PRESERVATION OF WALL PAINTINGS FROM THE **BUDDHIST MONUMENT OF FAYAZTEPA,** SOUTHERN UZBEKISTAN

Otabek Aripdjanov¹, Madina Usmanova²

¹Doctor of philosophy (PhD), Senior Research, Institute of Fine Arts, Academy of Science of the Republic of Uzbekistan

²Leading Specialist, State Museum of History of Uzbekistan Tashkent, Uzbekistan

ABSTRACT

This article highlights the preservation of mural Buddhist monuments of Southern Uzbekistan. In the light of archaeological discoveries in the south of Uzbekistan, Fayaz Tepa and Kara Tepa may be considered two of the most important and largest Buddhist centres of Kushan Bactria, favoured by their geographical location on the right side of the Amudarya (Oxus river).

KEY WORDS: Southern Uzbekistan, Fayaz Tepa, Kara Tepa, Buddhist centre, Kushan, Bactria, Amudarya

INTRODUCTION

The Buddhist temple and monastery complex Fayaz Tepa, 1 km northwest of the Ancient Termez (the Surkhandarya region, Uzbekistan), was studied by L. I. Al'baum for many years (AL'BAUM 1990, p. 19). The total area is about 1.5 km^2 and the history of its discovery is quite interesting (Fig. 1).

In the fall of 1968, the shepherd Absad Beknaev discovered a small human head on the surface of the hill carved out of limestone. A. Beknaev reported about the find to the Surkhandarya Museum of Local Lore, with which the Institute of History and Archeology of the Uzbek Academy of Sciences conducted a study of archaeological monuments (AL'BAUM 1974, p. 54). Taking an interest in this message, L. I. Al'baum went to the place of the find and made a reconnaissance excavation in the south-eastern part of the complex. The excavation immediately yielded interesting materials, among which were the fragments of artistic objects made of limestone (details of architectural decor in the form of small sculptures), as well as fragments of clay sculpture and wall paintings. Archaeological excavations at the site continued for several years, and the work was completed in 1976. The result is a completely uncovered complex of a temple-monastery of the 1st century CE with a unique ground plan.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The complex has the shape of an elongated rectangle measuring 117 x 34 m, facing northwestsoutheast. It consists of a temple, a monastery, a refectory and a free-standing stūpa.

The walls of the building were made of broken clay with straw (pakhsa), laid in a layer up to half a meter high and square adobe bricks. The premises were covered with vaults made of mud bricks with a flat roof, and possibly also with wooden roofs.

The central part of the building (temple) consisted of a courtyard (30 x 20 m) and 20 rooms along its perimeter, overlooking avvans with a number of columns supporting a wooden roof. The roof gave shade and protected from the rain, which was important for the wall paintings, traces of which were preserved on the walls of the *avvāns*, and they were especially clearly preserved in the central part of the south-western wall, where the entrance to the largest room of the temple cell (cella), the sanctuary, was located (6.1 x 6.0 m). The sanctuary was also decorated with murals, such as multi-coloured storylines on three walls and black solid paintings on the fourth (southwest) wall.

On the southeastern wall of the sanctuary there are portraits of two Buddha figures standing on white circles. Two women - apparently donors - are depicted on their sides clothed in a long dress with

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capes on their shoulders. One of them turns to the Buddha in three-quarter profile, the other on the right side is depicted with folded hands in prayer. On the right side near the second figure of the Buddha, a woman is depicted. The figures of the Buddhas are portrayed at almost natural human height.

On the northwest wall, there was a group of nine men (Fig. 2) with their legs turned to the sides, standing in a line slightly obscuring each other. In the lower part of the painting, there is a 20 cm wide red stripe border. According to L. I. Al'baum, the central figure of the composition depicts Kanishka (MINASYANTS, in print). Unlike the other walls on the north-eastern wall of the sanctuary, two more figures were placed on either side of the exit to the courtyard, from which the top of the image of the face in profile and the torso to the waist were preserved (Fig. 3). Above one of them, there is a Bactrian inscription "Farro" ($\varphi \alpha \rho o$) – the name of a deity of the Kushan pantheon. Remains of halos are visible above their heads. They wear white and vellow kaftans, one edge of which has a braid border fastened on the left shoulder with a red ribbon. Another fragment of wall painting depicts a figure of a bearded man in profile to the right (Fig. 4). He wears a piece of white cloth over his mouth. Behind him is a male figure characterised by a head nimbus, a helmet with two horns, and a pink coloured face. He wears earring pendants and a red garment and left holds а goblet in his hand (MINASYANTS/ARIPDJANOV/MUSAKAEVA 2018, p. 70, nos. 113-114).

The time of construction of Fayaz Tepa can be judged primarily by coin finds. A relatively large number of copper coins from different periods were found during the excavations, ranging from coins of the last Greco-Bactrian king Heliocles to Kushan coins of Kanişka, Huvişka and Vasudeva. They all date from the time when the temple was in operation. In addition, the study of the *stūpa* (the oldest part of Fayaz Tepa), as well as the buildings next to it, made it possible to date them to the end of the 1st century BCE or the beginning of the 1st century CE (AL'BAUM 1974, p. 57).

The most important issue confronting conservation professionals in Uzbekistan is the preservation of wall paintings found at archaeological sites. Their conservation will allow us not only to preserve these unique samples of ancient material culture and art, but also to study the working methods of ancient artists and craftsmen, and the composition of their original materials. This will help to determine the unique features that characterise artistic development in antiquity in the territory of Uzbekistan.

The preservation of wall paintings at archaeological sites in Uzbekistan has been carried out by specialists from various fields, such as artists, archaeologists and sometimes chemists. However, most of this work was episodic in nature, since it was done in connection with certain unique archaeological discoveries. Remedial treatments have mainly relied on the use of the widely accepted consolidation polymer, polybutylene methacrylate (PBMA), which was introduced into treatment practice in the 1940s.

In the second half of the 20th century, PBMA found wide application in the post-Soviet Union States, in particular in Central Asian countries, in the conservation of archaeological paintings on earthen supports, as well as of other types of murals (BIRSTEIN 1975, pp. 8-19). PBMA was chosen because of its good solubility parameters in a wide range of solvents, its workability in different concentrations, and its perceived ability to be used without causing colour changes in original materials. It has therefore been used to perform deep impregnation and consolidation of wall paintings so that they could be detached and removed from excavation sites, or, alternatively, it facilitated their conservation in situ. PBMA was introduced into the region in 1949 by P. I. KOSTROV, an employee of the State Hermitage Museum (KOSTROV/SHEININA 1961, pp. 90-106). Over the following decades, it became the standard material used in archaeological conservation.

After Uzbekistan became an independent state in 1991, exchanges intensified in the protection and preservation of the country's unique tangible and intangible cultural heritage. In the study and preservation of wall paintings, the restoration department of the Institute of Archeology of the Academy of Science of the Republic of Uzbekistan plays an important role. For many years, in collaboration with foreign colleagues, the Academy has been responsible for carrying out major conservation-restoration works. Special mention should be made of the head of the department, M. A. Reutova, who was principally responsible for the preservation of wall paintings from Afrasiab, Balalik Tepa, Kara Tepa and other sites. Advances in equipment and techniques, and the sharing of knowledge and experience, have been promoted by international cooperation.

In this context, special mention should be made of the work of experts from the Japan Foundation, the Ikuo Hirayama Foundation, Asia Cooperation on Conservation Science (ACCU), the Nara National Research Institute for Cultural Properties (NABUNKEN), the National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, Tokyo (TOBUNKEN) and other organisations that have carried out training in the study and preservation of cultural heritage in Uzbekistan. One of the most important training projects so far was the "ACCU Workshop on Cultural Heritage Protection in the

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Asia-Pacific Region 2008". This six-day workshop was organised by ACCU Nara in October 2008, in cooperation with the UNESCO office in Tashkent. Its main theme was documentation, principally measured drawing and imaging of archaeological artifacts.

From 2011 to 2013, the Japan Foundation carried out a key project titled "Human Resources Development and Technical Transfer for the Protection of the Culture Heritage (Uzbekistan)". A workshop held as part of the project provided training in the theory and practical techniques in the conservation and restoration of clay statues, aimed at practitioners in the field of cultural heritage in Uzbekistan. The principal aims were: research and restoration of clay objects found during excavation of the ancient settlement of Fayaz Tepa and stored in the State Museum of History of Uzbekistan, as well as training of specialists and technology transfer (ARIPDJANOV 2021, pp. 223–234).

During this collaboration, Dr. Hayakawa Yasuhiro carried out XRF spectography analysis of three fragments of gilded and coloured statues, as well as of fragments of wall painting from the collection of the State Museum of History of Uzbekistan (HAYAKAWA *et al.* 2013). The three sculpture fragments belong to the body, the left hand and part of the face of what is thought to be a statue from the Buddhist temple of Fayaz Tepa (2nd–3rd century CE).

Starting in 2018, the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, working in partnership with the State Museum for the History of Uzbekistan, organised a series of three annual intensive two-week training workshops the "Cultural Training Partnership for Artifact Conservation" (STEIN J. 2020, pp. 26-29) for 16 conservators from the national museums of Central Asian republics and provincial museums in Uzbekistan. This is the first systematic program to bring together heritage preservation specialists from the national museums of all the C5 countries for training. The goal is to develop a shared set of standardised best practices all across Central Asia for conservation of museum objects.

The workshop coordinator Mr. Fabio *I*. Colombo held clay sculpture conservation and the conservation of painted murals from Fayaz Tepa. Fabio focused on teaching best practices for pretreatment evaluation, documentation, and cleaning procedures. The curriculum emphasised the integration of conservation theory with hands-on practical training using actual archaeological objects from the collections of the State Museum.

In 2017–2019 a huge amount of work was done for preservation of wall paintings from Fayaz Tepa. The restoration work was carried out under the leadership of M. Reutova (Institute of Archaeology, Academy of Sciences of Republic of Uzbekistan, Samarkand) with the assistance and material support of the Sumitomo Foundation (2017–2019) and the Foundation for Cultural Heritage and Art Research (2016–2018), to which I bring my deep gratitude. I also consider it a pleasant duty to express my gratitude to Etsuko Kageyama for her active support in the implementation of this project (KAGEYAMA/REUTOVA/ABDULLAEV 2021, p. 104).

During this project, five groups of wall paintings for which conservators have completed the conservation and mounting treatments for this project are presented and commented on. Some of them were previously unknown and were published for the first time, of the others only black and white images or drawings were known, these have now been published in colour illustrations for the first time. Notable among them are the images of nine men (Figs. 2. A, B), fragments of which were discovered on the north wall of the sanctuary, and among which the main figure is the man in the centre. On either side of him are four figures whose bodies face the central figure. As we have seen from the decor of the Fayaz Tepa monastery, polychrome monumental painting, which was intended to affect not only the mind but also the spirit of the laity, was widespread.

CONCLUSION

In summary, it must be noted that with the appearance and spread of Buddhism and Buddhist artistic cultures in the territory of Northern Bactria, the region becomes more closely involved in the transcontinental line linking the civilization of China and India. Furthermore, it cannot be emphasised enough that the conservation of cultural heritage artifacts is both an important and complex undertaking. Collaborative conservation programs should be seen as essential steps in a longer-term commitment to capacity building for cultural heritage preservation in the countries of Asia. Certainly, such collaborations are necessary in helping to preserve and safeguard the tangible cultural heritage of Uzbekistan.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1. Plan of the Buddhist templemonastery complex of Fayaz Tepa; drawing by the present author.

Fig. 2. Wall paintings. A) Black and white picture of discovery of Buddha sculpture and wall painting with an image of nine men. B) Fragments of nine men (donors). H. 180 cm, w. 542 cm. Institute of Archaeology, Samarkand. Photograph in courtesy of Dr. Etsuko Kageyama

Fig. 3. A fragment of wall painting in several pieces illustrated tow mail figures walking to the right. H. 78 cm, w. 63 cm. State Museum of History of Uzbekistan, Tashkent, collection no. 274/3. © State Museum of History of Uzbekistan & The Ancient Orient Museum, Tokyo / photograph taken by A. Suzuki & K. Oguni.

Fig. 4. Wall painting. On the right is a figure of a bearded man in profile. Behind him is a male figure in helmet with tow horns. H. 75 cm, w. 63 cm. State Museum of History of Uzbekistan, Tashkent, collection no. 274/4. © State Museum of History of Uzbekistan The Ancient Orient Museum, Tokyo / photograph taken by A. Suzuki & K. Oguni.





Fig 2

Fig 1



(4)



Fig 3



