

# Nomads and the Shaping of Central Asia: from the Early Iron Age to the Kushan period

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## I Introduction

FOR MOST CLASSICISTS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN WORLD, Central Asia is known essentially for its Hellenistic past, beginning with the expedition of Alexander in 329–327 BC.<sup>1</sup> However, north of the Hindu Kush, this period, which ended between about 145 and 130 BC, was only a brief event in the history of the region. Since the beginning of the Iron Age, Central Asian oases have known endless invasions and migrations, and a permanent interaction between sedentary, semi-mobile and nomadic populations is evident.

The context of these events can be broadly outlined in the results of a series of excavations in which I have participated in Afghanistan and Uzbekistan (Fig. 1). They concern the treasury at Ai Khanum, a site explored by the French Archaeological Delegation in Afghanistan under Paul Bernard's direction,<sup>2</sup> the fortifications of Samarkand-Afrasiab, the city of Koktepe north of Samarkand, with its now famous kurgan, and the Iron Gates frontier wall between Termez and Samarkand; the last three sites have been explored by the French-Uzbek Archaeological Mission (MAFOuz) directed by Frantz Grenet (CNRS) and Mukhammadjon Isamiddinov (Institute of Archaeology of Samarkand).<sup>3</sup> This paper presents the ways in which these excavations

<sup>1</sup> On the history of the archaeological discovery of Central Asia, see Gorshenina & Rapin 2004.

<sup>2</sup> For an overview in English of the excavations of Ai Khanum see Bernard 1994, but a detailed study on this site is impossible without, among others, the annual reports published by Paul Bernard in the *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* and without the first eight volumes already published under the title *Fouilles d'Ai Khanoum* in the collection of the *Mémoires de la Délégation archéologique française en Afghanistan (MDAFA)*.

<sup>3</sup> On the recent excavations in Samarkand-Afrasiab, see: Shishkina 1996; Bernard 1996a; Bernard *et al.* 1990, 1992; Rapin & Isamiddinov 1994; Grenet 1996, 2003; Grenet & Rapin 1998; Karev 2000; Isamiddinov 2002.



are interrelated and how they can shed light on the main periods of Central Asian history, from the Iron Age to the Kushans.

Nomads are a constant factor in the history of the steppe belt and of all the adjacent southern lands. The latest bibliography related to the historical sources, the typology of the tombs and the artifacts, the polychrome jewellery (Schiltz 2002, Boardman 2003a and 2003b), and the iconography of the nomad engraved bones (Ilyasov 2003) illustrate the diversity of approaches in the study of Central Asian nomads.

Because of the lack of written sources, the chronology of the migrations and the definition of the areas the nomads occupied constitute one of the main historical problems.<sup>4</sup> Unlike the urban settlements of the so-called sedentary cultures, the nomadic populations are mostly represented by their cemeteries. However, at Koktepe, 30 km north of Samarkand, recent discoveries are providing a series of data that illustrate how nomadic cultures seem to have alternated or coincided with all the stages of urbanization in the region since at least the early Iron Age (Figs 2–5 and 9). The present contribution is based on general excavations related to urban settlements, that is, sedentary society and its fortifications and frontiers. It is intended to provide a complementary approach to the study of unsettled populations in Central Asia, with a series of data to place them in a chronological and geographical framework.

For a complementary approach, the historical background of this material data cannot be completed without some new interpretations relating to the textual sources, especially the biographies of Alexander and the works concerning the geography of the time (Fig. 1).<sup>5</sup> The position of the frontier between Bactria and Sogdiana appears to have changed between the Iron Age and the Kushan period, with a progressive reduction northward of the territory of Sogdiana from the region of the Darya-i Pandj to the Baysun and Hissar ranges. The geography of the Oxus and the Ochus as presented in the sources for Alexander's expedition indicates that in the late Achaemenid and Hellenistic periods the northern Bactrian frontier probably lay along the Amu-darya and the Wakhsh, rather than at the Iron Gates or along the Amu-darya and the Darya-i Pandj. This research has no implications for the archaeology, since before the Kushans the cultural context was very similar on both sides of the Oxus; it is doubtful that the now traditional term 'Northern-Bactrian' for the right bank of the Oxus—the classical Oxiana region—will ever be changed, but subtleties should not be forgotten when historical interpretations focus on defined 'ethnic' locations along the frontiers or peripheral regions.

<sup>4</sup> For recent general publications, see Lebedynsky 2002, 2003; Schiltz 2002; Boardman 2003a, 2003b; Ilyasov 2003 (with developments on the controversial discussions relating to some of the arguments presented here).

<sup>5</sup> Grenet & Rapin 2001; Rapin 2001; Rapin 2004. For opposition to recent interpretations, see for example P'jankov 2004 (traditional approach, but without reference to other specialists).

## II The early Iron Age and the first nomads at Koktepe ('Koktepe I and II')<sup>6</sup>

The intention of this paper is not to discuss the complex question relating to the Early Iron Age in Central Asia, since this has recently been well outlined by H.-P. Francfort (1989; 2001), but will be limited to the archaeological and chronological framework provided for the middle Zerafshan valley by the site of Koktepe. Even if the new data still have to be completed and corrected by further excavations, we shall see how this site illustrates the cultural and economic trends of this region between the Bactria-Margiana area (representative of the Iron Age Oxus culture: Francfort 2001) and the north-eastern cultures of Ferghana, Ustrushana and Chach.

### Koktepe I

The site of Koktepe lies on a primary terrace of the northern edge of the Zerafshan valley, at a distance from the Bulungur canal which still irrigates this area of the plain. In the early stages of its development, the city was situated along the border of the steppe, as the region to the north of the Bulungur canal was irrigated only later, probably after the beginning of our era, by the Pay-aryk.

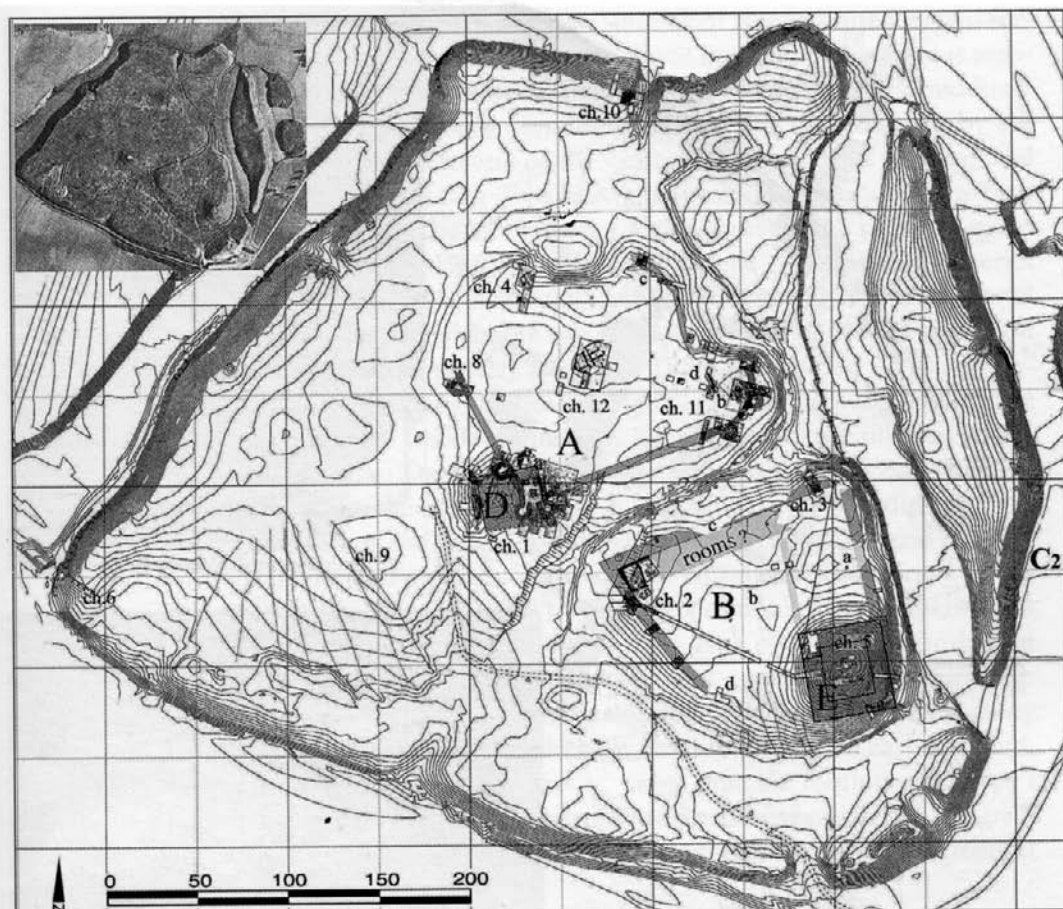
At Koktepe, several levels including architectural features are separated by intermediate layers with rows of wooden post holes (Fig. 3). These post holes apparently represent light constructions similar to the huts or yurts of non-permanently settled populations. Thus urbanization, the organization of sedentary populations around a monumental urban settlement, never appears to have been a continuous or linear process. The first buildings, which appear to cover a large area of the mound of Koktepe, are related to the beginning of development of an agricultural system in the Zerafshan valley.<sup>7</sup> Their association with handmade painted pottery (Koktepe I type, Yaz I period) provides a provisional dating to the transition of the Bronze to the Iron Age after the middle of the second millennium BC (Francfort 2001) (Figs 2–3).

Although the main discoveries belong to the Iron Age, it must be noted that at least one important earlier object was discovered in a pit of the courtyard area (for this building see *infra*). This is a large weight in the form of a discoid marble plaque with a handle, usually attributed to the Bronze Age (this particular type belongs to a late

<sup>6</sup> The site was surveyed in the early 1980s by G. V. Shishkina and O. Inevatkina and excavated under the direction of C. Rapin and M. Isamiddinov, with the collaboration of M. Khasanov, I. Ivanicky, A. Gricina, Sh. Rakhmanov and M. Shpeneva. On the Iron Age of Koktepe: Isamiddinov 2002; Isamiddinov *et al.* 2001; Isamiddinov *et al.* 2002 (with an erroneous presentation of my original plan of the entrance to the sacred area); Rapin *et al.* 2003; Isamiddinov *et al.* 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Houses with walls built of mud bricks, Isamiddinov *et al.* 2003, 72–3; on a typology of the Early Iron Age houses, Matbabaev 2002. A fortification wall and a round monument belonging to this period have been discovered in excavations conducted in 2006, after the completion of this paper.





KOKTEPE 2004 – Plan: V. Gomošov, C. Rapin

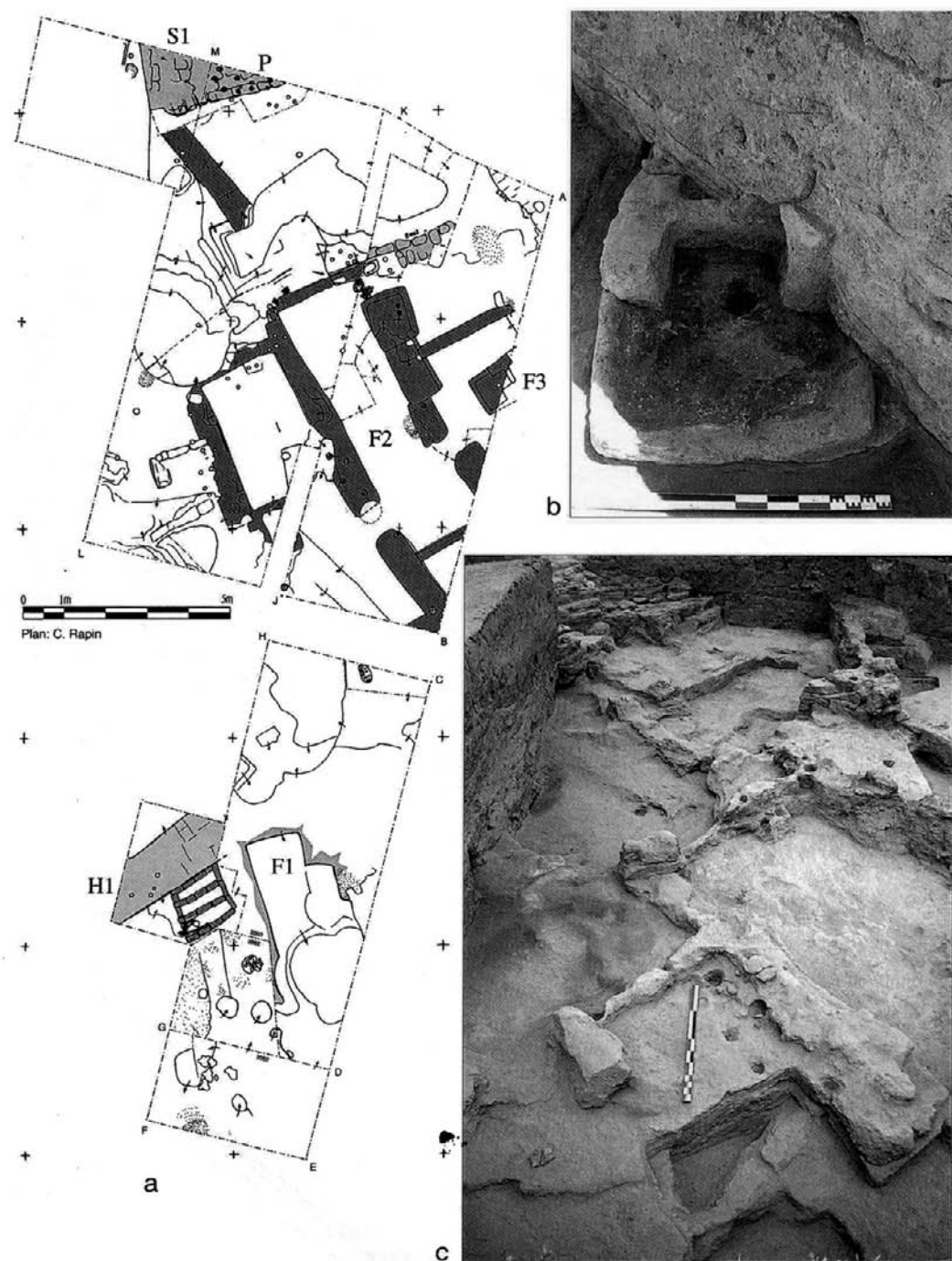
Figure 2. Plan of the excavations at Koktepe (2004).

phase, about the eighteenth century BC).<sup>8</sup> As it has been found in secondary use, but in a ritual context, its presence at Koktepe could be explained in relation with the other objects related to the purification ritual identified in the sacred area (*infra*).

## Koktepe II

After an apparent chronological gap around the first third of the first millennium BC, the first real monumental architecture appeared on the terrace of Koktepe (the

<sup>8</sup> The object was dated by H.-P. Francfort, on typological grounds.



**Figure 3.** a: Koktepe, plan of ch. 4 (early Iron Age). b: Koktepe, ch. 4, fireplace F3 (early Iron Age). c: Koktepe, ch. 4, view from the south (early Iron Age).

'acropolis' of the later wider settlement). The new settlement is represented by two fortified courtyards erected around the second quarter of the first millennium and is associated with pottery which includes modelled shapes (Koktepe II type) (Isamiddinov 2002, 104–13) (Fig. 2: A, B).<sup>9</sup> This early chronology appears to be confirmed by the similarity of the snail-shaped round towers of the western courtyard gate to one of the towers of the fortified platform of Tillya Tepe in Afghanistan. However, at Tillya Tepe the painted pottery was related to the monumental architecture of the platform up to the Achaemenid period (Sarianidi 1989), whereas at Koktepe (where the discoveries for the same main periods otherwise coincide closely with those of Tillya Tepe) this kind of pottery had already disappeared when the two courtyards were built. The transition between the period of the painted pottery (Koktepe I) and the period of the monumental courtyards (Koktepe II) needs further research, as the differences between the north-eastern and south-western trends of the early Iron Age cultures still need explanation. Contrary to the Surkhan Darya and the Bactria-Margiana area (Oxus culture), according to various theories, the Zerafshan and Kashka Darya valleys did not have the monumental settlements of the preceding Bronze Age agricultural period because of their proximity to the nomad cultures of the steppe. Although the itinerary of the above-mentioned Bronze Age discoid weight to Koktepe has not yet been explained, it can be provisionally assumed that the two earlier Iron Age phases distinguished at Koktepe could represent the first manifestations of local agricultural development. Maurizio Tosi has proposed that for the southern slopes of the Zerafshan valley, along the Dargom canal, this economic system could have developed from an earlier period, when irrigation was limited to the natural flows of water from the foothills (Koktepe I period), to a later irrigation system, mainly exemplified by the excavation of the great canals deriving from the Zerafshan, the Bulungur and the Dargom (Koktepe II period).<sup>10</sup>

Reflecting the major social and political development of the region, this monumental architecture is evidence of a strong local state organization. The inner buildings of these courtyards are at present difficult to reconstruct. Although this question has still to be resolved, it would seem that the courtyards of Koktepe housed earlier religious and administrative institutions.

<sup>9</sup> According to B. Lyonnet, the early painted pottery suddenly disappears at Koktepe. This event is dated by C14 analysis to some time around the end of the second and the beginning of the first millennium BC. The next types belong to a 'Scythian' population, according to Lyonnet.

<sup>10</sup> These first steps in the agricultural development of the region are difficult to date, but further research will probably shed light on the beginnings of the irrigation programme represented by the great canals. Kyndykly Tepe, a site recently observed on the Bulungur canal (upstream from the diversion of the Pay-aryk from the Bulungur itself) 13 km east of Koktepe, lies above the plain at the edge of a sparsely irrigated area which is almost steppe. Its foundation would seem to be directly linked to the construction of the Bulungur canal, and it is probable that the study of the pottery will soon provide an answer to the questions which were not resolved by the study of the first layers of Koktepe.

The religious function of the western courtyard has been determined by the presence of a fireplace, the remains of which seem to have been intentionally collected in one of the ruined towers of the main southern gate (Fig. 4a: B) after a period of nomadic presence which had put an end to the period of the first monumental building programme (Fig. 4a: A).

As was the case for various earlier constructions, both monuments were abandoned during a period of nomad invasions, possibly in the sixth century BC. (We know, for instance, that east of the Caspian Sea Darius I had to fight Scythian nomads like those represented by their king Skunkha illustrated as a defeated prisoner on the relief of Behistun.) Nevertheless, as we shall see, at Koktepe the function of these monuments apparently survived this major destruction.

### III The Achaemenid period at Koktepe (sacred platform and palatial area)

#### Koktepe IIIa

The sacred courtyard area and the nomad establishment are immediately followed by a totally different expression of monumental urbanization. The next period is represented at Koktepe by the construction of two platforms with religious and political functions (Fig. 2: D, E) and by a huge fortification wall built in the plain around the site.<sup>11</sup>

As can be inferred from its dimensions, this rampart seems to have been built at the same time as the fortification that surrounds the plateau of Afrasiab (Fig. 6: C1).<sup>12</sup> Both walls not only protected monumental buildings, but also encircled a large open area, probably for the surrounding population to shelter with their cattle when necessary. This conception is characteristic of Central Asian urbanism near the steppe areas (Francfort 2001), and is also apparent in later cities, such as Ai Khanum or Taxila-Sirkap.

<sup>11</sup> The examination of this fortification did not produce any dates, as the building techniques remained the same throughout the Iron Age. It is unlikely that it existed at the time of the first settlement (Koktepe I period: if there was such an early fortification, it was limited to the central mound) and no longer needed in the period of the strongly fortified courtyards (Koktepe II period); this wall can therefore logically be understood as a protection for the subsequent platforms (Koktepe IIIa period).

<sup>12</sup> The eastern part of the 'acropolis' of Afrasiab-Marakanda was fortified in the same period by a huge wall discovered by Olga Inevatkina (Inevatkina in Bernard *et al.* 1992, 276–80) and was isolated from the area of the later mosque by a deep ditch (Fig. 6: B). In a second phase, probably in the later Achaemenid period, a new wall appears to separate the 'acropolis' (all the area later covered by the mosque and the citadel) from the main urban plateau ('shakhristan'): Bernard *et al.* 1992, 281–2 (Fig. 6: C2). On the excavations of the fortified area of the 'acropolis', see O. Inevatkina in *Fouilles de Samarkand, I (Mission archéologique franco-ouzbèke, 1989–1994)*, forthcoming. Isamiddinov 2002, 65–75.



Figure 4. a: Koktepe, plan of the western courtyard gate (ch. 1). b: Koktepe, scheme of the Achaemenid sacred platform (ch. 1).



The western platform-building of Koktepe presents a fundamentally different character from the preceding courtyard,<sup>13</sup> but is difficult to date, as it is not closely related to the pottery finds (Koktepe IIIa). As proposed above, this programme could have been related to the Scythian expeditions of Darius I, but we know also that earlier, probably in 530 BC, Cyrus was killed during an expedition against the Massagetae after the Achaemenid conquest of Central Asia (Briant 1996, 49–50, 60). It is therefore not impossible that the nomad layers already mentioned (Fig. 3a: P; Fig. 4a: A) and the platforms of Koktepe (Fig. 3a: D–E) could correspond to the period of the Persian invasion and the organization of the eastern part of the empire by Darius I.

The function of these platforms is difficult to identify. Although it was fortified by towers, the western platform (Fig. 2: D), which in the aerial photograph taken before its destruction was surmounted by a smaller oval construction, was probably purely religious in nature, as it succeeded the probably sacred courtyard presented above. Its access was represented in the west by a staircase, which implies that the ritual was performed looking towards the east, that is the sunrise.<sup>14</sup> The sacred function of the monument, probably related to early Zoroastrianism (or at least to a local cult affiliated to the Indo-Iranian complex), is confirmed by the evidence of a ritual of foundation performed just before its construction.<sup>15</sup> This evidence was found in the last layer of the ruined walls of the gate of the previous courtyard building, just above the intermediate phase of plundering by nomads. It is represented by a fireplace (Fig. 4a: C) and a series of pits (Fig. 4a: D, E) which preserved the remains of rituals for the purification of the area before the erection of the sacred platform. Several oval pits contained flat stones of various shapes laid on the bottom as if the intention had been to illustrate a schematic corpse in a simulacrum of grave (*infra*) (Fig. 4a: E).

Although the bulk of its masonry surpasses 11,000 m<sup>3</sup>, the eastern platform—a higher two-stepped construction reminiscent of a reduced ziggurat—is too small to be a military construction and could therefore have had a political or religious function.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Excavations have been recently launched in the eastern courtyard-monument in order to elucidate the connection between the courtyard and the platform. The courtyard and its related columned rooms were probably occupied in the beginning of the Achaemenid phase (Koktepe IIIa), but were soon razed when the neighbouring platform was erected.

<sup>14</sup> On a similar platform at Ai Khanum, see *infra* note 21. For the central podium of the cella of Temple A at Surkh-kotal, see: Schlumberger *et al.* 1983, 24, 144–45, pl. 13.30–1; XI. See also the 'disc of Cybele' from Ai Khanum showing a ritual performed on a mountain, in the open air, on a stepped altar oriented towards the deity, Francfort 1984, 93–104.

<sup>15</sup> Grenet & Rapin in G. Fussman, Collège de France (24 January 2001).

<sup>16</sup> Grenet proposes to identify it as a watchtower for visual communication with the hill of Chopan-ata not far from Afrasiab, according to a practice well attested in the Achaemenid empire, Briant 1996, 383–4. However, because of the climate and the distance between them (26 km), these points are rarely visible from each other.



### Central Asian platforms and monumental buildings in the early Iron Age

Because of the chronological problems common to the early Iron Age, other examples of Central Asian religious monuments are not without contradictions. The monument which is geographically closest, although not yet dated definitively, is situated near Shahr-i Sabz in the Kashka Darya plain. There, the ancient Sogdian city of Nautaka, mentioned by the historians of Alexander (Fig. 1), is represented by the acropolis at Padayatak Tepe and by a large fortification wall, a segment of which has been explored in the surrounding plain on the site of Uzunkir. Despite the fact that this wall protected a large open area similar to that of Koktepe, the only recognized religious settlement lies outside the city, at some distance from the urban fortification.<sup>17</sup> This building has been recently identified by Mutallib Khasanov in the mound of Sangyr Tepe (part of the ancient site of Kesh, the main settlement of the Nautaka region, near the present town of Shahr-i Sabz). It belongs to various structures defended by a wall similar to the fortified courtyards of Koktepe (Koktepe II period). As stated by this discoverer, its central construction has apparently to be attributed to the 'Achaemenid' period (Koktepe III period). The religious structure was not set upon a real platform, but was apparently a roofed temple which sheltered a large fireplace. The structure lay on a level in which were dug and sealed several rows of pits filled with materials for ritual practices of purification such as sand, pebbles, pure ashes or bones.<sup>18</sup> It succeeded a preceding 'courtyard' type building. Like the pits which occupied the ruins of the Koktepe II courtyard, it was probably connected with a repeated ritual of purification undertaken in preparation to the construction of the later temple.

This kind of ceremony is well attested in Vedic India with the *Agnicayana*, the ritual of consecration of the area which precedes the construction of fire altars through a phase of purification which could last up to one year.<sup>19</sup> The parallel between these Sogdian and Vedic rituals is all the more convincing because, as apparently at Koktepe, the Vedic ritual contains references to early human sacrifices (Renou & Filliozat 1985, § 701 and 729; Staal 1983, 240, 418) replaced by imitations like the 'Golden Man' or the head of a man (*purusa*), among heads of animals, destined to be buried under the main altar (Staal 1983, 238–40). The multiplicity of the symbolic graves at Koktepe

<sup>17</sup> This monument is among the earliest Central Asian extra-urban sanctuaries. Like the large fortification system, it belongs to a tradition well attested in the Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic periods: see Ai Khanum (Bernard 1974, 287–9; 1976, 303–7), Taxila-Sirkap (for an attribution of the temple of Jandial to the Hindu religion: Rapin 1995; contra: Bernard 1996b, 507–12), and the Buddhist sanctuaries built in front of post-Hellenistic cities such as Bactra and Termez (Kara-tepe-Fajaz-tepe).

<sup>18</sup> The excavation, still unpublished, was conducted by Mutallib Khasanov, with the collaboration of the MAFOuz and of a team from the University of Berkeley directed by Sanjyot Mehendale. See *Kadimgi Kesh-Shaxrisabz tarixidan lavxalar* 1998, 11–13, 41, 44–55 (in Uzbek). For a new hypothesis on the etymology of Nautaka, see Grenet, 'Remarques sur le toponyme Nautaka' in Grenet 2002, 209–12.

<sup>19</sup> Renou & Filliozat 1985, § 729; Staal 1983. My thanks to F. Grenet for having drawn my attention to these analogies.

compared to the unique one in the Indian ritual may perhaps reflect the intervention of several commissioners in the building of the monumental terrace (several communities?), while in India the fire altar is commissioned by just one 'sacrificer', who is symbolized by the *purusa*.

This calls to mind similar early rituals which originated in the steppe world. We have not, however, observed any parallel with the 'naturally perforated stones' of the Vedic ritual (Staal 1983, 139–66, 417 sqq.).<sup>20</sup>

In its plan and the absence of a platform, this 'Achaemenid' sanctuary at Sangyr Tepe differs clearly from the apparently contemporaneous platform type of Koktepe IIIa, but, despite some differences, the preceding purification rituals on the area do not contradict the impression that both sanctuaries belonged to a common religious context.

In the Bactria-Margiana area, early Iron Age religious architecture is marked by different developments. The fortified platform of Tillya Tepe (Sarianidi 1989), for instance, seems at first sight to belong to the same tradition as the platforms of Koktepe IIIa. But as inferred from the discovery of painted pottery, the first phases of the monument of Tillya Tepe precede the Koktepe IIIa period, being therefore contemporary with the pre-Achaemenid courtyards of Koktepe II. A similar observation can be made, among other examples, for other apparently pre-Achaemenid platforms, such as the one supporting a building at Kuchuk Tepe (Askarov & Al'baum 1979) or the one with a monumental fire-place of Erk-kala (possibly the ancient Iasonion mentioned by Ptolemy) at Merv (Usmanova & Filanovich 2002). This architectural tradition probably originated in the Bronze Age period, despite the fact that the platforms were then somewhat larger than in the Iron Age (see, for example, the monument of Nad-i Ali, now attributed to the third millennium BC, that is to the Bronze Age Oxus civilization: Besenval & Francfort 1994).

These examples of religious architecture also coincide chronologically with quite different traditions, as at Ulug-depe, at the foot of the Kopet-dagh, where a building evoking Median architectural traditions has been recently discovered by a team led by Olivier Lecomte (Lecomte *et al.* 2002).

As inferred above, the 'pre-Achaemenid' courtyard of Koktepe (Koktepe II) can be related to the fortification of Sangyr Tepe in the Kashka Darya, but differs structurally from the contemporary platform-sanctuaries of the Bactria-Margiana area. Similarly, the 'Achaemenid' religious platform of Koktepe (Koktepe IIIa) appears later than in the Bactria-Margiana area, and was probably under the influence of the Achaemenids who had observed the western Central Asian platforms on their way towards Sogdiana. Moreover, the roofed temple of Sangyr Tepe without a platform seems paradoxically

<sup>20</sup> Grenet tentatively suggests that the Bronze Age stone discoid weight pierced for the handle, if not picked up at random during that later period, could have played such a role. We have no explanation for the stone bracelet of which only a fragment was discovered in this context.

closer to the older temple on the platform of Tillya Tepe than to the contemporary western platform—without a roofed temple—of Koktepe.

The diversity of these monuments before and after the arrival of the Achaemenids reflects the complexity of this period marked by various religious trends, local and imported. This period also corresponds to the emergence of the Zoroastrian religion, whose origins could be linked to these archaeological discoveries.

In a recent study, Frantz Grenet has proposed a location for the homeland of Zoroaster—not the real one, which is and will always remain unidentified, but the one which was favoured in the last stage of the Avesta (seventh–fourth centuries BC)—on the Darya-i Pandj, east of the Kyzyl-su, about 60 km from Ai Khanum (Grenet 2002, 193–214). The sacred platform discovered by Henri-Paul Francfort on the acropolis of Ai Khanum is probably only related to the Hellenistic form of this religion,<sup>21</sup> since the earliest occupation of the site, as shown by the excavations so far, does not go back to pre-Hellenistic times. But an earlier date for the city of Ai Khanum cannot be excluded, since its first name could have been the indigenous toponym of \*Oskobara, a term which according to Pavel Lurye, means 'high bank', mentioned by Ptolemy (Ostobara) and other early geographers (Peutinger map: Scobaru; etc.).<sup>22</sup> Through the Achaemenid inscriptions we know that at the time of Darius I, at the beginning of Persian rule in Central Asia, lapis lazuli from Badakhshan was supplied by Sogdiana. However, studies on the Iron Age Oxus culture have shown that the Bactria-Margiana pre-Achaemenid painted pottery is almost unknown east of the Qunduz river, as though this river marked the frontier of Bactria (Lyonnet 1997; Francfort 2001). These observations suggest that some time before the existence of the administrative organization known through the historians of Alexander (Grenet & Rapin 2001), the eastern part of Bactria had belonged to another country, possibly Sogdiana, an area roughly covering the foothills extending from Badakhshan to the Hissar range, including the right bank of the Oxus and the opposite slope of the mountain with part of the Kashka Darya and the Zerafshan plain. One cannot therefore exclude the hypothesis that before the arrival of the Achaemenids and during the first years of their presence in the region, the area comprising the sanctuaries of Shahr-i Sabz and Koktepe were linked with 'Badakhshani holy land of Zoroastrianism'.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Bernard 1976, 306–7; Grenet in Boyce & Grenet 1991, 181–4. For a similar platform dating back to the 'Achaemenid' period at Djandavlat Tepe (Pachmak Tepe) in the Surkhan Darya, Pidaev 1974, 32–8. On the platforms of the Bronze Age Oxus civilization, Besenval & Francfort 1994.

<sup>22</sup> Rapin 2004; 2003, 115. On the last Graeco-Bactrian name of the city, Eucratideia, see *infra*. For the problem of the existence or absence of an Achaemenid settlement at Ai Khanum, Leriche 1986, 24, 71–2. On findings of Bronze and Iron Age periods, Bernard 1969, 326. On the identification of Alexandria Oxiana with Termez, see Grenet & Rapin 2001. On the location of the Oxians (Oxiana) between the Iron Gates and the Oxus: Rapin *et al.* 2006.

<sup>23</sup> Sebastian Stride (below, pp. 99–117) has underlined the density of the settlements in the northern part of the Surkhan Darya region from the Iron Age at least. One cannot exclude that a northern route of communication existed along the main inhabited centres of the southern foot of the Hissar Range between the Wakhs region and the area of the Iron Gates. According to Leonid Sverchov, the city of Margina which Alexander fortified after the crossing of the Ochus and of the Oxus on his way toward the Iron Gates in 328 could be situated in the Baisun

In its differences with the Iranian platforms of Bactria-Margiana, the independent courtyard-type sanctuary of Koktepe II (and of Sangyr Tepe) illustrates the local development of a religious tradition.<sup>24</sup> However, the present geographical and chronological proposal is not yet sufficiently documented for certain attribution of one or the other Sogdian architectural period—the courtyards or the platforms—to an early form of the Zoroastrian tradition.

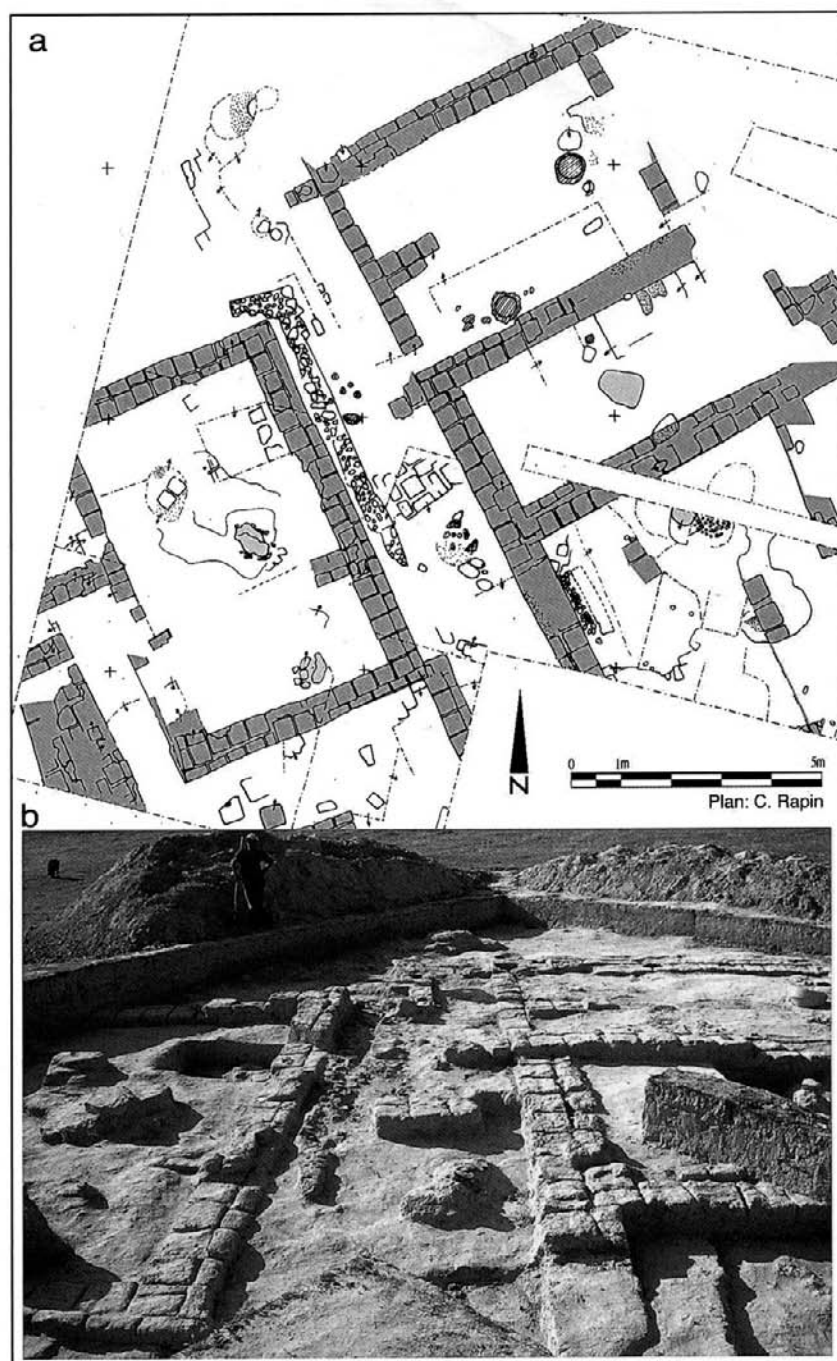
### Koktepe IIIb

It is not certain that the Achaemenid presence in Sogdiana was continuous for the two centuries between Cyrus and Darius III. The pre-Hellenistic pottery of Afrasiab differs fundamentally, and without transitional types, from the shapes which at Koktepe are apparently related to the earlier platforms (period IIIa: Fig. 2, D, E). If the identification of this gap is correct, it is possible that under Darius III or one of his immediate predecessors the region was reorganized, with an eventual modification of the frontiers (on the shifting of the Sogdian frontier from the Qunduz region to the Wakhsh: see above) and a centralization of the institutions of the Zerafshan Valley in the city of Samarkand.

The period which precedes the arrival of Alexander, a few years before the end of Achaemenid rule, was marked at Afrasiab by a massive reconstruction of the fortifications (Afrasiab I: Shishkina 1996, 81–99) (Fig. 6b: D, E, C1). At Koktepe, however, the corresponding period has not yet been clearly defined. Pottery of 'Achaemenid' tradition (Koktepe IIIb types) was discovered in a group of domestic buildings whose architectural technique with square bricks is usually attributed to the Hellenistic period (Isamiddinov *et al.* 2003, 71–2, 74) (Fig. 2: ch. 6, 10, 12; Fig. 5a–b). The pottery found in the latest layers shows that the occupation was limited to the early Seleucid period (Koktepe IVa). The construction of these houses is not dated, but recent excavations conducted on the contemporary fortifications of the terrace (by Sh. Rakhmanov, Institute of Archaeology of Samarkand) have brought to light four successive walls and repairs, too many architectural events for only the early Hellenistic period. It is therefore possible that this occupation had already begun before the collapse of Achaemenid power, even if most of the architectural construction seems to have taken place under

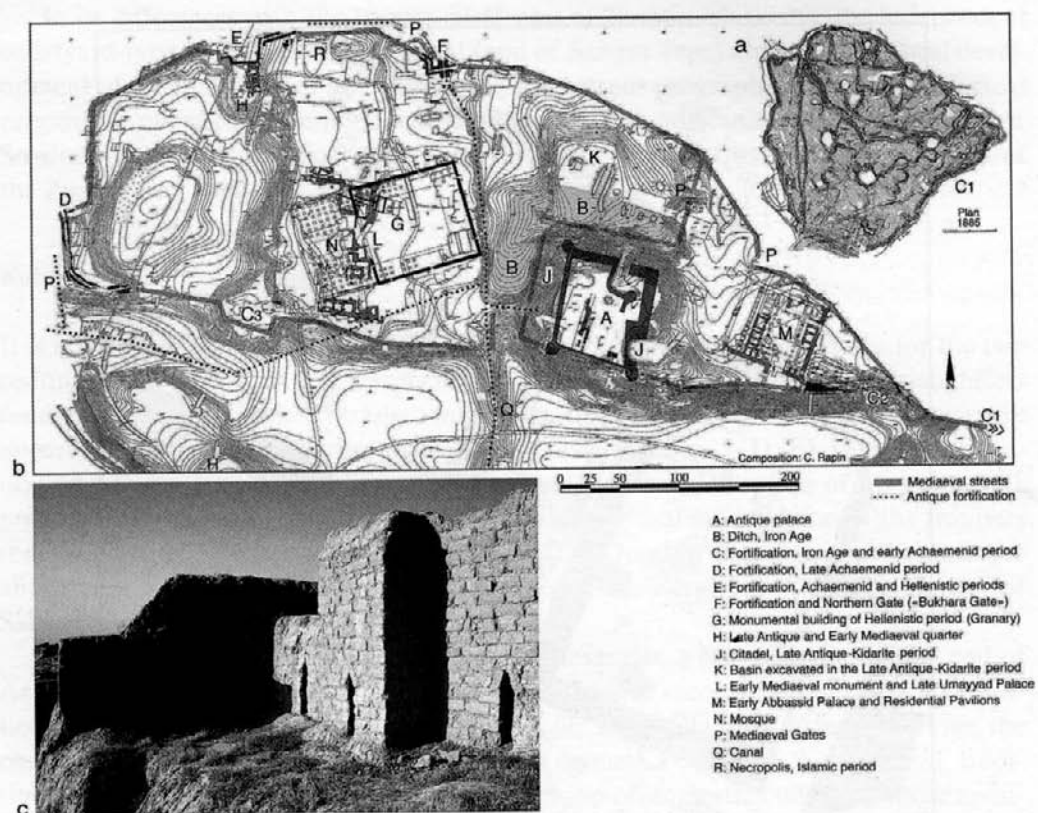
area (on the location of Margiana north of the Oxus see Grenet & Rapin 2001; on the proposal of L. Sverchkov see Rapin 2004, 155, n. 50; Rapin *et al.* 2006). If this hypothesis is correct, this parallel itinerary followed by Alexander at some distance from the Oxus on his way westwards would have crossed the Kizil-su valley and the region of Dushanbe north of Ai Khanum.

<sup>24</sup> In some ways, the concept of the courtyard sanctuary seems not to have completely disappeared, or to have known elsewhere an independent later development, as a religious reaction, as it is present at Dahan-i Ghulaman, in the probably sacred Achaemenid building No. 3, Scerrato 1966a; 1966b; Genito 1986; Bouchardat 1984; Stronach 1985; Callieri 1994. However, the fortified wall encircling the temple of Takht-i Sangin is also reminiscent of such an early tradition.



**Figure 5.** a: Koktepe, plan of ch. 12 (early Hellenistic period). b: Koktepe, ch. 12, view from the south (early Hellenistic period).





**Figure 6.** a: Samarkand-Afrasiab, plan of the site in 1885. b: Plan of the northern sector ('Acropolis'). c: Samarkand-Afrasiab, western Hellenistic fortification.

Macedonian and early Seleucid control<sup>25</sup> (see *infra*). The presence of clay loom weights points to the importance of domestic textile production in this context, like other examples found in the late Hellenistic layers of Afrasiab, although these houses seem to have been mostly barracks, characteristic of a military society, whose main task was the strengthening of Koktepe as a fortress.

<sup>25</sup> At present we have not observed any chronological gap in these buildings between the Macedonian period and the early Seleucids.



#### IV Alexander, the Iron Gates and the nomads

As far as the Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic periods are concerned, archaeological, numismatic and epigraphical discoveries made in recent decades enable the proposition of a general outline for the confusing events that took place during the transition to the Kushan period.

The Sogdian Iron Gates, near the modern village of Derbent, have always been a place of natural defence on the mountainous road that crosses the Baysun Range between Termez and Samarkand (Fig. 7). They consist of several gullies and a defensive apparatus related to a huge frontier-wall only recently discovered.<sup>26</sup>

This archaeological site is particularly important for the reconstitution of the main geopolitical events in Central Asia from the Hellenistic period onward.

The place has been mentioned by numerous travellers, among which were Buddhist pilgrims, as well as Clavijo, the ambassador of the king of Castille, invited by Tamerlane to Central Asia in 1404. One of the earliest events related to this strategic location is Alexander the Great's expedition and his capture of two fortified Sogdian rocks used by the Bactrians and Sogdians to slow down the conqueror's advance towards Samarkand in the spring of 328 BC, and then back towards Bactra a year later, in the spring of 327 (Rapin 2004; Sverchkov 2005; Rapin *et al.* 2006; cfr. Holt 1988, 61, 66–8, 76). In this context, the Iron Gates were only a natural barrier against the Macedonians, as they have always been for all 'traditional' nomadic invaders.

The nomads like those who had faced Cyrus continued to live at the edges of the oases settled by sedentary peoples in Sogdiana and Bactria. Despite Alexander's main victory near Alexandria Eschate (Khodjent, at the entrance of the Ferghana Valley), the Scythians were always present among the mobile populations of Central Asia, and did not prevent the arrival of new tribes.

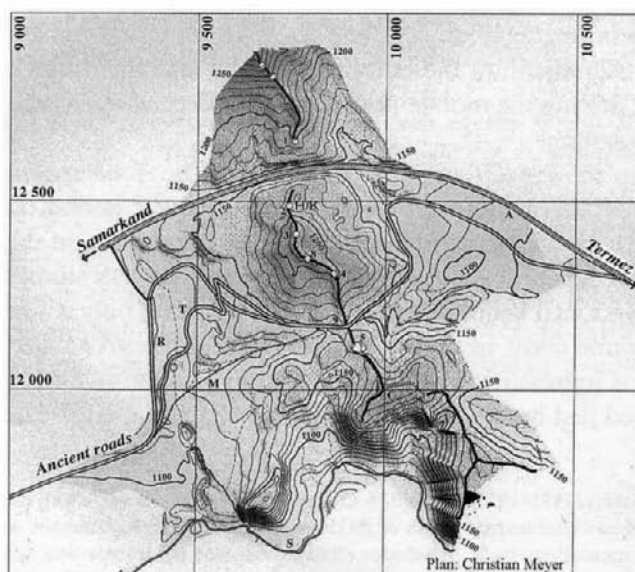
The advent of the Macedonians in 329–327 BC put a brutal end to the Achaemenid period, as seen at Afrasiab in the repairs undertaken during the Hellenistic period on the northern gate and in the palace of the satrap identified by Olga Inevatkina on the northern acropolis ('Ville Haute') (Fig. 6b: A). But the excavations and pottery studies have shown that the city was abandoned by the Greeks for the first time only a few decades after the conquest. The same event has been observed at Koktepe. As stated above, the period of the invasion is represented there by a new urbanization (Koktepe IIIb–IVa), which probably occurred just before the disappearance of Darius III.<sup>27</sup> The

<sup>26</sup> Rtveladze 1986. Results of the last excavations (1995–1997) directed by C. Rapin and Sh. Rakhmanov with the collaboration of M. Khasanov and Chr. Meyer (Bordeaux): Rapin & Rakhmanov 1999; 2002; Rakhmanov & Rapin 2003 (some comments about these excavations by E. Rtveladze (2003) show that the author was not informed of the publication of the last report in the same volume).

<sup>27</sup> A later possibility is not excluded as we know that at the arrival of Alexander in 328 BC, a fortification of the Sogdian cities had taken place under the control of Hephaestion (Arrian IV, 16.3), after the conquest of the 'rock' of Arimazes and the meeting of Hephaestion with Alexander (Curtius VIII, 1.10).



a



b



c

**Figure 7.** a: Iron Gates near Derbent (Uzbekistan), view from the north. b: Plan by Christian Meyer. c: View of the Hellenistic and Kushan wall, from the south.

fortification of Koktepe and its successive repairs were clearly justified by the situation of the city, on the border of the Zerafshan plain, at the end of one of the nomad roads which directly connected Ustrushana to Samarkand, and along which today long sequences of nomad kurgans may be seen.

As shown by Soviet research in the Zerafshan Valley, Sogdian territory north of the Hissar range was probably occupied by nomadic populations as early as the third century BC (Pugachenkova 1989; Obel'chenko 1992; *Arxeologija SSSR* 1992). The lack of coins for most of this Hellenized province is a problem for the reconstruction of the historical context. But recently, a coin of Seleucus I was discovered by a team directed by Maurizio Tosi at Sazagan near Samarkand in a dwelling destroyed by a nomad grave, giving rise to the idea that nomads arrived soon after the first Seleucids (Abdullaev *et al.* 2004).

In this new geopolitical situation, the Greek border along the Syr-darya (including the territory around Alexandria Eschate/Antiochia Scythica) was displaced southwards, when the Graeco-Bactrians launched the construction of the first monumental wall of Derbent (Fig. 1; Fig. 7). We know through the historical sources that under the reign of king Euthydemus, nomads were seriously threatening the northern frontiers of the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom (Polybius XI, 39.5).

From that time on, the history of the wall coincides with the history of the states controlling the region, since their frontiers are incessantly redrawn depending upon relations with their nomadic neighbours.

## V Eucratides, the Scythians, Tochari and Sacaraucae

The middle of the second century BC is marked by the expeditions of the Graeco-Bactrian king Eucratides I against his Indo-Greek rival Menander, who ruled territories south of the Hindu Kush that corresponded to Ariana and north-west India. These events are illustrated by the rich Indian booty Eucratides deposited in his treasury of Ai Khanum in the last years of his life.<sup>28</sup> This booty is well dated by ink inscriptions

<sup>28</sup> Indian artifacts are represented at Ai Khanum by coins and precious objects, such as an inlaid disc of shell probably illustrating the Indian myth of Sakuntala, and a throne with semiprecious stones (crystal and agates) manufactured in the region of Taxila. This throne was identical to another one discovered at Rome, in a nymphaeum of the Horti Lamiani, where it was associated with a group of sculptures portraying the emperor Commodus in the, not incidental, context of Dionysos' Indian *thyasus*, Rapin 1992 (for the chapters relating to Indian finds see also Rapin 1996); Callieri 1995. For an Indian myth engraved on an object from Takht-i Sangin, Rapin 1995. For a recent bibliography, Boppearachchi *et al.* 2003.

(Fig. 8a),<sup>29</sup> which also mention Indian punch-marked coins collected during these campaigns dating to at least 150/149 BC.

Before these Indian wars, Eucratides had already undertaken a northward extension of his kingdom, taking control of both Bactria and Sogdiana (Justin XLI, 6.3), from Ai Khanum (Eucratideia), on the axis of an eastern corridor of nomadic incursions, to Samarkand (Maracanda), near the northern frontier of the kingdom.

Between these capitals the wall of Derbent became useless and fell into ruin.

After this second Hellenistic conquest, marked by the arrival of a new wave of Graeco-Bactrians under Eucratides I, Samarkand was reorganized and its urban fortifications thoroughly reconstructed (Fig. 6c), as the old Hellenistic ones and the remains of the earlier Achaemenid walls had suffered since the withdrawal of the first Greek settlers.<sup>30</sup> However, this programme was interrupted before it was completed, as seen in a large gap in the northern wall (Filanovich 1973) and in the rapid destruction of the most recently built sections (Rapin & Isamiddinov 1994, 557). The pottery studied by Bertille Lyonnet does not provide a precise date for this event. According to her studies, the fall could be dated to as late as 130 BC, but in my opinion, if the erection of the last unfinished wall is attributed to Eucratides I, its destruction should then be dated to only a short time after his murder around 145 BC, in the first years of the rule of Heliocles I, a few coins of whom have been discovered north of the Oxus (Abdullaev & Erkulov 2004).

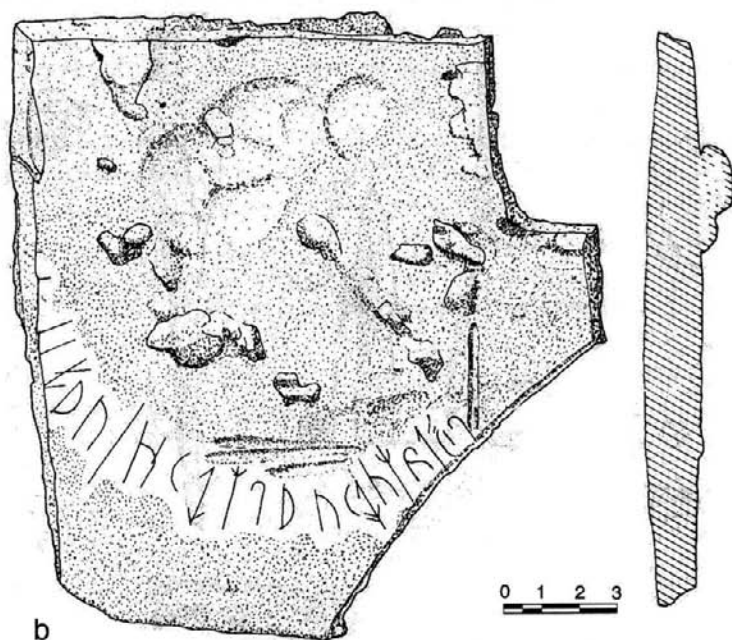
After this event, the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom north of the Hindu Kush slips gradually under nomadic rulers. It was apparently conquered through two routes: the first followed the most direct road from Chinese Turkestan to Bactria along the north-eastern valley of Karategin in Tadjikistan, the Comedai of the ancients; the second led to conquest from the west, from the northern regions<sup>31</sup> and by various tracks that crossed the Semirechie or the Ferghana valley, then the Ustrushana (between the Syr-darya and Djizak) towards the Zerafshan valley. In the same period, the western part of the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom suffered pressure from the Parthians.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Inscription 1a: Rapin 1992, 108; these lines are related to an operation concerning olive oil by a certain Hippias, a clerk of the gymnasium defined with the function of 'hemiolios'. The operation is dated to about 148 BC, by a synchronism between the period of Eucratides I and that of Mithridates I (Justin XLI, 6.1: Bernard 1985, 97–103; Rapin 1992, 281–7). The parallels with the other documents of the treasury date the abandonment and destruction of the city to around 145 BC.

<sup>30</sup> Recent excavations and trial trenches have shown that during the Hellenistic period the occupation of Afrasiab was relatively sparse, in contrast to the estimate of seventy stadia (13 km) for the length of the fortifications stated by Curtius (VII, 6.10), while the circumference of the plateau of Afrasiab is no more than 5.5 km (about thirty stadia). It has been suggested that the statement of Curtius refers to the external protection of the steppe area against the nomads, but more probably the measurement is due to an erroneous transmission of the text.

<sup>31</sup> For a general view on the nomads of northern origin, see Stavisky 1986, 123–5. On the Sacaraucae, see *infra*.

<sup>32</sup> On the relations between both regions, see Rtveldadze 1995.



**Figure 8.** a: Ai Khanum, Treasury, economic inscription (c. 148 BC). b: Ai Khanum, Treasury, Scythian inscription (c. 145 BC).



The eastern part of the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom, around the city of Ai Khanum, is probably the first to have been overrun by nomads, seen in the evidence of two successive events of pillaging in the ruins of the royal treasury (Rapin 1992, 287–94). As proposed by Bertille Lyonnet on the basis of pottery typology, each event corresponds to a different foreign group (Lyonnet 1997 and 2001). The first invasion was by nomads of Scythian origin, as in 145–144 BC one of them left in the treasury a silver ingot bearing an inscription of runic type (Fig. 8b) similar to an older one found in the Issyk kurgan, in Semirechie (Akishev 1978, 70–1; Bernard & Rapin 1980, 27–9; Rapin 1992, 139–42).

A few years later, a second wave of nomads, which corresponds to the Yuezhi (Yüeh-chih) of the Chinese sources (the Tochari of the later classical sources), followed the same road and put a definitive end to urban life in the Hellenistic city of Ai Khanum. Through the Chinese sources, we know that around 130 BC Bactria was still under the control of the first Scythian nomads (the Sai, as inferred from the fact that the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom had by then already disappeared) and that not long after this date, the Yuezhi (first settled between the Wakhsh—where the later ‘Kushan’ *yabghu* was probably situated after a gap in their presence north of the Oxus—and Termez) crossed the Oxus to take full control of the region, even launching some westward raids as shown by the death of the Parthian Artabanus I in 124–123 (Justin XLII, 2.2; Stavisky 1986, 118).

In the north-west, the invaders of the region of Samarkand after 145 BC differ from the first nomads of Ai Khanum. This population appears to be identified through a type of stemmed beaker (‘piédouches’ in French), which, according to Bertille Lyonnet, is common to the archaeological levels subsequent to the fall of Samarkand (Afrasiab III type) and along the middle Oxus. It is usually accepted that this branch of the nomad migrations should be attributed to the Sacaraucae of the Graeco-Roman historians, or to a group close to them.<sup>33</sup>

## VI Koktepe and the earlier post-Hellenistic nomads

The new post-Hellenistic nomad presence at Koktepe and in the Zerafshan Valley is attested by burials that should probably be attributed to this period (Koktepe V) (Rapin *et al.* 2001, 66–9).

<sup>33</sup> At Afrasiab, some buildings with walls built of mud bricks discovered under the mosque and along the northern ruined Hellenistic fortification, as well as a section of fortification (Filanovich 1973, 88, fig. 1.1), could be attributed to this population or to its successors (Afrasiab III and/or IV period). This new mobile population does not therefore mean the complete abandonment of the urban settlement between the Hellenistic power (Afrasiab IIb) and the Afrasiab V period beginning in the last third of the third century AD (see note 38).



Like Samarkand, Koktepe had been abandoned by the Hellenistic power not long after the Macedonian expedition. The constructions fell into ruin and the monumental buildings began to resemble natural hills (Fig. 9b). Some parts of the site had probably been sporadically occupied during the Hellenistic period, but the main traces of a subsequent occupation are represented by nomad burials. Two periods can be observed here. A first group of burials should be attributed to migrations of the third century BC,<sup>34</sup> or more probably to the (Sacaraucaean) invasion of the Zerafshan Valley and Samarkand after the death of Eucratides. The second period is attested by the particularly monumental grave built in the first century AD for a (Kangju) nomad princess or priestess (Fig. 9).

The first phase of burials corresponds to tombs with a lateral niche (in Russian 'podboi', in French 'tombes à enfeu' or 'à loculus' (Stavisky 1986, 121)), which is one of the most common types found from Siberia to the Black Sea area. In Central Asia, their orientation is not always the same. Independently of this parameter, it seems possible, as pointed out by Bertille Lyonnet, to distinguish two cultures in the burials of the second century BC. In the west, one group is represented by several cemeteries in the Zerafshan Valley and along the right bank of the middle Oxus (Oxiana), from Babashov to the Bishkent Valley, west of the Kafirnigan, all characterized by the above-mentioned stemmed beakers. The fortifications of the Iron Gates at Derbent did not constitute a frontier at that time and continued to fall into ruin. East of the Kafirnigan, a different type of burial is found, such as that of Ksirov in the Kyzylsu valley with a particular kind of handmade bottle, and is probably related to the second group of eastern nomads, the Yuezhi, which invaded Ai Khanum (Lyonnet 1997).

However, the wide distribution of the western pottery type and the long tradition of the burial types constitute a problem for classification, and historical conclusions are difficult. The intertwined relations between the various ethnic and political groups from the eastern to the western edges of the nomad area are confusing, especially from the chronological point of view. One cannot exclude, for example, that the Sacaraucae deeply influenced the culture of their successors, as shown by some pottery at Tillya Tepe.

## VII The Iron Gates between the Kushans and the Kangju<sup>35</sup>

With its later and quite different nomad phase, identified by the high-status tomb, the site of Koktepe helps to distinguish a later cultural group dated to the first century AD.

<sup>34</sup> Similar to some graves of Sirlibaj Tepe and to the graves recently excavated by the Uzbek-Italian expedition at Sazagan, in the historical period preceding the reign of Euthydemus or contemporary to it.

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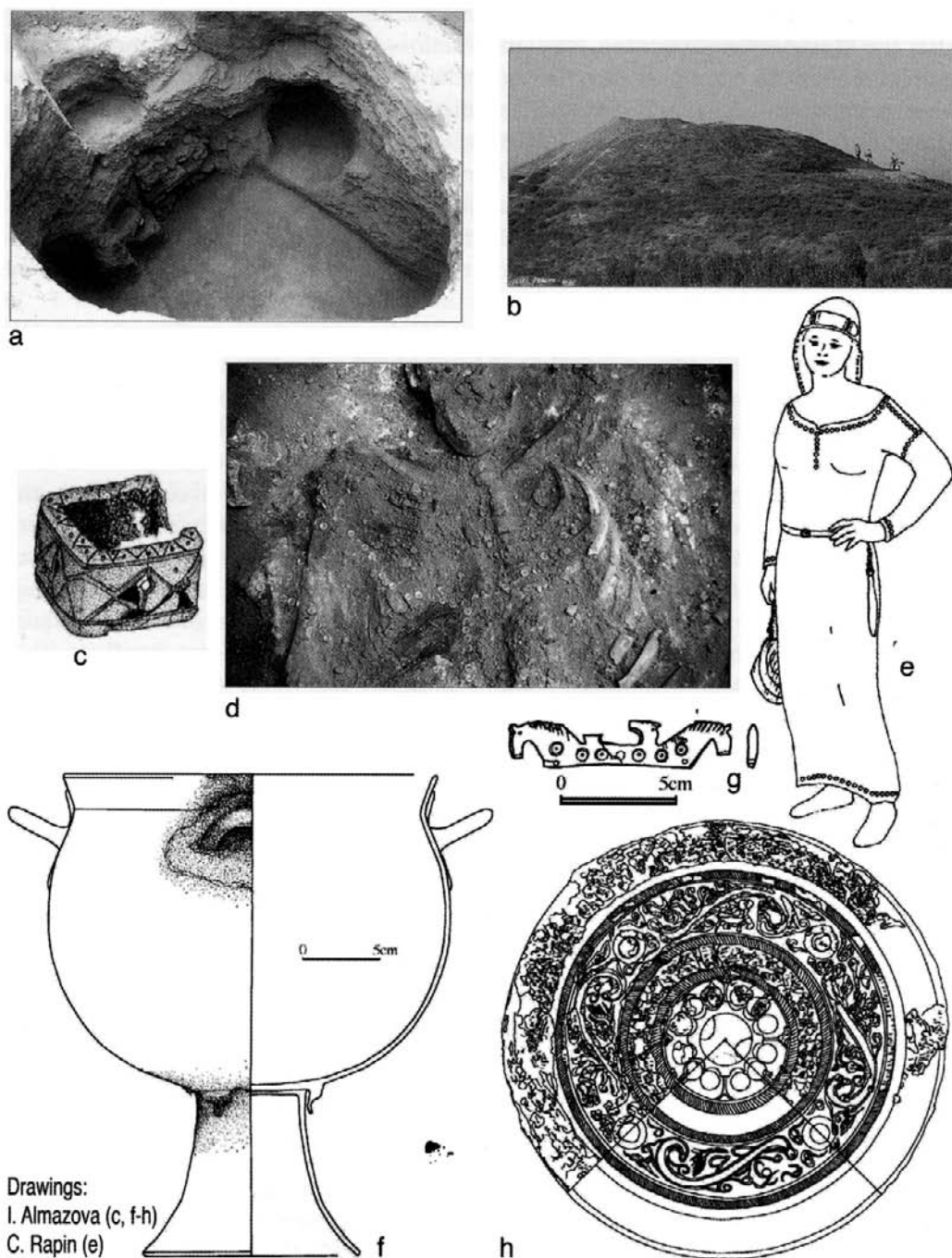
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**Figure 9.** a: Koktepe, aristocratic tomb (first century AD). b: Mound of the aristocratic tomb, view from the north. c: Incense-burner. d: View of the skeleton. e: Reconstruction of the costume. f: Scythian bronze cauldron. g: Scythian bone comb. h: Chinese mirror.

This change in the historical context is suggested by the development of the site of the Iron Gates: whereas the wall continued to fall into ruin during the reign of Eucratides I and that of the Sacaraucae (?), in the first century AD the frontier wall was rebuilt with stone masonry above the remains of the former Hellenistic structure, and several times repaired (Fig. 7c). This architectural development signifies that about two centuries after the death of Eucratides, a new balance of power was established along this border. As is the case for the Great Wall of China or for the Roman *limes*, this kind of fortification continued to appear as the unique solution the sedentary populations found against nomadic pressures. At that time in the east, the Yuezhi were settled within the framework of the new Kushan empire which spread from Derbent to Mathura near the Ganges. In the north-west, on the other side of the Derbent wall, the Kangju (K'ang-chü) progressed towards a broad 'nomad' empire, organized with a new system of capitals including Samarkand and various fortified sites. One of these seems to have been identified at Kala-i Zakhoki Maron in the modern city of Karshi. As proposed by Kazim Abdullaev (Abdullaev 2001, 205–6), this settlement consisted mainly of tent dwellings, and should be identified as a parallel 'nomad' capital close to Erkurgan, the ancient city of Xenippa mentioned by the historians of Alexander.

### VIII Koktepe and the later post-Hellenistic nomads

One of the most recent discoveries representing the Kangju period in the first century AD is the above-mentioned aristocratic grave of Koktepe (Koktepe VI) (Rapin *et al.* 2001, 38–64) (Fig. 9).

This monument was dug into the hill formed by the ruins of the south-eastern platform of the (apparently) early Achaemenid period. These ruins then appeared similar to the usual barrows of the steppe regions (Rapin *et al.* 2001, 69–73). The burial construction is the transverse catacomb type. The room in which the body of the deceased lay was vaulted and flanked by two small niches (Fig. 9a). A stepped dromos carefully cut in the masonry of the earlier platform monument provided access to the grave from the south. Although the tomb was partially plundered in antiquity, the body and the funerary material were by chance entirely preserved.

The plan of the dromos and of both lateral niches is directly connected to the different phases of the ritual practices. After the funerary banquet, the remains were deposited in the lateral niches; the eastern niche contained pottery related to beverages—two bottles, a pilgrim flask and a crater, the forms of which are Hellenistic in origin. On the threshold stood an iron candelabrum to light the tomb or for the burning of incense. In the western niche were food remains in the form of ox bones, and a bronze cauldron of Scythian type that had served for boiling the meat (Fig. 9f).

The body had been deposited on a wooden couch, perpendicular to the general orientation of the grave, along the northern wall of the main room, the head oriented



eastward (Fig. 9d). The skeleton had been smashed and severely damaged by the collapse of the vault, but the bones were not displaced, probably because the corpse was mummified or because it had not been long buried when the first grave robbery took place. Despite the damage, our colleague Michelle Glantz of the University of Colorado could recognize, in the fragments of the back of the skull, that the deceased presented an artificial deformation of the head, a well known feature in nomad burials seen in a geographical-chronological development from Central Asia to early mediaeval western Europe.

The funerary material is precious evidence for the social position of the deceased woman. The dress was decorated with 345 gold bracteas, the disposition of which on the skeleton has enabled reconstruction of the general layout, from the shoulders to the ankles (Fig. 9e). The waist was apparently tied with a belt, indicated by three gold buckles with turquoise inlays. The skull of the woman lay on a silver plate intentionally cut to fit the shape of her head. Her face had been covered with a veil decorated with glass beads of Syro-Phoenician origin. A head-dress on which was sewn a diadem with three gold leaves had been placed nearby.<sup>36</sup>

At the feet and near the head stood two clay incense-burners which were probably burning at the moment when the grave was closed (Fig. 9c). Not far from the left shoulder, a small silver cup had been placed, for an offering that has not been identified. Among the other finds was her personal tool set.

The instruments are represented by two iron knives, located near the left leg. It is not clear whether they had been attached to the belt or not. Under the right hand was an embroidered bag which contained a Chinese mirror (Fig. 9h) and a fragment of a bone comb of Scytho-Sarmatian type (Fig. 9g).

The objects found in this grave are of particular importance, since they link this burial to various cultural trends in the world of nomads. As can be inferred from the Chinese mirror, the burial can be dated to the first decades of the first century AD (Rapin *et al.* 2001, 61–4). More specifically it can be considered to be contemporary to the burials of Tillya Tepe, in northern Afghanistan (Sarianidi 1985; 1989). Politically, it is attributed to the Kangju, whose territory extended west of the Iron Gates.

The pottery deposited in the eastern niche belonged to the local sedentary culture, which cohabited with the nomads—or the sedentarized nomads to whom the aristocrat of Koktepe probably belonged—along the borders of the Zerafshan Valley. At the time of this burial, Koktepe ceased to be on the steppe frontier, as a new canal, the Pay-aryk, began to irrigate the upper terrace between the Bulungur and the northern foothills of the Zerafshan valley. From that period onward, the city of Kyndykly-tepe appears to have been the most powerful city, controlling for a time the northern canals of the region (*supra* note 10). Its reconstruction after the beginning of our era is not

<sup>36</sup> On the social and religious status of precious metals in a funerary context see, for example, Litvinsky 1982.



dated precisely (the site has not yet been excavated), but one cannot exclude that it was the residence of the rich woman buried at Koktepe. The situation was probably the same at Tillya Tepe, where, according to I. T. Kruglikova and V. Sarianidi, the buried ruler could have reigned in the neighbouring city of Emchi Tepe.<sup>37</sup> Further to the south of Koktepe, the site of Samarkand continued to be urbanized, as seen in the northern part of the city where buildings with walls made of mud bricks date from the first century BC (still under Sacaraucan control: Afrasiab III period) or to the first century AD (Kangju period: Afrasiab IV).<sup>38</sup>

This renewed agricultural activity north of Derbent began in Ferghana and in Chach, where a development of the irrigation system has been observed in the Kangju period from the first century BC (Mukhamedjanov 1994, 267).

Contrary to the pottery, the bronze cauldron of Koktepe, like a similar one discovered at Sirlibaj Tepe, clearly identifies the Scythian origin of the deceased, since this kind of vessel is related to the nomad diet of boiled meat, attested as early as the seventh century from Siberia to the Black Sea. The dress decorations also belong to the same culture. In the Greek, early Hellenistic and Scythian world, jewellery is characterized by the use of gold, without any association of stones or glass beads as seen in the jewellery in fashion in the Roman world (Rapin 1992, 168–9). The appearance of polychrome jewellery, as seen at Koktepe in the turquoise inlays, is due to a late trend, essentially represented in Central Asia by the rich material of Tillya Tepe (well identified from a cultural point of view by Paul Bernard (1987)), before the westward expansion of this technique. The iron knives, a similar example of which has been discovered in the woman burial No. 2 of Tillya Tepe (Sarianidi 1983, fig. 22; 1985, 23; 1989, 56), belong to the same Scythian culture, as do the incense-burners. The latter objects are particularly well attested towards the west, from the Aral Sea to the Don on the Black Sea, especially in burials of women.

<sup>37</sup> Kruglikova 1973; Sarianidi 1989, 46 (my thanks to H.-P. Francfort for this observation).

<sup>38</sup> These buildings (see also note 33) are difficult to date, but their ruins suggest that they existed for a long time before their replacement in the new urbanizing programme of the Afrasiab V period, when about the end of the third century AD, at the beginning of the Sogdian period, the city extended to the northern half of the ancient city (plan in Kabanov 1973, 18 [fig. 1.1]; see also Bernard 1996a, 355, fig. 8, houses attributed in this study to the second–third centuries). The space inside the walls is completely occupied in the first centuries AD. This new conception of the city is related to the increasing population and to the development of the irrigation system, but the principal reason is probably the evolution of the Central Asian urban society towards a commercial economy which characterized the Kushan period. The next urban policy (Afrasiab VI period) is represented by domestic constructions which cover the same area as the houses of the Afrasiab V period (Kabanov 1973, 18 [fig. 1.2]; plan in Bernard 1996a, 355). The citadel erected on the spot of the Achaemenid–Hellenistic palace probably appeared around the fifth century, in the Kidarite period, probably after an interruption due to the Chionite invasion around the middle of the fourth century (Grenet 1996, 370–5, fig. 6), or under the Hephthalites.

## IX Historical elements

The high status objects found at Koktepe reveal the first steps of these cultural trends westward, along the steppe belt, which can be defined as the Sarmato-Alan civilization whose origins can be partly identified in Siberia and the Altai (Rapin *et al.* 2001; Schiltz 2002, 852–78). The geographical and chronological development of this category of aristocratic finds may be seen in burials of the Black Sea region, such as the second century AD princess's grave at Kobayakov, in the deposit of Chinese mirrors of the same type as those buried much earlier in Tillya Tepe, Koktepe and the northern regions of Central Asia. The bone comb decorated with opposing horses found at Koktepe (Fig. 9g) is another important element for the identification of the route of these steppe cultures from the fourth century BC in Central Asia to the 'barbarian' fifth century AD in France.

As can be inferred from recent studies, several burials of the Samarkand area, such as some of the graves of Sirlibaj Tepe (Ivanicky & Inevatkina 1989) and the burial with the engraved bone plates in Orlat (Pugachenkova 1989, 122–54; Ilyasov & Rusanov 1997–8, 130–4; Ilyasov 2003), apparently belong to the same cultural group in Sogdiana as the burial of Koktepe. All should be attributed to the first decades of the first century AD or shortly after.<sup>39</sup> This attribution is strengthened by the site of Tillya Tepe, which should be added to this group, despite the fact that it is situated in western Bactria.

The case of Tillya Tepe has presented a controversial problem from the date of its discovery in 1978. The discussion concerns mainly the identity of the nomads, the terminology for which changes constantly throughout the publications. One position taken by some of the specialists, such as S. A. Yatsenko,<sup>40</sup> consider the aristocrats of Tillya Tepe to be Yuezhi-Kushan. This identity is too vague for the complex period which separates the fall of the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom in the second century BC and the events of the first century AD. It must not be forgotten that the Yuezhi invaders of Bactria occupy a pre-eminent position in the historiography because they have been documented by Chinese sources. But as has been illustrated by the discoveries at Ai Khanum and Samarkand, they were not the first nomads to reach Bactria and to follow the middle Oxus west of the Wakhsh in the second century BC; the Scythians-Sakas and the Sacaraucae had in fact already done so before the Yuezhi plundered the important cities of this kingdom. As they were present for a long time, it is therefore incorrect to attribute the whole Central Asian territory to the Yuezhi-Kushans only.

However, the precious objects of the nomad tombs do not specifically reflect the ethnicity or geographical origin of their owners; the significance of such 'modest'

<sup>39</sup> For the numerous controversies relating, for example, to the Orlat or Takht-i Sangin plaques and for Central Asian chronology, Ilyasov 2003.

<sup>40</sup> Yatsenko 2001, 73–120, excludes the other possibilities (see p. 86 on the views of Litvinsky & Stavisky). For an important study (not mentioned by him) related to the non-Yuezhi identity of the aristocrats of Tillya Tepe, see Bernard 1987.

objects as the iron knives found at Koktepe and Tillya Tepe must not be neglected. The Chinese mirrors and other related objects, dating to almost two centuries after the arrival of the Yuezhi, constitute historical data independent from the information available for the second century BC. Moreover the Iron Gates fortified frontier (Rapin *et al.* 2001) is important as it distinguishes two different populations. It separated the region into an eastern area mainly under Yuezhi-Kushan control (the presence of the Yuezhi can be excluded westward as far as Samarkand: *infra*), and a western area of nomads related to Koktepe and Tillya Tepe.

For identification of the cultural trends and for attribution to a specific group of nomads, the orientation and architecture of the tombs do not appear to be decisive elements. As Jangar Ilyasov and Dmitry Rusanov have pointed out, it is nevertheless important to be aware of the absence of catacomb burials to the east of the Iron Gates, in the Kushan territory, and apparently also in Afghanistan, where the necropolis of Tillya Tepe could have been composed of reburials (Boardman 2003b, 367) or provisional burials. Similarly, the Chinese mirrors usually found in the northern part of Sogdiana and in Ferghana are also nearly absent from the burials of the middle Oxus.<sup>41</sup> The exception of the south-western Tillya Tepe burials in Afghanistan, where a homogeneous collection of such mirrors has been found, as well as several decorative plaques reflecting Chinese links (Boardman 2003a and 2003b), can be explained by the location of these nomads on the route lying between the steppe belt and the Indo-Scythian world.

It is at the beginning of the first century AD that several precious Chinese objects appear in Central Asia for the first time (with the opening of the 'Silk Road' system of exchange). Their circulation seems initially to have been restricted to the Kangju territory since they have not been recorded south, in Kushan controlled areas. The presence of the Chinese lacquers discovered at Begram (Pirazzoli-T'Serstevens 2003)—in a context of the second century AD—should probably not be attributed to the activities in China of such merchants as Maes Titianos. The early date of these objects could suggest that their export westward resulted from the first trade activities of the Kangju or an affiliated population established on the other side of the Iron Gates and in northern Central Asia (see: Ilyasov 2003).

The diffusion of polychrome jewellery is related to the northern 'Sarmato-Alan' nomads from the first century BC, however its production in Central Asia probably coincides with the intensification of exchanges with China.

Turquoise is the most frequently used stone for inlays, presumably because it comes from the northern areas controlled by the Scythians. On the contrary, the Badakhshan stones, such as garnet and lapis lazuli are less common (the last being particularly rare

<sup>41</sup> An exception is a Chinese mirror from Barattepa in the Surkhan Darya region, *Antiquities of Southern Uzbekistan* 1991, no. 47; Rtveladze 1999, 131.

after the Achaemenid period) probably because in the first century BC and AD their sources were controlled by the Yuezhi-Kushans.

In this context of a jewellery mostly based on turquoise the gold treasure of Tillya Tepe ought not to be interpreted as a proof of the existence of a 'Bactrian jewellery'.<sup>42</sup> The events related to the gathering of the precious material necessary for this kind of jewellery are not known, but they are probably connected to the invasions of the second century BC (including pillage of the Graeco-Bactrian treasuries) and to the rivalry between the successors of the Greeks in the first century BC (*infra*). As mentioned before, this technique could have been linked mainly to 'nomads' such as those of Koktepe and Tillya Tepe, rather than the Yuezhi-Kushans.

### Sources

The study of the geopolitical situation in the first century AD owes much to the reconstruction of events in Central Asia during the last centuries BC, mainly the identification of the nomads which destroyed or occupied the Graeco-Bactrian urban centres after the middle of the second century BC.

The location of the territories occupied by the Yuezhi and the Kangju, two of the main states which succeeded to the Hellenistic powers, is still discussed. The historical sources relating to this period are scarce, and limited to Chinese literature like the *Shiji*, the *Han Shu* and the *Hou Han Shu* (with references to the Sai, Yuezhi and Kangju) (la Vaissière 2005, 27–8), and to a few classical Graeco-Roman texts such as the history of Pompeius Trogus summed up by Justin in the *Prologues* XLI ('Scythicae gentes, Saraucæ et Asiani, Bactra occupavere et Sogdianos') and XLII ('Reges Tocharorum Asiani interitusque Saraucarum') and by Strabo XI, 8.2 (Asioi, [Pasianoï],<sup>43</sup> Tokharoi and Sakaraukai) (Stavisky 1986, 118; Rapin *et al.* 2001).

### *The Sai, Yuezhi and Kangju at the time of Zhang Qian*

The reconstruction of a coherent framework is impossible if based only on the textual sources, without the complementary archaeological data such as the too often neglected discoveries of Ai Khanum and Afrasiab or the pottery studies of Bertille Lyonnet. From an archaeological point of view, the double plundering of Ai Khanum which we have already mentioned can only be interpreted through an eastern itinerary of the Sai-Saka, then, after a while, of the Yuezhi (see above). From a historical point

<sup>42</sup> This erroneous interpretation is due to the focus on the Bactrian origin of the metal. See the same conclusions by Schiltz 2002, 860. On Pre-Kushan pieces of jewellery see Denisov & Grenet 1981.

<sup>43</sup> The ethnonym '{P}asianoï' is probably an erroneous form resulting from the fusion of the Greek 'or' (the letter *eta* being confused with a *pi*) and '\*Asianoï' (original form of the textual source: 'Asioi or Asianoï'), Rapin *et al.* 2001, 81–2.

of view, the itinerary of Zhang Qian through Ferghana and the Zerafshan valley does not imply that the Yuezhi had earlier followed the same western road when penetrating into the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom. It seems difficult to locate the Yuezhi west of Derbent, as the region was probably occupied by the Sacaraucae, the western nomads who invaded Samarkand and even occupied for a while some regions east of the Hissar range.<sup>44</sup> Later, the strengthening of the Iron Gates definitely excludes a Yuezhi presence on both sides of the frontier.

According to the map of the region described in the *Shiji*, the Kangju who received Zhang Qian seem to have still been centred on Chach (the Tashkent region to the north-west of Ferghana) (Bregel 2003, map 5). It is not sure that the Kangju already occupied Samarkand, the capital of the Zerafshan valley, as the *Shiji* (123 [101]) distinguished them from the inhabitants of the region 'between Ferghana and Parthia',<sup>45</sup> without saying if these comprised the Sacaraucae cited by the Graeco-Roman sources.

#### *The Alans, the Asii-Asiani and the Graeco-Roman sources*

Following an observation made by our colleague Mihaela Timus (on the base of the work of Romanian historians and archaeologists), Frantz Grenet and Etienne de la Vaissière propose, in a new study on the sources relating to the nomads (2005), an identification of the Asii or Asiani with the later Alans and Ases (from which the modern Ossets derive their name), that is a western Central Asian population, rather than the Yuezhi-Tochari of eastern Bactria. The Central Asian origin of the Alans is now maintained in numerous studies (Yatsenko 1993; Kouznetsov & Lebedynsky 1997, 22–4; Simonenko 2001, 53–72; Rapin *et al.* 2001, 58, 60, 88; Lebedynsky 2002, 42–7, 213–19; Schiltz 2002, 872–8; Ilyasov 2003), since this group (of a 'non-tribal' or 'non-ethnic' nature, according to various scientists) could have migrated towards the north Pontic region in the first century AD, bearing such Chinese mirrors<sup>46</sup> as the ones buried in the aristocratic tombs of Tillya Tepe and Koktepe.

In some previous studies, the 'Scythian' invasions of Central Asia mentioned in Justin's *Prologue* XLI were explained in the light of the fall of eastern Bactria and its capital Ai Khanum-Eucratideia after the middle of the second century BC.<sup>47</sup> With the new identification of the Asii-Asiani, the *Prologues* seem instead to concern two later distinct periods already disconnected from the time of Eucratides. Moreover, from a geographical point of view, they describe events related not to the eastern, but to the

<sup>44</sup> Numerous studies propose to locate the Yuezhi to the south of Kangju, that is at least partially west of Derbent, see, for example, Zadneprovsky 1997, 100–3.

<sup>45</sup> La Vaissière 2005, 25–6. For a discussion about the ancient maps of the region, see Rapin, *Historical Geography*... , forthcoming.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, a Chinese mirror from Kobayakov similar to the one of Koktepe: *L'Or des Amazones* 2001, 231.

<sup>47</sup> Lyonnet 2001; Rapin *et al.* 2001, 33–92 (with an erroneous parallel between the classical and Chinese sources, as the Tochari cannot be identified with the Sai (Scythians), nor the Asioi-Asianoï with the Yuezhi).



western border of the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom, that is a region which was in closer contact with Parthia. Therefore, the ethnonym of the Asii-Asiani should be transferred westwards, that is to a different historical context (the Kangju area).

With the archaeological data chronologically organized (Rapin *et al.* 2001), the new textual interpretation enables reconstruction of a more complete picture of the history of nomads in Central Asia.

### *Eastern Bactria*

To summarize, the collapse of eastern Bactria with the city of Ai Khanum is only indirectly referred to by the Chinese sources and must be attributed to a first wave of Scythian nomads, the 'Sai'<sup>48</sup> or Sakas, then to the 'Yuezhi'. The latter were later referred to in the Graeco-Roman sources as the 'Tochari'. The material presence of this population in Bactria is confirmed by an ornamental plaque recently discussed by Véronique Schiltz (2003a).

As they were the first to plunder the city of Ai Khanum, before the Yuezhi who reached the region only later, the Scythians-Sai are the nomads who probably inherited control of the most important quantity of Graeco-Bactrian precious metals and stones. Fifteen years after the arrival of these Sai, according to the envoy of the Chinese emperor, Zhang Qian, many merchants were active in the bazaars of Lan-shi, the capital of Daxia (i.e. Bactria). From Zhang Qian's testimony one can infer that some of them dealt with Chinese productions imported from India, but we do not know if they arrived in Bactria after the fall of the Graeco-Bactrians, as we do not know how long some could have been trading in the spoils of Hellenistic Bactria.

It has not been discovered who among the Scythians (or Sai of the Chinese sources), the Yuezhi, or the Sacaraucae was responsible for plundering the Oxus sanctuary at Takht-i Sangin, on the frontier between Sogdiana and Bactria (Litvinsky 2002). The responsibility of the Sai-Scythians is not excluded, but their westward progress after the fall of Ai Khanum is difficult to reconstruct, as it is possible that they were later simply integrated into the Yuezhi confederation. On the other hand, we observe that the necropolises of the nomadic population (the 'Sacaraucae' of Oxiana?) identified by B. Lyonnet (1997) in the west along the right bank of the Oxus between the Kafirnigan and Babashov, have not supplied any significant quantity of precious objects (it has however been observed that the distribution in the Surkhan Darya-region of the coin imitations of the last Graeco-Bactrian kings partly coincides with the area

<sup>48</sup> It is nevertheless also possible that these 'Sai'-Scythians of the Chinese sources, which invaded Ai Khanum, correspond to the 'Scythicae gentes' of Justin. In this case, these 'Scythicae gentes' appear as the first element in the enumeration of the nomads, and not as a generic term describing the next two mentioned peoples. Concerning the Saka, H.-P. Francfort has underlined in a personal communication the absence of Graeco-Bactrian influences on the Saka of Pamir (on the chronology, see, for example, Litvinsky 1969, 17) and the isolation of the fortresses of the Wakhan (Babaev 1973).

of these nomads or their immediate successors: see *infra*). On the other hand, the nomads present not long after the fall of the Graeco-Bactrians in the east, in the region of the Wakhsh, seem to have been the Yuezhi, whose third *Yabghu*, named 'Kushan', was perhaps located according to the Chinese sources about 100 km east of Termez, in the territory later controlled by Heraus (cfr. Hulsewé & Loewe 1979, 122–3, n. 296). The circumstances of the formation (in the first century BC?) of the five *yabghu* mentioned by the Chinese sources towards Termez, in the territory which was earlier occupied by the Sacaraucae, have still to be determined (Hulsewé & Loewe 1979, 122–3, n. 296).

*Western Bactria, from the Sacaraucae to the Kangju*

In the west, the fall of Sogdiana is not directly described in the texts, but the *Prologue* XLI of Justin is related to 'Saraucae' and 'Asiani' who succeeded as invaders of 'Bactra' and of the 'Sogdiani' (the first toponym corresponding probably to western Bactria and the second to the Sogdian territory from Samarkand to the Oxus), in a situation dating probably to the first century BC. It is possible that the destruction of Samarkand, just after the reign of Eucratides I, should be attributed to the Sacaraucae (more than one century before the later domination of the region by the Asiani). The territory of these nomads could have covered the Zerafshan plain before their southward expansion along the right bank of the Oxus south of the Hissar range (as far as Takht-i Sangin or only the Kafirnigan? (Lyonnet 1997 and 2001)) and through Bactria towards the Indo-Scythian lands (Baratin 2004)<sup>49</sup> (Fig. 1).

As mentioned by Justin in the next *Prologue* (XLII), the state of the Sacaraucae disappears under the pressure of the Asii-Asiani (belonging to the 'Kangju'),<sup>50</sup> probably just before the beginning of our era.<sup>51</sup> In the same place, Justin mentions a victory of the same Asii-Asiani ('Kangju') over the Tochari (Yuezhi). This military context probably explains the transfer to the western nomads of the Graeco-Bactrian treasures, one of the sources in precious metal and stones for the polychrome jewellery which, together with Chinese goods, spreads westward as early as the first century AD. However, this origin for precious metal was not unique. Before their arrival, the Scythian invaders of Central Asia were or had been owners of important quantities of precious metals, as seen in such tombs as the Issyk kurgan (Akishev 1978; also Schiltz 2003b), or among the pieces of the 'Siberian collection' of Peter the Great (Schiltz 1994, 2003b).

<sup>49</sup> For Scythian nomad material presence in north-west India (second–first centuries BC), see a gold head-dress of unknown origin, commentary by Schiltz 2003b. The existence of a road through the Sakan Pamir and Chitral should also be considered (cfr. Litvinsky 1969, Babaev 1973).

<sup>50</sup> For a reconstruction of the historical context, see Grenet & la Vaissière 2005; la Vaissière 2005, 24–51. Torday 1997, 308, 360, 387 (quoted by Ilyasov 2003, 297, n. 207) has proposed an identification of the Asii/Asiani with the Kangju, but, I presume, in the context of the second century BC.

<sup>51</sup> Rapin *et al.* 2001, 85–7. On a more precise date of this event, see Grenet, la Vaissière 2005.

## X Conclusion

### The Iron Gates and the frontier of the Kushan empire

The parallel between the ethnonym of the Asioi-Asianoi and the Alans and the cultural connections between the latter and the aristocratic tomb of Koktepe imply that the territory concerning the 'Ases' or 'Asians' is the territory of the Kangju confederation (or a subdivision of this) located to the west of the Iron Gates between south-western Kazakhstan and western Uzbekistan.<sup>52</sup>

As 'As', a member of this Kangju aristocracy west of the Iron Gates and perhaps the son or grandson of the vanquisher of the Sacaraucae and heir of the treasures of the Sai and Yuezhi (?), the king of Tillya Tepe can be considered, with the princess of Koktepe, to be among the earliest 'Scythian' representatives of the Sarmatian and Alan aristocracies later encountered along the western routes towards Central Europe.

After these historical events illustrated by the rich burials on the western periphery of the former Graeco-Bactrian kingdom, the reconstruction of the Derbent wall emphasizes the following, post-Sacaraucae, international balance of power. It is evidence of another stage of the rivalry between the newly sedentarized Kushan empire and the still 'nomadic' Kangju on the other side of the Hissar range.

The opposition between the Kangju and the Kushans is best illustrated from a cultural point of view by their respective relations with the earlier Graeco-Bactrian world. The Kushans appear to have been more deeply hellenized as a consequence of their location in the heart of Central Asian hellenism, while the Kangju remained at the northern periphery of a territory which the Graeco-Bactrian power never controlled for long periods, as shown by the excavations at Samarkand. It is therefore exaggerated to reduce their difference to a pure nomad-sedentary scheme. The contrast seems particularly well illustrated by the comparison of some of the art objects discovered on both sides of the frontier wall of the Iron Gates. The engraved bone plaques found at Orlat in the region of Koktepe and dated by Jangar Ilyasov (2003) to the first-second centuries AD present the portraits of Kangju warriors and hunters, who probably belonged to the same social context as the aristocracy of Koktepe (Rapin *et al.* 2001). While the *Prologue* XLII of Justin mentioned an early defeat of the Yuezhi, the mural reliefs which decorated the palace of Khalchayan (Pugachenkova 1971) to the east of the Iron Gates commemorated the triumph of the Kushans led by Kujula Kadphises<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> For their late date, apparently distinct from the invaders of Samarkand in the second third of the second century BC, the Asii appear to be the last population originating from the north-eastern region of Central Asia within the framework of the Kangju confederation.

<sup>53</sup> The chronology of Khalchayan and Orlat iconography is still under discussion, as some propose the attribution of these sites to the middle of the first century BC (see, for example, Abdullaev 1995, 161). This position can hardly fit within the chronological frame presented here, distinguishing the Sacaraucae of the first century BC from the nomads of the first century AD. On the other hand, the location of Khalchayan in the Surkhan Darya evokes the

over their western 'Scythian' neighbours (Bernard 1987). This event occurred probably after the union of the five *yabghu* by Kujula Kadphises but, according to F. Grenet, should more precisely be dated just before AD 47 (Grenet 2000). The similarity of the collared armour of the defeated warriors of Khalchayan with that of the warriors of Orlat or the sovereigns' portraits on coins have been already observed in the studies of recent decades.<sup>54</sup> The engraved bone plaques of Takht-i Sangin (Litvinsky 2001; Ilyasov 2003) and the sculptures of Khalchayan illustrate respectively the nomadic and sedentary versions of Kushan art at the beginning of the first century AD.

In the same period, in the south and in the west, the Kushans replaced the Indo-Parthian sovereigns. In the north-west, however, the fortification of Derbent becomes not only a political frontier, but also an economic and cultural border, as it can be observed that the early phases of Buddhism—with its pilgrims and related merchants—never extended beyond Derbent.<sup>55</sup>

### Economic trends

As can be inferred from the discoveries of Ai Khanum, Bactria was, in the Hellenistic period, a major cultural centre, from which Greek culture radiated throughout Central Asia. But, from an economic point of view, nothing appears to prove that the Graeco-Bactrians were interested economically by their position on the main crossroads of Asia. The scarcity of coins on the site of Afrasiab and in its region is probably due to the short time of Hellenistic power, but it also suggests that in the Hellenistic period, trade in northern Sogdiana was not based on a developed monetary system (Graeco-Bactrian coins were mainly diffused in the form of imitations only by later nomad authorities). In Bactria, on the other hand, the monetary finds do not present such concentration as in the Indian area. So far as international commerce is concerned, the imports to Ai Khanum are limited to a few 'occidental' products, like Mediterranean plaster mouldings on metallic vases for the Graeco-Bactrian artists, olive oil for the gymnasium activities, or books for the library (Francfort 1984, 104; Rapin 1992, 295–6; 1996, 117), whereas the Indian objects collected mainly in the treasury of the palace have simply been identified as booty from Eucratides' Indian expeditions against

progression of the Kushans towards the Iron Gates between the reigns of Heraus (whose territory about 20 AD was limited to the Kafirnigan and to the Wakhsh area) and Kujula Kadphises. Therefore, according to Stavisky (1986, 225–6), the earlier difficult connection of Khalchayan with Heraus has to be reconsidered.

<sup>54</sup> Similar armour is represented on a painting of Dalverzin Tepe, Beljavea 1978, 38, pl. IV; Abdullaev 1995, 154.

<sup>55</sup> For a discovery made in confused circumstances in the region of Samarkand (the Buddhist 'sanctuary' of the Sanzar plain), see Stavisky 1998, 103–5 (who attributes it to the early Mediaeval period).

Menander (*supra* note 28).<sup>56</sup> Despite their direct links represented, for example, by the eastern imports identified at Nisa (Bactrian royal gifts or war booty?), the Parthians were probably partially responsible for the economic isolation of the Graeco-Bactrians from the western world. Before their disappearance, the Graeco-Bactrian economy appears therefore to have been based more on local natural resources and regional crafts (Francfort 1984; Guillaume & Rougeulle 1987; Rapin 1992) than on any international commercial potential, whereas the links perceived with the Indo-Greek world tended to be of an ideological, political and military nature.

Therefore, it is important to underline the role of the nomads in the renewal of cultures and in the development of international trade in Central Asia. The network of commercial routes between China, India and the western world through the steppe and later through the Indian Ocean corresponds to the so-called 'Silk Road'. Its real beginning is difficult to date, and this event is not necessarily a direct consequence of the disappearance of the Graeco-Bactrian rulers. The first links with China in the last third of the second century BC are related to the initiative of its emperor, who sent his ambassador Zhang Qian. The main information provided by the report of this envoy is that all the roads between China and Central Asia were controlled by mobile nomads. The identity of the merchants active in Lan-shi (see above) is difficult to determine. Their presence does coincide with the period of the plundering of the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom, and does not imply the involvement of a wide commercial system. Trade on a large scale probably begins later, when the Scythian and Kushan power in northern India appears well established and connected to the northern regions through roads affording sufficient security to travellers. The opening of international trade is therefore to be dated around the beginning of the first century AD,<sup>57</sup> in the period represented by the rich nomad burials of Tillya Tepe and Koktepe.

*Note.* I wish to express my thanks to Henri-Paul Francfort, Frantz Grenet and Bertille Lyonnet for their kind and important information, and to Elisabeth Willcox for the revision of the present English text.

## Appendix

### *Chronology of events in Central Asia based on the excavations of Ai Khanum, the Sogdian Iron Gates, Samarkand-Afrasiab and Koktepe*

thirteenth–sixth centuries BC	End of Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. Early occupation of Koktepe (Koktepe I, Yaz I period), monumental courtyards (Koktepe II, Yaz II period?).
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<sup>56</sup> At the time of Zhang Qian (*Shiji*), Chinese products imported from India were sold in Bactria (*supra*), but this international commerce related to India cannot be generalized to the Graeco-Bactrian period weakened by the war policy of Eucratides (Justin XLII, 6.3).

<sup>57</sup> Stavisky 1995. On the hypothetical links with the west through the Caspian area, Callieri 2003.



end of sixth century BC	'Scythian' presence at Koktepe. Conquest of Central Asia by Cyrus and Darius I. Large urban fortification of Samarkand-Afrasiab (Afrasiab 0) and Koktepe (Koktepe IIIa). Main canal of Afrasiab and L-shaped ditch isolating its north-eastern palace area; sacred platform of Koktepe.
second half of the fourth-third century BC	Darius III. New fortifications and palace of Maracanda (Afrasiab I). Alexander the Great. The 'Rocks' of the Iron Gates. First Hellenistic period of Maracanda (Afrasiab IIa). Reduced fortification and houses of Koktepe (Koktepe IIIb?-IV).
third century BC	Withdrawal from northern Sogdiana by the Hellenistic power (Samarkand-Afrasiab, Koktepe). Nomad cemeteries in the Zerafshan valley. Threats against the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom of Euthydemus. Building of the Hellenistic wall at the Iron Gates.
second quarter of the second century	Eucratides I's reign: conquest of Bactria, Sogdiana and the Indo-Greek territories south of the Hindu Kush. New Hellenistic fortification of Samarkand-Afrasiab (Afrasiab IIb). Abandonment of the Iron Gates wall.
third quarter of the second century	Death of Eucratides. Destruction of Ai Khanum by Sai/Scythians and by Yuezhi/Tochari. Invasion of northern Sogdiana by the Sacaraucae. Destruction of the fortifications of Samarkand (Afrasiab III).
end of second-first century BC	Cemetery of Koktepe (Koktepe V). Burials with a lateral niche. New occupation of Samarkand-Afrasiab (Afrasiab III). Disappearance of the Sacaraucae (end of first century BC) and progression of the Kangju southward.
first century AD	Afrasiab IV. Catacomb-burials in the northern regions of Central Asia, at Koktepe (Koktepe VI), Sirlibaj Tepe, Orlat, etc., royal burial ground of Tillya Tepe in Afghanistan. Construction of the Kushan wall at the Iron Gates. Decisive victory of the Kushans over the Kangju; palace of Khalchayan.
second century AD	Sarmatian burials in the north of the Caspian and Black sea areas.
end of third century AD	Sogdian independence (urbanism in the Afrasiab V period).
middle of the fourth century AD	Chionite invasion.
from the fifth century AD	Kidarite and Hephthalite periods (urbanism in the Afrasiab VI period).

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