

From The History Of The Study Of Archaeological Monuments Of The Surkhandarya Region

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Abstract: This article explores the stages of scientific research conducted on archaeological sites located in the Surxondaryo region, the role of these studies in the historical process, and the results of archaeological expeditions.

It analyzes the significance of major sites such as ancient Jarkoton, Dalvarzintepa, Fayoztepa, and Kampirtepa for the history of Uzbekistan and Central Asia. In addition, the methodological approaches employed by local and foreign scholars, the findings obtained, and the place of scientific conclusions in historiography are examined. The article aims to reveal the role of the Surxondaryo region in the civilizational development of the area through an in-depth study of its ancient cultural layers.

Keywords: Surxondaryo, archaeology, archaeological sites, history of research, Dalvarzintepa, Fayoztepa, Jarkoton, Kampirtepa, scientific expeditions, findings, historiography.

Introduction: Surkhandarya Region is one of the most ancient cultural areas of Uzbekistan and occupies an important place in the process of the formation of early civilizations in Central Asia. Geographical zones such as the Amu Darya oasis, the foothills of the Hissar mountain range, and the Sherabad–Surkhan valley have, since ancient times, been distinguished by large archaeological sites representing various stages of human cultural development. In particular, the discovery of numerous monuments dating to the Neolithic, Eneolithic, Bronze Age, and Early Iron Age indicates the formation of early agricultural, pastoral, handicraft, and religious centers in the territory of Surkhandarya.

From the beginning of the twentieth century, the region has attracted the attention of both local and foreign researchers, and prominent scholars such as B.P. Denike, A.P. Okladnikov, S.P. Tolstov, Y.G. Ghulomov, and V.I. Sarianidi made significant contributions to its scientific study. As a result of comprehensive archaeological investigations carried out in Surkhandarya, world-renowned sites such as Jarkutan, Sopollitepa, Kiziltepa, Dalvarzintepa, Fayaztepa, and the Zurmala Stupa were introduced into scholarly discourse. These monuments serve as

important sources not only for the study of ancient Bactrian culture but also for understanding art, religious beliefs, urban development, and economic life during the Kushan Empire period.

Nevertheless, the stages of archaeological research in the Surkhandarya region, their methodological approaches, the results of expeditions, and the dynamics of the development of scholarly investigations have not yet been fully systematized. In particular, comparing existing data on the history of archaeological studies in the region, conducting chronological analyses, and identifying methodological differences among scholarly schools remain pressing issues for contemporary archaeology.

The purpose of this research is to conduct a stage-by-stage analysis of the study of archaeological monuments in the Surkhandarya region, to generalize the scientific results of major expeditions, and to present the history of archaeological research in the region on a sound scientific basis. The relevance of the study is determined by Surkhandarya's role as a crossroads of ancient cultures in Central Asia and by the necessity of reassessing its archaeological heritage using modern scientific approaches.

METHODOLOGY

In this article, the study of archaeological monuments in the Surkhandarya region is presented on the basis of scholarly sources, using generally accepted research methods such as objectivity, historical analysis, comparative-logical analysis, and the principle of chronological sequence.

In the study of the history and culture of Surkhandarya, historical sources—both material and written—are considered to be of great importance. As a result of expeditions and archaeological excavations conducted in the region, numerous valuable findings have been discovered.

From the 1920s onward, the study, preservation, and utilization of examples of the cultural heritage of the region's population gradually emerged as an important scholarly task.

The first archaeological excavations in the Surkhandarya region were carried out by Professor B.P. Denike (1887–1941) of the Museum of Oriental Art. He was a Russian orientalist, art historian, archaeologist, and museologist who made a significant contribution in the early twentieth century to the study of the history of Oriental art and Central Asian archaeology. He published a number of scholarly works, including *Art of Central Asia*, *Culture of the Ancient East*, and articles on the Bactrian–Margiana Culture.

Beginning in 1930, archaeologically significant expeditions of great scientific importance were launched in the region. Among the most prominent scholars involved was Aleksey Pavlovich Okladnikov (1908–1981), a leading Soviet archaeologist, historian, ethnographer, and orientalist who conducted extensive research on the ancient cultures of Siberia, the Far East, Central Asia, and Northern Asia. He is recognized as one of the founders of the “Siberian School of Archaeology” and is the author of major works such as *The Earliest Population of Siberia*, *Petroglyphs of Central and Middle Asia*, and *Countries and Peoples of East Asia in Antiquity*.

In the study of prehistoric sites, an important role was played by G.V. Parfyonov, the founder of the Surkhandarya Regional Studies Museum. One of the oldest cultural institutions in Uzbekistan, the Surkhandarya Interdistrict State Museum (currently the Termez State Historical and Cultural Reserve), was established on September 17, 1933, in the city of Termez. The Termez State Reserve is based on a museum collection with a history of nearly one hundred years.

In the autumn of 1945, another archaeological expedition was conducted at Zarautsoy. The expedition was led by G.V. Parfyonov and included M. Rozinkrans, a photojournalist of the Uzbek Telegraph Agency (UzTAG), the artist Roginskaya, local historian I. Lomaev, worker Sh. Ismoilov, and reserve staff member B. Davlatov. During the expedition, 264 rock carvings at Zarautsoy were studied, photographed, and transferred to the museum's collection. In October 1945, Professor Y.N. Mins, an archaeologist from the University of Cambridge (United Kingdom), sent a letter to the Surkhandarya Regional Museum, stating: “I have read that Paleolithic frescoes appear to have been discovered in the Zarautsoy valley. It is remarkable that archaeological research in your country did not cease even during the war years,” and requested that this information be shared with the University of Cambridge.

Since 1970, large-scale archaeological excavations conducted by Academician Ahmadali Askarovich Askarov of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan and his students have resulted in significant scholarly works based on material culture finds from these sites. Major studies such as *Sopollitepa*, *Ancient Agricultural Culture of Southern Uzbekistan*, and *Issues in the Formation of Early Urban Culture at the Jarkutan Site* (Southern Uzbekistan) have demonstrated that from the second millennium BCE, the Surkhandarya region developed a culture comparable to those of ancient civilizations such as Sumer, Akkad, and Harappa (Northern India).

Indeed, this period represents the true formation of a developed culture. The diverse and finely crafted artifacts discovered in the monumental architectural complexes of Sopollitepa and especially Jarkutan serve as clear evidence of this claim. Over the past 35 years, world-renowned discoveries made at the Jarkutan site, located in the Bustonsoy basin of the former channel of the Sherabad River, have enabled A.A. Askarov and his students to propose that ancient Bactria was the homeland of Zoroastrianism, one of the earliest world religions. At the same time, the presence of monumental structures at Jarkutan indicates that an early city began to form there in the second half of the second millennium BCE. Jarkutan is considered not only the earliest city in Surkhandarya but also one of the earliest urban centers in the territory of Uzbekistan as a whole.

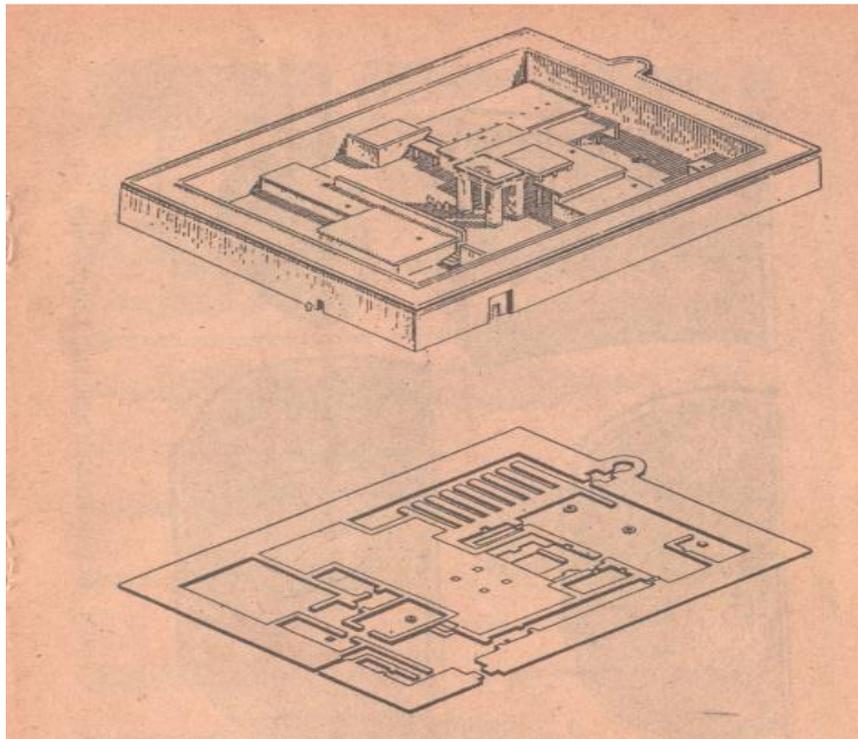


Figure 1. The Jarkutan Fire Temple (Bronze Age).

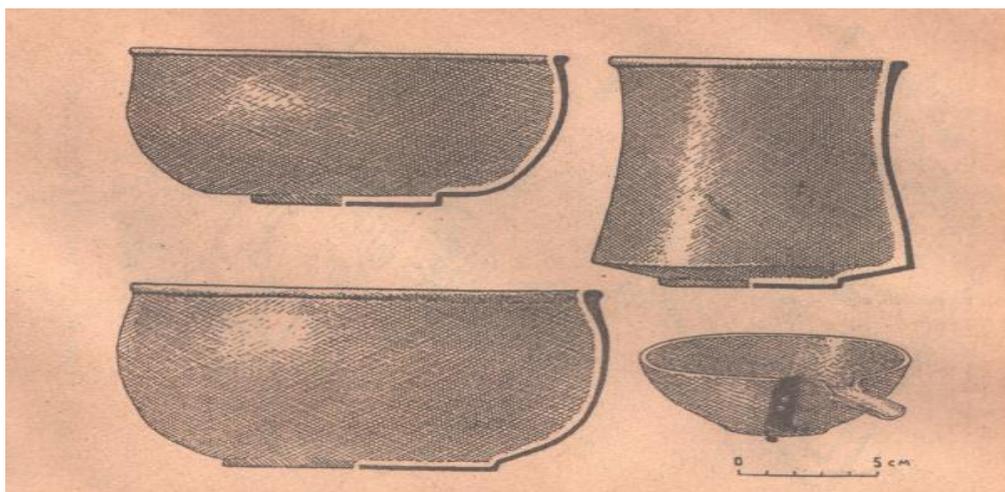


Figure 2. Pottery discovered at the Jarkutan site (Bronze Age).

Since the 1950s, research conducted in Surkhandarya, as well as in the southern regions of Tajikistan-which constituted an important part of the ancient Bactrian state-has provided numerous sources reflecting the history and culture of one of the oldest kingdoms of Central Asia, the ancient Bactrian state. Archaeological excavations carried out at sites dating to the first millennium BCE, such as Kuchuktepa, Pishaktepa, Bandikhon, Tallashqon, Qiziltepa in the Mirshodi oasis, and the nearby site known as Qizilcha, have served as the basis for the creation of several scholarly works. Notable examples include Kuchuktepa, co-authored by A.A. Askarov and L.I. Albaum, and The Villages of Ancient Bactria by A.S. Sagdullayev. Archaeologists such as E.V. Rtveladze, Duke Huan Ibarreche, and Sh.B.

Shaydullayev have also made significant contributions to the study of Bactria's culture during this period.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The emergence of archaeological research in Central Asia dates back to the last quarter of the nineteenth century. In analyzing the issues related to the archaeological study of the region, M.E. Masson noted that the earliest archaeological investigations were carried out in the context of foreign travelers, commissioners, and trade agents in Turkestan. These activities were closely linked to the economic and political interests of the Russian Empire following its establishment of control over the region and occurred within the framework of active efforts by collectors of ancient artifacts in Turkestan.

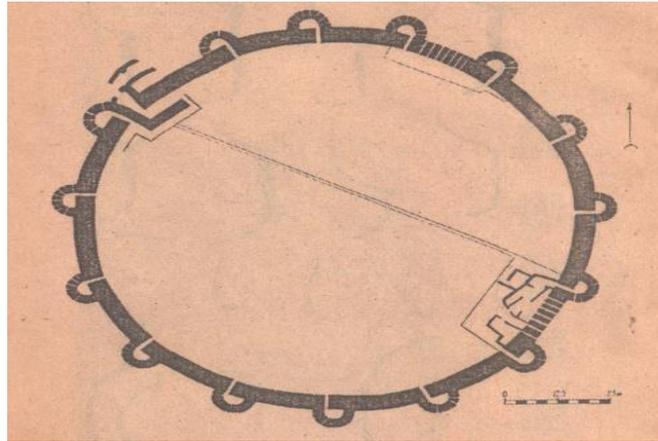


Figure 3. Talashqon Military Fortress (Early Iron Age).

The Kushan Kingdom, which ruled from the 1st to the 4th centuries CE, was not only a significant period in the history of ancient Bactria but also one of the decisive eras in the cultural development of the peoples of Central Asia. The first archaeological excavations aimed at studying the Kushan-period culture of Surkhandarya were carried out in 1926. In 1932, the Ayrptom tiles, now exhibited at the State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg, were discovered. Between 1936 and 1938, the Termiz Archaeological Expedition, led by Professor M.E. Masson, achieved notable success in the study of Kushan-period monuments in Ayrptom and Old Termiz. After World War II, the study of Kushan-period monuments in Surkhandarya became associated with the work of L.I. Albaum. Between 1949 and 1960, most of the currently known Kushan archaeological sites in the region were documented and mapped for the first

time by this specialist. Since 1959, extensive archaeological research at Kushan-period sites in Surkhandarya has been conducted by staff of the Uzbekistan Art Studies Expedition of the Institute of Art Studies named after Hamza under the Ministry of Cultural Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan. For many years, the expedition was scientifically supervised by Academician G.A. Pugachenkova of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan.

During 1959–1960, expedition members studied several monuments located in the village of Xolchaan near Denov, including Khonaqotepa and Qorabog‘tepa. A large number of monumental sculptural artifacts were discovered at Khonaqotepa, some of which, according to G.A. Pugachenkova, depict the founders of the Kushan dynasty.

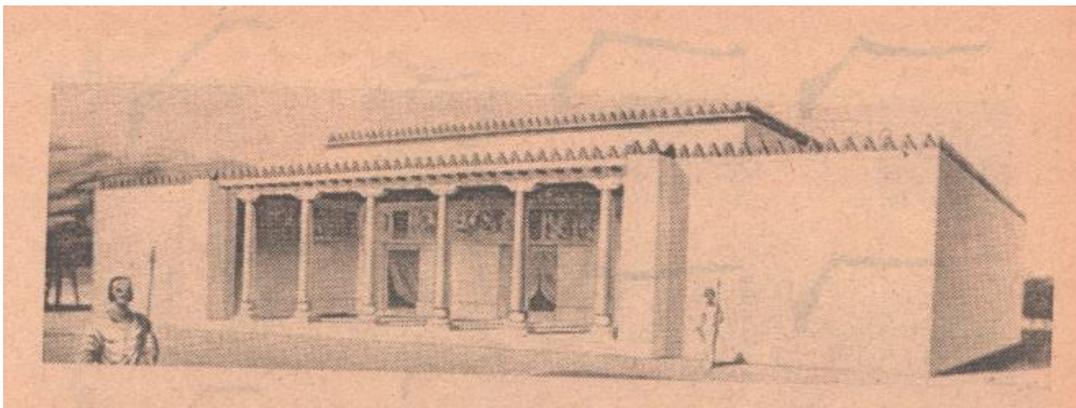


Figure 4. Kholchayon Palace (Kushan Period).

The high artistic achievements discovered at these sites enabled G.A. Pugachenkova to propose that, in Northern Bactria (geographically corresponding to Surkhandarya and southern Tajikistan), a distinctive school of artistic production existed during the Kushan period. Since 1967, members of the Art Studies Expedition have conducted continuous excavations at Dalvarzintepa, one of the major Kushan-period cities in Surkhandarya. To date, the research has revealed the

construction phases of the city, defensive fortifications, the potters' quarter with its adjoining workshops, residential areas of the urban elite, and the remains of a Buddhist temple in the city center.

In the northern and eastern parts of Dalvarzintepa, Buddhist shrines and urban burials were uncovered. Long-term research at the site has become an important source for understanding the internal structure and urban culture of Kushan-period Bactrian

cities. Treasures of gold artifacts, chess pieces, statues, and wall paintings discovered at Dalvarzintepa opened new avenues for studying the culture and cultural connections of the Kushan Bactrians.

Other Kushan-period cities in Surkhandarya, such as Old Termiz and Zartepa (Angor district), have also been extensively studied. In Zartepa, the ancient center of the Angor oasis, large-scale archaeological excavations were carried out under the Bactrian Expedition, led by V.M. Masson from the Institute of Material Culture History in Saint Petersburg and the Archaeology Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Research on Buddhist temples in Old Termiz, as well as excavations at Qoratepa and Fayaztepa, provided invaluable evidence for studying the religious beliefs, language, and scripts of the Kushan-period urban population.

Qoratepa, considered the religious center of Kushan-period Old Termiz, was excavated beginning in 1961 by a joint expedition under B.Ya. Stavskiy from the Moscow Restoration Institute, the Institute of Oriental Studies, and the State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg. Over more than fifty years, excavations at Qoratepa yielded extensive material evidence of cultural connections between Central Asia and Northern India, as well as the spread of Buddhism in the region. From 1969 to 1976, L.I. Albaum conducted full excavations of another Buddhist temple at Fayaztepa, shedding light on cultural interactions and religious practices in Kushan-period Surkhandarya.

Since 1980, Kushan-period culture in Surkhandarya has also been studied through research at Old Termiz. Under the leadership of Sh.R. Pidayev, investigations revealed multiple sources illustrating the formation and major development stages of Old Termiz, which served as the capital of Northern Bactria since the Greco-Bactrian period. Beginning in 1970, studies focused on the villages of the Kushan period and their

internal structures, exploring economic and cultural relations between urban and rural areas, as well as the role of village communities in Kushan society. Significant results were obtained through excavations of sites such as Oqqorgon and Mirzaqultepa in the Sherobod and Termiz districts. Over nearly forty years, research has also addressed anthropological features, customs, language, writing, and the northern boundaries of the Kushan state in the region.

Sources illuminating these issues were obtained through archaeological investigations in the Ayrptom and Bandikhon oases and the southern slopes of the Boysuntog' mountains. To date, dozens of major works and thousands of scholarly and popular articles on the history and culture of Kushan-period Surkhandarya have been published in Russian and other foreign languages.

Notable publications include: *From the Culture of Antiquity in Southern Uzbekistan* (G. G'ulom Publishing, 1973), *Ancient Bactria and Bactrian Antiquities* (Leningrad, 1974 and 1976), the five-volume series *Qoratepa – Buddhist Temple of Old Termiz* (Moscow, 1969–1985, edited by Y.Y. Stavskiy), Sh.R. Pidayev's *Kushan-Period Villages of Northern Bactria* (Fan Publishing), and the 1979 catalog *Ancient Coins of Southern Uzbekistan* (authors Sh.R. Pidayev, E.V. Rtveladze).

The scholarly contributions of Academician G.A. Pugachenkova are particularly noteworthy. Her major works include *Kholchayon – On the Artistic Issues of Northern Bactria* (Tashkent, Fan, 1966), *Kholchayon Statues* (Moscow, 1971, San'at Publishing), *Artistic Works of Dalvarzintepa* (Leningrad, 1978, Avrora Publishing), and the collaborative monograph *Dalvarzintepa – A Kushan-Period City in Southern Uzbekistan* co-authored with E.V. Rtveladze and other scholars.



Figure 5. Head of a Prince (Kushan Period).

Despite the extensive archaeological research carried out, many aspects of the history and culture of the Kushan period in Surkhandarya remain unresolved. These issues include the original homeland of the peoples who established the Kushan Empire, the ethnic history of its population, the reign dates of prominent ruler Kanishka I, and the socio-economic structure of the Kushan state.

Between 1950 and 1960, under the leadership of L.I. Albaum, the expedition of the Institute of History and Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR (later the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan) conducted excavations at several early medieval sites in Surkhandarya. Archaeological research was also carried out in the Southern Surkhandarya Reservoir basin and at Qulog'litepa (Zangtepa).

Notably, the murals preserved in the so-called Bolaliktepa pavilion stand out for their vivid colors. One of the reception halls in Bolaliktepa, an early medieval mansion of a prominent landowner, was adorned with paintings depicting ceremonial feasts characteristic of the early medieval period. From 1977, the team led by T. Annayev from the Archaeology Institute of the Uzbek Academy of Sciences conducted excavations at early medieval sites in northwestern Tokharistan.

Between 1977 and 1980, pavilions and courtyards of early medieval settlements in the Angor district, such as Kuchuktepa and Kuyovqorgon, were fully excavated. Among these, highly significant artistic specimens were discovered at Kuyovqorgon, including numerous painted statues and material culture artifacts dating to the 5th century. These sculptural finds are invaluable for understanding early medieval art in Tokharistan.

In recent years, the study of early medieval urban culture in northwestern Tokharistan has become a priority. To illuminate these issues, specialists from the Surkhandarya branch of the Archaeology Institute conducted excavations at Kattatepa (Sherobod district), while a team from the Hamza Institute of Art Studies worked at Budrachtepa (Denov district). The excavations at Budrachtepa revealed significant treasure hoards, including coins issued by the Hephthalites, providing important evidence for studying trade and monetary relations in northwestern Tokharistan.

In the 1980s, noteworthy studies were conducted on the religious beliefs, customs, and rituals of the early medieval peoples of Tokharistan. The opening of cemetery sites from the 7th–8th centuries at Bittepa and Dalvarzintepa is among these achievements. Excavations led by Sh. Rahmonov at Non-dahana (Tavka) fortress and by N.B. Nemseva at Bobotepa

(Sherobod district) also contributed significantly to understanding northwestern Tokharistan culture.

The history and culture of the early medieval period in Tokharistan have been reflected in works such as L.I. Albaum's *Bolaliktepa. Material Culture of Northern Tokharistan* (Tashkent, Fan, 1960), T.J. Annayev's *Early Medieval Sites of Northern Tokharistan* (Tashkent, Fan, 1988), and the monograph *Ancient and Early Medieval Monuments of Southern Uzbekistan* supervised by G.A. Pugachenkova.

Studies of the material culture of medieval Termiz and Chag'oniya began with the first excavations in the Termizshahs' Palace in Old Termiz between 1926–1928. Between 1936–1938, large-scale excavations were carried out in the defensive fortifications, blacksmith quarters, and outskirts of Old Termiz. The comprehensive investigation of the Termizshahs' Palace is particularly notable, forming the basis for the historical topography of medieval Termiz. Findings from these excavations were published under M.E. Masson's editorship in the *Collections of the Termiz Archaeological Complex Expedition* (1940, 1945).

From 1940 to 1969, relatively few excavations were conducted at medieval sites in Termiz and Chag'oniya, as research institutions focused primarily on Kushan and early medieval period sites. Beginning in 1969, a team of the Uzbek Art Studies Expedition, led by E.V. Rtveladze, undertook systematic surveys, mapping, and preservation assessments of all archaeological monuments in the region. This initiative later evolved into a major scientific project entitled *The Complex of Historical, Archaeological, and Architectural Monuments of Surkhandarya*. Excavations were also conducted at selected early medieval sites, such as Garmalitepa near Dalvarzintepa. The contributions of teams led by Sh.R. Pidayev and T.J. Annayev were instrumental in creating a comprehensive record of Surkhandarya's archaeological heritage, including medieval sites.

Mapping of these sites also allowed scholars to correlate historical references to cities and villages along the trade routes of northwestern Tokharistan with the corresponding archaeological remains. E.V. Rtveladze emphasized the comparison of settlements along the Termiz–Chag'oniya trade route with names mentioned in Arab and Persian sources.

Since 1980, systematic studies have been conducted at central urban sites in northwestern Tokharistan, including Old Termiz and Budrachtepa. Excavations revealed medieval fortifications, urban households, potters' quarters, granaries, and a Christian church on the northern side of the city walls. These studies provided a wealth of material evidence on the medieval

culture of Termiz and Chag'oniyon. In particular, the treasure of over 300 kilograms of metal objects discovered at Budrachtepa is invaluable for studying 10th–12th century art in Chag'oniyon.

The history and culture of Termiz and Chag'oniyon from the 9th to 13th centuries are documented in works such as *Collections of the Termiz Archaeological Complex Expedition* (1940, 1945, ed. M.E. Masson), *Medieval Monuments of Surkhandarya* (Tashkent, 1983, Z.A. Arshavskaya, Z.A. Hakimov, E.V. Rtveldadze), *Descriptions of Northern Bactria – History and Culture of Tokharistan* (Tashkent, 1990, G.A. Pugachenkova, E.V. Rtveldadze), and *Monuments of Past Centuries* (Tashkent, 1986, E. Rtveldadze, A. Sagdullayev). Research by J. Ilyosov and Sh. Rahmonov on the art, rural culture, military art, and fortifications of Termiz and Chag'oniyon further enriched knowledge of the region.

The late medieval history and culture of Termiz and Chag'oniyon (16th–19th centuries) remain poorly studied. Excavations at late medieval sites indicate that Termiz and Chag'oniyon maintained a distinctive cultural identity during this period. From 1970, several late medieval monuments were catalogued and initial excavations carried out, including at Yoni-Kalon fortress in the Topalang reservoir basin and the caravanserai in Xotinrabot (16th–19th centuries) by T. Annayev and Sh. Pidayev.

Additionally, newly recorded late medieval sites near Kohitang, Boysuntog' slopes, and around Jarqorgon were documented. Excavations at the citadel of Old Termiz yielded numerous material culture artifacts representing the cultural heritage of this period. Surkhandarya's archaeological monuments continue to attract the attention of foreign scholars, including Indian researchers B. Mukherji and N. Bhatiya, Hungarian Ya. Harmatta, and German H. Humbach.

Significant contributions to the study of Surkhandarya's Bronze Age sites were made by American scholars Professor Lambert Karlovsky and F. Kollar. From 1989 to 2016, excavations at Dalvarzintepa, Fayaztepa, Qoratepa, and Chingiztepa were conducted under the leadership of Kyudzo Kato from SOKA University, Tokyo, with additional participation by French and German research teams since 1993.

CONCLUSION

Since the 1920s, numerous scientific and archaeological studies have been conducted in the Surkhondaryo region, beginning with the first archaeological excavations and continuing to the present day. Notable scholars such as V.M. Masson, Yu.A. Zadneprovskiy, A.A. Asqarov, A.S. Sagdullaev, V.I. Sarianidi, L.B. Kircho, T.Sh. Shirinov, and T. Annayev

carried out significant research during this period.

With the advent of independence, large-scale nationwide initiatives were launched to study the material and cultural heritage accumulated by the people over centuries and to convey it fully to the younger generation. In particular, research dedicated to the history of the earliest cities and the study of ancient urban culture was carried out. The works of A.A. Asqarov, A.S. Sagdullaev, V.I. Sarianidi, T.Sh. Shirinov, Sh.B. Shaydullaev, T. Annayev, Sh. Pidayev, and B.J. Eshov emphasized the need to critically assess the Soviet-era scientific perspectives while also highlighting the positive aspects of existing theories and methodological approaches.

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