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# Urban Cultures of Central Asia from the Bronze Age to the Karakhanids

Learnings and conclusions from new archaeological  
investigations and discoveries

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# The Ancient Settlement of Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala in the Eastern Aral Region

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**Abstract:** This paper describes the archaeological research undertaken at the ancient settlement of Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala in the eastern Aral region (north-western Kazakhstan). One of the largest monuments in the eastern Aral region of the Syr Darya River delta, it is known to have been occupied from the first centuries CE to the 11th century. Its geographical coordinates are N45°31'05,38" E61°27'30,46".

After surveying the history of research in the Aral region, the paper considers the geographical extent of the Oghuz state, and identifies several of the known Oghuz towns, notably the new and old "capitals" Yangikent (Dzhankent) and Khuwara (Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala). Next it describes in some detail the surviving indications of building construction and urban layout, and then the finds of ceramics, coins and metalware revealed by recent excavations at the ancient site of Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala (a town which emerged during the epoch of the Kangju state), and considers to what extent the site reflects on the broader debate on the relationship between nomadism and urbanisation in ancient Central Asia.

**Keywords:** Kangju state, Oghuz state, Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala, medieval town, citadel, *shahristan*, *rabad*, Oghuz, cattle-breeding, agriculture, town handicrafts.

**Резюме:** Статья содержит информацию об истории археологических исследований древнего городища КескенКуюк-кала. Городище является одним из наиболее крупных памятников Восточного Приаралья, расположенного в дельте Сырдарьи. Датируется оно первыми веками н.э.–XI в. Географические координаты N45°31'05,38" E61°27'30,46".

В статье приводится историографический обзор археологических исследований древнего городища КескенКуюк-калы, отождествленного с городом Джуvara – Хуvara, известным в арабских средневековых письменных источниках. Дается характеристика застройке города, городскому жилищу, археологическим и нумизматическим находкам, полученным во время раскопок на его территории.

Город на месте городища КескенКуюк-кала сформировался в эпоху государства Кангюй и продолжал жить в период существования в Приаралье Государства огузов.

**Ключевые слова:** Государство Кангюй, Государство огузов, КескенКуюк-кала, Хуvara, средневековый город, цитадель, шахристан, рабад, помещения, огузы, скотоводство, земледелие, городские ремесла.

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1 Karl Baipakov passed away in 2018 before he could review the final proofs.

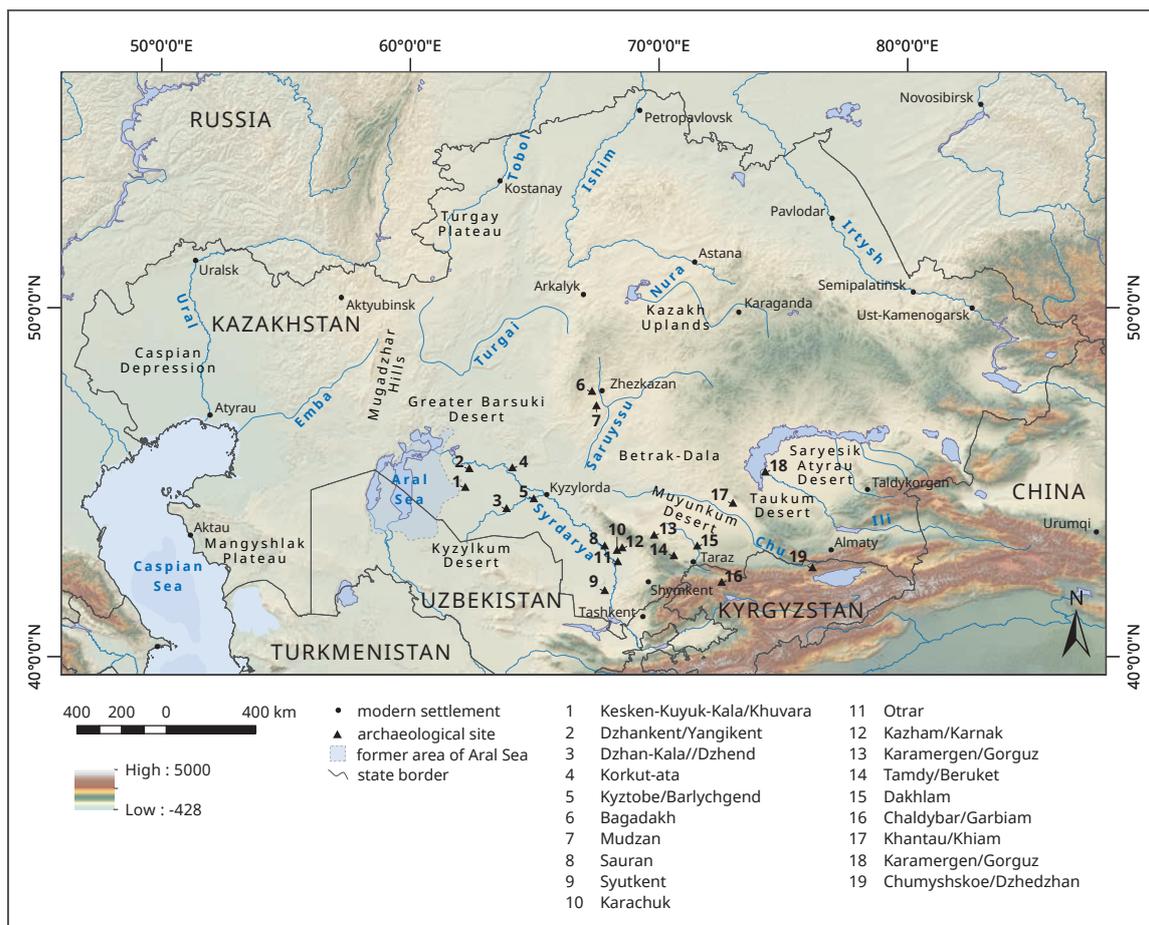


Fig. 1: Map of Oghuz towns (drawing by K. Baipakov and S. Rutishauser, © IAW, University of Bern).

## 1 Introduction

Historically, the Syr Darya River – called the Iaxartes by the Greeks, Yinchu-Uguz by medieval authors, and Sayhūn by early Arab writers – lay on the border of two worlds, southern Turan and northern Iran, a region of both cattle-herders and farmers, migrant peoples of the steppe and town dwellers.

Geographically, eastern Aral, the Kazakhstan part of the Aral region, is an alluvial plain adjacent to the Aral Sea. It is broadly triangular, stretching 400 km east-west and 200–250 km north-south. To the north and north-east it is bordered by the modern channel of the Syr Darya River, to the west by the Aral Sea, and to the south by the sands of the Kyzylkum desert. The plain was formed by the constant shifting of the numerous ancient channels of the Syr Darya as alluvium gradually formed (LEVINA/PRIČNIKOV 1991: 155–156), which over time led to areas of the delta drying out. Over the huge territory of the plain, four systems of ancient Syr Darya channels have been identified, the Inkar Darya, Zhana Darya, Kuwan Darya and Prakuwan Darya, which mostly flowed latitudinally from east to west,

spreading radially from the Syr Darya south of Kyzylorda.

It was a region where different cultures of the Great Eurasian Steppe came into contact and where different peoples co-existed, a “crossroad of the migration and trade routes”. For S.P. Tolstov, the celebrated scholar of Khorosm and the entire Aral region, Aral was a “centre of ethnogenesis” (TOLSTOV 1947a: 308–310).

## 2 The history of archaeological study in the Aral region and south Kazakhstan

The archaeological study of the region began in the second half of the 19th century, after it had become part of the Russian Empire. In 1867, the famous orientalist P.I. Lerkh travelled there at the behest of the Russian Archaeological Commission. He described the remains of the medieval towns he discovered and carried out small excavations at Dzhan-Kent, though the most valuable part of his report is

his summary of written references to the medieval towns and monuments of the region (LERH 1870).

The vivid accounts of the antiquities of a newly discovered, almost unknown, region published by scholars and travellers led to the Russian public taking a keen interest in the history and art of Turkestan. The famous art critic V.V. Stasov put the region's archaeological monuments on the same level as those of well-known world cultures and asked: "Why should the ancient town near Dzhanakent not be our Pompeii?" (STASOV 1894: 192).

Also significant at this time was the work carried out by members of the Turkestan group of amateur archaeologists established in Tashkent in 1895, which brought together representatives of the military, government officials and those interested in the archaeology and history of Turkestan (KALLAUR 1901a: 69–78; 1903: 59–69; 1900: 6–19; 1901b: 98–101; 1901c: 14–17). Particularly valuable were the studies of medieval town by V.A. Kallaur, A.A. Divaev and A. Simonov (DIVAEV 1896: 193–194; 1905: 40–42; SIMONOV 1900: 96–101).

In the early 20th century, the monuments of lower reaches of the Syr Darya attracted the attention of the famous orientalist and archaeologist A.Yu. Yakubovskiy, whose study of the town of Sygnak is still one of the best historical/topographical studies (ĀKUBOVSKIY 1929: 123–159). Later, the Khoresmian archaeology/ethnographical expedition of AS USSR (KhAEE AS USSR) (Khorezm Archaeological and Ethnographic Expedition of the USSR Academy of Sciences), headed by S.P. Tolstov, began investigating the lower reaches of the Amu Darya, Syr Darya-Oks and Iaxartes rivers, as well as Syr Darya and its ancient channels, including the Kuwan Darya, Inkar Darya, and others.

Thanks to the long and fruitful work of this expedition, the Aral Sea area is now widely recognised as a region with a unique ancient and medieval history and culture that played an important role in the historical development of Eurasia (TOLSTOV 1948a; 1948b; 1962; 2005; ANDRIANOV 1969; VINOGRADOV 1981; ITINA/ĀBLONSKIY 2001; LEVINA 1971; 1996; VAJNBERG 1999; RAPOPORT/NERAZIK/LEVINA 2000).

The prominent Russian orientalist V.V. Bartol'd (BARTOL'D 1963a) made an important contribution to the study of Aral region history through his research on written sources. A range of other researchers have also made significant contributions to the historical studies of the Aral region (MARGULAN 1950; AGEEVA/PACEVIČ 1958: 3–215; ANDRIANOV (ED.) 1962; AKIŠEV/BAIPAKOV/ERZAKOVIČ 1987; BELENICKIJ/BENTOVICH/BOL'ŠAKOV 1973; AGADŽANOV 1969; PIŠULINA 1969: 5–49; AHINŽANOV 1989).

Archaeological research in the area resumed in 2005, supported by the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation, and undertaken by the Kyzylorda State University, the Margulan Institute of Ar-

chaeology of the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of Russian Academy of Sciences.

In 2011, the archaeology department of Tübingen University (Germany) also became active in the study of the region, conducting research mostly at the sites of Dzhanakent, Chirik Rabat, and Balandy (ARŽANCEVA ET AL. 2010; ARŽANCEVA/TAŽEKEEV (ED.) 2014; BISENOV ET AL. (ED.) 2013; BAIPAKOV/VOYAKIN/ILIN 2012: 22–44; BAIPAKOV 2013: 163–174).

At present, importantly, research on ancient and medieval urbanisation in the Aral region is closely linked to the study of the ecology of the area. The "Aral Sea crisis" – the rapid and extensive drying out of this inland sea – has attracted the concerned attention of scientists and the wider public internationally. It prompts several questions: Why has the crisis come about? How have people and the natural environment in the Aral region interacted in the distant and recent past? What human actions have had a major impact on the region? The answers require a close study of historical economic activity, above all the development of irrigated agriculture in the region. A multi-disciplinary approach is required to evaluate the modern ecological situation. Archaeological research became particularly significant in relation to this issue with the discovery of two ancient settlements dated to the second half of the 14th century on the now-exposed bed of the Aral Sea (LEVINA 1996; ANDRIANOV (ED.) 1991; BAIPAKOV 2007a: 97; BAIPAKOV 2012a: 64–68, 166–170).

One of the important archaeological issues of the Aral region, and of Central Asia as a whole, remains the "Oghuz question", i.e. the important historical and cultural role played by the Oghuz (Guz) and Turkmen tribes in Eurasia (AGADŽANOV 1969: 5–7; 1973). They remained in the territory of Kazakhstan from the 9th to the 12th century, before leaving the area to move to the south of Central Asia, to Iran and Afghanistan, the Caucasus region, and Asia Minor, where they joined the Turkmen, Azerbaijani and Turkic peoples. The tribes of Oghuz origin also interacted with Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Karakalpaks, Bashkirs and Tatars (AKIŠEV ET AL. (ED.) 1996: 3, 18–320).

### 3 The extent of Oghuz settlements

S.P. Tolstov began studying the Oghuz towns of the Aral region in 1945, and his important paper "The Towns of the Oghuz" (TOLSTOV 1947b: 55–102) is still relevant.

Historical and geographical information provided by early Arab writers, including al-Idrīsī, al-Iṣṭaḥrī ("Kitāb Rūḡār"), al-Marwardī and al-Bīrūnī allow us to define the approximate borders of the lands

of the Oghuz in the 10th century CE. Oghuz tribes inhabited the steppes of Kazakhstan from the south Balkhash region in the east to the lower reaches of the Volga River in the west (AGADŽANOV 1969: 23). There were concentrations of the Oghuz in the Aral area, the north Caspian region, and in the middle reaches of the Syr Darya River. Separate groups of Oghuz inhabited Semirechye (Zhetysu), and some settled on the edges of the Shash (Čäč) and Isphidzhab regions.

In the 10th century, the majority of Oghuz tribes migrated to the steppes around the Aral and Caspian Sea. The contemporaneous Arab historian and geographer al-Mas'ūdī noted that in the steppes near the “Khazar” (Caspian) Sea, there were many nomadic camps of Oghuz, while in the 10th-century anonymous geographical work *ḥudūd al-'ālam* we read that “there is said to be a settlement of a group of Turks of the Oghuz tribes” on “Siyakkuh”, the mountain to the north of the Caspian Sea (Siyakkuh has been identified with the Mangistau peninsula). The “Hudud al-Alam” also relates that to the north of the Caspian Sea, the Oghuz reached as far as the Volga River. At the time, the western borders of Oghuz sites and fortresses reached as far as the southern Urals and the Lower Volga region; along this western limit, the Oghuz tribes bordered not only the Bashkirs, but also the Khazars and Burtases of the Volga region (AGADŽANOV 1969: 49–85).

Al-Idrīsī describes the towns of the Oghuz as follows: “The towns of Oghuz are numerous; they stretch out one after the other to the north and to the east. They have high mountains and fortified fortresses where the leaders shelter and where they store their stocks of food. There are people (appointed by leaders), who protect this land [...] Their [...] main town is Khiam. There they find refuge and shelter with their belongings [...] it is an unassailable fortress on the top of a mountain which is difficult climb [...] and it is fortified [...] Both Khiam to the north and Dzhandan to the south of the river are small towns strongly fortified, and both are equal [...] On the bank of this river (Magra, or Marga) there is situated the mountain with high peak with more than one thousand springs coming from it which all flow into the Magra River. Two towns like fortresses are situated on the top of this mountain; the name of one of them is Nudzhah, the other Badagah, and the distance between them is one day's walk. There are two towns at the foothills of the aforementioned mountain, the name of one of them is Daranda, the other Darku. Daranda is to the west of Darku and the distance between them is a three days' travel. They are two small towns where are markets, handicrafts, and excellent goods, the both of them are strongly fortified and unapproachable. The snow is always there; inhabitants of these countries gather their crops unripe and dry them in smoke and under the tent: this is because of deep cold and the rarity of

dry days...” The towns Ruzan (Rudan), Garbian and the “Old Town of the Oghuz” are mentioned later (VOLIN/ROMASKEVIČ/ĀKUBOVSKIJ (ED.) 1939: 311–312).

The 11th-century Arab scholar Maḥmūd al-Kāšgārī cites the Oghuz towns of Sauran, Karachuk, Sygnak, Syutkent and Karnak (VOLIN/ROMASKEVIČ/ĀKUBOVSKIJ (ED.) 1939: 220–222). He notes that “the Oghuz who live in towns and who do not move to another places, and who do not fight, are called *yatuk*” (VOLIN/ROMASKEVIČ/ĀKUBOVSKIJ (ED.) 1939: 311).

In the lower reaches of the Syr Darya, the Oghuz lived in the towns of Dzhend, Yangikent and Khora (BARTOL'D 1963b: 558–561; AGADŽANOV 1969: 76, 133–135, 176–178).

The 10th-century Arab geographer Muḥammad al-Muqaddasī provides information about the Turkmens of the Beruket-Baladzha area (AGADŽANOV 1969: 49–85; BAIPAKOV 2007b: 35–61).

However, there is also some evidence that the Oghuz did not inhabit towns at all. In the *ḥudūd al-'ālam* we read: “The Oghuz do not have any one town, while the people living in felt yurts are numerous” (VOLIN/ROMASKEVIČ/ĀKUBOVSKIJ (ED.) 1939: 211).

Trying to reconcile these contradictory claims, V.V. Bartol'd considered that “Oghuz towns were formed not by the Oghuz themselves, who were nomads, but by others, including the Khoresmians; but some of the Oghuz, who had acquired a less nomadic way of life, settled in the towns and lived there” (BARTOL'D 1963b: 561).

For S.P. Tolstov, the economy of the Aral region tribes, including that of the Oghuz, was a complex one that combined nomadic animal husbandry with agriculture, in nother words with a settled and urban way of life (TOLSTOV 1947b: 99–100). This view is now widely accepted.

In the view of the author of the present paper, the “towns of the Oghuz” were established and developed long before the Oghuz and Turkmens themselves arrived, though we can speak only of the Oghuz period of their existence, when they dominated the region politically and some of them settled in the towns (BAIPAKOV 1986: 106, 121).

## 4 Oghuz towns in the Aral region

In “Kitāb Rūḡār”, al-Idrīsī mentions, while describing the Oghuz region, “Old Guzia”: “Between Khiyam and Old Guzia [the distance] is four days' travel south and west. Old Guzia is located in a region bounded by the western spurs of the Tian Shan mountains, the Shu River and the Karatau mountains.” By Old Guzia was meant, no doubt, the former “capital” of

the Oghuz tribes, which we can assume was the first residence of the Oghuz leaders.

Al-Idrīsī also mentions “New Guzīa”, the political centre of the Oghuz state, located in the lower reaches of the “Šāš River” (Syr Darya), where the leader of the Oghuz resided during the winter. New Guzīa is identical with Yangikent, whose other names in Arab and Persian sources include Yanykent, al-Qariya al-ḥadiṭa, Dih-i Nau, Shekhrkent, all meaning “New Town”. The appearance of these names in the sources is most likely connected with the Oghuz attainment of political hegemony in the region. It took 10 days to travel from Yangikent to Khorezm, 20 days to Farab. Boats carried grain from Maverannahr to Yangikent along the Syr Darya River.

In the medieval Arabic sources, one of the first references to Yangikent is in the works of the 12th-century writer Ibn Rushd (Averroes), who in describing the eastern shore of Lake Khorezm, refers to the “shah of the New Town.”

The 10th-century Arab writer Ibn Ḥauqal provides interesting information about Yangikent in his historical/geographical works, where he states directly that the “New Settlement” is the capital of the Oghuz state. Yangikent, in his words, was “the largest settlement” in the lower reaches of the Syr Darya River (BARTOL'D 1963a: 235). Yangikent has also been identified with Dzhankent, a name it preserves to this day (Fig. 1).

The choice of New Guzīa (Yangikent) as the political centre of Oghuz power was based on its advantageous geographical location, which allowed it to link the large agricultural oases of Kazakhstan and Central Asia, acting as a corridor along which flowed trade between the Oghuz steppes and Khorasm, Maverannahr and Khorasan. It was located on the important caravan route through the Kimak steppes to Sarysu-Kengir valley, Ishim and Nura and the southern Urals.

As we know from written sources, in 1219 Yangikent was captured by Mongol troop headed by Dzhuchi (Jochi) Khan, the eldest son of Genghis Khan. Unlike the towns of Sygnak, Ashnas and Barchkent, which were destroyed because their citizens resisted the Mongols, Yangikent surrendered without a fight and so was saved (BARTOL'D 1963a: 483).

Also according to the written sources, not far from Yangikent was the town of Khuwara (Dzhuwara, Khora). Now that the location of Yangikent has been fixed, the position of Khuwara can be determined with greater confidence. The author of the present paper once placed it near the Mausoleum of Korkut Ata (BAIPAKOV 1986: 28). Now, however, the author believes that it has been convincingly shown that the town corresponds to one of the ancient “marsh settlements”, namely Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala (BAIPAKOV 2007b: 52). This site, which features the remains of a large town with a complex topography, has provid-

ed an extensive quantity of finds which indicate that the settlement flourished from the first centuries CE to the 11th century (LEVINA 1971: 76–89).

Under the name Chauriana, Khawrana/Khuwara it is mentioned by the Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus, in the last quarter of the 4th century, as being located in Lower Syr Darya, together with the towns of Aspabota and Spaga (ZUEV 1995: 42–43).

The fact that Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala/Khuwara was once the capital was confirmed by the discovery there of a “new type” of silver coin, modelled on the Aphrighidian drachma but with Arabic inscriptions on both sides. On one of these coins, numismatists have identified the mint (inscription on the coin: X.r.v/Dzh.r.) and have concluded that this is the name of the capital of the Oghuz state of Syr Darya, Dzhuwara (Khuwara) (GONČAROV/NASTIČ 2013: 89–91).

On the basis of an analysis of the complex of ceramics collected at Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala, L.M. Levina, following S.P. Tolstov, has concluded that in the 10th to the 12th centuries CE, the “marsh towns” became Oghuz, being the settled, urbanised component of the mixed livestock, farming and fishing economy of the ancient Turkic tribes that created a unique (in part urban) culture. Moreover, Levina believes that the culture of these “marsh towns” was based on the Jetyasar culture, which was in turn influenced by the culture of Semirechie, the Middle Syr Darya and Khorezm (LEVINA 1971: 76–89).

## 5 Research grant from the Society for the Exploration of EurAsia

From 2006 onwards, Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala has been systematically studied by the scientific company Archaeological Expertise Ltd. Work on the site has produced new and important finds. From 2008 to 2018, research was financed by the Society for the Exploration of EurAsia, Switzerland.<sup>2</sup>

The ancient settlement of Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala is broadly oval in plan, measuring 830 × 710 m, and rises above the surrounding terrain by 2–5 m. It consists of a citadel, *shahristan* (inner city) and two *rabads* (areas for craftsmen), and was surrounded by an outer wall that has been preserved to a height of around 2–2.5 m (Fig. 2).

In the north-east corner of the site, the square *shahristan* (210 × 210 m) stands 3 m above the gen-

<sup>2</sup> The author of this paper and the specialists who studied the Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala site would like to express their gratitude to the board of the Society for the Exploration of EurAsia, and personally to Dr Christoph Baumer, for the financial support given to this project, and for their contribution to the study and preservation of the cultural heritage of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

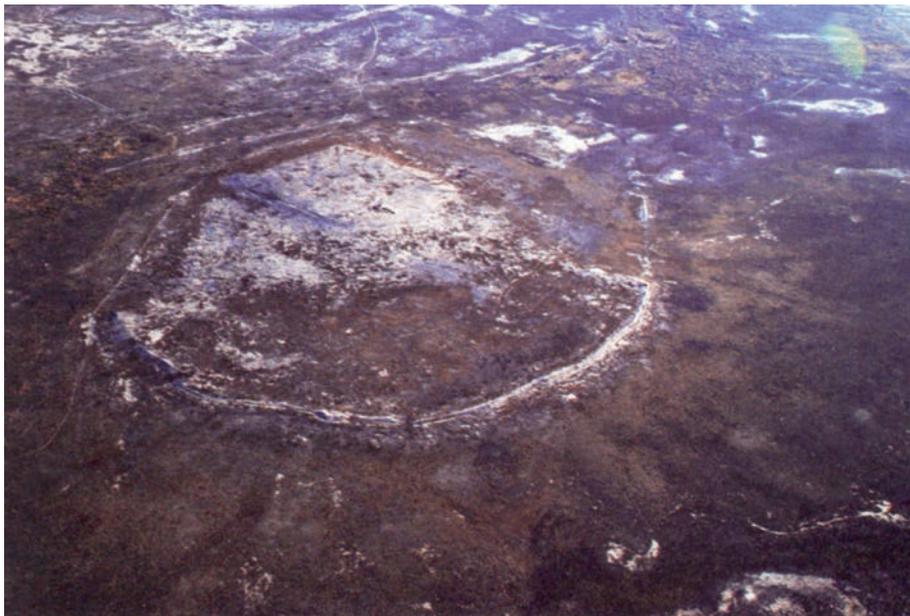


Fig. 2: Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala. Aerial photograph (photo by D. Sorokin).

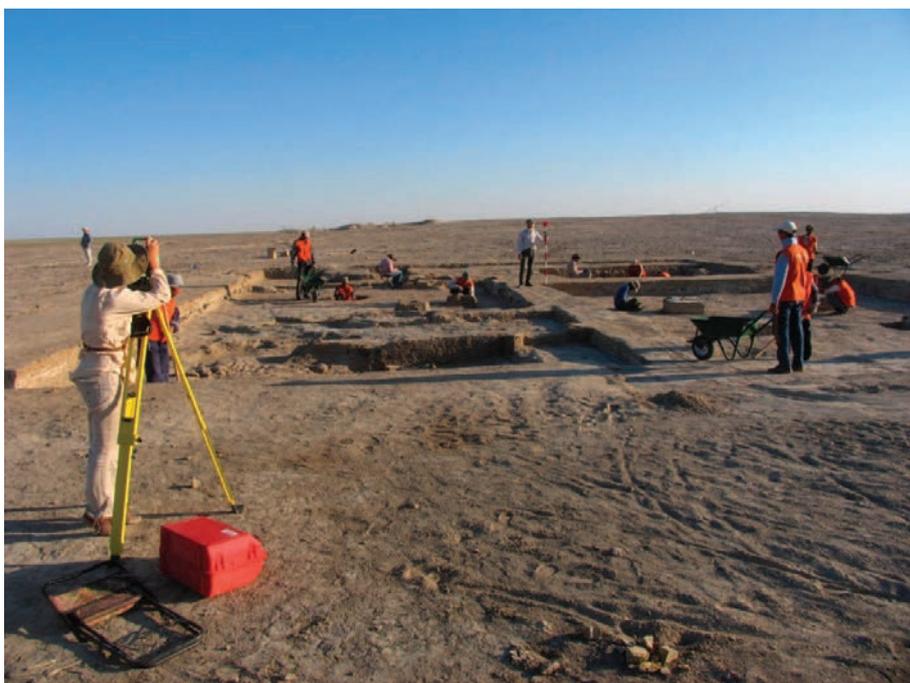


Fig. 3: Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala. General view of the excavation (photo by D. Voyakin).

eral level of the site. It is traversed by a street about 3 m wide from which run curving alleys that divide the square of the citadel into areas that differ in size and shape (Fig. 3).

In the south-west corner of the *shahristan* is the citadel, which is 60 × 60 m and the base of which is 1 m higher than the *shahristan*.

*Rabad 1*, separated from *Rabad 2* by the wall running north-south, is situated to the south, the east and the south-east of the *shahristan*.

The main focus of study was a section 21 × 63 m in the eastern corner of the *shahristan*, in which, according to aerial photographs, two streets crossed. On the surface, signs of walls and premises can be observed. In total, 36 premises were partially or totally documented, the largest part of the complex.

Stratigraphy revealed three cultural layers:

- The first (upper) destroyed layer is loose loamy ground, grey and brown in colour and containing the remains of broken raw and

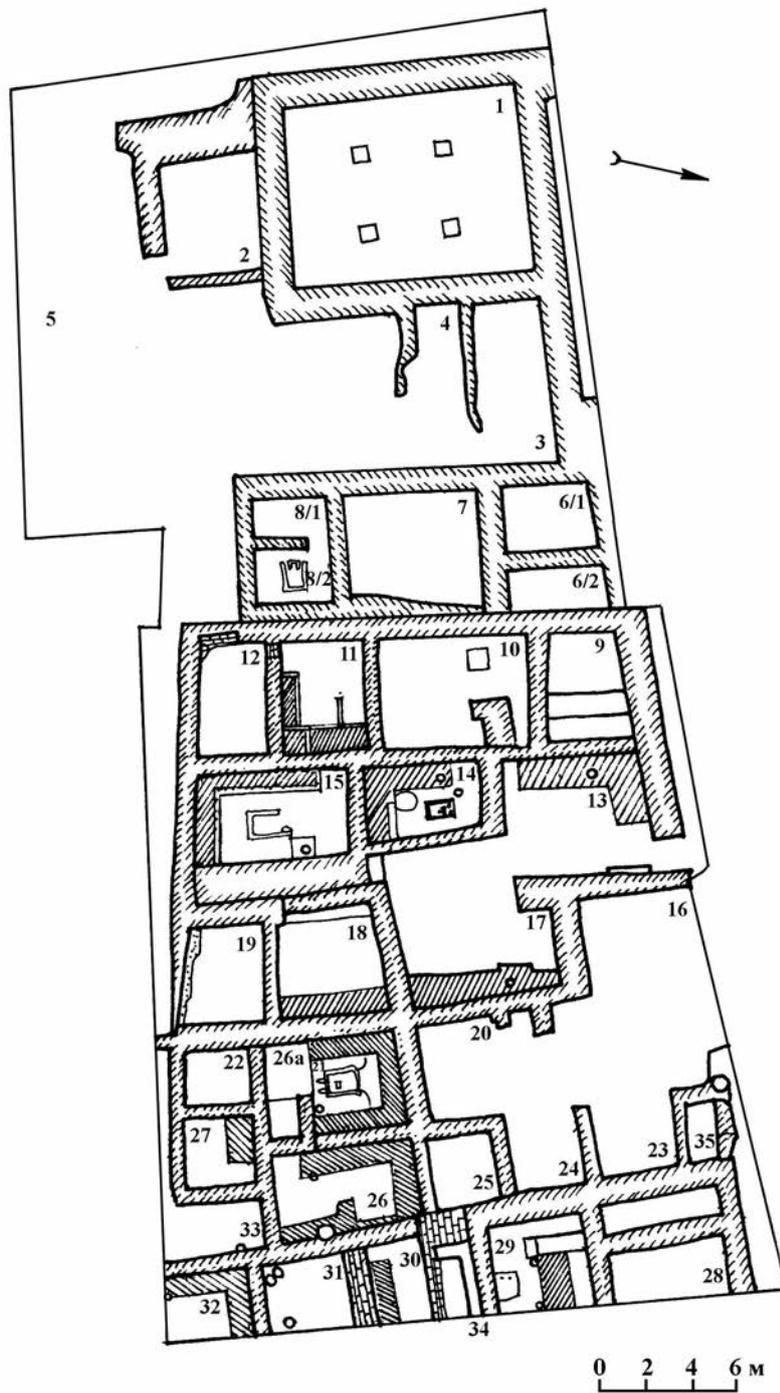


Fig. 4: Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala. The Temple and the subterranean portion of the excavation.  
(drawing by M. Gurulev).

burnt bricks. The depth of the layer is uneven, varying from 5 to 20 cm. Chronologically, it relates to the early 13th century.

- The second layer contains the remains of badly preserved construction. Chronologically, it relates to the 12th century.
- In the third layer are the well-preserved remains of constructions in height from 50 to

70 cm, which is equivalent to the depth of the layer. Chronologically, it relates to the 10th to 11th centuries.



Fig. 5: Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala Site. Remains of the Temple (photo by D. Voyakin).



Fig. 6: Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala. The Premise 14 with the altar (photo by D. Sorokin).

## 6 Excavations at Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala

As stated above, the main excavation focussed on the eastern sector of the *shahristan*. The topography reveals the main street, from which small streets and alleys radiate in different directions, dividing the square *shahristan* into differently sized constructions and grounds. A complex of buildings was identified and excavated, and interpreted as a temple complex – a residential development consisting of eight premises located along the main and “western” streets.

### The Temple

At the centre of the Temple is Premise 1, a sanctuary covering 100 sq m; rectangular in form, it extends north to south (Fig. 4). This contained four square bases of raw bricks which once supported wooden columns. On the eastern side of the hall with columns are two *aiwans*. In Premise 1 a *khumcha* (vessel) was found, and at the wall pits were cleared (Fig. 5).

On the south side of Premise 1 is Premise 2, where during the excavations layers of white ash were discovered. Apparently, the room was intended for storing ash that accumulated during the burning



Fig. 7: Dzhan kent. Decoration of the altar. Fragment (photo by T. Smagulov).

of offerings on the altar fire. In Premise 2, a cluster of ceramic vessels was found on the floor, lying on a reed mat. On the floor of Premise 2, an altar decorated with stylised sheep heads (protomai) was unearthed. Behind this was Premise 5, which extends west to east. Between Premises 2 and 5 there was a passage that leads to the courtyard of the Temple.

In this courtyard, which adjoined Premise 2 in the east, there was an altar platform on which a floor altar was found. Near the altar lay a *khumcha* (storage vessel) with two loop-shaped handles, decorated with a delicate stucco moulding in the form of flowers. Near the altar were accumulations of the bones of domestic and wild animals: camel, cow, sheep, goat, and wild boar. These, it seems, are the remains of sacrifices.

In the yard adjoining the eastern side of the hall with columns (Premise 1), there was a square with two *tandyr*s (floor ovens) dug in the floor and covered by raw bricks.

From west to east along the wall of Premise 1 there are two *aiwans* leading to the yard of the Temple. Supported by columns, the roof in the central hall was made of reeds, the remains of which were found on the floor. The walls of the temple were completely plastered with clay.

To the east of the hall with columns there are three premises (6, 7 and 8), separated by a wall, that were used during cult ceremonies.

Premise 6, which has been conventionally called the "Tabernacle", is rectangular in plan (6 × 4.2 m) and is divided into two compartments by a wall.

To the south of the "Tabernacle" is Premise 7, measuring 5.57 × 6.3 m, which was filled with ash. In Premise 10, which is next to Premise 7 and which measures 6.15 × 4.2 m, an altar was excavated.

### Household 1

Household 1, which is situated to the east of the Temple, consists of nine premises (Fig. 8). Premise 9, which is trapezoidal in plan, is situated in the north-eastern part of the excavation. Inside the premise, on the eastern wall is a *sufa*. During the clearing of the premise, fragments of the stucco moulding of a ceramic mug with ornamented walls was discovered, while in the northern part of the premise a ceramic mug with a loop-shaped handle was found.

Premise 10 (6.75 × 5.1 m) is situated to the south of Premise 9. At the centre, a round, calcined area 57 × 64 cm was observed. In the north-western part of the premise, there is the base of a column 85 × 85 cm made of raw bricks that measure 32 × 18 × 6 cm. Its height from the level of floor is 23 cm. Three to four rows of masonry reaching a height of 23 cm from the floor were discovered. In the eastern part of the premise, adjoining the wall, there is a platform measuring 2.04 × 1.8 m paved with raw bricks. In a pit on this platform a pot made on a wheel was found.

Premise 11 (5.43 × 3.75 m) is situated between the premise with columns and the *aiwan* (Premise 12). There were found fragments of thick-walled red clay vessel and stucco moulding jug with a vertical, loop-shaped handle. To the south of Premise 11, there is an *aiwan* that is rectangular in plan, measuring 5.43 × 3.1 m. To the east of this *aiwan* is Premise 15 (6.4 × 5.7 m.), in which there is an altar and an L-shaped *sufa*. In the north-eastern part of this premise, between the northern walls of households 1 and 2, there is the passage 1.1 m long and 9.5 m wide leading to the main street.



Fig. 8: Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala. Household 1: Niches in the wall (photo by R. Ilin).

Premise 14 (5.55 × 3.75 m) is located in the eastern part of the household. The southern and western parts of the premise are occupied by a Γ-shaped *sufa*, on which were fragments of ceramic vessels. In the center of the premise, on the floor, there is an altar built of rectangular raw bricks. In the northern part of the premise was another altar, decorated by two sculptural stylized images of rams (protomai), whose heads are turned in opposite directions. A similar altar with ram protomai was also found at Dzhan Kent (Fig. 7).

On the altar was discovered a mug with loop-shaped handle stood upside down. In Premise 21 there is one more rectangular altar (7.1 × 4 m).

To the west of Premise 21 near the wall there is Premise 18, which has a *sufa* of raw bricks measuring 40 × 20 × 6 cm, and also Premise 19.

Premise 17 (5.65 × 7.2 m) is situated in the eastern part of household.

Premise 18 (5.60 × 4.90 m) is on the western side, separated from Premises 15 and 13 by a wall made of raw bricks. In the north-eastern part of Premise 18, a passage leads from it to the *aiwan*.

In Premise 19 (4.70 × 3.90 m) there are no signs of constructions. The southern wall, made of raw bricks, had been reconstructed twice. Earlier building work has been detected under layers.

In the centre of Premise 21 (7.1 × 4 m) there is an altar that sits on a hard floor of rammed earth. The surface of the floor around the altar is calcined and covered with a layer of soot. In the premise there is also a Π-shaped *sufa*, on whose edges, strengthened by a row of raw bricks, fragments of a ceramic vessel were found.

## Household 2

Household 2, which is situated in the eastern part of the complex, comprises 18 premises and areas of various functions. During excavation, two construction periods were revealed. In the late construction period, the courtyard of the household was replanned, the buildings being backfilled and levelled with ash and household rubbish. A similar situation can be observed in Premise 29, where the main area with altar and a wall with niches was divided into four independent sectors. The second premise with an altar was built anew. From the northern wall of the premise there was a wall that directly faced the main street. The yard measures 6.40 × 5.70 m. Behind the yard there are the *aiwans*.

The centre of the home (north of Premise 26a) was a premise with an altar and a “Π”-shaped *sufa* extending along the northern, eastern and western walls. The *sufa* is made of raw bricks, its surface plastered. Near the eastern edge of the *sufa*, a *khumcha* filled with millet was dug into the floor.

Behind the premise with the altar was a premise with a *sufa*, where clusters of various ceramic vessels were found. This premise, it seems, housed utensils used for both domestic and cultic purposes.

Along the northern, western and eastern walls of Premise 26, there is a *sufa*, on the surface of which was found a *khumcha* and a pot. To the south of this premise are Premises 32 and 33. In one of the premises, a *khumcha* used as an oven was dug into the floor.

In the premise with an altar there was a “Π”-shaped *sufa* along a wall with arched niches that are covered in a thick layer of plaster. Near both the *sufa*

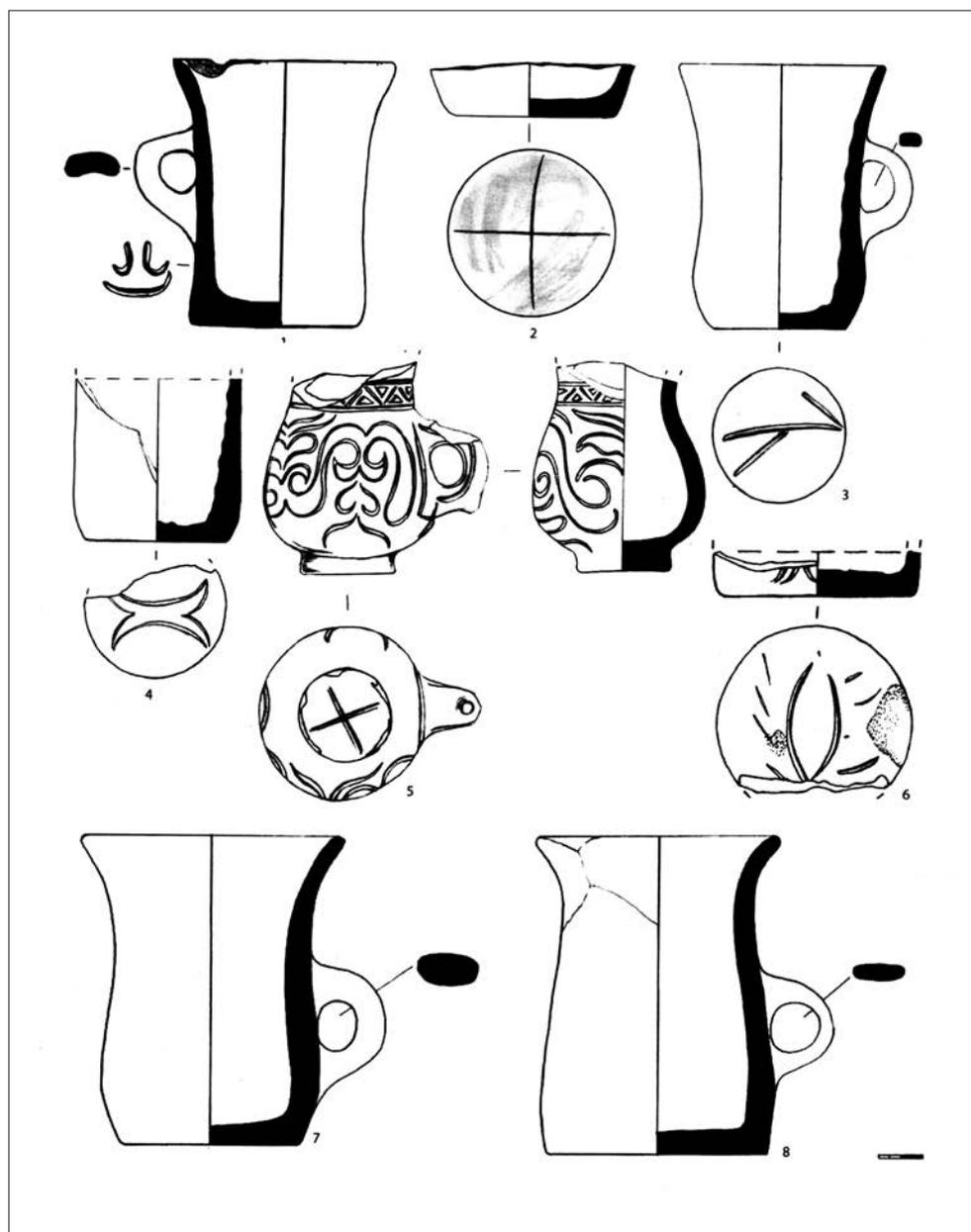


Fig. 9: Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala. Ceramic mugs (drawings by A. Kuz'minova).

and the wall with niches, a *khum* was found in the dense raw-brick floor.

### Ceramics

The vast majority of finds at Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala are ceramics. They can be divided into two groups: hand-formed and wheel-made.

The dishes are made mostly of red clay, but there are also examples of grey clay. Tests revealed the presence of impurities such as chamotte (grog) and sand (quartz). The dishes are decorated with vegetal patterns (shoots, leaves) or geometrical forms. The pitchers are decorated with straight or wavy concentric lines.

Hand-formed dishes are represented by pots, cauldrons, mugs, *khums*, *khumchas*, covers, and *das-tarkhans*.

The dishes are decorated with vegetal and geometric patterns. Among the fragments are stylised zoomorphic necks and handles. Most dishes are covered with a red, brown, white or dark-cherry engobe. Some crockery was polished.

The ceramics made on a potter's wheel are of red clay, the paste being well mixed. Admixtures of sand and mica, gypsum and mica, gypsum and chamotte (grog) have been identified. They are represented by jugs decorated by carved vegetal and geometrical ornamentation. Engobe streaks of red, reddish,

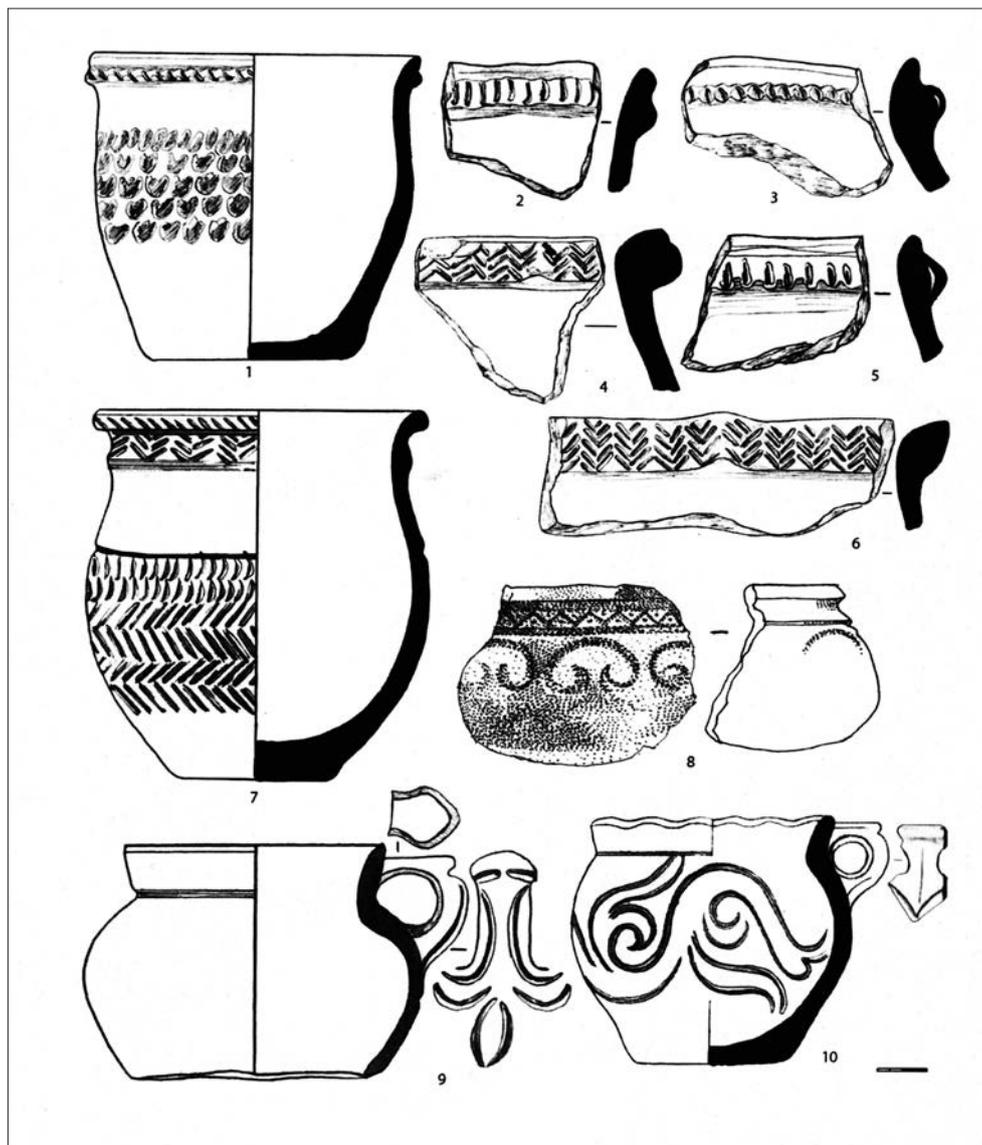


Fig. 10: Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala. Unglazed ornamented vessels (drawings by A. Kuz'minova).

lilac-violet or light colours were used as decoration (Fig. 11).

A separate category of ceramics comprises weaving spindles and the sheep protomai that adorn the altars.

Among the ceramic material it is necessary to note the findings of two ceramic "boots", decorated richly by carved herbal ornamentation. "Such 'boots' were used as incense burners" (Fig. 12; SMAGULOV 2017: 143–152, ill. 61, 65).

In the upper layer, fragments of dishes with transparent glaze over white englobe have been found.

### Other finds: Coins, jewellery, items of bronze, iron, bone or stone

At Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala, silver and copper coins were found, including Turgesh, Tan and Aphrighian Khoesmi (originals and imitations of Aphrighian coins). The close links between the "marshy settlements" and Khoesmi is confirmed in particular by the discovery on the site of coins of Aphrighian Khoesmi from the 7th to 8th century CE, and coins imitating the Khoesmi drachma of the 9th century. All coins were in circulation from the 8th to the 11th centuries (Fig. 13).

Bronze items include jewellery: earrings, rings, and twisted bracelets; details of clothing, such as buckles, belts; and elements of a horse's harness – plaques (rounded, heart-shaped and rectangular),



Fig. 11: Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala. Cup. 10th–11th century (photo by B. Seisenov).



Fig. 12: Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala. Ceramic incense burners in the form of “a boot” (photo by O. Kuznetsova).

pendants and bells (Figs. 14–15). The figure of the horse was cast from bronze.

Of especial note among the jewellery is a large bronze ring with an inset of turquoise. There are also fragments of lapis lazuli, as well as an assortment of glass and semi-precious stones (Fig. 16).

Of particular interest among the finds is a gem of the coloured stone carnelian on which is carved the face of a young woman (Fig. 17). The gem is dated to the 4th to 5th century CE. At the request of the authors of the find, a translation of the inscription “bylpykywyhdyn”, which is written in ancient Pahlavi, was made. This reads: “Bil-big [personal name] witness of the true faith”.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Reading and translation by V.A. Livshits and A.I. Kolesnikova.

Articles made of iron include fragments of knives, stirrups, nails, details of locks.

Frequently found were the bones of domestic and wild animals, i.e. the products of food preparation; big and small fragments of hand-made ceramic dishes; and pestles for grinding.

## 7 Conclusions

The finds at the ancient site of Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala allow us to identify three building horizons: the first can be dated to the 12th–early 13th century, the second to 11th century, and the third to the 9th–10th centuries.



Fig. 13: Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala. Silver coins  
(photo by O. Belyalov).



Fig. 14: Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala. Bronzeware  
(photo by O. Belyalov).



Fig. 15: Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala. Bronzeware  
(photo by O. Belyalov).

S.P. Tolstov characterises the Oghuz economy of Lower Syr Darya as a complex combination of cattle breeding, agriculture, and fishing. Cattle breeding was indicated by the large quantity of bones of domestic animals (cows, horses, sheep, goats and camels). In terms of agriculture, the study of fruits and seeds made by C.V. Bashtannik shows that two-row barley, soft-grain wheat and, probably, beans were cultivated; and the role played by fishing is illustrated by the discovery of fish bones and scales.

The material finds also show that at Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala characteristic pottery and metal items (iron and copper) were manufactured.

The Oghuz towns of the Syr Darya region appeared and were developed before the coming of the Oghuz and Turkmens, though what we know of them relates solely to the Oghuz period in their existence, when the Oghuz dominated the region politically.

Yangikent (Dzhankent) and Khuwara (Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala) were, respectively, the new and old



Fig. 16: Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala. Beads  
(photo by O. Belyalov).



Fig. 17: Kesken-Kuyuk-Kala. Gem  
(photo by O. Belyalov).

capitals of the Oghuz. So some of the Oghuz and the Turkmens adopted a more settled way of life and moved into towns, adapting to urban culture and building construction. At first, however, they retained their specific ethnic features in domestic ceramics and in part in their cult ceremonies connected with the preparation of food.

In considering the issue of the “Oghuz towns” in the Syr Darya valley, it is necessary to note the ethno-political situation that prevailed in the epoch of the Kangju state and earlier during the time of the Saka state. The question here is to what degree the Oghuz was “nomadic” in character, and to what extent urban.

In the early Middle Ages, the independent possession of Kangu Tarban was formed in the Middle Syr Darya, in which a group of Pechenegs established a settled population in the oases (KLÂŠTORNYJ 1964: 101–179). The Kangars played an important role in forming the Oghuz and then the Kypchak union of

tribes (TOLSTOV 1947b: 101; BAIPAKOV 2005: 48–57).

Later, during the 10th–11th centuries, in the foothills of the Karatau Mountain, Oghuz and Turkmen tribes formed a state that was part nomadic and part semi-nomadic. A minority of the latter settled in towns whose populations had already adopted Islam but had also partially preserved the traditions of pre-Islamic religions.

The state of the Oghuz and Turkmens played an important role in the history of Eurasia, notably in the political, economic and cultural life of Kazakhstan, Central Asia, the Near and Middle East, the Caucasus, Asia Minor and Eastern Europe (AGADŽANOV 1969: 5–7; 1973; TOLSTOV 1948b: 244–252; Baipakov 2007b: 35–61).

The issue raised by the “Oghuz towns” is a part of the broader “town and steppe” question (BAIPAKOV 2012c: 12–25).

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