The S-shaped brooches of Uppåkra indicate connection with Italy and southern Germany dated back to 6th century AD. Simultaneously equal-armed brooches of Uppåkra referred to connection with Germany dated back to 5th to 6th century AD. Oval brooch was also found from Gudme and it was probably imported from Southern Europe, perhaps from northern Italy around 6th century AD (Hårdh 2003, pp. 43-44).

Presumably some mountings of Uppåkra might be connected to the Merovingian Period and to the Early Viking Age. Even though it is difficult to interpret that the brooches of Uppåkra were local or imported product. But the characteristics of those brooches express very skill craftsmanship as well as indicate the contacts networks. The metal craft in the brooches also indicates high mobility in the society and that tradition might have been started from the Migration Period (Hårdh 2002, pp. 49, 51).

8.6 Uppåkra in the Viking Age:

The term 'Viking' derives to economical and political power in European context. In the early Viking Age there was a trading network along the Baltic coast include Western Europe. It is such a big challenge to interpret Uppåkra as Viking Age settlement because there are few indications found due to the cultivation layer. Even though some significant findings such as the Carolingian coins, Khazarian and Volgo Bulgarian coins, oriental mountings, small horned figurine, brooches, cast and gilded pendants and brooches, two animal heads found from Uppåkra indicate the timeline of the Viking Age (Hårdh 2003, p. 57; 2010, p. 105).

Some medieval coins also found from Uppåkra and most of the coins were issued by Abbasid dynasty of Arab. 40 coins were identified as Samanid dirhams dated back to 8th or 9th century AD. These coins indicate a trade connection (Hårdh 2010, p. 107).

The mountings from Uppåkra also indicate a probable contact networks. It has been claimed that the similar mounting found from Bornholm and Hedeby (Hårdh 2010, p. 105). Nevertheless, it is still difficult to reconstruct clear characteristics of the Viking Age in Uppåkra. Probably Uppåkra was founded as farm complex during the Viking Age (Hårdh & Larsson 2007 in Hårdh 2010, p. 105). Presumably Uppåkra was an important production centre during the Viking Age. Some objects such as equal-

armed brooches, tre-foil brooches and oval brooches of Uppåkra might have been a part of the early Viking Age around 9th century AD (Hårdh 2010, p. 106).

9. Conclusion:

Centrality in the Migration Period probably expresses personal, far-reaching network aspects as well as some findings indicate Uppåkra was some kind of religious centre. On the other hand, trade, handicraft, long-distance networks, religious and political phenomenon indicates Uppåkra as a central place and probably that was continued until 10th century AD before foundation of Lund. The place Lund has also been suggested as urban centre that might have been founded last decade of 10th century AD through a consistent context of Uppåkra. The central place aspects in Uppåkra were probably regulated by some functions such as trade, exchange, manufacture and legislation (Hårdh 2002, p. 52; 2010, p. 105).

“Thus it is tied to organized cult, ceremonies and royal and religious centres” (Hårdh 2004, p. 89).

Lund is estimated to exist one thousand years. There could be several reasons to found a new centre only 5 kilometres distance from Uppåkra. Probably the political aspect was changed during that time. One should know that Uppåkra and Lund cover a period of roughly 2000 years and Lund was built around 10th to 11th century AD when the late Viking Age central place of Uppåkra was abandoned (Carnap-Bornheim 2010, p. 112).

“It is important to distinguish between the moment when Lund was created as a new place in the landscape when this place was regarded by its inhabitants and others as a town.” (Larsson 2006, p. 174 in Hårdh 2010, p. 109).

10. Why Mahasthangarh was a central place?

Central place theory shows that the cities and towns are to be found in all parts of the world. But, all places are not identified as central place rather than only that place is called as central place which could be combined with politics, trade and religious aspects (King 1984, p. 9). In Bangladesh hundreds of small and large rivers are flown all over the country. The major occupation of the country is agriculture. It could be one reason to create human settlement from a long term perspective in that region. On

the other hand a large number of historical sources with myth and legends are available to assume about the past context. And the academic practice of archaeology in Bangladesh was started from the shadow of History discipline.

Bangladesh is basically originated in 1971 as an independent country. From that perspective archaeology is only a 41 years old discipline in that region until 2012. During the British colonial period and Pakistani era there was a government archaeological sector in present Bangladesh. Even though, the institutional archaeology was started from 1990 as a complete academic subject in Bangladesh. So the archaeological practice is very young in nationwide perspective of Bangladesh.

Externally the archaeological approach of Bangladesh was known as South Asian Archaeology before the independence of Bangladesh. Mahasthangarh was identified as a significant archaeological site during the colonial period. But the place was observed as urbanized settlement in Bangladeshi perspective. However, a large number of archaeological materials and historical information indicates Mahasthangarh as a central place on basis of political power, trade and religious aspects.

10.1 Mahasthangarh: Political Power, Trade and Religion

Bangladesh has evolved through a long political history and probably it was one of the wealthiest parts in the subcontinent. Religiously the place witnessed Hinduism, Buddhism as well as Islamism through a long term perspective. On the other hand the invasion of external power such as Sultanate, Mughal and European included Portuguese and British power indicates good position for settlement of Bangladesh. In 1757 the British ruler established an organizational and social structure in Bangladesh as well as the most part of the Indian subcontinent. Eventually political and economical control was dominated by the British colonialism in Bangladeshi context from 1757 to 1947.

British scholar Sir Alexander Cunningham identified Mahasthangarh in the late 19th century. Cunningham wrote,

“The place is so extensive, and in many parts (especially amongst the brick ruins) so thickly covered with jangal that is quite impossible to make any satisfactory exploration, save a great waste of both time and money” (Cunningham 1882, p. 104-117).

Mahasthangarh is also known as *Pundranagara* of *Pundravardhana* region. According to a legend, “*Pundravardhana was a country of the Pundras*”. But the political history of Mahasthangarh is not mentioned in Vedic literature, Buddhist and Jaina texts. Only the Mahasthangarh stone inscription (*See chapter 4.1*) represents as authentic source to assume about the political aspects of Mahasthangarh (Rahman 2000, pp. 47-48). The historical framework of Mahasthangarh was established through written sources. A number of exploration and excavation was carried out last couple of decades but very unfortunately most of the archaeological works on Mahasthangarh was unpublished. On the other hand there was no evidence mentioned in Indian and Bengali sources about Mahasthangarh rather Arabic and Persian inscription with epigraphic evidence indicate a site in North-Bengal (Alam & Salles 2001, p. 9).

“However, answering these historical questions is a major archaeological issues as it might help to understand why, and how, the city developed as a regional centre from at least the 4th/3rd century BC to the early 13th century AD” (Alam and Salles 2001, p. 10)

The river Karatoya flown beside Mahasthangarh is mentioned as a sacred river in *Mahabharata*, an epic poem of the ancient India based on Hindu faith. The records of *Mahabharata* also describe the Karatoya River as ‘a sea’ or ‘an ocean’. The Mahasthangarh region is also reputed for cultivation as rich agricultural region. The Mahasthangarh stone inscription describes about distribution of grains during a period of food shortage. The sources generalize Mahasthangarh as capital city. Due to lack of enough archaeological materials it is difficult to summarize the place as capital city on basis of few written indication. But the role of river is certainly important to assume about agricultural exploitation, circulation and food exchanges in Mahasthangarh. And archaeological indication was found in the eastern rampart of Mahasthangarh expressed the destructions by river flooding in different periods.

“These are only some of the questions raised by our current exploration of Mahasthangarh, which once more demonstrates that archaeology cannot be understood without the help of

historical records, and that history cannot be reconstructed without a comprehensive interpretation of the archaeological data” (Alam & Salles 2001, p. 14).

On the other hand as archaeological materials the *Northern Black Polished Ware* (NBPW), terracotta plaques, punch-marked coins indicate Mahasthangarh as an important centre on the route from Himalaya to the Indian Ocean. Simultaneously the archaeological materials indicate a trading network between Mahasthangarh and the Ganges valley. The present environment of Mahasthangarh indicates physical settings with the development of human settlement, agriculture, urbanization, transport and trade. Presumably the satellite images of Mahasthangarh give some idea about the paleoenvironment. According to the satellite images of Mahasthangarh, there might have been a close relationship between the Karatoya river and the city of Mahasthangarh as water supply and transport facilities.

A large number of archaeological materials of Mahasthangarh indicate that the materials either produced locally or imported from outside. The metal and stone objects might have been imported to the region as metal and stone are scarce in the area of Mahasthangarh. NBPW represents the place a close parallels with Ganges valley. The fine wares also indicate that the items were made locally. If the products made by locally then there should have been availability of suitable clays with other resources such as water and fuel as well as high skilled craftsmanship. The idea helps to assume Mahasthangarh as city centre.

The statement of agricultural wealth is also described on Brahmi inscription dated back to 3rd or 2nd century BC. The archaeological and historical sources with the contemporary research indicate Mahasthangarh was either a regional capital or an urban centre by means of its relations with surrounded locality. The idea also implies to the commercial routes through eastern India in relation with the river system.

However, it is such a big challenge to make chronological parameters at the central site of Mahasthangarh. The historical sources and archaeological materials give a general impression that there may have been a numerous local chiefs who dominated the place in a long term perspective. The idea indicates that Mahasthangarh witnessed a long term perspective as an urban centre for more than thousand years.

10.2 Early Historic Context (3rd century BC to 2nd century AD):

It has been suggested that the fortified site was built as an urban centre during 3rd to 4th century BC (Smith 2001, p. 67). Simultaneously archaeologist mentioned the Brahmi inscription was issued by Mauryan emperor Ashoka (Bhandarkar 1931; Barua 1934; Sircar 1942 in Rahman 2000, p. 48). The statement indicates the timeline of Mahasthangarh from c. 304 BC to 232 BC. The discovery of terracotta figurine from Mahasthangarh also indicates a timeline around 1st century BC.

“However, the discovery of terracotta figurines of the Sunga Period and of gold coins of the Kushana Period at Mahasthangarh indicates that Pundravardhana maintained its relations with rest of India during the reign of the Sungas and Kushanas” (Rahman 2000, p. 48).

On the other hand the Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) indicates that Mahasthangarh witnessed the Early Historic Period as the NBPW covers a timeline between 3rd century BC to 1st or 2nd century AD (*See chapter 4.2.1*). This polished ware indicates the presence of aristocracy as well as it represent production centre at Mahasthangarh. NBPW reported from over 415 sites from various parts of Indian sub-continent which represent a trade relation between Mahasthangarh and the other sites of the sub-continental context. This fine ware also represents the high skilled technology as luxury ware. This idea implies that Mahasthangarh witnessed the central place context during the Early Historic Period (c. 300 BC to 200 BC).

10.3 Gupta Period (3rd century AD to 6th century AD):

In Bangladeshi context the timeline of 3rd to 6th century AD is known as Gupta period. But the Gupta Period is controversial in the context of Mahasthangarh. Arguably, R. C. Majumder (1943:47) wrote that,

“With the exceptions of Samatata the rest of Bengal was definitely incorporated in the Gupta Empire by the time of Samudra Gupta” (Majumdar 1943, p. 47).

Rahman suggests that the power of Bengal was probably taken by Samudra Gupta (Rahman 2000, p. 48). On the other hand as archaeological evidence Gupta sculpture, Gupta coins, Gupta structures found from Mahasthangarh indicate the existence of Gupta kingdom in Mahasthangarh. The statement of Hiuen Tsang indicates the place Buddhistic. He also mentioned about 700 monks studied *Mahayana* in

Mahasthangarh. Two sites Bihar and Bhasu Bihar within the locality of Mahasthangarh could be the place described by Hiuen Tsang.

“The excavations at Bihar and Bhasu Bihar indicate that the substantial construction of this era outside the walls of Mahasthangarh appear to be religious sites related to Buddhist practice” (Smith 2001, p. 68).

The Bangladesh-French team excavated the Eastern Rampart reveals a level indicating the Gupta period. Simultaneously, the statement of Hiuen Tsang conveys an importance to show the political and religious activity in the fortified city of Mahasthangarh. Presumably the place could have been used for power control, manufacturing as well as religious purpose. On the other hand the ideas indicate a symbol of administrative structure. The construction of fortification walls in the top of Eastern Rampart might have been established to protect the place from seasonal flood of the Karatoya river. The idea indicates that Mahasthangarh was probably turned into an urban centre through the economic development during the Gupta period.

10.4 Pala Period (8th to 12th century AD):

In Bengal context the timeline of 8th to 12th century AD is proposed as Pala dynasty. By analyzing the Pala inscriptions and related literature of Pala period it may assume that Gopala was prominent emperor of Pala dynasty.

The Bangladesh-French team excavated material culture within the city walls of Mahasthangarh suggests that the place might have been witnessed substantial political power and religious activity during the Pala period. The architectural structure of monasteries and shrine, decorated terracotta plaques, interior of the building indicates the activities of Pala period. On the other hand a pair of temples identified from a site of Mahasthangarh indicates the timeline between 800 AD and 1100 AD. The construction of temples brings some ideas about Buddhist activities as well as represents economic life of the surrounding peoples. There is other example in Bengal to flourish the religious monasteries during the Pala period such as Paharpur, one of the largest Buddhist monasteries in the Indian subcontinent. It may assume that Mahasthangarh witnessed a development as an urban area with religious activity in the Bengal during the Pala period.

10.5 Sena Period (12th century AD):

The 12th century AD is known as Sena Period in Bangladeshi context. Few numbers of archaeological remains also noticed from Mahasthangarh indicate the Sena period. Some structural elements of Mahasthangarh indicate the timeline of Sena period. Sena dynasty patronized the Hinduism in Bengal. The Hindu votive and structural remains of Mahasthangarh indicate the Hindu religious aspects. Interestingly the symbol of Pala period was appeared during the ruling period of Sena dynasty at Mahasthangarh. Smith (2001:71) has interpreted the activities as,

“It is not surprising that their function as central places would have been reutilized by the builders of Hindu temples as they introduced new forms of worship to the population” (Smith 2001, p. 72).

The historical sources indicate that the religious context of Sena period belongs to the Hindu religion. A number of terracotta figurines reported from Mahasthangarh. Some of the iconographic features of the terracotta indicate the character of Hindu god and goddess. It may assume that the terracotta findings from Mahasthangarh represent the Sena dynasty. Nevertheless, there is no clear archaeological evidence to interpret Mahasthangarh witnessed the Sena dynasty.

10.6 Early Islamic Period (13th to 16th century AD):

A mosque of Mahasthangarh stands with date 1719 by an inscription. Earlier structure and evidence of Islamic rule in Mahasthangarh is not appeared. Presumably a tomb of Mahasthangarh dated back to the 17th century AD. Another mosque is identified as pre-Mughal period (before 15th century AD) located around 300 meters distance to the north-west mound of Mahasthangarh. It is difficult to understand as chronological parameters of Islamism at Mahasthangarh. But, one should know that Bangladesh was ruled by Muslim emperor from 12th century AD to 16th century AD. But, it is very difficult to interpret Early Islamic context of Mahasthangarh due to lack of archaeological evidence. Probably Mahasthangarh was used by the Islamic emperor to expand the religion as a new faith in the society rather than the fortification. But, there is no clear archaeological evidence to interpret political and religious context of Early Islamic Period.

The people of the Indian sub-continent faced a caste system during the ruling period of Hindu emperors. It is noteworthy that the caste system within the Hindu religious community is still appeared in the socio-religious context of Indian sub-continent. Probably the Islamic ruler tried to exploit the weakness of the society by focusing on the humanism rather than the fight or force. It could be one reason to expand the new religious activities in Bangladesh from 13th century AD. A number of Islamic preaches went from some Arabic countries to Bangladesh as well as the Indian sub-continent to expand the religious activity. The Islamic preaches were patronized by the rulers to expand the Islamic religion from 13th century AD. But there are no specific archaeological remains in Mahasthangarh to imply the idea of Islamic expansion at Mahasthangarh.

It is noteworthy that the contemporary religious context of Mahasthangarh village is almost Islamic. And even there is some Islamic structures are visible now on the top of the mound at Mahasthangarh. These structures could have been used for religious purpose. But it does not represent the central place aspects basis on religion. New ideologies, political power was probably played significant role to change the context of Mahasthangarh. Due to lack of archaeological remains and historical sources it is difficult to interpret the central place context of Islamic Period of Mahasthangarh. Either the archaeological remains were abandoned or the place never witnessed the central place aspects during the Early Islamic Period in Bangladeshi context.

Unambiguously the structural development and the wealthy cultural remains indicate Mahasthangarh as capital city. The fortification technique of the city wall was well mastered. Archaeologically the site has been abandoned, but peoples are still living beside the archaeological site of Mahasthangarh. The pressure of population has become a threat to protect the massive archaeological site. On the other hand government is also unaware to protect this site for further research. But, it is very important to excavate the site in larger scale to understand the whole context from urban-based understanding with the central place aspects. It is still a puzzled issue to interpret about the abandonment of this massive site. The cultural materials might have been re-used several times in the later phase of Mahasthangarh. Economic instability could have been a reason to re-use the old materials at the place. On the other hand natural calamity such as flood could have been another reason for the

abandonment of the site. Future research should be continued by focusing on the archaeological materials to compare the archaeological data in every single sites of Mahasthangarh to understand the central place aspects in a broader perspective as well as to assume about the possible factors of the abandonment.

11. Why Uppåkra was a central place?

According to examine the central place theory in Uppåkra a large number of cultural materials indicate the concept that might be applicable to identify Uppåkra as a central place. Due to lack of historical sources it is sometimes difficult to compare the ideas for interpretation. But, a large number of archaeological materials with special features help to assume about the central place context of Uppåkra.

11.1 Uppåkra: Political Power, Trade and Religion

The luxurious consumption represents an elite society of Uppåkra. A number of precious objects identified from Uppåkra indicate as an important centre. Some findings such as glass with cut and polished decoration, sherds, glass beaker from Uppåkra point to a trade network. These findings also indicate a connection with the Roman Empire. The prestigious items, craft production of Uppåkra strength the assumption about the central place.

Some kind of trade connection might have been existed between Uppåkra and Roman Empire. The pottery and Roman coins also found from Uppåkra indicate a trade network. Group of gilded or gold ornaments are also remarkable to assume about a trade connection of Uppåkra.

A large number of warrior's equipment indicates political, social and religious connection in the Iron Age society. The similar weapons also found from some sites of Northern and Central Europe. The material indicates external contact between Uppåkra and some parts of Northern and Central Europe. Warrior's equipment also indicates a special character as a central place.

“The special area (Uppåkra) must have played an important role for the warriors and the elite at the settlement, and perhaps people from other areas” (Helgesson 2004, p. 232).

The raw materials of the cultural items attested seasonal activities which could have been connected to a trade place. A large number of cultural materials represent the political structure, economic and social life during the Roman Iron Age. There might have been a relation between the graves and Uppåkra. Some prestigious graves and cemeteries around 10 km distance from Uppåkra indicate aristocracy during the Late Iron Age. The raw materials and rich findings of Uppåkra strengthen the idea of trading and social contact.

Apparently the crafts also indicate a political scenario during the Migration period. Craftsmanship was probably extended during the Migration period as a number of items found from Uppåkra of that period. On the other hand the cultural materials of Uppåkra indicates extended contact network during the Merovingian period and the Viking Age. The traces of trade, crafts and trading network appear in rich western material. There might have been a contact network between Uppåkra and Western Europe.

“From the record at the present stage of the investigations, Uppåkra appears not primarily as a trade and craft centre but rather as a residence with and impact on a larger region” (Hårdh 2003, p. 62).

Some fibulae also found from Uppåkra indicate as production place during the Migration period. The production idea implies a high skilled craftsmanship at Uppåkra as well.

“An alternative situation is that Uppåkra tried to achieve a monopoly, controlling both the production and the metal supply” (Helgesson 2002, p. 38).

The glass findings of Uppåkra represents import item as luxury products during the Roman Iron Age. The item also indicates aristocratic presence in the Migration and the Viking Age. Ornaments as personal belonging expresses personal contact by means of trade relation with other places. Glasses, garnet brooches, silver and gold indicate far-reaching network with some parts of Europe. The mountings and brooches from the Merovingian period represents skilled and technological standard of craft. The impact of varieties object might have been changed through the political transformation of the Migration and the Merovingian period at Uppåkra. Simultaneously trading contact and network could have been changed during the

transition period. The glass along with some imported objects expresses external contact as well as indicates a regular trading relation.

“Long-distance trade can be proved in some cases but as a rule commodities were spread through linked trade over settled areas” (Stjernquist 2002, pp. 107).

Many scholars emphasized on political differences of the Migration and the Merovingian Period as the social structure that might have been dominated by a warrior elite group. The idea indicates the existence of professional military system in the society. Simultaneously there is a possibility to develop smaller tribal organisation. The group could have been directed by a leader or magnates. The central periphery of the Migration period expresses far-reaching trade with alliances in aristocratic form. Trade, handicrafts, long-distance connections, religious and aristocratic expressions are profound at Uppåkra in a long term perspective that represents the character of central place.

The enigmatic house of Uppåkra is also an important element to assume the socio-political structure of Uppåkra as well as it represents some ceremonial aspects. The findings from the house indicate that the house could have been used as cultic or ceremonial purposes. Glass beaker from the house indicates a ritual meaning. In the Scandinavian context drinking was a part of elite ceremony. Presumably the beaker represents a special function in the context of cultic acts as well as symbolic function of wedding or sacrifices.

“Yet this may also reflect an important part of the social interaction between leading families” (Larsson 2002, p. 28).

The form of welcoming guest is also depicted in the motifs of gold-figurine. Simultaneously the idea indicates Uppåkra as cult, ceremonies, royal and religious centres. The glass bowl also indicates luxury item through a high level network of exchange. Another possible idea is that the beaker and the glass bowl express the nobility and a desire of power. However the ideas of beaker and the bowl represent a ceremonial uses on a high level for make friendship and contact with the elite class. The items might have been used as power, express the wealth and the generosity as well as the ritual ceremonies.

The cult house also contain considerable cultic images and offering to the gods in the religious perspective. The hypothetical structure of the house can be considered as a cult house or a hall which could have been built as a holistic purpose. Religiously the Iron Age is known as Old Norse period in Scandinavian perspective. One may assume that the special house could have been built for the ceremonies and ritual purposes in the Old Norse period. But the cultural materials in the sequence of the house provide a timeline from the late part of Roman Iron Age to the early Viking Age. On the other hand the high timbered house indicates cosmology and mythological character of the Norse religion. The idea indicates that the house witnessed a transitional sequence from socio-political perspective through the change of political power and religious context.

A number of glass vessels with cut decoration found from Muntenia and Ukraine. The idea about the glass vessels of Uppåkra indicates a culture expansion or trade network. Hypothetically it may assume that the bowl and the beaker produced in the same areas.

“The result is a hypothesis that the production area is the south-eastern parts of the continent” (Stjernquist 2004, p. 164).

A large number of gold-figure foils from Uppåkra indicate probable religious character depicted in the foils. The iconographic features of gold-foil could have been represents the gods Thor, Odin and probably Frey. However the gold-foils have been suggested as traditional local production.

“The interpretation of gold-foil figures as ‘temple money’ is supported by the character of the building at Uppåkra with which they are associated” (Watt 2004, p. 216).

Uppåkra appears as an important centre with cultural materials such as gold bracteates, gold-foil figures, garnet brooches, glass, ornaments and weapons indicates a function of central place with high skilled craftsmanship and local production centre. Probably the items played important role for long-distance trade in the political and religious context. Presumably the handicraft indicates a social relation in the Migration period. The social environment was probably supportive to produce some materials in locally. Ceremonial aspects have also been identified by examining the beaker found from the cult house of Uppåkra. At the same time the aristocratic

appearance has also been appeared. On the other hand the gathering of aristocratic society, skilled craftsmanship, ceremonies, myth and legends are appeared in archaeological materials to examine the character of central place theory in Uppåkra.

12. Scientific research environment in Bangladesh and Sweden:

The sites Mahasthangarh and Uppåkra are located in two different contexts and the socio-cultural and political contexts are different of these two places as well as the scientific research environment is also different. Bangladesh witnessed a long term colonial rule by the British ruler from 1757 to 1947. And in the Bangladeshi context the archaeological practice was initiated by the British scholar. At present in Bangladesh the past as constructed by the modern power of colonialism and nationalism. The archaeological practice is particularly manifested in the institutionalize disciplines of archaeology and history. But unfortunately the archaeological practice is ambiguous and problematic in the archaeological context of Bangladesh.

Indian subcontinent witnessed almost 200 years of colonial domination and India was partitioned into two separate independent states in 1947. After nine months of freedom struggle, Bangladesh became an independent country in 1971. During this long period of struggle, from the colonial period until now, archaeology and history played a significant role to construct the ambiguity and conflicts from a nationalistic discourse in Bangladesh. In the context of Mahasthangarh, archaeologists have not yet attempted to understand the processes of central place context within the discursive powers of modern western categories. Most of the interpretation was undertaken through the history based framework. At present the archaeological laws are being regulated and implemented by the Department of Archaeology, a directorate under the Ministry of Culture, and by the National Museum, an autonomous body with direct links to the same ministry. Only one university has a department of archaeology in the production of knowledge which was initiated from 1990. A few non-government organizations like the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, the Barendra Research Society and the International Centre for the Study of Bengal Art (ICSBA) are involved in the scientific archaeological research in Bangladesh (Sen 2002, pp. 346-353). But the colonial impacts are still appeared in the *Antiquities Acts* of Bangladesh (*Antiquities Acts of Bangladesh 2005*).

As an example in number 7, the Antiquities Acts (*Acquisition of land containing antiquities acts*) describe that,

“If the Central Government has reasonable grounds to believe that any land contains any antiquity, it may direct the Provincial Government to acquire such land or any part thereof and the Provincial Government shall thereupon acquire such land or part under the Land Acquisition Act, 1894 (1 of 1894), as for a public purpose” (Antiquities Acts of Bangladesh 2005).

Bangladesh is still stated as a province in the *Antiquities Act of Bangladesh*. The long term colonial perspective has not yet been changed in Bangladesh rather than the socio-cultural and political infrastructure of Bangladeshi context is influenced by the colonial impact. On the other hand the academic archaeological practice of Bangladesh is still known as cultural-historical archaeology whether the theoretical paradigm of archaeology underwent a major change from 1970s. The new theoretical approaches of archaeology such as post-processual, post-structural, post-colonial thought are still unfamiliar in the archaeological context of Bangladesh. The archaeological research of Mahasthangarh is also influenced by the history based frame which was created through the colonial period. In Mahasthangarh, the archaeological activities omitted the archaeological context rather than constructed the history from colonial perspective based on historical information.

In a smaller scale, the scientific study of the physical evidence of past human societies recovers through the archaeological excavation in Bangladesh. Archaeologists attempt to discover and describe past cultures to formulate explanations for the past culture. The study of the physical remains in Bangladesh is based on human settlement, artefacts, human craft specially tool, weapon, or ornament in archaeological context. Very often the scientific study, interpretation and reconstruction of the past human cultures continue in an anthropological perspective based on investigation of human activity and the reconstruction of related past environments. But in a broader sense the historic archaeology proceed the major archaeological activities and uses historical documentation to interpret the past cultures in Bangladesh.

Swedish archaeological context was different than Bangladesh. The new method and theoretical aspects are involved in the academic archaeological research in Sweden. In

Scandinavia, the archaeological practice has a long tradition compare to Bangladesh. And the socio-political context was also different in Sweden though the socio-cultural and political context of Southern Sweden witnessed political domination of the Danes (Larsson 2012). On the other hand, the archaeological research of Sweden was influenced by English antiquarians and it was systematized by following the concept of English antiquarians. In that consequence an archaeological approach was developed in Sweden to protect the antiquities and cultural heritage. One should know that in the 1666 an Antiquities college was established in Uppsala to expand the antiquities research and knowledge in nationwide (Trigger 1989, pp. 49-51). In the contemporary archaeological research of Sweden, the Anglo-Saxon influence is still appeared. Even though the endeavour of Swedish archaeologist is to discover and interpret the past cultures by following the theoretical approaches of archaeology. And the new methodology as well as the theoretical approaches applied in the archaeological context of Uppåkra.

13. Problem and Possibilities:

Interpretation is a challenging phenomenon in archaeological perspective which has no ending. In the context of Uppåkra there are almost nothing historical sources to compare the data to assume about the factors of central place theory. So, it is a big challenge for archaeologists to contextualize the central place theory in archaeological perspective. On the other hand Mahasthangarh was interpreted on the basis of historical sources though a large number of archaeological materials noticed from Mahasthangarh. But, it is highly recommended to excavate the site in a larger scale to understand the archaeological context of Mahasthangarh.

The socio-political context of Sweden is not similar to Bangladesh. But, in a sense archaeological sites have some unique characteristics. In Bangladeshi perspective the site Mahasthangarh is known as urbanized area through the cultural materials and the written sources. On the other hand Uppåkra has already been interpreted as central place in Swedish context. A few number of research publication was carried out on the issue of Mahasthangarh in the past decades. But, in Sweden a large number of research and publication carried out on the issue of Uppåkra.

The large amount of cultural materials found from both sites which could help to examine the central place aspects of Mahasthangarh and Uppåkra in archaeological context. The cultural materials indicate the political power, trade and religious aspects of both sites by means of central place theory. The radiocarbon dating is also important evidence to assume about the timeline of both sites. Simultaneously proper archaeological investigation and activities could be more helpful to understand the scenario of Mahasthangarh. In Bangladeshi perspective more archaeological theory and methodological approaches recommended to investigate Mahasthangarh from archaeological aspects. Theoretical approach undoubtedly plays very important role to interpret the archaeological context. Unfortunately the theoretical practice is almost absent in the academic archaeological context of Bangladesh.

On the other hand the *Antiquities Acts* of Bangladesh should be changed to protect the massive site for further research and investigation. Significant number of archaeological research and publication is essential in the context of Mahasthangarh. Simultaneously, more intellectual discussions, arguments, debate, opinion and the suggestion are required to understand the central place concept of both Mahasthangarh and Uppåkra to interpret as central place.

‘Archaeology’ is a problematic discipline by itself. It is such a big challenge to examine the character of Mahasthangarh and Uppåkra in central place context as ‘the past’ has already been disappeared. Even though the cultural materials indicates that the both place witnessed long term continuity as central place based on political power, trade and religious aspects. There are a significant number of researches and publication is available on the issue of Uppåkra and more research will be carried out in the future which could help to understand central place context. But, In Bangladeshi perspective most of the previous work carried out through the historical sources except the Bangladesh-France joint venture excavation. Proper and a large number of archaeological researches highly recommend for further research in Mahasthangarh to examine the central place theory in a broader perspective.

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