



**V.A. ZAVIALOV, KUSHANSHAHR PRI SASANIDAKH.
PO MATERIALAM RASKOPOK NA GORODISHCHE
ZARTEPA (KUSHANSHAHR UNDER THE SASANIANS.
ON THE RESULTS OF EXCAVATIONS OF THE ZARTEPA
SITE), FAKUL'TET FILOLOGII I ISKUSSTV
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The book *Kushanshahr pri Sasanidakh. Po materialam roskopok gorodishcha Zartepa* by V.A. Zavialov is a summary of archaeological research conducted at Zartepa in today's southern Uzbekistan in 1975–1986. It must be said, the author is an excellent archaeologist, a member of expeditions at sites in Khorezm, Parthia proper, and Baktria. Among his special achievements in recent years was his model research of the fortification at Merv (Gyaur-kala) in which he identified its chronological phases.

The fortified city of Zartepa, in the Surkhan Darya valley, established in the 1st century B.C. on a square plan, occupied an area of ca. 16.9 hectares. It is the third largest known Kushan site in southern Uzbekistan, after Old Termez and Dalverzintepa. The book spans mainly the period from the mid-3rd to the mid-4th centuries A.D., when the once powerful Kushan state was subordinated to the Persian Sasanians. The nature of this dependence and its exact chronology still causes much controversy.¹ What with historical sources being fragmentary, archaeological research becomes greatly important.

¹ For the chronology of the Kushan-Sasanian period, see: A.D.H. Bivar, *Kushan and Kushano-Sasanian Seals and Kushano-Sasanian Coins. Sasanian Seals in the British Museum* (Corpus Inscr. Iran. III, VI, portf. I), London 1968; 'The absolute chronology of the Kushano-Sasanian governors in Central Asia' in J. Harmatta (ed.), *Prolegomena to the sources on the history of pre-Islamic Central*

Until the mid–3rd century A.D., the Kushan empire was the dominant power in Central Asia and northern India. It was created as an end result of migrations and population shifts beginning in the 2nd century B.C., when this Indo-European tribe, identified with the Tocharians and called Yuezhi in Chinese sources, was pushed out of Xinjiang province in today’s western China by the Xiongnu people. The Yuezhi subsequently migrated across Central Asia to Afghanistan. About the year 130 B.C., the Yuezhi crushed the state of Baktrian Greeks. In Baktria, they created five separate tribal states of which one, Guishuang, conquered the remaining four in the 1st century A.D., giving rise to a powerful Kushan realm. The Kushan kingdom combined elements of several cultures and traditions: Baktrian, Indian, Greek, and Parthian. Sasanian rule in Kushanshahr, begun by Shapur I, ended in the mid–4th century, as a new nomadic people, Chionites, arrived in Baktria.

In his introduction, V.A. Zavalov presents the first archaeological findings at Zartepa. The site was first explored by L.I. Albaum in 1950. By 1952, a plan had been developed and the site had been provisionally described. More than 300 coins had been found, as had zoomorphic and anthropomorphic statuettes, and a large number of ceramics. Further expeditions in 1972–1973 and 1973–1974 directed by V.N. Plishka brought more discoveries. Remnants were discovered of a palace and defense walls.

The next chapter outlines further findings by Zavalov in 1975–1986. Despite the lengthy research, only a part of the site was explored. Zartepa was surrounded by a wall reinforced with protruding semicircular towers placed every 37 meters. The researchers found a 120 meter-square citadel in a north-eastern quarter of the city, and another, much smaller, measuring 60 x 60 meters in the south-eastern part of the site. Apart from defensive structures and living quarters, the archaeologists uncovered a palace belonging to a local ruler, together with two adjacent structures having platforms thought to have been temples of fire. The palace’s floor plan, with a central hall, complete with a throne, and two temples arranged in a straight line formed a letter T, was a very popular design in Kushan-Sasanian Baktria. Similar arrangements are known from early medieval Sogdiana, which suggests that this type of building was in use long after the fall of Kushanshahr.

The site yielded large numbers of small terracotta human figurines. Another type of finds were everyday items, including an array of bone needles, metal scissors, a spearhead, a round belt buckle, and many others.

Asia (= Collection of the sources for the history of pre-Islamic Central Asia), Budapest 1979, 317–332; J. Cribb, ‘Numismatic evidence for Kushano-Sasanian Chronology’ *Studia Iranica* 19, 1999, 151–193; N. Sims-Williams, ‘From the Kushan-Shahs to the Arabs. New Bactrian documents dated in the era of the Tochi inscriptions’ in M. Alram, D.E. Klimburg-Salter (eds.), *Coins, art and chronology. Essays on the pre-Islamic history of the Indo-Iranian borderlands* (Österr. Akad. d. Wiss., Phil.-hist. Kl., Denkschriften, 280 = Veröff. d. Numismat. Kommission, Bd. 33), Wien 1999, 245–258; Gorin, ‘Parthian Coins from Kampyrtepa’ (in this volume).

The last chapter in the book is devoted to ceramics. Finds show, for the Sasanian phase, a preponderance of old, Kushan types of vessels, but also appearance of new kinds produced to follow Persian designs. The Russian scholar who identified and described several sets of vessels believes it to be another proof that Kushan Baktria was under Sasanian dominance.

The book contains general plans of the site, a comprehensive collection of drawings showing respective types of artifacts discovered, and some color photographs. At the end, the book lists the hundreds of coins discovered on the site.

Yet V.A. Zavalov's book is more than a publication of the material discovered at Zartepa. The archaeologists were able to cast a new light on a poorly known period in the history of Iran and ancient Baktria, only referred to in a handful of mentions in historical sources. Sasanian rule in the territory was relatively brief, no longer than 120–130 years. Contrary to older, erroneous views about centralizing efforts by the first Sasanian kings, Kushan territories were not, strictly speaking, included in Eranshahr. They were ruled by a Kushan-shah, even if he obeyed Ktesiphon. His freedom of movement must have been large, as is suggested by Kushan-Sasanian coins imitating Persian money. Whenever the Sasanian power waned, Kushan independence obviously grew.

V.A. Zavalov noted that Persian political dominance was reflected in many items of material culture. As the site was explored, many artifacts were found which had clearly been influenced by Sasanian art. The most characteristic are ceramic plates made to imitate silver and gold-plated Sasanian ware, centrally decorated with a portrait or a hunting scene. Such plates were popular in Iran throughout the Sasanian period. Other Persian vessels were imitated, too. The most common designs included deep clay bowls decorated with a lion mask, following similar designs on metal and glass vessels. Such designs were very popular in the entire Kushan-Sasanian period and are also known from other sites: Old Termez, Karatepa, and Ak-kurgan. Interestingly, vessels bearing a lion mask also appear in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire in the 4th century.

Another category in the ceramics found at Zartepa were zoomorphic plates, also discovered in Susa, Merv, and many other Baktrian sites. In Iran, they appeared in the late Parthian and early Sasanian period. Therefore, their presence at Zartepa must be linked to its political dependence from the Sasanians. Other than the above types, there were other kinds of ceramics displaying Sasanian or even Parthian influences. In the case of Zartepa, the presence and time span of Sasanian-influenced ceramics coincides with the Kushan-Sasanian period.

Zartepa digs revealed the remains of living quarters. Popular in Sasanian Iran, the technology of decorating buildings, including monumental royal palaces, with terracotta tiles was adopted in Kushanshahr, as is shown by evidence discovered at Zartepa. Such examples clearly demonstrate the dominance of Persian imperial

culture, as distinct from previous Parthian influences at the time of the Great Kushans. Kushan-Sasanian elites, composed of immigrant Iranians and members of the local population, regardless of the degree of their political dependence from Eranshahr, made up a relatively uniform cultural model with other countries within Ktesiphon's sphere of influence. It was so not only due to Iranian hegemony, but also the attractiveness of the Iranian culture, parts of which were even adopted by Persia's greatest political rival, the Imperium Romanum.

Zavialov's book is one of few publications to present such a comprehensive and orderly survey of archaeological findings in ancient Bactria. The work is an important contribution to studies not only on Kushan-Sasanian Bactria, but it also points out the multiple contacts between Eranshahr and Kushanshahr which far exceeded any usual schemes of political dependence. New tendencies in studying the early Sasanian period place emphasis on continued Parthian administrative patterns and a far stronger status of local powers than was thought previously.² One example are the new discoveries at Kampyrtepa, a fortress on the north-eastern fringes of the Parthian empire. Even 15 years ago no one thought that the site would alter our understanding of eastern Parthia and western Bactria. For the early Sasanian period, the same applies to Zartepa. A great majority of writings on the relations of the Sasanian Iran with neighboring countries focuses on contacts between Persia and Rome.³ The empire's eastern frontier in Bactria, then so important in the political history of the Sasanian state, is only given perfunctory treatment, mostly in terms of military conquest or dangers from nomads. The Russian scholar shows us archaeological findings which permit a new, deeper insight into relations between Sasanian Persia and its dependent Kushanshahr by highlighting cultural and commercial relations. The reader will appreciate the book's excellent editorial quality, with fine photographs and drawings. Zavialov's opus will remain a fundamental publication for the archaeology and history of Bactria and Central Asia.

Marek Jan Olbrycht, Sebastian R. Wójcikowski

² Their role was so important that P. Pourshariati even speaks of Sasanian-Parthian confederacy. Cf. P. Pourshariati, *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire. The Sasanian-Parthian Confederacy and the Arab Conquest of Iran*, London-New York 2008.

³ Very rich literature exists on the subject of such contacts. Examples of newer publications include: W. Ball, *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire*, London 2000; B. Dignas, E. Winter, *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity. Neighbours and Rivals*, Cambridge 2008; J.D. Howard-Johnston, *East Rome, Sasanian Persia and the End of Antiquity: Historiographical and Historical Studies*, Abingdon 2006.