

# HISTORY OF BANGLADESH

Early Bengal in Regional Perspectives  
(up to c. 1200 CE)

Vol. 1

ARCHAEOLOGY POLITICAL HISTORY POLITY

Foreword by Romila Thapar



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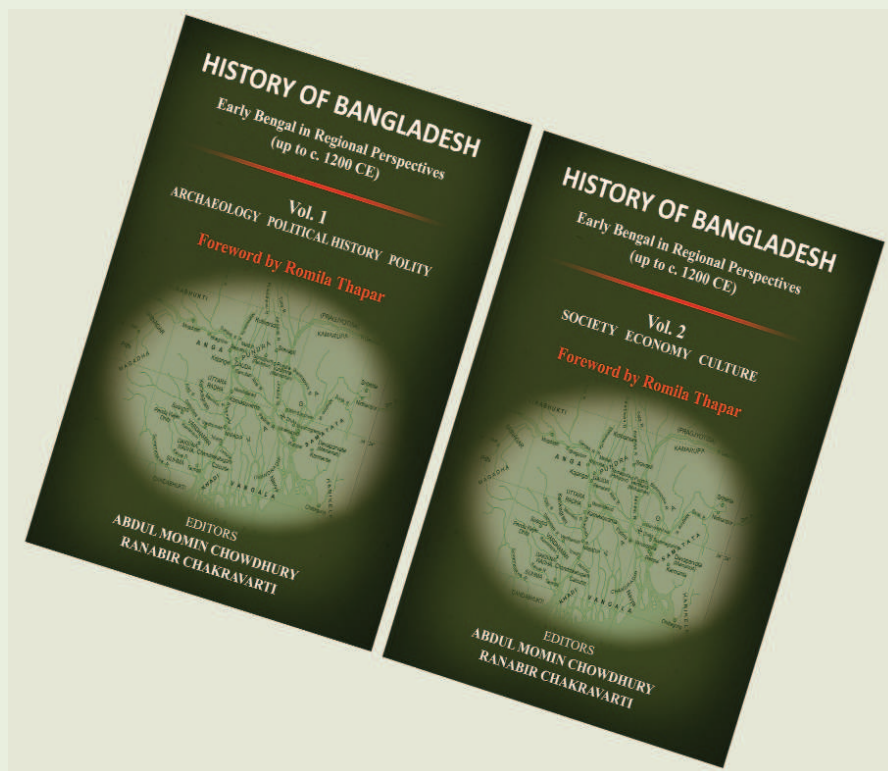
## ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BANGLADESH

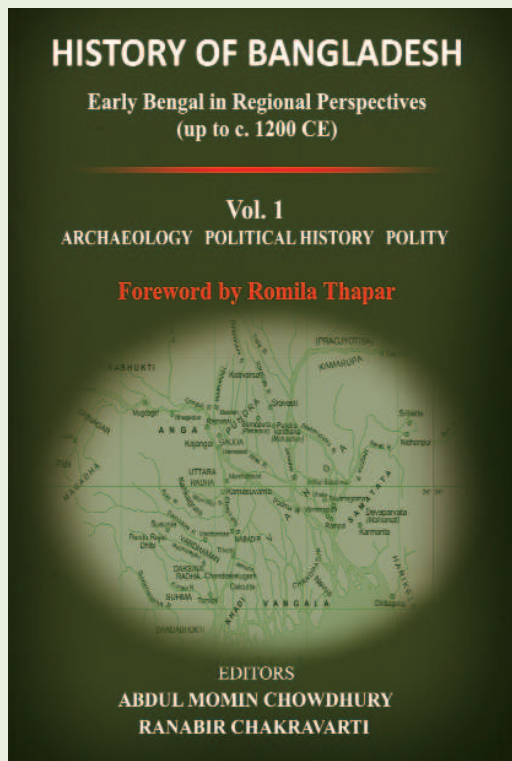
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Asiatic Society of Bangladesh proudly announces the publication of The *History of Bangladesh: Early Bengal in Regional Perspectives (up to c. 1200 CE)* in two volumes edited by Professor Abdul Momin Chowdhury and Professor Ranabir Chakravarti under the project titled 'History of Bangladesh: Ancient and Medieval'. Vol. 1 is on **Archaeology, Political History and Polity** and Vol. 2 is on **Society, Economy and Culture**. In these two volumes the remote past of the region called Bengal (Bengal before 1947) has been explored and studied by going beyond the boundaries of modern nation states.

**Professor Emeritus Romila Thapar** (of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi), internationally acclaimed authority on early Indian history, has graced the volumes by writing the Foreword.

The chapters in the two volumes have been penned by established experts who belong not only to Bangladesh and India, but to various parts of the globe.



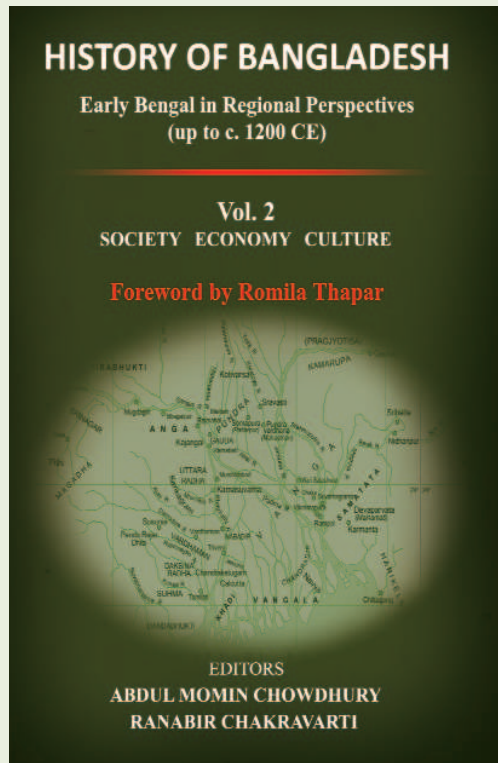


The first volume looks into the historical geography of the ancient region and its inhabitants by combining perspectives of historical geography and anthropology; it also pays meticulous attention to the pre-literate phase in the early history of Bengal. One of the salient features of this volume is the thrust on field archaeological materials which offer the most reliable window to grasp the transition from the pre-literate to the early historic times (up to c. 300

CE). Elaborate discussions on political history have been also accommodated as new epigraphic and numismatic sources have led to the considerable rewriting of the political history of the regions and sub-regions (especially of the Pala period and of Southeastern Bangladesh). The understanding of the polity and nature of the state forms another important aspect of discussion in the first volume.

Volume 2 takes a close look at economic life, circulation of money and different media of exchange, social life (including the relevance of the *varna-jati* norms and the question of gender), everyday life, religious beliefs and practices (Brahmanical, Buddhist, Jaina and Ajivika), art activities (terracotta art, sculpture, iconography, painting and architecture) and language and literature. The last point is of crucial significance as the language Bangla is the quintessential marker of identity of the

inhabitants of Bengal; it is from the ninth-tenth centuries that the earliest traces of the vernacular, Bangla, are traceable in historical sources. Each chapter combines the state of the art of the subject concerned with the specific researches of the contributor(s) who have meticulously highlighted the regional features and the sub-regional diversities. Rich in empirical details, the chapters offer critical analyses of available data in view of the current historiographical issues and debates.



The two volumes are expected to fill a long-felt gap in the historiography of early Bengal and will possibly serve as a standard reference work for both the specialist scholars and the general readers.

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**Abdul Momin Chowdhury** studied at the University of Dhaka (1956-1960) and the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London (1962-1965). He taught at the University of Dhaka (1960-2005) and retired as Professor of History. He spent an academic year (2013-2014) at the Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, U.S.A., as a visiting scholar with a Senior Fulbright Fellowship. In 2014 he was made a Fellow of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh. His *Dynastic History of Bengal c. 750-1200 A.D.* (Dhaka, 1967) was acclaimed as an authentic work for the period covered. Among his other publications mention may be made of *Bāṅglādeśer Itihās* (Dhaka, 1973) and *Prācīn Baṅglār Itihās O Saṅskṛti* (Dhaka, 2002). He has a number of contributions to edited volumes, and himself edited many volumes including *Bangladesh in the Threshold of Twenty First Century* (Dhaka, 2004), *A Revered Offering to Nalini Kanta Bhattasali, A Versatile Scholar* (Dhaka, 2016).

**Ranabir Chakravarti** has just retired as Professor of Ancient History, Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He specializes in the socio-economic history of early India with a particular interest in the Indian Ocean maritime history. A regular contributor to international peer-reviewed journals, Chakravarti has authored/edited *A Sourcebook of Indian Civilization* (Hyderabad, 2000), *Trade in Early India* (New Delhi, 2001), *Trade and Traders in Early Indian Society* (New Delhi, 2007), *Indo-Judaic Studies in the Twenty First Century: A View from the Margins* (New York, 2007) and *Exploring Early India up to c. AD 1300* (New Delhi, 2016). He has annotated the English translation (by Giles Constable) of a 14th century Latin Crusade text (*How to Defeat the Saracens*, Washington DC, 2012).

## **EXCERPTS FROM ROMILA THAPAR'S FOREWORD**

Reading the manuscript has been a source of my discovering occasional new information and the fresh interpretation of known information: both of which enhance one's understanding of the region.

Although the main title describes the volumes as the history of Bangladesh, the contents cover much beyond that. The sub-title is the more appropriate description. The volumes cover the history of the region that was called Bengal - in its variant versions - and which in earlier times was more extensive as a single region, than that which lies within either of the current demarcations associated with the name, Bengal.

These volumes cover the evolution of the societies that went into the making of the region of Bengal. There were initially simple social and economic forms. Gradually they changed into more complex polities accompanied by developments in the patterns of living. This is illustrated for instance, in the economic forms arising from agriculture and commerce, in the social stratification that incorporated the variations in the status and occupations of castes, in the temples and shrines dedicated to older deities as well as the new deities arising from the inter-mixing of belief systems, in the new forms of devotional worship, and in the slow transformation of a popularly used language into a sophisticated literary idiom. Stages of these processes come into the discussion in these volumes.

In the context of the history of the sub-continent, regional histories are beginning to play a significant role. The historical importance of new sources, both texts and artifacts, is being recognized.

In charting the evolution of regional cultures, we have to recognize the plurality of cultural patterns, as well as the inter-face of the regional pattern with the larger trans-regional pattern. These volumes help us to see these complex phenomena in the history of Bengal.

New Delhi  
April 2018

**Romila Thapar**  
Professor Emeritus  
Jawaharlal Nehru University, India