

The Bamiyan Valley as a center of trade and cultural exchange: the latest excavations on the site of Shahr-e Gholghola

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Abstract

Bamiyan, as a region, has been an important route for trade as well as for the passage of armies. Its importance is associated with the Silk Road network stretching between China and the Mediterranean from the 1st century BC until the Arab conquest. An extraordinary variety of merchandise was traded, probably changing hands between merchants several times in the way: gold and other metals, precious and semi-precious stones, rare natural products. From this period on, the region highly developed, and was an area of importance during the Islamic period.

Sitting atop a natural hill in the center of Bâmiyân Valley, Shahr-i Gholghola is traditionally considered the Islamic capital of the territories of Bamiyan. It is a strongly fortified city surrounded by several large stones masonries and mudbrick walls, rising to more than 2600m in altitude.

Since 2013, our fieldwork project increased understanding of the general organization of the site and the method of construction on the city terrace. The site is divided into multiple quarters separated from each other by ramparts. It consists in a succession of terraces, beneath which cellars were dug, presumably to serve as warehouses, cisterns, or even habitats.

Delivering the first results of the excavation at Shahr-i Gholghola, this presentation aims at showing the importance of the socio-cultural exchanges in the valley, at least since the Kushano-Sassanid period (first centuries CE), the development of the city until medieval times and its destruction of the valley by the Genghis Khan horde.