AMERICAN JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY BULLETIN
ISSN: 2996-511X (online) | ResearchBib (IF) = 9.512 IMPACT FACTOR
Volume-4| Issue-5| 2025 Published: |30-05-2026|

UDC 72.025.4(075)

THE DASHLY-3 TEMPLE IN THE TERRITORY OF BACTRIA

https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20278645

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Abstract

This article examines the architectural characteristics and volumetric-spatial configuration of the circular temple of Dashly-3, its functional role within the planning structure, and the influence of the Margian building tradition on the formation of this cultic monument.

Keywords

Bactria, temple, circular plan, Dashly-3, pakhsa, construction techniques.

In northern Afghanistan, in the Dashly area, the Soviet-Afghan expedition identified the remains of a monumental structure with an unusual planning scheme. The building consists of two rows of walls which, in plan, form four circular outlines and together create a non-standard annular corridor. At certain intervals, structures adjoin the outer wall and are connected to the circumferential corridor by passages. The corridor itself is divided into several sections that are linked with the towers.

The outer wall of the structure contains three passages, two of which are located on the western side of the wall between Towers II and III. The third passage is situated in the northern part of the complex between Towers V and VI. It was probably associated with a similar opening in the surrounding plan, since these concealed passages, according to researchers, served as the main access to the complex and led into an enclosed interior space. Within this area, irregular construction extends along the circular line, while in the centre of the entire complex the remains of buildings with a series of rectangular rooms have been preserved; these rooms may have had a special cultic significance. To the south, the enclosed space is connected with the common corridor by two additional passages arranged in the inner annular wall opposite the openings in Towers VII and IX.

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The construction of this complex employed rectangular sun-dried bricks measuring 42 x 20 x 10 cm and 40 x 18 x 8 cm. Certain sections of the annular wall in the northern sector were built of beaten clay, or pakhsa. The walls were covered with clay plaster mixed with straw [1].

The diameter of the outer ring is almost 35 m; the width of the circumferential corridor and the average internal distance between the towers are approximately 2 m, while the thickness of the annular walls is 0.8-0.9 m.

Researchers of the circular structure at Dashly-3 hold different views regarding its original function. In particular, K. Jettmar suggested that it was an arena where shamanistic rituals accompanied by ritual dances and singing were performed, while the circular gallery functioned as a space for spectators [2].

The first researcher of the monument, V. I. Sarianidi, also proposed the hypothesis that the circular building was intended for temple use. M. S. Bulatov supported this view, noting the presence of an altar in the western sector of the circle [3].

The literature also presents different interpretations of the function of the square towerlets flanking the complex. V. I. Sarianidi defined their purpose in two ways: either cultic or defensive, giving preference to the second interpretation. In the first case, the number of towerlets may have symbolically corresponded to the number of months associated with fertility. According to M. S. Bulatov, the consolidation of the tribal union of the agrarian Bactrian state was apparently accompanied by the unification of tribal gods into a single pantheon. In his opinion, each tower was assigned to a particular tribal deity [4].

It should also be noted that similar bastion-like elements are encountered in Margiana and, as an architectural feature, are characteristic of the fortified structures of the Kelleli oasis. The clear subdivision of the plan of the circular structure at Dashly-3 indicates the builders' intention to follow a definite modular system. An analysis of the plan proportions shows that the average width of the towers corresponds to the average width of the annular belt and is contained approximately nine times within the diameter of the larger circle. The same dimension is repeated three times in the interval between Towers VI and VII, and twice in the intervals between the remaining towers.

A rather precise analysis of the construction of the plan of the circular temple at Dashly-3 was carried out by M. S. Bulatov. He divided the diameter of the temple plan into eighteen equal parts, or modules, and calculated the length of the circumference as 56.52 modules. In this case, the distance between Towers VI and VII equals eight modules, while the distances between the remaining towers equal seven modules. Comparing the Dashly-3 temple with the Stonehenge monument in

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Great Britain, whose circumference also contains 56 divisions interpreted by the astronomer J. Ho as an instrument for astronomical observations, M. S. Bulatov concluded that astronomical observations may also have taken place in the Dashly-3 temple [5]. (Image 1,2)

Image 1. Dashly -3 temple

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Image 2. Dashly -3. Reconstruction of Sarianidi V.I.

The circular temple was located at the centre of a square-shaped settlement plan surrounded by a fortress wall, outside of which a deep ditch extended. The entire settlement area around the central circular complex was densely built up in rows. Within this development, two brick enclosures stood out, surrounding the central structure in a circular manner as well. Thus, the massive temple complex, arranged in a defined belt-like composition, was encircled by two additional large rings; in turn, the whole arrangement was inscribed within a giant square of fortress walls measuring 130-150 m on each side.

Among the identified Bactrian monuments of the Bronze Age, no direct analogue has been found for the circular temple at Dashly-3, whose architectural and planning composition consists of a circular core with square-shaped elements on the outer side. For example, the “Oval Temple” at Khafaje and the “Round House” at Tepe Gawra led V. I. Sarianidi to indicate the external similarity of the circular temple at Dashly-3 to early Mesopotamian architecture. Taking into account the “chronological priority” of Mesopotamia, this observation led to the conclusion that Mesopotamian influence may have affected the planning solutions of Bactrian monumental architecture.

M. S. Bulatov, analysing the plan of the “circular temple” at Tepe Gawra, came to the conclusion that this structure should be considered in the context of temple

architecture, recalling the existence in the Sumerian state of circular temples associated with the idea of a "roof," that is, the celestial vault.

At the same time, if the Dashly-3 temple is considered in relation to local monuments, the origin of the square towers placed along the uneven circular outline remains not entirely clear. As noted above, these elements may well have been borrowed from the monumental structures of Margiana.

Archaeological and architectural research across the extensive dune areas of Iran and the Pre-Kopetdag plain of Turkmenistan may help reconstruct only part of the architectural and planning composition of the Dashly-3 temples. Such studies also indicate the influence of these planning principles on the architectural solutions of monumental monuments of the Achaemenid period, including Kutlug-depe and At-Chapar, and possibly on the monumental structure of ancient Khorezm known as Koi-Krylgan-Kala.

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