

New data on the ancient settlement of Ak-Beshim (Chu River Valley, Northern Kyrgyzstan)

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Abstract

According to the archaeological data, a series of ancient settlement appeared on the territory of the Chu River Valley (Dzhety-Suu, Semirechie) in VI-VIII centuries. Some of them were composed of the citadel and shakhristan and transformed later (IX-XI centuries) into the territories surrounded with one-two rings of so-called “long walls” with considerable size in the perimeter. Of these cities was Suyab, which ruins correspond to the ancient settlement of Ak-Bashim known as a capital of three Turkic Khaganates in VI-X centuries: Western Turkic, Türgesh and Karluk.

Scientific studies were implemented by Kyrgyz (National Academy of Sciences) and Japanese (National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, Tokyo and Teikyo University since 2016) archaeologists.

Excavation site No 15 put in place on the territory of shakhristan No 2 revealed the concentration of grey-clay tile, which corresponds to the remains of the collapsed wall of the building. Probably, the revealed construction may be the component of the garden-park ensemble of the Tang Dynasty Period. Analysis of the aerial photo of 1967 and further geophysical studies of the territory of the “second” Buddhist temple have shown that it was a part of the larger complex with the walls of 140-150 m in length. As the result of the excavation site No 18 the revealed temple was occupying only its south-western corner, while another construction the role of which has to be identified during the further archaeological studies, was situated nearby. Studies of the fortifications of both shakhristan were made in parallel.

Archaeological evidence of the presence of the Khazars in the territory of Azerbaijan in the VII-X centuries

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Abstract

For a long time from mid-VII to mid-10 centuries CE, a powerful state of Khazars competed with Byzantium and the Arab Caliphate for control of trade routes in Central Eurasia. The Khazar state had a great influence on the political and economic processes in the neighboring states of the South Caucasus, Central Asia and Eastern Europe. Arab written sources left a lot of evidence about military presence of the Khazars in Caucasian Albania by the time the Arabs appeared in the South Caucasus. After the Arab conquest, the migration and settling of the Khazar population on the territory of contemporary Azerbaijan continued as a deliberate policy of the Arab caliphate aimed at partnership with Khazars on Silk Road. The article discusses the archaeological evidence of the presence of the Khazars on the territory of the modern Azerbaijan Republic in the first three centuries after the Arab conquest. For the first time attention is drawn to the similarity of some archaeological artifacts found at the excavations in the ancient city of Gabala in the north of Azerbaijan and in the central part of the country with findings of the Saltovo-Mayatsk archaeological culture in Eastern Europe, which traditionally is attributed to the archaeological heritage of the Khazar Kaganate. Data from written sources and archaeological finds on the territory of Azerbaijan testify to the importance of the Khazar population and the Khazar state in the ethnic, political and religious processes on the territory of modern Azerbaijan in the early Middle Ages.

Gold disks of Shymkent

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Abstract

In 2012, during archaeological works carried out on the northern outskirts of Shymkent city in South Kazakhstan, two gold discs were found. These disks were discovered at the entrance to the study of the burial mound-2 of Kaitpas burial ground, consisting of ten hills with earth banks, chain-lined in the directions south-west and north-east and since the ancient times have been repeatedly ravaged. According to the preserved archaeological complex of findings, this burial ground dates back to the IV-II centuries BC.

Particular attention should be paid to the disks found in the cist in situ, which are obviously of imported nature, made, undoubtedly, in ethnocultural environment alien to nomads.

The disks on the external ring have diameter of 6.7 cm, on the internal base of 3 cm. There were three-dimensional insertions from sea shells with a through hole in the internal base of the discs. There are up to twelve holes on the external edge for attaching the discs to the base with 6 mm gold nails. Relief designs are plotted on the matrix and have right-hand and left-hand mirror image on both discs.

Analysis of iconography of these findings revealed, in contrast to the expected animal style, the presence of images of marine life – fish of various sizes, snails, sea horses, shrimp, etc. Direct analogies to these subjects have not been found to date, which makes it impossible to localize the geography of the origin of the gold disks from Shymkent.

Cultural Exchange along the Silk Road as Reflected in the Sealings Unearthed from Kafir-kala

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Abstract

Kafir-kala is located approximately 12 km south-east of Samarkand, the principle city of the Sogdians who are known to have been long distance merchants along the Silk Road. This site is assumed to be a residence of the Sogdian kings. The first consistent excavations in Kafir-kala have been conducted by the Uzbek-Italian expedition (2001-2008), followed by the Uzbek-Japanese expedition (2013-present). These excavations chiefly focused on the citadel of Kafir-kala, the lofty square fortress separated from its surrounding Shahristan by a moat. Already in the first years of excavations, a layer in which an enormous fire had occurred was identified. According to the coin finds thus far unearthed from this layer, we can deduce that the fire took place in the beginning of the 8th century CE.

From this layer, nearly 700 specimens (including fragments) of sealings along with several unique wooden carvings depicting the goddess Nana and her worshippers, numerous ceramic pieces and other artifacts have been unearthed. They represent the greatest number of sealing finds thus far unearthed from any single site in Central Asia. These sealings bear fine examples of Sogdian art and other artistic traditions, such as that of Hellenistic, Bactrian, Sasanian and Turkic traditions, in the forms of divine, human, and animal (fantastic or naturalistic) figures occasionally accompanied by Sogdian or Bactrian inscriptions. In this paper, I will present some recent research results on these sealings, including a review of recent excavations on the citadel of Kafir-kala.

The Bamiyan Valley as a center of trade and cultural exchange: the latest excavations on the site of Shahr-e Gholghola

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Abstract

Bamiyan, as a region, has been an important route for trade as well as for the passage of armies. Its importance is associated with the Silk Road network stretching between China and the Mediterranean from the 1st century BC until the Arab conquest. An extraordinary variety of merchandise was traded, probably changing hands between merchants several times in the way: gold and other metals, precious and semi-precious stones, rare natural products. From this period on, the region highly developed, and was an area of importance during the Islamic period.

Sitting atop a natural hill in the center of Bâmiyân Valley, Shahr-i Gholghola is traditionally considered the Islamic capital of the territories of Bamiyan. It is a strongly fortified city surrounded by several large stones masonries and mudbrick walls, rising to more than 2600m in altitude.

Since 2013, our fieldwork project increased understanding of the general organization of the site and the method of construction on the city terrace. The site is divided into multiple quarters separated from each other by ramparts. It consists in a succession of terraces, beneath which cellars were dug, presumably to serve as warehouses, cisterns, or even habitats.

Delivering the first results of the excavation at Shahr-i Gholghola, this presentation aims at showing the importance of the socio-cultural exchanges in the valley, at least since the Kushano-Sassanid period (first centuries CE), the development of the city until medieval times and its destruction of the valley by the Genghis Khan horde.

Lock-shaped Stone Handbags (Pierre Ansées) from Central and Middle Asia: Typology, Distribution and new Findings

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Abstract

This paper is dedicated to the study of the stone handbags discovered throughout Bronze Age Eurasia. This paper is the first ever comprehensive collection and presentation of information, data and measurements. A preliminary typology of the artefacts, divided into seven large types with sub-types, is then put forth. Unfortunately, most of the handbags were discovered by chance, and no useful information that may aid in understanding and reconstructing their original function - whether ritual, social or economic – is available. The earliest artefacts were found in proto-chalcolithic and chalcolithic sites of southern Turkmenistan. However, the period of their greatest diffusion is comprised between the mid-3rd and mid-2nd millennium BC, as confirmed by the discovery of some handbags in stratigraphic contexts of farming settlements located in northern and south-eastern Iran, southern Turkmenistan, Iraq and Uzbekistan. Other handbags have been recently identified in the store-rooms of several museums in southern Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, which would appear to extend their area of diffusion northward, toward the cultural world of the Eurasian steppes. Cognizant of the fact that the geographical definition of Oxus Civilisation is a matter of heated scientific debate, the study of this class of objects allows to shed some new light on the socio-economic and cultural contact between the settled farming communities of Middle Asia and the mobile groups of cattle breeders prevalent across the Eurasian steppes.

Crossroads between Iran and Central Asia. New data on the ceramic assemblage of the Bukhara Oasis.

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Abstract

The recent activities of the MAFOUB in the Bukhara oasis are providing new data for the evaluation of the multifaceted cultural phenomena that took place in this context from antiquity to the Islamic period. The aim of the project is to reconstruct the history of the settlement, its cultural exchanges and its relationship with Iran and Central Asia. The study of the ceramic material conducted since 2016 falls within this framework. The main objective is to gain a more in-depth understanding of the temporal variation and technical innovations reflected in the pottery production of the oasis with special regard to the identification of cultural links with the adjacent regions of Khorasan, Margiana and Bactria to the southwest, Khorasm and Chach to the northeast.

Archaeological excavations and ceramic studies were carried out in the main cities of the oasis covering all its different administrative districts. Samples were collected and submitted for thermoluminescence and C14 analyses, which provided a reliable chronological frame for the stratigraphic units within which to place the variations in the pottery assemblage.

Through a selection of representative examples, the main features of the oasis' ceramic assemblage will be diachronically analysed in order to assess the contributions that trade, movement of people and regional and interregional political changes may have produced. This study will shed new light on the analogies and differences in the ceramic production of the different areas of the oasis, while highlighting its cultural relationships within Sogdia and, on a larger scale, within Central Asia.

The Steppe and the Sown - New evidence for culture contacts and migration between South Siberia and Central Asia

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Abstract

From 2017 to 2019 excavation campaigns at Tunnug 1 in Tuva Republic started to unveil the cultural connections between one of the earliest horse-based nomadic economies and sedentary agricultural societies to the south. Documenting the Early Iron Age burial mound has not only resulted in insights into this period, but led to the discovery of a plethora of items from the Bronze Age to the Turkic period as well as 20 well-preserved human skeletons. The organic remains are in an excellent condition due to the climatic circumstances and the underlying permafrost. We present new finds and the far-reaching cultural connections which can be inferred from them. Based on a stylistic analysis of the objects as well as radiocarbon dating, stable isotope analyses ($\delta^{13}\text{C}$, $\delta^{15}\text{N}$, $\delta^{34}\text{S}$) and ancient DNA investigations of the human remains, we will provide information about the region's complex history of migration painting a detailed picture of South Siberia's connections to the cultures of Central Asia and the importance of the Eurasian steppe belt for the transfer of ideas between East and West.

Redefine the idea of BMAC through the last innovative data of the Late Bronze Age Margiana

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Abstract

Central Asia's Bronze-Iron Age transition during the 2nd millennium BCE is bookended by the urban florescence of the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC) and the re-emergence of urban centers that would eventually be subsumed into the Achaemenid Empire. The intervening period (Late and Final Bronze Ages, ca. 1950-1300 BCE) has been described as one of de-urbanization, collapse, and decay of the BMAC socio-political and cultural system, meanwhile other scholars view the changes of the Late/Final Bronze Ages as an untroubled continuation.

There are three key issues that drive the still-underdeveloped scholarship on the dissolution of the BMAC in the 2nd millennium BCE. The first is the position of the BMAC vis-à-vis its regional contemporaries and economic partners in the Indus Valley, the Iranian plateau, the Arabian Peninsula, and Mesopotamia. Their fragmentation in the early 2nd millennium BCE no doubt influenced BMAC decline, but the mechanism of this economic and political transformation remain poorly understood. A second issue often tied into discussions of BMAC decline is the apparent intensification of interactions between established sedentary farming communities and non-local agropastoralists linked to the Andronovo cultural community of Bronze Age Central Eurasia. Lastly, chronological issues overshadow all other archaeological inquiries on this period, whose unclear timescales are difficult to reckon with the archaeological record. All three of these interrelated issues can potentially be addressed through deep stratigraphic study of a single long-lived BMAC site as Togolok, with the hope to clarify how BMAC related to earlier and later occupation in ancient Margiana.

The medieval town of Talkhir. Origination and development of urban culture in the northeast Zhetisu.

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Abstract

Using the medieval Talkhir site as an example, the paper presents the main results of research investigating the process of formation and development of the urban culture in the northeastern part of Zhetisu, covering the territory of the Ili Valley and the Trans-Ili-Alatau mountains in modern-day Kazakhstan. Archaeological materials and historic sources provide evidence for existence of a specific urban landscape on the Tien Shan stretch of the Great Silk Road and significant role of Talkhir as one of the leading center of handcraft in Central Asia. But unlike the neighbouring Talass Valley, where the urbanisation was a successive, natural process, the region of Ili River is characterized by a sudden appearance of the developed form of urban living.

The present study focused on identifying and analysing of prerequisites of emergence and expansion of urban life in southeast Kazakhstan from the AD 5th to the 13th century. The author comes to conclusion, that the building of urban centers was effected by socioeconomic factors as well as changings in political constellation. In those circumstances the external cultural influences had been adapted to local needs and traditions.

Keywords: Central Asia, Zhetisu, settlement of Talkhir, medieval urbanisation, Silk Road.

Sharing Spiritual Life and Beliefs in the Murghab Region (Southern Turkmenistan): New Evidence from Bronze Age Terracotta Figurines and Seals

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Abstract

In recent years several researches were carried out in the Murghab alluvial fan in Southern Turkmenistan, mainly in order to understand how mobile peoples integrated in the broad social arena of the vast open pasturelands and the sedentary contexts. This region was doubtlessly a strategic location for interactions between sedentary farmers and mobile pastoralists between the Middle and Final Bronze Age (2400-1300 B.C.). The investigation of sedentary villages and mobile campsites has allowed a better understanding about what customs and traditions mobile pastoralists may have borrowed from their sedentary contemporaries.

However, only few data regarding a possible interaction in the spiritual sphere between the two cultures were drawn from the researches. Artefacts as terracotta figurines and seals detected during the investigations of the Namazga V sites showed how sedentary populations had their own complex belief system. So, if this interaction happened, how mobile pastoralists 'reinterpreted' and adapted sedentary customs to their own spiritual life?

About these questions, recent discoveries carried out between 2014 and 2018 at the sedentary site of Togolok 1 can offer new important answers. The researches led to the identification of a mobile camp attributed to nomadic pastoralists after the abandonment of the site or in a final stage of its life during the Late Bronze Age. An in-depth analysis of the terracotta figurines and the seals documented during this excavation will allow a better understanding regarding the everyday and spiritual life of people who lived in one of the most important regions of Central Asia.

At the Crossroad of the Ancient World – On the Kingdom of Kroraina and its implications for the Silk Route model

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Abstract

Scholarly works and approaches to the Silk Routes, as a model describing exchange and interaction across Eurasia since at least antiquity, are extraordinarily diverse. But, at least within the field of economic history one can broadly speak of two narratives that dominate the research on the early Silk Routes, that of Empires and that of Nomads. The first is primarily interested in the great empires at the “ends” of the routes, Rome and Han, who are seen as the drivers and initiators of exchange. The second focuses on the role of the nomadic peoples of the Eurasian steppe, on the importance of exchange in their social and political systems, and often sets the start of Silk Route exchange far into prehistory.

This paper however aims to challenge both these approaches to the Silk Routes by discussing the evidence from second to fourth century Kroraina in the Southern Tarim Basin, drawing mainly from the famed Niya and Loulan sites. Not only does the rich sources from this kingdom, both written and archaeological, show that Silk Route exchange continued after the fall of the Han dynasty. It also reveals that a wide range of actors were involved, from the Krorainans themselves to the Chinese army and Sogdians merchants far from home. Based on these findings this paper will end by proposing a new multifaceted and tiered model of the Silk Road, one endeavouring to grasp the full complexity of exchange through Inner Asia in late antiquity.

End of the Long Way. Tamgha-signs from Qarshovul-tepa as a marker of Nomad's sedentarisation process

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Abstract

Qarshovul Tepa is located in the Tashkent Oasis (ancient Chach). Due to its geographical position Chach played a major role as a contact and transfer zone between settled oases and nomadic steppe.

Qarshovul Tepa was a small town (about 6 hectares). Excavations here are important because we do not have any early medieval site in the Tashkent Oasis which in the big scale. That complicates our understanding of many historical and cultural processes, does not allow to prove many theoretical assumptions, to support them with facts and proofs. One such problem is the question of the sedentarisation of nomads – the tribes which were descendants of nomadic Saka and known as the people of Kang-chü from Chinese sources.

Different kinds of ceramic vessels from Qarshovul Tepa excavations are marked with tamgha, i.e. property signs. They are, undoubtedly, signs of owners. Our finds are dated to the 7th – the beginning of the 8th century, that means, they were used for some centuries after nomads started to switch to a sedentary way of life, most likely, in the 3rd-4th centuries AD. Nevertheless, the popularity of signs shows that the tradition has not been forgotten. Even on the eve of the Arabian invasion inhabitants of the small town remembered their belonging to particular clans or tribes. The further accumulation and studying of tamgha-signs from archaeological sites of the Tashkent oasis will allow us to investigate one of the important questions of the history of Chach, namely the process of sedentarisation of nomads.

TO THE GENESIS OF THE CITIES OF CHUI VALLEY (according to data from the site Novopokrovskoe-2)

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Abstract

The Chuy valley in the early Middle Ages was a place of intensive cultural exchange between different ethnic groups and civilizations. It is at this time that it acquires the image of a region with urban culture as the dominant one.

In 1940, A.N. Bernshtam clearly formulated the hypothesis of “Sogdian colonization” of the region.

Our excavations 2004-2019 the hillfort Novopokrovskoye-2 allow to reasonably correct this hypothesis:

1. The lower layers of the settlement contain a ceramic complex, which finds the closest analogies in the ceramics of the Jety-Asar culture of the middle Syr Darya;
2. In the middle layer, dating from the 8th-9th centuries, there are many “hearth stand”, which, together with hand-made conical lids, A.N.Bernshtam considered Sogdian and attributed to the 5th-8th centuries. A small number of such finds were in the upper layer of 10-12 centuries, but they are not in the bottom. A.N.Bernshtam was wrong with their dating;
3. In Sogd's materials there is no such type of “hearth stand” and hand-made conical lids - A.N.Bernshtam was mistaken with their ethno-cultural attribution. According to the style and decoration motifs, their genesis should be sought in the monuments of the Lower Syr-Darya, such as Zharkent;

It means that the appearance of the ancient settlement Novopokrovskoye-2 and other medieval cities of the Chui Valley cannot be associated only with Sogdians. This process is more complex and was attended by carriers of cultures of middle and lower Syr-Darya.

Chemurchek (Qiemuerqieke) phenomenon as result of western migration and its impact on cultures of South Siberia and Kazakhstan

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Abstract

Not later than the 2700-2600 years BCE, in the western foothills of the Mongolian Altai, funerary and ritual constructions begin to be erected, having no earlier analogies in the Eurasian steppes («Chemurchek phenomenon»). Most of these structures were excavated by our expeditions over the past 20 years. Collective burials were committed in huge stone boxes built of vertical stone slabs surrounded by stone and earthen cairns, overlapping each other like “onion skin”. Tombs were accompanied by portals and stone statue-menhirs depicting a naked man with a crook and a bow, with a girdle with triangles. From the inside, stone boxes were decorated by red okhra geometric patterns. Ritual stone fences with steles and portals were discovered in the highest mountainous region of the Mongolian Altai. On the walls of these fences there are images of “deities” with parabolic bodies and antennas, but without a head, and one-leg demons. Inside ritual fences, engraved anthropomorphic shale plaques of “Iberian type” were found.

All of these features and form and ornamentation of excavated vessels are presented in the context of Western European megalithic cultures of 4th -beginning 3rd mill. BCE. Ritual structures and geometric okhra paintings of "Chemurchek type" appear on the Okunevo culture. Engraved anthropomorphic plaques and “Chemurchek” stone vessels were found in the Russian Altai and Tuva. Petroglyphs depicting same "deities" and one-leg demons were discovered in Southern Kazakhstan. It shows a wide connection of a people who came from the West and its impact on surrounding cultures.

Isotopic Studies of Bronze Age Societies in Central Asia and Iran

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Abstract

With the beginning of the 3rd millennium the emergence of complex societies in Central Asia are observed next to the great cultures of Mesopotamia, Elam and Indus. Central Asia has formed a crossroad for millennia between the East and the West. The region exhibits a high genetic, ethnic and linguistic diversity and played a key role in linking cultures.

Stable isotopes analyses of human and animals remains provide data on the origin of individuals, the mobility during lifetimes, the subsistence of people, and the climatic conditions of the investigated region. The results indicate the composition of populations and the rate of migration. Respectively information about sedentism or mobility of human populations and external cultural influences within societies can be reconstructed.

The paper will present isotope analyses of several sites in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Iran. Focus are the Bronze Age communities of Ulug Depe on the foothills of Kopet Dagh and Dzharkutan in the southern valley of Surchandarija River. The two sites represent the complex society systems of the Oxus Civilisation. The data argue for strong social hierarchies as well as a larger exchange network to the neighbouring civilisations. The question to be answered is what the results of isotope analyses can tell us about these still enigmatic people?

BETWEEN TWO CULTURES - THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD OF AKDEPE

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Abstract

Akdepe, near the old river bed of the Ashgabadka, is located southwest of Ashgabat, the capital of modern-day Turkmenistan. Administratively part of the city, Akdepe is an unusual archaeological site in Turkmenistan for its long history of occupation. Several archaeological soundings have shown occupations ranging from the 5th millennium BC to late medieval periods. The Chalcolithic and Bronze periods are of special interest at Akdepe and deserve close examination. Akdepe is the only known site in southern Turkmenistan where painted and grey ware ceramics are equally represented; their association is dated to the 4th – 3rd millennium BC. Painted ware is understood to belong to the ancient inhabitants of the “Namazga Culture” of the Kopetdag piedmont, and well-documented in sites such as Kara-depe, Namazga-depe. Grey and black pottery, by contrast, belongs to the sites of south-western Turkmenistan and north-eastern Iran. The documented association of painted and grey ware types at Akdepe suggests the close contact of ethnic groups and cultures from the south and west of the region, and possibly the presence of immigrants or their influences. For a scientific understanding of the history of settlement in the region of Ashgabat, there is no known comparable site. This presentation focuses on our recent excavation results from Akdepe.

Swiss Research at Gonur Depe in 2014 and 2015

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Abstract

Swiss Research at Gonur Depe in 2014 and 2015

Gonur Depe is until today the largest and most famous Bronze Age settlement in southern Turkmenistan. The proper site of Gonur forms together with its 21 settlements the central part of the so called “Gonur Oasis” and is considered to be the administrative and religious center of the region.

In the years 2014 and 2015 a cooperation between the Margiana Expedition of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Moscow) and the Institute of Archaeological Sciences (IAW) of the University of Bern carried out archaeological fieldwork at Gonur Depe. Next to geomagnetic surveys, subsidized by the Society for the Exploration of Eurasia (EurAsia), two seasons of excavations were conducted, funded by the Swiss-Liechtenstein Foundation for Archaeological Research Abroad (SLSA). Aim of the excavation was to gain more information on the stratigraphic sequence and the chronology of the archaeological remains.

The paper will present a summary of the results of the excavations with main focus on the stratigraphic units, while presenting the architectural remains and the associated objects, namely the ceramics.

The spectrum of small finds points to interregional contacts of the site and the BMAC towards the Indus valley on the one hand and Elam on the other.

Ulug-Khem archaeological culture of the Xiongnu period in Tuva

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Abstract

In recent years, in course of regular work around the Sayan-Shushenskoe reservoir in Central Tuva (Russian Federation), the Tuvan Archaeological Expedition of the Institute for the History of Material Culture (St. Petersburg) found two undisturbed cemeteries located 4.5 km apart, Ala-Tey 1 and Terezin. The both are unquestionably dated to the early period of the Xiongnu era, 2-1 century BCE. The excavations at the reservoir are receiving support from the Society for the Exploration of Eurasia (Switzerland).

To date 99 burials have been uncovered in the Ala-Tey 1 cemetery, and at Terezin 31.

The cemetery of Ala-Tey is located on the bottom of the reservoir and the excavations work there is possible only during about 3-4 weeks a year in May to June. During the rest of year the cemetery is at a depth of 16-17 m under water.

The finds from these cemeteries (burial rite, grave goods like bronze openwork belt plates, pottery, chinese mirrors and coins etc) allow us to formulate more precisely the identification signs of the Ulug-Khem archaeological culture of the Xiongnu period in Tuva (and its connection to Han China) and to confirm the justification of its distinguishing.

Sine Sepulchro cultures of the Early Iron Age: an interconnected Central Asian community of cultures

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Abstract

During the Early Iron Age (also known as Yaz I period), most of southern Central Asia is occupied by the Sine Sepulchro Cultures, also known as Handmade Painted Ware Cultures. The seven cultures identified up to date all display their own particularities of the material culture. Although no direct evidences of contacts have been brought to light yet, numerous common elements are found among them –in material culture as well as in ideological field– that suggest the existence of exchanges. Limited evidence of interaction with the neighbouring cultures at the intraregional scale is also found, with the Amirabad Culture on the North, and with the Archaic Dehistan Culture on the South. Based on data from both recent and ancient excavations, we will examine these elements in order to provide hypotheses on the nature and modes of contacts during this period.

Hellenistic Bactria. A view from Torbulok, Tajikistan

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Abstract

In Bactria, the Hellenistic period is usually characterized as a period of "Greek and non-Greek interaction". In fact, however, it has to be assumed that the majority of the population of Hellenistic Bactria consisted of native Bactrians and in the 3rd and 2nd century BCE most of the Greek migrants quickly adapted to local customs. In our contribution we roll up the question "how Greek was Hellenistic Bactria?" on the example of finds and findings from Torbulok, Tajikistan, where from 2013 to 2018 a Hellenistic sanctuary was unearthed.

Analysis of the archaeological contexts and ritual implements reveals that some of the performed rituals were inspired by Greek customs, while others likely followed local Bactrian traditions. Hence, although the ancient visitors of the sanctuary had knowledge about the way Greek religion was performed, they found their own way how to get in contact with the venerated god(s).

The local traditions not only influenced ritual behavior but also material culture. This was exemplified by a comparative study of ceramics from Torbulok. For even the tableware used in Torbulok was more influenced by local traditions although the potters who worked in Hellenistic times developed new ceramic shapes and techniques, some of which had a Greek-Mediterranean influence.

Modular residence block in Panjakent in comparative context

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Abstract

Since 2014 the Panjakent archaeological expedition is excavating area XI-East, located between the temple area and northern fringe of the terrace of the city. On the south, it reaches as street separating it from the Temple II; on the north the city wall was discovered; the eastern part of the area is occupied by another, minor temple or sanctuary. The central and western part, however, is covered by at least three uniform structures located one after another. Each of these structures comprises of two vaulted rooms, antechamber with oven, winding staircase to the upper floor and entrance area towards the street; the buildings are dated to the first half of 8th century, do not have decorations, and, although varying in size, have very similar planning. Such series of identical habitations haven't been attested in Panjakent during more than 70 years of excavations, but were documented in some other sites in Sogdiana and in neighbouring areas. In this paper I am going to collect information on these living modules of pre-Islamic Central Asia in order to understand their social function.



The fist-sized "command batons" from Elam and Bactria-Margiana




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Abstract

On the famous Persepolis silver vessel one of the depicted individuals holds two fist-sized sceptres in both of her hands. Other Elamite rulers' portraits show similar objects held by political authorities. The present paper suggests that the fist-sized stone poles found in burial grounds at Gonur and elsewhere – generally understood as symbols of power or "command batons" (G. Rossi-Osmida) – could be their archaeological counterparts. In the Linear Elamite text written on the Persepolis vessel, the word  ·  · hu(?)·us·sa·me (with the suffix · - me for inanimate nouns) is likely to reveal the name of the object in question.

Other observations which potentially bring Elam and Bactria-Margiana closer together are discussed briefly, the most interesting of which being that of a Bactrian gold seal with a bird man and the four Linear Elamite signs    · (hal Ši·maš·ki 'the land Šimaški?') on it.

The cultural traditions of urban planning in Samarkand during the epoch of Timur

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Abstract

The paper will be devoted to the analysis of various cultural traditions that have been reflected in the urban planning of Samarkand during the era of Timur. The author participated in the archaeological research of the pre-Timur's Samarkand and the city of the Timur's epoch, and came to the conclusion that Samarkand in the Timur era acquired a new image associated with an attempt to synthesize the various cultural traditions of the peoples that were part of the vast Timur's Empire. In the second half of the 14th century, there was a recovery of urban culture in Samarkand, which was due to the coming to power of Timur and the economic growth in the country. Existing data shows that Timur purposefully pursued a policy of urban planning, which manifested itself in the founding of a large citadel in the city. In Samarkand, holy places were landscaped; palaces, mosques, mausoleums, baths were erected. In urban planning, Timur relied on certain cultural traditions of the peoples of Central Asia and Iran. Based on my own research, I argue that in the construction of monumental buildings in Samarkand of the Timur's epoch, at least three urban planning traditions are revealed: Ilkhanid Iran, Khorezm and the heritage of the Chagatai khans. In the ceramic production, the paintings of Samarkand reveal the influence of Syrian and Chinese traditions.

Local trade routes in Pre-Islamic Samarkand

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Abstract

The territory of Samarkand experienced a significant socio-economic growth during the Pre-Islamic period (5th-early 8th centuries CE) thanks to the improvement of irrigated agriculture and trade at intra- and inter-regional scale. Especially at that time, the area South and East of the city (Maymurgh in the historical sources) played a crucial role in the connection between the Middle and the Upper Zeravshan Valley, as attested by the large number of archaeological sites (fortified settlements, villages, manors, etc.) recorded by the Uzbek-Italian Archaeological Expedition in the last years. The spatial relationships between major sites, will be taken into consideration to attempt a reconstruction of the major routes that developed locally, also according to the main geomorphological and environmental conditions. Moreover, the results from a long-term excavation at Kafir Kala will provide further detail on how a major settlement functioned within the regional trade network before and after the Arab conquest of Sogdiana in the early 8th century.

Early Karakhanidian glazed ceramics from Bukhara (based on materials from the complex of the Vardanzeh citadel)

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Abstract

Despite of significant archaeological research in the Bukhara oasis, the study of glazed ceramics from the era of the developed Middle Ages lags far behind the well-known neighboring regions of Central Asia.

In recent years, in the large urban center of the region - ancient settlement Vardane an interesting complex of glazed tableware from the end of the 10th - first half of the 11th centuries was obtained, which vividly reflecting the emergence of a new phase in the development of stylistic features, both in Bukhara and in other regions of Maverannahr. The materials obtained allow a completely new look at the overall development processes of various schools of glazed ceramics of known urban centers of the studied period in Central Asia. As a result of comparing the earliest stylistic features and then spread throughout the neighboring regional ceramic centers, can definitely be considered Binket-Tashkent, or, more generally, the ceramic school of the northeast, the leading stylistic school of the Transoxian pottery of the late 10th - first half of XI centuries.

A Study on the Clothes Carved in the Wooden Panels from Kafir-kala

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Abstract

This study examines the costume of the human figures carved onto the wooden panels which were excavated from Kafir-kala near Samarkand in Uzbekistan. The wooden panels were discovered from the innermost central room (R 15/16) of the citadel of Kafir-kala. Numerous sealings, coins, fragments of wall paintings, and other artifacts were also unearthed from the same layer in which a massive fire had occurred.

The wooden carvings are all carbonized and consist of one square wooden panel (about 130 × 114 cm), one wooden arch-shaped panel (about 300 × 55 cm, of which 156 x 55 cm are preserved), and several other pieces. On the square wooden panel, the goddess Nana is depicted with two hands, seated on a lion throne, with 45 human figures are bringing various offerings in their hands to her. On the arch-shaped panel, the goddess Nana is depicted with four hands seated on a double lion throne, and human figures carrying various items towards her.

All worshippers wear a dress consisting of a tunic extending above the knees, loose pants or leggings, and tall boots. Some worshippers also wear short crossover or center-opening coats. The tunics have round collars, slits up the side from the hem to the hip, and are edged in what is likely to be pattern-woven textile, with various patterns represented. Belts are most likely leather with metal plates or fabric sashes. This paper will also compare the dress at Kafir-kala with that from other depictions of Sogdian costume.

Archaeological Representation of Caspian Trade Route on the Territory of Azerbaijan

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Abstract

Historically the economic development on the western coast of the Caspian Sea depended largely on the functioning of international trade routes connecting the Middle East and the Caucasus to the Volga region. Strabo reported in the second century BC on the trade route from the south to the north, called the “Aorses Road”, along which “the goods of Babylon and India” were delivered to the northern countries. Trade arteries in this direction also functioned actively in the era of “geopolitical” rivalry, and then at the time of the trade alliance in the Caucasus between the Arab Caliphate and the Khazar Kaganate in the 7th and 10th centuries. During this period, Vikings used the overland and water routes from the Baltic to the Volga, and from there across the Caspian Sea to the south, which was reflected in numerous testimonies of medieval Arab authors. In the era of Mongolian and then Russian dominance in the 13th-17th centuries the so-called Volga-Caspian road remained the main trade route that connected the South and the North and ensured close inter-regional economic relations. The territory of the modern Azerbaijan (Caucasian Albania in the ancient times, and Shirvan in the Muslim period) was actively involved in this international trade. This is evidenced by numerous archaeological monuments of various kinds. The report will provide information on the status of a number of archaeological sites located on the territory of Azerbaijan along the western coast of the Caspian Sea, directly related to the Caspian trade route.

Early History of Sogdiana and its international trade: silk, fur, amber, and slaves

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Abstract

The early history of Sogdiana is barely known. Its rough contours are only emerging from the numismatic and archeological research. Among the broad spectrum of questions we have to answer are: when and under which circumstances the Sogdians entered the network of trans-Eurasian exchange; when they managed to take it over and bring it to its pinnacle; and what allowed them to do so?

It was always clear that the silk trade was not the only “super-source” of the Sogdian wealth. Recent research shows that in the 7th and 8th centuries the fur trade with Eastern Europe and Siberia also played a major role. We still, however, have to answer the question: when did this fur trade start? In this talk we will mobilize new finds of coins and silver vessels in Kama area and in Western Siberia.

It would be also very important to understand which other markets were available to the Sogdians? Was there also trade in amber and walrus ivory, musk and slaves? And in general: how did the Sogdian economy look in different periods?

While it is definitely impossible to offer a detailed treatment of all these questions in a conference report, this talk will present some most important recent materials and will mark some critical points in order to facilitate further research in new directions.

New discoveries in Paikend: on nomadic influence in Sogdian domains

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Abstract

Excavations in Paikend site ongoing by the Bukhara Expedition of the State Hermitage Museum (St. Petersburg) and the Institute of Archeology of Uzbekistan have shown that its first Hellenistic fortress was rebuilt in the middle of 2nd c. BC. Material culture has changed as well; iron weapons and accoutrements became major innovations. The better part of them periodically placed in sacrificial pits (βόθροι). Apparently, this is due to the reconstruction of a treasure-trove of the local temple of fire.

There were swords, daggers, spear- and arrowheads, armor plates, bone laths of a bow. Some artifacts were decorated with gold foil applications. Parts of belts such as rivets, brackets, pendants, buttons, buckles, inserts etc. made from bone, shell, copper, iron, turquoise are numerous.

The finds have analogies in nomadic complexes, both in the Bukhara oasis itself and in the Eurasian steppes as a whole. A copper bowl with an ornament of acanthus leaves and the gold button with the image of a spiral griffin are very interesting. Similar things were found in archaeological monuments associated with the world of Sakas, Sarmatians, Tocharians in vast territories from Bactria (Tilla-Tepe, the Temple of the Oxus) to the Black Sea region.

Some of Paikend's findings have similarities with Chinese military items as well. They are buckles made from rhino horn, the bronze cross-guard and the pommel of a sword. An image, probably of the Lord Hyrkodes, the founder of the Kangjiu principality in post-Hellenistic Sogdiana, was sketched out on one of them.

A study of the gold folding crown from Tillya-tepe as an indicator of cultural exchange and status

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Abstract

An elaborate, collapsible crown was found in the grave of a woman at Tillya-tepe, an important burial site in modern Afghanistan, in the borderlands of Bactria and the Parthian world and at a nodal point on major communication routes through Central Asia to China. The crown was among thousands of objects excavated from six richly provisioned, elite burials dating to the 1st century CE. Both its form and ornament reflect Tillya-tepe's pivotal position between different cultures.

This gold crown comprises a diadem decorated with an ensemble of five trees with birds in their upper branches and spiny beasts at their bases. This configuration of motifs relates it to headdresses from the Altai region, the Southern Urals, and the Pontic-Caspian area. However, it is uniquely covered with six-petalled rosettes, identifiable as narcissus flowers, which are more usually found in Graeco-Roman and Parthian contexts.

This paper entails an analysis of the crown's structure and associated imagery and will consider the transmission from different sources of both its shape and motifs. It may be demonstrated that these diverse iconographies converge to provide strong clues towards the status and worldview of the crown's owner. This evaluation is measured against the backdrop of the Central Asian nomadic heritage of the Tillya-tepe folk.

Monumental plot polychrome painting of Karatepa in Old Termez

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Abstract

The large-scale archaeological studies conducted in the past two decades at Karatepa, allowed to obtain the new patterns of the plot polychrome painting, which have the best preservation and were performed both in the traditions of three-dimensional modeling, and in contour. The polychrome plot painting with the image of Buddha and monks decorated the stupa platform was discovered in the room No. 11 of the monastery complex on the northern hill. Another pattern was found in room 56 of the monumental monastery complex. According to the remnants, the walls of the room were decorated as follows: the lower level was a panel painted red, the second and third levels were filled with the plot polychrome painting. The plot compositions are placed inside the frame with the images of deities and secular faces. The use of a rich palette of colors in the painting of Bactria was noted for the first time.

In the light of the latest discoveries of the wall plot polychrome painting samples of Karatepa, it can be mentioned with great confidence that in Bactria of the Kushan period, the artistic technique of volumetric modeling was widely used by using of the black and white tinting. These examples demonstrate that the artists who created the paintings belonged to the single artistic tradition, which can be called the Bactrian art school. One of the centers of this art school, most probably, was Termez. At the beginning of the development, the school gained the best achievements of the Hellenistic painting.

Bactrian influence in the re-foundation of Vardana in the Early Medieval period

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Abstract

The site of Vardāna (Bukhara, Uzbekistan) has been under investigation since 2009 by a Swiss-Uzbek archaeological project that involves the Society for the Exploration of EurAsia and the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Science of Uzbekistan. The site, recorded in the Arabic language sources as the capital of Obavija, was an important pre-Islamic principality of the Bukhara oasis. The discovery of an aristocratic palace, founded around the IV-V cent. AD and used until the beginning of the VIII cent. AD, represents one of the most important achievements of the project. The palace was built on top of the citadel, on the ruins of previous structures that were intentionally buried under a large amount of pebbles and sand. At almost the same time, the lower village assumed a quadrangular shape, attesting to a planned re-organization of the whole settlement.

New archaeological data from Vardāna, more specifically selected pottery finds, considerations of the settlement organization and radiocarbon dating are evaluated in this paper, in order to frame the political context responsible of the re-foundation of this settlement in the Early Middle Ages. Parallels with the neighbouring areas, in particular Bactria, would suggest the existence of interregional connections that contributed to the circulation of material culture and models of ideology at the Early Medieval Vardāna.

Fortifications, fortresses, and border walls in ancient Bactria-Sogdiana (sedentary and nomads between Samarkand and Ai Khanum)

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Abstract

This paper will focus on the fortifications in Bactria-Sogdiana as an example of the influences between local Achaemenid and imported Hellenistic traditions and their interactions with the Scythian world. The phenomenon of urbanization during the Iron Age occurred in parallel with the development of monumental fortification systems, such as those of northern Sogdiana in Koktepe (Gava/Gabae, pre-Achaemenid capital of the Zeravshan Valley) and Afrasiab (Maracanda, the later capital founded by the Achaemenids). As the latter city testifies, the Hellenistic fortifications built around the middle of the 3rd century BC seem to conform to Achaemenid traditions, albeit with Hellenistic technical innovations. Ai Khanum (ancient Oskobara/Eucratidia in eastern Bactria) presented massive fortifications that probably reflected the evolution of Hellenistic siege techniques.

In both regions, cities interacted with nomadic peoples whose representatives lived on the periphery of oases and along major roads, or participated in the defence of cities, as evidenced, for example, by the cavalry associated with the Sogdians' resistance against Alexander or, later, by the weapons discovered in the Ai Khanum arsenal. In the second half of the 3rd century BC, the fall of Northern Sogdiana into the hands of nomadic rulers led to the construction of the Derbent border wall, the function of which will be discussed in relation to the other Hellenistic fortified systems on the surrounding mountains.

Finally, the communication will include some examples of fortresses, such as those of the Sangir-tepe site near Shahr-i Sabz – a fortified Achaemenid temple outside the walls of the capital Kish-Nautaca (Padayatak-tepe-Uzunkir sites), later a Chionite castle – and the Kidarite castle of Kindikli-tepe north of Samarkand.

An archaeological survey of sites of Kech-Makran, Balochistan, Pakistan

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Abstract

Kech-Makran remained a trans-migrational route of South-Central Asia that witnessed several expeditions and migrations. In this respect, the archaeological and historical importance of Kech-Makran laid the foundation of many archaeological researches and excavations. Ancient occupations of Makran was firstly reported by Major E. Mockler British political Agent in 1870-75. Sir Aurel Stein has also conducted archaeological explorations in Makran area in 1927-28, and in the 1960s, American Missions conducted a salvage excavation at the site of Sutkagen Dor in Makran under the directions of George F. Dales. Further, this area was extensively investigated by the French mission under the supervision of Roland Besenval (1987 to 2007). This paper is an archaeological survey by the author conducted during his MPhil research; comparative studies of the previous archaeological fieldwork of previous archaeological missions were taken into account. This is an attempt to trace out the ancient occupations and cultures of Kech-Makran and evaluate them to the cultures of present. In this regard, a comprehensive archaeological survey and documentation was undertaken to establish the cultural profile of the area (Chalcolithic Era). Moreover, this research is further focused on the comparative study of the different sites in the Indo-Iranian Borderlands and would attempt to design a better chrono-cultural sequence of Kech-Makran.

Keywords: Kech-Makran, cairn, gabarband, chrono-cultural, Chalcolithic, Miri Qalat, grinding stone.

Hand gestures in Sogdian iconography, their origins, and their significance

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Abstract

One of the peculiar features of Sogdian pictorial art (wall paintings, ossuaries, sculptures, etc.) is depiction of personages and scenes inspired by ancient Indo-Iranian mythical and epic motifs as well as illustration of banquet and battle scenes. Although many aspects of these scenes have been exhaustively scrutinised by scholars in the past decades, yet no sufficient study has been done on the gestures made by characters of these scenes, their origins, and their meanings in the Sogdian culture. Among these gestures are different finger gestures and arm-folding gesture (*dastkaš*). On the one hand, similar gestures can be found in Sasanian and Bactrian iconography (e.g. rock reliefs, coins, silverware, and paintings), which might have shared the same usages and meanings with the Sogdian ones. On the other hand, however, some Sogdian finger gestures are comparable to certain Buddhist mudras, which may show the influence of Buddhist culture in Sogdiana.

The aim of this paper is to collect and categorise the divergent hand gestures appearing in Sogdian iconography, and to identify their origins in a comparative study with the gestures attested in the iconographic evidence from neighbouring cultures. Also, the hitherto proposed interpretations of these gestures and their significance will be revisited in the light of the scarce, but remarkably informative evidence of certain literary sources, which have often been neglected in modern archaeological and art historical scholarship.

Eastern Zeravshan valley in Transition from the Sogdian to the Arab Rule: New evidence from the Sanjar-Shah Excavations

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Abstract

Recent excavations at the Sogdian site of Sanjar-Shah near Panjikent have brought to light evidence of a large scale building activity, expansion of the town and of construction of monumental public buildings during the 740s. These activities can be attributed to the policies of the last Umayyad governor of Khurasan Naṣr b. Sayyār (738-748). In addition, it seems that unlike in the neighbouring Panjikent and other smaller settlements in the region, which were mostly abandoned in 770s-780s, life at Sanjar-Shah continued until the 9th century thus providing a rare example of a transition of a Sogdian urban space from 8th to 9th century.

This paper discusses the evidence for the changes in the settlement patterns in the region of the eastern Zeravshan valley emphasizing continuities and important cultural shifts in the early Islamic period based on the new data from Sanjar-Shah, on historical and archaeological sources and on what is known about the transformation of the Sogdian urban society as a result of the Arab conquest of the 8th century.

Ili Valley Settlement: Urban Development along the Northern Silk Route

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Abstract

Currently archaeologists are excavating the city of Ucharal-Ilibalyk, which flourished between the eighth and fourteenth centuries, near the modern border between China and Kazakhstan. Discoveries, so far, include a sophisticated bath complex in its citadel and a Christian cemetery containing gravestones with Syro-Turkic inscriptions. These findings, and other recently discovered sites, have prompted a reassessment of all medieval monuments between the Syr Darya and Ili River Valleys. Urban development in this area facilitated trade networks northwest of the Tarim Basin, and their monumental architecture and material culture demonstrate that a wide range of artistic concepts and products were exchanged—forms originating as far away as the coasts of the Mediterranean Sea to the Bohai and Khambhat Gulfs. Ili settlements formed stable societies that contributed to, and supported, the emergence of the Karakhanid Khanate and, later, the Mongol Empire. As such, the excavations of Ucharal-Ilibalyk has prompted a reassessment of all the available evidence for the development of urban settlements within the Ili River basin.

Archaeological Investigations of the Medieval Ilibalyk: Achievements and Perspectives

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Abstract

The present paper includes topographical and archaeological studies of the large medieval settlement on the territory of the Ili River Valley – today's Usharal, Kazakhstan, which is also known in Armenian, Persian and Chinese sources of 12th - 14th centuries as Ilibalyk, Ilibalyk, or Ilibaly. The ancient settlement was situated on the left river bank of the Ili River, a two-day march from the city of Almalyk, the capital of Chagatai Khanate and Mogulistan, now located in northwest China. A large number of the coins, which were collected on the surface, demonstrate the significant urban and commercial life of the city from the 11th to the 14th centuries situated in the mountains of the Tien Shan corridor of the Great Silk Road.

In addition, the discovery of gravestones, or "kayraks" with Nestorian crosses and Syriac or Old Turkic inscriptions demonstrates the presence of Christian communities, most likely Church of the East (commonly known as Nestorian) in the city.

Archaeological investigations provide new data for understanding the nature of the medieval site of Usharal-Ilibalyk and give important information regarding the spread of Christianity along the Great Silk Roads together with its role in the cultural life of the Karakhanid Empire through the Chagatai Khanate of the Mongolian Empire as well as its relationship with other religions.