

Hergiswil, 3 February 2020

EurAsia archaeological projects

Brief report on 2019 and outlook for 2020

Dear EurAsia members

This report provides a brief overview of EurAsia's seven 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. Terezin + Ala-Tey in Tuva, southern Russia

The rescue excavations of Scythian, Xiongnu and Kokel culture graves (6th century BC – 4th century AD) near **Terezin** and **Ala-Tey** in Tuva, southern Siberia, which have been carried out very successfully since 2006 (with one interruption), continued in 2019.



Partial view of the Ala-Tey burial ground

In 2019, a total area of 935m² was excavated in Ala-Tey. Nineteen unplundered graves were discovered and uncovered, bringing the total number of burials discovered here to 118. Archaeologists found a total of 289 artefacts. The area of the burial ground has expanded in all directions over the last two years, which is why we assume that numerous additional Xiongnu-era burials can still be expected.



Bronze belt buckle from the woman's grave AT1/101

Four graves with the following finds were particularly noteworthy:

- In the woman's grave AT1/101, a pair of large bronze belt plates depicting two yaks *en face*. (Picture above) Until now, such large belt plates have only been found individually here (with the exception of two small belt buckles from the woman's grave AM1/48).
- In the female grave AT1/111, a large belt plate with a previously unknown (no analogy) depiction of two yaks in profile.
- In the male grave AT1/84, a pair of identical bronze belt buckles was found.
- A belt plate made of Siberian jet engraved with a deer was found in the female grave AT1/112. The burial rites and finds are very similar to those found in the female grave AT1/86 discovered in 2017, with similar grave goods and a sitting position for the deceased, which is rare for Ala-Tey.



Xiongnu-period ceramic vessels

At the end of June, a short excavation was also carried out at the Terezin burial ground. Here, a stone coffin destroyed by water was found on the beach of the reservoir, containing a fragment of a Han-period Chinese mirror made of white bronze. In addition, a well-preserved stone coffin with a male burial was discovered. Of particular interest here is a bone arrowhead, which again bears an "H" symbol or tamga – such symbols are already known from Ala-Tey and Terezin: three times on the back of the large jet belt plates and once on a ceramic vessel. This is probably the clan symbol or tamga of the person buried here.



Belt plate made of jet engraved with a deer, female grave AT1/112.

2020: Excavations continue.

II. Kesken Kala, Kazakhstan

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



Excavation site in the northeast of Shahrستان (walled city centre). View from the southwest. Aerial photograph.

In 2019, a drone was used to conduct a systematic aerial survey of the city district, the necropolis, two other ruins and the medieval site of Tortkul. The data is currently being evaluated. Excavations were also carried out in the north-eastern part of Shahrستان and in the burial ground.

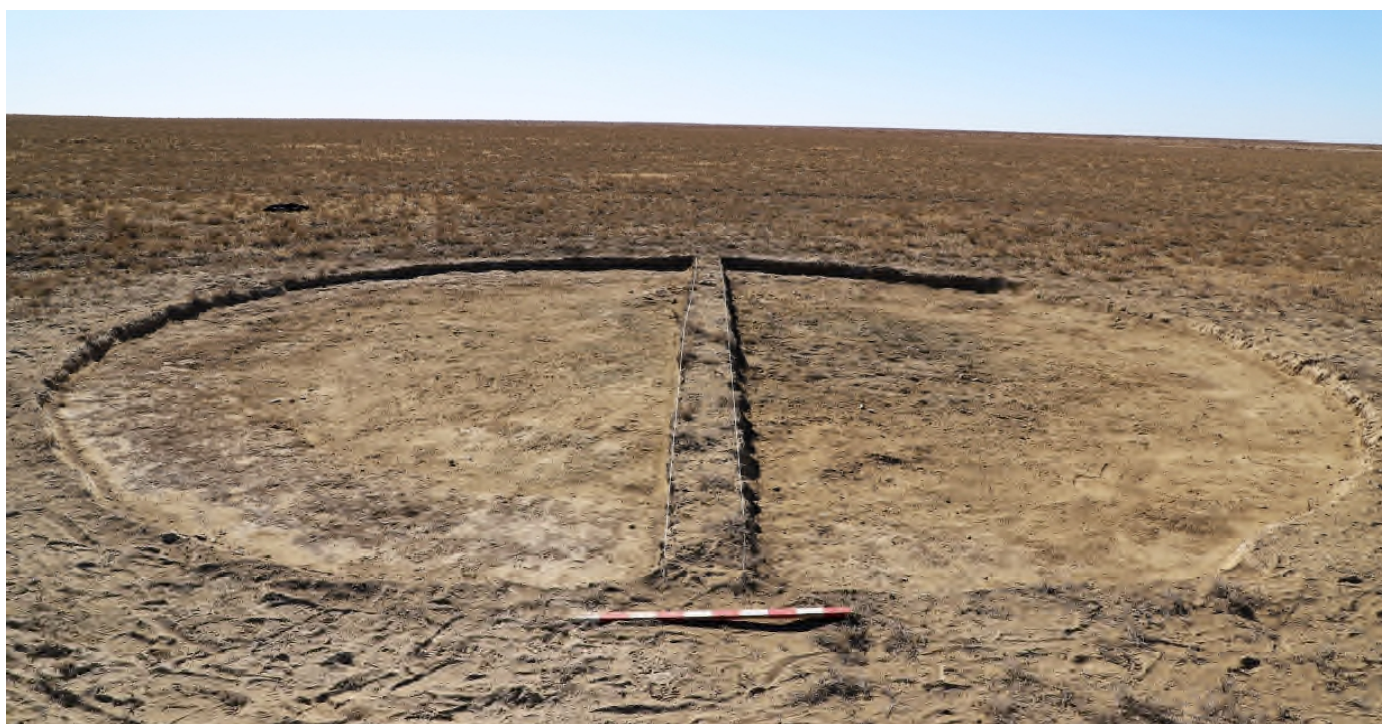
Two structures were found and partially excavated. A house consisting of six rooms, with three altars uncovered in the eastern part of the excavation, and a large building with at least three long parallel rooms uncovered in the eastern half of the excavation. The above-mentioned structures belong to the second and third building horizons. The most likely date is the 9th to 10th century. The uppermost cultural settlement layer dates back to the 10th to 11th centuries. This dating was confirmed by a Samanid coin found in a waste pit and identified as a coin minted in Samarkand in 956. Two silver sheep vertebrae were also found, which were used for a game similar to dice.



Stones and glass beads from necklaces and glass fragments. One glass bead looks like a head (white arrow).



Excavation in the north-eastern part of the Shahristan



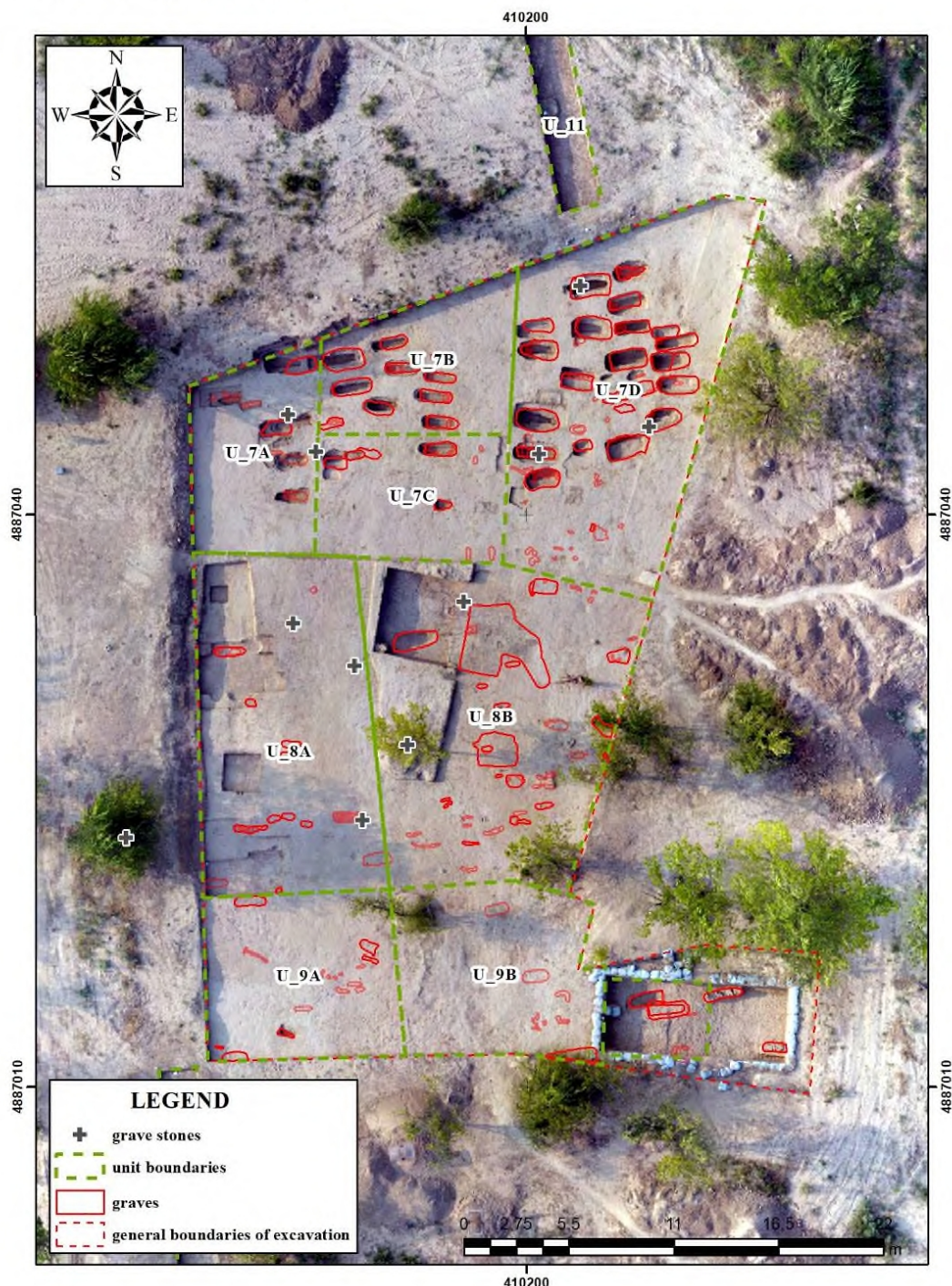
Kurgan with a diameter of 19 m. A wooden coffin containing a dead body and an iron vessel was discovered 50 cm below the old ground surface. The bones are being analysed for dating purposes.

2020: The excavation will continue in autumn 2020, again under the direction of Dr Voyakin, project co-director of the EurAsia excavation Ilan Baliq.

III. Ilan Baliq/Uch-Aral, Kazakhstan

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

ILIBALYK SITE EXCAVATION AREA 2019



The burial ground explored in 2019

During the six-week excavation campaign, seven trained archaeologists, 30 international volunteers and 18 trained Kazakh workers were involved. Like last year, the season was once again very successful. In 2018, 33 unplundered graves were uncovered, 31 of which

were children's burials. In 2019, in Sector C, close to the bath complex uncovered last year, excavations continued at a site already explored in 2018, even though a survey conducted in 2017 using ground-penetrating radar (GPR) had yielded no results. However, a few chance finds provided evidence that graves might be located here, which is why a further 10 cm of soil was removed across this sector. After a morning rain that brought out the different soil characteristics, the excavators were surprised when they clearly saw the outlines of several dozen burial chambers with different types of mud brick structures in the early morning. The subtle constructions had escaped the ground-penetrating radar. In addition, many of the chambers were not only children's graves, but also adult graves. Furthermore, the team found the first gravestone directly associated with a specific burial, as well as a breast cross made of bronze or silver.



Part of the newly discovered burial ground after the downpour. The outlines of the graves are clearly visible.



Pectoral cross discovered in a grave.

In total, the team found more than 100 graves during the 2019 season, 78 of which were excavated! This is the first time that a cemetery belonging to the Church of the East ("Nestorians") has been examined and scientifically investigated. There were also signs that the graves differ chronologically. This conclusion is based on various disturbances to the graves caused by other, more recent graves, as well as on different forms of grave construction. Unfortunately, no coins were found in or near the graves that could have provided clues for dating. The typologies of the ceramics are still too general and broad to provide a more specific chronology, but it can be provisionally stated that these burials date from the 12th to the early 14th century.

C-14 analyses should enable a more precise dating.

In addition, eight new gravestones with an engraved cross were discovered, bringing the total to 36.



Gravestone with an engraved cross in the shape of the cruciform container that held a piece of the "True Cross" in the Middle Ages and stood on the altar of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

Also significant is the discovery in grave C/089 of an elderly woman of two silver bracelets and, in particular, a silver ring with a four-leaf rosette motif. In early Christian art, the use of the "four-leaf rosette" was very common because it is a reversible image (i.e. an optical illusion). Depending on how you look at it, you see either a flower or a cross (the so-called Georgian cross of Bolnisi). In the early Church and in predominantly non-Christian political circumstances, the use of symbols was important due to the persecution or discrimination of Christians. A Christian could freely wear four-leaf jewellery because only the initiated saw the cross between the negative spaces of the petals.



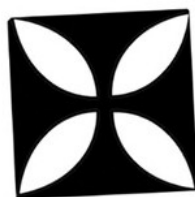
Silver ring from grave C/089



Four-leaf rosette: Tomb C/089 Ilan Baliq



Gold ring from Kayalik



A reversible image: a rosette or a cross

A gold ring discovered in the medieval town of Kayalik, 250 km north of Ilan Baliq, bore the same four-leaf rosette pattern. As reported by the Franciscan monk William of Rubruck, who travelled to Mongolia in 1254 on behalf of the French king Louis IX, Kayalik was predominantly inhabited by Christians. Silver bracelets from the medieval Christian burial ground of Olon Süme, Inner Mongolia, China, also feature the same four-leaf rosette pattern.

2020: Excavations will continue on the same scale.

IV. 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 with a rudimentary engraved cross (2012), the expedition succeeded in 2016 in discovering three further pieces of evidence of an early Christian past in the form of locally minted coins bearing a cross.



Overall view. From left to right: the large palace platform E-3, a palace? E-8, and in the background the city gate E-7.



Work on the large "platform" E-3.

In 2019, work focused on:

- The large platform E-3, tentatively identified as a palace. In particular, the Further research was conducted on the "ceremonial hall".
- In sector E-8, where extensive fire damage and 11 mostly pre-Islamic coins had been discovered in 2018, a hoard of 38 coins was found in 2019, which are now being cleaned and analysed. The numerous coin finds in Qarshovul over the years are extraordinary and indicate that the city was abandoned very suddenly before its final destruction and abandonment; the people fled without taking their mobile possessions with them. Based on the layout of the excavated rooms, E-8 could also be a palace.



Excavation work at E-8, the presumed second palace.

- At city gate E-7, stratigraphy was continued to a depth of 650 cm below the current ground level. Pieces of rotten wooden beams were found, which may have been part of the city gate.

2020: Excavations continue.

V. Vardana, Uzbekistan

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



Vardana 2019: Overview plan of the citadel; the areas marked in pink indicate the 2019 excavations.

The tenth excavation campaign in Vardana focused on the still unknown eastern sector of the citadel. The layers uncovered date from the medieval period, from the 9th to the early 13th century. The finds of various coins and an unusually large number of ceramic finds already allow for fairly accurate dating and the assignment of individual layers to their corresponding cultural epoch. These are, from bottom to top:

- Iranian-speaking Samanids, whose capital was nearby Bukhara. Dynasty period: 819/75-999.
- Turkic-speaking Karakhanids, a semi-nomadic horsemen tribe whose ruling elite lived as cattle breeders in present-day Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan and granted the tributary cities, such as Bukhara and Vardana, a high degree of autonomy. Dynasty: 946-1212 (in the oasis of Bukhara until 1207).
- Khorezm-Shahs, also a Turkic-speaking equestrian elite, 992-1220/31 (in Bukhara 1207-20).
- Destruction of the cities of the Bukhara oasis, including Vardana, in 1220 by the Mongols. The upper layer in the eastern sector of the citadel, which consists of reddish clay and ash mixed with broken bricks, dates from this last period.

The excavations showed that in the eastern sector, as in the western part of the citadel, after the Arab conquest around 712, the citadel remained abandoned in the 8th and early 9th centuries and was only used sporadically by shepherds. During the Samanid period, a large bathing complex was constructed over the early medieval layers. The baths were covered and the interior walls were decorated with waterproof paintings, fragments of which were discovered in 2019 and preserved. The excavations also revealed a sophisticated water supply and drainage system.

Further trial excavations deeper than the Samanid layer uncovered a relatively small quantity of pottery and two spindle whorls from the 5th to 8th centuries. Pottery finds from the 16th to 18th centuries show that the eastern sector was used by local farmers after a second, longer period of abandonment.



Part of the bath complex with mud bricks, water supply and drainage pipe.

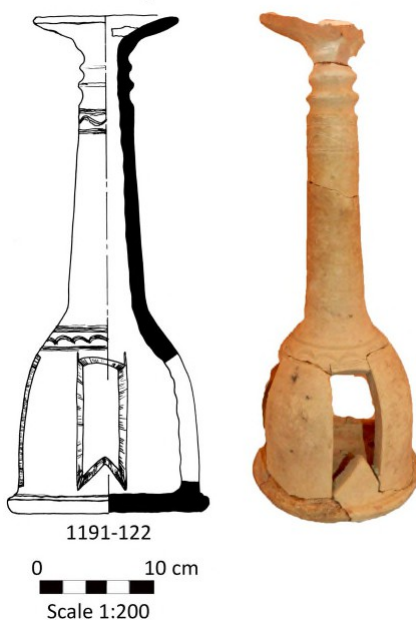


Drainage system, unit SU 1183.

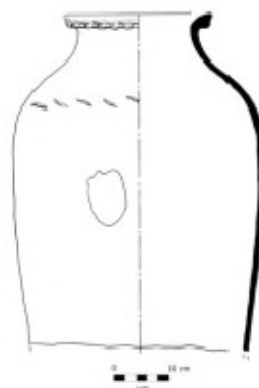


Small fragment of painting, SU 1183.

The exceptionally large quantity of ceramic finds from the 9th to 13th centuries will take around five months to analyse. Chief archaeologist Dr Pozzi is working on a comprehensive monograph on the ceramic finds from Vardana, which will place the results from the ceramic finds in the context of the history of Vardana. As the finds date from the 18th/19th centuries to the 2nd century AD or even earlier, they offer a rare opportunity to define an exact chronology spanning 2000 years.



Lamp, approx. 10th–11th century.

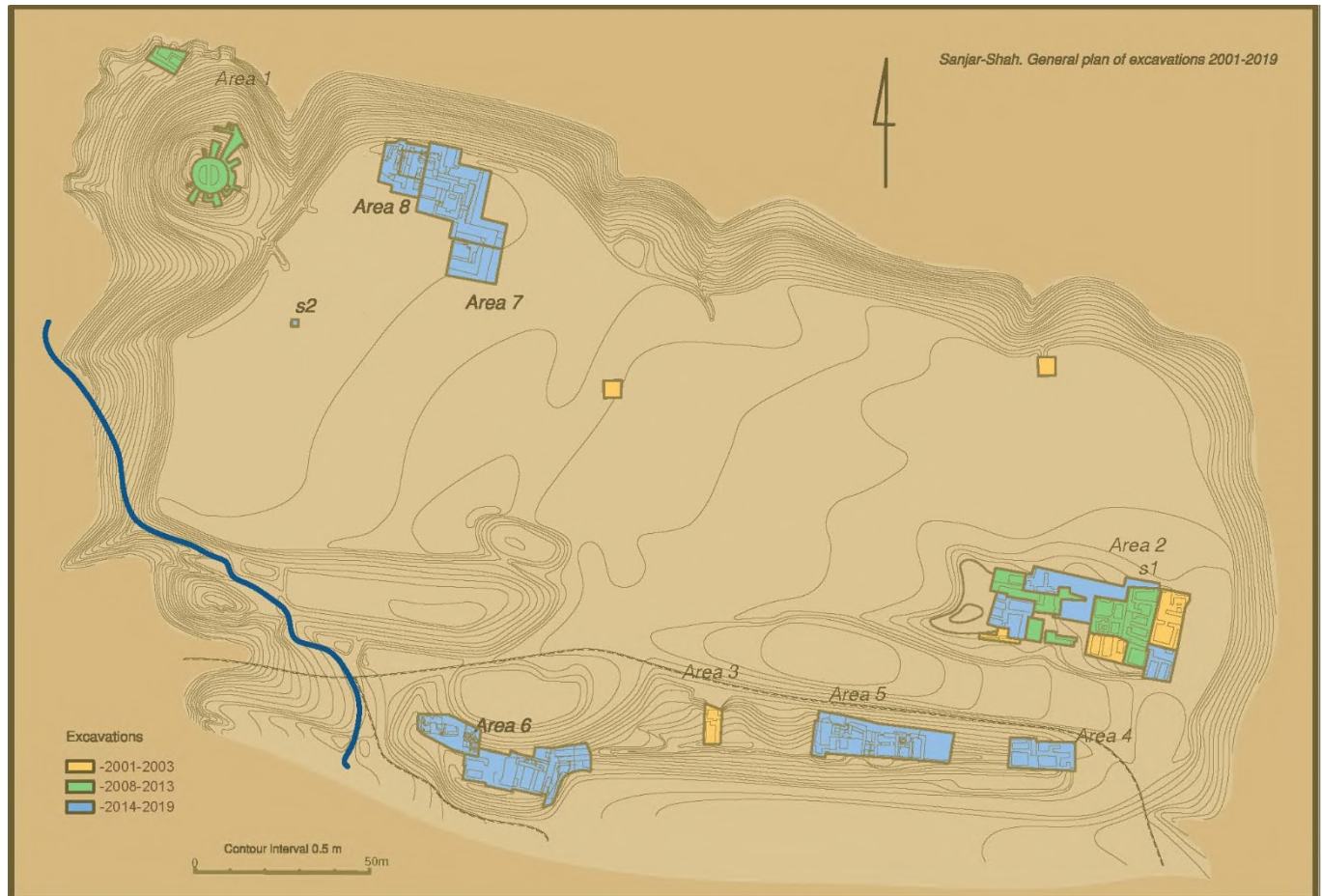


Ceramic vessels, which were repurposed for water supply.

2020: Excavations continue in the eastern sector of the citadel.

VI. Sanjar Shah, Tajikistan

Excavation of a small Sogdian town with a citadel.



Plan of the excavations since the beginning

Excavations continued in 2019 in sectors (areas) VI, VII and VIII. The hypothesis put forward in 2018 that sector VIII was a significant monumental building has been confirmed. It also became apparent that sectors VII and VIII form a single unit. This was most likely the residence of the local ruler or governor.

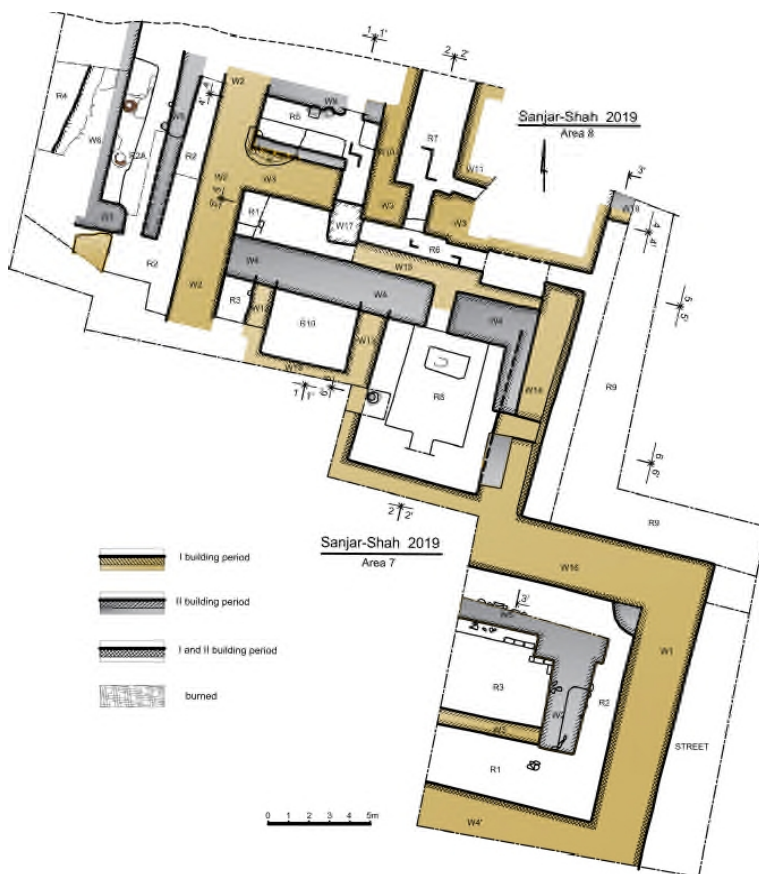
Several rooms were examined in Area VI along the southern city wall. A well-preserved two-storey pottery kiln was discovered in Room 11 (see below). This is the second pottery kiln found in Sanjar-Shah (the first was excavated in Area II). Interestingly, after more than 70 years of excavations, no evidence of pottery production has been found in the neighbouring, larger city of Panjikent. These facts suggest that Sanjar-Shah was the regional centre of pottery production.



Two-storey pottery kiln, Sector VI.



Sectors VII and VIII, with the citadel in the background and today's village of Sanjar Shah on the right; view to the west.



Plan of the contiguous sectors VII and VIII.

However, work concentrated on the western part of the city, where excavations of the monumental building, presumably a palace, continued. The excavations were carried out over a large area with the aim of combining areas VII and VIII and determining the floor plan of the building (see plan). Seven rooms were partially excavated and two construction phases were identified, the first dating to the 740s and the second to the end

the end of the 8th to the beginning of the 9th century. This provides important clues about the continuation of urban life in the area after the abandonment of Panjikent in the 770s-80s. It can be hypothesised that around 770/80, Sanjar Shah replaced Panjikent as the capital of the Upper Zarafshan region.

Further fragments of the wall painting were found on the east side of wall 2 in room 5, but the most remarkable discoveries were made in the monumental room 8. It appears to have the floor plan of a typical Sogdian reception hall and could be one of the central reception rooms of this palatial building. Room 8 was destroyed by a severe fire and is filled with numerous fragments of burnt beams and joists, some of which are carved (picture below). Further fragments of burnt wood with carved decorations were found in the adjacent corridor (Room 6). The painting and burnt wood were preserved by covering them with earth and, in the case of the wood, with paraffin. Next season, a team of professional restorers from the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg will excavate and secure the paintings and singed wooden beams.



With floral pattern, singed wooden beam from Room 8 of the presumed palace.

A scholarly publication about Sanjar Shah appeared in Hebrew at the University of Jerusalem.

2020: Excavations continue in Sector VII-VIII.

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

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

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



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

The 2019 campaign began with geophysical prospecting. A team of 120 archaeologists, workers and volunteers then excavated more than 4,000 m².

As hoped for based on the aerial photograph, the central burial mound revealed a perfectly preserved wooden structure that can now be clearly correlated with Arzhan I, which dates back to around 800 BCE. (Image below)



Left: Arzan 1, 1970s;

Right: Tunugh 1 in 2019

The wooden beams made of larch trunks, which were dated to around 833-800 BCE in 2018, have up to 280 annual rings, which will make it possible to make a significant contribution to the further expansion of the dendrochronological curve of the region.

Surprisingly, the wooden architecture is enclosed in a clay structure. Clay architecture is not known in the wider region for the early Scythian period and suggests connections to Kazakhstan (the closest architectural comparison for such a clay structure could be Tagisken North, which dates back to the 16th/15th to 13th century BCE). The main kurgan, as far as it has been excavated, has remained untouched, which is very promising.

Over 50 individual stone structures and more than 70 individuals have been documented in the southern periphery. Since the emergence of nomadic pastoralism in eastern Eurasia, warfare has become a cultural feature of steppe nomads – not only towards sedentary cultures, but also between different nomadic tribes. Little bioarchaeological data is available for this late antique context, making it difficult to discuss the nature of violence that characterised these societies. The team was able to secure a large group of late antique skeletal samples from the 2nd to 4th centuries CE. Seventeen individuals show perimortem trauma, i.e. injuries that led to death, including decapitations, battle axe blows and arrowheads embedded in the bones. Finally, one of the richest burials from the Kokel culture was discovered, containing gold objects. (Image below)



Skeletal finds from the Kokel period with violent trauma.



Finds from a grave of the Kokel culture (2nd-4th century CE).

2020: Excavations will continue at the same pace, but the location has not yet been determined.

VIII. Further **Novopokrovka II,** **Kyrgyzstan**

The project is complete. As stated in the 2019 report, the necessary final work, such as filling and covering all pits, had to be postponed until 2019. The final report is available and will be published on the Society's website in April. Further publications will follow.

Annual event 2019

The annual event took place at the Skulpturhalle Basel, where Prof. Dr Mirko Novák from the University of Bern gave a highly interesting presentation on the topic of *Elam and Margiana: Two Cultures in Contact*.

Annual event 2020

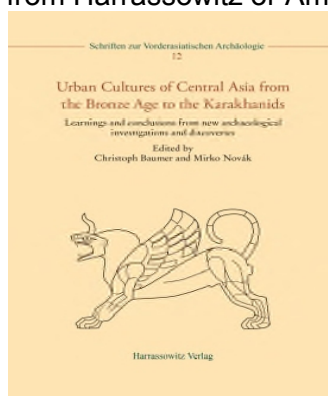
The next annual event will again take place at the Skulpturhalle Basel on Sunday morning.

1 November at 11:00 a.m. The speaker is Prof. Dr. Hermann Kreutzmann, Free University of Berlin; he will talk about *The geographical and historical exploration of the Pamirs in Tajikistan and Afghanistan*.

We would like to thank the Skulpturhalle for allowing EurAsia to continue to hold its event there.

Congress Monograph Volume I, 2019

The comprehensive monograph (462 pages, many colour and black-and-white illustrations, plans and sketches) on the 2016 scientific congress of EurAsia and the University of Bern was published by Harrassowitz in April 2019. It is available from Harrassowitz or Amazon.



Congress II, 2020

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

Cultures in Contact

Central Asia as a Focus of Trade, Cultural Exchange and Knowledge Transmission

Cultures in Contact

Central Asia as a Focus of Trade, Cultural Exchange and Knowledge Transmission

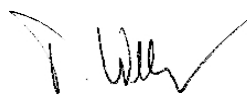
The programme and all further information about the congress can be found on the society's website:

<https://eurasia20.viva-events.ch/>

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 2020 and kind regards



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