



## FONDOQESTĀN

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**FONDOQESTĀN** (FONDUKISTAN), early medieval settlement and Buddhist monastery in Afghanistan, in the province of Parvān (Parwan). The site is situated in the Ġūrband valley, five kilometers south of Sīāhgerd and 117 kilometers north-east of Kabul, at 34° 58' N 68° 53' E. It was named after a village located nearby.

Although coins found at the site of Fondoqestān had been in evidence since the first half of the 19th century, the first archaeological exploration there was not conducted until 1936, by Joseph Hackin of the *Délégation archéologique française en Afghanistan* (q.v.). A year later, in 1937, Jean Carl (also a member of the *Délégation*) carried out limited excavations on the site. The expedition conducted more a clearing of the site than excavations proper, yet it nonetheless uncovered magnificent monuments of art. The results were summarized in a short paper published by Hackin (1959).

The installations are situated at the top of a steep hill which dominates the valley. Only a small part of the structures have been excavated so far, comprising a temple and an adjoining building connected to it by a vaulted passage. The latter structure, built of adobe, comprises several cells, congregation halls for the Buddhist community *saṅgha*, and other chambers. Unfortunately, no detailed description or documentation of the site has ever been published. The most important data about the installations is still unavailable; even the exact size of the structures is not known.

The overall building plan of the square temple has not as yet been determined.



Hackin assumed that it was a vaulted hall; according to others it was a domed structure (Rowland, 1961); a third opinion holds that it was an open courtyard (Tarzi). Judging by the photographs published by Hackin, the sides of the temple must have been ca. eight to ten meters long. Its walls—not very thick and encompassing deep niches—were obviously not built to support the weight of a large dome. Most likely the temple was indeed an enormous courtyard, with a square stupa in the middle. The stupa had a two-tier foundation, with pilasters along each ledge. On the upper ledge, above the pilasters, there were trapezium-shaped arches, which framed another row of pilasters. The massive cylindrical drum was also decorated with small arches and pilasters.

In the walls of the temple there are twelve deep niches, three on each side, covered by elliptical vaults. The five gateway arches are supported by pilasters with corinthian-style capitals, and the archivolt of the gateway niches are trimmed with wide strips of carved-scroll ornamentation. The walls and the vaults of the niches are decorated with magnificent frescoes. In niche E there is an image of Maitreya Buddha seated cross-legged (Lalitāsane) on a throne. His head is inclined over his right shoulder; in his right hand he is holding up a blue lotus flower and in his lowered left hand a Brahman water flask. The Boddhisattva is richly bejeweled, wearing a diadem, earrings, bracelets, etc. The frescoes in another niche depict the sun god and the moon god. Each niche was a shrine holding an ensemble of clay sculptures built up around a wooden lattice or armature. As Benjamin Rowland remarks, “These little shrines, densely packed with sculptured figures set off by gaily painted backgrounds, must have given the effect of a kind of religious peep-show, in which, as on a stage, the visitor obtained a glimpse of celestial realms” (Rowland and Rice, p. 45). Some sculptures were depicted in full length, others as torsos. These figures of Buddhas, Boddhisattvas, *devata*, princes, princesses, etc. are true masterpieces of Buddhist art, striking images, remarkable for their vivid polychromy (see [Figure 1](#) [= AFGHANISTAN viii, PLATE XXIII.2] and [Figure 2](#) [= *ibid.*, PLATE XXIV]). Both sculptures and frescoes exude warmth and breathing, depicting elegant little curvatures of the body and flower-like gestures of the hands, as if capturing for eternity the complex movements of a dance. The genesis of this art form can be traced back to the art of Gandhāra and the Guptas. Also evident is the artistic influence of Sasanian Persia and of Central Asia, particularly of western and eastern Turkestan, where similar tendencies in the arts were manifest.



The Fondoqestān site is usually dated to the 7th century C.E. on the evidence of artistic style and numismatic finds, the oldest of which is from 689 C.E. (Göbl, p. 313-14). However, the shape and the decorations of the stupa suggest that the complex can be dated even earlier, around 6th-7th century C.E.

See also [AFGHANISTAN viii](#) and [ix](#).

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