

A History of the Study of Archaeological Sites of the 14th–16th Centuries in the Jizzakh Oasis (A Case Study of Gallaorol District)

Hasanboyev To‘raqul Faziljon o‘g‘li
Doctoral Researcher, Jizzakh State Pedagogical University, Uzbekistan

ABSTRACT

This article presents information on archaeological research conducted in the Jizzakh oasis (region), particularly survey and excavation studies at archaeological sites dating from the 14th–16th centuries in Gallaorol District. It discusses the material culture finds recovered in recent years through excavations at the ruins of Kurgantepa, Lapakhtepa and Katta Khonimkurgan, as well as surveys at the Kokgumbaztepa and Etimtepa sites, highlighting their distinctive features.

KEYWORDS: Jizzakh oasis, rustaq (administrative district), Gallaorol District, Kurgantepa, Lapakhtepa, Katta Khonimkurgan, Kokgumbaztepa, Etimtepa site, Kharakana, Amir Temur.

INTRODUCTION

Recent archaeological surveys and excavations in the Jizzakh oasis (region), one of Uzbekistan’s major historical and cultural regions, have identified more than 400 archaeological heritage sites dating to various periods. Excavations have been conducted at monuments associated with the history of ancient urban and rural construction, sedentary farmers, and nomadic pastoralists. As a continuation of this research, this article examines the archaeological surveys and excavations carried out at several sites dating from the 14th–16th centuries in Gallaorol District, Jizzakh Region, and discusses the findings obtained.

The first ancient urban site in Gallaorol District to be considered here is Kurgantepa. The ancient polity of Ustrushana is known to have consisted of 18 rustaqs (administrative districts), nine of which were located within the territory of present-day Uzbekistan. In the western part of Ustrushana, namely the Sangzor Valley basin, three of these districts were situated: Feknon (Jizzakh), Kharakana (Gallaorol) and Burnamad (Bakhmal) [4]. The Kharakana rustaq was located on the site of the Kurgantepa ruins, on the northern outskirts of Sarbozor village, on the left bank of a large canal originating from the Sangzor River. Kurgantepa is a traditional ancient urban settlement consisting of an ark (citadel), shahristan (inner city) and rabad (suburban area). The citadel lies in the southwestern corner of the shahristan and measures 80 × 80 m (0.64 ha) at its base. The shahristan has a rectangular outline and covers 5.5 ha, or 6.14 ha including the citadel. The microrelief indicates that the shahristan had a single gate, located in the western section of the southern defensive wall, beside the eastern walls of the citadel [5]. Thus, as at Qaliyatepa, the defensive strength of Kurgantepa’s gate was reinforced by the citadel’s separate fortification walls.

NEXT SCIENTISTS CONFERENCES

The third component of Kurgantepa, the rabad, was levelled in later periods. The town's inhabitants and the surrounding cultivated fields were supplied with water through a large canal.

The history of research at this site is limited and discontinuous. Stratigraphic excavations were conducted in the western part of the shahristan in the late 1970s under the direction of E. Kadyrov and in 1996 under the direction of M. Pardayev. These excavations did not reach the natural soil. According to the results of the latest excavations, the earliest layers date to the 1st century CE, while the latest construction phases date to the mid-18th century. Overall, analysis of the stratigraphic materials has identified construction phases at Kurgantepa's shahristan dating to the 1st–4th, 5th–8th, 9th–12th, 14th–16th and 17th–18th centuries [1, 3].

In the spring of 2022, the Jizzakh Archaeological Expedition, led by M. H. Pardayev, carried out excavations at the ruins of Kurgantepa. First, the area where stratigraphic excavations had been conducted in 1996 was cleaned. A stratigraphic trench measuring 3 × 8 m was then opened behind the same excavation area and excavated to a depth of 3 m. This excavation, too, did not reach the natural soil. Four construction phases were identified during the excavation. Chronologically, the pottery recovered was attributed to the late Early Medieval, Developed Medieval and Late Medieval periods. Research is ongoing.

According to local residents, Kurgantepa had a system of underground passages, one branch of which passed beneath the Sangzor River and connected with the Gortepa fortress on the river's right bank, approximately 3 km away. The entrances and exits of this underground passage are said to have survived at both Kurgantepa and Gortepa.

Another site from this period is the Lapakhtepa rural settlement, located amid flat cultivated land on the left bank of the Sangzor River, northeast of Qashqabulok-2 village (Zokir Top). Lapakhtepa has a rectangular plan, measures 110 × 95 m (1.045 ha), and extends along an east–west axis. Its western section is considerably lower than the eastern section, giving the site a two-tiered appearance [2, 5]. The sides of this small fortress are steep, indicating that it had substantial defensive walls. The entrance gate was situated in the centre of the western wall. Stratigraphic investigations were conducted at Lapakhtepa in 1983 by A. Berdimurodov [2], followed by planimetric excavations in 1996 by M. Pardayev.

In 2022, the Jizzakh Archaeological Expedition, led by M. H. Pardayev, conducted excavations at the Lapakhtepa ruins. Initially, the area excavated stratigraphically by A. Berdimurodov in 1983 was cleaned. A stratigraphic trench measuring 3 × 5 m was then opened behind the earlier excavation area. The excavation reached a depth of 1.5 m. The recovered pottery samples, both glazed and unglazed, were dated to the Early Medieval and Late Medieval periods.

In conclusion, we consider that Lapakhtepa functioned in the past as a military outpost or fortified stronghold during both the Early and Late Medieval periods.

Another site is Etimtepa, located 500 m south of the centre of Gallaorol District, on the right-hand side of the road leading from the Jizzakh–Samarkand highway to the district centre. A monument commemorating the participants of the Second World War currently stands on top

NEXT SCIENTISTS CONFERENCES

of Etimtepa, while the Gallaorol District Museum of Local History is situated below it. According to the topographic plan, the site is rectangular, measuring 115 × 90 m and standing 6 m high. An approximately circular citadel, 8 m high, has survived in the eastern part of Etimtepa. During construction work, the top and side walls of the citadel were levelled. In addition, the builders constructed a ramp on the western and southwestern sides of the site. Finds exposed on the surface as a result of the construction work, particularly numerous pottery sherds, were collected. These finds can be dated to the 6th–8th, 9th–12th and 15th–16th centuries [5].

The Kokgumbaztepa site is located 1.2 km southeast of the centre of Gallaorol District, in the southeastern part of Kokgumbaz village, near the left bank of the Sangzor River and on the right-hand side of the Tashkent–Samarkand highway. According to village elders, the Kokgumbaz site was converted into a cemetery in the 1950s. The site was built on a natural hill formed by terraces extending from the eastern spur of the Nuratau mountain range to the left bank of the Sangzor River. Kokgumbaztepa is generally oval in shape, elongated along an east–west axis, and covers a total area of 3.6 ha. Its citadel is located in the northeastern part of the site. The citadel is circular; its upper section consists of a level area measuring 22 × 20 m. Its lower section measures 40 × 35 m, and its total height is 6.5–7.0 m. During the compilation of the archaeological site inventory of the Jizzakh oasis in the 1970s, the site was investigated by O. Alimov and N. Nemtseva, who dated its latest construction phase to the 14th–16th centuries [5]. Perhaps for this reason, or for some other reason, a local tradition arose that the Kokgumbaz fortress had been built by Amir Temur. Its construction was even assigned the specific date of 1365, which was recorded on an inscription plaque inside the cemetery. In this regard, one point should be emphasised. Given that the Kokgumbaz fortress was built at the exit of the Ilonutti Gorge towards Samarkand, close to a river crossing—in other words, at an exceptionally advantageous and strategically important military location—the rulers of the period likely used it to defend Central Sogdiana against enemies advancing through the Ilonutti Gorge via Jizzakh, particularly nomadic groups conducting raids. Later rulers who restored such structures, which had been destroyed and reduced to mounds of ruins during the Arab conquest or the Mongol invasion, including Amir Temur and his descendants, may have used them to prevent incursions by the Jete (Mongols who had not adopted Islam).

Among the Late Medieval sites in Gallaorol District that have attracted the interest of many researchers because of their distinctive features are the Great and Small Khonimkurgans.

The Great Khonimkurgan is located in the northeastern part of Khonimsaroy village, south (on the left-hand side) of the main Tashkent–Samarkand highway, in a flat steppe area, on a small ‘island’ formed where a major canal branching off from the ancient Tuyatortar Canal divides into two. The Small Khonimkurgan lies 180 m south of the Great Khonimkurgan. In shape, this site is almost identical to the Great Khonimkurgan, but is approximately three times smaller. Its gate was built at the southwestern corner of the southern wall.

On the topographic plan, the Great Khonimkurgan has a roughly square shape. Its northern and eastern sides each measure 170 m, its southern side 180 m, and its western side 165 m; its height is 3.5–4.0 m. The site is enclosed by defensive walls on all four sides. Its defensive capacity was reinforced by eight military towers: four at the corners of the structure, one in the

NEXT SCIENTISTS CONFERENCES

centre of each of the eastern and northern walls, and two flanking the gate in the centre of the western wall, which is approximately 3.0–3.2 m wide. Ditches have survived behind the southern and northern walls of the Great Khonimkurgan. They are approximately 3.0 m wide and up to 1.2 m deep. In the past, these ditches were filled with water, further strengthening the site's defensive capabilities. The major canals, 8–10 m wide, on the eastern and western sides of the site also served as moats [5].

The first investigations at the Great Khonimkurgan were carried out in November–December 2018, when a small excavation was opened to the right of the western gate (entrance). First, the upper portions of the towers flanking the gate were cleared of turf, making it possible to clarify the outlines of their later-period appearance. Four layers were recorded in the stratigraphic trench. Three belonged to the upper construction phase, while the fourth layer was attributed to the Early Medieval period (7th–8th centuries); these periods were dated on the basis of material culture finds. In particular, the upper construction phase dates to the 16th–18th centuries, while the lower construction phase dates to the 7th–8th centuries.

In August 2022, archaeological excavations were carried out at the Great Khonimkurgan under the direction of M. Pardayev. The stratigraphic trench opened in 2018 was cleaned and expanded, reaching overall dimensions of 3 × 8 m. The excavation did not reach the natural ground level (virgin soil).

Thus, the material culture objects recovered from the excavations at Khonimkurgan have so far been dated to the 7th–8th centuries for the earliest phase and the 16th–18th centuries for the latest construction phase.

According to accounts given by local elders, these fortresses served as the summer country residence of Saraymulk Khanum, the beloved wife of Amir Temur, and were named after her. The reason given is that a cool breeze blows here during the summer months. This natural feature remains unchanged to this day. According to local tradition, Saraymulk Khanum described the place as 'somewhere a person can spend the summer in summer and the winter in winter' [5].

In conclusion, the Jizzakh oasis, one of the principal regions of the ancient and medieval polity of Ustrushana, is among Uzbekistan's major historical and cultural regions. This small oasis, which in every period had its own strategic significance, patterns of development and decline, socio-economic life and distinctive culture, acquired particular importance during the period of states in the Late Medieval era, including the 14th–16th centuries. This is evident not only from the analysis of written sources produced during that period, but also from the material culture finds recovered in recent years through excavations at Qaliyatepa, Kurgantepa, Lapakhtepa, the Great Khonimkurgan and the ruins of the Unnamed City, as well as survey investigations at the Kokgumbaztepa and Etimtepa sites.

References

1. ABDUKARIMOKHUNOVA, R., BERDIMURODOV, A., DORMINA, S., AND KADYROV, E. "EXCAVATIONS AT KINGIRTEPA." ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES (AO), 1978. MOSCOW, 1979, P. 542.

NEXT SCIENTISTS CONFERENCES

2. Berdimurodov, A. E. Early Medieval Archaeological Sites of the Jizzakh Oasis (North-Western Ustrushana, 5th–10th Centuries). Abstract of Candidate of Historical Sciences Dissertation. Moscow, 1985, p. 23.
3. Pardayev, M., Valiyev, A., and Pardayev, A. “On the Archaeological Work Conducted at Kurgantepa.” Archaeological Research in Uzbekistan, No. 3. Tashkent, 2003, pp. 124–128.
4. PARDAYEV, M., RAKHMONOV, H., AND PARDAYEV, SH. “RECENT DATA ON THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MAP OF NORTH-WESTERN USTRUSHANA.” ARCHAEOLOGY OF UZBEKISTAN, NO. 1 (10). SAMARKAND, 2015, P. 47.
5. Catalogue of Archaeological Sites of Uzbekistan: Jizzakh Region. Report of the Grant Project on the Registration and Mapping of Archaeological Heritage Sites in Jizzakh and Syrdarya Regions (electronic copy). Samarkand, 2017.

NEXT SCIENTISTS CONFERENCES