

Hergiswil, 11 March 2019

EurAsia archaeological projects

Brief report on 2018 and outlook for 2019

Dear EurAsia members

This report provides a brief overview of EurAsia's nine ongoing projects. The detailed archaeological reports will be published on the society's website at the end of April at: www.exploration-eurasia.com



EurAsia projects

I. Tuva, Southern Russia

The rescue excavations of Scythian, Xiongnu and Kokel culture 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 and resumed in 2016. Several publications have since appeared in English and Russian.



Partial view of the Ala-Tey burial ground

In 2018, 13 new graves were discovered in Ala Tey, bringing the total number of excavated graves in Ala Tey to 99. Additional graves were identified but could not be explored due to rising water levels; these will be excavated in 2019. Fourteen new graves were discovered and excavated in the neighbouring cemetery of Terezin, bringing the total number of graves at both sites to 27. The majority date from the Xiongnu period (2nd century BC to 2nd century AD), with some from the Kokel period (1st/2nd century to 4th century AD). Like those uncovered in 2016-17, the graves had not been plundered, but had been washed out by the annual rise in water levels. The dead lay in a stretched supine position, mostly resting in rectangular stone coffins.

In 2018, a total of 2,112 finds of 290 types were made, 156 of which require careful cleaning and restoration. Twelve restorations are particularly complex as they involve organic objects made of leather, felt and wood. Copper(II) acetate ("verdigris") is being removed from bronze objects. This is being done in the laboratories of the Hermitage, St. Petersburg, IHMC RAS.



Plan of Ala-Tey at the end of the 2018 excavation.



Tomb T/21 in Terezin, still covered



Exposure of grave AT1/86 in Ala-Tey

The burial of an archer was particularly interesting, especially the bone bow tip reinforcements and the three-winged arrowheads.



Terminal reinforcements of a reflex bow and arrowheads



Burial of a young woman with a Chinese bronze bell as a grave offering, AT1/91

Belt buckles made of jet and bronze, Chinese mirrors, an engraved wooden box and 1,500 small beads were also discovered in Ala-Tey.



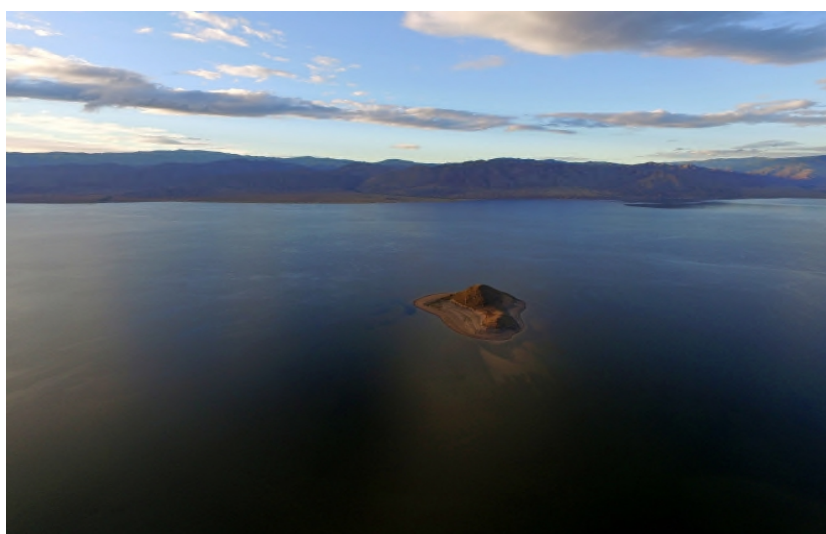
Rich woman's grave T/31 from Terezin



Bronze belt buckle, grave T/31



The rising water of the reservoir begins to flood the excavation site



The flooded Ala-Tey site – the necropolis is now approximately 16 to 17 metres under water

Four articles in English and Russian have been published in edited volumes.
2019 Excavations are continuing.

II. Kesken Kala, Kazakhstan

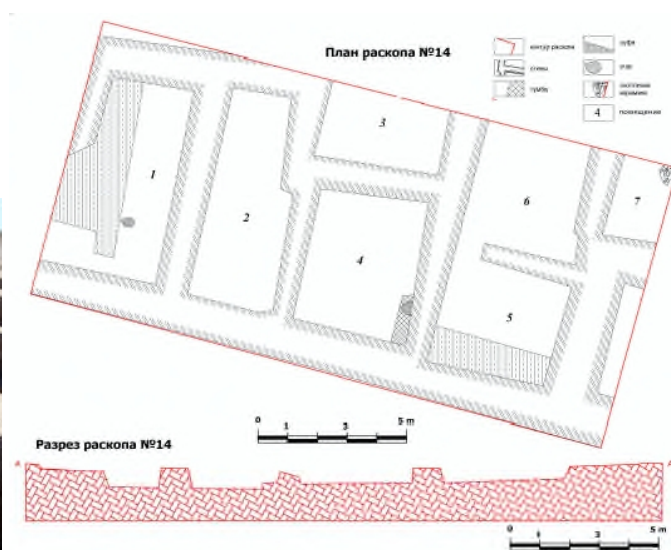
Excavation of a Khorezmian (5th-7th century) and Oghuz (9th-12th century) city.

In 2016-17, excavations took place within the fortified city quarter of *Sharistan*. The pottery found there dates from the 10th–12th centuries AD. A building with a floor area of 15 x 6.15 m had an *aiwan*. *Aiwans* are tall halls open on one side, usually covered by a barrel vault; they are found in representative buildings such as palaces or mosques.



The Sharistan

Excavations continued in *Sharistan* in 2018, particularly in Sector 14, which covers an area of 200 m². The pottery found there dates from the 10th to 12th centuries.



Sector 14 in the Sharistan

Note: The unexpected death of project director Prof. Dr. Karl Baipakov in November 2018 (see next page), just a few weeks after the completion of the excavations at Kesken Kuyuk Kala, has significantly delayed the preparation of the excavation report, which is expected at the end of April.

2019: Excavation will continue in autumn 2019, presumably under the direction of Dr. Voyakin, project co-director of the EurAsia excavation Ilan Baliq.

ASTANA KAZINFORM:

Outstanding Kazakhstani archaeologist Karl Baipakov passed away on 23 November 2018



Outstanding Kazakhstani scholar and archaeologist, academician of the Kazakhstan Academy of Sciences Karl Baipakov passed away at the age of 79. The Minister of Culture and Information expressed his condolences to the family and relatives of Karl Moldakhmetovich Baipakov.

Karl Baipakov held a doctoral degree in History. He was a professor, member-correspondent of the National Academy of Sciences of Kazakhstan, Eminent Science and Technology Professional, Director of Archaeology Institute of the Academy of Sciences (since 1991). He also authored numerous books and monographs. Karl Baipakov was born on 17 November 1940 in the town of Talgar in the Almaty region. In 1963, he graduated from the Department of History at A. Zhdanov Leningrad State University. In 1966, he received his Cand. of Science degree in History after defending his thesis on "Medieval Towns and Settlements of Semirechye (VII-XII centuries)". From 1963 to 1991, he worked at the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Kazakh SSR Academy of Sciences. Karl Baipakov was a scholar of medieval archaeology in Kazakhstan and Central Asia. His large-scale study of ancient cities such as Otrar, the Kuiryktobe settlement, the Kostobe necropolis, etc. enriched the resource base of Kazakhstan's ancient history. https://www.inform.kz/en/outstanding-kazakhstani-archaeologist-karl-baipakov-passed-away_a3463877

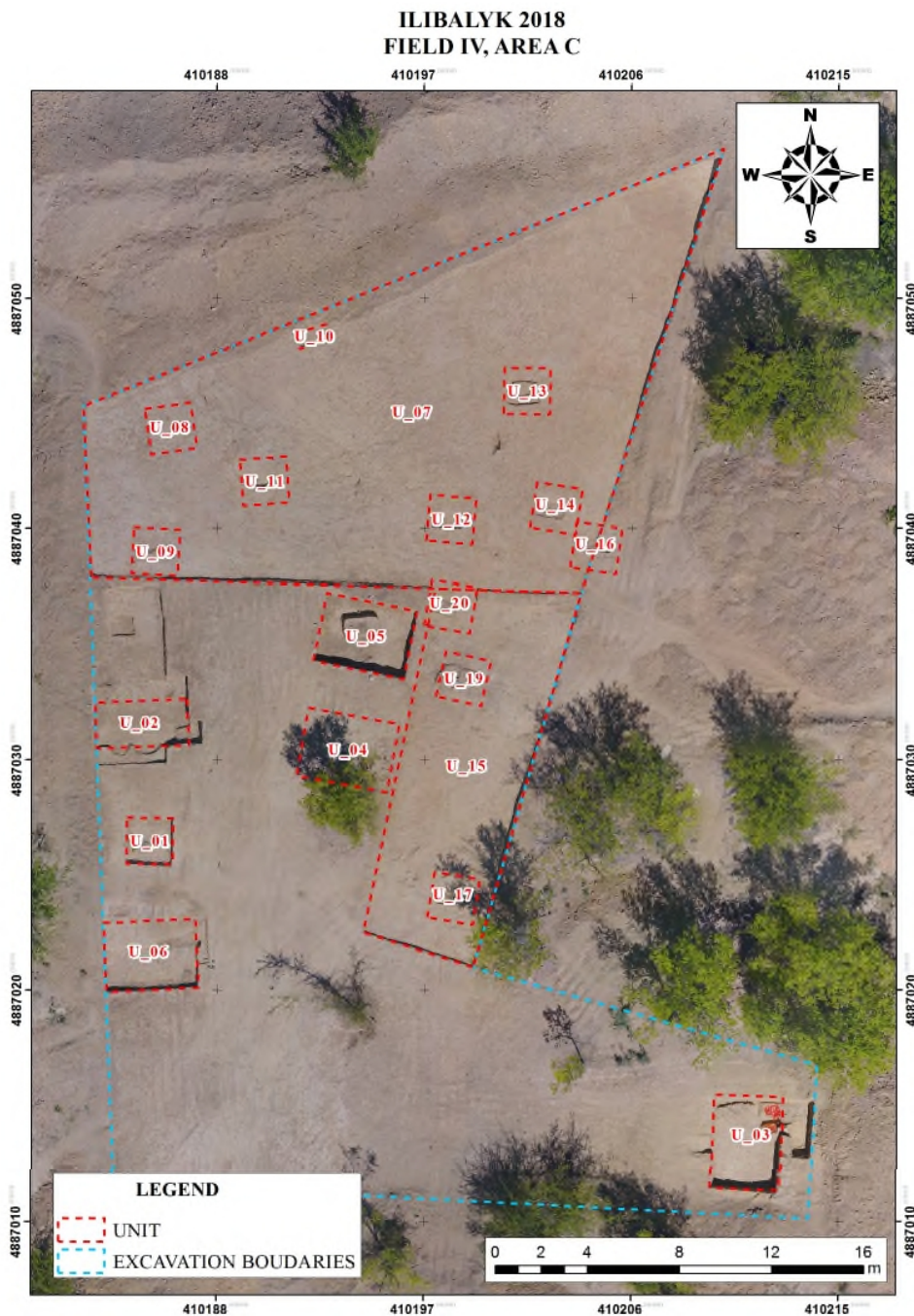
EurAsia's collaboration with Prof. Baipakov began in 2006, after Th. Weber and C. Baumer had discussed an initial project with him in Almaty in 2005. C. Baumer met Karl Baipakov at the end of July 2018 during the EurAsia excavation at the citadel of Ilan Baliq. (See page 11)



From left to right: Kevin White (Director of the Institute for Nestorian Studies at the Academy of Sciences, Almaty), Karl Baipakov, C. Baumer

III. Ilan Baliq/Uch-Aral, Kazakhstan

Ilan Baliq is a Christian Nestorian cemetery dating from the 13th-14th centuries. The neighbouring settlement on the former Silk Road is most likely identical to the place Ilan Baliq, which the Armenian King Hetum I of Cilicia (southeastern Anatolia) found and described on his way to the Mongolian Grand Khan Möngke (reigned 1251-59) in 1254. The excavation is being carried out in collaboration with the *Archaeological Society of Kazakhstan* and the *Tandy Institute for Archaeology*, Fort Worth, Texas.



The burial ground excavated in 2018

A. Necropolis

The excavations, which began in 2016, were very successful in 2018 and represent a decisive scientific breakthrough. After the initial chance discovery of a Nestorian gravestone in 2014 and the 16 gravestones found in 2016-2017, the cemetery itself was discovered in 2018. It turned out that some of the stones discovered in the past had been moved, and that the excavations in 2016 and 2017 had not been deep enough.

In 2018, a total of 33 unplundered graves were uncovered, 31 of which were children's burials (ranging from infants to teenagers). Eight additional gravestones engraved with crosses were discovered, all belonging to graves in this phase of the excavation, bringing the total number of gravestones found to 26. In addition, four mud bricks with engraved crosses were found, which were also lying directly on a grave and thus replaced a gravestone. Another four to six identified graves, which could not be excavated due to lack of time, will be investigated in 2019.



C. Baumer visits the Ilan Baliq archaeological team in summer 2018

Half of the graves contained grave goods such as necklaces and pins. Animal bones and ashes suggest that a funeral feast was held immediately next to the grave, as is still customary among Central Asian peoples today.

The excavations show that there was a homogeneous culture in Ilan Baliq. This is evidenced not only by the gravestones and bricks marked with crosses, but also by the fact that all the dead were buried in the same position; they were oriented east-west, with their heads resting slightly elevated on a clay pillow and facing east.



Careful excavation of a young person

This excavation is only the second time (after the one in the late 1880s in the greater Bishkek area, Kyrgyzstan) in Central Asian archaeology that an entire Christian Nestorian necropolis has been discovered! 130 years ago, only the gravestones were collected and the graves ignored, but now they are being carefully researched and DNA samples taken.



Nestorian gravestones engraved with crosses, the one on the left has a fivefold cross.



A burial site that has not yet been excavated will be covered again and filled with earth at the end of the campaign.

2019: The promising work will continue in the children's cemetery, and the search for the adult cemetery and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre will continue.

B. Citadel

Parallel to the work in the necropolis, a second team explored the presumed citadel at the opposite, south-eastern end of the settlement, which covers more than 1 km², near a well-preserved section of the 13th-14th century city walls. The walls were 8 m thick at the base. Here, a large, presumably private bath was uncovered, whose heating and sewage system is very similar to those from the late Byzantine period; perhaps the bath belonged to a palace that has not yet been discovered.



The baths near the presumed citadel



Nephrite necklace



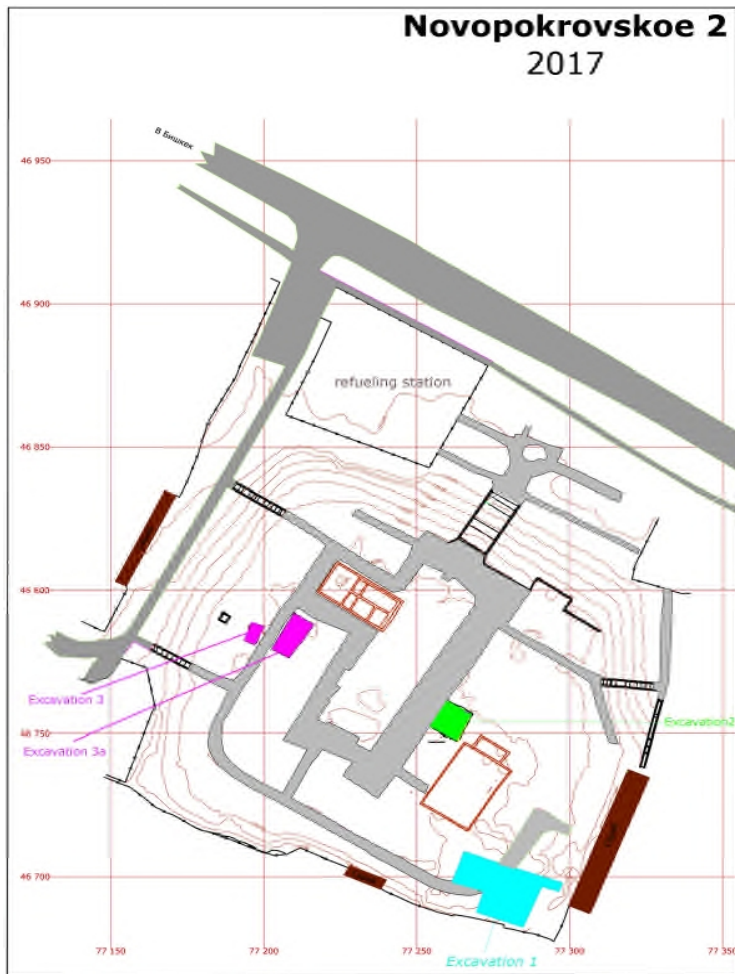
Carnelian necklace

A wooden box containing 13 necklaces from the 12th-13th centuries was discovered on the inside of the city wall. There are 7 silver necklaces, 2 nephrite necklaces, 1 coral necklace, 2 carnelian necklaces and 1 pearl necklace. There were also 3 silver arm rings. The jewellery was probably hidden there before an impending attack and then forgotten.

2019: The decision to continue research at both the necropolis and the citadel is still pending and depends on the necessary financial resources and available manpower. The excavation at the citadel may be postponed until later; the excavation was covered again, as required by law.

IV. Novopokrovka II, Kyrgyzstan

Excavation of a fortified settlement and a presumed Buddhist monastery.



Overall plan of Novopokrovka II.

Sector 3a with the graves.

Conclusion after the 2017 campaign: During the fourteen years of excavation, no evidence of a Buddhist monument came to light. Nor were any clearly Buddhist artefacts discovered. The small Buddhist finds made by Kojemjako in 1953 remained isolated items. This leads to the conclusion that either Kojemjako's individual finds were privately owned at the time, i.e. in the 8th century, or that the Buddhist monument, if it ever existed, was completely destroyed during the construction of the Soviet cultural centre in 1954. Furthermore, it is impossible to excavate the discovered Muslim cemetery in order to explore the layer beneath it.

Even though the initial hypothesis of a Buddhist place of worship could not be confirmed, the excavation provided valuable insights into the cultural exchange with Sogdia and medieval cultures along the middle Syr Darya River.

For these reasons, this project is being concluded. Selected finds will be handed over to the National History Museum for exhibition, while the rest will remain at the Archaeological Institute of Bishkek University.

The final work planned for **2018**, such as filling and covering all pits, had to be postponed until 2019.

A final report will be prepared.

V. Qarshovul, Uzbekistan

Excavation of a Sogdian city, 4th-9th 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. Following the chance discovery of a metal pectoral cross in Qarshovul (2008), EurAsia began excavations two years later. Following the controlled discovery of a gravestone engraved with a cross (2012), the expedition succeeded in 2016 in discovering three further pieces of evidence of an early Christian past in the form of coins bearing a cross.



Overview of Qarshovul. E 3: excavation with "ceremonial hall"; E 7: excavation with at least two construction periods and northern city gate; E 8: sector with five large rooms, possibly a palace, destroyed by fire.

In **sector E 3** (overview photo: bottom centre), excavations revealed a large room with sufahs (seating areas along one wall), which is interpreted as a "ceremonial hall" or representative reception hall. During the last construction period, the entrance door was sealed, the room was filled with pebbles and a platform was built over it. It is believed that the ceremonial hall was then used as a hiding place for valuable objects, as grave robbers broke in shortly after the platform was built.

Sector E 8 (rear centre) is the highest point of Qarshovul. Under the uppermost, most recent building layer, extensive burn marks showed that this second-youngest architectural layer had been violently destroyed and rebuilt immediately after the fire in significantly lower quality. This uppermost layer has been severely damaged by later graves.

During the excavations, 11 coins were found, the majority of which are pre-Islamic coins from Bukhara (ca. 650–712 AD); two of them are particularly interesting. The first is a pre-Islamic Khorezmian silver coin of a ruler named Bravik (Frawik) from the 7th century AD; This is the first time that a silver coin from this ruler has been discovered in the Tashkent oasis. The second coin is a fils copper coin, a small currency unit, from the year 821. It provides the *post quem* date when Qarshovul was abandoned. All coins must be carefully cleaned.



Rhyton, approx. 3rd-5th century AD.

A pre-Islamic rhyton was also discovered in sector E 8 beneath the fortification walls. The ceramic vessel, which has only one handle, has an opening at the bottom for pouring libations. Similar ritual vessels from the eastern Iranian cultural area date from the 3rd–4th/5th century AD.

In **sector E 7** (left rear), a 12-metre-long and up to 9-metre-deep trench was dug east of the city gate, revealing that tower 1 of the city gate had been rebuilt at least twice. However, the tower and city gate do not stand on topsoil; there are at least two older architectural layers underneath.



Cut in sector E 7

Sector E 5 (not shown in the overview photo) is the early medieval cemetery located 200 m northeast of the city, where six new graves were uncovered. The most interesting find was a straight sword with an 80 cm long iron blade, which was originally housed in a wooden sheath.

In summer 2018, an exhibition featuring objects and photographs from Qarshovul was held at the Archaeological Institute in Tashkent.

2019: Excavations continue.

VI. Vardana, Uzbekistan

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

Vardanzeh 2018

Citadel, general plan
Topography S. Mirzaachmedov



General plan of the citadel 2018

Excavations continued in the citadel. It has been confirmed once again that at the beginning of the 8th century, storage and utility rooms were built not only *above* but also *within* the state rooms of the former palace from the late 7th century, as further fragments of polychrome wall paintings have been uncovered. In anticipation of the impending attacks by the advancing Arabs, the ruler's palace was converted into a fortified castle before 705, and the ruler's state rooms were converted into storage rooms.

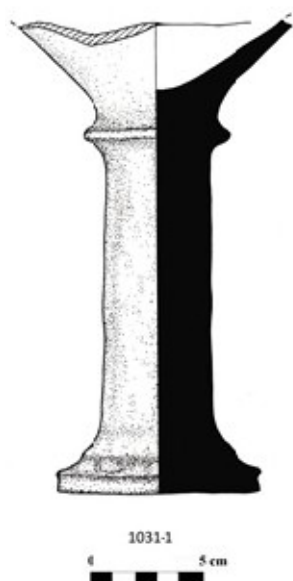


Citadel, excavation sections T-8/11, 12a, 16/17, 22-24

Radiocarbon measurements have confirmed that the first phase of construction of the castle uncovered so far took place in the 4th-5th century AD at the latest, while another measurement indicated that construction began in the 3rd century. However, older building structures were discovered beneath the soil layer of these early buildings, which consists of sand and pebbles. Radiocarbon measurements of charcoal indicate that these structures, covered by the layer of sand and pebbles, were abandoned or destroyed in the 1st-3rd centuries AD. It follows that this newly discovered building layer was constructed before this date, possibly in pre-Christian times. This hypothesis is supported by the observation that various stratigraphic details indicate that this newly discovered architectural substance was constructed in several phases.



Sections T 23 and 24 at the end of the excavation



Incense burner



2019: Excavations continue at the citadel with the primary aim of gaining a better understanding of the construction chronology, particularly that beneath the layer of sand and gravel. For safety reasons, the excavation area must also be significantly enlarged to reduce the risk of collapse of the current deep but narrow excavation shaft.

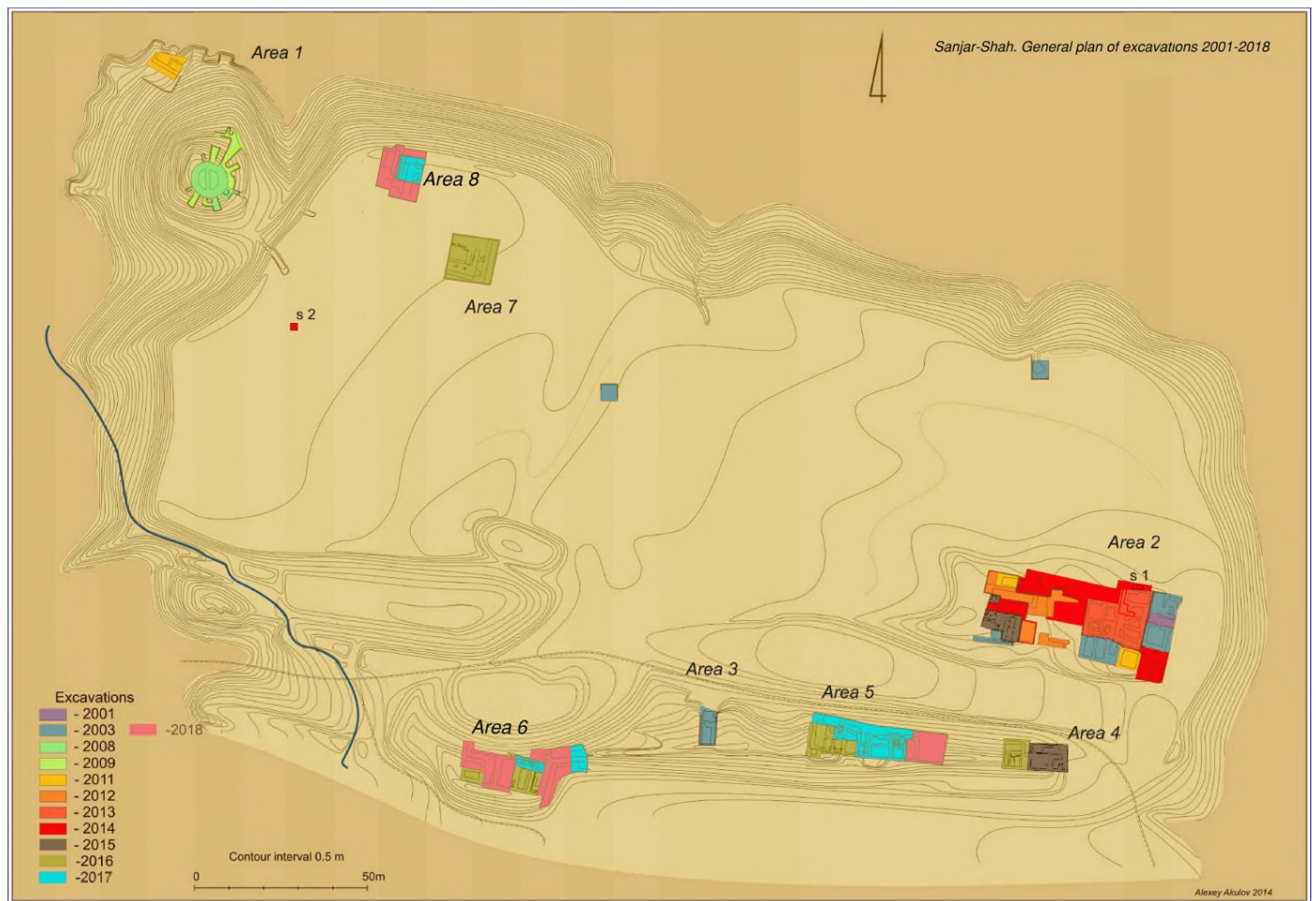
A two- to three-year archaeobotanical collaboration with Dr Robert Spengler from the Max Planck Institute, Paleoethnobotanical Laboratory Jena, is initiated.



Drawing the vessels

VII. Sanjar Shah, Tajikistan

Excavation of a small Sogdian town with a citadel



Plan of the excavations since the beginning

Excavations continued in 2017 in sectors (areas) V, VI and VIII. The hypothesis expressed in 2018 that sector VIII was an important monumental building has been confirmed. Here, in room 2, fragments of poorly preserved narrative wall paintings were uncovered, removed and taken to the Panjikent Museum. This may have been the residence of the local ruler or governor.



Mural painting of a lotus flower from Room 2/VIII



Sector VIII, view to the north

A coin from Turgar dating from 738–750 found within the palace walls provides a clear indication of the construction phase. It is particularly noteworthy that Monumental Building VIII is a "new building" and not a reconstruction. The rooms in Sector V are also new buildings, constructed after 738. Both neighbouring cities, Panjikent and Sanjar Shah, were burned down in 722, whereupon the last Umayyad governor, Nasr ibn Sayyar (in office 738–48), pursued a strategy of reconciliation with the defeated Sogdians. However, while only some of the abandoned residential buildings in Panjikent were rebuilt and no new ones were erected, several new buildings, including some monumental ones, appear to have been built in Sanjar Shah.

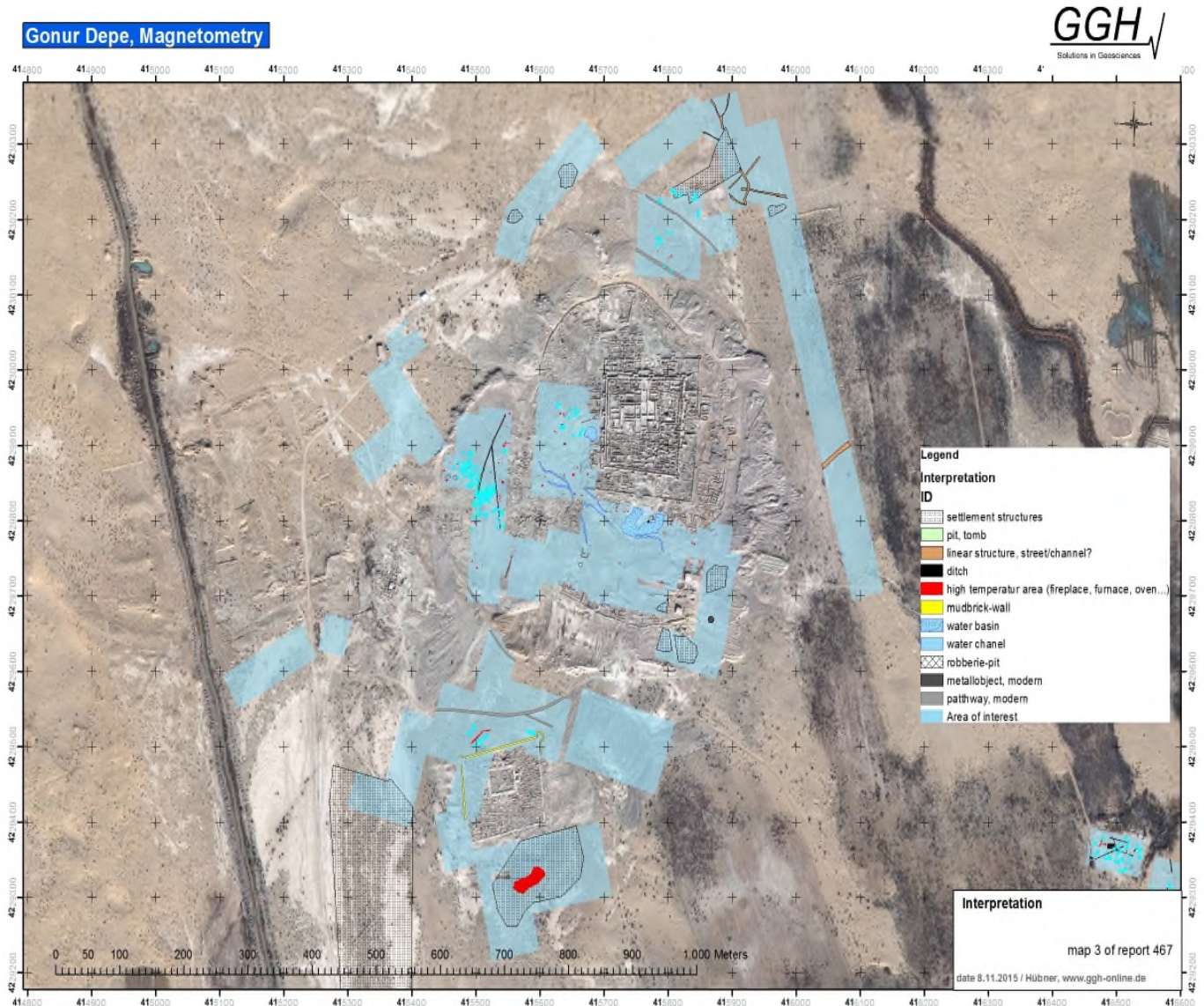


Sector V, view to the south

2019: Excavations will focus on Sector VIII in order to uncover the monumental building and gain a better understanding of it. If the above hypothesis is confirmed, the history of the Upper Zerafshan Valley in the 8th century would have to be rewritten.

VIII. Gonur, Turkmenistan

Non-invasive exploration of areas around Gonur that have not yet been excavated.



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 got off to a very successful start in 2014 and 2015, had to be interrupted from 2016 to 2018 because, for unknown reasons, the Turkmenistan Ministry of Culture did not grant any foreign archaeological expeditions a licence to continue their work.

Unfortunately, new administrative difficulties arose in the winter of 2018-19, prompting the lead university, the University of Bern, to terminate the project prematurely. This regrettable decision is acceptable to EurAsia insofar as the non-invasive research using GPR (ground penetrating radar) has been completed and its results published in the monograph on the EurAsia Urbanism Congress; only the drone aerial photographs planned for 2019 can no longer be realised.

IX. Tunnug 1: An early Scythian kurgan in Tuva, southern Russia

Excavation of a presumed ice kurgan from the early Scythian period in Tuva, southern Siberia.

Satellite images and aerial photographs have identified a large, unknown kurgan (a burial mound with a circular layout). The aerial photograph provided evidence of a concentrically arranged wooden structure with dozens of smaller chambers. A unique structure of this kind was uncovered in the 1970s by archaeologist Gryaznov in the nearby Kurgan Arzhan 1; the bones of sacrificed humans and horses were discovered in several wooden chambers in the plundered kurgan. Arzhan 1 dates from the early Iron Age at the transition from the 9th to the 8th century BC.



The main kurgan Tunnug 1 in the background and excavated peripheral burials from the Scythian and Kokel periods in the foreground.

2017: Results of the trial excavation

- The kurgan contains wooden beams.
- Two radiocarbon measurements of wooden beams yielded a date in the second half of the 9th century BC. Tunnug 1 is therefore the same age as Arzhan 1, which has been considered the oldest Scythian kurgan to date.
- Beneath the burial mound covered with a layer of stones, frozen ground was found at a depth of approximately 110–150 cm – in the middle of summer! Although Tunnug is only 800 metres above sea level, temperatures often fall below freezing at night, even in summer, and in winter temperatures can reach -50°C. In the vicinity of Tunnug, the permafrost lies at a depth of 5-6 m; the stone mantle of the kurgan prevents the soil layers from thawing at a depth of approximately 100+ cm. For these reasons, Tunnug 1 is probably a so-called ice kurgan, in which the buried remains and grave goods are enclosed by an ice lens.

A scientific publication appeared in November 2017 in *Archaeological Research in Asia*, among others.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352226717300600>

2018: Results of the 2018 campaign

Despite extremely difficult weather conditions with persistent heavy rain, the excavation campaign yielded rich and surprising findings. The team consisted of 3 archaeologists, 15 specialists, 16 workers and 90 volunteers from the Russian Geographical Society. As the kurgan is located in a marshy area, the army provided a special tracked vehicle with a trailer and two drivers.



The tracked vehicle with trailer provided by the army

Radiocarbon measurements of wooden beams inside the kurgan, calibrated using the "wiggle-matching" method (tree ring counting from dendrology), yielded a date of 833–800 BC, confirming the great age of Tunnug 1. Tunnug 1 is thus, from today's perspective, the oldest known Scythian princely kurgan.

A total area of 2510 m² was excavated. Numerous secondary burials and presumably also ritual structures are located on the periphery of the main burial mound. These span a period of 3000 years, from the Bronze Age Okunev culture (ca. 2000 BC) through the periods of the Scythians, Xiongnu, Kokel and Old Turkic periods to the Kyrgyz of the 9th–10th centuries AD. This period represents an exceptionally long period of ritual use of the necropolis; a complete and such a long sequence of archaeological cultures is naturally very rare in the steppe region, as the cattle breeders and their families of that time were mobile.



Daily journey from the tent camp through the marsh to the kurgan



Three small burial mounds after removal of the grass cover



In the eastern sector

The main kurgan has a diameter of more than 80 m, making it approximately 30 m smaller than that of Arzhan 1. The central kurgan was surrounded by an 8 to 10 m wide trench filled with large stones. This trench was in turn surrounded by an approximately 8 m thick wall. Future excavations will clarify whether these two concentric structures had a purely static function or other functions as well. The architecture of Tunnug 1 is unique.

On the eastern periphery, a cemetery of the Kokel culture (1st/2nd–4th century AD) was discovered, which is believed to lie above a Scythian burial site. Twenty skeletons, 2,245 animal bones or fragments thereof, and 486 archaeological objects such as pottery, parts of horse harnesses and coins were found. Excavations on the eastern edge of the main kurgan provided further evidence of a concentric arrangement of wooden structures, but only a large-scale excavation will be able to confirm or refute this hypothesis.



Object 7 after conservation

Two scientific publications will appear this summer. For this reason, the detailed report for EurAsia will not be posted on the society's website until it is published.

2019: First, a large-scale geophysical survey (GRP: Ground Penetrating Radar) will be carried out to create a map of invisible stone structures and arrangements. The aim is to gain a better understanding of the architecture of the site and thus be able to excavate in a targeted manner.

X. Further

The comprehensive monograph (462 pages) on the 2016 EurAsia and University of Bern scientific congress will be published by Harrassowitz in April 2019.

The second scientific congress will take place from 13 to 15 February 2020, again at the University of Bern, with the theme:

**Cultures in Contact
Central Asia as Focus of Trade, Cultural Exchange and Knowledge Transmission** Finally,

we would like to thank all our members for their invaluable and much appreciated support. With best wishes for a continued good and successful 2019 and kind regards

Christoph Baumer
President

Therese Weber
Vice President