

Hergiswil, 15 February 2022

EurAsia archaeological projects

Brief report on 2021 and outlook for 2022

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; current projects are marked in yellow (except Gonur).

Preliminary remark

The 2021 excavation season was once again challenging due to the pandemic. Thanks to the dedication and creative solutions of the respective teams, six of the seven planned excavation campaigns were carried out despite numerous restrictions. No scientific compromises were made, but there were fewer staff available everywhere. Logistics remained significantly more complex and costly in 2021.

I. Terezin + Ala-Tey in Tuva, southern Russia

Since 2006 (with an interruption in 2011-12), highly successful rescue excavations of Scythian, Xiongnu and Kokel culture graves (6th century BC-4th century AD) have been taking place in Tuva near **Terezin** and **Ala-Tey**. As a result of heavy rainfall in the spring of 2021, the Sayan-Shushenskoye reservoir filled up earlier than expected and the Ala-Tey necropolis was flooded after only a week of excavation. The archaeologists worked for four weeks at the neighbouring excavation site **in Terezin**. In contrast to the excavations in 2020, students from the University of Tuva took part again this year.



Flooded kurgans (bottom centre of picture) at Ala-Tey.

Three graves were excavated at Ala-Tey with typical Xiongnu ceramic grave goods. During the excavations at Terezin, four undisturbed graves were discovered – two children's graves from the Xiongnu period and two presumed warrior graves from the later Kokel culture (3rd-4th century AD).



Terezin, children's grave T/40, Xiongnu
Xiongnu Bone arrowhead, iron belt buckle
bronze belt ring, skulls of sacrificed
goats.



Terezin, children's grave T/41,
Skull of a sacrificed goat. and

One of the children's graves was remarkable because it contained an adult man's belt and four bone arrowheads (photo on page 2, bottom left). One of the Kokel burials contained several decorative gold foil plates similar to those discovered in Tuva in another EurAsia excavation in 2020, namely in a Kokel burial in Tunnug-1. The same plates were discovered in 2015 in Terezin, also in a Kokel grave, just a few metres away from the 2021 find.

The expedition also identified more than 200 additional kurgans in the area between Ala-Tey and Terezin, some of which had already been destroyed by annual flooding.

Publication: A forty-page scientific article by Pavel Leus on the Xiongnu jet belt buckles discovered by the EurAsia Expedition at the Aly-Tey 1 burial ground was published in *Археологические новости* (Archaeological News), Volume 30 (St. Petersburg). The publication is available on the society's website at:

http://www.exploration-eurasia.com/inhalt_english/frameset_publikationen.html

2022: Excavations will continue, but the exact plan can only be determined on site due to weather conditions.

II. 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.

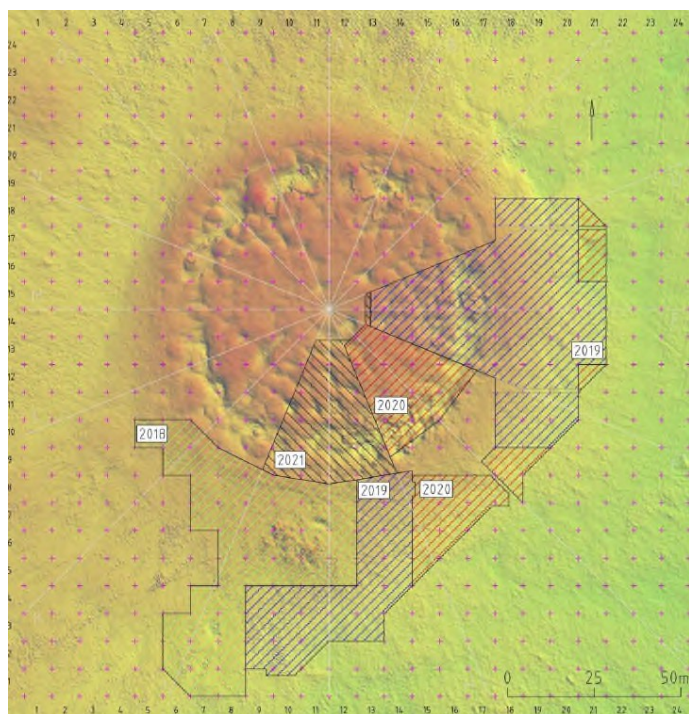
Satellite images and aerial photographs have identified a large, unknown kurgan (a burial mound with a circular layout). The aerial photograph provided evidence of a concentrically arranged wooden structure with dozens of smaller chambers. A unique structure of this kind was uncovered in the 1970s by 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 back to the early Iron Age at the transition from the 9th to the 8th century BC. Initial excavations proved that the central burial mound contains a perfectly preserved wooden structure that correlates with Arzhan-1. Analyses of wooden beams from larch trunks yielded a date of around 833-800 BCE for Tunnug, making the kurgan at least as old as Arzhan-1.

As in 2020, the Russian Geographical Society declined to provide logistical support due to the pandemic. There were no volunteers, and the team consisted of 20 specialists (instead of approximately 120).



Excavations in the southern sector of the main kurgan.

The excavations took place in the southern sector of the main royal burial mound. Given the limited personnel, the excavations focused on the upper layers in order to remove all obstacles to a major campaign in 2022. A total area of 972 m² was tackled. 780 m² were completely excavated, documented and completed.



The 2018-21 excavations.

The most important architectural find is a stone wall surrounding the monument and delimiting the clay architecture of the main burial mound. Beneath it are deep pits. This is promising, as early Scythian monuments often feature additional burials at the edge of the main burial mound. This area will be tackled in 2022.

The team discovered a group of horse and possibly human sacrifices located in the part of the excavation site closest to the centre of the burial mound. Compared to the data from the previous field season, three groups of horse bones with elements of horse harness can be distinguished in the excavated area. Several human bones were found among them, most likely belonging to a single individual (anthropological analysis is ongoing). The main finds of this campaign are pieces of bronze horse harness. Several pierced boar tines, known from Arzhan-1, were also found, which also belong to the equipment of the sacrificed horses. In addition, a bronze knife and several arrowheads were found, with the wood of the shaft still largely intact.

This is significant news, as these finds were discovered close to the surface, suggesting that preservation further down in the ground may be excellent.



Horse bridle made from wild boar tusks.

For the first time, an artefact decorated in the Scythian animal style depicting birds of prey has been discovered. The use of the artefact is unclear, but it is believed to be a bell that was also attached to one of the horses. It could be the oldest animal style object ever discovered.



Bronze object in the Scythian animal style, probably a bell.

Several unique steles were found in the stone layer. They do not belong to any of the currently known and precisely defined types of deer stones or stone steles. Further investigations are necessary to find useful analogies.



First discovery of a stone stele of an unknown type.

Publication: A scientific publication appeared in *Archaeological Research in Asia*, (Elsevier). Available on the society's website.

2022: Excavations will continue in accordance with the objectives of the five-year plan.

III. Kesken Kuyuk Kala, Kazakhstan

Excavation of a Khorezmian (5th-7th century) and Oghuz (9th-12th century) city and a necropolis. The campaign took place in November-December with a reduced team of 15 specialists.

Shahrستان: Archaeological research took place in the centre of Shahrستان. The excavation area covered 269.5 m². During the investigation of the cultural layer and its components, two building horizons were uncovered. Nine residential buildings were identified within the excavation area.



Central sector of Sharistan.



Incense burner, Room 3.

Necropolis: Burial mound No. 2 is located in the south-eastern part of the Kesken-Kuyuk kala necropolis, south of burial mound No. 1, which was explored in 2020. The mound has a diameter of 10 m and a height of 30 cm in the central part. The burial chamber measures 3.5 x 1.6 m in plan, with a depth is about 1.6 m compared to the surface. The burial chamber was equipped with a wooden floor. The grave contained two burials, a vessel with animal bones and two human skeletons. Burial mound 4 was also completely excavated. A total of 43 intact archaeological objects were recovered, which are believed to date from the 9th to 11th centuries, i.e. from the era of the neighbouring city. These kurgans are the first medieval Oghuz graves ever excavated in Kazakhstan.



Work on kurgan no. 2.



Kurgan 2, grave 1: pieces of a ceremonial belt lie on the pelvic bones.



Kurgan 2, Tomb 1: Silver belt buckle



Kurgan 2, Tomb 1: Silver decorative plates



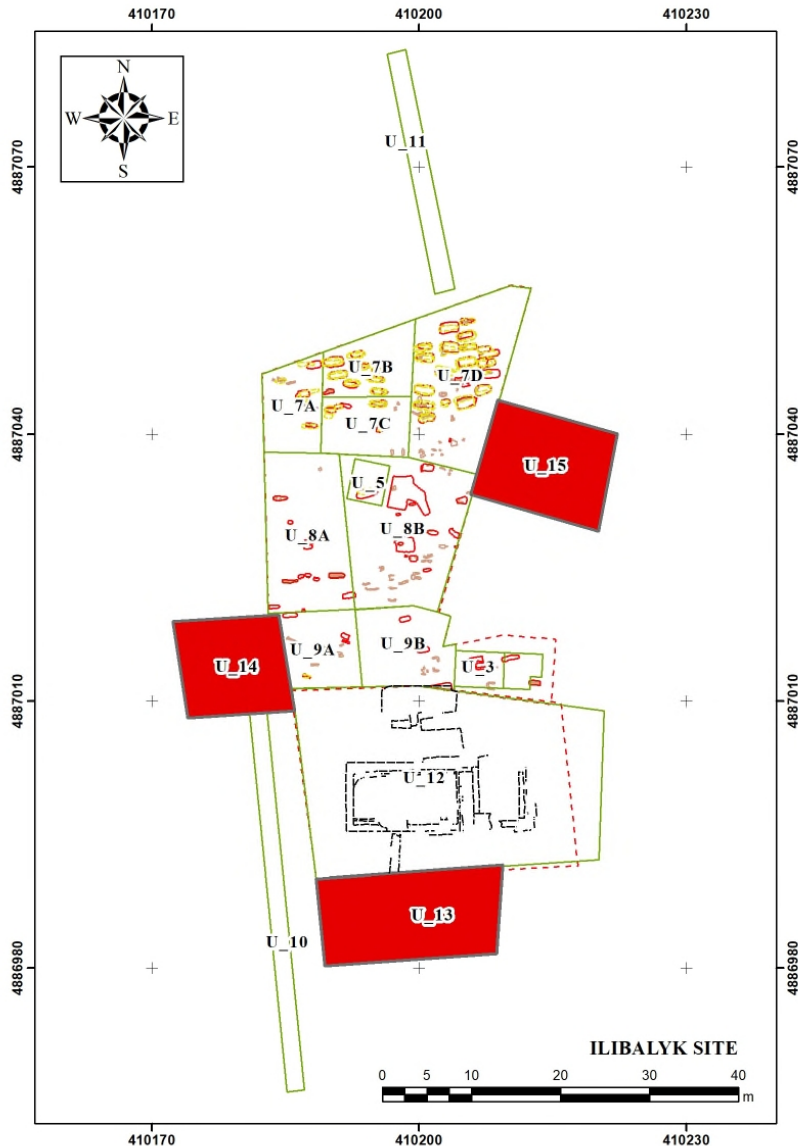
Kurgan 2, Tomb 1: Gold decorative plates

2022: Excavation will continue in autumn 2021 in accordance with the five-year plan.

IV. 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) found 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*.

Due to the pandemic, the excavation campaign was again carried out without American funding and with fewer personnel. The absence of American archaeologists was partially compensated for by the hiring of additional Kazakh experts.



The excavation site in 2021. In the lower centre of the image is Unit 12, the burial chapel.

The excavations took place south of the burial chapel/church U-12 discovered in 2020. An attempt was also made to define the eastern boundaries of the cemetery. For this purpose, an excavation unit was opened south of Unit 12 (location of the building). This unit was designated Unit 13, with a total area of 200 m². Another unit was designated Unit 14, which was excavated west of Unit 9A and measures 12 N/S x 11 E/W m (130 m²). Finally, east of Units 7D and 8B, a third unit measuring 12 N/S x 11 E/W was demarcated and designated Unit 15.

Seven new graves (5 children and 2 adults) were found in Unit 14. This extends the western boundary of the cemetery by 2.6 m. A complete, older grave of an adult woman was excavated in its entirety, and another adult grave was partially excavated. In the east, in Unit 15,

a child's grave was found in a slightly elevated position. In Unit 13, in the south-western part of the unit Only burial mounds and a layer of ash, about 5 cm below the cleared surface of 2020, were found. We did not encounter any graves in this area, so we assume that the chapel marks the southern boundary of the cemetery.



Christian Nestorian gravestone.

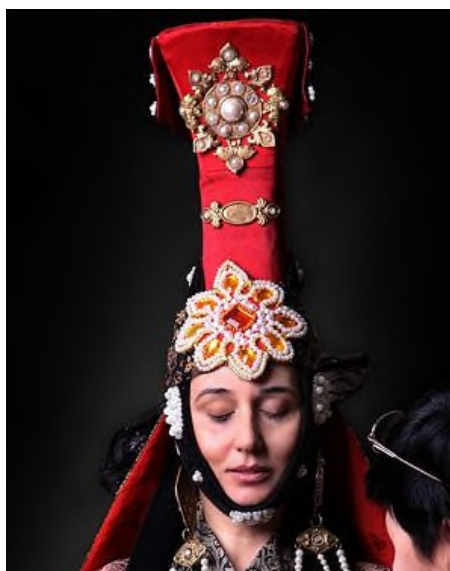
A small kayrak (Nestorian gravestone) with a complete cross engraving was found south of the burial chapel (U-12) in Unit 13. However, it is believed that this stone was not in its original location. This discovery is the 39th gravestone found to date.

Another important find is further pieces of a light blue ceramic bowl, which may come from the same vessel that was found in the field in 2020 and 2018. This find is most likely a significant import. A coin from 1310, from the time of the city's presumed late flowering, was also discovered.



Opium pipe with inscribed fibre surface, probably paper made from silk cocoon fibres.

Another interesting find was the discovery of a metal opium pipe (probably bronze or silver), which is thought to date from the 17th or 18th century and is associated with a nearby (1.5 km away) Chinese fortress that has never been excavated. Inside the pipe, a fibre surface (presumably made of silk cocoon fibres) was found with letters in ancient Uyghur script; the text has not yet been deciphered and is being further investigated.



Model of a Mongolian "bocca" headdress.

The discovery of a woman's grave with clearly Mongoloid facial features is very significant. The grave contained the remains of a classic wooden "bocca" headdress on the right-hand side (see picture above). The woman was buried in an east-west direction in the Nestorian manner. Due to time constraints, the grave could not be excavated. Such a bocca was an important status symbol that not all women were allowed to wear. Microscopic analysis of a small piece of the bocca headdress showed that it was painted red and covered with gold foil. The deceased therefore belonged to the highest Mongolian class, perhaps even a member of the royal family. This find could be the first evidence that, as reported by European travellers in the 13th century (Carpini, Rubruck), Mongolian princesses and queens belonged to Christianity.

In 2022, the grave will be excavated as a block, i.e. the entire grave with the skeleton and the surrounding earth, and this will only be opened in a laboratory. An aDNA analysis of the woman's genome is planned.

Some key data on the finds since 2016:

- Excavated graves: 87
- Identified graves not yet excavated: 58
- Presumed graves not yet excavated: 25
- Estimated total number of graves: approx. 590
- Gravestones engraved with crosses: 39, 5 of which have inscriptions.
- Burial chapel: 1
- The citadel with baths.
- A rich jewellery box
- Archaeologists involved: 23 from 5 countries
- International presentations and lectures: Texas-Fort Worth University/USA; Almaty University/Kazakhstan; Missouri University/USA; Princeton University/USA; University of Bern/Switzerland; University of Pisa/Italy.

2022: Excavations will continue in accordance with the five-year plan. The aim is to conduct further investigations in sectors B and C, particularly at lower levels, as earlier burials may be located beneath those already excavated. In addition, a search for evidence of the city church will be conducted in Shahristan.

V. Vardana, Uzbekistan

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

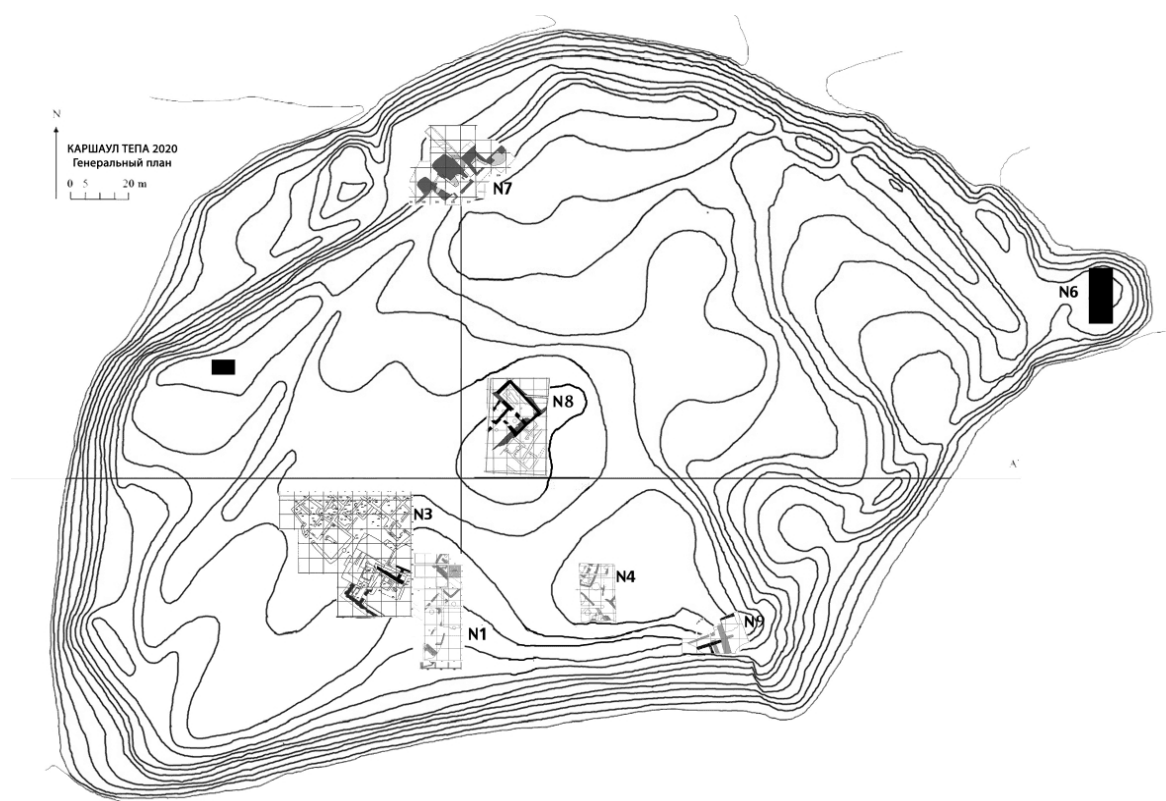
Unfortunately, the planned campaign had to be cancelled due to a lack of clarity regarding the division of responsibilities between two Uzbek authorities in the granting of the excavation licence.

2022: Provided the project receives an excavation permit, excavations will resume in the eastern sector of the citadel.

VI. 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: first, 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.

In the summer of 2021, the 12th excavation campaign was carried out with a slightly smaller team.



Excavation N-4: The southern part of N-4 (200 m²) was excavated. The aim was to clarify the floor plan and examine the lower layers. In 2020, we reached ground level at a depth of -260 cm (-380 cm from the zero reference mark). This year, after exposing a well-tamped and dense soil, we were able to determine the wall bases of three rooms at a depth of -300-320 cm. To the east of these rooms, the road ran in a SE-NW direction. Below the level at which the walls were located (-320 cm), excavations were carried out down to a level of -540 cm. No architectural remains were found in this 220 cm thick layer across the entire excavation area. It consists exclusively of ash interlayers of varying density. Since the same findings were made in the other excavations, it can be assumed that at this point in the settlement's history, probably during the Turkish period (6th-7th century), from which several graves in the nearby necropolis date, the people mainly lived in tents and yurts.

Excavation N-8: During the 2021 excavation season, work in N-8 focused on rooms 4, 5 and 6, as well as on the so-called street. This is located in the south-western part of the excavation. It has been identified over a length of 17 m; rooms 4, 5, 8 and the end of the corridor (room 6) border the street to the east. Stratigraphic investigations continued in room 4; in room 5, the remains of a

furnace, which was probably used for smelting metal, were found under a clay bench. There are no architectural remains under the walls of the rooms. This corresponds to the situation observed in N-4.



Excavation N-4: Layers of ash and pits beneath the floor.

Excavation N-9: The excavation was extended to the north to clarify the situation in this part of the city. The total area of the excavation reached 320 square metres. It was found that a pakhsa wall (tamped clay) up to 3 m thick was attached to the city's defensive wall from the north. This continued the line of the tower wall, which was attached to the same wall in the south. The wall confirmed the assumption made last year about the location of the citadel.



Excavation N-9: The citadel tower seen from the east.

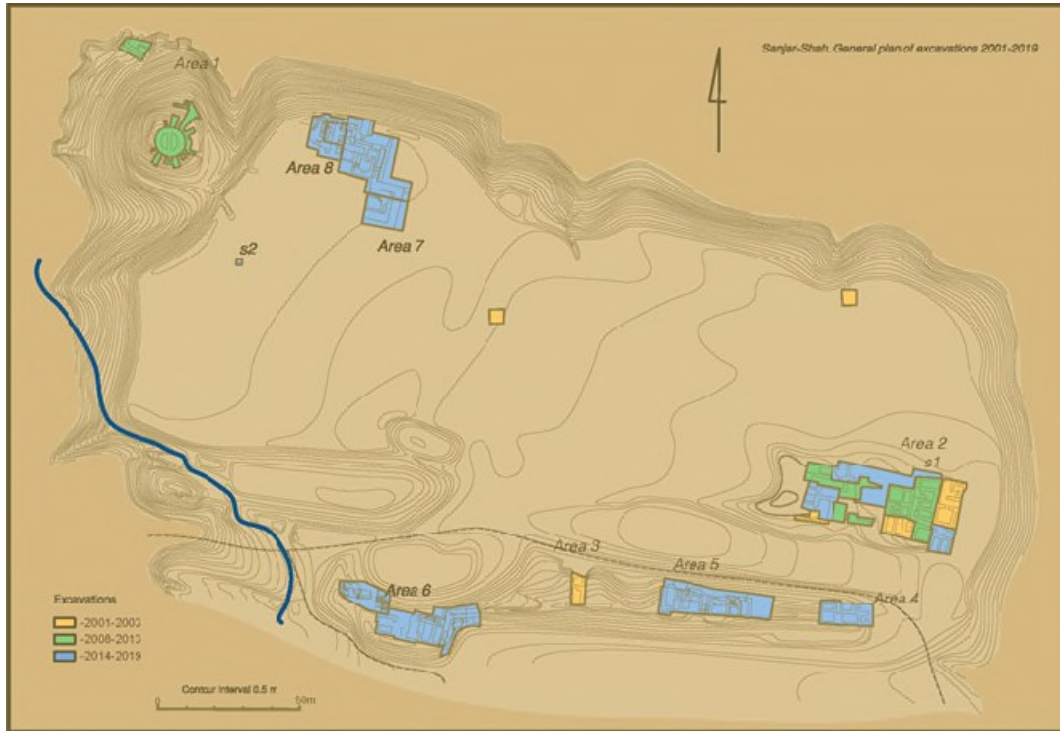
Publication: Dr Jangar Ilyasov published a scientific article on the ceramics of Qarshovul in the bulletin of IICAS, *International Institute for Central Asian Studies*, Samarkand. (The article will be uploaded to the EurAsia website.)

2022: Excavations will continue in accordance with the five-year plan.

VII. Sanjar Shah, Tajikistan

Excavation of a small Sogdian town with a citadel 12 km east of Panjikent. Sanjar Shah (an exonym, the original name of the town is unknown) probably replaced the much larger town of Panjikent as the administrative centre of Eastern Sogdia after it was burned down in 722.

As in 2020, the excavation had to be carried out with fewer staff due to the pandemic.



Plan of the excavations since they began in 2001.

In 2021, excavations of the palace complex in the western part of the city (Area VIII) continued and the area was expanded to the north. During this season, six rooms from the first construction phase (740s) were completely excavated.



Sector VIII, general view looking west. Long corridor (room 6) and a reception hall (room 8).

The focus was on the fragment of a wall painting discovered in Room 2 in 2019 and on the fragments of carved, singed wood discovered in Rooms 6 and 8. These were excavated and conserved by the Hermitage Museum's restorers, Maria Gervais and Nazokat Kasymova.

Unfortunately, the fragment of the painting is poorly preserved. Nevertheless, it is clear that it is a narrative painting comparable to the best examples from Panjikent. Above the pearl border, a well-preserved hoof (perhaps from a horse or a wild boar) is clearly visible. In addition, details of yellow-painted horse harness (which represents gold in Sogdian painting) can be seen in several places. It is possible that this painting originally depicted a hunting scene.



Section VIII, Room 6: Fragment of a beam with geometric pattern.

There are a total of 24 fragments of carved wooden beams and panels with geometric, floral and zoomorphic patterns. Three panels from Room 8 belonged to a frieze depicting mountain goats crouching side by side. Such goats are known from Sogdian silver vessels, but this is the first time they have been found on wooden architectural decoration.

The wall paintings and carved wood are part of the original decoration of the palace, which was built in the western part of the city in the 740s and was destroyed in a major fire in 770-780. Coins from the 7th/8th century of the Bukhar-kudah and Türgesh-Türken types were also found.



Redrawing of a wooden beam with mountain goats.

2022: Excavations will continue in sectors VII-VIII and the wood and painting fragments preserved in situ will be recovered.

VIII. Further

Annual event 2021

Prof. Dr. Hermann Kreutzmann, Free University of Berlin, gave a lecture at the Sculpture Hall Basel entitled "*Geographical and Historical Research on the Pamirs in Tajikistan and Afghanistan.*"

Monograph on Congress II, 2020

The monograph entitled *Cultures in Contact: Central Asia as Focus of Trade, Cultural Exchange and Knowledge Transmission* will be published in summer 2022, again by Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden.

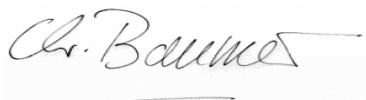
General Assembly 2022

Provided the Covid situation allows, the General Assembly will take place in person in May. The invitation will follow in the second half of April.

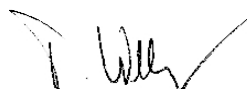
Finally, we would like to thank all our members for their invaluable and much-appreciated support, which is very important for the realisation and further development of our scientific projects.

We would be delighted if you continued your membership.

With best wishes for a happy, healthy and successful 2022, and kind regards.



Christoph Baumer
President



Therese Weber
Vice President

Enclosures (where applicable):

- Donation receipt 2021 for the tax authorities
- Payment slip