

Fortress of the Infidels

Temples
Clay Buddha, decorated with stucco, adorned the interiors of many important buildings

Statues
Archaeologists hope to uncover a giant reclining Buddha, similar in size to those destroyed at Bamiyan

Civilisation
The Gandhara empire stretched from Pakistan across an area to the west and north of Afghanistan



ward stupa indicates that the city was probably destroyed by fire, after which it was never rebuilt and the valley was gradually abandoned.

Robert Knox, head of the oriental department at the British Museum, agrees that the discovery of Kafir Kot is of enormous importance. "Without further investigation, this site

poses more questions than it answers. But it is very significant," he said.

Looting of ancient sites in Afghanistan is a growing problem. Lorryloads of artefacts are smuggled to the south through Peshawar in Pakistan, west through Iran, or north through Russia. Some end up in galleries in London and New York.

In the Taliban years many of the items reaching the West came from official collections. Kabul Museum's display of 40,000 historic coins, one of the world's largest, has been dispersed around the world.

The Bactrian gold, a collection of 21,000 items excavated by the Soviet archaeologist Victor Sarianidi in northern

Afghanistan in 1978, has also seemingly vanished.

"The illegal excavations must be stopped and a proper scientific examination must take place," said Knox. "Material is flooding out onto the market in an appalling act of vandalism. Kafir Kot is a dramatic discovery, vital to the future cultural life of the country."