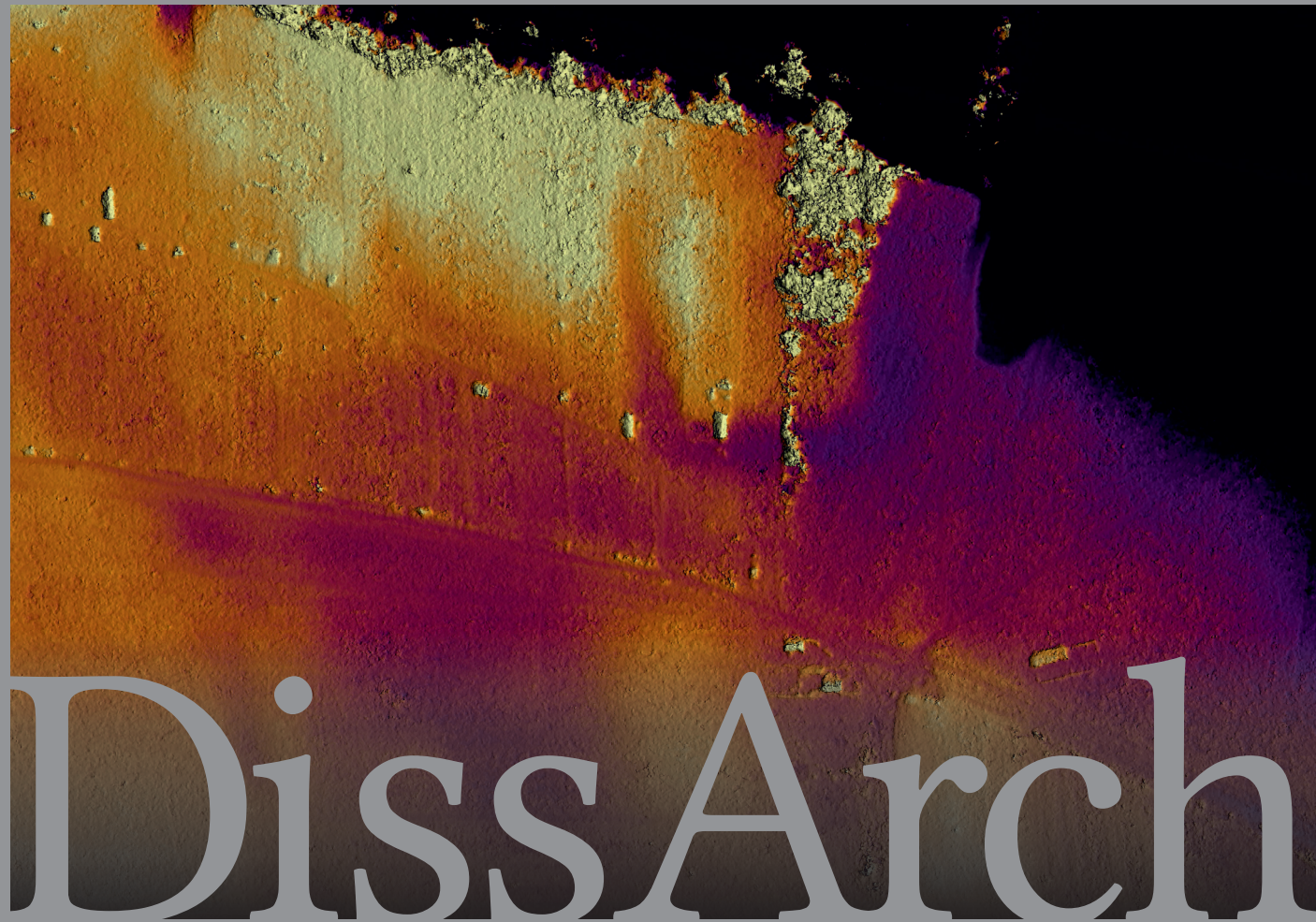


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Kakhramontepa in Southern Uzbekistan

A 4th–6th-century AD monument in context

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Abstract: The paper presents a brief overview of the excavation results from the early medieval, 4th–5th-century AD fortress of Kakhramontepa in southern Uzbekistan, with a wide range of analogies from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Nearby burial groups were also surveyed, some of which belong to the same period. Based on the joint evaluation of the fortress, the find material, the structure of the burials, and written sources, the entire complex could be attributed to the Kidarites, one of the enigmatic peoples known from historical sources and difficult to identify in the archaeological record.

Keywords: Central Asia, Uzbekistan, Early Middle Ages, Kidarites, Kakhramontepa

The archaeological site of Kakhramontepa is situated in Boysun (Baysun) District, Surxondaryo Region in southern Uzbekistan. The micro-region may be described as the Bandikhon oasis—‘oasis’ being used here in the sense ‘dense settlement group’ (*Siedlungskammer* in German). The coordinates of the site are North 37°54′45″ and East 67°23′26″; it lies at 514 m a.s.l. On a macro-regional scale, it is situated on an ancient and important route between the ford of the rivers Vakhsh and Kofarnihon (Kafirnigan) to the southeast and the Iron Gates at Derbent to the northwest. Located on the right bank of the Urgulsai branch of the Bandikhansai (also known as Baysunsai or Tashkupriksai), it allowed for controlling the route, and the waterflow of this stream and the fertile land between the stream and the southern mountain limit of the Baysun Basin with its rich pastures in the north (Fig. 1).

The site, then without a known name, was first identified during a survey in 1974 by the Uzbek Art Historical Expedition (*Узбекистанской искусствоведческой экспедиции – УЗИСКЭ*) led by E. V. Rtveladze and, without any testing or excavation, dated most probably to the Early Middle Ages. Altogether five archaeological sites were identified in the immediate vicinity of the site:

- a water regulation structure (*плотина*, dam) from the late 16th or early 17th century AD,¹
- a destroyed medieval settlement on the left bank of the Urgulsai,²

1 RTVELADZE – ISKHAQOV 1977; RTVELADZE 2007, 69, Fig. 9; RTVELADZE – ISKHAQOV 2007.

2 ARSHAVSKAYA et al. 1982, 116, Fig. 9.

- the fortified town of Saryband on the right bank of the Bandikhansai, dating to the Kushan and Kushano-Sasanian Periods,³
- the burials of Saryband,⁴ and 5, the (then-nameless) mound now known as Kakhramontepa.⁵

Kakhramontepa is a square mound of 35 × 35 m, with corners oriented roughly to the cardinal points. It is 2.5–3 m high (Fig. 2), with a slight depression in its top and a visible break in the middle of the south-eastern outer wall marking the entrance gate which opened towards the stream. Excavations were resumed there by an Uzbek–German team of the Baysun Expedition in 2005, and continued in 2007 and 2014.⁶ While during the 2005 campaign, only a small test trench (2 × 3 m) was opened, in 2007 the western (10 × 12 m) and in 2014 the southern quarter (ca. 18 × 16 m, plus an extension to the north-east) of the mound were uncovered; in summary, presently practically half of the site is excavated and a general understanding of its architecture and chronology has been achieved.

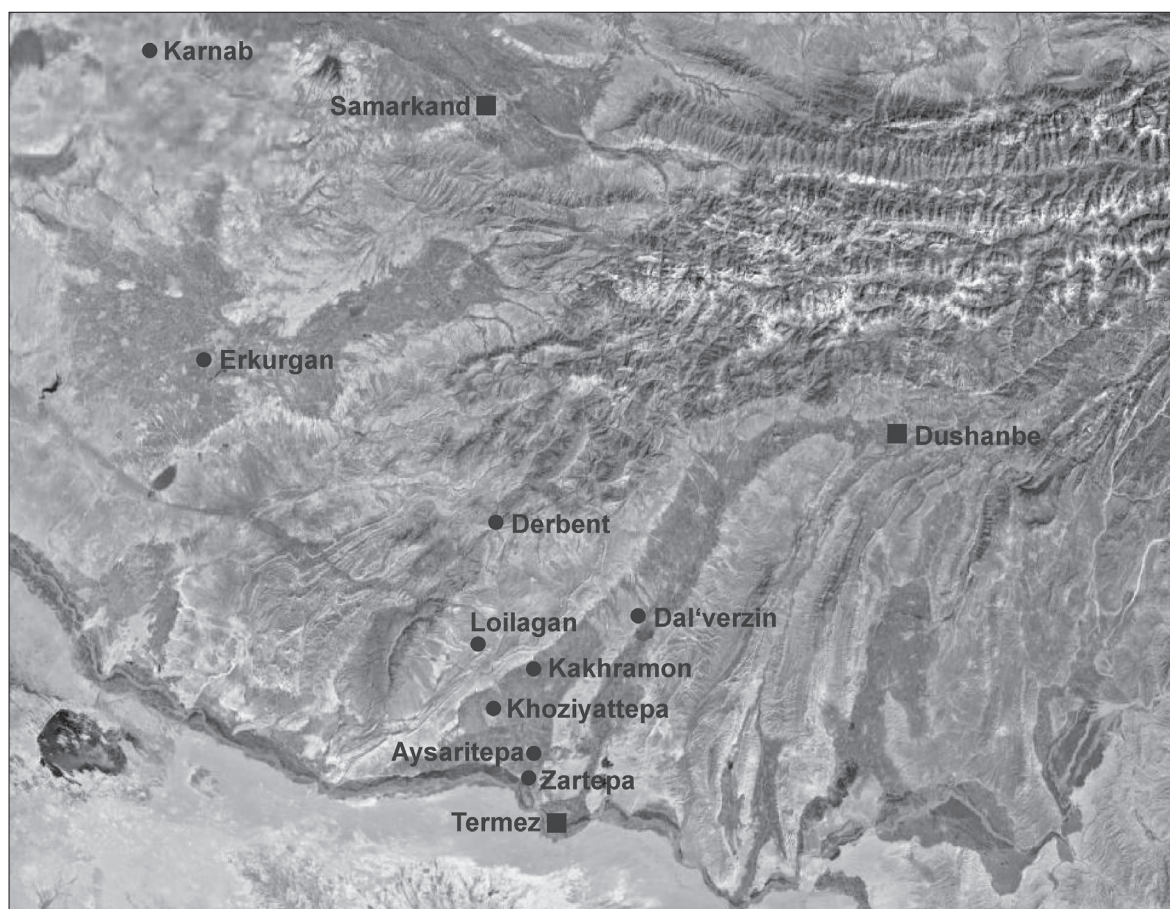


Fig. 1. ● Major sites of southern Uzbekistan mentioned in the text; ■ modern cities added for orientation (© DAI Eurasien-Abteilung. Figure by R. Boroffka, base map by Google Earth™)

Overall, the small fortress of Kakhramontepa has a ca. 2.5 m-thick outer wall without external towers but with staircases leading up to a presumed parapet from lateral corridors inside (Fig. 3). The internal layout shows a main central corridor or street (ca. 1.8 × 36 m) running from the entrance

3 RTVELADZE 1987, 64–65; RTVELADZE 2007, 68, Fig. 7.

4 PUGACHENKOVA – RTVELADZE 1990, 44; RTVELADZE 2005, 304–306; SAGDULLAYEV 2005. See also below.

5 ARSHAVSKAYA ET AL. 1982, 116–117, Fig. 10; RTVELADZE 2007, 69, Fig. 8.93.

6 For preliminary reports: SVERCHKOV – BOROFFKA 2007 and SVERCHKOV – BOROFFKA 2012.



Fig. 2. Kakhramontepa before excavation, viewed from the northeast (© DAI Eurasien-Abteilung. Photo by N. Boroffka)

southeast-northwest. From this, four lateral corridors/streets start on either side (ca. 2×15 m, including the platform in Corridor 2 and the stairs in Corridor 1, all joining the perimeter wall). Most rooms could be accessed directly from either side of the main or the lateral corridors. The structure was built completely from standard-size unfired mud bricks ($48\text{--}50 \times 28\text{--}30 \times 8\text{--}10$ cm). The simple stratigraphic sequence of the site shows two phases, which were probably not very far apart in time (Fig. 3.3–5). These phases are indicated by the renewal of the rammed mud floor in some rooms and the corridors and some changes in the overall ground plan (walls removed, walls added, entrances blocked or newly opened) (Fig. 3.1–2). The central corridor appears to have had a large gate, indicated by a massive, fragmentary hinge-stone (Fig. 4.10) and a threshold of large stones (partly re-used grindstones) on the north-eastern side. The fortress appears to have been given up peacefully—nothing indicates armed conflict or destruction by fire.

The rooms have different dimensions⁷ (all measurements given refer to the older Phase 1): Room 7: 2.7×4.65 m (12.6 m²), Room 8: 2×4.5 m (9.0 m²), Room 9: 2.1×4.5 m (9.0 m²), Room 10: 2×4.5 m (9.0 m²), Room 3 (divided in Phase 2): 2.9 m,* Room 4 (divided in Phase 2): 2.2 m,* Room 5: 2.2 m,* Room 6: 2.2 m,* Room 11: 2.7 m,* Rooms 12–13 (divided in Phase 2): 3.4×6.9 m (23.5 m²), Room 14: 3.4×6.4 m (21.8 m²), Room 15: 1.9×3.4 m (6.5 m²), Room 16: 3.5×3.9 m (13.7 m²), Room 17: 2.9×3.4 m (14.2 m²), Room 18: 2.5×3.4 m (8.5 m²), Room 19: 2×4.9 m (9.8 m²), Room 20: 3.5×4.9 m (17.2 m²), Room 21: 2.9×4.9 m (14.2 m²), Room 22: 2.6×4.9 m (12.7 m²) (Fig. 3.1–2). Thus Rooms 8, 9 and 10, all having a floor of 9 m², form a group to which Rooms 18 and 19 may also be added as these are only slightly smaller or larger. A second group consists of Rooms 7, 16, 17 and 22, their floor area ranging between 12.6 and 14.2 m², amongst which Room 16 stands out as the only square one with a central column, presumably of wood. Two central rooms (12–13 [divided in Phase 2] and 14) and one-off Corridor 2 (Room 20) are significantly larger ($17.2\text{--}23.5$ m²), while Room 15, with only 6.5 m², is very small. In Rooms 7, 8, 9 and 10 the lower parts of the ceiling's vaults built from obliquely placed unfired mud bricks were preserved due to the favourable conditions provided by the more solid perimeter wall (Fig. 3.5). The outer corner of Room 15 between the central corridor and Corridor 2 was decorated by an engaged quarter-column. Unfortunately, the general scarcity of finds on the floors—which also indicates an intentional and peaceful abandoning of the fortress—does not give a hint on the function of the various rooms. Several changes took place in the second building phase: Rooms 3 and 11 were divided by a new wall each, the entrance of Room 5 was widened to room-width, the door openings of Rooms 10 and 20 were moved, and the foundations of the central corridor and Corridors 1 and 2 were fortified with additional bricks or rammed clay. Whether some

7 All measurements are given based on the extents in the older building phase, Phase 1. Measurements referring to partially excavated parts (room width) are marked with an *.

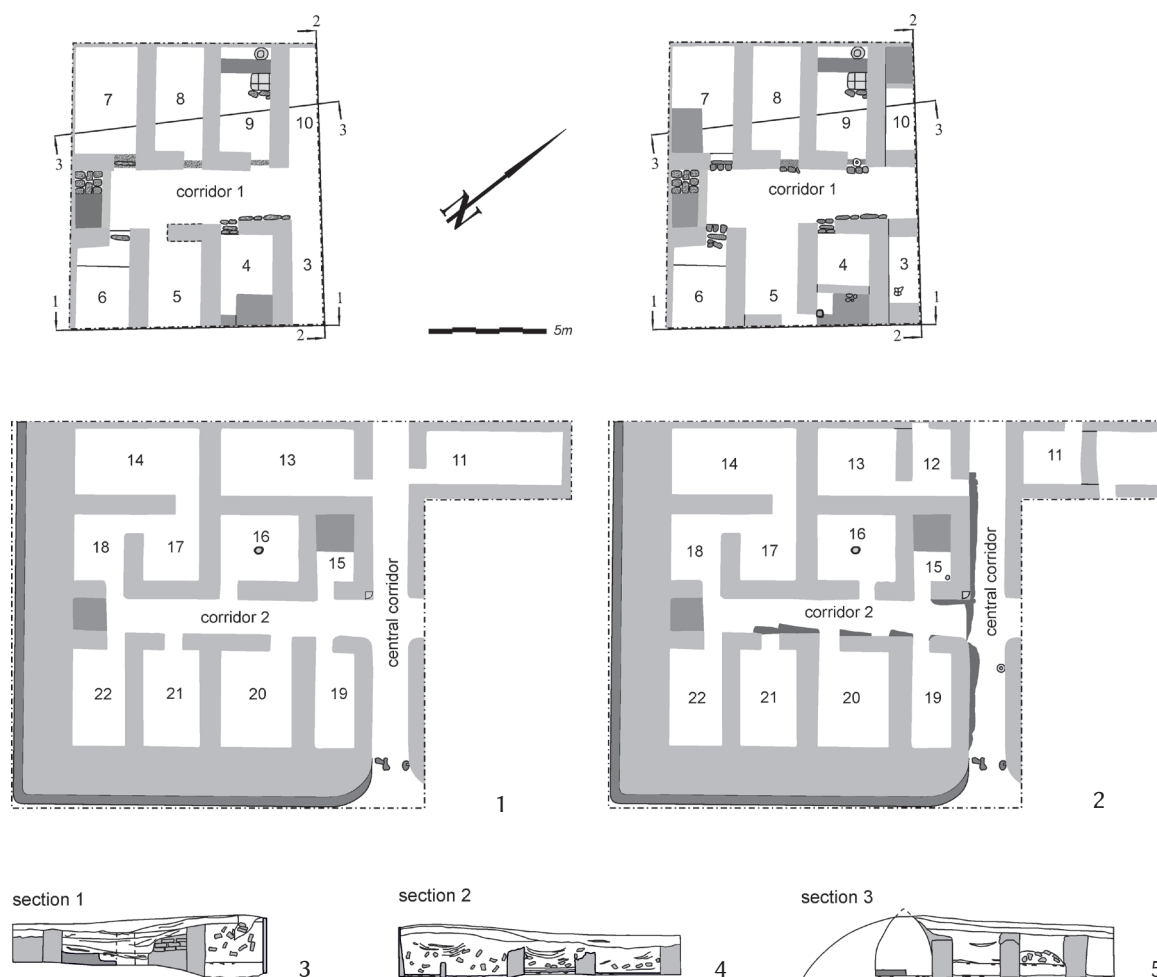


Fig. 3. Kakhramontepa. Groundplans and profiles. 1 – Phase 1 (older phase, Floor 1), 2 – Phase 2 (younger phase, Floor 2 and restructuring), 3–5 – Profiles 1–3, marked on the plans (© DAI Eurasien-Abteilung. Drawings by R. Boroffka)

installations (platforms [*sufa*]) in Rooms 2/4, 7, 9, 10 and 15 were built at the start or only during the second phase, has remained unclear.

Overall, the building had a well-planned original layout, which was presumably very suitable for a small military fortress—even the entrances of the opposing rooms along Corridors 1 and 2 were offset (in the original plan of Phase 1), so that people exiting in a hurry would not impede each other.

Generally, the floors of the rooms and corridors yielded finds in small quantity in both building phases and the later fill. Besides pottery fragments, from which complete vessels rarely could be reconstructed, several worked stone items have been recovered, including whetstones (Fig. 4.9; Rooms 2, 7, 9 and Corridor 1), grindstones or pounders (Rooms 2, 4, 7, 8, 9 and Corridor 1), a round handmill with an eye, holes for the handles on one side, and three radial grooves for enhanced grinding on the active side (Fig. 4.11), a stone disk fragment from Corridor 2 (Fig. 4.8), and two egg-shaped sling stones from the central corridor and Corridor 1 (Fig. 4.6). Metal finds are even more scarce, comprising a bronze disc (presumably a former coin but unreadable) with a hole from the fill of Room 8 (Fig. 4.1), an iron knife from the floor of Room 9 (Fig. 4.7), as well as a bronze sheet fragment (Fig. 4.3), an iron nail (Fig. 4.2) and an iron mount or fitting (Fig. 4.5) from the fill of the central corridor. Puddles of a bituminous substance were found on the floors of Room 3, the central corridor, and Corridor 2.

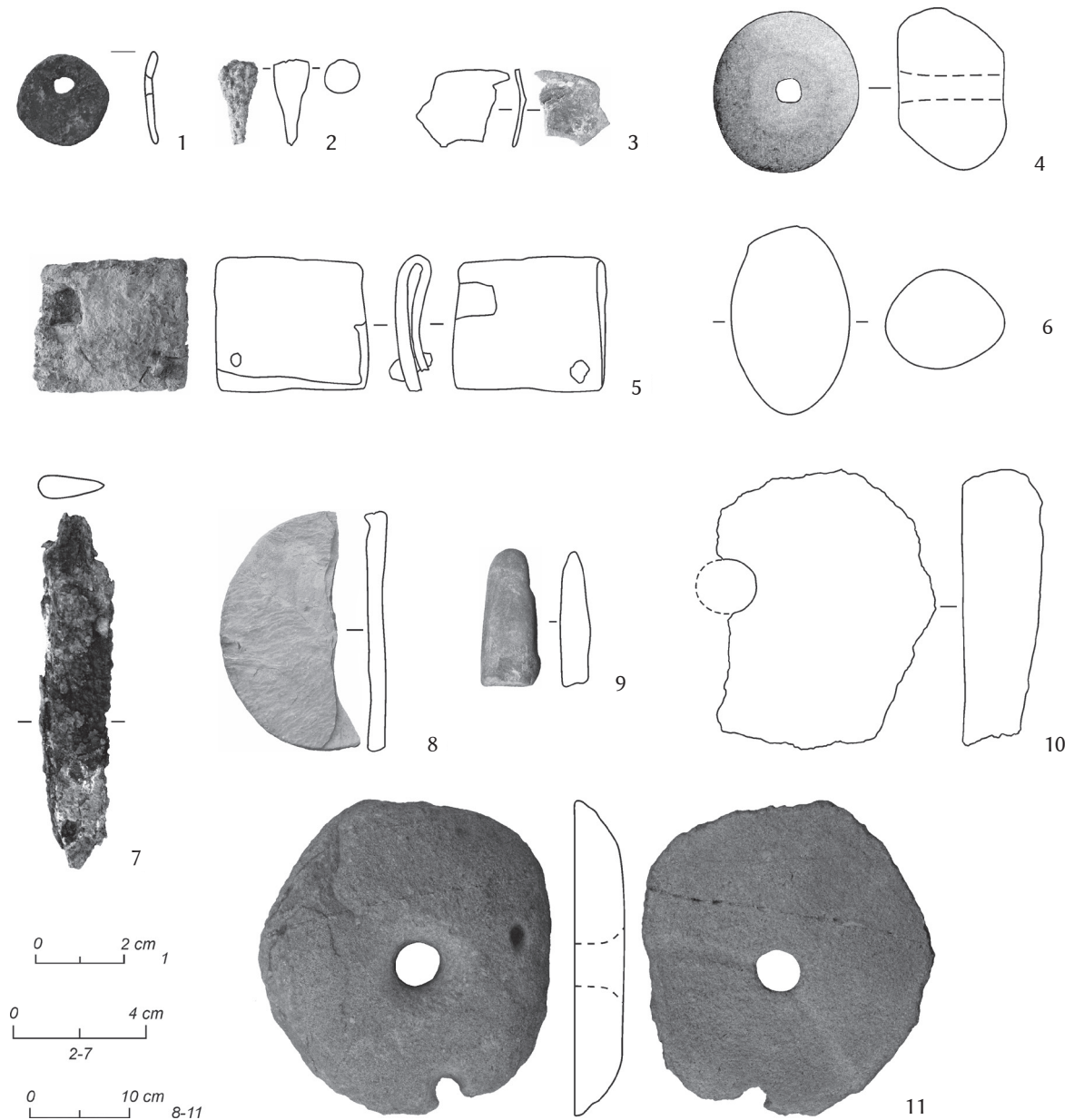


Fig. 4. Kakhramontepa. 1 – Bronze disc (Floor 1 in Room 8), 2, 5 – iron nail and iron mount or fitting (fill of the central corridor), 3 – bronze plate (central corridor), 4 – clay spindle-whorl (Floor 1 of Room 2), 6 – slingstone (fill of the central corridor), 7 – iron knife (Floor 1 of Room 9), 8 – stone disc fragment (Floor 2 of Corridor 2), 9 – whetstone (Floor 2 of the central corridor), 10 – hinge-stone (reused hand mill; Floor 1 of the central corridor), 11 – stone hand mill (Floor 1 of Room 9) © DAI Eurasien-Abteilung. Photos by N. Boroffka, drawings by R. Boroffka

The pottery may be divided into fine tableware (plates/bowls, jars, jugs, amphorae), medium-quality large storage vessels, and coarse, sometimes spouted cooking cauldrons (Figs 5–7). The finer ware may be covered by reddish to black slip (engobe), decorated with burnished wavy lines, zig-zags or cross-hatching (Fig. 5.1,3,5,7,8). The slip was sometimes applied only to the upper part of larger pots, with decorative paint runs down the body, while some patches of dark paint or slip on others give the impression of intentionality (Fig. 7.1–2). Especially flat dishes with high-quality red slip (Fig. 6.1) are considered imitations of Roman terra sigillata (*псевдоарретинские* [pseudo-arretine] pottery in Russian terminology).

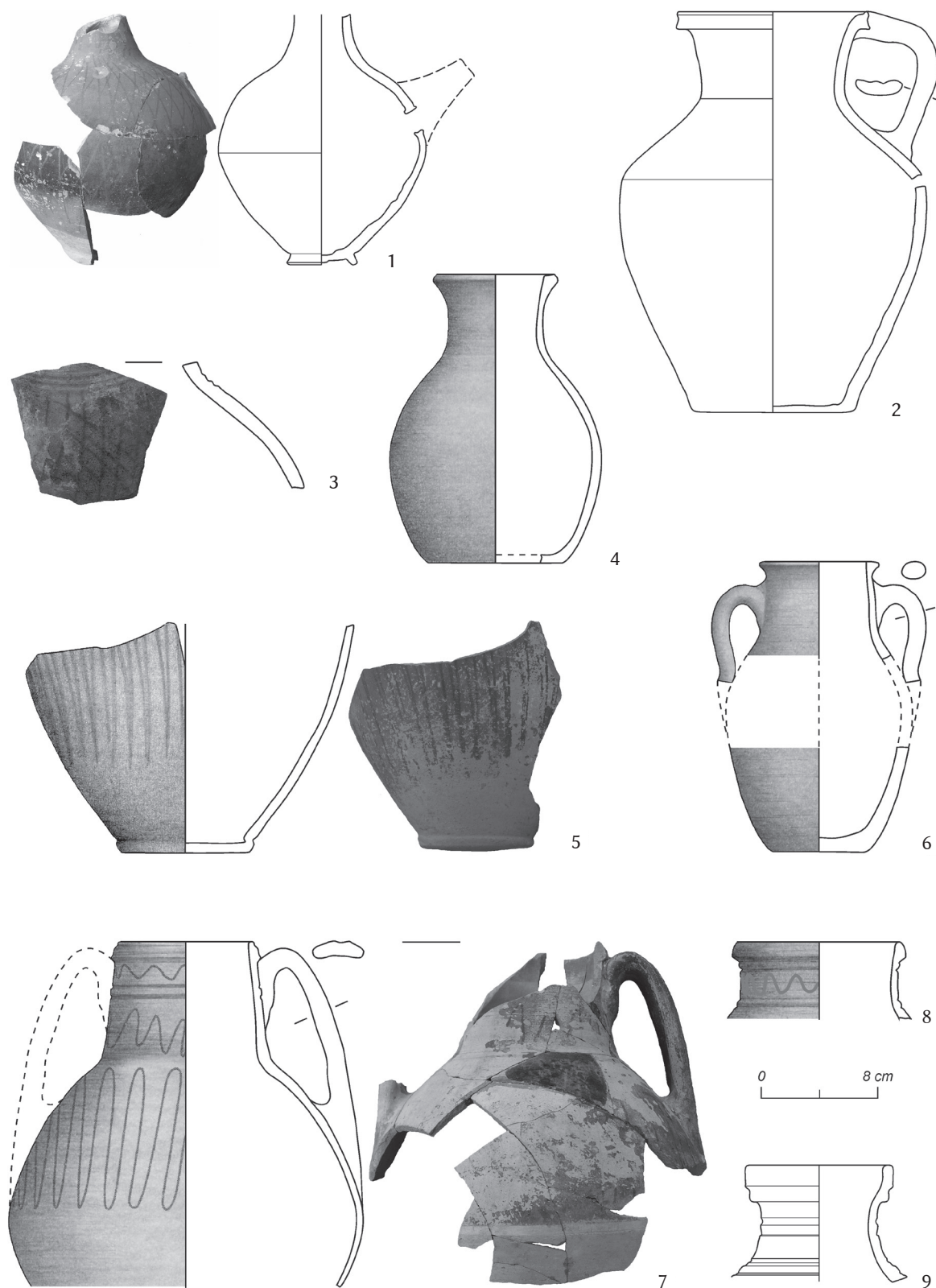


Fig. 5. Kakhramontepa. Pottery selection. 1 – Floor 2 of Corridor 2, 2–3 – Floor 1 of Corridor 2, 4 – Floor 1 of Room 6, 5, 8 – fill of Corridor 1, 6–7 – floor 1 of Room 9, 9 – Floor 1 of the central corridor (© DAI Eurasien-Abteilung. Photos by N. Boroffka, drawings by R. Boroffka)

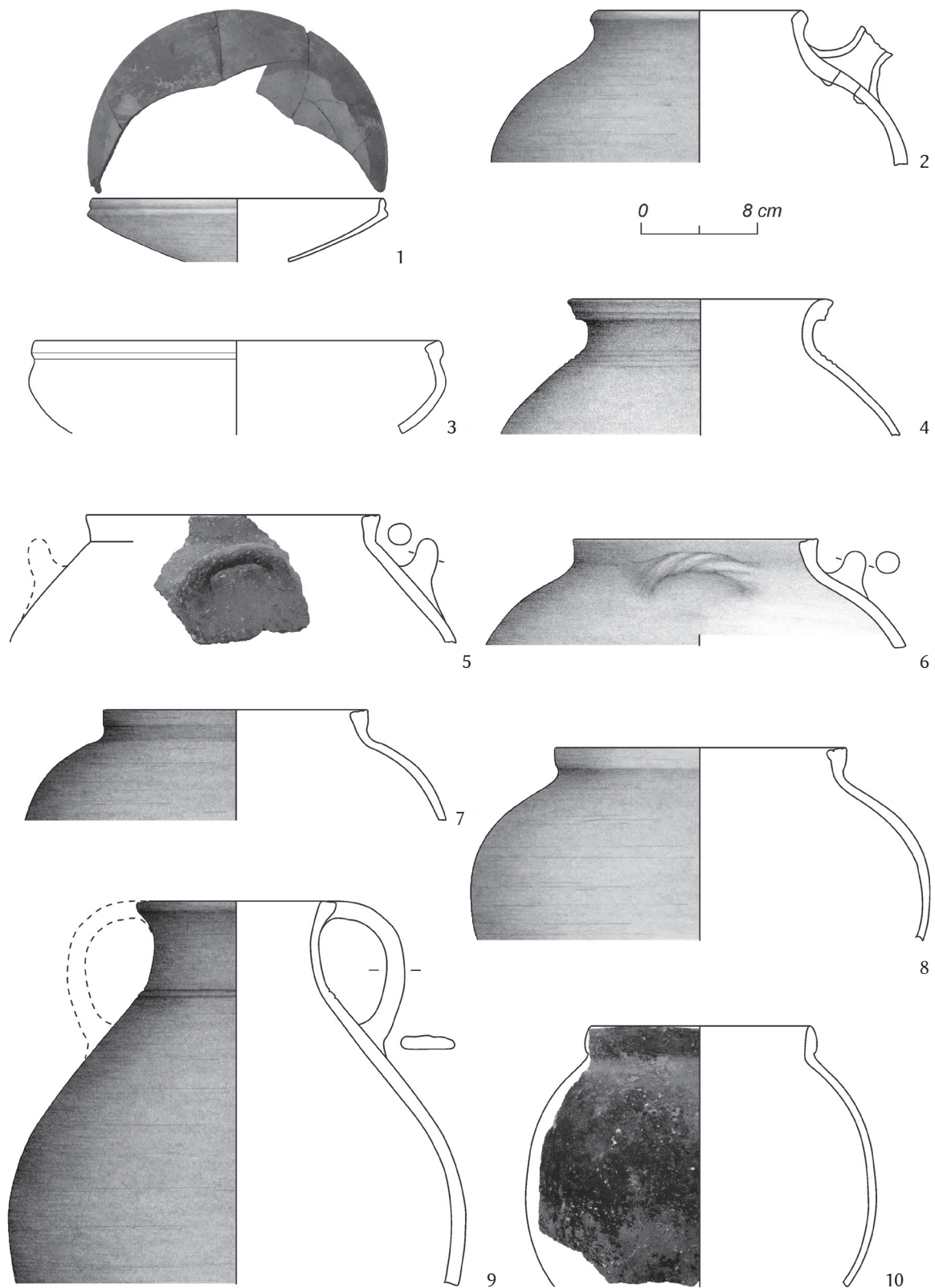


Fig. 6. Kakhrmontepa. Pottery selection. 1 – Floor 1 of Corridor 2, 2, 10 – Floor 1 of Room 9, 3 – Floor 1 of the central corridor, 4, 8 – Floor 1 of Room 2, 5 – Floor 1 of Room 8, 6 – Floor 1 of Room 7, 7, 9 – Floor 1 of Corridor 1 (© DAI Eurasien-Abteilung. Photos by N. Boroffka, drawings by R. Boroffka)

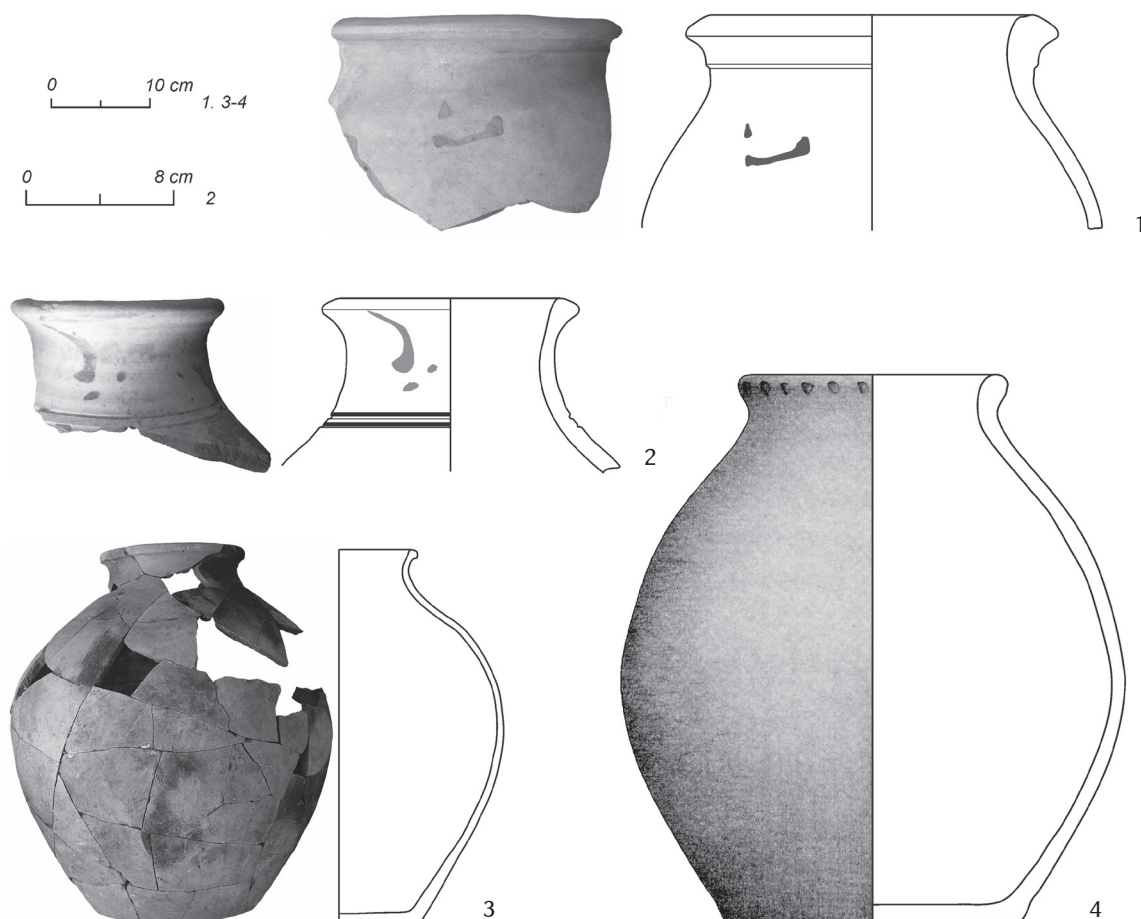


Fig. 7. Kakhramontepa. Pottery selection. 1, 3 – Floor 1 of the central corridor, 2 – Floor 2 of the central corridor, 4 – Floor 1 of Room 8 (© DAI Eurasien-Abteilung, Photos by N. Boroffka, drawings by R. Boroffka)

General analogies to the pottery record of Kakhramontepa may be found in Aysaritepa⁸ and Khosiyattepa⁹ in the Sherobod (Sherabad) District a little further west and in Zartepa near Angor a little further south.¹⁰ While the pottery reflects late Kushan traditions, it also comprises new types, such as hand-made pots with running slip, painted, or burnished decoration; based on its overall characteristics, it could be dated to the 4th or early 5th century AD.

Three radiocarbon dates from the two building phases and the fill of Kakhramontepa¹¹ (Fig. 8) give corresponding calibrated (2σ) ages of 380–540, 400–550, and 410–560 AD, respectively, thus confirming the presumed short use of the small fortress. Only one sample, from the outer face of the external wall,¹² gave a clearly younger 770–970 AD (2σ) date, which may be the result of some unknown activity at the site later, in connection with the destroyed medieval settlement on the left bank of the Urgulsai (mentioned above).

Thus, the brief description of the excavation results outlines a fairly small fortress with a carefully designed inner layout, which was slightly changed after a presumed short time. The archaeolog-

8 PIDAEV 1974, 39 Fig. 6.

9 ANNAYEV 1988, Pls 6–7.

10 ANNAYEV 1988, Pls 2–3; ABDULLAYEV – ANNAYEV 1990, 15–17, 21, Figs 2–3.

11 Room 8, Floor 2: KIA 37137 (1620±25 BP), central corridor, Floor 1: Poz 68023 (1595±30 BP), Room 15, fill: Poz 68025 (1575±30 BP).

12 Poz 68024: 1170±30 BP.

ical dating of the pottery via analogies puts the time of its use to the late 4th or early 5th century AD, while the peaks in the calibration curves of the radiocarbon dates possibly indicate a slightly younger period, covering the entire 5th and possibly even reaching the start of the 6th century AD.

Atmospheric data from Reimer et al (2004); OxCal v3.10 Bronk Ramsey (2005); cub r: 5 sd: 12 prob usp[chron]

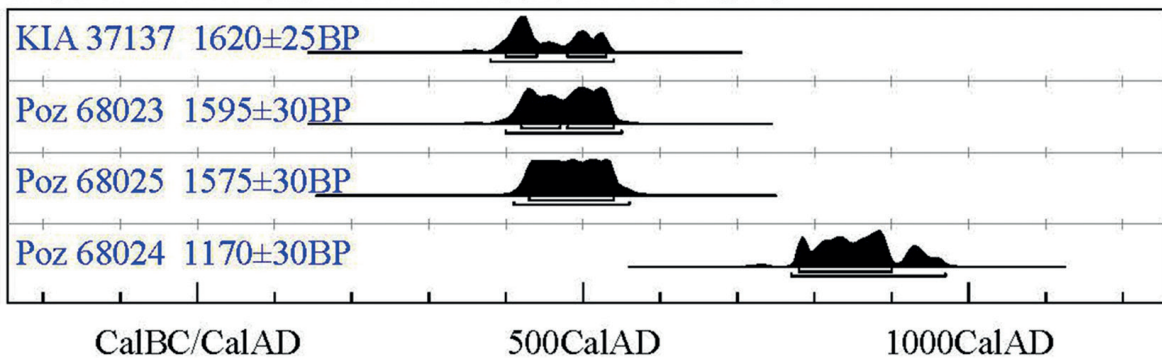


Fig. 8. Kakhrmontepa. Radiocarbon dates. KIA 37137: Floor 2 of Room 8, Poz 68023: Floor 1 of the central corridor, Poz 68025: fill of Room 15, Poz 68024: external face of the perimeter wall (© DAI Eurasien-Abteilung)

The field campaigns of the joint Uzbek–German Baysun Expedition, started in 2005, included, besides excavation, the survey of the entire Bandikhon oasis. While the site mentioned in the introduction of this paper, identified already in the 1970s, was described earlier as ‘the burials of Saryband’, the new survey identified several groups of kurgans (burials marked on the surface) west-northwest of the Kakhrmon fortress in addition to those already known west and northwest of Saryband. The burials west-northwest of Kakhrmon appear on the surface as small groups of stones lying flat—an outstanding phenomenon on the steppe, otherwise without stones on the surface. Two were excavated (K001a-b out of 28 registered kurgans) but did not yield any finds; therefore, this group cannot be dated reliably at the present.

Over sixty kurgans were registered around Saryband. The various kinds of structures form clusters arranged with consideration to each other (Fig. 9). They may be classified into distinct types by their appearance:

- Furthest north: simple small groups of stones lie flat on the steppe. One of these (Kurgan S005) was excavated, revealing a ring-shaped construction of large stone blocks, apparently built on the ancient surface without any foundation. The few finds from this structure could be dated to the Early Middle Ages and are probably contemporaneous with the Kakhrmon fortress (Fig. 9). One within this group of kurgans had a different layout: a rectangle marked by four larger stones on the corners and one inside the rectangle, somewhat north from its centre (Kurgan S009). Upon excavation, it turned out that this central stone lay actually slightly north of one end of a presumed grave pit, which did not contain either human bones or datable finds.
- South of the kurgans of group (a): low earth mounds of varying dimensions (ca. 3–15 m in diameter, 0.20–0.60 m high), usually without any visible stone construction. Two (Kurgans S045 and S 046) were excavated and may be dated to the Kushan Period.
- Northwest and south of the mounds of group (b): a large number of stone circles, sometimes with a central group of stones. One of these (S047) was excavated. The burial shows a rather complex structure: an east-west oriented grave shaft with sides narrowing in steps downward and a small chamber next to it in the west, separated from the main shaft by a narrow wall built of unfired mud bricks and stones on top of a low threshold. The main shaft was engirded by the stone circle on the ancient surface where some upper stones of

the separating wall also lay scattered. Some stones marked perhaps a second, outer circle encompassing the entire feature, but these were only scattered loosely in the north-western and south-western parts of the excavation area (Fig. 10.A1). A few bone splinters and the small fragment of a metal(?) object (Fig. 10.B1) were found in the grave pit. Pottery sherds of a few vessels have been recovered from the smaller pit outside the circle, and several pottery fragments were found inside the northern part of the stone circle; presumably, these had been displaced by robbers (Fig. 10.B2–6). The pottery has good analogies in the find material of Kakhrmontepa and can, thus, be dated also to the late 4th–5th centuries AD. The kurgan excavated earlier by E. Rtveladze and A. Sagdullaev¹³ is now registered as S001, belonging to this group, and dated to the same period as well.

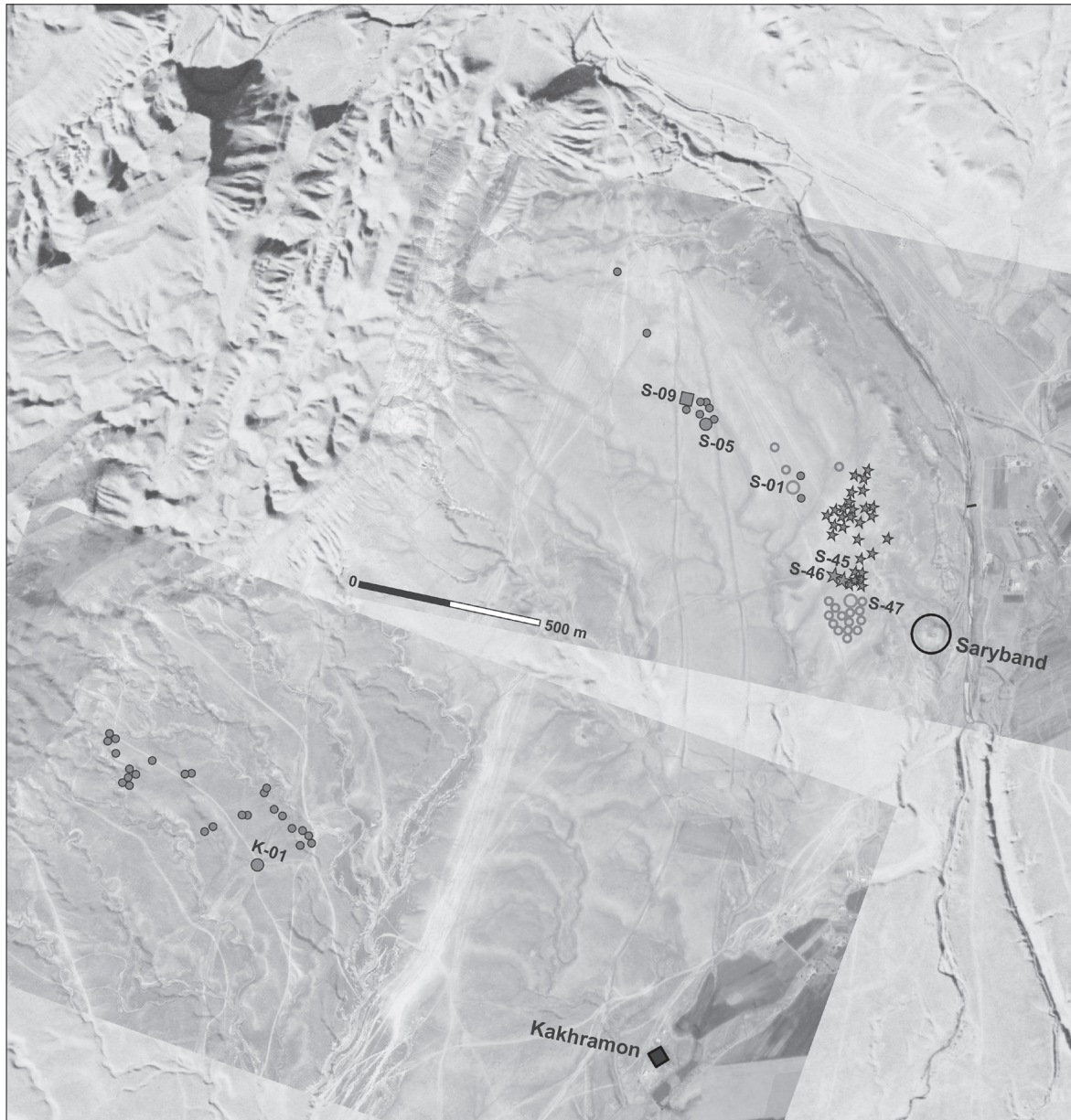


Fig. 9. Satellite images of the Kakhrmontepa-Saryband burial ground. ● Small stone groups, ○ stone circles, ★ earth mounds, ■ rectangular stone setting (© DAI - Eurasien-Abteilung. Figure by R. Boroffka, base maps and images by Corona and Google Earth™)

13 PUGACHENKOVA – RTVELADZE 1990, 44; RTVELADZE 2005, 304–306; SAGDULLAYEV 2005; see also below.

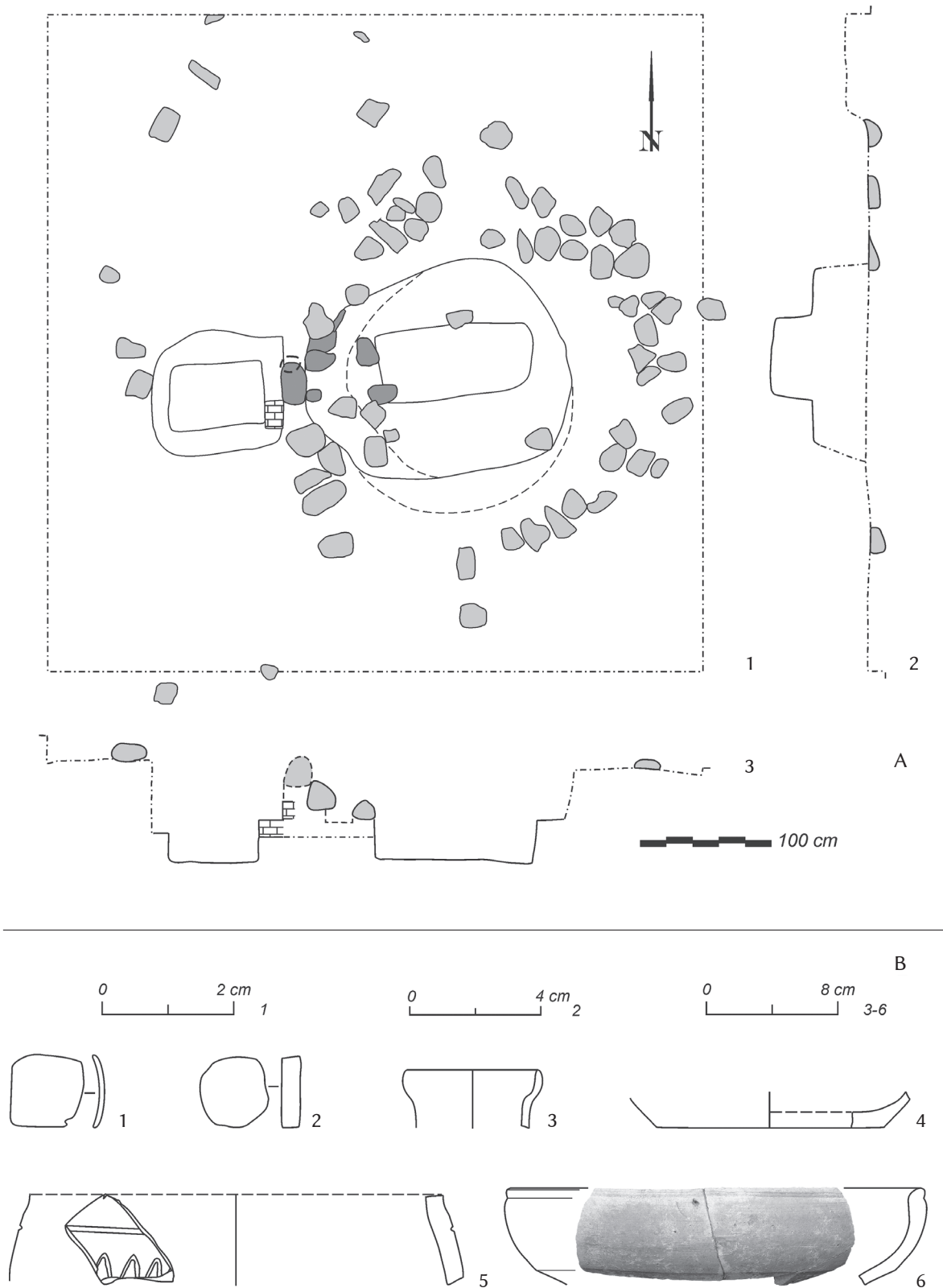


Fig. 10. Kakhramontepa-Saryband. A: 1 – Ground plan, 2–3 – profiles, and B: 1 – metal and 2–6 – pottery Grave S047, a stone circle burial (© DAI Eurasien-Abteilung. Drawings by R. Boroffka)

Some settlements with coeval layers in the region have already been mentioned amongst the analogies to the pottery of the small fort. Besides, the large and well-known site of Erkurgan, located further west near Karshi,¹⁴ and the settlement mound in the modern locality of Karnab, further north, may be mentioned. Karnab is one of the sites in Uzbekistan excavated by modern methods and published extensively; it has a chronologically long stratigraphic sequence. The best analogies to the hand-made and partly coated vessels of Kakhramon may be found there in periods V (with more elements of the Late Antique tradition) and VI (when the well-preserved fortification on the site was in use).¹⁵ Karnab is also of interest in the present discussion for another reason—it is one of the few regions in Uzbekistan where well-dated burials from the 4th–5th centuries AD have been excavated. While relatively many settlements with layers dated to the period in focus have been identified in Uzbekistan, burials are barely known. Several grave groups were identified during surveys around the settlement mound of Karnab.¹⁶ A kurgan with a shaft-like entryway (A403) was excavated at Abdurakhman Kyr. The entryway, disturbed by a modern shepherd pit-dwelling, led to an underground chamber sealed by a large stone slab. The chamber, with four steps leading down from the entry shaft, contained the bones of at least thirteen individuals, carefully placed in piles or on earthen platforms (*sufa*) along the sides of the chamber; only the last two buried individuals lay stretched in supine position beside each other on the floor at the centre of the chamber.¹⁷ All preserved crania featured pronounced artificial deformation.¹⁸ The grave contained pottery characteristic to Karnab Phases V and VI, some bronze and iron jewellery, remains of armour, a fragmentary sword, arrowheads, glass beads, and two silver Samarkand Sogd coins with standing archer figurines on the reverse, dating from the 4th–5th centuries AD.¹⁹ Different burial structures were excavated at Karnab, sites A006 and A342a. Karnab A006 was an above-surface chamber built from massive stone blocks (similar to the *kurum* or *mugkhona* types),²⁰ which did not yield any *in situ* skeletons but only some bone splinters, the remains of several pottery vessels, and a glass bead. Based on the pottery, the feature could be dated to the 4th–6th centuries AD, corresponding with Karnab Phase VI.²¹ The burial structure at Karnab A342a was a low oval earth mound with a few stones, of ca. 7 × 5 m. A roughly north-south directed, stone-lined pit was uncovered at the centre of the mound, with a separate small stone enclosure at the northern end. The burial, robbed in Antiquity, contained no human bones; only some remains of the one-time inventory could be recovered. Both the pottery, the bronze and iron jewellery (rings and bracelets), and the glass beads have good analogies in the Late Antique/Early Medieval Period and may be dated to Karnab Phase VI and the 4th–6th centuries AD.²²

Looking at Kakhramontepa in a wider context and taking into account its chronological position, we have good reason to assign the site with high probability to the Kidarites—one of the mysterious peoples who actively participated in the political and ethnic movements of the 4th and 5th centuries AD in Central Asia.

There is no need to recite all hypotheses about the recurring problem of the origin of the Kidarites, Khionites, and Hepthalites, which are mostly based on written sources and numismatic data.²³

14 ISAMIDINOV – SULEJMANOV 1984, 68–99, Figs 29–41 (phase ER VI, with extensive bibliography and analogies).

15 PARZINGER – BOROFFKA 2003, 134–143, Figs 99–123 (with extensive bibliography and analogies).

16 PARZINGER – BOROFFKA 2003, 16–22, Figs 1–3.

17 PARZINGER – BOROFFKA 2003, 206–209, Figs 136–137.

18 Photographs are published in KURBANOV 2013, 54, Fig. 16.

19 A. Atachodžaev in PARZINGER – BOROFFKA 2003, 232–233, Figs 1–2.

20 LITVINSKIY 1972a; LITVINSKIY 1986; PARZINGER – BOROFFKA 2003, 211.

21 PARZINGER – BOROFFKA 2003, 209–213, Figs 138–140.

22 PARZINGER – BOROFFKA 2003, 213–215, Figs 141–142.

23 A recent overview is given in KURBANOV 2013.

According to a widely accepted theory the Kidarites (or Siao Yuezhi, Small Yuezhi) are the descendants of the Da Yuezhi (Large Yuezhi) and came to Central Asia and northern India from eastern Turkestan at the end of the 4th or beginning of the 5th century AD. The precise dating of the period marked by their leader, by the name of Kidara, has not been established yet; some historians and numismatists assume that the coins of Kidara imitate those of Shapur II (AD 309–379), while others consider the prototype of Kidara's coins to be those of Bakhram V (AD 420–438). The Kidarite capital may have been Balkh, with their rule extending north and south of the Hindukush. The first reference to Tokharistan, in AD 383, is also known from this time.²⁴ Towards the middle of the 5th century AD, probably during the reign of Yazdigerd II (AD 438/439–457), who attempted to recover the eastern provinces, the Kidarites were forced to leave Tokharistan due to the Sasanian pressure and withdrew to Gandhara.²⁵ Some of them may have stayed in western China, west of Dunhuang, up to the 10th century AD, when they were assimilated by Tibetan tribes.²⁶

Both the chronological position and the find material of Kakhramontepa and the apparently sudden and unexplained abandonment of the fortress correspond well to the general understanding of the fairly brief rule of the Kidarites in Central Asia.

Thus, Kakhramontepa may be interpreted as a small Kidarite fortress, presumably intended not so much for general defence as for storing supplies and providing accommodation for a small garrison controlling the important pass at the Kyzylkum and the water resources of the Bandykhansai. In this sense, Kakhramontepa perhaps replaced the older Saryband about three kilometres upstream, which probably controlled the water route during Kushan and Kushano–Sasanian times.

Some of the graves known as 'burials of Saryband' belong to the time of the Kakhramontepa fortress: the burial excavated by E. Rtveladze and A. Sagdullaev (S001), as well as Kurgans S005 and S047, excavated in 2014 and briefly described above. Interestingly enough, they represent two different construction types; S001 and S047 have stone circles with (sometimes complex) burial pits, while S005 appears to be an above-ground burial chamber resembling the *kurum* or *mugkhona* type known from the Ferghana region.²⁷

The burials with stone circles resemble the Wusun-type structures on the right bank of the Ili River in Kazakhstan, where burials with stone circles emerged first in the 3rd–2nd centuries BC and, with minor changes, remained in fashion until the 2nd–3rd centuries AD. The changes concerned the stone ring: those with visible rings around the base of the mound are considered early, while later the stone circle is covered by the earth mound. A third variant is most similar to the features at Saryband, comprising a simple, east-west oriented oval or rectangular pit encircled by a stone circle on the surface but without a mound.²⁸

K. A. Akishev and G. A. Kushaev assumed a continuous, unbroken evolution of the burial rite and, correspondingly, of the population in Semirechye from the Saka Period (6th–4th century BC) to the 2nd–3rd century AD. However, they noted the coexistence, from the change of eras onwards, of two grave types in the Ili Valley, which held a high anthropological variation of buried individuals: simple shaft graves and burial chambers with entryways.²⁹

It is rather difficult to understand such an open geographic area as Semirechye being isolated from its environment. It is open in almost all directions: the far west, where the people of the 'Sauromatian'

24 LITVINSKIY – SOLOV'YEV 1985, 119.

25 BICHURIN 1950, 264; ZEIMAL 1996, 119–126.

26 RERIKH 1963, 118–123.

27 LITVINSKIY 1972a; LITVINSKIY 1986; PARZINGER – BOROFFKA 2003, 211.

28 AKISHEV – KUSHAYEV 1963, 240.

29 AKISHEV – KUSHAYEV 1963, 251–253.

Sargat³⁰ and the ‘Sarmatian’ Prokhorovka³¹ cultures dwelled in the period in focus, the north, where the lands of the ‘Asian Scythians’ (i.e., the Saka) lay, and the east, with a string of diverse archaeological groups, characterised by hand-made painted pottery, along the same Ili River in north-western Xinjiang.³² The complexity and variety of the ethnic mixture in western China and eastern Kazakhstan during the Wusun Period is well illustrated by the Chinese source translated by I. I. Umnyakov:

“[...] the peoples, conquered by the Hsiung-nu and pushed west by them, are mentioned in Chinese under the names of Wu-Sun and Yue-zhi. The Yuezhi people, after being attacked by the Hsiung-nu, started moving. An insignificant part, therefore named small Yue-zhi (Siao-Yue-zhi), probably retreated from the pressure of the Hsiung-nu into the region of Nan-shan, while the major part, the ‘large Yue-zhi’ (Da-Yue-zhi) moved west, where they encountered the Saka (Sie), and later moved on to the northern Tian Shan. The crushing defeat the Saka suffered from the Yue-zhi probably took place somewhere in the region at the upper course of the Ili, Chi, and Naryn rivers. A part of the Saka was apparently integrated by the Yue-zhi. However, the rule of the Yue-zhi did not last there. Another group of people, the Wusun from the pastures of the Bulundzir River Basin, who became vassals of the Hsiung-nu, attacked them and pushed them further west. A part of the Yuezhi was perhaps integrated by the Wusun, who now ruled the extensive territory from Ebi Nor in the east up to Ferghana in the west”.³³

The above may reveal why Pompeius Trogus called the Asiani or Asoi rulers Tocharians, provided, of course, that the identification of the Asiani with the Wusun and the Tocharians with the Yuezhi is correct. From an archaeological point of view, however, one thing does seem clear: the population in the Ili River region was composed of more than only one ethnic group or people, and the burials with the stone circles, similar to those in Saryband, could have equally been constructed by the Saka, the Wusun, or the Yuezhi. At present, it may only be assumed that some part of the Yuezhi persisted somewhere in the foothill area of Xinjiang, perhaps along the upper Ili River and its tributaries, and moved later to Central Asia, where they became known as Kidarites.

In the mid-5th century AD, following the Kidarites, another mysterious people of unclear origin appeared in Central Asia: the Hephthalites.³⁴ Two theories emerge from Chinese sources, where they are named Ye-da (also Ye-dien, Idi, Ye-ta-ilito): they were either a kind of Yuezhi or a branch of the ‘Gaogiu tribe’, albeit their language is not similar to that of the Zhuzhan, the Gaogiu, or the Turks.³⁵ Following K. A. Inostrantsev, most archaeologists connect these people with the burial structures known as *kurum* or *mugkhona*³⁶ that is, stone tombs usually constructed above-ground, which are especially well-researched in the Ferghana Valley.³⁷

Kurum-type burial structures have been found in the southern foothills of the Baysun Mountains, not far from the graves of Saryband. They form the large cemeteries, sometimes stretching over several kilometres, which mark a broad zone along the western Hissar Mountains, including the periphery

30 KORYAKOVA – EPIMAKHOV 2007, 287–312.

31 MALASHEV – YABLONSKIY 2008.

32 DEBAINE-FRANCFORT 1989, 202–205.

33 UMNYAKOV 1940, 185–186.

34 A recent comprehensive overview in KURBANOV 2013.

35 BICHURIN 1950, 268–269.

36 INOSTRANTSEV 1909; LITVINSKIY 1972a; LITVINSKIY 1976, 55–56; LITVINSKIY 1986; SOLOV’YEV 1998, 474, 488–489.

37 INOSTRANTSEV 1909; LITVINSKIY 1972a; LITVINSKIY 1976, 55–56; LITVINSKIY 1986; SOLOV’YEV 1998, 474, 488–489.

of Surkhandarya region, the mountainous parts of southern Kashkadarya, and the adjacent areas in Tadzhikistan. Those located in the foothills are mostly severely damaged, but well-preserved examples are known high up in the mountains, although those too had been completely emptied long ago. Usually, these structures now look like shapeless stone piles of 9–10 m in diameter and up to 2 m height, or circular or oval stone rings of 2–3 m in diameter and up to 0.5 m high. Three such cemeteries are known in the southern foothills of Baysuntau, near the modern settlements of Omonkhona, Tuda, and Khatak-Loilagan.³⁸ Kh. Duke excavated seven ‘stone enclosures’ (some with traces of cremation) in the largest group at Loilagan in 1973; these features were tentatively dated to the 6th–7th centuries AD based on the few finds they yielded,³⁹ which was corrected later to the 4th–6th centuries AD.⁴⁰ Outwardly, the *kurums* of the three localities (Omonkhona, Tuda, and Khatak-Loilagan), which in fact form a single, huge cemetery, are similar to some kurgans at Saryband (especially S005) and Karnab (A006), and were dated to the same period. The variants of this funerary rite, typical of the mountain areas of Central Asia, are fundamentally similar, corroborating the views of those who insisted that the “Khionites, Kidarites and Hephthalites belonged to a single ethnic group but comprised different hordes with different tribal names”.⁴¹ Taking also into account the analogies to the kurgans of Semirechye, perhaps the idea of A. Yakubovskii that these people were the descendants of the Massagetae mentioned by Herodotus is also to be reconsidered.⁴² K. A. Akishev assumed that the burials at Besshatyr on the left bank of the Ili River belong to the Saka *tigraxauda* (the demonym meaning ‘with pointed hats’),⁴³ while B. A. Litvinskiy identified the Saka *tigraxauda* with the Massagetae, placing them, however, in the western part of Central Asia (Prearal and Caspian regions), while identifying the Saka of Semirechye, outside the attention of the Achaemenid Empire, as the Saka *haumavarga* (‘haomadriking’).⁴⁴ The high headdress of the famous ‘Golden Man’ from the Issyk burial, however, does prove that the Saka of Semirechye wore ‘high hats’—i.e., were indeed *tigraxauda*.

Although the architecture of the small fortress of Kakhramontepa and the finds from this military outpost do not allow for a clear ethnic attribution, the burials are somewhat more informative—that is, if we consider burial structures and habits as ethnic markers. In summary, all micro-regions with burials, including Kakhramon-Saryband, the foothills of the Baysun Mountains, and Karnab, are characterised by a diversity of roughly coeval burial structures in the 4th–5/6th centuries AD, which may either reflect a very quick succession of different peoples dominating the area or a blend of different ethnic groups. Both possibilities would fit the little we know from historical sources: a quick succession of ruling ‘peoples’ or a multi-ethnic composition of ‘peoples’, the names of all of whom are practically only known from external sources.

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- 38 SVERCHKOV 2006; SVERCHKOV 2007.
- 39 DUKE 1975, 76.
- 40 LITVINSKIY – SEDOV 1984, 134; BOLELOV 1995, 98.
- 41 FIGULEVSKAYA 1941, 50; YAKUBOVSKIY 1955, 103.
- 42 YAKUBOVSKIY 1955, 104.
- 43 AKISHEV – KUSHAYEV 1963, 25–87.
- 44 LITVINSKIY 1972b, 172–174.

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