

Settlement of Hulbuk (IX-XI)

The ancient territory of Khuttal, situated in the eastern portion of Khatlon (*Хатлон*) province has a rich history. Khuttal is the region north of the Panj (*Панҷ*) river and east of the Vakhsh (*Вахш*) river. Khuttal is the Arabic word for Khatlon. Capital of this province up until the 12th century was Hulbuk. Also in this province was the ancient city of Munk which is today called Khovaling (*Ховалинг*) and Sayod near to Farxor (*Фархор*). Hulbuk was very independent from the regional powers and according to history the emirs of Khuttal only gave gifts and not taxes to the powerful Samanid (*Сомони*) dynasty. Hulbuk was just north of the Silk Road that ran along the Panj River. The excavated site of Hulbuk is from the IX to XII century. The ancient capital city lies beneath the village and gardens of Kurbon Shahid (*Курбон Шаҳид*). This region also was known for protecting its own political and spiritual freedom as they resisted the armies of the Arab Caliphate until Arabs conquered the palace in the 8th century.



The Palace of the Governors of Khuttal was placed on an elevated hill in the valley. The palace was strategically located 5 kilometers from two hills that were monitored for protection (south is the Salt mountain and Hills west of Hulbuk). The palace from the outside was erected with burnt bricks, which were riveted with the slopes of the hill. The walls of the palace were made of “pakhsa,” decorative alabaster. The palace complex was 150 m by 50 m. The palace consisted of an extensive courtyard, governor’s residence, craftsmen shops and living dwellings. The courtyard was reinforced with stucco walls and “pakhsa” towers. Along the walls were economic and living dwellings.

Western Wall

A restored portion of the original walls can be seen at the foundation, while new bricks have been lain on top to show what the wall probably looked like 800 years ago. The gate is a replica as well but portions of the original gate can be seen in the Museum. Carved on its surface, one can see the Aryan symbol of the East (swastika) along with Kufic Arabic verses from the Koran. This gate symbolizes the mixture of two cultures in Hulbuk: Zoroastrian and Islamic.

Entrance Hall

Originally, the ramp led to three entrances and the head guard’s office. In the latter, located between the second and third entrance, a large sword was found. The sword was not only used for protection: it symbolized the key to the palace. The special shelf for this sword can still be seen, as can the original ramp.

On entering the hall, one would have seen two wooden colonnades on each side of the entrance. The entrance hall was 50m

x 50m and was covered with figured tiled bricks, most of which no longer exists. The rest is covered up for preservation.

On each side of the gate were living quarters for the guards with the kitchen on the right and sleeping quarter on the left.

Southern Palace

The palace on the southside was the administration portion of the palace, which included the main throne area. In one of the rooms of the governor an individual mosque is found. The limestone cubbyholes were for storing parchments and religious items. Next to this mosque was a special room used for times of abstinence. The entrance was semi-blocked to cut down on noise. Most of the walls in the palace were beautifully carved with alabaster. These colorful lattice designs were very elaborate and some are on display in the Hulbuk museum. The alabaster designs were found on the exterior and interior of the palace. In some of these designs can be seen the protective lion of the Saminid time period. This lion was the angel of protection for the Khatlon area.

Also in the Southern palace, the channels for heating can be seen as warm steam passed under the floors. Hot steam flowed beneath the floors to keep the rooms warm. This helped the palace to stay warm in the wintertime. Near to the eastern wall a cistern is found. The palace had an advanced system for drinking water, as the water was filtered in the cistern. They piped in water from a spring 12 km that was held in the cisterns till it was needed.

A fire destroyed the southern palace area in the 11th century and which the ruins of the fire became the foundation for the new palace. Evidence of a fire can be see near the cistern along with the different layers of building material. This new palace was higher than the courtyard and makes this area a bit higher than the rest of

the site. At least three times the Southern palace site was reconstructed.

At the palace site they have found 7 tombs, and some pre-date the time of the Hulbuk palace. One in the governor's courtyard (near the western wall) is a memorial grave of one of the governors of Hulbuk, who died in another location. This area was decorated with noble furniture and bricklaying of the "perami" design (curved) that was very popular during the architecture of this time period. In this courtyard, a huge hole is found, this is a hole that leads to the exterior of the wall. Garbage was thrown down this tunnel; to be picked up on the outside of the wall by the servants.

Northern Palace

In the palace dwellings on the northside (left of the main gate) are found example of palace harem dwellings at that time. In the center of this portion of the palace is an entertainment hall. In this hall, the officials would sit and watch the entertainment. The room that goes three meters below the surface was a changing room that had a window to look up into the hall. Most of the harem rooms are small 1.5 m by 1.5 m and about 70 rooms existed in this portion. Unique fire circles are seen that held sitting chairs around the fire that was placed in the middle. These circles show the importance of fire in the life of those who lived in the palace area. These may have remained



from the Zoroastrian religion that existed before Hulbuk fell to the Arab conquerors in the 8th century.

On the eastern side of the Northern Palace is the Palace Pool. The deepness of the pool can still be seen and near this pool were small rooms. This pool was tiled but none of the tiles remain today. Near to this pool is the main corridor that connected the North palace with the south palace.

Hulbuk territory

Outside the palace located along the southern wall is a gravesite of a small child. This grave pre-dates the present construction of the palace. Place on top of this grave was a place to burn fire. The arch of the mausoleum is “balkhi” and consists of a very low external wall.

Near the road can be seen the guardhouse which was located on the wall of the city section of the Palace. The foundation stones of the wall and guardhouse are excavated.

In the yard of the Museum building is located the ancient bathhouse for the city of the governors. Some of the plaster and elaborate water system can be seen at this site.

In the Hulbuk territory from this time period also exists a grave at School # 1, Zoroastrian burial site (сағона, north of the present town) and of course the Hulbuk Museum that contains numerous artifacts from archeological digs.

Skilled craftsman’s of Hulbuk

Hulbuk was very advanced in its wood carving and alabaster designs. The alabaster was very delicate and colorful.

Ancient glass and carefully glazed and painted pottery were also developed in this ancient city. Goldsmiths, ironsmiths and tanners, and rock carvers worked in the ancient Hulbuk City. Many pre-islamic influences effected the craftsmen of Hulbuk as painting have been found that bear images of musicians and animals. Only found in this location are three iron figurines of the Samanid (*Сомонӣ*) lion of protection. This lion was the main symbol of protection for the Samanid dynasty. Ivory chess pieces were also found, which shows the Silk Road’s influence on the city.

Historical accounts

From 1953 to 1994, a few excavations of the site took place. E. Ghulomova has done most of the analysis of the archeological finds. Today these archeological artifacts are located in the Hulbuk Museum, Archeological museum in Dushanbe and some in the St. Petersburg Museum. Over 5,000 fragments of carved alabaster (stucco), which included some entire panels, were found in these archeological digs. Some of these fragments are on display in the Hulbuk museum. By J. Butler

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