CHAPTER - 1
INTRODUCTION

Like other major river systems of India, the Doiyang-Dhansiri in the State of Assam had its significant contribution to the growth of culture of the region through which it has been flowing. The present author who served as the Registering Officer from 1982 to 1991 and afterwards as Technical Officer and Exploration Officer in the Directorate of Archaeology, Government of Assam, had many occasions to travel extensively in the region. These travels and investigations of the author led to the discovery of a good number of archaeological sites in the cradle of the Doiyang-Dhansiri river system.

THE SCOPE:

The scope of study of art and archaeology of the Valley is very wide and open. In the past, several scholars who include John Butler (1841), Major Godwin Austen (1874), T. Bloch (1905), K.N. Dikshit (1923-24), T.N. Ramachandran (1936-37) drew the attention of scholars to the Deopani sculptures, stone architectural remains at the Deoparvat, the megalithic sites and the brick built gateway at Dimapur. However the vast archaeological ruins of the Doiyang-Dhansiri Valley did not receive much attention of scholars until recent times. In subsequent periods, some scholars studied only those sites which had been earlier explored, with the only exception of Monoranjan Dutta (1990) who observed the stylistic development of some stone sculptures of the region. As such, no comprehensive study has been made so far to unveil the rich and varied archaeological wealth of the Valley. Consequently, a major part of the history, art, archaeology of the State of Assam has been left unstudied.
The present writer visited most of these sites and undertook the study of a number of artefacts and antiquities, which include stone, wood and metal sculptures, inscriptions, inscribed stone pieces and sculptures, terracottas, clay seal, metallic pots and implements such as bronze-coated iron architect's plummet, sāncipāt (bark of aloe tree) manuscripts and other objects. Incidentally, this is the first systematic attempt at a study of the archaeological remains of the Valley.

Several archaeological sites found with brick architectural remains, together with stone sculptures, and layout of tanks, ramparts, moats constitute the primary basis of our investigation. The discovery of several inscriptions, clay seal, inscribed sculptures during field investigation and the data offered by these epigraphical records, in addition to those recovered earlier, provide us with a firm background to this study.

Brick architectural remains in the form of brick mounds are numerous, but for limitation of methodical explorations, no complete ground plan could be ascertained.

However, the provenance of brick architectural ruins found in large scale confirm the development of a strong brick architectural movement in the Valley, pointing towards the attainment of a stage of urban life.

The fortified brick built site at Duboroni, and the setubondha (embankment and bridges) located at Alichiga-Tengani in Borpathar are found to be two largest ancient settlements. For all we know Duboroni might have been the capital and Alichiga Tengani was possibly a commercial harbour (pattana). Both the sites found with brick architectural evidence, are remarkable not only for their planned layout, as sthaniya fortress, on the bank of the Dhansiri, but also for their striking similarities with planning of ancient Indian fortified cities, as laid down in the Arthasastra of Kautilya. Further, the setubondha (embankment within square water ditches) at Alichiga-Tengan-believed to be the commercial harbour, was possibly developed into a pleasure garden (arāma) with orchard, brick built shops (vipani) and guarded passages.
Also, in art, the Doiyang-Dhansiri may be viewed at least in the early medieval period as a single cultural entity, distinct from its neighbouring regions. The sculptures found therein, be they in stone or in wood are stylistically akin to one another and developed features of regional art. The emergence of a strong native tradition of stone art under the aegis of the Eastern Indian School of Mediaeval Art (EISMA) is noticed at Deoparvat which was innovative as found in the carving of kirttimukha, and the facial treatment of some of the anthropomorphic sculptures. As such, we would endeavour, in this study, to bring out the salient features of the art of the Valley. These evidences that mark the development of the art movements with distinct regional features during the early medieval period have, however, been studied on the basis of stylistic considerations. Because, although indications of dynastical rule in the valley are found, it would be far fetched at this stage to go in favour of a discussion on dynastic division of the art styles.

Richly carved megaliths are also found in the Valley. This indicates the development of a unique phase of megalithism of a regional character the likes of which are nowhere else to be found. This study seeks to unveil the nature and significance as also certain beliefs that worked behind the development of the art and structure of these megaliths.

**Some Problems and Method:**

The art and archaeology of Doiyang-Dhansiri Valley is virtually an unexplored phase of Assam's past history. The absence of methodical exploration stands as a barrier to a through study of the different stages. Most of the sites are now under thick and thorny coverage of forests. Some of the sites have been completely denuded of their contents, leaving no records for assessment.
In exploring the stages of development of history, ancient myths and legends current in the valley have been totally omitted, reliance being placed solely on archaeological materials and historical documents. As limitations are there, this study at places may appear introductory rather than an indepth approach to the materials. One may also find it as a sort of a compendium of monuments and cultural indexes of the Valley, as we have tried to include here every individual image, metallic art object, epigraph, wood carving, terracotta object, tank and rampart, painted manuscript etc. that could be located.

Temple sculptures at the Deoparvat are numerous, and as such, only representative pieces of art work in the genre have been discussed. In spite of that, some evidence might have been left here and there, though we tried to study all the existing materials in situ by exploring village after village. Evidence of a working site, or rather quarry for masons and craftsmen exists at Arlongpira near the Deoparvat. This site is found to be the only archaeological sites of its kind in that area and hence has been included in this study.

**DATA COLLECTION:**

For this study personal visits have been undertaken to all the archaeological sites from 1982 onwards and materials have been collected in course of such visits as a Registering Officer, and afterwards as Technical Officer and Exploration Officer. The measurements and photographs of the objects, given in this work and sketches of the archaeological sites reconstructed have all been based on our personal visits. A good number of stone, metal and terracotta sculptures, metallic pot, a pair of bronze-coated iron plummets used by architects, and epigraphs, were collected by us from the region, which are now handed over to in the District Museum, Jorhat. At least six stone sculptures, collected by us with the help of R.N. Mulhun I.A.S., from Borpathar are now in the Assam State Museum, Guwahati. Objects that came under registration and those collected from the Valley have been freely used in this study.
Sources:

Needless to say the primary source materials for this study have been collected by this author from extensive field works in this region. A number of epigraphs, megalithic sites, and sculptures, that were discovered earlier in addition to those art objects collected and archaeological sites and remains discovered by this author are the first-hand sources of information. Besides inscriptions collected earlier, observations of earlier scholars have been critically examined as far as possible. The data of the epigraphs and a clay seal collected by this author provide indispensable sources of information in preparing the tentative genealogy of kings ruling in the Valley.

Besides, a few artefacts from this region now preserved in the Anthropology Department of Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh, and the Assam State Museum, Guwahati, have been incorporated. Antiquities and art objects, such as, illustrated manuscripts, ivory objects, wood carvings noticed in the Vaishnavite sattras, as also personal collections found at different places of this region have been used in this study. It is found that the Valley has made significant contribution to the development of human history and art, covering all branches of fine arts and archaeology.

Periodical Division:

Chronologically, the history and art movement of the Valley, is divided into three periods on the basis of the archaeological evidences as follows:

1. Ancient period (from earliest times to A.D. 600)
2. Early Mediaeval Period (from A.D. 600 to A.D. 1200)
3. Mediaeval Period (from A.D. 1200 to A.D. 1800)