Boris Litvinskiy, one of the titans of Soviet Central Asian archaeology, passed away just a few days before the publication of this book, the long-anticipated third volume of the final report of the excavations of the Oxus Temple at Takht-i Sangin.

Litvinskiy, together with his spouse Elena Davidovich, is rightly credited with establishing the study of archaeology in Tajikistan and is widely regarded as one of the most prominent specialists in Central Asian archaeology. This posthumous volume represents the last of his numerous contributions to Central Asian archaeology and history.

The site of Takht-i Sangin is located in the modern Republic of Tajikistan at the confluence of the Vakhsh and Panj Rivers. Boris Litvinskiy was the scientific supervisor of the excavations carried out from 1976 until 1991, and he was assisted by Igor Pichikyan, the field director. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the Tajik civil war that followed interrupted the field work, which had been scheduled to continue for another ten to twelve seasons.

The excavations at Takht-i Sangin were renewed in the late 1990s under the direction of Angelina Druzhinina.² Litvinskiy totally and

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deliberately ignores the results of Druzhinina’s expedition, accusing her of usurping his excavations, violating ethical norms (p. 655), and hushing up and misappropriating the achievements of his expedition (p. 7, n. 4).

The original excavations of the 1970s and 1980s resulted in the discovery of a major sanctuary, which was constructed in the Hellenistic period and functioned from the beginning of the 3rd century BCE until the 4th century CE. In the first two volumes of the final report of the excavations, Litvinskiy attributed the erection of the temple to the end of the 4th or the beginning of the 3rd centuries BCE. In the current volume he is more precise, suggesting that the sanctuary was built between 293 and 281 BCE when Antiochus I was the governor of the Eastern provinces under his father Seleucus I (p. 14).

The Takht-i Sangin sanctuary, or the Oxus Temple as it became known, thanks to the discovery of a votive altar bearing a dedication to the god Oxus, belongs to the temples of the “Iranian type”. It is characterized by a symmetrical plan consisting of a tetrastyle main hall surrounded by L-shaped corridors and an eight-columned portico placed between the two wings.

Some 8,000 artifacts of various kinds, including weapons and objects of art dating from the pre-Achaemenid period to the 3rd century CE, some of them of extraordinary importance, were uncovered in the temple, making Takht-i Sangin the most spectacular and important site of Central Asian archaeology and Eastern Iranian Hellenism since Ai Khanoum.

The first two volumes of the final report were dedicated to the architecture and religious life of the Temple and to the arms and armour found in it. The current volume consists of a Foreword, an Introduction, three main parts entitled respectively: Art; Fine Art; and Musical Instruments, and a Conclusion. There are six appendices on a variety of subjects: (I) the art and religious beliefs of the Pamir nomads in the 1st millennium BCE (by B. A. Litvinskiy); (II) the jewellery from the Kushan period sites of Northern Bactria (by B. A. Litvinskiy); (III) bronze mirrors discovered

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4 Litvinskiy and Pichikyan, Ellinisticheskiy khram Oxsa…; Litvinskiy, Khram Oxsa v Baktrii….
at the Oxus Temple and other sites of Northern Bactria (by B. A. Litvinskii); (IV) the manufacturing technology of clay sculpture in Central Asia (by L. N. Novikova); (V) metal objects from the Oxus Temple (by M. S. Shemakhanskaya); and (VI) the attribution of the clay heads of the so-called “Hellenistic rulers” found in the Oxus Temple (by A. S. Balakhvatsev). It also includes a bibliography, personal names and geographical indexes, 27 colour plates, 96 black and white figures, and an English summary.

In the Introduction, Litvinskiy provides a brief description of the site including the main architectural features of the Oxus Temple and offers his vision of the genesis of its layout. Basically, his discussion of the temple’s architectural layout is a summary of Part II of the first volume. Regretfully, Litvinskiy seems to ignore again, as he did in the first volume, the recent studies of Iranian temple architecture, and still refers to the Frataraka temple at Persepolis, the sanctuary of Kuh-i Khwaja, and the so-called āyadanā in Susa as the earliest examples of the Achaemenian fire-temples (p. 20). Recent research and excavations of these sites have clearly demonstrated that the Frataraka temple at Persepolis dates from the Hellenistic period, the temple on Mount Kuh-i Khwaja is probably late Parthian or Sasanian, and the cultic interpretation of āyadanā in Susa is doubtful, as is its attribution to the Achaemenian period.5

Litvinskiy upholds the original opinion expressed by him and his colleague I. Pichikyan, that the Oxus Temple is the “classical example of the Bactrian fire-temple” (p. 464). However, as distinct from the earlier publications, he is now more cautious and pays more attention to the fact that at some stage, typically Greek altars were erected in the sanctuary and Greek gods were also worshipped in the temple. This leads him to the conclusion that the Bactrian cults and rituals—which he sees as identical with Zoroastrian—coexisted with the Greek ones (p. 460).

In all previous publications the excavators repeatedly claimed that the altars and the layers of ashes in the so-called “altar rooms” (nos. 7 and 5’) belong to the first period of the temple’s existence,6 despite the criticism of Paul Bernard7 and Frantz Grenet.8 Moreover, recent excavations conducted by A. Druzhininia led her to conclude that the walls of altar-room 5’ are

6 For instance: Litvinskiy and Pichikyan, Ellinisticheskii khram Oksa..., p. 105.
contemporary with the first stage of the temple and that this room was used as *ātašgāh* already from the earliest period.\(^9\)

Even if this is so, and the altars functioned from the beginning, it seems that the earliest definite evidence for the existence of “fire-temples”, from which the sanctuaries of modern Zoroastrianism derive directly, does not predate the Sasanian period. Therefore, the employment of the anachronistic term “fire-temple” to designate the Oxus Temple or other temples in the Iranian world before the rise of the Sasanian dynasty is methodologically problematic and does not get us any closer to understanding the function and the complex role of these sanctuaries. Fire worship obviously played an important role in many of them, but cultic statues and altars intended for the slaughter of animals (practices wholly alien to modern Zoroastrianism) were part of at least some of them as well.

The following three chapters of the Introduction are in fact separate essays. The first offers a survey of the origins of Bactrian art and architecture and discusses the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC); the second, gives a brief survey of Greek contacts with Central Asia before the Hellenistic period; and the third, and longest of these essays, focuses on the “Oxus Treasure”—a famous hoard of mostly Achaemenian objects of art found under mysterious circumstances in the 19th century on the bank of Amu Darya and currently kept in the British Museum. The exact find spot of the “Oxus Treasure” has been the subject of exhaustive speculations on the part of both Western and Russian scholars. Litvinskiy continues to defend his idea, expressed in his earlier publications, that it originally belonged to the Oxus Temple at Takht-i Sangin.

Many entries in the main part of the book represent accomplished, separate studies *per se*. To some extent this is due to the fact that the majority of the objects have already been published more than once, both in Russian and various western languages. Litvinskiy provides references to previous publications for every object and his discussion often reproduces these publications, sometimes expanded and sometimes abbreviated.

The publication of the objects is not limited to description; it includes also an examination of their artistic and historical interpretation. The ability of the author to analyze objects from various periods and artistic traditions and to incorporate vast amounts of comparative material is admirable. However, although Litvinskiy discusses every object with his characteristic striking erudition, the bibliography is frequently not up to date.

He also tends to be rather uncritical in his use of Iranian written sources, citing Avestan and Middle Persian texts without acknowledging their enormous chronological and contextual problematic. If one chooses

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to use these texts to illuminate archaeological finds—and the Iranian
written tradition offers no other alternative—one has to be extremely
cautious, as it is uncertain to what degree the content of these texts is
relevant to Hellenistic Bactria.

In contrast, at times Litvinskiy is inexplicably cautious; e.g. when he
writes that the name of the four-handed goddess on a lion widely venerated
in Central Asia is “still unknown to us” (p. 128). The identity and the icon-
ography of this goddess are in fact, perfectly known to us. She is undoub-
tedly Nana, who was in all probability the chief deity of the Bactrian and
Sogdian pantheons.

Not all the objects of art found in the temple are published in this
volume. The author himself admits that the huge quantity of finds forced
him to select only the most significant and representative items (p. 466).
There is also a problem of documentation. As Litvinskiy confesses, many
facts and objects were not properly registered in the field (p. 10) and much
invaluable information was lost beyond recovery. To make things even
worse, no ceramics from the excavations were ever published.10

During the time Boris Litvinskiy was working on this publication, his
health was already declining. Had he had another two or three years to
finalize the book, as he desired (p. 7), many of the mistakes and typogra-
phical errors frequently encountered throughout the volume would undoub-
tedly have been avoided. The transcription of Western names is also often
inadequate. For instance, Curtis should be transcribed “Кёргис” and not as
“Кыргис” (p. 280) or “Каргис” as it appears repeatedly (e.g. p. 33).

Oddly, when describing the famous Cybele plate from the Temple with
Niches in Aï Khanoum that depicts the goddess Cybele standing in a
chariot driven by Nike and drawn by two lions, Litvinskiy calls the priest
marching behind the chariot a “maenad” (p. 227).

In this regard, I should mention a fragmented plate showing a lion
harnessed to a chariot, which was discovered at Takht-i Sangin and whose
full publication is presented in this volume for the first time (Part I, II;
Chapter 9). The only previous publication of this object is a brief note by
Pichikyan back in 1991.11 Moreover, in the same corridor (no. 6) and about

10 Except for the ceramics from the area of the tower 2/altar 2 in the north-western part
of the temple: Kerzum, A.P., “Takhti Sangin. Keramika altarno-bashennogo pome-
shcheniya [Takht-i Sangin. The Ceramics from the Altar-Tower Room]”, in Kosh-
lenko, G. A. and Uzaynov, S. A. (eds.), Uchenye zapiski komissii po izucheniyu
pamyatnikov tsivilizatsiy drevnego i srednevekovogo Vostoka (Arkheologicheskie
istochniki) [Proceedings of the Committee on the Study of Monuments of the Civil-
zations of Ancient and Medieval Orient (Archaeological Sources), Moscow, 1989,
pp. 195-209.

11 Pichikyan, I. R., Kul’tura Baktrii. Akhemenidskiy i ellinisticheskiy periody [The Cul-
ture of Bactria. Achaemenid and Hellenistic Periods], Moscow, 1991, pp. 103-104.
20 m. from the remains of the Takht-i Sangin plate, a silver plaque depicting a bust of Helios was uncovered (Part I, II; Chapter 8). Although it seems unlikely that this plaque originally belonged to the Cybele plate—even if Litvinskiy does not completely exclude this possibility (p. 225)—it is interesting that an image of Helios also features on the Cybele plate from Aï Khanoum.

The presence in two different Bactrian temples of two very similar cultic objects with what seems to be an analogous scene suggests that these plates, which were probably originally attached to wooden poles, were produced locally. Moreover, it may indicate that the cult of Cybele, or of other (local?) goddess(es) associated with her was widespread in Hellenistic Bactria.

However, using this book could be very frustrating for other reasons. The most problematic aspect, which significantly hampers its usability and value, is the manner in which the finds are presented. All the art objects in Part I are arranged by Litvinskiy in three chronological groups: Achaemenian, Hellenistic and Kushan. Only Chapter 11 of Part I and Parts II and III are arranged in the form of a catalogue, with clear distinctions between the description and the discussion.

The insufficient documentation is obviously one of the reasons that exact find spots are indicated only occasionally. Generally, the reader has to consult the first volume in order to try to clarify the provenance of a particular object and what other objects were found in the same favissa, a task which, in some cases, proves to be formidable, if not impossible.

Out of twenty-seven colour plates, ten depict objects from the Oxus Treasure, which have been published many times and are very easy to find elsewhere. Only twelve reproduce actual artifacts from Takht-i Sangin and these seem to have been scanned from the catalogue of the recent exhibition in Mannheim (without acknowledging the source).12

Furthermore, some of the objects discussed in the book are not illustrated at all while for many others no reference is provided in the text and one has to search through all 96 figures in order to find that, for instance, the drawing of the “Ring depicting a horseman” (Part I, I; Chapter 6) appears in Fig. 75, 1, and that the multi-rayed bronze star discussed on p. 227 is reproduced in Fig 74, 2. As for the ivory objects, furniture and jewellery (Part II), only the inventory numbers and the numbers of the general figures (in which a number of objects are reproduced together) are given, not the number of the particular object on the given figure.

Therefore, it is extremely difficult to correlate between the text and the image and to locate the pictures of a specific object.

Wrong references only add to the confusion. For instance, the correct reference for the medallion depicting a “Bactrian leading horses” (Part I, II; Chapter 2) is Fig. 25 and not Fig. 24 (p. 176).

Given the limited scope of the review, it is impossible even to mention all the items discussed by B. Litvinskiy, let alone to comment on them. Therefore I shall confine myself here only to two objects.

The first one is a small female silver statuette holding a round object, perhaps a pomegranate, in her bent right hand (Part I, III; Chapter 2). Judging by a small surviving fragment of her headdress, she probably wore a kalathos. In the catalogue of the exhibition Drevnosti Tadzhikistana, where this statuette was published for the first time, it was dated by I. Pichikyan to the first centuries CE.13 S. Uzyanov, who discussed it in a separate detailed article, opted for a date “not later than the 2nd century BCE.”14 B. Litvinsky comes to the conclusion that it belongs to the 2nd–1st centuries BCE (p. 278). In the light of this dating, it is hard to understand why he included this statuette among the objects of art from the Kushan period.

According to Litvinskiy, this statuette represents a Bactrian Anâhitâ; Uzyanov is more cautious, identifying her as a syncretistic “Magna Mater,” combining the iconographic traits of local fertility goddesses.15

Litvinskiy’s identification with Anâhitâ is unacceptable, since her cult is not attested in Eastern Iran before the 3rd century CE. Although Beros-sus in the famous passage lists Bactra (Balkh) among the cities where Artaxerxes II installed statues of the goddess Anâhitâ,16 the first concrete evidence for her worship in Eastern Iran is found only several centuries later on the coins of Kushano-Sasanian kings Ardašīr I, Ardašīr II (230-245 CE) and Öhrmazd II (295-300 CE), where the image of the goddess is identified by a Middle Persian inscription.17 Anâhitâ does not feature in the Kushan royal pantheon and is not attested as a theophoric compound in Bactrian names. Therefore, it seems that the worship of Anâhitâ was

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16 Clement of Alexandria, Protrepticus 5.65.3.
imported to Bactria from the Sasanian Empire after this part of the Eastern Iranian world came under the domination of the Western Iranian kings.

If this statuette does depict a goddess, which is by no means certain, other candidates should be looked for. Based on her Greek attire, we may speculate that it could be the goddess Demeter, whose worship is attested in Central Asia in the later periods. That she was an important deity in pre-Islamic Central Asia is suggested by the fact that the eleventh month of the Bactrian and Sogdian calendars was named after her.

The second object to be mentioned here is the head of a bearded man made of unbaked clay, wearing a typical Iranian headdress (kyrbsasia) (pp. 244-249). Litvinskiy attributes it to the 4th-3rd centuries BCE and identifies it as a “portrait of a Zoroastrian priest” (p. 249). His main argument for this identification is the white colour of the headdress. Literary sources attest that priests in pre-Islamic Iran did indeed wear white garments, as do modern Zoroastrian clerics. However, there are no indications that white was reserved exclusively for the priests and nothing else in this head seems to suggest a religious connection. More probably it is the portrait of a donor, perhaps a local Bactrian noble.

Among the appendices, one should make special mention of the contribution of A. Balakhvanzev dealing with the identification of two clay portraits of “Hellenistic rulers” found in the Oxus Temple (Appendix VI). These heads, depicting a young and an old man, both wearing diadems, were interpreted as portraits of Seleucid or Graeco-Bactrian kings, or governors of Bactria. Balakhvanzev proposed to identify them with real historical personages: Stasanor of Soli, a Cypriot, one of the hetairoi of Alexander the Great who was probably of royal lineage and held the satrapies of Bactria and Sogdiana; and Andragoras, son of Androcles, the ruler of Amathus on Cyprus.

Despite all the shortcomings and inaccuracies of this monumental work, and though the structure is not as the optimal archaeological report, the book is essential for anyone in the fields of Central Asian archaeology or the Hellenistic East. We should all be grateful to Boris Litvinskiy for this posthumous publication. While controversial at times, his interpretations and proposals are nevertheless stimulating and innovative. At the end of the day, the starting point for every discussion of every object discovered at the Oxus Temple will inevitably be – what did Litvinskiy write about it?

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