14. The Shahi Barikot: Vajirasthana

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Chapter 14. The Shahi Barikot: Vajirasthana

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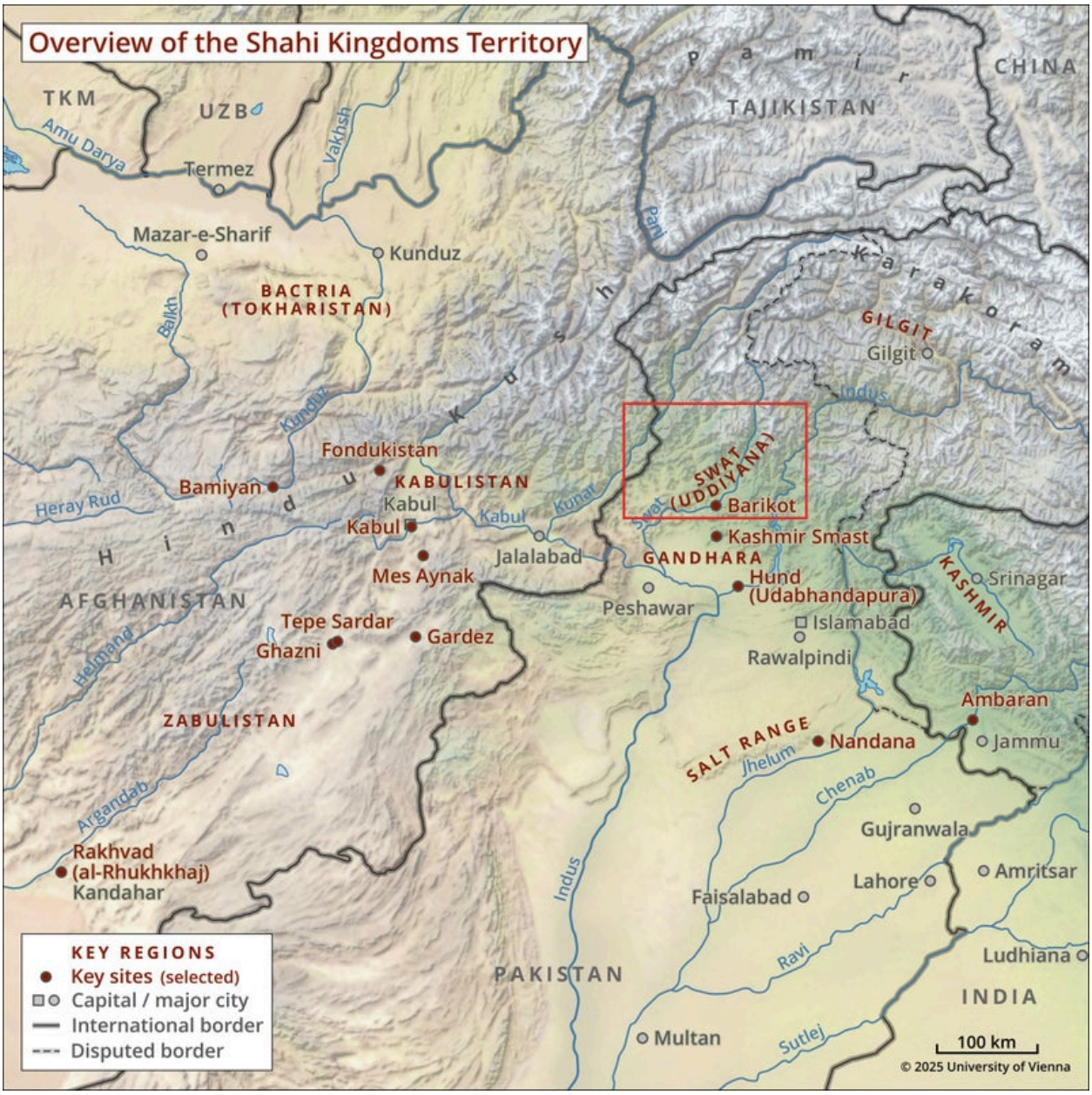

Map 13–19. Key regions of the Shahi territories discussed in chapters 13–19 (University of Vienna, Department of Geography and Regional Research, 2025, with annotations, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

RECENT FIELDWORK AT BARIKOT

(Luca Maria Olivieri)

The first fieldwork carried out on the hilltop was by Aurel Stein in 1926. Based on the shape of the two mounds that were visible in the center of each of the two terraces, Stein hypothesized they could be stupa remains, supported in this by the numerous finds of schist fragments of Gandharan sculptures (Stein

1930: 21; see Moscatelli in Olivieri et al. 2025). Tucci concurred with this idea when he gave an extensive description of the Barikot hilltop and went as far as to hypothesize that the hilltop housed the acropolis or *basileion* of the city of Bazira, which he identified on the flat land south of the hill, in agreement with Stein (Tucci 1958: 298).

The Italian Archaeological Mission officially began investigation of the Barikot hilltop in 1984, first by carrying out excavations on the southern flank of the hill (Trench BKG 2, 1984), then by conducting a thorough survey of the archaeological emergences in 1992–96 (Olivieri 2003a, 2003b; rev. in Olivieri et al. 2025). In 1998–2000, archaeological explorations on the hilltop started (Callieri et al. 2000; Callieri et al. 2000–1) but were suspended in 2001 due to the security conditions of the area.[1] In 2017–18, we resumed the exploration of the southern flank of the hill and excavated the ruins of the pre-modern village (Macrophases 7–10; Trench BKG 13, unpublished). Work on the hilltop resumed in 2019–21. Reports on the 2019–22 field activities and research were presented on an annual basis at workshops organized through Austrian Science Fund Project P-31246 “Cultural Formation and Transformation: Shahi Art and Architecture from Afghanistan to the West Tibetan Frontier at the Dawn of the Islamic Era” directed by Deborah Klimburg-Salter in cooperation with Michael Alram.

Fig. 12. The southeastern corner of the East Terrace during the excavation work (2023) (IAMP, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Finally, in January 2022, the Mission along with the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (DGOAM KP) launched the ALIPH Foundation project "Save the Archaeological Site of Bazira." This project, directed by L. M. Olivieri, ended in December 2024 after almost thirty-six months of uninterrupted work (the final report has been published in Olivieri et al. 2025) (**Fig. 12**).[2]

All the data presented in the following pages derives from the research conducted at the site by the Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan with the Federal Department of Archaeology and Museums (1984–2010) and, from 2011 onward, with DGOAM KP.[3] Surveys conducted in 1993–96 were financed by IsMEO and Italian CNR. The 1998–2001 excavation campaigns were financed by IsIAO, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI), and the University of Bologna. The 2019 campaign was funded by ISMEO, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and by the Austrian Academy of Sciences. In 2020, funding was provided by ISMEO and MAECI. The 2021–24 campaigns were funded by MAECI, Ca' Foscari University of Venice and ISMEO. In 2022 the work accelerated thanks to the generosity of the ALIPH Foundation, which, together with ISMEO, financed the 2022–24 fieldwork.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA ON THE SHAHI OCCUPATION OF THE ACROPOLIS

The Retaining Wall of the East Terrace: Pre-Shahi and Shahi

(Luca Maria Olivieri)

The monumental retaining wall has three clearly defined phases (with sub-phases) (**Fig. 13**). Period 1 is attested by the remains of an ancient wall, which became visible after the recent collapse of the later masonry (**Figs. 14–15**). The alignment of the wall indicates an original arrangement with a wider angle than the later and currently visible one (Period 2a–b). This indicates a completely different orientation of the East Terrace wall: in Period 1 it was 334°NNW; in Period 2, 2°NNE. The north wall also had a slightly different orientation in Period 1, as attested near its west end, where there is clear evidence of a Period 2a facing. Wherever later revetments were built, the newly constructed parts were structurally weak. For this reason, in a third phase (Period 2b), some of these sectors were provided with supports in the form of projecting structures or bastion-like buttresses.

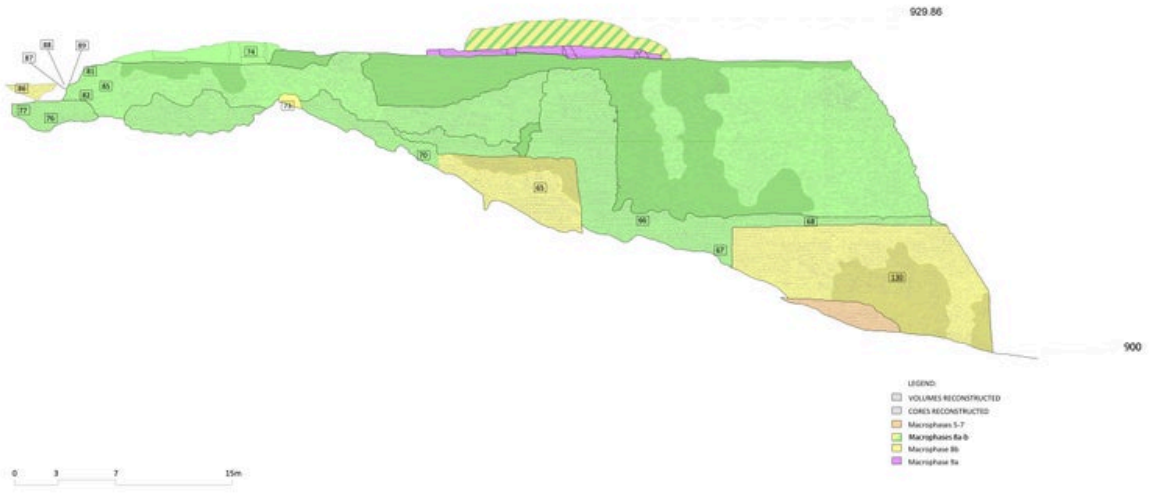

Fig. 13. View of the east structures of the East Terrace (EssaNoor Associates/IAMP, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Fig. 14. Structural Phases of the east corner (IAMP, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Fig. 15. Overlay of the masonry phases of the east corner (IAMP, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Fig. 16. Remains of the stupa structures under the podium of Temple 6 (IAMP, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

At the northeast corner, wall E, Period 1a, we have documented an original wall (ca. 334° NNW). Against it, a large triangular corner wall, parallel to the previous one, was built in Period 1b. Only partial remains of

this wall are visible (see figures above). This large triangular prop must have supported the wall of Period 1a at its weakest and highest point. According to the archaeological data, in Period 1a–b the monumental terrace must have supported a Buddhist sacred area revealed by the dig (Period 1 = Macrophases 4–5) (**Fig. 16**). In particular, the orientation of the stupas is parallel to the orientation of the east wall of the terrace in the same period (see above). A direct relationship between the demolition of the stupas and the subsequent construction of Temple 6 cannot be positively established, even though it can be considered as likely.

The core of the East Terrace was built together with its cladding in Period 1 and modified/enlarged in Period 2. Therefore, the terrace structure must be considered in the various phases as one with its retaining wall and thus, these two—both statically and structurally—represent a single architectural unit.

In Period 2a, the Period 1b revetment of the northeast corner was demolished, and a smaller and more acute corner was built directly against the earlier Period 1a corner wall. Now the orientation was changed sharply to 2° NNE. In Period 2a the elevation of the wall was marked by a string course, about three-fourths of the way up, marked by a course of neatly aligned travertine blocks (*kanjur*).

In this period the top of the terrace housed Temple 6. At this stage access to the top of the terrace was possible through a gate (Gate 1) located at the south end of the east wall. Gate 1 was accessed by a masonry stairway parallel to the eastern wall, which was built into the rock but also pegged to the masonry.

In Period 2b, a series of rectangular and semicircular ramparts were built to support the elevation on both the north and east sides for the reasons explained above.

In Period 3, on top of the Period 2b walls, small buildings and habitations were built analogously to the West Terrace.

We must consider that the hill has no water resources. Probably at this stage a system of tunnels was built from the banks of the Swat River up into the gully between the East Terrace and West Terrace. This system of tunnels, very complex and of which only a part has been explored, ascends the gully partly underground and is equipped with half-ogival vaults. Stein was the first person to notice them in 1926 (Stein 1930); he partly mapped them, but today they are either completely inaccessible or unsafe (Olivieri 2003a: fig. 54). This access to water was guarded by a series of ramparts and military installations on the west side of the gully, the dating of which is uncertain but is certainly Shahi or Post-Shahi.

The Defense Wall of the West Terrace: Pre-Shahi, Shahi, and Post-Shahi

(Luca Maria Olivieri)

The same structural history is found in the perimeter wall of the West Terrace (cf. Iori, chapter 15). The original Period 1 wall can also be associated here with Macrophase 5 (3rd–4th century CE). In Period 2 the

terrace was fenced in by huge structures equipped with circular ramparts (**Figs. 17–18**).

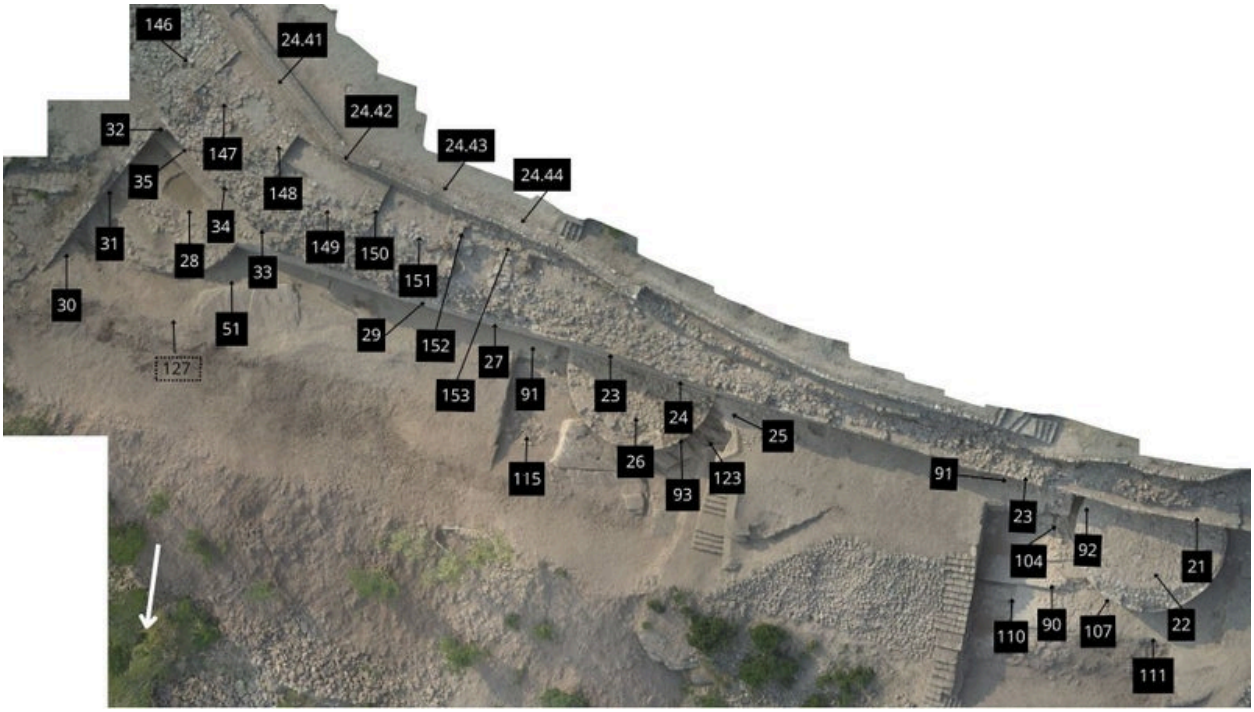

Fig. 17. Example of the documentation of the wall structures of the West Terrace at the end of the 2024 excavations (IAMP, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Fig. 18. The West Terrace of the Barikot hilltop seen from the west during the 2024 excavations (IAMP, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

In this terrace, the walling was different from the one at the East Terrace. If there we have a true huge retaining wall, on the West Terrace the surrounding wall was a freestanding wall with raised parapets. Therefore, different from the other terrace, West Terrace is the result of the progressive expansion of the space starting from the earliest defensive structures, dating back to Macrophase 3a (mid-2nd century BCE), along with their post-processual archaeological deposits.

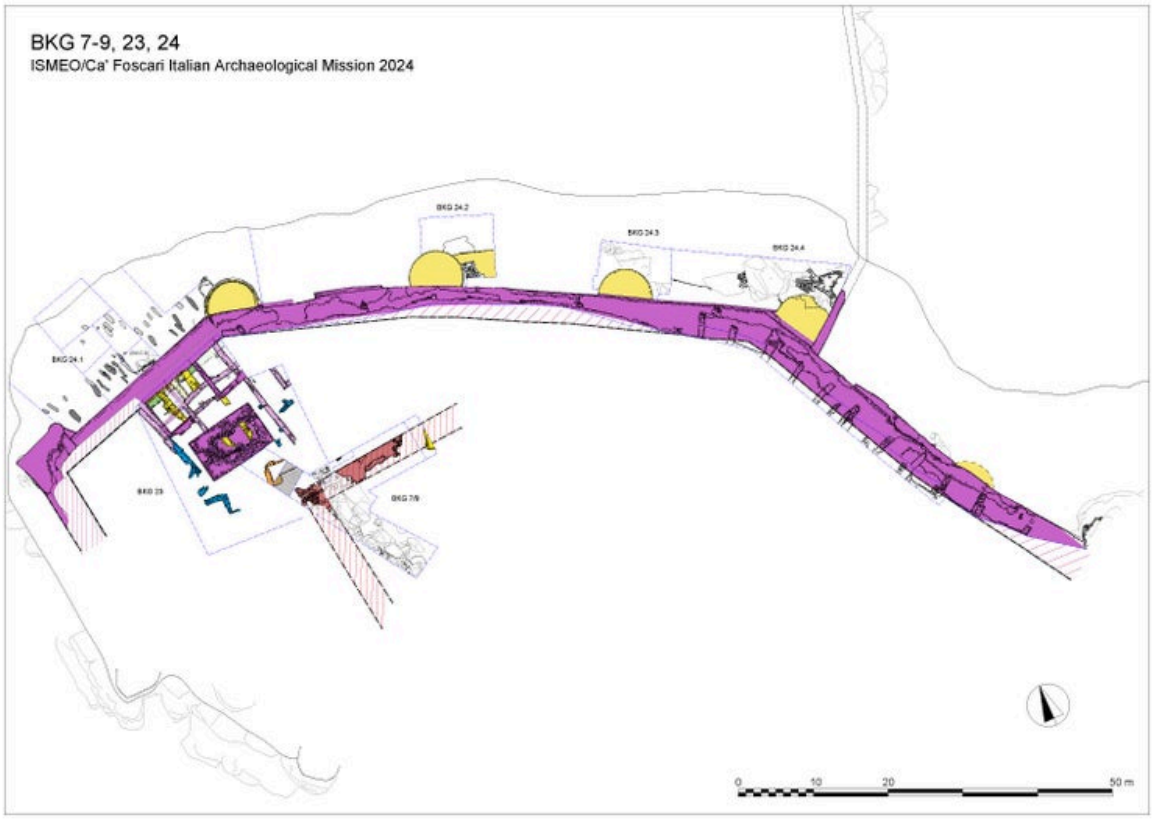

Fig. 19. Map of the West Terrace with periodization of the excavated areas (Michele Minardi/IAMP, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

In Period 3, the entire walled contour was partly demolished and partly re-walled. All the round bastions were razed, and the new walls were built above their razed surfaces, abutting and obliterating the Period 2 walls. On top of the Period 3 structures, analogous to the East Terrace, small buildings and habitations were built. This corner of the terrace is the reinforcement of a natural defensive spur guarding the lookout and control point on the western routes. In Periods 2, 3, and 4, the internal part of the terrace at this stage, unlike the East Terrace, presents evidence of living spaces—small buildings and buildings with veranda courtyards separated by narrow lanes (see also Olivieri 2003a). The northwest side of the external area in Period 3 was occupied by an Islamic cemetery (**Fig. 19**).

The West Terrace and the central fortress are thus clearly distinguished from the East Terrace by their defensive function. If the East Terrace testifies with its ruins to the ideological and religious dimensions of the Shahi citadel at Barikot, the summit fortress (see below) and the West Terrace represent its military power.

The late Shahi military architecture (represented here by Period 2b), in its documented phase, is clearly recognizable in its accurate wall texture, in the elevated volumes marked by string courses, in the presence of solid circular (or rather semi-circular) bastions, and in the presence—at once symbolic and

structural—of cylindrical buttresses. These elements can all be found in castle structures, such as Sure Tangai, Udegram, Barikot, Damkot, and Gumbatuna, as well as in the series of watchtowers built according to variations of established modules along the mountain ridges from Kunar to Bajaur, Dir, Swat, and Buner (see Iori, chapter 15). The castle structures slavishly follow the natural profile, trying as much as possible to exploit the rocky outcrops to support the elevations since all these constructions lack foundation pits. The recurring elements (taking into consideration the differences in the masonry texture related to the different qualities of local stone) are the following: irregular polygonal plans, elevations without foundations, circular bastions, quadrangular reinforcements, simplified "diaper" masonry texture, the use of mortar only in the core, and the widespread presence of travertine blocks (*kanjur*).

The Central Fortress: Pre-Shahi and Shahi

(Michele Minardi)

If East Terrace represents the religious center and West Terrace the civil and military center, the structures on the summit are, one might say, a synthesis of the two components. The palatial sphere, as we have seen, the residences of the elites and their elusive centers of worship (see Temple 2), were located in the inner part of the city, at the south foot of the hill.

Fig. 20. The hilltop as seen from the southeast (IAMP, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

The stratigraphic history of the summit of the hill (**Fig. 20**) is described by Minardi in Olivieri et al. 2025. For the purpose of the general narrative, it is appropriate here to present a few points in extreme synthesis. The complete sequence is obliterated by the massive reconstruction phase that occurred in the Shahi phase. Evidence of protohistoric and early-historic phases can only be inferred from some finds (Period 0 = Macrophase 1), while a great part of the Shahi structures rest on the ruins of an earlier massive walled terrace hypothetically attributed to Macrophase 5 (Period 1). In fact, the summit of the hill (BKG 14), which is characterized on the north side by a steep schist slope, was filled in by creating an artificial terrace resting on the rock emerging to the north and supported on the south and on the two other sides by a broad substructure wall with connected structures (BKG 15) (**Fig. 21**).[4]

Fig. 21. The hilltop (BKG 14–15) at the end of the excavation (2021) (north is bottom right) (IAMP, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

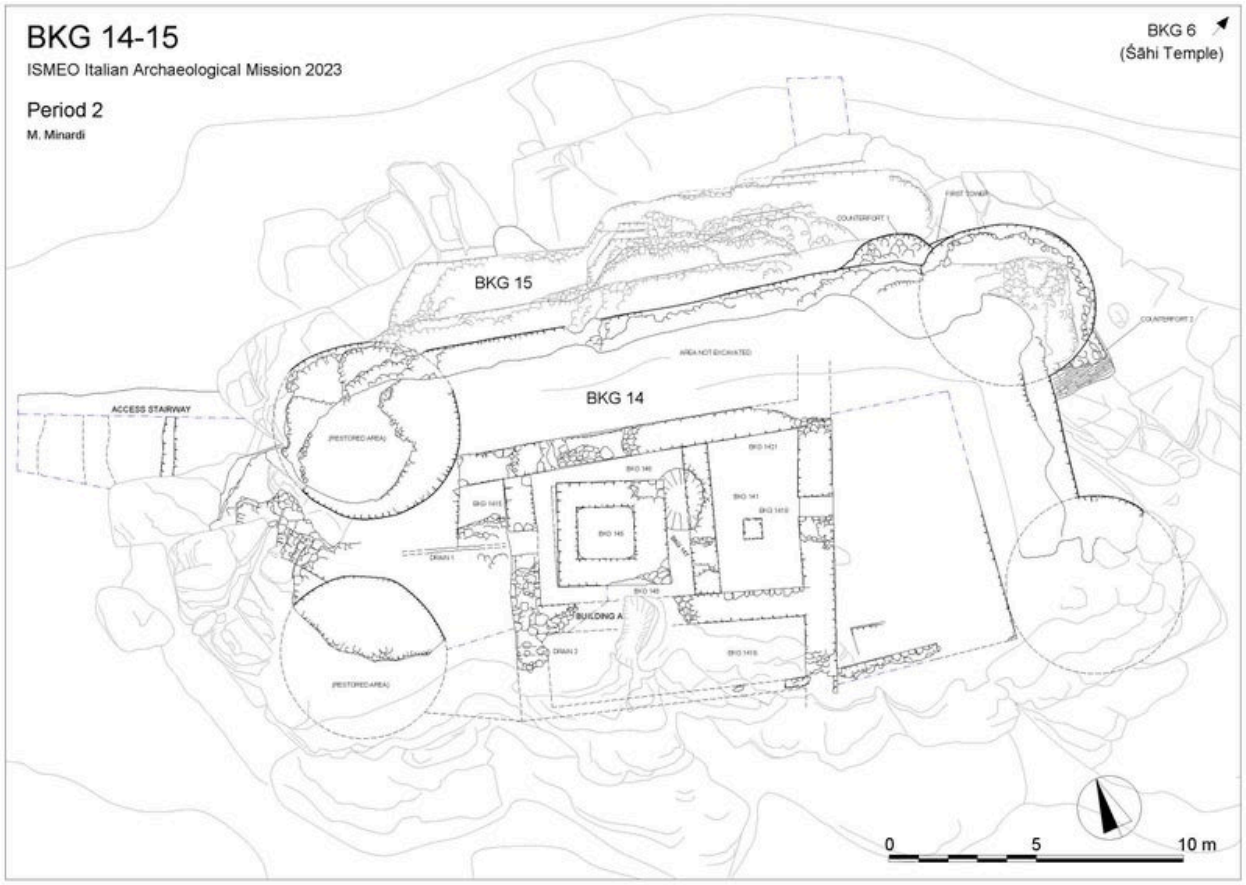

Fig. 22. Map of BKG 14–15, Period 2 (Michele Minardi/IAMP, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

During the Shahi cultural phase (Period 2), the entire top of the hill was rearranged by demolishing the previous structures and by encompassing the new built-up area with a fortified structure (defined here as "fortress"). This is marked by significant circular buttresses protecting a square water tank (cistern) (**Fig. 22**).[5] The fortress was accessible from the west thanks to a flight of steps built on the overflow drain of the cistern. This was fed utilizing the adjacent vertical couloir circa 15 meters deep, equipped inside with pulleys (the recesses remain) to lift containers with the water collected at the foot of the hill to the south area (inhabited or protected area). The defensive or symbolic structure (or both) was built to protect the cistern, which was built for the functionality of Temple 6 located just below.

The small, artificially enhanced plateau of BKG 14 follows an east-west orientation and is occupied by two main dry-stone masonry structures: Building A to the west is dominated by a large square-shaped reservoir; and the adjacent Building B, to the east, is a later Ghaznavid structure, possibly a donjon. Structures related to BKG 15, mostly older structures reshaped and heavily modified during the Shahi phase, are located on all sides except the south.

All identified structures were discovered razed in correspondence with the elevation of the modern floor level, marked by the presence of machine gun nests, casemates, and military trenches dating to 2008–9, when the area was occupied by the Pakistan Army during the military operations against the Taliban.

Area BKG 14 (Period 2)

During the Shahi phase, Building A primarily consisted of an irregular trapezoidal enclosure formed by a thick wall (averaging 1.2 meters) constructed with unwrought stones in a diaper-masonry pattern and thin layers of clay-based mortar. Initially, the enclosure surrounded an area of approximately 45 square meters, which was divided into two parts by a transverse wall orthogonal to the north perimeter wall of the building.[6] The largest area to the west contained the reservoir. Another narrower "courtyard," of which only fragmentary evidence remains, was likely adjacent to the south of it. Possibly, this situation was mirrored by a similar space to the north, located in the partially investigated area facing BKG 15. In Period 2, the west portion of Building A was built around an earlier massive square water reservoir (side: 3.5 meters). The bottom of the water reservoir was partially excavated into the bedrock.[7] The reservoir is currently preserved for a depth of 3 meters from the highest preserved point of its preserved wall. The south side of the corridor around the reservoir's enclosure (BKG 147) gives access to a natural rocky passage that descends vertically for about 50 meters. It was possibly used as the main water supply to feed the tank when necessary. This access point to the complex was protected by the wall of the southern "courtyard" that later collapsed, as well as much of the south side of the hillock.[8]

Access to the east courtyard facing the reservoir was provided by two openings located on the eastern side of the complex. The one on the internal north-south transverse wall is only supposed, as in this area the structure is poorly preserved. The main access to the complex, however, is still well preserved: the narrow passage, approximately 0.6 meters wide, would close toward the outside (to the west) through two wooden jambs.[9] The layout of the east area at this stage remains virtually unknown, as the Ghaznavid-era Building B overlays most of the earlier complex.[10]

Area BKG 15 (Period 2)

During the 2020 campaign, it was noticed that some Period 2 walls in BKG 15 had already partially collapsed, and we found a coin from Vakka Deva or Samanta Deva (Shavarebi, chapter 18) on a floor that was obtained by partially leveling the collapsed Period 2 structure. We reckoned that a seismic phenomenon of significant magnitude, possibly the same one that had contributed to the end of the urban phase of the lower city, could be responsible. In 2021 and 2022, we confirmed this initial hypothesis, as the towers of the castle clearly overlay older and partially collapsed structures, and they were built beyond the maximum original extent of the ruined curtain wall to better exploit the rock outcrops for new foundations.

The south side of the fortress, which would have been roughly symmetrical to the north side and better protected by a ravine, has mostly disappeared because of landslides.[11] Nonetheless, the remains of the foundation (dry-stone masonry made of roughly cut stones) of two round towers are still somewhat visible. They are of approximately the same dimensions as the northern towers but are set at a slightly wider distance from each other (approximately 19 meters as opposed to 15 meters), making the castle layout trapezoidal. As in the case of the northern towers, the terrain morphology is the cause of this

phenomenon. We do not have enough data to say with certainty whether the towers were still in use during the Ghaznavid occupation, nor can we accurately describe the relation between the “donjon” of Building B and the rest of the fort.[12] What we know comes from two elements: 1) Counterfort 1, located next to the northeast corner tower on the north side of the fortress; 2) the multi-stage drainage system discovered in correspondence to the main access to the fortress on its west side.

Counterfort 1 (at wall no. 17) was erected to support the construction of a tower in the northeast. This semi-circular architectural feature (ca. 3 meters in diameter) overlies both the bedrock and the ruins of the Period 1 curtain walls and can definitively be ascribed to the Shahi period. At some point in the life of the structure, the counterfort must have been damaged, as the northeast tower was then rebuilt over it with a slight modification in plan. With its stratigraphic position, this feature is one of the few but significant elements that help us clarify that the tower, and generally the entire fort, was restored or partially rebuilt in the two centuries that preceded the Islamic occupation, or perhaps even by the Ghaznavid power when the donjon (Building B) was erected. Likewise, in this scenario, the trapezoidal Counterfort 2 located on the opposite corner of the same northeast tower could be either a late Shahi or a later Ghaznavid buttress, as it also overlies both the final building stage of the tower and the east curtain wall of Period 2. The original entrance to the fortress in the Shahi/Ghaznavid periods was located on its short west side. It consisted of a stepped ascending path, 1.9 meters wide, defended by two round towers. The Shahi builders adapted their stonework to the pre-existing structures and to the irregular nature of the terrain made of fractured boulders and bedrock.

Fig. 23. Part of the ceramic pipes of the Period 2 cistern in BKG 14 (IAMP, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

The drainage system in this area (Drain 1) was in line with the steep access and was implemented both for the water tank overfill and for the ordinary drainage of clean water. The drainage shows two stages: in Period 2, it consisted of ceramic pipes (**Fig. 23**). It was then redone as a standard dry-stone gutter system by the Ghaznavids, who also raised the floor level of this area for reasons that were possibly related to the modification or the restoration of the access towers; unfortunately, precise stratigraphic data are missing due to the spoliation of the summit after its final abandonment and the absence of relevant stratigraphic accumulations. Another drainage system (Drain 2, reused in Period 3, and Drain 3 belonging to Period 3) has been documented in BKG 1415, located to the south, yet parallel to the main drain. It served the lost south portion of Building A, as it likely discharged water from the natural well, used for the provision of the Kandak River water to the reservoir, into Drain 1.

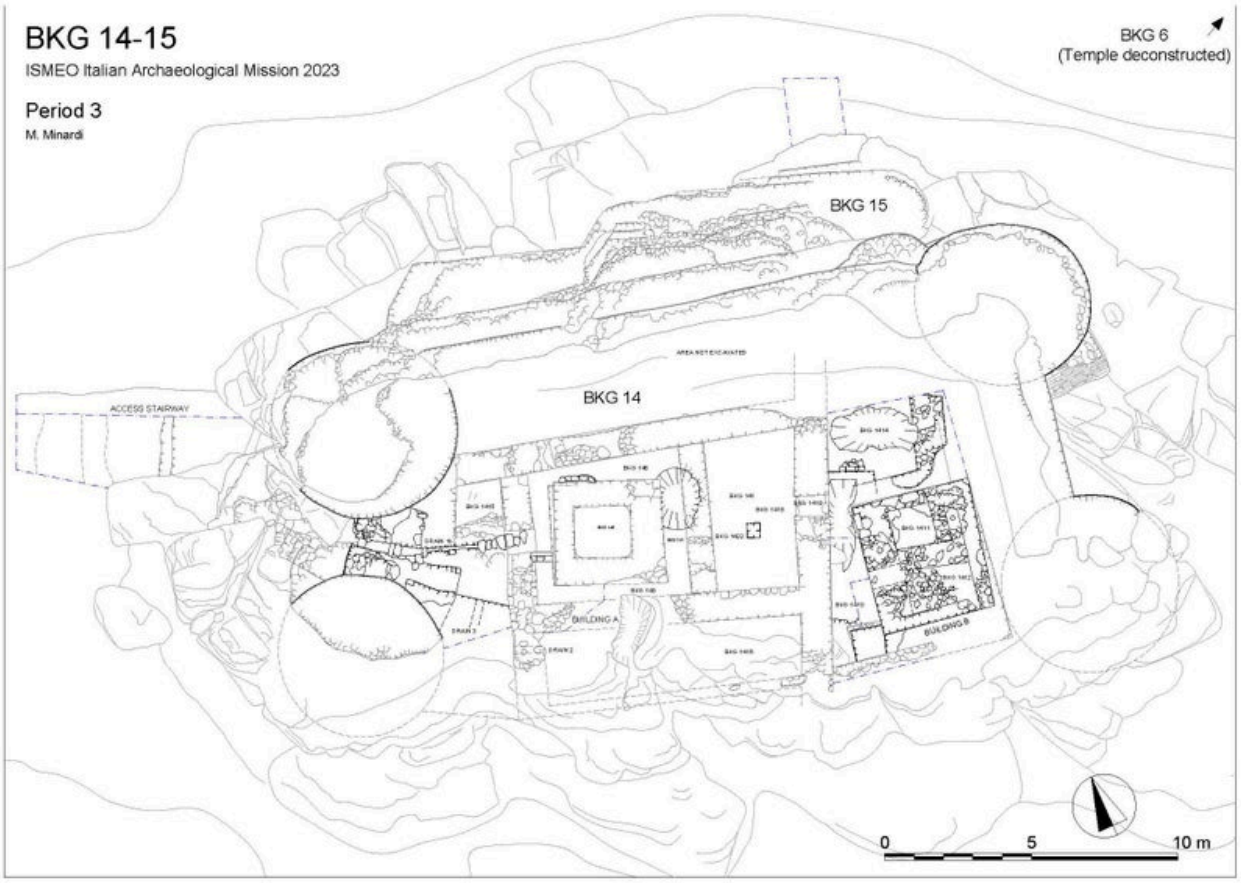

Fig. 24. Map of BKG 14–15, Period 3 (Michele Minardi/IAMP, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

The Post-Shahi Phases (Period 3)

The chronology of the fortified complex of Barikot (and its attribution to the Shahi phase) is mostly determined by its reuse during the temporary Ghaznavid occupation of the site (Period 3) (**Fig. 24**). Over a short period of time, the east portion of Building A was gradually entirely filled in with the waste left while the garrison—whose command post was Building B—was being provisioned. The mass of waste came from the southeast corner of the complex near Building B, where it must have been discarded in clusters from above, and consisted mostly of a stratigraphic accumulation of trunco-conical bowls (Class ABc 1.1.1 in Olivieri 2020b)—specifically, seven stratigraphic units of discharged ceramic in association with the short-lived floor levels clearly developed within a limited temporal range. Many of these bowls were found intact, or broken after being thrown out, and several were stacked on top of each other inside the dump area.

Fig. 25. Rear view of a *tsa tsa* from BKG 14 (IAMP, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Fig. 26. Ceramic wall sconce with Narasimha head from BKG 14 (IAMP, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Fig. 27. Boar figurine with *trishula* sign from BKG 14 (IAMP, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Other material in this medieval fill included numerous used, undecorated terracotta lamps, clay dice, and dozens of tokens for board games made from pottery fragments and from stone, as well as arrowheads and several millstones. In a layer of the dump, we also found two Buddhist votive stupas (*tsa tsa*) with four flights of stairs molded in unbaked clay. Due to their intrinsic fragility, they must have been thrown into the Ghaznavid dump shortly after being crafted (**Fig. 25**).[13] Other special finds give us a glimpse into the activities on the hilltop in these later phases: a ceramic appliqué depicting Narasimha was found in the area of Building B (**Fig. 26**), while terracotta animals and a ceramic jar with incised *trishula* (**Fig. 27**) were found in the later (Ghaznavid) filling of the reservoir.

Our interpretation is that when the demolition of Temple 6 began in the Ghaznavid period, guard post Building B was constructed within the restored fort on the summit of the acropolis; it was conveniently located next to the summit's water reservoir, which remained in use.

Fig. 28. View of the BKG 2/13 area at the end of the excavation (2019) (view from the west) (Fazal Khaliq/IAMP, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

The Palatial Area and Temple 2

(Luca Maria Olivieri)

At Barikot, a second cultic building was discovered at the southern foot of the acropolis (Temple 2) (Callieri et al. 1992). It is a turreted square structure with cylindrical corner buttresses.[14] Inside it features a court with four columns and a central fireplace (**Fig. 28**). To the east side were other structures where a small altar in clay and stone was discovered. It was excavated between 1984 and 1990 and again in 2018–19. The new dig revealed that the temple was part of a larger palatial complex inside the late antique settlement firmly dated, as we will see, to Macrophase 8b. From a trial trench targeting the foundation of the temple, we obtained a very clear late ninth-century chronology that perfectly matches the slightly later dates obtained in 1990 from the early floors of the cella (see **Table 2**: nos. 69–71). It is now evident that the columned temple was built in the early Hindu Shahi phase, when Temple 6 had already been established. Analysis of the materials yielded by the site excavation is still in progress and it is premature to advance a hypothesis on the nature of Temple 2. Inside the settlement, a bit above the columned temple, we hypothesized the presence of a third shrine, of which just an *amalaka* stone and two Shahi marble sculpture bases were recovered (Taddei 2004: figs. 12–13; Olivieri 2023b: fig. 14.5c; see also Olivieri 2022b; and Filigenzi, Casalini, and Iori, chapter 17). However, none of these fragments can be directly associated with Temple 2, whose associated material culture does not present anything that directly or indirectly refers to recognizable cultic contexts. The most important evidence is offered by its architecture and the presence of the central hearth. Therefore, the idea that the columned temple was somehow cognate with cultural contexts already present in Swat (Filigenzi in Callieri et al. 1992) is thus far the only plausible one. In any case the archaeological evidence of this second temple invites us to consider the cultural and religious dynamics of the Hindu Shahi period as far more complex than we might possibly have thought.

Footnotes

1. In 2001, a few months after the destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan, a group of local Taliban climbed the hill, beat up our guards and, using our own tools, severely damaged the podium decoration of what they clearly knew was a Hindu temple (Temple 6). After this incident, we decided to fill in the open trench on the hill and hide the temple. This trench (BKG 6) was reopened in 2019. ↩
2. In addition to the architecture (civil, military, religious), and marble sculptures dealt with in these contributions, for the material culture of the Shahi phases the reader can refer (besides Filigenzi 2010, 2015) to the following contributions published in Olivieri et al. 2025: Filigenzi: late Buddhist rock sculptures; Forlivesi: terracotta figurines (see also Gooni 2025); Rabbani: pottery; Arcuri, Prota: zoomorphic spouts; Rabbani: beads and ornaments (see also Rabbani 2025 in *Sourcebook for the Shahi Kingdoms*); Mahzounzadeh: arrowheads. In the same volume, a limited number of relevant objects were also selected for specific contributions. Among these, some belong to the Shahi phases: a late Buddhist tablet from BKG 20 N (Arcuri, Casalini, Cecchini); a three hares terracotta roundel from BKG 2 (Casalini); late Buddhist *tsa tsas* and inscribed tablets from BKG 14 and 24.1 (Baums, Minardi, Prota). ↩
3. In 2011, following the 18th Constitutional Amendment, archaeology and heritage matters were devolved from the federal government to the provincial governments. ↩
4. The antiquity of this structure can only be conjectured. We know from excavation data (Trenches BKG 7 and 9) that fortified structures on the hill date to Macrophases 3a, 3b, and 4–5 (i.e., from 2nd century BCE to 3rd century CE). It is possible that the Period 1 terraced wall belongs at latest to Macrophases 4–5. ↩
5. See the almost identical Period 4 “water reservoir” dug in the Middle Peak, Area A, at Damkot (Rehman 1968). ↩
6. This wall was partly founded on a preceding Period 1 wall with the same orientation. ↩
7. Thick concretions due to the original presence of water filled the bottom of the vertical chamber. Inside the reservoir, layer (132), the deepest among the layers containing wasted material, returned nearly intact ceramic forms whose surfaces had been weakened by a prolonged immersion in water or in the damp deposits at the bottom. ↩
8. The natural crevice allowed to lift water from the nearby Barikot River through a pulley system that likely made use of leather containers. The rock walls show man-made cavities and recesses at various heights used to attach beams to facilitate the lifting system. ↩
9. Two symmetric indentations are still visible in the masonry of the west wall of the water tank enclosure. The area was designed to be accessed primarily from the outside, with openings facing outward. ↩

10. But evidence of earlier walls, of the same orientation as Building B, suggests that its foundation incorporated elements of a pre-existing structure. This earlier construction may have been repurposed during the Islamic phase. ↩

11. One of these major events occurred in the autumn of 1990, when the south flank of the hill was struck by lightning during a severe electrical storm, causing a massive boulder to collapse. In 2020, L. M. Olivieri and I had to interrupt the excavation during one of these electrical storms that often hit the hilltop in late summer. On that occasion, we experienced a storm of static electricity in the air, which, had it been night, would have caused the phenomenon known as St. Elmo's fire. ↩

12. The southeast tower, adjacent to Building B, has almost completely disappeared. ↩

13. Description, references, and epigraphic notes are given by Baums, Minardi, and Prota, in Olivieri et al. 2025. ↩

14. It displays a kind of pseudo-military architecture that may hint at a dynastic cult (?) also considering the position of the Temple 2 in a palatial environment. ↩