

From Late Antique to Early Medieval Sogdiana: A View from Novel Excavations in Samarkand

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Abstract

This paper will chiefly focus on recent excavation results from four different sites in the Samarkand oasis: Kafir-kala in the southeastern vicinity, Kuldortepa and Kurgontepa in Urgut, southeast of Samarkand, and Mingtepa in Jomboy, northeast of Samarkand.

The latest results of our fieldwork at Kafir-kala, presumably the Royal Residence of the Samarkand kings – Rewdat, show that its earliest layers can be attributed to the late 4th and early 5th centuries, which coincide with the period of Hunnish (Chionite, Kidarite) migrations and invasions. This site experienced serious upheavals during the transition to the Islamic era, which appear to have led to the loss of its significance in later periods. Kuldortepa and Kurgontepa have long been debated in favor of being the remains of Sogdian settlements - Maymurg and Sanjarfagn. And Mingtepa is considered a potential candidate for the Sogdian settlement - Kabudhan, known from early Arabic and Chinese sources. The last 2-3 seasons of our excavations demonstrate some favorable results for the significance of Kuldortepa, Kurgontepa and Mingtepa in late antique and early medieval Sogdiana.

While there are dramatic and immediate changes in material culture of Sogdiana during the transitional period, particularly the early Islamic period, there are thus far no easily discernible vicissitudes in fauna and flora. This paper will also present recently acquired palaeobotanical and zoological data from the sites in question.