



KEŠ

KEŠ (Kešš, Kašš), an important ancient and medieval city, located in the upper Kaškā-daryā valley, now Shahrīsabz (lit., “green town” [*šahr-e sabz*]), Uzbekistan. To its north, an easy road leads into the Sogdian Samarqand district; the oasis of Naḵšab (Nasaf, Qārši) is located downstream to the west; to the south is found the famous Iron Gates Pass leading toward Termid of historical [Bactria](#) (q.v.).

Keš was a significant center of southern Sogdiana from antiquity onwards. The Sogdian name, *Kəš-, sounds Iranian, although it is too short for any etymological speculation; it is probably present in the river-name Kaškā-daryā. Archeological excavations some 12 km north of Shahrīsabz show the large (70 ha) settlement of Padaytak tepe that includes the fortress of Uzunqir. This settlement dates from the 8th century BCE to the Achaemenid period. The town is first mentioned in Aramaic documents from Ḳolm, dating to late Achaemenid times and speaking of renovation of its walls (Shaked, p. 1519); in the histories of the Macedonian expedition, the name Nautaca probably refers to the same region, and the fortress (“rock”) of Sisimithres where [Bessos](#) (q.v.) was captured in 329 BCE may be equated with Uzunqir (see Grenet, pp. 209-12). The citadel of Hellenistic Keš, Kalandatepa, is located within present-day Kitab, 5 km to the north of Shahrīsabz; the early medieval city (of 40 ha) has been found nearby.

The Chinese histories bear witness to the political importance of early medieval Keš (called Shi, and later Ke-shuang-na, i.e., *Kəšyāne; perhaps Suxie in the *Hanshu*) in Sogdiana. The ruler Dizhe (probably Sogdian Δyxcy,



mentioned between 605 and 615), who is said to have erected the city, announced his vassalage to China. His successor in 642, Shashebi (*Šēšpēr*), was followed from 656-60 by Zhaowu She Ahe (*Šir-āyat*). A later ruler, Hubiduo (*Āxurpat*), sent an envoy to the Chinese court in 727. Following the reigns of the rulers Yantun (**Yandun* in Arabic sources) and Xubo (*Āxurpat II?*), an embassy from the ruler Sijinti (*al-Eškand* of Ṭabari) arrived in 741 (see Chavannes, *passim*).

A significant number of pre-Islamic coins (3rd century BCE–8th century CE) are associated with Keš, judged chiefly by the provenance of their finding. Coins depicting a king stabbing a lion (ca. 3rd-7th centuries CE, found, however, not in Keš, but mainly in Naḵšab) bear the inscription *kyšykw xwβ*, while those of Hubiduo possess the legend *kš-y'n'k xwβ "xwrpt* “*Āxurpat* (lit. stabledmaster), King of Keš.” The coins of Shashebi (*šyšpyr*, *Šēšpēr*) are unambiguously related to Samarqand; nevertheless they bear *tamghas* of both Samarqand and Keš (the latter being in the form of a triskelion); this fact is in accordance with the statement of Ya‘qubi (p. 299) that Keš was once a capital of Sogdiana. The adjectives *kšy'n'k* and *kšyknδc* “from town of Keš” are found in several Sogdian texts. The Chinese applied to the people of Keš the surname Shi (lit. “history,” not to be confused with another character Shi, lit. “stone,” for natives of Čāč [q.v.]). Keš was captured by the Arabs in 710, and in 740 the local prince of Keš, the *dehqān* (q.v.) Eḵrid, started to issue coins with Arabic legends. Later he acknowledged Turkic rule, but in the end he was killed by the forces of Abu Moslem (q.v.) in 750-51. Keš played an important role during the revolt of Hāšem b. Ḥakim (775-85), known as *al-Moqanna‘* (q.v.).

In geography texts of the Samanid period, Keš is described as a small town with a citadel, an inner city, suburbs, and an outer city. The citadel and the inner city were already in ruins and the old settlement of Kitab had become unpopulated before the 9th century, probably after having been destroyed during the events of the revolt of *al-Moqanna‘*. The new (as yet archeologically unidentified) town probably lay between modern Kitab and Shahrīsabz; it had four gates and was supplied by the water of two branches of the Kaškā-daryā river. From the 12th century onwards, an apparently small settlement was located at the site of present-day Shahrīsabz (*Šahr-e Sabz*). Timur (1336-1405), who was a native of this area, made Keš his summer residence. He is responsible for the fortifications, several monumental buildings (particularly the Āq-sarāy palace, 1380; [PLATE I](#)) and renaming the city to Shahrīsabz (for a long time the two names were used interchangeably); the buildings of the

Timurids were a source of admiration for travelers, and are still there today in various states of preservation. In the Uzbek period, Shahrisabz was usually controlled by a local ruler (*beg*) under more or less nominal suzerainty of Bukhara. It was captured by the Russians in 1870. In 2002, the 2700th anniversary of Shahrisabz was celebrated.

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