

Fortifications, fortresses, and border walls in ancient Bactria-Sogdiana (sedentary and nomads between Samarkand and Ai Khanum)

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Abstract

This paper will focus on the fortifications in Bactria-Sogdiana as an example of the influences between local Achaemenid and imported Hellenistic traditions and their interactions with the Scythian world. The phenomenon of urbanization during the Iron Age occurred in parallel with the development of monumental fortification systems, such as those of northern Sogdiana in Koktepe (Gava/Gabae, pre-Achaemenid capital of the Zeravshan Valley) and Afrasiab (Maracanda, the later capital founded by the Achaemenids). As the latter city testifies, the Hellenistic fortifications built around the middle of the 3rd century BC seem to conform to Achaemenid traditions, albeit with Hellenistic technical innovations. Ai Khanum (ancient Oskobara/Eucratidia in eastern Bactria) presented massive fortifications that probably reflected the evolution of Hellenistic siege techniques.

In both regions, cities interacted with nomadic peoples whose representatives lived on the periphery of oases and along major roads, or participated in the defence of cities, as evidenced, for example, by the cavalry associated with the Sogdians' resistance against Alexander or, later, by the weapons discovered in the Ai Khanum arsenal. In the second half of the 3rd century BC, the fall of Northern Sogdiana into the hands of nomadic rulers led to the construction of the Derbent border wall, the function of which will be discussed in relation to the other Hellenistic fortified systems on the surrounding mountains.

Finally, the communication will include some examples of fortresses, such as those of the Sangir-tepe site near Shahr-i Sabz – a fortified Achaemenid temple outside the walls of the capital Kish-Nautaca (Padayatak-tepe-Uzunkir sites), later a Chionite castle – and the Kidarite castle of Kindikli-tepe north of Samarkand.