

Bactrian influence in the re-foundation of Vardana in the Early Medieval period

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Abstract

The site of Vardāna (Bukhara, Uzbekistan) has been under investigation since 2009 by a Swiss-Uzbek archaeological project that involves the Society for the Exploration of EurAsia and the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Science of Uzbekistan. The site, recorded in the Arabic language sources as the capital of Obavija, was an important pre-Islamic principality of the Bukhara oasis. The discovery of an aristocratic palace, founded around the IV-V cent. AD and used until the beginning of the VIII cent. AD, represents one of the most important achievements of the project. The palace was built on top of the citadel, on the ruins of previous structures that were intentionally buried under a large amount of pebbles and sand. At almost the same time, the lower village assumed a quadrangular shape, attesting to a planned re-organization of the whole settlement.

New archaeological data from Vardāna, more specifically selected pottery finds, considerations of the settlement organization and radiocarbon dating are evaluated in this paper, in order to frame the political context responsible of the re-foundation of this settlement in the Early Middle Ages. Parallels with the neighbouring areas, in particular Bactria, would suggest the existence of interregional connections that contributed to the circulation of material culture and models of ideology at the Early Medieval Vardāna.