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Research Article

An Archaeological Study of the Fondoqestan Temple: An Analysis of Its Architectural Features, Sculpture, and Wall Paintings in the Context of Cultural Interactions

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ABSTRACT

The Fondoqestan Temple is one of the most significant archaeological sites in Afghanistan and a prominent example of Buddhist architecture and art in the Ghorband region of Parwan Province. Owing to its architectural remains, clay sculptures, wall paintings, and decorative elements, the site provides considerable potential for studying the development of Buddhist art and the cultural interactions between Afghanistan and neighboring regions. This study aims to examine the historical, architectural, and artistic significance of the Fondoqestan Temple and to analyze the characteristics of the artifacts discovered at the site. In terms of its purpose, the research is fundamental, while methodologically it adopts a descriptive-explanatory and qualitative approach. The data were collected and analyzed through documentary and library-based sources. The findings indicate that the Fondoqestan Temple dates to the sixth and seventh centuries CE, particularly the seventh century CE, and consists of a square-shaped structure with a central courtyard, a central stupa, porticos, iwans, and subsidiary spaces. Among the most significant artifacts discovered at the site are sculptures of Buddha, Bodhisattvas, Avalokiteshvara, and various deities, as well as wall paintings. An analysis of the stylistic characteristics of these works reveals a synthesis of Gandharan, Indian, Gupta, Sasanian, and Central Asian artistic elements. From this perspective, Fondoqestan was not merely a Buddhist religious center but also an important hub for the interaction and reinterpretation of artistic traditions in ancient Afghanistan. The evidence from the site highlights Afghanistan's significant role in the transmission and transformation of Buddhist art between the Indian subcontinent and Central Asia.

1. Introduction

Afghanistan, owing to its geographical location and its position at the crossroads connecting Central Asia, the Indian subcontinent, and the western regions, has historically been one of the most important areas of cultural interaction and exchange in the ancient world. The archaeological evidence found across different parts of the country reflects the cultural, religious, artistic, and social developments of various historical periods. Among these remains, evidence dating to the Buddhist periods is of particular significance, as it not only demonstrates the spread of Buddhism but also provides an opportunity to study the formation and development of artistic and architectural styles, as well as cultural relations between Afghanistan and the surrounding regions.

Among the Buddhist archaeological sites of Afghanistan, Fondoqestan holds a distinctive position. The site is located in the Ghorband Valley of Parwan Province, along the historical route leading toward Bamiyan. Its geographical position on one of the important communication routes of ancient Afghanistan, together with its architectural remains and artistic discoveries, enhances the significance of the site for the study of the region's cultural and artistic history. The Fondoqestan Temple was situated on a hill, and its remains include a square-shaped structure, a central courtyard, a stupa, porticos, and numerous architectural spaces that were decorated with wall paintings and clay sculptures.

The earliest known reports concerning Fondoqestan date back to the observations of Charles Masson in the nineteenth century CE; however, more systematic investigations and formal excavations of the site were conducted during the 1930s. These excavations revealed the remains of a Buddhist sanctuary, a central stupa, decorated porticos, various sculptures, coins, and pottery vessels. These discoveries provided a basis for a more detailed study of the architectural structure and artistic characteristics of the site.

From an architectural perspective, the Fondoqestan Temple exhibits an organized spatial arrangement and distinctive features of Buddhist architecture. The main structure was designed in a square plan, with a stupa positioned at its center. Porticos and iwans were constructed around the central space, while a number of sculptures and decorative elements were placed within these areas. The use of mud brick and *pakhsa* in parts of the structure, together with decorative elements and architectural arches, indicates the combination of different building and artistic traditions at the site. Based on the evidence presented in previous research, the construction of the temple is generally attributed to the seventh century CE.

The significance of Fondoqestan is particularly evident in its artistic remains. Sculptures of Buddha, Bodhisattvas, Avalokiteshvara, deities, and other religious and human figures, together with the wall paintings, constitute a rich corpus of Buddhist art. The techniques employed in the production of the clay sculptures, including the use of composite materials such as clay, straw, and horsehair, as well as their sculptural characteristics, allow these works to be compared with discoveries from sites such as Hadda, Tepe Sardar at Ghazni, and Mes Aynak.

From a stylistic perspective, the artistic remains of Fondoqestan are also of particular importance. The sculptures and paintings from the site exhibit characteristics associated with Indian and Gupta art, Gandharan art, Sasanian traditions, and artistic elements from Central Asia. In particular, the representation of Avalokiteshvara and the manner in which the figures are depicted against painted backgrounds demonstrate the complex processes of artistic adaptation, transformation, and reinterpretation in this cultural sphere. Comparisons between these paintings and examples from Ajanta in India, as well as from several artistic centers in Central Asia, further highlight the position of Fondoqestan within the broader network of artistic exchange during this period.

Accordingly, the study of Fondoqestan is not merely an examination of an ancient religious structure; rather, it constitutes an investigation of a cultural and artistic complex in which diverse civilizational and artistic elements converged. Therefore, the central question of this study is: **What information do the architectural features and artistic remains of the Fondoqestan Temple provide regarding the site's position in the development of Buddhist art in Afghanistan and the cultural interactions among Afghanistan, India, and Central Asia?** Adopting a descriptive-explanatory approach and relying on documentary and library-based sources, the present study examines the

geographical location, history of archaeological investigations, architectural structure, and archaeological finds of Fondoqestan in order to clarify the historical and artistic significance of this important site.

Research Findings

An examination of the archaeological, architectural, and artistic evidence associated with the Fondoqestan Temple reveals significant findings concerning the site's position in the cultural and artistic history of Afghanistan. The principal findings of the study are as follows:

1. Fondoqestan was an important Buddhist site in ancient Afghanistan. Architectural evidence and archaeological finds indicate that Fondoqestan was among the important centers of Buddhism in the Ghorband region, and that its remains belonged to an organized religious complex. Its location along the historical Ghorband-Bamiyan route further enhanced the site's significance as a center of communication and cultural interaction.

2. The temple's architecture had an organized structure consistent with Buddhist architectural traditions. The temple consisted of a square-shaped plan, a central courtyard, a central stupa, porticos, iwans, and subsidiary rooms. The presence of sculptures and decorative paintings within the porticos indicates that, in addition to its religious function, the architectural space of the temple provided an appropriate setting for the display and ritual use of artistic works.

3. The artistic remains of Fondoqestan demonstrate the synthesis of multiple artistic traditions. One of the most important findings of this study is that the art of Fondoqestan cannot be explained solely within the framework of a single artistic school. The sculptures and paintings from the site incorporate elements of Gandharan art, Indian and Gupta art, Sasanian characteristics, and components of Central Asian artistic traditions. This synthesis makes Fondoqestan an important example of the interaction, adaptation, and reinterpretation of artistic traditions in Afghanistan.

4. Fondoqestan's clay sculpture is characterized by notable technical and stylistic features. The sculptures discovered at the site were predominantly made of clay, with reinforcing materials such as straw, reeds, and horsehair incorporated into their construction. The manufacturing techniques and stylistic characteristics of these sculptures can be compared with examples discovered at Hadda, Tepe Sardar in Ghazni, and Mes Aynak.

5. Sculptures of Buddha, Bodhisattvas, and Avalokiteshvara constitute some of the most significant artistic finds from the site. The presence of numerous religious sculptures, particularly representations of Avalokiteshvara, enhances the significance of Fondoqestan for the study of Buddhist art. The physical characteristics, bodily postures, clothing, hairstyles, and treatment of anatomical features in these sculptures demonstrate connections with certain artistic traditions of India and Gandhara.

6. The wall paintings of Fondoqestan provide important evidence of artistic connections with India and Central Asia.

The wall paintings of the temple display characteristics that can be compared with the paintings of Ajanta in India and with certain artistic examples from Central Asia. These similarities suggest that the artists of Fondoqestan were influenced by transregional artistic traditions and adapted and reinterpreted them within the artistic environment of Afghanistan.

7. The combination of clay sculptures with painted backgrounds is a distinctive feature of Fondoqestan's art.

One of the notable aspects of the site is the placement of clay sculptures against painted backgrounds, creating an integrated artistic composition combining sculpture and mural painting. This technique is significant for understanding the development of Buddhist art, and the study discusses its relationship with the subsequent development of similar artistic practices in Buddhist centers of Central Asia and China.

8. The Fondoqestan remains demonstrate Afghanistan's role in the transmission and transformation of Buddhist art.

An examination of the artistic corpus indicates that Afghanistan was not merely a recipient of cultural and artistic influences during the period under study, but also served as an environment for the synthesis, transformation, and reinterpretation of these elements. In this context, Fondoqestan represents an example of the interaction of Indian, Gandharan, Sasanian, and Central Asian artistic traditions.

9. The Fondoqestan finds are significant for chronology and for understanding the historical developments of the region.

In addition to architectural and artistic remains, coins and other cultural materials have been recovered from the site. The study refers to the association of some of these materials with the Hephthalite and Sasanian periods. Together with the stylistic characteristics of the artistic remains, these finds are important for examining the chronology and continuity of cultural activities at the site.

10. Fondoqestan can be regarded as important evidence of cultural interaction among Afghanistan, India, and Central Asia.

The combined architectural, sculptural, pictorial, and material evidence recovered from Fondoqestan demonstrates that the site formed part of a broader cultural sphere. Therefore, the principal significance of Fondoqestan lies not only in its religious or architectural value; rather, the site constitutes material evidence of cultural and artistic connections and exchanges between Afghanistan and the surrounding regions.

Geographical Location of Fondoqestan

Fondoqestan is a village situated in the beautiful valley of Ghorband District, Parwan Province, near Sayyidgird (Syagird), approximately 117 kilometers northwest of Kabul and 128 kilometers east of Bamiyan. The site is located at approximately 68° east longitude and 34° north latitude (Zaker, 1988, p. 8).

The ancient Fondoqestan Temple is located in the picturesque Ghorband Valley and is regarded, from an artistic perspective,

as one of the richest pre-Islamic sanctuaries in Afghanistan. The lush and densely wooded valley of Fondoqestan lies along an ancient route that, after passing through Charikar and Shinwari, crosses the Ghorband Valley and reaches Bamiyan through Sheikh Ali District. The artistic remains of this magnificent temple, situated on a green hill, exhibit distinctive artistic styles and techniques. The refinement of its workmanship reflects the high level of development achieved in sculpture in ancient Afghanistan during the sixth and seventh centuries CE.

Charles Masson, a British officer and antiquarian, was among the first individuals to document the remarkable beauty of the Fondoqestan sanctuary. He discussed the site in his work *Ariana Antiqua*, which was subsequently published in London in 1841. Approximately a century later, Jean Carl, an engineer and member of the French Archaeological Delegation in Afghanistan (DAFA), conducted systematic archaeological investigations at the Fondoqestan Temple. The results of these investigations were significant not only for the study of Afghanistan but also for understanding the cultural and commercial connections that existed across the ancient world.

As a result of systematic archaeological excavations, a temple emerged from beneath centuries of accumulated deposits and historical obscurity. Its high walls were constructed on a square, quadrilateral plan. At the center of the temple stood a tall stupa, surrounded on all four sides by arches and elevated porticos decorated with finely crafted sculptures. The recessed spaces of the porticos within the interior walls of the temple created distinctive architectural niches, while delicate stucco decoration around these spaces further enhanced the aesthetic character of this ancient sanctuary. Although no major new study of the temple appears to have been published for some time, it remains important to document and preserve its valuable decorative elements.

Archaeological Excavations at the Ancient Site of Fondoqestan

Archaeological investigations at the ancient site of Fondoqestan were conducted in both informal and formal contexts. A brief review of each phase is provided below.

1. Informal Investigations

As documented in historical sources, Charles Masson (C. Masson), a British officer and antiquarian, conducted various unsystematic and unauthorized excavations in different parts of Afghanistan during the nineteenth century, including areas around Kabul, Parwan, and Nagarahara (Nangarhar). Masson visited Fondoqestan in 1826 and recorded his observations in *Ariana Antiqua*, which was later published in London in 1841.

2. Formal Archaeological Excavations

In 1936, following heavy rainfall at the archaeological site, part of a sculpture became exposed. The local authorities subsequently informed the National Museum of Kabul. In the same year, Joseph Hackin, a member of the French Archaeological Delegation in Afghanistan, visited the site and emphasized its archaeological importance. According to his observations, the significance of the discoveries at Fondoqestan

lay in the fact that they represented some of the later phases of Buddhist art. He further noted that the artifacts discovered at the site demonstrated stylistic and technical affinities with painted images and sculptural works from Central Asia, suggesting close artistic relationships between them (Kohzad, 1967, pp. 70–71).

One year later, in 1937, the site was excavated under the supervision of Joseph Hackin by Monsieur Carl, a French archaeologist. The excavations revealed a Buddhist sanctuary, a central stupa, sculptures, and nine porticos decorated with polychrome paintings. Coins attributed to the Kushan and Kushano-Sasanian periods, as well as Kushan pottery vessels, were also recovered from the site.

Architectural Style of Fondoqestan

In 1937, excavations conducted by the French archaeologist Monsieur Carl led to the discovery of a temple dating to the sixth and seventh centuries CE. The temple was constructed on a conical-shaped hill and, like other Buddhist temples of the Gandharan tradition in Afghanistan, consisted of a series of courtyards, each surrounded by a portico. Sculptures were installed within these porticos, while lamp niches and representations of musicians were decorated with polychrome paintings.

The sanctuary was a large, square-shaped structure with a stupa positioned at its center. The stupa featured three levels of decorative motifs and relief ornamentation. It had a square foundation, attached elephant-shaped supports, and stone walls with cornices (*karniz*). The surrounding courtyard was constructed of *pakhsa* (rammed earth) and mud brick. The painted sculptural decoration was arranged in a prismatic form and exhibited a distinctive style that did not correspond directly to the other architectural sections. When viewed from the bottom upward, the successive rows of motifs did not form identical or directly corresponding patterns, indicating a highly individualized decorative system.

The upper level contained arched vaults, with the arches interconnected by additional lines and decorative elements. Above these structures was the principal dome of the temple, which was cylindrical or drum-shaped and connected to the surrounding architectural elements by painted lines and smaller arches.

The building also contained halls surrounded by walls with doorways and covered verandas or iwans, with three iwans along each wall, together with a central stupa. The halls were connected through corridors to other rooms. In terms of architectural organization and construction materials, the complex can be compared with the Buddhist stupas of Hadda and Tepe Sardar at Ghazni, as well as the ancient Kafiri archaeological site at Mes Aynak in Logar. The construction materials and proportions of the building also suggest the influence and adaptation of Greco-Buddhist artistic traditions.

According to research conducted at the site, the Fondoqestan Buddhist temple was constructed in approximately 689 CE or thereafter. Its wall paintings and decorative elements represent the distinctive artistic ideas and skills of accomplished artists

who lived in this ancient region during the seventh century CE (Tarzi, 1978, p. 22).

Archaeological Finds from the Ancient Site of Fondoqestan

All the sculptures recovered from the site were made of fired and unfired clay. They were reinforced with reeds, straw, horsehair, and pieces of wood, which were used as substitutes for plaster. This relatively advanced technique bears similarities to artistic practices found in Central Asia and China. It should be noted that comparable sculptures had previously been discovered at Hadda and other archaeological sites. The artifacts recovered from Fondoqestan and Tepe Sardar at Ghazni are similar in terms of their construction and techniques, and both groups were produced from clay mixed with straw. At Fondoqestan, however, horsehair was used instead of straw, whereas the sculptures from Tepe Sardar at Ghazni were coated with thin layers of red earth. Wooden frameworks were also employed to reinforce the sculptures. These characteristics can be compared with artifacts recovered from the archaeological remains of Mes Aynak, particularly Tepe Kafiri.

As noted above, sculptures of Buddha, Bodhisattvas, deities, and other figures were placed within the porticos of the temple or monastic complex. Unfortunately, some of these sculptures have not been adequately preserved, and detailed information concerning them is therefore unavailable.

In Portico D, a Bodhisattva is depicted seated upon a throne, with the left leg hanging down in front of the throne while the other leg rests upon a lotus flower (*Lotus*). The ankle touches the lower edge of the composition. On either side of the Bodhisattva, in front of the upper section of the throne, there appears to have been a monk-like figure, surrounded by a lotus stem and the upper body of a *nāga*, the mythical serpent king associated with aquatic realms. Above the lotus flower, two Buddha figures attract attention. One of these Buddhas is undoubtedly a highly venerated figure and represents one of the finest molded sculptures from Fondoqestan. The *nāga*, represented in human form, is positioned between the central Bodhisattva's throne and other divine figures.

From Portico E, instead of conventional representations of Buddha and Bodhisattvas, two particularly interesting sculptures were recovered that provide valuable evidence concerning the local population of ancient Ghorband. One represents a prominent male figure and the other his wife. Their clothing appears to be local in character and constitutes an important example for the study of dress and costume at the National Museum. The couple is depicted holding hands and wearing long outer garments, with the collar and upper part of the clothing secured by a belt. This type of clothing reflects traditions represented in Hephthalite coinage and at the Nipky (Nipki) site of Tepe Sardar in Ghazni. The portico also contained painted wall surfaces.

It is also noteworthy that a painted clay half-figure of a *devata* was recovered from the site. Originally, this figure appears to have belonged to a group or ensemble and was positioned within a Buddhist ceremonial mandala in one of the temple's porticos. This mandala is currently preserved in the National Museum of Kabul. Several polychrome clay figures

representing donors were also discovered. In terms of bodily proportions and costume characteristics, these figures display considerable similarities with Sasanian sculpture. They were found together with several Bodhisattva sculptures from the site.

Another clay Bodhisattva sculpture was also discovered at Fondoqestan. Its hair falls in curls over the shoulders, while part of it is gathered on top of the head in the form of an *ushnisha*. A necklace is visible around the neck. The figure's right hand is raised near the shoulder in a gesture of stopping or protection, while the left hand rests upon the knee. The abdomen and chest are exposed, whereas the lower part of the body is partially covered by the drapery extending from the left hand. Two bracelets are visible on the right wrist. The right leg is folded beneath the left, and the folds of the garment are clearly rendered.

Among the most remarkable artistic remains from Fondoqestan are the representations of **Avalokiteshvara**, which are discussed in greater detail in subsequent sections.

Representations of Avalokiteshvara were commonly found in Buddhist temples and caves and were also painted on temple walls. In the Fondoqestan paintings, the figure is represented in a feminine form, holding a lotus flower in the raised right hand and a water vessel in the left hand. The figure displays elegant curves and a graceful treatment of the human body, reflecting the influence of the characteristic Gupta artistic tradition, which reached a high degree of refinement in the Ajanta caves. In particular, a female figure depicted in the paintings of Cave 7 at Ajanta exhibits similarities in delicacy, softness, and refinement to the figure preserved at Fondoqestan.

A comparable representation can also be observed in Portico E of the Buddhist temple at Fondoqestan, recovered during archaeological excavations and currently preserved in the National Museum of Afghanistan. The figure was outlined using bold, raised lines, while the three-dimensional effect—particularly the modeling of the body and the folds of the garments—was achieved through dark shading. This technique reflects a Central Asian adaptation of an originally Indian artistic style and was frequently employed in paintings discovered in Central Asian sites such as Tumshuk in Chinese Turkestan.

Comparable paintings can also be observed in the Golden Hall of Horyuji Temple in Nara, Japan, where a similar technique was employed. Based on previous research, these paintings are generally dated to the seventh century CE. The author of the original study personally visited and examined the aforementioned paintings in Nara in October 2008.

Regarding the temple discovered at the Fondoqestan archaeological site, it should be emphasized that the temple dates to the seventh century CE and represents one of the important examples in which Buddhist, Gupta, Sasanian, and Gandharan artistic elements were combined in Afghanistan before the widespread transmission of Buddhist art to Central Asia and China. Archaeological excavations also yielded a number of coins and pieces of *tikar* from a vessel containing

soil associated with funerary practices. These coins have been attributed to the Hephthalite period and to the reign of Khosrow II of the Sasanian Empire, corresponding approximately to 590–621 CE. Clay, wooden materials, horse-tail hair, and related organic remains were also recovered from the site, representing evidence of advanced sculptural and technical practices. Such materials are relatively unique and have also been recovered from Sections B2 of the second sector and D2 of the third sector of the Mes Aynak archaeological site in Logar, as well as from the Tepe Shotor site at Hadda.

The clay sculptures of Fondoqestan were produced according to distinctive Indian techniques. Their modeling, softness, and treatment of the body display strong Indian characteristics. At the same time, Gandharan artistic features are also evident, while Sasanian influences can be identified in several examples. For instance, the sculpture of a prince is characterized by a typically Sasanian long outer garment, elongated collar, and long sleeves arranged in harmonious proportions. Comparable sculptures have also been discovered at Mes Aynak in Logar.

One of the most fascinating features of Fondoqestan is the presence of richly decorated and brightly colored painted backgrounds. These backgrounds were integrated with clay sculptures to create a visual representation or mandala. This unusual combination of sculptural figures and painted backgrounds represents an important innovation at Fondoqestan and suggests that the site played a pioneering role in the development of this artistic approach. Later, this combination of clay sculptures and painted mural backgrounds was developed more fully and masterfully within the Mahayana Buddhist tradition. One of the most important centers where this artistic synthesis reached a high degree of development was Dunhuang, an ancient Buddhist center in China.

Among the works considered particularly significant by researchers are two examples. The first is a clay Bodhisattva recovered from Portico D. The sculpture, although partially fragile and deteriorated, was executed in a distinctly Indian Gupta style. The delicate movement of the hands, the treatment of the folds, the wide-open eyes, and the curved eyebrows can be compared with sculptures from Hadda.

The wall paintings of Fondoqestan were positioned within the temple porticos and behind the sculptures. They were executed in relatively subdued colors. According to Hackin, the artistic style and technical characteristics of the finds from this region demonstrate close affinities with painted images and sculptural works from Central Asia. The arrangement of colored images and sculptural works, combined with portraiture and figural representation, represents the beginning of a method in which human and divine figures were presented within an imagined visual setting. The later development of this technique, in which sculptures were positioned against colored painted backgrounds, can also be observed in the Buddhist cave complexes of Dunhuang, China.

The wall paintings of the Fondoqestan Temple display Indian and Sasanian artistic influences and bear similarities to the Ajanta paintings of the fifth and sixth centuries CE. In general, the artistic remains of Fondoqestan represent one of the latest

and most refined manifestations of the development of Buddhist art in Afghanistan, in which Indian artistic traditions were transformed into a distinctive regional style. In terms of coloration, these paintings can be compared with the paintings of Section I at Qala-ye Gul Hamid and the large hall or *vihara* of Tepe Kafiri at Mes Aynak in Logar. They also exhibit similarities in their color treatment to the wall paintings of the Delbarjin site in the Bactrian region.

In addition to the presence of remarkable sculptures, the porticos of Fondoqestan were decorated with wall paintings, although little survives today beyond fragments of their painted designs. Among these murals, a *fresco* depicting two standing figures can be identified. One of the figures wears a three-crescent crown. Considering the crescent-shaped motif extending upward from the shoulders and forming a curved halo around the head, these figures have been interpreted as representations of a moon deity. The crown of this deity consists of a beaded band and circular jewels connected to a three-crescent motif. The central crescent is larger and contains additional circular, irregular decorative elements, while the crescents on the right and left are smaller and lack additional ornamentation. Comparison of this crown with crowns depicted on Hephthalite coins suggests a possible date between approximately 470 and 720 CE.

Other important paintings were also recovered from Fondoqestan, commonly identified as representations of **Surya and the Moon**, or the sun and moon deities. The sun deity is depicted wearing military attire and holding a vessel in one hand, while a crescent appears above the shoulders of the moon deity.

Among the wall paintings, there is also a Bodhisattva figure positioned between representations of Maitreya and a blue lotus. This important work is currently preserved in the Kabul Museum (Faizi, 2015, pp. 105–108).

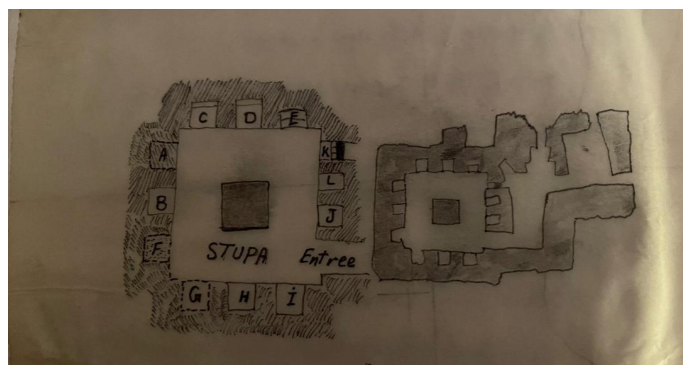


Figure 1. Map of the Fondoqestan Archaeological Site.
Adapted from *Archaeological Finds from Parwan and Kapisa Provinces* (1366/1987, p. 12).

Conclusion

An examination of the architecture, archaeological finds, and artistic characteristics of the Fondoqestan Temple demonstrates that the site represents one of the most significant archaeological sources for the study of Buddhist culture and art in ancient Afghanistan. The architectural

structure of the temple, including its square-shaped plan, central stupa, porticos, iwans, and subsidiary spaces, indicates the development of an organized religious complex in which architectural and decorative elements were integrated with the ritual function of the structure. The available evidence generally dates the construction and active use of the temple to the sixth and seventh centuries CE, particularly the seventh century CE.

The artistic remains discovered at Fondoqestan, especially the sculptures of Buddha, Bodhisattvas, Avalokiteshvara, and deities, provide valuable information concerning the development of sculptural art in Afghanistan through their techniques of production, bodily proportions, facial expressions, clothing, and methods of figural representation. The use of clay and composite materials in the production of the sculptures, together with similarities between some of these works and examples from Hadda, Tepe Sardar at Ghazni, and Mes Aynak, indicates the existence of artistic and technical connections among different cultural centers of Afghanistan.

The wall paintings of Fondoqestan also constitute some of the most important artistic elements of the site. An examination of these paintings and sculptures demonstrates that Fondoqestan's art was not shaped by a single artistic tradition; rather, it resulted from the interaction and synthesis of diverse artistic elements. Characteristics of Gandharan art, Indian artistic traditions and the Gupta school, Sasanian elements, and certain Central Asian features can be observed simultaneously in these works. This indicates that the artists of Fondoqestan not only drew upon existing artistic traditions but also integrated them with local conditions and aesthetic preferences, thereby creating new and distinctive artistic forms.

Furthermore, the presence of Avalokiteshvara sculptures and the technique of combining clay sculptures with painted backgrounds elevate the significance of Fondoqestan beyond that of a merely local archaeological site in the study of the development of Buddhist art. The similarities between some of the Fondoqestan paintings and the examples from Ajanta, as well as their comparison with artistic works from Central Asia, indicate the existence of processes of transmission and exchange of artistic elements across the broader Asian cultural sphere. Accordingly, Fondoqestan can be regarded as an important link in the formation and transmission of Buddhist artistic traditions between Afghanistan, the Indian subcontinent, and Central Asia.

In response to the central research question, it can be argued that the architectural characteristics and artistic remains of Fondoqestan establish the site as an important example of the interaction and synthesis of cultural and artistic traditions. The significance of Fondoqestan lies in the fact that Indian, Gandharan, Sasanian, and Central Asian elements appear not as isolated components but as integrated features within a unified artistic and architectural complex. Therefore, the site provides valuable material evidence of Afghanistan's role as a cultural and geographical intermediary between the cultural spheres of South and Central Asia.

Ultimately, the findings of this study demonstrate that Fondoqestan was not merely a Buddhist sanctuary but an important cultural and artistic complex whose study can contribute significantly to reconstructing aspects of the history of art, architecture, and cultural relations in ancient Afghanistan. Consequently, the preservation, systematic documentation, and further archaeological and interdisciplinary investigation of the site are essential. The remains of Fondoqestan have considerable potential to contribute to a more precise understanding of the development of Buddhist art in Afghanistan and the processes through which artistic elements were transmitted, adapted, and reinterpreted among Afghanistan, India, and Central Asia.

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