



# KANDAHAR II. PRE-ISLAMIC MONUMENTS AND REMAINS

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## KANDAHAR

### ii. Pre-Islamic Monuments and Remains

The ancient city of Kandahar lay along the Qaytul ridge, west of the modern city. It was emptied of its population by [Nāder Shah](#) in 1738, but subsequently it became inhabited again. The layout of the pre-1738 defenses is easily seen from the air and from the top of the Qaytul ridge. At that time, the walls of the city encompassed a rectangle ca. 1,200 × 500 m at the foot of the Qaytul ridge; a high citadel lay inside the walls, at the foot of the ridge, and additional defenses were on the top of the hill.

The walled city was surrounded by huge, mainly Islamic, burial grounds (bibliography to 1980 in Ball and Gardin, I, pp. 145-47; for the pre-Sasanian period, see the footnotes of P. Bernard in Bernard, Pinault, and Rougemont, pp. 260-328). G. Fussman, after a short field survey, showed that the Islamic defenses lay often on top of earlier walls (of the Kushan period; Fussman, 1966). He submitted a sketch of urban development that is now outdated, thanks to subsequent British excavations, which demonstrated that some of Fussman's hypotheses were wrong. These excavations had to stop in 1978 due to the anti-communist insurrection against the newly proclaimed Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, before it was possible to retrace the development of



the town from its beginnings. However, evidence was found that a settlement had existed there since ca. 700 BCE.

The citadel, which is entirely man-made, goes back at least to the 6th century BCE and is probably an early Achaemenid construction (Helms, 1997, pp. 90-92). This, and the announced discovery of an Elamite tablet (Briant, p. 968), could add strength to the debated thesis of P. Bernard, who equates Old Kandahar with the Kapišakaniš of Darius's Bisotun inscription (DB 3.60-61) and with the Arachosian Alexandria (q.v. for references; Bernard, 1974; Briant, pp. 446, 966). Some pieces of stone mortars and pestles found in the Persepolis treasury could be of Arachosian provenance and, according to Bernard, could have been sent there from Kandahar (Bernard, 1972; Briant, p. 966). In any case, there is no doubt that Kandahar was an important fortified town in Achaemenid times (Vogelsang, pp. 48-49). No Mauryan or Greek building has been located there up to the present, for such remains must lie deep under later strata. Hints have been given regarding locations of Greek and Saka cemeteries (Bernard in Bernard, Pinault, and Rougemont, p. 325; Ball).

On the top of the Qaytul, a Buddhist *stūpa* and *vihāra* (monastery) are still extant, overlooking the city and visible from very far. The *stūpa* is of a well-known Gandharan type: square base, round drum and dome, and diapered masonry covered with white plaster. The well-preserved (in 1978) *vihāra* is somewhat strange, being an irregular rectangle ca. 28.5 × 24 m, with a large, square room that occupied two-thirds of the building interior on the western side. That room was covered by a cupola on squinches and surrounded by a corridor. There were two smaller rooms on the eastern side. A staircase led to a second storey above, probably inhabited by the monks. In the large, square room, the diggers discovered, inside a small *stūpa*, a hoard of over 100 coins; most of them are Hunnish (Napkī Malkā, i.e., *Nēzak*), one Omayyad, and one Chinese, as yet unpublished. This hoard probably was hidden in the small *stūpa* when there were no more monks, although the excavator believes otherwise; it provides a terminus ante quem for the small *stupa*, hence for the whole building, between the late 7th and the early 8th centuries. The *vihāra* was built much earlier (3rd-6th cents. CE), and we do not know whether it was built over an even earlier building (Fussman, 1966, pp. 37-38 ; Helms, 1979, pp. 1-3 ; Blurton; Helms, 1983, pp. 349-51). The *stūpa* and *vihāra* were later incorporated into Islamic fortifications that enclosed cisterns hewn in the rock.



At the northern end of the Qaytul, Čehel Zina is the name given to a flight of rock-cut stairs leading to a chamber cut into the rock. A Mughal Persian inscription is engraved there. Dated 1531, it lists the territories and towns held by the founder of the Mughal empire, Bābor (1483-1530 [N. S. 1531]). From this place, on 22 September 1881, Sardār Moḥammammad Ayyub, son of Amir Šēr ‘Ali (d. 1879), watched his army being defeated by the troops of his rival, Amir ‘Abd-al-Raḥmān (Kakar, pp. 58-61). Nearby, a bilingual (Greek and Aramaic) rock inscription of the Mauryan emperor [Aśoka](#) (ca. 272-231 BCE) was discovered in 1958. It is a sort of locally made summary of the first eight of the emperor’s Rock Edicts (Fussman, 1974, pp. 383-84, with bibliography).

A fragment of a free Greek translation of the Aśokan Rock Edicts XII and XIII was discovered in the ruins of the ancient town and is (was?) kept in the Kabul Museum (Benveniste). A fragment of a word-for-word Indo-Aramaic translation of Pillar Edict VII, no doubt bought in Kandahar, is (now?) kept in Italy (Benveniste and Dupont-Sommer; Mukherjee, pp. 39-42). A ca. 275 BCE Greek dedication (by?) Alex . . . son of Aristōnax was found during the British excavations (Fraser, 1979; 1996, p. 136). A wonderful Greek elegiac poem by Sōphytos, son of Naratos, is said to come from Kandahar by its London-based owner (Bernard, Pinault, and Rougemont), but the provenance will remain doubtful forever. Despite his father’s name, it is difficult to believe P. Bernard’s thesis that Sōphytos the trader, who built anew “the tomb of his fathers,” was a Hindu Indian or that he was related to Sōphytos the ruler, whose coins are found in Bactria only, never in Kandahar.

A huge stone bowl, found in Sultan Ways Bābā’s shrine inside the ruins of the city, is now in the Kabul Museum; many consider it as a former Buddha’s begging bowl brought from a Gandharan shrine (Fussman, 1966, pp. 41-42). The Kandahar Museum keeps (kept?) two coffins (stone and bronze) and two amphoras (silver and ceramic) of Hellenistic or Parthian date (Bernard in Bernard, Pinault, and Rougemont, pp. 324-28). Early local currencies include Mauryan issues and *negama* coins of merchant organizations, which may have been struck locally. There are also some Seleucid bronzes (Antiochus III) and a Greco-Bactrian copper of Euthydemus, then Indo-Bactrian coins, with Greek and Kharoṣṭhī legends (Apollodotus I, Eucratides, Menander, Hermaeus, Hippostratus). Parthian (Mithradates II, Phraates IV, Gotarzes II) and Indo-Parthian (Gondophares, Pacores, Orthagnes, Arda Mitra) coins are numerous. Coins of Azes I and II are also found. Most of the listed coins are pre-Kushan, Kushan and Later Kushan, and Sasanian from Ardašir to Ḳosrow II



(MacDowall, 1996; 1985, pp. 50-51; MacDowall and Ibrahim, 1978; Helms, 1997, pp. 95-99).

The earliest Islamic building known in Kandahar is an octagonal platform built over a grave in a cemetery on the south side of the Old City; its closest parallel is the Sulṭān Ghārī (“Cave of the sultan”) mausoleum near New Delhi, built in 1231 (Whitehouse, 1976; Taddei, 1979). The other Islamic monuments postdate Nāder Shah’s siege and subsequent destruction of the city in 1738. The octagonal mausoleum of Aḥmad Shah Dorrāni (r. 1747-72), founder of the Afghan kingdom (with frontiers different from those of present-day Afghanistan), was built by the king as part of his plan for the new city (on which see above, i); it stands on a basalt platform and is crowned by a blue-tiled dome. The tomb is behind (west of) Aḥmad Shah’s other major building, the Da ḳerqa šarif ziārat (Pers. Ḳerqa-ye mobarak) “Shrine of the Cloak of the Prophet,” which was built ca. 1770 and embellished ca. 1908; it is covered in green marble and 20th-century tiles. This building complex was situated on the west side of the city’s central north-south axis, between the Shah Mosque and, a short distance to the north, the ‘Idgāh gate, which led to the citadel. The royal tomb served as the model for another, smaller one built outside the city in 1930 (Dupree, 2002, p. 983). It marks the burial site of Aḥmad Shah’s predecessor as a leader of Afghan independence in Kandahar, Mir Ways (d. 1715; see [ĠILZĪ](#)).

See also [AFGHANISTAN viii](#).

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