



THE STUDY OF THE TESHIKTEPA AND CHINORTEPA MONUMENTS IN THE UZUN DISTRICT

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Abstract

This article explores the historical and archaeological significance of the Teshiktepa and Chinortepa monuments located in the Uzun district of Uzbekistan. It provides an overview of recent excavations, findings, and scholarly interpretations related to these ancient sites. Special attention is given to the cultural layers, artifacts, and architectural structures uncovered, which shed light on the region's role in the socio-economic and cultural development of early civilizations in Central Asia. The study also highlights the importance of preserving and further investigating these sites for understanding the broader historical landscape of the region.

Keywords: Teshiktepa, Chinortepa, Uzun district, archaeology, ancient monuments, excavation, Central Asia, historical heritage, cultural layer, architectural structure.

Introduction

During the two field seasons of 2018–2019, a joint team carried out work in the Uzun district to identify new archaeological monuments and to clarify the condition of existing sites. As a result of the survey, the joint team discovered 18 new archaeological sites. Chronologically, these newly discovered sites span a wide range of periods, from the 1st millennium BCE to the 18th century CE. The Jonchekka and Kimmattepa sites, for example, date back to the middle of the 1st millennium BCE.



Unfortunately, due to the negligence of local authorities, the Jonchekka site—as well as the Qarovultepa fortress, where over 1,100 coins minted in the name of Kushan rulers were discovered—has already been destroyed. In addition to pottery fragments dating to the 6th–8th centuries BCE found in the ruins of Jonchekka, a local schoolteacher, Q. Umarov, discovered a clay seal imprint placed on the wall of a large jar (Figure 3).

Five of the identified monuments belong to the Yuezhi and Kushan periods. The largest among them is Chinortepa, a two-part urban-type settlement covering a total area of 17 hectares; other notable sites include the Qarovultepa fortress, the Oqbet and Serharakat cemeteries, and the Boltalibobo I–IV cemetery complexes. Early ceramic artifacts collected from these sites include gray-clay vessels (from Chinortepa); a disk-based bowl made in clear Hellenistic tradition (from the Boltalibobo I-1 cemetery); and a red slipware bowl with a densely polished surface on both sides, dating to the late 2nd–1st centuries BCE (Figure 2.2).

The earliest core of the Boltalibobo I-1 cemetery, located on the elevated part of the foothill zone, is associated with Yuezhi settlements and the organization of urban irrigation systems in the “Upper Surkhandarya Irrigation Region,” with Beshkapa as the center.

In 2019, joint efforts of the Uzbekistan-China expedition led to the discovery of 34 tombs in the Serharakat cemetery. Based on associated items (ceramic ware, jewelry, metal objects), the site is attributed to the Kushan period, dating from the mid-1st to the 3rd century CE. The Qarovultepa I and II fortresses used this site as their necropolis.

On the southern slope of the excavated area of the Serharakat cemetery, two adjacent structures—Bittepa and Teshiktepa—were found. During our visit to these sites, a local resident handed over two ceramic vessels that were directly recovered from these structures. The first is an incense burner (Figure 2.1), and the second is a 7th-century pot with a molded handle (Figure 2.3).

Among the newly discovered sites is an unnamed settlement located at the confluence of the Surkhandarya and Argamchisay rivers, covering an area of approximately 15–16 hectares. This settlement is dated to the 10th–12th centuries CE.



During the survey work carried out on the left bank of the Surkhandarya River, we witnessed the destruction of a large archaeological site from the Kushan period – the ruins of Chinortepa. The site is located in the eastern part of Namuna village in the Uzun district of Surkhandarya region, approximately 7 km southeast of the district center, Uzun. The monument consists of three separate mounds (Coordinates: N 38°19'43.1454"; E 68°4'1").

The fortress is located in the northern part of the site and is square-shaped, measuring 130x130 meters, with an estimated height of 10–15 meters. To the east of the fortress is another mound in a triangular shape, approximately 50x50 meters in size and of similar height. All the upper sections of the site are currently under a cemetery. According to local residents, during the construction of graves, various artifacts were discovered, including coins, terracotta pieces, burnt bricks, and other archaeological materials.

Nearby is the settlement of Rabot (III), which has now been turned into a clay quarry for a brick factory. Pottery fragments from the Kushan period have been found in the ruined areas. Red-cornered goblets and unstable-footed bowls are particularly notable. Local people showed us Kushan and Islamic coins discovered in this area.

About 500 meters southeast of the fortress, pottery shards were found on the surface during plowing. It is likely that in ancient times this area was home to a large rural settlement. To the north of the fortress, on a ridge stretching from north to south, numerous pottery fragments and human bones were found on a surface approximately 100 meters long, 40 meters wide, and 20–25 meters high. A test excavation using the trench method revealed 12 burials, one of which was excavated.

Beneath the grass layer, remains of human bones were found in a disturbed state. The burial chamber was rectangular in shape, with an opening of 210x180 cm and an inner chamber measuring 140x74 cm. The walls of the chamber were built using square (40x40x9–11 cm) and rectangular (52x23x9–10 cm) mud bricks. Three individuals had been buried in the chamber; the bones of the first two were shifted toward the northern corner of the chamber.

The second body was preserved in anatomical position, with the head oriented to the southwest and the arms and legs extended. The head of the buried individual



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was destroyed during land cultivation. The associated materials primarily belonged to the most recently buried individual. Around the shoulder area, 32 small beads, copper bells, and other ornaments were found. The individual, based on the presence of a comb and the accompanying items, was determined to be an adult female.

The village of Qarg'ali (coordinates: 38.225293 N, 68.090890 E, elevation 689 meters above sea level) is located east of Teshiktepa village, near the border with Tajikistan. A large portion of Qarg'ali's territory is flat, and its northern part—now within the territory of Tajikistan—contains extensive foothill zones that have traditionally been suitable for livestock farming.

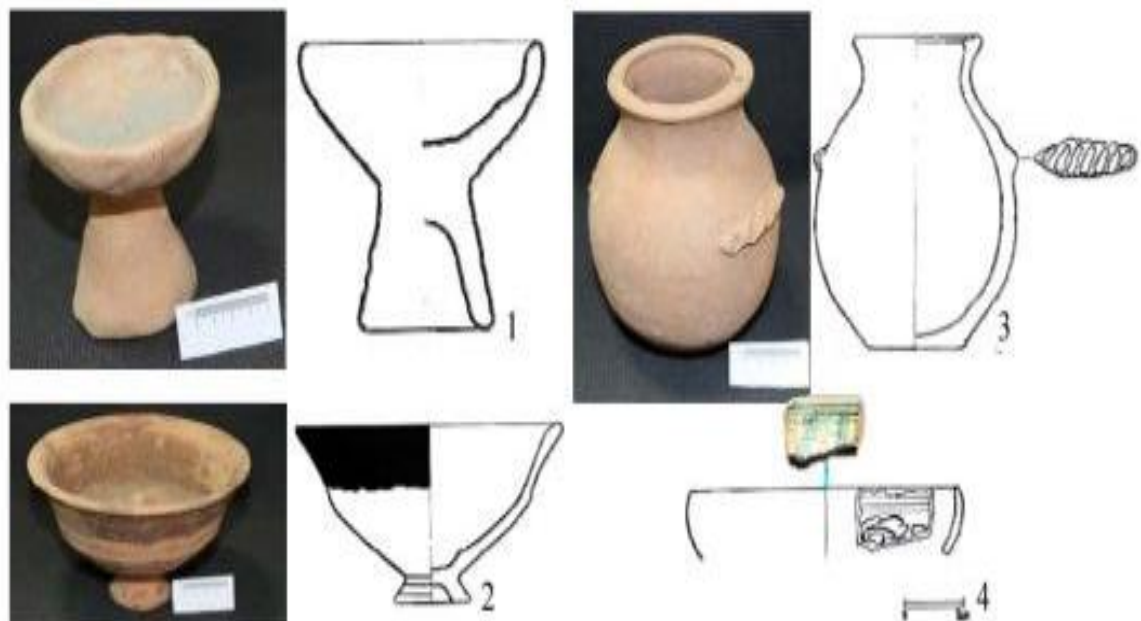
Based on the materials found around the Qarg'ali village and the testimonies of local residents, we concluded that livestock breeding developed in this area starting from the Bronze Age. Beneath the building of the village school, locals found human burials accompanied by ceramic vessels. Unfortunately, these ceramic vessels have not survived to the present day.

The Teshiktepa ridge (coordinates: 38.212796 N, 68.062567 E, elevation 585 meters above sea level) is located 1700 meters west of Dehqon village and 1200 meters southwest of the Beshkapa village center. The site has an oval shape, measuring 170 by 140 meters, and is situated over 50 meters above the surrounding area. The ramp leading to the site is located on its southeastern side. Artifacts such as ceramic vessels, burnt bricks, and grain grinders have been found at the site. At present, the hill is used for rain-fed farming.

As a result of archaeological fieldwork carried out in 2019 in the Uzun district of Surkhandarya region, more than ten previously undocumented archaeological sites were recorded. Geographically, most of these are located in elevated ridge zones, some in continuous pasturelands and others in flat agricultural oases. This dual structure of the economy continues to this day. The tradition of livestock herding in the wide ridge pastures traces back to the Late Bronze Age. New ceramic finds from the Mullali stage of the Bronze Age, discovered from the northernmost Qarg'ali village down to Serharakat, cover the entire left bank of the Surkhandarya River.

With the help of Chinese trenching techniques, graves were also documented at three more rural settlements during survey work. During this field season, local

residents gifted us rare ceramic vessels from the Bronze and Kushan periods. Excavations were carried out at two cemeteries, the most significant being the Serharakat cemetery, where 38 burial mounds were discovered—one (M34) dating back to the Bronze Age, while the rest belong to the Kushan period. Two types of burial structures were present:



Figures 1–2. Artifacts found at Teshiktepa.

Conclusion

The archaeological investigations conducted at Teshiktepa and Chinortepa in the Uzun District have provided valuable insights into the ancient cultural and historical heritage of the Surkhandarya region. The artifacts unearthed, including household items, tools, and architectural remnants, suggest that these sites were once thriving settlements with established socio-economic structures. The findings contribute significantly to our understanding of early urbanization



processes and regional interactions in Southern Uzbekistan. Continued research and preservation of these monuments are essential for reconstructing the region's past and for promoting its archaeological significance on both national and international levels.

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