

On the History of Buddhist Structures in Tarmita-Termez

Shakirdjan R. Pidaev
Translated by Nobuo Yamagishi

New Discovery of Buddhist Temples in Old Termez

BUDDHIST monuments of Old Termez¹ (Fig. 1) have been known to academic circles from around 1926–28. It was then that A.S. Strelkov, a member of the archaeological expedition of the State Museum of the East, proposed the hypothesis that the monumental structure of the Zurmala in the north-east of the ruins of Old Termez is the remains of a Buddhist stupa,² and that the caves located on the hill of Karatepa were Buddhist cave monasteries.³ However, special archaeological studies of these monuments were not carried out at that time. In 1932, a stone block with relief images of musicians was found at the bottom of Amu Darya in the Ayrтам area, 15km upwards from Termez. The finds including this block were later named Ayrтам Frieze (Fig. 2).⁴ In fact, Ayrтам Frieze marked the beginning of study on Buddhist structures of northern Bactria, including the district of Termez.

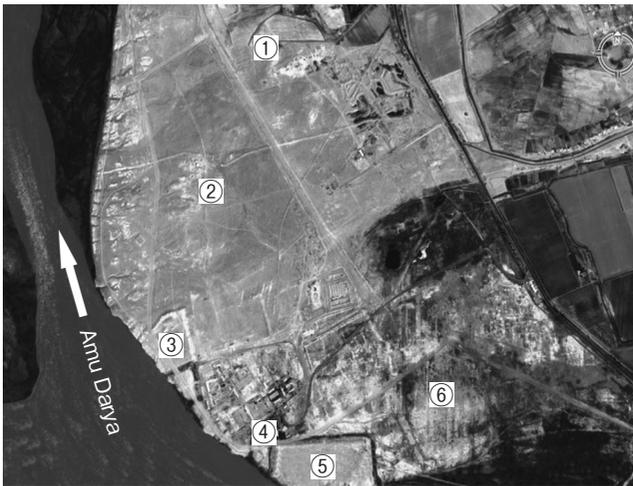


Fig. 1 Buddhist monuments of Old Termez: 1) Fayaztepa, 2) Karatepa, 3) Chingiztepa, 4) Hakim at-Termezi Mausoleum, 5) Citadel, 6) Medieval Rabat. (The stupa of Zurmala is in further lower right direction.)



Fig. 2 Ayrtam Frieze: This is a limestone block that was discovered by a border guard on the banks of the Amu Darya in 1932. In the frieze, musicians are playing on a cylindrical drum (from left), lute and harp.

In 1937, the Termez Archaeological Complex Expedition (TACE), led by M.E. Masson, took the first steps in the archaeological study of the cave structures of Karatepa. Excavations by the expedition have shown that these caves were part of ground-cave complexes associated with Buddhism.⁵

From 1961 to 1994, studies of the Buddhist structures of Karatepa (Fig. 3) were carried out by a joint archaeological expedition of the State Hermitage Museum, Museum of Arts of the Peoples of the East and Research Institute of Restoration under the direction of B.Ya. Staviskiy. The main purpose of the expedition was to study the ground-cave complexes [above-ground building and rock-cut cave complexes] on the eastern and northern slopes of the southern hill of Karatepa. As a result of the study, the ground-cave structures with original architectural design, decorated with unique sculptures and paintings with religious content, were fully excavated.

The excavated artefacts indicate a material and spiritual culture of an advanced level. Multilingual inscriptions (Kharoṣṭhī, Brāhmī and Bactrian) on ceramic vessels and on the walls of rooms show that literacy skills were highly developed among the population. The findings of this expedition confirm that Karatepa was the largest Buddhist centre of Bactria in the Kushan period.

Since 1998, a joint Uzbek–Japan expedition has been stationed in Karatepa concentrating specifically on the northern hill of Karatepa. What has been excavated is an enormous monastery of complex architectural design and a richly decorated interior and it is recently being explored. The objects of material and spiritual culture discovered here greatly enriched ideas about Buddhism and Buddhist art culture. They show traces of the Buddhist art of Bactria, in particular Termez. In



Fig. 3 Karatepa: From the right, northern hill, western hill and southern hill. Anti-clockwise from the southern hill of left, Complexes A, Б, В, Г, Д, E and IO on the upper left where a biggest stupa on round base was excavated. Main stupa with a diameter of 13m was excavated on the north side of the monastery on the northern hill; the protective roof was built by the late Dr Kyuzo Kato and the author.

2011, the National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Korea entered into an agreement for research in Karatepa.

The study conducted by the institute has shown that Karatepa is not the only major Buddhist monument in Old Termez. From 1968 to 1976, a massive above-ground Buddhist monastery, Fayaztepa (Figs 4 and 5) was also found and explored. This site is located 1km north of Karatepa and outside the city wall, and has a unique architectural



Fig. 4 Fayaztepa Buddhist monastery



Fig. 5 Fayaztepa Buddhist monastery (top) and Karatepa viewed from Fayaztepa



design. The monument consists of three parts as well as a stupa which is located outside the main building. The interiors of Fayaztepa temple were richly decorated with stones, clay-ganch (gypsum) sculptures and thematic polychrome paintings (Fig. 6). In 1972, the remains of a small underground Buddhist structure were discovered on the east side of Fayaztepa.⁶

New Discovery of Buddhist Monuments

In Old Termez, extensive archaeological research conducted in recent years has revealed new Buddhism-related sites. For example, there are several large Buddhist structures belonging to the Kushan period in the Small Chingiztepa. In particular, a Buddhist building belonging to one stage of the Small Chingiztepa's inhabitation was found. A large monumental building in the central part of Big Chingiztepa also displays a Buddhist character. In addition, there is a monumental stupa on the hill to the north-west of this site, where a gilded head of the Buddha like one of Karatepa (Fig. 7) was found.⁷

Buddhist structures were also discovered in the area of Hakim at-Termezi mausoleum, north-west of the citadel. More than 10 Buddhist cells were discovered underground and it turned out that the layout of cells is very similar to one at Karatepa which was built underground by cutting through the sandstone (Fig. 8). Excavated artefacts help date these cells to the late Kushan and early medieval periods. Later, during the Islamic period, they were reused as *chillahona*, rooms for seclusion. There are currently no ground-level structures of the period preserved there, but in the territory of Shahrستان (urban area), the base of a small stupa was found next to the underground Buddhist cells underneath medieval structures. The layout and design of the stupa base are identical to ones belonging to the early medieval period. An intricately designed architectural remnant, in particular the head part of an unusual reculangular column



Fig. 8 Cave monastery cell



Fig. 6 Polychrome paintings excavated from the Fayaztepa: Two persons appear to worship the Buddha. There are inked Bactrian letters 'faro' above the person on the left.

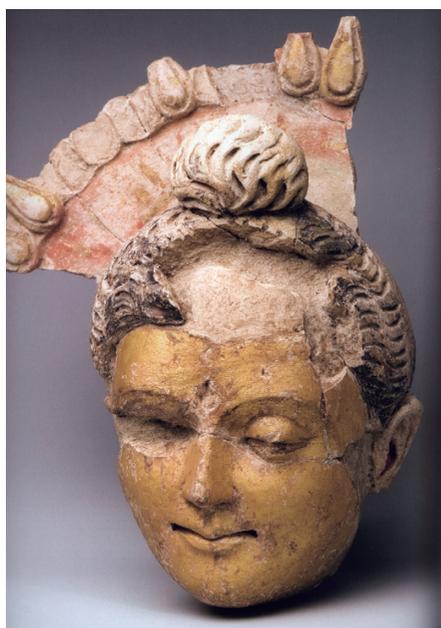


Fig. 7 Head of the Buddha (Karatepa): It is made of clay-ganch (gypsum) and is gilded.

1) Person in memorial service

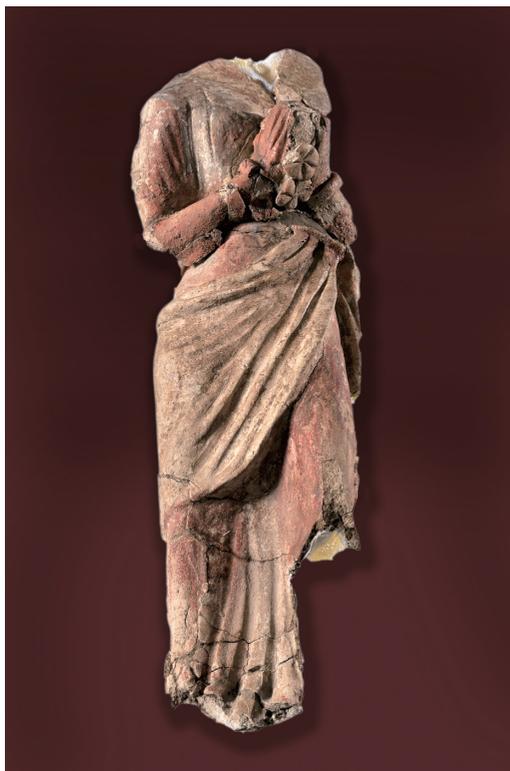
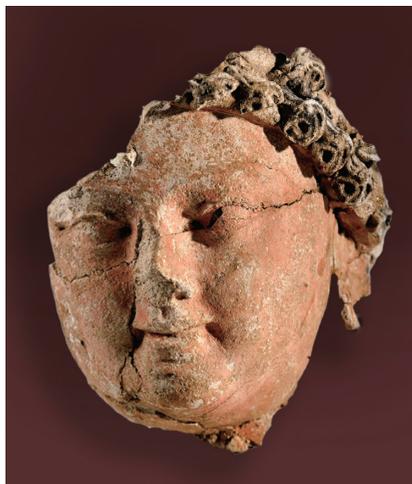


Fig. 17 Clay-ganch sculptures



2) Person in memorial service



3) The Buddha



Fig. 9 Rectangular column images of human busts and shamrocks

decorated with human busts and shamrocks has been excavated from there (Fig. 9).

The location of the stupa in the medieval town shows that many open places of Shahristan were densely inhabited in the Kushan and early medieval periods.

In light of archaeological research, Termez appears to be a major centre of Buddhism and Buddhist art that impacted not only ancient Bactria but the whole of Central Asia. Going by the scale of Buddhist monuments, diverse structures and unique objects of material and spiritual culture, it can be said that Buddhism and Buddhist art culture occupied a special place in the socio-economic and cultural life of the city and people's thought. An examination of art objects can illustrate how widespread but important Buddhist culture was during the Kushan period. At the same time, these objects suggest that there was local art school with unique characteristics in Termez during this period. The findings clearly show how Buddhist art of ancient Termez is positioned in the history of Buddhist art as a whole and how it played a significant role.

Contested Chronology of Buddhist Structures

However, to date, some issues regarding the history of Buddhism in Termez and its Buddhist structures have remained contested. For example, the dates of emergence of the Buddhist community, the founding of the first Buddhist structure in the city, and the period when the Buddhist temples of the Karatepa and Fayaztepa in the city as well as other Buddhist monuments were abandoned are disputed. The key materials for identifying the dates of these structures (cities) are coin finds. The composition and topography of coin finds show that

the earliest Buddhist structure of Old Termez is Fayaztepa, which was constructed in the first century CE as L.I. Al'baum established.⁸ The tetradrachm coins of Heliocles and 'Sōtēr megas' coins were found



Fig. 10 Sōtēr megas coin

from the floor of the building in the lowest soil layer (Fig. 10), which established the date of the structure. The discovery of the coins of these groups together from one soil layer is an interesting one. A similar finding was made from Mirzakultepe, one of the early Kushan ruins.⁹ If we ignore the circulation period of these coins and consider only the group and spread area, it can be pointed out that imitations of Heliocles coin were probably in circulation from the late second century to the first half of the first century BCE, as Masson also asserts.¹⁰ He later pushed the latter date further up to the time of the Kujula Kadphises, or possibly, Vima Kadphises.¹¹ According to G.A. Pugachenkova, imitations of Heliocles coin could have been used at the earlier stage of Sōtēr megas circulation.¹² Most scholars place the period of Sōtēr megas circulation in the middle or late first century CE and identify the coins with those minted during the period of Kushan ruler Vema Takto.¹³ E.V. Rtveladze, taking into account the epigraphic features of legends on the coins, proposes the first half of the first century CE as the latest date of circulation of imitation Heliocles coins.¹⁴

As Rtveladze rightly notes, the imitation tetradrachms of Heliocles are never found together with the mints of Vima Kadphises or Kanishka.¹⁵ Therefore, it can be assumed that the construction of the Fayaztepa building was started around the mid-first century CE. The techniques and materials used in the construction are also evidence in support of such an assumption. As is well known, *pahsa* (rammed earth) was used in the construction of the lower part of the wall in the Fayaztepa building and sundried bricks for the upper part. This is typical of construction in Termez between the first century BCE and first century CE. In particular, the technique can be seen in the defensive walls of Termez and the Big Chingiztepa citadels, and the walls of the iconic building in the centre of the Chingiztepa. The square sundried bricks used in Karatepa, on the other hand, are good evidence to show that buildings constructed between the late second and fourth centuries CE consisted of only square sundried bricks.

Staviskiy reviewed findings of archaeological research conducted at the Karatepa Buddhist centre in Old Termez between 1961 and 1994 and concluded that Buddhism entered Bactria, including Termez, during the reign of Kanishka I.¹⁶ E.V. Zeymal' studied coins collected at Karatepa between 1961 and 1984 and noted that coin finds cannot be used to date or confirm Buddhist transmission and construction of Buddhist structures in Termez.¹⁷ According to T.K. Mkrtychev, the extensive construction of Buddhist places of worship in Bactria, in particular Karatepa, dates back from the latter half to the end of the first century CE. He uses the small-denomination Sōtēr megas coins, embedded in the first floor of the western cave in Complex E, as evidence from excavated finds to support this.¹⁸ During archaeological research conducted at the monumental and ground-level monastery complex on the northern hill of Karatepa, both large and small denomination Sōtēr megas coins were excavated (Fig. 10). These coins are associated with the early monastery structures. In this regard, it is especially interesting that in 2012 the Sōtēr megas coins were discovered together in the body of a circular stupa on the ground part of Complex IO, the southern hill of Karatepa. Judging from their state of preservation, these coins must not have been long in circulation. This stupa was erected on a sandstone layer formed as a result of the construction of cave structures. At the moment, this stupa (on a round base), with a diameter of more than 8m, is the largest of a series of stupas found in Termez. Near it there are remains of other stupas which have the same type of round base as those of Complex Я and are somewhat smaller than the ones of Complex IO. Two large stupas with a round base found in the south-western part of the southern hill of Karatepa are themselves evidence that the Buddhist community of Termez chose Karatepa for founding their first place of worship.

A stupa with round base found at Complex B on the southern hill, dating from the latter half of the first century to the early second century CE, was once considered the oldest of Karatepa stupas.¹⁹ The base of the stupa is decorated with ganch relief images of lotus leaves. As is well known, round-base stupas were typical in the earlier period and rectangular-base ones emerged in Gandhāra from the latter half to the end of the first century CE.²⁰ The date for the emergence of the rectangular-base stupa in Bactria has not yet been exactly identified, but it may have already emerged between the late first century and early second century CE. The evidence to support this are stupas discovered in two adjacent rooms of the ground-level monastery complex south of the later monumental complex on the northern hill of Karatepa: one

stupa on a round base (Fig. 11) and another on a high rectangular base (Fig. 12). The complicated rectangular-base structure has remained in almost perfect state of preservation. The discovery of two types of stupas in adjacent rooms indicates that they coexisted at a certain stage in history. While stupas with rectangular base spread widely in Termez and other Bactrian sites from the second century CE, stupas with round base gradually disappeared.

The find of 151 copper coins excavated together from the ground-level layer of Complex IO²¹ in 2011 also shows that Buddhism transmitted at an early stage in this area and Buddhist structures were constructed at Karatepa. Although all the excavated coins have not been fully covered, more than two dozen coins of two denominations have been identified as mints of Vima Kadphises (Fig. 13), the predecessor of Kanishka I.

Therefore, at the moment, Sōtēr megas coins can be said to be the oldest coins collected from Karatepa. The tetradrachm coins of



Fig. 11 Stupa on round base

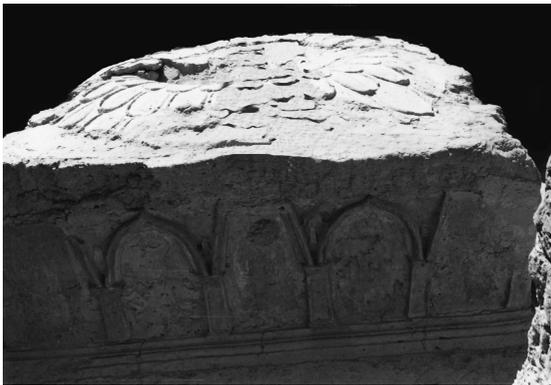


Fig. 12 Stupa on rectangular base



Fig. 13 Copper coin of Vima Kadphises: Coins were excavated together from Karatepa.

Heliocles were not yet known there, but it is too early to completely exclude this type of coin from the Karatepa collection. Thus, it can be assumed that Buddhist places of worship were constructed at Karatepa when Sōtēr megas coins were in circulation, i.e. by the middle of the first century CE or possibly earlier.

This chronological view is supported by paleographical analysis of inscriptions found on the northern hill of Karatepa. Among the excavated inscriptions, G. Fussman identified some belonging to the first century CE.

Dissemination of Buddhism to Bactria and Prosperity of the Kushan Empire

In light of the latest archaeological data and the findings of previous studies on Buddhist monuments, there is every reason to believe that the oldest Buddhist structure of ancient Termez is Fayaztepa, which was built in the mid-first century. There is a high probability that the early Buddhist structure of Karatepa was constructed during the period of the ruler who minted Sōtēr megas coins, that is from the latter half to the end of the first century CE. An analysis of the architectural structure and design and a consideration of the functional purpose of its rooms and courtyards, would show that the Fayaztepa building was constructed as a special architectural project, which is precisely what Mkrttychev also notes.²² The complexity and grand scale of its layout suggest that, during the construction of Fayaztepa in Termez, there was quite a large Buddhist community which had strong influence on the socio-political and cultural life of the city and the world of thought. Thus, it can be said that the first Buddhist missionaries appeared in Termez between the latter half of the first century BCE and the beginning of the first century CE. It is difficult to extrapolate from other cases to prove how a Buddhist community could achieve such influence amongst the gentry

and common people of the city in such a short period of time — so much so that they provided considerable assistance for the construction of such a huge building as Fayaztepa — and what the motivation was for constructing Buddhist buildings at Karatepa, and the temples in the central part of Chingiztepa. The contention of earlier scholars that the Bactrians became acquainted with the Buddhist teachings as early as the first half of the second century BCE²³ and that the teachings had already spread widely by the first century BCE seems valid.²⁴ Mkrttychev analysed the available data related to this issue and concluded that the first Buddhist missionaries appeared in Bactria as early as the second and first centuries BCE and that the extensive construction of Buddhist structures in this area can be dated to the latter half of the first century CE.²⁵ From an analysis of coin finds and sculpture style, Pugachenkova identified the date of construction of the Dal'verzintepa temple as the first century CE.²⁶ Rtveladze also corroborates this chronological view.²⁷ Therefore, going by the current research on monuments of northern Bactria, it seems valid to identify the date of construction of the first Buddhist structures as the middle of the first century CE.

As is well known, the Sōtēr megas coins were minted by the Kushan rulers as the very first national coinage. Excavated in quite a large number throughout the territory of the Kushan Empire, these coins are a good source of information about the history of a particular area. It is probably from the era of the ruler who minted the Sōtēr megas that Buddhism started to spread widely and Buddhist structures started to be constructed in the Bactria region. Buddhist preachers could move freely throughout this great new empire which integrated most parts of Central Asia and India. This gave a qualitatively new impetus to Buddhism during the reigns of the Kanishka I and subsequent Kushan kings.

In the whole territory of the great Kushan Empire, thanks to political stability, favourable conditions for development of the economy and domestic and international trade were created and great changes took place in the socio-cultural life of the empire and the world of thought. Buddhism became a leading religion in the life of the new empire. It was the kings and their governors who provided great support for this religion to spread throughout the empire, and Kanishka I played an especially crucial role. Every change which took place in the life of the Kushan Empire was reflected in that of Termez. The results of archaeological research on the site of Old Termez show that it reached a size of 350 ha during the Kushan period and various handicraft industries rapidly developed. Termez transformed itself into a kind

of centre of Buddhism and Buddhist art culture in Central Asia. New archaeological discoveries from Buddhist monuments confirm this position of Termez.

Buddhism and Buddhist art culture flourished in Termez in the second and third centuries CE, i.e. during the reigns of Kanishka I and his successors. It was identified that new ground-cave complexes on the southern and western hills of Karatepa and monumental above-ground monasteries on the northern hill were constructed in the mid-second century CE, existing complexes repaired and renovated, and the interiors decorated.²⁸ It was not uncommon for these complexes to often be renovated and their design changed. During that time, earlier complexes coexisted with later ones. Each place has its own history and characteristics. The same pattern is also observed from the Fayaztepa, where individual renovation and repair were undertaken in the second and third centuries CE. It is probable that the walls of the temple were adorned with paintings in the second century CE. The stupa of Zurmala (Fig. 14) has been dated to the first half of the second century CE.²⁹

The only remains left of a grand stupa-like structure on the north-west hill of the Big Chingiztepa is a base made of square sundried bricks that can tentatively be dated to the second century CE. A gilt head of the Buddha, an artefact excavated from there, indicates that the structure is the remains of a stupa. The period of this stupa overlaps with the high prosperity of the Buddhist temple at the Small Chingiztepa.³⁰



Fig. 14 Stupa of Zurmala: It is said to have been constructed during the reign of King Kanishka. As calculated by Pugachenkova, 1.2 million sundried bricks were used in its construction.

Karatepa: “Vihara of the Sovereign”

Large-scale construction of Buddhist places of worship took place in Old Termez and they played an active role in the second and third centuries CE. On the one hand, it can be said that these events resulted in the quantitative growth of the Buddhist community and its growing influence in all spheres of social, political, cultural and spiritual life of the city. On the other hand, it was the special attention of the rulers, their aides and the elite in the urban area which resulted in the growing reach of Buddhism. This can be supported by numerous inscriptions on ceramics that had the names of persons such as Buddhasira, Buddhamitra, Jivananda and others who lived in the city and had great knowledge of the Buddhist teachings, and names of monasteries such as “vihara of the sovereign” and “vihara of Gulavhara’s (Gondophares) son”.³¹

The excavated coins also indicate that people densely inhabited the Buddhist structures of Termez between the second and third centuries CE. In the well-known numismatic collections of Termez Buddhist monuments, the coins of Vima Kadphises, Kanishka I (Fig. 15) and Huvishka are the most numerous.³²

Therefore, there is unanimous agreement amongst scholars that the widespread transmission of Buddhism and the construction of Buddhist structures in northern Bactria, in particular Termez, date between the second and third centuries CE.



Fig. 15 Copper coin of Kanishka I

Decline of Buddhist Structures

It is very difficult to identify when the decline of Buddhist monuments started and they stopped being used for their original purpose. According to Staviskiy, many complexes on the southern hill were abandoned between the later third and fourth centuries CE and a little later, during the Kushano-Sasanian period, they became the urban necropolis (Fig. 16). At the same time, Staviskiy notes that some parts of the complexes could have been used in the early fifth century CE.³³ In fact, Mkrtychev agrees with the chronology proposed by Staviskiy.³⁴ After a paleographic analysis of inscriptions on ceramics found at Karatepa,

V.V. Vertogradova concluded that some monasteries could have been inhabited between the fifth and early sixth centuries CE.³⁵

From an analysis of the coins from Karatepa and a consideration of their stratigraphic deposit, E.V. Zeymal' believes that separate ground-cave complexes on the southern hill of Karatepa started to lose their original function after the mid-fifth century CE. In support of this, he uses coins of the Kushano-Sasanian Kingdom which were found near burial remains as evidence. For dating coins of the Kushano-Sasanian Kingdom, he follows the chronological method proposed by V.G. Lukonin. At the same

time, he admits that the abandonment of the monastery could have occurred in the latter half of the fourth century CE and the burials taken place a little later, by the latter half of the fifth century or sixth century CE.³⁶ According to him, Karatepa as a Buddhist monastery was partially inhabited between the latter half of the sixth century and the beginning of the seventh century CE.³⁷ T.I. Zeymal' believes that the structures on the northern hill of Karatepa were abandoned and lost their function as late as the end of the fourth century to the fifth century CE.³⁸ In other words, there is no consensus among researchers about when the Karatepa Buddhist complexes declined and lost their original function. It is impossible to identify the exact date of these events, as they did take place multiple times. There is no doubt that these Buddhist complexes gradually declined. However, there is no firm basis to show that these events could date 100 or 200 years later than commonly accepted estimates, as asserted by some researchers.³⁹ In this sense, the findings of archaeological research conducted at Karatepa, Fayaztepa and Chingiztepa in the last two decades, make it possible to give a clearer estimate of the period of decline and desolation. In particular, archaeological work on the northern hill of Karatepa shows that the monumental ground complexes with at least three stupas were intensively inhabited from the second century to the first half of the third century CE and that they were destroyed sometime in the

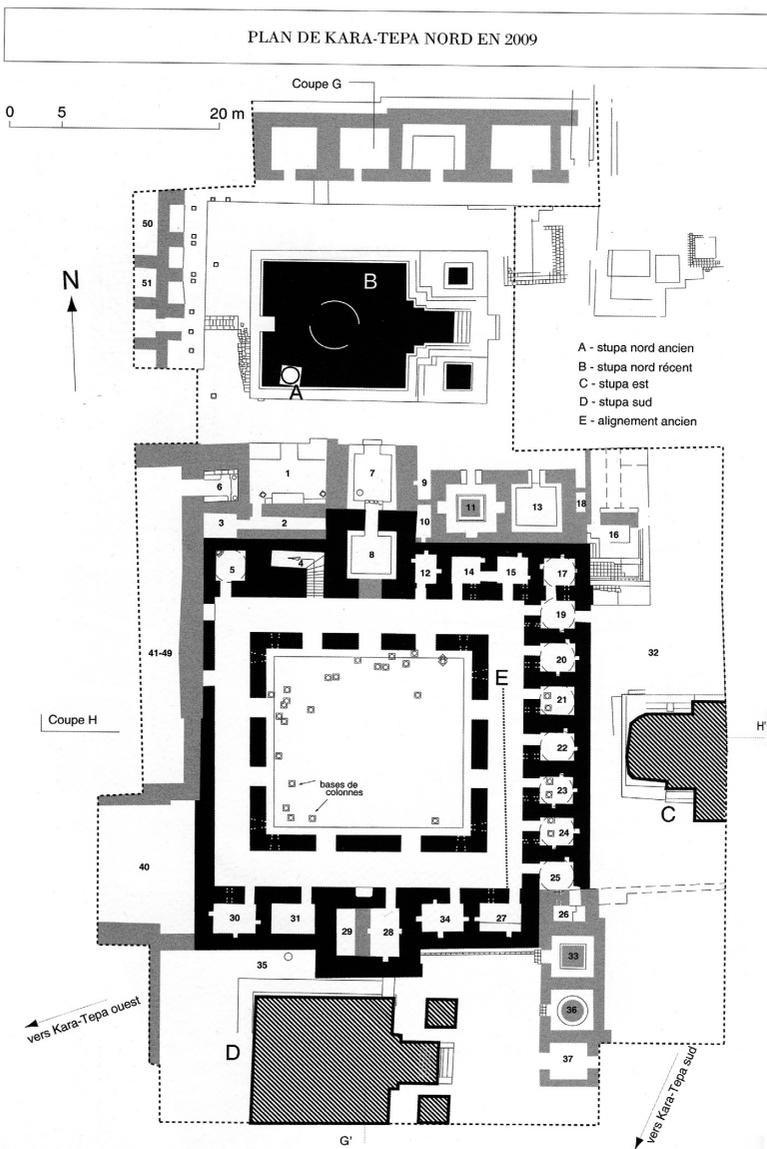


Fig. 16 Burial at urban necropolis

mid-third century CE. Completely demolished walls of most parts of the north and east complexes tell us that they were destroyed quite violently. Furthermore, the stone and clay-ganch sculptures, with which the interior monastery was adorned, were also broken and scattered (Fig. 17.1, 17.2 and 17.3). In all likelihood, this is related to the military campaign of the Sasanian King Shapur I (243–73 CE). The conquest of Termez by Sasanians is evidenced by two Middle Persian inscriptions which were excavated from the cave part of Complex Б, on the southern hill of Karatepa. While V.B. Hening states that one of them was inscribed in 264–5 CE, V.G. Lukonin asserts that it is dated 369–70 CE and he specifically emphasizes the later date.⁴⁰ However, the conquest of Termez by the Sasanians was temporary. As Mkrttychev rightly points out, this attack resulted in Bactria no longer being part of the Kushan Empire and being administered by rulers who minted imitation coins of the last Kushan kings instead.⁴¹ Soon after the destruction, a huge above-ground complex was constructed at the site of the northern complex and it remains in a pretty good state till today (Fig. 18). During the construction of this complex, separate sections of the south and east walls of the older complex were successfully incorporated in the structure of the new monastery. However, this complex too gradually lost its original purpose by the end of the third to early fourth century CE, but there are no signs of violent destruction.

On the western hill of Karatepa (Fig. 19), two ground-cave complexes were fully explored and two imitation coins of Vasudeva were excavated. Copper coins of Termezshah (Fig. 20) and imitation silver coins of Peroz (Fig. 21) and not coins of the Kushano-Sasanian Kingdom were found at the burials in the cave part of the complexes. The same pattern is observed on the northern hill of Karatepa. As is well known, quite a large number of Kushano-Sasanian coins were found as well at the burial sites on the southern hill.⁴² These details are of significance in showing that the abandoned Buddhist structures of Karatepa were later used as an urban necropolis. But they aren't related to the Buddhist history of Karatepa.

Archaeological research conducted at Fayaztepa from 2003 to 2004 also provides significant material to necessitate a review of the architectural design of the monument and later history of the inhabitation. It established that the Fayaztepa stupa was not a separate structure but an intrinsic part of the whole complex, which contradicts previous research. It was surrounded by a special wall on the north-eastern and north-western sides and a wide courtyard-corridor was constructed around the stupa. The cylindrical drum of the stupa was



Plan dressé par C. Dupont et E. Ollivier à partir du plan original de Sh. Pidaev et de leurs relevés au théodolite. Le rendu correspond à l'interprétation du site de G. Fussman.

Fig. 18 Plan of monastery on the northern hill of Karatepa (2009): A) Early stupa on north side, B) Later stupa on north side, C) Stupa on east side, D) Stupa on south side, E) Array of early structures, □ Foundation stone



Fig. 19 Karatepa: 1) Fayaztepa, 2) Main stupa on northern hill, 3) Buddhist monastery on northern hill, 4) Stupa of complex on western hill

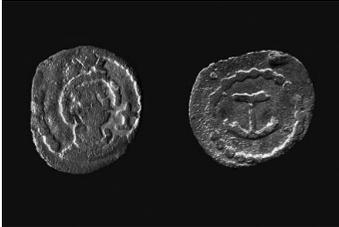


Fig. 20 Copper coins of Termezshah



Fig. 21 Imitation silver coins of Peroz

installed on a two-stage base. On the south-east side of the base, there was a ladder or ramp leading to the cylindrical drum. On both sides of the ramp, small stupas were installed on the square base. Unfortunately, there are no remnants to establish the star-studded layout around the large stupa, as architect A.A. Asanov's reconstruction shows.⁴³ As is well known, the star-studded layout is more typical of stupas of the early medieval period. In light of the latest excavations, the Fayaztepa stupa, as Mkrtychev rightly notes, can be surmised to have been built at the same time as the monastery complex.⁴⁴ Therefore, whether the Fayaztepa stupa functioned in the fifth century CE is beyond the scope of our discussion but it is certain that Fayaztepa as a Buddhist monastery fell into disrepair at the end of the third century CE.⁴⁵

To summarize, it is possible to reconstruct the overall circumstances leading up to the decline of the Termez Buddhist monuments and the breakdown of the community as follows. The Buddhist complexes of Karatepa, Fayaztepa and Chingiztepa gradually fell into disrepair at the end of the third century CE. The cause has been traditionally related to

the eastern campaign of the Sasanian troops led by Shapur I. However, the conquest of Bactria, in particular its right-bank area including Termez, was temporary, and this attack was not the main cause of the dereliction of Buddhist structures in the area. Archaeological research shows that there are no traces of violent destruction of any of these monuments. The process of decline was most likely related to domestic events such as the collapse of the Kushan Empire and subsequent socio-economic changes. Termez, of course, was not left behind in this process. As a result, the urban population reduced drastically and people resettled in rural areas. In addition, handicraft production dropped slightly. The urban rulers and elite too were not economically so strong anymore, so they could no longer provide essential financial support to the Buddhist complexes.⁴⁶ It was first the smaller Buddhist complexes



Fig. 22 Main stupa on the northern hill



Fig. 23 Buddhist monastery on the northern hill of Karatepa

densely distributed on the southern and western hills of Karatepa that were primarily affected by these circumstances. It is because the lower-level monks of small complexes generally seemed less dignified than those of large monasteries to the urban people. However, even the large monasteries like the Termez one could not sustain themselves for a long period and soon started to decline. As these Buddhist complexes were gradually abandoned, they started to be reused as an urban necropolis. The semi-destroyed Buddhist structures of Karatepa acted as shelters to some people such as recluses for several centuries. It is worth mentioning that some separate rooms of the ground monastery complex on the northern hill (Figs 22 and 23) have remained in a very good state, to the extent that even the ceiling has remained intact (Fig. 24).

Staviskiy is of the opinion that some complexes were used for Buddhist purposes in the early fifth century CE and cites inscriptions on ceramic artefacts in support of his argument.⁴⁷ However, such evidence alone cannot conclusively prove the usage of the complex for Buddhist purposes. The ceramic pieces could have been abandoned later by some Buddhist pilgrims who visited the Karatepa complexes as a ‘sacred’ Buddhist centre.

Influence of Buddhist Thought

Although the Buddhist complexes were abandoned at Karatepa, Fayaztepa and Chingiztepa, it does not mean that the history of Buddhism and Buddhist art in the area ended. As recent archaeological research in Termez shows, most of the Buddhist communities were based in places such as the present-day area of Hakim at-Termezi’s mausoleum or near



Fig. 24 Squinch arch. Traces of circular dome

the city of mediaeval Shahrstan. This view is supported by about two dozen cave monasteries which were excavated there. These monasteries were cut out of thick sandstone and ceramic materials of the late Kushan and early medieval periods were also excavated from there. During the Islamic period, they were used as *chillahona*, rooms for seclusion. The excavated cave monasteries have a characteristic design which is different from other ones. A small stupa discovered in the area of medieval Shahrstan also indicates that the Buddhist community was intensively developing this part of city during the late Kushan and early medieval periods.⁴⁸ The finds of stones with Buddhist characters used as architectural material show the rich intricacy and grandness of Buddhist structures in the area.⁴⁹

It seems that the idea behind the founding of a new Buddhist centre in this area was to bring the city's Buddhist community into closer contact with people and thereby strengthening its position and economic situation.

Based on these discoveries, I believe that it was this Buddhist centre that was visited in 630 CE by Chinese traveller Xuanzang, who left records of a city with more than 10 Buddhist monasteries and more than 1000 monks, and many stupas and images of the Great Buddha.⁵⁰

Before the discovery of this centre, some scholars of Buddhism and the Buddhist art of Bactria had placed the centre on the site of Karatepa and intentionally dated the settlement much later,⁵¹ and Staviskiy even doubted the reliability of Xuanzang's observation mentioned in the previous paragraph.⁵²

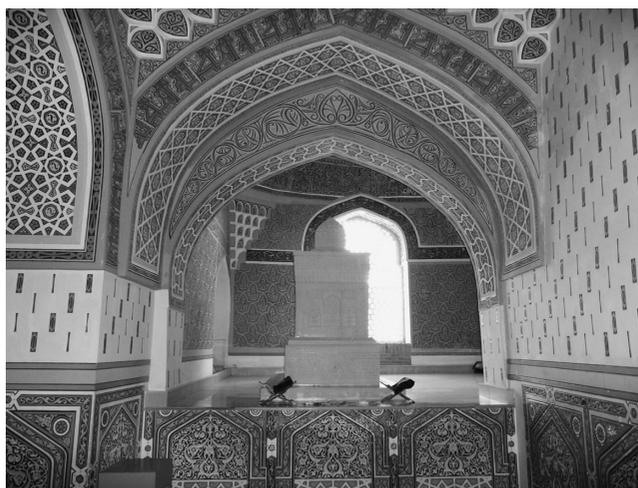


Fig. 25 Hakim at-Termezi Mausoleum

The Arab conquest of Termez at the end of the seventh century apparently put an end to the Buddhist history of the city. It is assumed that some Buddhist monks of Termez moved to Kashmir, whose rulers continued to provide great support to Buddhists.⁵³ However, it does not mean that Buddhist thought disappeared without any trace. It had quite a strong influence on the formation of the worldview and spiritual culture of people in the city. In particular, we can find many Buddhist characteristics in the teachings of Hakim at-Termezi (852–92 CE), an outstanding scholar, theologian and mystic, whose mausoleum (Fig. 25) coincidentally lies close to Termez's Buddhist ruins.

Notes

- ¹ Old Termez is the ruins of an ancient and medieval city located on the outskirts of Termez, capital of Surkhandarya Region, Republic of Uzbekistan.
- ² Strelkov 1927, 27–30.
- ³ Strelkov 1928, 41–47.
- ⁴ Masson 1933.
- ⁵ Masson 1945, 8; Pchelina 1964, 96.
- ⁶ Al'baum 1974, 53–58; Al'baum 1976, 43–46; Al'baum 1990, 18–26.
- ⁷ Pidaev, Lerish and Papakhrstu 2000, 113.
- ⁸ Al'baum 1990, 26.
- ⁹ Pidaev 1990, 38.
- ¹⁰ Masson 1956, 74.
- ¹¹ Masson 1976, 11.
- ¹² Pugachenkova 1967b, 82.
- ¹³ Masson 1950, 47; Sims-Williams and Cribb 1995/96, 97–101; Errington 1999/2000, 216.
- ¹⁴ Rtveladze 2002, 130.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 128.
- ¹⁶ Staviskiy 1998, 156.
- ¹⁷ Zeymal', E.V. 1996, 193.
- ¹⁸ Mkrtychev 2002, 18.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 76.
- ²⁰ Marshall 1951(1), 233.
- ²¹ Among the excavated coins are those of Kanishka as well as Vima Kadphises.
- ²² Mkrtychev 2002, 76.
- ²³ Litvinskiy 1968, 129; Litvinskiy and Zeymal' 1971, 111.
- ²⁴ Marquart 1901, 90.
- ²⁵ Staviskiy and Mkrtychev 1996, 223; Mkrtychev 2001, 53.
- ²⁶ Pugachenkova and Turgunov 1978, 91–97.
- ²⁷ Rtveladze 2000, 18.
- ²⁸ Staviskiy 1998, 26.
- ²⁹ Pugachenkova 1967a, 263.
- ³⁰ Pidaev, Lerish and Papakhrstu 2000, 113.
- ³¹ Vertogradova 1995, 43–45.

- ³² Al'baum 1990, 26; Zeymal', E.V. 1996, 186. In this case, only coins directly related to the Buddhist complexes as religious place are taken into account.
- ³³ Staviskiy 1998, 41–43.
- ³⁴ Mkrtychev 2001, 57; Mkrtychev 2002, 21–22.
- ³⁵ Vertogradova 1995, 46.
- ³⁶ Zeymal', E.V. 1996, 194.
- ³⁷ Ibid., 195.
- ³⁸ Zeymal', T.I. 1996, 148.
- ³⁹ Vertogradova 1995; Zeymal', E.V. 1996; Zeymal', T.I. 1996.
- ⁴⁰ Lukonin 1969, 46.
- ⁴¹ Mkrtychev 2001, 57.
- ⁴² Zeymal', E.V. 1996, 186.
- ⁴³ Asanov 1976, 32–34.
- ⁴⁴ Mkrtychev 2002, 76.
- ⁴⁵ Al'baum 1990, 26.
- ⁴⁶ Mkrtychev 2002, 22.
- ⁴⁷ Staviskiy 1998, 43.
- ⁴⁸ Leriche and Pidaev 2007, 190–93.
- ⁴⁹ Leriche, Pidaev and Genequand 2002, 43–49.
- ⁵⁰ Kato 2001, 106.
- ⁵¹ Vertogradova 1995; Zeymal', E.V. 1996; Zeymal', T.I. 1996.
- ⁵² Mkrtychev 2002, 26.
- ⁵³ Mkrtychev 2001, 58.

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Figure References

Figs 1–4, 6, 7–17, 20–21, 24 and 25: Photographs by the author

Figs 5, 19, 22 and 23: Photographs by late Dr Kyuzo Kato

Plan (Fig. 18) was drawn up by C. Dupont and E. Ollivier from the original plan by Sh. Pidaev and their theodolite surveys. The rendering corresponds to G. Fussman's interpretation of the site.

About the Author and Translator

Shakirdjan R. Pidaev is director at the Fine Arts Institute of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan and a member of the Academic Council of the International Institute for Central Asian Studies in Samarkand. He earned a PhD in history and has a rich experience in archaeological research as well as teaching within and outside Uzbekistan, including lecturing as a visiting professor at Soka University, Japan.

Nobuo Yamagishi is commissioned a research fellow at the Institute of Oriental Philosophy. He earned a PhD in area studies from Kyoto University and his recent research focuses on food and the eating culture of India.