



## TILLA BULAK

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**TILLA BULAK**, a Late Bronze Age site in the Kugitang district of southern Uzbekistan (lat 66°48' E, long 37°42' N) classified as belonging to the Sapalli Culture, the regional variant of the Namazga VI tradition in the Surchandarya region (Askarov, 1973; 1977; Askarov and Abdullaev, 1983; Askarov and Shirinov 1991; Kohl, 1984, chap. 14; [Figure 1](#): Map of Surchandarya plain with Sapalli Culture sites). The settlement covers an area of ca. 0.4 ha on a steep spur rising in the eastern half of the Pashkhurt plain. On its northwestern side it was bounded by a shallow trench of 1.5 m depth. An accompanying necropolis—whose presence must be assumed due to a very low number of intramural burials—has not yet been discovered. Excavations at Tilla Bulak were begun in 2006 by members of the Tokharistan Archaeological Expedition, Institute of Art History, Uzbek Academy of Science, and were, during 2007-2010, continued in cooperation with the Institute of Near Eastern Archaeology, Munich University. About half of the site's surface area has been investigated archeologically ([Figure 2](#): Topographic plan of Tilla Bulak with architectural remains of the younger building phase). Preliminary reports have been submitted to *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran und Turan* (Kaniuth, 2007; 2009; 2010; 2011). An Internet presence has been established at [Forschungsprojekt Tilla Bulak](#).

The site's stratigraphy is marked by two main building horizons, of which the earlier one was destroyed in a conflagration that apparently engulfed the entire hamlet. From rooms of this phase, complete household inventories have been recovered which will be of enormous help in understanding the rural



economic system. The buildings of the upper horizon, erected mostly on the walls of the preceding phase, were opened on a larger scale, supplying information mainly on the architectural layout of the settlement.

A series of 20 radiocarbon dates has been run from all strata, and the occupation can be dated from the mid-20th to 19th centuries BCE (this is the result of analysis from short-lived samples; only several wood samples published in the preliminary reports go back into the late 3rd millennium BCE).

Tilla Bulak can be described as a small rural settlement without any discernible functional interior differentiation: all rooms excavated were used as habitation quarters and/or for food processing purposes. The site's economy was based on agriculture (with *hordeum vulgare* and *triticum* dominating, and *fabaceae*, *parthenocissus* and possibly *vitis vinifera* present) and small stock breeding (*caprini* 80 percent; bovines 9 percent; wild species 9 percent, according to a preliminary count).

The industry mostly confirms this picture: Hand mills and pounding stones make up the majority of stone artifacts. The pottery, on the other hand, is the same as on other sites of the Late Bronze Age Sapalli Culture and consists of 90 percent wheel-made fine wares. They appear to have been manufactured locally. The pottery dates to the initial phase of the Sapalli Culture (LB Ia, after Teufer, 2005), when southern Uzbekistan was initially populated by settlers from the south or southeast (northern Afghanistan or eastern Turkmenistan).

Of particular importance is the evidence for seal use. For the first time in Bronze Age Central Asia, the use of wood in the production of seals (or amulets) has been documented in addition to stone and bronze. One seal (Figure 3: Stone seal TB-KF-557) stands out by its enormous diameter of 8 cm and the mythological scene carved on its front. While the use of seals for administrative purposes could not be substantiated at Tilla Bulak (or on any other Sapalli Culture site), the sealing of pottery vessels with metal compartmented seals (Baghestani 1997) is, albeit rarely, attested.



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