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Town Planning and Architectural Study of The Medieval Ahom Royal Palaces at Che-Hong (Gargāon) and Che-Muan (Rangpur)

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Abstract

During the 600 years (1228-1826 AD) reign of Ahom monarchy, the Ahom kingdom had five permanent capitals, namely Che-Rāi-Doi (Charāideo, established in 1253), Charaguā (1397?), Che-Hong (Gargāon 1540), Che-Muan (Rangpur 1707), and Dichai (Jorhāt 1794/95). Out of the five vibrant and permanent capitals Jorhat, Charāideo and Charaguā ossified into non-existence. Only the ramparts of Che-Rāi-Doi (Charāideo) and ruined royal palaces and half-demolished ramparts of Che-Hong (Gargāon) and Che-Muan (Rangpur) are striving to expose the glorious days of Ahom royal capital cities. This research was confined to explore the history of three capitals, viz., Che-Rāi-Doi, Che-Hong and Che-Muan, whereas the largest attention was given to study the town planning and architectural study of the medieval Ahom Royal the two prime royal capitals – Che-Hong and Che-Muan – that are still equipped with brick-made Royal Palaces till today. Artifacts unearthed expose the saga of the wonder that was taking place in medieval Assam. The embattled capital town Che-Hong looked like an ‘exclusivist fort’. The royal capital complex of Che-Hong inside the inner rampart resembles the Forbidden City, and the structure in-between the inner and outer rampart resembles to the Imperial City of the Shan States. Evidence of architecture is evident in the documents of two foreigners - Shihabuddin Talish (1662), a Mughal and Jean-Baptiste Chevalier, a Frenchman (1756). The royal Palace of Che-Mun was the Secretariat cum Court and garrison where warriors were deployed for war purpose. At the west side of it, the so-called Rang-Ghar was built for watching and enjoying sports and games. The so-called Bā-Guá was built on the south of it for religious purposes. Che-Muan was the hub of amusement, secretariat, court of law, army cantonment or garrison of the real capital Che-Hong that continued to function as the centre of administration. The remnants have withstood the vagaries of nature and rampaging Moāmaryās, Mān and the British to tell its own never-ending tale.

Keywords: town planning, architecture, Ahom, Che-Hong (Gargāon), Che-Muan (Rangpur), Assam

Paranan Konwar*

**TOWN PLANNING AND ARCHITECTURAL
STUDY OF THE MEDIEVAL AHOM ROYAL
PALACES AT CHE-HONG (Gargāon)
AND CHE-MUAN (Rangpur)****

A short introduction to Tai Ahom capital

During the 600 years (1228-1826 AD) reign of Ahom monarchy, the Ahom kingdom had 5 permanent capitals:

Che-Rāi-Doi¹ (Charāideo, established in 1253),
Charaguā² (1397?),
Che-Hong³ (Gargāon 1540),
Che-Mun⁴ (Rangpur 1707), and
Dichai (Jorhāt 1794/95).

Che-Rāi-Doi (Charāideo) which was the first capital city lasted for about 145 years (1252 - 1397) under the following rulers:

Süa-kaa-faa (1228-1268);

who is said to have migrated with a number of Tai followers – including typical Tai specialists – from *Müang Māo-luang* that consists today mainly of the Tai *müang* of Shan State, Myanmar;

Süa-taiü-faa (1268-1281);

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**ed. For inclusion of this text in TAI CULTURE, the Romanization mode was largely changed to NEW TAI, especially for core Tai concepts, terms and expressions.

¹ This capital city has several names: *Che-Tām-Doi* or *Che-Rāi-Doi* or *Che-Lung* or *Che-Kham*. *Che-taam-dooi* or *Che-raai-dooi*: In ancient Tai languages, *che* means ‘city’; *tām* or *raai* means ‘along’, *doi* means ‘hill’, i.e. city alongside the hill range.
Che-luang: *luang* means ‘large’, ‘main’, i.e., main city.
Che Kham means Golden city.

² Charaguā: The writing variant *Che-rai-kua* possibly could be translated as “city without fear”.

³ *Che-Hong*: In Tai it means: *che* is ‘city’; *hung* is ‘fame’, ‘rampart’, ‘light’; i.e., the city of fame, or rampart, or light. This Che-hong was āssāmized into Gargāon. *Gar* is ‘rampart’; *Gaon* is ‘village’; i.e. village surrounded by rampart. So the king *Süa-klen-müang* who established capital of Gargāon was known as Gargayān Raja. It is worth noting that whereas the Tai people were accustomed with the city/town concept, the Assamese people were accustomed with village concept only.

⁴ *Che-Mun*: In Tai it means: *che* is ‘city’; *mun* [or *muan* in other Tai languages] is ‘amusement’, i.e. city of amusement. In Assamese its name is Rangpur: *Rang* means ‘amusement’; *Pur* means ‘city’, i.e. city of amusement.

King *Süa-khrung-faa* or Rudra Singha started the works of this new capital in 1699 AD (12th Aghun of 1621 Sak, Lākni Kā-Plāo); laid the foundation pillar in 1704 AD (11th Aghun of 1626 Sak, Lākni Plek-Si-nga), inaugurated and named the new capital as Che-Mun or Rangpur in 1707 AD (17th Kāti of 1629 Sak, Lākni Rung-Rāo) (Handique, 1959:5).

<i>Süa-bin-faa</i>	(1281-1293);
<i>Süa-khaang-faa</i>	(1293-1332);
<i>Süa-khraam-faa</i>	(1332-1364);
<i>Süa-too-faa</i>	(1369-1376);
<i>Thaao-kham-thii</i>	(1380-1389);

Interregnums were prevailing during the years 1364-1369, 1376-1380 and 1389-1397.

Che-ra-guā, which was situated up the Dholā River and near the Dihing River, was the capital for about 142 years (1397-1539 AD) during the Ahom monarchs

<i>Süa-daang-faa</i>	(1397-1407); alias Bāmuni Konwar
<i>Süa-jaang-faa</i>	(1407-1422);
<i>Süa-phök-faa</i>	(1422-1439);
<i>Süa-seen-faa</i>	(1439-1488);
<i>Süa-han-faa</i>	(1488-1493);
<i>Süa-pen-faa</i>	(1493-1497);

Süa-hum-müang (1497-1539); alias Dihingiā Raja encamped temporarily at Bakatā after 1537 AD.

Che-Hong (Gargāon) was the capital city for about 156 years (1540-1696) during the reign of

<i>Süa-klen-müang</i>	(1539-1552); alias Gargayan Rajā
<i>Süa-khaam-faa</i>	(1552-1603);
<i>Süa-seng-faa</i>	(1603-1641);
<i>Süa-raam-faa</i>	(1641-1644);
<i>Süa-ching-faa</i>	(1644-1648);
<i>Süa-taam-laa</i>	(1648-1663);
<i>Süa-pöng-müang</i>	(1663-1669),
<i>Süa-njat-faa</i>	(1669-1673),
<i>Süa-lik-faa</i>	(1673-1681);

Süa-paat-faa (1681-1696); alias Gadādhār Singha shifted the works of the capital and encamped at Barkalā (which is close to and east of the Royal capital complex Che-Hong) during his tenure for the time being.

Che-Mon (Rangpur) was the capital for about 88 years (1707-1795 AD) during the regime of

<i>Süa-khrung-faa</i>	(1696-1714); alias Rudra Singh,
<i>Süa-taan-faa</i>	(1714-1744);

Süa-nen-faa (1744-1751);
Süa-rem-faa (1751-1769);
Süa-njen-faa (1769-1780);
Süa-hit-pöng-faa (1780-1795);

The capital at Di-chai (Jorhāt) run for about 31 years (1795-1826) during the reign of

Süa-nin-faa (1795-1810), alias Kamaleswar Singha
Süa-den-faa (1810-1818),
Purandar Singha (1818-1819),
Süa-den-faa for second time (1819-1821),
Jogeswar Singha (1821-1824),

the conquest by the British (1824-1825), and
the Treaty of Yāndāboo (1826).

Like other oriental monarchs, the Ahom kings shifted their capitals from one place to another where they felt convenient. The first Ahom monarch *Süa-kaa-faa* continued to shift to many places for some time before he finally fixed his headquarters at Che-Rāi-Doi (Charāideo) in 1253 AD. It was because, this place seemed to be safe from neighbouring indigenous people; high and fertile as compared to the outskirts. *Süa-dang-faa* or Bāmuni Konwar shifted the capital to Charaguā near Hābung in the midst of Hindu or Brahmin surroundings.

Süa-hung-müang encamped at Bakatā due to inundation at Che-ra-guā by the Dihing River and internal family conflict. It was written that in 1537 AD, *Süa-hung-müang* married a daughter of a goldsmith – a socially lower class status. For this reason, his son *Süa-klen-müang* came to stay at Gargāon and his former wife went to live at Charāideo. To patch up the rift in the family, he encamped at Bakatā and summoned his wife and his son to come to negotiation. After that, *Süa-klen-müang* founded his new capital at Che-Hong (Gargāon) because “Cheregua became reminiscent of his unholy patricide and it began to sting *Süa-kleng-müang*’s monarchical conscience” (Bhuyan, 1990: XXXI).

Süa-lik-faa alias Ratnadhvaj Singha alias Larā Rajā (Child King) (1679-1681) preferred to stay at Lechāng (Dichāng) and then at Metekā (now inbetween Rangpur’s Kārenggar and Joysāgar Tank). At last he stopped near Hātisāl (the stable for elephants) (north of Rangpur capital and south of the Dikhov River).

Süa-paat-faa alias Gadādhār Singha (1681-1696) encamped at Barkalā (on the immediate east of Che-Hong) and then stopped at Metekā. Because Gadādhār Singha did not have faith in the prevailing rituals and the royal nobles of the Gargāon royal capital complex along with Larā Rajā conspired to injure him. But Che-Hong continued to be the prime capital. *Süa-khrung-faa* alias Rudra Singha (1696-1714) founded the new capital at Che-Mun (Rangpur) for amusement and to make Rangpur as a complete garrison. Later on, *Süa-rem-faa* or Rajeswar Singha (1751-1769) used the Kā-Ren⁵ or Talātal Ghar as Secretariate.

⁵ Ren is *hüan* ‘house’.

After the flight of *Süa-hit-pöng-faa* alias Gourināth Singha and the occupation of Che-Mon and Che-Hong by Rebel Moāmoriāyās, the de facto ruler Purnānanda Buragohain shifted the capital to Jorhāt enthroning Kinārām alias Kamaleswar Singha alias *Süa-ning-faa*. Jorhāt was the capital of the Ahom kingdom till the termination of Tai Ahom rule.

Guwāhāti was the vice regal capital that was transferred to Kaliābar during the occasional occupation of Guwāhāti by the Mughals.

It can be noted that in some Assamese history (not in Ahom chronicle) Shalaguri was mentioned as temporary headquarter during *Süa-kaa-faa* (1228-1268), *Süa-pen-faa* (1493-1497) and *Süa-khaam-faa* (1552-1603) (Burāgohain 2000:36).

***Chää-raai-dooi* (Che-Rāi-Doi or Charāideo)**

After the arrival of the Tai-Ahom, the place was christened in Che-Rāi-Doi which was later on, āssāmised into Charāideo or Charāi-Khorong (Hamilton, 1963:3)⁶. Now, the entire adjoining area of Che-rāi-doi is known as Charāideo. During the medieval period two contiguous areas to Charāideo were Roonrouph and Govindhuguan (Sarma 1972:348; Wade 1927)⁷. But today nobody knows the proper location of these two areas or villages, and nobody use the names.

Prior to the advent of the conqueror *Süa-kaa-faa*, the entire eastern Assām was ruled by the tribal Kings. Almost all the tribes belonged to the Mongoloid Bodo Race. Two neighbourhood tribes of Charāideo were Morān and Borāhi people.⁸ The political boundary of Morān state was the Sufrāi River in the east, the Brahmaputra in the west, the Buri-Dihing in the north and Dichāng in the south. The Barāhi state reached to Nagāhāt in the east, Barāhi Fikā in the west, the Dichāng River in the north and the Dikhow river in the south (Gogoi 1999:266). After the arrival of the Tai Ahom at Charāideo, one horse^{ed. OR} was put in the north another was in the south⁹. Khām Le,

⁶ The plains of the hill was sanskritized into Bihagāchal (Gogoi 1999:265).

⁷ “Charadeo is contiguous to Roonrouph; it is the principal seat of their former worship, and was distant from Rungpoor about eighty miles, these districts which extend to the westward of the Dhekow river are not subject to inundations from the river...”

“Ranru/Roonrouph is about ten miles in length and six in breadth; it takes its name from a place of ancient Assamese worship in their original language, Roonrouph means God.....”

“Govindhuguan is about twelve miles in length and eight in breath. It is noted for a Govindh Dewal or temple, placed in a very romantic situation on the banks of the Dihkow.”

Though the measurement of distance is not accurate, we can conclude that Ranru/Roonrouph may be the area between Dolbāgān and Suffry, and Govindhuguan may be the areas of Chantak and Bihubar.

On the other hand, some contend that to the east of the Che-Rāi-Doi capital, was Sonāpur, the capital of the Borāhi King, that was existed at the time of arrival of Hšo-Kā-Hpā. In this case, the Tai manuscript is silent.

⁸ To the Assamese chronicles, the name of Moran chief was Badauchā and Barāhi chief was Thakumthā whom Hsö-Kā-Hpā ‘had subjugated through friendship’ (Bhuyan.1945:13).

^{ed. OR} For me, it is very sure it is not horse but dog [both are *maa* in Tai languages but with different tones], as I have witnessed such offering rituals with a black dog *maa dam* [*dam* in Tai languages is not only ‘black’ but also ‘souls of our ancestors’] in the Tai place in South China which I think is the original place of the Ahom and other Tai people in Assam who arrived in Assam in several waves, spanning many hundred years.

⁹ Instead of ‘put’ G.C. Barua (Ahom Buranji, 1985:47) translated it as sacrifice whereas Ranoo Wichasin used the word ‘propitiation’ (Ahom Buranji, Vangshavatar Tai Ahom Vol. I, Bangkok, 1996, pp. 60-61).

Rong Le gold coiled in a Tun-pang (tree).¹⁰ One silver Chain (soi) was put in a pot. After this, oblations/propitiations were made to the god of the kingdom. (Phukan, et al. 1998:41-60). It is worth noting that there is no mention of the existence of a Barāhi tribe at Charāideo in original Tāi Manuscripts.

According to Barua, the term “Assam” might have originated from Sivasagar district, especially from greater Charāideo. This name ‘Assām’ originated from the combination of the words ‘Hā-Chām’ in Bodo-Kachin language. The Morāns, a section of the Kāchin tribe used to call *Süa-kaa-faa* and his followers as ‘Chām’, as the Kāchin (Jingphaw, Singpo) equivalent for the Burmese “Shān”. The Barāhis who belong to the Bodo group signified the occupying of land by *Süa-kaa-faa* as ‘Hā-Chām’, i.e., ‘land of the Chām (Shān)’. In the course of time, ‘Hā-Chām’ or ‘Hā-Shān’ transformed and softened to Achām or Ashān or Assām (Barua, 1991:197).

The Deo-Shāl¹¹ is situated at the highest hill of Charāideo hill with 628 feet height. Now in this place the remnants of seven stone pillars and bricks are telling its existence. These pillars were used to construct a temporary worshipping chamber. It is known as *Hoo-phii Laang-ku-ri*¹² (temple of Laang-ku-ri). The *Hoo-phii Chum-cheng* (Temple of Chum-cheng) or ‘Chumdeo’ temple is situated on the low hill to the south of the Deo-Shāl where Chum-Cheng (the Royal Deity) was kept. Gadādhār Singh built this *Chum-cheng* temple with brick and stone in 1691 AD. *Süa-kaa-faa* initially founded his capital to the north of the Chumdeo temple (Sātsari Asom Buranji (1999:5) and adjacent to a small hill (Barua, 1985:47). *Süa-daang-faa* alias Bāmuni Konwar (1398-1407 AD) was the first monarch who ascended the throne of the Ahom Kingdom through a coronation ceremony held on the northern hilly low area of the *Laang-ku-ri* temple. At the time of coronation a king wore *Chum-cheng* (the Royal deity) around his neck, took a sword called *Heng-daang* and entered three specially constructed houses – Pāt-ghar, *Hoo luang-ghar* and Singari-ghar one after another that were constructed under the supervision of the *Chaang-rung-phukan* (Chief Architect Engineer). The 15th monarch *Süa-klen-müang* alias Gargayā Rajā (1539-1552) shifted *Chum-cheng* to Che-Hong (Gargāon).

The first royal capital complex of Charāideo (283m breadth and 421m length) was situated immediately north to the *Hoo-phii Chum-cheng*. Later on, coronation ceremonies were held at that place and the capital complex was shifted to another place (1.5 km distance from the *Hoo-phii Chum-cheng*). That new Royal capital complex is situated in 26°56'10"N and 94°50'32"E. This capital complex (540m breadth and 861m length) was equipped with four ramparts. There was a straight road of 1.5 km distance from the western gate to the *Hoo-phii Chum-cheng* worshipping place. (see diagram 1)

¹⁰ G.C. Barua mentioned “He worshipped the three spirits near a tree. Clearing off the place at the foot of the tree, he adored the gods by offering a vessel full of silver” (G.C. Barua 1985:47). Gait also wrote the same.

¹¹ In Assamese chronicles it is mentioned that Barāhi Chief offered their ‘Deoghar’ (worshiping place, temple) to the new king *Süa-kaa-faa*. In ‘Deoghar’, *Süa-kaa-faa* founded the ‘Deo-Shāl’ (worship place) (Sātsari Asom Buranji, 1999:5). *Süa-kaa-faa* engaged seven Barāhi families as potter, water bearer, bowl keeper, physician, store-keeper, cook, fowl rearer, servant stationed at Chilanimariā village (Choudhery 1991; Baruah 1985; Goswami 1977).

To Lila Gogoi, Tung-Phi Lang-Ku-Ri (Temple of Shiv) is situated on the low hill to the south of the Deo-Shāl and Gadādhār Singh built this Lāng-Kuri temple with brick and stone in 1691 AD (Neog 2004:41) (Gogoi 1957:38).

¹² Sometimes, it is called *tung-phii*.

Chää-hong (Che-Hong or Gargāon)

Süa-klen-müang (1539-52 AD) established the magnificent Che-Hong (Gargāon) in 1539-40 AD at Hemanābār¹³ (Sātsari Assam Buranji, 1999:16). As per suggestion of Nāng-Tyep-Khām alias Chāo-Sing¹⁴, the king fortified the Che-Hong with rectangular inner rampart (Bhitargarh) and outer rampart (Bāhirgarh) around the *hoo luang*¹⁵, the Royal Palace (Assām Buranji, 1945: 31-32). Of course, the Itāgarh (brick rampart) around the Royal Palace and inside the inner rampart was constructed by *Süa-rem-faa* or Rajeswar Singha (1751-1769 AD) at the time of building the Kāreng-ghar, the Royal Palace made of brick (Gait, 2004: 191). In 1610 AD *Süa-seng-faa* alias Pratāp Singha (1603-1641 AD) under the supervision of Momāi Tāmuli (who bore the portfolio Tipamiā Rajkhowā) erected long and big ramparts. These ramparts were named as Rājgarh in the East, Bānhgarh to in the west, Bānhgarh and Pathāligarh in the North and Bānhgarh in the South. The distance of the Rājgarh from the Nām-Sāo (Dikhow) to the Pathāligarh is 10.4 km. The distance of the Bānhgarh from Singha-Duār to the river Dichāng is 8.5 km (5.5km+3km). The distance of the Bānhgarh in the midst of the river Dichāng is 4.2 km. The distance of Pathāligarh is 3 km. There were four (as Shihabuddin mentioned) prime gates made of brick and stones (Singha-Duār in Assamese) and ten small gates. In these boarder ramparts, specially, the Bānhgarh, ten small gates and three brick-made gates were constructed under Sukati Tāmuli Barbaruā¹⁶. Later on, his royal designation was upgraded to Barbaruā (Sātsari Asom Buranji, 1999:21). The area of the capital Che-Hong was about 10 square km. The four main brick-stone entrances were - Nonglamorā or Salakhāmorā Singha-Duār in the North, Rājgarh-Singha-Duār in the East, the remaining two gates were in the west in Cherekapār and Bogidol. Around the capital, instead of wall, there was an encompassing bamboo (Kuntuhā) plantation running continuously. The bamboo grove was thick (Fathiyah-i-Ibriaah, 1915: 179-195). It is apparent that out of these four main gates – two gates were inside the river Nām-Khun and Nām-Sāo in east-west direction; and out of the remaining two gates – one is to the south of the Nām-Sāo and the other to the north of the Nām-Khun. It was done to protect the Che-Hong from the invaders and rivals.

The Ahom warriors resisted enemies coming from the north and south sides, first by infantry and then by navy. Che-Rāi-Doi was connected through Rāj-Garh Singha-Duār and Che-Mon was connected through two gates – Pāni-Chaki and Singha-Duār of Bar-Ali. Interestingly, the ramparts of the Pathāligarh, Bānh-Garh on the south bank of the

¹³ Hemanābāri (Garden of Hemanā) was named after Hemanā Gohain. Hemanābāri was on the North-West corner of the outer rampart (Bāhirgarh) of Che-Hung. Hemenā expressed vehemently his reluctance to leave his land to king while constructing the outer rampart. The king honoured his decision and the works on the North-West corner remained half-done. Of course, the king could complete the rampart construction only after the death of Hemanā. It reveals that Ahom kings were not autocrats.

¹⁴ Chāo-Sing was the Shan Princess and daughter of the Shan Sawbwa [*tjau-faa*], the king of Narā country and relative to the Ahom Royal family. She was the queen of *Süa-Klen-Müang* and scholar in Tai in Ahom court.

¹⁵ *Hoo luang*: *hoo* – ‘palace’; *luang* – ‘large’, ‘main’; i.e. large or main palace. In Assamese, Hoolung Ghar means the house (Ghar) made of a specific tree the wood of which was taken for building palaces.

¹⁶ Lila Gogoi mentioned that these ramparts and gates were constructed under Momai Tamuli; So, later his portfolio was upgraded from Tipamiā Rajkhowā to Barbaruah (Gogoi 1957:22-23).

Nām-Khun and the Bānh-Garh on the north bank of the Nam-Khun were not on the exact horizontal line. The Bānh-Garh situated on the north bank of the Nam-Khun is just on a lower position as compared to the other ramparts in order to mislead the enemies who attempted to attack Che-Hong from the north. Similarly, the ramparts constructed that time were arrow-straight, for, if the enemy tried to cross the rampart on one side; the Ahom warrior could observe them from the other side of the rampart and then attack them by arrow or ordinance from a long distance. (See Diagram 2).

The Royal capital complex of Che-Hong is situated in 26°55'38.7" and 26°56'36.6" Latitude North and 94°44'04.7" and 94°45'01.5" Longitude East. It was used for administrative purposes only.

Two foreigners visited Che-Hong. One was Ibn Mohammad Wali alias Shihabuddin Talish¹⁷, a Mughal, who accompanied Mughal Army Commandant Md. Sayeid alias Mir Jumla as Waqis Nabis (News writer). He came in 1662 during the rule of *Süa-taam-laa* or Jayadhrāj Singha (1646-1663) when the capital Che-Hung was almost abandoned as the king fled to Nāmrup with his officials and family members. Shihabuddin entered Che-Hung as an enemy with victory. The *hoo luang* or Royal houses were made of wood, bamboo and straw. The second visitor was Jean-Baptiste Chevalier, a Frenchman, who entered Che-Hong (and also Che-Mon) in 7th February, 1756 AD during the reign of *Süa-rem-faa* (1751-1769 AD) alias Rājeswar Singha when the capital was full of prosperity and splendour with Royal look (Dutta-Baruah et al., 2008:25-26). The Royal Palaces and Gates were made of brick and stone. J. B. Chevalier came as a friend abiding by the order of French Governor of Chandernagar for obtaining land from the Ahom king to establish a factory. So, he got the Royal reception and saw everything as a friend with joy.

Around the Royal Palace or Kā-Ren (āssāmised into Kāreng-ghar¹⁸) strong bamboos¹⁹ (Kuntuhā) had been planted on the Bāhirgarh or outer enclosure (1.2km in breadth and 1.3km in length, and on average 25 feet high 20 feet wide) to serve as a taller wall. Around and outside the Bāhirgarh, a moat²⁰ (20-28 feet in depth and 55-75 feet wide) had been dug.

Inside the Bhitargarh or inner enclosure²¹, a brick rampart of lower height (11 ft in height and 11 ft in width) was got constructed in the midst of which a brick Kā-Ren (the Royal Palace) was situated. In between the Southern Bhitargarh and Bāhirgarh a road was running in east-west direction. The Bāhirgarh was provided with three entrances-Pāni-Duār in the East, Na-Duār in the West and Bar-Duār in the South. No gate was in the North. The king entered the Che-Hong through the Bar-Duār (the main entrance) following the Tai tradition of Royal capitals in the Shan States of present-day Myanmar.

¹⁷ He wrote the account of Assam in Persian between 9th Aug, 1662 AD and 13th May, 1663. The book authored by Fathiyah-i-Ibriyah (The victories that Give warnings) or T'arikh-Faith-i-Ashām (History of the Conquest of Assam).

¹⁸ Kareng-ghar: *Kareng* comes from the Tai words *Ren Kā*. *Ren [hüan]* is 'house', *kaa* is 'dance'. Among Assamese people the word order is Kā Ren, and the Assamese word 'ghar' (means house) is added.

¹⁹ Shihabuddin Talish wrote that "bamboo grove is about two kos, more or less across" 1 Kos (or Krosha) = 2miles. Hence, the bamboo grove was about 4 miles across the rampart.

²⁰ Shihabuddin Talish described that moat "... which is deeper than a man's height in most places and is always full of water".

²¹ To Shihabuddin "Round the Rajah's house a enclosure is one Kos and 14 chains in circumference."

These three entrances were made of brick and stone and were provided with a chamber for security guards. The entrance was equipped with an iron bar at the gateway (Imperial Gazetteer of India). Security guards were manned inside and outside the entrances. Outside the entrance, two ever-ready Bortup (cannon, ordnance) were placed one on the left and one the right (Burāghāin, 1990:14).

The royal capital complex inside the inner rampart resembles the Forbidden City, and the structure in-between the inner and outer rampart resembles to the Imperial City of the Shan States.

The *hoo luang*²² was made of wood, bamboo and straw. It stood on 66 pillars. The smoothed huge pillars were seemed to be turned on a lathe. The sides of this house/palace had been partitioned into wooden lattices of various designs carved in relief and adorned both inside and outside. 1200 workers completed this mansion in one year. There were mirrors of brass polished so finely that sunbeams dazzled and flashed. At the end of this palace, on four pillars facing each other, nine rings have been fixed on each pillar. Whenever the monarch arrived at this house, a throne was placed between four pillars and nine canopies – each made of a different stuff – and were fastened to the rings above the throne. When the king sat on the throne under the canopies, the drummers beat their drums and bands (a circular flat instrument of brass like gongs). (Fathiyah–i-Ibriah 1915:179-195). Seeing this *hoo luang*, Shihabuddin Talish opined, “Men pen fails to describe in detail the other arts and rare inventions employed in decorating the woodwork of this palace. Probably, nowhere else in the whole world can wooden houses be built with such decoration and figure-carving as by the people of this country”.

Beside the *hoo luang*, many other wooden mansions, such as, Bar-Charā, Singari-Ghar, Pāt-Ghar, Kunji-Ghar, Pāli-Ghar, etc. (that were well-carved and crafted, decorated, strong, long and broad) were built in-between the brick-rampart and the Bhitargarh (inner enclosure).

Between the Bāhirgarh and Bhitargarh, perfectly neat and pure mansions had been built for the residence of the nobles. The fine and strong residence of the King had been built in between the brick rampart and inner rampart. The Barphukan had laid out an extremely elegant and fresh garden round a very pure and sweet tank within the grounds of his mansion. Owing to excess damp, all the houses were built on platforms resting on (wooden) pillars (Fathiyah-i-Ibriah). A Golā-ghar²³ (66 feet × 36 feet) exists by the southern side of in-between the inner rampart and outer rampart on the west of the Royal Palace. (Buragohain 1990:14).

The kings neither allowed strangers to enter the capital nor permitted any of their own subjects to go out of it without permission. The monarch did not bow his head down in worshipping of any idol. (Fathiyah-i-Ibriah).

²² The Royal palace. According to Shihabuddin it was 120 cubits long and 30cubits breadth measured inside. Each pillar of them was about 4 cubits round.

²³ Golā - explosive, ammunition, missile; Ghar- Emporium, House i.e. the Royal arsenal or emporium of ordnances, ammunition, gunpowder. But, to Buragohain (1990:56), there were two Golā- Ghar- one for keeping silver and gold and another for keeping ornaments and costumes.

At present, there are only the inner and outer ramparts, the silver Golāghar and the Royal Palace made of brick. These were made by *Süa-rem-faa* or Rajeswar Singh (1751-1769 AD).

The Royal Palace consists of seven storeys (four storeys on the surface and three storeys under the ground). The outer length of the royal palace in north-south direction is 74ft 9 inches and its breadth in east-west direction is 58ft 10.5 inches. Excluding the balcony portions, the area of the first floor is 54 ft × 40ft 5 inches and it is on the 2ft 5 inches height from the surface **of the balcony**. There were four chambers in each corner for four watch-men. Excluding the balcony portions, the outer measurement of the second floor is 25ft 7 inches (in north-south direction) × 25ft, and this floor is on the 11 inches height from the surface of the balcony. The second floor is also equipped with four rooms in each corner for four sentinels. The inner portion of the Top floor is on the height of 2ft 4 inches from the surface of the balcony with four watch-room in each corner.

It is said that there were two tunnels—one from the Kā-Ren of Che-Mon and another from the Kā-Ren of Che-Hong that were joined together near the Nām-Sāo, with only one exit.

The Royal Palace of Che-Hong is the majestic landmark of the Ahom kingdom. Its stony silence signifies the splendour and vigour of the Ahom monarch towering the majesty. The political and cultural history can be traced through what was built by the people in certain times.

The embattled Che-Hung looked like an ‘exclusivist fort’. Geometrical, natural and structural motifs adorn the cornice and baseboards. The historic significance of the palace lies in the frequent use of intricately crafted pilaster and Mihrabs in the alcove.

It is worth noting that *Süa-paat-faa* alias Gadādhār Singh (1681-1696) encamped at Barkalā (which is close to and east of Che-Hong) during his tenure for the time being. The breadth of Barkalā in east-west direction is 1km whereas the length of it is 1.4 km. It is situated in 26°55'24.1" and 26°56'18.7" Latitude North and 94°44'41.6" and 94°45'38.8" Longitude East.

***Chää-muan* (Che-Mun or Rangpur)**

The area where *Süa-khrung-faa* alias Rudra Singha (1696-1714) established the capital *Chää-muan* or Rangpur which was originally known as Metekā. To the east of the *Chää-muan* (Rangpur) was the Bānhgarh (rampart with bamboo) while the west was marked by the juncture of two rivers – the Nām-Sāo (Dikhow) in the north and the Nām-Deng (Nāmdāng) in the south.

The adjoining areas of Rangpur were ‘Kalu-gāon’, ‘Gourisaghur-gaon’ (Gaurisāgar), ‘Kerimiriali-gaon’, ‘Duburaniali-gaon’, ‘Mutteimara-gaon’, ‘Sāringh’ (Chām-Ring < Chāring), ‘Tipām’, ‘Meteka’, Nā-zirā, ‘Atkhal’, ‘Goveindhur-gaon’, and ‘Roonrough’ (Sarma, 1927:347). *Che-Muan* (Rangpur) was the hub of amusement and the garrison of the real capital Che-Hong.

The three main entrances of the capital were the Singha-Duār in Bānhgarh in the east; the ‘Nāmdāng Shilā Sānko’ (in Assamese shilā=stone; sānko=bridge, i.e., bridge made

of stone) in the west and the Pāni-Chaki (in Assamese pāni=water; chaki=check gate i.e. check-gate where guards or vigilants of the northern border used boats) in the east.

From the Singha-Duār and the Pāni-Chaki on the north to the Shilā-Sānko on the west, a straight road called Bar-Ali (bar=big, ali=road in āssāmese) was constructed which was 13km long. A rampart called Pahu-garh²⁴ (pahu=deer, garh=rampart, i.e., rampart for keeping deer) by the left side of Bar-Ali from entrance of Joysagar Pond up to Shilā-Sānk Na-Pukhuri (tank), Pahu-Garh Pukhuri (tank) and Joysāgar Pukhuri (tank) were surrounded by moats that were connected by the Dimou river to keep the water level of these three ponds constant and full of water. The Pahu-Garh Pukhuri (tank) was a dockyard or Nāo-Shāl²⁵ (a place for loading, unloading, construction and repairing of boats). It was under the Nāoboichā Phukan (head of the navy). The Pahu-Garh Pukhuri (tank) was divided into nine parts to keep the boats systematically. The Na-Pukhuri²⁶ was used both for the navy and boats sports for the king's pleasure. Boats were entered into the Na-Pukhuri and Pahu-Garh Pukhuri tanks from the Nām-Deng River via the Dimou and Ailā canals. (See Diagram 2)

The Royal capital complex of Che-Mun is situated at 26⁰57'54"N and 94⁰37'28"E. The royal Palace of Che-Mun was the Secretariat cum Court and garrison where warriors were deployed for war purpose. At the west side of it, the so-called Rang-Ghar was built for watching and enjoying sports and games. The so-called Bā-Guá was built on the south of it for religious purposes. The breadth of the outer enclosure of Che-Mun is 666 meter, and the length of it is 847 meter. The breadth of the inner enclosure of Che-Mun is 283 meter and the length of it is 445 meter.

Rang or *Cha-rang* (meaning 'pavilion' in Tai, and is popularly known as "Rang Ghar" in Assamese) is a medieval two-storied royal pavilion of imposing structure to watch sports games, etc. The kings enjoyed traditional indigenous games, like, cock fights, buffalo fights, elephants' marathon, wrestling, etc. This construction is remarkable and unique in entire Asia as no pavilion like the Cha-Rang was built at that time in Asia. It was constructed under King *Süa-nen-faa* (1744-1751AD) alias Pramatta Singha in 1746 AD.

The Bā-Guá (Chinese: 八卦; pinyin: bā guà; Wade-Giles: pa kua; literally "eight symbols" in Taoist cosmology) was constructed by Rudra Singha in 1703-04 and was later-on popularly known as "Phākuā-Dole".

At the commencement of the Che-Mun, King *Süa-khrung-kaa* established one Bar-ghar (Big family house), one Bar-bātghar(?), one Chāngmai-Shāl (in Tai, *chāng* = 'expert'; *mai* = 'wood'; and addition of Assamese word *shāl* 'place'. Among the Assamese people, Chāngmāi-Shāl means 'kitchen' and 'pantry'), one Bar-Charā (assembly hall, council chamber) and one Bar-Marang (toilet, latrine, urinal). Bricks were laid on the rafter (Ruwā) of the roof. In 1719 AD (1641 Sak, Lākni Kā-Rāo) when bricks slipped and fell down, bricks were replaced by straw on the rafter (Ruwā) of the roof. (Handique, 1959:5).

²⁴ Many say that it was originally known as Pashu-garh (Pashu=animal; garh=rampart). Pahu>Pashu. It was said that there was a Zoo established and patronized by the king where the monarch kept varieties of animals, crocodiles, etc.

²⁵ As referred by Nomal Gogoi.

²⁶ Many opine that it was originally known as Nau-Pukhuri (Nau=boat; pukhuri=pond), i.e., where boats were kept.

In 1745 AD (1667 Sak, Lākni Kāt-Keo), King *Süa-nen-faa* or Pramatta Singh (1744-1751 AD) constructed newly Bar-ghar with 9 rooms, Ag-Michāng (*chaan* = front-side veranda of a house with raised floor) with 6 chambers, Pāch-Michāng (*chaan* = the back-side veranda of a house with raised floor) with 5 chambers, Bar-bātghar (Tāng-ren-phāt-tu, the large gateway house) with 5 compartments, Bar-Changmāi Sāl (kitchen) with 5 rooms, Dolā-Kākhariā Charā (chamber of attendants who walked on either sides of a litter as guards of the kings and nobles), Dhākani Charā (?) with 3 rooms, Bar-Marang²⁷ (big latrine and toilet) of 3 rooms.

In 1748 AD, he laid the foundation of Pāt-ghar (a throne house with a wooden platform where the king with the queen first entered in his coronation ceremony). It is noteworthy that the breadth of each chamber or room was approximately 14feet (11 Hāt). (Handique 1959:10).

It is notable that the surrounding ramparts of the royal complex of Che-Muan (*Chäü-muan*) were of lower height and thinner as compared to those of the Che-Hong. The royal complex of the real capital Che-Hong was kept in tight protection from the foreign enemies.

Of the former 7 storeys, only 4 storeys can be seen on the ground, as the 3 storeys under the ground were already filled up by the British.

Süa-rem-faa or Rajeswar Singha (1751-1769 AD) got constructed the Kā-Ren, the Royal Palace of *Che-Mon* along with the Kā-Ren, the Royal Palace of *Che-Hong*. The adjoining Z-shaped brick-buildings and basements were made in between the rule of Rudra Singha and Rajeswar Singha. Wooden compartments were lying on the Z-shaped brick-edifice which were, later on, demolished and burnt at the time of the Moāmaryās (followers of the Māyāmārā group of Assam Vaisnavas), Mān (people coming from Burma), and the British. These were the chamber of the Assembly Hall, the Court and the Council. Under these Chambers, the basements were on the ground floor.

The house of fooding, lodging, rest, amusement, latrine, drugs, etc., was the so-called *Hāng-Ren* or Chāng-ghar (a house with raised planked platform) whereas the house of the princes, for worship, and the kitchen were *Ti-Ren-Din* or Māti-ghar (a house with a floor on earth). The Bar-ghar, Bāt-ghar, Bar-Charā that were mentioned already were all Hāng-Ren^{ed. OR}.

The mound and fortification of *Che-Mon* town and the architectural legacy of the Royal Palace reflect the grandeur and artistic sublimity of the Tai tradition in the Shan States of Burma. The buildings that are awe-inspiring in size and design enshrine a spirit that has survived centuries. The remnants have withstood the vagaries of nature and rampaging Moāmaryās, Mān and British to tell its own never-ending tale. The excavation exposes the brick structure with intricate stairs, terraces and broken walls.

The roof of the Kā-Ren (the Royal Palace) was made together by interlocking bricks without beam. The Palace is a labyrinth. It is an astounding acoustic feat. The acoustical system carries the faintest whisper around the interior rooms and returns it to the

²⁷ Bar-Marang comes from Rang Ma. *Rang* means 'building' and *Ma* means 'gun-powder'. The Assamese word "Bar" means 'big'. Hence, 'Big house of gun-powder'. But, it is said that the Bar-Marang was used as big latrine and toilet.

^{ed. OR} In Tai languages it is *hüan haan* (wooden houses on stilts with raised platform). This is a good example of many occasions where the word order in Tai Ahom language was converted.

listeners many times louder. This ‘Whispering Palace’ comprises two barrel-vaulted galleries on the its northern and eastern side.

The arches of the whole buildings are of crescent shaped and bow-shaped. Triangular, circular and hexagonal arches are not found.

On the northern, southern and western wall of the central room of the top floor, a series of exquisite reliefs were intricately crafted by Korāl (cementing).

On the ground floor, the entire Royal building is full of basements from North to the South, and amid of them is a connecting way.

On the first floor, there was a huge and enchanting Barcharā (Assembly Hall) made of bamboo & wooden pillars made of Shāl wood (*shorea robusta*). To the immediate east of the entrance of the Assembly hall is the Nyasodha Phukan Charā (the court of the Chief Justice), to the south of which was the Bhitaraal Phukan Charā (the secret Assembly Hall).

At the south-western edge of the Kā-Ren there was a temple. To the east of the Barcharā and parallel to the Kā-Ren there was an archive under the Gandhiā Baruah (Officer of Record) and Gandhia Phukan (Executive Officer of Record).

Conclusion

The Tai Ahom Kingdom which was established in 1228 AD by *Süa-kaa-faa* (he reined from 1228 to 1268 AD) ended in 1826 with the Treaty of Yandaboo with the British. During the 600 years (1228-1826) of reign of the Ahom monarchy, the Ahom kingdom had five permanent capitals – Che-Rāi-Doi (Charāideo, established in 1253 AD), Charaguā (1397 AD?), Che-Hong (Gargāon, 1540 AD), Che-Muan (Rangpur, 1707 AD) and Dichai (Jorhāt, 1794/95 AD).

Out of the five vibrant and permanent capitals Jorhat, Charāideo and Charaguā ossified into non-existence. Only the ramparts of Che-Rāi-Doi (Charāideo) and ruined royal palaces and half-demolished ramparts of Che-Hong (Gargāon) and Che-Muan (Rangpur) are striving to expose the glorious days of Ahom royal capital cities.

This research was confined to explore the history of three capitals, viz., Che-Rāi-Doi, Che-Hong and Che-Muan, whereas the largest attention was given to the two prime royal capitals – Che-Hong and Che-Muan – that are still equipped with brick-made Royal Palaces till today.

Artifacts unearthed expose the saga of the wonder that was taking place in medieval Assam. The Royal Palace of Che-Hong is the majestic landmark of the Ahom kingdom.

Its stony silence signifies the splendour and vigour of the Ahom monarch towering the majesty. The political and cultural history can be traced through the buildings. The embattled capital town Che-Hong looked like an ‘exclusivist fort’. Che-Muan was the hub of amusement or garrison of the real capital Che-Hong. The ‘Whispering Palaces’ that are awe-inspiring in size and design, enshrine a spirit that has survived centuries. The remnants have withstood the vagaries of nature and rampaging Moāmaryās, Mān and the British to tell its own never-ending tale.

Sivasāgar is the former place of the capital of the arriving Tai Ahom with a rich heritage of art, culture and history that is composed of Tai elements together with adapted indigenous or imported cultural influences. The scenery and background knowledge of hundreds of Pyramid-like sacred graves *maai-dam* of the members of the royalty and aristocracy along with large man-made tanks, royal palaces, tall temples and roads which were made under Royal patronage provide a very special feeling and are prone of historical importance.

It is noteworthy that the Sivasagar tank is the biggest man-made tank (length 2586 feet and breadth 2136 feet of the water surface), and the Bar-Dole ('Great Shrine') with 132 feet 9 inches height beside this tank is the tallest Siva Temple in Northeast India. Rang Ghar, a royal pavilion, is unique in entire Asia.

Diagram 1

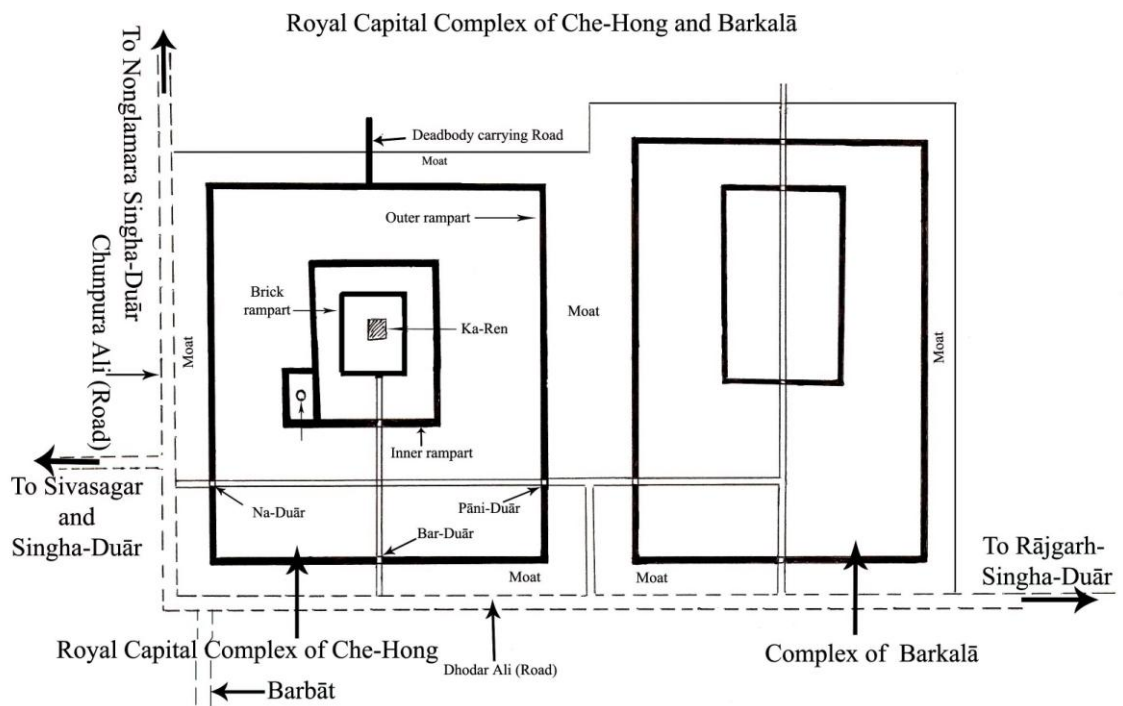
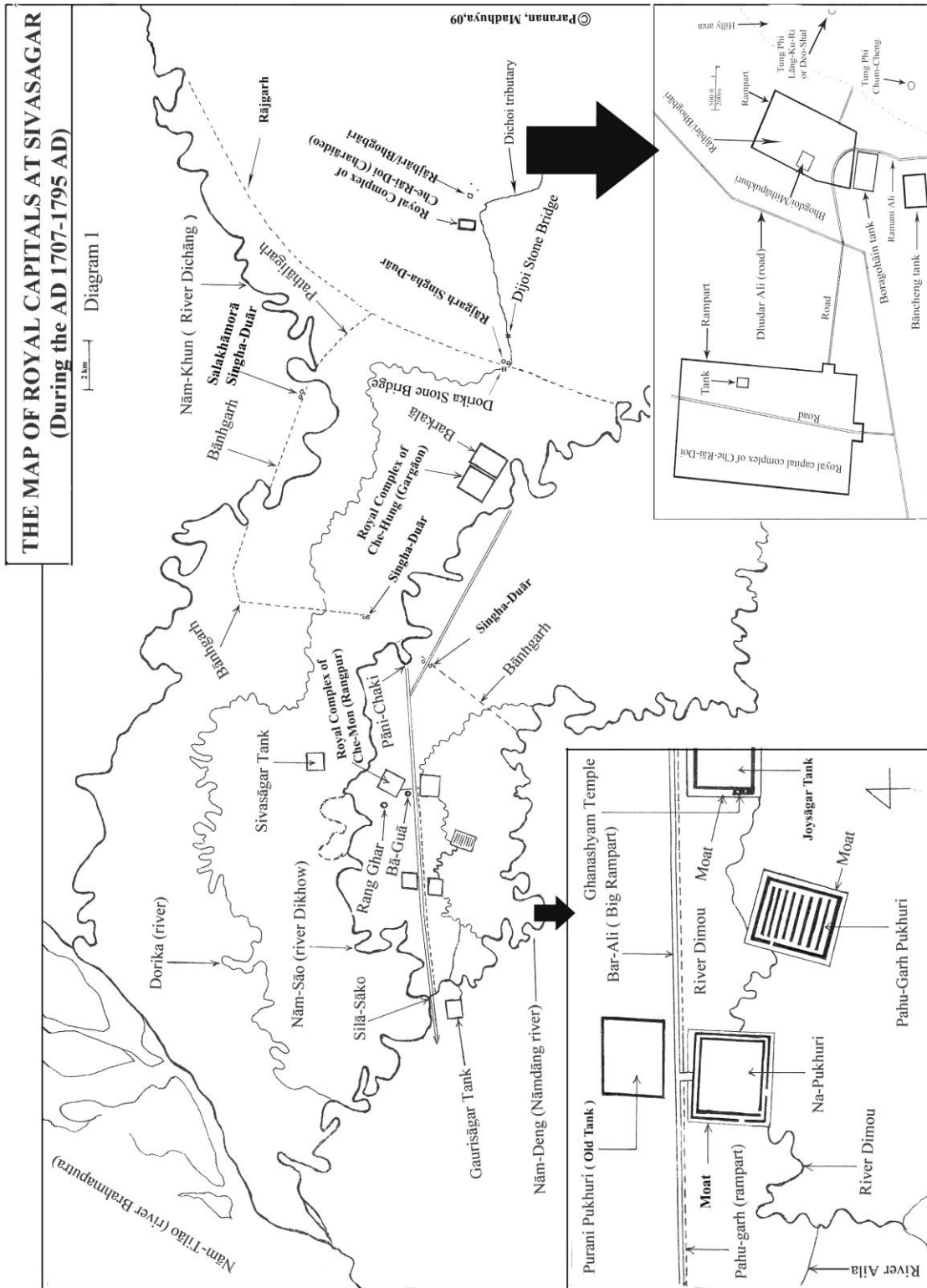


Diagram 2



INTERIOR OF THE ROYAL PALACE COMPLEX OF CHE-MON(1707-1751 AD)*
 (In Between the Reign of Rudra Singha and Rajeswar Singha)

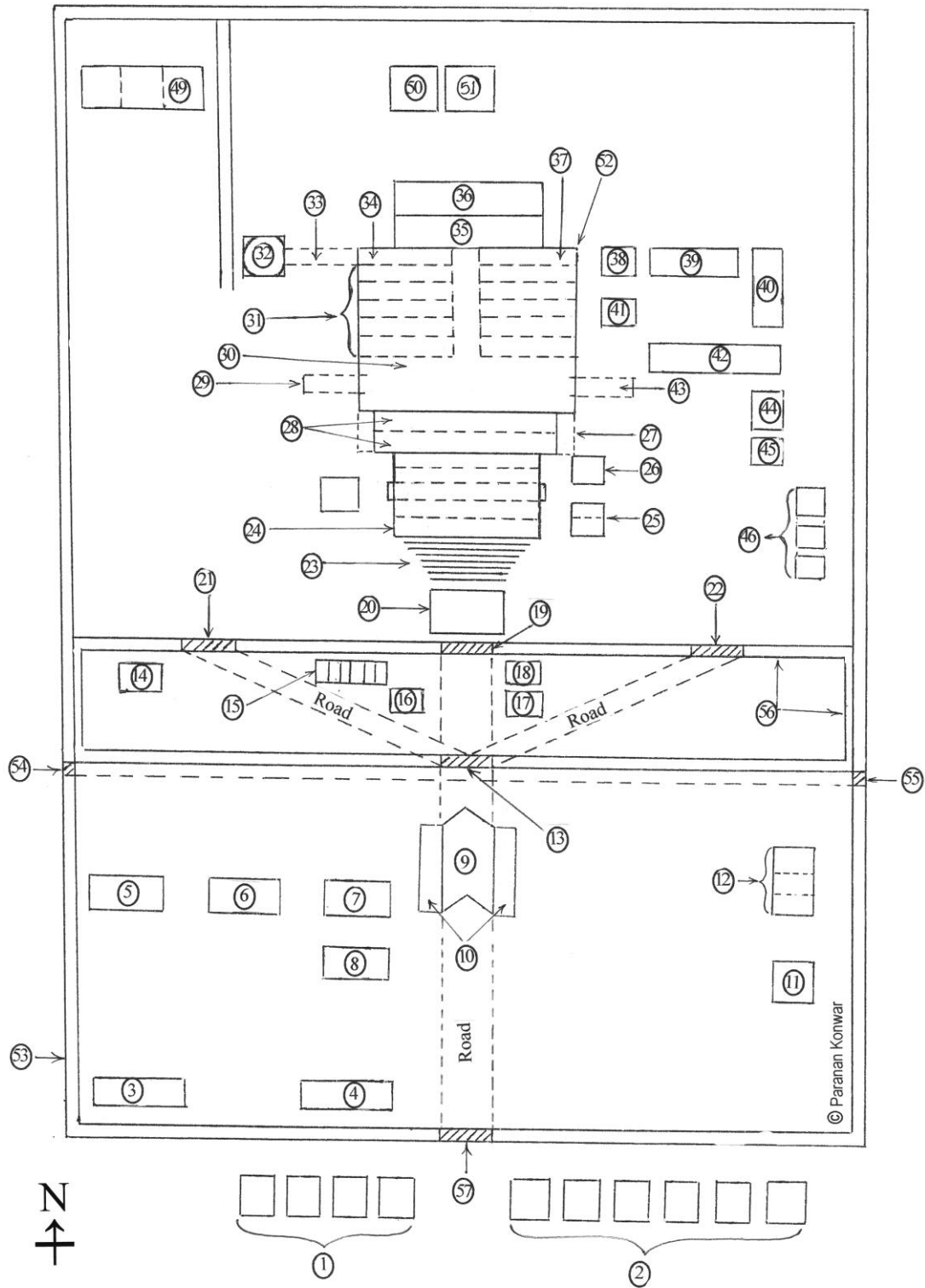


Diagram 3 (based on an old Ahom manuscript)

Details of the Interior of the Royal Palace Complex of *Che-Mon* (ca. 1707-1751)

1. Pāli-Ghar: House of guards (working by turns) of officers having duties at the court or Royal enclosures
2. 6 keeping chambers of litters, swords of nobles
3. Rāj-Ghar or Pāli-Ghar of 6 Phukans: Rāj-Ghar (Royal official house) or Pāli-Ghar (House of Guards) of 6 Phukan (the head or superintendent of a *Khel* or *Mel*, strength of which ranges up to 6,000 *Paiks* (enrolled adults))
4. Rāj-Ghar or Pāli-Ghar of 14 Rājkhowā: Rāj-Ghar (Royal, official house) or Pāli-Ghar (House of guards) of 14 Rājkhowā (an officer having jurisdiction over a prescribed area or 3,000 *Paikes* (enrolled adults) whose duties were civil administration and revenue collection)
5. Chatāi-Charā of Barpātra-gohain: A house made of mat of stout spilt bamboo or bamboo strips where Barpātra-gohain (the third of the three cabinet ministers) stayed
6. Chatāi-Charā of Bar-gohain: The Chatai Charā of Bar-gohain (the second of the three cabinet ministers)
7. Chatāi-Charā of Burā-gohain: Chatai-Charā of Bura-gohain (the first of the three cabinet ministers)
8. Pāni-Chowā Ghar of Barboruah: Toilet cum urinal of Barboruah (the head of the executive wielding control over all judicial, revenue and even military activities)
9. Bar-Charā with 13 chambers: Assembly hall or council chamber where the Ahom king used to preside over the state deliberations accompanied by his three cabinet ministers and officers
10. Bar-Chāli: Big shed consisting of one flat roof
11. Deo-Ghar: Worshipping house
12. Chumdeo Chatāi-Charā: Worshipping room of the Royal Deity Chumcheng
13. Dwarikā-Duār: One of the four gates to the interior of the Royal Palace facing the Dwarikā River
14. Storeroom of firewood, fuels.
15. (From west to east) House of Net, Ghee, Zoo, falcon (or Hawk), deer, and Khanikar (carpenter, sculptor, engraver, painter, etc.)
16. House of prop.
17. Store-room of the Royal umbrella, offers, spittoon.
18. Instruments used to practice divination by Bāilung (one type of astrologer)
19. Manbachā-Duār: Last gate to enter the interior campus of the Royal Palace
20. Dolā-Kāsharia Charā: The house of the attendants who walked on either sides of the litters as guards of the monarch and the nobles
21. Gosain-Ghar-Duār: (The gate to worshipping) or Kamalābariā-Duar or Nāchani-Duār (the gate to the entertainment)
22. Māti-Ghar-Duār: The gate towards the houses with the floors of earth) or Ligiri-Duār (the gate to the houses of the waiters or personal attendants of the nobles)
23. Seven-stepped ladder
24. Five-roomed house of Bar-bāt (way-house of the family) with raised bamboo platform
25. Bej-Sāl Ghar: Chamber of the physician
26. Jorā-Sāl: The stock-room of Jara or Bhogjora (a kind of drinking water pot with spout to the monarch)
27. Bulani-pāt: Covered walking place of the king
28. Bhātao-Chāli: 2 roofs crafted like parrots
29. Cover walk of the house with raised planked platform
30. Pālengi-Khāt: Bedstead of the monarch
31. Sowani-Kotha: Bed-room of the king and queen
32. Mitha-Pukhuri: Pond of the royal Palace
33. The king washes and bathes
34. Hātani Perā: Wooden box mostly used for cash
35. Bulani Kāren-ghar: A covered walk leading from one house to another
36. Marang-Ghar: Latrine and urinal
37. Place where the king sits and meets the others at day and night
38. Covered walk of the kitchen
39. The house of the waiters or the attendants of the nobles
40. Tool-Ghar: Premises of Rāj-Māo (the mother of the king)
41. Covered walk of Chāudāng (public executioner or body-guards)
42. Chāudāng Charā: house of the public executioner or body guard
43. Cover walk of the queens and ladder of the house with the floor on earth
44. & 45. Tool-Ghar: Premises with the floor on the earth
46. Premise with the floor on the earth of Charing Raja and Gohains
47. Store-house of Chiring (a class of priests).
48. Kāth-Bhanrāl: Store house of wood
49. Bar-Bhanrāl: Main store house
50. Gandhiā-Bharāl: Archive, the store of the records
51. Cholahdarā-Bharāl: Store of the officer who was in charge of the Royal costume or wardrobe
52. Nine-roomed Barghar: Big family house
53. Bāj-Garh: The outer rampart
54. Na-Duār: The eastern entrance of the royal enclosure
55. Pāni-Duār: The western entrance of the royal enclosure towards a canal or stream
56. Jung-Garh: The rampart made of the wood with pointed end
57. Bar-Duār: The main gate of the royal enclosure having the Royal Palace and Secretarial inside

**GROUND PLAN OF THE ROYAL PALACE OF CHE-MUAN
(FIRST FLOOR)**

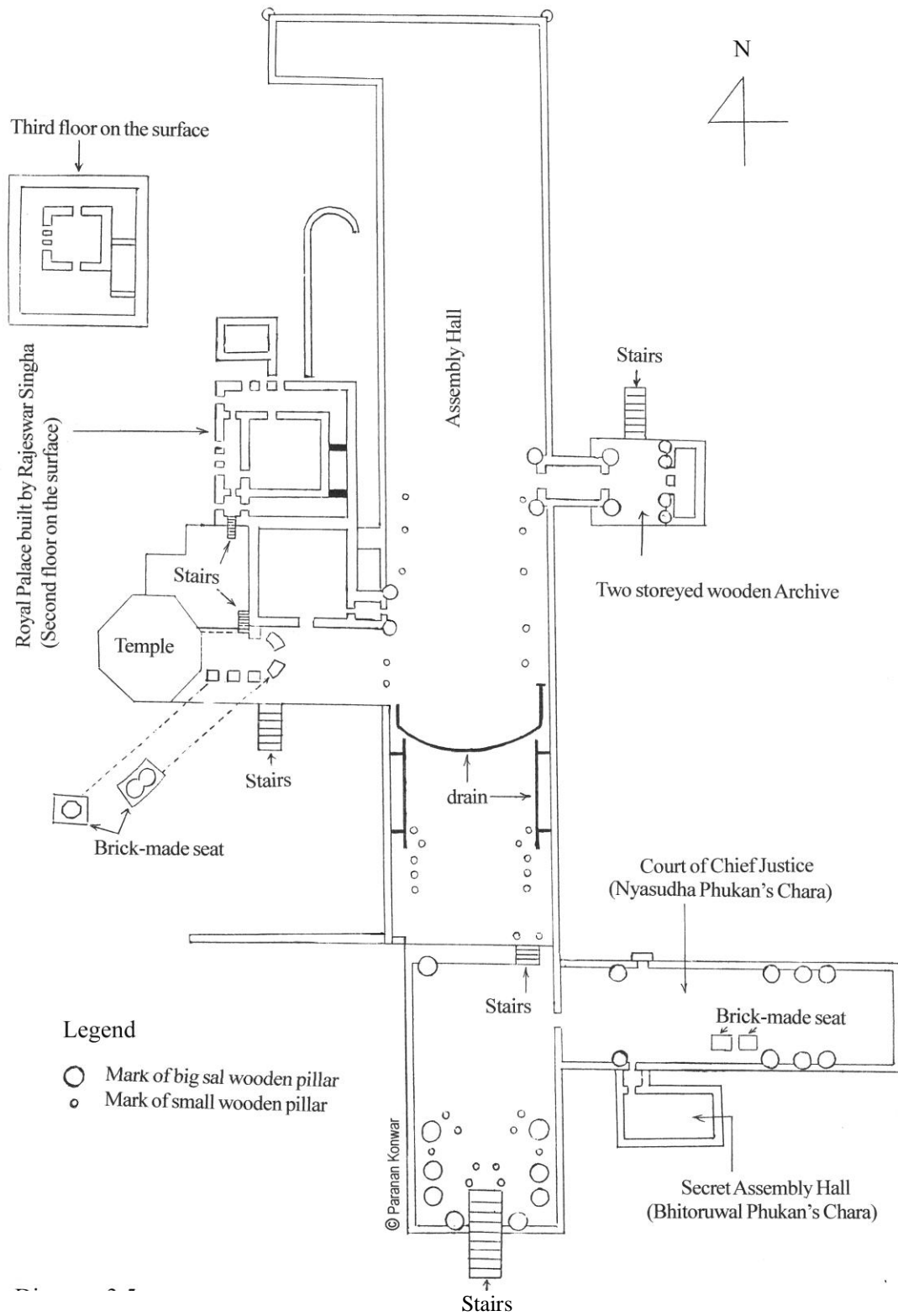


Diagram 4

ORIGINAL FORM OF THE ROYAL PALACE OF CHE-MUAN WITH WOODEN CHAMBERS*

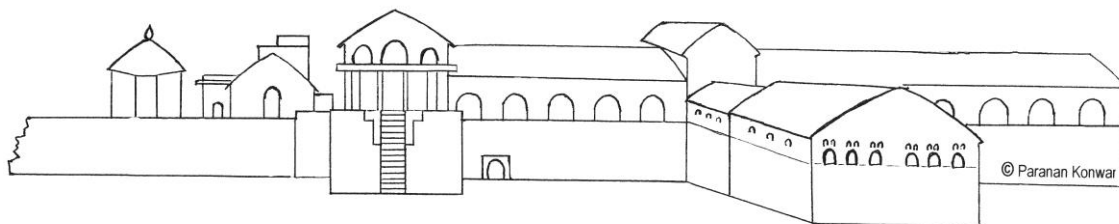


Diagram 5

* The wooden chambers and halls were burnt by the Moāmryas and by the British

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