



ARCHAEOLOGY V. PRE-ISLAMIC CENTRAL ASIA

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v. Pre-Islamic Central Asia

[In this article the Russian rendering of place names based on local pronunciation is generally followed. For archeological expeditions and discoveries prior to 1920 see [Central Asia](#).]

The study of Central Asian archeological remains began on a large scale in the 1920s and 30s with the organization of large archeological expeditions which uncovered the Kushan remains in the south of Uzbekistan (M. E. Masson), the ancient civilization of *Ḳvārazm* (Choresm) (S. P. Tolstov); and the Parthian Nisa. The excavations of A. B. Okladnikov in the cave of Teshik-Tash (Tešik-Tāš) were the starting point for the study of the Central-Asian Paleolithic period. The creation in the 1940s and 1950s of the Academies of Science of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kirghizia promoted further expansion of the scope of archeological work; increased the number of well-trained specialists; and initiated different lines of research. In each of the Academies, there is a special department of archaeology, and the universities of Tashkent, Samarkand, and Alma-Ata have special departments of archaeology. Archeological research is carried out by the Republics' Academies of Sciences jointly with Moscow and Leningrad institutions, first of



all with the Institute of Archaeology of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences, the Leningrad section of which has a special sector for the archaeology of Central Asia and the Caucasus, which in the 1920s was headed by V. V. Barthold, and in the 1930s and 40s by A. Yu. Yakubovskii. In 1969 a special council on the problems of Central-Asian and Kazakh archaeology was formed. (See Yu. A. Zadneprovskii, "Desyatiletie Nauchnogo soveta po problemam arkheologii Sredneĭ Azii i Kazakhstana," (A decade of the scholarly council on the problems of archaeology of Central Asia and Kazakhstan), *Narody Azii i Afriki*, 1979, no. 4, pp. 165-68). As a result, archeological remains of almost all the major epochs have now been uncovered, numerous compilations have been published, and materials have been obtained that describe comprehensively the ancient civilizations of Central Asia of the pre-Islamic period.

The Paleolithic period. The earliest Paleolithic remains in Central Asia were found in Kopet-Dag, in the valley of the Sumbar river, and belong to the ancient Ashel, or possibly to the pre-Ashel period (see V. P. Lyubin, "Paleolit Turkmenii" (The Paleolithic period of Turkmenistan), *Sovetskaya Arkheologiya*, 1984, no. 1, pp. 26-47). In loess deposits of western Tajikistan, in the layers that according to the geological data correspond to the period from 200 to 130 thousand years ago, implements of the pebble (*galechnyi*) type close to the Soan (Karatau I, Lakhuti I) have been found. At that time, Paleolithic man had established himself throughout the region. Implements of the Ashel type have been found in southern Kazakhstan (Tanirkazgan, Borykazgan) and on the Mangyshlak. In the Tashkent area there is a multi-layered Ashel nomadic camp called Kulbulak. Also, remains of the *Muster* Period are represented everywhere (the Teshik-Tash and Obirakhmat [Āb-e Raḥmat] carts in Uzbekistan, the Karabura station in Tajikistan, Tasor and Georgiev in Kirghizia, Dzhanak in Turkmenistan). With the exception of Karabura, with its many pebble-type implements, these materials tend to resemble the complexes found in the Near East and the Caucasus. In the Teshik-Tash cave a Neanderthal burial site was found surrounded by the horns of mountain goats (see *Teshik-Tash. Paleoliticheskii chelovek* (Paleolithic Man), Moscow, 1949, pp. 184ff.). The higher Paleolithic period has been less researched. The main remains of this time are the caves of Shugnou in Tajikistan and the Samarkand station, in which one can find implements both of thin, narrow plates as well as in the form of pebbles.

The Mesolithic period. Various cultural traditions are being traced through the remains of the Mesolithic period as well. On the eastern shore of the Caspian



Sea the cave complexes of Dzhebel (Jebel) and Dam-Dam-Chesme (early, with elongated triangles, and late, with trapezoids) have direct analogies in the materials of Zarz (Iraq) and Gari (Ġār-e)-Kamarband (Iran). East of the Caspian Sea, in the late-Mesolithic layers, bones of the domestic goat can be found, pointing to the beginnings of hooved-animal rearing. In Farġāna and west Tajikistan remains where geometric microliths are combined with pebble implements are widespread (Tashkumyr and Obishir [Āb-e Šīr] in Farġāna, Tutkaul [layer IIA] in west Tajikistan). The earliest complex, Tutkaul III, contains rectangles of the Kebar type, which permit one to relate it to the period from 11-10,000 B.C. (see G. F. Korbokova, “Mezolit Sredneġ Azii i ego osobennosti” [Mesolithic period of Central Asia and its peculiarities], *Kratkie soobshcheniya Instituta arkheologii* 149, Moscow, 1977, pp. 108-15).

The Neolithic period. In this period, Central Asia breaks down into two major economic zones, which facilitates a more far-reaching cultural differentiation. In south Turkmenistan, in 6000 B.C., the Dzheitun (Jeytūn) culture of settled herders and farmers is formed (see V. M. Masson, *Poselenie Dzheitun* [The settlement of Jeytūn], Leningrad, 1971, pp. 208ff.). This culture had small settlements consisting of one-room houses with floors covered with lime and then painted red or black. In one settlement a sanctuary was discovered with a two-color wall painting depicting animals. Flat-bottomed ceramics covered with simple paintings and terra-cotta figures of people and animals are both characteristic features of this settled, agricultural culture. At the same time, the lamellate flint industry bears some archaic traits, including segments and small symmetrical trapezoids. In the remaining territory of Central Asia, Neolithic tribes engaged, for the most part, in hunting and fishing. Remains of the Kelteminar culture, with its large semi-mud huts (*poluzemlyanka*) at base sites (6-4000 B.C.) are characteristic for this economic zone (Dzhanbas 4 and Kabat 5) in K̄ārazm, Darbaza-Kyr in lower Zeravshan (Zarafšān). Typical features of the Kelteminar culture include: large, crude round-based and sharp-angle-based ceramics decorated with scratched or carved designs, and lamellate flint industry with infrequent trapezoid-type microliths (see A. V. Vinogradov, *Drevnie okhotniki i rybolovy sredneaziatskogo mezhdurech'ya* (Ancient hunters and fishers of the Central Asian Mesopotamia), Moscow, 1981, p. 171; G. F. Korobkova, *Orudiya truda i khozyaġstvo neoliticheskikh plemyon Sredneġ Azii* (Work implements and economy of the Neolithic tribes of Central Asia), Leningrad, 1969, p. 216). The Hissar (Ĥešār) culture, 6-3000 B.C., represents another cultural type which was found in mountainous regions of Tajikistan and Kirghizia. Here lamellate flint implements are found alongside



implements of the pebble type, a continuation of the local Mesolithic Period. At base sites, mud huts, and light surface structures represent the typical dwelling places for this culture (Tutkaul II and I, Sai-Saed).

The Eneolithic period. While the tribes of the Kelteminar and Hissar cultures retained their traditional culture, the southern zone of settled agriculture became the center of economic and cultural progress. In the first half of the fifth millennium B.C. the Dzheitun Neolithic culture gives place to complexes of the Anau IA type with only an insignificant number of flint implements and varied metal articles. The steady development of the Anau culture of the Eneolithic period takes place on the basis of this complex (see *Srednyaya Aziya v epokhu kamnya i bronzy* [Central Asia in the Stone and Bronze Ages], ed. V. M. Masson, Moscow and Leningrad, 1966, p. 290; *Arkheologiya SSSR. Eneolit SSSR* [Archaeology of the U.S.S.R. Eneolithic U.S.S.R.], ed. V. M. Masson, N. Ya. Merpert, Moscow, 1982, p. 360). The excavations of Namazga Tepe (Namāzgāh Tappa) (Namazga I-III) and Altyn Tepe (Figure 9), where fractional stratigraphic columns were established, have served as the basis for isolating the individual stages in the development of the Eneolithic period. In complexes of the Namazga I type, ceramics typically display black paintings on a red and greenish-white background with large geometric drawings and, occasionally, figures of hooved animals. Clay bi-conical whorls (*pryaslitse*) and terra-cotta figures of standing women are widespread. Along with small settlements (northern Anau and others), settlements with an area not less than 10 hectares (Kara [Qara] Tepe, Namazga Tepe) were established. Communities spread in an easterly direction, where the ancient Tejen river delta (Dashlydzhi Tepe) became settled.

During the middle Eneolithic period, a certain cultural differentiation occurred between the western and eastern groups of remains. In the west (Anau, Kara Tepe, Namazga Tepe), one finds ceramics of the Namazga II type with fragmented polychrome painting; in the east (Geoksyur [Geoksür], Altyn Tepe), vessels with monochrome painting in simple lines along the rim. In eastern settlements large statuettes of full-bodied, seated women are numerous; the settlements are surrounded by walls with perimeters that enclose circular structures.

A significant cultural advance takes place at the time of the late Eneolithic period during the last third of the period between the fourth and the beginning of the third millennium B.C. Widely dispersed at this time in the west are ceramics of the Kara Tepe style with colorful rug decorations and



depictions of goats, spotted snow-leopards, and birds, which find a close analogy in the painted ceramics of the Sialk III and Hissar IA-IIB type. An insignificant quantity of gray ceramics also appears. All the evidence points to a movement of the south Turkmenistan population groups from out of the Sialk-Hissar region, leading to the intermingling of local populations. At Kara Tepe, several multi-room houses and two shrines, along with a group of adjacent structures for household use, have been excavated. Near the shrines, vessels carved out of marble and statuettes of a bull were found. In the metallurgy of this time, the practice of pouring into closed molds can be noted. Graceful statuettes of sitting women with intricate coiffures are extremely characteristic of Kara Tepe. In the burial sites one finds graves with a large number of decorated vessels, belonging, possibly, to the tribal aristocracy.

In the eastern group of remains, the ceramics of the Geoksyur type with polychrome paintings of large figures of crosses and half crosses are widespread during the late Eneolithic period. Despite certain analogies with the early painted ceramics of Mesopotamia and Elam, most likely the Geoksyur complex came into being primarily as the result of local cultural evolution. Collective tombs, usually oval in shape and made of adobe, are also characteristic of the eastern group of archeological remains. During the late Eneolithic period Altyn Tepe becomes a large-scale center with an area of 25 hectares and surrounded by an adobe wall with rectangular watch towers. Individual tombs for women contain a rich inventory of items such as articles made of copper and painted ceramics. Aside from female statuettes of the Kara Tepe type, small heads of male soldiers wearing helmets with ear flaps are also widespread. Geoksyurian communities actively spread to the east and south, and typical Geoksyur ceramics were found in the lower layers of the Šahr-e Sokta in Sistan. Small settlements from the Geoksyur complex were found in the Morġāb delta and upstream in the Zeravshan (Sarazm).

The Bronze Age. The Geoksyur layer laid the basis for the development in south Turkmenistan of a local civilization of the ancient, oriental type. These cardinal changes began to take place during the early Bronze Age or in the Namazga IV period (2900-2300 B.C.). At this time a gradual transformation of the Geoksyur and Kara Tepe cultural traditions was taking place simultaneously with progress in technology (the introduction of copper-arsenic alloys, potting wheels, etc.). Decorations on painted ceramics become more and more fragmented, coarse, and gradually disappear altogether. In southwest Turkmenistan, complexes with a large quantity of gray ceramics



are widespread (Ak Tepe), sometimes predominant (the Parkhaï II burial site at Kara Kala [Qara Qal'ā]), and are similar to the plates and dishes of northeastern Iran. At the end of this period, at Altyn Tepe, the main gates of the city are decorated with massive pylons, pointing to the development of monumental architecture.

As a result of these changes, a qualitatively new archeological complex is formed at the time of the middle Bronze age: Namazga V (2300-1850 B.C.). The following are characteristic features of this complex: wheel thrown, unpainted ceramics of a greenish-white hue, flattened figures of sitting women with attached braids and scratched magic signs, geometrical and zoomorphic metal stamps with handles on the reverse side, terracotta models of four-wheeled carts drawn by camels.

Settlements of the city type—Namazga Tepe and Altyn Tepe, which by their structure noticeably differ from the early agricultural settlements, become the centers of social life (see V. M. Masson, *Altyn-depe*, Leningrad, 1981, p. 175). At Altyn Tepe a monumental religious complex was formed, with a four-level tower of the Mesopotamian ziggurat type. In a nearby burial site for high priests, a golden bull's head with an inset made of turquoise in the shape of a lunar disc on its forehead was found. It appears that the whole complex was dedicated to the astral deity, the Moon God, which in Mesopotamian mythology is often described as a bull the color of fire. Three population groups may be distinguished in Altyn Tepe, according to the types of houses and the level of well-being: ordinary commune dwellers, the wealthy aristocracy, and the social elite, i.e., the chiefs and high priests. Extremely cramped burials with no funeral inventory but placed near to wealthy collective tombs may have belonged to patriarchal slaves. The Altyn Tepe civilization was in close contact with neighboring cultures. Sulfur-glazed vessels (Hissar, Tureng Tepe) obviously brought in from northeastern Iran turned up during the excavations in the aristocratic sector. Various materials testify to stable links with the ancient Indian civilization of Harappa. In Altyn Tepe, items brought from India were found, including objects made of ivory and stamps (*pechat'*) of the Harappian type, one of which bore symbols from Harappian writing. It is possible that the founders of the Altyn Tepe civilization, like the Harappians, spoke a proto-Dravidian language for which Harappian writing may have been created. During the late Namazga V period the settlement of the Morḡāb delta, which had started in the late Eneolithic period but was interrupted in the late Bronze Age, reemerges. In the lower



reaches of the Morġāb, the Kelleli oasis forms a culture identical to that of the upper layers of Altyn Tepe.

Significant changes in south Central Asia took place during the late Bronze Age during the existence of the Namazga VI complex (1850-1100 B.C.) at Namazga Tepe. The ancient centers of south Turkmenistan, Altyn Tepe and Namazga Tepe, fell into decline, to be replaced by small villages with a relatively poor culture. At the same time, permanent communities widely settled the Morġāb delta and spread toward the middle of the Amu Darya. These new regions of urban cultural dissemination became the centers of cultural progress. In the Morġāb delta a number of oases already existed centered around large villages, and square-shaped, fortress-type settlements spread out. A major innovation was the introduction of flat stone stamps bearing scenes of dragons fighting with hooved animals, and cylinder seals, also with complex subjects. Similar fortresses were also found in the south of Uzbekistan (Sappali), where a gradual cultural evolution took place throughout the second millennium B.C. (see A. Askarov, *Drevnezemledel'cheskaya kul'tura épokhi bronzy Yuzhnogo Uzbekistana* [Ancient agricultural cultures of the Bronze Age in south Uzbekistan], Tashkent, 1977, p. 213). Here we find bronze implements like axes, stamps, pins, and croziers with sculpted top pieces depicting various animals. Tombs in the catacombs contain a rich and variegated inventory. As a result of all these changes the entire south of Central Asia in the second millennium B.C. became an area of highly-developed settled culture of the ancient oriental type.

At this time significant changes were taking place in more northerly regions as well. Here, already in the late Neolithic period, domesticated animals had made their appearance, and by the middle of the second millennium B.C., a herding culture of the steppe Bronze Age appears, giving rise to a series of local variations on the Andronov culture. Important innovations in this region included the creation of light chariots harnessed to horses and the spread of military weapons (axes and spears) as well as the construction of burial mounds on top of tombs. In the lower reaches of the Amu Darya remains of this type are united in the Tazabagyab culture (see M. A. Itina, *Istoriya stepnykh plemyon Yuzhnogo Priaral'ya* [The history of steppe tribes in southern Pre-Aral], Moscow, 1977, p.239). Villages consisting of rectangular semi-mud huts and with molded ceramics of simple, notched ornamentation are widespread; irrigation ditches built for watering fields are also found. Andron tombs are relatively rich; gold and silver ornaments were found in



the Samarkand area. Steppe Bronze Age ceramics can be found nearly everywhere in Central Asia, bearing witness to the wide dispersion of its carriers, who reached as far as the borders of the settled oases in the south. As a result of the mutual influences of the settled and steppe-dwelling cultures in south-west Tajikistan a number of mixed cultures arose, where we find both a burial mound rite and wheel-thrown ceramics or hand-molded dishes made according to a handicraft pattern (Bishkent, Vakhsh cultures). In certain graves of Bishkent, stones are laid out in the form of a wheel or swastika. A limited influence of the steppe cultures has also been noted on the settled villages of south Uzbekistan during the late Bronze Age. This complicated picture reflects, most likely, the process of spreading settlements by Indo-Iranian tribes who were genetically linked with the Eurasian steppe zone, but absorbing in the course of their migrations elements of the Near Eastern cultures. In all likelihood, the cultural transformation was accompanied by the linguistic assimilation of the local pre-Indo-Iranian population.

In the first third of the first millennium B.C. major changes take place in the culture of the settled oases of the south. The amount of wheel-thrown ceramics diminishes greatly; there appear light-colored, handmade clay dishes, sometimes painted with simple geometric designs, bronze arrowheads, and citadels standing on high elevated platforms built of adobe. A culture of this type (Yaz Tepe I) was first studied in the Morġāb delta, (see V. M. Masson, *Drevnezemledel'cheskaya kul'tura Margiany* [The ancient agricultural culture of Margiana], Moscow and Leningrad, 1959, p. 217); it was then discovered in southern Uzbekistan (Kuchuk Tepe), in Afghanistan, and in recent years in the Kashka Darya valley as well. Some scholars explain the changes that took place as solely the result of migration of tribes, others give more prominence to cultural processes: transformation and integration. In any case, it is indicative that the distribution of the complexes of the Yaz Tepe I type coincide in large part with the area inhabited by settled peoples of the eastern Iranian linguistic groups (Bactrians, Sogdians, inhabitants of Margiana) whereas in the west complexes with gray ceramics are widespread. To these may be added the remains of the culture of ancient Dahestān (1200-600 B.C.) in southwest Turkmenistan. Here the typical ceramic form is a cup supported on three legs, which has close parallels in northern Iran. In any case, the settled oases of south Central Asia continued to outstrip other regions in cultural and economic development: In the first third of the first millennium B.C. large scale irrigation systems were established; city-type settlements displayed powerful citadels; iron began to be used.



At this time, in the lower reaches of the Amu Darya, we have the Amirabad culture, which continues to a great extent the traditions of Tazabagyaba. The settlements consisted of large-frame houses of the semi-mud hut type; hand-molded dishes are occasionally decorated with notches. The wide distribution of domesticated horses is significant. The Chust culture is represented in the eastern part of Farḡāna, with hand-molded ceramics painted with simple geometric designs in black paint on a red background; it is closely connected with the remains of eastern Turkestan.

The evolution of Yaz Tepe type complexes follows a trend toward increasing amounts of wheel-thrown ceramics; jar-shaped vessels become predominant, a trend apparent already in the seventh century B.C. (Yaz Tepe II). This culture gradually came to embrace Sogdia and K̄vārazm and survived until the fourth century B.C. Iron objects can be found everywhere; large fortified centers formed, combining the functions of residence of the ruler (citadel or palace complex) and refuge for a fairly large region (Kyzyl Tepe in Bactria, Gyaur Kala in Margiana, Kyuzeli Gyr (Küzeli Gir) in K̄vārazm, Er-kurgan and Afrāsīāb in Sogdia). These complexes continued to develop even after Central Asia became a part of the Achaemenid state.

The Greco-Bactrian kingdom. An important event in the history of Central Asian culture was the campaign of Alexander the Great and the subsequent creation of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom (250-140 B.C.), within the framework of which a creative synthesis of the Hellenic and Oriental traditions was realized. Up till now, however, the layers of permanent settlements of the third and second centuries B.C. have been little studied. In Bactria, in the lower layers of Dalverzin, archeologists have noted a combination of ceramics following the local traditions with cups made of gray clay and a folded rim similar to the so-called “fish-plates” of the ancient type. Similar phenomena can be observed in the layers corresponding to this period at the site of the former city of Afrāsīāb, where a vessel with Greek writing has been found. A striking example of objects from Greco-Bactrian times was found at the site of the former city of Taḳt-e Sangīn in southern Tajikistan. Here, at the end of the 4th-3rd centuries B.C., a square-shaped four columned temple with an *ayvān*-shaped portico was erected. The temple existed with renovations and structural alterations until the 2nd-3rd centuries A.D. Numerous valuable objects and *objets d'art* serving as sacramental offerings have been found in it. A Greek inscription found on one stone altar indicates that the temple was dedicated to the deity Oxus, i.e., the Amu Darya.



The Kushan period. In 140-130 B.C., Greco-Bactria fell under the pressure of the nomadic tribes that had settled in part on the northern bank of the Amu Darya. Gradually, a consolidation of small holdings took place here and in the first century A.D. they united into a large new state, the Kushan state, which included a number of areas far beyond Bactria's borders. The Kushan epoch (1st-4th centuries A.D.) marked the highest blossoming of the ancient urban civilization of Central Asia and neighboring countries (Figure 10). Kushan cultural standards influenced other regions in Central Asia and even went beyond its borders. Four basic elements can be traced in the Kushan culture of Bactria: the local element, going back to the Bronze Age; the Hellenistic element, that received a new impulse in the period when trade was developing with the Roman empire; the Indian element, stimulated by the spread of Buddhism; and the nomadic element, connected with the cultural traditions of the steppe zone of the Asiatic continent. The latter were especially prominent in the 1st century B.C.-1st century A.D., when the nomads were undergoing cultural and ethnic assimilation as they were becoming settled.

One of the early Kushan remains in Bactria is Khalchayan (Kałčayān) (1st century B.C.-1st century A.D.), where a country palace-residence has been uncovered with a festive hall and a four-columned *ayvān*. The entire complex is richly decorated with painting and clay sculptures representing members of aristocracy and a group of heavily-armed warriors on horseback. In a number of statues one can see a striving for a certain portrait quality harking back to the Hellenistic psychological portrait. At this time in Bactria, there is a growth of urban centers; cities are again being constructed according to a regular rectangular or square plan, surrounded by fortress walls with watchtowers (Zar Tepe, Keyqobād Šāh, Kohna Kala). The Buddhist complexes in the suburbs of Termez, the capital of northern Bactria have been studied (Fayaz Tepe, Kara Tepe, and the stupa of Zurmal).

An important center of worship was Ayrтам located on the bank of the Amu Darya to the west of Termez. Here, already in 1932 a sculptured frieze that used to decorate the Buddhist shrine was uncovered. When excavations were continued in 1979 a block was found with a Kushan inscription that mentioned the restorations done in the cult center in the fourth year of Huvishka's reign.

A typical urban settlement is Zar Tepe, located 25 kilometers north of Termez, where the layers of the late Kushan period have been studied on a large scale. Here a palace with many-columned halls, a small Buddhist shrine, a fire



shrine, and a city section have been unearthed. The multi-roomed houses were situated along a straight street and occupied 600-800 square meters. Characteristic is the high standard of city culture. The diverse ceramic objects (goblets, wine glasses, cups, bowls, pitchers) are decorated with artistic stamps and affixed decorations, often representing human heads. There are numerous terra-cotta statuettes—of horsemen, women in heavy, draped clothing, musicians, and various animals.

In the homes archeologists have found dozens of copper coins, a variety of decorations, bronze vessels, and bone pins, sometimes with a horse's head as top piece. Urban cultural standards were widely adopted in rural settlements of Kushan Bactria. Among these, villages laid out according to a square plan and surrounded by a wall predominated (Shor Tepe, Mirzakul Tepe); less often one finds ruins of a somewhat chaotic plan (Ak-kurgan). (See *Baktriiskie drevnosti* [Bactrian Antiquity], ed. V. M. Masson, Leningrad, 1976, p. 126).

Dalverzin was the largest center in the Surkhandar valley (see *Dal'verzin. Kushanskiĭ gorod na yuge Uzbekistana* [Dalverzin. A Kushan city in South Uzbekistan], ed. G. A. Pugachenkova, Tashkent, 1978, p. 237). The monumental houses of the city patricians were located in the center of the city. In one of these houses a pitcher was found containing many gold ornaments and gold bars with inscriptions in Kharoshti script, indicating the name of the owner and the bar's weight. Near the quarter of the ceramic artisans a small temple was found dedicated to a female deity—apparently Nanaia. Beyond the city walls, a small Buddhist shrine was excavated containing a sculpture made of gypsum reproducing the traditional image of the Buddha and his entourage, as well as lay persons—a ruler in a pointed head piece along with his courtiers. Buildings specially designed for burials were located in the city's outskirts. The chambers chiefly contained cleaned bones. At this time in Bactria, other forms of funeral rites were practiced as well. Cemeteries have been found with elongated graves, sometimes with ceramic coffins and a coin placed in the mouth of the deceased (Tup-khona [Tūp-kāna]); and there are also graves with linings reminiscent of the funeral customs of the nomads (Ayrtam). The remains of Kushan era writing are quite varied. Inscriptions in Bactrian writing in the Greek alphabet have been found on vessels in a number of settlements, as well as on the walls of the cave monastery at Kara Tepe. Buddhist centers are associated with inscriptions in Indian language using the Kharoshti and Brahmi alphabets.

Purely Greek inscriptions are comparatively rare; at Kara Tepe there are two



inscriptions in Pahlavi, apparently from the time of the Kushano-Sasanian wars. On two clay fragments derived from Khalchayan and Kara Tepe there are inscriptions in letters identical to those of the inscriptions on a cup from an early nomadic burial site in Issyk (see below).

Parthian Nisa. A creative synthesis of cultural traditions is also characteristic of Parthia, the northern part of which now forms the southern region of Turkmenistan. The site of Old Nisa is located here, a city which in the 3rd-1st centuries B.C. served as one of the official residences. In Nisa we find a concentration of monumental palace and temple structures whose adobe architecture clearly continued local Bronze-Age traditions. At the same time, Hellenic elements can be observed in the decorations, notably in Corinthian type columns with Corinthian capitals. The convergence of differing cultural traditions at Nisa is demonstrated by objects from the treasure deposits, marble Hellenistic-like statues, artistic sculptured tableware made of silver, ivory, rhytons, and reliefs in which the Oriental-Hellenistic synthesis is clearly evident (see M. E. Masson and G. A. Pugachenkova, *Parfyanskije ritony Nisy* [Parthian rhytons from Nisa], Ashkhabad, 1959, p. 266). Documents in Parthian written in the Aramaic alphabet on ostraca were found in spacious wine cellars. These documents contain the ancient name of the fortress Mihrdātkert. Among the officials mentioned many carry Zoroastrian names, and the Zoroastrian calendar was used.

Literacy was not at all limited by the walls of the palace office: ostraca with household records were found at the excavations of the Kosha Tepe estate near Baba Durmaz and short inscriptions on clay ostraca were observed at nearly ten small settlements, including the fortress of Igdy Kala at Uzboy.

Parthian Marv. Southeastern Turkmenistan corresponds to still another ancient region, that of Margiana. Here there are small Parthian towns built according to a regular plan (Chilbudzh, Durnali) but the main center was Marv. Gyaur Kala, which covers a surface of four square kilometers, not including large suburbs, corresponds to a Parthian city. (The materials on the archaeology of ancient Marv were published in the "Proceedings of the South-Turkmenistan Archeological Complex Expedition," Ashkhabad, XI, 1962; XII, 1963; XIV, 1974). Parthian Marv was a fortified city: its surrounding walls reach a width of up to 10 meters. Within the city, archeologists unearthed a craftsman's house in which ostraca were found, and a flour-grinders quarter. The high-quality clay tableware is close to the Kushan ceramics in many respects; however, a typical Bactrian form such as the wine glass is rarely



found in Marv. A specific feature of the Marv culture are terracottas portraying women holding mirrors.

Khvārazm. On the lower Amu Darya still another ancient civilization of Central Asia was situated, that of Khvārazm (see S. P. Tolstov, *Drevnii Khorezm* [Ancient Khvārazm], Moscow, 1948). Both Kushan and Parthian cultural influences were felt here; however, the peripheral location together with close links to the nomadic world promoted the preservation of the culture's original features. One of the early monuments in Khvārazm is Koi Krylgan Kala (see *Koï-krylgan-kala. Pamyatnik kul'tury drevnego Khorezma* [Koï-krylgan-kala. A monument of the culture of ancient Khvārazm], Moscow, 1967). At its center is a monumental building on a circular plan, while the external, fortified wall with towers encompasses a circle 86 meters in diameter. The space between the central building and the external wall is filled with dwelling and business complexes. Scholars suppose that this is a religious complex built in the 4th-3rd centuries B.C., which combined the shrine itself with buildings housing the temple's economic management. Khwarezmian ceramics of this time are distinguished by the originality of their shapes and decorations.

Widespread here is simplified painting; festival tableware had fine-art attachments and reliefs. With time, cities appear in Khvārazm which, as in Bactria and Marv, are built according to a single plan. Such is the site of Toprak Kala, which was apparently the capital of the right-bank Khvārazm. It occupies a surface area of 500 by 350 meters; the city itself is divided by streets into distinct rectangles of residential quarters. Each block consisted of several multi-room households, which recalls the layout of Zar Tepe. In the northern part of the city there is a powerful three-tower palace citadel. Halls richly decorated with painting and clay sculpture stand out in the festival part of the palace. In one of the halls, life-size statues of members of the reigning dynasty had stood in niches along the walls. A relief in another hall depicts deer stylistically close to the artistic traditions of the ancient nomads. Khwarezmian ceramics of the 2nd-4th centuries A.D. are in some respects close to the Kushan tableware; for example, there are wine glasses. Terracotta statuettes of women are numerous, and a figurine of a monkey was found. In the household section of the palace citadel, records on leather and wood were found, written in Khwarezmian with Aramaic letters. These documents, among other things, keep account of inhabitants of large-family communes, which seem to have occupied separate households in the city. Among the households, slaves are also mentioned. The distinctiveness of Khwarezmian culture is confirmed by



its minting of local coins, picturing a ruler on horseback on the reverse.

Sogdia. The culture of Sogdia in the 3rd-4th centuries A.D. has so far been little studied. Its traditional capital, Samarkand, was situated on the site of Afrāsīāb; it had very strong fortress walls with towers and loop-holes. In the Samarkand area there were also towns with a precisely rectangular layout (Umraman Tepe). The big center of southern Sogdia was at the site of Er-kurgan in the Kashka Darya valley. It has a square layout, and when it flourished, it occupied an area of 150 hectares. At the center of the city was a temple on a high platform with a small, tiered altar. Before the central structure there was an *ayvān* with five columns. The temple was ornamented with wall inscriptions, and statues of clay and gypsum. Here the Kushan influence on ceramics is stronger than in Samarkand. Beginning in the 2nd century B.C., a silver coin was put out in Sogdia, often similar to the Seleucid and Greco-Bactrian coins, but with Sogdian inscriptions in Aramaic script.

Farḡāna and Čāč. By comparison with these primary civilizations of ancient Central Asia, the settled culture of Farḡāna and Chach (Čāč/Šāš, the Tashkent oasis) developed at a slower pace. Only in the first centuries A.D., in Farḡāna complexes of the early Kugai, do wheel-thrown ceramics begin to predominate over hand-formed pottery. This ceramic is covered with red angob and scratched designs of plants and birds. Small fortified farmsteads on high platforms are also widespread.

The development of the Chach culture represents a curiosity. Here, in the 2nd-1st centuries B.C. arises the culture of Kaunchi, left by the agricultural and herding tribes. Permanent settlements and adobe structures are combined here with graves in catacombs under burial mounds, in other words, with typical nomadic rites. Flat-bottomed hand-molded ceramics predominate; the most characteristic forms are pitchers and mugs with one handle, often with an animal figure, usually that of a ram. In the first centuries A.D. the amount of wheel-thrown ceramics somewhat increased. The center of settlements is usually occupied by oval monumental buildings, possibly temples, sometimes surrounded by a supplementary defensive wall. The only large center was the city of Kanka located in the south of the Tashkent region. In the first centuries of our era it was laid out according to a rectilinear square plan and was surrounded by a wall with internal corridors and occupied an area of 150 hectares. The theory has been put forth that the area in which remains of the Kaunchi type were distributed, and which reached as far as Syr Darya in the Otrar region, was the nucleus of the political formation of the Kangyu, known



from Chinese sources, with Kanka as its capital.

Nomadic tribes. The settled oases of Central Asia maintained a close association with the nomadic tribes, which occupied vast areas on the steppes, semi-desert regions, and mountain pastures. In large part these tribes were the descendants of the steppe-land herders of the Bronze Age. The most general designation for these early tribal groups is the term Sakas, attested to already in ancient Persian inscriptions, where three different groups of Sakas were distinguished: *tayaiy paradraya* (the ones across-the-sea), *haumavargā* (the preparers of *hauma*), and the *tigraxaudā* (wearers of pointed hats).

In Central Asia and Kazakhstan, a whole series of early nomadic complexes from the 7th-5th centuries B.C. has been found. The characteristics common to all of these include burial mounds, hand-molded ceramics, and the so-called “Scythian triad,” a characteristic set of weapons, horse bridles, and artifacts in the Scythian or Scytho-Siberian style. On the eastern shore of the Aral Sea, at the Uigarak burial grounds (O. A. Vishnevskaya, *Kul'tura saksikh plemyon nizov'ev Syrdar'i VII-V vv. do n.e.* [The culture of Saka tribes of the lower reaches of the Syr-Darya in the 7th-5th centuries B.C.], Moscow, 1973, p. 159), under the burial mounds, we find grave pits or interments directly on the ground with a frame superstructure, sometimes reduced to ashes. The buried lie on their backs in a stretched-out position. In male graves, we find horse harnesses, arrows with copper tips, and daggers; in female graves, ornaments, toiletries, sacrificial stone tables. Only in one female grave was a horse harness found. In Semirechye in south Kazakhstan, together with ordinary grave sites, a burial mound of the Saka aristocracy was discovered. In Besshatyr there is a concentration of burial mounds surrounded by rings of stones and with cut-log graves. The embankments of the burial mounds reach a diameter of 100 meters and a height of 17 meters. The graves themselves had been totally plundered already in ancient times. An unplundered wealthy Saka burial mound was excavated in eastern Kazakhstan (Chilikta), where in a roofless, four-walled log structure men and women were found buried accompanied by numerous gold ornaments. Issyk in Semirechye is one such princely burial mound: in it a youth of 17-18 years of age was buried in a tomb built with logs of the Tien-shan fir tree (see K. A. Akishev, *Kurgan Issyk* [The Issyk burial mound], Moscow, 1978, p. 130). The body had been cloaked in rich clothing, covered with gold badges, accompanied by festive weapons including arrows with gold tips, and a high, pointed headpiece. The latter fact confirms the conclusion of researchers who placed the *sakā tigraxaudā* in south



Kazakhstan and north Kirghizia. Individual early nomadic burial mounds have been found in the Zeravshan valley on Sogdian territory. In these too, as in the burial sites of Uigarak, one may find wheel-thrown ceramics of the Yaz Tepe II type, bearing witness to close ties with a settled culture. The early nomadic burial sites of Alai and Pamir are distinguished by a number of specific traits (see B. A. Litvinsky, *Drevnie kochevniki "kryshi mira"* [Ancient nomads of the "roof of the world"], Moscow, 1972, p. 268). Here one often meets with stone rather than earthen embankments, interments in bent position, bodies often covered with ochre. Due to the high altitude, articles made of wood (various vessels and spoons) are often well preserved. There are no imported, wheel-thrown vessels. It is assumed that these groups of early nomads merged with the *sakā haumavargā*.

The migrations of nomadic tribes which began in the second century B.C. significantly complicated the picture we have of the spreading of the ancient nomads, whose burial sites can be found throughout most of Central Asia. Burial mounds with catacombs or linings are widespread. A group of such burial sites in the area between the Surkhan Darya and Kafirnigan rivers (Tulkhar, Aruktau) has been investigated. The interred were placed on their backs and in a stretched-out position, with the head facing north. Iron weapons included swords, daggers, and arrows, typical of many nomadic cultures of Asia. Almost all the ceramic is wheel-thrown and the forms represented are typical of the Bactrian settlements (wine-glasses, pitchers); Bactrian coins (imitating the obols of Eucratides) are also found. It is assumed that these burial sites, which date from the second half of the second century B.C. to the first century B.C., were left by the Yueh-Chi, who destroyed Greco-Bactria (see A. M. Mandel'shtam, *Kochevniki na puti v Indiyu* [Nomads on the path to India], Moscow and Leningrad, 1966, p. 230; idem, *Pamyatniki kochevnikov kushanskogo vremeni v Severnoi Baktrii* [Nomad relics of the Kushan period in north Bactria], Leningrad, 1975, p. 226). Some scholars compare a number of the burial sites of more northerly regions with the artifacts of "Huns" (A. N. Bernshtam, *Kenkol'skiĭ mogil'nik* [The Kenkol' burial site], Leningrad, 1940, p. 34). In the Kenkol burial grounds, a variety of wooden articles were found (dishes, small tables, children's cradles), along with leather shoes and clothes made of silk and wool. Numerous burial grounds with catacomb interments from the 1st-4th centuries A.D. have been studied in Farḡāna and in northern Kirghizia. Often these contain imported articles (an Indian bronze statuette, a glass chalice of Roman origin with a relief showing lion heads) and golden objects with inlays of precious stones



(Shamshi in northern Kirghizia).

The fifth century A.D. and later. Significant changes in the culture of Central Asia take place in the 5th century A.D., when most large urban centers of Bactria, Parthia, Sogdia, and K̅v̅ārazm fall into decline. In this period, small estates increase in number, gradually turning into fortified castles situated on platforms many meters tall. In southern Turkmenistan (which in the 3rd-7th centuries A.D. was included into the Sasanian state as part of Khorasan), the castle of Ak Tepe was unearthed near the station of Artyk. The castle is surrounded by a fortified wall with oval towers. The forms of the ceramic of this period sometimes imitate gala silver vessels. Archeologists found Sasanian silver coins, many bullae with impressions of typical Sasanian gems—with representations of the ruler's bust, animal figures, and Pahlavi inscriptions. Not far from the castle there was a small fire temple. In ancient Marv, after it joined the Sasanians, life in Gyaur Kala went on as before, and only in the 4th-5th centuries is there evidence of a certain decline. Not far from the city there was a necropolis where cleansed bones were preserved in specially-made ceramic ossuaries and in large storage vessels. It is interesting that traditions harking back to the Kushan period were also observed: In the third century, a Buddhist sanctuary was built in Gyaur Kala, which functioned at intervals until the fourth century. Marv was an important center of international trade and cultural contacts. Here Khwarezmian coins were found that had been minted in K̅v̅ārazm; in the layers of the eighth century clay fragments with scribes' exercises in Pahlavi and Sogdian were found along with Arabic ABC's. This may testify to the existence of a special school for scribes, a *dabīrestān*.

Bactria. A transformation of traditions, and a disintegration of the Kushan culture occurs in the 5th-8th centuries in Bactria, now called Tokharistan. Gradually, there appears more of the hand-modeled ceramic, while the typical forms of Kushan tableware disappears. In the fifth century, the shape and size of adobe bricks change; the square bricks of the Central Asian antiquity are replaced by large oblong bricks; starting from the second half of the sixth century mugs with handles become widespread. Quite typical are fortified estate houses. From the fifth century we have the small estate of Kuev-Kurgan, situated on a platform four meters above the ground. Its gala hall was decorated by painted clay statues still influenced by Kushan sculpture. The castle of Balalyk belongs to a somewhat later period; its platform is elevated to ten meters. Here one of the halls has walls decorated with paintings



representing a feast scene and which stylistically anticipate the painting of the Panjikent. In the culture of the seventh and eighth centuries, Sogdian influences are noticeable: cups with a wavy edge that imitate Sogdian forms become widespread, and coins are minted of the Sogdian type-with a square opening in the center. At the same time, Kushan traditions show in the continued importance of Buddhism. There is a Buddhist monastery dating from the 6th-7th centuries, with paintings and wall sculptures, including a figure of the Buddha in nirvana 12 meters long (Adzhina Tepe) and a number of settlements had small Buddhist temples and shrines (Kafir Kala, Kala-i Kafirnigan).

Kvārazm. Here fortified estates and castles become of primary importance; the latter have donjon-towers at the center and external walls decorated with closed half columns. In one of the unearthed castles, the walls of the gala room are decorated with a frieze made of clay reliefs reproducing palmettes and rosettes (Teshik Kala). The decline of ceramic production in the 6th-8th centuries is even more apparent than in Tokharistan. The diversity of types of ceramics is sharply decreased, vessels are produced on a potter's wheel of slow rotation, in a number of sites we find clay-modeled tableware decorated with cuts and appliques. Widely represented are necropoles with ceramic and alabaster ossuaries. In the necropolis near the settlement of Tok Kala a few of the ossuaries are decorated with painting, sometimes depicting a scene of mourning. Often, Khwarezmian inscriptions were added, stating the name of the deceased, and the month and year of his death, according to the Khwarezmian era.

Sogdia. In the 6th-8th centuries, Sogdia gradually moves to occupy the most prominent place in the cultural development of Central Asia. In the 4th-5th centuries there can be found also here signs of a decline of the urban culture and, specifically, of crafts. Later, however, this crisis was successfully overcome, and a special Sogdian culture emerges that becomes a standard for neighboring regions. In Sogdia itself, old centers are revived (Afrāsīāb) and new towns appear (Panjikent). In the Samarkand area, terracottas are still made and large vessels are often made in the form of a human head. Clay vessels are sometimes covered with mica in imitation of the shiny surface of silver tableware. In Afrāsīāb, large residential houses of the 7th-8th centuries have been unearthed, which have gala halls decorated with refined paintings whose style anticipates in some respects medieval miniatures. In one of the halls, a painting represents the arrival in Samarkand of several envoys;



drawings are often accompanied with Sogdian explanatory inscriptions. Especially striking is the scene of a procession on horses and camels with the figure of an elephant in the center (see L. I. Al'baum, *Zhivopis' Afrosiaba* [Paintings from Afrāsīāb], Tashkent, 1975, p. 112). Bright colorful frescoes decorated also the palace of the Bukhar-Khudats in Varakhsha. There, in one of the halls, a painting on a red background shows people riding on elephants attacked by spotted and striped predators.

Large-scale excavations of the ancient Panjikent have demonstrated the high level of Sogdian culture of the 6th-8th centuries (*Zhivopis' drevnego Pyandzhikenta* [Painting of ancient Pendjikent], Moscow, 1954, p. 204; *Skul'ptura i zhivopis' drevnego Pyandzhiketa* [Sculpture and painting of ancient Panjikent], Moscow, 1959, p. 192; *Trudy Tadjikskoi arkheologicheskoi ekspeditsii* [Proceedings of the Tajik archeological expedition] IV, Moscow and Leningrad, 1964, p. 300). The city was tightly built with multi-room houses of two and often even three stories. Along the streets there were small artisan shops and stores. In the citadel there was a palace with a gala hall that was seriously damaged by fire in the 8th century. In the center of the town, two temples were located with large rectangular courtyards in front of them. The suburb of Panjikent had some scattered houses and a necropolis consisting of small clay buildings which contained ceramic ossuaries. Sometimes ossuaries were decorated with applique designs including anthropomorphic figures. Some of the Sogdian ossuaries were real works of art: On their walls human figures were presented in high relief, standing in an arcade with various attributes in hands (Biya Naiman). Among the buildings the quarter of aristocracy stands out; it has more massive houses with gala halls decorated with frescoes. Large paintings are characteristic of Sogdian culture of the 6th-8th centuries. Various plot compositions illustrating heroic narratives are worthy of special notice. They present scenes of battles, feasts, and hunting on horseback. Just as widely spread are large-scale representations of various deities accompanied by small figures of their worshipers. These large panels are sometimes accompanied by small friezes filled with plant ornaments or illustrations of fables and fairy tales. Scenes from animal life indicate acquaintance with the *Pancatantra*. Sogdian paintings and other samples of art work, including carved wood, were found in a number of monuments of early medieval Sogdia (Kalai Kakhkacha [Qal'a-ye Qahqaha], etc.).

Even though urban settlements constitute the better studied part of Sogdia of the 6th-8th centuries, fortified castles and estates are just as widely



represented here as in other regions of Central Asia. Such is the two-story castle of Kalai Mug, where in 1932-33 a part of the archives of the Sogdian ruler Dēvāstič was found. Another castle—that of Filmandar—was unearthed near Panjikent.

Sogdian culture exerted a noticeable influence on the neighboring regions of Fargāna, Chach and Semirechye. In the 6th-8th centuries, urbanization developed actively and the new culture incorporated local traditions as well as Sogdian standards. The castle of Ak Tepe near Tashkent shows a culture in many respects identical to that of the Samarkand region. At the same time, in other Chach monuments the elements of Sogdian culture are combined with the tradition of the local Kaunchi culture. The spreading of the Sogdian cultural models was facilitated by Sogdians settling along the Silk Road, the international trade route to China.

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For non-Soviet literature see also [Central Asia](#).