
Hergiswil, 18 April 2014

EurAsia archaeological projects Brief report on 2013 and outlook for 2014

Dear EurAsia members

Below you will find reports and plans for EurAsia's five ongoing projects, as well as two new projects with New York University, USA, and the University of Bern, Switzerland. The detailed archaeological reports will be posted on the society's website at the end of April at: www.exploration-eurasia.com

I. Kesken Kala, Kazakhstan

Excavation of a Khorezmian (5th-7th century) and Oghuz (9th-12th century) city

Excavations of the temple palace complex continued in late autumn and winter 2013. This is the first discovery of a temple belonging to the Oghuz Turkish confederation. Further altars with protomes were uncovered, along with a large quantity of pottery and a sacred (?) clay figurine. The investigation of the neighbouring district and the cemetery also continued. The earlier discovery of Iranian Sassanid coins shows that Kesken Kala was already an important trading city during the Khorezmian period in the 5th-7th centuries. At the height of Kesken Kala's prosperity, formerly known as Djuvara, the city was located in a former delta of the Syr Darya River, which later changed its course.



The temple palace complex



Archaeologically well-preserved ceramic finds, 11th century.



Coins from the ancient Khorezmian period, 6th-8th centuries

2014: Excavation continues.

II. Novopokrovka II, Kyrgyzstan

Excavation of a fortified settlement and a presumed Buddhist monastery

Work again focused exclusively on the centre of the settlement, reaching the Sogdian layer. The team came across strikingly decorated ceramic fragments, whose decoration could indicate a Buddhist context.



Excavation in the city centre



Pottery finds with unusual, as yet unidentified decorations.



2014: Excavation continues in the centre.

III. Vardana, Uzbekistan

Excavation of a Sogdian and medieval city in the oasis of Bukhara

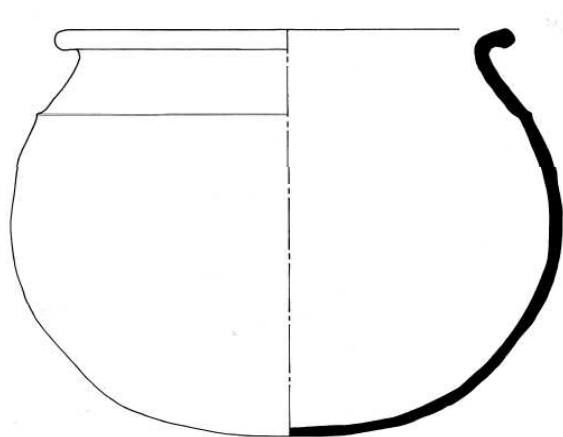
Last year's excavations in the citadel and radiocarbon measurements carried out in winter by the University of Salento, Lecce, have confirmed that the city was founded in the late 4th or early 5th century AD. Even then, the city had massive defensive walls. The royal palace located in the citadel was built in the 4th to 5th century and fundamentally renovated at the end of the 7th century. The palace was abandoned in the late 8th century, presumably as a result of the Arab occupation. In the 10th century, Vardana was repopulated under the Samanids and greatly expanded in the 12th century. Round glass windows also date from this period. The city was then abandoned in the early 13th century as a result of the Mongol invasion and was only used as a cemetery. A marble gravestone or memorial stone commemorating a presumed "holy man" was also found here. Whether it is a grave or a cenotaph remains unclear.



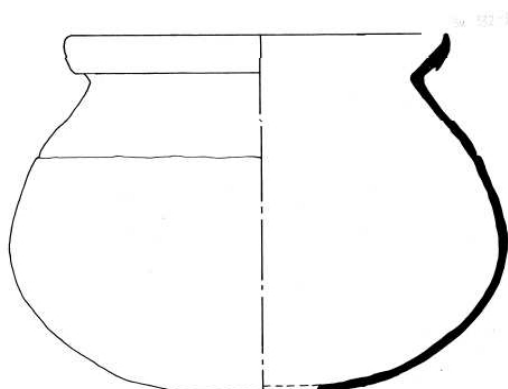
The excavation team



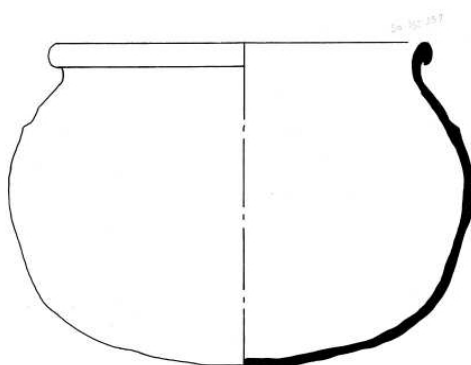
Vessel lid with zoomorphic handle, 10th century



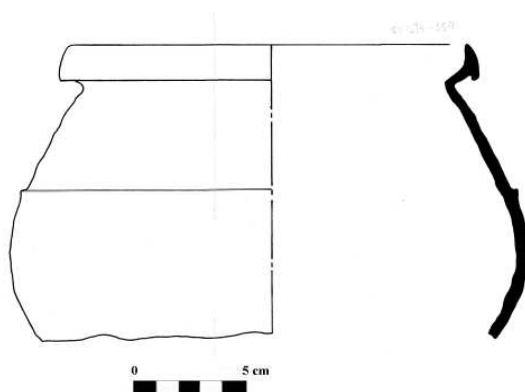
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Ceramic vessels

2014: The excavations continue.

IV. Qarshovul, Uzbekistan

Excavation of a presumed Christian Nestorian city

After special ceramic finds in 2011 pointed to a Christian settlement context, the team discovered a cemetery in 2012 with a few gravestones, each with a rudimentary cross carved into it. This suggests that a Christian settlement may have existed here.

The grave finds from 2013 did not provide further confirmation of a Christian presence. Instead, a grave with two burials at different times was uncovered. Both male deceased were buried with weapons, including arrows. Based on the type of arrowheads, the first burial can be dated to the 1st century AD, the second to the early Middle Ages after the 4th century. Both burials are therefore significantly older than the architectural structures uncovered so far. The implications of this finding are still unclear. Secondly, excavations continued in the central sector 3, where a temple-like platform was uncovered. Numerous finds of interesting coins and semi-precious stones from the Sogdian period (7th-8th century) demonstrate the importance of the city at that time, the extent of which is still unclear. The levelling of the site in the late 1990s for agricultural cultivation complicates the work and underlines the urgency of archaeological research.



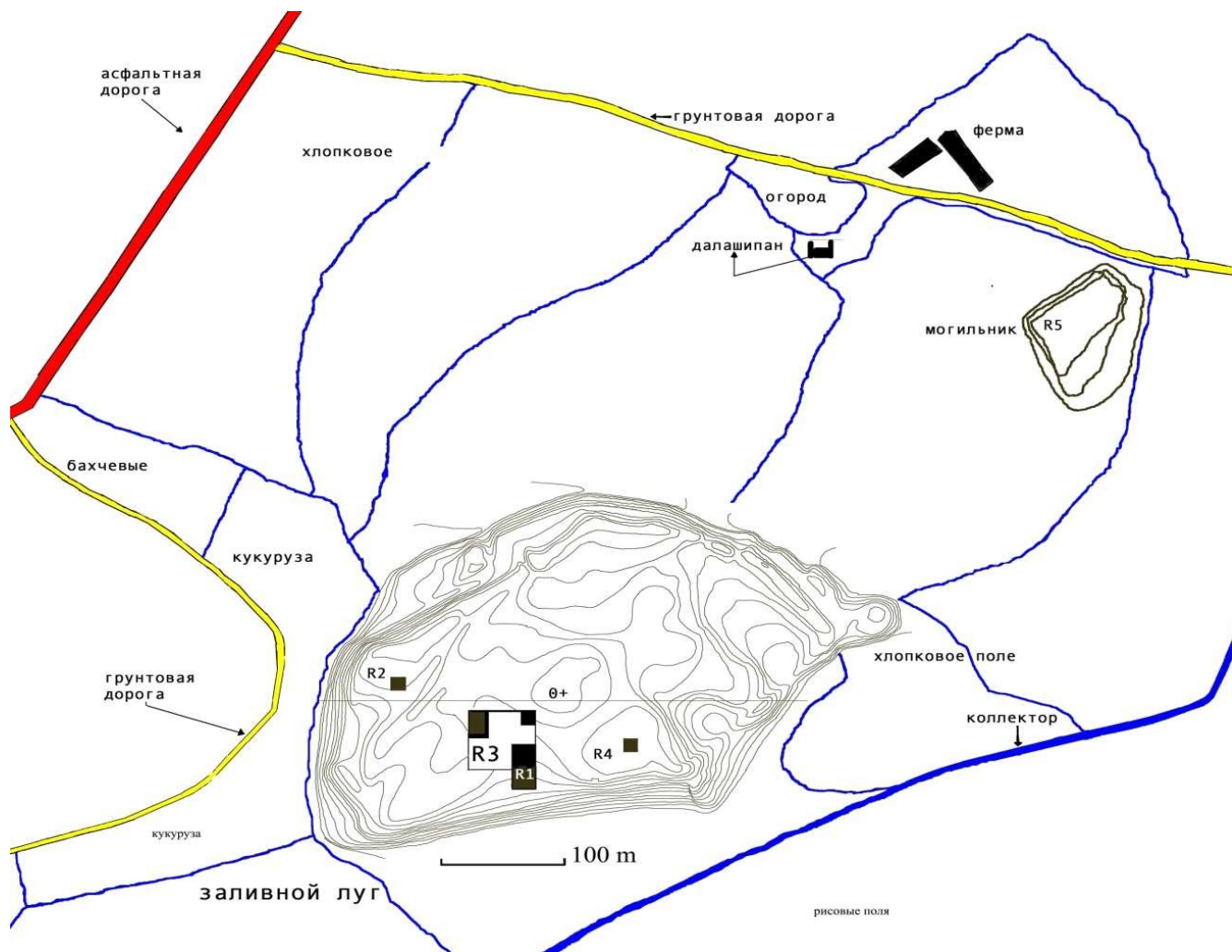
Sector 3 with the large platform



Reverse side of a Sogdian bronze coin of the Sochak



Front of a Sogdian bronze coin of the ruler



Site plan of Qarshovul Tepe



Steatite vessel neck

2014: Excavations continue in the necropolis and at the presumed temple platform.

V. Sanjar Shah, Tajikistan

Excavation of the fortified residence of a Sogdian ruler and a remarkably well-preserved citadel

In 2013, excavations focused on the north-eastern sector, where evidence (fire altar, figures of gods) of a Zoroastrian sanctuary of the Central Asian type had been discovered the previous year. The latest excavations also revealed residential complexes. Since no traces of ordinary residential settlements with streets have been found in Sanjar Shah to date, the site was probably not a city, but the seat of a regional feudal lord who ruled over neighbouring settlements. For this reason, a topographical survey of the ruins east of Sanjar Shah was begun in 2012 and continued in 2013. This survey is intended to provide information on the extent of the Prince of Sanjar Shah's sphere of influence.



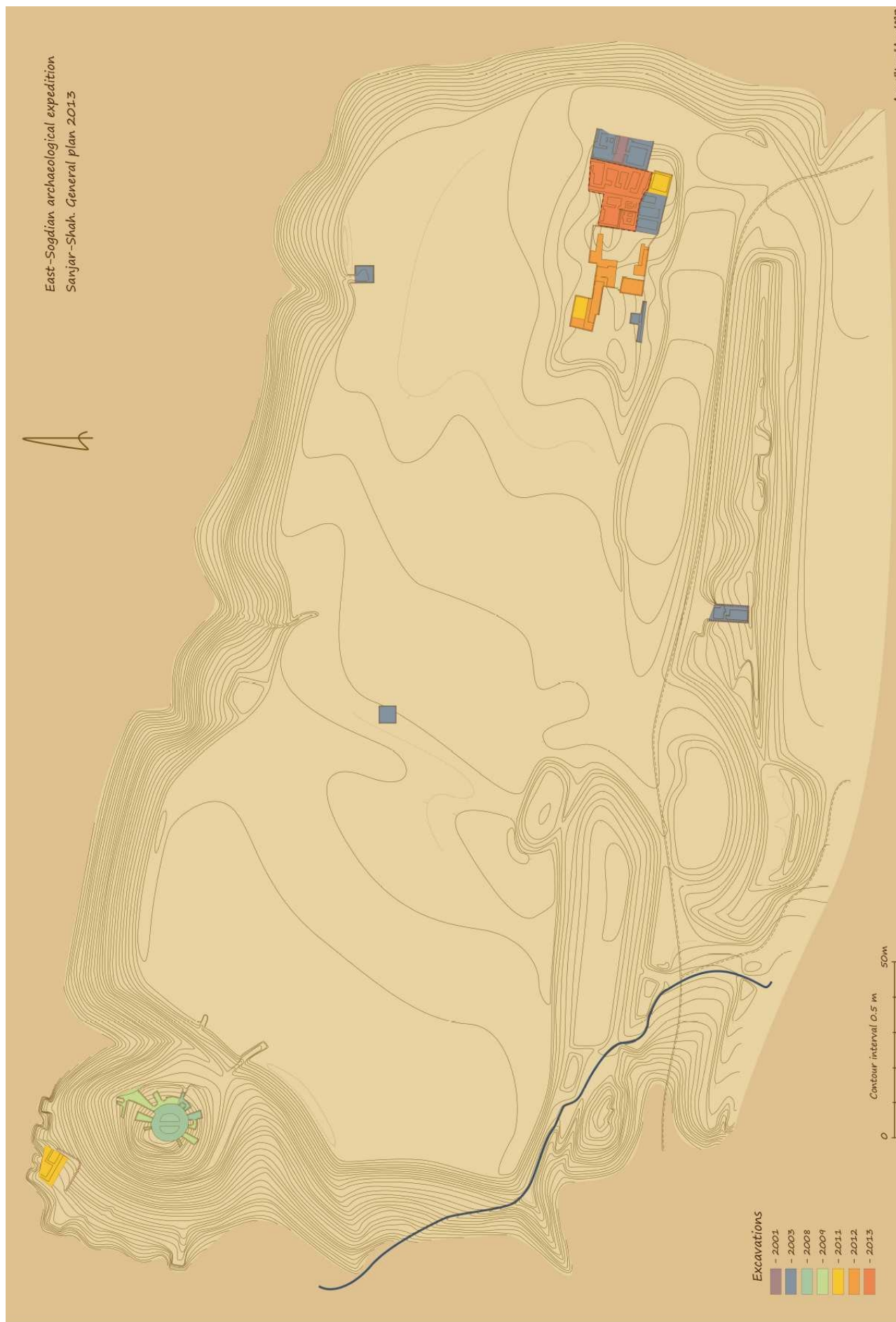
Excavations in the north-eastern sector



Base of an incense burner



Vessel with anthropomorphic spout



Sanjar Shah's new plan showing the stages of excavation

2014: Excavations continue in the north-eastern sector.

VI. The long walls of the oasis of Bukhara, Uzbekistan. NEW

Terrain walls are known to be a widespread phenomenon in many parts of the Old World. In western Central Asia – especially in metropolitan areas – they usually appear as veritable "oasis walls". Undoubtedly the most extensive of these territorial fortification systems east of Iran is the "oasis wall" of Bukhara in present-day Uzbekistan. It once had a circumference of approximately 400 km and was complemented by dozens of fortresses and watchtowers. Despite over a century of research, key questions regarding this extraordinary monument remain largely unanswered: when exactly was it originally built, what functions was it intended to serve, and how did this defence system evolve over the course of its existence?

The fieldwork begun in 2011 will be complemented in 2014 by a drone-assisted survey. This aerial survey, the first of its kind in Uzbekistan, is being carried out by the Archaeocopter project of the Dresden University of Applied Sciences and the Free University of Berlin, in cooperation with EurAsia and the **University of New York**, Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, represented by Prof. Dr. Sören Stark.



The Ganj Tepe Fortress



Satellite image of the Khodja Adjvanti Tepe Fortress

VII. Gonur, Turkmenistan. NEW

Gonur Tepe was the largest city in the so-called *Bactria Margiana Archaeological Complex*, which flourished between 2400/2300 and 1500 BC between south-western Turkmenistan and northern Afghanistan. The oasis of Gonur, located about 70 km north of Merv, consisted of at least 20 settlements, of which Gonur North (2400/2300-1900? BC, bottom of picture) with at least 20,000 inhabitants and Gonur South (1900-1600? BC), located about 250 m further away, were the most important; southeast of Gonur, a necropolis with sensational finds was uncovered in 2009.

Gonur has been the subject of archaeological research since the 1970s, yet many questions remain unanswered, particularly with regard to the area between Gonur North and Gonur South. It is also suspected that the necropolis continues to the south or that there is another necropolis. The new project, which will run from 2014 to 2016, aims to use non-invasive methods (aerial photography and geophysical prospecting such as geomagnetics, ground-penetrating radar and geoelectric resistance measurements) to uncover further urban traces, which may then be investigated further through excavations.

Parallel to our project, the University of Bern, in cooperation with the SLSA, the Swiss-Liechtenstein Foundation for Archaeological Research Abroad, is conducting a selective cross-sectional excavation with the aim of establishing a basis for creating an absolute chronology of Gonur North.

The project is a collaboration between EurAsia and the **University of Bern**, Institute of Archaeological Sciences IAW, represented by Prof. Dr Mirko Novak.



The fortified city of Gonur North



Gonur North (above) and Gonur South (below)

The cooperation between EurAsia and the University of Bern also opens up new options, such as a joint congress on archaeological topics in which EurAsia is involved.

If interesting results emerge from projects VI and VII, both of which use non-invasive research methods, such an approach will be considered for the two EurAsia projects already underway in Uzbekistan, Vardana and Qarshovul.

VIII. Further

Dr Silvia Pozzi, excavation director for Project III, Vardana, has received a scholarship to pursue a second doctorate at the University of Naples; her doctoral thesis will focus on our Vardana project.

The public annual event was held for the sixth time in Basel in 2013, for the fifth time in the Skulpturhalle, and was very successful with approximately 180 attendees. Prof. Dr. Sören Stark, professor at the University of New York, USA, spoke about the culture of the ancient Turks in Mongolia.

The 2014 annual event will again take place at the Skulpturhalle Basel on **Sunday, 16 November** from 11:00 to 13:00. Prof. Dr. Mirko Novak and Dr. Silvia Winkelmann will speak about the *Bactria Margiana Archaeological Complex* and, in particular, about our new Project VII, Gonur.

Finally, we would like to thank all our members for their valuable and much appreciated support.

With best wishes for a continued good and successful 2014 and kind regards

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