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# Urban Cultures of Central Asia from the Bronze Age to the Karakhanids

Learnings and conclusions from new archaeological  
investigations and discoveries

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# The Study of Ceramics from Sanjar-Shah

## Technological, cultural and administrative connections with Panjikent

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**Abstract:** This paper offers some preliminary observations on the ceramic assemblages from the excavations of the Sogdian town Sanjar-Shah in northern Tajikistan (5th–8th centuries CE). It discusses some characteristic vessels and shapes and compares the data obtained from Sanjar-Shah with the abundant ceramic material from neighbouring Panjikent.

**Keywords:** Sanjar-Shah, Panjikent, Sogdian, ceramics, pottery, Tajikistan.

**Резюме:** Данная статья содержит предварительные заметки по поводу керамических комплексов выявленных в результате раскопок на городище Санджар-Шах в северном Таджикистане (V-VIII вв. н. э.). В статье обсуждаются керамические сосуды типичные для Санджар-Шаха, которые рассматриваются в сравнении с керамическими изделиями из соседнего Пенджикента.

**Ключевые слова:** Санджар-Шах, Пенджикент, Согд, Керамика, Гончарное производство, Таджикистан.

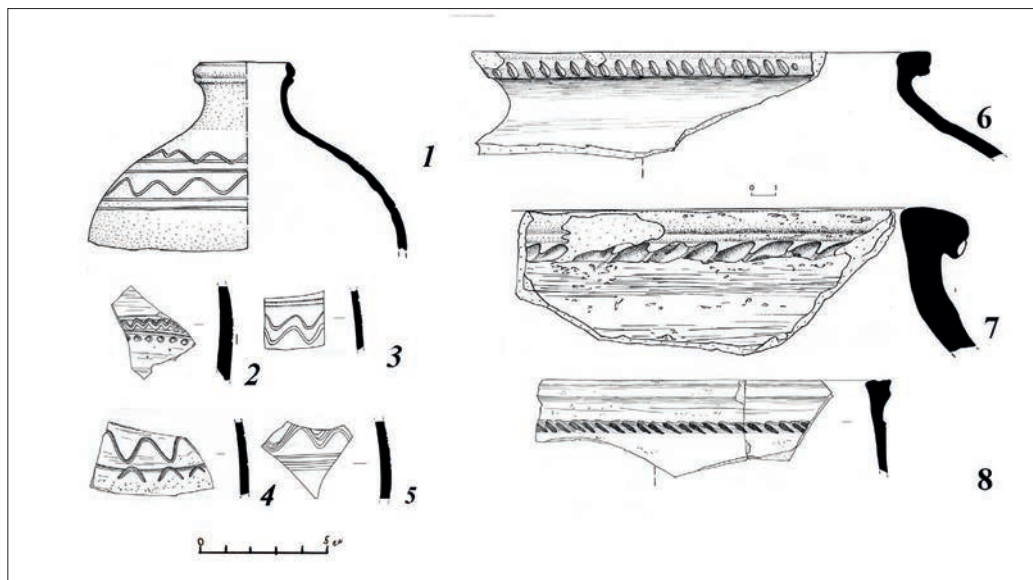


Fig. 1: Representative ceramics from Sanjar-Shah. 1: The upper part of the aquifer jug with wavy lines, Sanjar-Shah 2012, Area 2, Room No. 24; 2–5: Fragments of a pitcher with straight and wavy lines, Sanjar-Shah 2012, Area 2, Room No. 21; 6: Fragment of a wide-mouthed jug with strokes under the rim, Sanjar-Shah 2012, Area 2, Room No. 21 (from the floor); 7: Fragment of a storage-jar with strokes under the rim, Sanjar-Shah 2012, Area 2, Room No. 21. (from the floor); 8: Fragment of “taghara”, Sanjar-Shah 2012, Area 2, Room No. 21 (from the floor) (after KURBANOV/PULOTOV/AMINOV 2016a, drawings by Sh. Kurbanov and O. Vorobeva).

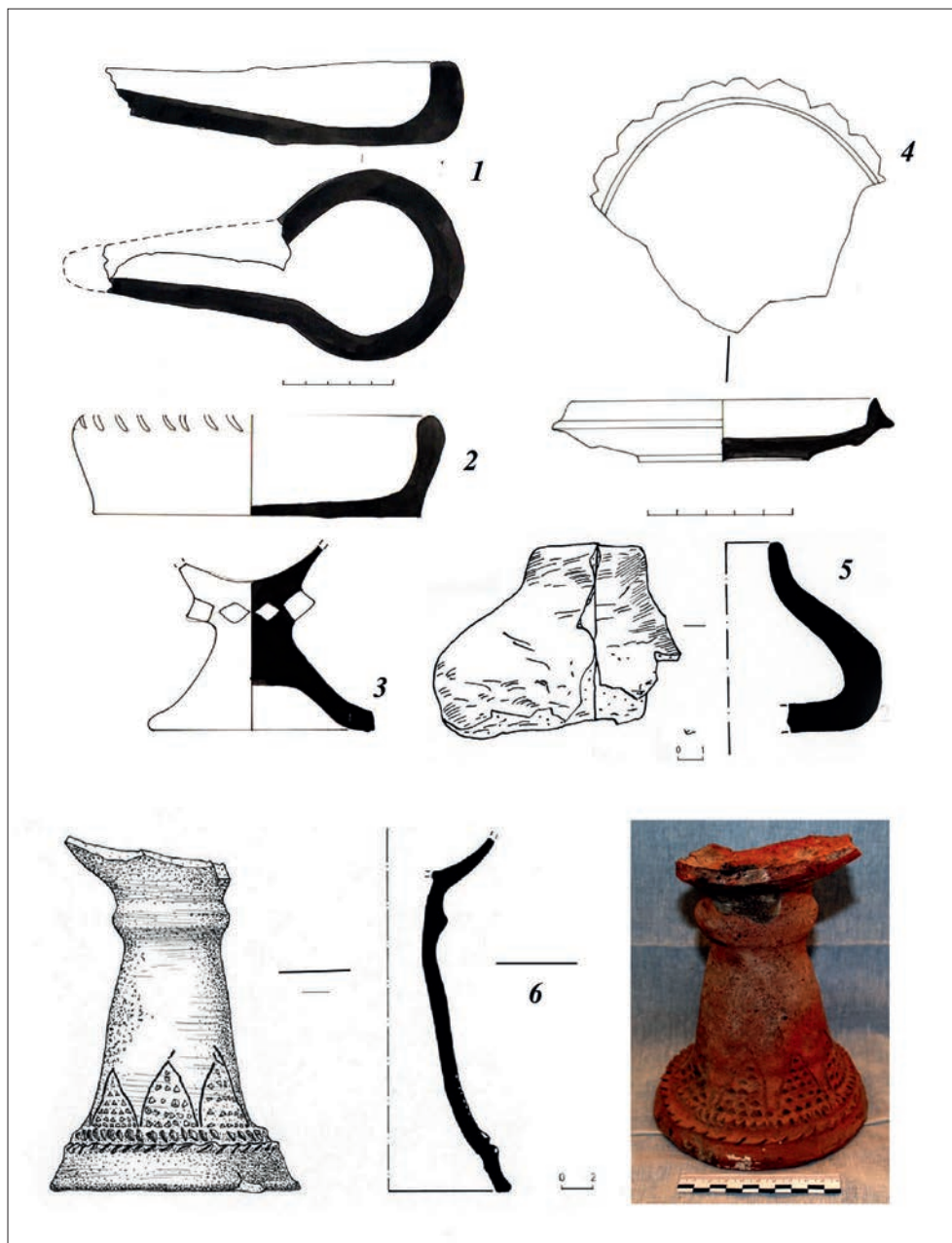


Fig. 2: Lamps. 1: Lamp (cylindrical form of the tank with the extended nose), Sanjar-Shah 2009, Area 1, Room No. 9 (from the fill); 2: Hand-made lamp, Sanjar-Shah 2013, Area 2, Room No. 9 (from the fill); 3: Hand-made miniature lamp (*mijmar*), Sanjar-Shah 2013, Area 2, Room No. 10 (from the fill); 4: Lamp (wheel-made), Sanjar-Shah 2013, Area 2, Room No. 13 (from the first floor); 5: Hand-made lamp, Sanjar-Shah 2012, Area 2, Room No. 21 (from the first floor); 6: Lamp – burner (wheel-made), Sanjar-Shah 2012, Area 2, Room No. 21 (from the fill) (after KURBANOV/PULOTOV/AMINOV 2016a, drawings by Sh. Kurbanov and O. Vorobeva, photo by M. Shenkar).

In marked contrast to Panjikent, where during more than 60 years of continuous archaeological investigations no evidence for pottery production has yet been found, a pottery kiln has been uncovered at Sanjar-Shah in Area 2 (GROPP/KURBANOV 2007: Fig. 32).<sup>1</sup> From this kiln, and from other areas, an im-

pressive ceramic assemblage dated to the Sogdian period (5th–8th centuries CE) has been assembled (Fig. 1). The aim of this paper is to analyse the ceramic assemblages from Sanjar-Shah and Panjikent and to single out similarities and discrepancies

1 For the preliminary results of the recent excavations at

Sanjar-Shah, see SHENKAR/KURBANOV this volume.

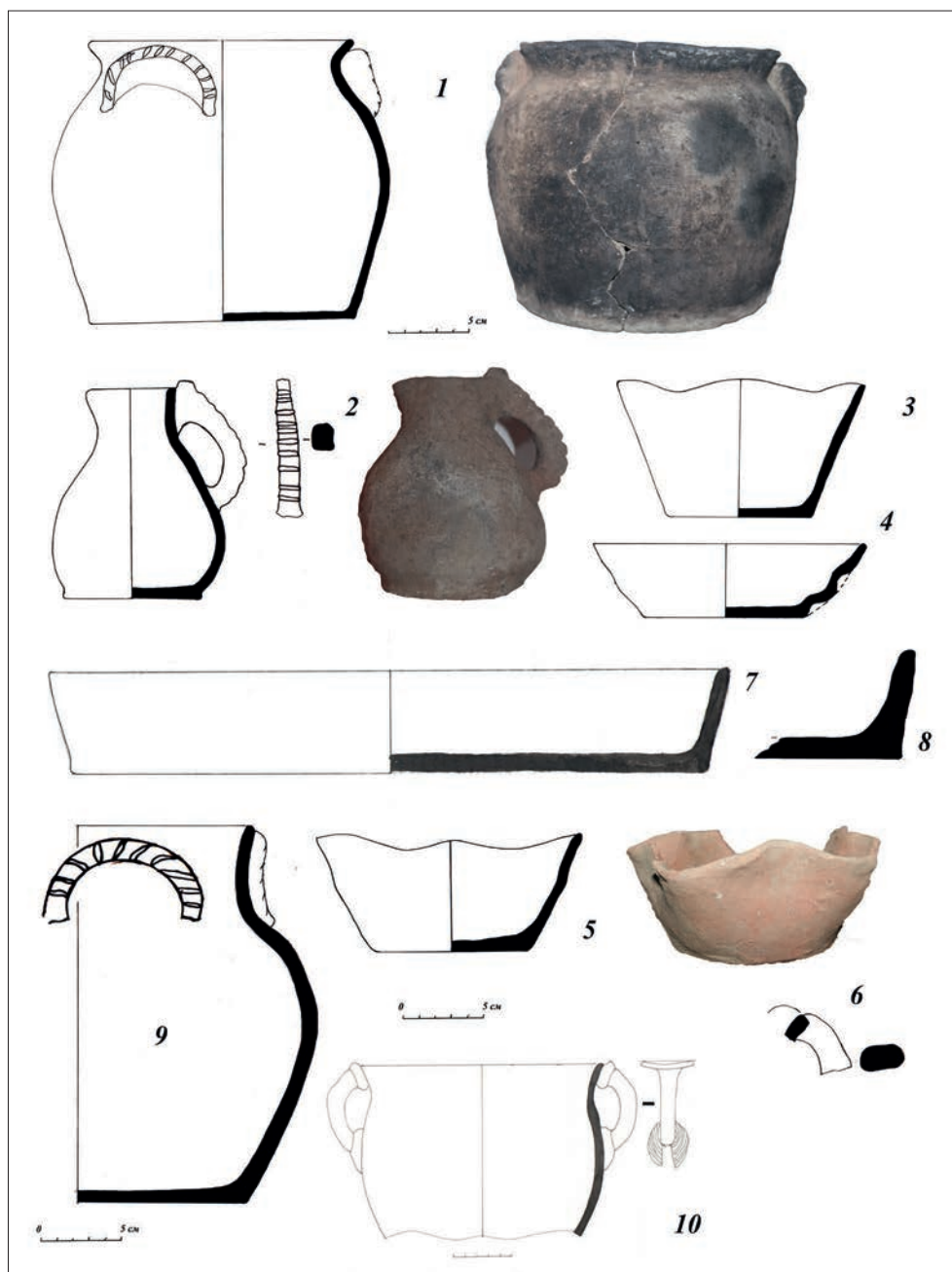


Fig. 3: Hand-made ceramics. **1:** Complete hand-made kettle, with two (horseshoe) handles, Sanjar-Shah 2015, Area 2, Room No. 35 (from the fill); **2:** Complete hand-made jar with ribbed handle, Sanjar-Shah 2015, Area 2, Room No. 35 (from the fill); **3:** Complete hand-made cup with wavy rim, Sanjar-Shah 2015, Area 2, Room No. 36 (from the fill); **4:** Complete hand-made bowl, with embossed rim (with fingers), Sanjar-Shah 2015, Area 2, Room No. 36 (from the fill); **5:** Complete hand-made cup with wavy rim, 7th–8th centuries, Sanjar-Shah 2015, Area 2, Room No. 34 (from the second floor); **6:** Fragment of the handle of the hand-made mug, Sanjar-Shah 2015, Area 2, Room No. 36 (from the fill); **7:** Hand-made pan, Sanjar-Shah 2013, Area 2, Room No. 8 (from the first floor); **8:** Fragment of a brazier, Sanjar-Shah 2015, Area 2, Room No. 36 (from the fill); **9:** Complete hand-made kettle, Sanjar-Shah 2015, Area 2, Room No. 34 (from the fill); **10:** Hand-made kettle with two handles, Sanjar-Shah 2013, Area 2, Room No. 10 (from the *sufa* surface) (drawings and photos by the author and A.G. Pulotov).

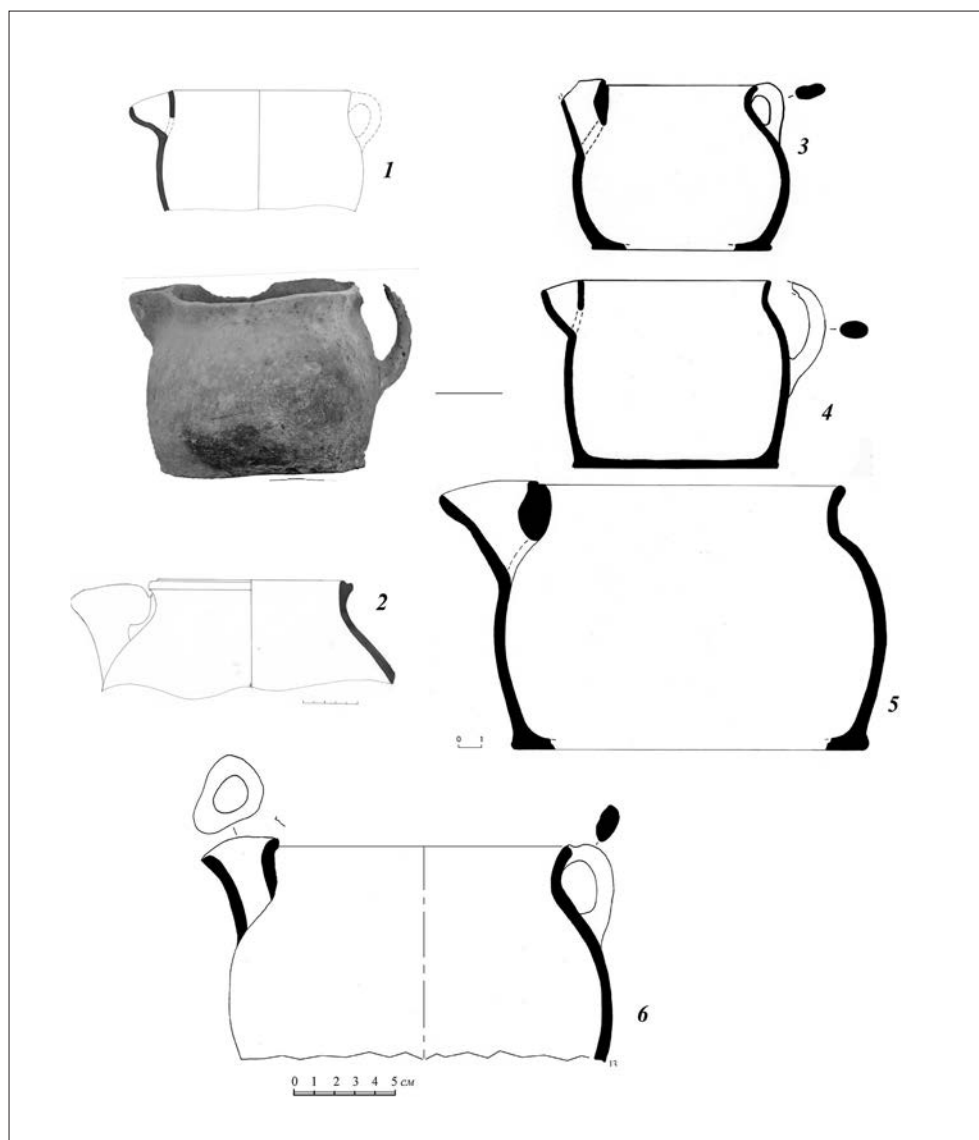


Fig. 4: Hand-made kettles or “Choynush”. 1: Hand-made kettle with handle and drain, Sanjar-Shah 2013, Area 2, Room No. 10 (*sufa* surface); 2: Wheel-made kettle, Sanjar-Shah 2013, Area 2, Room No. 14 (from the fill); 3–5: Hand-made kettles (wide-mouthed) with handle and drain, Sanjar-Shah 2012, Area 2, Room No. 20 (from the fill); 6: Hand-made kettle from Panjikent, Panjikent 2009, Area XXVI (26), Room No. 33 (from the first floor) (after KURBANOV/PULOTOV/AMINOV 2016a, drawings by Sh. Kurbanov and A. Pulotov, photo by M. Shenkar).

which could shed light on the relations and connections between the two neighbouring Sogdian cities.

The Sanjar-Shah ceramics can be divided into hand-made and wheel-made. The clay from which they were made is saturated with admixtures of quartz, sand, chamotte, shale and small pebbles. After the formation of the vessels on the wheel, they were cut free with a knife. The entire surface of the vessels, or certain parts, were often coated with red, rose, brown or black slip.

In many cases, pottery was decorated with ornaments pressed on by the fingers before it was fired in the kiln. Usually, such an ornament, often in combed-shaped bands, was placed just beyond the

rim of the storage jars (*khums*). Upper parts of the jugs were decorated with three wave-shaped and straight lines as well as with strokes made with a small, sharp stick.

## 1 Hand-made

Hand-made clay items can be divided into the following categories: weaving and other accessories, figurines, musical instruments, toys, lamps, ossuaries and storage vessels. The main type are massive supports for domestic fires, and spindle weights (sometimes made of fragments of pottery vessels).

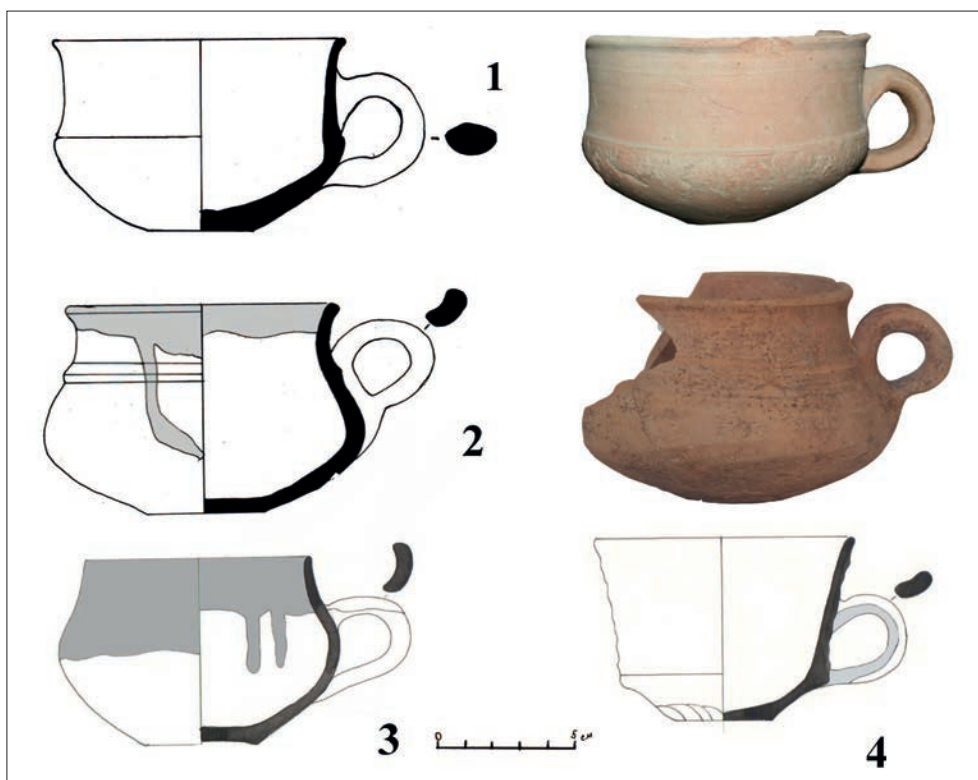


Fig. 5: Mugs. **1**: Complete mug with a loop-like handle, Sanjar-Shah 2015, Area 2, Room No. 35 (from the fill); **2**: Complete mug with a loop-like handle with “S”-shaped profile ledge (boat), Sanjar-Shah 2014, Area 2, Room No. 22 (from the third floor); **3**: Complete mug with a handle, Sanjar-Shah 2013, Area 2, Room No. 10 (from the fill); **4**: Complete mug with ribbed walls curved handle, Sanjar-Shah 2013, Area 2, Room No. 10 (from the *sufa* surface) (drawings and photos by the author).

There are also several fragments of ossuaries and terracotta figurines.

Hand-made lamps can be divided into two types: those with support in the form of a stem with dentate ornament just below the lamp, and shallow lamps with an elongated mouth (Fig. 2). Of course, the most numerous group is that of ceramic wares, characterised by a wide diversity of types (Fig. 3). We have cooking pots with flat base, frying pans, jugs, bowls, braziers with low rim, mugs with flat base and loop-shaped handle, miniature jugs (their bases were often reused as lamps). We can single out kettles of the “*choynush*” type – large, wide-mouthed vessels with flat base, small loop-shaped handle and a spout attached to the rim (Fig. 4). Interestingly, in Panjikent the spouts of such kettles are not attached to the rim. We should also note hand-made thin-walled mugs with flat base.

## 2 Wheel-made

The wheel-made pottery can be divided into three groups according to their function: lamps and fragments of incense burners, moulded figurines, and vessels. The last category is the most numerous

and diverse. There are massive and heavy storage jars, and mid-sized storage jars, flat-based vats that were used for laundry and in the preparation of pastry. Cooking pots with flat base and with round base, jars of several types, such as those with zoomorphic spouts, vessels for filtering, churns, vessels with a hole in the base, bowls, bowls with cross-like ornament inside, mugs with loop-shaped handle and rounded or conical body, jugs and cups (Fig. 5; Fig. 6). Similar vessels with zoomorphic decorations have been found in Panjikent (Fig. 7).

The cups on a high stand and small, flat cups with elongated spout were probably multifunctional. Depending on the contents (oil or resin) they served as lamps or as incense burners. Another possible function was to transport fire from one place to another.

In Sanjar-Shah as well as in Panjikent, wheel-shaped pottery predominates over the hand-made.<sup>2</sup> This was already established for the Panjikent material by Bentovich in 1953. According to our calculation, the percentage of the wheel-made pottery in Sanjar-Shah is 86%. In Panjikent, where only the early ceramics assemblages were comprehensively

<sup>2</sup> For the Panjikent ceramics, this was established already by Bentovich. See BENTOVICH 1953: 144; 1964: 265.

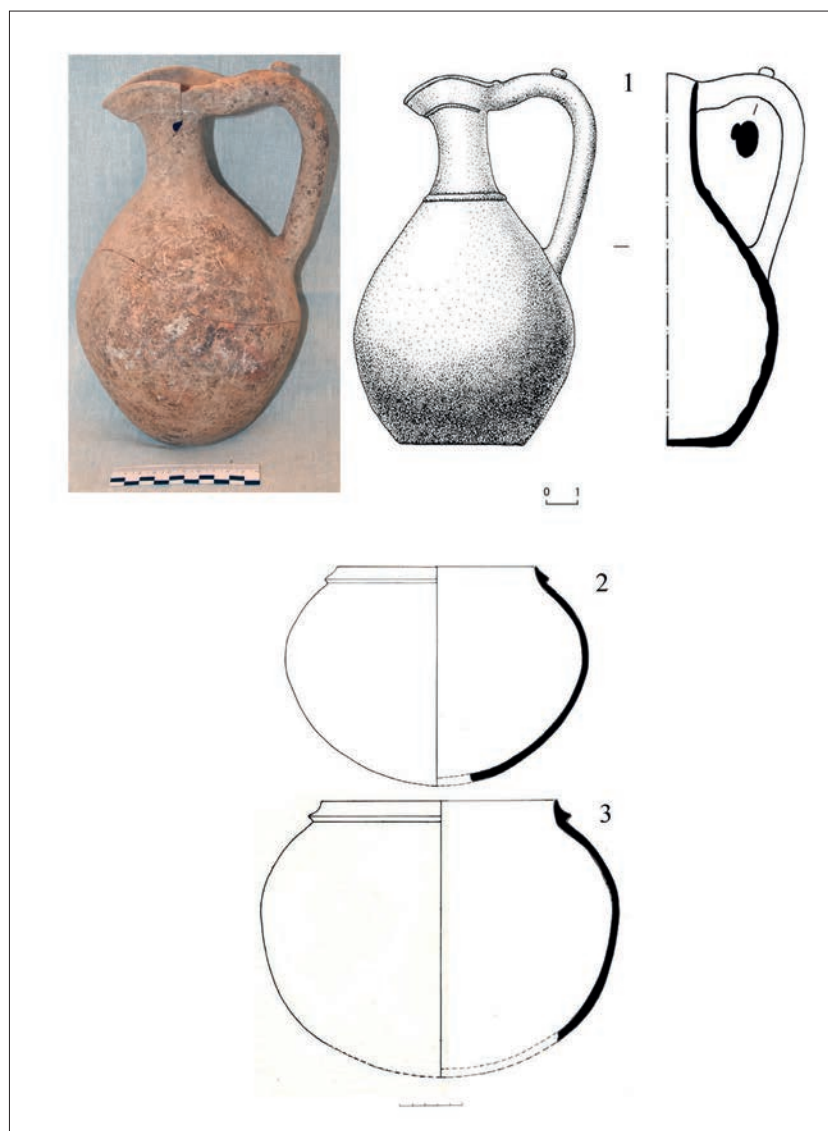


Fig. 6: Thin-walled cattle and jug. 1: Complete table jug (*oinochoe*) with a handle, Sanjar-Shah 2012, Area 2, Room No. 24 (from the fill); 2–3: Wheel-made cooking pot, boilers with thin round bottom, Sanjar-Shah 2013, Area 2, Room No. 8 (from the first floor) (after Kurbanov/Pulotov/Aminov 2016b, drawings and photo by the author).

studied by Boris Marshak, the figure ranges from 79 to 86% (MARŠAK 2012). In the pottery assemblages from 2014, the proportion remained virtually the same: handmade pottery 11%, wheel-made pottery 89%. However, changes must be made following our work in 2015, when we started excavating in Area 4. Thus, as of 2015, the percentage is 22% for handmade pottery, and 78% for wheel-made. This is the general picture. Of course, the next step is to enlarge our scope and to compare ceramics from different Areas and even different rooms.

What characterises the Sanjar-Shah pottery is the abundance of well-made, thin-walled cooking pots with round bases. In Panjikent, the number of such cooking pots is lower. It is worth noting that the quality of manufacture of Sanjar-Shah bowls is also

higher than in Panjikent. Dating the Sanjar-Shah ceramic assemblages without other finds (such as coins) is only possible based on the parallels from other sites, the most important of which is undoubtedly neighbouring Panjikent. Certain ceramic types in Sanjar-Shah and Panjikent show remarkable similarity and consistency. For instance, bowls with a cross and cup-like goblets keep the same form from the 5th to the 8th century (Fig. 8). In both Sanjar-Shah and Panjikent, there are examples of bowls with a cross from both early and late layers. Interestingly, such bowls are not attested anywhere in Sogdiana except for Panjikent and Sanjar-Shah. They have not been found, for example, at the neighbouring Navruz-Shah, Mugh-tepa, Shotorak, or Ok-tepa.



Fig. 7: Zoomorphic decorations on ceramics. **1:** Fragment of the rim of baby stroller, plum with the image of a mountain goat, Sanjar-Shah 2012, Area 2, Room No. 23 (from the fill) (drawing and photo by the author); **2:** Fragments of pottery with zoomorphic image from Panjikent (see LURJE 2015: 207; Fig. 168) (drawing by D.A. Zhulina); **3:** Archaeologically complete mug with a drain (for filtering) with zoomorphic image (the end 7th/early 8th century CE), Sanjar-Shah 2013, Area 2, Room No. 9 (from the fill); **4:** Ornamental jug with zoomorphic decorations (from Panjikent), Hermitage Museum (after KURBANOV/PULOTOV/AMINOV 2016b, drawings by Sh. Kurbanov, photos by P.B. Lurje and M. Shenkar).

According to the coin finds, the majority of Sanjar-Shah pottery is dated to the 5th to the 8th century. Pottery is often found together with the bronze

coins of the kings of Sogd, the coins of the rulers of Panjikent, the *bukharkhuda* coins, and the Arab *fulus* finds of the 8th century.



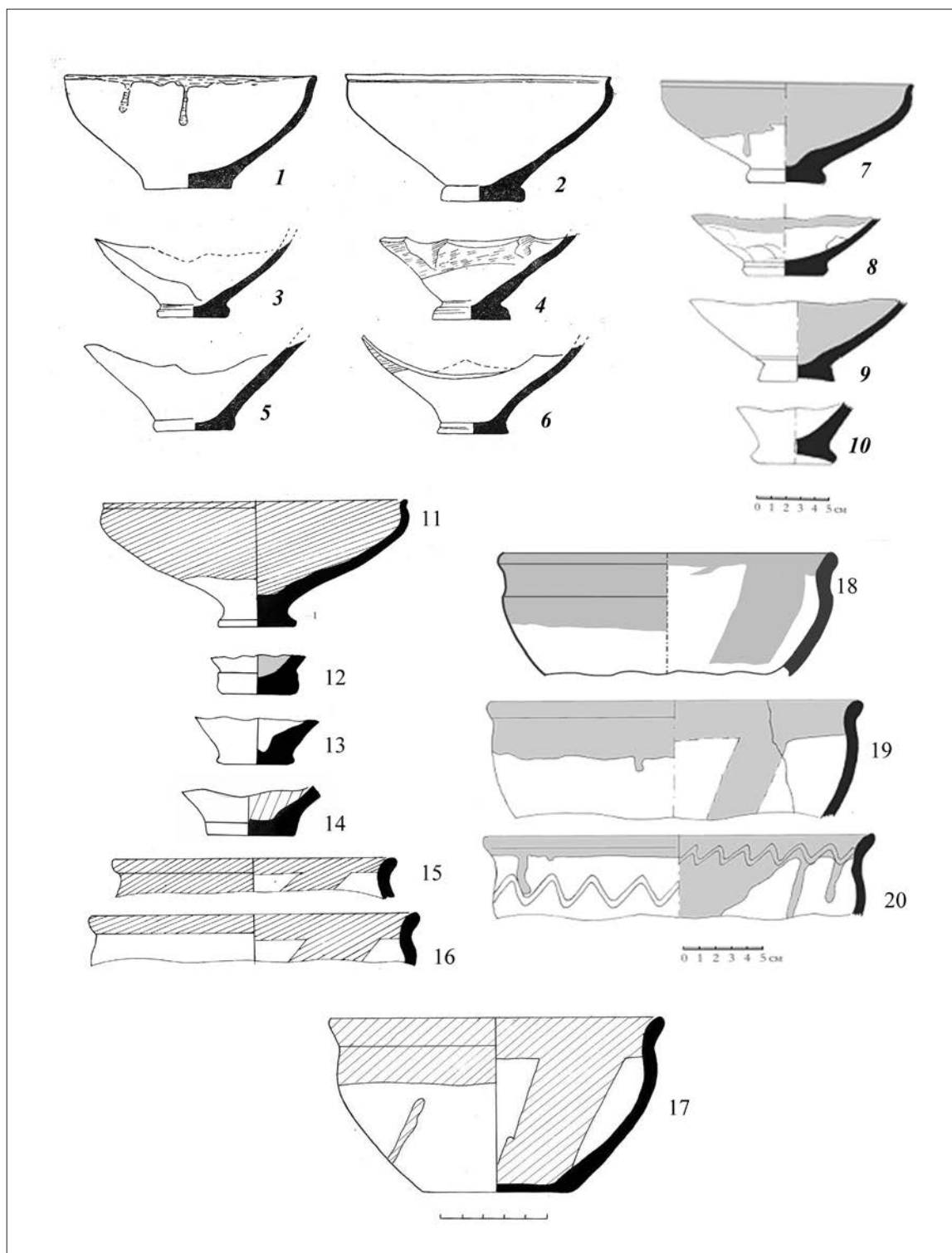


Fig. 8: Bowls with a cross and cup-like goblets. **1-6**: Cup-like goblets from Panjikent (see BENTOVICH 1953: 140; Fig. 7); **7-10**: Cup-like goblets from Panjikent, materials from the complex earlier ceramic layer (6th-7th centuries) from Panjikent (Qaynar) (see LURJE 2011: 27-33; Fig. 81); **11-14**: Fragments of a cup-like goblets (5th-6th centuries) from Sanjar-Shah; **15-17**: Fragments of bowls with a cross from Sanjar-Shah (5th-6th centuries); **18-20**: Fragments of bowls with a cross from Panjikent (5th-6th centuries) (see LURJE 2011: Fig. 81; KURBANOV/SEMENOV 2011: Fig. 30: 1) (drawings by the author).

The earliest ceramic assemblage identified so far at Sanjar-Shah comes from the terrace below the Round Tower (Area 1). These types are dated to the late 5th/early 6th centuries. Pottery from the same period was found also in Sounding 1 in Area 2. The rest of Sanjar-Shah pottery is dated to the 7th to 8th centuries. After that, it seems that Sanjar-Shah was abandoned and its inhabitants moved to Muborak-Shah.

### 3 A comparison

Let's now look more closely at the local similarities and differences between the ceramic assemblages from Sanjar-Shah and Panjikent. According to our calculations, the most numerous and widespread type of hand-made ceramics in Sanjar-Shah are

cooking pots: among the hand-made pottery, 42%. Storage jars are the predominant type in wheel-shaped pottery: 31%. It is interesting that in Panjikent the predominant type of hand-made pottery are bowls: 21%; and the prevalent type of wheel-made pottery are mugs: 36%. It should be noted, however, that this data is from the early layers; the later ceramic assemblages from Panjikent are yet to be systematically analysed. It is very interesting that at Sanjar-Shah jugs were the predominant type, while in Panjikent it is bowls.

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