

**The Historical Depictions of Epigraphs of Hassan in Alur
Region with Special Reference to Hoysala Rule:
A Socio-Cultural Study of Medieval
Karnataka History**

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Abstract:*Epigraphs constitute one of the most significant primary sources for reconstructing the political, economic, religious and socio-cultural history of medieval Karnataka. The Hassan region, particularly the areas corresponding to present-day Alur Taluk and neighbouring parts of Belur, Hassan and Sakleshpur, formed an important geographical and cultural zone of the Hoysala kingdom. The inscriptions of this region preserve information concerning kingship, land grants, taxation, temple institutions, religious communities, village administration, warriors, merchants, artisans, women and patterns of social interaction. This review paper examines the historical depictions contained in the epigraphic records of the Hassan–Alur region with particular reference to the Hoysala period. It adopts a qualitative historical and interpretative research design based on the critical reading of published inscriptional corpora and recent scholarship from 2020 onwards. The analysis demonstrates that Hoysala epigraphs should not be understood simply as royal proclamations. They provide evidence of a complex social order in which state authority, local elites, temple institutions, agrarian communities, religious groups and occupational communities interacted. Recent scholarship on Hoysala agriculture, customary practices, artistic production, temple sculpture and hero-stones strengthens this socio-cultural interpretation. The study concludes that the Hassan–Alur epigraphic landscape represents a valuable archive for reconstructing the everyday structures of medieval Karnataka society.*

Keywords: Alur, Epigraphy, Hoysala, Medieval Karnataka, , Temple Institutions, Kannada etc.

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1. Introduction

Epigraphs are among the most durable historical sources for reconstructing medieval South Indian society because they record political authority alongside land transactions, religious endowments, social obligations, local institutions and commemorative practices. The Hassan region was particularly significant under the Hoysalas, whose political and cultural centres included Belur and Dvarasamudra (Halebidu). The surviving inscriptional landscape demonstrates that Hoysala authority was embedded in village institutions, agrarian relations, religious establishments and networks of artisans and local elites. Recent scholarship has consequently moved beyond dynastic narratives toward the social meanings contained in epigraphic records (Dayma, 2020; Shivaramu, 2021).

The Hassan–Alur region provides an important micro-historical setting for such an investigation. Its inscriptions reveal interactions between rulers, chiefs, gavundas, temple authorities, merchants, cultivators, religious specialists and warriors. The epigraphic evidence also records donations, taxation, irrigation, temple maintenance and commemorative practices. Recent research on Hoysala hero-stones demonstrates that such records can illuminate rural conflict and social organization rather than merely royal warfare (Ali, 2025).

This paper therefore examines the historical depictions preserved in the epigraphs of the Hassan–Alur region and interprets them as evidence for the socio-cultural history of medieval Karnataka.

2. Review of Literature

Recent scholarship on medieval Karnataka demonstrates a movement from conventional dynastic and political narratives towards interdisciplinary interpretations of inscriptions, temples, agrarian institutions, artistic communities, religious identities and rural society. The following studies published from 2020 onwards are particularly relevant to understanding the epigraphic and socio-cultural history of the Hassan–Alur region

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Sl. No.	Author & Year	Title / Study	Research Focus	Major Findings / Contribution	Relevance to Hassan–Alur and Present Study
1	Dayma (2020)	<i>Trade and Urbanisation in Early Medieval Southern Karnataka: As Reflected in the Western Ganga Inscriptions</i>	Examines Western Ganga inscriptions to reconstruct trade, commerce, agrarian expansion and urbanisation in southern Karnataka.	Dayma demonstrates that inscriptions can be used to reconstruct economic networks, urban centres and relationships between state institutions, agrarian expansion and religious establishments. The study challenges interpretations that associate the early medieval period simply with economic decline.	Although the study concerns the Western Gangas rather than the Hoysalas, its methodological approach is highly relevant. It demonstrates how inscriptions can be treated as evidence for economic and social transformation. This approach can be applied to Hassan–Alur inscriptions to examine land grants, taxation, temple endowments, local authorities and economic relationships.
2	Shivaramu (2021)	<i>Agrarian System of the Hoysalas</i>	Studies agriculture, land classification, land revenue, cultivation and agricultural productivity during the Hoysala period.	The study identifies different categories of agricultural land, including wet land (<i>gadde</i>), dry land (<i>beddalu/hola</i>) and garden land (<i>thota</i>). It also discusses land	The findings provide an important framework for interpreting Hassan–Alur inscriptions containing references to land grants, cultivation, irrigation, taxation and temple endowments. They help establish the connection between agrarian resources, political authority and religious institutions.

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				assessment and revenue collection and emphasizes the importance of agricultural resources in the Hoysala economy.	
3	Prakash (2021)	<i>Some Customary Obligations of Hoysala Period</i>	Examines customary duties and obligations in Hoysala society.	The study draws attention to customary practices and social obligations that operated alongside formal administrative structures. It contributes to understanding the institutional and social relationships of the Hoysala period.	The study is useful for interpreting Hassan–Alur inscriptions as records of social obligations rather than merely royal orders. References to temple services, village responsibilities, land-related duties and community institutions can be understood within a broader framework of customary social organization.

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4	Hardy (2022)	<i>Re-creation and Self-Creation in Temple Design</i>	Examines Hoysala temple architecture and the Karnata Dravida architectural tradition.	Hardy demonstrates that Hoysala architecture represents a historically developed architectural language and emphasizes the importance of understanding the principles through which Hoysala temples were designed and constructed.	The study is significant because temples and inscriptions should be examined together. Inscriptions associated with temples can provide information about patrons, donors, religious institutions, construction and maintenance. This strengthens the interpretation of Hassan–Alur temples as socio-cultural institutions rather than merely architectural monuments.
5	Kulkarni (2023)	<i>The Riddle of Hoysala Artist Baichoja of Nandi</i>	Investigates Hoysala artists and the role of named sculptors in temple construction and artistic production.	The study discusses Baichoja and other Hoysala artists and demonstrates the importance of identifying individual artists and artistic communities. It also notes the movement of artists from different parts of Karnataka and their association with Hoysala temples.	This provides a valuable socio-cultural dimension to the Hassan–Alur study. Inscriptions mentioning sculptors, architects and patrons can be interpreted as evidence of occupational identity, artistic mobility, professional communities and systems of royal and local patronage.

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6	Tosato (2023)	<i>Encapsulating Dance in Sculpture: The Story of "Arjuna and the Hunter" as Represented in the Hoysala Temples</i>	Studies the relationship between Hoysala sculpture, dance, theatre, literary traditions and religious narratives.	Tosato demonstrates that Hoysala sculptors employed the technical vocabulary of dance and theatre to represent emotions, movements and narrative meaning in temple sculpture. The study examines sculptures from four Hoysala temples and connects visual representations with literary and theatrical traditions.	The study expands the interpretation of Hoysala monuments from architecture to cultural communication. For Hassan–Alur, it suggests that inscriptions, sculpture and temple spaces should be examined together to reconstruct cultural practices, performance traditions, religious narratives and artistic expression.
7	Shanthamurthy (2024)	<i>Polemic, Diatribe, and Farce: Jaina Postures vis-à-vis Sectarian Others in the Kannada Texts of Nayasēna, Brahmasīva, and Vṛttavilāsa</i>	Examines Jain attitudes towards sectarian communities in medieval Kannada literature and the religious environment of the Deccan.	The study highlights the political and religious ferment of the medieval Deccan and examines interactions between Jain, Shaiva and Vaishnava traditions. It demonstrates that religious identities developed through interaction, debate and	The findings are useful for interpreting religious inscriptions in Hassan–Alur. Rather than viewing the expansion of one religious tradition as the complete disappearance of another, the region can be examined as a space of religious interaction, patronage and institutional coexistence.

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				sectarian negotiation.	
8	Ali (2025)	<i>Rural Violence and Warfare in Medieval South India: The Evidence of Hero-Stones</i>	Examines hero-stones from lower Karnataka between the ninth and thirteenth centuries to reconstruct rural violence, warfare and social organization.	Ali demonstrates that hero-stones reveal everyday forms of rural violence and that conflicts involving peasants, cattle, local communities and chiefs cannot be separated completely from wider forms of political or state violence. The study specifically identifies the	This is particularly significant for the present study because the research directly connects hero-stones with Hoysala-period rural society. The evidence provides a framework for studying memorial stones in Hassan–Alur in relation to cattle raids, boundary disputes, local conflicts, honour, sacrifice, village solidarity and social memory.

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				importance of Ganga and Hoysala- period evidence.	
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2.1 Research Gap Identified from the Literature

The review indicates that recent scholarship has substantially enriched the study of Hoysala history; however, several gaps remain.

First, most recent studies examine specific dimensions of Hoysala history agriculture, architecture, artistic production, religion or rural violence rather than integrating these dimensions through a focused study of a particular micro-region.

Second, the Hassan–Alur region has not received sufficient integrated socio-cultural analysis based specifically on its epigraphic landscape. Hassan, Belur and Halebidu are well known for their architectural heritage, but the inscriptional evidence of smaller settlements and local communities can reveal dimensions of history that are less visible in major monuments.

Third, there is a need to connect temple inscriptions, land grants, local administrative records and hero-stones within a common analytical framework. Such integration would allow researchers to move from a predominantly royal history towards a history of communities, institutions and everyday life.

Fourth, existing research demonstrates that inscriptions can reveal economic, religious, artistic and conflict-related histories, but relatively little work combines these themes to construct a comprehensive socio-cultural history of the Hassan–Alur region during Hoysala rule.

The present study therefore attempts to fill this gap by treating the Hassan–Alur region as a micro-historical epigraphic landscape and examining its inscriptions as evidence of political

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authority, agrarian organization, religious patronage, artistic activity, social relations, rural conflict and collective memory.

2.2 Conceptual Contribution of the Present Study

Based on the reviewed literature, the present study proposes an integrated model:

Epigraphic Evidence → Political Institutions → Agrarian Economy → Religious Patronage → Artistic Production → Social Relations → Conflict & Memory → Socio-Cultural History

This framework enables the inscriptions of Hassan–Alur to be interpreted not merely as chronological records of Hoysala rulers but as historical documents reflecting the interaction between state, society, economy, religion and culture.

Accordingly, the present study contributes to medieval Karnataka historiography by shifting the focus from “Hoysala kings and monuments” to “Hoysala society and its regional historical landscape.”

3. Research Design

3.1 Research approach

The study adopts a qualitative historical-interpretative research design. It combines epigraphic analysis with socio-cultural historical interpretation. The objective is not to establish a new chronological sequence of Hoysala rulers but to examine what the inscriptions reveal about the structure and functioning of medieval society.

3.2 Study area

The geographical focus is the Hassan–Alur region, with particular emphasis on present-day Alur Taluk of Hassan District and comparative references to neighbouring Hoysala centres such as Belur, Halebidu and other Hassan localities.

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Hassan remains one of the most important regions for Hoysala history. The district administration identifies Belur and Halebidu among the principal Hoysala monuments and emphasizes the historical importance of Hoysala inscriptions for understanding administration, taxation, land relations and Kannada cultural activity.

3.3 Primary source base

The principal source base consists of:

- Kannada stone inscriptions.
- Sanskrit-Kannada bilingual inscriptions.
- Temple inscriptions.
- Land-grant inscriptions.
- Hero-stones and memorial stones.
- Records relating to religious establishments.
- Records relating to taxation, irrigation and village administration.
- Inscriptions associated with artists, officials and local elites.

The published inscriptional corpus of Hassan District is particularly extensive. The historical corpus catalogued from Hassan includes Hoysala records among a much larger body of inscriptions.

3.4 Secondary sources

The study uses recent academic literature published from 2020 onwards, particularly research on:

- Hoysala Agrarian Organization;
- Customary Obligations;
- Architecture;
- Artistic Communities;
- Temple Sculpture;

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- Religious Identities;
- Hero-Stones and Rural Violence.

3.5 Analytical framework

The inscriptions are classified under six analytical themes:

Theme	Major indicators
Political	Kings, chiefs, officers, royal authority
Economic	Land grants, taxes, irrigation, agricultural resources
Religious	Temples, Jain establishments, Shaiva and Vaishnava patronage
Social	Gavundas, merchants, artisans, cultivators, women
Cultural	Language, literature, artistic communities, temple culture
Conflict and memory	Hero-stones, warfare, cattle raids, boundary disputes

The analysis follows a micro-historical approach, moving from individual inscriptional references to broader patterns of medieval social organization.

4. Analysis

4.1 Epigraphs as instruments of political authority

The Hoysala inscriptions of Hassan reveal the importance of royal authority in organizing political space. Royal names, regnal years, titles and genealogical statements established the legitimacy of rulers.

However, political power should not be understood as exclusively centralized. The inscriptions frequently reveal the participation of local chiefs, officials, gavundas and other intermediaries. This indicates a multilayered political system in which royal authority operated through local institutions.

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The socio-cultural importance of this system lies in the interaction between the state and local society. The inscription transformed a political order into a publicly visible and permanent statement. Its location in temples, public spaces or memorial contexts further reinforced the relationship between authority and community.

4.2 Land, agriculture and economic organization

Agriculture formed the economic foundation of medieval Hoysala society. Recent scholarship emphasizes differentiated land categories and systems of revenue assessment (Shivaramu, 2021).

The Hassan–Alur inscriptional landscape can therefore be interpreted through three interconnected processes:

Land → Revenue → Religious and institutional patronage

Land grants were not merely economic transactions. They could create enduring relationships between donors, temples, Brahmanical institutions and local communities.

A temple receiving land became an economic institution. Agricultural surplus could support:

- Ritual Activities;
- Temple Personnel;
- Festivals;
- Maintenance;
- Lamps;
- Food Offerings;
- Educational Or Religious Functions.

Thus, epigraphic references to land reveal the economic foundations of medieval religious and cultural life.

4.3 Village institutions and local governance

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One of the most important socio-cultural dimensions of Hoysala inscriptions is their evidence for local governance.

The village was not merely a geographical settlement. It was a social institution involving cultivators, local elites, religious authorities, artisans and administrative personnel.

The evidence discussed by recent scholarship on Hoysala customary obligations suggests that social life was structured by established responsibilities and reciprocal relationships (Prakash, 2021).

In the Hassan–Alur context, this implies that the functioning of medieval villages depended upon:

- Customary Rights;
- Hereditary Responsibilities;
- Landholding;
- Taxation;
- Temple Services;
- Irrigation;
- Collective Obligations.

The inscription therefore provides evidence for the institutional history of rural Karnataka.

4.4 Religious pluralism and institutional patronage

Hoysala society cannot be described adequately through a single religious identity.

The broader Hassan epigraphic corpus records Jain, Shaiva and Vaishnava traditions. The continuation of Jain activity alongside expanding Vaishnava and Shaiva patronage demonstrates that religious change was not necessarily synonymous with complete religious replacement.

The religious institution was also an economic and social centre. Donations of land, money, livestock, food and other resources created relationships between donors and religious institutions.

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The Hoysala temple therefore performed several functions simultaneously:

Religious centre + economic institution + cultural centre + social gathering place + political symbol

Recent research on medieval Kannada religious traditions further supports the interpretation of the period as one characterized by religious interaction and sectarian negotiation rather than a simple linear religious transition (Shanthamurthy, 2024).

4.5 Temple culture and artistic production

The Hoysala period is internationally recognized for its architectural and sculptural achievements. Yet the social history of Hoysala art becomes clearer when inscriptions and sculptures are studied together.

Research on Hoysala artists demonstrates that individual sculptors and artistic communities could acquire recognition and patronage (Kulkarni, 2023).

Inscriptions referring to architects, sculptors or temple builders therefore provide evidence of professional identity.

This is especially significant because the Hassan region contains major examples of Hoysala architecture. The inscriptions allow historians to move beyond the aesthetic appreciation of temples toward questions such as:

- Who commissioned the temple?
- Who constructed it?
- Who maintained it?
- Which religious community controlled it?
- What resources sustained it?
- What social groups participated in its production?

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Such questions convert architectural history into social history.

4.6 Language and cultural identity

The predominance of Kannada in the Hoysala inscriptional environment is an important cultural indicator.

The use of Kannada for administrative and commemorative purposes indicates that the language was not merely a literary medium but also an important language of public record and social communication.

The presence of Sanskrit alongside Kannada in some records illustrates a layered linguistic culture. Sanskrit could provide religious and political prestige, while Kannada served important regional administrative and communicative functions.

The Hassan–Alur inscriptions consequently contribute to understanding the historical formation of Kannada cultural identity.

4.7 Women and socio-cultural participation

Women appear in medieval inscriptions in a variety of roles, including members of royal families, donors, patrons and relatives of individuals commemorated in memorial records.

The presence of women in donation and commemorative contexts challenges interpretations that treat medieval political and economic activity as exclusively male.

Women could participate in religious patronage, family-based endowments and memorial practices. The inscriptional evidence therefore allows a more differentiated understanding of gender relations in Hoysala society.

4.8 Hero-stones and the culture of memory

Hero-stones constitute one of the most revealing categories of inscriptional evidence.

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Ali's recent study demonstrates that hero-stones can reconstruct localized rural conflict, including cattle raids, boundary disputes and conflicts involving local chiefs and village communities. Importantly, his study includes Hoysala-period examples from Hassan and Alur areas.

A hero-stone performed several functions:

- It commemorated the deceased.
- It preserved the memory of sacrifice.
- It established social honour.
- It connected the deceased to family and community.
- It transformed an individual death into collective memory.

The Marasu example from Alur Taluk, dated to the Hoysala period, illustrates the value of such memorial evidence for reconstructing local conflict and social relationships.

Therefore, the hero-stone should be understood not simply as a military monument but as a social memory institution.

4.9 Rural violence and social structure

The evidence of hero-stones also complicates the conventional portrayal of Hoysala society as a period of uninterrupted prosperity and cultural achievement.

The countryside could experience:

- Cattle Raids;
- Boundary Disputes;
- Conflicts Between Villages;
- Struggles Involving Local Chiefs;
- Military Mobilization;
- Disputes over Resources.

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Ali (2025) argues that rural violence existed in an intermediate space between purely local conflict and state-sponsored warfare.

For the Hassan–Alur region, this suggests that political authority was negotiated through everyday relationships between villages, local elites and royal institutions.

4.10 Social hierarchy and local elites

The epigraphic evidence also indicates the importance of intermediary social groups.

Terms associated with local officials, chiefs, landholders, warriors and religious specialists point toward a stratified but interconnected society.

The gavunda is particularly significant in understanding local political and agrarian organization. Such groups could participate in landholding, administration and military activity.

Consequently, Hoysala political organization can be represented as:

King → Provincial/local authorities → Gavundas/chiefs → Village institutions → Cultivating communities

This was not necessarily a rigid hierarchy. Individuals could perform multiple functions, combining economic, military, political and social roles.

5. Major Findings

The review produces the following major findings.

Finding 1: Epigraphs provide a multidimensional historical archive

The Hassan–Alur inscriptions contain evidence not only about rulers but also about agriculture, religion, social organization, art, warfare and community memory.

Finding 2: The Hoysala state depended upon local institutions

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Royal authority operated through local elites and village institutions. The evidence indicates that political power was distributed through multiple layers rather than exercised exclusively from the royal centre.

Finding 3: Agrarian resources supported socio-cultural institutions

Land grants and agricultural resources were closely connected with temples and other religious institutions. Economic production therefore supported cultural and religious life.

Finding 4: Religious life was plural

Jain, Shaiva and Vaishnava traditions formed significant components of the wider Hassan cultural landscape. Religious patronage should therefore be studied as a process of interaction and institutional competition/coexistence rather than simple replacement.

Finding 5: Temples were multifunctional institutions

Hoysala temples functioned simultaneously as religious, economic, artistic and social institutions.

Finding 6: Artisans formed an important cultural community

The inscriptional and artistic evidence indicates the importance of professional artists, architects and sculptors in the creation of Hoysala cultural identity (Kulkarni, 2023).

Finding 7: Hero-stones provide evidence of ordinary people

Memorial stones reveal individuals and conflicts that are often absent from royal narratives. They provide access to the history of villagers, warriors, local elites and families.

Finding 8: Alur deserves greater micro-historical attention

Although Hassan, Belur and Halebidu have received substantial historical and archaeological attention, Alur and its surrounding villages provide an important but comparatively understudied inscriptional landscape.

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Finding 9: Epigraphy can reconstruct social memory

The placement and content of memorial stones demonstrate that communities used inscriptions to preserve collective memories of death, sacrifice, honour and conflict.

Finding 10: A multidisciplinary approach is necessary

The most productive interpretation emerges when epigraphy is combined with archaeology, architecture, art history, historical geography, linguistics and social history.

6. Suggestions

6.1 Establish an Alur-specific epigraphic database

A dedicated digital database should be developed for Alur Taluk containing:

- Inscription Number;
- Village;
- Gps Location;
- Dynasty;
- Ruler;
- Date;
- Language;
- Script;
- Inscription Type;
- Donor;
- Recipient;
- Deity;
- Land Details;
- Tax References;
- Occupation;
- Photographs;
- Transcription;
- Translation.

Such a database would make Alur a valuable micro-historical case study within Hoysala studies.

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6.2 Conduct systematic field surveys

Several inscriptions and memorial stones require systematic documentation. Field surveys should record inscriptions in their original archaeological context rather than studying the text alone.

6.3 Digitise inscriptions

High-resolution photography, 3D scanning and digital epigraphy should be employed to preserve damaged inscriptions.

6.4 Integrate inscription and temple studies

Temple architecture, sculpture and inscriptions should be studied as interconnected cultural evidence. This is consistent with recent scholarship emphasizing the relationship between architectural form, artistic production and historical research (Hardy, 2022).

6.5 Study neglected social groups

Future research should specifically examine:

- Women;
- Cultivators;
- Artisans;
- Merchants;
- Pastoral Communities;
- Village Officials;
- Religious Specialists;
- Marginal Groups.

Such research would produce a more socially inclusive history of medieval Karnataka.

6.6 Develop comparative regional studies

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Alur should be compared with Belur, Hassan, Halebidu, Arsikere and Channarayapatna to identify regional variations in Hoysala administration, religion, economy and culture.

6.7 Protect hero-stones and local monuments

Hero-stones located outside protected monuments are particularly vulnerable to displacement and destruction. Local communities, educational institutions and heritage authorities should collaborate to document and conserve them.

6.8 Promote community-based heritage education

Schools and colleges in Hassan District can use local inscriptions as teaching resources. This would connect students with regional history and strengthen heritage consciousness.

7. Conclusion

The epigraphic heritage of the Hassan–Alur region provides an exceptionally valuable foundation for reconstructing the socio-cultural history of medieval Karnataka. The evidence demonstrates that Hoysala history cannot be reduced to the achievements of kings, the construction of monumental temples or military expansion. The inscriptions reveal a much more complex social world involving cultivators, local chiefs, gavundas, merchants, artisans, religious communities, women and warriors.

The major historical significance of these records lies in their ability to connect political authority with everyday social processes. Land grants reveal the economic foundations of temples; temple records illuminate religious and cultural institutions; records concerning artists reveal professional communities; and hero-stones preserve memories of local conflict and sacrifice. Recent scholarship has strengthened this interpretation by examining Hoysala agrarian organization, customary obligations, artistic communities, temple traditions and rural violence.

The Hassan–Alur region should consequently be approached as a historical landscape rather than simply a collection of monuments. Its inscriptions represent layers of political authority,

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economic exchange, religious patronage, social obligation and collective memory. The Alur area, in particular, deserves further systematic epigraphic and archaeological investigation because localized evidence can reveal dimensions of medieval society that remain invisible in royal chronicles.

The study ultimately demonstrates that epigraphy is not merely a supplementary source for political chronology. Properly contextualized, it is a primary archive of social structure, cultural identity, economic organization, religious interaction and historical memory. A focused socio-cultural study of Hassan–Alur inscriptions can therefore contribute substantially to the reconstruction of medieval Karnataka history and to a more community-oriented understanding of the Hoysala past.

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