

# Buddhism in the Chuy Valley (Kyrgyzstan) in the Middle Ages

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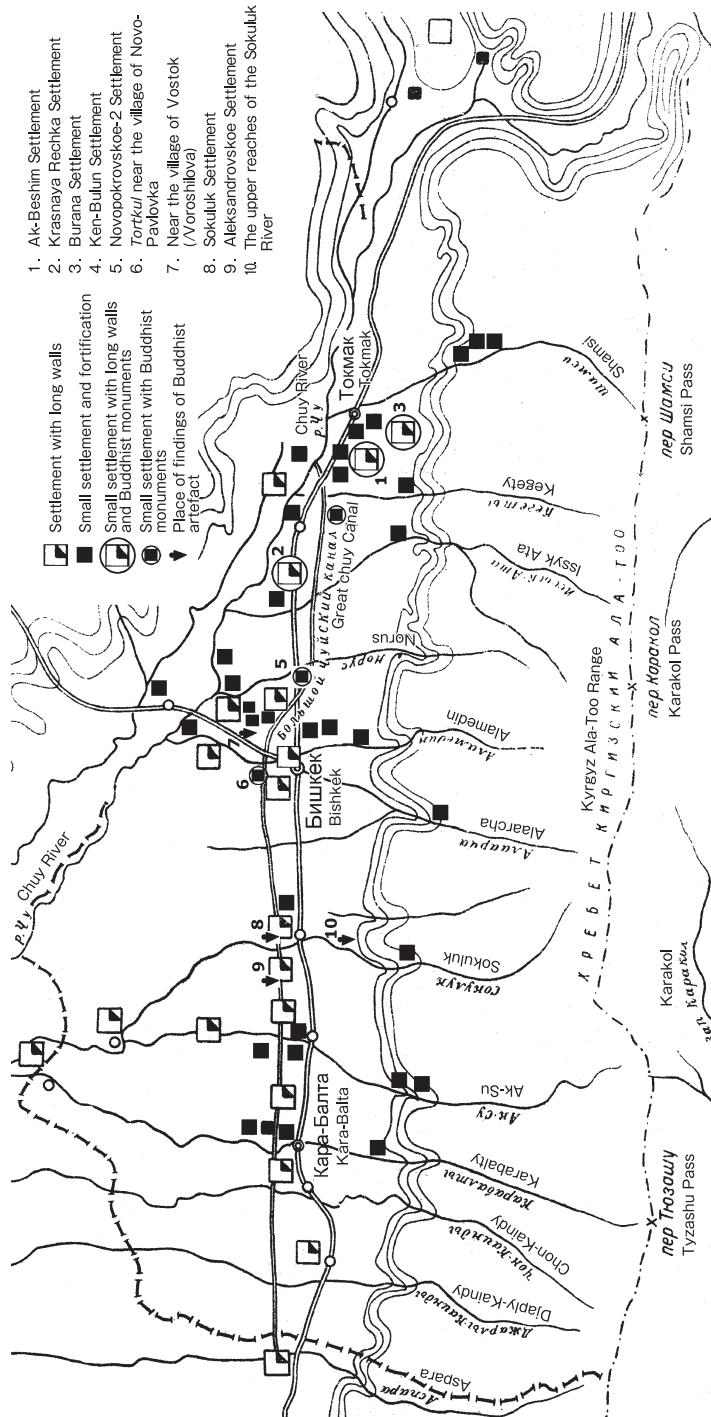
THE geographical position of the territory of modern Kyrgyzstan in Central Asia largely determined its historical and cultural past. Lying between East Turkestan and the middle flows of the Syr Darya, this territory was a contact region between the nomadic Steppe (and mountains) and traditional agricultural regions.

This is most clearly manifested in the Chuy Valley,<sup>1</sup> which was an eternal crossroads where nomadic Turks, farmers and merchants of the Sogdian world, carriers of the imperial traditions of China met and where individual impulses from Tibet, India, Iran, the Volga region found their way. One of the routes of the Great Silk Road passed through it. All of these factors determined the formation of a culture in the Chuy Valley that had absorbed elements of different cultural worlds.

Before the Middle Ages, the Chuy Valley was perceived as a peripheral part of the “former Usun lands”, in which nomads lived and where there was no settled way of life.<sup>2</sup> By the seventh century, practically at the same time, the Chuy Valley became the political centre of the Western Turkic Khaganate, and a network of settlements and cities rapidly came up. Having reached a quantitative peak in the 10th–11th centuries and having barely survived the invasion of the armies of Genghis Khan at the beginning of the 13th century, the cities in the Chuy Valley suddenly and abruptly disappeared. The valley again became the sole territory of the nomads.

Medieval cities and settlements of the Chuy Valley during the fifth–seventh centuries, despite all the transformations remained multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-confessional. According to archaeological data, adherents of Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Manichaeism, Christianity and Islam lived in the cities and settlements, coexisting with and replacing each other. This article is devoted to the monuments of medieval Buddhism in the Chuy Valley.

Data on Buddhism in the Chuy Valley is practically absent in written sources of the period. The first of such sources could be the work of



Sketch map of Buddhist sites in the Chuy Valley

Xuanzang, the Chinese Buddhist traveller, since he stayed in Suyab (素葉, 碎葉), one of the cities of the valley and the capital of the Western Turks, on his pilgrimage to India in 629–30. But he does not report anything about Buddhism here in the record of his travels.<sup>3</sup> Even in the biographies of the pilgrim compiled a little later, there is no data on Buddhism in the Chuy Valley.<sup>4</sup> It can be concluded that Buddhism had not yet been introduced in the Chuy Valley by the third decade of the seventh century.

Perhaps the only direct mention of Buddhism is included in the encyclopedia *Tongdian* 通典 (General Review) by Duyou 杜佑 (766) in connection with Chinese traveller Duhan's 杜環 visit to Suyab in 750. In this regard, the encyclopedia says that Suyab was occupied in 748 by the Chinese army of Wang Zhengjiang 王正見, which destroyed the city walls and the houses of people. It continues, "This is the place where Princess Jiaohe 交河 used to live. The Dayuan Monastery 大雲寺 built by the Chinese has survived."<sup>5</sup> Antonio Forte, analysing this passage, came to the conclusion that the monastery was one of the many temples built on the orders of Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 between 692 and 705.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, archaeological finds eloquently document the existence of Buddhism in the medieval Chuy Valley. Based on these finds, it can be said that the Chuy Valley was a Buddhist oasis in the desert of non-Buddhist territories in a certain sense. Within a radius of 300–500km from the valley, there were no Buddhist monuments known to anyone. However, the position of Buddhism in the valley was not exclusive.

As a result of archaeological research in the Chuy Valley, architectural remains of medieval Buddhism have been excavated and seem to have existed at six sites. All of them are concentrated in the eastern, and to an extent, central part of the valley.<sup>7</sup>

Ak-Beshim has two remains, Buddhist temples AB-1 and AB-2, which are well studied. Krasnaya Rechka has three remains: Buddhist temples KrR-1 and KrR-2 and Buddhist temple and monastery KrR-3. We do not have complete data on two architectural remains, one of Ak-Beshim (AB-0) and another near the villages of Novo-Pavlovka on the north-western outskirts of modern Bishkek. Based on the finding of a series of Buddhist artefacts, it is assumed that there are Buddhist buildings at three more settlements of the Chuy Valley; Burana, Ken-Bulun and Novopokrovskoe-2. Furthermore, at four more points in the valley: the upper reaches of the Sokuluk River and a site near the village of Vostok (or Voroshilovskoe), the settlements of Sokuluk and Aleksandrovskoe, single Buddhist finds have been discovered. Therefore, it can be said

that Buddhism in the medieval Chuy Valley was a significant cultural phenomenon and one of the leading religious systems, and that remains of religions such as Zoroastrianism / Mazdaism, Christianity and Islam belonging to the Middle Ages are less prevalent.

## Buddhist Monuments of Ak-Beshim and Krasnaya Rechka Settlements

Records on Buddhist monuments at the sites of Ak-Beshim and Krasnaya Rechka have been published many times,<sup>8</sup> including our article in Russian and Japanese.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, we will try to give some general analysis on these sites.

It should be noted that all these remains are regarded as not only individual temples, but also parts of Buddhist monasteries. Almost all of them except AB-0, are located outside the castle walls of the central city ruins, but close to them, and have their own strong fortifications. On the other hand, AB-0 is located a little far from the *tortkul* (literally square tell), central ‘inner city’, inside the castle walls of Shakhristan-2, which may be the ‘Chinese city’ of the ancient settlement (Fig. 1). While in the case of AB-1 temple, excavated outer walls indicate that the structure was a Buddhist monastery, in other cases there are only reliefs to establish the fact. For the monastery with KrR-2 temple, it is difficult to determine the size (Figs 1 and 2).

In most of these remains — AB-1, AB-2, KrR-1, KrR-2 and KrR-3 — the structure of the temple was planned in quite a uniform way with a sanctuary surrounded by corridors and a hall in front of the sanctuary (Fig. 3). The size of these temples also seems quite similar, ranging from 20m to 25m, with only AB-2 temple almost twice as large as the others (see Table 1). Further, AB-0 temple has a different structural plan, which can be seen to originate from other cultural traditions.

Despite the same structural plan, there is a difference in the way the walls have been built at Ak-Beshim and Krasnaya Rechka. The walls of the AB-1 and AB-2 temples were built with *pakhsa* (pressed clay) used for laying on the ground and large-format raw bricks (42–48×23–25×9–10cm) for support. On the other hand, the walls of KrR-1 and KrR-2 temples were built with the same bricks on the ruined buildings in the ground. The walls had to be thick (1.3–2.6m) because the extra margin was necessary for supporting mud bricks of vaults and domes. Both the styles were unique to the tradition of building in this area.

The walls of AB-0, which are still only partially explored, seem totally different. They are thin (from 0.4 to 0.95m) and made of small-

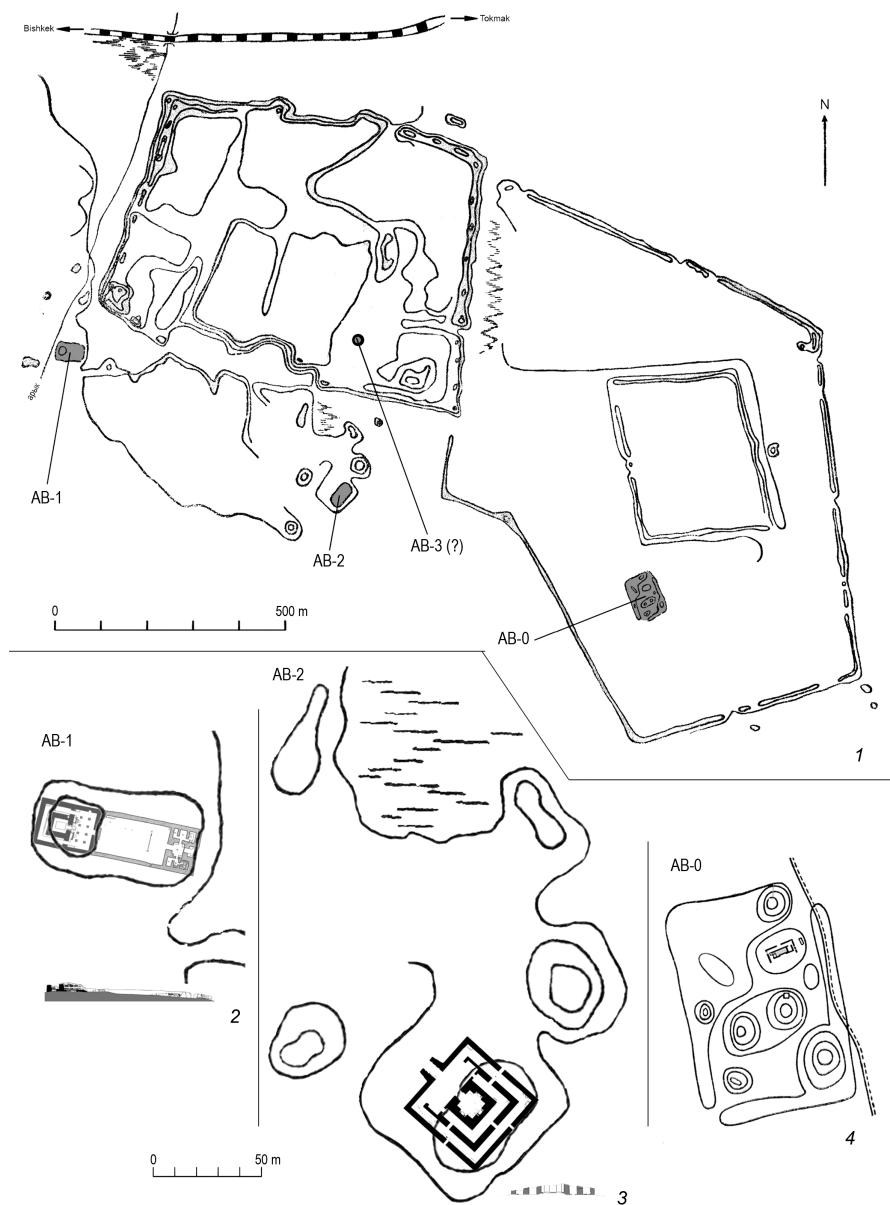


Fig. 1 Plan view of Ak-Beshim (1) and its Buddhist remains: (2) AB-1, (3) AB-2, (4) AB-0

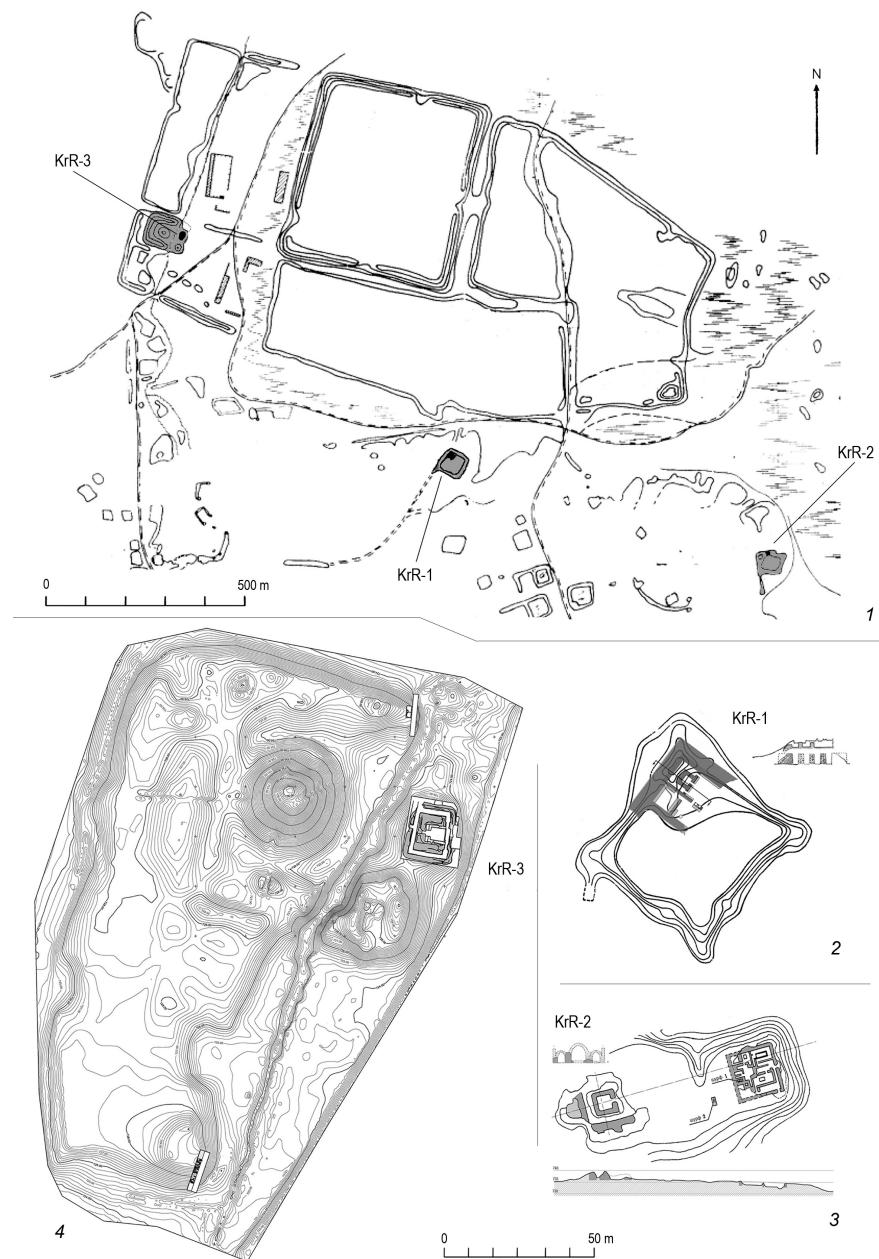


Fig. 2 Plan view and relief map of Krasnaya Rechka (1) and its Buddhist remains: (2) KrR-1, (3) KrR-2, (4) KrR-3

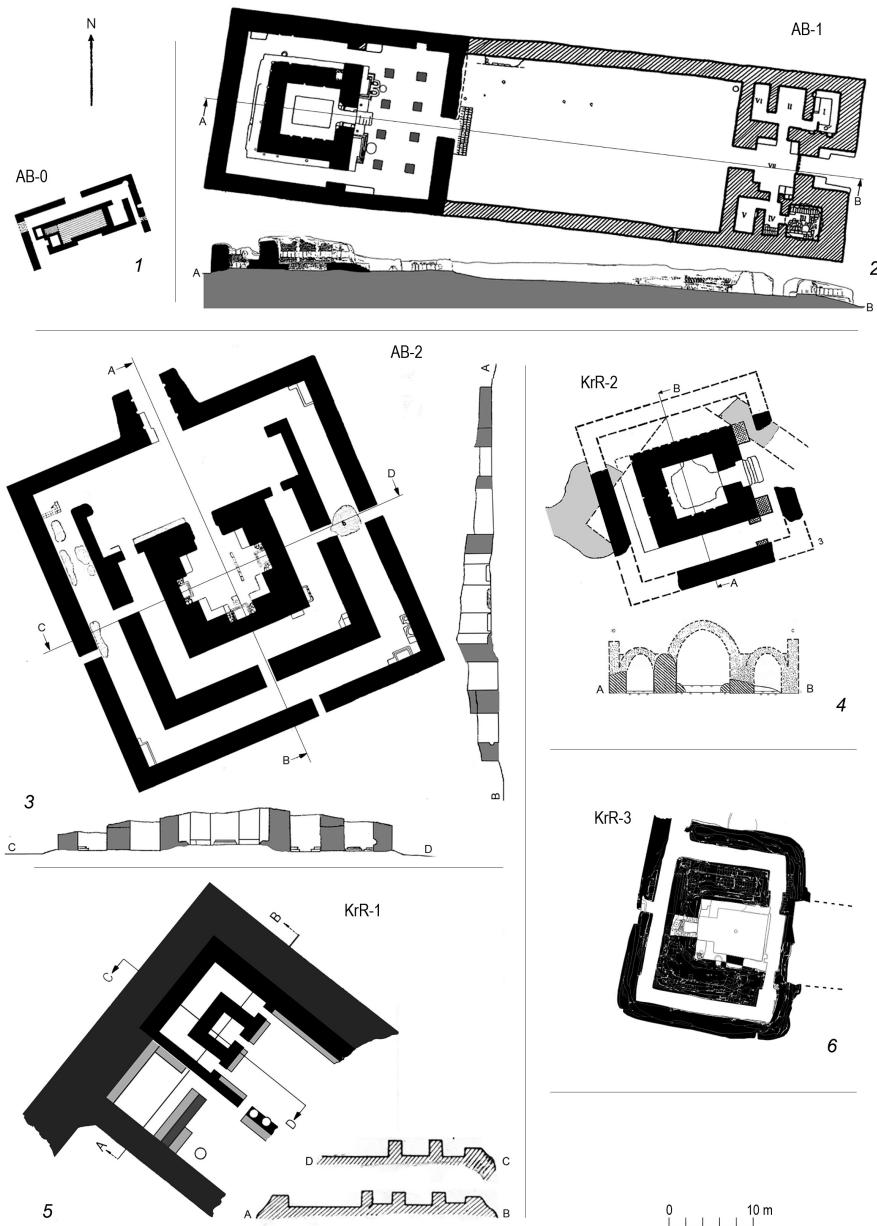


Fig. 3 Buddhist remains of Ak-Beshim and Krasnaya Rechka

Table 1

№	Object	External size of temple	Size of monastery
1	AB-0	14×6.5+m	113×64m / 100×71m
2	AB-1	22×27.5m	76×22m
3	AB-2	38×38.4m 28×28m (inner corridor)	130–140×130–140m
4	KrR-1	18×21+m	62×62m
5	KrR-2	22×22m	?
6	KrR-3	23.5×20.4m	105×100m
7	<i>Tortkul</i> near Novopavlovka village	?	67×68m
8	Settlement Novopokrovskoe-2 (NP-2)	?	120×120m
9	Settlement Ken-Bulun (KBu)	?	?
10	Settlement Burana (Bu)	30–35×30–35m*	70×60m

\* Size on the outer sides of the hill

format raw bricks (24×17×6cm and 33×20×7.5cm); individual burnt bricks (34×16.5×5.5cm) are used at their base. As far as we understand the layout, there is a one-way open kiosk, a large pedestal (10×3.5m) covered with a tiled roof for placing an icon sculpture, and narrow ‘technical’ passages along the side walls. We believe that the style of building has different cultural roots such as the Chinese or Far Eastern tradition.

The dates of Buddhist architectural remains according to the first research reports are listed in Table 2.

One of the main criteria for the early dates (sixth–seventh centuries) of remains AB-1, AB-2 and KrR-2 were the finds of Turgesh and Tukhus coins excavated on the floors or in the underlying layers. According to Chinese sources, the beginning of the casting of Turgesh coins dates not earlier than the early eighth century when this tribe (Turgesh) became the head of “ten arrows’ folk”. The chronological issue of Tukhus coins casting has not been solved yet. Based on the stratigraphic fact that Tukhus coins were found below Turgesh coins during the excavations of AB-1, O.I. Smirnova surmised the date of Tukhus coins as being the seventh century which is earlier than Turgesh coins.<sup>10</sup> By regarding his hypothesis as fact, remains AB-1, AB-2 and KrR-2 could be so dated. However, Turgesh coins were in circulation with Tukhus ones until the transition to the Muslim monetary standard, which happened in the Chuy Valley in the 10th century. This means that

Table 2

No	Object	Years of field research	Field research supervisor	Dating proposed by the first researchers
Buddhist remains at the Ak-Beshim settlement				
1	AB-0	1939–40	A.N. Bernshtam	11th–12th / ninth–10th centuries
2	AB-1	1953–54	L.R. Kyzlasov	seventh–eighth centuries
3	AB-2	1954–58	P.L. Zyablin	from sixth–seventh centuries till the end of seventh–beginning of eighth century
Buddhist remains at the Krasnaya Rechka settlement				
4	KrR-1	1940 1961–62	A.N. Bernshtam P.N. Kozhemyako	Second half of eighth–10th centuries From the second decade of the eighth century till ninth century / 10th century / middle of 10th century
5	KrR-2	1940 1961–62 1980–2000-e	A.N. Bernshtam P.N. Kozhemyako V.D. Goryacheva	did not date seventh–eighth centuries seventh–eighth / ninth centuries
6	KrR-3	2010–15	A.I. Torgoev - V.A. Kolchenko	from the beginning of eighth century till 10th–beginning of 11th centuries
Inferred Buddhist remains based on finds at other settlements				
7	<i>Tortkul</i> near Novo-Pavlovka village	1941, during the construction of the Great Chuy Channel	A.N. Bernshtam	eighth–10th centuries
8	Settlement Novopokrovskoe-2 (NP-2)	Early 1960s, a complex of random finds		seventh–eighth centuries (Goryacheva, Peregudova) eighth–10th centuries (T.V. Grek)
9	Settlement Ken-Bulun (KBu)	2000s, a complex of random finds		10th–11th centuries (T.K. Mkrtchyan)
10	Settlement Burana (Bu)	beginning of 2000s		?

the noted stratigraphy of the coin finds at AB-1 seems too early from the chronological perspective. In addition, some modern researchers, based on important primary sources, view that the casting of Tukhus coins seems to have started later in the middle of the eighth century.<sup>11</sup> Such analysis of Tukhus coins leads to a reconsideration of Smirnova's hypothesis, which automatically influences dating of well-researched Buddhist remains. As a result of such chronological reconsideration of numismatic material, we believe that the construction of the five Buddhist remains under study (AB-1, AB-2, KrR-1, KrR-2 and KrR-3)

should date to almost same period, that is approximately the beginning of the eighth century.

The date of establishment of AB-0 temple could, however, be earlier than the date proposed by A.N. Bernshtam by one or two centuries (see Table 2). The keys to its dating are fragments of stone stele and a more intact similar stele which was found accidentally and depicts a Chinese-type reliquary below the lotus pedestal (Figs 8.2–8.4).<sup>12</sup> These resemble ones which are not known after the first quarter of the eighth century.<sup>13</sup> This may mean that the building itself was erected in the eighth century. Tiles and God guardians of the Tang tradition belonging to the same century were found, but along with them were glazed ceramics that were not known in the Chuy Valley earlier than the 10th century,<sup>14</sup> and coins of the Karakhanids. The burnt brick walls seem to indicate that they were built in the eighth–10th centuries, as Bernshtam proposed.

## Buddhist Monuments in Other Ancient Settlements of Kyrgyzstan

In addition to the Ak-Beshim and Krasnaya Rechka settlements in the eastern part of the Chuy Valley where Buddhist architectural monuments have been studied, there are also a number of other settlements where Buddhist buildings seem to have existed. While there has been much debate regarding such an assumption, it has not led to any clear conclusion.

### Remains near the Village of Novopavlovka<sup>15</sup>

In 1941, during the construction of Big Chuy Canal (BCC), small fortified *tortkul* settlements which were 300m away from each other were demolished in the north-east of Novopavlovka, a suburban village west of Bishkek. In the western settlement, there was “a building extremely destroyed” due to late (or modern) Muslim burials, where interior decor in Buddhist style was seen, such as wall paintings and painted clay reliefs (or sculptures). Some publications describe nine objects and three images amongst these fragments.<sup>16</sup>

Amongst the reliefs are fragments of clothing and “armor balteus with Sasanian-like buckles on the crosshairs” of the “Buddhist knights, Šakya”. The face of Dokshit or Vajrapāṇi stands out “with a long, straight nose and a magnificent long mustache, painted in red” (Fig. 7.11) and it seems to be a small fragment (13cm high and 13cm wide) of sculpture or wall relief.<sup>17</sup>

Wall paintings are characterized by geometric and plant images, which were made with “dry” (or glue) paints.<sup>18</sup>

The *tortkul* settlement itself was actually square in shape (67×68m) with the heaped walls (up to 3–3.5m high). The inner space was slightly lower than the outer walls and the *tortkul* was oriented to the cardinal points. It is associated with the district of the large settlement of Chala-Kazak (= Klyuchevskoe, Novopavlovskoe), as Bernshtam identified it with the medieval city of Juhl.<sup>19</sup>

The building with Buddhist antiquities was probably located in one corner of the settlement. It is because there was also another building which “began in the north-eastern corner of the settlement and reached the middle of the settlement square”. Based on the destruction traces of graves, researchers wrote: “[I]t is extremely difficult to make a clear judgment about the inner plan. One can only assume that there were small rooms like cells.”<sup>20</sup>

It is reported that amongst the finds are burnt bricks, ceramic water pipes, a *dastarkhan* (place where food was eaten) table, “Muslim vessels”, as well as a *tandoor* (cylindrical clay oven) and a Kaiyuan-Tongbao coin.<sup>21</sup> These finds can be dated to the Karakhanid time (10th–11th centuries), or pre-Karakhanid time (ninth–10th centuries) at best. On the other hand, Bernshtam dates them to the “Karluk period” (i.e. middle of eighth–10th centuries) probably based on the presence of a Chinese coin. But it is an obvious fact that the single Chinese coin was found in the layers of the Karakhanid time, therefore, it cannot serve as firm evidence for dating.

The data as a whole allows a number of researchers following Bernshtam to suggest that there was a Buddhist monastery in this small settlement in the eighth–10th centuries.<sup>22</sup>

From our point of view, there was a Buddhist structure near the village of Novo-Pavlovka. However, we do not have enough data to establish that the whole *tortkul*, in which there was a building with Buddhist decor, was a Buddhist monastery. The building can be classified based on the size (see Table 1), but still there is insufficient data to classify this Buddhist structure as a temple, small shrine, monks’ cells, etc. The lack of stratigraphic description in combination with the data on finds does not give a clear answer about the dating of the finds. If the object (*tortkul*) was in a single layer, then it definitely dates to the ninth–11th centuries. But it cannot be ruled out that the layer with the Buddhist structure was covered by layers of the ninth–11th centuries. If this was so, the eighth–ninth centuries dating proposed by Bernshtam would seem to be correct.

### Findings from the Settlement of Novopokrovskoe-2

During construction work on a hill in the centre of the village of Novopokrovka, located 11km east of Bishkek, Buddhist artefacts were collected. The hill where the construction was carried out turned out to be the settlement of Novopokrovskoe-2. Three items of the collection were introduced by T.V. Grek and V.D. Goryacheva in 1983.<sup>23</sup> Later, Goryacheva proposed that artefacts of the Buddhist complex could indicate that the entire settlement had a Buddhist character.<sup>24</sup> Such a statement caused some disagreement, but not because the existence of a Buddhist architectural object was in dispute but rather that it had been scaled up to cover the entire settlement. According to B.Ya. Staviskiy, the whole settlement was not necessarily a monastery and there was nothing more than a temple or even a small shrine there.<sup>25</sup> We concur with this view.

Seven Buddhist artefacts were the first to be transferred to the museum from the settlement and later one more was transferred: a fragment of red stone relief, a miniature head of white stone statuette (not “fragile” alabaster),<sup>26</sup> a bronze *vajra* (rod), a mirror with four Buddhist relief images, four figurines<sup>27</sup> from surprisingly different portable altars (Figs 4.3–4.9).

Let us note the chronological and cultural-geographical heterogeneity of these artefacts. The red stone relief was a work of Gandhāra craftsmen and dates from the second–fourth centuries to the fifth–sixth centuries.<sup>28</sup> Regarding the bronze sculpture, there is even less unanimity on the iconographical attribution. Grek considers the two figurines which appeared in publications (Figs 4.7 and 4.8) as imports from north India between the eighth and 10th centuries, and T.K. Mkrtchyan sees them as Chinese products of the Sui era or their locally reproduced copies.<sup>29</sup> At the time, Bernshtam asserted that a bronze mirror found at Krasnaya Rechka could be identical to the Novopokrovskoe one and belongs to the “Tang-Song” period.<sup>30</sup> In our opinion, these artefacts from the Buddhist complex show that such heterogeneity continued for a relatively long period.

Novopokrovskoe-2 where the complex was found is a relatively small settlement (120×120m) (Fig. 4.1). It is located south-east of the large settlement of Novopokrovskoe-1, with long perimeter<sup>31</sup> walls 1.6 km away from the citadel [of Novopokrovskoe-2]. P.N. Kozhemyako who identified two construction layers, proposed on stratigraphic basis that the site must date to the eighth–12th centuries.<sup>32</sup>

Our joint excavations of 2004–19 with German explorer F. Rott in the settlement (Fig. 4.2) furnish grounds to refute that the entire settlement



Fig. 4 Plan view and Buddhist Artefacts of Novopokrovskoe-2 settlement

showed a Buddhist character. It means that only a separate structure of the settlement had a Buddhist character and it was completely or partially excavated during the construction of Big Chuy Canal. So where could the structure have been? Our excavations clarified that the upper layers (1.5–2m thick) contained the ruins of a residential building of the 10th–12th centuries. Moreover, buildings were located not only inside the castle walls but also outside, and built even on the partially destroyed walls.<sup>33</sup> It seems unlikely that the Buddhist structure existed in the layer partially destroyed during the construction of Big Chuy Canal throughout the settlement.

The underlying buildings layer of the ninth–10th centuries has been little influenced by modern construction. The 0.3–0.5m deep belt-

like foundation of modern structures and the lower technical trenches (1–1.3m below the surface) are still positioned in the upper layer and do not reach the lower layer. There seems to have been only a basement in the cultural layer (2–3m below the surface) on the central point of settlement. We have been exploring Excavation 2 near this point since 2009. A road and remains of two houses with *tandoors* were identified, but they did not provide reliable evidence of Buddhist architecture or interior decor. We have not reached the natural ground layers yet.

Another place in the settlement where a Buddhist complex might have been found was a hill (tell) in the middle of the west wall of the settlement (Fig. 4.1). According to the description of Kozhemyako, the hill, which had a 30m-long diameter, rose 2m above the surrounding area.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, there is a strong possibility that the tell was the ruins of a significantly large Buddhist temple. There is no trace of the tell on the ground in the lower area. Artefacts could have been found during the demolition of the tell. However, the lower parts of the demolished structure as well as artefacts were displaced outside the settlement during the destruction, so the remains cannot serve as evidence at all and it seems difficult to prove the hypothesis of a Buddhist temple.

As a result, only artefacts of the complex have remained and most of them are parts of portable altars. According to a study of the latest artefacts, the entire complex should date to the eighth–ninth centuries.

### **Buddhist Finds from the Settlement of Ken-Bulun**

In 2006, the Historical Museum in Bishkek received several interesting bronze artefacts from the vicinity of the village of Ken-Bulun (Figs 5.2–5.7). They were found in clay brought for construction purposes. Later, archaeologists L.M. Vedutova and V.A. Kolchenko confirmed that there were clay quarries in front of the floodplain terrace eastwards from the heaped walls of the central part of the settlement. There was a terrace, but the 300m hill adjacent to the quarry was completely demolished (Fig. 5.1).

Up to now, it has been observed that the Ken-Bulun complex includes six Buddhist and Jain artefacts. A Buddhist sculpture stands on a lotus pedestal and stepped stands and ‘thousand Buddhas’ are engraved on three fragments of plate (Figs 5.2–5.3). Stylistically speaking, both artefacts are of Chinese origin and could date to the 10th–11th centuries. Jain artefacts include three portable altars with undeciphered inscriptions on their back (Figs 5.4–5.7) and similar altars dating to 1128 and 1285 have been found.<sup>35</sup>

As in case of the Novopokrovka’s findings, these artefacts could indicate that another Buddhist temple of the Chuy Valley existed on

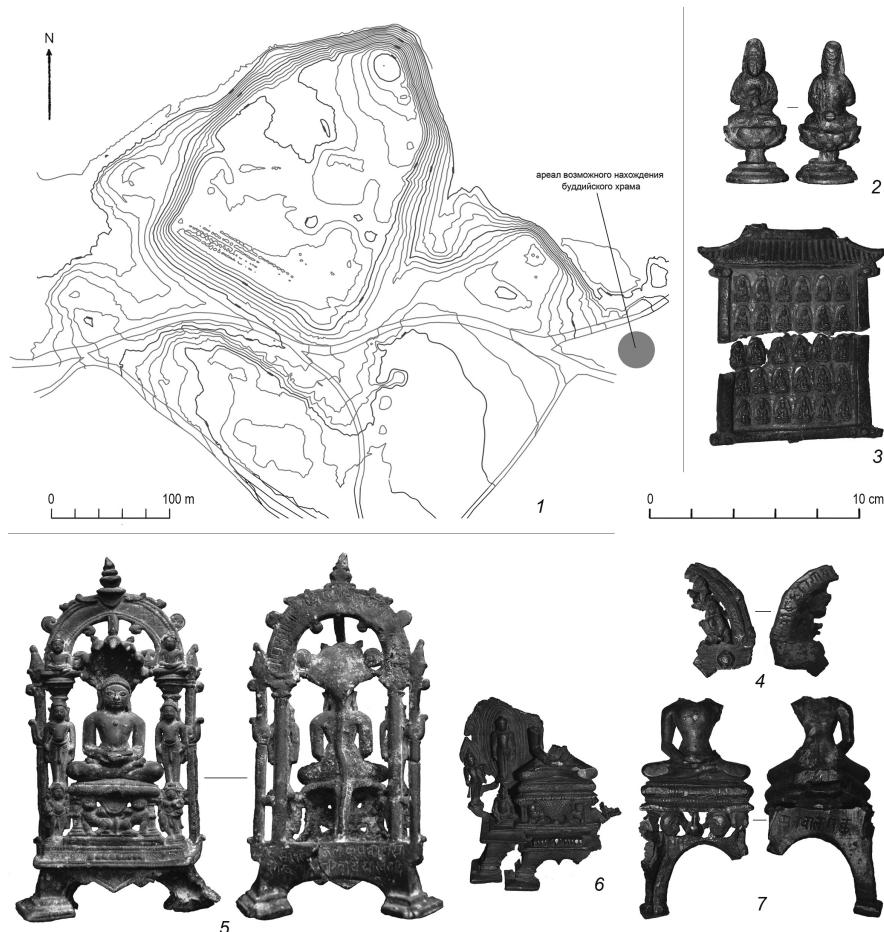


Fig. 5 Relief map of Ken-Bulun settlement and Buddhist and Jain artefacts

the site of Ken-Bulun. Later structures may have also existed on this Buddhist site and would have been very important for purposes of dating, but they have been completely destroyed over time.

### Buddhist Artefacts from the Burana Settlement

At the Burana settlement, two authentic Buddhist finds were excavated (Fig. 6). The one on the left in Fig. 6 was found from a mud brick in the mid-1980s, when archaeologist Vedutova was exploring upper layers of the 10th–12th centuries in the western part of a large hill in the centre of the settlement. This is a miniature bronze and gilded sculpture of a bodhisattva on a four-legged pedestal, which is similar to one found in the reliquary of KRr-2. It seems a reduced image [after repeated casting]

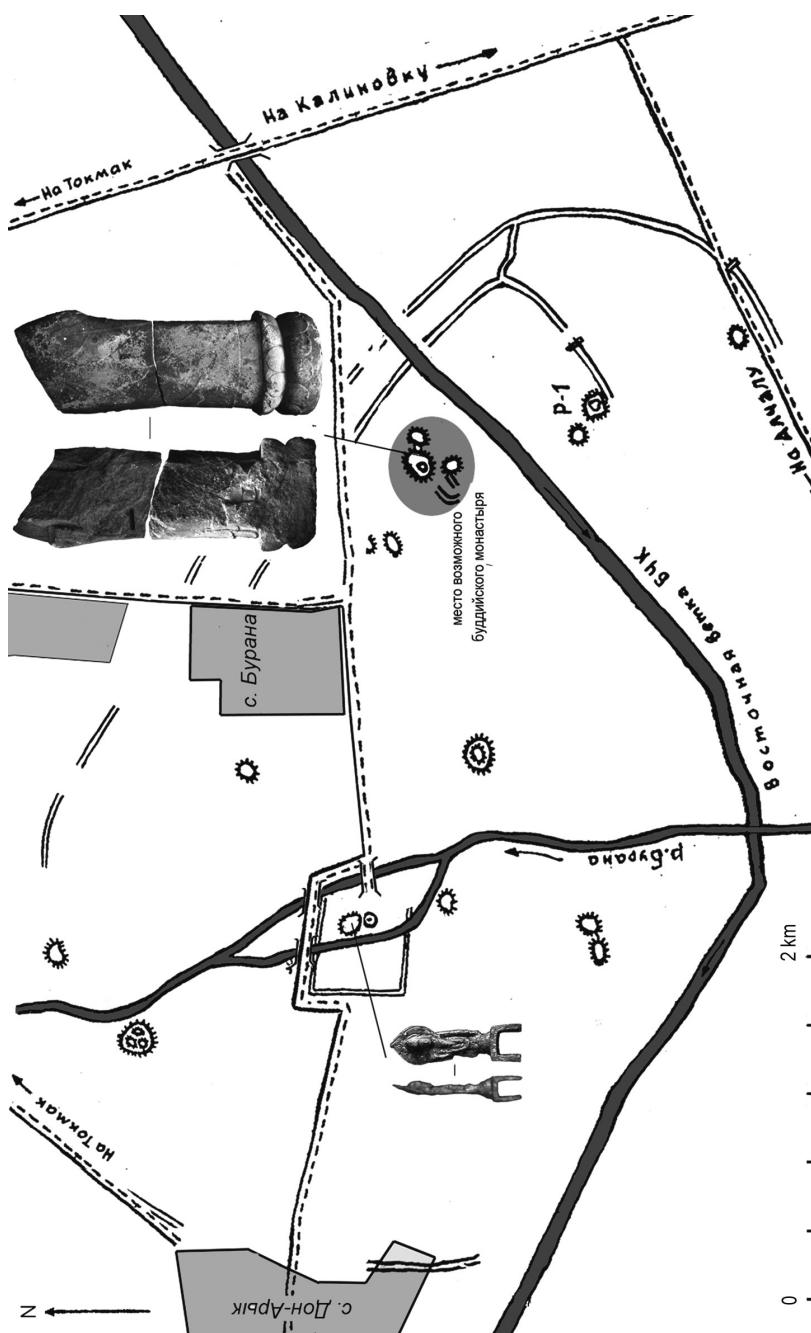


Fig. 6 Sketch map of Burana settlement

from the original of the later Wei or early Tang period (fifth–eighth centuries). But as a matter of fact, it is impossible to identify where the clay used for this brick was collected from.

Another find (on the right in Fig. 6) is a round stone sculpture of the Buddha in *samapāda* pose on a double lotus pedestal. The height of the sculpture is three-fourths that of a life-size human. The head, arms and front of the chest are lost. The remaining parts consist of three fragments: (1) a lotus base and legs just above the knees, (2) thighs and torso, and (3) a small part of a shoulder girdle. The first and second fragments fit together,<sup>36</sup> but the third one does not.

The sharp protrusion of the image's right arm evidently shows that the elbow is bent at a right angle or even that the arm is raised upward. Judging by the outline of the figure, the left hand is kept lowered down, but the lower part (palm?) goes out to the front side. Weak embossed oblique lines on the back of the sculpture depict folds of clothing, a cape (Pali *uttara sanga*), falling from the left shoulder with edges lined up 10–12cm above the pedestal. Another horizontal line is shown 3–4cm above the pedestal, which possibly shows a skirt (Pali *antaravasaka*) covering the whole legs from behind. The feet are aligned, with toes bare. As a whole, the sculpture is quite schematically and simply made. The intact back is essentially pillar-like and there are no curves to depict the back and legs.

The sculpture was found by chance on an arable 1500m east of the central part of the ruin, but the excavation point was on the boundaries of the long walls of the settlement. Nearby, due to the hilly slope, we can clearly discern the outline of ancient rectangular object. Its dimensions are 70×60m. In the south-western corner is a tell of a monumental structure, measuring 30–35×30–35m and 2.5–3m high, and in the northern and eastern parts is an open space (courtyard) with thick outer walls. The ruin is attractive enough to give the feeling that a Buddhist monastery actually existed there.

## Analysis of Buddhist Artefacts

When studying all the Buddhist architectural objects of the Chuy Valley, researchers rightly pointed out similarities with clay and stone sculptures and wall paintings founded in the monuments of China and East Turkestan.<sup>37</sup> However, there are also similarities with sculptures excavated in the southern area of Central Asia and Afghanistan.

As far as we can judge from the fragments, all the clay sculptures were made in either standing, sitting or lying positions, but they are

always in a static posture. They face to the front and no complicated angle is used. However, the fragments show that the hands and fingers are variously formed and they are dynamically positioned. The individual sculptures were located one by one. It is possible to understand the interaction of even the triptych compositions arranged in the niches of temples AB-2 and KrR-3 only based on their size and rank. The side figures just turn to the main or larger one to some extent, from which we cannot see anything dynamic. Judging from the size of different fragments (Fig. 7), it turned out that the height of most sculptures is almost the same as or slightly less (because they may have been in the secondary rank) than actual human height.

The sculptures were always decorated with glue paints under which white ganch primer was used in most cases. For example, the *nirvāṇa* Buddha sculpture excavated from KrR-2 is in red robes and the *padmāsana* (lotus pose) Buddha sculpture from KrR-3 is in orange robes. The Buddha's curls in conical form of same size, were found from almost all the remains (AB-0, 1, 2, 3 and KrR-2) and they all have traces of blue paint. A number of figures including Buddhas have different hairstyles, such as straight or wavy hair combed back (Figs 7.3, 7.6, 7.7 and 7.9) and some of them were coloured blue. It should also be noted that most pedestals on which the sculptures were installed were painted red.

Even these fragments of clay sculpture show slight differences in style and iconography as well as many similarities: face proportions, eye position and expression of eyebrows and pupils, etc. We can clearly see such different characteristics once these fragments are placed together (Fig. 7). But it is still impossible to find any evidence of whether the differences owe to regional traditions, schools, chronological variations, or individual figure expressions. What can be declared with a degree of certainty is that the sculptures are not the handiwork of one particular group of craftsmen.

Few ancient stone artefacts have been found in the territory of Kyrgyzstan, which means that stone processing was not widespread there. In the course of archaeological excavations, stone Buddhist sculptures were also not commonly found. For example, only 23 fragments were excavated at Ak-Beshim in 1940 during Bernshtam's research. Even otherwise, not many stone relics were accidentally found, but those that were reveal very clear and significant information. Here, we have selected only stone sculptures that clearly seem to be associated with Buddhism, and have left aside the steles with Chinese inscriptions, parts of steles with dragon images, and so on.

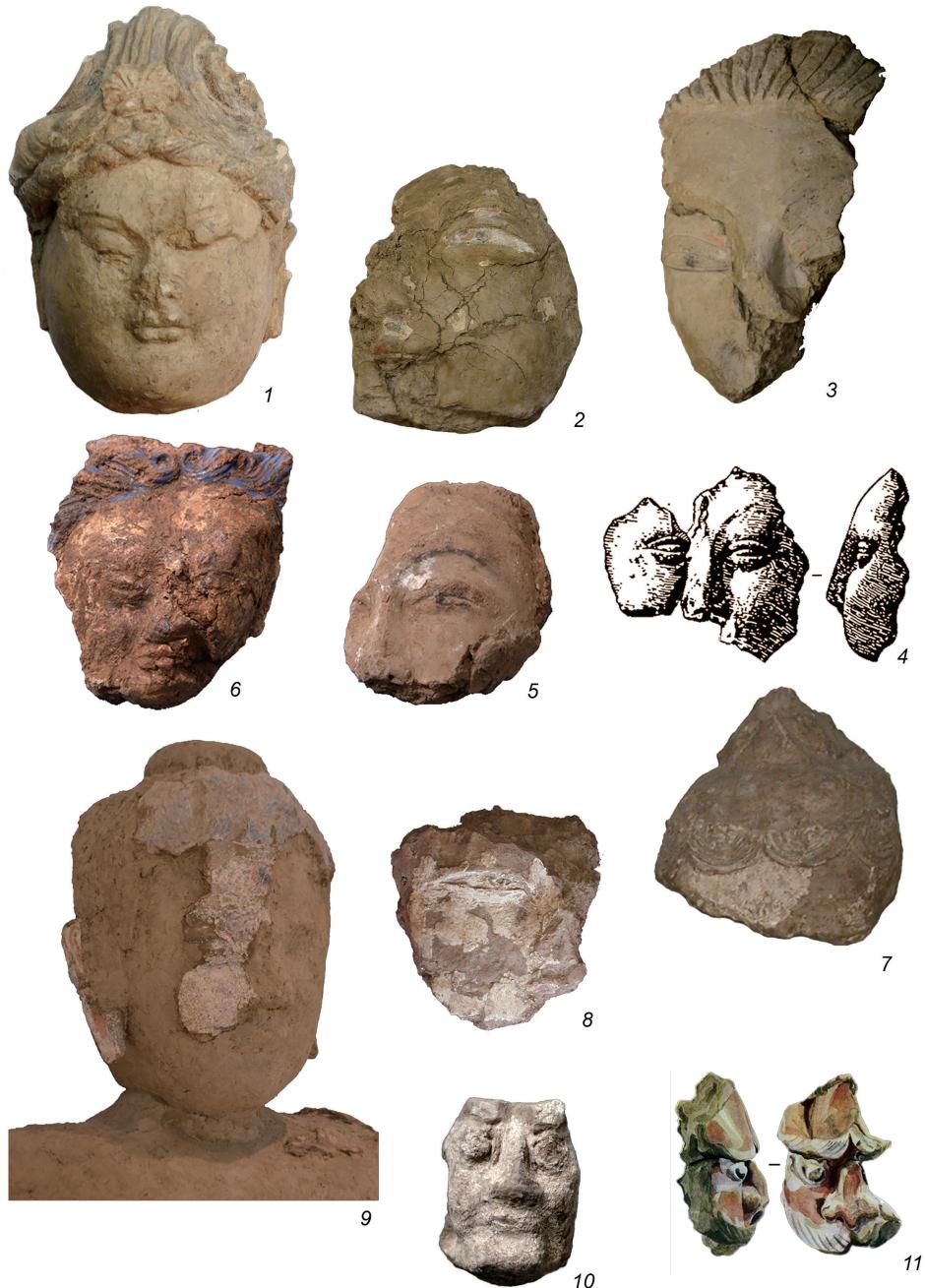


Fig. 7 Clay fragments of sculpture



Fig. 10 Bronze Fragments. Some were discovered by chance



Fig. 8 Fragments of stele

In 2014, a small light granular stele fragment was found near the base of the temple ruin in the Ak-Beshim settlement, a little south of where the AB-1 temple was once located. The size is too small ( $23\times23\times12$  cm) to ascertain the characteristics, but it is enough to surmise that the fragment is a part of large stele and not of a sculpture (Fig. 8.5).

A red stone stele fragment ( $62\times45\times13$  cm) found at Ak-Beshim by local residents in 1987 (Fig. 8.4) is much more interesting.<sup>38</sup> It depicts the Buddha in *padmāsana* on a double lotus pedestal. The left hand rests on the thigh, fingers are straight and pressed together, and the palm is down but does not reach the pedestal. The right elbow is bent and the hand shows the *abhaya-mudrā* (protection gesture) in front of the chest. However, the fingers of both hands are not clear. Two lingam shafts diverge from the base of pedestal, bifurcate and support small lotuses in

a symmetrical way. It is assumed that two figures must have stood in a *samapāda* position on the lotus on either side (the sculpture on the left side no longer exists; only the part below the knees of the outside figure on the right side remains while the inside one is missing its head only). The best-preserved figure has arms bent at both elbows holding a small object in front of the chest. Under the pedestal of the Buddha, a round reliquary is shown on a lotus base and guarded by lions on both sides. The artefact does not date back later than the first quarter of the eighth century and indicates the development of Chinese Buddhism.<sup>39</sup> It can be emphasized that these two fragments found by Bernshtam in 1940 have a closeness in terms of material, size and style (but they are not sculptures of the same object) (Figs 8.2 and 8.3).

In addition, an eight-petalled lotus relief of gray granitoid was excavated near the same location at Ak-Beshim and stored at a museum of the Burana settlement (Fig. 8.6). It can be presumed to be the foundation or base stone of a column. It is slightly more than 50cm in diameter and 25cm high. In the centre is a through hole, the diameter of which is 6–8cm. On the back are a 4cm margin, a cornice and poorly processed recess for more strongly fixing the surface of clay. Amongst the finds of Bernshtam are similar but smaller lotuses. There are also base stones of columns which have different lotus styles (Figs 8.7–8.9). The most interesting stele was found at the Krasnaya Rechka settlement in the early 1980s (Fig. 8.1). It is almost complete except for a slight chip in the lower right corner, missing faces of all the figures and the carving on the back being slightly worn. Ch.D. Dzhumagulov first studied this stele found at an arable,<sup>40</sup> and since then it has been published many times.<sup>41</sup>

The stele is made of red (or pink) sandstone and is 64×33–36×12–16cm in dimension. It depicts carved images in three-tiered sections on the obverse. In the lower section, two donors are arranged on both sides across the inscription (of which only three letters remain).<sup>42</sup> In the middle section, two mythical dog-lion guards are depicted in side view on the both sides of a reliquary ball on a lotus base. In the upper main section, there is Buddha triad on lotus pedestals which connect to each other with their stems. Behind each Buddha head is a *mandorla* (big round halo). In the centre, the largest Buddha image in *padmāsana* faces to the front, with left hand lying on the thigh, the palm reaching down to the knee and the right hand in *abhaya-mudrā*. The image actually appears a duplicate of the image on the stele excavated from Ak-Beshim even in details. The side figures are bodhisattvas in *samapāda* pose with right hands also held in *abhaya-mudrā* in front

of the chests. The left fist of the bodhisattva on the right is lightly clenched near the groin. The second bodhisattva [on the left] holds a jug in the downward hand, which indicates that it is an image of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara.

On the surface of the arch-type top and both laterals, Chinese floral designs unique to the Tang period are carved. On both lateral faces, *lokapāla* figures of three-quarters view in *tribhāṅga* pose are also carved. They are armed with spears to defeat enemies and there is a round halo behind the head of each. On the back, an image of the Buddha in *padmāsana* surrounded by arabesque design is depicted, but in a poor state of preservation.

Both stone reliefs and sculptures excavated from the Chuy Valley show Chinese designs, which can be regarded as a common element. However, Mkrtychev contended that there is no directly comparable Chinese or Eastern Turkestan Buddhist relief [sculpture], and suggested that these reliefs [sculptures] were made by Chinese craftsmen of rural traditions.<sup>43</sup> It does not seem unlikely that these were made on site.

In the entire Central Asian region, bronze Buddha statues were perhaps most commonly excavated from Kyrgyzstan. While the clay sculptures are too fragmented to reach clear conclusions from the cultural perspective, and the stone reliefs bear a distinct Chinese influence, the bronze statues are good evidence of diversity.

Bronze items from the region can be categorized into three groups in terms of function: (a) individual bronze sculptures, (b) parts of relief with more complex detailing and (c) ritual objects (*vajra-ghanta*). Judging from the similarity in style, all of them seem to have been made in the eighth–12th centuries.<sup>44</sup>

Two fragments of the third category will be discussed in detail here.

The first is a *vajra-ghanta* (ritual bell) fragment (Fig. 9.1) brought from Issyk-Kul and now kept in the Kyrgyz Russian Slavic University Museum. The upper part of the bell is designed as *vajra* crown and the lower part as a human head from which hangs a bell ring. It was cast at one time as one unit. The crown is a five-pronged handle: one prong stands straight in the centre, the other four bow-like prongs surround the central one, and all the prongs are joined at the top. The *vajra* bell was said to transmit lightning and it was put on a plate with notches on the edge. Under the plate is a conical stand of an eight-petalled lotus. Below this is another plate with notches on the edge, but with a smaller diameter than that of the one above. It can be understood as an *uṣṇīṣa* (crown of hair). The figure's face is oval. Both eyebrows are close on the bridge of the nose and the almond-shaped (relief-like) and outlined

eyes appear closed. The nose is protruding straight and wide from the flat face. The small mouth is also depicted like a relief. The large and prominent ears have earring-like ornaments but without rings. The back of the head is smooth and has no carving of hair.

The second *vajra-ghanta* fragment is kept in a private collection. It is reported that it was found at the Ak-Beshim settlement. It was cast at one time as one unit. A 3.5cm piece survives. It is the middle part of a ritual bell, representing a head with a crown or headdress (Fig. 9.2). The face is rounded and parts (especially left side) of the forehead, eye and nose are lost. The eyes are large, wide and partially open. The nose is flat with wide nostrils. The full-lipped mouth is closed and has a slight smile. It has a small, double chin. While straight hair is carved on the back of the head, two bunches of hair are gathered in a bun in the middle of the lower part. The hair ornament, that is the base of the *vajra* crown, is conical and the top is a plain face. The lateral face around the crown depicts eight lotus petals in a symmetrical arch shape. The lower part has double hoops, on which inlaid stones are carved in relief. From these hoops, two divided bunches of hair hang down from the head, relatively widely spaced in two symmetrical reliefs. On the plain face at the top, only a *vajra* prong base remains in the centre and there are eight holes around the base matching the position of the eight-lotus arch on the lateral face. It can be presumed that these holes were used for letting wires through the *vajra*. On the bottom face of the fragment, there is an oval-shaped remain which seems to be upper part of a handle in place of the neck.

These two artefacts were made in the Tibet-Chinese traditional style. They can broadly be dated to the end of the first millennium, but it is very difficult to arrive at a more precise date.

There is another *vajra* (Fig. 4.5) included in Buddhist finds from the Novopokrovsky complex. It bears similarities to artefacts of the Far Eastern area and may be related to the Chzhurzhen people.<sup>45</sup>

One statue standing in the familiar *tribhāṅga* pose was found somewhere on the site of Ak-Beshim (Fig. 9.6).<sup>46</sup> It was identified as Buddha Tathāgata Akṣobhya Vitarka Mudrā (imperturbable), whose image was actively developed in Vajrayāna Buddhism.<sup>47</sup> The statue, which is hollow inside and made of a very thin layer of metal, was cast in a wax mould. The height is 37cm. Since on the back there is a small broken protrusion with a hole to attach the halo or fix the body of statue into an altar, the statue seems to have been a part of a portable altar. The feet are soldered to a fragment of thin plate which is probably part of a pedestal. The urna (white hair) and pupils were inlaid with silver.



Fig. 9 Bronze Fragments. Some were discovered by chance

Judging from the features of the face and style of crown and clothing, it can be concluded that the statue was made by a craftsman of Gilgit in the late eighth–10th centuries. It seems to be the latest of the Buddhist artefacts discovered at Ak-Beshim.

Another statue in well-known style (Fig. 9.3) was also discovered by chance at a place 3km north-east from Bishkek.<sup>48</sup> It also seems to have derived from northern India, but from Kashmir or the Swat River (part of Gilgit) area. This statue is also hollow inside and is 15cm high. A figure is seated in *padmāsana* on a throne (*singhasan*) supported by two lions, which face the front. The right upper arm from the elbow remains and it seems to extend down from the shoulder without touching the body. The lost right hand and fingers may have formed the *vitaraka mudrā*. The left hand rests on the thigh with the fingers in *kataka mudrā*. Eyes and urna were inlaid with silver. In the left front corner of the pedestal is a miniature image of a kneeling donor with curly hair hanging down. At the bottom of pedestal on the front and right lateral sides, a Sanskrit offering line of 22–23 letters is carved: “This is an offering of a pious person who prays for the happiness of every living being ... [the donor’s name is unclear].”<sup>49</sup> Different researchers have dated the statue to different periods, including the 12th century, eighth century and ninth–10th centuries,<sup>50</sup> but the supposition of ninth–10th centuries seems the most well-reasoned and plausible.

Some statues were also found by chance at different times in the Sokuluk settlement,<sup>51</sup> located 30 km west of Bishkek. One of them was identified as the Hindu deity Padmapānī (Fig. 9.5).<sup>52</sup> The figure in *dhoti* (traditional costume for men) is seated with the left leg hanging down and the right leg tucked inwards (*rājalil*). The total height is 13.5cm. The left hand rests on the knee and an oblong object, one of the Buddhist treasures (*ratna*), is depicted in the right palm open at chest level. The figure sports some ornaments such as bracelets on the forearms and wrists, anklets, different type of earrings and a complicated three-pronged crown. There is a general consensus amongst researchers that the source area of the creation is Kashmir in north India. While Grek suggested that the statue dates to the eighth century, Mkrtchyan has dated it as late as the 10th century.<sup>53</sup>

Another bronze statue is kept in the National Historical Museum of the Kyrgyz Republic. It was cast at one time as one unit. The figure stands in *alidha* (arrow from a bow) pose (Fig. 9.4), with upper part facing front and lower one almost lateral from the scenographical point of view. Its height is 13.6cm. The lower part of the legs is lost and face and details of headdress are missing, which may have been caused by initial unprofessional work at the time of transfer to the museum. The figure seems to wear only a short *dhoti*, which doesn’t even cover the knees. A long garland hanging down from the elbows is arranged around the middle of the body. It should have been iconographically decorated

on the skull (like a crown). Both arms with bracelets are crossed on the chest in *hunkara* pose and the left hand is placed on the right wrist with a *vajra* in the left hand and *ghanta* in the right hand. Grek identified the artefact as an image of Vadjarukhankara made in Kashmir in the ninth century.<sup>54</sup> Mkrtychev found a similarity with another image of Vajrayāna-Samvara from Kashmir. Judging from the individual expression which is unclear since the figure is damaged, it is assumed that the artefact is a rough duplicate of a Kashmiri prototype made after the ninth–10th centuries.<sup>55</sup>

Amongst the smaller bronze items shown in Fig. 10<sup>56</sup> is a statue (8.5cm) which seems to be from a portable altar (Fig. 10.12).<sup>57</sup> It was identified as an image of a devotee making offerings or a Buddhist mentor.<sup>58</sup> It was modelled on the sculptures of the Tang court. The figure is standing upright on a small rectangular pedestal, faces the front and has a high headdress. The face is rounded and in fact poorly modelled. The hands are joined around the abdomen but details are not clear. It seems that a cape is thrown on the palm. The figure wears a long ankle-length robe with wide sleeves and rounded neck (or a relief fold fixing the necklace at the bottom of the neck).

Another independent figure depicts a bodhisattva (Fig. 10.1). The figure is not round but embossed and the back is flat and smooth. It is extremely rudimentary to the extent that the small parts are designed with tubercles and it is difficult to judge whether the posture is *samapāda* or *tribhāṅga*. The figure is on a lotus pedestal with a sharp pin protruding downwards (for fixing to the ground or food). Behind the head is a round halo decorated with triangular notches and on the upper edge of halo is an image of the Buddha in *padmāsana*. The head sports a tall headdress. The eyes and mouth are carved simplistically. Both ears have long earrings with large rings on the edge. The left arm turns slightly outwards with the elbow bent and the edge of something (which seems clothing) is covered on the wrist at shoulder level. The right arm hangs down slightly away from the body with an object (which seems a vessel) in the hand. It is reminiscent of the Avalokiteśvara statue in the same pose excavated from the Novopokrovsky complex (Fig. 4.8) and it can be also said that the ‘canonical pose’ is completely reflected in the statues.

The smallest statue of 4cm (Fig. 10.2) is a gilded one of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara with a flaming halo behind his head. According to our observation, it is the smallest carved artefact, but the craft technique had become much more sophisticated. The figure is almost upright in *samapāda* pose and the pose actually originated from *tribhāṅga*, a trace

of which can be seen. The face has an oval shape. There is a tall but poorly designed crown on the head. The left hand hangs down holding an elongated vessel. A soft *hada* scarf covering both arms and legs is expressed with dark lines, but it is of seemingly transparent fabric that does not hide the body. A necklace with a pentahedral jewel is carved around the neck and bracelets on the wrists.

The figure was placed on a flattened round cushion which once lay on a cylindrical pedestal. The pedestal had a flattened round base twice as large as it now is. At the time of miniaturization of the front and back of the pedestal and base, the diameter of the cushion was shortened for flattening the cushion. The halo on the top comes from the shoulders. The edge is decorated with notches and separated from the main part with lines. It can be presumed that some vertical lines of the halo express tongues of flame. The halo expands down to the pedestal in rectangular form and the edge overlaps the scarf in the right hand and the vessel in the left. On the back of the halo, the stripes go down and the shape of body is separately expressed at the lower level. The original probably did not have such a halo, and it was added (along with the head part) at the time of miniaturization. Based on the evidence of the simply carved clothing and restrained body proportions, this statue can be concluded to have originated in the early Tang period.

The last fragment of a Buddhist artefact found in the eastern part of the Chuy Valley is now kept at the Kyrgyz Russian Slavic University Museum and it has already been written about (Fig. 10.4).<sup>59</sup> This statue is the lower right part of a very large gilded openwork relief, the height of which is 7.5cm. The figure stands in *tribhanga* pose with a partially damaged low column on the right side. Behind the head is a round halo rimmed with a line. The upper part may have connected with other parts of a relief which is lost. The face is oval and quite well-developed with a low prominent forehead, arched eyebrows, heavy eyelids, large lanceolate eyes, relatively thin and short lips and plump chin. The nose is damaged. Long earrings with rounded flower rosettes hang down from hidden ears to the neck. On the head is a conical headdress with slightly sharp top, from which ribbons hang down to below the shoulders. On the neck are three strings of a necklace which hangs down till the upper abdomen. The left hand is placed on the hip, the right elbow is bent and the hand reaches shoulder. On the open palm, there is an egg-shaped object or a large pearl on a pedestal which is similar to that of the bodhisattvas excavated from Novopokrovsk (Fig. 4.7). Clothing is depicted in numerous small relief folds but it is not clear that it covers the body parts. There are the typical bracelets are on the

wrists and typical anklets on the ankles. The heels are joined together and toes are open on the disc in the centre of the lotus pedestal. It is especially noteworthy that the craftsman considered the planar nature of artefacts at the time of drafts, applied five lotus petals (leaves) not from front side, and used a method of perspective on front to upper sides. The depicted figure was identified as a bodhisattva. Considering the detailed elaboration, this statue does not seem to have been locally duplicated but was imported.

Amongst the well preserved artefacts made by craftsman in the Kashmir Valley or Swat River area between the ninth and 10th centuries, there is a figure standing near two columns which support the flaming chakra or wheel of the Law (Fig. 10.13).<sup>60</sup> Although there are many differences in details [compared to general artefacts of north-western India], there can be no doubt that this statue was also produced in north-western India at the end of the first millennium CE.

There is another fragment excavated in Chuya area: a miniature *yasti* (top of a stupa) with ribbons spreading in different directions (Fig. 10.3). The size of the fragment is 2cm (2.3cm including ribbons). It has been written about several times<sup>61</sup> and is convincingly identified as the work of a craftsman from the Swat River (or Kashmir) Valley between the ninth and 10th centuries.<sup>62</sup>

The two embossed lotuses in Figs 10.6 and 10.7 are regarded as *chatras* (umbrellas) which can be categorized as Buddhist artefacts and were probably part of votive stupas.<sup>63</sup> It has been pointed out that the stupas were also linked to the north Indian principalities.

A round seal with 3.5cm diameter (Fig. 10.8) is a remarkable find from the Krasnaya Rechka settlement. It depicts a figure in *padmāsana* in reverse relief style, with hands joined around the abdomen as well as some objects. There is a vessel on the left side. It is obvious that Buddhists of the Chuy Valley, like anywhere else, invariably marked privately owned property (by using this seal).

I will now take up separately for discussion three similar miniature reliefs (3.3–3.6cm) depicting the Buddha (Figs 10.9–10.11), found at the Krasnaya Rechka settlement. The images are iconographically the same: the Buddha in *padmāsana* with a halo behind facing the front, joint hands covered with Chinese clothes around the abdomen. There is a pin to fix to the base on the back of one relief. In another relief, there is a prong protruding downwards from the centre, which suggests us that it may connect with other parts of other artefacts, details of which lead us to draw many interesting conclusions. We can see similar halos in the ‘thousand Buddha’ artefact of the Hermitage collection which

was found in Khara-Khoto and dates between the late 12th and 13th centuries (Fig. 10.14). The quality of these three reliefs varies greatly. While the cast relief of Fig. 10.9 is of good quality with relatively finer details and partial traces of gilding, the relief of Fig. 10.10 is too rough to hold the external shape and the relief of Fig. 10.11 may be more stereoscopic with characteristics of line drawing. The first relief can be regarded as an original or a duplicate similar to the original, the second as a reduced artefact, and the third as a local imitation on a given theme.

At the end of the examination of Buddhist bronze artefacts, it should be added that researchers see Sogdian touches in the gilding openwork bronze clamp excavated from the AB-1.<sup>64</sup> However, some hold that these are derived from China.<sup>65</sup> They date later than the middle of the eighth century.

To sum up, all the Buddhist bronze artefacts are not from the same tradition or made by the same process. Some were high-quality imported artefacts, others were local duplicates of older models or bulk imitations. Whether they were imported or local, most of them originated in northern India including Kashmir and Gilgit (valleys of the Swat and Chamba rivers). Of course, there were also imports from China and their copies such as the finds of the Novopokrovsky complex (Figs 4.7–4.9), Burana (Fig. 6) and KrR-2. It is presumed that most artefacts entered the Chuy Valley from north India, not through Central Asia (Tokharistan, Sogdiana and Chach), but through East Turkestan (Khotan, Yarkand and Kashgar). The artefacts of the latest Buddhist finds of the ninth–11th centuries have not been covered yet.

To our mind, these bronze Buddhist artefacts of small size and low quality show that Buddhist followers expanded their social network in a new way. From the observation of relations around these Buddhist artefacts from different areas and the cultural aspects of Buddhist structures,<sup>66</sup> the following hypothesis can be offered. The Chinese initially forced people to have some faith in Buddhism and even protected Buddhists of different ethnic groups. But when the Chinese left this area, Buddhists scattered from the capital to many rural areas, as evidenced by Buddhist artefacts found not only in Suyab (Ak-Beshim) but also in Xincheng / Nevaket (Krasnaya Rechka) and the Novopokrovskoe settlement, and even farther in places such as the Sokuluk settlement. It means that the seeds sown by the Buddhists also sprouted in places distant from the central area and this new way of life coexisted along with other trends like Hinduism.<sup>67</sup>

## Conclusion: How Buddhism Flourished and Survived

A comparison between the archaeological finds discussed in this article and written sources can help draw some conclusions and clarify what was previously not articulated. As mentioned, the history of Buddhism in the Chuy Valley seems to have begun later than the passage of Chinese monk Xuanzang (629 / 630) who stayed at Suyab, the capital of the Western Turkic Khaganate, which was identified as the local city at the Ak-Beshim settlement. In his notes, Xuanzang says nothing about Buddhism in Suyab, its surroundings and the valley in general. Even in the biographies of the pilgrim, there is no material on Buddhism in the Chuy Valley. Therefore, it can be concluded that Buddhism did not exist in the Chuy Valley in the third decade of the seventh century.

From the second half of the seventh century to the first half of the eighth, under the policy towards the Western Region, the Tang rulers seized Suyab several times (some historical sources give the dates of 678, 692 and 748) and incorporated the city into the 'Four Garrisons of Anxi' (administrative military stations) for a period of time. For the purpose of dominance in the peripheral areas of Suyab, the castle wall was built in 679<sup>68</sup> and the Dayun temples dedicated to Maitreya were constructed in each district of the empire between 692 and 705 according to the imperial edict of Empress Wu Zetian.<sup>69</sup> These Chinese garrisons and the momentum of the construction of temples (which initially accommodated important Chinese guests and officials) led to the gradual spread of Buddhism and the construction of Buddhist temples in Suyab (= Ak-Beshim) and nearby cities, as mentioned in this article. In this context, it seems quite plausible that the Chinese or East Turkestan version of Buddhism came to the Chuy Valley and that the Chinese pattern of decor was used in the local construction techniques.

Due to the Chinese influence of 50–70 years, *sanghas* of local followers were formed. However, after the Chinese were forced to withdraw not only from the Chuy valley but also East Turkestan in the middle of the eighth century, their influence and cultural dominance inevitably and drastically waned. At that time, the local *sanghas* were needed by people of other cultural impulses and products from other places especially north Indian principalities appeared in the Chuy Valley. Taking into account the political situation with the whole of Central Asia drastically Islamized and non-Islamic elements suppressed, there is high possibility that these products were introduced through Khotan and Kashgar of East Turkestan. Both these territories, especially Khotan, had long and strong ties with India, one indication of which is

that their scripts derived from the Brāhmī script. Khotanese Buddhism partially (though not completely) withstood the tide of Islamization of East Turkestan in the beginning of the second millennium. Even after the destruction and desecration of Buddhist temples, followers continued to practice and one group produced the so-called Uyghur (i.e. Turkic, Khakan) version of Xuanzang's biography in the first half of the 11th century. In the second stage in the history of Buddhism in the Chuy Valley, without any political support due to the decentralization of the Karluk Khaganate, Buddhists were forced to change their style of faith. Instead of active construction of new temples and monasteries, they started to move to different places and use portable altars and objects as discussed in this article. On the other hand, old structures constructed at the primary stage survived over the century. But from the middle to the end of the 10th century, when new followers moved in, they seized the old structures and reconstructed new ones with financial support. The excavated objects selected for this article can tell the history of how Buddhism began and survived in the Chuy Valley.

#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The Chuy Valley is located in the north of Kyrgyzstan and the south of Kazakhstan, along the middle course of the Chuy River. It is 250km in length. The valley floor lies at an altitude of 500–1300m above sea level. The valley is bounded by a ridge of Kyrgyz Ala-Too in the south and the Chu-Ili mountains in the north-east, and gradually passes into the Moyun-Kum desert in the west and north-west. Therefore, the eastern part of the valley is closed and has a narrow width of up to 10–12km, and the western part is open and as wide as 90–100km.
- <sup>2</sup> Regarding a few settlements which were archaeologically identified as belonging to the first half of the first millennium CE, the situation basically does not change.
- <sup>3</sup> Xuanzang 2012: 40.
- <sup>4</sup> Tugusheva 1991: 5–6.
- <sup>5</sup> Lubo-Lisnichenko 2002: 118.
- <sup>6</sup> Forte 1994: 42 and 53.
- <sup>7</sup> We consider the rock image of the Buddha in the Issyk-Ata Gorge, along with Tibetan inscriptions, six-syllable mantras on the rocks and stones of Issyk-Kul, as well as a series of Buddhist bronzes from Issyk-Kul, to be connected with the Dzungar people in the territory of northern Kyrgyzstan in the 16th and early 18th centuries.
- <sup>8</sup> Hayashi 1996; Kenzheakmet 2017; Torgoev et al. 2019.
- <sup>9</sup> Kolchenko 2020.
- <sup>10</sup> Smirnova 1958.
- <sup>11</sup> Kamyshev 2002: 6.
- <sup>12</sup> Bernshtam 1950: table XXIII.2, 3; Tabaldiev 2000; Tabaldiev 2003.
- <sup>13</sup> Mkrtychev 2002: 121–23.
- <sup>14</sup> The Kyrgyzstan-Japan excavation led by B.E. Amanbaeva and Kazuya Yamauchi

explored the district of the settlement and clarified that the lower parts of the structure remained there.

- <sup>15</sup> In an article by Toshio Hayashi (1996), it is called Klyuchevskoe (KL).
- <sup>16</sup> Bernshtam 1943: 22; Bernshtam 1950: 92, 131–33, 147.
- <sup>17</sup> Bernshtam 1950: 92, 132, table XXI.4.
- <sup>18</sup> Bernshtam 1943: 22, table VI.15–16; Bernshtam 1950: 92, table LXXVII.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid., 92–93.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid., 131.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid., 92.
- <sup>22</sup> Goryacheva and Peregudova 1996: 183; Staviskiy 1996: 130–32; Hayashi 1996.
- <sup>23</sup> *Pamyatniki* 1983: 45, 64–65; Grek 1983: 83.
- <sup>24</sup> Goryacheva and Peregudova 1996: 183.
- <sup>25</sup> Staviskiy 1996: 133.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> We know about one of these items only from the museum documentation, where it is listed as Miniature Buddhist Bodhisattva.
- <sup>28</sup> *Pamyatniki* 1983: 45; Mkrtchyan 2002: 121–22.
- <sup>29</sup> *Pamyatniki* 1983: 64–65; Mkrtchyan 2002: 162–64.
- <sup>30</sup> Bernshtam 1950: 42, table X.1.
- <sup>31</sup> Kozhemyako 1959: 107–108, 141.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid., 141.
- <sup>33</sup> Kolchenko and Rott 2019.
- <sup>34</sup> Kozhemyako 1959: 141.
- <sup>35</sup> *Otchet Imperatorskoy Arkheologicheskoy komissii za 1896 g* 1898: 135, fig. 477; Dzhumagulov 1982: 57.
- <sup>36</sup> The front sides of these fragments were photographed separately. They turned out to be different in color.
- <sup>37</sup> Bernshtam 1950: 55; Bernshtam 1952: 169–71; Kyzlasov 1959: 193–202; Zyablin 1961: 50–52.
- <sup>38</sup> Tabaldiev, 2003: fig. 1.1; Tabaldiev, 2000.
- <sup>39</sup> Mkrtchyan 2002: 121–23.
- <sup>40</sup> Dzhumagulov 1982: 57.
- <sup>41</sup> Goryacheva and Peregudova 1996: 176, figs 11–13; Goryacheva 2004; Mkrtchyan 2002: 120–24.
- <sup>42</sup> Goryacheva and Peregudova 1996: remark 15.
- <sup>43</sup> Mkrtchyan 2002: 124.
- <sup>44</sup> Several (more than five) statuettes were found in Kyrgyzstan, dating back to the time of the Dzungarian occupation of part of the territory of Kyrgyzstan in the 16th–18th centuries and Qing's influence in early 19th century. For all their interest as a phenomenon, they are not chronologically the subject of this study.
- <sup>45</sup> Artem'eva 2004.
- <sup>46</sup> Stavskaya 1998: 56.
- <sup>47</sup> Mkrtchyan 2002: 168–70.
- <sup>48</sup> Bernshtam 1950: 91, 139, 148, table LXXXIX.5.
- <sup>49</sup> *Pamyatniki* 1983: 65.
- <sup>50</sup> Bernshtam 1950: 91, 139, 148; *Pamyatniki* 1983: 63–65; Staviskiy 1996: 150; Mkrtchyan 2002: 168.
- <sup>51</sup> Kozhemyako 1959: 93–95.

<sup>52</sup> Mkrtchyan 2002: 124; *Pamyatniki* 1983: 62.

<sup>53</sup> *Pamyatniki* 1983: 62; Mkrtchyan 2002: 124.

<sup>54</sup> *Pamyatniki* 1983: 63.

<sup>55</sup> Mkrtchyan 2002: 166–67.

<sup>56</sup> Almost all small Buddhist sculptures in Fig. 10 are in the private collection of a Bishkek collector (with the exception of two items he donated to the KRSU museum). Some of the items were discovered by the collector himself, others were purchased from other private individuals. According to him, artefacts were found at the sites of Ak-Beshim and Krasnaya Rechka. But the information coming from him about the settlement of discovery can be contradictory and mutually exclusive. Therefore, we prefer not to highlight the place of discovery of each individual object, but to give this generalized information.

<sup>57</sup> The owner of a private collection including an artefact, has doubts about the authenticity of information that he received when he acquired the artefact from another private person.

<sup>58</sup> Mkrtchyan 2002: 164; Goryacheva 2010: 231.

<sup>59</sup> Stavskaya et al. 2013: 89.

<sup>60</sup> Taking this opportunity, we express our gratitude to T.K. Mkrtchyan who showed us this analogy.

<sup>61</sup> Baypakov, Ternovaya and Goryacheva 2007: 192–93, fig. 306 is included.

<sup>62</sup> Mkrtchyan 2002: 170–71.

<sup>63</sup> Baypakov, Ternovaya and Goryacheva 2007: 192, fig. 305; Mkrtchyan 2002: 170–71.

<sup>64</sup> Kyzlasov 1959: 208–09; Marshak and Raspopova 1996: 129; Mkrtchyan 2002: 166.

<sup>65</sup> Grek 1983: 81–82.

<sup>66</sup> Mkrtchyan 2002: 171–72.

<sup>67</sup> Kolchenko 2019: 145–46, 161–62.

<sup>68</sup> In my opinion, this castle wall should be identified with the wall around Shahristan-2 / Khitan section / rabad (names given by different researchers to the same structural part of the Ak-Beshim settlement), inside which, on the surface and in the excavations, there is a tile of the Chinese type.

<sup>69</sup> Researchers such as G. Clauson identified the Suyab temple Dayun with the remains AB-1 (Clauson 1961; Forte 1994; Kyzlasov 2006: 298–300). However, partially excavated by A.N. Bernshtam, Buddhist remains AB-0, taking into account the stated arguments on possible re-dating based on the stele and its localization inside Shahristan-2, can stake a claim to this with good reason.

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