

# **The Bronze Age Civilization of Central Asia**

## **RECENT SOVIET DISCOVERIES**

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**M. E. Sharpe, Inc.**

Armonk, New York

# Excavations of the Bronze Age Settlement of Sarazm

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The settlement of Sarazm is situated 15 kilometers west of Pendjikent (Tadjik SSR) on the second flood terrace of the left bank of the Zeravshan River. It appears as an elevation stretching from west to east, about 1.5 kilometers in length and 400 to 900 meters in width.

The settlement consists of ten small mounds of different heights and five depressions, the area of which fluctuates between 0.25 and 0.5 hectares.<sup>1</sup>

From its topography one can see that the settlement of Sarazm, like many other Bronze Age sites, does not have a clearly defined plan. A significant quantity of accidental finds, collected on different parts of the settlement, primarily from private plots, were given to us by the local inhabitants. It appeared possible from these finds to define preliminarily the area of the settlement, which, apparently, during its most developed period exceeded 90 hectares. Today the village of Sokhibnazar lies on top of the northern and western parts of the settlement, and the village of Avazali, on its northeastern section. The unobstructed or open part of the ancient settlement is equal to 35 hectares.

Eight exploratory soundings, situated in different parts of the settlement, and three excavation units were made at the settlement. The soundings and excavations revealed that the site had four occupation horizons, three of which preserved building remains (rooms with walls, hearths, heating and household pits).

The most interesting materials came from excavations I, II, and 111.

Excavation II. This unit stretched from west to east more than 100 meters and from north to south for 30 meters; it was situated on a relatively low prominence 100 meters south of the northern edge of the settlement and 20 meters from private plots of the inhabitants of the village. The remains of 23 rooms, relating to three building horizons, which preliminarily defined three periods, Sarazm I, II, and III, corresponding to the lower, middle, and upper levels, were found as a result of the excavations here in 1977-78 (Figure 1).

Sarazm I. The constructions of this earliest period were considerably disturbed as a result of subsequent building activity.

They were excavated in small areas in two sections. The first: courtyard I; the second, considerably larger, in the northwestern part of the excavation. In both sections the remains of walls 50-60 centimeters thick were found; they could easily be traced in the northwestern part of the excavation. In this area it was possible to determine the remains of three rooms (16, 17, and 18), two of which (17 and 18) were connected by a doorway that was 55 cm wide and had a clay threshold 20 cm high.

Sarazm II. The building remains of the second (middle) period were found under the floors and walls of the upper level. The rooms of this period were divided in terms of their function into cult, residential, and economic-storage areas and were separated into five living complexes. The first complex consisted of rooms 2, 3, 8, and 21; the second 4 and 19; the third 6, 7, and 16; the fourth 11 and 12; and the fifth 1, 22, and 23. Rooms 13 and 14, which also related to this period, are still not connected to these complexes. All the complexes had a separate exit to a courtyard, where hearths were situated and, apparently, bread ovens.

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1 See A. Foucher, La vieille route de l'Inde de Bactres a Taxila, in collaboration with Mme. E. Bazin-Foucher, 2 vols. (1942-47), Memoires de la Delegation Archeologique Frangaise en Afghanistan (DAFA), I.

2. See V. I. Sarianidi, "Issledovanie pamiatnikov dashlinskogo oazisa," Drevnaia Baktriia, Moscow, 1976, and Drevnie zemledel'tsy Afganistana, Moscow, 1977; and A. A. Askarov, Sapallitepa, Tashkent, 1973, and Drevne- zemledel'cheskaia kul'tura epokhi bronzy iuga Uzbekistana, Tashkent, 1977.

3. See A. A. Askarov and L. I. Al'baum, Poselenie Kuchuktepa, Tashkent, 1979.

4. See T. Khodzhaiov, Antropologicheskii sostav naseleniia epokhi bronzy Sapallitepa, Tashkent, 1977.

5. V. I. Sarianidi, "Baktriia v epokhu bronzy," Sovetskaia arkheologiya, 1974, no. 4, p. 69.

6. See Iu. A. Zadneprovskii, Drevnezemledercheskaia kul'tura Fergany, Materialy i issledovaniia po arkheologii SSSR, no. 118, Moscow, 1962.

7. See Kh. Duke, "Burguliukskaia kul'tura," Drevnosti Tuiabuguza, Tashkent, 1978, pp. 47-92.

8. See A. I. Isaakov and U. Eshonkulov, "Raboty kosataroshskogo otriada," Arkheologicheskie otkrytiia 1977 god a, Moscow, 1978, p. 558.

9. See Kh. Duke, "Iz arkheologicheskikh otkrytii 1972 g.," Uspekhi Srednea- ziatiskoi arkheologii, no. 2, Leningrad, 1972, and R. Kh. Suleimanov et. al., "Osnovnye itogi raskopok na Ierkurgane," Arkheologicheskie otkrytiia 1976 goda, Moscow, 1977, p. 545.

All the rooms of the complexes were connected by passages that were 50-60 cm wide with the high (20-25 cm) adobe thresholds characteristic of Bronze Age sites. The walls of all the rooms of excavation II were built of adobe, and the walls and floors were covered by two or three levels of plaster.

Sarazm III. The uppermost level related to the next period of occupation. This level was 30-45 cm thick, and the surface of a floor was found in its lower part, which preserved traces of plaster in separate areas. Surfaces of floors that were burned red were encountered in several areas; holes of hearths that were 18-25 cm in diameter and 15-20 cm deep were found alongside these burned floors. Burned hearths also were encountered that formed shallow (15-20 cm) pits with diameters ranging from 70 to 100 cm; they

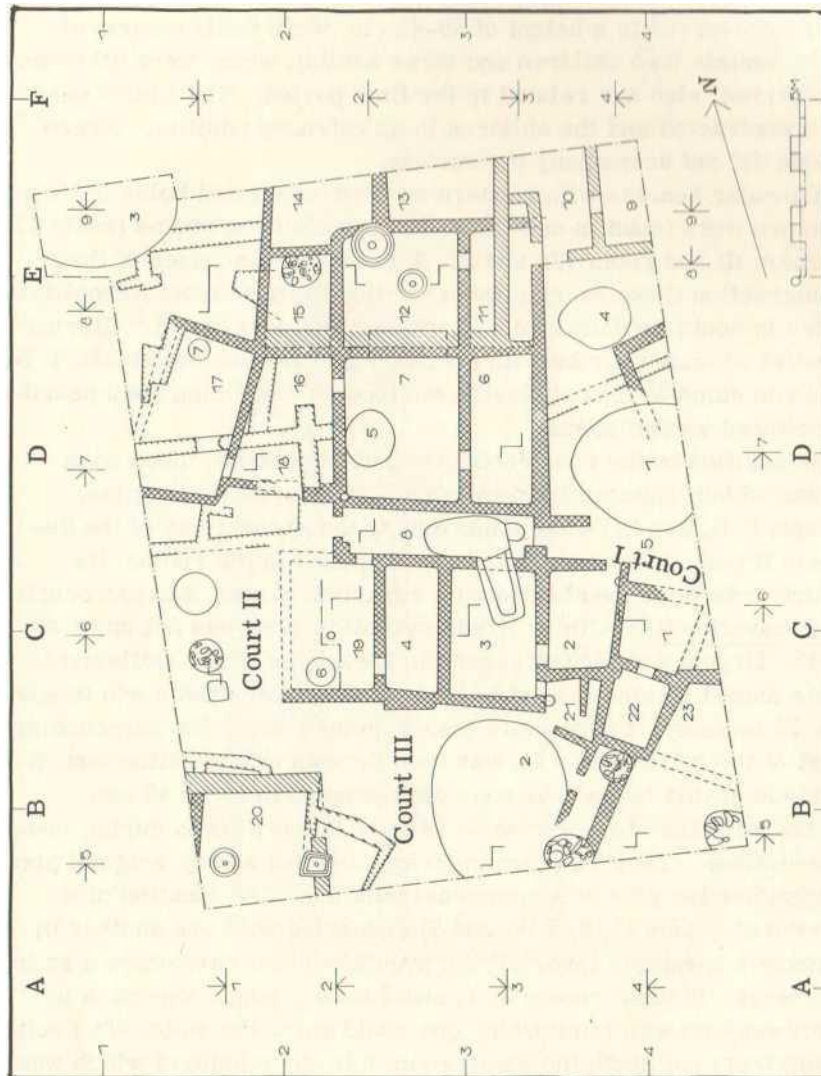


Figure 1. Plan of excavation II.

were filled with cracked river pebbles.

The remains of four rooms (9, 10, 11, and 20) were established; their dimensions ranged from 2.10 x 2.90 to 4.75 x 6.25 meters. The walls of these rooms, which were 35-50 cm thick and which were preserved to a height of 40-45 cm, were badly destroyed.

Five burials (two children and three adults), which were all poorly preserved, also are related to the final period. The adults were in a contracted and the children in an extended position. Grave goods did not accompany the burials.

Circular hearths with borders on their edges and holes in their centers were found in only three of the excavated rooms (room 12, Sarazm II; and room 12a and 20, Sarazm III). In terms of their construction these hearths were similar to those from Aeneolithic sites in southern Turkmenia (Geoksyur and Aina-depe).<sup>2</sup> Having studied similar hearths with southern Turkmenian materials, I. N. Khlopin came to the conclusion that rooms containing such hearths

functioned as cult areas.

In addition to the residential and activity rooms, three open areas which, apparently, were small courtyards (in the plan, courts I, II, and III) were found during the excavations of the Sarazm II period in excavation 2. As opposed to the rooms, the courtyards were overloaded with ceramics, bones, and ash debris.

Excavation III. A third fixed excavation area was set up on top of the largest and highest mound in the center of the settlement. This mound stretched west to east for 50 meters and north to south for 25 meters. It rose more than 3 meters above the surrounding part of the settlement. As was true throughout the settlement, the surface of this mound has been plowed up as deep as 40 cm.

The remains of seven rooms (Figure 2) were found during these excavations. They were symmetrical and had a very original plan, suggesting the plan of a communal building. The location of a series of rooms (3, 4, 5, 6, and 7) connected with one another by passages speaks in favor of this hypothesis and resembles a suite of rooms. In turn, rooms 3, 4, and 5 have a single approach in their eastern wall from which one could enter the suite. The suite abuts from the south the small room 6 in the middle of which was placed a hearth. Its central hole was 20 cm in diameter and 16 cm deep. The sides of this hole were burned.

The unique dimensions of three rooms and their unique plan attract attention. Their walls were made of brick with dimensions of 58 x 26 x 11 cm and 59 x 27 x 12 cm, and their surfaces were carefully plastered.

Two corridor-shaped rooms (1 and 2), which stretched south to north, apparently functioned as storage areas. There were no doorways, and it has been suggested that one entered through a hatch in the roof.

The complex of excavation II had north-south walls that functioned as a fortress. On their northern part these walls were excavated for four meters, and on their southern, for ten meters. Their insignificant thickness (1.10 x 1.15 m) indicates that the investigated building area was situated within the settlement and that these walls were the exterior walls of some multiroom building complex.

In terms of their construction the rooms of excavation III are markedly different from those of excavation II. The walls of the latter were adobe, while the walls of excavation III were made of brick. In addition, while the rooms of excavation II were constructed without a preliminary architectural plan, the symmetry of the rooms and the facade of the buildings of excavation III established that they were constructed according to a well-conceived plan.

While the buildings in excavation II were probably residential quarters, those in excavation III seem communal or cult areas; this hypothesis is supported both by the general plan of the building in excavation III and by the almost complete absence of material remains within it.

Significant interest attaches to the discovery of fragments of painted ceramics, which previously had not been found in the Ze-ravshan Valley of Central Asia; these ceramics can be divided by their features into two groups.

Polychrome ceramics form the first group; dark-brown and dark-rose designs are placed on red and light-yellow slipped wares (Figure 3).

The second group consist of monochrome wares with dark-brown designs on a light background (Figure 4). All the painted ceramic fragments from Sarazm share broad analogies with wares from southern Turkmenia, particularly those of the Namazga IV period.<sup>4</sup> Separate fragments with triangles and sawtooth designs inside rectangles are similar to ceramics from the upper levels of Geoksyur<sup>5</sup> and Kara-depe.<sup>6</sup>

Most of the ceramics are unpainted. They are distinguished not only by their technology and color but also by their wide variety of shapes (Figure 5). Different cooking and tablewares, including miniature examples, are found along with jars. In a series of cases bits of fired clay and lime-rolled pebbles had been added to the paste of the cooking vessels. Nearly all the cooking and tablewares were

burnished. The majority of grayware cups were burnished on both sides. Separate examples were covered with a red-flint or dark paint, resembling a heavy varnish.

Among other finds we mention a spindle-whorl, the head of a pin, and a small stamp (a unique find). This stamp had a square shape ( 4 x 4 cm) and was 0.9 cm thick. Diagonally stretched grooves divided the stamp into four triangles in which were placed complicated rhomboid-shaped designs.

Not only ceramics but other stone objects from Sarazm are analogous to stone artifacts from Anau, Kara-depe, and non-Central Asian sites. Different articles relating to the local customs of the Sarazm peoples are the most interesting stone objects. This group includes plummets with diagonal and longitudinal grooves, cups, mortars, grinding stones, pestles, spindle-whorls, beads (lapis lazuli), jamps, whetstones, and the like.

Three stone weights assume a basic value for determining eco-

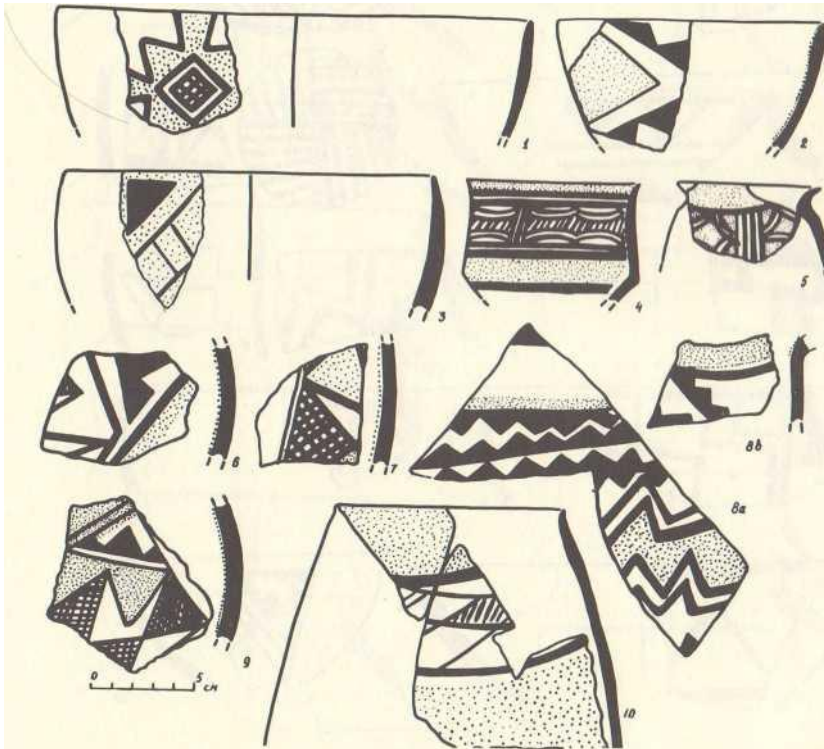
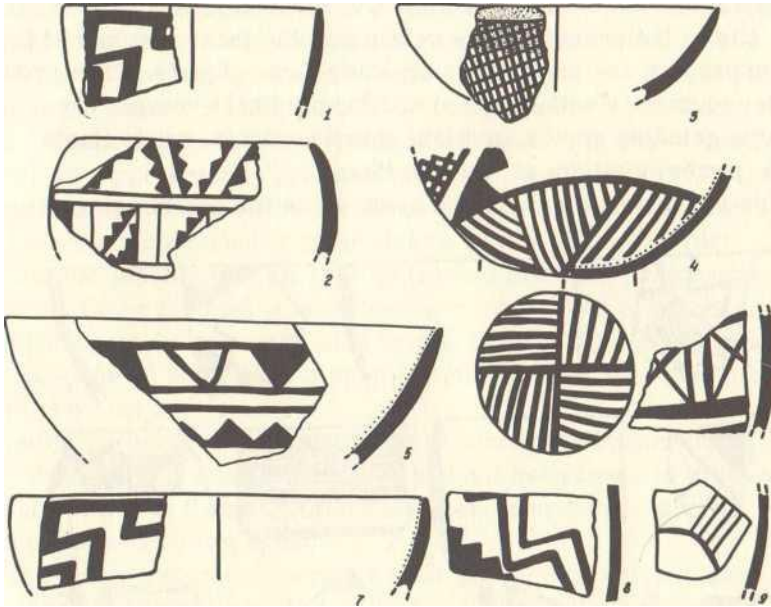


Figure 3. Polychrome ceramics: J.-3 — cups; 4-5 beaker- goblets; 6-10 fragments; 11 — vessel with cylindrical sides.

nomie conditions for the inhabitants of the settlement. Two of them are disc-shaped with clearly defined handles. Both in form and

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in weight, these objects appear analogous to weights from Anau, Kara-depe,<sup>8</sup> and a series of other sites in Iran and Afghanistan.<sup>9</sup> One of the weights was found near a hearth in a courtyard of excavation II. Fragments of rims and sides of cups with polychrome painting were found together with the weight in the fill of the hearth. The third weight also had a handle and was made from a riverine



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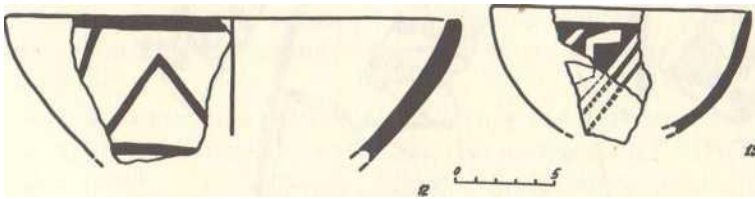
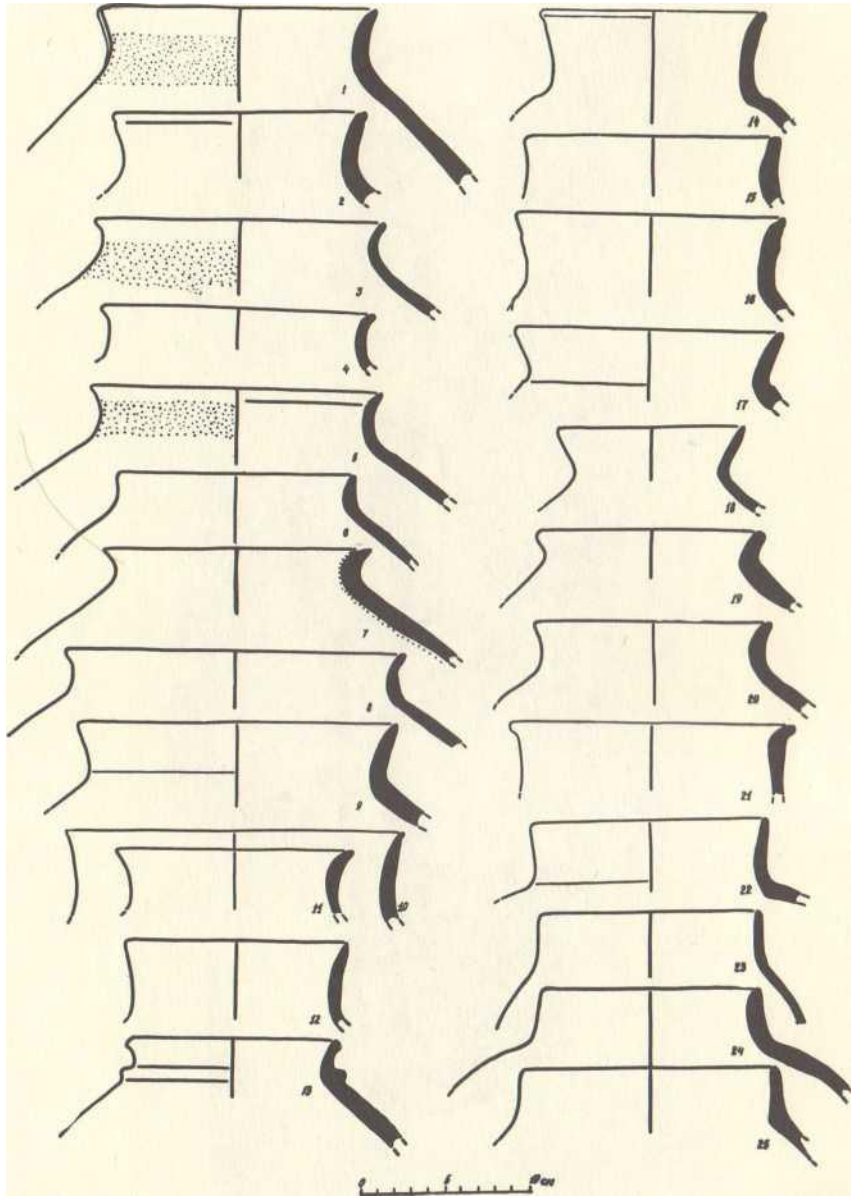


Figure 4. Monochrome ceramics: cups and fragments of cups.

stone with an oval shape. In form and in weight this object is absolutely unlike the others and has no direct analogies.

Figure 5. Unpainted ceramics: pots.



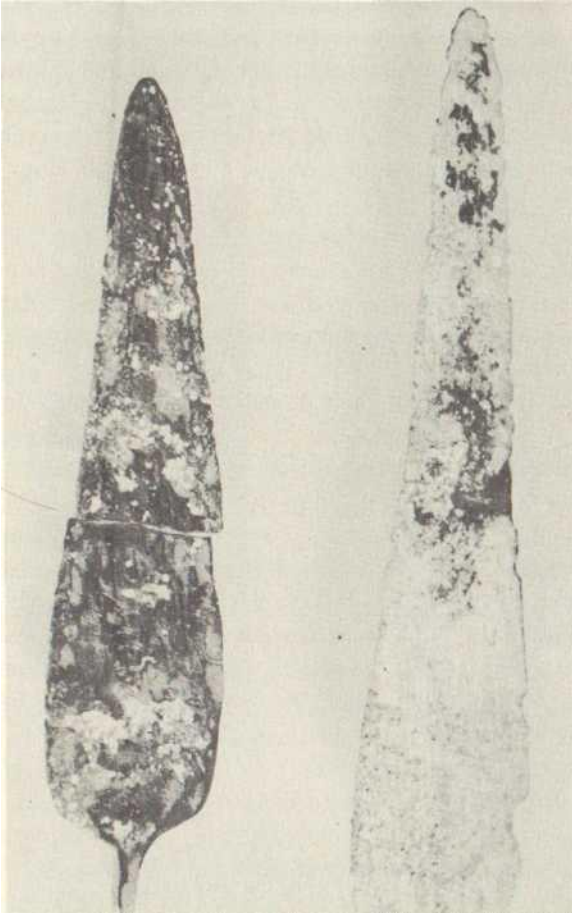
Two other unique stone objects were found. The first was complete; it was 14 cm long, and the diameter of its smooth, blunt end was 5.5 cm. Its upper part was shaped like a "bill" or "beak"



**Figure 6. Bronze axe-adze.**



under which, at its throat as it were, was an opening apparently intended as a metal handle. The second object was broken. The fracture occurred at the place where the opening should have been



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Figure 8. Bronze daggers. 9«4

and divided the object into two pieces. Both the size and shape of its "beak" repeated those of the first object.

Analogous stone objects were found by R. M. Munchaev in kur-gans at the Uech I and II settlements in the Caucasus<sup>10</sup> and by N. Ia. Merpert in the Volgo-Ural interfluve.<sup>2</sup> However, both investigators did not determine their significance. Although we lack convincing proof, it seems to us that these objects were staffs symbolizing sovereignty. It is well known that the pharaohs of ancient Egypt<sup>12</sup> used bone and gold scepters of a somewhat different type.<sup>13</sup>

As opposed to other early agricultural sites in Central Asia, Sarazm contained numerous metal objects. So far, sixteen metal objects have been recorded among the accidental finds. These include a shaft-hole axe-adze (Figure 6), two-edged knives (Figure 7), and daggers (Figure 8). The significant quantity of crucibles and slag that was found in sounding 2 shows that metal was worked directly at the site.

Thus it has been clearly established that the inhabitants of Sarazm were occupied not only with agriculture and herding but also with metallurgical production.

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2 N. Ia. Merpert, *Drevneishie skotovody Volzhsko-Ural'skogo mezhdurech'*- ja, Moscow, 1974, p. 75, fig. 10.  
12. H. Carter, *Grobnitsa Tutankhamona*, Moscow, 1959, pis. 123 A and 141.

Questions about the stratigraphy of Sarazm are still not resolved. The fact is that different chronological indices — the polychrome ceramics, the shaft-hole axe, and the weights — have been encountered among the surface materials and the accidental finds. By analogy with southern Turkmenian sites, they can be dated to the time of Namazga III and IV, i.e., to the Aeneolithic and Early Bronze Age periods, and also to the time of Namazga V.

The discovery of the extensive permanent agricultural settlement of Sarazm modifies a series of current conceptions concerning the range of cultures with painted ceramics. It is already clear that the Sarazm Culture also finds parallels over a significant territory of Central Asia, the borders of which stretch from the shores of the Indian Ocean to the Central Asian Mesopotamia.

#### A. I. Isakov

#### Notes

1. The site was found in the fall of 1976. Archeological excavations began in 1977 and continued in 1978-79.
2. I. N. Khlopin, "Model' kruglogo zhertvennika iz Ialangach-depe," *KSIA AN SSSR*, 1964, no. 98, p. 48.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
4. B. A. Litvinskii, "Namazga-tepe po dannym raskopok 1949-1950 (??.,"

*Sovetskaia etnografiia*, 1952, no. 4; B. A. Kuftin, "Polevoi otchet o rabote XIV otriada IuTAKE po izuchenliu kul'tury pervobytno-obshchinnikh osedlo-zemledel'cheskikh poselenii epokhi medi i bronzy v 1952 g.," *TluTAKE*, vol. 7, Ashkhabad, 1956, pi. XXXI, 7; XXXII, 13.

5. V. I. Sarianidi, "Eneoliticheskoe poselenie GeoksiurTluTAKE," vol. 10, Ashkhabad 1960, p. 247, pis. III, IV, VIII.
6. V. M. Masson, "Raspisnaia keramika Turkmenii," *ibid.*, p. 336, pis.

XX, XXI.

7. R. Pumpelly, "Ancient Anau and the Oasesworld," *Explorations in Turkestan. Prehistoric Civilizations of Anau*, vol. 2, Washington, 1908, pp. 478-79,

## CHAPTER

### Bronze Age Settlements of Southern Tadjikistan

#### L. T. P'IANKOVA

A large part of the territory of the Tadjik SSR is covered with high mountains. Only in the southwest of the republic is there an extensive low plain, the boundaries of which continue far to the south, beyond the borders of the Soviet Union. Geographically speaking, this plain belongs to the Southern Tadjik Province of the pre-Asian natural region.

The territory of the Southern Tadjik highland is intersected by a number of low ranges running from north to south. Between them run, also meridionally, the valleys of the right tributaries of the Pianj-Amu Darya: the Kafirnigan, Vakhsh, Kyzylsu, and their tributaries. In the south the valleys of these rivers merge into the Cis-Amu Darya Plain. In topography and natural conditions the territory of southwestern Tadjikistan resembles the adjacent districts of southern Uzbekistan and northern Afghanistan, where a considerable number of monuments of the Late Bronze Age have now been discovered and studied.

Systematic study of Bronze Age monuments in Southern Tadjikistan began in the 1950s with excavations of burial grounds in Besh-kent Valley under the direction of A. M. Mandel'shtam. He investigated the Early Tulkhar and Aruktau burial grounds (Figure 1, 6,

7), where six different types of burial structures were found.

Along with interment of the entire skeleton (contracted, on one side), which was the prevailing burial rite, cases of cremation were identified here, as well as burials of the bones of the dismembered skeleton. Mandel'shtam dates the Beshkent Valley

figs. 506-10.

8. V. M. Masson, "Eneolit iuzhnykh oblastei Srednei Azii," part 2, *SAI*, B3-

8, p. 22, pi. XI, H)-13.

9. R. Ghirshman, *Fouilles de Sialk*, 1938; J.-M. Casal, *Fouilles de Mundi-gak*, Paris, 1961; V. A. Alekshin, "Kamennye giri s drevnezemledel'cheskikh poselenii Iuzhnoi Turkmenii," *Sovetskaia arkhologiiia*, 1973, no. 4, p. 239, fig. 1.
10. R. M. Munchaev, *Kavkaz na zare bronzogo veka*, Moscow, 1975, p. 280, fig. 64, ^5-18.