

Hergiswil, 20 March 2017

EurAsia archaeological projects Brief report on 2016, outlook for 2017

Dear EurAsia members

Below you will find brief overviews of EurAsia's eight ongoing projects and one new project. The detailed archaeological reports will be published on the society's website in April at: www.exploration-eurasia.com

I. Tuva, southern Russia

The rescue excavations of Scythian and Hunnic-Sarmatian graves (6th century BC – 4th century AD) near **Terezin** in Tuva, southern Siberia, which were successfully carried out from 2006 to 2011, were temporarily suspended in 2012-2014.

Several publications appeared in English and Russian. In spring 2015, a new reconnaissance survey was carried out on the site on the banks of the Sayano-Shushenskoye reservoir, which floods the necropolises every year and threatens to destroy them, followed by excavations that brought to light the new **Ala-Tey cemetery** and numerous interesting finds.



"Closed" grave



Boat-shaped grave

The excavations in 2016 were very successful; 17 flat graves were uncovered, where the dead lay stretched out on their backs. They had not been plundered, but some of them had been washed out by the annually rising water. Rectangular and boat-shaped stone coffin burials were discovered with several bronze belt buckles from the Xiongnu era (2nd century BC to 2nd century AD). These include belt plates with two yaks, two camels, a horse and a multi-horned bull. There is also a rare stone belt plate with inlaid coral, turquoise and mother-of-pearl, Chinese Wuzhou coins and an intact Han-era mirror with the inscription "When I look at the sky, I always think of the ruler".



Han Dynasty Chinese mirror.



Stone belt plate with inlaid coral, turquoise and mother-of-pearl and Chinese Wuzhou coins



Belt buckle depicting a yak or bull

2017: Excavations are now continuing on a larger scale.

II. Kesken Kala, Kazakhstan

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

Excavations and geomagnetic prospecting of the temple palace complex continued in 2016. At the same time, further research was carried out in the residential quarter in the south-eastern sector, yielding rich finds of pottery.



Aerial view: in the background on the right, the ongoing excavation in the southeast; on the left, the citadel.



Vessel fragment with engraved floral pattern and a Mask reminiscent of ancient Turkic-Kipchak stone figures.

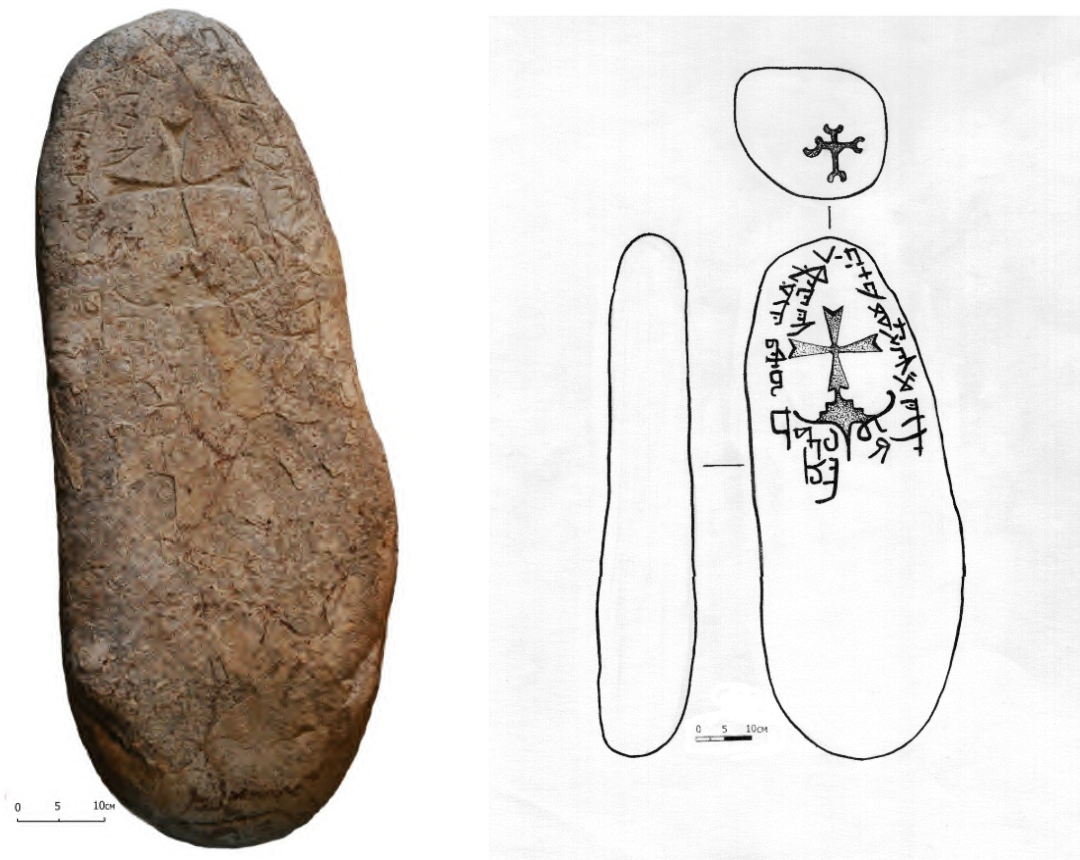


dastarkhan, a ritual ceramic vessel.

2017: Excavations continue in the south-eastern sector and at the same time another excavation site is opened in Sharistan (fortified district), where a palace-like complex may be located.

III. Ilan Baliq/Uch-Aral, Kazakhstan

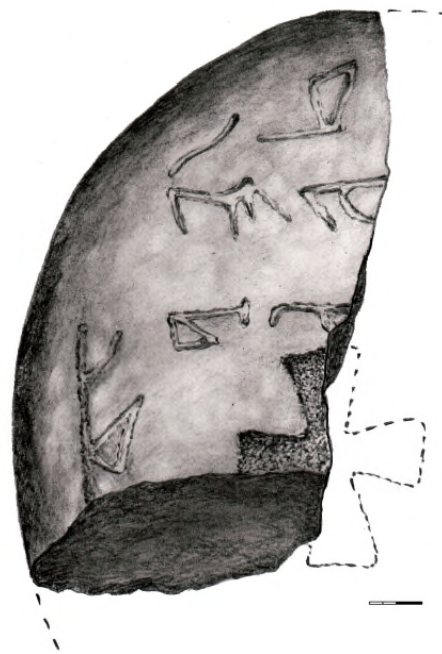
EurAsia's new project in Ilan Baliq, south-eastern Kazakhstan, got off to a very promising start. A survey conducted in 2014 uncovered a Nestorian Christian gravestone from the 13th/14th century with an engraved Maltese cross and an inscription in Old Turkic and Old Syrian script. This important location on the Silk Road of that time is most likely identical to the place Ilan Baliq, which the Armenian king Hetum I of Cilicia (southeastern Anatolia) encountered and described on his way to the Mongolian Grand Khan Möngke (reigned 1251-59) in 1254.



Nestorian gravestone 2014/1 with the inscription: 'Tegin's son Petros, Baršhabba Qucha's son [name illegible]'. In addition, three coin hoards totalling 123 coins were discovered, none younger than the 1340s.



Gravestone 2016/5



Gravestone 2016/7 with partially preserved inscription



Aerial view of Ilan Baliq

During the 2016 excavation, in collaboration with the *Archaeological Society of Kazakhstan* and the *Tandy Institute for Archaeology, Fort Worth, Texas*, seven more Nestorian gravestones were discovered, as well as numerous pottery shards engraved with crosses. There is no doubt that EurAsia has discovered a second ruin site of the Nestorian Church of the East here in south-eastern Kazakhstan, after Urgut in southern Uzbekistan. The eight Nestorian gravestones discovered in Ilan Baliq are the largest find of such gravestones in the same location since those discovered at the end of the 19th century east of Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.



Nestorian gravestone no. 2016/3 (edited photo)



Vessel fragment with engraved cross



Shard with engraved water bird.

2017: Work continues at the presumed cemetery and evidence is sought for a cemetery church believed to have stood there. Later, the town and citadel will be investigated.

IV. Novopokrovka II, Kyrgyzstan

Excavation of a fortified settlement and a presumed Buddhist monastery.

Work again focused on the centre of the settlement, with pre-Karakhanid layers from the 8th to late 9th centuries being explored. Two roads were uncovered, whose high technological standard was very surprising and contributes to the discussion of urbanisation in the Chu Valley in the 8th-9th centuries.



Road 1 in excavation II with two layers of stone



Türgesh coins from the 8th century found on the surface of Road 1. Whether there is another archaeological layer beneath Road 1 will be clarified in 2017.

2017: Excavation will continue in the centre, after which a decision will be made on whether to continue this excavation, which began in 2004.

V. Qarshovul, Uzbekistan

Excavation of a Sogdian city, 4th-8th century. In the 10th century, the Arab geographer and traveller Ibn Hawqal described two Christian (Nestorian) cities: firstly, the monastery of **Wazkerd**, which EurAsia successfully identified, excavated and published near Urgut, south of Samarkand. Secondly, the village of **Weshgird** in the oasis of Chach, today's Tashkent.

Here, EurAsia began systematic excavations in 2010 near the village of Qarshovul, south of Tashkent, after field surveys had taken place in 2008-09. Following the chance discovery of a metal pectoral cross (2008) and the controlled discovery of a gravestone engraved with a cross (2012), the 2016 expedition succeeded in uncovering three further pieces of evidence that not only did a Christian Nestorian community live in Qarshovul in the early Middle Ages, but that the ruling family may also have been Christian. This could support the working hypothesis that Qarshovil could be identical to Ibn Hawqal's Weshgird.



Aerial view of Qarshovul town (left) and the necropolis (right).



The city gate with its two towers, uncovered in 2016



Ceramic vessel with engraved cross from room 14



Front of the coin: A predator



Reverse: A cross: coin from the early 8th century

2017: Excavations continue in Qarshovul.

VI. Vardana, Uzbekistan

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



Excavations in the citadel, room 31

Excavations continued in the citadel. This confirmed the earlier hypothesis that, at the beginning of the 8th century, storage and utility rooms were built above the state rooms of the former palace from the late 7th century, where small fragments of polychrome wall paintings were discovered. Presumably, the palace of Vardan Khudah (a title) was converted into a fortified castle during the attacks by the invading Arabs between 705 and 709, and the ruler's state rooms were converted into storage rooms for food in order to withstand a prolonged siege. After the fall of Vardana in 709, the palace was destroyed and fell into disrepair; the site remained uninhabited for a century.

The excavation also confirmed that the earliest archaeological layer dates back to at least the 5th century AD. Due to the risk of collapse, it was not possible to reach the natural topsoil, so an even earlier date for the settlement cannot be ruled out. In 2017, attempts will be made to reach the topsoil at another, less dangerous location.



Ceramic vessel with zoomorphic spout



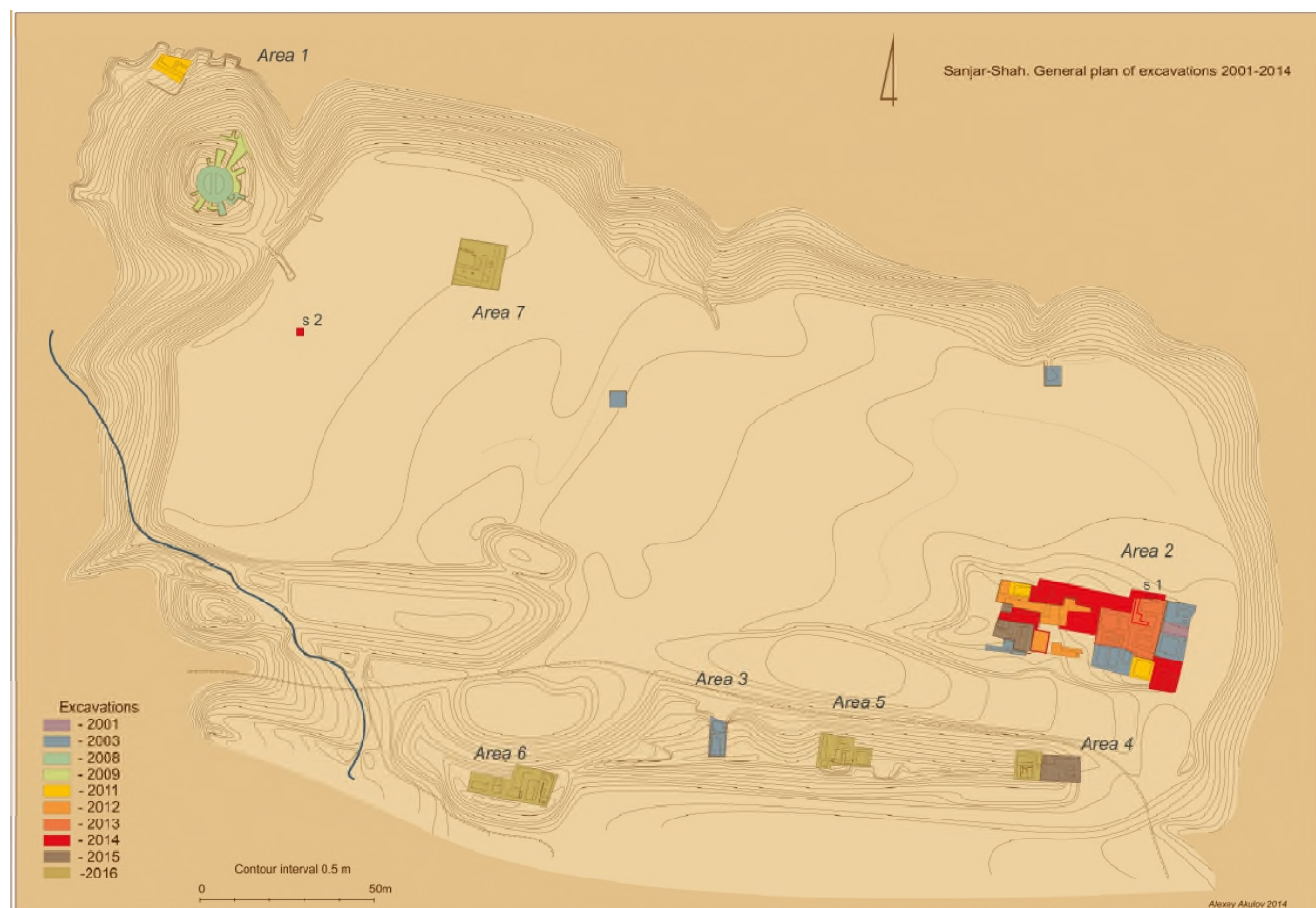
Preservation and removal of traces of wall paintings

2017: Excavations in the citadel will continue, and a monograph on ceramics is planned for 2018.

VII. Sanjar Shah, Tajikistan

Excavation of the fortified residence of a Sogdian ruler or a small town with a citadel

Excavations continued in sectors IV and VII in 2016 and were resumed in sectors V and VI.



Plan of Sanjar Shah with the corresponding excavation sectors.

In the relatively well-preserved Sector V, it was found that the archaeological structure is partially preserved up to the third floor. Not only were small fragments of wall paintings discovered here, but also a piece of a Chinese bronze mirror and a unique Janus-shaped pin; both of these finds will be the subject of separate investigations.



Sector V, Room 2



Sector V, Room 1



Fragment of a Chinese mirror



Janus-headed pin

Offprint from

JERUSALEM STUDIES IN
ARABIC AND ISLAM
43 (2016)

Ofir Haim,
Michael Shenkar and Sharof Kurbanov

The earliest Arabic documents written on
paper: three letters from Sanjar-Shah
(Tajikistan)

THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM
THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES



The multi-part paper manuscript fragment in Arabic script and language discovered at the beginning of Sanjar Shah's excavations was published in 2016 in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, No. 43, *The Hebrew University of Jerusalem*, under the title *The earliest Arabic documents written on paper: three letters from Sanjar Shah (Tajikistan)*. With the discovery and publication of the world's oldest Arabic document written on paper, EurAsia made a sensational find and published an important work. The publication is available as a PDF on the society's website under Projects/Sanjar Shah.

2017: Excavations continue in sectors IV to VII.

VIII. Gonur, Turkmenistan

Non-invasive exploration of previously unexcavated areas around Gonur

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 and Gonur South (1900-1600? BC), located about 250 m further away, were the most important.

The geophysical prospecting project, which was successfully launched in 2014 and 2015, unfortunately had to be interrupted in 2016 because, for reasons that remain unknown, the Turkmen Ministry of Culture did not grant a single foreign archaeological expedition a licence to continue the work. We hope to be able to resume work in 2017.

IX. NEW: Early Scythian kurgan, Tuva, southern Russia

In summer 2017, trial excavations will begin on a presumed Early Scythian kurgan (burial mound) in Tuva, southern Russia. The test excavation aims to uncover organic material, in particular wooden structures, whose C-14 and dendrological analyses should provide clues about the dating of the kurgan. These results will form one of the bases for deciding whether to excavate the very large burial mound, which is approximately 100 metres in diameter. The project is a collaboration with the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia.

X. Further Scientific Congress

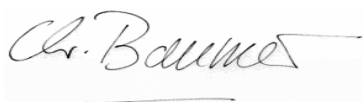
As summarised in the circular dated 20 March 2016, the Society for the Study of EurAsia, in collaboration with the University of Bern, Department of Near Eastern Archaeology, held an international congress from 4 to 6 February 2016 on the topic:

Urban Cultures of Central Asia from the Bronze Age to the Karakhanids
Findings and conclusions from new archaeological investigations and discoveries

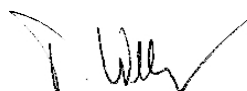
More than thirty archaeologists from Asia, Russia, Western Europe and the USA took part. The presentations will be published in a monograph in 2018.

Finally, we would like to thank all members for their invaluable and much appreciated support. With best

wishes for a continued good and successful 2017 and kind regards



Christoph Baumer
President



Therese Weber
Vice-President

Pilatusstrasse 20, P.O.B. 36, CH-6052 Hergiswil. Tel: + 041 610 33 74; Fax: + 041 610 49 32
Email: contact@exploration-eurasia.com Internet: www.exploration-eurasia.com