

The Achaemenid Persian Empire and its Non-Western Borderlands: A Change of Paradigm



The religious life in the northeastern satrapies of the Achaemenid Empire

Imperial signature and/or local traditions

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Structure

- **Introduction**
- **Religious life in Achaemenid Central Asia: Archaeological sources**
- **Religious life in Achaemenid Central Asia: Iconographical sources**
- **Religious life in Achaemenid Central Asia: Textual sources**
- **Conclusion**



Achaemenid Central Asia

- **Northeastern Great Satrapy: Bactria**
 - Bactria proper
 - Sogdiana
 - Gandāra
 - Margiana
 - Aria
 - Main Satrapy of the Dahā (or Sakā paradrayā)
 - Main Satrapy of the Massagetai (or Sakā tigraxaudā)
 - Main Satrapy of the Amyrgioi (or Sakā haumavargā)
- Chorasasmia
- Boundaries are very fluid



Central Asia

RUSSIA

KAZAKHSTAN

UZBEKISTAN

TURKMENISTAN

KYRGYZSTAN

TAJIKISTAN

AFGHANISTAN

IRAN

PAKISTAN

INDIA

CHINA

MONGOLIA

GEORGIA

ARMENIA

AZERBAIJAN

IRAQ

KUWAIT

NEPAL

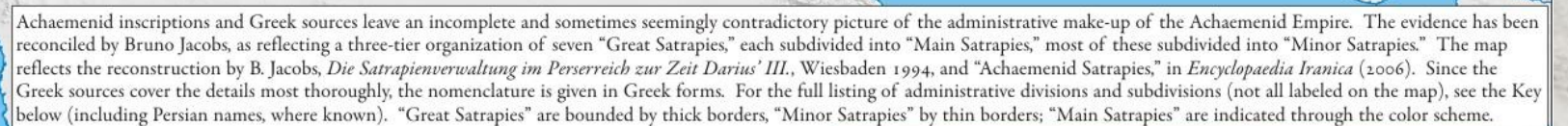
Major cities: Ufa, Chelyabinsk, Omsk, Novosibirsk, Krasnoyarsk, Nur-Sultan, Karaganda, Aktobe, Volgograd, Tashkent, Shymkent, Almaty, Bishkek, Namangan, Osh, Samarkand, Bukhara, Ashgabat, Dushanbe, Mazar-i-Sharif, Kabul, Peshawar, Islamabad, Srinagar, Lahore, Multan, Quetta, Kandahar, Herat, Mashhad, Tehran, Tabriz, Baku, Yerevan, Tbilisi, Baghdad, Kermanshah, Isfahan, Ahvaz, Basra, Kuwait City, Shiraz, Ürümqi, Kashgar, Hotan, Ludhiana, New Delhi.

Water bodies: URAL RIVER, CASPIAN SEA, ARAL SEA, LAKE BALKHASH.

Scale: 400 km, 400 miles.

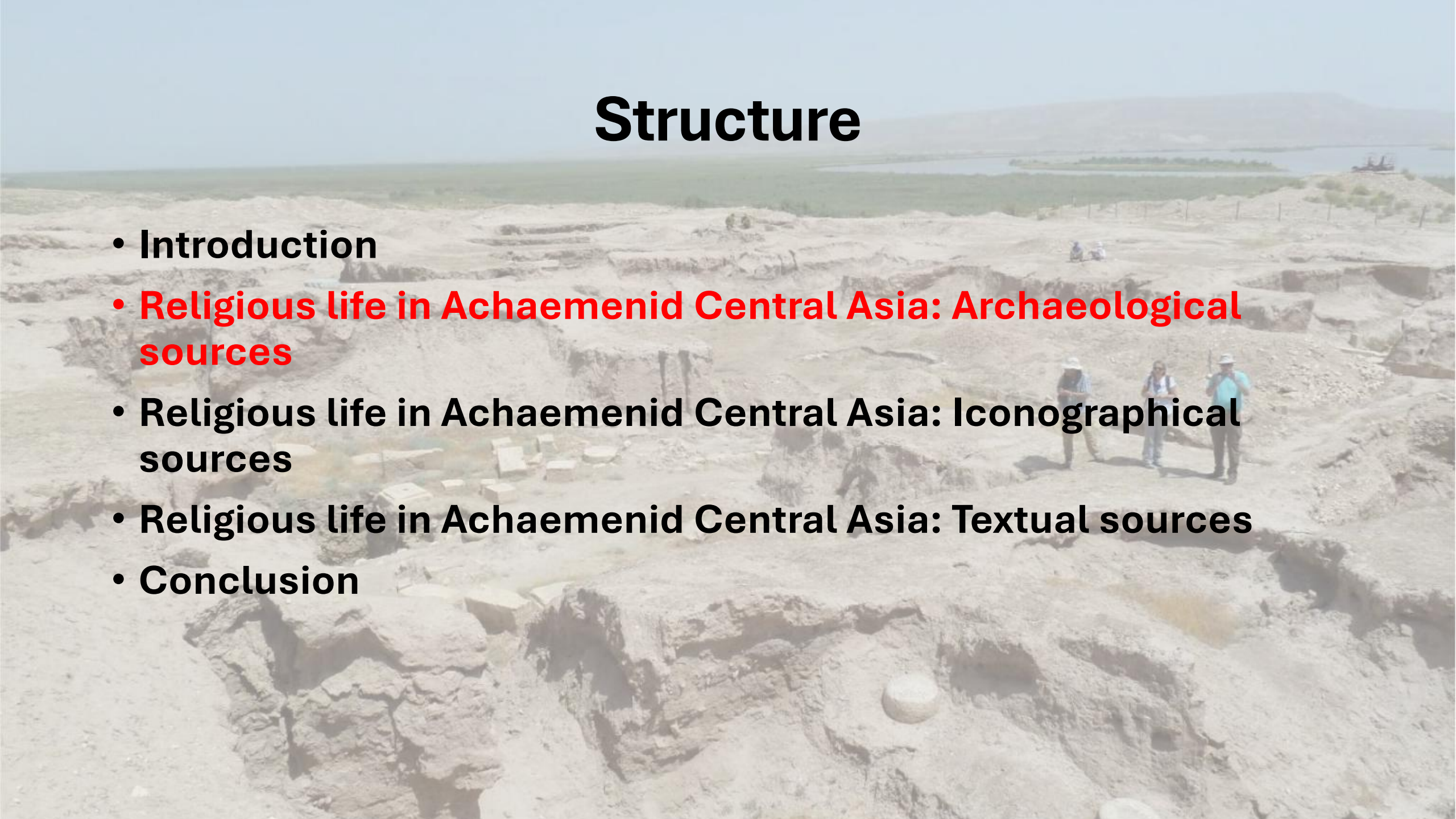
North arrow.





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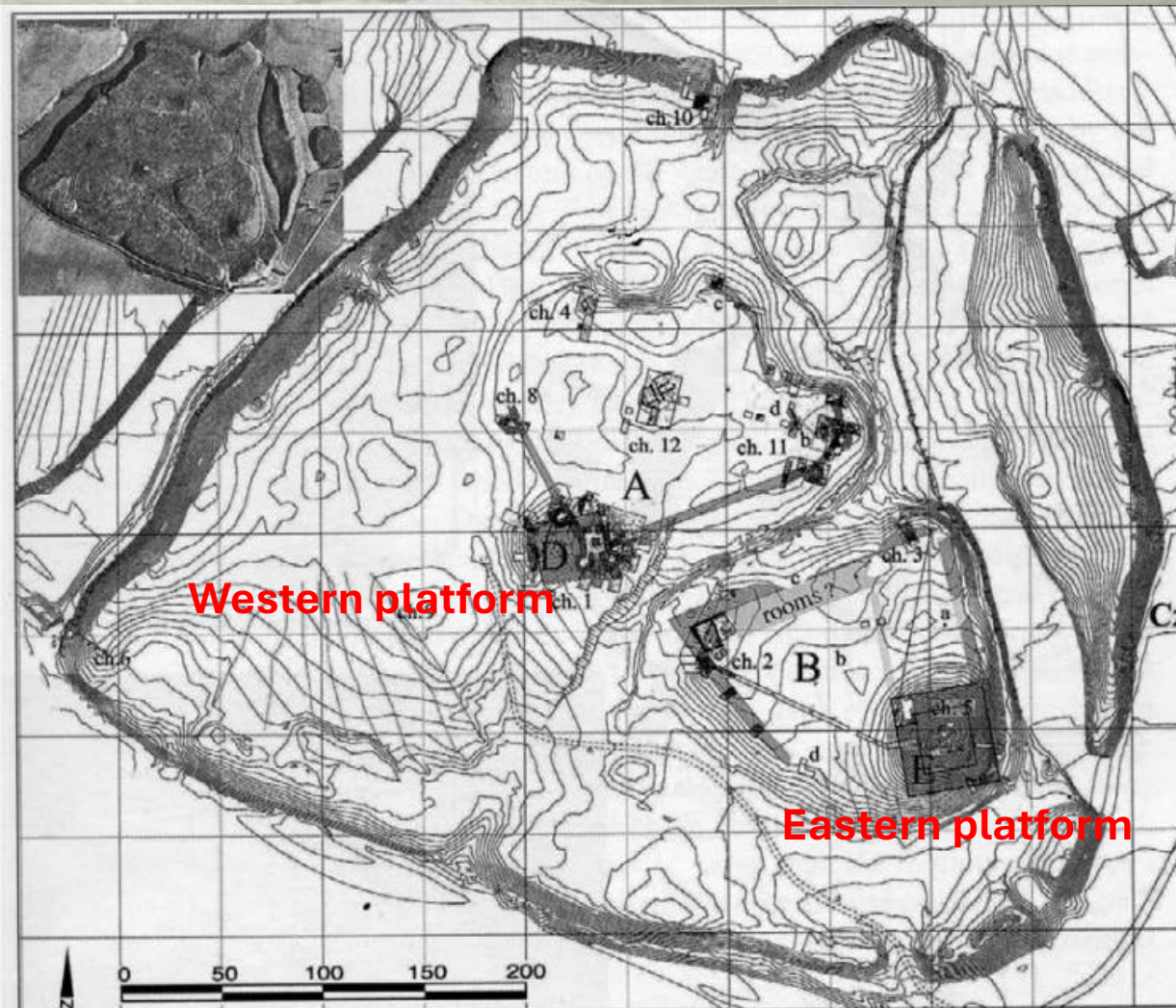


Koktepa (Sogdiana)

- 30 km north of Samarkand (Eastern Uzbekistan)



Koktepa (Sogdiana)

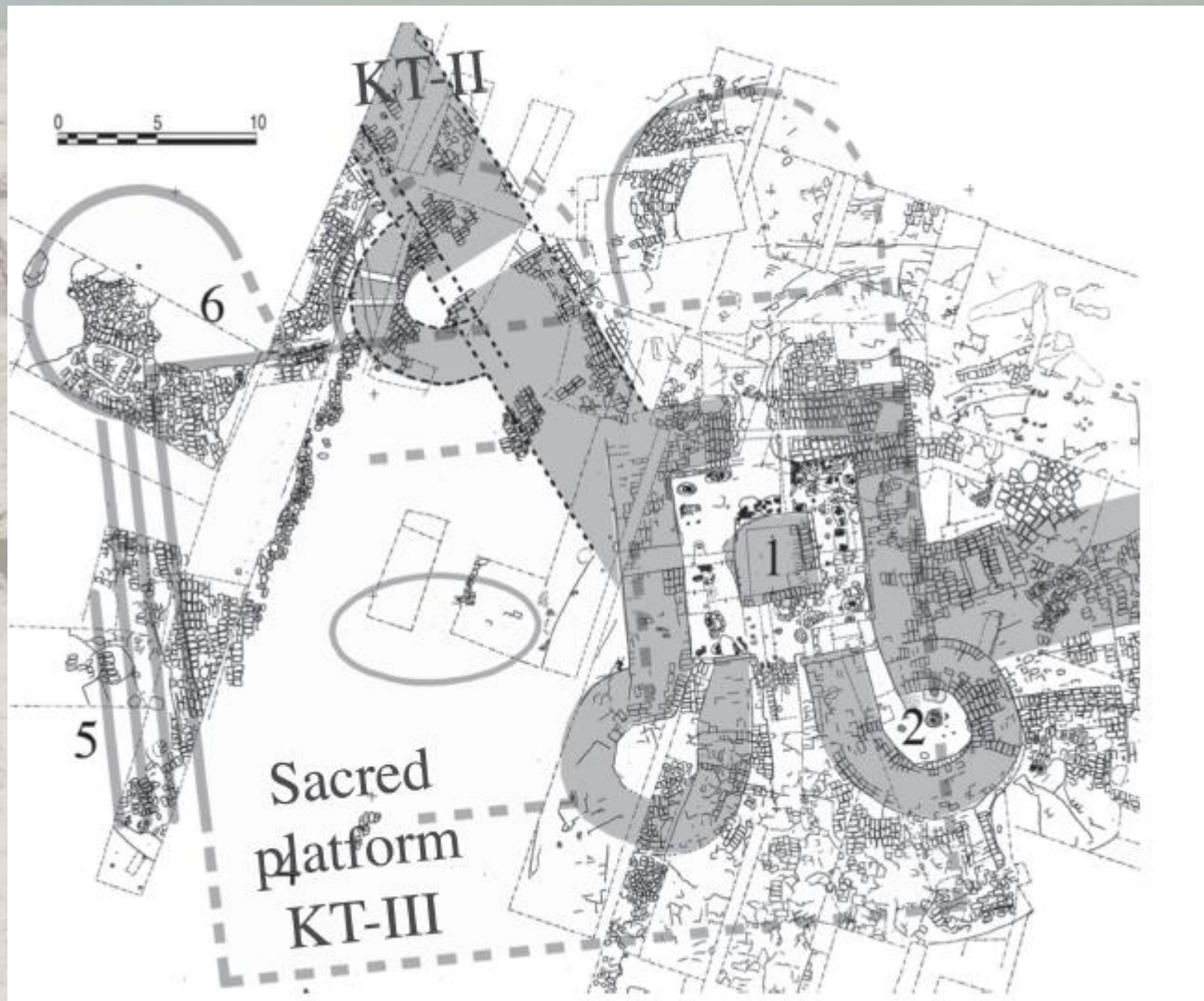


Western platform

Eastern platform

- 6th-4th centuries BCE
- Koktepa IIIa: two monumental platforms
 - Probably built under Achaemenid influence
 - Western platform
 - 30 x 40 m wide and 3-5 m high
 - Above Pre-Achaemenid sacred courtyard
 - Fortification towers on the north side
 - Access to the west, so ritual performed facing east
 - Surface badly damaged
 - Large fireplace
 - Many pits filled with sand, pebbles or stone plaques
 - Foundation/consecration rituals (Rapin: early Zoroastrianism)
 - Also known from Vedic sources (Agnicayana)
 - Eastern platform
 - Two stepped structure (mini-ziggurat)
 - Too small to be military

Koktepa (Sogdiana)



Koktepa (Sogdiana)



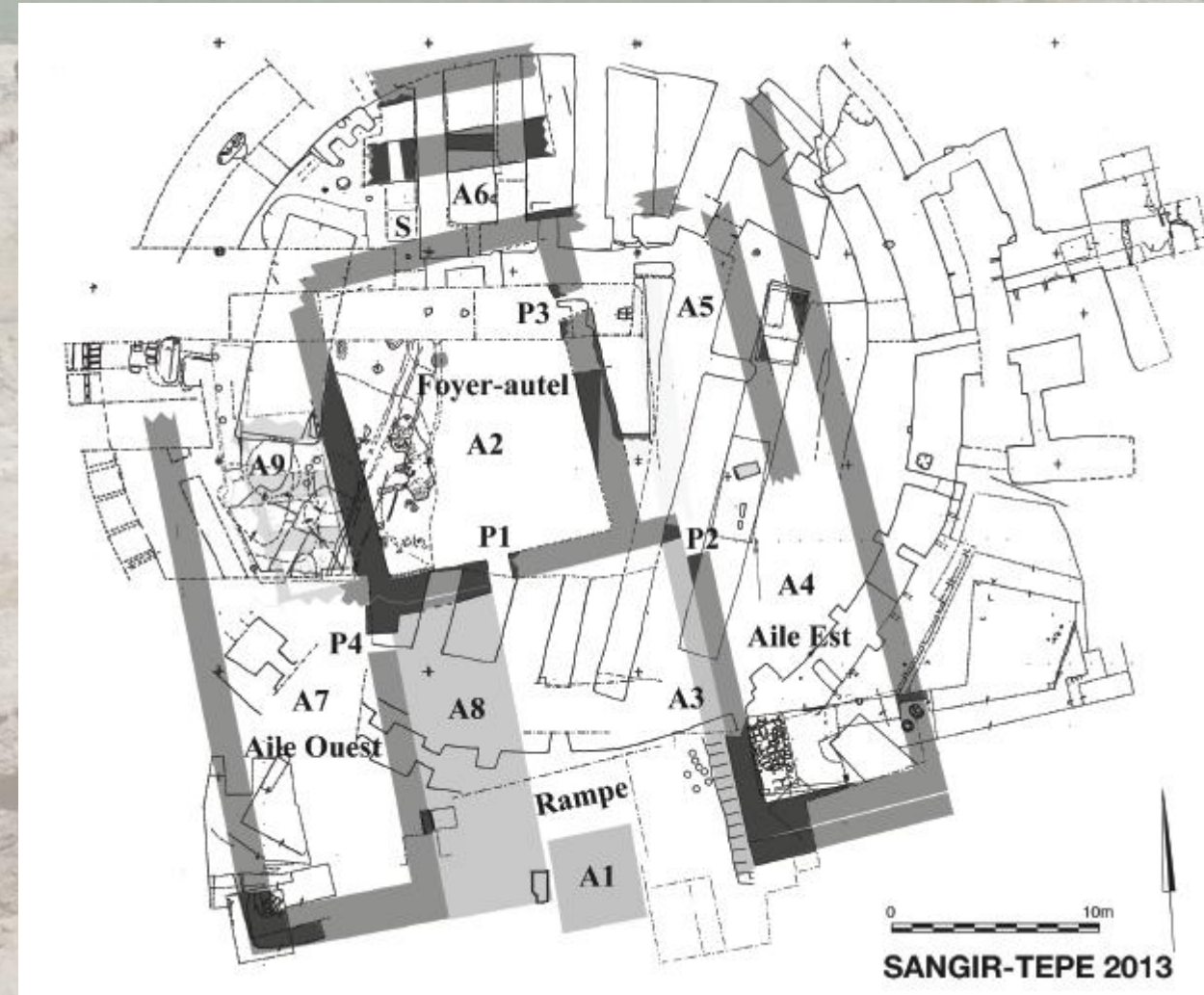
Pits filled with sand, stones, and other substances at Koktepa

Sangir-tepa (Sogdiana)



Sangir-tepa (Sogdiana)

- Sangir-tepa IIIA-B: closed temple
 - Near Shahri-Sabz (Kashakadarya Valley, Southeast Uzbekistan)
 - 6th-5th centuries BCE
 - Outside a fortified settlement (Kesh)
 - Central square room flanked by two lateral rooms and a courtyard
 - Altar/hearth in centre of central room
 - Four wooden columns
 - Pits dug before the construction of the cella: foundation rituals
 - Vedic purification rituals: *agnicayana* (Rapin)
 - References to human sacrifice in the Vedic ritual and at the site (bones in pits)
 - Zoroastrian rites (e.g. *barəšnūm nū šaba*)
 - BUT: no single trace of ritual activity except the altar
 - BUT: bad state of preservation
 - BUT: did fire temples exist before the 4th century?
- Sangir-tepa IIIC: sacred platform
 - 4th century BCE (end of Achaemenid period)
 - 1 m high
 - Fireplaces, pits, altar
 - Pits contained clay pots and two human skulls: by-products of (foundation) rituals?
 - Zoroastrian?

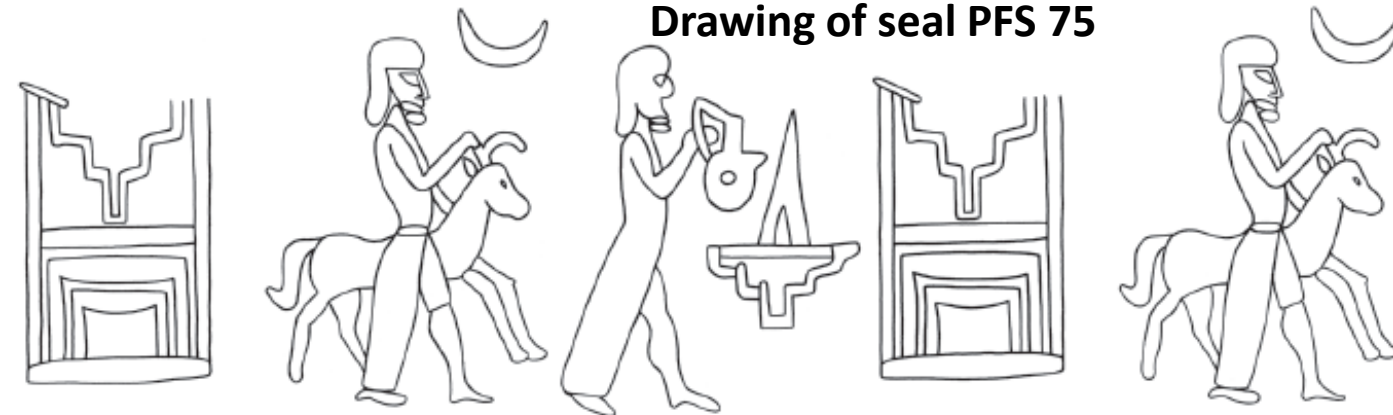


Kafir Qala (Bactria)

- Northern Afghanistan
- 6th-4th centuries BCE
- Hilltop fortress overlooking Cheshm-e Shāfa
- Monumental fire altar
 - Not for eternal fire
- Free-standing cultic installation
- Not in a fire temple



Drawing of seal PFS 75



Kafir Qala (Bactria)



Tomb of Xerxes



Kyzyltepa (Bactria)

- 40 km northeast of Kindyktepa
- Near the modern town of Shurchi (Upper Surkhandarya Valley, southern Uzbekistan)
- 5th-4th centuries BCE
- Important administrative centre
- Two parts
 - Citadel (Achaemenid)
 - Lower Town (Early Hellenistic)



Kyzyltepa (Bactria)



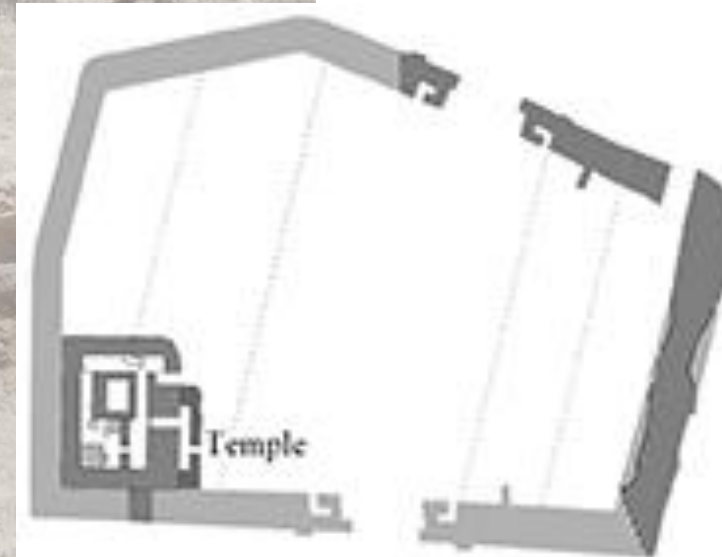
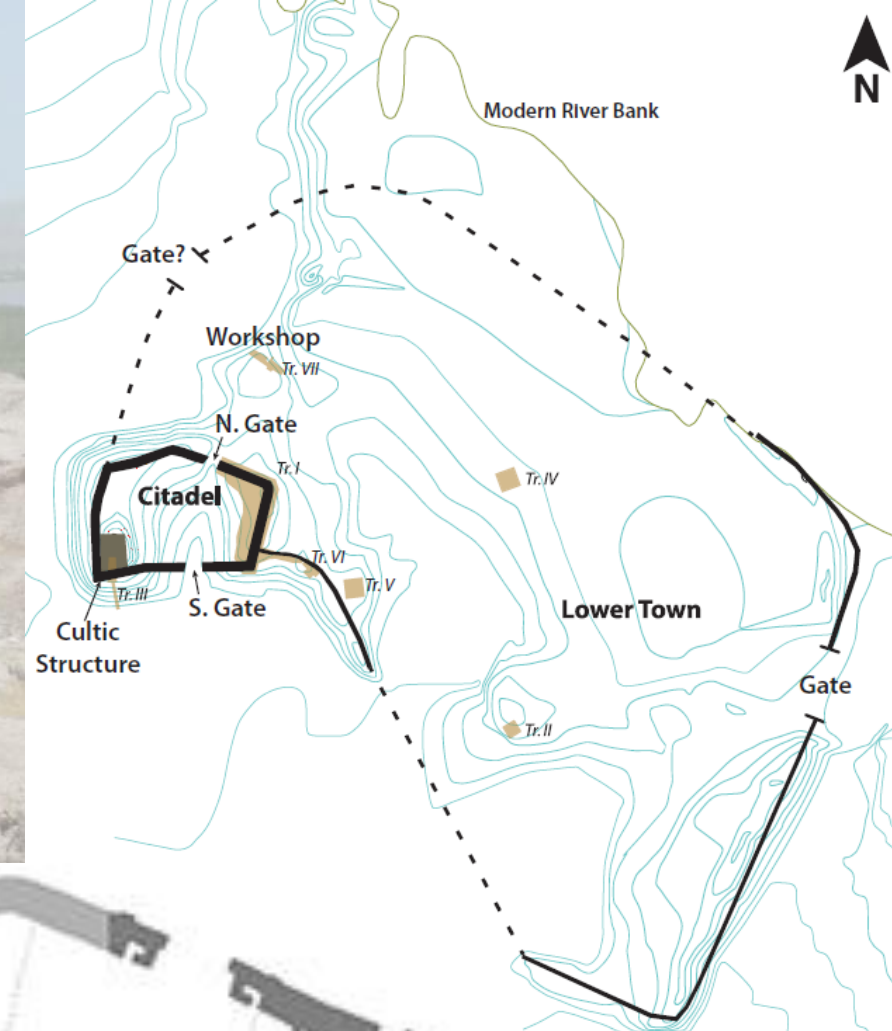
Citadel: general view, facing southeast



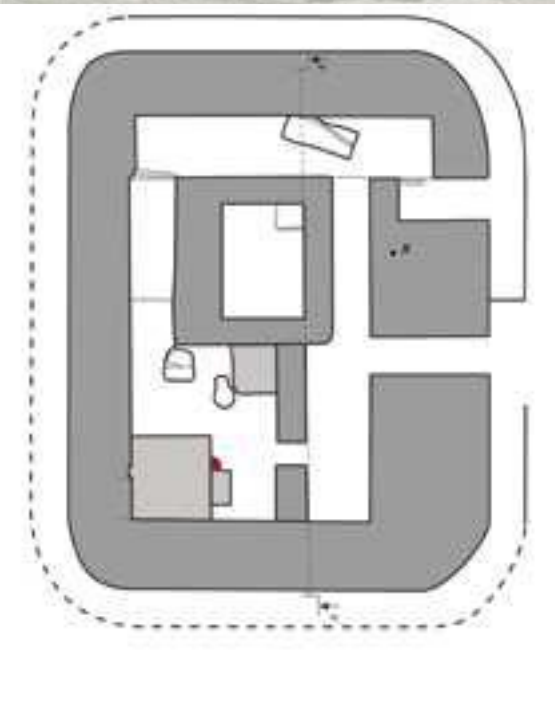
Citadel: general view of the temple

Kyzyltepa (Bactria)

- **Cultic tower-like structure**
 - Southwestern part of the Citadel
 - 18 x 22,5 m
 - Three building phases
 - Phases 1-2 (ca. 450 and 400 BCE)
 - Large fire altar with podium
 - Two pits (residues of burning)
 - Platform with pit
 - Bathtub
 - Phase 3
 - Smaller fire altar (ca. 2 x 1,4 m)
 - Deep fire hole
 - Long exposure to fire – eternal fire?
 - Terracotta pan (transporting fire) and pestle (*haoma*)
- Wu: early Zoroastrian fire temple
- Destruction (around 329 BCE)
 - Partition wall
 - Filling up and sealing
 - Bronze arrowheads



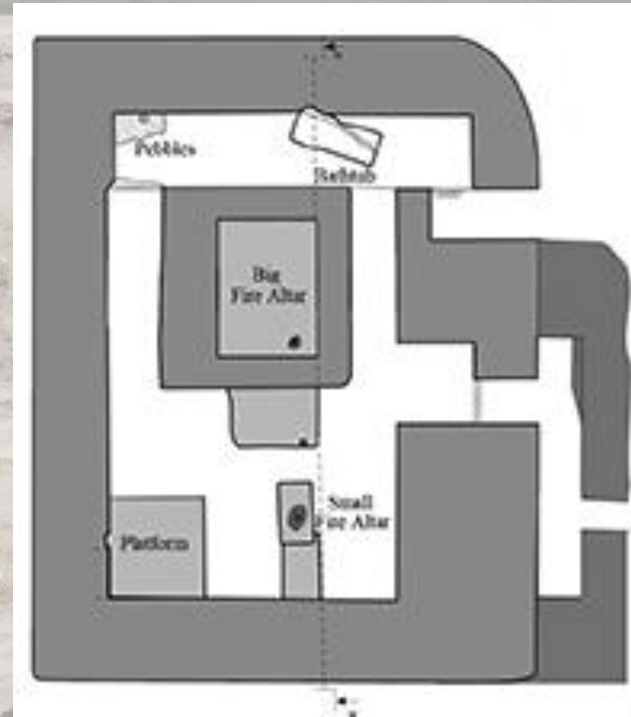
Kyzyltepa (Bactria)



Phase 1



Phase 2



Phase 3



Destruction phase

Kyzyltepa (Bactria)



Surface of main altar



Bathtub



Kyzyltepa (Bactria)

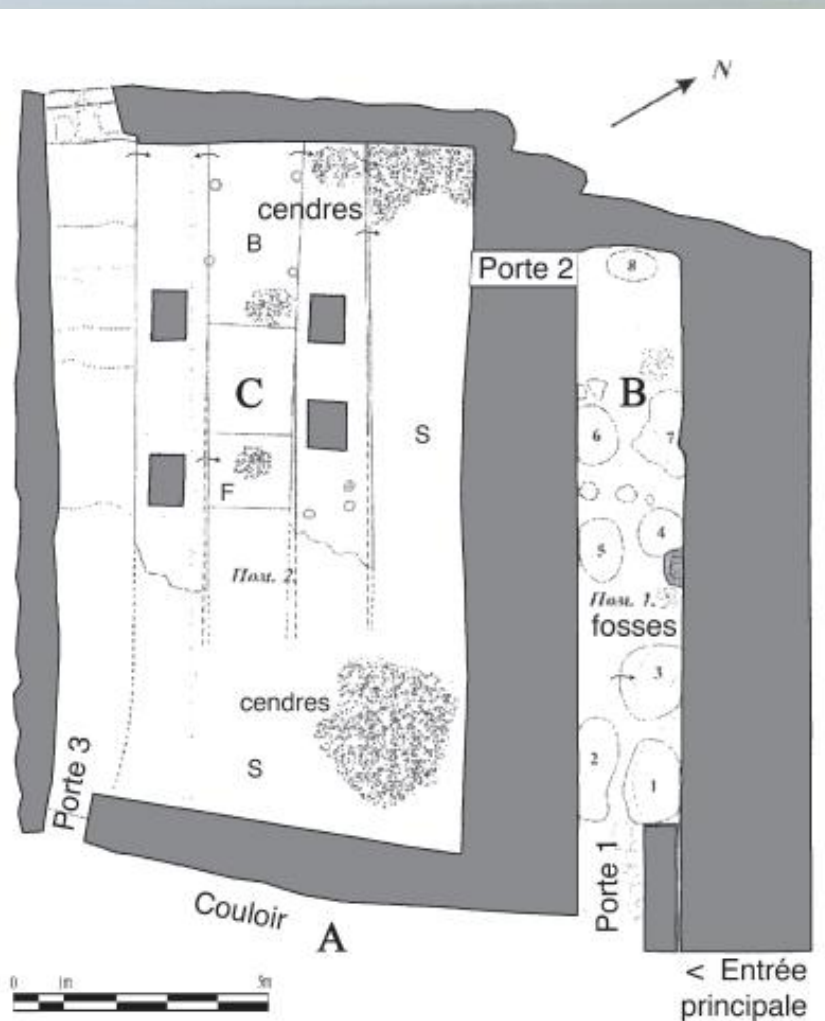


Temple

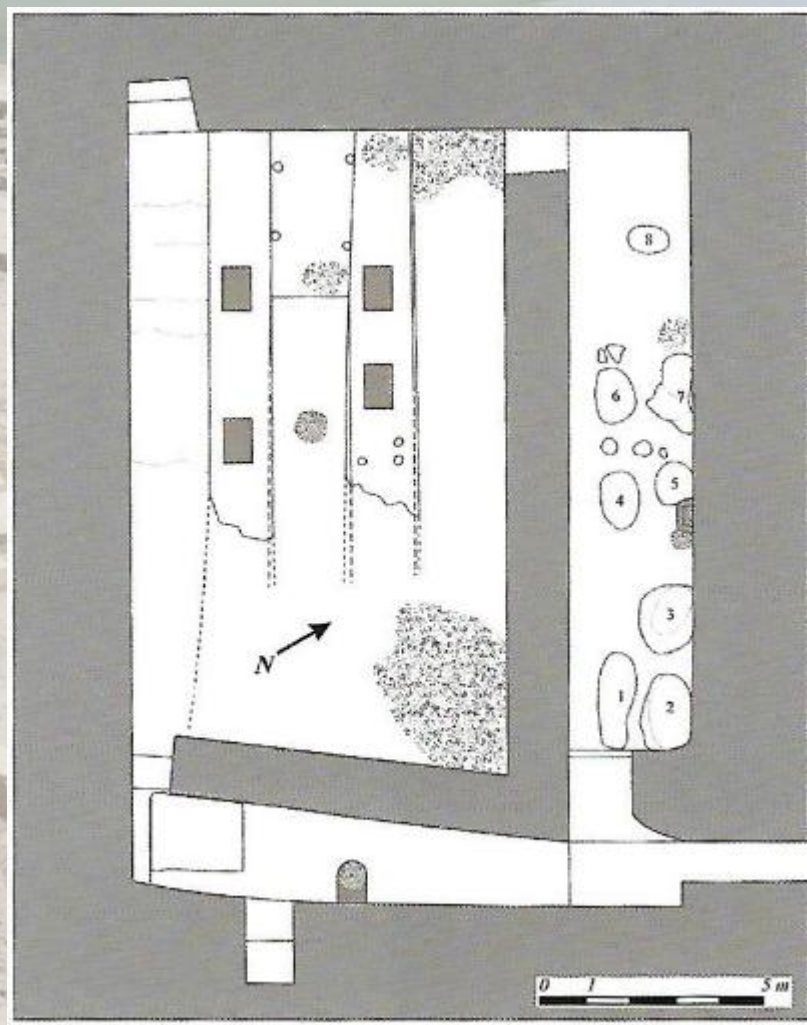


Smaller fire altar

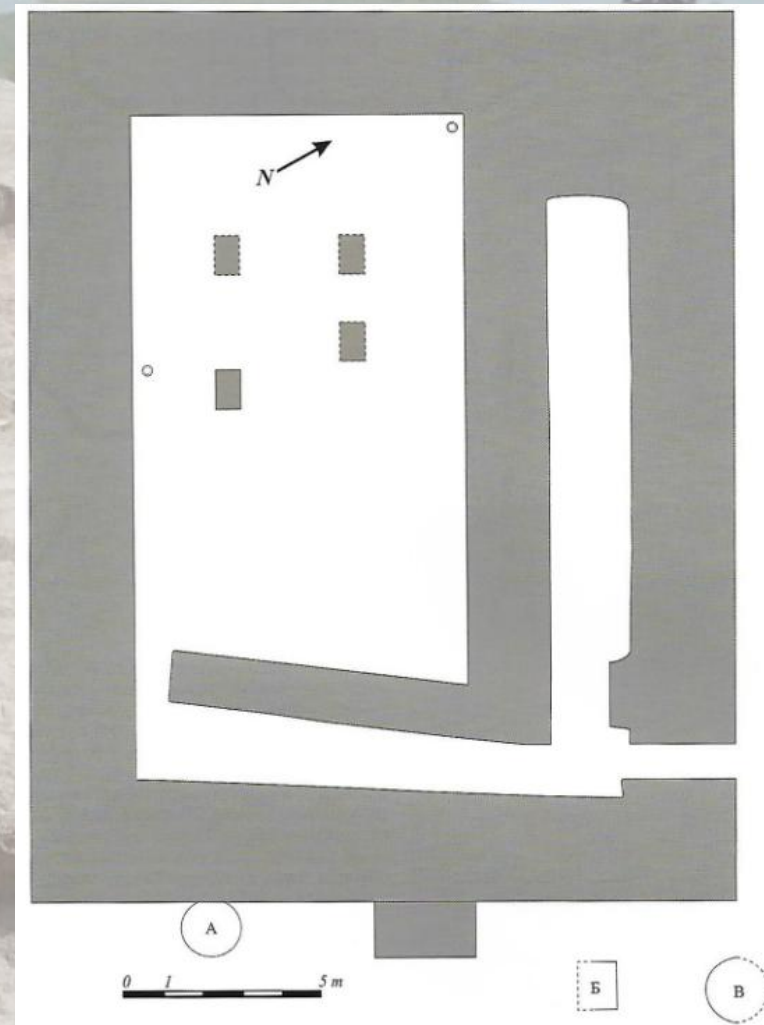
Kindyktepa (Bactria)



General plan



Plan (1st phase)

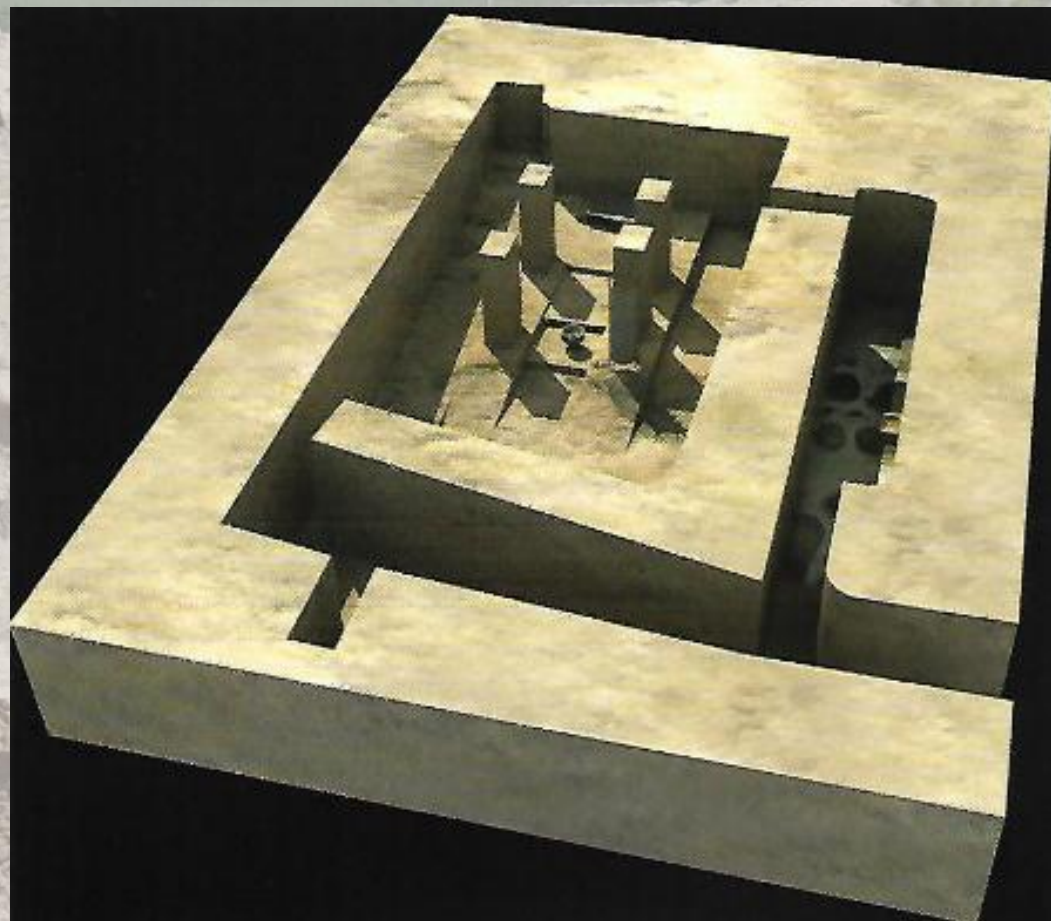


Plan (3rd phase)

Kindyktepa (Bactria)

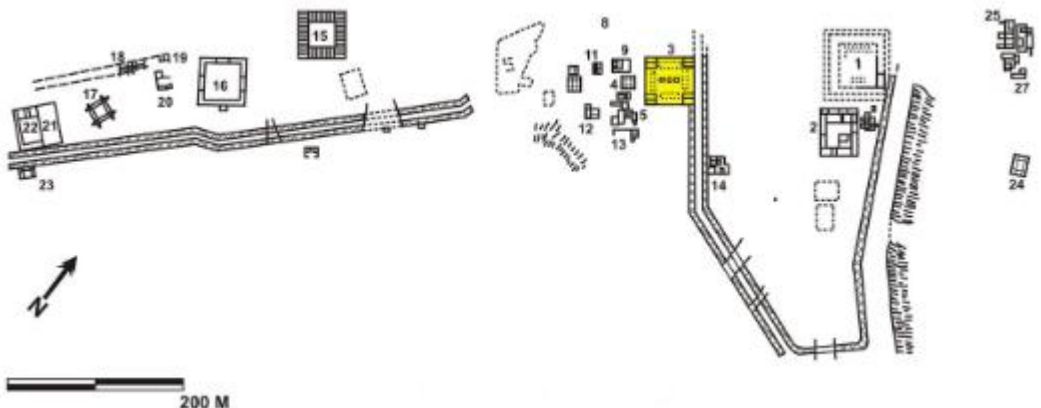
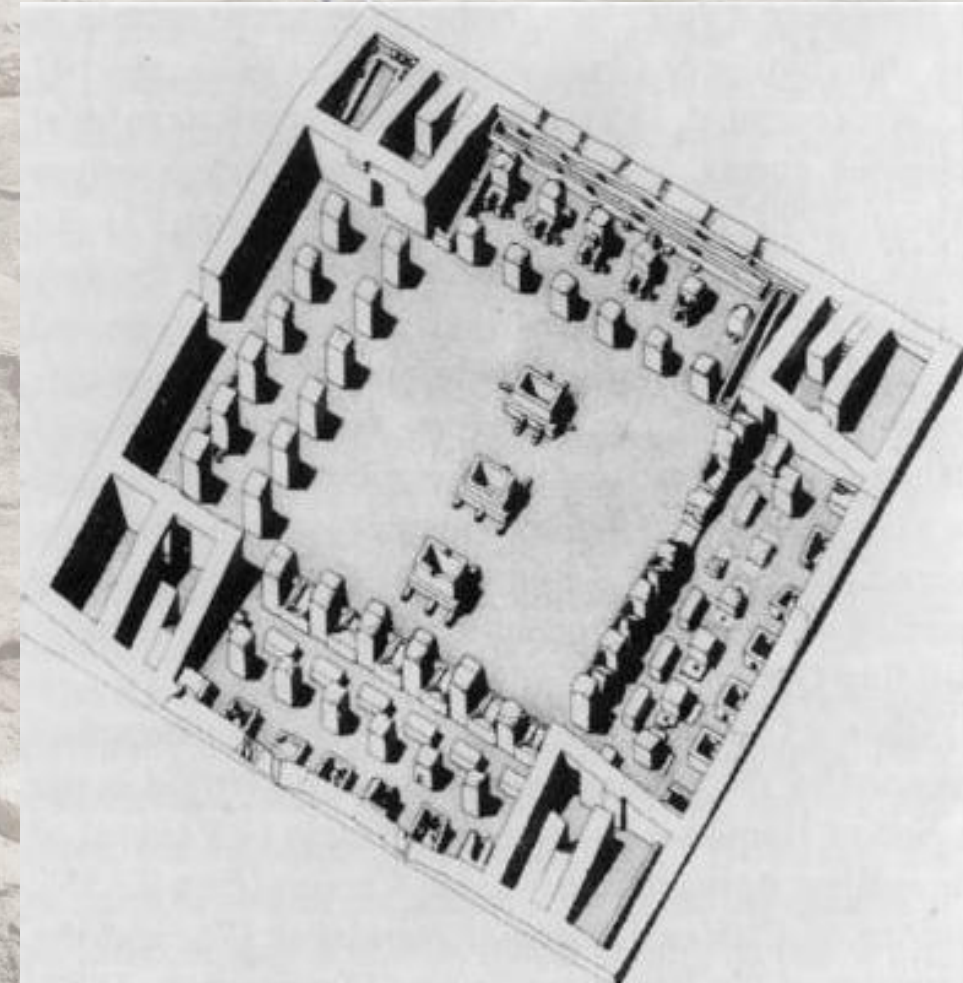
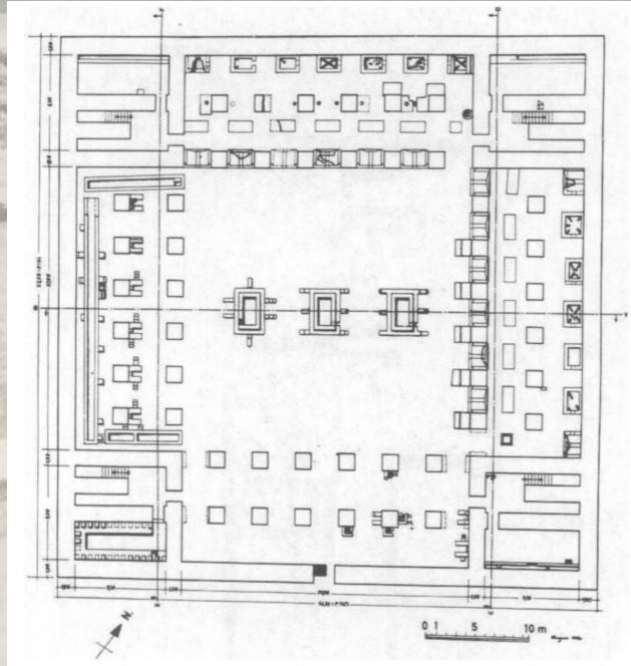


Kindyktepa (Bactria)



Dahān-e Ghulāmān (Seistān)

- C. 500 BCE
- Temple in the eastern part of the site, close to the residential area
- Unique structure
- Three monumental altars in the middle of the courtyard
 - Divine (Iranian) triad?
- Many fireplaces
 - Remains of ashes and burned animal bones
- No Zoroastrian temple
 - Possibly temple belonging to a pre-Iranian, autochthonous cult



Dahān-e Ghulāmān (Seistān)



Religious life in Achaemenid Central Asia

Archaeological sources

- Overview of the sanctuaries

Sanctuary	Type	Date	Location	Bathtub or pits (purification)	Fire altar	Fireplace	Buried/sealed after use
Koktepa	Platform	6 th -4 th centuries	Centre	Yes	No	Yes	No
Sangir-tepa IIIA-B	Temple	6 th -5 th centuries	Outside	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Sangir-tepa IIIC	Platform	4 th century	Outside	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Kafir Qala	Altar	6 th -4 th centuries	Outside	No	Yes	No	No
Kyzyltepa 1-2	Temple	5 th century	Centre	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Kyzyltepa 3	Temple	4 th century	Centre	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Kindyktepa	Temple	4 th century	Outside	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

Religious life in Achaemenid Central Asia

Archaeological sources

- **Common features**
 - Outside the main settlements
 - Fireplaces
 - Fire altars
 - Important role for fire in the cult
 - Pits for foundation rituals
 - Desacralization (burying, sealing)
 - Note: also Nush-i Jan
- **Differences**
 - Temple plans
 - Co-existence of platforms (Koktepa, Sangir-tepa, Pachmak-tepa, Pshak-tepa) and closed temples (Sangir-tepa)
- **Zoroastrianism**
 - **Early Achaemenid period (6th-5th centuries BCE)**
 - No certainty for a strong position of Zoroastrianism
 - Many local traditions
 - Perhaps sharing of common features with Zoroastrianism
 - **Late Achaemenid period (4th century BCE)**
 - First possible traces of Zoroastrianism and fire temples
 - Sangir-tepa, Kindyktepa, Kyzyltepa

Structure

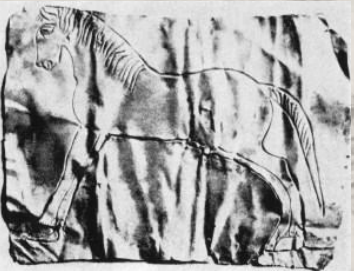
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Treasure hoards

- **Oxus Treasure**

- Found 1876-1880
- Find spot unclear
 - Probably Takht-i Kuwad (or Takht-i Sangin [both in southwestern Tajikistan])
- Ca. 180 metal objects (5th-4th centuries BCE) and hundreds of coins (5th-3rd centuries BCE)
- Typical provincial Achaemenid artistic style (bracelets and vases also depicted on the Persepolis apadana relief)
- Property of a temple
 - Miniature animals
 - 51 gold-sheeted votive plaques
 - 25 individuals holding *barsoms*; no fire depicted
 - 1 individual with *padām*
 - Animals: one camel and three horses
 - Purchased individually by pilgrims
 - Devotional figurines
 - Ritual fish: *Luciobarbus conocephalus*
- Zoroastrian aspects



Oxus Treasure



Golden plaques and bowl

Oxus Treasure



Golden disks and jug

Oxus Treasure



Model chariots

Oxus Treasure



Achaemenid gold scabbard showing lion hunt
(*akinakes*; similar to the ones depicted in Persepolis)

Oxus Treasure: fish



Luciobarbus conocephalus



Oxus Treasure: votive objects



Gold statuettes
carrying *barsoms*



Treasure hoards



- Mir Zakah Treasure
- Found 1992 in Afghanistan (southeast of Kabul)
- About 1200 objects
 - Vessels and utensils
 - Silver and gold figurines
 - Humans (e.g. 6 worshippers with *barsom*)
 - Animals
 - Gold models (e.g. miniature weapons)
 - Cut-out plaques in sheet-gold
 - Humans
 - Body parts: eyes, arms, legs
 - More than 300 votive plaques
 - Worshippers, some with *barsom*
 - Animals (including agricultural scenes)
 - One man charging
- Achaemenid provincial style
- Zoroastrian aspects



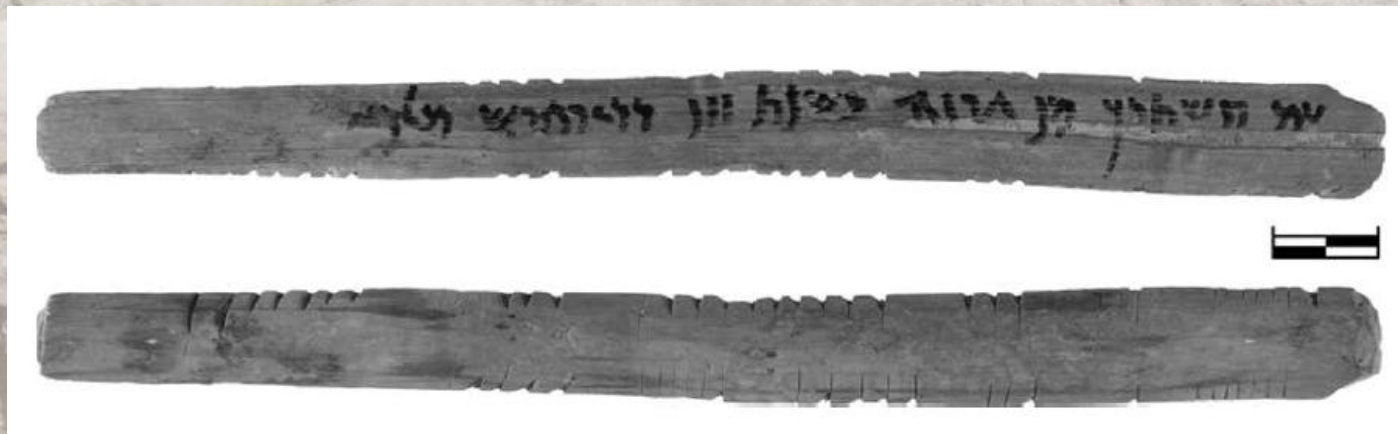
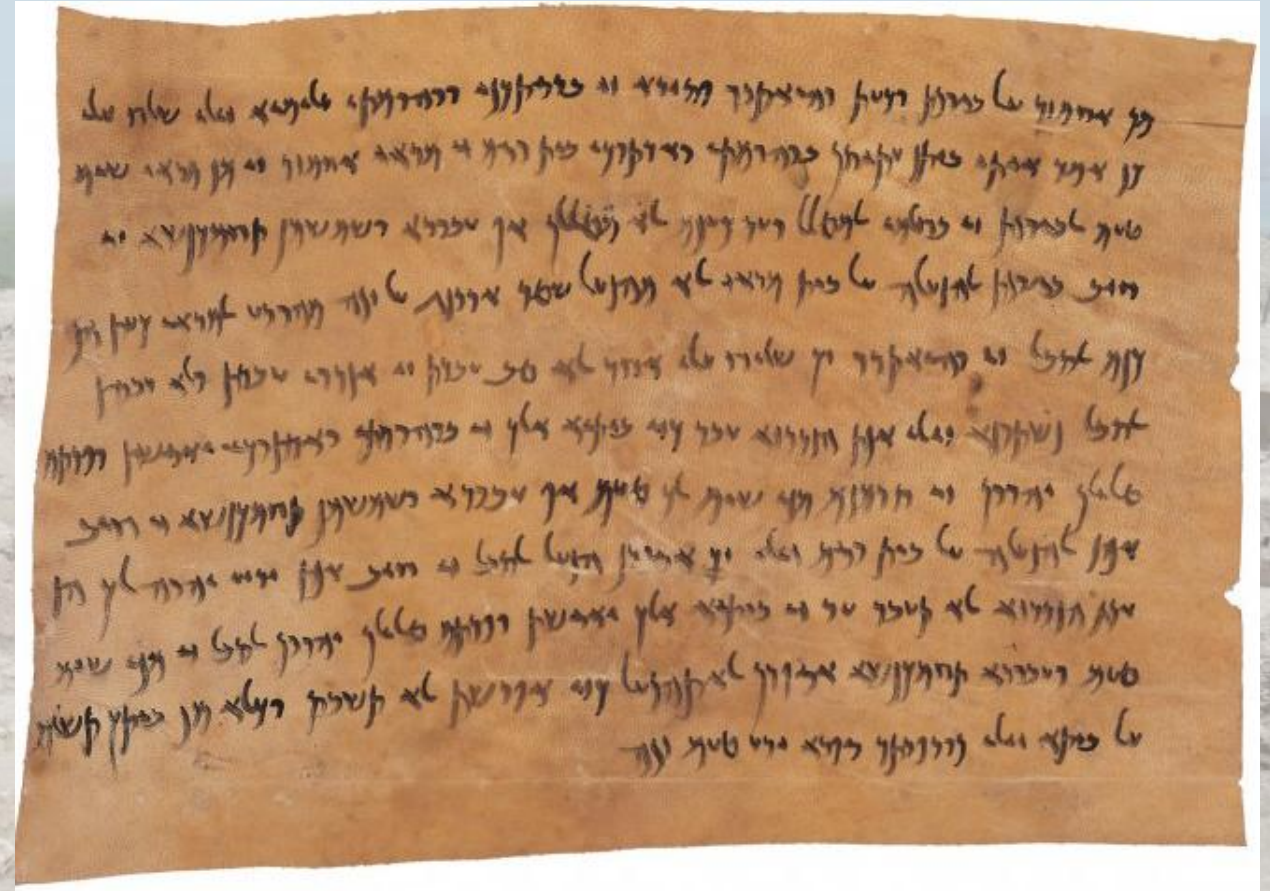
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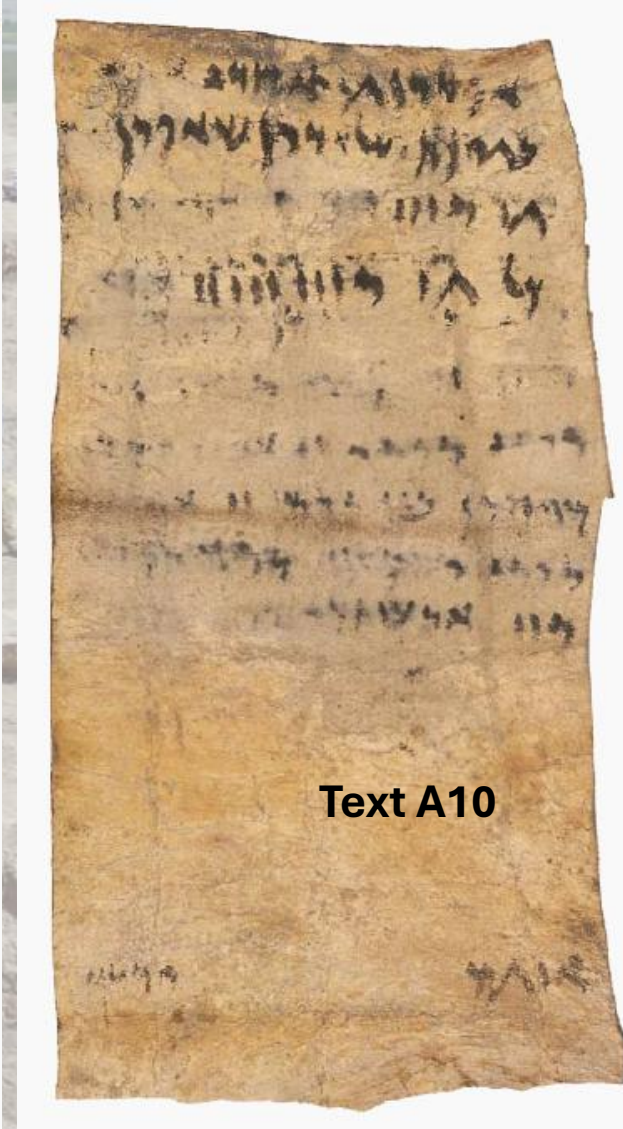
Aramaic Documents from Ancient Bactria

- Official Aramaic
- 353-324 BCE
- Satrapal administration of Bactria
- 48 texts, six groups
 - One letter of the first half of the 5th century (B10)
 - Letters from Axvamazdah to Bagavant, 353-348 BCE (A1-A6)
 - Letters concerning Bagavant, no dates (A7-10)
 - Other letters from the middle of 4th century BCE (B1-9)
 - Lists of supplies and names, 337/330-324 BCE (C1-9)
 - One label, no date (C10)
 - Wooden sticks recording debts, 334 BCE (D1-18)



Aramaic Documents from Ancient Bactria

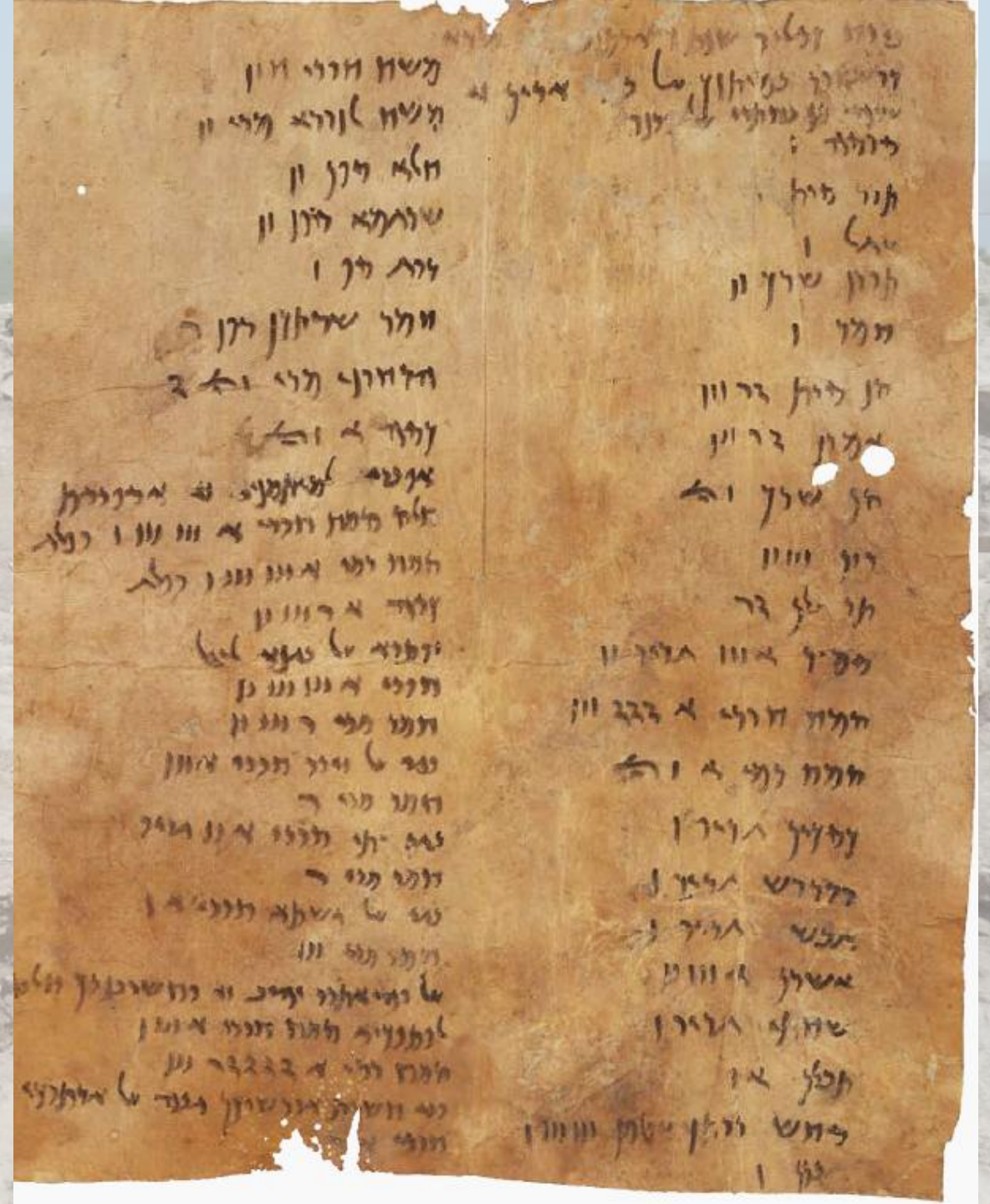
- Zoroastrian calendar
 - Bym dyn (C3:2,18)
 - 24th day, after the divine entity *dainā/dēn* ‘religion’
 - Wty (C1:42-43)
 - Bgy <'l> wty “To be allotted to Vāta”
 - NOT: 22nd day
 - PN Dtšprn = *Daθušafarnah
“Possessing the glory of the day/month called ‘of the Creator’” (A10:2)
 - Doubtful (no *-farnah* in other names)



Aramaic Documents from Ancient Bactria

- Text C1

- (37) zwtr' 'l bgn' lbyl (38) ḥwry' 8 (39) ḥmr mry 15 (40) bgy 'l zyrw ḥwry' 3 (41) ḥmr mry 10 (42) bgy <'l> wty ḥwry' 2 gryw 2 (43) ḥmr mry 10 (44) bgy 'l yšt' ḥwry' 1 (45) ḥmr mry 3
- “Libation for the temple, to Bēl: white flour, 8 *ardab*, wine, 15 *mari*. Allotment to *Jirava: white flour, 3 *ardab*, wine 10 *mari*. Allotment <to> Vatyā: white flour, 2 *ardab*, 2 *grīv*, wine 10 *mari*. Allotment to *Yašta: white flour, 1 *ardab*, wine 3 *mari*”
- Bēl worshipped in Bactria
- Bgy: ‘allotment’ (not an offering)
- PN’s, not deities



Aramaic Documents from Ancient Bactria

- Text C3

- (40) ḥmr' 'l srkrn (41) s 6 <'l> srwšy ḥ 1 'l (42) 'hrdt spr' g 1 'l (43) bgyš s 4 bgy (44) <'l> prwrtn s 2 <'l> pšbr' (45) ḥlh s 2 ḥ 1 kl g 2 s 2 (46) ḥ 1 glh s 2 ḥ
- “Wine to the superintendents, 6 se'a. <To> (the official in charge of) penalties, 1 ḥufn. To Ahuradata the scribe, 1 gun. To Bagaica-, 4 se'a. Divine gift <for> the spirits of the dead, 2 se'a. <For> provisions for the road: vinegar, 2 se'a, 1 ḥufn. Total: 2 gun, 2 se'a, 1 ḥufn; vinegar, 2 se'a, 1 ḥufn” (translation: Naveh & Shaked 2012)
- Zoroastrian religious concept *fravarti- (Avestan *frauuaši*-)
- BUT: Rather a PN
- Mere list of rations: “Wine to the superintendents, 6 se'a. <To> the official in charge of penalties, 1 ḥufn. To *Ahuradāta- the scribe, 1 gun. To *Bagaica-, 4 se'a. Allotment to *Fravartina-, 2 se'a. Provisions for the road: vinegar, 2 se'a, 1 ḥufn. Total: 2 gun, 2 se'a, 1 ḥufn. Vinegar: 2 se'a, 1 ḥufn”



Aramaic Documents from Ancient Bactria

- Second batch of texts, one document
 - 1 bywm spndrmtš On the day Spandarmat
 - 2 lkmzbt' [---] 1 for Kāma-zbāta (?) [---] 1
 - 3 trngl[n ---] 2 chickens [---] 2
 - 4 ldwšhr' [---] 1 for the viaticum [---] 1
 - 5 trngln 3 3 chickens.
 - 6 'l bwdnybr trngln 2 For Baudanibara (?), 2 chickens
 - 7 pr[ḥw]tn wz' 1 1 flying goose (?),
 - 8 trngl 1 1 chicken.
 - 9 by[wm] hrwtt On the day Harvatāt [---]
 - 10 'l dwšhr' wz' for the viaticum [1] goose
 - 11 [---] [---]
 - 12 'l ymnybr wz' 1 for Yamanibara (?), 1 goose,
 - 13 trngl 1 1 chicken.
 - 14 bywm 'm[rtt] 'l On the day Am[rtāt] for
 - 15 dwšhr trngl the viaticum, chicken (?) [1].
- 5th, 6th and 7th day of a Zoroastrian month
- Also 4th century



Aramaic Documents from Ancient Bactria

- Personal names

- Zoroastrian names (9/93)

- *Ahuradāta- “given by Ahuramazda” (Aram. *’Hrdt*), *Ātrpāta- “protected by Fire” (Aram. *’Trwpt*), *Ātrvāza- “having respect for the Fire” (Aram. *’Trwz*), *Āxvamazdah- “having the mind, or the existence, of Mazdā-” (Aram. *’Hmzd*), *Daθūšafarnah- “possessing the glory of the day/month called ‘of the Creator’” (Aram. *’Dtš’prn*), *Farnapāta- “protected by the divine glory” (Aram. *’Prnpt*), *Rtainapāta- “protected by the righteous” (Aram. *’Rtynpt*), *Vahya-ātr- “better through the Fire” (Aram. *’Why’trw*) and the royal name *Rtaxšaθra- (Artaxerxes)

- Other ‘religious’ names (20/93)

- Baga (3): *Bagaica- (Aram. *Bgyš*), *Bagavanta- (Aram. *Bgwnt*), *Bagayaza- “God-worship” (Aram. *Bgyz*)
 - Mithra (3): *Miθrafarnah- “knowing splendour through Mithra” (Aram. *Mtrprn*), *Miθrapāta- “protected by Mithra” (Aram. *Mtrpt*), *Miθravaxšu- “(adherent of) Mithra and the Oxus” (Aram. *Mtrwḥšw*)
 - Tīr (2): *Tīravahišta- “the best through Tīr” (Aram. *Trwhšt*), *Tīraya- “related to Tīr” (Aram. *Tyry*)
 - Names reflecting local religion (8)
 - *Margu-: *Margudāta- “given by the genius of Margiana” (Aram. *Mrgdt*)
 - *Vaxšu- (= Oxus): *Hašavaxšu- “truthful through Vaxšu” (Aram. *Hšwhšw*), *Miθravaxšu- (*Mtrwḥšw*), *Vahuvaxšu- “Good through Vaxšu” (Aram. *Whwhšw*), *Vaxšuabdadāta- “given by the wonderful Oxus” (Aram. *Whšw’bddt*), *Vaxšubandaka- “servant of Vaxšu” (Aram. *Whšwbndk*), *Vaxšudāta- “given by Vaxšu” (Aram. *Whšwdt*), *Vaxšuvahišta- “the best through Vaxšu” (Aram. *Whšwhšt*)
 - Others (4): *Čiθra-čar-dāta- “given by the one who makes brilliant” (Aram. *Štršrdt*), *Vacadāta- “given by the Word” (Aram. *Wšdt*), *Xvacadāta- “given by Good Speech” (Aram. *Ḥšdt*), *Xvardauštā “friend of the Sun” (Aram. *Hrdwšt*)

- Not much ‘religion’ in PN’s, and certainly not much Zoroastrianism!!

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Thank you very much!!

