


Uzundara Fortress – The Hellenistic Guardian of Bactria

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	<p>Abstract</p> <p>This article covers the history of the Uzundara fortress and its strategic importance in the Bactrian territory of the Hellenistic period. The author analyzes the role of the fortress in the Border Protection System, defensive architecture and military-political tasks of the Seleucid and Graeco-Bactrian States in the 3rd-2nd centuries BC. Based on archaeological research, the plan of the fortress, the construction technology of its walls and the elements of the fortification are described. The Fort's contribution to ancient urbanization processes and cultural exchanges in Central Asia is also shown. This article is of scientific and practical importance to historians, archaeologists and experts studying cultural heritage.</p> <p>Keywords: Alexander, Kushan Kingdom, "Hellenistic Civilization", E.V. Rtveladze, Bactrian, Detachment, Central Asian.</p>
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Introduction

The three-century historical period from the reign of Alexander the Great (336-323 BC) to the Roman Emperor Augustus (31 BC - 14 AD) is traditionally called Hellenistic, as is the civilization that developed in the Greek world at that time. It differs both from previous eras, such as ancient and classical Greece, and from subsequent ones – the time of Roman rule in the Eastern Mediterranean, Parthia and the Kushan Kingdom in the Middle East. At the same time, the brilliant and diverse era of Hellenism left its indelible mark on the history of these regions, largely determining their further development. In the Hellenistic world, there is a simultaneous coexistence of innovation and continuity, devotion to tradition and amazing innovations, people tied to the past and those who were passionately aspiring to the future. As a result of Alexander's campaigns, fundamental changes took place in the mentality of the Greeks and numerous Eastern peoples, which contributed to the rise that their culture experienced at that time, the fruitfulness of the discoveries made by their scientists, thinkers, inventors and artists in all fields of life. As William Tarn subtly noted in his classic work "Hellenistic Civilization": "In the era of Hellenism, the world changed and expanded. Although in real life the particularism of the Greek polis retained considerable force, in theory it had already collapsed, being replaced by universalism and related

individualism. The idea of an "ecumene," or "inhabited world," as a whole, a common possession of civilized people, emerges" (Tarn 1949, 20).

It is important to take into account the fact that the history of the peoples and countries that were part of the Hellenistic Ecumene varies greatly. The situation in the West, in the Eastern Mediterranean, was different from that east of the Euphrates. If until the middle of the third century BC the main part of the Hellenistic East was part of the Seleucid state and it is safe to speak about the common historical destinies, then after this milestone the development paths of the more eastern and more western parts of this region diverge. The more eastern part became the core of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom, which soon began to expand southward towards the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent. The end of the Hellenistic era here falls on the second half of the second century BC for Central Asia and the second half of the first century BC for India, when nomads, moving from the north, conquered one after another the areas belonging to the Greeks.

Practically in the far East of the Hellenistic Ecumene, in the mountain range of the Western Hissar spurs, along the entire stretch along the M39 highway from the Iron Gate and Darband to Sayrob, along the eastern foot of Mount Suzistag, there was an important military-strategic node of fortifications. He, in turn, represented the cornerstone of the "Great Bactrian Wall." Thus, with the light hand of academician E.V. Rtveladze, a chain of fortifications was traced and partially investigated by him – from the fortress and the wall of Kafyrkala at K. The Sina River (Uzbekistan) in the East and the Biglyar Gorge in the upper reaches of the Kugitang Darya (Turkmenistan) and Kerchak Darya (Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan) in the West. It was from the Hellenistic era, probably from the time of Antiochus I (281-261 BC), that this wall was erected to protect the Seleucid and Greco-Bactrian states from repelling nomadic peoples from the North and leading along the Western Hissar and its spurs as a boundary between Bactria and Soghd. As an administrative border between the states of the South (Bactria) and the North (Sogd, Kangju).

In 1991, E.V. Rtveladze, the head of one of the detachments of the Uzbek Art Expedition (UzISKE – headed by academician G.A. Pugachenkova) of the Institute of Art Studies, found and examined a stone fortress on the edge of the Uzundara gorge, dissecting the Suzistag mountain range (located in Baysun district, Surkhandarya region). For a number of reasons, it was possible to return to the study of this monument only after 22 years.

From 2013 to the present day, the Tokharistan Archaeological Expedition (TAE) of the Institute of Art Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan under the leadership of Academician E.V. Rtveladze and the Bactrian Detachment of the Central Asian Archaeological Expedition (BO SAE) The Institute of Archeology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, headed by Candidate of Historical Sciences N.D. Dvurechenskaya, is conducting research on this mountain fortress. During the work, a unique archaeological complex from the time of early Hellenism was revealed here for the first time.

Since 2016, a series of reconnaissance routes have been conducted along the crest and eastern slope of Mount Susiztag, during which time a 16 km long section of the mountain has been explored, 10 towers, 7 defensive walls with a total length of over 4,300 m and one room have been identified. Thus, the materials obtained during the exploration can put an end to the disputes about the northern border of Bactria.

In the Uzundara fortress, along with the complexes of ceramics, weapons, household items and art, a unique numismatic material was also obtained. During the 11 field archaeological seasons

of 2013-2021, 222 coins were found here, 185 of which were Hellenistic; of the latter, two coins of Alexander the Great posthumously minted, 12 Seleucid coins, 171 Greco-Bactrian coins. In addition, mainly during the tablet collections around the fortress, 16 imitations of Greco-Bactrian coins, one Indo-Scythian coin, 10 Kushan coins, 12 imitations of Vasudeva coins and one imitation of Kanishka II/III coins, the uniqueness of the Uzundara coin complex lies in the amazing preservation of numismatic material, its extraordinary abundance and diverse composition.

For a long time, our ideas about money circulation north of the Amu Darya in the Greco-Bactrian period were based on a relatively small number of coin finds. The researchers held two diametrically opposed points of view. Some of them believed that: "most likely, the power of the first Seleucids extended only to some part of the right-bank valley of the Amu Darya, since, according to ancient authors, the border between Bactria and Sogdiana was the Oxus River (i.e., the Amu Darya from the river Vakhsh as the source), but not to the entire territory of Sogdiana" (Zeymal 1983, 29). And also that the archaeological complexes discovered north of the Amu Darya "do not correspond in any way to our ideas about the heyday of Hellenistic culture in the Greco-Bactrian kingdom, and these complexes have not yielded finds of Greco-Bactrian coins... It is safe to assume that in Southern Tajikistan and Southern Uzbekistan, the lands immediately adjacent to the right bank of the Amu Darya were under the rule of the Greco-Bactrian kings" (Zeymal 1998, 365).

The coin finds from Uzundara, in the light of the above, allow us to reconsider this point of view. An additional confirmation of this is the fact that coin finds were made during the route exploration of the Uzbek-Czech expedition (Charles University, Prague and Termez State University) archaeological sites in the foothills of Baysun and Kugitanga. 84 Hellenistic coins were found on seven of the monuments studied by this international team of scientists (Stančo 2021, 81, tab. 2). Thus, it can be assumed that the entire Greek-controlled territory north of the Amu Darya River was covered by monetary circulation in the Hellenistic period.

In general, it can be stated that archaeological research in recent years has significantly changed our understanding of the fate of the Hellenistic East.

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