

A Buddhist monastery and stupa were built in Gyaur Kala during the Sasanian period.

Buddhism: Siddhartha Gautama Buddha was born around 566 BC in one of the small states which came part of the Mauryan Empire in India. He founded the religion called Buddhism. He believed that each person should do good works, be disciplined in their life and meditate. After his death a group of followers established an order of monks and began to spread this religious belief. Monasteries had a special building, called a *stupa*, for rituals and to hold relics associated with the Buddha. In Turkmenistan *stupas* have domed roofs. The westernmost Buddhist stupa can be found in the south-east corner of the city.

The sanctuary was in the centre of the monastery and featured a large courtyard. At the rear of the courtyard was a small stupa enclosed by a wall and a corridor and may have been thought a more private place of worship than the large stupa outside.

On the east of the building were the living quarters with rooms for monks to sleep in. These rooms were quite small and it is not known how many monks would have shared each room, probably only two. Towards the rear were probably kitchens and domestic rooms.

The stupa was a very important part of the monastery. The structure and its decorations represent Buddha's final exit from the world and is always solid apart from a niche containing important relics. The stupa was deliberately built away from the monastery to allow worshippers to walk freely around the structure – an important part of Buddhist ritual. The stupa is believed to have been plainly decorated, featuring a red painted

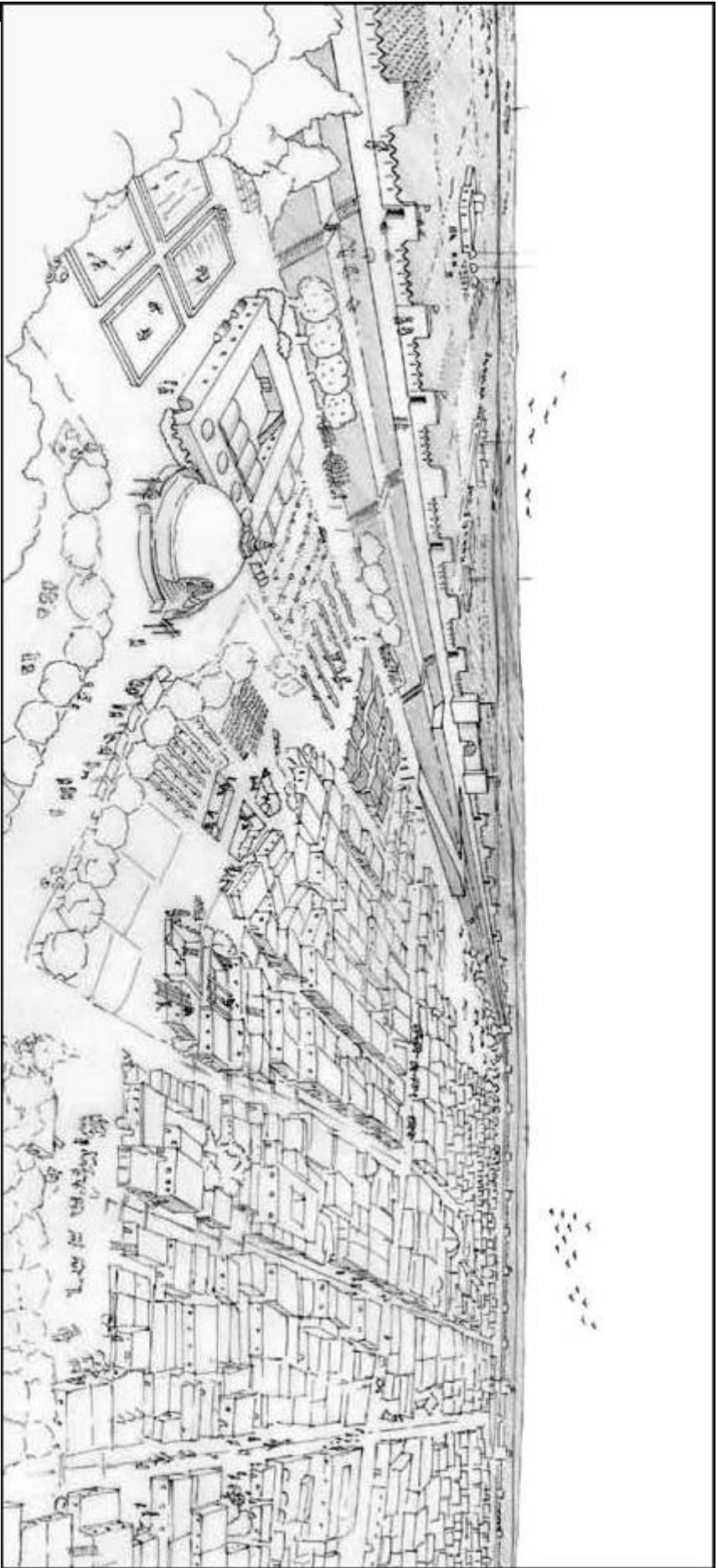
staircase leading to the dome and possibly a tier of golden umbrellas on the top of the dome.



A view of the Buddhist monastery and stupa from the walls of Gyaur Kala.



Painted vase from the monastery in Merv.



An artist's impression of how part of Gyaur Kala might have looked. The Buddhist stupa and monastery is shown bottom left.