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Unearthing the Mysteries:

An Archaeological Survey of Ichnad Village in
Aishmuqam, Anantnag, Jammu and Kashmir

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Abstract

This research paper discusses the preliminary results of an archaeological field survey carried at Ichnad, an ancient settlement located in the Aishmuqam area of Anantnag district, Jammu and Kashmir. The survey was conducted in two seasons. In season first, few pottery sherds, Kushana period bricks and one broken stone sculpture were documented, from the lower foothill of the village. Oral sources prompted us to revisit the settlement for the second time which led to the discovery of another settlement on the mountain peak towards the northern side of the village. Huge terracotta storage jars, few pottery sherds and one architectural member of a door was noticed in addition to ruins of a shelter and rubble masonry fortification of a watch station. The analysis of the data permitted us to date the lower terrace of the area to the Kushana period and upper area was probably used for security purposes where a watch station (*drang*) was discovered of the early medieval times.

Keywords: Kushana, Early Medieval, Terracotta storage jars, Ichnad, Karkota, *drang*, *dhaka*

1. Introduction

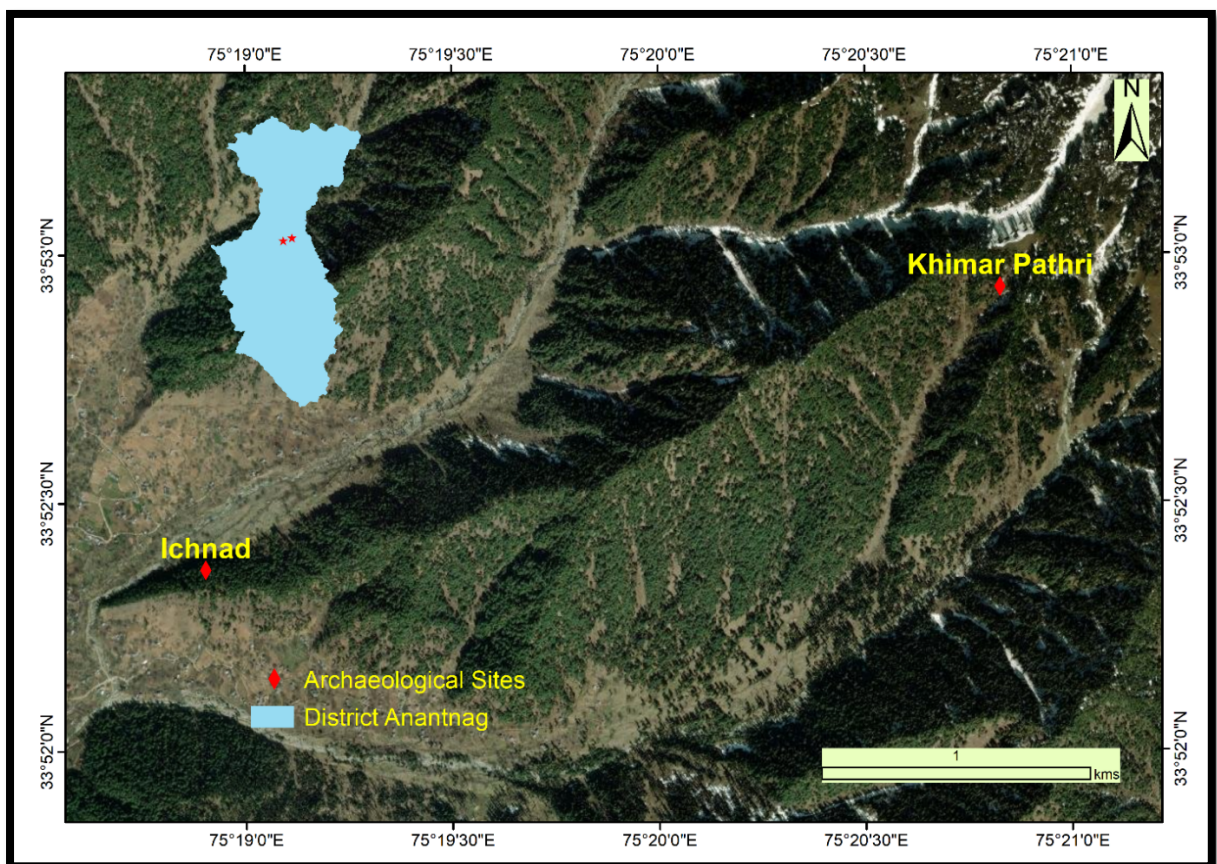
Ichnad is a small modern village located in between two hill ranges of the Pir Panjal mountains in the southern part of the valley of Kashmir in Aishmuqam area of Anantnag district. The village lies at a distance of about five kilometres from Aishmuqam on its eastern side. The landscape of this area is quite interesting and significant from many perspectives. This area is historically rich and has provided many clues about its habitation in the past centuries.

The historical importance of this area came into lime light due to a village-to-village survey conducted by the authors in the spring of 2022, when Kushana period bricks

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were recovered from the northern slopes of the hill (33°52"13.16' N; 75°18"53.90' E) (Map.1) along with some potsherds and a broken stone sculpture, at an elevation of 2122 masl (Fig 1.). The brickbats were found heaped at the corner of a levelled field used for cultivation by the locals, who claim that these bricks were part of a masonry wall of a structure which was removed some years ago. Adjacent to this field is a spring (*naag*), presently providing irrigation facilities to the surrounding cultivable fields of the village. Two brickbats measuring 19×17.5×5cms and 24×17×5cms (Fig. 2 A, B) were collected for further analysis. During the survey, the geographical and archaeological features of the area were documented for further examination, which hinted towards the occupation of the settlement during the Kushana period. The analysis of the finds opened new vistas about the settlement archaeology of the forests in this area and hence tempted us to revisit this site. While collecting the oral sources, we were informed about a fort (*qila*) and pottery jars at another place on the top of the hill summit on its northern side.



Map.1. Location of archeological site at Ichnad (Source: Google Map)



Fig.1. Broken stone fragment of a sculpture (Photo: Yasir)



Fig. 2. A, B. Kushana period brickbats (Photo: Yasir)

2. Settlement Pattern

During the next field survey carried in October 2022, we approached this settlement which is located on the top of the hill summit, locally known as *Khimar Pathri* (33°52"57.0' N; 075 °20"39.6' E) situated at an elevation of 3034 masl. A steep track of about 4.5 kilometres led us to the top of the hill where this site is located. While trekking towards the top, burnt bricks were noticed at many spots on the foothill, probably belonging to the Kushana period.

The site of *Khimar Pathri* is nestled on the top of the hill and is fortified with a rubble masonry stone wall on all sides in a rectangular fashion, traces of which were located and documented during the survey. The length and breadth of the rectangular enclosure walls are 15.36 and nine meters, respectively. It occupied roughly an area of 138 square meters with a perimeter of 48 metres. The height of the wall on the south-western side is around 1.8 metres (Fig.3). The wall is visible on all sides from the external side, however, some portions of the rubble wall on the southeast and

northwest are displaced now. The entrance of the settlement could not be established, but a stone slab measuring 121× 52 ×16 cms was found lying in the north-eastern corner of the rectangular fortification. The stone slab is rectangular in shape and bears concave marks; a small cuboid measuring 23x10x4 cms, and some circular cup marks. The design of the slab hints towards its utility as a lower member of a wooden door, probably a sill/door jamb, having proper locking holes. (Fig 4). These rectangular and cup marks probably acted as locking holes, a technique prevalent during early medieval times in Kashmir, whose evidences are also visible in the stone blocks and slabs used in the entrances of the Martand temple.



Fig.3. Masonry rubble wall at *Khimar Pathri* (Photo: Yasir)



Fig. 4. Stone sill (Lower member of a door) (Photo: Yasir)

In the centre of the rectangular fortification, a masonry stone wall was noticed, half visible beneath the ground, adjacent to the heaped rubble and mud debris, which seems to be ruins of a temporary shelter constructed of stone, wattle, and daub. In the north-western corner of the settlement, a huge storage jar was noticed buried in the ground, whose rim and body portion was exposed and documented (Fig.5). This storage jar is made of burnt clay, and its section is two cms thick. Adjacent to the storage jar on the northern side, four circular pit-like features were also noticed, indicating the remnants of more storage jars buried inside the ground, whose actual evidence was not noticed. One local who accompanied us to the site informed us that these four pit-like features were actually the remnants of the similar huge storage jars buried beneath the ground, as were seen by locals few years ago.



Fig 5. Body portion of a big terracotta Storage jar (Photo: Yasir)

3. Ceramic Analysis

While scanning the ground inside the stone masonry wall of the site, in addition to the storage jars, some diagnostic and non-diagnostic pottery sherds were also observed and collected for further analysis. The collected pottery was washed and cleaned for documentation. The initial typology led us to divide the sherds into six different types basing our observation on the colour, paste, inclusions, and condition of each potsherd as was visible to the naked eye. The pottery types varied from thick

to medium sections varying in profile thickness from 0.8 to 0.4 cms. One sample of a huge storage jar was also collected with a maximum profile thickness of 2.2 cms. The material or paste used in the manufacturing process of these potsherds was not well levigated and bear witness to large grains of sand particles used as temper. The visible porosity, especially in the profile of the sherds, mostly those which are thicker, hints towards the use of organic inclusions in the clay matrix of the pottery. The colour of the profiles of these potsherds varied from red to greyish and black and even buff red. Some of the sherds also bear slip on the external surface varying in colour from red to deep red. However, the huge storage jars were devoid of any slip. (Fig.6).



Fig 6. Pot sherds (Photo: Yasir)

Three rim shreds varied in diameter from 2.6 cms to 5.1 cms. These rim shreds represented open-mouthed vessels, including saucers and possibly a cooking pot with a thick, out-turned rim. Additionally, a miniature vessel was represented by a sherd that had a profile thickness of 0.4 cms and a wide mouth with a rim diameter of 5.1 cms. Lastly, one diagnostic sherd of a bowl base with a profile thickness of 0.7 cms was also collected and documented. (Fig.7)

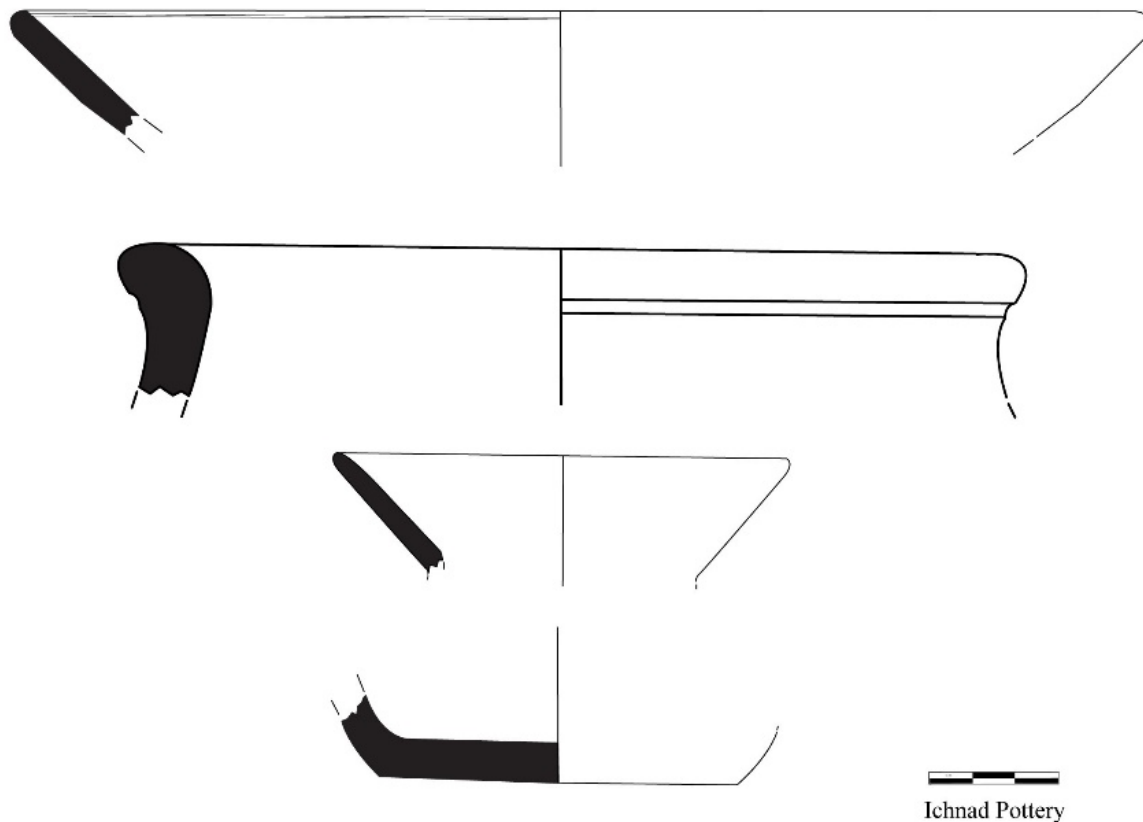


Fig 7. Drawing of the diagnostic wares (Source: Rashid)

Discussion

The location of this settlement in a forest has opened new vistas in the settlement archaeology of Kashmir, where the relationship between the people and their environment could be visualised most accurately. Geographically speaking, the settlement at Ichnad probably started in the lower terraces of the hillock, very close to the foothills where the present village is located. The evidence recovered during the survey placed the earliest date of the settlement, possibly to the Kushana period.

Pertinently, the standard brick size commonly found from many Kushan period settlements in Kashmir like at Kanispora is 27x19x5 cm.³ The evidence from Ichnad corresponds to this universal brick size of the Kushan period hinting towards the occupation of this settlement initially by the Kushanas in the forest region of south Kashmir. While climbing the steep hill towards its top, some brick bats were also

³ *Indian archaeology 1998-1999—A Review*. New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India. P.40.

noticed at a couple of isolated spots at irregular distances hinting towards the presence of more structures on the slope of the hill. This assumption is supplemented by the recovery of the copper coins of the Kushana period by the locals from the field in addition to stone sculptures etc. ⁴

The location of the Kushana period material culture from the lower foothills at the village thus seems important. The presence of similar material culture from other Kushana period settlements like at Lidroo (33°58'21.7' N; 75°19'53.7' E) (2283 masl) and Daradkut, Huthmura (33°46'01.1' N; 075°13'28.9' E) (1737 masl) on the other side of the same mountain range speaks volumes about the communication linkages of many settlements during the early historic times. These mountain ranges and passes continued to occupy strategic positions as far as the functioning of trade and communication routes resting places and security posts are concerned. Majority of the Kushana period settlements in the Liddar valley of south Kashmir are located on these strategic mountain peaks overlooking the mountain passes, which were frequently passed by traders, merchants, students, and even by pilgrims.

The settlement at Ichnad nestled at the top summit of the mountain known as *Khimar Pathri* probably was not a permanent residential site, rather this could have been a temporary shelter. The isolated location and the elevation of the settlement and the presence of the material remains could be explained from many perspectives.

The recovery of few diagnostic sherds at the site hints towards the presence of a temporary shelter at this altitude which could have accommodated only few persons. Given the geographical location of the top summit of the mountain at an elevation of 3034 metres above sea level, the presence of a storage jar hints towards the idea of storage of the grains for consumption by probably those who were part of the security system or perhaps by some hermits or ascetics. The premise that soldiers guarded the valley of Kashmir on these high-altitude mountain peaks holds ground here. Among

⁴ The coins and stone sculpture are with the locals who showed them to us during the field survey. They allowed to photograph the sculpture only (see Fig.2).

the ceramics observed at the site, only the storage jars are comparable to those found inside the Martand and Awantipora temple complexes,⁵ belonging to the early medieval period of Kashmir. These storage jars were manufactured to store surplus (tribute) in the temples. However, their nature and functionality varied. At Ichnad, they also served as storage space for perhaps grains or food for longer survival periods at these isolated mountain peaks, which are not easily accessible on a daily routine especially during the harsh and snowy winters of Kashmir.

Since the valley of Kashmir is engulfed by mountain ranges of the Himalayas and the Pir Panjal in all directions, it was approachable only through various passes located in different directions. These passes had played a vital role in the rise and fall of many cultures and historical civilizations of the region. Mention may be made of firstly Mihirakula, who entered the valley through Pir Panjal pass near Hirpora, Surapora of the *Rajatarangini* of Kalhana, via the Mughal road;⁶ and secondly of Hiuen Tsang who entered the valley from the Baramulla pass⁷ and left it via the Tosamaidan pass towards Punch.⁸ Throughout her history the guarding and protection of these mountain passes was mandatory for the rulers of Kashmir to save it from foreign invasions, to keep a check on the movement of pilgrims and students and most importantly to facilitate the to-and-fro movement of traders and merchants.

The historical sources of the region particularly the *Rajatarangini* of Kalhana, often mentioned these watch stations as *dranga* and *dhaaka* during the early medieval times.⁹ Kalhana also talks about the *dvaras* which are actually the passes that connect Kashmir with the rest of the world.

⁵ *Annual Report 1913-1914*. Calcutta: Archaeological Survey of India. P. 54; *Indian Archaeology 1969-1970—A Review*. New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India. P.13.

⁶ Stein, M. A. (1900 (reprint 1961). *Kalhana's Rajatarangini*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. i.320 fn.

⁷ Stein, *Kalhana's Rajatarangini*. II.P.355.

⁸ Stein, *Kalhana's Rajatarangini*. II.Pp.356-7.

⁹ Stein, *Kalhana's Rajatarangini*. i.122, viii.1577, 1578, 2010.

The settlements like *Khimar Pathri* could have also served as watch stations, which were sort of check post or entry points thereby taking care of the arrival and departure of the people from the Valley. This phenomena of establishing watch stations in Kashmir became common during the Karkota rule which emerged as a very powerful military empire during the early medieval times, particularly under Lalitaditya. 'The term *dranga* signifies a watch station established near mountain passes for the double purpose of guarding the approaches to the valley and of collecting customs revenue'¹⁰ known as octroi duty, which was a type of tax levied on goods that were brought into a particular country or city for use or sale. In the early medieval times of Kashmir evasion of paying taxes to rulers was a norm. R.S. Sharma, while quoting *Kathasaritasagara* of Somadeva, an 11th century CE treatise of Kashmir, describes how in order to evade the octroi tax liability, certain merchants frequently approached the valley through the forests.¹¹

The term *dranga* has linguistically survived even upto the modern times as in case of village name Ferozpur *dranga*, a modern-day hamlet in Tangmarg area of north Kashmir, which was known as 'Karkotadranga' in the pre-Muslim era of Kashmir.¹² This post controlled the Tosamaidan route to Punch (ancient *parnotsa*).¹³

Conclusion

One can conclude by saying that the archaeological importance of the Ichnad village is considerable. This village seems to had been occupied initially during the Kushana period and continued upto the early medieval times, especially the *Khimar Pathri* area at the peak of the mountain.

The geographical distribution of the material culture in the village hints towards the widespread habitation of the area during the early historic times. This probably acted

¹⁰ Stein, *Kalhana's Rajatarangini*. II. P. 291.

¹¹ Sharma. Ram Sharan, (2003). *Early Medieval Indian Society*. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan. P.187.

¹² Stein, *Kalhana's Rajatarangini*. iv. 1596, 1997.

¹³ Kak, Ram Chandra. (1933, rp.2020). *Ancient Monuments of Kashmir*. New Delhi: Aryan Books. Pp. 159-160.

as an important trading route also as is evidenced by the location of another settlement at the peak of mountain at *Khimar Pathari* which acted perhaps as a watch station as well as a custom station. The present survey could only unfold the part of the secret of this settlement, much needs to be done in order to highlight the true nature of this archaeological settlement in the forested area of south Kashmir.

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