

## ACT Archaeological Fieldwork in Swat (2012)

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Almost 60 years after the foundation of the Italian Archaeological Mission in Swat, Italy and Pakistan launched a new project to revitalize Swat Archaeology (Olivieri, 2009).

“ACT (Archaeology, Community, Tourism) - Field School” is a project carried out by the Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan and the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Pakistan), and financed by the Italian Government (Olivieri, Vidale and Meister, 2012).

The Project started in March 2011 and now will complete its second year. Four 2-month long archaeological seasons were carried out so far.

To the fieldwork actively participated also students and faculty staff of the Taxila Institute of Asian Civilizations (Quaid-i Azam University) and Hazara University.

Here we are briefly presenting three archaeological projects: Amluk-dara, Barikot and Udegram.

Other activities, like Gumbat-Balo Kale, the reconstruction of the Swat Museum, the restorations of the Udegram mosque, of the Main Stupa at Saidu Sharif I, and of the Jahanabad Buddha, the latter three in their final stages, are not included, as they were thoroughly addressed in other occasions (Olivieri, Vidale and Meister, 2012).

### **Amluk-dara**

The site of Amluk-dara, first described by Aurel Stein in 1926 (Stein, 1930), was

restored by Federal DOAM in 1958-59 (second storey, N side), and briefly excavated by Federal DOAM in 1994. The Main Stupa is the major one in Swat after Shingardar, with its podium 32 m wide and 6.5 m high. Unfortunately, the site was over the time targeted by illegal excavations. A vast-scale looting activity was stopped by the local police 10 months ago, and, following a request of DOAM K-P, has been put under the protection of the Project in February 2012.

The excavation started on April 22, 2012, with a large trench (18x40m), and lasted for 9 exhausting weeks. We opened a relevant portion of the original lay-out of the stupa terrace and of the Main Stupa as well. As the layers were almost disturbed, the trench was reduced to 18x18 m. We dug the fillings of pits and tunnels, which crossed each other, intersected by ramps for wheel-barrows and small retaining walls made by the robbers during their destructions.

Four monuments came to light: the Main Stupa (30), a stupa at its North-East (61), a shrine (60) just North of the previous one, a pent roofed shrine (17) at the bottom of the Main Stupa's staircase, a shrine (100) W of the previous one.

Only North and South of stupa 61 the excavation revealed intact archaeological layers. From these we got samples of soil, organics, and charcoals for AMS-14C analysis.

The site has a long and complicated history of structural phases. According to the AMS-

14C results we may indirectly infer for the early phases a rather late Gandharan date. In fact a 2nd-3rd century CE chronology represents the earliest dating obtained from charcoal samples collected in the filling of the robbers' pits.

The most important moment of life of the monuments was the foundation of the Main Stupa (Period I) and of the coeval stupa 61 and shrine 60.

The planning of the Main Stupa was done close to the winter solstice, as suggested by the inclination of of more than 35° North-North-West (to the astronomical N). Worshippers climbing the staircase in this early phase were welcomed by monumental pillars, whose bases we actually found. Similar elements, although thinner, were found in situ in the stupa terrace of Panr I. One is decorated by a figure of Aphrodite, or at least a Hellenistic-style female figure, while the other one apparently bears a Herakles-like figure. The two pieces were later on re-used as brackets.

After the foundation of the sacred area (Period I), we observed a long series of later additions and modifications (from 4th to 7th century). In Periods II-IV the first story's staircase was gradually elongated. Most of the decoration of the Main Stupa was re-done in *kanjur* and stucco after Period II. To the same phase belong two small niches 150 and 151 cut into the staircase body, and - probably - the construction of a gigantic frontal niche, which was certainly decorated in *kanjur* and stucco. In fact, a large scar in front of the dome, on the North, and the presence of a typical pediment always associated to false-gables, suggest the existence of frontal niche. This is rarely found in real architecture, and generally absent in big stupas. However such frontal niches are documented in some late

Gandharan stupas from Kapisa, which chronology (Kuwayama, 2000) is consistent with the dating of this phase of the Main Stupa of Amluk-dara.

Another important architectural feature is represented by Vihara 17 (Periods V-VI). According to the AMS-14C data, a Shahi phase, which, by the way is also testified by a watch-tower, which ruins lay few meters North-East of the Main Stupa, is proposed for Periods V-VI. The pent roofed feature of the shrine 17, although known in Gandhara, at Saidu Sharif I and Takht-i Bahi for example, closely recalls similar post-Gupta Kashmiri architecture.

We have thus evidence of a long abandonment phase, with the progressive enshrouding of the monuments and their initial decay and looting. However, to some extent the sacred area was still functional. To Period VI dates a panel, our Inv. no. AKD 89, here documented in its find spot. Re-utilized for worship purposes, it leaned against the S wall of the first story of the stupa 61. In Period VII was used a very late between Main Stupa and stupa 61.

The chattras - although already collapsed up on the top of the dome - fell down to the top of the stupa's podium in Medieval or pre-Modern times, most probably in consequence of an earthquake. On the basis of the available AMS-14C dating, we propose a 9th-10th century CE chronology for the abandonment of the sacred area.

During the excavation, portion of the staircase as well as the roof of the shrine 17 were preliminary restored, while all the surviving stucco and plaster decoration was preliminary preserved.

## **Bir-kot-ghwandai**

The site of Bir-kot-ghwandai (Barikot), the ancient Bazira of the Graeco-Latin sources, is a very well known key-site for the study of the settlement patterns in ancient Swat, from Bronze Age onwards (Olivieri, 2003; McDowall and Callieri, 2004; Callieri, 2006 & 2007; Colliva, 2011).

ACT is currently excavating a new large area, in the South-Western sector of the ancient city. It lies to the N of the trench BKG 4/5 dug in 1990-1992 (Callieri et al. 1992; Olivieri, 1993). We exposed the largest possible area of the ancient city within the original limits provided by the S and W stretches of the city wall. Labeled BKG 11, it was divided into two sub-areas, and sectors, separated by bulks left un-excavated and used as service corridors for removing earth.

The area cover c. 6000 sqm. The W side is about 140.00 m long and the E side 105.00 m. It slopes towards N and it is marked at W by artificial step created by the buried defence wall of the ancient city.

The 4 reasons for this operation were the following:

- 1) to save the only available portion of the ancient city from the encroachment of new buildings;
- 2) to expose the largest possible area of the Late-Kushan urban lay-out within its structural limits, the city Defensive Wall;
- 3) to determine the time of the final abandonment of the city (Period VIII) as well as of the latest occupation phases, and put it in its regional historical context;

4) to ultimately confirm the historical importance of the archaeological site and to prepare the largest possible area in the form of a permanent public archaeological park, accessible to tourists and visitors.

We started the restoration of the W stretch of the Defensive Wall (the external face of which was bulldozed away in many parts). Visitors will have an easy understanding of the whole city, at least in its SW quartier, as it was in Late-Kushan times. At the same time the ruins will illustrate how the city appeared after the abandonment, when it was briefly or seasonally occupied by non-urban occupants.

Five AMS-14C samples collected in Period IX, gave us a coherent early-4th century CE chronology for this post-abandonment phase. By consequence we may suggest that the urban site was abandoned in the last decades of the 3rd century, in connection with the collapse of the Kushan system of power and the creation of the Sasanian Kushan-shahr (Bivar, 2009).

The architecture, partially excavated, is still under study.

The excavation stopped this year at the level of the final abandonment and later occupations (Period IX; early-4th century CE). However in some sectors we exposed the floors related to the last living phase of the city (Period VIII): Rooms 59-61, Court 28 and Corridor 35, Rooms 21 and 29, Street 10. Court 28 revealed the presence of a religious monument with a a phase of collapse and abandonment at the end of Period VIII (most probably end-3rd century CE - we are waiting for the new AMS-14C data). In this layers we recovered 3 Gandharan sculpures. Amongst these there is a panel representing a stupa with columns. During Period VIII the Court was affected by series of collapses with water infiltrating

from N.

In this phase the court shows a continuous surface, slightly sloping S, with 3 fire-places, small mounds of ash and a saddle-shaped quern. In this phase the monument was covered by a sort of wooden canopy as proved by two rough post-holes.

In a previous phase of the same period, the monument, a sort of domestic shrine or aedicula, now preserved up to the cornice and part of the coping, had a cella with external side niches, open to S, and enclosing a small rectangular altar.

In a secondary access to the Court from Street 10, several large jars were lined along with 3 grinding stones. At the very end of the Corridor close to the threshold acceding to Court 28, we found, close to a stony cist, a small stele with a bearded deity sitting on a throne, wearing Iranian cloths, and holding a wine-cup and a goat-head. Although the iconographic features recall those of Dyonisos as "Old man", the deity certainly belongs to a local pantheon. The stele matches another object found in a domestic niche in the same structural Period VIII, the image of a female deity holding a cornucopia and a goat-head.

In the layers associated to the early collapse of such domestic shrine we found other parts of the original decoration, mostly re-used, with scenes of Buddha's life in the palace, and of the Dipankara-jatakas. Amongst the former, we found an outstanding panel representing the Great Departure, with clear Sasanian features.

In Period VIII, In a cluster of connected rooms pertaining to the service-hall way connecting the Court 57 to Street 10, we found a stele representing a sitting Maitreya. The stele was found inside a large jar, close

to a threshold leading to the Court. The stele was probably a much older object of worship, as it matches perfectly another stele with Maitreya in an earlier structural context.

### Udegram

Everyone links the ancient cemeteries of the late Bronze and Iron ages of the region to the names of Giorgio Stacul and Ahmed Hassan Dani. Although many cemeteries were excavated in the past, many uncertainties remained about their architecture, absolute chronology and the rituals of deposition. ACT began a new phase of archaeological exploration of these cemeteries. This program of small-scale excavations was meant to act as training camp-site for Pakistani students. Eventually the contribution of the Hazara University students was instrumental for the success of this program. The program started at Gogdara 4, near Udegram, in 2011. Contrarily to what previously stated, the original trampling surface of the graveyard was to a great extent preserved. Lines of post-holes, left by wooden fences or railings around the mouth of the graves, were easily recorded. Two graves were completely excavated, reconstructing complex rituals of deposition and recovering substantial funerary furnishings (various pottery types and metal objects). AMS-14C analysis provided a cogent 13th-10th century BCE dating.

In June 2012 ACT opened a second training camp-site at the protohistoric cemetery of Udegram. About 10 ancient graves were partially exposed by modern excavations for a house building yard. Lines of heavy stone slabs were laid flat, at the bottom of large pits. Some graves were marked by wooden posts. We recorded a section about 30 m long, and 4 m deep, with the precise order in which each grave had been made. Graves

were arranged in rows, set into a thick artificial terrace and, like at Gogdara, signalled by rows and circles of decayed wooden poles. The ancient cemetery of Udegram had been carefully planned and constructed, at the price of an intensive collective effort, in a tract of the local slopes where cultivation was impossible because of the local schist bedrock. When the excavation was resumed in October-November 2012, we opened a trench along the previous section. In a strip of about 18 x 5 m, we dug a total of almost 30 graves, tightly clustered and partially superimposed one to the other. Some graves had a stone wall, others were protected by walls and enclosures in beaten clay.

Through a careful stratigraphic recording, we obtained new taphonomic evidence and data for the reconstruction of funerary rituals of unexpected complexity. New AMS-14C datings and anthropological study will spread a new light on this crucial civilization of ancient Swat. Among the grave finds range pottery, remains of cloth, copper pins of different fashion, earrings and other ornaments, ivory spindles, terracotta and chlorite spinning whorls, and a rare terracotta figurine of a mother-goddess. The cemetery, like that of Gogdara, seems to have been used between the end of the 2nd millennium BCE and the first half of the 1st millennium BCE.

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Fig. 1 - The excavated area of Amluk-dara (AKD) seen from NNE: Stupa 61 is visible at the left of the main staircase; the partially-restored sector of the staircase of the Great Stupa is also visible (photo by E. Loliva, ISCR - Rome).



Fig. 2 - The excavated area of Amluk-dara (AKD) seen from NNW: Shrine 17 and the remains of Shrine 100 (right) are visible (photo by E. Loliva, ISCR - Rome).



Fig. 3 - The excavated area of Bir-kot-ghwandai, Trench 11 W seen from NNW: Street 10 is visible along the remains of the ancient defensive wall (partly restored) (photo by L.M. Olivieri, IsIAO).



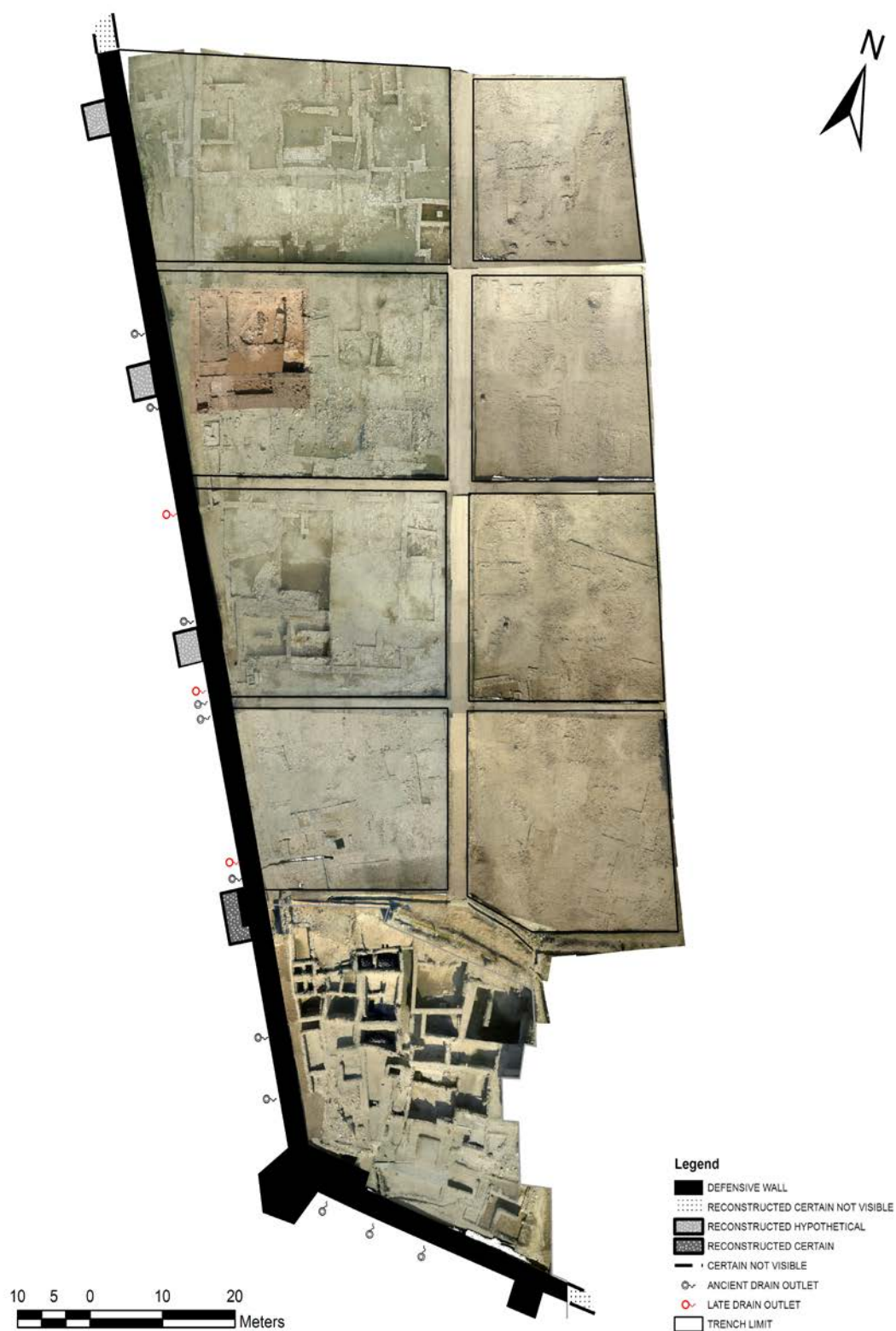


Fig. 4 - The excavated area of Bir-kot-ghwandai, Trench 11: Aerial photo showing also the excavation sectors' limits, the defensive circuit and the drainage outlet's system (photo by F Genchi, University of Bologna).

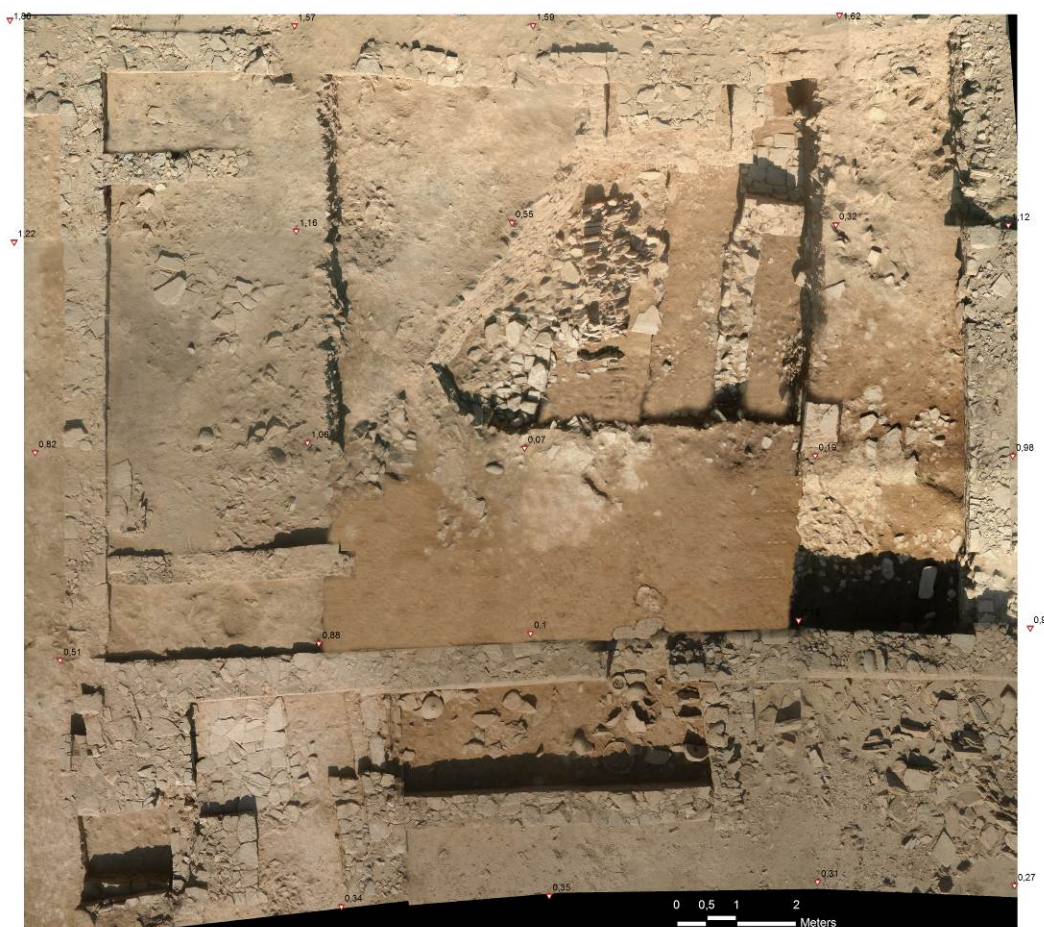


Fig. 5 - The excavated area of Bir-kot-ghwandai, Trench 11W: Aerial close-up of Court 28 with the Shrine (top, center), the early collapse layers (center), the later floors connecting to Corridor 35 (bottom) and Street 100 (right) (photo by F. Genchi, University of Bologna).



Fig. 6 - The excavated area of Udegram Graveyard (UDG): Aerial photograph (photo by F. Genchi, University of Bologna).





Fig. 7 - The excavated area of Udegram Graveyard (UDG): Grave 10 (photo by R. Micheli, Sovrintendenza del Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage).



Fig. 8 - The excavated area of Udegram Graveyard (UDG): Grave 4 (photo by M. Vidale, University of Padua).