

# **BUDDHIST SITES OF AFGHANISTAN AND WEST CENTRAL ASIA (III BC-VIII AD)**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The main goal of this article is to provide an annotated inventory of the Buddhist sites located at the western and northern periphery of Gandhara in Afghanistan and in former Soviet Central Asia. It constitutes the raw information for the database critically interpreted in another article presented in these proceedings concerning the historical development of the Central Asian Buddhist sites and schools<sup>1</sup>.

The justification of such a compilation is, on one side, the absence of a comprehensive catalogue of the Buddhist sites of Afghanistan (it exists for West Central Asia)<sup>2</sup> and, on the other, the absence of an exhaustive essay putting together the sites of these two regions that have been closely interconnected during the diffusion of Buddhism<sup>3</sup>.

The rise and development of Buddhist monuments in Gandhara happens almost synchronically with its diffusion in Central Asia, including Afghanistan, West (or Soviet) and East Central Asia (Xinjiang). Here we will not examine the sites of Xinjiang because they already received a good treatment and a wide international diffusion through exhibitions and publications at the same level of those of Gandhara.

The diffusion in Afghanistan and West Central Asia started roughly together with the Kushan empire (I-III AD) and declined with the occupation of the Arabs (VIII AD), even if Buddhism touched Afghanistan already during the III BC and Buddhist monuments survived in the Chu

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<sup>1</sup> See the article of R. Sala, “The Spread of Buddhism from Gandhara to South and West Central Asia”. Article submitted at the International Workshop on Gandharan Heritage, Islamabad, Pakistan, 1-3 December 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Stavisky, 1998

<sup>3</sup> Even if the article of B.Litvinsky BA (1989) ‘Buddhist sites in Afghanistan and Central Asia’ represents a shorter but quite representative overview of the sites presented in this article.

valley (Kyrgyzstan) till the X AD<sup>4</sup>.

During the first centuries of the diffusion, from Gandhara to the northern bank of the Amu-Darya can be found the same type of monasteries with quadrangular plan surrounding a yard (Shotarak, Fayaz-tepe, Ushturmullo...), similar cave complexes cut in alluvial cliffs (Basawal, Bamiyan, Takht-i-Rustam, Kara-tepe), analogous stupas with engraved base, circular drum and spherical dome (Darunta, Topdara, Airtam...), statues of Buddha, Bodhisattvas and devas with same iconographic standards, carved in schist and more often in stucco (Hadda, Bagram, Bamiyan, Dalverzin-tepe ...), related bas-relief with scenes of Jataka stories and Corinthian capitals (Hadda, Bagram, Airtam...). The Kushan art of Hadda, Kapisa, Kara-tepe, Airtam and Delbarjin is the direct continuation of those of Peshawar, Swat, Buner and Taxila. The main difference was the use of adobe masonry in the north and of stone in the south. But during the Kushano-Sasanid (300-500 AD) and Hephtalite-Turkic (500-900 AD) phases, the Buddhist artistic production of Afghanistan and West Central Asia is already the product of a local manufacture (Kabul, Bamiyan, Balkh, Delbarjin, Ushtur-Mullo for the transitional period; Tepe-Shotor, Tepe-Sardar, Ajina-Tepe, Penjikent for the last production) and show a strong regional style mixing Iranian, Indian and Central Asian iconographies and concurring with the artistic centres of Gandhara and Mathura.

Knowledge about the existence of Buddhist sites in Afghanistan and Western Central Asia had been already recorded by travelling Chinese pilgrims at the time of their full activity (Fa Xian, travel 399-412; Xuan Zang, 629-645; Yi Jing, 671-695; Hui Chao, 723-726 ...), by Arabic authors at the time of their decline or ruins (al-Faqih, d. 912, al-Biruni, 973-1048; Yaqubi; d. 997, Yaqut 1179-1229, etc.), by Western travellers during the following medieval time (Marco Polo, 1271-1295; Van Ruysbroeck, 1253-1255...). Their rediscovery happened in Afghanistan by some 19<sup>th</sup> century explorers like the British horse-dealer W. Moorcroft (1819-1825), the Hungarian Honigsberger (1832), and the East Indian Company antiquarian C. Masson who provided the first site maps and amateur excavations (1834-37). No ruins of Buddhist monuments were known in Western Central Asia before their first excavations by Soviet archaeologists in the 1920'ies and mainly after World War II.

In Afghanistan the first scientific studies happened in 1922 with the French DAFA (French Archaeological Delegation in Afghanistan) working in Balkh, Bamiyan, Kabul, Kapisa, Hadda. After a long gap, their researches restarted after the Taliban rule in 2003 (Bamiyan, Kabul, Balkh, Wardak). After World War II, the Buddhist sites of Afghanistan involved Japanese archaeologists of the Kyoto University working from 1959 in Nagahara, Lalma (Hadda) and Basawal, and from 1967 in Bactria, Takht-i-Rustam (Haibak), Durman-tepe and Chakalak-tepe (Kunduz). The Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East (ISMEO) studied the Buddhist sites of the Tepe-Sardar (Ghazni) from 1959 to 1962. Soviet archaeologists worked in the site of Delbarjin-tepe near Balkh in 1969-1973. The Afghan Institute of Archaeology (AIA) investigated many Buddhist sites starting in Tepe-Shotor (Hadda) in 1965 and from 1973 to nowadays in Kabul region, Bamiyan, Bagram, Hadda.

In Soviet Central Asia, the first Buddhist sites of Bactria-Tokharistan were discovered near Termez in 1926-28 by the Moscow Museum of Oriental Cultures, and at Airtam in the 1930's by excavations in Kara-tepe. In 1940, the Semirechie expeditions led by A. Bernshtam excavated the early medieval towns of the Chu valley and revealed the first local Buddhist monuments in Ak-Beshim and Krasnaya Rechka. In 1946, the Sogdian Buddhist culture was made known through the excavations of Penjikent.

The major archaeological work of the second half of the century is due to 3 persons who provided also the best historical reconstructions (see bibliography): B. Stavisky who worked during the

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<sup>4</sup> See the chronology of the diffusion in 7 phases in the article of R. Sala [Phase I (Mauryan-IndoGreek, III-II BC); II (Saka-Parthian, I BC - I AD); III (Kushan, II-III AD); IV (LateKushan-Sasanid-Kidarite IV-VAD): V (Hephtalite-Sasanid-Turk, VI-VIII AD); VI (Tibetan-Uighur, IX-XV AD) and VII (Mongol-Jungar, 1578-1750 AD)].

1960-70's in the region of Termez (Kara-tepe, Fayaz-tepe, Airtam); B. Litvinsky who studied during the 60's the monuments of East Tadjikistan (Adjina-tepe, Kafyr-kala); and G. Pugachenkova who excavated Airtam and Dalverzin-tepe in the 1960's. In Fergana and Semirechie the Buddhist monuments were excavated from the 1953 till the end of the 1980's (and have retarded in 2010).

The discovery of such a high number of Buddhist sites in the 1960's made of the diffusion of Buddhism in Western Central Asia a western parallel to the Buddhist sites of Xinjiang, which were already well known through the explorations of A. Stein, P. Pelliot and A. Von Le Coq from 1900 to 1930. At first the Soviet archaeologists supposed that the Buddhism spread in West and East Central Asia happened simultaneously from the common spring in Gandhara. But subsequent discoveries made in East Tadjikistan, Sogdia, Fergana and Semirechie (sites belonging to the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> phases) revealed that the diffusion occurred from different centres, being that the main centres were changing location with time, basically moving from Gandhara during the first phases to Afghanistan and to Xinjiang during the following phases.

## 1 - AFGHANISTAN

The Buddhist sites of Afghanistan are around 60 in number, located in 4 historical regions: **Nagarahara** (Jalalabad), **Arachosia** (Ghazni, Kandahar), **Kapisa** (Kabul, Begram), **Bactria** (Balkh), and in the **Bamiyan** province (Damian and upper Band-i Amir valleys) (ill.01).

The development of Buddhism in Afghanistan happened during the first 5 phases of its general spread in Central Asia: 1- Mauryan-IndoGreek (III-I BC), 2- Saka-Parthian (I BC - I AD), 3- Kushan (II-III AD, the peak period), 4- Kushano-Sasanid-Kidarite (IV-V AD) and 5- Hephtalite-Sasanid-Turkic period (VI-VIII AD).

The main diffusion happened under the early and late Kushan Empire. A recession occurred during the Hephtalite rule (V-VI AD) when several sites had been destroyed (especially in the Kabul and Nagarahara regions); although the last wave of building was initiated under their reign (testified by Bamiyan, Fundukistan and Ghazni) and supported later by the Turks (VI-VIII AD). During the reign of the Turki and Hindu Shahi dynasties (VII-X AD), Hinduist temples spread in the Kabul region and in Arachosia.

The Kushan period is marked by the building of many monasteries, cave-temples and votive stupas concealing Buddha's relics. The Kushano-Sasanid period emphasized colossal statuary representations of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. The Hephtalite-Turkic period shows a new artistic trend blending Indian Gupta, Sasanid and late Gandharan styles inspired by Mahayana and Vajrayana schools; and is also characterized by the blending of Hinduist and Buddhist pantheons under the Shahis (VII-X AD).

We present here down the main sites by regions, following the geographical succession South-North and East-West, which corresponds almost adequately to the historical spread. The only exception is represented by Nagarahara that, by constituting the first reach and main bifurcation in the diffusion of Buddhism from Gandhara, is treated before the southernmost region of Arachosia.

### 1.1 - Nagarahara (Nangarahar, Kabul valley, regional centre: Jalalabad)

The Nagarahara region includes the portion of the Kabul valley going from the Pakistan border in the east (Khyber pass) to the confluence of the Laghman river in the west. It has been often considered as a western sub-region of Gandhara. The Buddhist sites are located on both sides of the alluvial plain of the Kabul river. Buddhism reached the area already during the III BC under

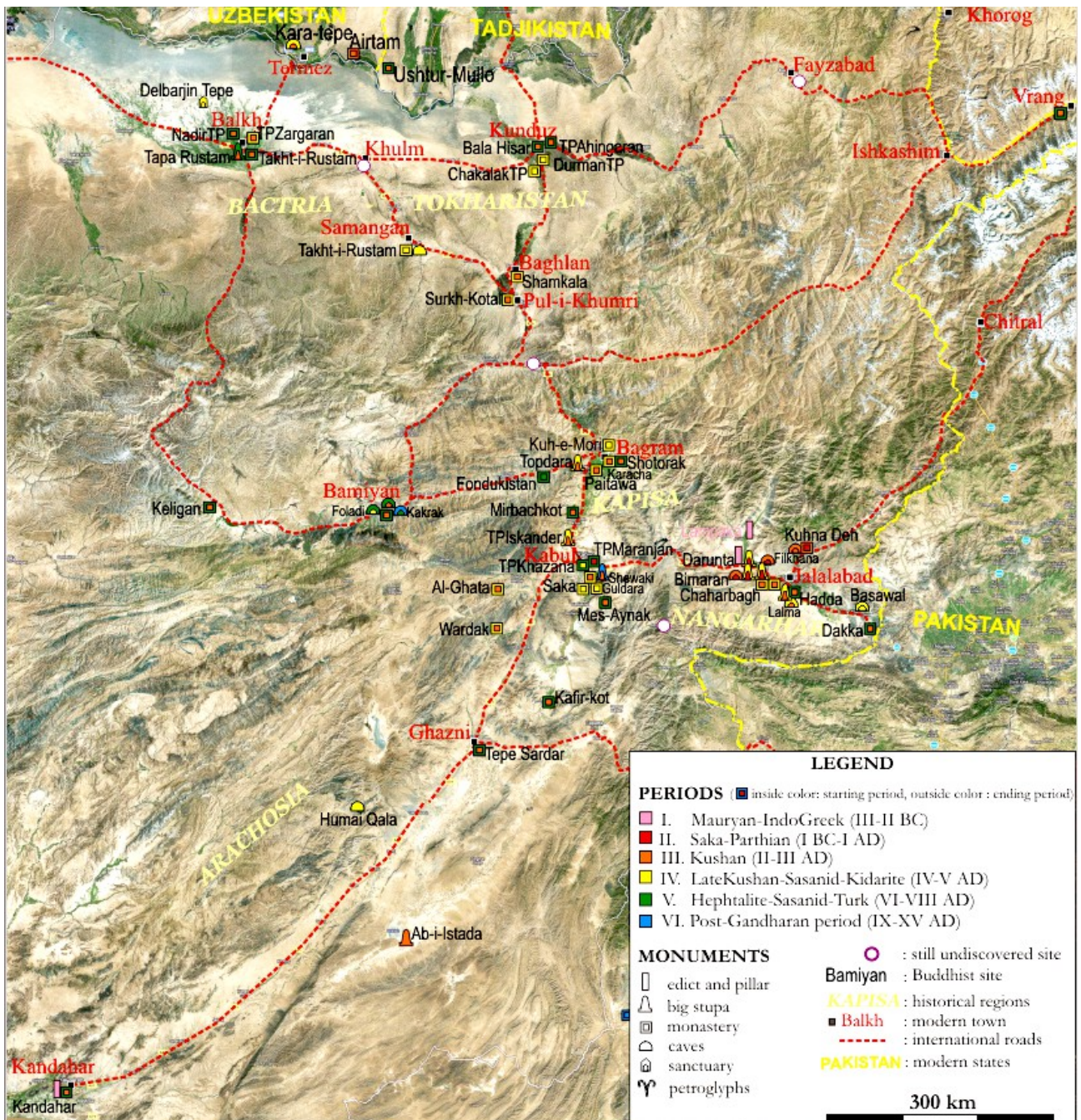


Fig.1- Map of the Buddhist sites of Afghanistan (Deom, Sala, 2010)

Asoka as testified by a rock edict found in Lampaka but the earliest Buddhist buildings consist of hundred of stupas located around Darunta and attributed to the Saka-Parthian time (2d phase) and by elegant stucco-sculptures of the Hadda stupas executed in a late Indo-Bactrian style occurring at the beginning of our era (3d phase).

Sites. From east to west the main sites are the following ones:

- **Kama Dakka**, south of the Kabul river, 8 km northwest of the Khyber Pass, is a site holding the ruins of a Buddhist monastery where fragments of schist sculptures and stucco were found (II-VII AD).
- **Basawal**, 70 km east of Jalalabad, is made of several groups of caves with more than 100 cells including meeting halls and monks cells (IV-V AD) spreading over 3,5 km of cliffs on the north side of the river.
- The region around Jalalabad is very rich in Buddhist sites which could be grouped in 3 main areas: Hadda in the southeast, Kuhna-Deh in the north and Darunta in the west. The cluster of

**Hadda** is located 8 km south of modern Jalalabad and is made of several Buddhist complexes (*Tepe-i-Shotor*, *Chakhil-i-Ghoundi*, *Tepe-Kalān*, *Tepe--i-Kafariha*, *Bagh-gai*, *Tepe-Zargarān*, *Lalma*) distributed all together in an area of 15 km<sup>2</sup>, including stupas (over 1000), monasteries and artificial caves (II-VIII AD). The artifacts of Hadda consist of clay and stucco sculpture, many gold and silver, reliquaries and several Kharoshti inscriptions. The peak of the Kushan phase of building happened during the III AD. Eventually the transition to the Kushano-Sasanid rule (300-500 AD) slowed down the process even if a new wave of construction reached the site under the Turkic rule during the VII AD, as testified by the bas-relief of the Tepe-i-Shotor monastery similar to other ones met in Central Asia from Tepe-Sardar (Ghazni) to Ajina-tepe (East Tokharistan) and Penjikent (Sogdia). The site was burned down during the VIII AD.

- In the same region but closer to Jalalabad (2 km south), the site of *Ahin Push Tepe*, located on a hill west of the road to Hadda, consists of a stupa-monastery complex (II-V AD) with fragments of colossal figures. The central stupa had a double platform and concealed a gold reliquary.
- To the North of Jalalabad, on the right bank of the Kunar valley, in *Kuhna Deh*, there is a large stupa-monastery complex with caves (I-III AD). The small stupa has an intact dome and the monastery with its walls still standing is equally well preserved.
- The sites located at the west of Jalalabad closer to the Darunta dam include *Chahar Bagh* (or Lal Qal'a, 9 km southwest of Jalalabad), a stupa-monastery complex (I-V AD) with reliquary and Saka coins and *Nagara Ghundi*, 4 km west of Jalalabad, south of the confluence of the Surkhud and Kabul rivers, holding the remains of a very large stupa (100 m circumference, I-VI AD) which could be the Nagara stupa saw by Xuan Zang in 631.
- Located just in front of the previous site but on the right bank of the Kabul river, *Fil Khana* (“Elephant House”), 5 km northwest of Jalalabad, is a complex of 32 caves (I-III AD) including a large pillar cave surrounded by individual cells in the Indian tradition. On the summit of the hill above the cells are the remains of two stupas, the northern one is better preserved and sheltered a gold leafed reliquary.
- At the southern foot of the Sia-Koh range, are found 3 sites. *Qalai-Kachala* is located 3 km west of Bimaran and includes stupas and caves (I-III AD). Stretching at both sides of a narrow gully the caves include one circumambulatory chamber and on the top of the hill are found the ruins of walls, mounds and stupas. In one of them was found a steatite vase containing small reliquaries, a manuscript and Saka coins minted under Azes I (57-35 BC). In the cultivated plain located 4 km south of Bimaran, the mound of *Jani Tup* holds the remains of a stupa standing on a platform without decoration where coins and reliquary were exhumed. Two mounds of the vicinity are probably the vestiges of other stupas (I-III AD). The most important site is located inside and around the village of *Bimaran* and consists of 4 large stupas, 2 parallel lines of smaller votive stupas and a complex of six artificial caves closer to the foothills (I-III AD). All the main stupas except one sheltered a reliquary with treasures. The well known golden Bimaran casket with the earliest human representation of Buddha dated to the reign of Azes II (35 BC-1 AD) was found in one of the biggest stupa.
- At mid road between Bimaran and Darunta, the site of *Nandarra* includes several groups of stupas and caves (I-III AD). The biggest stupa standing on a square platform on the hill side has an elaborate frieze with blind arches. Three of the several other smaller stupas were excavated for their hoards (Tope-i Kutchera contained coins minted under the IndoGreek ruler [Hermaeus](#) (90-70 BC) and Azes I, Tope-i Fasl revealed a gold reliquary, Tope-i Hosenamanat, a casket with coins of Azes I).
- At the west of the hydropower dam, at the eastern tip of the Sia-Koh mountain, is the site of *Pul-i Darunta* with fragments of Asoka Edict (III BC) and artificial caves bordering the river. The fragmentary bilingual stone inscription in Aramaic and Prakrit from a Pillar Edict was found in 1932.

- Two other Asoka edicts are located 15 km northwest, on the western rock side of the Marvandar ridge, on the eastern bank of the river Laghman, in the site of **Shalatak** (between Shalatak and Kargha). The best known is the stone tablet of **Lampaka** discovered in 1968 and including 4 texts, 3 in Sanskrit and one in Aramaic. The second Asoka inscription, in Aramaic, was discovered in 1973. The rocks bear also petroglyphs of animals.

Historical accounts. According to the Chinese monk Fa Xian, who crossed Nagarahara in 403 AD, there were in the region many more Buddhist establishments than the ones revealed by archaeology. In Jalalabad existed a stupa and a shrine conserving the relic of a Buddha's tooth; and in Hadda a monastery where was conserved the flat bone skull of the Buddha, protected under order of the king by 8 members of the local aristocracy.

At the turn of the V-VI AD, Nagarahara, as Gandhara, suffered from a wave of destruction made by some Hephtalite rulers and will never recover from its previous glory. When in 630 the monk Xuan Zang crossed Nagarahāra, ruled at the time by the kings of Kapisa, most of the Buddhist sites of Jalalabad were abandoned and the ones of Hadda were damaged but still in activity.

Schools and styles. The ancient Kharosthi manuscripts (I-III AD) discovered in the region of Jalalabad (and acquired and studied by the British Museum and by the University of Washington) testify that, among the early schools active in the region, especially important were the Dharmaguptaka and the Sarvastivada. Among these manuscripts are counted some important texts like the Dhammapada, few main Suttas, some Avadana stories and some Abhidharma texts. There is also the reference to a polemic against the Mahayana school probably present in the region from the first wave of the diffusion.

The monasteries of Hadda represent both the early and mature artistic trends of Buddhist art in the region starting with pure Indo-Greek sculptures like the statue of Buddha surrounded by Herakles and Tyche at Tepe-i-Shotor (II AD) to the Boddhisattva called the "Spirit with flowers" of Tepe-Kalan (IV-V AD) who anticipate the last artistic phase represented by Fundukistan.

## 1.2 - Arachosia (Ghazni and Arghandab valleys, regional centres: Ghazni, Kandahar)

The ancient kingdom of Arachosia conquered by the Greeks and the Mauryans, lies in the plain south of the Hindu Kush. Kandahar has always remained the capital town of the region, at the junction of the highways from Kabul, Herat and Quetta and the main commercial centre of south Afghanistan.

The diffusion of Buddhism occurred here between the III BC and VIII AD.

The earliest Buddhist monuments are 2 edicts of Asoka found in the old city of Kandahar (1<sup>st</sup> phase). The other Buddhist sites are attributed to phases 3, 4, 5 (Kushan, Kushano-Sasanid and Hephtalite-Turkic).

Sites. The main sites, from south to north, are the following:

- In **Kandahar**'s old city located 3 km at the west of the modern town, several major Buddhist remains have been discovered: two Asoka inscriptions (III BC), the first a bilingual Greek-Aramaic inscription on a massive boulder and the second a purely Greek inscription; and, at the south of the citadel on the ridge overlooking the city walls from the south, the ruins of a Buddhist stupa-monastery complex with important stone sculptures and wall paintings (III–VII AD) was documented.
- **Ab-i-Istada**, located 100 km south of Moqor between Ghazni and Kandahar, consists of 3 large stupa complexes (dated by C<sup>14</sup> to 150 AD).
- Located 35 km northwest of Moqor, west of the road towards Ghazni in the valley of a tributary of the Argandab river, the site of **Humai Qal'a** consists of a group of caves dug at differ-

ent levels in a cliff face (IV-V AD). The cells, some vaulted but without decoration, are interconnected by corridors and stairs.

- Located in the southeastern periphery of modern Ghazni, on the top of the large mound of **Tepe-Sardar**, stands a very large stupa-monastery complex dated to 2 periods of building (III-V and VII-VIII AD) consisting of a main large stupa (the biggest in Afghanistan) surrounded by many votive small stupas and chapels where colossal clay statues including a 18 m long Parinirvana Buddha and frescoes were exhumed by Italian archaeologists. The site also included a Hindu temple with a statue of Durga Mahishasuramardini.
- At 2 km west in **Gudul-e-Ahangaran** miniature stupas and unbaked clay tablets inscribed in Sanskrit were also discovered.

Historical accounts. Xuan Zang, who crossed Ghazni (Hexina) in 644 on his way back to China, reports that the local people have “considerable skill in magical sentences but they have no good aim in view. They daily repeat several myriads of words (...) Although they worship a hundred spirits, yet they also reverence the three precious ones (Buddhism). There are several hundred monasteries with around 1000 monks. They all study the Great Vehicle (...). There are some ten stupas built by Asoka-rajā, and several tens of Deva temples, in which sectaries of various denominations dwell together”<sup>5</sup>.

Schools and styles. Xuan Zang quotes that in 644 AD Ghazni was a center of late Buddhist development, blending Hinduist, Mahayana and Vajrayana elements. And in fact, the frescoes and the statuary of Tepe-Sardar, representing the last artistic phase of Buddhism in Afghanistan, show similarities with synchronous ones from the sites of Bamiyan and Fundukistan.

### 1.3 - Kapisa (Kabul, Panjshir, upper Ghorband valleys, regional centre: Kabul)

The historical region of Kapisa is situated in southern part of the Hindukush range and is made of 2 sub-regions: the plain of Koh-Daman and its surrounding mountain neighborhoods with Kabul in the south; Kapisa itself, located north of Koh-Daman at the confluence of the Panjshir and Ghorband river valleys.

Buddhism spread here during the Kushan period when stupas and the first monasteries were built in the Koh-Daman valley (in and near Kabul) and in the summer capital of the Kushans near Bagram (ancient Kapisa). Under the reign of the Hepthalites, several Buddhist monuments were abandoned in Kapisa but others met a new phase of construction (Tepe Maranjan) which extended till the Turkic rule (VI-IX AD) characterized by the new artistic trends found in the last sculptures of Shotorak (Bagram).

Sites. The main sites, from south to north and from east to west, are the following.

- At 90 km south of Kabul in the Kharwar valley of the **Logar** province, the site of **Kafir-Kot** is a huge fortified monastery complex with stupas and statues (III-VII AD) still unexcavated but partially looted.
- At the southwest of Kabul at the west of the road Kabul-Ghazni in the **Wardak** province, near the confluence of the Beksamand and Djilga rivers, the site of **Wardak** is located outside a Kushan walled town and consists of a fortified stupa-monastery complex (II-IVAD) where a steatite vase with Kharoshthi inscription was discovered.
- In the Nirkh district (Wardak province) the site of **Al-Ghata** (DAFA, 2005-10) is a large stupa-monastery complex with huge statues (II-IVAD) located on a slope under an ancient castle.

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<sup>5</sup> Beal S (1884) Digital version 2.0 (2005) passage concerning Tsau-ku-ch'a (Arachosia)'s capital Ho-si-na (Ghazni)

- Located 30 km south of Kabul in the **Logar** province near the village of Gol Hamid in the copper mine deposits of *Mès Aynak* a group of several Buddhist complexes covering almost 300 ha is today the object of archaeological rescue (DAFA-AIA, 2009) before the exploitation of the mines by the Chinese Metallurgical Group Corporation (start planned for 2014). The area includes several monasteries like *Gol Hamid*, *Kafirkot tepe*, *Shah tepe*, *Shesh karez*, *Tepe Kafiriati*...which have revealed many stupas, temples and monk cells, wall paintings, more than 150 statues including a 5 m long sleeping Buddha (II-VI AD).
- At 10 km at the south of Kabul on a rock above the Logar river near the village of *Saka* are situated the ruins of a fortified monastery (V AD).
- Located 15 km southeast of Kabul and overlooking the plain from the top of the Munarai range, are standing 3 Buddhist sites with Kushan period stupas: the southernmost is located in the Musa-i-Logar valley near the mountain pass of *Guldara* where is situated a well preserved stupa-monastery complex (III-VI AD); the second is located 2 km north near the mountain pass of Munarai where stands the pillar of *Minar-i-Chakri* which consists of a cylindrical diaper masonry pillar on a square base resembling Indian columns of the Mauryan period (II-V AD); 2 km further north at the south of *Yakhdara* village is located the stupa of *Shewaki* (I-IX AD), other stupas and a enclosed monastery are located further west.
- In **Kabul** most of the Buddhist sites are situated at the southeast of the town around the Takht-i-shah mountain: the southernmost complex stretches at the south of the *Hasmatkhan* lake among modern buildings and consists of several stupa-monastery sites with caves and sanctuary cells with frescoes (II-V AD); further north on the eastern flank of Takht-i-shah, *Tepe Naranj* is a stupa-monastery which revealed statues, wall paintings and manuscript fragments (II-V AD); in the north of the ridge, 800 m west of Bala Hissar, the site located near the shrine of *Khwaja Safa* includes another important stupa-monastery complex (IV-V AD); down the point of the Šher Darvaza hill behind the Avicenna Hospital, *Tepe-Khazana* (Treasure Hill) revealed 60 stucco heads belonging to a group of unexcavated Buddhist buildings (V-VII AD) and the largest site is located 1,5 km at the northeast of Bala Hissar under the southern slope of *Tepe Maranjan* where 2 stupa-monastery complexes with reliquary, wall paintings and 7 stupas have been discovered (I-VI AD).
- Along the road going from Kabul to Begram are located several Buddhist sites such as the fortified tell of *Tepe-Iskander*, located 15 km north of Kabul with 2 stupas (II-IVAD) situated at its foot and including a Hinduist complex built under the Turki and Hindu Shahis (VII-IX AD), *Mir-Bacha-Kot* (also called Serai-Khoja), located 30 km north of Kabul, where 2 large schist statues of standing Buddha and remains of few buildings (III-VII AD) were exhumed and *Topdarra* (Valley of the Stupa), 6 km south of Charikar, where a well preserved 20 m high Buddhist stupa (II-IV AD) with Indo-Corinthian pilasters is located. In the northern vicinity of Topdarra are situated 2 monasteries with courtyards and small stupas.
- At 12 km east of Charikar near the long mound stretching along the Panjshir river where is located the Greek and Kushan walled town of *Bagram* (ancient Kapisa), are found several Buddhist sites which have exhumed most of the essential sculptures of early and late Gandharan styles. *Paitawa* is a stupa-monastery complex with important Gandharan schist statuary (II-IVAD) located 4 km at the east of the road Kabul-Charikar, 16 km southwest of the tell of Bagram. At the east of the fortified tell of Bagram are located 3 sites: at 1 km east on a rock outcrop (Koh-i-tope) hanging above the Panjshir river is the monastery of *Karatcha*, a stupa-monastery complex with Gandharan statues (II-IV AD), further east closer of the hill of Koh-i-pahlavan, once covered with Buddhist sites and stupas, the stupa-monastery site of *Qol-i-Nader* which revealed an unique reliquary (II-VII AD), and further north above the right bank of the Panjshir river, the well-known site of *Shotorak*, a small cloistered including 8 stupas (II-VII AD) which could have been the summer residence where the Kushan king Kanishka kept hostages from China as reported by Xuan Zang.



- North of the valley, on the left bank of the Panjshir river 14 km southeast of Golbahar at the foot of the Kuh-i Kham-i Zargar mountain, the stupa-monastery complex of **Kuh-e-Mori**, has revealed a 25m high stupa among other smaller ones and a monastery below the hill (IV-V AD).
- Located 60 km at the west of Kapisa in the Gurband valley, five kilometers south of Sauhgerd is located the site of **Fundukistan** which includes a square temple consisting of a huge courtyard, with a square stupa in the middle and an adjoining building connected to it by a vaulted passage built in adobe and made of cells, congregation halls and other rooms (VII-VIII AD).

Historical accounts. Fa Xian, who in 404 AD crossed the region southeast of Kabul called Luoyi (Northeast Logar province, probably the area of Azrow), reports about the presence of around 3000 monks belonging to both Hinayana and Mahayana schools. Xuan Zang crossed Kapisa twice, in 630 and on his way back in 644. In Kapisa, he reports the presence of 100 monasteries with more than 6000 monks mainly Mahayanists and in the northern piedmonts near Kapisa he saw a large monastery with 300 monks all Hinayanists.

Schools and styles. According to the ancient Buddhist Kharoshti manuscripts found in the region of Kabul, the most influential early schools were the Dharmaguptaka and Sarvastivada. The early Buddhist artistic phase is well embodied in the architecture of the stupas of Kabul (Tepe Naranj, Shewaki) and in the Gandharan sculptures of Shotorak and Paitawa, while the transitional style (IV-V AD) represented by the clay sculptures of Tepe Maranjan and Tepe Khazana anticipate the late Buddhist artistic trend (VII-VIII AD) illustrated by the sculptures of Fundukistan as a syncretism of Graeco-Bactrian, Sasanid and Gupta-Indian religious iconography.

#### 1.4 - Bamiyan province (Damian and upper Band-i Amir valleys)

This geographical more than historical region corresponds to the mountain valleys delimiting the administrative province of Bamiyan. It includes the lower Ghorband, the Damian and the upper Band-i Amir valleys. This region provides the most convenient transit for moving between north and south Afghanistan and is crossed by 2 roads connecting Kapisa to Bactria, one going northwest of Bamiyan reaches Balkh through the Band-i Amir valley, the second follows the Surkhab valleys till the fork of Pul-i Khumri and further North to Khulm or Kunduz. The diffusion of Buddhism occurred here between the II and VIII AD.

Sites. Most of the sites are grouped around the valley of Bamiyan.

- The site of **Bamiyan**, built in the northern cliffs of the Damian valley just above the modern town, consists of a large Buddhist monastic centre including around 750 artificial caves with sculptures and frescos (III-VIII AD), 2 large standing statues of Buddha blown up by the Taliban in 2001 (smaller one 38 m high and bigger one 53 m high, both carved at the beginning of the VI AD) and a large stupa at Sheikhrza (III-VIII AD). Other remains of Buddhist buildings in the vicinity of the colossal statues like a monastery and a stupa located at the northwest of Shahr-i Gholghola have been unearthed during the last years. During the IV-VII AD, the region of Bamiyan became the main Buddhist center of Afghanistan.
- The adjacent western perpendicular **Foladi Valley** (village of Deh-i-Ahangaran), includes the numerous painted caves of **Kalai Ghamai** and **Qout-i Akram** (V-VII AD), some are four and five stories high and have frescos and decorations of "lantern" ceilings.
- In the **Kakrak Valley**, 3 km southeast of the cliff, are located a 15 m high standing Buddha in a niche surrounded by caves with paintings (like the representation of Maitreya surrounded by seated Buddhas in medallions in the Hunter King cave) constituting the final period of Buddhism at Bamiyan (VI-XIII AD).

- Around 120 km at the west of Bamiyan, along the Band-e-Amir valley, near the village of **Keligan** (6 km east of the fort Chil-Borji), a stupa-monastery complex (III-VII AD?) including a 2-storey dome-shaped temple with a lecture hall has been recently identified by Japanese historian<sup>6</sup>.

Historical accounts. In 630, coming down from Balkh, probably through the Balkh and Band-i Amir valleys, Xuan Zang stayed in a country named Jiechi (Gachi?) just before crossing the mountains towards Bamiyan. This region had 10 monasteries and about 200 monks, all belonging to the Sarvastivadas, and might corresponds to the region near the Buddhist site of Keligan.

In Bamiyan he reported the existence of ten convents and about 1000 priests belonging to the Hinaya and the Lokottaravadin school, even if his local guide belonged to the Mahasanghika sect. Hui Chao, a monk of Korean origin who visited Bamiyan around 727 AD, wrote that here “monasteries and priests are abundant” following both Hinayana and Mahayana traditions.

Schools and styles. According to the ancient Buddhist Kharoshti manuscripts found in the region of Bamiyan (British Library, University of Washington, Schoyen collection), the most influential early schools were the Dharmaguptaka and Sarvastivada. In the early VII AD, according to Xuan Zang, the Lokottaravadins were predominant in Bamiyan, although the Mahasanghika was also active as testified by some fragments of manuscripts (VI-VIII AD) related to the Mahasanghika and Sarvastivadin schools found in Bamiyan<sup>7</sup>. During the VIII AD Hui Chao testifies the importance of Mahayana schools.

Concerning Buddhist arts, the sculptures and frescoes of Bamiyan of the VI-VIII centuries are characterized by a syncretism of Greco-Bactrian, Sasanid and Gupta-Indian religious iconography. In Bamiyan, especially in the Foladi Valley, the lantern roof of the caves is a stylistic imitation of the wooden ceilings found still today in Wakhan and Nuristan. In Kakrak, the panels depicting repeated circles of seating Buddhas are early Vajrayana representations similar to the ones found today in Nepal and Tibet.

### 1.5-Bactria (Kunduz and Balkh valleys, regional centre: Balkh)

The historical region of Bactria, renamed **Tokharistan** at the end of the Sasanid period (IV AD), is located at the north of the Hindukush with the main centers along the Amudarya river, which divides Northern Bactria (Termez, UZ) from its central and southern part located in Afghanistan. The 2 Afghan sub-regions are: South Bactria, consisting of the northern piedmonts of the Hindukush, hosting the cities of Baghlan and Samangan (where is located the site of Surkh-Kotal, summer residence of the Kushans); and Central Bactria consisting of the alluvial plains of the Kunduz and Balkh rivers down to their confluence with the Amudarya, hosting the city of Balkh, the most important political center of all Bactria-Tokharistan.

The diffusion of Buddhism occurred here between the II and VIII AD during phases 3, 4, 5 (Kushan, Kushano-Sasanid and Hephtalite-Turkic).

Sites. The most important sites, from south to north and east to west, are the following ones.

- At 1 km east of **Surkh-Kotal**, the ancient dynastic temple of the Kushans (II-III AD) located 19km northwest of **Pul-i-Khumri**, a Buddhist shrine with decorated pilasters has been documented.
- At **Shamkala**, in the northeastern periphery of modern **Baghlan**, the remains of a stupa-monastery complex consist of a square fortified mound containing a stupa with Buddhist bas-

<sup>6</sup> Discovered by Meiji Yamada as reported by his conference in UCLA. See: <http://www.international.ucla.edu/buddhist/events/showevent.asp?eventid=1768>

<sup>7</sup> The Sanskrit manuscripts coming from an excavation made by J.Hackin (DAFA) in 1930 are mostly treatises of the *Abhidharma* but include also a portion of the *Vinaya* of the Mahasanghikas. See: Litvinskii, 1989.

- reliefs and limestone capitals and another mound at its west is considered to incorporate a monastery (II–VIIAD).
- In the Kunduz valley in the vicinity of modern Kunduz, several Buddhist sites have been documented: on the double walled settlement of *Chakalak tepe* located 11 km south of Kunduz were discovered the fragments of a stupa, a building made of several rooms and important findings like limestone sculptures and 15 pillar bases (IV-VAD); in *Durman Tepe* situated 8 km south of Kunduz were found the remains of a Buddhist building dated to the same period; the ancient walled town of Kunduz (*Bala Hisar*) have disclosed some limestone fragments, a Buddha's head and Kharoshthi inscription on a vase (II-VIIAD); but the richest remains are associated with the mound of *Tepe Ahingaran* located 2 km northeast of Bala Hisar, where were excavated 2 stupa-monastery complexes including stucco panels, many sculptures, Buddha heads, stone column bases and Corinthian capitals probably belonging to a stupa (II-VII AD).
  - In the Samangan valley, the site of *Takht-i-Rustam*, situated 2 km south of modern **Haibak**, is a cave-monastery complex carved in the rock (IV-VAD). The monastery is made of 5 cells including 2 special rooms, the smaller, probably a chapel, has decorated domed ceiling and the big one (22x22m) could act as lecture hall. The stupa is located in an adjacent hill in front of other less elaborated caves.
  - The region of **Balkh** includes several Buddhist sites: *Tapa Rustam* and *Takht-i-Rustam* are 2 mounds located in the southern outskirts of modern Balkh outside the medieval city walls, the first one, on the west of the road, is topped by a 61 m high stupa and the second, on the east, contains the remains of a monastery which could be the Navavihara seen by Xuan Zang where were preserved several sacred relics of the Buddha (II-VIII AD).
  - Southeast of the ancient walled town of Balkh (**Bala Hisar**) on the mound of *Tepe Zargaran*, the oldest Buddhist ruins of Bactria has been recently excavated (DAFA 2004), they belong to a stupa (II-IVAD) destroyed by a Sasanid irrigation channel, with a cubic platform and Corinthian columns similar to the architecture of Surkh-Kotal and revealed a reliquary with Kushan coins dated to the reign of Soter Megas (80-95 AD).
  - On the top of the mound of *Nadir tepe* located 3,5km to the northwest of Bala Hisar, the ruins of a possible stupa-monastery complex (II-VIIAD) consisting of the base of a stupa with staircase and a non excavated square walled structure.
  - *Delbarjin*, a large antique town located on the plains 40 km northwest of Balkh, has revealed a 3 periods Buddhist temple with an attached sanctuary with frescoes (IV-VAD) similar to those of Tepe Sardar.

Historical accounts. Xuan Zang, going south through the region in 630 AD, didn't meet any Buddhist community in Baghlan and Samangan; but in Khulm, half way between them, where no archaeological remains have been found yet, he accounted 10 monasteries with 500 monks. In 644, on his way back from India north of Kapisa through the Salang pass, Xuan Zang met in Andarab 3 monasteries with tens monks belonging to the Mahasanghika school, and at Khost (Pul-i-Khumri?) 3 monasteries with few monks. In Kunduz there were 10 monasteries with several hundred monks belonging to both Hinayana and Mahayana schools. In Balkh, he says, there were 100 monasteries with 3000 monks, all Hinayana. At the southwestern outskirts of the town was located the monastery Nava-Vihara, built by a former king of this country and led by masters coming from Kashmir with a statue of Vaiśravaṇa (a protective deity). At the north of the monastery was erected a very high stūpa, enclosing a sacred relic reflecting a divine splendor; and at the southwest, another vihāra built few centuries earlier had several hundreds stupas and played as refuge for ascetics with about 100 monks.

According to Xuan Zang, each of two towns (Diwei and Poli) located some 25 and 45 km northwest of Balkh (near Delbarjin), had the oldest stupa (10 m high) of Bactria where Buddhist merchants brought the hair and nail-cuttings of the historical Buddha.

*Schools and styles.* From the early Kushan period, Sarvastivadins from Gandhara built monasteries in Balkh. One of the eminent founders was Ghosaka (II AD), a master of the Sarvastivada Vaibhasika school who participated to the 4<sup>th</sup> Buddhist council under Kanishka and built the Nava-Vihara of Balkh. From here the Sarvastivada Vaibhasika will spread till Termez and further to North Tarim. Hinayana schools (and particularly of the Sarvastivada) were still dominant in Bactria till the VII AD, as confirmed by Xuan Zang. But the existence of other schools like the Dharmaguptaka is attested by a copper reliquary from the Kunduz region with a Kharosthi dedicatory inscription for a monk from a monastery of the Dharmaguptaka school<sup>8</sup>.

## 2 - WEST CENTRAL ASIA

West Central Asia consists of 5 historical regions: **Bactria-Tokharistan** (also called Northern Bactria), **Margiana** (Murghab valley with Merv as main town); **Sogdia** (Zeravshan valley), **Fergana** basin and **Semirechie** (Chu valley) (ill.02). Bactria-Tokharistan is made of 5 sub-regions: **Termez** and **Chaghaniyan** both in the Surkhandarya valley, **Kubadian** in the Kafirnigan valley, **Khuttalan** in the Vaksh and Pyandj valleys and **Badakhshan** in the upper Pyandj and Wakkhan valleys. The Buddhist sites are 23 with a total of around 30 buildings.

Buddhism arrived in West Central Asia during phases 3 (Kushan, II-III AD), 4 (Kushano-Sasanid, IV-V AD), 5 (Hephtalite-Turkic, VI-VIII AD). An exceptional event has been the building of a Buddhist monument in the XII AD in east Semirechie (Kayilyk on the Jungarian piedmonts). The main diffusion happened under the Kushans. Recessions happened under the Persian Sasanids when some early sites (mainly in Termez) were disturbed and some of them even used by Zoroastrians (III-IV AD). Recession and development both happened during the Hephtalite rule (V-VI AD) when several sites got abandoned and others were newly rebuilt at the north and east of the previous nests (in Chaghaniyan and Khuttalan), where later have been supported by the Turks (VI-VIII AD). A new wave of construction under the Turks mainly happened under the influence of the Buddhist oases of the Tarim basin (Kucha, Turfan) when the Central Asian Turkic empire was submitted to the Chinese Tang dynasty (657-751) who supported the building of Buddhist temples in the Chu and (possibly) the Fergana valleys.

The Kushan and Kushano-Sasanid phases are characterized by the diffusion of Gandharan architecture and arts similar to those of Gandhara, Nagahara and Kapisa. The Hephtalite and Turkic phases show similarities to the late Gandharan art of Nagahara, Kapisa and Arachosia with colossal statues and buildings with square plan around a large stupa. The post-Gandharan phase is a mix of late Gandharan and Chinese styles blended in the Tarim basin.

### 2.1. Termez and Chaghaniyan (Surkhandarya valley, regional centre: Termez)

The Surkhandarya region consists of the Uzbek part of the Surkhandarya river valley from the northern bank of the Amudarya in the south to the Tadjik border in the north and made of 2 historical regions: Termez in the south and Chaghaniyan in the north with Dalverzin-tepe as main centres. The main diffusion of Buddhism occurred here between the II and VII AD, concerning first the region nearer the Amudarya and later the upper Surkhandarya valley. Around 500 AD, most of the early Buddhist buildings were partially destroyed and often used as cemeteries. Later on some constructions were repaired (the stupa of Fayaz-tepe) and new ones built (a small temple in Kara-tepe and the presumed stupa of Tshor-Dinak). Xuan Zang crossing the area in the VII AD revealed that Buddhism was still active at that time.

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<sup>8</sup> The vase is dated to or after Vima Kadphises (II AD) by G.Fussman, 1974, p.58-61.

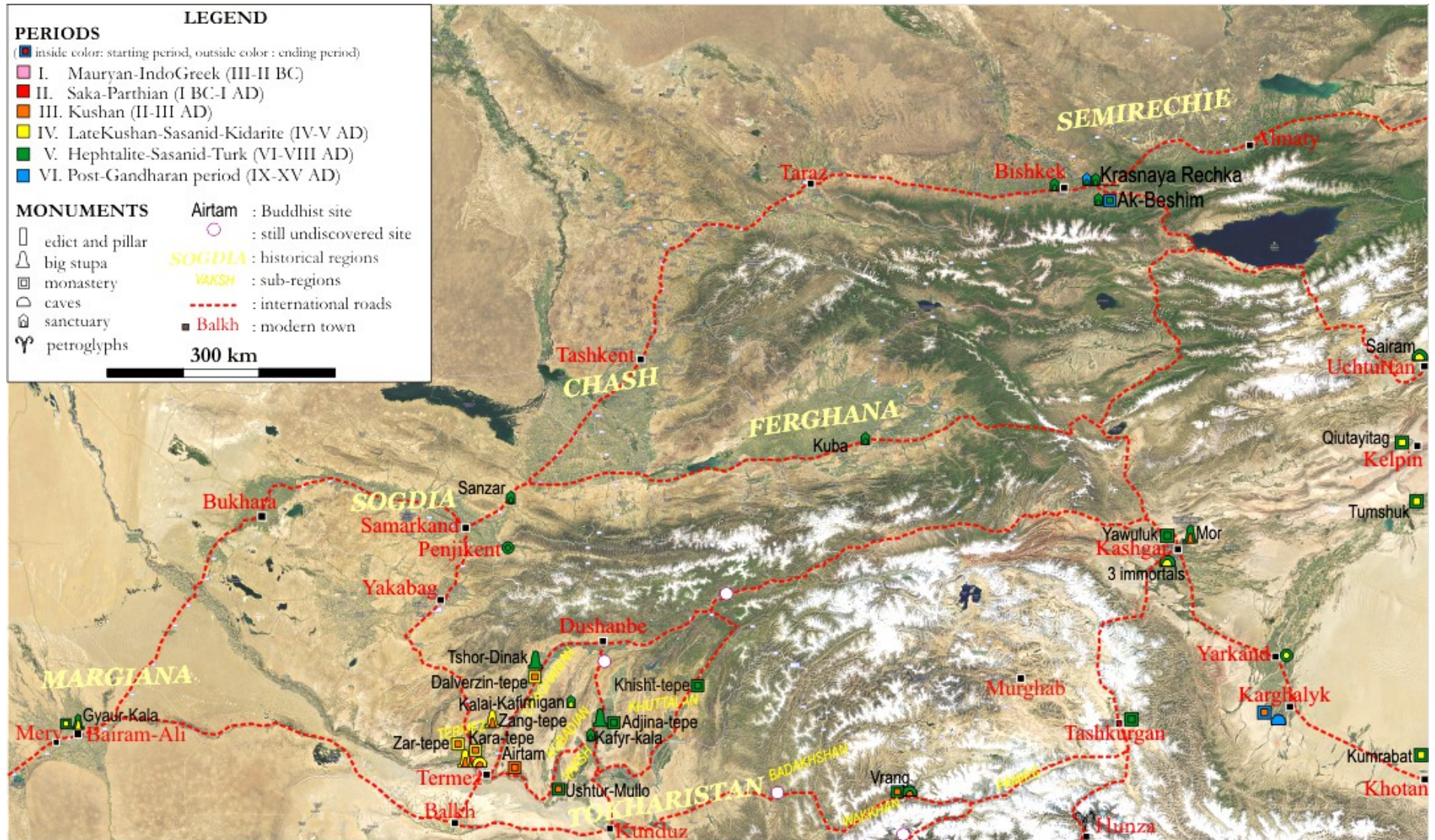


Fig.2- Map of the Buddhist sites of West Central Asia (Deom, Sala, 2010)

Sites. The main sites, from west to east and south to north, are the following ones.

- **Zar-tepe**, 25 km at the NW of ancient Termez, is a square walled town built before the Kushans and active till the VI AD. In the northwestern angle of the tepe, a Buddhist chapel (III-IV AD) was identified. A mound (Katlaman tepe) located 250 m east of the city walls hosted a stupa (IV-early V AD) built after the phase of disturbance following the Sasanid conquest. A Buddha head and Kushan coins were found in these 2 sites.
- In **ancient Termez** (7 km NW of the modern town) the earliest Buddhist monuments consist of: **Kara-tepe**, a main Buddhist complex consisting of a group of monastery-cave-temples (II-V AD) combining free standing buildings, yards and stupas and rooms dug inside a large oval mound in the northwestern corner of the ancient town; **Fayaz-tepe**, a rectangular mound situated outside the walls 800 m northeast of Kara-tepe, is a monastery complex made of 3 parts with a stupa in front of the central sanctuary (II-VI AD) which revealed polychrome frescoes, limestone and clay sculptures; the **Zurmala Tower**, a big stupa (II-IV AD), located 1 km at the southeast of the city walls, associated with limestone sculptures. An **anonymous complex** preserving only an underground room including remains of Buddhist artifacts (II-IVAD) has also been excavated inside the eastern part of the old town.
- **Airtam**, a Graeco-Bactrian walled settlement located 18 km east of ancient Termez and stretching over 90 ha along the right bank of the Amurdarya, consists of a Buddhist complex with monastery, temple and stupa (II-III AD). Here were discovered sculptured stone capitals known as “Airtam Frieze” similar to those found in Fayaz-tepe and in the Swat valley in Pakistan.
- In **Zang-Tepe**, a castle located 30 km north of Termez, 12 fragments of Buddhist Brahmi Sanskrit texts of the Vinaya Pitaka were exhumed, probably sheltered in a Buddhist stupa (III-IV AD ?).
- In **Dalverzin-tepe**, a large Graeco-Bactrian and Kushan town (12 km north of Shurchi and 24 km south of Kalchayan, the ancient capital of the Kushan), are located two Buddhist sanctuaries, the first is located at the north of the town walls (II-IVAD), the other inside the walls (III-IVAD). Both temples have revealed excellent clay statues of the Kushano-Sasanid period.
- **Tshor-Dinak**, located 14km northwest of Dalverzin-tepe in the village of Khazarbag, disclosed the ruins of a tower-shaped mound supposed to be a stupa (VI-VII AD).

Historical accounts. The historical sources testify the importance of Termez region during the Kushan and Kushano-Sasanid periods (II-V AD), a Buddhist treaty (translated at the end of the first millennium in Tibetan) records the name of its original compiler, Dharmamitra, a monk from Tarmita (Termez) and the Chinese Buddhist biographies mention Dharmananda, a major translator of Hinayana texts from Tokharistan who stayed in China between 384 and 391.

In the Surkhandarya valley, Buddhism continued its activity at a reduced speed under the Hephtalite and Turkic rules (V-VIII AD) even if new Buddhist sites were built in the valley.

When Xuan Zang crossed Termez in 630 AD he recorded about 10 monasteries with about 1000 monks, stupas and Buddha’s images. At that time Buddhism was already waning here, as attested by archaeology. But in Chaghaniyan on the upper Surkhandarya valley, he saw 5 monasteries with few monks. In Akharun (Huluomo, Garm) at the east of Chaghaniyan (Tajikistan) he met 2 monasteries with about 100 hundred monks; and in the kingdom of Shuman (south of Dushanbe) he found 2 monasteries with few monks.

Schools and styles. In Termez (Kara-tepe and Fayaz-tepe), early Buddhist inscriptions on potteries and dedications on reliquaries in Kharosthi, Brahmi and Bactrian scripts belong predominantly to the Mahasanghika school, and then to the Sarvastivada and Dharmaguptaka.

As mentioned above, a monk from Tarmita (Termez) was the first translator of Buddhist texts translated in Tibetan and the Chinese sources record that during the IV-VII AD the school of Tokharistan was very active in the transmission of Buddhist texts.

In Zang-tepe many fragments on birch bark of the Vinaya Pitaka in Sanskrit and Brahmi script are similar to fragments in Bactrian language found in north Tarim. These elements confirm the importance of the Bactrian Mahasanghika and Sarvastivada schools of the Termez region and of their connection with Tarim and Western China.

The cave complex of Karatepe and the Zurmala tower are architecturally similar to caves and stupas of Nagarahara and Kapisa (Shewaki near Kabul).

## 2. 2. **Kubadian** (Kafirnigan valley, regional centre: Kobadian)

The Kafirnigan region, also known in history as **Kubadian**, consists of the valley of the lower course of the Kafirnigan river (Tadjikistan) from its confluence with the Amudarya in the south to the southeastern piedmonts of the Babatag range in the north. Its ancient capital is the medieval town of Kobadian, located 20 km north of Shaartuz, modern administrative centre of the valley.

The diffusion of Buddhism occurred here between the II and VII AD, circumscribed to the northern bank of the Amudarya under the Kushans (II-V AD), and then in the Kafirnigan valley under the Hephtalite rule.

Sites. The main sites, from west to east and south to north, are the following ones.

- **Ushturnullo**, a Buddhist stupa-monastery complex (II-VI AD) located on the left bank of the Kafirnigan river near its confluence with the Amudarya, close to the village Shakh. The northern complex consists of a monastery with a central yard decorated with mural paintings, a sanctuary surrounded by a circumbulatory corridor and adjacent monk cells, a meeting hall and economic rooms. The southern part consists of a big stupa with a base made of stone reliefs dated to 2 periods: the main period of activity (III-IV AD) and a phase of reconstruction (VI AD) adding 3 stairways at each side.
- **Kalai-Kafirnigan** (also called Tokkuz-kala), a medieval town situated upstream on the left bank of the Kafirnigan river near the village of Esambai 80 km southwest of Dushanbe, where have been found the remains of a Buddhist sanctuary complex with frescoes (V-VIII AD). The 3 periods building consists of a sanctuary with ambulatory corridor including wall paintings (VII-VIII AD) and statues of the Buddha and Lokapalas leading to a smaller shrine at its back.

Historical accounts. Xuan Zang attests during the 630 AD the presence in the Kubadian kingdom of 3 monasteries with about 100 monks.

*Schools and styles:* According to Xuan Zang and Yijing (Chinese pilgrim who traveled here in 694 AD), the orange robe of the Buddhist monks depicted on the wall painting of Kalai-Kafirnigan is an attribute of the Mahasanghika school.

These frescoes, probably made by local Tokharian artists, belong to a Central Asian school of art also active in Chaghaniyan, Margiana and Sogdia during the Western Turkic rule.

## 2. 3. **Khuttalan** (Vaksh and Pyandj valleys, regional centre: Kulyab)

**Khuttalan** is the historical region of Tadjikistan located on the right bank of the Pyandj river between its confluence with the Vaksh and Kunduz river (where the Amudarya starts). It included 2 sub-regions **Vaksh** in the southwest and **Khuttal** in the northeast.

The diffusion of Buddhism occurred here between the VII-VIII AD.

Sites. The main sites, from west to east and south to north, are the following ones.

- **Kafyr-kala**, an early medieval square walled town located on the left bank of the middle course of the Vaksh river at the west of Kholkhozabad, where in the southeastern corner of the citadel was found the remains of a Buddhist domed sanctuary with frescoes surrounded by ambulatory corridor (VI-VIII AD). A fragment of Buddhist birch-bark manuscript in Brahmi was also exhumed in the citadel.
- The World Heritage site of **Adjina-tepe**, located 12 km east of Kurgan-tube and 2 km south of the village of Kirovski on the left bank of the Vaksh river, consists of a Buddhist monastery complex made of two parts both centered around a courtyard. The northern court had a big stupa with a cross-shaped plan and staircases at the orient, along the northern wall were niches holding statues and the ambulatory corridor included a 12 m long reclining Buddha. The southern yard was surrounded by a vaulted corridor holding statues on pedestal, monks cells, meeting hall and shrines all built on two floors with adobes. The complex revealed many frescoes and statues (VII-VIII AD).
- **Khisht-tepe**, located on the left bank of the Obimazar-Yakshu river (a right tributary of the Pyandj river), in the mountain area of Eastern Tadjikistan near Khovaling village, hosts the remains of a Buddhist monastery (VII-VIII AD). The complex made of pakhsa blocks and adobes had a square plan with a central courtyard and a sanctuary at the north surrounded by a corridor and flanked with room containing a stupa at its south. Here and in other rooms of the complex were found small votive stupas and clay tablets with Buddhist texts.

Historical accounts. Xuan Zang in 631 AD didn't meet any Buddhist activity in Vaksh and Khottal, but according to Hui Chao who crossed the region in 726, half of the population of Khuttalan was Turkic and, together with its Turkic ruler, was devoted to Hinayana Buddhism and supported many monasteries.

Schools and styles. The absence in the iconography of Adjina-tepe and Kafyr-kala of early Gandharan representations of Jataka stories and the repetition of 'thousands Buddhas' images witnesses artistic trends of the Turkic period, i.e. the predominance of Mahasanghika and Lokottaravada schools privileging the representation of the supramundane Buddha against the one of the historical Buddha. The theme of the assaults of terrible spirits in the sculptured décor of Adjina-tepe (VII-VIII AD) is met during the same period in monuments of Afghanistan Fergana and Tarim. The plan of the Buddhist temples of Vaksh and Khuttal, although revealing some local Tokharistan adaptations, is very similar to the architecture of Kapisa. But the wall paintings, here like in all Bactria-Tokharistan, display an original school of art.

#### 2.4. - Badakhshan (upper Pyandj and Wakkhan valleys)

**Badakhshan** is considered here in its broad denotation corresponding to the modern administrative regions of Badakhshan in Afghanistan incorporating the Wakkhan corridor and Gorno-Badakhshan in Tadjikistan including all the Pamir region. As an historical region it was delimited to the region of Fayzabad and Khorog while Shughnan, Wakhan and Pamir were some of the several kingdoms covering the area. It provided the shortest and most used trade road between Kashgar and Bactria-Tocharistan and was already known by the Chinese dynastic annals of the Northern dynasties, Beishi (concerning the IV-VI centuries but written in the VII AD), as the country where the Hephtalites had their headquarters. The diffusion of Buddhism occurred here between the IV-VII AD.

Site. Even if Chinese pilgrims recorded the activity of several Buddhist monasteries in the region, there is only one Buddhist archaeological site documented in the Tadjik side of the Wakkhan valley.



- Built on the hill side of a rocky moraine along the river Vrangdara at his confluence with the Pyandj near **Vrang**, there is a complex made of a fortified convent, a group of 11 caves dug in the rock (Vrang II) and a stupa in the village (IV-VII AD). The monastery is organized around a central yard including a temple and the living quarters of the monks (Vrang III), all built in crude bricks above a stone foundation.

Historical accounts. The first mention of Buddhist activities in Badakhshan is coming from the Chinese pilgrim Hui Sheng (travelled between 516-523) who reported that the capital Badiyan had many Buddhist temples and a holy gilded pillar.

On his way back to China through the Pamirs, Xuan Zang met several Buddhist monasteries crossing this area. In Badakhshan where the king was a devoted Buddhist, he noted the existence of 3-4 sangharamas but very few monks, further east, crossing the Wakhan corridor, he met 10 convents and an important monastery in the capital (around Vrang or Langar) and in the country located at its south (near Mastudj) there were 2 monasteries with few monks.

At the east of the Pamirs, he found other important monastic foundations. In Tashkurgan, there were 10 monasteries and around 500 monks belonging to the Sarvastivada school. Xuan Zang relates that a former king of this country brought back from Taxila the founder of the Sautantrika school, Kumaralabdha, who built a sangharama in the capital. In the next, probably southern, state called Wucha existed 10 monasteries and less than 1000 monks related to the Sarvastivada school.

## 2.5 - Margiana (Murghab valley, regional centre: Merv)

Margiana, consists of the large delta of the Murghab river (Turkmenistan) with Bayram-ali as modern centre. The region has been a main centre of the Parthian Kingdom (III BC-III AD). Although the Parthians, as rulers of Gandhara (I AD) and then as Buddhist monks, played a major role in the earliest spread of Buddhism from India and Gandhara to Central Asia and China, no Buddhist remains is to be found in Margiana before the IV AD. Buddhism reached the oasis under the Kushano-Sasanid rule (IV AD) and had been active till the Arab invasion (VII AD).

Sites. Some Buddhist monuments are located in the area of ancient Merv, 2 km north of modern Bayram-ali)

- In the site of **Gyaur-kala** in ancient Merv, two Buddhist monuments have been discovered. The first is situated in the southeast angle of the walled mound and consists of a Buddhist temple-monastery complex with stupa (IV-VI AD), the second is a great stupa located outside the eastern walls (V-VI AD).

Historical accounts. The Parthians, as rulers of Gandhara in I AD, played a major role in the earliest spread of Buddhism from India and Gandhara to Central Asia and China. The first foreign translator of Buddhist scriptures in Chinese, An Shigao has been often considered to be a Parthian prince because of his Arsacid family name (An) but he was probably a native of Bukhara (see next paragraph).

Schools and styles. Inside the 2 stupas of Gyaur-kala have been found 150 sheets on birch bark with Buddhist texts of the Vinaya Pitaka in Sanskrit and Brahmi, and also some inscriptions on vessels, all ascribed to the Sarvastivada school.

The great stupa outside the walls, rebuilt in the V AD, show architectural features similar to those of Gandhara and Termez (Kara-tepe).

## 2.5. Sogdia (Zeravashan valley, regional centre: Samarkand)

Sogdia, is the historical region made of the Zeravshan valley stretching from the Turkestan range (Tadjikistan) in the east (ancient Ustrushana) across Samarcanda to the oasis of Bukhara in the west (Uzbekistan). The historical region of Sogdia included also the adjacent regions of the Nuratau range in the north and of the Kashkadarya valley in the south.

The diffusion of Buddhism probably occurred here during the V-VIII AD, mainly among Sogdian families trading on the Silk Road between NW India and China.

*Sites.* Although no Buddhist sites have been clearly individuated on the territory of ancient Sogdia, several ruins, some archaeological findings and historical accounts testify the presence of Buddhism in the Zeravshan valley during the V-VIII AD. The most convincing evidence is represented by the following sites, from west to east.

- **Bukhara.** The name of the town itself could be a Sogdian derivation from vihara (monastery) as attested by the Arab writer Juvayni. Another Arab writer, Narshaki, reports that the first mosque of Bukhara was built on the ancient citadel, on the site previously occupied by a temple (botkhana) that could have been a Buddhist temple.
- **Afrasyab** (ancient Samarkand). Here excavations exhumed a Buddhist bronze statuette in Chinese Wei style (VI AD)
- **Penjikent**, located at the mouth of the upper Zeravshan valley (in Tadjikistan). Here the excavations of a mansion exhumed some frescos with Buddhist representations (700-750 AD), including a fragmentary representation of Buddha and of a monk. Another construction (temple 2) has been thought to be used for Buddhist dramatic representation (according to the archaeologist B. Marshak). Among other Buddhist findings of Penjikent, figure a Sogdian Buddhist inscription and a terracotta mould (VI AD).
- **Sanzar**, located in the Nuratau range at the northeast of Samarkand, holds the ruins of a so-called Buddhist temple that has been leveled and its Buddhist objects disseminated, so that the scientific identification and dating of the site remain difficult (V-VI AD, according to the archaeologist B. Stavisky),
- **Saryk-tepe** and **Kul-tepe** (in the Kashkadarya valley, district of Yakabag). Here have been found two fragments of terracotta high-relief: respectively of a Buddha and of a sitting crowned Buddha with a Bodhisatva (VI-VIII AD). some

*Historical accounts.* According to the historical sources, the Sogdians have been among the first Central Asian peoples to participate to the spread Buddhism from Gandhara to Central and East Asia. Two Samarkandi monks, Kang Ju (187-199 AD) and Kang Mengxiang (190-220 AD), were among the first translators to work with the Bukharan An Shigao<sup>9</sup> who reached Luoyang in 148 where he worked for 40 years as master of a group of translators (mostly Central Asians and Indians) transferring in Chinese language 170 texts. One of his disciples was An Xuan, born in a family of merchants who arrived in Luoyang in 181. One century later, An Faqing born in China worked in the group of translators directed by the Kushan monk Dharmaraksha (Zhi Fahu, 230-286).

Kang Senghui (222-280) was born in Jiaozhou (modern Hanoi) in a Sogdian family of merchants and had been the first monk to spread Buddhism in Nanjing. During the following centuries (III-VIII AD) several Sogdian translators worked in China, of whom the most were born in China itself.

The Chinese dynastical annals Suishu (around 620 AD) and Beishi (660 AD) report that the people of Kang believe in Buddhism; and the Tangshu annals (930 AD) report that they are Buddhist and sacrifice to the sky. But Xuan Zang in 630 AD notes that in Sogdia “the king and people don’t believe in Buddhism but venerate the fire”. He also says that in Samarkand there are 2 Buddhist monasteries without monks which local people would impeach foreigners to approach

<sup>9</sup> The family name An has been considered to designate the Parthian Arsacid family but An is also the name of the kingdom of Bukhara and, in fact, among the numerous Bukharans present at the court of China from the Wei dynasty onwards (IV AD), some were considered to be relative of An Shigao.

by chasing them with torches. According to the biographers of Xuan Zang, after a while an assembly was organized by local authorities and the monks were allowed to come back. In fact Hui Chao, who came to Samarkand one century later, saw one monastery with one monk. Even if Buddhism was scarcely represented in Sogdia, Buddhism was the religion of numerous Sogdian merchants trading on the Silk Road between India, Gandhara and China. Among the Buddhist rock inscriptions of the Karakorum pass (I-VIII AD) figure many Sogdian writings and names. In Tarim and Dunhuang a lot of inscriptions, letters and Buddhist manuscripts have been found in Sogdian script and language.

Schools and styles. According to B. Marshak, the sculptured decor with aquatic scenes of temple-2 of Penjikent show very close similarities with the niche of Tepe-i-Shotor in Hadda. Some similarities are also found with the sculptures of Ushkur in Kashmir.

#### **2.4. Fergana** (Fergana valley, regional centre: Kuba)

The Fergana valley, or more precisely its southern part, consisting of the northern piedmonts of the Alai range (Uzbekistan), received the diffusion of Buddhism probably during the Chinese protectorate in Central Asia (657-751) when Buddhist communities from Tarim immigrated into Fergana (VII-VIII AD).

##### Sites.

**Kuba** is an early medieval walled town in the center of the modern city of Kuva where at the north of the shahristan outside the walls was located a Buddhist sanctuary including clay sculptures of horses and big statues of Buddha and the Buddhist pantheon (VII-VIII AD).

Historical accounts. Hui Chao, who crossed the valley in 724, reported that there were no followers of Buddhism in the region. May be, by the time, the Arab invasion already destroyed the Kuba sanctuary.

Schools and styles. Like in Ghazni, in Adjina-tepe and in Tarim, the clay sculptures of Kuba representing emaciated arahants confronted by Tantric deities (Shridevi) belong to the last development of Buddhist art during the VII-VIII AD.

#### **2.5. Semirechie** (Chu valley, regional centre: Suyab)

In the eastern segment of the Chu valley located on the northern piedmonts of the Alatau range (Northern Tianshan) around the modern town of Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan), Buddhism got probably diffused during the time of the Chinese protectorate in Central Asia (657-751) together with the immigration of Buddhist communities from Tarim and China. The main sites are located in 2 important medieval towns and in smaller medieval mounds around Bishkek.

Sites. The main sites, from east to west and south to north, are the following ones.

- **Ak-Beshim** (ancient Suyab), a medieval town located 60 km east of Bishkek that has been the capital town of the Western Turks and one of the 4 Chinese garrisons in the Western Regions. Here have been discovered one Buddhist monastery and two temples. The monastery located in the eastern rabat (suburbs), is adjoined with a small chapel and a larger area with living quarters dated to the IX-X AD. It had 2 periods of construction of which the characters testify Uighur influences from Tarim. The Buddhist temple-1 is situated outside the southwestern tower of the town and has a rectangular shape with large courtyard following the entrance with side premises, 6 rooms, a sanctuary with vestibule and another sanctuary with ambula-

tory corridor (VII-VIII AD). The Buddhist temple-2 is located outside the southern walls and has a square shape with double ambulatory corridor and 4 entrances surrounding a central vaulted room (VII-VIII AD).

- ***Krasnaya Rechka*** (ancient Navaket) is a medieval town located 40 km east from Bishkek, probably corresponding to the ancient capital of the Turk Turghesh (699-751). Here 2 Buddhist temples and a monastery complex with a stupa have been excavated (VII-VIII AD). The first Buddhist temple, located outside the southern gate of the large citadel, revealed fragments of painted stuccoes and sculptures. The ruins of the second Buddhist temple, located 300 m south-east of the citadel, consist of a domed sanctuary with a roofed ambulatory corridor where big clay statues, including a reclining Buddha have been exhumed. The monastery complex located in the western suburbs of the town is made of a 12 m high stupa and a series of premises among which a sanctuary with a sitting Buddha has been recently excavated (2010-14).
- ***Novopokrovka-II*** is a medieval square fort (*tortkul*) located 10 km east of Bishkek where local people found 20 bronze gilded Buddhist statuettes. Later excavations led archaeologists to consider this site to be a Buddhist monastery (VIII-IX AD).
- ***Novopavlovka*** is another medieval square mound located 10 km west of Bishkek and mostly destroyed by a modern cemetery. Here were found numerous small rooms with Buddhist frescoes and some clay sculptures supposed to be the vestiges of a monastery (VII-VIII AD)

*Historical accounts.* The Chinese sources report that, in 626 AD i.e. 3 years before the arrival of Xuan Zang, a group of 10 Indian Buddhist monks crossed Semirechie during the rule of the Turkic khagan Tong-Yabghu, who tried to retain them there. Xuan Zang himself didn't find any trace of Buddhist presence in the Chu valley but had been similarly requested by the khagan to stop there. Du Huan, a Chinese envoy who crossed the region in 751 just after the battle of Talas and was captured by the Arabs, reported the activity of a Chinese monastery called "Da Yunsi" (the Big Cloud monastery) in Suyab (Ak-Beshim).

*Schools and styles.* Most of the Buddhist monuments, sculptures, wall paintings and objects of the Chu valley show close architectural and artistic similarities with the Buddhist sites of Northern Tarim (Turfan, Yanqi and Tumshuq) and China.

In particular the temple 1 of Ak-Beshim is probably corresponding to the Chinese monastery "Big Cloud" mentioned by Du Huan because of its dating, planning and of its large statues of Buddha and Maitreya. "Big Cloud" was the name given to all the Buddhist monasteries built all over China and Central Asia (similar ones were built in Kashgar and Kucha) by the empress Wu Hou (Wu Zitian, 690–705) when, after 692, she adopted a Buddhist messianic policy on the base of the "Commentary of the Sutra of the Big Cloud" (Da Yunjing, clearly a Mahayanic text and possibly of the Sukhavati school, the most imbued of Taoist elements).

## CONCLUSIONS

The Buddhist sites enlisted here amount to 84 sites, 61 in Afghanistan and 23 in Western Central Asia. In Afghanistan, the highest concentration is located in the regions closer to Gandhara: in Nagarahara around Jalalabad (16 sites with more than 30 monuments, not counting the stupas and caves); and in Kapisa around Kabul (10 sites with around 20 buildings). In Western Central Asia, the highest concentration is found around Termez (6 sites with 7 buildings) and around Bishkek (4 sites with 8 buildings).

The peak of Buddhist building happened during the early Kushan period (II AD) when 30 % of the sites were established, and under the LateKushan-Kidarite period (IV AD) when 20 % of the sites were erected.

The inventory presented here doesn't pretend to be exhaustive. If we sum up all the sites recorded by the Chinese pilgrims, there should be around 500 sites in Afghanistan and around 40 in West Central Asia. Every year, new Buddhist sites are found in Afghanistan; and the large amount of settlements bearing a Buddhist name (like bahar, from *vihara* - monastery), if proved to correspond to what it designates, would seriously increase the quantity of identified Buddhist constructions.

Moreover, the Buddhist sites were not only located along the interregional trade roads but in area still badly explored: the sites of Humai-Qala, Wardak, Al-Ghata, Mes-Aynak, Khisht-tepe are in fact located in remote valleys, probably connected with the rule of local aristocracies, in a manner similar to the wide distribution of Lamaist monasteries in Tibet during the XV AD.

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