



AFRĀSĪĀB I. THE ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE

AFRĀSĪĀB

i. The Archeological Site

Afrāsīāb is the ruined site of ancient and medieval Samarqand in the northern part of the modern town. The term Qaḷ'a-ye Afrāsīāb appears in written sources only from the end of the 17th century. The name is popularly connected with that of the epic king of Tūrān, Afrāsīāb, but scholars see in it a distortion of Tajik Parsīāb (Sogdian Paršvāb), "Above the black river," i.e., the Sīāhāb or Sīāb, which bounds the site on the north. The area of Afrāsīāb covers 219 hectares, and the thickness of the archeological strata reaches 8-12 m. The ruined site has the shape of an irregular triangle, bounded on the east by the irrigation canal Āb-e Mašhad, and on the west by the deep Aṭčapar ravine, which in ancient times played the part of a moat. Inside these limits Afrāsīāb appears as a hilly waste with several depressions sunk over what had been town squares and reservoirs. In the northern part rises the citadel (90 by 90 m) with a ramp along its eastern facade. The ruined site is surrounded by earth banks, remnants of fortress walls belonging to four successive ages.

Archeological excavations carried on in Afrāsīāb since the end of the 19th century, and very actively in the 1960-70s, have supplied sequences of the site's material and artistic culture and so have established the basic



chronology of its history. The settling of the territory of Afrāsīāb began in the 7th-6th centuries B.C. It was already a city occupying almost the entire area of the present site and surrounded by a powerful fortress wall of rectangular, unbaked bricks on an adobe platform. The supply of water was ensured by a canal and open reservoirs (discovered in the eastern and northern parts of Afrāsīāb). The archeological complex of that time is represented by wheel-turned pottery vessels of cylindrical or conical-cylinder shape with a slanting base, grain crushers, and leaf-shaped (and for the 5th-4th centuries B.C., three-bladed) bronze arrowheads. The city at the end of this period is identified with Marakanda, mentioned in connection with Alexander's expedition into Soğd in 329-327 B.C. by Arrian and Quintus Curtius.

The archeological strata of the 4th-1st centuries B.C. have been traced in various zones of Afrāsīāb. In the northern and western parts of the ruined site fortress walls have been uncovered built of square unbaked brick with internal passages, loopholes, and a lower projecting shelf. Dwellings have been excavated. Specific for this archeological complex are high quality wheel-turned ceramics (thin, polished, red *angāb* goblets, cups, vases, and dishes) showing the influence of the Hellenistic tradition. One of the goblets bears the Greek name Nikis, while among the terracottas there are heads of the helmeted Athena and Arethusia type. Characteristic finds are bronze, three-bladed arrow-heads, ornaments, and gem seals. Coins of Antiochus Soter and of the Greco-Bactrian kings Eutidemus and Eucratides witness to trade relations.

Contrary to the opinion held by some researchers that during the Kushan period (1st century B.C.—first centuries A.D.) the city was passing through a period of decline, a number of scholars regard it as having flourished, a view confirmed by excavations of recent years. These have uncovered monumental residential and religious buildings and workshops, in particular the quarter of ceramicists and metalworkers. During that period the leaden aqueduct Jūy-e Arzīz was conducted from Darğom. A special defense wall was built around Afrāsīāb in a large district of Samarqand. The archeological complex contains ceramic vessels of high quality, on arrowheads, stone projectiles, bone styluses, intaglio gems, a treasure of silver obols bearing the figure of a bowman (which enjoyed a long circulation), glass vessels and ornaments, blue paste Egyptian objects for cult use. Among modeled artifacts are numerous statuettes of goddesses of aristocratic or popular type, musicians playing lutes and horizontal and vertical flutes, horses, and other figures.



In the 4th-5th centuries A.D., a time of crisis in the slave-holding society and the beginning of the shaping of feudalism, the inhabited area of Afrāsīāb shrank. The fortress walls encircled only part of the territory of the town, and burials took place in the ancient wall. The quality of the pottery sharply deteriorates; the shape of the vessels alters, and many are hand modeled. Horrific figures predominate in terracottas. In the 6th-7th centuries Samarqand was the capital of Soğd ruled by the local Eḳšīd dynasty. The town on the site of Afrāsīāb is surrounded by a double wall with moats having four gates—of Bokhara, China, Kaš and Nowbahār. In the eastern part of Afrāsīāb were situated metalworkers' and potters' workshops with two-storied kilns. The residential quarter of the aristocracy and the palace complex of the Eḳšīds with reception halls, surrounding passages, and out-buildings have been explored in the center of the site. The main hall of the palace was ornamented with monumental wall paintings. There are scenes of a solemn procession, the bringing of gifts in visitations to the ruler of Samarqand Varhuman by envoys from various countries, including Čağānīān (indicated by a Sogdian inscription). Apparently to this period belong the wooden sculptures of animals preparing for combat which were set up in the town square; they are recorded by Ebn Ḥawqal in the 4th-10th century. Terracottas attain exceptional variety; there are statuettes of Sogdian and Turk horsemen, youths and young girls in royal headdress with symbolic ornaments, demonic creatures, and a Sogdian paladin accoutered and armed. Remains of bones, preserved according to Zoroastrian custom, were frequently placed in ossuaries with modeled ornamentation; particularly expressive are small, Orphean-type, sorrowing heads.

In the year 93/712 Samarqand was conquered by the Arabs. The walls of Afrāsīāb were partly destroyed by them after a rising of the inhabitants, and the main Sogdian temple was converted into a mosque. The town was largely depopulated, and Arab cemeteries appeared in the waste spaces. The situation changes in the 3rd-4th/9th-10th centuries, when Samarqand became part of the Samanid possessions. This period is marked by prosperity, and Afrāsīāb then became known as the *šahrestān* of Samarqand. The entire area was again surrounded by a wall with four gates (of Bokhara, the East, Nowbahārān, and Iron). In the northern part arose the citadel (*kohandez*) with its two gates, the palace of the ruler, and the prison. A water supply was ensured by the ancient leaden aqueduct, which distributed through three main branches. From the south and west of Afrāsīāb a trade and craft suburb grew up, surrounded (together with gardens and estates) by its own wall, Dīvār-e Qīāmat. In several



parts of the ruined site inhabited quarters of the time have been uncovered, showing streets, stone pavements, water conduits, and sewers. Oriental geographers of the 4th/10th century mention in Samarqand (at Afrāsīāb) a Friday mosque, the palace of the Samanids, castles, and caravansaries. The excavation of the palace, with its vast audience hall, large dwelling house with an *ayvān*, and square, domed reception room, brought to light rich decoration—stucco carved into stylized plant and geometrical designs. A potters' quarter covering an area of 4,000 square meters has been explored. It contained some fifteen ceramicists' households yielding highly artistic glazed pottery.

In the middle of the 5th/11th century under the Qarakhanid Tamğač Khan Ebrāhīm (r. 444-60/1052-68) and at the beginning of the 7th/13th under the K̄vārazmšāh Sultan Moḥammad (r. 596-617/1200-28), attempts were made to transform Afrāsīāb into a new administrative center. Building activity increased in the 5th-6th/11th-12th centuries, but mainly outside the limits of Afrāsīāb in the inhabited *šahr-e bīrūn*, while Afrāsīāb remained on the whole an enclosed administrative and defensive center. A cathedral mosque was enlarged and to a great extent rebuilt. In the 6th/12th century there developed the cult of Šāh-e Zenda (“the Living King”) around the spurious tomb of Qoṭam b. ‘Abbās; a mausoleum was built over it, and several other buildings (partly preserved) were erected: a *madrasa*, a minaret, and an *ayvān* with some carved wooden details. The palace of the Qarakhanid rulers was constructed at Afrāsīāb, as well as the mausoleum of the Qarakhanid Ebrāhīm b. Ḥasan, which is faced with tiles of carved terracotta.

In Moḥarram, 617/March, 1220 Samarqand was seized by the army of Čingiz Khan and destroyed. After that event life in Afrāsīāb never recovered, and the town became a ruined site. In the 9th/15th century Afrāsīāb is mentioned under the name of Bālā Ḥeṣār as a “fortress of former days.” Some of the poor lived in cave dwellings on its sheer loess slopes, while the building of the Šāh-e Zenda complex still proceeded on the southern slope of the weather-beaten medieval wall. Under Tīmūr and Uluğ Beg there arose along a paved path and steps a group of mausoleums, memorial mosques, and domed passages (*čārṭāqs*) brightly faced with glazed tiles. Up to the 20th century a cemetery spread out over the waste area around Šāh-e Zenda. Among the few later erections at Afrāsīāb are the *madrasa* and summer mosque of Šāh-e Zenda, the tomb of K̄vāja Dāniāl in the northern area of the ruins, and the mosque of Ḥaẓrat-e Keẓr (second half of the 19th century, rebuilt in 1919 by the architect



‘Abd-al-Qāder b. Bāqī Samarqandī). Since 1923 the ruins of Afrāsīāb have been under state protection, and in 1966 the site was declared a state archeological reserve. The Afrāsīāb Museum was founded there, housing the material of many years’ archeological research.

See also [Samarqand](#).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Afrasiaba. Sborniki I-IV, Tashkent, 1969-75.

I. Akhrarov and L. Rempel, *Reznoī shtuk Afrasiaba*, Tashkent, 1971.

L. I. Albaum, *Zhivopis’ Afrasiaba*, Tashkent, 1975.

Yu. F. Buryakov and M. Taguiev, “O kangue-kushanskikh sloyakh Afrasiaba (po materialam arkheologicheskikh raskopok 1968 g.),” *Obshchestvennye nauki v Uzbekistane*, 1968, no. 8, pp. 58-60.

M. I. Fedorov, “Afrasiabskiī klad zolotykh monet vtoroī poloviny XII v.,” *Epigrafika vostoka* 21, 1972, pp. 32-34.

S. K. Kabanov, “Izuchenie stratigrafii gorodishcha Afrasiab,” *Sovetskaya arkheologiya*, 1969, no. 1, pp. 183-98.

Idem and G. V. Shishkina, “Drevneīshie nasloeniya gorodishcha Afrasiab,” *Obshchestvennye nauki v Uzbekistane*, 1968, no. 3, pp. 53-55.

M. E. Masson, “K periodizatsii drevneī istorii Samarkanda,” *VDI*, 1950, no. 4, pp. 155-66.

Meshkeris, *Terrakotty Samarkandskogo Muzeya*, Leningrad, 1962.

N. B. Nemtseva and Yu. Z. Shvab, *Ansambl’ Shahi-Zinda*, Tashkent, 1979.

V. A. Shishkin, *Afrasiab—sokrovishchnitsa drevneī kultury*, Tashkent, 1966.



G. V. Shishkina, *Glazurovannaya keramika Sogda*, Tashkent, 1979.

Idem, “O mestonakhozhdanii Marakandy (arkheologicheskie dannye o drevnem Samarkande I tsysacheletiya do n.e.),” *Sovetskaya arkheologiya*, 1969, no. 1, pp. 62-75.

Idem, “Ellinisticheskaya keramika Afrasiaba,” *Sovetskaya arkheologiya*, 1972, no. 2, pp. 60-79.

S. S. Tashkhozhaev, *Khudozhestvennaya polivnaya keramika Samarkanda IX-nachalo XIII v.*, Tashkent, 1967.

A. I. Terenozhkin, “Voprosy istorii ob arkheologicheskoi periodizatsii drevnego Samarkanda,” *VDI*, 1947, no. 4, pp. 127-35.

Idem, “Voprosy periodizatsii i khronologii drevneishego Samarkanda,” *Sovetskaya arkheologiya*, 1972, no. 3, pp. 90-99.

V. L. Vyatkin, *Afrasiab—gorodishche drevnego Samarkanda*, Samarkand and Tashkent, 1927.