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A 'Line of Time' for Northern Bengal

By H. E. STAPLETON



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A 'Line of Time' for Northern Bengal.

[From the period of Gupta domination under Chandragupta Mauryya (c. 300 B.C.) to the Muhammadan conquest of Bengal (c. 1200 A.D.).]

By H. E. STAPLETON.

While editing the late Khān Sāhib Abid Ali Khān's 'Memoirs of Gaur and Pandua', I was greatly struck by the scarcity of definite information regarding historical events in Northern Bengal prior to the Muhammadan invasion under Ikhtiyārūddīn Muhammad bin Bakhtiyār Khaljī that brought the reign of the Sena Kings in every portion of Bengal except the Eastern Division of Banga to a close. Against the dim background of repeated invasion from outside and the strife of local Kings and Chieftains, almost the only periods of comparative peace were those indicated by the Khalimpur Copperplate Inscription of Dharmapāla—issued from Pāṭaliputra c. 800 A.D., by which land in the Province of Puṇḍravardhana (the modern Rajshahi Division) was granted to Brahmins; and by the Damodarpur Copperplates of Kumāragupta, Budhagupta, and Bhānu (?) Gupta (443-543 A.D.), which show a settled administration of Northern Bengal under the Gupta Emperors of Magadha.

Since the 'Memoirs' were edited, much further light has been thrown on the history of Bengal by (a) the discovery of the Mauryya inscription at Mahāsthān which is dealt with in Dr. Bhandarkar's paper as well as the Kushān and pseudo-Kushān coins that have been described in Mr. N. G. Majumdar's paper. I accordingly again took up the question in consultation with Messrs. N. K. Bhattasali (Curator of the Dacca Museum) and Sarasi Kumar Saraswati (Government Research Scholar, Rajshahi Museum), and now present the results of my enquiries in the annexed tentative 'Line of Time'. In this, as far as possible, all the archæological material that has a bearing on the history of Northern Bengal is summarized in tabular form as a basis for future historical work on the subject. It will be seen from this table that, with the exception of a gap in the period of about 250 years from the period of the Sungas to that of the Kushān King Vāsudeva, a reasonably complete picture of the history of Northern Bengal from 300 B.C. to 1200 A.D. is now available.

January 2nd, 1933.

NOTE.—The Line of Time was subsequently revised in the discussion at the Society's meeting as well as the enquiries. It was resubmitted for publication 22nd, 1933.



A LINE OF TIME FOR NORTH BENGAL
TO THE MUHAMMADAN CONQUEST

I Dates.	II Historical Facts.
(1) 318 B.C.	Accession of Chandragupta Maurya at Pataliputra.
(2) 185-73 B.C.	Sunga dynasty of Magadha.
(3) c. 120-150 A.D. c. 160-185 A.D. c. 185-220 A.D.	Kushān dynasty of Kanishka reigning from Peshāwar. Huvishka Kanishka's son. Vāsudeva, the Hinduized Kushān successor of Huvishka.
(4) 319-320 A.D.	Gupta era begins in Northern India with the accession of Chandragupta I to the throne of Pataliputra.

FROM THE ACCESSION OF CHANDRAGUPTA MAURYA,
OF BENGAL (i.e., c. 300 B.C. TO 1200 A.D.).

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Archæological Material discovered in Northern Bengal and elsewhere
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(with Bibliography).

- (1) (a) Fragmentary Maurya Inscription found at Mahāsthān (Bogra Dist.) in November, 1931, in which some ruler issued an order that, for the relief of distress caused apparently by famine to a people called Saṁvamiṅgiyas, the Mahāmātra (officer) stationed at Puṇḍranagara should (i) make advances in money and (ii) distribute paddy from the district granary on which the inscription was placed. Dr. Bhandarkar in his paper (annexed) suggests that this is the first mention of the Bengalis as a confederation of tribes called Vaṁgiyas (a name still current in Eastern Bengal under the form Vaṅgas). The inscription also settles the identity of Mahāsthān with the historical Puṇḍravardhana.
- (b) That Jainism was very prevalent in Puṇḍravardhana in the Maurya period may be gleaned from a story in the *Divyāvadāna*, where it is said that on the report that in the city of Puṇḍravardhana, the effigy of Buddha is painted as falling at the feet of Nirgrantha by the Nirgrantha (Jaina) worshippers, King Aśoka ordered the slaughter of all Ājīvakas (Jains) there and that 1,800 Ājīvakas were slain in one day (vide *Divyāvadāna*, edited by Cowell and Neill, p. 427).¹
- (2) Terra-cotta plaque of the Sunga period (2nd century B.C.) found at Mahāsthān in 1928-29 : now in the Indian Museum.²
- (3) (a) and (b) Two gold coins of the Kushān King Vāsudeva, one from Mahāsthān (now in the collection of the V.R. Society, Rajshahi—V.R. Society, Ann. Rep., 1927-28), and one said to have been found at Māldah in 1888 (now in Mr. H. E. Stapleton's cabinet).
- (c) A gold pseudo-Kushān coin (modelled on those of Kanishka) found at Mahāsthān in May, 1932, and now in the cabinet of the Indian Museum. This is possibly a local coin struck between the end of Vāsudeva's reign and the accession to power of the Guptas, i.e., in the 100 years between 220 and 320 A.D.
- A reproduction of these 3 coins will be found in the Plate illustrating Mr. N. G. Majumdar's paper (annexed).
- (4) The Allāhābād Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta (Fleet, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, Vol. III, No. 1) mentions Samatata, Davāka, Kāmarupa, and Nepāla as frontier kingdoms of Samudragupta's empire.
- Samatata, according to N. K. Bhattasali ('Some image inscriptions from East Bengal', *Ep. Ind.*, Vol. XVII, p. 353), is the area of plain including Tippera which was bounded on the North by the Gāro and Khāsī Hills, on the West by the old course of the Brahmaputra (through Mymensingh), and on the South by the Bay of Bengal. The next country on the list before Kāmarupa (which was certainly Assam) is Davāka and may be identified with the northern portion of the modern district of Dacca, Western Mymensingh, and possibly the modern district of Rangpur.

¹ Vide also Note (1) on p. 145.

² Vide also Note (2) on p. 145.

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I Dates.	II Historical Facts.
(5) c. 380-415 A.D. ..	Chandragupta II (Vikramāditya), son of Samudragupta.
(6) c. 415-455 A.D. ..	Kunāragupta I (Mahendrāditya), son of Chandragupta II.
c. 543 A.D. ..	Gupta rule in North Bengal appears to have continued, but a gradual diminution of their authority may be inferred from the Governors taking upon themselves the title of Mahārājās.
(8) c. 590 A.D. ..	The Maukhari prominence in North India who, in their career of expansion, came into conflict with the rising power of the

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Its probable boundaries were the Brahmaputra on the East and Karatoyā on the West. Nepāla still retains the name it bore nearly 1,600 years ago. In the light of the mention and location of these apparently still practically independent Kingdoms in North-Eastern India, it seems reasonable to conclude that the ancient province of Puṇḍravardhana had already been incorporated in the Gupta empire.

- (5) (a) Three coins of Chandragupta II—'Śrīvikrama' (Archer) type—found in Bogra district and now in the collection of the Varendra Research Society, Rajshahi (*V.R. Society, Ann. Rep.*, 1927-28).
(b) Another coin of the same type found 5 or 6 years ago on a mound near Patisar (Rajshahi) district and now with Babu Jogendra Nath Mandal of village Pālsā, 2 miles distant (information supplied by S. K. Saraswati).
(c) The image of Buddha of the Gupta period from Beharail (Rajshahi Dist.), now in the collection of the V.R. Society, Rajshahi.

- (6) (a) The Dhanaidaha (Rajshahi Dist.) Copperplate of Kumāragupta of the year 113 G.E. (432-433 A.D.) registering a sale of land in Khātāpārā *visaya*,—situated presumably in the Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti*. (*Vide Ep. Ind.*, Vol. XVII, pp. 345 ff.)
(b) The Damodarpur (Dinājpur Dist.) Copperplates of Kumāragupta of 124 and 128 G.E. (443-444 A.D. and 447-448 A.D. respectively) registering sales of lands in the Kotivarṣa *visaya* of the Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti*. (*Vide Ep. Ind.*, Vol. XV, pp. 113 ff.)
(c) The newly discovered Baigrām (Hili, Bogra Dist.) Copperplate, dated 128 G.E. (447-448 A.D.)—about to be published in *Ep. Ind.* by Dr. R. G. Basak.

These plates show that regular administrative machinery was then working in North Bengal under Governors (*Uparikas*) appointed by the Gupta Emperor. The Governors in their turn appointed District Officials (*Viśayapatis*) who were assisted in the local administration by a council of four members.

- (7) (a) The Paharpur Copperplate grant of the Gupta year 159=457 A.D., registering the purchase of fallow state land by a private individual for gift to the Jain Vihāra at Vata-Gohāli presided over by the Jain preceptor Guhanandin. (K. N. Dikshit, *Ep. Ind.*, Vol. X, pp. 59-64 and plate.)
(b) The Damodarpur Copperplates Nos. 3, 4, and 5 recording purchases of fallow state lands in the Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti*, the last of which is dated in 224 G.E.=543 A.D. (R. G. Basak, *Ep. Ind.*, Vol. XV, pp. 113 ff.)
(8) The Haraha Inscription of the reign of Išānavarman (*Vikram Samvat* 611=554 A.D.; *vide Ep. Ind.*, Vol. XV, p. 110) says Išānavarman compelled the Gaudas, strong on the sea, to remain within their proper limits. The statement gives rise to

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I Dates.	II Historical Facts.
	Gaudas, also following a similar course, but the latter were ultimately checked by Išānavarman, the Maukhari King.
<p>(9) c. 590 c. 620 A.D. ..</p>	<p>Śaśānka of Karṇasuvarṇa (Now Kāṇṣonā, <i>alias</i> Rangamati, on the western bank of the Bhagirathī, about 7 miles southwest of Berhampur) becomes supreme ruler in Bengal (<i>cf.</i> ‘Gaudādhīpa’, the epithet of Śaśānka in the <i>Harṣacharita</i> of Bāṇabhaṭṭa).</p> <p>Campaign of Harṣa against Śaśānka which does not seem to have been very successful (at least while Śaśānka was alive).</p>
c. 619–637 A.D. ..	After the death of Śaśānka, the power of Bengal was broken by a combination of Harṣa and his eastern ally Bhāskaravarmān of Kāmarūpa, who is said to have had his camp of victory pitched at Karṇasuvarṇa. This, however, seems to have been a temporary occupation, though it may have led to the disruption of Śaśānka’s empire and the division of Bengal among several smaller chieftains.
<p>(10) 637 A.D. ..</p>	Hiuen Tsang visits Bengal—then divided into six states.

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presumptions—first that by 554 A.D. Gauda was an independent power; secondly, that the Gaudas had not only become independent but were trying to overstep their natural frontiers. Three Kings of Bengal, who must be ascribed to this period on palæographic grounds, are known, *viz.* Dharmāditya, Gopachandra, and Śāchāra. They are all styled Mahārājādhīrājas in their Feudal plates (*Indian Antiquary*, 1910, p. 216, and *Ep. Ind.*, Vol. I, p. 74 ff.). Except for two coins of Samāchāra from the same neighbourhood, these Kings are only known through the discovery of their Copperplate grants.

- (9) (a) *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, 53rd *Paṭalavistāra* (New reference suggested by Prof. Radhagobinda Basak in his paper on 'Śaśānka, King of Bengal'; *I.H.Q.*, Vol. VII, pp. 1 ff.).

(b) In the campaign, Harṣa is said to have reached the territory of Puṇḍra where he caused great havoc, but from the way in which the author of the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* sums up the results of the war (*Ibid.*, p. 14), they do not seem to have been very satisfactory for Harṣa. Evidently only a temporary victory was obtained. The Ganjam Plates of Mahāsāmanta Mādhavavarman (*Ep. Ind.*, Vol. VI, p. 143), mentioning Śaśānka as his suzerain as he died in 619 A.D., supports this suggestion.

- (c) The Nidhanpur (Sylhet) plate of Bhāskaravarman (*Kāmarājāśāsanāvālī* by MM. Padmanath Bhattacharyya, pp. 1-43).

- (10) In his time *Pun-na fa-tan-na* (Pundravardhana, *i.e.*, North Bengal), which was more than 4000 *li* (c. 800 miles) in circuit and its capital more than 30 *li* in circumference, had a flourishing population, and was well provided with tanks, hospices, and flowery groves. Jack-fruits were available in plenty. Besides the Buddhists following the Great and Little Vehicles, and the Brahmanas, there lived in North Bengal many Digamvara Nirgranthas (Jains). Belief in oracles was current. (Watters on Yuanchwang, Vol. II, p. 184.)

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I Dates.	II Historical Facts.
<p>(11) c. 650-750 A.D. ..</p>	<p>Bengal under local kings who struck coins modelled on those of the Guptas and of Śaśāṅka. Beginning of the period of confusion : but continuance of the revival of Hinduism.</p>
<p>(12) c. 700 A.D. ..</p>	<p>The King of Puṇḍra, who is described even by his enemies as skilful in destroying his enemies, was killed by a chief of the Śaila family who usurped the kingdom and established his family there.</p>
<p>(13) c. 720 A.D. ..</p>	<p>Gauḍa, which, in all probability, was under Kings of the Śaila family and not under Jīvitagupta II as is generally held, was invaded by Yaśovarman of Kanauj.</p>
<p>(14) c. 740 A.D. ..</p>	<p>Lalitāditya Muktāpīḍa, King of Kashmir, defeats and kills Yaśovarman and in his triumphal progress towards the Eastern ocean most probably conquered Gauḍa. He invited the King of Gauḍa to Kashmir where he was murdered. The followers of the Gauḍa King travelled to Kashmir to avenge the murder.</p>
<p>(15) c. 750 A.D. ..</p>	<p>Gauḍa occupied by Harṣadeva of Kāmarupa.</p>
<p>(16) c. 750 A.D. ..</p>	<p>The Kashmir King, Jayāpīḍa, visits Puṇḍra-wardhana, marries Kalyāṇadevī the daughter of Jayanta, the King of Gauḍa, and, after defeating five other chiefs of Gauḍa, made his father-in-law supreme in Bengal.</p>
<p>(17) c. 765 A.D. ..</p>	<p>Gopāla, elected King of Bengal by the people themselves to end the prevalent anarchy. The dynasty he established, which was known as the Pāla dynasty, continued to rule Bengal, though with</p>

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- (11) (a) 'Attribution of imitation Gupta coins' (N. K. Bhattasali, *J.P.A.S.B.*, 1925, P. N. 1 ff.).
(b) Paharpur reliefs of this period show many Hindu gods in which scenes from the life of Kṛishṇa (including a relief of Gopī and Kṛishṇa) predominate.
(c) Vishṇu image in the Rajshahi Museum ascribed by Dr. Kramrisch to 7th-8th century A.D. (Fig. 2, Pl. II, Pāla and Sena Sculpture, *Rupam*, No. 40).
- (12) The Ragholi (Central Provinces) plates of Jayavardhana (*Ep. Ind.*, Vol. IX, pp. 41 ff.).
- (13) (a) *Gauḍavaho* of Vākpatirāja, Ed. by S. P. Pandit (Bombay Sanskrit Series, No. 34).
(b) 'Kanauj and Yaśovarman', V. A. Smith (*J.R.A.S.*, 1908, pp. 765 ff.).
- (14) Kālhaṇa's *Rājatarāṅginī* (Stein's translation, Vol. I, pp. 132-3 and 152-3).
- (15) Paśupati Inscription of Jayadeva, King of Nepal, dated 153 H.E. (759 A.D., *Ind. Ant.*, Vol. IX, p. 178). Jayadeva married Rājyamati, daughter of Harṣadeva of the Bhagadatta dynasty of Kāmarupa, who is styled in the inscription as Lord of Gauḍa, Oḍra, Kalinga, and Kośala.
- (16) Kālhaṇa's *Rājatarāṅginī* (Stein's translation, Vol. I, pp. 160-3).
- (17) (a) *Ind. Ant.*, Vol. IV, pp. 365-366.
(b) Copperplate Inscription of the 32nd year of Dharmapāla found at Khalimpur alias Kholi Alampur, 6 miles east of Gaur, verse 4 (*Ep. Ind.*, Vol. IV, p. 243).



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I Dates.	II Historical Facts.
	various vicissitudes of fortune, for about four centuries. Buddhism was the religion of the ruling family, but Hinduism continued to progress.
(18) c. 775-810 A.D.	Dharmapāla, son and successor of Gopāla, had a triangular contest with the Gurjaras (Vatsarāja and Nāgabhaṭa) and the Rāshtrakūṭas (Dhruva and Govinda II) for the supremacy of Northern India, in the end of which he appears to have been successful, as in all the Pāla records he is uniformly described as the paramount sovereign of Northern India.
(19) c. 810-850 A.D.	Devapāla, son and successor of Dharmapāla, maintained his supreme position in Northern India.
(20) c. 850-970 A.D.	Vigrahapāla I (Surapāla I), Narāyanapāla, Rajyapāla, Gopāla II, Vigrahapāla II. Gradual decline of the Pāla power in Northern India, before the eastward expansion of the Pratihāras under Bhaja and Mahendrapāla. Indeed, the political power of the Bengal Pālas sank so low that, about the beginning of the 10th century A.D., they may for a time have been ousted from their homeland, Varendrī, by Mahendrapāla.
(21) c. 970-980 A.D.	Occupation of North Bengal by Kārobujas, who probably ousted Vigrahapāla II.
(22) c. 985 A.D.	Mahīpāla I, son of Vigrahapāla II, recovers North Bengal.

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- (18) (a) The above-mentioned Khalimpur Inscription of Dharmapāla, issued from Pāṭaliputra but granting villages in Puṇḍravardhana bhukti.
(b) Seal of the community of monks at the monastery of Somapura founded by Dharmapāla, discovered at Paharpur in 1926-27 (*A.S.I., A.R.*, pp. 149 and 199).
(c) Baroda grant of Karkarāja (*Ind. Ant.*, Vol. XII, p. 160).
(d) Wami grant—(*Ind. Ant.*, Vol. XI, p. 157).
(e) Gwalior Inscription of Bhoja (*A.S.I., A.R.*, 1903-04, pp. 280-81).
(f) Unpublished Copperplate of Amoghavarṣa by D. R. Bhandarkar (*Ep. Ind.*, Vol. IX, p. 26, note 4; *J.B.R.A.S.* Vol. XXII, p. 118).
(g) R. C. Majumdar, 'Pāla Chronology' (*J.P.A.S.B.*, 1921, pp. 1 ff.).
- (19) Consideration of the Nālanda Copperplate of Devapāla deva, year 39 (*Vide* N. G. Majumdar, *V.R.S. Monographs* No. 1) necessitates the pushing back of Dr. R. C. Majumdar's chronology by a further five years.
- (20) (a) Badal (Dinājpur) Pillar Inscription of Bhaṭṭa Gurava Mīśra, the Minister of Nārāyaṇapāla (A. K. Maitra, *Gauḍalekhamālā*, pp. 70-85).
(b) The Paharpur (Rajshahi) Pillar Inscription of the year 5 of Mahendrapāla (c. 900 A.D.; *A.S.I.A.R.*, 1925-26, p. 141).
(c) Miniature inscribed image of Jambhala from Paharpur (now in the Indian Museum), 10th century A.D.
- (21) The Dinājpur Pillar Inscription (*J.A.S.B.*, Vol. VII, p. 619), records the erection of a temple at Devīkoṭ by a King of Kāamboja extraction. Mr. R. P. Chanda takes the word 'Kuñjaraghaṭāvarṣa' of the inscription as the date 888 Sāka. Dr. R. C. Majumdar is inclined to take it as an epithet (*viruda*) of this Gauḍapati of Kāamboja extraction, and suggests that he may be identified with Sāhilladeva, King of Chamba, who acquired the epithet 'Karivarṣa' by destroying herds of elephants of the enemy at Kurukṣetra. (*Vaṅgavāṇī* of Chaitra, 1330 B.S., pp. 249-52.)
- (22) (a) The Bangarh (Dinājpur) Copperplate grant of Mahīpāla, year 9. (A. K. Maitreya, *Gauḍalekhamālā*, pp. 91-100.)
(b) Mahīpāla dighi, 18 miles to the S.-W. of Dinājpur.

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I Dates.	II Historical Facts.
c. 1026-1070 A.D. .. (23)	Nayapāla ; Vīgrahapāla III : Mahīpāla II.
c. 1070 A.D. .. (24)	Kaivartta revolt, and the temporary eclipse of the Pāla power in North Bengal.
c. 1077 A.D. .. (25)	Rāmapāla, youngest brother of Mahīpāla II, defeats and kills Bhīma, the Kaivartta King and recovers North Bengal. Foundation of Rāmāvatī, the new Pāla capital, on the present site of Gaur. Assam conquered (or invaded) by a feudatory of Rāmapāla.
c. 1120 A.D. .. (26)	Succession of Kumārapāla, who reconquered Assam.
c. 1125 A.D. .. (27)	Gopāla III, son of Kumārapāla.
c. 1130 A.D. .. (28)	Madanapāla, youngest son of Rāmapāla, succeeds Gopāla III.
c. 1140 A.D. .. (29)	North Bengal passed into the hands of the Senas under Vijayasena, who had already wrested Rāḍha and Mithilā from the Pālas, and who now drove away the King of Gauḍa (evidently Madanapāla). The latter took shelter in Magadha where he reigned for a few years more.
c. 1165-1178 A.D. .. (30)	Vallālasena, son of Vijayasena.
c. 1178-1208 A.D. .. (31)	Lakṣmaṇasena, son of Vallālasena.

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- (23) The Āmgachi (Dinājpur) Copperplate grant of Vighrahapāla III (A. K. Maitreya, *Gauḍalekhamālā*, pp. 121-26), granting land in his 13th year in the village Brāhmanī, situated in the Koṭīvarṣa *viśaya* of the Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti*.
- (24) The Dhīvardighi pillar near Devīkot (Dinājpur), though uninscribed, is connected by local tradition with the successful Kaivartta revolt under Bhīma in Varendra, which forms the subject matter of Sandhyākara Nandī's *Rāmācharitam* (A. K. Maitreya, 'The Stones of Varendra', reprinted from the *Modern Review*, 1912, September, p. 6).
- (25) (a) *Rāmācharitam* of Sandhyākara Nandī, Edited by MM. Haraprasad Sastri (*M.A.S.B.*, Vol. III).
(b) The extensive embankment in the Bogra district, known as *Bhīmer jāngāl*, most probably represents the defensive work set up by Bhīma against the army of restoration under Rāmapāla.
- (26) The Kamauli Plates of Vaidyadeva (A. K. Maitreya, *Gauḍalekhamālā*, pp. 127-146), Vaidyadeva was the Minister of Kumārāpāla, and afterwards became King of Kāmarupa.
- (27) The Rajshahi (Manda) Stone Inscription (now in the Indian Museum) of Gopāla III (R. D. Banerji, *M.A.S.B.*, Vol. V, p. 102).
- (28) The Manahali (near Devīkoṭ, Dinājpur) Copperplate grant of Madanapāla, year 8, granting the village Kāṣṭhagiri situated in Koṭīvarṣa *viśaya* in Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti* (A. K. Maitreya, *Gauḍalekhamālā*, pp. 147-58).
- (29) The Rajshahi (Deopara) Inscription of Vijayasena (N. G. Majumdar, 'Inscriptions of Bengal', Vol. III, pp. 42-56).
- (30) Vallāl-bāri, the northern part of Gaur, probably was the twin palace and fortress of Vallālasena.
- (31) (a) The Tarpanadighi (Dinājpur) Copperplate grant of Lakṣmaṇasena, year 3 (N. G. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 92-105), granting the village Belahisṭī in Varendrī within the Puṇḍravardhana *bhukti*.

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I Dates.	II Historical Facts.
<p>(32) c. 1202 A.D.</p>	<p>Invasion of Ikhtiyāruddīn Muḥammad bin Bakhtiyār, who occupied North Bengal up to a line somewhere north of Devīkot. He unsuccessfully invaded Assam in 1206 A.D. and died shortly afterwards.</p>