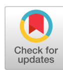

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Sīyaḍoṇi: an unplanned town of the Gurjara-Pratīhāra times

Aman Mishra*

Indian Institute of Technology Mandi, VPO Kamand, Mandi District, Himachal Pradesh 175005, India
*Corresponding author. Email: amanmishra1402@gmail.com

Abstract
Between the sixth and the tenth century, India passed through a new phase of urbanization. This has been identified as the third urbanization in India, setting it apart from two earlier phases. The focus of historical investigations for this period has generally been on capital cities and royal centres, or centres of pilgrimage. Port cities have also received some attention. There are no exclusive studies on unplanned cities from this period other than the overview that a few historians provide. In this article, I am focusing on one of them, Sīyaḍoṇi in central India, in order to understand how urban centres developed in this period without being royal centres, places of pilgrimage or hubs of maritime trade. I propose that Sīyaḍoṇi emerged as a merchant town on an important trade route and its commerce-centred economy was reinforced by deep-seated practices of rent-seeking involving generation of income through ground rent, taxation and interest on loans.

Between the sixth and the tenth century, India passed through a new phase of urbanization. This has been identified as the third urbanization in India,[1] setting it apart from two earlier phases, viz., urbanization in the Harappan centres, which commenced *c.* 2600 BCE, and the post-Vedic urbanization, which began in the sixth century BCE. Historians have associated the third urbanization with a set of inter-related processes, including agrarian expansion, trade, regional state formation, the making of regions, temple building and the ideology of *bhakti* devotionalism. The impetus for identifying a third phase came in response to Ram Sharan Sharma's theory of urban decay, in which Sharma had argued that between 300 and 1000 CE, urban centres in India underwent a decline.[2] In his book, he

[1]B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Trade and urban centres in early medieval North India', *Indian Historical Review*, 1 (1974), 203–19; B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India* (New Delhi, 1994), 130–84; V.K. Thakur, 'Towns of early medieval Bengal: an archaeological survey', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 44 (1983), 120–32; V.K. Thakur, 'Trade and towns in early medieval Bengal (c. A.D. 600–1200)', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 30 (1987), 196–220; R. Champakalakshmi, 'Urbanisation in South India: the role of ideology and polity', *Social Scientist*, 15 (1987), 67–117; K.R. Hall, *Trade and Statecraft in the Age of Cōḻas* (New Delhi, 1980).

[2]R.S. Sharma, 'Decay of Gangetic towns in Gupta and post Gupta times', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 33 (1972), 94–104; R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India (c. 300 – c. 1000)* (New Delhi, 1987).

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surveyed the archaeological remains and literary sources, on the basis of which, he argued that the decline of urban centres was related to economic changes that happened in the post-Kuṣāṇa (third century CE) and post-Gupta periods (after the fifth century CE). He posited that Indian cities flourished due to their trading connection with the Roman Empire and that as a consequence of the decline in this trade, urban centres in India started to disappear.[3] Historians such as Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, who contested this idea, came up with evidence for urbanization in the second half of the first millennium CE, identifying it as a third phase in the history of urbanization in India.[4] In fact, we owe the term 'third urbanization' to Chattopadhyaya.[5]

Since then, a considerable body of work has appeared discussing various aspects of the third urbanization, in addition to a number of works that continue to register their disagreement with Sharma's urban decay thesis. This body of writings is characterized by three distinct perspectives. The first of these argues for the primacy of political processes in which religion in its form as temple worship, royal rituals and *bhakti* devotionalism functions as an ideology. R. Champakalakshmi's study of the Kuḍamukku and Paḻayāṟai complex identifies the temple as the ideological base of the city with *bhakti* as the ideology in Tamil Nadu during the Cōḻa period (848–1279 CE).[6] She argues that the rise of urban centres in the Cōḻa period constitutes temple urbanism. Ideology has also been an important factor in the studies on Puri carried out by Hermann Kulke and his associates.[7] The second perspective underplays the importance of the state and presents urbanization as the result of local political factors and their intersection with ritual practices. James Heitzman, who also argues for temple urbanism, adopts central place theory to describe urbanization in Tiruvārūr and a few other places in Cōḻa period Tamil Nadu,[8] while Burton Stein posits that ritual sovereignty was an important factor in the development of both the state and urbanization in that period.[9] The third perspective places greater emphasis on trade. Carla Sinopoli's work on the economy of the Vijayanagara empire (1336–1646 CE) comes under the very late period but it is a good example through which to understand relations between religious centres and trade.[10] The

[3]Sharma, *Urban Decay in India*, 101.

[4]Chattopadhyaya, 'Trade and urban centres in early medieval North India'.

[5]*Ibid.*, 204–5. Some historians have endorsed Sharma's view with caution: R. Champakalakshmi, *Trade, Ideology and Urbanization: South India 300 BC to AD 1300* (New Delhi, 1996), 12; J. Heitzman, 'Temple urbanism in medieval South India', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 46 (1987), 792; V.K. Thakur, *Urbanisation in Ancient India* (New Delhi, 1981). Others have been more vocal in their rejection of the urban decay thesis completely. These include S. Kaul, *Imagining the Urban: Sanskrit and the City in Early India* (Ranikhet, 2010); J.D. Hakwes, 'Finding the "early medieval" in South Asian archaeology', *Asian Perspectives*, 53 (2014), 53–96; S. Panja, 'Whither "early medieval" settlement archaeology: a case study of the Varendra region', *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, 60 (2018), 27–62. A critical evaluation of the urban decay thesis has recently been made in M.V. Devadevan, *The 'Early Medieval' Origins of India* (Cambridge, 2020).

[6]Champakalakshmi, *Trade, Ideology and Urbanization*.

[7]A. Eschmann, H. Kulke and G.C. Tripathi (eds.), *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa* (New Delhi, 1978).

[8]Heitzman, 'Temple urbanism in medieval South India'.

[9]B. Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval India* (Delhi, 1980), 254–365.

[10]C.M. Sinopoli, 'The organization of crafts production at Vijayanagara, South India', *American Anthropologist*, 90 (1988), 580–97.

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discussion in the writings of Chattopadhyaya and Ranabir Chakravarti underlines the intersection of trade, political processes and the expansion of agriculture. This article moves beyond the three perspectives to investigate urban processes in the light of economic transactions in the city.

In spite of the wide-ranging discussions in the existing literature, the focus has generally been on capital cities and other royal centres, or centres of pilgrimage,[11] although port cities have also received some attention.[12] There are no exclusive studies of unplanned cities from this period, although Chattopadhyaya's overview of urban processes has discussed four such centres, viz., Pṛthūdaka, Tattānandapura, Gopagiri and Sīyaḍoṇi, now known as Pehoa, Ahar, Gwalior and Siron Khurd, respectively. Except for Gopagiri, the other three cities have remained mostly obscure. In this article, I wish to focus on one of them, Sīyaḍoṇi, in order to understand how urban centres developed in this period without being royal centres, places of pilgrimage or hubs of maritime trade.

According to Chattopadhyaya, the expansion of agriculture led to the appearance of local and regional nuclei of power, and also the burgeoning of trade, markets and urban centres. 'The essence of the economic process', according to Chattopadhyaya, 'lay in the horizontal spread of rural agrarian settlements'[13] that precipitated regional state formation and urbanization. He does not identify a decisive break between the early medieval period and the preceding early historical period, however. Instead, he argues that the changes were part of gradual processes.[14] While this article is based upon the same source used by Chattopadhyaya, the emphasis on exploring urbanization in the light of revenue systems and new developments in wealth-generation distinguishes this approach from that of Chattopadhyaya.

As Chattopadhaya has noted, the economic landscape of the period between the sixth and the tenth century was characterized by expanding agriculture and the appearance of urban centres. More than 200 towns and cities are known from inscriptions, archaeological remains and literary sources of this period. Some of them such as Ujjayini and Kañcīpuraṃ continued from earlier times, while a few such as Tripuri and Maski were older centres that were revived after going through a decline after the third century CE. Most other centres were new and arose as part of contemporary processes of urbanization. Urban centres included capital cities and royal centres, pilgrimage centres, ports, military camps, seats of learning and merchant towns. While towns and cities often had defining aspects, there were considerable overlaps due to the complexities involved in their functioning. Kañcīpuraṃ was, for example, a capital city, a centre of trade, a seat of learning and a pilgrimage centre.

[11]R.S. Tripathi, *History of Kanauj: To the Moslem Conquest, History and Culture Series* (Delhi, 1989); R.C. Majumdar and A.D. Pusalkar (eds.), *The Age of Imperial Kannauj* (Bombay, 1955); C.R. Srinivas, *Kanchipuram through the Ages* (Conjeeverom, 1979); R. Champakalakshmi, 'The urban configurations of Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam: the Kāñcīpuram region, c. A.D. 600–1300', *Studies in the History of Art*, 31 (1993), 185–207.

[12]R. Chakravarti, 'Monarchs, merchants and a maṭha in northern Konkan (c. 900 – 1053 AD)', *Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 27 (1990), 189–208.

[13]Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India*, 202–3.

[14]For a critique of this position, see Devadevan, *The 'Early Medieval' Origins of India*, 35–7.

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Sīyaḍoṇi and its inscription

This article draws upon a set of 27 temple documents recorded in a Sanskrit stone inscription engraved in Nāgarī characters from the eleventh century discovered in the village of Siron Khurd in the Lalitpur district in the modern state of Uttar Pradesh. The inscription was first brought to the notice of Sir Alexander Cunningham by a native of the contemporary princely state of Gwalior, and reported in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* by Dr Fitz-Edward Hall in 1862.[15] It was subsequently edited by F. Kielhorn, with assistance from J. Burgess, and published in the first volume of *Epigraphia Indica*, when this series commenced publication in 1882.[16]

Temple documents are vital sources, and in many instances the only source, for the study of early medieval economic processes in India. These are deeds of eleemosynary grants of land, gold and other gifts, recorded on stone tablets and temple walls. They contain a wealth of information relating to the larger economic transactions of this period. The social groups involved in these transactions, their caste and class character and their relationship with power are brought to light in these records, even when they occur only in snippets. The nature of land tenure and agrarian labour, trade in the urban centres, circulation of money, usury and interest rates are known from them in some detail, even though the information is not exhaustive. The sidelights shed by these inscriptions help us to reconstruct the larger picture of the urban economy. This does not offset the absence of non-eleemosynary land deeds, trading documents, price lists, tax and rent records and other economic sources. But in spite of this limitation, it must be allowed that our knowledge of the political economy of early medieval India depends on the information gathered from the temple grants.

We learn about the town of Sīyaḍoṇi from the Siron Khurd inscription. This village, lying at an altitude ranging from 360 to 370 metres above mean sea level, is about 20 kilometres by road north-west of the town of Lalitpur at a latitude of 24° 84^{1} N and a longitude of 74° 31^{1} E. The inscription records a set of eleemosynary endowments made to various temples in the town in the tenth and the eleventh centuries. It is a compilation of deeds drawn up at different times. The inscription and archaeological remains enable us to construe that Sīyaḍoṇi rose as a town in or shortly before the early tenth century, when the process of urbanization in India had begun to intensify rapidly.

The Siron Khurd inscription was first found within the boundaries of the temple of Śāntinātha, the Jaina Tirthānkara. Near this temple, there was once a stream called Kherar in what was perhaps a tributary of the Betwa, which flows at a distance of 10 kilometres from the village. The village seems to have been located on a trade route between Ujjain and Varanasi, connecting the major cities such as Vidisha, Bhojpur, Khajuraho, Kalinjar, Chitrakoot and Allahabad. From Khajuraho, a route branched off to the north, leading to the important political centre of Mahoba and onwards to Kannauj. Another route branched off from

[15]F. Hall, 'Vestiges of three royal lines of Kanyakubja, or Kanauj', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 31 (1862), 6–10.

[16]F. Kielhorn, 'Sīyaḍoṇi stone inscription' (hereafter FK-SSI), in J.A.S. Burgess (ed.), *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. I (Calcutta, 1892), 162–79.

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Vidisha eastwards, connecting to the Paramāra outpost of Udayapura and the Kalacūri seat of Tripuri (modern Tewar), from where the route turned to the south-east and led to the east coast, passing through important political centres such as Ratanpur and Sonepur. The route beyond Ujjain was connected on the south, either directly or through Dhar, to Maheshwar, which was historically the most important fording point on the Narmada. From there, the course of the Narmada provided access to the west coast, where at its mouth, the early historical port of Bhṛgukaccha (now Bharuch) was located (see Figure 1). Ujjain was a major political and trade centre connecting northern India to the Deccan. Between the sixth and the tenth century, the city of Varanasi was gaining in importance as the pre-eminent religious centre in North India. This situation might have made the location of Sīyaḍoṇi on this trade route important for the pursuit of commerce.

The archaeological remains found at Sīyaḍoṇi are now preserved in the state museum of the Jhansi district and are more than a dozen in number, including

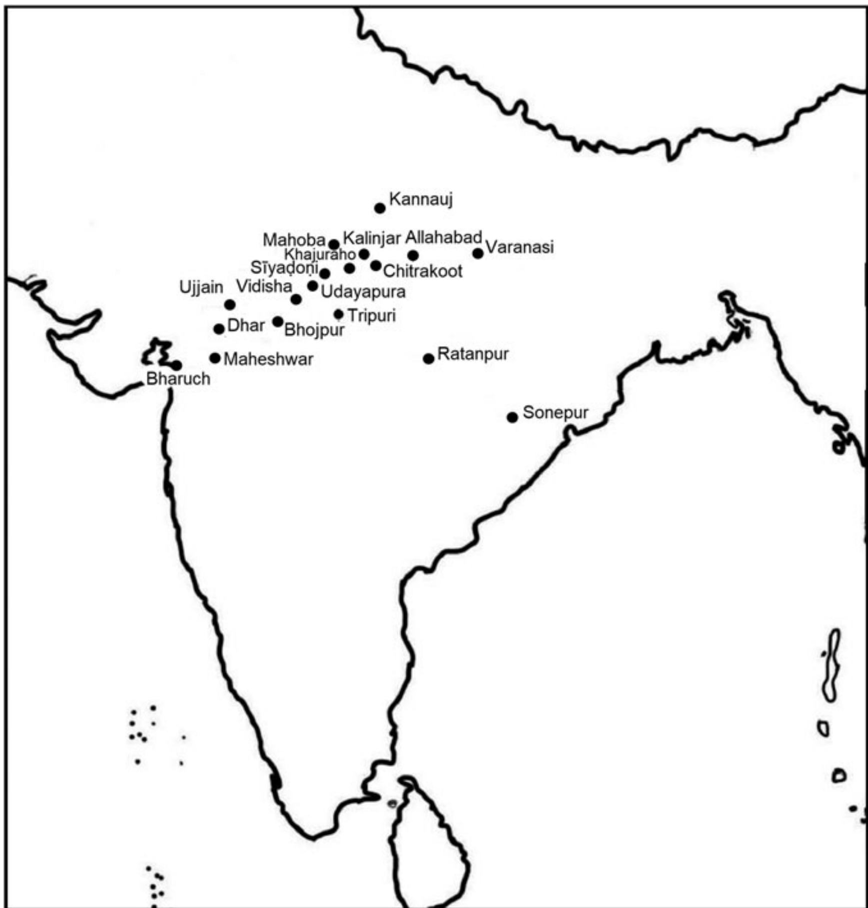

Figure 1. Cities on the early medieval trade routes connected to Sīyaḍoṇi.

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two figures of Vāmana from the tenth century,[17] a figure each of Brahmā and Indra from the same period,[18] three figures of Śiva in the form of Rāvaṇānugrahamūrti from the tenth and eleventh centuries,[19] figures of the dancing Gaṇeśa[20] and the four-armed Gaṇeśa from the tenth century,[21] in addition to the figure of a goddess sitting on an eagle,[22] a figure each of Nṛsimha[23] and Hanumān[24] and the temple of Viṣṇu with a stepwell in a nearby village.

Administrators and political elites

The town figures in the inscription as an administrative outpost of the Gurjara-Pratīhāras kings of Mahodaya, which was another name for the capital city of Kannauj.[25] There is a considerable body of writings on the history of this dynasty and its branches.[26] The Pratīhāra rulers assigned it to their feudatories for purposes of revenue administration. All of these local rulers governed the town within a period of 60 years. According to the inscription, the first local ruler of Sīyaḍoṇi was Undabhaṭa, who bore the titles of *Mahāpratīhāra*, *Samadhigataśeṣamahāśabda* and *Mahāsāmantādhipati*.[27] The second local ruler was Dhurbhaṭa whose title was *Mahārājādhirāja*.[28] After him, Niṣkalaṅka came to power with the same title.[29] The last local ruler, according to the second part of the inscription, was Harirāja.[30] The titles adopted by these rulers point to their subordinate status under the Gurjara-Pratīhāras. But the title of *Mahārājādhirāja* suggests that with the weakening of Pratīhāra power during the long reign of Rājyapāla (r. 960–1018), local rulers became more assertive. We notice that there are no details given of their predecessors. This indicates that the four local lords mentioned in the inscriptions were not related to one another. Unlike many other contemporary assignments, the control of Sīyaḍoṇi was not a permanent hereditary tenure. This arrangement was not unusual for this period because we have similar evidence of non-hereditary service tenures from other parts of northern India. In the second part of the inscription, there is mention of a town called

[17]S.D. Trivedi, *Sculptures in Jhansi Museum* (Jhansi, 1983), 8.

[18]*Ibid.*, 10.

[19]*Ibid.*, 9.

[20]B.N. Goswamy, *Essence of Indian Art* (San Francisco, 1986), 96.

[21]N. Yadav, *Gaṇeśa in Indian Art and Literature* (Jaipur, 1997), 75.

[22]Journal of Oriental Institute, *The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda*, 20 (1970), 296.

[23]U.C. Dwivedi and C.R.P. Sinha, 'Medieval art of India (1000 A.D. to 1700 A.D.)', *Proceedings of Indian Art History Congress*, 10 (2001), 96.

[24]J. Kala, *Epic Scenes in Indian Plastic Art* (New Delhi, 1988), 31.

[25]FK-SII, No. 40.

[26]D.R. Bhandarkar, 'Gurjaras', *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 21 (1904), 413–33; D.R. Bhandarkar, 'Foreign elements in the Hindu population', *Indian Antiquary*, 40 (1984), 7–37; J.S. Deyell, *Living without Silver: The Monetary History of Early Medieval North India* (New Delhi, 1999); Majumdar and Pusalkar (eds.), *The Age of Imperial Kannauj*; B.N. Puri, *History of Gurjara-Pratihāras* (Bombay, 1957); D. Sharma, *Rajasthan through the Ages*, vol. I (Bikaner, 1966); S.R. Sharma, *Origin and Rise of the Imperial Pratihāras of Rajasthan: Transitions, Trajectories and Historical Change* (Jaipur, 2017).

[27]FK-SSI, No. 2.

[28]*Ibid.*, No. 18.

[29]*Ibid.*, No. 36.

[30]*Ibid.*, No. 42.

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Rāyakka, donated to a group of *Brāhmaṇas*, which went on to attain renown as Rāyakabhatta.[31] As Chattopadhyaya writes:

> There is nothing surprising in an urban centre being assigned to feudatories. Document number 27 of the Sīyaḍoṇi group of inscription clearly refers to a township, Rāyakka, made over to some *brāhmaṇas* by a prince of Mahodaya. Similarly, in the eleventh century, one half of a town, along with a number of villages, was assigned by Paramāra Bhoja to a feudatory in the Nasik area.[32]

The local rulers were not alone in shouldering the responsibility of administering the town. The inscription shows that a committee of five persons, called *pañcakula*, was constituted by the local rulers to assist them. According to Chattopadhyaya, there is evidence that the membership of the committee was changed each time the administrator changed.[33] There are no mentions of any officials like *nagaraśreṣthi*, *sārthavāha*, *prathamakulika*, *prathamakāyastha*, etc., known from other parts of northern India. The use of the names of these functionaries in inscriptions had been very common since the Gupta era. But there are references to two functionaries, *kauptikas* and *karaṇikas*, in the *pañcakula*.[34] The second of these was a scribe, commonly known as *kāyastha* in other parts of northern India. According to Kṣīrasvāmi, a commentator on *Amarakośa*, the word *karaṇika* was a synonym for *kāyastha*. In the inscriptions of Khajuraho[35] and Bilhari,[36] the term *karaṇa* is used to refer to those who drafted the inscriptions. We are not sure about the role of the *kauptikas*, but they would also have been associated with administrative activities.

Temple grants in early medieval India required the sanction of authorities identified for the purpose. In the case of Sīyaḍoṇi, the actual power to sanction an endowment rested in a body called the *vāra*, which was apparently a council in charge of urban affairs.[37] This council seems to have been placed in charge of revenue and fiscal administration. As temple grants generally involved the transfer of revenue from the state to the temple, the consent of the *vāra* was obligatory. All donations and endowments were made after obtaining consent from the head of this council. According to contemporary inscriptions from Gwalior, this council was constituted by different *sārthavahas*, who were caravan traders, and *śreṣṭhis*, who were money-lending merchants.[38] Evidence shows that their authority continued throughout the period covered by the inscriptions, which extended from the first quarter of the tenth century to the first quarter of the eleventh century.

[31] *Ibid.*, Nos. 38, 39, 40, 41.

[32] Chattopadhyaya, 'Trade and urban centres in early medieval North India', 210; R.D. Banerji, 'The Kalvan plates of Yaśovarman', in E. Hultzsch (ed.), *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. XI (Calcutta, 1911–12), 69–75.

[33] Chattopadhyaya, 'Trade and urban centres in early medieval North India', 211.

[34] FK-SSI, Nos. 1, 22, 26.

[35] H.C. Ray, *Dynastic History of Northern India*, vol. II (Calcutta, 1935), 685.

[36] F. Kielhorn, 'Bilhari inscription of the ruler of Chedi', in Burgess (ed.), *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. I, 251–70.

[37] FK-SSI, Nos. 4, 7, 10, 14, etc.

[38] E. Hultzsch, 'The two inscriptions of Vaillabhatta Svamina Temple at Gwalior', in Burgess (ed.), *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. I, 154–62.

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We may conclude from this discussion that the administration of Sīyaḍoṇi involved the presence of three components, the local ruler and his officials, the *pañcakula* committee and the *vāra* council. We must acknowledge the likelihood of the two latter bodies being one and the same, but such a possibility is not expressly suggested in any of the deeds.

Temple endowments

All 27 endowments recorded in the inscription were donations and cash capital assigned to different temples to maintain their religious establishment. The implications of this evidence make it possible to draw a suggestive picture of the religious life of this town. The temples, their builders and the nature of endowments mentioned in the inscription are summarized in Table 1.

It is clear from Table 1 that the most popular deity among the prosperous class was Viṣṇu. Most temples were built for Viṣṇu, and they received the lion's share of the grants. He was worshipped under different names, including Viṣṇu, Vāmanasvāmi, Nārāyana, Cakrasvāmi, Tribhuvanasvāmi and Murāri. After him, there are references to Śiva and the sun god. They were worshipped as Umāmaheśvara and Bhailasvāmideva,[39] respectively. As opposed to the picture gleaned from the inscription, the remains of sculptures found from Sīyaḍoṇi point to a greater popularity for Śiva.

The people, who made donations towards the construction of these temples, were mostly *vaṇikas* (merchants), while a few of them were local rulers. The 27 transactions recorded in the inscription were made on 11 separate dates. The first individual mentioned in the inscription was Caṇḍuka who built the two main temples of the town. Most of the donations were given by him and his family members to his temples. Caṇḍuka and his son Nāgaka were salt merchants.[40] It is clear from the evidence that they had strong control over the resources and administration of the town and may have participated in its governance. The inscription also records the names of some of their family members. Caṇḍuka's father was Saṅgata. He had at least two brothers, Sāvasa and Māhapa, and the latter's son was Siluka. The most important person in the inscription was Caṇḍuka's son Nāgaka who made most of the endowments. He had connections with traders in liquor, betel and salt and with stonecutters, oil makers and potters. This indicates the strong possibility that he was the *nagaraśreṣṭhi* (head of the merchants) of the town, although this term does not occur in the inscription. It is not unlikely that Nāgaka was a member of the *pañcakula* committee.[41] It is also mentioned that Caṇḍuka's family members donated their own shops in different markets of the town, which is an indication of the extent of their wealth and investments in the market. Other individuals who built temples were also from the merchant class with the solitary exception of Dāmodara, a *Brāhmaṇa* from the town of Rāyakka, who built a temple of Viṣṇu and decorated it with many luxuries.

[39] *Ibid.*, Nos. 25, 26, 28, 29.
[40] *Ibid.*, Nos. 3, 7, 8, 10, 13, 14, 16, 19.
[41] *Ibid.*, Nos. 1, 2, 11, 20.

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Table 1. Temple grants made in Sīyaḍoṇi

Sr. No.	Temple	Constructed by	Donor	Year	Nature of endowments
1.	*Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭāraka*	Caṇḍuka	1. The city council	Vikrama Era (hereafter VE) 960/ CE 903–04	A land measuring 200 by 225 *hastas*[a]
			2. Siluka	VE 967/ CE 911–12	A *vīthi* (shop)[b]
			3. Nāgāka	VE 969/ CE 913–14	Four *vīthis*[c]
2.	*Viśnu Bhaṭṭāraka*	Caṇḍuka	1. Undabhatta	VE 964/ CE 907–08	Money[d]
			2. Caṇḍuka, Sāvasa, Māhapa	Same year	An *avāsanika* (residence or house) with four rooms[e]
			3. Nāgāka	VE 965/ CE 908–09	Acquired taxes from the traders of liquors and sugar boilers in certain coins[f]
			4. Caṇḍuka, Keśava, Nāgāka	VE 967/ CE 911–12	Seven *vīthis*[g]
			5. Nāgāka	VE 969/ CE 913–14	Taxes[h]
			6. Liquor merchants	Same year	Taxes every month[i]
			7. Nāgāka, Dedaika, Vālika, Rudāka, Chhitarāka	VE 991/ CE 934–35	An *avāsanika* and two *vīthis*[j]
			8. Savara and Mādhava	VE 994/ CE 937–38	Tax on every *pālika* of leaves[k]
			9. Nāgāka	Same year	Tax from oil makers[l]
			10. Sūtradhara Jejapa, Visiāka, Bhaluāka	VE 1005/ CE 948–49	Taxes[m]
3.	*Viśnu Bhaṭṭāraka*	Vāsudeva	Vāsudeva	VE 967/ CE 911–12	An *avāsanika* and one of his houses for lighting the lamp of temple[n]
4.	*Vāmansvāmi Deva*	Not mentioned	Bhāila	VE 969/ CE 913–14	Taxes[o]
5.	*Tribhuvansvāmi Deva*	Not mentioned	1. Nāgāka	VE 969/ CE 913–14	Two houses[p]
			2. Sāvasa	VE 994/ CE 937–38	A *vīthi*[q]

(*Continued*)

Table 1. (*Continued.*)

Sr. No.	Temple	Constructed by	Donor	Year	Nature of endowments
6.	*Umāmaheśvara*	Not mentioned	Dhamāka	VE 969/ CE 913–14	An *uvaṭaka*[r]
7.	*Bhailasvāmideva*	Vikrama	The *Mahājanas* of town	VE 994/ CE 937–38	Monthly payment of cash[s]
8.	*Cakrasvāmideva*	Purandara	Keśava and Durgātiya	VE 1008/ CE 951–52	Tax from every oil mill[t]
9.	*Cakrasvāmideva*	Pappāka	Mahāditya and Nohala	Same year	An *avāsanika* with three rooms[u]
10.	*Viśnu Bhaṭṭāraka*	Mahāditya	Śridhara	VE 1025/ CE 968–69	Rent from a *vīthi*[v]
11.	*Murāri*	Dāmodara	Himself	Not indicated	Money[w]

[a]FK-SSI, Nos. 2, 3, 4.
[b]*Ibid.*, Nos. 17, 18.
[c]*Ibid.*, Nos. 21, 22, 23.
[d]*Ibid.*, Nos. 4, 5.
[e]*Ibid.*, Nos. 6, 7, 8.
[f]*Ibid.*, Nos. 9, 10.
[g]*Ibid.*, Nos. 13, 14, 15, 16.
[h]*Ibid.*, Nos. 18, 19, 21.
[i]*Ibid.*, No. 20.
[j]*Ibid.*, Nos. 34, 35, 36.
[k]*Ibid.*, No. 26.
[l]*Ibid.*, No. 28.
[m]*Ibid.*, Nos. 29, 30.
[n]*Ibid.*, Nos. 11, 12.
[o]*Ibid.*, No. 24.
[p]*Ibid.*, No. 25.
[q]*Ibid.*, No. 28.
[r]*Ibid.*, No. 26.
[s]*Ibid.*, No. 27.
[t]*Ibid.*, No. 31.
[u]*Ibid.*, Nos. 32, 33.
[v]*Ibid.*, Nos. 37, 38, 39.
[w]*Ibid.*, No. 42.

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The market and its transactions

Sīyaḍoṇi is called Pattana in the inscription and it hosted a regular market or *maṇḍapikā* (*sīyaḍoṇisatka -maṇḍapikā*).[42] People from other regions and cities visited the *maṇḍapikā* to pay their transit tolls and taxes, and to sell or exchange their goods and produce. The town had at least six different markets, which were called *haṭṭa*: *Dosihaṭṭa*, *Prasannahaṭṭa*, *Caturahaṭṭa*, *Catuskahaṭṭa*, *Vasantamahaṭṭaka* and *Kallapālānāmasatkahaṭṭa*.[43] These markets had two types of shops and many industries that were the main source of income.[44] The first type of shop was the *pitṛpitāmahopārjita*, a hereditary shop that was held by families for generations, while the second type of shop, *svopārjita*, was established by the merchants concerned and not inherited by them.[45] These shops were called *vīthis* in the inscription and were the centre of the *haṭṭas*. The first market *Dosihaṭṭa*, would have been more important, because there is more than one reference to it in the inscription. Caṇḍuka's son Nāgaka had properties in *Dosihaṭṭa*, including two shops and a house. There is also mention of *mahājanas* in this market who were involved in money lending. In *Prasannahaṭṭa*, Caṇḍuka had five shops of his own, the income from which he donated to the temple. In both markets, Caṇḍuka and his family had their own shops and house, so both would have been centres for the salt trade. There is also reference to another unnamed family selling betel in *Caturahaṭṭa* for several generations. The family owned a hereditary shop that was eventually donated to a temple. As the name indicates, *Kallapālānāmasatkahaṭṭa* was a market for the distillers of liquor. Chattopadhyaya posits that this market was developed to facilitate liquor merchants and that this was not unusual for the time.[46] We have no information relating to the last market, *Vasantamahaṭṭaka*, other than its name, which seems to suggest that it was established by a person called Vasanta or was named after him. It is also possible that there were more markets in the town but they did not find a place in the records.

Sīyaḍoṇi was not a capital or a planned city and its 'unplanned' status is evident from the layout of the road network that must have developed organically, intersecting the town and its markets.[47] The most notable roads were *haṭṭarathyā*, *rathyā*, *kurathyā*, *bṛhadrathyā* and *vaṇijonijarathyā*. In the inscription, *haṭṭarathyā* is mentioned several times. As the name 'haṭṭa' indicates, it was a road that went through the markets. Most of the donations of shops were made near the *haṭṭarathyā*. The second term *rathyā* refers to a road or a lane in Sanskrit. Two other types of road are also mentioned in another inscription of the time from Pratīhāra.[48] From their prefix, it is certain that *kurathyā* was a narrow or minor road and *bṛhadrathyā* the main road of the town and obviously a road related to merchants. Although Sīyaḍoṇi was largely unplanned, the division of roads in this manner shows that

[42]*Ibid*., Nos. 2, 11, 27.

[43]*Ibid*., Nos. 6, 7, 8, 27.

[44]*Ibid*., Nos. 13, 15, 19.

[45]Chattopadhyaya, 'Trade and urban centres in early medieval North India', 212.

[46]*Ibid*., 209.

[47]FK-SSI, Nos. 6, 7, 9, 10.

[48]D.R. Sahni, 'Ahar stone inscription', in Hultzsch (ed.), *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. XI, 52–4; C.D. Chatterjee, 'The Ahar stone inscription', *Journal of the United Provinces Historical Society*, 3 (1926), 83–119.

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space-management was well-developed. Besides shops, other buildings were also located near these roads and lanes. These were *āvāsanikā*, *aparasaraka* and *gṛhab-hitti*.[49] According to Chattopadhyaya, the *āvāsanikā* was a residence and there are references that indicate that some *āvāsanikā* had two rooms while some had four rooms.[50] *Aparasaraka* was also a residential building but it had a covered area at the entrance gate or a porch.[51] There is no certain explanation of what form the *gṛhabhitti* took but it may have been a site for a residential building or house. All these different houses and shops were under the ownership of different communities and merchants. Despite the detailed analysis of the physical entity of Sīyaḍoṇi that this inscription offers, it is still unclear whether there was any variation between the residential and commercial areas.

The industries developing in these markets were of *kallapālas* (liquor makers and distributers), *nemakavaṇikas* (sellers of salt), *kandukas* (sugar boilers), *tāmbulikas* (betel sellers), *tailika* (oil millers), *śilākūṭas* (stone cutters), *kumbhakāras* (potters) and *lohavāna* (probably blacksmiths).[52] People who engaged in different commercial activities were as follows.

1. Caṇḍuka and his son Nāgaka were leading figures in the salt business. Nāgaka's brothers Sāvasa and Māhapa and Mahapa's son Siluka were also partners in the business. Nāgaka was also associated with the liquor merchants and sugar boilers. Apart from this family, merchants named Bhāīla, Vāsudeva, Śridhara, Pappā and Mahāditya were also associated with the salt trade.[53]
2. The merchants associated with the business of *tāmbulikas* were Keśava, Vateśvara, Dhamāka, Savara and Māhava. According to the records, they were the wealthiest in the town after the salt merchants. They donated many shops, cash and houses to the temples.[54]
3. Jejapa, Visiāka and Bhaluāka were involved in stone cutting and donated cash.[55]
4. Keśava and Durgātiya were oil pressers who gave a *pallika* measure of oil from every oil mill.[56]

Salt merchants were the most important merchants in the town. It is likely that Sīyaḍoṇi functioned as a distribution point for salt to settlements in the hinterland. Many other merchants made endowments to the temples built by salt merchants. This is an indicator of the monopoly that the salt merchants created in the market and in matters of administration. Seeking favours from the powerful salt barons might have encouraged other merchants to make endowments to these temples. K.K. Shah presents the following picture of the salt merchants of Sīyaḍoṇi,[57] describing them as a different and prosperous sub caste:

[49]FK-SSI, Nos. 3, 6, 7, 14.
[50]Chattopadhyaya, 'Trade and urban centres in early medieval North India', 209.
[51]*Ibid.*
[52]FK-SSI, Nos. 3, 9, 11, 12, 15, 19, 23.
[53]*Ibid.*, Nos. 3, 10, 13.
[54]*Ibid.*, Nos. 16, 25, 26, 27.
[55]*Ibid.*, Nos. 29, 30.
[56]*Ibid.*, Nos. 31, 32.
[57]K.K. Shah, 'Salt merchants of Sīyaḍoṇi', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 49 (1988), 134–7.

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> The hurried survey of the first part of record [*sic*] brings into high relief the eminent position of the salt-merchants in the local economy. Statistically speaking, out of the 27 recorded endowments 17 came from this class and as the deeds are spread over in time, they reveal their continued prosperity. The Salt-merchants had become conscious of their wealth, status and power. Though at places mentioned merely as merchants, in majority [*sic*] of references we find their names qualified by the expression salt merchant. One may not believe [*sic*] but towards the end they had developed some sort of caste-consciousness. At least one reference points towards this tendency. Mahaditya, the son of Pappa, is mentioned in line l7 as belonging to the caste of salt-merchants. This seems to be quite natural in a caste-ridden society.[58]

The cash economy in Sīyaḍoṇi

Economic transactions in Sīyaḍoṇi involved substantial use of coined money. The inscription mentions several varieties and denominations of coins that served as the means of exchange. This information is summarized in Table 2.

Most of the Pratīhāra coins were known with the suffix of *Dramma*. Some of these coins are classified as Indo-Sassanian coins because the Pratīhāras followed the pattern of Sassanian coinage.[59] The most notable coin was the *Vigrahapāla Dramma*, known in at least three variant spellings (nos. 3, 4 and 7 in Table 2) and of which more than a single denomination seems to have existed. It was minted from an alloy of silver with copper. Hoards containing the *Vigrahapāla Dramma* have been found across Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Bengal.[60] This is a vast area for the occurrence of a single type of coin in the tenth and the eleventh century, a period that is now recognized for the spread of regional states. Surabhi Srivastava identifies two possible reasons for the extensive use of the *Vigrahapāla Dramma*. First, the Pratīhāras and their contemporary Āyudha kings of Kannauj and Pāla kings of Bengal issued this type of coin during their tripartite struggle.[61] Secondly, when the Pratīhāras of Ujjain conquered the north of India, these coins were introduced in the other regions to facilitate trade and commerce.[62] The second most abundant coin was *Ādivarāha* (no. 6 in Table 2).[63] This coin was introduced and issued by the king Mihira Bhoja (*c*. 836–85). Samples of this coin were found in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh.[64] The distribution of these coins in the different parts of North India is indicative of Sīyaḍoṇi's standing in the commercial networks of these areas.

The circulation of coined money might not have been a centrally governed process or an activity that was controlled fully by the state. The preponderance

[58] *Ibid*., 136.

[59] S. Srivastava, 'Coins and currency system under the Gurjara Pratiharas of Kannauj', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 65 (2004), 111–20.

[60] Deyell, *Living without Silver*, 27.

[61] Srivastava, 'Coins and currency system', 113.

[62] *Ibid*., 114.

[63] FK-SSI, Nos. 28, 37.

[64] Deyell, *Living without Silver*, 29.

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Table 2. Coins mentioned in the Sīyaḍoṇi inscription

Sl. No.	Name of the coin	Used by
1.	*Dramma*	*Mahājanas* in the market named *Dosihaṭṭa*[a]
2.	*PaunciyakaDramma*	*Mahāsāmantadipati* Undabhatta[b]
3.	*VigrahapālaDramma*	Merchants of liquor[c]
4.	*VigrahapāliyaDramma*	Bhāila[d]
5.	*VigrahatungiyaDramma*	Merchants of liquor[e]
6.	*ŚrimadĀdivarāhaDramma*	Nāgāka[f] and Śridhara[g]
7.	*VigrahapālasatkaDramma*	Stone cutters Jejapa, Visiāka and Bhaluāka[h]
8.	*VarāhakayaVimsopaka*	Merchants of sugar[i]
9.	*VigrahaDrammaVisovaka*	The betel sellers, Savara and Mādhava[j]
10.	*Kapardaka*	Nāgāka[k]
11.	*Yugā*	*Mahāsāmantadipati* Undabhatta[l]

[a]FK-SSI, No. 29.
[b]*Ibid.*, Nos. 4, 5.
[c]*Ibid.*, No. 9.
[d]*Ibid.*, No. 23.
[e]*Ibid.*, No. 20.
[f]*Ibid.*, No. 19.
[g]*Ibid.*, Nos. 38, 39.
[h]*Ibid.*, No. 30.
[i]*Ibid.*, No. 10.
[j]*Ibid.*, No. 26.
[k]*Ibid.*, No. 21.
[l]*Ibid.*, No. 6.

of *Vigrahapāla* and *Ādivarāha Drammas* points to the active involvement of the state in the circulation of coined money. However, there are coins such as *Paunciyaka Dramma*, *Kapardaka* and *Yugā* (nos. 2, 10 and 11 in Table 2, respectively), which cannot be convincingly assigned to any early medieval Indian state, indicating the absence of rigid control by the state. Multiple loci or agencies of monetization existed in the tenth and eleventh centuries, making it a fluid process.

It is likely that funds held by the Sīyaḍoṇi temples were also used for extending loans as a way of generating income. Most cash donations were given as grants of taxation made by merchants and sellers, which involved transferring to the temple the tax that was due to the state. There is also reference to an endowment of a capital sum of 1,350 *Śrimad Ādivarāha Dramma* by the salt merchant Nāgaka.[65] The record does not specify that the income from the capital was to be generated by way of interest on a loan, but in so far as grants made in Sīyaḍoṇi were perpetual in nature, it must be posited that Nāgaka's endowment was utilized in this fashion.

Investing cash income into the temples was not a process limited to Sīyaḍoṇi and cash transactions were becoming established in other parts of South Asia during this period. References to interest on money or gold endowed on temples are fairly common in inscriptions of this period and in other parts of India at different times.[66] In western India, an inscription found at Kaman town, situated in the Bharatpur district, Rajasthan, records that artisans and potters had to pay taxes

[65]*Ibid.*, Nos. 18, 19.
[66]For example, see the records in C.R. Krishnamacharlu (ed.), *South Indian Inscriptions*, vol. XII (Madras, 1943).

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to the temple.[67] In another inscription from Rajasthan, we see merchants paying transit tolls in cash before entering the town.[68] We meet with instances of tax payment in cash in early medieval rural Bengal.[69] Similarly, in northern India, the Ahar and Peheva stone inscriptions point to the circulation of money within these towns[70] and the Gwalior inscription from central India refers to taxation in a fortified town. In South India, the ninth-century Tiruchchennampundi Inscription shows that the interest on a loan of gold went to a temple situated in a hamlet while the gold was held by a merchant in the city of Śrikaṇṭapuram.[71] After the Pallava state collapsed in the latter half of the ninth century, South India produced inscriptions with details of different guilds and cash income with considerable frequency.[72] There is rich information on revenue and its investment in the Tarisāppaḷḷi copperplates of Kollaṃ in Kerala, for example.[73] The investments in the temples in Sīyaḍoṇi occurred in a similar manner in the form of diverting revenue payable to the state to the temple.

Sīyaḍoṇi as a Merchant Town

As discussed above, most urban centres of early medieval India were the capitals of emergent dynasties, fortified centres of local kings and chiefs, pilgrimage centres of regional and local deities, and centres of trade and commerce. The town of Sīyaḍoṇi had the characteristics of both a political and commercial town. The analysis of the inscription and evidence shown in Tables 1 and 2 brings two major aspects of the town into light. The first is the presence of merchants during the tenth and eleventh centuries, whose transactions involved the use of coined money of various denominations. In the first three centuries of the early medieval period (i.e., between 600 and 900 CE), inscriptions from the region in which Sīyaḍoṇi was located do not indicate the presence of mercantile groups. But the evidence from Sīyaḍoṇi in the tenth and eleventh centuries not only points to their presence, but also to their role as donors in almost all endowments. Concomitantly, the patchy evidence for use of coined money between the seventh and ninth century in this region stands in contrast with the evidence on hand from the records that we have examined here, which points to the circulation of money, even though coins have not been unearthed on a notable scale from these areas in archaeological excavations. Some of the coins which the inscriptions mention seem to have been minted by local merchants because they are not like the great majority of coins prefixed

[67]V.V. Mirashi, 'Kaman stone inscription', in N.P. Chakravarti (ed.), *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. XXIV (Calcutta, 1942), 329–33.

[68]D.C. Sircar, 'Stray plates from Nanana', in D.C. Sircar (ed.), *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. XXXIII (Calcutta, 1963), 238–46.

[69]R. Furui, 'Merchant groups in early medieval Bengal: with special reference to the Rajbhita stone inscription of the time of Mahīpāla I, Year 33', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 76 (2013), 391–412.

[70]Hultzsch, 'The two inscriptions of Vaillabhatta'; Sahni, 'Ahar stone inscription', 52–4.

[71]V.V. Ayyar, *South Indian Inscription*, vol. XII (Madras, 1943), 18–28.

[72]S.J. Mangalam, 'Numismatic data in medieval South Indian inscriptions: economic perspectives', *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute*, 49 (1990), 237–42.

[73]M.V. Devadevan, 'The Tarisāppaḷḷi copperplate grant and the early Christians of India', *Nidan*, 5 (2020), 5–26.

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with names of Pratīhāra kings who issued them. In the light of these two considerations, it appears that the town of Sīyaḍoṇi emerged as a merchant outpost in this region. Other evidence shows that it was also associated with trans-regional trade because salt was not a local produce. Due its location on a trade route that was connected to the west coast through the Narmada, salt merchants became the wealthiest inhabitants of the town.

The available evidence makes it possible to identify Sīyaḍoṇi as primarily a merchant town. Mercantile affluence brought greater levels of autonomy for urban centres such as Sīyaḍoṇi in matters related to their internal affairs. As we have seen, all endowments were verified by the council called the *vāra*. Even the local administrator sought the council's consent for making an endowment of money. The existing conditions of trade, especially in salt, appear to have created the monopoly of merchants and traders in economic affairs as well as in internal matters related to the town. But it needs to be asked if trade was only one aspect of the economic life in Sīyaḍoṇi or whether there were other factors that brought a degree of stability to the economy. This is an important question because Sīyaḍoṇi was not a political capital or a famous port city or a centre of pilgrimage.

The absence of records of routine economic transactions from this period forces us to make generalizations on the economy from the sidelights thrown by our inscription, which as we have observed above was a record of eleemosynary endowments. These endowments were given to different temples to meet their expenses for lighting the lamps, buying things for daily services, etc.[74] The temples became centres of wealth through the endowments they received at various times. These endowments were perpetual grants (*pradatācandrārkakālinam*), which could not be revoked. They gave stability to the day-to-day functioning of the temple by generating a steady flow of resources. The nature of the income that the temples generated through the grants they received appears to be a reflection of a distinct feature of the economy in general. From the details of the grants summarized in Table 1, this income can be described as consisting of three components, viz., rent, tax and interest on loans. All three elements involved making financial gains without augmenting production or creating resources, infrastructures or alternate forms of wealth. What we observe here is the generation of revenue through already existing wealth, without the creation of new wealth. This enables us to conclude that the temple drew its stability from what would today be termed 'rent-seeking'.

The Rent-Seeking Economy

Among the forms of rent-seeking that were employed, the first was ground rent generated through immovable properties. Table 1 shows that 16 shops, 7 houses or residential buildings and a piece of land were given to the temples by the people of the town in the form of ground rent and the income they generated.[75] The individuals who made these endowments might have transferred the rents to the temples themselves; alternatively, the rents might have been remitted directly by the

[74]FK-SSI, Nos. 4, 6, 9, 10, 11, 13, 16, etc.
[75]*Ibid.*, Nos. 7, 12, 14, 16, 21, 23, etc.

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tenants to the temples, as temples had the right to collect rent. When Nāgaka donated a house and shops to temples built by his father, he also transferred the income that he derived from these places. Such endowments were very common in the Pratīhāra inscriptions.[76] Income arising from buildings was mostly paid in cash. But it is unclear whether this was also true of the income received from the land donated by the *vāra* council. It may have been in cash or as a share of the agricultural produce, although the records make no reference to agriculture in or near Sīyaḍoṇi.

Besides ground rent from land and buildings, a wide range of commercial taxes also formed a rich source of income. There are several references to endowments made to the temples in cash by different traders. Most of them were in the form of monthly taxes promised by the merchants. The taxes were levied by the Gurjara-Pratīhāra state on the merchants selling goods such as salt and liquor. They were now transferred by the merchants to the temple with the consent of the *vāra* council. The temples obtained regular and monthly payments from the liquor distillers,[77] sugar boilers,[78] betel sellers,[79] oil pressers,[80] the *Mahājanas* of *Dosihaṭṭa*[81] and stone cutters.[82] We already know from the inscription that taxes were granted to the temples for life. The transfer of regular taxes from their original claimants to the temples facilitated a steady supply of economic resources to the temples. The purpose for which such grants of taxation were made are indicated in the inscriptions, and it may be surmised that income for worship and services, offerings, maintenance of lamps, remuneration for priests and other temple servants, renovation of old structures and building of new structures, maintaining the livestock and organizing festivals came from such grants.

As already mentioned, the Sīyaḍoṇi temples might have generated income by extending loans through the money they held. References to interest on money or gold endowed to temples are fairly common in inscriptions of this period.[83] Temples could not spend this gold and cash on their expenses. They were only allowed to spend the interest they received on the capital. The capital was kept either by the donor himself or by the *vāra* council that controlled the activities of temples in this respect.

This discussion sheds light on the main sectors of Sīyaḍoṇi's economy, but it also raises the question of how they contributed to the stability of the town's economy. As we have shown, the temples were receiving cash payments from three different sources – rent, land grants and taxes – which the authorities managing the temples used to purchase goods and services and to cover their running costs. The money that came to the temple through different sources from markets returned to

[76]G. Buhler, 'The Peheva inscription from the temple of Garibnath', in Burgess (ed.), *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. I, 184–90; Mirashi, 'Kaman stone inscription'; Hultzsch, 'The two inscriptions of Vaillabhatta'; Sahni, 'Ahar stone inscription', 52–4.

[77]FK-SSI, No. 20.

[78]*Ibid.*, No. 10.

[79]*Ibid.*, No. 26.

[80]*Ibid.*, Nos. 31, 32.

[81]*Ibid.*, No. 29.

[82]*Ibid.*, No. 30.

[83]For example, see the records in Krishnamacharlu (ed.), *South Indian Inscriptions*, vol. XII.

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the market as payment for services. The taxes and rents that came from salt merchants, liquor traders, stone cutters, betel sellers and sugar boilers went back to the merchants who provided services. Through this process, money circulated in the local economy of Sīyaḍoṇi. Although Sīyaḍoṇi was a merchant town on an important trade route with the administrative presence of a Pratīhāra representative, the wealth generated by commerce was more than buttressed by rent-seeking involving ground rent, tax and interest on loans. This form of rent-seeking and the endowments made from the income thereof are likely to have made it easier to absorb any economic distress that might have arisen from commercial fluctuations. It is true that rent-seeking was not altogether new to early medieval India but unlike the taxation system imposed by the state it was not widespread. Interest on loans and ground rent had only a marginal presence. The generalization of rent-seeking in early medieval India created a new economy that gave cities of this period unprecedented stability.

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