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The Kushano-Sasanian Phases at Barikot, Swat:
The Evidence from the 2018 Excavation Campaign

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This article is dedicated to the memory of Sebastiano Tusa (Palermo 1952 – Bishoftu 2019) prematurely died in a tragic plane crash in Ethiopia on his duty as archaeologist. Sebastiano Tusa was the excavator of Aligrama in Swat, member of the Italian Mission, a great manager of Sicily's immense cultural heritage, and a great friend of Pakistan.

Abstract: The article reports on the archaeological data provided by the 2018 excavation at the urban site of Barikot, Swat (NW Pakistan). The campaign focused on the last phases of occupation of some residential and cultic areas located in the SW sector of the city, Units C and B. The excavation in Unit C reveals that the reconstruction activity following the seismic event occurred at the end of Period VII (mid-3rd century) caused a substantial contraction and redistribution of the living spaces. The investigation of the Kushano-Sasanian phases in some areas of the so-called Temples C and B, enriched our knowledge of these urban cultic areas, both in terms of architectural layout and ritual practices.

Keywords: Kushano-Sasanians, abandonment phases, residential units, urban cultic areas

Introduction

The site of Barikot (Bir-kot-ghwandai or BKG) has no need of being introduced here anew. The excavation of the ancient city of Bazira with its acropolis has been a project of the Italian Archaeological Mission since 1977. The site from 2011 to date has become the target of an intensive series of excavation campaigns focusing on the South-Western quarter of the ancient city, both inside and outside the limits of the urban area (Trenches BKG 4-5, 11, and 12) (Figs. 1-2). The excavation at Barikot and the Mission (ISMEO) are both led by the co-author of these notes. However, during both the past three years and the 2018 fieldwork, the task of supervising the fieldwork was given to Dr. Elisa Iori (now at the Max-Weber-Kolleg, Universität Erfurt). In Fall 2018, we shared the responsibility of the training of two teams of archaeology students with Dr. Zarawar Khan of the University of Swat, and Prof. Subhani Gul of Jahanzeb College from those institutions. Mr. S. Niaz Ali Shah (DOAM) supervised the fieldwork as representative of the KP Government, whereas Mr. Fazal Azeem and Mr. Fazal Malik guided the team of specialised local workers.

One of the objectives of the Fall 2018 campaign was the exploration of the last structural phase (Period VIII) of urban life in two sectors of the ancient city, which was either left unexplored or needed some punctual clarification. The first sector corresponds to Unit C (BKG 11, Sector 1-2 E), the second to the area of Unit B (Temple B; BKG 11, Sector 1-2 W). Period VIII, and the preceding Period VII, belong to the same BKG cultural phase (Macrophase 5a and 5b), which is marked by a well-defined Kushano-Sasanian acculturation phase (see Olivieri 2017a and Noor Agha Noori *et al.* 2019)[1]. The end of both periods was marked by important seismic events, which were largely documented in the stratigraphy (Olivieri 2011 [2015], 2012, 2012 [2016], 2017a, 2017b; Olivieri *et al.* 2014; Moscatelli *et al.* 2016). After the first earthquake, the layout of the city shows clear signs of contraction, many loci were left abandoned whilst others were transformed. These aspects will be analysed in the following pages. Eventually, the last earthquake was fatal,

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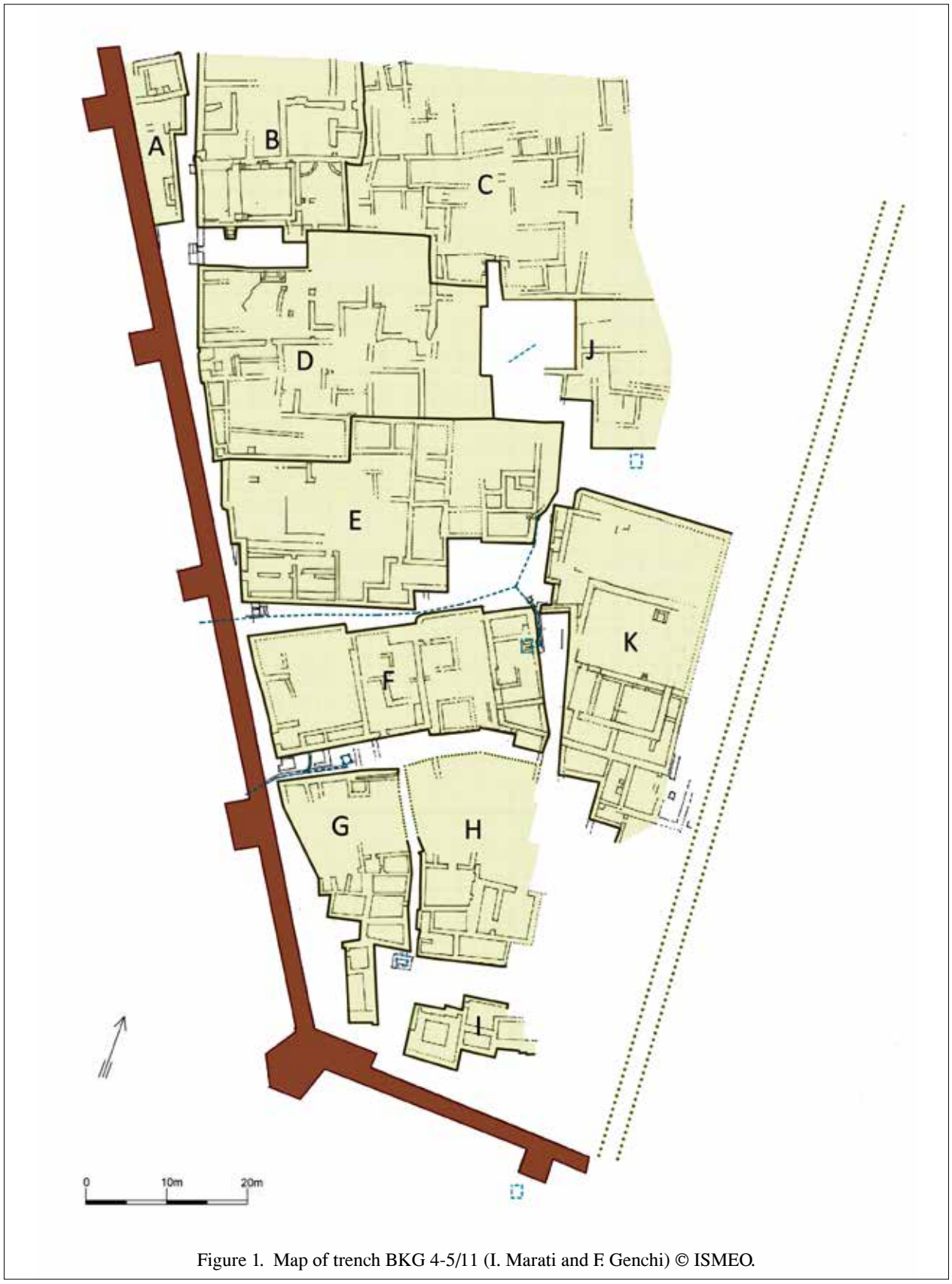

Figure 1. Map of trench BKG 4-5/11 (I. Marati and F. Genchi) © ISMEO.

Figure 2. Aerial view (from S) of trench BKG 4-5/11 (F. Khaliq) © ISMEO and Fazal Khaliq.

and the city was suddenly abandoned. There is evidence of a temporary re-occupation phase in Period IX/Macrophase 6, which is scattered throughout the ruined quarters and features shabby and makeshift structural reuses (Cupitò and Olivieri 2013; Olivieri *et al.* 2014).

At the end of the excavation campaign, we decided to immediately prepare a preliminary report, in order to contribute to the historical volume XXX of *Ancient Pakistan* also. Elisa Iori is the principal author of this report, which here is accompanied by a few notes, where the co-author has tried to outline some historical issues. These issues, which concern chronology and political affiliation, were already raised after our previous fieldwork, but are now better supported by evidence from the last campaign.

Macrophases 5a-b present a completely new and coherent Æ numismatic assemblage: Late Kushan, sub-Kushan, and Kushano-Sasanian coins. The same assemblage is also documented in the following re-occupation phase (Macrophase 6) (Table 1). Updated lists (to 2016) of all the excavated coins with stratigraphic description and data are available in Olivieri 2011 [2014], Id. 2012 [2015]; Olivieri ed. 2014; Iori *et al.* 2015. We do not want to discuss aspects, which are beyond our expertise. The final and definitive attribution of these coins will wait for the full catalogue of the BKG coins (found until 2019) currently in progress with Ehsan Shavarebi under the supervision of Michael Alram (Austrian Academy of Sciences).

Late Kushan coins are mainly represented by

Table 1. List of identified coins per Period-Phase/Macrophase (b). (N.B.: * is Western Kṣatrapas?) Preliminary data (updated 2018).

Periods/Phases	Macrophases	earlier	Kushan	Late Kushan	Kushano-Sasanian	sub-Kushan	other	later
BKG 11 and 12 (after Olivieri et al. 2014, etc.)								
Period X	6	1	3	11	1	10		1
Period IX		-	1	13	7	15	1*	-
Period VIII	5b	3	15	15	32	7	-	
Period VII	5a	1	7	7	-	-	-	-
BKG 4-5 (after McDowall and Callieri 2004)								
Period X	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Period IX	5b	-	-	3	-	-	-	-
Period VIII		1	12	12	6	6	-	-
Periods VII	5a	-	8	4	4	5	-	-
BKG 3 (ibid.)								
Period IVB-Phase 2b	5b	-	-	11	14	-	-	-
Phase 2A2		-	-	8	-	-	-	-
BKG 1 (ibid.)								
Period X	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Period IX		-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Period VIII	5	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Period VII		1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total		**7**	**46**	**84**	**64**	**42**	**1**	**2**

Vasudeva types (imitiation) (Śiva/bull type and Ardoxšo type: MacDowall 2005: figs. 8 and 9), which possibly started being issued in early post-Kushan times in Bactria or central Afghanistan (Jongeward, Cribb, Donovan 2014: 13)[2].

Sub-Kushan coins (a definition coined by Malcom McDowall) are tiny pieces of Æ with traces of figures with an average weight of 1 gr., which have been found at different sites, including Hadda (excavations 1970-71) and Taxila (Bhamala) (Callieri and McDowall 2004: 69). These coins are basically cut-offs of Late Kushan (Fig. 3d) and Kushano-Sasanian coins (see Figs. 3a-c), and are used as small change. Late Kushan, sub-Kushan and Kushano-Sasanian coins might have been convertible for each other, since the latter two roughly correspond to ~1/2 and ~1/4 of the Late Kushan unit (~6 gr.) respectively (see Callieri and MacDowall 2004: 69; see also Cribb 1990: 173-174).

The Kushano-Sasanian coins are largely represented by extremely worn issues; the few readable coins point to the earliest Sasanian governors (for the recent evidence from Bhamala, see Hameed *et al.* 2017a: 60-61) (Table 3)[3].

On preliminary basis, we are proposing for Macrophase 5 a mid-/end-3rd century CE chronology, which seems confirmed by the available radiocarbon data (Cupitò and Olivieri

Figure 3. Coins from Macrophases 5a and 5b: a – BKG 4185 (D. 1.3; gr. 1.35; 11 H); b – BKG 3999 (D. 1.6; gr. 3.35; 12 H); c – BKG 2375 (D. 1.7; gr. 3.38; 11 H); d – BKG 4184 (D. 1.4; gr. 1.35; 1 H) (Aurangzeb Khan; Cristiano Moscatelli) © ISMEO.

2013). The final study of the coin assemblage, which is now in progress (see above), will eventually confirm or adjust our chronological hypothesis for the late phases of the ancient city's life.

Political affiliation

Some years ago, we put ahead the hypothesis that if '[…] these élites "were" the town, a crisis of their political patrons (Kushans) might have produced a sort of waterfall-effect that caused - in between – a crack in the social framework (that may be proven by the abandonment of drainage management), and eventually put an end to the life of the town as it was before. Practically the Kushan allied élites may have found themselves on the wrong side when the political wind changed' (Olivieri 2012: 163). The starting points of our argument were that (a) the city had already experienced and survived at least three earlier major seismic events since early first century CE (see Table 2), and that (b) the abandonment of the draining system, clearly shown by thick layers of alluvium mixed with debris, clogging all the drains and pit-wells in trenches BKG 3, 4/5 and 11 at the end of Macrophase 5b, can be explained only by a 'microseism' in the social organisation of the city[4]. In the trade market of the city, Kushano-Sasanian coins were largely in use (as proved by the conditions of the coins, and by the number of cut-offs documented). As already said, the abandonment of the city occurred under the Kushano-Sasanians, and not because of them[5]. Our conclusions were that '[…] the new rulers of Barikot might have had less prestige, less financial and military power, may be also looser connections with the influential abbeys of the many Buddhist foundations around the town. All these factors, combined with the natural disasters, might have eventually led the town to abandonment' (ibid.: 167).

It is premature to draw any conclusions, but there are some hints from Western sources, that may indirectly help in explaining the sudden abandoning of the city at the end of 3rd century CE. Although the Eastern borders of the Sasanian Empire were never stable and tranquil, these sources directly refer to a dire political threat for

Table 2. List of archaeologically documented ancient earthquakes in Swat

Chronology (circa)	Source	Barikot	Amluk-dara	Butkara I/Panr I/Saidu Sharif I
900-1000 CE	C14	destruction of the Shahi temple	collapse of the chattravali	
800 BCE	C14	collapsed structures	abandonment	
300 CE	C14	total destruction of the city	reconstruction of the external facing/decoration	abandonment (Panr I and Saidu Sharif I); structural evidence (Butkara I)
250 CE	C14	collapsed structures		
150 CE	stratigraphic evidence	collapse of the defensive moat		
50 CE	C14	collapse of the fortification		
Status	Certain	Probable	Possible	No data
Magnitude (indirect)	Total destruction	Huge damages	Damages	None

the Sasanian throne, a state of great disturbance, a rebellion led in 283 CE by the brother of Bahram II, in the Kushanshahr[6].

The successive history of the Barikot settlement can be followed at the foot of the acropolis. There a new, smaller settlement, characterised by a later interesting cultic building, was established before the 8th century CE (see Callieri *et al.* 1992: 37-45). Excavations in this area (Trench BKG 2/13) have just resumed after a break of 30 years, and results will be soon reported.

LMO

The 2018 Excavation Campaign

In the city, the passage from structural periods VI, VII and VIII, was characterised by structural modifications and contractions. For example, in Unit B, a 'former residential complex was […] completely transformed into a new building by means of architectural features consistent with a place of worship. Adaptive reuse was also documented in the coeval Sacred Precinct K (Sector 11 E 5/6-7-8) (Olivieri 2016)' (Moscatelli *et al.* 2016: 50). In many other instances, a contraction of the residential spaces was noted in the first reconstruction after the earthquake that marked the end of Period VII/Macrophase 5a (see both Olivieri 2011 [2015], and Id. 2012 [2016]). A building contraction was already noted at the end of the 1992 excavations in Trench BKG 4-5 (Callieri *et al.* 1992: 24-27) (see Fig. 4). In the 2018 excavations, we documented further striking evidence of a contraction of the inhabited area.

Unit C (Figs. 5-6)

Unit C is as of yet the largest block of the late city (> 800 sqm). Located on the NW limits of BKG 11, it is the central-most of the SW quarter of the city. The Unit is arranged on different levels. The upper one, to the N, presents a series of large rooms leading to a series of service rooms along a slope to the E. To the S, at a lower level, lies a cultic building, Temple C, facing an open public courtyard to the S (Court 92), which – slightly sloping towards S and SW - separates Unit C from Units D, E and J.

At the moment, only the southern limit of the Unit is known (Court 92): here, to the W of Temple C, was the main entrance of the Unit. To the W, the limits between Units B and C are still unclear. The northern part of the Unit has not yet been excavated. The eastern limit, which lies below the nearby peach orchard, should hypothetically be situated along a major street of the city. A N-S street leading to the secondary city

Figure 4. Maps of Trench BKG 4-5, in Period VII (Macrophase 5a) and VIII (Macrophase 5b) (Drawings by F. Martore, after N. Olivieri†) [N.B.: The former staircase to the bastion functions only for the vaulted drainage channel] © ISMEO.

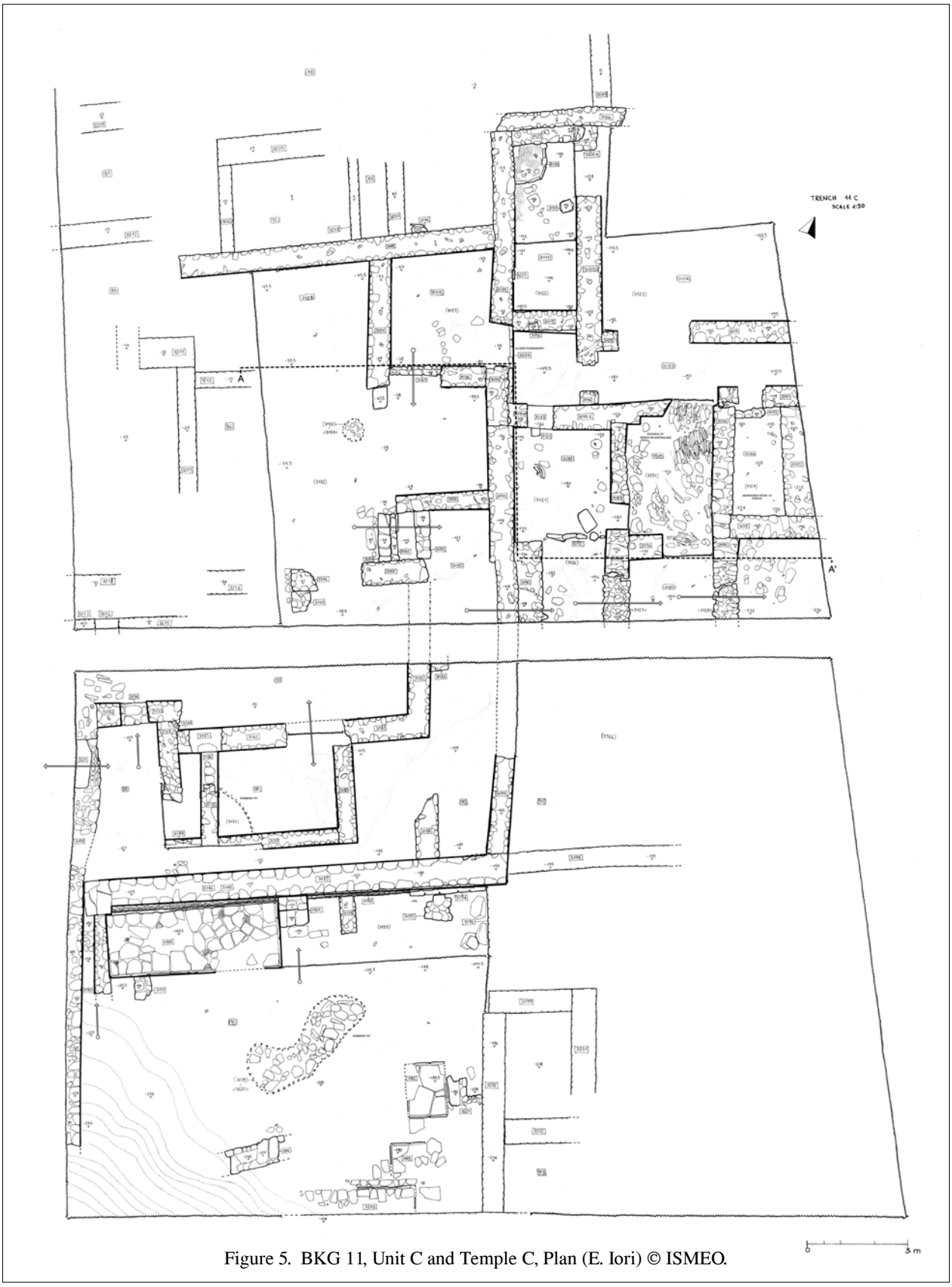

Figure 5. BKG 11, Unit C and Temple C, Plan (E. Iori) © ISMEO.

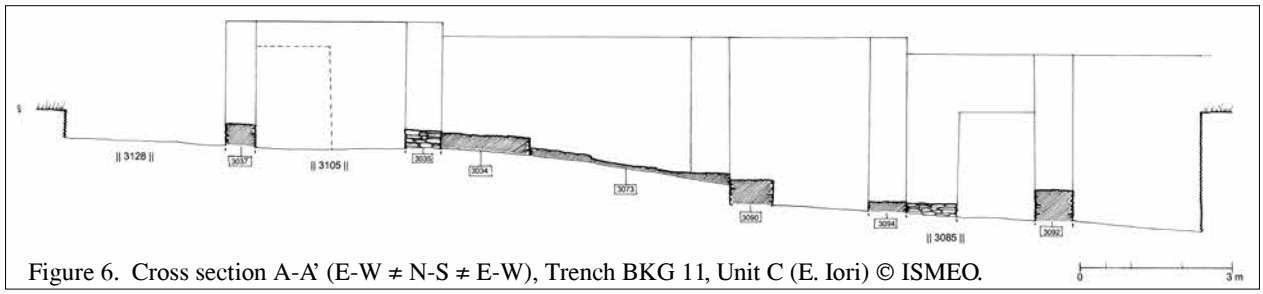

Figure 6. Cross section A-A' (E-W ≠ N-S ≠ E-W), Trench BKG 11, Unit C (E. Iori) © ISMEO.

Figure 7. A view of the lower eastern sector of Unit C (seen from S). In the foreground the evidence of the Period VIII collapses (L.M. Olivieri) © ISMEO.

Figure 8. Details of Room 3089 with the collapses caused by the Period VIII earthquake (L.M. Olivieri) © ISMEO.

gate was conjectured in a previous report (Iori *et al.* 2015: 81) (henceforth Main Street; see Fig. 1).

Period VIII (Figs. 7-9)

The destructive seismic event, which marks the end of Period VII must have deeply shaken city life. As already noted in previous investigations (see above), the 2018 campaign clearly documented that the activity of re-construction, re-use and re-functionalisation of residential units was not uniformly applied, and some loci of the city were abandoned already in Period VIII.

This is the case of Unit C where the closure of corridors and rooms brought to a contraction of the living spaces and to a consequent spatial reorganisation of the Unit.

For example, in the upper sector of Unit C, in Period VII the threshold [3176] gave access to the open private Court 3128 connected to a series of rooms (3104, 3084, 3089) opening to Corridor 3083. After the Period VII earthquake, in Court 3128 the resulting stone debris was levelled out but not removed, with a substantial rise of the floor's level. Although Room 3105 continued to be used, the passage through Corridor 3083 does not seem to be still used (stone debris were not fully removed) as well as rooms 3104 (rodents' traces clearly indicate an abandonment phase) and 3084 (its entrance was closed by wall [3093]).

In this phase, some parts of the Unit were clearly unconnected. Immediately to the E of Room 3105, Room 3111 is in fact now accessible only from N and E. In this room is a large *tanur* [3130] delimited by vertical stones, which was found in association with a working surface and the base of a lost wooden pillar [3031] placed to further support the roof (Fig. 9).

The lower sector of the Unit was still connected to Court 3128 through a staircase ([3053]-[3054]-[3072]) leading to a passageway (Corridor 3085) which resulted from the restructuring collapsed

Figure 9. Details of *tanur* in Room 3111 (L.M. Olivieri) © ISMEO.

structures of Period VII ([3094] and [3092]). A sort of rectangular paved ramp [3090] was constructed to overcome the differences in levels (c. 0.65 m).

Immediately to the N of Corridor 3085, is Room 3088, which in Period VIII was used as a stable. Slabs of the original coping of the roof were found on the floor surface. The skull of a small horse or donkey was found in situ. A smaller entrance with a step is represented by a threshold [3117] possibly obtained from a window of an earlier Period VI building. The room was also connected with the adjacent Room 3089, excavated up to Period VIII earthquake.

In this phase, the structures opening to Court 92 were part of Temple C. The latter consists of a rectangular building enclosing an inner Cell 82/89 (unfortunately heavily damaged by illegal excavations). Cell 82/89 is accessible from W and encompassed on the three sides by Corridor 84. The frontal part of Temple C is marked by a sort of low torus type *crepidoma* formed by small projecting slabs (3145-3146). Cell 82/89 was accessible from Court 92 by means of a flight of steps [1301] placed right in the centre of the facade. Court 92 is a rectangular court walled on three sides provided with a large rectangular tank [1300] built against the *crepidoma* on the left (W) side of the steps of the Temple. A drain and other three tanks ([1302], [1303] and [3203]) are documented in the S and SE sides of Court 92. Finally, Court 92 features an eroded surface sloping towards SW in accordance with the inclination of the main drain [1306].

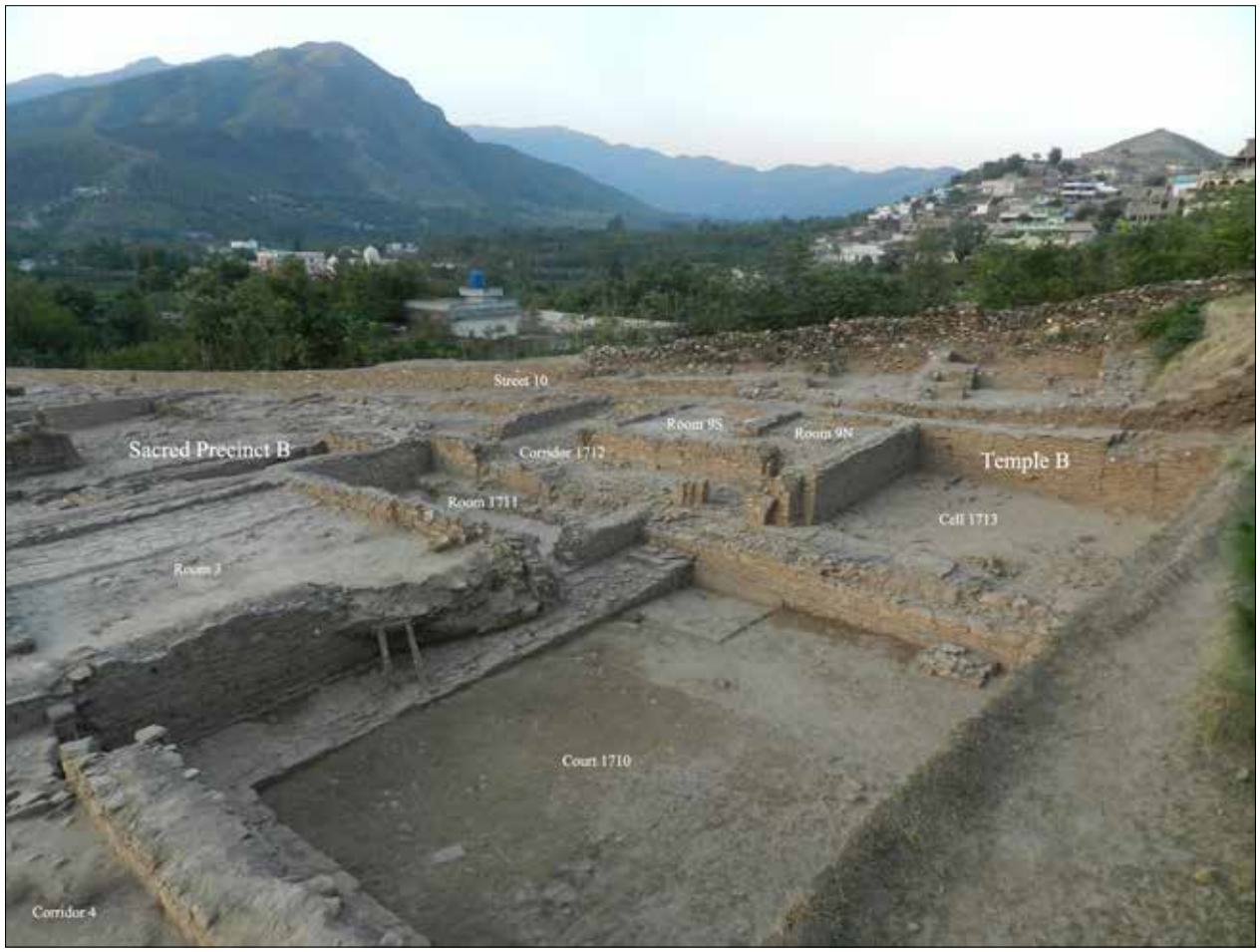

Figure 10. A general view of the upper level of Unit B (seen from NE) (L.M. Olivieri) © ISMEO.

The second earthquake destroyed much of the buildings and several thin slate slabs composing the original coping were recovered in the N area. The collapse occurred in two main stages, in the first stage most of the walls collapse on floor-level (3103).

Period IX

The post-earthquake restructuring activity was limited to the re-habilitation of the NE sector with the some restructuring of the ruins, such as building of rough walls and passageways. However, no clearance of the collapses was pursued, and in general, only fireplaces associated with numerous bones and ceramic fragments attest the episodic occupation of this area. Later on, a second collapse (3091) seems to definitively mark the end of the use of the area.

Unit B (Figs. 10-11)

Unit B is characterised by a large cultic Buddhist complex organised in two levels: the upper one to the N (Temple B) and a lower one to the S (Sacred Precinct B) (see Moscatelli *et al.* 2016; Olivieri and Iori, in press). During the 2018 season, we explored the following loci of Unit B: (a) Corridor 4, which gives access to the courtyard of Temple B from E; (b) two adjacent connected rooms, 9N and 9S, on the S side of Temple B. In both loci, the work was limited to Period VIII.

Corridor 4, which gives access to both Court 1710 (the main court of Temple C) and to Room 3 (placed at a higher level), represents

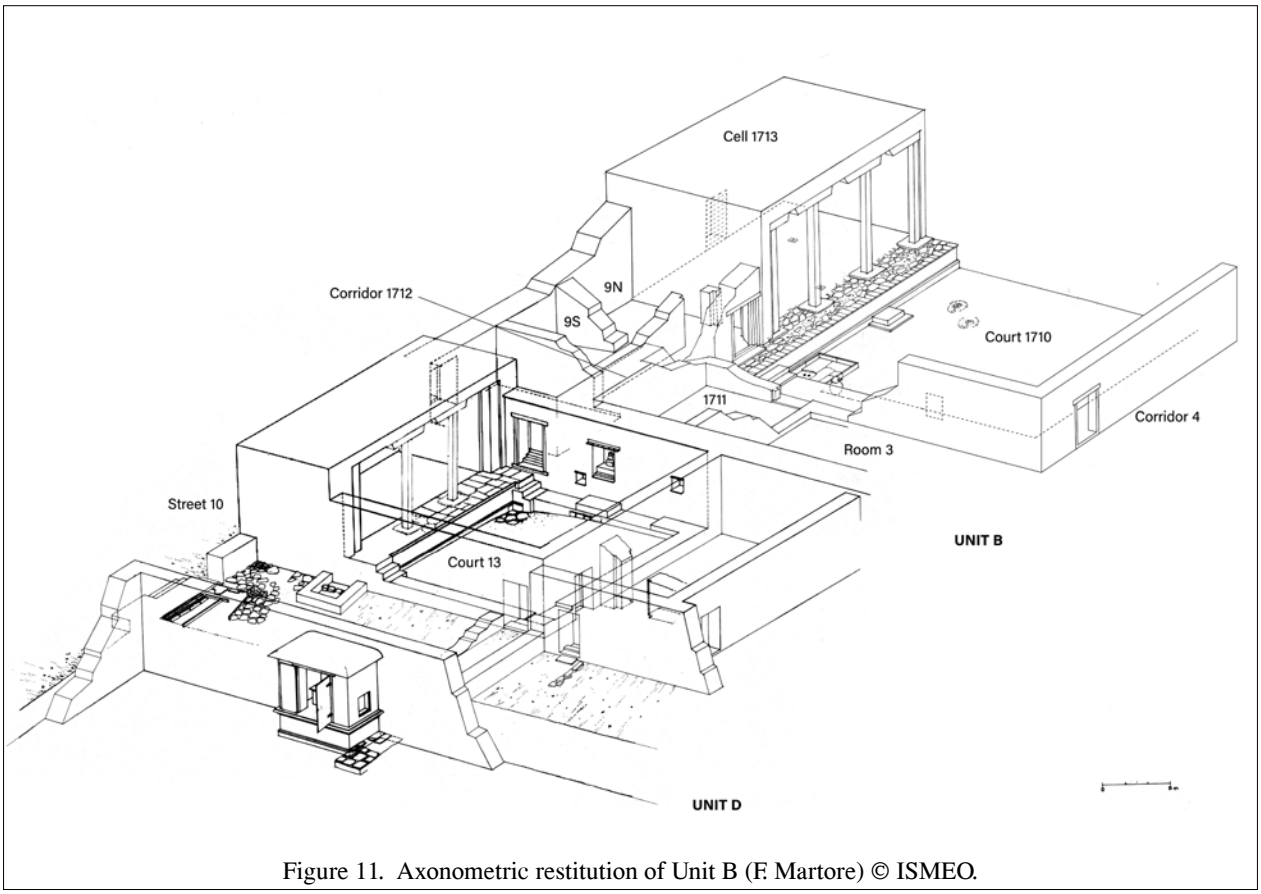

Figure 11. Axonometric restitution of Unit B (F. Martore) © ISMEO.

the service access to the compound of Temple B. The corridor results from the re-structuring of previous structures. A *tanur* of the same type as documented in Unit C was found built against the corner between the E wall and a small partition wall (Figs. 12-13).

Rooms 9S and 9N are situated next to the Cell of Temple B, along the raised corridor connecting Sacred Precinct B with Temple B. Both rooms are formed by earlier structures largely re-structured in Period VIII (e.g. the earlier S entrance of Room 9S was walled-up, see Fig. 15). In Rooms 9N, a large accumulation of ashes was documented associated with several medium-sized jars. Just in front of the entrance, a posthole delimited with stone was recovered (Fig. 14). Room 9S, which curiously features a manger delimited by vertical stones on the northern side, was probably used as a stable (for not more than two-three animals) (Fig. 15). At first glance, the presence of a small stable within a cultic complex could appear strange. Close to the entrance of Room 9S, a small hoard of 25 small copper coins rusted together was found (they were certainly contained in a small fabric bag) (see Figs. 3a-d; Table 3: BKG 4161-4185).

Observations

Temple C

The discovery of Temple C increases to five the number of the cultic areas found in the late phases of the NW quarter of the city (in Blocks I, K, C, B and D; see Fig. 1). As already noted, the layout of these late cultic complexes, apart from the *stūpa* in Unit I, is alien to the mainstream *stūpa-cum-vihāra* layout attested by the Buddhist foundations in the countryside. In fact, these urban sacred complexes generally consist of an open court

Figure 12. Unit B, Corridor 4 (seen from N) (L.M. Olivieri) © ISMEO

Figure 13. Details of *tanur* in Corridor 4 (seen from W) (L.M. Olivieri) © ISMEO.

Figure 14. Room 9N phase 2 (seen from NW) (E. Iori) © ISMEO.

Figure 15. Room 9S with details of the manger (seen from NE) (L.M. Olivieri) © ISMEO.

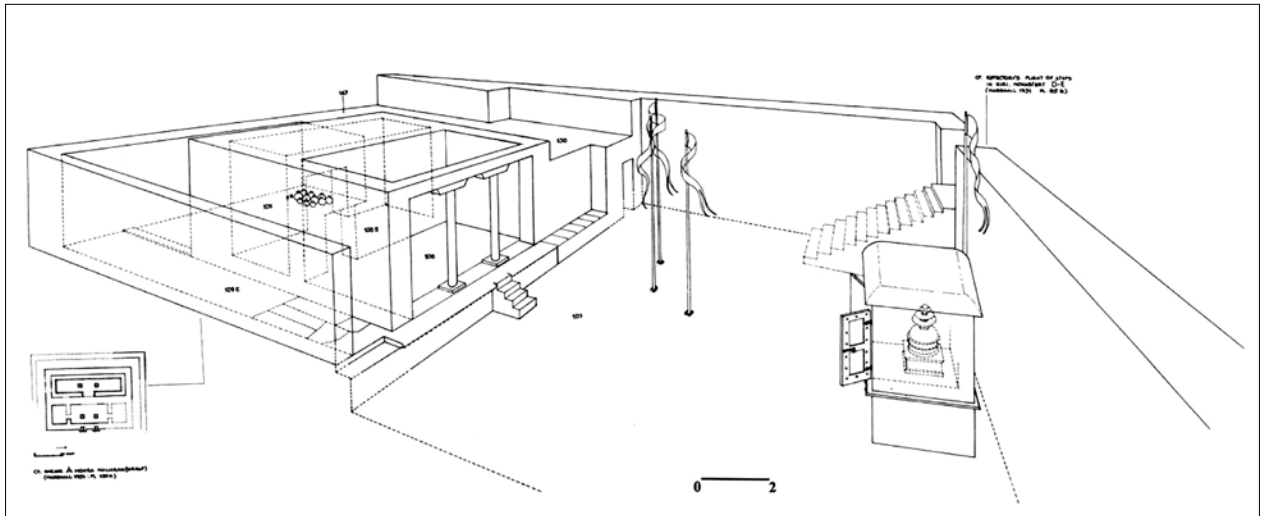

Figure 16. Axonometric restitution of Temple K and its courtyard (F. Martore) © ISMEO.

Table 3. List of coins from the Fall 2018 Campaign

Inv. No.	Stratigraphy	Description	Conditions	Dimensions	Material	Period / Macrophase
4052	BKG 11 J (1273)	Coin. L-K Vasudeva type. Śiva and bull. Göbl 1976: nos. 195-208.	Corroded, oxidized	D. 2.2 8.25 gr H 12	Æ	
4053	BKG 11 J (1273)	Coin. L-K Vasudeva type. Śiva and bull. Göbl 1976: nos. 195-208.	Corroded, oxidized	D. 2.2 8.15 gr H 12	Æ	
4054	BKG 11 J (1273)	Coin. K-S Uncertain Governor Obv. Bust of king right (?) Rev. Fire altar MacDowall and Callieri 2004: 126-146	Corroded, oxidized	D. 1.3 2.45 gr H 12	Æ	
4080	BKG 11 B (442), corridor 4	Coin. L-K Huvishka (imitation): Obv.: king riding an elephant; Rev.: Sun god (MIIPO) Ihsan Ali 2004: 169	Fair. Corroded	1.0 gr D. 1.8 H 11	Æ	
4088	BKG 11 C (1273) cell 82	Coin. L-K imitation Unidentified.	Broken. From two fragments.	0.65 gr D. 1.9	Æ	
4161	BKG 11 1-2W 9S (4002)	Coin. K-S/s-K	Extremely worn. Corroded	1.27 gr. D. 1.2	Æ	
4162	BKG 11 1-2W 9S (4002)	Coin. K-S/s-K	Extremely worn. Corroded	1.10 gr. D. 1.1	Æ	
4163	BKG 11 1-2W 9S (4002)	Coin. K-S/s-K	Extremely worn. Corroded	1.50 gr. D. 1.3	Æ	
4164	BKG 11 1-2W 9S (4002)	Coin. K-S/s-K	Extremely worn. Corroded	1.20 gr. D. 1.3	Æ	
4165	BKG 11 1-2W 9S (4002)	Coin. K-S/s-K	Extremely worn. Corroded	1.05 gr. D. 1.1	Æ	
4166	BKG 11 1-2W 9S (4002)	Coin. K-S/s-K	Extremely worn. Corroded	1.05 gr. D. 1.1	Æ	
4167	BKG 11 1-2W 9S (4002)	Coin. K-S/s-K	Extremely worn. Corroded	1.50 gr. D. 1.4	Æ	
4168	BKG 11 1-2W 9S (4002)	Coin. K-S/s-K	Extremely worn. Corroded	0.80 gr. D. 1.3	Æ	
4169	BKG 11 1-2W 9S (4002)	Coin. K-S/s-K	Extremely worn. Corroded	1.50 gr. D. 1.7	Æ	
4170	BKG 11 1-2W 9S (4002)	Coin. K-S/s-K	Extremely worn. Corroded	1.20 gr. D. 1.2	Æ	
4171	BKG 11 1-2W 9S (4002)	Coin. K-S/s-K	Extremely worn. Corroded	1.20 gr. D. 1.3	Æ	
4172	BKG 11 1-2W 9S (4002)	Coin. K-S/s-K	Extremely worn. Corroded	1.30 gr. D. 1.3	Æ	
4173	BKG 11 1-2W 9S (4002)	Coin. K-S/s-K	Extremely worn. Corroded	1.00 gr. D. 1.2	Æ	
4174	BKG 11 1-2W 9S (4002)	Coin. K-S/s-K	Extremely worn. Corroded	1.10 gr. D. 1.5	Æ	
4175	BKG 11 1-2W 9S (4002)	Coin. K-S/s-K	Extremely worn. Corroded	1.15 gr. D. 1.0	Æ	
4176	BKG 11 1-2W 9S (4002)	Coin. K-S/s-K	Extremely worn. Corroded	1.05 gr. D. 1.1	Æ	
4177	BKG 11 1-2W 9S (4002)	Coin. K-S/s-K	Extremely worn. Corroded	1.10 gr. D. 1.8	Æ	
4178	BKG 11 1-2W 9S (4002)	Coin. K-S/s-K	Extremely worn. Corroded	0.95 gr. D. 1.2	Æ	
4179	BKG 11 1-2W 9S (4002)	Coin. K-S/s-K	Extremely worn. Corroded	0.60 gr. D. 0.9	Æ	
4180	BKG 11 1-2W 9S (4002)	Coin. K-S/s-K	Extremely worn. Corroded	1.20 gr. D. 1.1	Æ	
4181	BKG 11 1-2W 9S (4002)	Coin. K-S/s-K	Extremely worn. Corroded	1.30 gr. D. 1.2	Æ	
4182	BKG 11 1-2W 9S (4002)	Coin. K-S/s-K	Extremely worn. Corroded	1.25 gr. D. 1.4	Æ	
4183	BKG 11 1-2W 9S (4002)	Coin. K-S	Extremely worn. Corroded	1.25 gr. D. 1.4	Æ	
4184	BKG 11 1-2W 9S (4002)	Coin. K-S Obv.: Standing king with spear? Rev.: Nimbate figure standing frontal?	Extremely worn. Corroded	1.35 gr. D. 1.4 H 1	Æ	
4185	BKG 11 1-2W 9S (4002)	Coin. K-S Obv.: King facing r. Rev.: Altar	Extremely worn. Corroded	1.35 gr. D. 1.3 H 11	Æ	

connected by a flight of steps to a raised roofed platform. In particular, the layout of Temple C bears a certain resemblance to the nearby Temple K (Olivieri 2012 [2016]) (Fig. 16). While the presence of a tank in the open courtyard, right in front of the temple, reminds us of Court 1710 in Temple B (Moscatelli *et al.* 2016: 50). In terms of architectural layout, a positive comparison is represented by the so-called 'House of Naradakha' or 'House D' of Shaikhan-dheri (2nd-3rd century CE; Taddei 2006: 51)[7]. Unfortunately, since the heavy damage to the stratigraphy of Temple C by illegal digging, no evidence of ritual and cultic practices has been found, and the way in which this sacred place was experienced by devotees and 'caretakers' will remain unknown.

Our knowledge of the area is limited to setting and function assumed by the complex in Kushano-Sasanian period since Period VII stratigraphy has only been partially reached. The possibility that the Period VIII cultic area resulted from a transformation of a former residential unit (see Olivieri *et al.* 2014: Moscatelli *et al.* 2016: 50-51) cannot be excluded, however, the layout of the Cell 89 seems to be unchanged from at least Period VII.

Temple B

Although at first glance the presence of a small stable within a Buddhist cultic area could appear peculiar, considering the possible use of milk, butter or *ghee* (clarified butter) as offer, ritual drink or oil for lamps makes the presence of animals capable to supply daily dairy products not so unreasonable in this context. Indeed, the presence of a stable in Room 9S can only be explained by its connection with the activities performed in Sacred Precinct and Temple B[8]. Significant in this regard are the evidences revealed within the adjacent Room 9N, where heaps of ashes and broken jars might indicate an area of production or storage. If so, the two connected rooms can be considered contiguous not only in structural but also in functional terms. In particular, it is worth noting the singular position, right in front of the door, of a stone-dressed posthole originally housing a wooden pillar that, rather than having a structural function, more than likely represented a free-standing pole somehow related to the activities performed within Room 9N. At the moment, no explanation of these activities can be drawn with any degree of confidence, however, we have to admit that this situation brought an image to our mind that is quite familiar to the rural houses of Swat (Fig. 17)[9]. In particular, we are referring to the churning process for the production of butter. In this process, basic tools are represented by a pot, a wooden churning paddle, a rope, and a wooden pole. This possible picture, however, remains within the limits of a conjectural realm.

The main point is indeed represented by the fact that, in our opinion, the most reasonable explanation for the presence of a small stable within a cultic urban complex devoid of any traces of areas for slaughter, is that dairy products were used in practices connected with ritual activities at the complex. Something that we will not treat here as it deserves dedicated research on texts and evidences[10].

At any rate, this element adds a new piece to the complex puzzle of the ritual practices attested in this Unit. The use of 'intoxicating drinks' connected with the character of Hāritī, protector of fertility and infants (Temple B, Moscatelli *et al.* 2016), is correlated with deposits of votive objects (Sacred Precinct B, Olivieri *et al.* 2014) significantly dominated by the concentration of shell bangles, possibly related to rituals or prayers relating to birth and fertility (Micheli 2020: 252). Seen together, this evidence pictures ritual practices and spaces - never documented in *extra moenia* Buddhist complexes - where the 'female component' and local/Dardic practices (not reported in canonical texts) are dominant. It is within this local 'female' context of untold rituality that the use of dairy products in Buddhist rituals will possibly find an explanation.

EI

Notes

1. This phase is well defined by a typical ceramic assemblage characterised by new forms like the distinctive red-slipped fine bowls-on-stand (see Olivieri *et al.* 2014: figs. 134-135), but also by Fashion, Golden, Red-on-Golden and Red-on-Red

slip Wares (see Olivieri 2017a and Noor Agha Noori *et al.* 2019). Specimens of these luxury wares were documented also in 2018.

2. At Mes Aynak? See Noor Agha Noori *et al.* 2019: 107, fn. 37-39.

3. *Pro*: the numismatic assemblage and recent radiocarbon evidence ('Parinirvana Chamber – Feature 25') obtained from Bhamala match the chronology of Macrophases 5a-b (Hameed *et al.* 2017b: 44, 50). *Contra*: from BKG 4-5, Macrophase 5a, comes a Kushano-Sasanian coin [not illustrated here] attributed by MacDowall to Shapur II on the basis of the Bactrian legend (obv.) Þοβορο (BKG 1489; MacDowall and Callieri 2004: 39, pl. 11.125; = Göbl 1121). The stratigraphic position of the coin is certain, and if it were an issue of Shapur II, it would represent a clear point against the proposed early chronology of Macrophase 5a. This coin perfectly represents the 'case' introduced by J. Cribb in his Appendix I of Cribb 1990: 'The Kushano-Sasanian copper coins with the portrait bust of Shapur II' (ibid.: 178). We are not numismatist, but, still, we wonder why it should be of Shapur II,

Figure 17. Balo Kale, Kandak (Barikot): churning butter in a Gujar's house (C. Biagioli) © ISMEO and Carla Biagioli.

and not of Shapur I [Peroz I] (see Carter 1985: 271). Cribb puts these coins at the end of the Kushano-Sasanian series and says that the solution which 'makes them coins of Shapur I' is contradicted by 'the details of the portrait'. Instead, at least in this coin, the same 'mural crown' of the bearded king (obv.) and stepped fire altar (rev.) appears also in the coins attributed by MacDowall to Peroz I and Kavad (MacDowall/Callieri 2004). It is a thorny issue, and – again - we are not specialist. Indeed, for a definitive chronological reconstruction of BKG Macrophase 5, the interpretation of this coin, and the other Kushano-Sasanian and Sub-Kushan coins, currently studied by M. Alram and E. Shavarebi, will be crucial.

4. Similar situation was documented in the abandonment phases of the Sasanian city at Merv (Simpson 2006).

5. The current working hypothesis is that the city's elites came under the political control of the earlier Sasanian governors already in Macrophase 5a, in mid-3rd century CE. Cribb 1990; Id. 2018. On the early acquisition of Gandhara by the Sasanians, see the evidence provided by the rock relief of Rag-i-Bibi in Northern Afghanistan (Grenet *et al.* 2007: 258-261).

6. See a reassessment of the question in de La Vaissière 2016. The rebellion occurred during the campaign of M. Aurelius Carus against Bahram II (282-283 CE) that led to the temporary Roman occupation of Ctesiphon (Eutropius, *Breviarium Hist. Rom*. 9.18: 'nuntiato Persarum tumultu'). See [Vopiscus] *Hist. Aug. Vita Cari* 8.1: 'Ingenti apparatu et toti[u]s viribus Probi profligato magna ex parte bello Sarmatico, quod gerebat, contra Persas profectus nullo sibi occurrente Mesopotamia<m> Carus cepit et <C>testifontem usque pervenit occupatisque Persis domestica seditione imperatoris Persi<ci> nomen emeruit [...]'; Claudius Mam. *Pan. Lat.* XI (III) 17.2: 'Ipsos Persas ipsumque regem adscitis Sacis et Ruffis [em. <Cussis>?] et Gelis petit frater Ormies [Hormazd] nec respicit vel pro maiestate quasi regem vel pro pietate quasi fratrem'. On the hypothesis that the rebellion occurred in Sakastan (after Agathias, *Hist.* IV 24.5.8) rather in Gandhara, see de La Vaissiére 2016 (with ref.).

7. The latter has been already proposed as comparison for Barikot complexes as far as layout (Olivieri *et al.* 2014: 140) and objects of worship (Olivieri *et al.* 2014: 95-96; Moscatelli *et al.* 2016: 52) are concerned.

8. It is worth mentioning that a stable was also documented in Unit C (Room 3088) in the service quarters located immediately to the NE of Temple C (see above).

9. In Fig. 17, for practical reasons, it was utilised the supporting pillar set in the middle of the room. In absence of that, a free-standing pole can be placed in the most convenient spot of the room.

10. The use of pouring milk and/or butter in ritual places is so widely documented in cultic places of various creeds throughout South Asia that it does not need of being illustrated here. The act of pouring clarified butter appears in several Gandharan relief representing Siddhārtha's marriage (Verardi 1994: 4-5). According to Verardi, the ritual derived from the Hindu/Vedic tradition. In the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra,* the transformation of milk to cream or butter is used in several passages as analogy to explain how sentient beings potentially possess the Buddha-nature (Liu 1982).

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