

KYRGYZSTAN

Krasnaya Rechka

Under the Western Turkic and Turgesh *Khanates* from 560 to 760, the section of the Chu Valley between Bishkek (40 km east of Bishkek, Chu Valley) and Lake Issyk-kul became one of the main political, economic and military centres in Eurasia, connected with Byzantium and China by the Northern Silk Roads. Archaeological excavations carried out in the Chu Valley between 1940 and 2000 revealed towns and monumental structures dating from the 5th to 12th centuries that reflected the cultural and artistic traditions of many countries and peoples, from Byzantium in the west to India in the south and China in the east.

The main towns of the valley, Navikat (today Krasnaya Rechka), Suyab (Ak Beshim) and Balasagyn (Burana), were founded during the 6th century, later developing significantly and becoming unique centres of symbiosis between Indian, Chinese, Sogdian and Turkic cultures, as well as a connecting link between these cultures.

The archaeological sites of the Chuy Valley represent a unique mixture of urban settlements and religious buildings of different cultures. Throughout the Soviet period excavated ruins and remains of earthen architecture were not protected properly. Deterioration has therefore already taken place, and if urgent conservation measures are not carried out the remains will be lost forever, representing an irreplaceable loss of this unique heritage of the medieval cities in Kyrgyzstan.

A UNESCO/Japan Trust Fund Project has currently started to document and conserve some of the most important structures. One is the so-called Temple II at Navikat, dated to about the 8th century.

The temple covers 17 m x 17 m and consists of a sanctuary room of 6 m x 5 m with a domed roof and a roofed corridor. The remains of an 8 m long reclining clay statue of Buddha have been uncovered in the rear corridor, and Bodhisattvas were discovered in the southern corridor and on both sides of the sanctuary gates. These are now in the Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg. Fragments of wall paintings, a Chinese stela with carvings and inscriptions, fragments of a manuscript on birch-bark in Brahmin script and Sanscrit language, have also been found with gilded bronze statuettes of Bodhisattvas and deities of Sogdian and Indian origin. In 1961, the temple's 10.4 m long western corridor was excavated. The walls of this corridor are plastered and covered with frescos, the traces of which are still visible. An incomplete clay statue of the reclining Buddha was discovered, measuring about 8 m in length and about 1.5 m in height. The entire sculpture was originally painted red, as were the surfaces of the pedestal. Fragments of frescoes were also found.

Navikat is only one of many examples of extensive expressions of urbanism of which we have scarcely any knowledge and which need urgent assistance and further protection.

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The mudbrick cella wall from south



A part of the *pradakshina patha* with the highly threatened mudbrick structures of the cella (left) and the outer wall



The nearby mountains of the Tien Schan, over 4000 m high