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in: Franke-Vogt, Ute – Weisshaar, H.-J (Hrsg.), South Asian archaeology 2003: proceedings of the Seventeenth International Conference of the European Association of South Asian Archaeologists, 7–11 July 2003, Bonn 253–259.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34780/mvc3-3u6b>

**Herausgebende Institution / Publisher:**

Deutsches Archäologisches Institut

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Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Zentrale, Podbielskiallee 69–71, 14195 Berlin, Tel: +49 30 187711-0

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P. Chaudhary

## Some Important Trade Routes and Trading Centres of Jammu from Ancient Times to 10<sup>th</sup> Century AD

Jammu and Kashmir is the northern most state of India. It offers a unique topography and comprises three distinct regions, differing in topography and culture – the foothills of Jammu, the valley of Kashmir and the starkly beautiful cold desert of Ladakh. It may be noted here that Jammu is not only the name of the sprawling region girdling the Kashmir valley in the west, south and south east, it is also the name of the largest city in the region which functions as the winter capital of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The prosperity of the state since ancient times has depended upon trade. Literary texts as well as archaeological remains of the region bear evidence to this. Kashmiris have been referred to as good caravan leaders and traders par excellence and through the millennia remained well connected with places of commercial interest like the Roman Empire, Central Asia, Nepal, etc.<sup>1</sup> Much has been written about Kashmir and its commercial activities but the same cannot be said of Jammu. It is, however, unfortunate that not much effort has been made by the historians to study the trade and commercial activities in the region of Jammu. Nonetheless, the study of the trade routes and trading centres of ancient Jammu is of immense importance as it provides an essential basis for the understanding of the economy of the region. Therefore, the focus of the paper is to highlight the commercial activities of ancient Jammu.

Geographically, ancient Jammu, popularly known as the *Dugar* land, dominated the entire tract in the outer Himalayas between rivers Chenab and Ravi, which coincided with the region Darva Abhisara<sup>2</sup>. It is also stated that Jammu in ancient days was part of the native states, from Indus to the sources of Ganges, the outer ranges of Punjab Himalayas. Of these, important were Kashmir, Trigarta (Kangara) and *Dugar* states, each named after the most powerful principality, which was the head of the confederation (Hutchison/Vogel 1933, 41). According to Sir A. Cunningham, of these the Dugar group was divided into 22 Hindu and Mohammedan principalities (Cunning-

ham 1963, 130). Present day Jammu region also more or less corresponds to the same geographical boundaries, though now the former principalities exist in the form of districts and tehsils (administrative units) of Jammu province. However, Bhimbar, Khari-khariyali and S'akala (Sialkot), the ancient states of the Dugar group are now in Pakistan. On the basis of the present administrative divisions, the Jammu region is divided into six districts namely Jammu, Kathua (Jasrota), Udhampur, Doda, Rajouri (Rajapuri) and Poonch (Parnotsa). The district of Jammu includes the ancient states of Bahu, Jammu, Mankot, Samba and Akhnur. The district of Kathua (Jasrota) has the ancient states of Balaur (Basholi), Sumerta, Bhadu, Jasrota, Lakhanpur, and Jasmergarh (Hiranagar). In the district of Udhampur are included the states of Chenani, Ramnagar, Krimchi, and Reasi. In the district of Doda fall the ancient states of Kishtwar and Bhadarwah. The districts of Rajauri and Poonch include the ancient states of Rajapuri (Rajauri) and

<sup>1</sup> Kashmir was well connected with the mainland of India and Central Asia due to trade. Hence several towns in the form of entrepots sprang up on the major trade routes. It is also significant that with the decline of Roman empire, commercial activities with western world received a setback. Alongside, the disturbed political conditions on the north-west and unsafe trade routes, because of the advent of the Arabs, led to the further decline in trading activities. But the situation was reversed with the coming of the Karkotas under the leadership of Lalitaditya. Kashmir had however, developed as a commercial centre because products from its forests, like *kutha* (*costus*), saffron, etc., had a flourishing market in the west.

<sup>2</sup> Even today the people of Jammu are known as the Dugars/Dogras. Hutchison/Vogel (1933, 665) refer the name of Darva-Abhisara in connection to two tribes – darva and Abhisara – and apply it to the whole tract between Jehlam and Chenab. Further suggest that the name darvaabhisara was in use before the time of Alexander's invasion down to 12<sup>th</sup> century or maybe later.

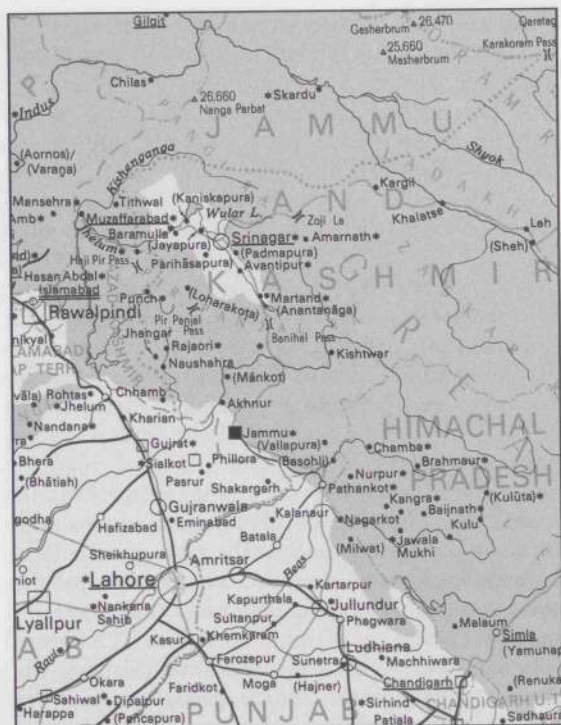


Fig. 1. Map of Jammu.

Parnotsa (Poonch) respectively. These districts and their sub units as mentioned above formed a part of the twenty-two states of the *Dugar* (Durgra) group (fig. 1). It also needs to be mentioned that these areas had emerged as important trade centres because of their location on the trade routes, which connected Jammu with the rest of the Indian sub continent. Some of the material remains, like forts, temples etc., of the region too came into existence mainly because of the economic potential and efforts of the traders. This is particularly true of Jammu, Akhnur, Mankot, Sumerta, Balaur, Krimchi, Rajapuri, Parnotsa, etc. The reason is not far to seek. The region of Jammu on account of its close proximity to Kashmir on the one hand and Sakala on the other had developed as a flourishing trade.

It would not be wrong to mention here that both Kashmir and S'akala had since ancient times flourishing trade based economy because of their geographical location which provided them access to different trade routes. Both the trade centres were very well connected for internal as well as external trade. Kashmir was connected to Central Asia via the Silk route and with the western world through sea routes (Chandra 1977). Similarly S'akala was also connected to Taksila and Rajagriha through the Rajagriha-Pushkalavati route (Singh 1967, 237). This route passed through Patliputra, Varanasi, Kausambi, Mathura, Indraparstha and S'akala. It connected Rajagriha with Takshasila and Pushkalavati, which were busy centres of trade in the

North Western extremity of India<sup>3</sup>. Takshasila was just like an international trade centre and established commercial relations between India and the West. Sakala, therefore, because of its location on the route also developed as an important trade centre.

Milinda Panha while giving the description of S'akala refers to it as a city of par excellence and its markets being full of merchandise, hence, a great attraction for the traders (Rhys Davids 1890). It was during the period of the Kushanas that India had a flourishing trade with the Roman Empire and we have several references to brisk trade flourishing between Kashmir, S'akala and Barygaza (Warmington 1974). We have reasons to believe that the economic prosperity of S'akala and Kashmir were perhaps due to the flourishing trade. Therefore it was natural on the part of the traders to have worked out short-cuts on the routes connecting the valley and S'akala to important entrepot in Jammu region. There are many references to number of such short-cuts on the routes connecting the main route, which continued to be used for trade purposes till much later, at least till as late as the Gupta period (Aggarwal 1982, 64).

Besides, a recent excavation in the area around Akhnur and more specifically at Ambaran has helped to strengthen this contention by throwing up very interesting artifacts which indicate that trade flourished in the region as far back as the Harappan period (Thappar 1980, 21). These recent finds in the form of pottery, terracottas, architectural remains coupled with the literary bits gleaned from various sources now help us to provide some understanding of the economic settings of Jammu region.

Nearly a hundred Kushana sites have been reported from the Jammu region. Of these the largest numbers of sites have been found in the areas adjoining river Chenab and these sites, perhaps existed in the shape of entrepots. This was because Jammu has a hilly terrain and it was probably to facilitate and save the cost of transport that small entrepots were worked out in the interiors of Jammu hills as is evident by the archaeological finds from the region. One of the major entrepots in this area was Akhnoor, which is 30 kms from the city of Jammu. Archaeological finds at Akhnur mainly date back to the Harappan phase and inform that the economic activity at Akhnur can be traced to Harappan days and by the time of Kushanans commercial activity in Jammu was probably at its peak (Thappar 1980, 21). The importance of Akhnur lies in the fact that

<sup>3</sup> Singh 1967, 237. This route was the same which is referred to as Uttarapatha by Panini and was known to the Greeks as the Northern route. From Pushkalavati, the route probably branched out to Kashmir to the North East and to Bactria in the North West.

it is located at a point where river Chenab for the first time becomes navigable. It was because of this factor that Akhnur emerged as an important trade centre from early days. This is indicated by the pattern of settlement known to us from archaeological excavations, which suggests the beginning of urban settlement at Akhnur in the form of an entrepot.

Another factor, which added to Akhnur's importance as a trading centre, was its location on the ancient trade routes, which connected Kashmir on the one hand, and S'akala (Sialkot, now in Pakistan) on the other with the rest of the Indian Sub continent. Accordingly, we are informed that one route, which connected S'akala with Kashmir, was via Akhnur and Rajauri and Akhnur was the main halting place on this route (Bates 1980, 485f.). Another route which passed through Akhnur was via the Shupian-Buddhal pass (Bates 1980, 519). This route connected Kashmir with Akhnur and S'akala. Bates mentions that even though the route remained closed from November to May due to heavy snowfall the traders of the region frequently used this route as less duty was levied on their goods on this route (Bates 1980, 519). The route was maintained till recently as a track and due to its shortness it was formerly a favourite route with Kashmiris (Rabbani 1981, 24). Kshemendra, a historian from Kashmir mentions a part of this route as *Lavanasarani*<sup>4</sup>. It was the ancient salt route through which salt was imported into the valley from the Punjab salt ranges. The route also finds a mention in the Mughal records as the "Mughal Route" (south west of Shupian) used by the Mughal emperors to reach Kashmir. It was a prominent route since ancient times, which connected the valley with the rest of the sub continent<sup>5</sup>. The route was popular with the caravans' leaders and it was at Akhnur that the caravans moving through the land route halted (Ram 1930). It was also at Akhnur that the hill produce was exchanged with the articles imported from Punjab (Ram 1930). While going from Kashmir to Sialkot one had to again pass through Akhnur and Rajauri. Thus Akhnur was the main halting place for the caravans moving from Kashmir to Sialkot and vice versa.

It therefore seems Akhnur developed mainly because of its trade potential and continued to flourish. Eight copper coins belonging to the Kushana rulers Soter Megas, Kanishka and Huviska and one of perhaps Tormana, the Huna ruler along with the remains of metal smiths workshop with huge quantities of iron slag, iron implements and other related materials, which can be dated to the Gupta period (Mani 2000–2001), found at Ambaran certainly suggests this. The Iron Slag was probably used for making various means of transport. We have references to vehicles like *Laghuyana*, *Golimgam* etc. which were used for commercial purposes for transporting articles from one



Fig. 2. Ambaran. Structural remains of a stupa. Photo courtesy ASI.

place to another (Aggarwal 1982, 65f.). These must have required skilled carpenters and metal smiths to build the vehicles of all sorts. It would therefore, perhaps not be wrong to presume that the metal smith workshop found at Akhnur was used for this purpose. The importance of Akhnur as an entrepot continued during the Kushana period. This is revealed by the ample evidence in the form of terracotta heads and other material remains of the period. Recent excavations at Ambaran certainly suggest that the place had a flourishing Buddhist Monastery and a Stupa (figs. 2 and 5)<sup>6</sup>. The patronage provided by the Kushans to Buddhism is a well-known fact. Certain terracotta figurines found at Akhnur (fig. 3) clearly display the char-

<sup>4</sup> Kshemendra, *Samayamatrika*, Sarga II, 81.92.104.

<sup>5</sup> Proceeding further west along the same range was another important route: the Tosa-Maidan Route. The Tosa Maidan route was an important line of communication, owing to its natural advantage as it was the shortest and the safest route to Poonch (Lohara) connecting the valley with Punjab. At times when the mughal route was closed on account of heavy snow the Tosa-Maidan route was used.

<sup>6</sup> Excavation conducted at Ambaran, Akhnur in the year 1999–2000 under the supervision of B. R. Mani.



Fig. 3. Akhnur. Terracotta head. Photo courtesy ASI.

acteristics of Gandhara School of art, which flourished during the Kushana period (Fabri 1955). Besides these, we have certain terracotta figures (fig. 4) that demonstrate the classical trend of the Gupta period (Fabri 1955). The place remained a trade centre in the early medieval period too. The two Brahmanical sculptures obtained from the place suggest that Akhnur was a flourishing art centre and perhaps it used to cater to the requirements for religious sculptures of the Jammu area<sup>7</sup>. This also suggests that the place had a workshop for the purpose of sculptures<sup>8</sup>. In the post-Kushana period too Akhnur continued to flourish from the economic point of view (Thappar 1980, 21). Subsequently in the Mughal period, we have reference to Akhnur-Ambaran state yielded three lakhs and ninety thousand rupees as revenue<sup>9</sup>. This leads us to believe that the revenue yielded by the state of Akhnur was mostly through octroi as the tract is otherwise quite infertile. Hence, it is very obvious that Akhnur came into existence as a commercial centre and continued to remain so till recent times. It may be noted here that Akhnur also developed as a centre for timber collection. F. Drew refers to this<sup>10</sup>.

However, due to the Huna invasion such centres of economic activity like S'akala were disturbed and had declined. Besides, Rome, the biggest market of those days had declined and the routes leading to Rome had become unsafe. Later, with the Arab invasion both the sea and the land routes were dominated by the Arabs. This further led to the decline of trade. However, because of the establishment of new Rajputra dynasties in around 8<sup>th</sup> century AD in remote areas within the Jammu hills, there was a boost to local economy

of such remote areas (Hutchison/Vogel 1933). Accordingly we are informed that scions of the Rajputra families came and settled in the hills of Jammu and established twenty-two royal houses in various parts of Jammu. Detailed history of these Rajputras is not known, as there are no inscriptions and coins nor accounts exclusively pertaining to them. These rulers were able to provide law and order after bringing an end to the chaos, which was created due to Huna interregnum. However, the internecine wars amongst themselves and ascent of Ghaznavids and Ghurids on the scene never allowed these rulers to extend their influence beyond a limit. The territories under their control were small. Hence, trade could not be carried on a large scale, but these rulers tried to revive trade on a small scale by giving protection and other facilities to traders who entered the hilly terrains in search of safe routes. As a result of this, small markets started developing at halting places situated on important trade routes. In the process entrepôts like towns and capitals of ruling houses of Balaur, Krimchi, Babor, etc., emerged. Another trait, which the early medieval Jammu saw, was the development of art activities, like temples, etc., by the trade guilds. We find early medieval temples situated at those places alone which were flourishing because of their being at the halting places on important trade routes, for example Balaur, Krimchi, etc.

Balaur thus came into prominence because of its trade links with various parts of the country, and was an important halting place on the route that connected Kanauj with Kashmir. Alberuni has mentioned the route (Alberuni 1964). It seems that due to confusion and disorder in the plains, trade had been diverted to the hills and the merchants travelling to Kashmir adopted this route. On the one hand Balaur was connected with Kanauj and on the other, through it Chamba was connected with Jammu and Kashmir. As a result of this the trade guilds of Balaur, perhaps, started dominating the horizon and building activities started there. The possibility is there that before its emergence as a capital there were fortified halting places for

<sup>7</sup> Sculptures of three-faced Siva and Vishnu are displayed in the Dogra Art Museum, Jammu.

<sup>8</sup> Singh (1976, 30) mentions that stone of good quality for this purpose was obtained from far-off places and the icons found here were probably fashioned for the purpose of sale.

<sup>9</sup> Abul Fazal Aallami, *The Ain-i Akbari*, Oriental Books Corporation, Delhi, p. 325.

<sup>10</sup> Drew 1971, 147ff. It also may be mentioned here that prior to partition the towns Jehlum and Wazirabad were the main collection centres. After the partition of India, timber began to be collected through the process of *Boom* at Akhnur and Ramban and from here was transported to Panjab for purposes of sale, Pathankot being the main market.

the traders and it was the traders who brought into existence the famous temple of Hari Har as the local rulers were not financially prosperous enough to indulge in art activities. During the early medieval period when different hill principalities started coming into existence, Balaur too attracted a prince and thus a royal dynasty was founded. It was the establishment of a principality which led to the fortification of Balaur. Yet even at this stage, its economic importance was not ignored and therefore, not a fort but a fortified city came into existence at Balaur.

Krimchi, now a small village of Udhampur district, in ancient times lay on the route which once connected the valley of Kashmir with Jammu-Sialkot region by the Banihal pass (Bates 1980, 24). The route remained in use as a halting place till the time of Gulab Singh, the Maharaja of Jammu, and the new route via Udhampur was started (Anita, 34). Since then Krimchi was relegated to the background and lost its significance.

However, the archaeological remains from Krimchi tell us that it was an important Kushana site. Kushana bricks from the side of the platform of the existing remains of the temple number 4 have been found<sup>11</sup>. Further a base of Gupta temple too has been unearthed at Krimchi, thereby suggesting that some kind of trade activity flourished in the region. The existing groups of six temples however, belong to 10<sup>th</sup> century. The possibility that these temples were also constructed because of the efforts of the traders and trade guilds cannot be ruled out. This bears evidence from the fact that the temples bear a close resemblance with the Bhubaneshwar and Kashmir temples. The "shikhara" at Krimchi is in Orissan style, whereas the columns are fluted, which were very common in Kashmir. Moreover, unlike other founders of states in Jammu, tradition ascribes the foundation of the Krimchi royal house to a prince who came from the Kashmir valley (Anita, 246f.). And that of Kishtwar to the Rajput kings of Bengal (Hutchison/Vogel 1933, 640). Trade relations of Kashmir with the different parts of eastern India as well as Sakala are a well-known fact. Thus, the Orissan and Kashmiran influence on the temples of Krimchi is natural. There is also a possibility that a guild of traders of Jammu and more specifically Krimchi employed the migrant artisans for the construction of temples and gave them free hand to build a temple in accordance to the money allocated for that purpose.

Similarly, Babor is on the route which connected Jammu as well as Kashmir with Chamba and was used by the people of Kashmir to enter Chamba region (Bates 1980). The place has also yielded a foundation of Kushana bricks. According to the Archaeological Survey of India, if more extensive excavation is carried out in the region, it may yield some positive results. The temple building of this region too it seems did not depend



Fig. 4. Akhnur. Terracotta figure. Photo courtesy Dogra Art Museum, Jammu.

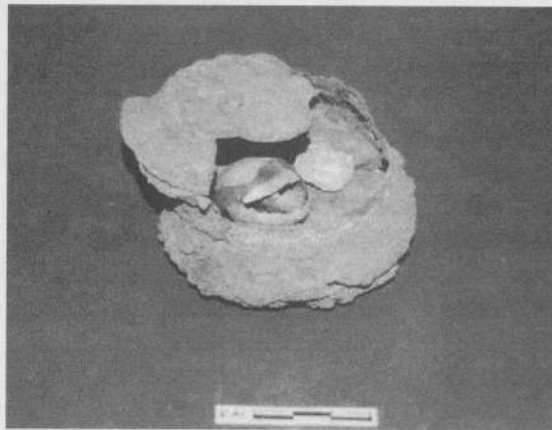


Fig. 5. Ambaran. Copper reliquary. Photo courtesy ASI.

upon royal munificence and was the work of the trade guilds.

Poonch and Rajauri were two states that were very important from the point of view of trade since ancient times. They were so significant that even their foundation is ascribed to the merchant Nara (Kalhana 1892, 712). Accordingly we are informed that the states of Rajauri and Poonch

<sup>11</sup> Archaeology reports.

were founded by one of the local hill chiefs of the Khasha tribe on the basis of the reference found in the Rajatarangini that "Nara and other merchants who were in possession of spotless horses and owned villages ruled Darva Abhisara and the neighbouring regions, setting up their own thrones" (Kalhana 1892, 712).

Moreover, since they lay on the ancient trade route, *Lavanasarani* or salt route, which later became famous as Mughal route, their importance as a trade centre increased. Salt route was very important for Jammu region as the entire trade with the valley was carried by the traders of the other parts of the country through this route<sup>12</sup>. The area was dominated by the merchants and perhaps, for their protection and also to house the revenue collected in kind, several forts and watch stations were constructed on this route. For example the Mangala Dei fort during the Dogra rule was also used as a granary and the revenue collected in kind in the form of food grains was stored here for the purpose of sale as well as distribution at the time of famine or other calamities. The inner apartment of the fort shows that a place for storage was there. It seems the fort was planned originally as a watch station for the safe passage of caravans and later improved and used to house the amount collected in the form of revenues.

In this connection we find that not much information is available. Stray finds like the coins of the Indo-Bactrian kings do not tell us anything concrete. The inscriptions from the adjoining areas like Himachal Pradesh too do not contain much information. The same is the position of the literary sources. Jammu has no text of early days and the chronicles belonging to 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries also do not have much information about the trade aspect of the region. Rajatarangini of Kalhana too is silent about Jammu.

However, the folk traditions of the region point out that the area of Jammu had a perfect setting for the trade and trade guilds to flourish. According to a tradition the land of Jammu excelled in virtue and no living creature bore enmity against each other. It is said that king Jambu Lochan, the founder of Jammu, while on an hunting expedition about four thousand years ago happened to see a lion and a deer drinking water at the same spot on the bank of river Tawi. The king was so impressed by this that he founded a new town and named it Jambupura (Jammu). Throughout recorded history the region of Jammu has been relatively free of strife and has been an area which has provided sanctuary to people. Guru Nanak Dev, the founding guru of the Sikh religion, is also known to have blessed Jammu while passing through the area and had declared that peace would reign in the area<sup>13</sup>. The people of Jammu also refer to the place as Dar-ul-Aman, the area where peace reigns. Even today Jammu provides sanctuary and shelter to hundreds and thousands

of people who have been rendered homeless in the last four decades. This wonderful quality of the region and the people inhabiting it has always encouraged traders to prefer this region for their activities.

#### ITEMS OF TRADE

The district of Doda in which fall the ancient states of Kashtwar (Kishtwar) and Bhadarvaksha (Bhadarwah) were very important from the point of view of the local produce. The region lay almost at the same altitude as Kashmir. The saffron grown here is of very superior quality. Another prized product which was in great demand in western world was the Kutha and this also grew in abundance in this region. Besides this the area was rich in the growth of minor forest produce like anardana, gucchi, honey, ghee, banaksha, etc. Banaksha is still known for its medicinal properties and was exported to Panjab. The name Kishtwar according to the local etymology means "the place of dried apples"<sup>14</sup>. Another name for Kashtwar was *Kashthavata*, the literal meaning of which is "garden of wood". Even till date the region is famous for its pine trees of different kinds like Deodar, Fer, Kail. The wood was transported to different areas through river Chenab.

The principality of Basholi was particularly famous for woollens and shawls. These and the Kashmiri shawls were in great demand. Reference to the use of Kashmiri shawls goes back to as early as epic days. The tradition has it that when lord Krishana went to the Kurus as a delegate from the Pandavas, the presents of Dharishrastra to him included ten thousand shawls of Kashmir<sup>15</sup>. Another item which seemed to grow in abundance in Kashmir was chillies. Kshemendra while referring to the corrupt administration in the valley writes that the officers were so corrupt that they even accepted chillies as bribe, thereby suggesting chillies to be the cheapest and the most abundant produce of the region.

#### ARTICLES MANUFACTURED

Wooden sandals (khadun), combs, spoons were manufactured in Rajauri and Thana Mandi. The wood used for their manufacture was perhaps Chikri. These items were in great demand in

<sup>12</sup> Kshemendra, *Samayamatrika*, Sarga II, 81.92.104.

<sup>13</sup> The Gurudawara at Donthali (paccadanga), Jammu is the only Gurudawara of the region which has the idol of GuruNanak Dev. The idol was installed by Maharaja Pratap Singh after the Guru blessed the town.

<sup>14</sup> Hutchison/Vogel 1933, 643. The name of dried apricot used in hills is kishta.

<sup>15</sup> Census of India, 1921, vol. 22, part 1 (reprint), Lahore 1923, 181.

Panjab<sup>16</sup>. As far as imports were concerned, the area, besides importing salt from Panjab, also imported sugar, cotton, copper, pepper etc. The local produce of the region was transported to the other parts of Jammu as well as outside Jammu via the land routes mentioned earlier.

Thus, we find that the region of Jammu developed because of the requirement of either big or small entrepot and continued to flourish till the advent of Hunas. After the Huna interregnum it continued to thrive on local trade. The local trade was mainly in the hands of the Kashmiri traders, who were very enterprising. References to Kashmiri traders carrying on trade with different regions, like Sakala, Bengal, etc. are many (Damodargupta 1961; Chandra 1977; Warmington 1974). This is so because Kashmiri traders did not confine their interest only in Kashmir's own products but also acted as agents for the sale of products of other areas. Jammu region continued to thrive on trade until as late as the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Hutchison and Vogel write, "During Ranjit Dev's reign, the town of Jammu prospered greatly. The confusion and disorder on the plains diverted trade to the hills and many wealthy merchants had sought asylum or established branch firms for safety and security. To all alike, Hindu or Mohammedan, the king extended a warm welcome and his capital grew and flourished" (Hutchison/Vogel 1933, 542). There is also a reference to the revival of old trade routes during that time (Hutchison/Vogel 1933, 542).

<sup>16</sup> Discussions with S. Sharma, Department of History, Jammu University.

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