

# Semthan: A Hellenistic outpost in Kashmir Himalaya

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## ABSTRACT

Semthan is one of the important archaeological sites in the southern part of the Kashmir valley. The very limited archaeological excavation at the site has revealed interesting results and a cultural continuity which bridged the gap from the end of the Megalithic phase to the emergence of Kushan culture in the valley. The material culture from Semthan significantly changed the whole fabric of Kashmir history and introduced hitherto unknown deposits from the Indo-Greek phase. From the archaeological investigations it becomes clear that the Indo-Greek phase at Semthan has seen a considerable change in the social and cultural proliferation as well as a subsistence change from the earlier cultures. Given the fact that the material culture at Semthan reveals a widespread Hellenistic influence, it is true that a recent find of Indo-Greek coins and associated material has put the region into the limelight once again and needs a serious archaeological investigation. This paper makes an attempt to highlight the past and recent sporadic finds from and around the archaeological site of Semthan and puts in perspective the Indo-Greek rule in the northern most Himalayan region of the Kashmir valley.

## KEYWORDS

Semthan; Kashmir; Indo-Greeks; Kushan; *Rajatarangini*; *Chakradhara*; NBPW; Coins.

## INTRODUCTION

Semthan<sup>1</sup> is an early historic archaeological site in the town of Bijbihara in Anantnag district in the Himalayan region of Jammu and Kashmir, India. The site is situated on a plateau known as Tsakdar, ancient Chakradhara, mentioned in the *Rajatarangini* of Kalhana (Kalhana, *Rajat*. I, 38), the 12<sup>th</sup> century chronicle of Kashmir and was first reported by Buhler (1877, 18). The site is located on the top of the loess *karewa*<sup>2</sup> formation, deposited by an ancient lake, at an altitude of 1646 masl, on the left bank of the Jhelum River. The river makes a sharp bend or inverted 'U' turn near Semthan, crossing it from the northern side, touching the north-western end of the plateau tableland, thereby making a peninsula (**Fig. 1**). The present-day village of Semthan is situated some fifty kilometres from the capital city of Srinagar on the Srinagar-Jammu national highway.

The archaeological remains of rubble and pebble stone walls, terracotta bricks, miniature terracotta figurines, pottery, coins, and other cultural material can be seen scattered in huge concentration in the area presently bound by the Jhelum River on the east and north, Semthan village on the west and the new colony of Bijbihara on the south roughly measuring from 90 to 100 hectares with a perimeter of around 3.5 km.

The most prominent archaeological features at the site are a series of high and low archaeological mounds dotting this whole landscape. Some of these mounds occupy the loess

1 33°48.33317' N, 75°05.82967' E

2 The term *karewa* is derived from Kashmiri dialect which means an 'elevated table-land'. *Karewas* are lacustrine deposits.



**Fig. 1: Location of Semthan on River Jhelum (Satelite imagery: Esri).**

plateaus on natural elevated areas. Other mounds occupy plains with the cultural occupation of more than one metre in stratigraphy. Identified by different names by the local population these mounds are known as Chakdhar (1646 masl), Rajma Teng (1622 masl), Sona Khut (1595 masl) and Shushrum Nag (1612 masl).<sup>3</sup> There are some other smaller mounds besides these four major mounds in this area. While two are occupied by modern graveyards the remaining five have been levelled for agricultural purposes.

The Semthan (Chakdhar) plateau is roughly trapezoid in shape measuring 275 m in length at its east-west axis on the northern side which varies up to 400 m on the same axis on the southern side. The average length of the mound on the north-south axis is 400 m. The surface of the plateau occupies approximately an area of 17 to 20 hectares having a rough perimeter of 1.5 km. The top of the plateau is plain and devoid of any modern building construction, except one Muslim shrine of late medieval times. There are a number of depressions varying in shape from circular, square and rectangular dotting the whole surface of the mound representing the ancient traces of habitation and activity areas (**Fig. 2**).

3 Relying mostly upon the local caretaker of this archaeological site and other ASI personnel for the names of these mounds (personal communication). The whole area beyond the Chakdhar mound on the northern side up to the banks of the Jhelum is full of archaeological material. Gaur (1987, 328) had estimated the perimeter of this archaeological site at between 1.5 and 2 km. Probably Gaur and others refer only to the Chakdhar mound at the site, where the excavations took place.



Fig. 2: Image showing archaeological features at Semthan (Google image, accessed on 27-01-2020).

## LITERARY EVIDENCE

The decline of the Mauryan Empire in northern India in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE created a power vacuum in the north-western of India. Indo-Greeks were the first, among the foreigners, who benefitted from the political disintegration and subjugated many parts of the region (THAPAR 2002, 213–217). The valley of Kashmir could not possibly keep herself immune from these convulsions (RAY 1957, 37). There is no direct reference to Indo-Greek rule in Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*. The text mentions Jalauka as the son and successor of Ashoka in Kashmir, who is supposed to have crushed a horde of *Mlecchas* and advanced as far as Kanauj (Kalhana I, 108–117). *Mlecchas* are referred in *Rajatarangini* as the foreign tribes who invaded Kashmir and the first reference is undoubtedly to Greeks after Ashoka's reign (STEIN 1900, note to v. 107). Some scholars, however, doubt whether these *Mlecchas* were Bactrian Greeks (BASHAM 1954, 145–146; NARAIN 1957, 9; THAPAR 1971, 411; SUBRAMONIAM 1995, 7). Immediately after Jalauka, Kalhana mentions King Damodara II, who seems to be none other than King Demetrius II of the Indo-Greek lineage. According to Tarn (1938, 155) 'Demetrius was the lord of the realm [...] which included Punjab and Southern Kashmir'.

After mentioning King Ashoka and his successor in great detail, Kalhana is not sure about the dynasty and lineage of Damodara II (Kalhana, *Rajat*. I, 153), which makes it doubtful that this king might have been of some foreign origin. Kalhana credits this king for having constructed a long dam for carrying water to the town he founded on the outskirts of present-day Srinagar city. The area is still known as Damodar Udar (Damodar Plateau) where Indo-Greek coins of many rulers<sup>4</sup> have been found in the vicinity. Yet another association of Kashmir with Indo-Greek rulers is of Menander. In the *Milindapanho* (*Mil.* III, 7.5), it is stated that the discussion between the Buddhist monk Nagasena and Milinda (Greek King Menander) was held at a place which was only twelve yojnas from Kashmir (RAY 1957, 32). From the readings of the text and the archaeological evidence, the place has been identified by many scholars as Sagala which corresponds to modern Sialkot (Pakistan), which was within the geographical limits of ancient Kashmir.

One can rightly presume that if the name Menander has been changed to Milinda in the literary texts of South Asia, similarly Demetrius becomes Damodara in Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*. It becomes highly probable to infer that Kalhana seems to have been influenced by the popularity of the rulers, which both had a larger geographical domain and fame – likewise, were Sanskritized and found a place in the *Rajatarangini*; as Sanderson (2009, 106) rightly points out, ‘The name Jalauka / Jalaukas, meaning “leech” in Sanskrit, is certainly implausible to our mind, except as a sanskritization of the Hephthalite name Javūka via Jalauka's by-form \**jaūka*. The motive for doing so is evident enough: to strengthen the Brahmans' claim of the antiquity of their local religious culture by pushing back traditions associated with a more recent anti-Buddhist, pro-Saiva, and pro-Brahman culture hero'. While keeping the actual identity concealed and creating a substitute to fit them in the cultural ethos of Kashmir and at the same time constructing an aura of historical authenticity without a proper chronology, Kalhana tried to restructure and fill the gaps. This was either his own innovation or from the texts he referred to.

The earliest literary reference to Semthan as a hub of religious activities is mentioned in the *Rajatarangini* of Kalhana. The site is referred in relation with a famous temple shrine of Vishnu situated on a hill near ancient Vijayesvara on the left bank of the Jhelum. *Vishnu-Chakradhara* and *Siva-Vijayesa* are referred to as the images of the two famous gods, geographically located in close proximity (Kalhana, *Rajat*. I, 38).

*Vishnu-Chakradhara* had an ancient shrine on the alluvial plateau, which lies on the left bank of the *Jhelum* one mile below the town of Bijbihara to its north-west. So deep rooted is the tradition in the local memory even today this plateau is still known as *Chakdhar* – an ancient appellation of *chakradhara*. Kalhana mentions frequently the temple and the hill of *Chakradhara* (Kalhana, *Rajat*. I, 38, 261; IV, 191; VIII, 971–995), which also served in ancient times as a fortified position. Stein during his explorations in Kashmir found numismatic evidence in considerable quantities pertaining to Greek and Indo-Scythian rule at Semthan (STEIN 1900, notes to 201–202). These finds leave no doubt of the remote antiquity of the site.

Semthan (*Chakdhar*) is mentioned in a variety of contexts from being a massive fortified settlement to a very strong centre of political activities. The importance of the settlement is such that it found mention in the text as the only place in southern Kashmir where water wheels were employed by the State for irrigation purposes during the historical period. The settlement has seen many ups and downs throughout its history. The temple of *Chakradhara* was burnt down in the 11<sup>th</sup> century by the rebel troops of King Bhiksacara (Kalhana, *Rajat*. VIII, 971–995). The temple courtyard was protected by massive wooden ramparts and gates. Stein,

4 Unpublished. Cf. the accession register of the Central Asian Museum at Kashmir University.

during his visit to the site in 1895 saw ‘traces of a quadrangular enclosure, about forty yards square, marked by hollows in the ground’ (STEIN 1900, comment on VIII, 974) probably the last indications of these wooden ramparts.

## MATERIAL CULTURE

The archaeological site of Semthan was subject to excavations by the former north-western circle, now Srinagar Circle of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) for three years from 1977–1981<sup>5</sup> (*IAR* 1981, 69–70; *IAR* 1983, 21–23). The results of these excavations were never published; however these were reported in the yearly bulletin of *Indian Archaeology-A Review*<sup>6</sup> (*IAR*) and a few later publications (*GAUR* 1987). The site was also subject to Site Catchment Analysis recently which helped in assessing the economic potential of the site, the exploitation of natural resources, the nature of interaction with the network of satellite settlements located in the catchment area of Semthan and beyond. The survey also led to the discovery of a number of new settlements from the early historic period and the associated material culture (LONE 2019).

The first systematic archaeological excavation at Semthan was conducted by R.S. Bisht of the ASI who reported its results in *IAR* 1980–81 (*IAR* 1983, 21–23). Here, for the first time, the actual cultural sequence at the site was confirmed. The excavators reached up to the natural soil at a depth of 10.2 m (*GAUR* 1987, 327–337). A total of 35 successive floor levels (**Fig. 3**) were encountered which reflected six periods of cultural occupation, ranging from the pre-Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) period up to the medieval times without any significant break (*GAUR* 1987, 329). From the references of these excavations the following cultural sequence of the occupation levels could be made (*GAUR* 1987, 328–335; SHALI 1993, 111–121, 143, 214):

- Period I – ‘Pre-Northern Black Polished Ware’ 700–500 BCE
- Period II – ‘Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW)’ 500–200 BCE
- Period III – ‘Indo-Greeks’ ca. 200 BC–ca. 1<sup>st</sup> century CE
- Period IV – ‘Kushan-Huna’ ca. 1<sup>st</sup> century CE–500 CE
- Period V – ‘Hindu period’ 500 CE–1300 CE
- Period VI – ‘Late Medieval’ 1300 CE onwards

The third phase of occupation at Semthan is termed as the Indo-Greek period.<sup>7</sup> It commences from ca. 200 BC and continues up to the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE. The occupational level at Semthan of this period is only 40 cm thick, marked by a series of successive floor levels. The period revealed well developed and sophisticated pottery unknown to Period I and Period II. This is a distinct pottery of very thin fabric having a slip ranging from bright red to orange (*IAR* 1983, 21) and pink in colour (*GAUR* 1987, 331; SHALI 2001, 128). It was characterized by the frequent use of functional devices like a pinched lip, spout, handle, and ring or pedestal base (SHALI 2001, 128). The prominent shapes include goblets, earthen plates (pans), bowls (*IAR* 1983, 21; AGRAWAL 1998, 80), vases with out-turned and internally thickened rims, and vessels with

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- 5 Shali (2001) suggests four seasons of excavation at Semthan by the ASI. However, he does not furnish the proper details of the years of excavations and its subsequent results.
  - 6 *IAR* is an yearly publication report of the Archaeological Survey of India of excavations and explorations throughout the country. These are however, merely sketchy references.
  - 7 As this paper deals with the evidence of Indo-Greeks at the site, therefore only relevant cultural material of the occupational level shall be discussed.

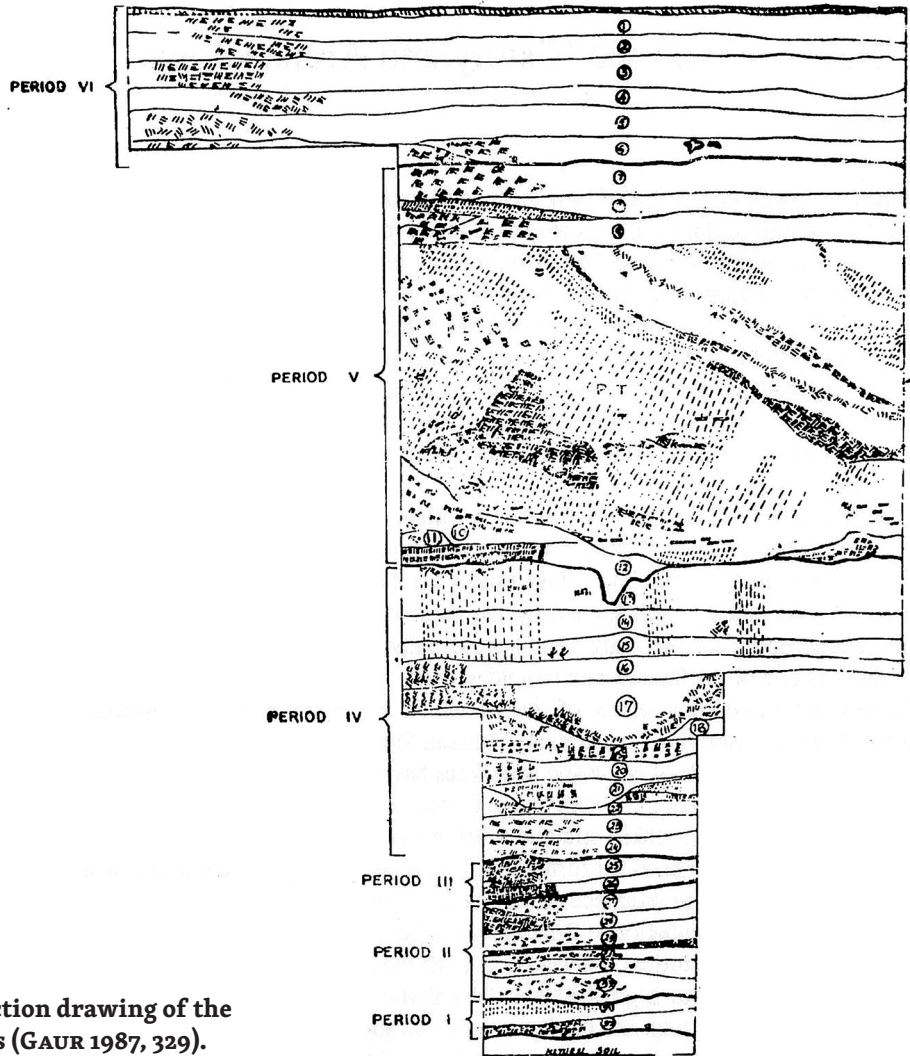
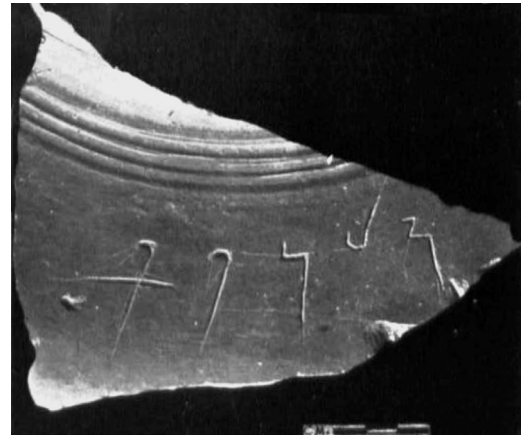


Fig. 3: Semthan. Section drawing of the 1982 excavations (GAUR 1987, 329).

high necks (SHALI 1993, 120). The most significant discovery of this period is a potsherd with an inscription in five letters (Fig. 4) in Kharoshti script engraved below the rim portion or the neck of the pot on the external side (IAR 1983, 21, pl. XIII B; SHALI 1993, 120). The inscription was deciphered by Shali who reads it as ‘dhamorai’ or ‘dharmo (rajai)’, which would refer to a king, probably Menander who visited Kashmir during this period (SHALI 1993, 120) while according to the actual interpretation, which merits attention, it could also be Demetrius (II). Lahiri (1992, 270) places this inscription to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC while Shali (1993) dated this inscription to the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. It has been shown above how Damodara of Kalhan’s *Rajatarangini* comes close to the identity of Indo-Greek king Demetrius (II).

Besides this, a small clay seal depicting an Indo-Greek deity was also discovered in this level (IAR 1983, 21, pl. XI A) identified as the Greek god Apollo (GAUR 1987, 331). Another clay seal or amulet has a depiction of an eagle with its head turning left having half open wings (Fig. 5). Similar types have been reported from the old delta of the Murghab River in Turkmenistan (SARIANIDI 2002, 186). Yet another terracotta seal recovered from the area has a human depiction in a seated posture on one side, while on the other side a prominent stupa depiction can be seen (Fig. 6). The most significant discoveries of this period are, however, Indo-Greek



**Fig. 4: Inscription on a potsherd from Semthan (IAR 1983, pl. XIII B).**



**Fig. 5: Terracotta seal or pendent depicting an Eagle, (Central Asian Museum, University of Kashmir) for comparison see SARIANIDI 2002, 186.**



**Fig. 6: Terracotta seal depicting a human in a seating posture and Stupa on the back (Central Asian Museum, University of Kashmir).**

coins (IAR 1983, 21, XI C). These coins were collected from the surface exploration at Semthan. Among the surface finds, coins of Menander were prominent, besides the copper issues of the rulers of the Indo-Scythians and Indo-Parthians like Azis, Azilises, and Abdages (SHALI 1993). In the last couple of years a good number of coins from surface collections have been reported at Semthan. These include the coins of Hermaeus, Manander, Heliocles, and Apolodotus (Fig. 7-10). Besides these, numerous coins of Demetrius, Eukretides, Antimachus, Archibus, Laysis, and Hippostratus have been reported in the Kashmir region from time to time (KAK 1923, 123-125). Cunningham during his visit to Kashmir found a number of silver coins of Azis and Azilises in the foothills in Baramulla (North Kashmir) and on the bank of the Jhelum River (CUNNINGHAM 1971, 44).

The Indo-Greek level at Semthan yielded a large number of terracotta figurines of humans and animals. Prominent among them is a terracotta human head with a serene facial expression (SHALI 1993, 120). The most common subject is a draped standing female, a number of detached broken heads, including that of a bearded and moustachioed male, and a variety of other figures have also been discovered. The stance of the fully draped type (headless) is



**Fig. 7: Coin of King Hermaeus (Central Asian Museum, University of Kashmir).**



**Fig. 8: Coin of King Manander (Central Asian Museum, University of Kashmir).**



**Fig. 9: Coin of King Heliocles (Central Asian Museum, University of Kashmir).**



**Fig. 10: Coin of King Appolodotus (Central Asian Museum, University of Kashmir).**

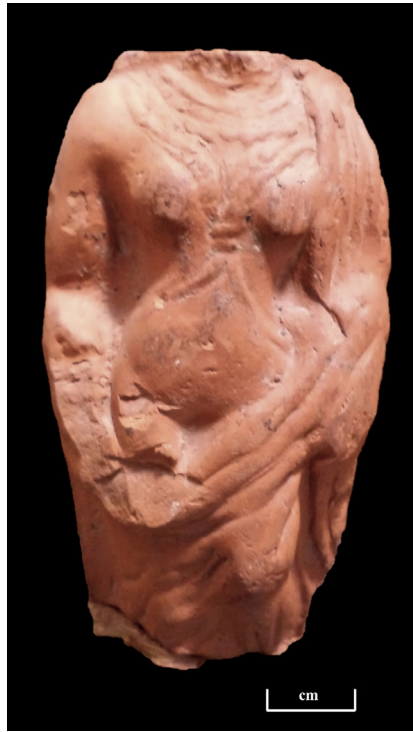
a bit flexed with the left leg bent in front of the right (**Fig. 11**). The drapery is long, covering the feet and belted high on the waist. A long himation over the left shoulder and wrapped around the lower front part of the body and the left arm with an edge being held by the right hand. A notable feature in other figurines (**Fig. 12-13**) of a similar type is the beaded necklace and semi-draped type, uncovered from the shoulders to the top of the thighs, the exposed right shoulder and hip heavily emphasised. The features like arched eyebrows, upper eyelids, pouting lips and narrow nose are more prominent. The miniature figure (**Fig. 14**) of a woman wearing a round necklace followed by beaded bands crossing the body in the middle and moving in a right and left direction continuing towards the back portion of the body. The figure has a well decorated belt type covering the waist area and braided hair. In form and appearance these figurines could not be compared with the neighboring territories of Pakistan, India, and Central Asia. The sites like Taxila and Charsada in Pakistan have no doubt revealed somewhat similar Kushan period objects while the figurines from Semthan belong to the Indo-Greek period. In style and composition, they bear a marked similarity to the fragmentary female figurine depicting a mother holding a child, excavated at Tepe Zargaran near Balkh (SIUDMAK 2013, 42), and found in stratigraphical correspondence with Kushan period pottery vessels; it has the same deep folding and irregular pleating of the garment as the Semthan examples, and offers the closest comparison from this region (SIUDMAK 2013, 42). The animal figurines recovered from Semthan are mostly broken and mention can be made of the squatting postures of monkey types having mostly an Indian subject matter.

Further systematic surface exploration at the site also led to the discovery of material remains typical of those excavated from the site. During the transect survey, potsherds identical to Indo-Greek pottery found during excavations were collected from the eastern portion of the Semthan (*Chakdhar*) mound and on the *Rajma Teng* mound. Among the Indo-Greek pottery,





**Fig. 11:** Female figurine (headless) Semthan (Central Asian Museum, University of Kashmir).



**Fig. 12:** Female figurine (headless) semi-draped, Semthan (Central Asian Museum, University of Kashmir).



**Fig. 13:** Female figurine, semi-draped, Semthan (Central Asian Museum, University of Kashmir).

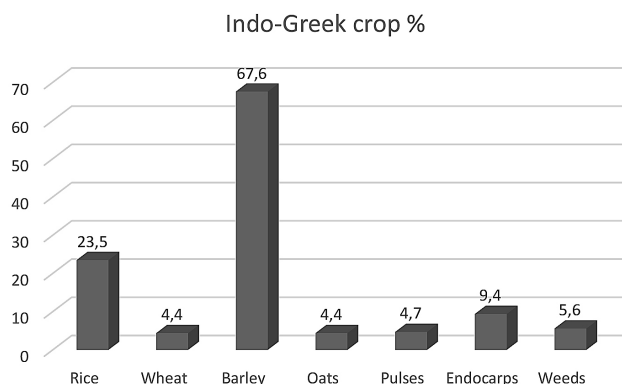


**Fig. 14:** Miniature figurine of a woman, Semthan (Central Asian Museum, University of Kashmir).

rim portions of the goblets and the big earthen plates are typical. One such example roughly having a diameter of 32.75 cm and 5.25 cm in depth has been illustrated by Agrawal (1998, 81). The section of the plate is 0.5 cm at the base which tapers to 0.9 cm near the rim. The internal portion of the rim is decorated by small incised designs in two concentric circles. In the middle of the plate, on the internal side, is an incised design of a star. However, the external side of the plate is devoid of any decorations.

### SUBSISTENCE AND LAND USE

The excavations at Semthan also led to the recovery of palaeobotanical remains (**Tab. 1**) giving an idea of the magnitude of the cultivation of different crops (**Fig. 15**). The number of grains, seeds, endocarps, and remains of plant species from different periods<sup>8</sup> of occupation are reference to the subsistence pattern of the people at Semthan. The centrality of the subsistence pattern is a critical link to understand the human-plant relationship at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE at Semthan. The vast palaeobotanical material recovered indicates that people practised double cropping and mixed cropping patterns with both *rabi* and *khari*<sup>9</sup> crops grown in the region.



**Fig. 15: Percentage of different crops during Indo-Greek occupation (LONE et al. 1993).**

Plant/Crop Species	Botanical Name
<b>Cereals</b>	
<b>Rice</b>	Oryza sativa linn
<b>Wheat</b>	Triticumaestinum
<b>Barley</b>	Hordeum vulgare
<b>Common millet</b>	Panicum maliaceum
<b>Endocarps</b>	
<b>Walnut</b>	Juglans regia
<b>Apricot</b>	Prunus armeniaca
<b>Hackberry</b>	Celtis australis
<b>Peach</b>	Prunus persica

Plant/Crop Species	Botanical Name
<b>Woods</b>	
<b>Indian spruce</b>	Picea smithiana
<b>Guelder</b>	Vibernum sp.
<b>Willow</b>	Salix
<b>Elm</b>	Ulmus wallichiana
<b>Indian horse-chestnut</b>	Aesculus indica
<b>Weeds</b>	
<b>Oats</b>	Avena fatua
<b>Corn Cromwell</b>	Lithospermum arvense
<b>Bushvetch/Vetchling</b>	Vicia/Lathyrus sp.

**Tab. 1: Palaeobotanical remains recovered from Semthan excavations. (Source: IAR 1980-81; BUTH - BISHT - GAUR 1982; GAUR 1987; LONE - KHAN - BUTH 1988; LONE - BUTH - KHAN 1990; BUTH - LONE - KHAN 1993; LONE - KHAN - BUTH 1993).**

- 8 The list comprising the common name and the scientific name of the plant/pulse species has been reconstructed from a number of sources (BUTH - BISHT - GAUR 1982; IAR 1983; GAUR 1987; LONE - KHAN - BUTH 1988; LONE - BUTH - KHAN 1990; BUTH - LONE - KHAN 1993; LONE - KHAN - BUTH 1993).
- 9 *Rabi* and *Kharif* are the two cropping patterns which are adopted in many Asian countries, depending upon the monsoon. The season of *Kharif* crops starts with the onset of monsoon and ends when the rainy season is over. On the other hand, *Rabi* crops are grown in winter, i.e. sown when the monsoon ends and harvested before the advent of the summer season.

The palaeobotanical studies at the site revealed a major diversity in the ancient food culture and economy at Semthan. In the initial phase of occupation (i.e. Pre-NBPW), rice dominated as the major crop to be cultivated, which was replaced by barley under the NBPW phase (56.25%) and subsequently under the Indo-Greeks (67.6%) (LONE – KHAN – BUTH 1993, 210). Replacing rice with barley as a staple food during these phases is significant. This reflected the changing taste of the different set of people who colonized this region soon after the end of the Pre-NBPW phase at the site. The same was witnessed after the Indo-Greek occupation was over. Now instead of barley, wheat became the staple food which was cultivated during the Kushan times. There was a diversity of botanical assemblages across sites in the valley which seems to suggest at least some form of localized selection of crops. The recent examination of the stratified botanical remains from Qasim Bagh, where wheat dominated throughout the sequence dated 2000–1400 BC (SPATE *et al.* 2017, 576), whereas barley and wheat together make up the largest proportion of crops during the Kushan period at Kanispur (POKHARIA *et al.* 2018, 484) at nearly double the quantity of summer rice and millets. The recent earliest dates for millet in the Kashmir valley have given altogether new data (YAROO *et al.* 2020) predating Qasim Bagh and Kanispur. The argument, that the returning dominance of winter wheat/barley may be ascribed to their higher calorific returns (BETTS *et al.* 2019), as well as their suitability to cooler-dry conditions following the Megalithic period in Kashmir seems relevant.

The palaeobotanical analysis at various archaeological sites across the valley hints at the long-term patterns of human adaptation to the ecology of the valley. Many new species were observed as new entrants during the Indo-Greek period, which were not noticed in the palaeobotanical remains of the earlier periods of occupation at the site. All this indicates that with the changing occupation at the site, tremendous changes were felt in the tool repertoire, ceramic traditions and even in the food culture at the site.

The results of the site catchment analysis at Semthan (LONE 2019) have helped in assessing the economic potential of the site, exploitation of natural resources, nature of interaction with the network of satellite settlements located in the catchment area of Semthan and beyond. The survey also led to the discovery of a number of new settlements of the early historic period and the associated material culture. Within the catchment area of five kilometres radius, Semthan was divided into two zones – one on the north and north-eastern side of the site beyond the Jehlum River and another on the south and the south-western sides. While the former might have been used as a source for forest products, mainly for game and pasture lands due to the hilly nature of the terrain, the latter fulfilled almost all the agricultural needs of the people supplying grains and clay for pottery. The area from 2.5 km to 5 km and beyond might have satisfied all other needs like the hunting of small and big game, forest products, and also some mineral resources. This area might have served as an ideal pasture land as well. The catchment area of the site may have extended beyond 5 km on the left side of the river and it was probably not much utilized beyond the plains on the northern side (LONE 2019).

## CONCLUSION

The archaeology of the early historic Semthan is interesting and promising. The important contribution made by the Semthan excavations to Kashmir archaeology is the continuation of cultural settlement from 800 BC–1300 AD. Semthan is the only archaeological site in the Kashmir valley which provided important evidence of three unknown cultures; Pre-Northern Black Polished Ware (Pre-NBPW), Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW), and the Indo-Greeks, thereby bridging the gap between the Neolithic and the Kushan period in the Kashmir valley.

The miniature terracotta figurines from Semthan have been distinguished on the basis of having a Hellenistic and Indian subject matter. Numismatic evidence of kings Euthydemus, Eukratides I, Apollodotus, Menander, Antimachus II, and Hippostratos indicate that Indo-Greek settlement took place in the valley sometime around ca. 200-180 BC and continued to flourish till the arrival of the Kushans on the political scene.

The Semthan excavations have provided clues to some of the unsolved problems in Kashmir history and archaeology and has further widened the scope of Indo-Greek studies in northern India especially in the Himalayan region of Kashmir. The continuity of the cultural proliferation from Indo-Greeks to Kushans and further down to the local dynastic rulers of Kashmir could be widely understood from the art-centric narratives (SHAH 2014) as well as impressive temple architecture, which undoubtedly has a solid foundation and imprints from Hellenistic art. The best examples of Greek or Graeco-Roman temple architecture of Kashmir (BROWN 1959, 156; HONDA 2001, 102; BANGROO 2009, 84; HARDY 2019, 264; HAMDANI 2021, 43) are not far from Semthan. The group of temples at Awantipora and the sun temple of Martand are among the Greek style temples located around Semthan.

Semthan became very prominent during the Indo-Greek occupation of Kashmir. As Kashmir maintained very close relations with the Gandharan territories, the occupation at Semthan would have been an outpost of their political link with the valley. That is why Semthan became a strategic place for the ruling powers to occupy before and even after the Indo-Greeks. Few issues of coins of some Indo-Greek kings have been reported from many places in Kashmir, albeit without any archaeological context, and Semthan so far remains the only site revealing occupational layers dated to the Indo-Greek period. The excavations have uncovered many terracotta male and female figurines in a unique Hellenistic style which may be attributed to the Indo-Greeks and accentuated the need for fresh archaeological investigations which can help in reconstructing the Hellenistic past of the Himalayan region of the Kashmir valley.

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