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SANJAR SHAH

SANJAR SHAH, an archeological site in Tajikistan. In 1946 a team of Soviet orientalists surveyed the foothills of the Zarafshan (Zarafšān) mountain ridge in northern Tajikistan for archeological monuments. During their second campaign of 1947, the expedition reached the estuary of the Magiān-daryā (River of the Magi) near the settlement of Sujina, northern Tajikistan. There the site of Sanjar Shah was first noticed, and it was briefly described in the resulting publication (Expedition).

Excavations in Sanjar Shah, conducted in 2003 and 2008 by the Iran Museum Hamburg and the Academy of Sciences of Dushanbe, investigated parts of an urban complex which—based upon finds of coins of Sogdian kings—can be dated to 680-730 CE, just before the Arab Muslim conquest of the region. The excavated site lies 20 km east of Panjikant, one of the former capitals of Sogdiana. The site owns its modern name to a Saljuq ruler of central Khorasan (r. 1118-57 CE; see SANJAR, AḤMAD B. MALEKŠĀH).

In excavation area 1, a Zoroastrian fire temple was partially uncovered. It consists of two buildings. The main building has a hall 5 m square, whose northern entrance wall is preserved to the height of the squinches of the cupola (4 m; Figure 1). Parts of two collapsed vaults were preserved in the debris. Probably the second one was built after the destruction of the first. The southern wall of the room was of later date. Light must have reached the room from openings in the transition zone of the vault, because the four well-preserved walls had no windows. Fragments of stucco decoration had fallen to the ground beneath the squinches. The hall was lined with 50-cm-high

benches (*sufa*). A huge layer of ash from the sacred fire had been heaped against the southern wall (Figure 2). Discolorations in the room's northern corners and in the center indicated that most likely three fires had burned there. In the center, there probably stood a metal fire-vase, which must have been removed when the temple was abandoned. In the corners, pottery lamps were found. These traces of fire and the ashes are similar to discoveries in fire temples of Panjikant, Sorkh Kotal in Afghanistan, and Toprak-kala in Khwarazm (see CHORASMIA i, Archaeology and pre-Islamic history).

Entrance to this main hall was gained by a corridor 2.35 m broad and 6.41 m long, which probably had the form of an *ayvān* in the partially destroyed facade. The walls were coated with mud plaster painted dark brown. Visitors could sit on a 50-cm high bench built of mud bricks. A pithos vessel, possibly of the early Islamic period, was found 35 cm above the ground floor in the debris—a sign that the building was still in use in the Middle Ages. But on the ground floor lay two copper coins of the Sogdian king Shishpir (ca. 642/655 CE) and the Turkish governor Tonyukuk (700-720 CE). In a small sondage beneath the ground floor, a wall with different orientation and pottery from the period 300-500 CE was found.

The northwestern side of the corridor has a door to a small, barrel-vaulted hall (3 × 5 m). The walls were badly preserved and could not be cleared completely. The vault was supported by two arches, remains of one were preserved in the debris, filling the room (Figure 3). The brick benches at the sidewalls were 10 cm high. In front of the eastern wall, a well-preserved fire altar was constructed with stucco and mud bricks. The fire was burnt inside a vaulted niche, which was still filled with ash. Behind this eastern wall, there is a stair-tower with two spiral stairways, which lead at a height of 2.5 m to two windows (Figure 4). From these windows, one could have looked down into the hall to observe the fire ritual. The boxes behind the windows were wide enough for several people to stand there. The stairways continued up to the roof of the tower. The northern edge of the hill was destroyed, so the northern wall of the hall could not be excavated. Also the eastern edge of the hill was destroyed and it remains unclear how the monumental ayvān portico to the building was connected with the entrance to the stairway.

A large structure lies west of the main building along a paved lane (Figure 5). It consists of a tower with two spiral stairways and several halls. Remains of Zoroastrian cultic apparatus (see *ĀLĀT*) were found in two of the halls. The western hall was roofed with timber, and the holes for their insertion were

still visible in the walls, It may have had two stories. On the floor between benches of brick (*sufa*) lay shards of multicolored glass, stone- and bronze vessels (*tashta*, *fulian*) and ritual implements of terracotta. A sieve made of pottery was used to sift the haoma juice. A conical stand with bull head and crescent-shaped horns, also made of pottery, looks like the stands for the *barsom* twigs (*mahrui*). One cup was made from jasper. In Zoroastrian practice today, these implements are made of metal. Fragments of two tables with 3 legs made of gypsum are similar to many pieces excavated in Panjikant. These were once the seat of the priest and the table for the implements. Today they are cut from heavy stone. On the floor of the second hall, shards of glass and a coin of the Sogdian kings (ca. 700 CE) were found. A vaulted niche in the southern wall possibly was a chimney. The eastern wall of this hall was unusually thick, and behind it lies a smaller hall, which contained no finds.

It seems that in this building the haoma ritual was celebrated, whereas the main building was reserved for the eternal fire. The southern wall of the building was reinforced, standing at the edge of a deep and extensive cavity near to the city wall, which may have been an artificial lake. It seems that the two buildings of the fire temple were placed near a (sacred?) lake, similar to the temple of Taḵt-e Solaymān in Azarbaijan. The façade of the main building with a protruding ayvān portico and the cupola hall are quite unfamiliar in the context of Panjikant architecture; there we find façades with column vestibules and ritual halls supported by four columns. The separation of the two rituals of fire and haoma into two buildings is well known from contemporary Parsi temples in Bombay and the Sasanian Taḵt-e Solaymān. Probably a Sasanian architect constructed this temple in Sogdiana.

A well-preserved kiln was found to the west of the structure. The cupola of the kiln was destroyed, but the screen with openings to the underground fire chamber was still intact. It was rectangular, 320 × 2.35 m, and had 14 holes and a bigger opening near the center, where the chimney stood. A big heap of ashes, shards, and fragmentary figurines lay in front of the kiln. Some of these fragments date back to the 5th century, that is, the period of the early building buried beneath the fire temple.

In the south of the urban layout is a city wall, 200 m long, 12 m high, which likely dates to the 4th century CE (Figure 6). It is preserved up to the height of the loopholes used for shooting. There, excavation in area 4 uncovered several large halls with barrel vaults, which were built onto the city wall. They yielded coins of Sogdian kings (700-720 CE) and the contemporary

pottery of the 7th century and also some shards of the 10th century (Nishapur-ware). In view of this, the vaulted rooms could still have been accessed in Samanid times and perhaps were used by shepherds.

Two trial trenches were made in the northern part of the city (excavation areas 2 and 3), which revealed that in recent times large parts of the urban complex has been leveled and the ruins destroyed in order to gain land for cultivation. By contrast, the citadel in the northwest, which was investigated in 2008, is well preserved and displays mud brick walls several meters in height. A circular corridor surrounds the tower and yielded fragments of an Arabic letter similar to that found in the Mugh archive, which was excavated 100 km to the east in 1937 (see MUGH, MOUNT; cf. ANCIENT LETTERS).

The pottery of the 7th century is quite similar to that excavated in Panjikant. Shards only were preserved of glass vessels in several colors and glass pearls. An arrowhead and some jewelry were made of bronze. More important finds were 13 Sogdian copper coins, of which seven were readable (Shishpir, Bidian, Tonyukuk and Bukharakhodai). There were various pieces of iron, ivory, and stone, and a multitude of animal bones.

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