

THE EXCAVATIONS AT SURKH KOTAL AND  
THE PROBLEM OF HELLENISM IN BACTRIA  
AND INDIA

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JUST ten years ago nobody had ever heard of Surkh Kotal,<sup>1</sup> nobody including myself.

Even now, do not try to locate it on a map: it is to be found on no map.<sup>2</sup> Is this due to its lying in some remote corner of some unexplored district of Afghanistan? Not in the least. It lies on the main road from Kabul, the capital of the country, to Mazar-i Sharif, the capital of the Northern province, about 8 miles from Baghlān and 10 miles from Pul-i Khumri, two modern towns in full development (Fig. 1). How, then, could it remain unknown till 1951? Well, just because when life, on any given site, has stopped for about a millennium and a half, when the site itself is but a barren hill,<sup>3</sup> then nothing is left; not even a name.

When we first visited the place (Fig. 2), ten years ago, and asked for the name of the ruins on the hill, the answer was: 'It is a Kafir Kala', a Heathen's Castle.

Now there are scores of Kafir Kalas all over the East: Kafir Kala is a kind of standard name for any pre-Islamic ruin; thus to call a ruin a Kafir Kala amounts to admitting its anonymity. While we were trying to elicit from our informants some other name, somebody said: here is the Surkh Kotal, the Red Pass; and these ruins are the Kafir Kala of the Surkh Kotal. We adopted that name, and very soon shortened it into just Surkh Kotal.

The real name was to be discovered a little later, not by us on the spot but by a scholar working in England.<sup>4</sup>

You may wonder how we discovered the site. Just as *we* did not discover the name, *we* did not discover the site. This is how it happened. In September 1951, one morning I was sitting at my desk opening my mail. I had a letter from an Afghan friend. Suddenly I saw some photographs falling from the envelope. I still remember the shock this sight gave me. For here were stones bearing letters,<sup>5</sup> large Greek letters on fine, well-cut

blocks obviously from an important monument: never had a find like this been made before in Afghanistan! A few weeks later we were on the spot.

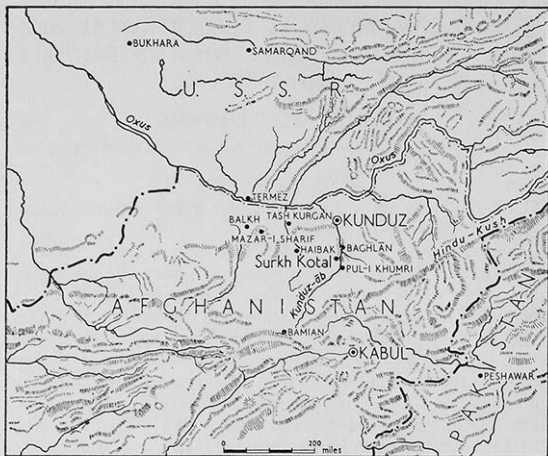


FIG. 1.

The stones, seven in number, had appeared at the foot of the hill. Before 1951 the road used to climb the 'Red Pass', west of the hill. But in 1951 H.E. Ismail Khan, Governor General of the Kataghan province had decided to avoid that difficult passage by having a new section of the road built around the eastern side of the hill.<sup>6</sup> Here the blocks had been found and, with them some remains of mud-brick architecture: a strong square tower, which we called the 'bastion' (Pl. Ia).

Now what was this 'bastion'? At first glance one thing was clear: it was but a small part of a large complex of ruins. Before any excavation had taken place, after just a few hours walking about the site, we could make four important observations:

1. A large part of the hill was walled in. We called this wall the Outer Enclosure. Most of it was perfectly clear, though buried. It was of irregular shape and included the flat top of the hill, and most of its eastern slope (A on Fig. 2).



FIG. 2. Sketch-plan of the site and its environs.

A = the acropolis; s = the sanctuary; p = the Buddhist platform; 1 = old road before 1951; 2 = shorter road from Pul-i-Khumri, 1955; 3 = new road round the hill, 1951; 4 = irrigation canals. Horizontally hatched = marshes; cross-hatched = fields.

2. Inside this enclosure another one could be seen, smaller, but still an imposing ruin, of rectangular shape. We called it the Inner Enclosure (s on Fig. 2).

3. Inside the Inner Enclosure there was a large, flat mound obviously containing the main monument, the centre of the whole complex.

4. Some architectural fragments were lying about, clearly from no small building. Especially notable were fragments of several very large column bases (Pl. Ib), and a big slab, 2.20 metres high, bearing a sculpture in high relief,<sup>7</sup> unfortunately mutilated beyond recognition.

Here, then, we were confronted with a very large complex of ruins, and a most intriguing one, for it seemed at first sight to differ greatly from the usual Buddhist monastery complex, as known from scores of instances in Northwest India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. I cannot say the resolution, which was going to fix us for years to that spot, was carefully thought out. No: we came, we saw, we decided! Half an hour after our arrival we knew already that we were going to excavate there. This was in December 1951. In April 1952 we were back with all our staff and material.

Our first goal was the mound (Pl. IIa). After a few weeks it had revealed the ruin of a temple (Fig. 3). This building had strong walls of mud brick with timber reinforcements. It rested on a large brick podium framed by a stone revetment adorned with small pilasters (Pl. IIb). Its plan was a peculiar but a simple one.<sup>8</sup> It was larger in width than in length, and showed a square central room surrounded on three sides by a corridor. There were three doors, all of them on the main side, the middle door giving access to the central room, while the side doors led to the corridor. In the centre of the square room there stood a large stone platform, with a column base at each of the four corners. From the rear three steps led up to the platform. The walls of the room were adorned with pilasters (Pl. IIIa).

If the building in the mound was a temple, then the space around the temple should be the courtyard of that temple, and the Inner Enclosure should be a peribolos-wall, marking the limits of the sacred precinct.

The following year was spent excavating the courtyard and the wall. At the end of 1953 we had most of the plan.<sup>9</sup> From the outside the sanctuary looked like a fortress: it had towers, narrow entrances, and a *chemin de ronde*, the evidence for this last feature

being four staircases leading up to it in the corner towers (Fig. 3).

From the inside the courtyard rather resembled some Italian piazza, surrounded by porticoes. In the rear walls of these porticoes square niches were to be seen. From fragments lying

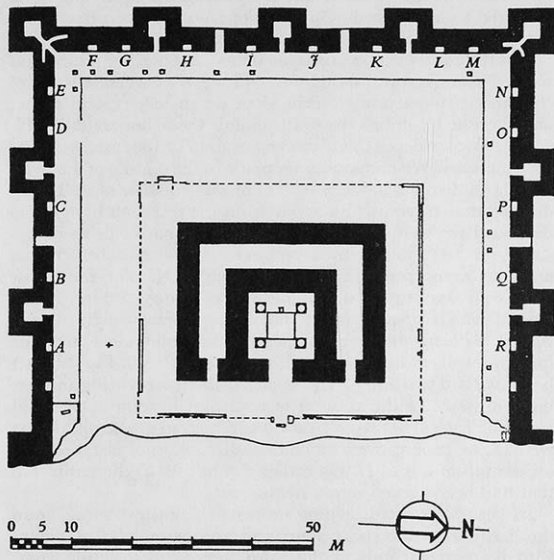


FIG. 3. Plan of the temple and its courtyard, first period only. (Drawn by M. Le Berre.)

about, it soon became clear that these niches (A to R on our plan) had contained great figures, carved in clay, and brightly painted. Most of them had unhappily been reduced to powder.

At the end of 1953, then, everything seemed clear: we had a Citadel, the Acropolis as we called it, the Outer Enclosure being the wall of that Citadel. Its centre was marked by the great temple surrounded by its courtyard, in a crowning position, the hill fulfilling somewhat the function of a pedestal for the monument. We were already making plans for the final publication.

Of course several problems remained to be solved. Where

had the inscription originally been set up? The seven blocks already mentioned had been found, let it be recalled, at the bottom of the hill; and the excavation at the top had brought no answer to that question.

Where was the access to the temple? Normally it was to be expected from the front. But the slope was so steep that I did not deem it possible.

Did the courtyard remain open on its eastern side? This again seemed scarcely possible. One could see the two side-walls of the sanctuary extending on the slope down to a certain point; and there a big transverse-wall joining them horizontally (Pl. III*b*). We considered this transverse-wall to be the eastern wall of the sanctuary. We had soundings made in the middle of that wall hoping to discover a doorway. There was no trace of it. Thus I decided that there was no access from the front, and having so decided I wrote it, and having written it I had it printed.<sup>10</sup>

A year later this printed opinion of mine had become an error, as monumental as the monument itself. For the transverse-wall was but the sustaining-wall of a huge terrace, in the axis of which stood a large stairway, 7 metres wide, deeply ruined, with no step left, but nevertheless quite clear, from its fine side-walls of cut stones, still standing high (Pl. IV*b*). Down below we had two other terraces each of them supporting another flight of steps. In the autumn of 1954, having dug a big axial trench (Pl. IV*a*) we were nearing the bottom of the hill. What we had, we progressively came to realize, was not just a temple on the top of a hill. It was rather the hill itself, the entire hill that had been turned into a monument.

In 1955 we started digging on a new front, extending from the 'bastion' to the rocky spur, and approximately coincident with the eastern limit of the third terrace. Below this front, distinctly apparent on our photographs (Pls. V, VI), we began clearing the area bordering the modern road, with the hope of finding remains of the façade of the sanctuary and of its entrance. Projecting downwards foundations (Pl. VI) were discovered: they belonged to a fourth flight of steps extending right to the road, the main road from Kabul to Mazar-i-Sharif, a road most important indeed for the economic life of modern Afghanistan. I felt that we should cut that road, and asked the Afghan authorities. I want to say here how grateful we are for the liberal way this permission was given; for if this was certainly to the advantage of archaeology, it was just as certainly for months to the disadvantage of traffic.

Our pictures (Pl. VII) show the road after we had cut it, in July 1956. To the right are the foundations of the upper part of the fourth flight of steps already found in 1955. To the left is the lower part of that flight, with its steps preserved, seventeen beautiful steps (Pl. VIII), some of them bearing a mysterious sign looking like the 'trident of Shiva'<sup>11</sup> (Pl. IXa).

This excavation alongside and under the road (1955-7) brought two discoveries. The first discovery was rather surprising. Starting downwards from the hilltop we had found three mighty terraces, each of them carrying a flight of the monumental stairway. The lowest of the three, the corners of which were marked on the south by the 'bastion' and on the north by a rocky spur, we considered to be the basic terrace, its eastern front thus forming the façade of the sanctuary. That there should be a fourth flight of steps leading up to it was but natural. But that there should exist yet a fourth and still lower terrace, was completely unexpected. This we now called the 'bottom terrace'. It differed from the three others in one important point. It consisted really of two separate terraces, a northern and a southern one, framing the bottom flight, the stairway being not, in this case supported by the terrace, but, so to speak, sunk into it.<sup>12</sup> Anyway it seemed now that the front of the bottom terrace formed the façade of the sanctuary, and this inference seemed to be confirmed by our second discovery, a truly beautiful one: at the foot of the terrace, obviously fallen from its façade, lay a huge squarish slab (Pl. IXb) covered with Greek letters, in perfect condition.<sup>13</sup> This was 6 May 1957. Some time before we had found the lowest step of the fourth flight marked by two small pilasters the bases of which were still *in situ*. Here then we thought, here at last, we had reached the bottom, the level of the plain. It seemed that nothing remained to be done, except the clearing of about 4 metres of accumulated debris before the façade of the sanctuary.

This we did in 1958. In front of the stairway we found a large empty space, neatly paved with bricks, which we called the 'parvis'. It ended in the fields. At the limit of the paved surface, a few blocks were lying about. Clearing them, we discovered other blocks, many of them; then, somewhat lower, an irrigation canal; then, beyond the canal, a row of stones, neatly arranged, with lower down a second row, and soon found ourselves going down once more: we had found a fifth flight of steps (Pl. X)! It took us two campaigns to clear it. It consisted of a steep dromos the walls of which were stuffed with blocks from an

earlier building, some of them bearing fragments of inscriptions (Pl. XI). Fifty-three of these blocks have been recovered (Pl. XII). They have been shown by Professor Benveniste to belong to two great inscriptions (S.K. 4A and S.K. 4B), which he has succeeded in reassembling. As a whole they give the same text as the slab (S.K. 4M), but with variants at the end.<sup>14</sup>

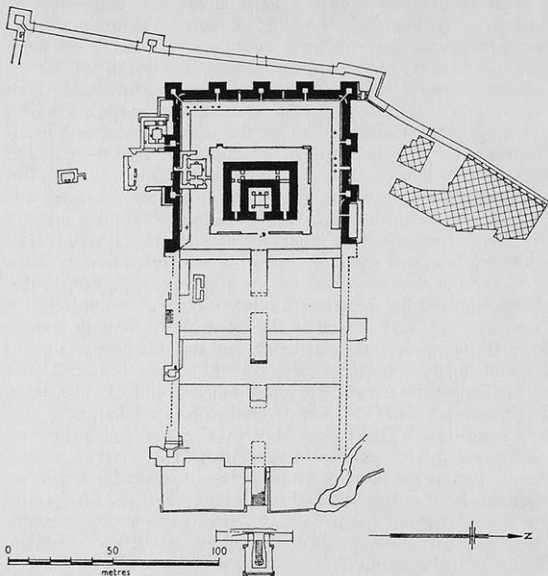


FIG. 4. Sketch-plan of the sanctuary. (Drawn by M. Le Berre.)

With the twenty-eighth and last step we found the dromos ending in a cylindrical well (Pls. XIII, XIV, XVa). We had spent six years (1954-9) following down the five successive flights of steps, and had reached a level about 55 metres below our starting-point at the top of the hill.

This was the situation at the end of 1959. Two things remained to be done; first we had to excavate the bottom terrace, still largely buried; then we had to clear the debris, still covering the



façade on both sides of the well. The year 1960 (two campaigns) was devoted to these tasks, and brought us a last discovery. Just above the level of the bottom terrace M. Bruno Dagens, who was in charge of the excavation, found two stone courses of the façade of the third terrace still *in situ*, with eight blocks bearing Greek letters on the lower course (Pl. XVb). These letters were the end of the great inscription (S.K. 1), the first scattered blocks of which had been found in 1951 by the workmen of the road, and for which we had been in search for nine years. We have grounds to believe that the inscription, consisting of one long line of large-size letters, extended over the whole length (about 75 metres) of the front wall of the third terrace.<sup>15</sup> Let us add that a text in such a position may reasonably be assumed to have contained the dedication of the sanctuary. Thus our first hypothesis finally appears to be correct: the front of the third terrace formed the original façade of the sanctuary. And the bottom terrace, which had caused us for some time such perplexities, is to be considered as a later addition. Let it be recalled that the great monolithic inscription S.K. 4M (Pl. IXb, see above, p. 84, and note 13) came from the bottom terrace, a fact with which W. B. Henning's interpretation of this inscription as a restoration text agrees very well indeed.

If we try to sum up the results of the excavations at the bottom of the hill (1955-60), the history of the monument appears more complicated than we had first expected (Fig. 4). Three periods at least are to be distinguished.

In the first period there were but three terraces, each carrying one flight of steps, with one more flight of steps (the 'bottom flight', then still outside the sanctuary) leading up to a (lost) monumental gateway, at the centre of the façade.

After an interval of neglect<sup>16</sup> followed a second period: a restoration was undertaken by an official named Nokonzoko, and commemorated by an inscription preserved in three versions.<sup>17</sup> At the same time the 'bottom terrace' was being built on both sides of the 'bottom flight': that this addition should be a part of Nokonzoko's restoration work is to be inferred from the fact that the slab bearing the inscription S.K. 4M is affixed on the brick façade of the 'bottom terrace'. The 'parvis' and the canal should also date from that period.

Lastly, of a third period we have the well. The walls bearing the two inscriptions S.K. 4A and B having been pulled down, the blocks therefrom are being reused as building material for the side walls of the stairway leading down to the well. The

construction of the well results in pushing back westwards and considerably narrowing down a section of the canal, as the masonry of the well now encroaches upon it, obviously for a bridge, linking the well with the sanctuary, and protected by side walls. The existence of such walls is to be inferred from their foundations, on both sides of the bridge: sixteen heavy monolithic pillars, eight on each bank of the canal.<sup>18</sup>

I have tried to give you an idea of our excavation. As it developed we were confronted with a number of problems, as all excavators are. Let us now consider some of them.

A first problem was: when had that mighty sanctuary (Pl. XVI) been built? And by whom? Luckily we had no great pains in settling this most important question. From the beginning we had found bronze coins much corroded but belonging to a well-known class: they were coins of the second Kushâna dynasty, the dynasty of the great Kanishka. On the other hand we had the seven blocks with Greek letters. Now these letters showed some peculiarities characteristic of the Greek alphabet of the Kushânas.<sup>19</sup> Thus, when we later found the inscriptions mentioning Kanishka and showing him to be the founder of the sanctuary, it was a very great pleasure but no great surprise.

These inscriptions of course brought new questions with them. What language did they speak? What story did they tell? I am afraid, for the story at least, we shall have to wait for some time. The language is clearly a language of the Iranian family, and 'Bactrian' seems the most appropriate name for this idiom, the old native language of Bactria.<sup>20</sup> Now this language is unknown, the sole documents we had before being some legends on coins and seals. Our inscriptions are the first text of any length ever discovered. As the words are not separated, the first task consists in trying to recognize them. As we have no bilingual texts the meaning of the words can only be established by comparisons with other related languages. This is no easy task.

Nevertheless we may be confident that the deciphering, already brilliantly launched by A. Maricq, W. B. Henning, and others, will succeed, even if new documents fail to bring new help. But we have to be patient. For the time being, let us content ourselves with the knowledge that the temple was built by Kanishka, that great figure of Buddhist legend who is also a great historical king, whose dominions extended from the Iaxartes to the Ganges, and whose exact dates, though unfortunately still unknown, must lie somewhere in the last

quarter of the first century or in the first half of the second century A.D.

As soon as it became clear that we had found a temple, a second problem arose. Which god did it belong to? What kind of a cult was it for? A striking feature of the temple is the fine stone platform right in the middle of the cella. It is very large.<sup>21</sup> With its stairway at the rear, it does not seem to be a pedestal

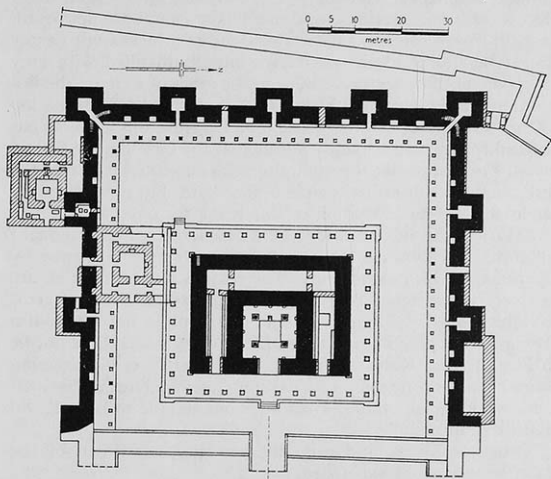


FIG. 5. Main temple and courtyard, showing additions (hatched), with temples D (in the courtyard) and B (outside). (Drawn by M. Le Berre.)

for cult statues which one would not expect to be situated on a platform of that sort and size. These steps were obviously meant for people, probably priests, who had to ascend the platform. In this Bactrian world, in this mother country of Zoroaster where Fire temples existed everywhere down to the eleventh century, as attested by Al-Biruni, is it not the most likely surmise to consider the monument as a Fire temple? And the platform as a pedestal for the Fire altar, where the ceremonies of feeding the Fire were performed, as we see it on Sassanian coins, and as we know it from Zoroastrian practice in Sassanian times and down to our own age? This, at least, was my suggestion in 1952.

In 1953 while excavating the peribolos we made an unexpected discovery: we found a small building (Fig. 5), set against the outer wall of the peribolos and consisting of a square room surrounded by narrow corridors. Obviously it was a small temple; we called it temple B.<sup>22</sup> Right in the middle of that room there was a square block built of sun-dried bricks, this time not a pedestal for a Fire altar, but the Fire altar itself, adorned with a motif of birds carved in clay (Pl. XVIIa). That the altar was a Fire altar is quite certain, for though its top had been destroyed, it still bore a square cavity, the sides of which were deeply burnt by fire. And the cavity we found still filled with grey ashes of very fine texture similar to the ashes of a cigar: the last remains of the Perpetual Fire. This I considered a confirmation of my surmise about the great temple. Now this surmise has been disputed and I readily admit that the fact that we have a small Fire temple on the same site is no absolute proof that the great temple was also a temple of that kind. But it seems to me at least a strong indication of this being so. My contradictor, A. Maricq, did not want it to be a Fire temple, for he thought it must be a dynastic temple; that is, a temple dedicated by Kanishka to his own divinity. The reasons for this opinion are a set of monuments from Mathurâ, and seem to me of great weight indeed.<sup>23</sup> But why should our temple not be both a Dynastic temple and a Fire temple? Why should there not be a Fire of King Kanishka, as there are later Fires of Sassanian kings? Until strong reasons to the contrary are given, and at least as a working hypothesis, I consider our temple to be a Royal Kushan Fire temple.

Other problems, and very difficult ones, are raised by the later history of the sanctuary.

The monuments on the top of the hill clearly belong to (at least) three different periods.<sup>24</sup> For the greater part they are of the original period, going back to Kanishka. A second period sees a number of changes and additions, made to the temple during its life-time. Finally, after a thorough destruction of the temple by a fire, we have a period of revival, attested by the reconstruction, on a modest scale, of the central room of the temple.<sup>25</sup>

On the other hand, as we have seen (above, p. 85), the monuments at the bottom of the hill do also clearly belong to (at least) three different periods. But the only thing we know for sure, both for the top and for the bottom, is the Kanishka date of the first period. That the changes made to the temple

during the second period should be part of Nokonzoko's restoration work is possible, even likely, but cannot be proved. Again we are tempted to link the third period on the top of the hill with the third period at the bottom, i.e. to consider the reconstruction of the temple after the fire contemporaneous with the building of the well. But this too is just surmise.

A particular problem of the history of the second period is the reason for the existence of three copies of Nokonzoko's inscription; and of the place inscriptions A and B occupied before being demolished to be reused in the well. A particular problem of the history of the latest period is the reason for the building of the well, a considerable undertaking, which cannot be accounted for just by lack of water, as the canal was providing it, and which therefore may be explained by the necessity of supplying the sanctuary with pure water.

Finally a last problem may be mentioned. In Kanishka's time as in Nokonzoko's time we consider the temple to be a Royal Kushan Fire. But what about the later period (or periods)? Here we are in the dark, and the possibility of the nature of the cult having changed, and of the temple having become a Zoroastrian Fire, though entirely hypothetical, cannot be excluded altogether, and should perhaps be evoked.

In spite of so many unsolved problems the excavations at Surkh Kotal may already be said to shed fresh light on one of great historical importance, though still a very dark one: the problem of Hellenism in Bactria and India, and of its survival in these countries after Greek domination had come to an end.

Until now, if we discount the Greek alphabet used by the Kushans for their un-Greek language, we have seen rather little that is Greek: a divinity that is not a Zeus or an Artemis but the Kushan King, receiving a cult which, if I am right, we should call a Fire cult; a temple of a most un-Greek plan inside a fortress-like precinct of a most un-Greek aspect; an architecture using mainly sun-dried brick and only secondarily stone; architectural ornament still partly following old oriental traditions, as shown for instance by its use of stepped battlements (Pl. XVII**b**), or of brick patterns for the external decoration of its walls (Pl. XVIII**a**).

Nevertheless a number of features of this architecture and of its decoration are of obvious Greek origin, as for instance the peristyle around the temple and the porticoes around the courtyard (Fig. 5); most of the architectural mouldings in stone; the Corinthian order of the pilasters on the podium (Pl. XVIII**b**);

a frieze with a motif of garlands borne by winged Amorini (Pl. XVIII*c*).

The same duality may be observed in figurative sculpture, of which we have fragments in stone and in clay.

In stone we have three statues, all three showing men from the steppe in native dress and hieratic pose. One could hardly imagine anything more un-Greek than these rigid figures (Pl. XIX), with their flat surfaces and unnaturalistic draperies.

But the sculpture in clay (see above, p. 81), although preserved only in fragments, most of them very small (Pl. XX), still clearly shows on the one hand remains of figures similar to the stone statues, on the other hand remains of Greek drapery (Pl. XXI).

The general picture, then, is a simple one. We have un-Greek buildings but clad with Hellenized architectural ornament; men (and gods) some of which retain their native appearance while others have taken a Hellenized garment; in short, oriental art, but oriental art in Greek dress. Now this is precisely what could be said of the celebrated Graeco-Buddhist art, that starts about the time of Kanishka and flourishes south of the Hindukush both in Kapisa, i.e. Eastern Afghanistan, quite close to Surkh Kotal, and in Gandhâra, i.e. the old Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan. Should we say then that, at the time of Kanishka, the Hindukush was the limit between these two arts, between Graeco-Buddhist art in the south and this new, non-Buddhist art which we are discovering in the north? It may be so. Whether we should accept it for certain depends on the date of a small monument, the last of our discoveries at Surkh Kotal, of which I have to speak now.

While we were excavating the monument on the hill, we were shown one day a Corinthian capital of a type slightly different from those which we had already found on the acropolis.

Having succeeded, not without difficulty, in discovering the exact spot in the plain (P on our sketch, Fig. 2), about 2 km. from the hill, exactly on the axis of the monumental stairway, we started digging. After three days we had uncovered a beautiful stone-wall adorned with pilasters (Pl. XXII*a*). After a few weeks we had the plan of the monument. It was a squarish platform (Pl. XXII*b*) that had carried colossal statues of clay. Of these statues very little remained, but their existence is nevertheless quite certain; remains of drapery were found, as well as fragments of two feet (Pl. XXIII), about three times larger than life-size. Knowing the Buddhist fondness for colossal statues we

thought at once that the new monument might be Buddhist, but we also doubted, for some time, whether this could ever be proved. Now, of the forty pilasters that adorned the platform twenty-five capitals are preserved. Twenty-four of them bear a little bust (Pl. XXIVa), none of them definitely Buddhist; but on the twenty-fifth the bust is replaced by an object, a cult-object on its draped base, shown as it was venerated in North-west India, and as we know it from a number of Gandhâra reliefs:<sup>26</sup> the turban of the Bodhisattva (Pl. XXIVb).

This leaves no room for doubt. Here at Surkh Kotal, at the foot of the acropolis and of its great non-Buddhist sanctuary, we have a truly Graeco-Buddhist monument.

Is it contemporary with the sanctuary? Does it belong to the time of Kanishka? This is the problem. But the architecture and its decoration are so similar that the difference in times is unlikely to be of great length. One great fact is clear at Surkh Kotal itself. Non-Buddhist art of Bactria, as revealed by the Kanishka sanctuary on one hand, and Graeco-Buddhist art in general, both north and south of the Hindukush, on the other hand, are to a very large extent but one art, or at least one style, although belonging to two different religions. I cannot help recalling here the well-known situation in the Roman empire about the end of the third and during the fourth century. The traditional Graeco-Roman art was continuing while a new Christian art was being born. But very often we are unable to distinguish the Christian monuments from the pagan ones; they are so similar that without some clue such as an inscription or some clearly Christian scene or symbol to settle the problem, we cannot know. The same is the case here; without the turban of the Bodhisattva on one isolated Corinthian capital (had, for instance, this capital been lost) we should not have been able to ascribe the monument to the New Faith. The Buddhist art of Kushâna times in Gandhâra and the non-Buddhist art of Kushâna times in Bactria are twin brothers. Now Gandhâra art we call Graeco-Buddhist art. What are we going to call the non-Buddhist art of Bactria? The word 'Graeco-Bactrian' cannot serve. Being already in use for the period of Greek domination, the word is not available. On the other hand, this Kushâna art of Bactria is, I believe, something much larger than Bactria. Bactria in the second century A.D. is a part of the old world of the Iranian countries, as well as of the new world of the Iranian invaders. I think we are justified then in calling it 'Graeco-Iranian'.

By the old world of the Iranian countries I mean, of course, the world of the Achaemenid Empire. Here is the source for this strange architecture, intimately combining the use of mud-brick, of timber, and of well-cut stone. Here is the source for the very plan of our temple, as shown by a comparison with the temple at Susa excavated some seventy years ago by Marcel Dieulafoy:<sup>27</sup> it has the same cella with its roof resting on four columns, surrounded by the same corridor on three sides. Here is the source of our stepped battlements. Here is the origin of some of the characteristic recipes used by Kushan artists: of a certain type of heavy folds for instance, falling straight down like pipes and forming a little sinus at the bottom; or of another kind of folds, just as stereotyped, consisting of a succession of sharp angles forming a kind of herring-bone pattern, sometimes combining with the former, the 'pipes' alternating regularly with V-shaped angles (Pl. XIX), just as they do in Achaemenid art.<sup>28</sup>

By the new world of the Iranian invaders on the other hand, I mean the world of the new masters: Sakas, Parthians, Kushanas. These people wear the dress and the armament of the nomad horsemen from the steppe, for to them is due the now complete supremacy of cavalry, definitively discarding the chariot that was still used for ceremony by the Old Persian kings and for battle (remember Gaugamela) by the Old Persian armies.

These are the two components that have mixed in Bactria with the imported forms of Greek art. Now, as we have just seen, this mixture is not now discovered for the first time. It was already well known in Gandhâra. With Greek architectural ornament Gandhâra art shows 'Persepolitan' features. Side by side with figures clad like Greek citizens and gods it shows other figures clad like cavalry from central Asia.

The felt-cap, the riding-coat, sometimes trimmed with fur, of our Kushan princes at Surkh Kotal are also worn by Buddhist donors in Gandhâra.<sup>29</sup> And not only in Gandhâra. We have them farther down in India, at Mathurâ in the Ganges plain. And the statues from this site do not just show an anonymous Kushan prince, as do our statues from Surkh Kotal: some are identified by inscriptions—one of them shows Kanishka himself.<sup>30</sup>

Now these statues from Mathurâ, though found in a Buddhist or Jaina environment, have as little to do with Buddhism as our statues from Surkh Kotal.

The invaders of the Ganges plain being the same as the



invaders of the Oxus and of the Indus plains, these statues fully deserve the name Graeco-Iranian, just as do our statues from Bactria.

Thus the Hellenized Buddhist arts of India, both at Mathurâ and in Gandhâra, cease to appear as isolated enigmas. We begin to see these arts taking their place in a wider picture, as a part and as an offspring of a complex originally foreign to India, the Graeco-Iranian complex of Bactrian provenance.

How do we know this complex to have formed in Bactria? After all, what we have at Surkh Kotal is not Graeco-Bactrian art of the third century B.C.; it is Kushâna art of the second century A.D. It has often been remarked that for the Greek period we have not one monument from Bactria except the coins. This is still true. It has been observed that the idea of Kushâna art being descended from Graeco-Bactrian art was a surmise. It still is a surmise. It will become a certainty only when at last the monuments of the Greeks themselves begin to emerge from Bactrian soil. I am not sure that we ourselves will see this, but I am confident that it will happen one day or another. In risking such a prophecy, I know that I am in danger of being considered imprudent. Well, I feel somewhat in the position of an astronomer who, believing he has discovered unexplained features in the orbit of a planet decides that these can only be accounted for by the existence of some other planet. This other planet, 'Graeco-Bactrian art', still lies hidden somewhere under the Bactrian horizon.

If ever it does rise above the horizon, what will it look like? It has generally been admitted that the art of the Greek masters of Bactria could have been but Greek, as Greek as their language and culture must have been. And their coins, the sole documents we have, seemingly lend great weight, it must be confessed, to this preconceived opinion. But are coins really qualified to testify for all the different branches of an art otherwise lost? Let us just imagine what kind of a picture we should draw of the art and culture of British India if we had to build it up solely from the Indian coinage of Queen Victoria or King Edward VII!

Rather than coins from Bactria let us consider monumental art, though of necessity outside Bactria. One great art exactly contemporaneous with the climax of the Bactrian Greeks in the third century B.C. is the earliest art of India, the art of Aśoka. Now this art is an original mixture of an Indian element with two foreign elements, one being an Old Persian import, the other being a Greek import. These two foreign elements are generally

supposed to have mixed in India. But why should they not have mixed already before being brought there?

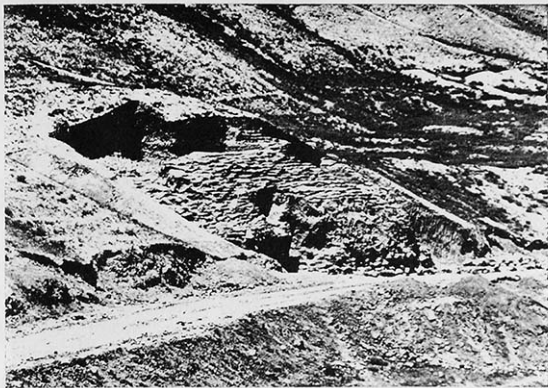
No answer can yet be given to this leading question. Let it just be said that what we know today of Kushâna art in Bactria renders it at least likely that, centuries earlier, the Graeco-Iranian marriage had actually taken place there, in that rich country between the Oxus and the Hindukush, nowadays northern Afghanistan, which, paradoxically and in spite of its remoteness, seems to have been the most Hellenized of all Iranian lands.

#### NOTES

(*BSOAS* = *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, London; *CRAI* = *Comptes-rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions*, Paris; *FA* = *Fasti Archaeologici*, Firenze; *JA* = *Journal Asiatique*, Paris; *Mém. DAFA* = *Mémoires de la Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan*, Paris)

1. Preliminary reports of the excavation at Surkh Kotal have been given in *JA*, 1952, 1954, 1955, and a report covering the years 1955-60 will be given next year in the same periodical. News has been given in *CRAI* and *FA*. Bibliography up to 1959 in *Antiquity*, xxxiii, 1959, pp. 81-86.
2. But see our sketch-map here, Fig. 1.
3. For a view of the hill, see *JA*, ccxl, 1952, p. 435.
4. See W. B. Henning, in *BSOAS*, 1956, p. 356. The old name, *Bagolaggo*, still survives in the name of the district and of the modern town of Baghlan, the etymology of which it explains.
5. Reproduced in *JA*, ccxl, 1952, p. 439 and in *FA* vii (1952), 1954, 2834, fig. 70. They are fragments of inscr. S.K. 1, see p. 85.
6. See Fig. 2, also the sketch-plan in *JA*, loc. cit., p. 437.
7. *JA*, loc. cit., p. 443.
8. We are describing here the original plan. The temple was found with additions: see *JA*, ccxl, 1952, p. 440, where its later history is discussed. It was surrounded by a peristyle. Though no column bases were found *in situ*, this is quite certain, being proved by a study of the foundations. The additions and the (restored) peristyle are shown on Fig. 5.
9. *JA*, ccxlii, 1954, p. 163, fig. 1: a small area still remained to be cleared.
10. *JA*, ccxlii, 1954, pp. 179-81.
11. For Shiva-Herakles in Bactria, see a recently discovered relief from Saozma Kala (to the south of Balkh), Kl. Fischer, *Arch. Anz.* 1956, p. 417.
12. On Pls. VI, VII the north wall of the south terrace, with its arrow-slits, is clearly to be seen, behind the stairway. On Pl. X the south wall of the north terrace is to be seen.
13. The size of the slab is 1 m. 32 (maximum width) by 1 m. 17 (maximum height). Kanishka's name is twice mentioned. A Maricq, who published the inscription, *JA*, ccxlii, 1954, pp. 345-440 (S.K. 4, see list pp. 414-17; henceforward to be called S.K. 4M), believed it to be the dedication of the sanctuary by that king. W. B. Henning, *BSOAS*, xxiii, 1960, pp. 48-

- 55, opposes this view and considers it to commemorate a restoration of the monument, that had actually been erected by Kanishka, but had later fallen into disrepair.
14. See E. Benveniste, in *J.A.*, ccxlix, 1961, pp. 113-52.
  15. The height of the letters varies between 5 and 8 cm., some of them measuring up to 11 cm., *J.A.*, ccxlii, 1954, p. 191. One block had already been found *in situ*, *J.A.*, ccxlv, 1958, p. 414, *i*, but at the time this point appeared doubtful.
  16. W. B. Henning, *BSOAS*, xxiii, 1960, p. 53.
  17. S.K. 4A, S.K. 4B (both on stone walls), S.K. 4M (on large slab).
  18. The eight pillars on the west bank clearly appear on Pl. X, the eight on the east bank on Pl. XVa.
  19. First recognized by A. D. H. Bivar, see *J.A.*, ccxli, 1952, p. 445.
  20. W. B. Henning, *BSOAS*, xxiii, 1960, p. 48.
  21. The sides of the platform measure 4 m. 65.
  22. *J.A.*, ccxlii, 1954, pp. 167-71.
  23. These monuments are from what an inscription calls a *deva-kula*, which must mean a sanctuary of some kind. Statues of Kushâna princes, strikingly similar to those at Surkh Kotal, have been found there. One of them shows Kanishka himself (above, p. 92). See A. Maricq in *J.A.*, ccxlv, 1958, p. 368, with full bibliography.
  24. *J.A.*, ccxli, 1952, p. 439.
  25. The difficult problem whether temple B belongs to the second or to the third period cannot be discussed here.
  26. A good instance in H. Ingholt and I. Lyons, *Gandhâran Art in Pakistan*, New York, 1957, p. 61, no. 50.
  27. *L'acropole de Suse*, pp. 411-14.
  28. For a good instance of both types of folds and of their combination see A. U. Pope, *Survey of Persian Art*, iv, pl. 90 (central figure).
  29. Instances of the riding-coat in J. Meunié, *Shotorak (Mém. DAFA, x)*, pl. xx; xxix, 90.
  30. J. Ph. Vogel, *Sculpture de Mathurâ (Ars Asiatica xv)*, pl. i (Kanishka); pl. iv (felt-cap).



*a.* The 'bastion' in June 1952, at the end of the first campaign



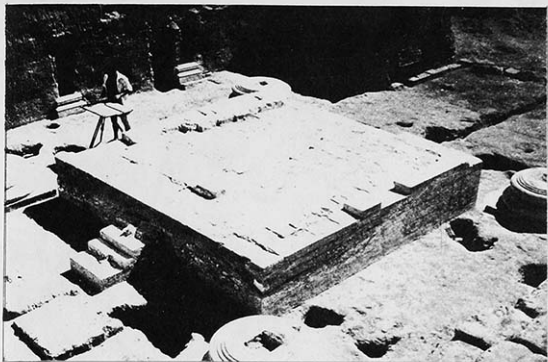
*b.* Base of column, photographed in 1951 before any excavation had taken place



*a.* The mound at the beginning of the excavation (April 1952)



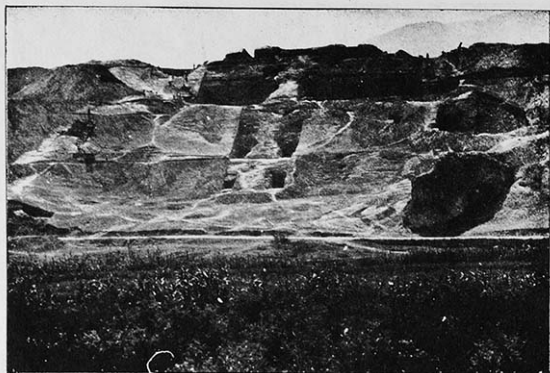
*b.* The temple and its podium (May 1952)



*a.* Central room of the temple, with stone platform (June 1952)



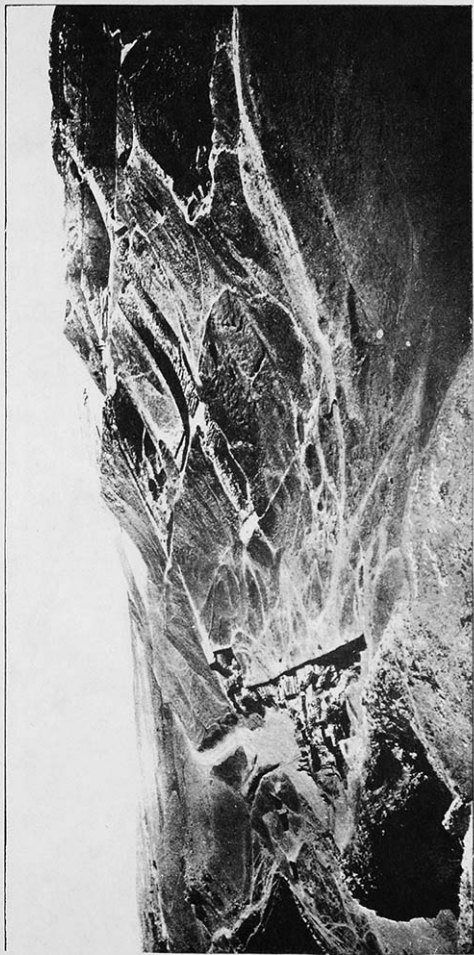
*b.* Eastern slope of the hill before excavation; half-excavated temple on summit (May 1952)



*a.* Eastern slope of hill (1954). At the foot, the 'bastion' (extreme left), the rocky spur (right), and the modern road

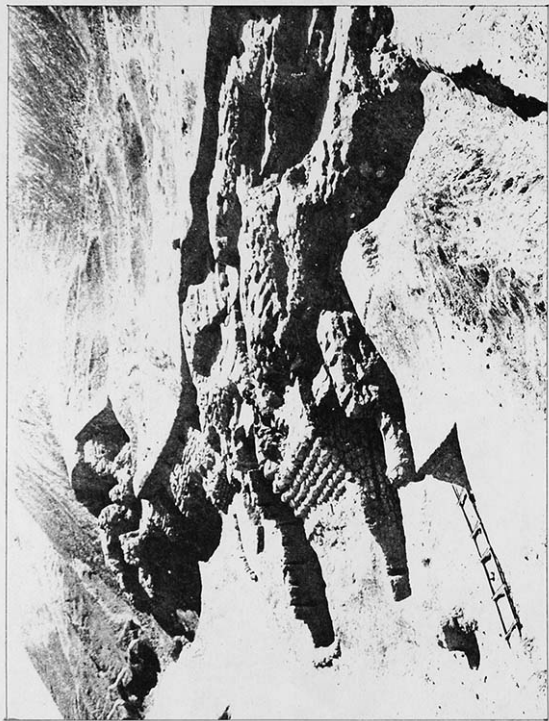


*b.* Upper terrace under excavation (June 1955). In the foreground, the north-eastern angle of the retaining wall; behind (right), the monumental stairway; in the background, the south wall of the peribolos



The eastern slope of the hill (May 1956), showing the monumental stairway





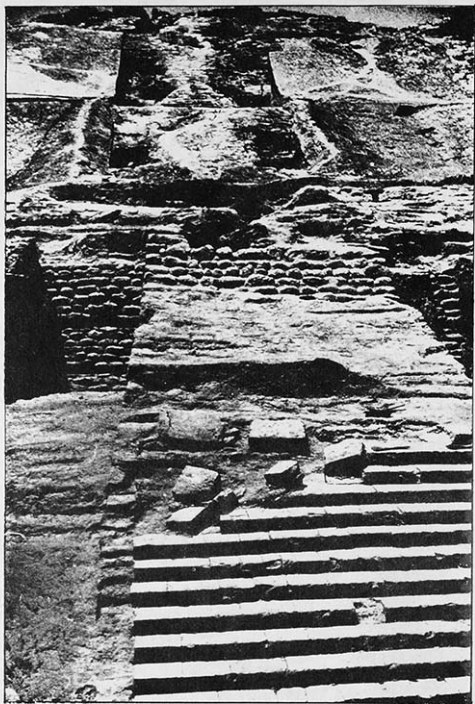
Search for the façade of the sanctuary (May 1956)



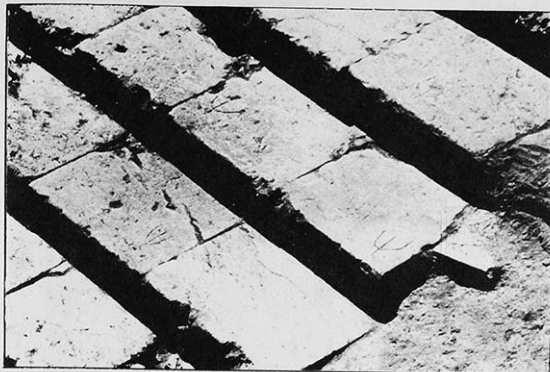
a. Excavation under the modern road (July 1956) seen from the rocky spur



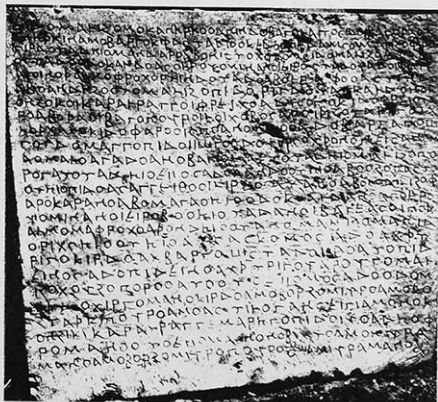
b. Excavation under the modern road (July 1956)



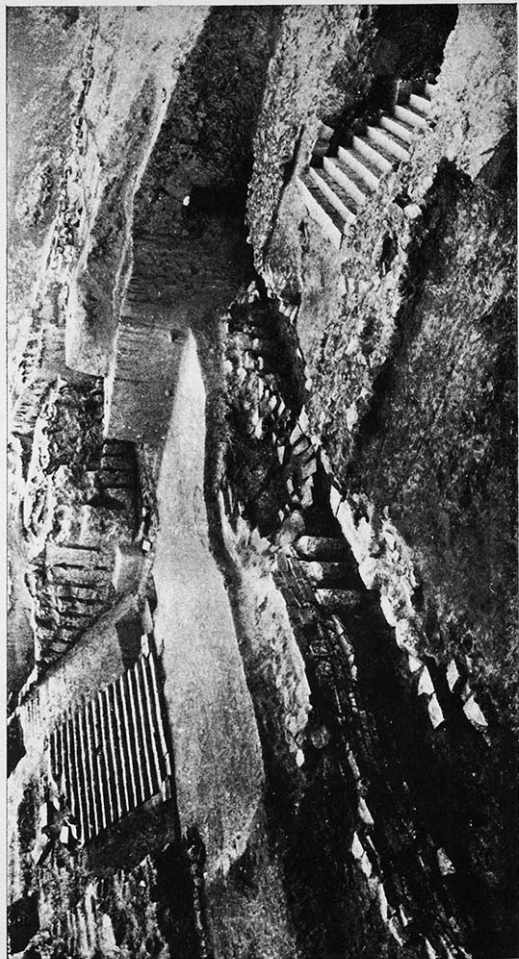
The monumental stairway (July 1956)



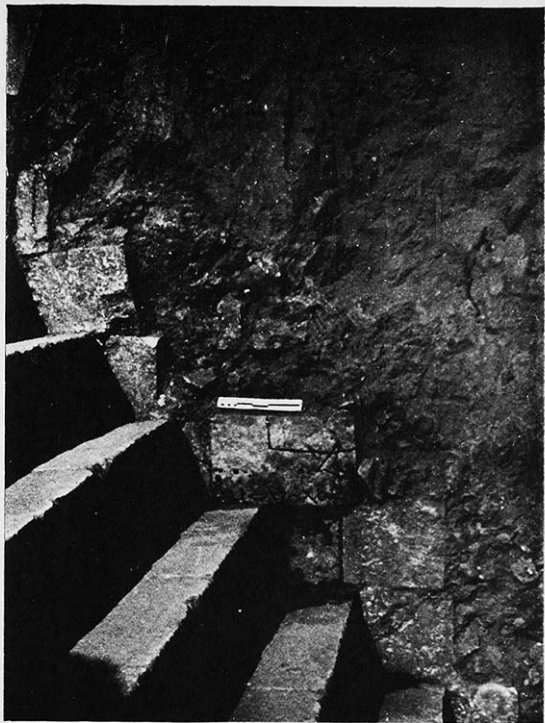
a. The monumental stairway (July 1956). Some of the steps are marked with tridents



b. The inscription SK. 4M



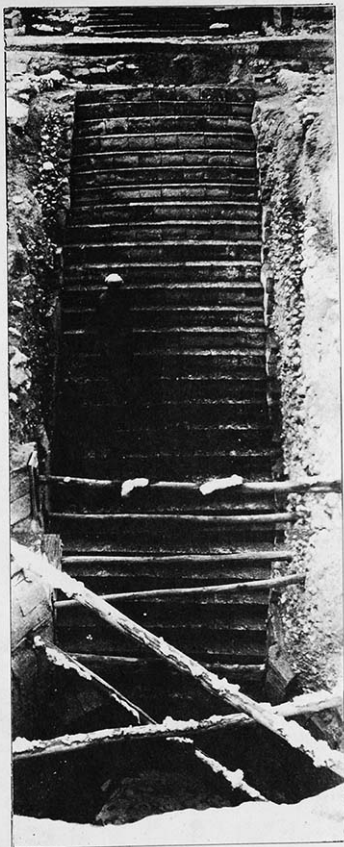
The lower part of the monumental stairway (left), the 'parvis', the canal, and the upper part of the dromos (right)



Reused blocks in the side-wall of the dromos, one of them bearing Greek characters

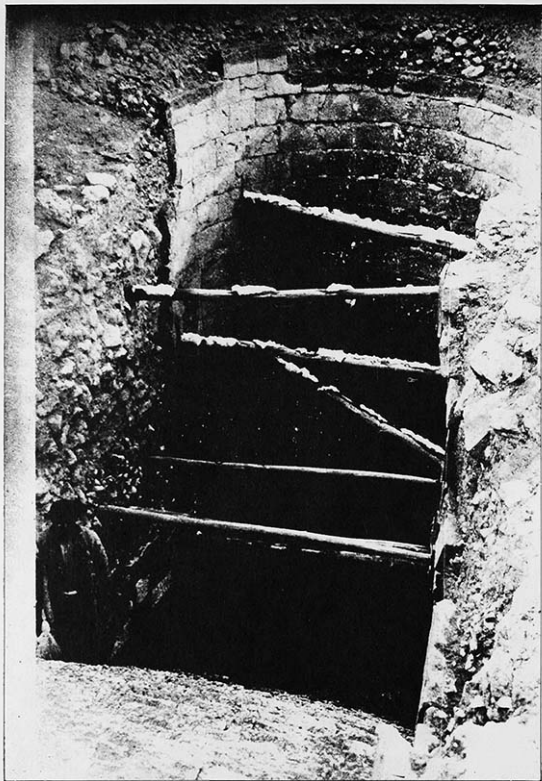


Four blocks from the dromos wall, reassembled

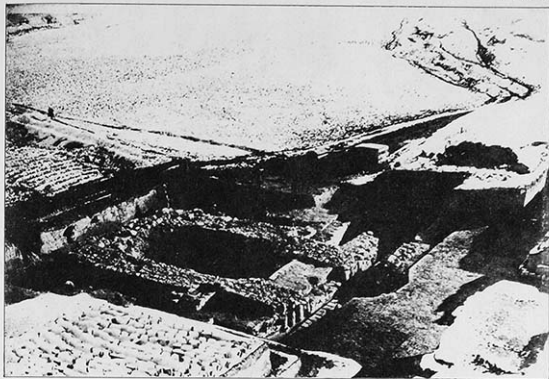


The well





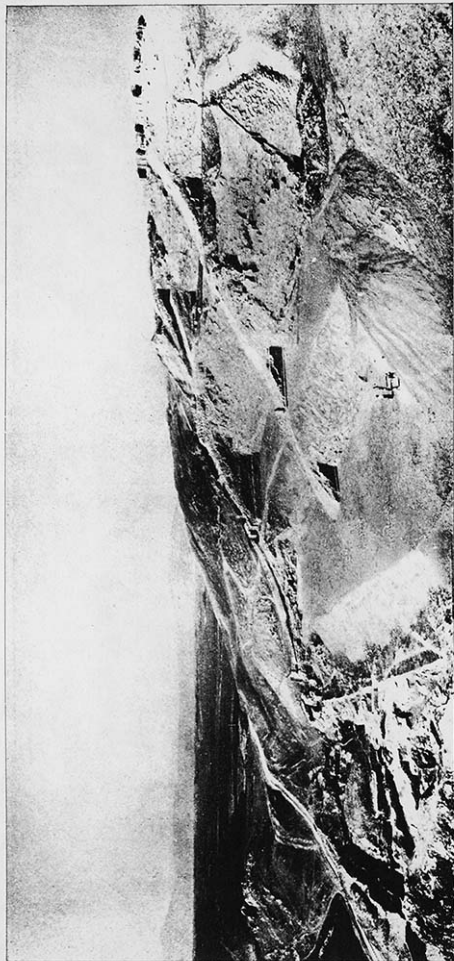
The well



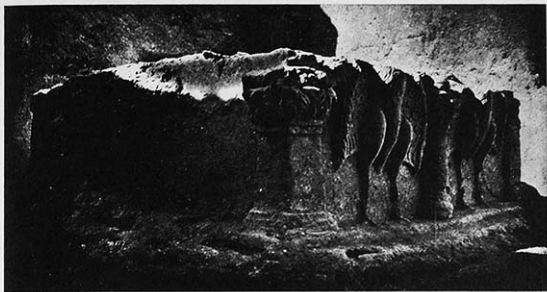
*a.* The bottom of the hill under snow (December 1959). From left to right: the well; the canal (with masonry of well encroaching upon it); the 'parvis'



*b.* Two courses of the façade of the lower terrace, with an inscription on the lower course, and foundations below



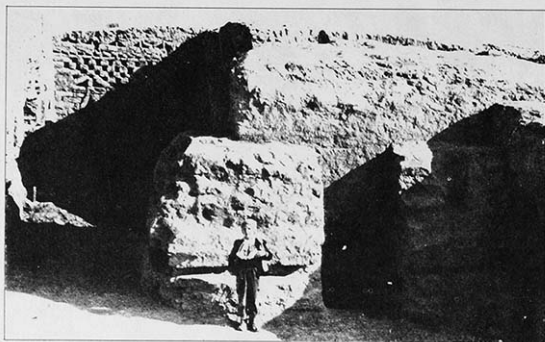
General view (1959), showing the three upper terraces after excavation, and the bottom terrace still partly under debris



*a.* Temple B, the fire-altar



*b.* Stepped merlon



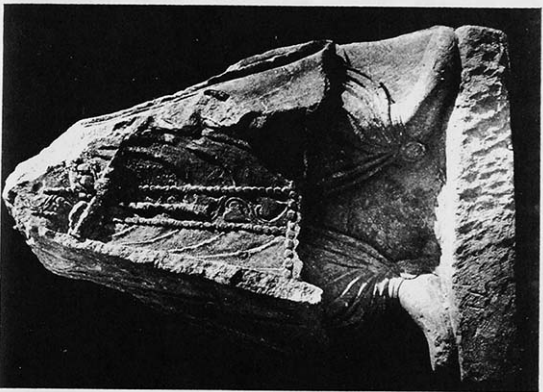
*a.* Brick decoration on outer wall of sanctuary



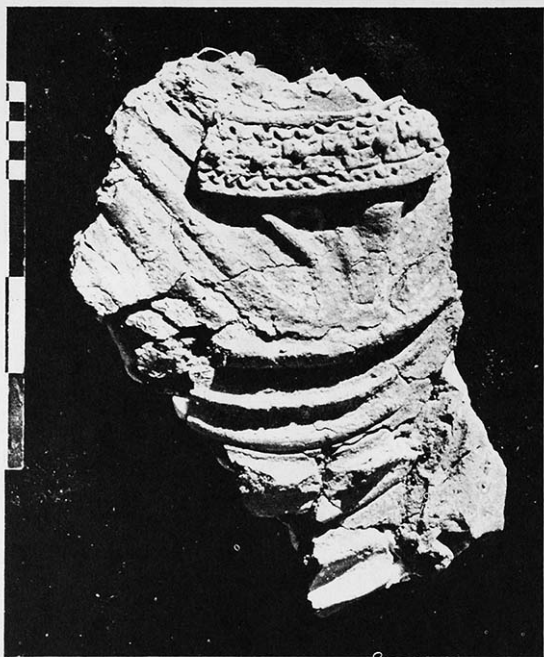
*b.* Corinthian capital from the podium of the temple



*c.* Fragment of a frieze found in the cella of the main temple



Statue of a prince or god in Kushāna dress



Fragment of a figure in clay



Fragment of draped figure in clay





a. The Buddhist platform; pilaster *in situ*



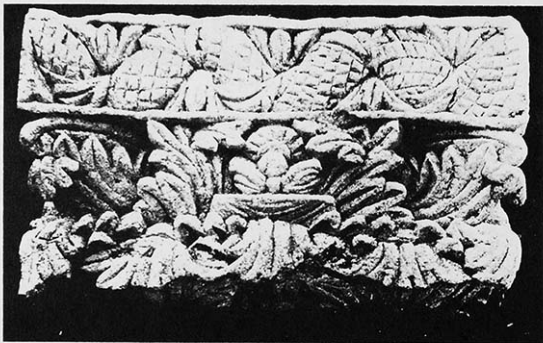
b. Façade of the Buddhist platform



The foot of one of the colossal statues on the Buddhist platform.  
*(Man's foot for comparison)*



*a.* Capital from the Buddhist platform, with mutilated bust amidst the foliage



*b.* Capital from the Buddhist platform, showing the turban of the Bodhisattva