



ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY THE UZBEKISTAN–CZECH INTERNATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPEDITION IN 2010–2020 (A CASE STUDY OF BOYSUN DISTRICT)

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ABSTRACT

The Uzbekistan–Czech International Archaeological Expedition, organized by the Institute of Classical Archaeology of Charles University (Czech Republic), has been conducting research on the history and archaeology of Southern Uzbekistan, particularly Northern Bactria, since 2002. Throughout this collaboration, numerous archaeological sites have been discovered and systematically studied.

In 2008, the expedition members carried out the creation of an archaeological map of the Sherobod District. The emergence of the Google Earth online platform in the same year significantly expanded the possibilities for remote archaeological surveys and site identification. As a result, the first catalogue of archaeological monuments in the Sherobod District was compiled. In September 2010, the third stage of archaeological research was implemented by the Uzbekistan–Czech International Archaeological Expedition in the Sherobod District of Surxondaryo Region. During this field season, students of the Classical Archaeology Department at Charles University — Viktoria Chistyakova, Vera Dolejalkova, and Tereza Machachikova — under the supervision of P. Tushlova, actively participated in a systematic survey program of the lowland areas.

At the beginning of the 2010 research season, 93 archaeological sites were recorded; by the end of the season, 37 new sites had been added to the list. In total, the expedition team conducted on-site investigations at 53 sites. To date, more than 40 archaeological monuments of the Bronze Age have been identified in the Surxondaryo oasis. The contribution of the Uzbekistan–Czech International Archaeological Expedition in studying these sites holds particular significance for understanding the early cultural and historical development of the region.

Literature Review: During 2008–2011, the Uzbekistan–Czech International Archaeological Expedition conducted extensive research in the Surkhan (Sherobod) oasis, which yielded significant results in the identification and study of Bronze Age sites. These findings were comprehensively presented by L. Stančo and P. Tušlová in the book *“Sherobod Oasis”* and in several articles published in the Czech archaeological journal *Studio Hercynia*.

Research Methodology: This article is based on generally accepted historical research methods, including the principles of historicism, comparative-logical analysis, chronological sequencing, systematic consistency, and objectivity.

Analysis and Results: As a result of the expedition’s activities, the number of identified Bronze Age archaeological sites increased substantially. The Uzbekistan–Czech International Archaeological Expedition also paid special attention to the Boysun District — one of the most picturesque and historically rich regions of the Surxondaryo Province. In 2017, the expedition carried out an extensive surface survey around the ancient city of Darband in the Boysun District. This work was based on the field survey methods developed during the 2014 and 2015 archaeological research seasons. The main objective of the project was to verify several scholarly hypotheses concerning the route of Alexander the Great’s army as it moved northward from Bactria toward Sogdiana.

Field Research Conducted in 2017–2018 During the archaeological excavations carried out between April 28 and May 2, 2017, research was conducted across 30 different locations, including the eastern border of Darband, the northern area near the Machaydaryo River, the village of Darband itself, the surroundings and southern border of Sarimas, the abandoned settlement in the western area, and the vicinity of Sayrob. Throughout these archaeological investigations, a number of significant historical artefacts were uncovered — including coins, ceramic wares, fortification remains, medieval cemeteries, and residential structures dating back to the Hellenistic and Medieval periods. In April and May 2018, the Uzbekistan–Czech International Archaeological Expedition continued its large-scale fieldwork in the Boysun District of southern Uzbekistan, particularly around the village of Darband. The main distinction between the 2018 season and the 2017 research lay in the expanded focus on foothill valleys, which were systematically explored and documented.

During the archaeological surveys, **ceramic fragments** collected from all examined areas were analyzed and **chronologically classified by Sh. Shaydullayev**. Additionally, **GPS localization** of all sites was performed, **topographic anomalies** were documented, and **metal detector examinations** were conducted on erosive slopes at selected locations presumed to contain archaeological remains. Between **April 20 and May 11, 2018**, a total of **38 sites** were surveyed and documented as part of the expedition’s research program. **Archaeological Survey in the Boysun Mountains (2017–2019).** Between **2017 and 2019**, the Uzbekistan–Czech International Archaeological Expedition conducted . archaeological surveys in the **Boysun Mountains** [Stančo et al., 2018, pp. 134–157; Shaydullayev et al., 2020, pp. 345–351]. These investigations were based on the methodology developed during the 2014–2016 studies of the **Poshxurd Depression** [Stančo et al., 2015; Stančo, 2016]. In addition to examining micro-oases located near small streams and springs, the expedition also focused on the previously known archaeological sites such as **Munchoqtepa** (near the village of Kofrun), **Qapchig’ay** (Darband village), **Qo’rg’onzol**, and **Poyonqo’rg’on** [Abdullayev,

1999]. The research combined **GIS mapping, satellite imagery analysis, and on-site field surveys**, along with the collection of ceramic and metal artefacts, followed by **comparative analysis with the works of ancient authors**. Based on the 2017 survey framework, a total of **nine locations** were explored during the 2017–2019 seasons, Sarimas Mountain, Machaydaryo Valley, Suvsiztog', Alamli Mountain, Darband Village, Sayrob–Rabod Desert Zone, Oqrabod–Qopqog'li Gorge (Dehqonobod District, Qashqadaryo Region), Kichik O'radaryo Oasis (around Belboyli Village, Dehqonobod District, Qashqadaryo Region), Panjob Valley.

As a result, **Kushan–Sasanian period coins** were discovered along the route from Darband village toward Sarimas Mountain. This finding indicates that the road was widely used during the Kushan–Sasanian period. Ceramic fragments collected from the early Hellenistic site near **Machay village** were examined and analyzed, while **Achaemenid-period pottery** was identified at the village of **Khojadahyak** in the Machaydaryo Valley. Archaeological studies conducted east of **Suvsiztog'** also contributed to the examination of the **defensive system stretching from Darband to the Amu Darya**, previously documented by Russian archaeologists [Dvurechenskaya, 2018, p. 18].

Archaeological Studies in the Darband Area. Prior to the new investigations in Darband village, the expedition re-examined the previously identified sites of Qapchig'aytepa and Sultonqultepa [Sverchkov, 2005, pp. 13–14].

Qapchig'aytepa is located on a small hill to the north of Qapchig'ay village, about 250–300 meters southeast of the entrance to the Machaydaryo Valley. A modern road cuts directly through the center of the site, dividing it into two parts, and the hill itself is now almost completely covered by modern constructions. However, archaeological materials were discovered in the courtyards and gardens located in the western section of the mound (110 × 100 m). The eastern area of the site measures 150 × 120 m. Due to long-term agricultural and construction activities, numerous ceramic fragments were scattered across the site. In the northwestern profile, a 2-meter-thick cultural layer containing architectural remains was documented. The ceramic assemblage indicates that Qapchig'aytepa dates back to the Hellenistic period.

On the opposite bank of the Darband River, investigations were carried out to locate the **Sultonqultepa** site. However, the survey revealed that the mound had been completely leveled. No pottery characteristic of the **Achaemenid period**, as described by [Sverchkov, 2005, p. 13], was found. Local residents suggested that “Sultonqultepa” functioned as a “**dudbon**” or “**didbon**” (from Persian *didan* — “to observe”), meaning a **watch-hill or signal post**, possibly used to transmit smoke signals between **Darband Wall** and **Qapchig'ay**. To the west of Darband village lies the **Darband Wall**, which consists of **three sections**. During archaeological observations, over **300 diagnostic pottery fragments**—mostly characteristic of the **Hellenistic period**—were collected. Numerous **metal artefacts** and **Greco-Bactrian coins** were also discovered. Excavations confirmed that the **Darband Wall** was constructed **not during the Kushan period, but during the Greco-Bactrian Kingdom**. Along the route from **Sherobod oasis to Darband**, and further toward the **Qashqadaryo oasis**, the site of **Munchoqtepa** was recorded, and surveys were extended to identify new archaeological sites in these valleys. In **Dahnaijom village**, a mound was investigated where **35 Hellenistic-period pottery fragments** were collected. The **Dahnaijom site** measures **85 × 44 m**, with a

height of **4–5 meters**, covering an area of **0.35 hectares (3,492 m²)**. Six **Hellenistic coins** (Antiochus I, Euthydemus, and Demetrius) were found there. The newly discovered **Dahnaijom site** is located **10.1 km south of Munchoqtepa** and **8.3 km north of Qapchig'aytepa**. Survey results from the nearby **Poyonqo'rg'on** site indicate that it dates to the **late Hellenistic and early Kushan periods**, as evidenced by **44 diagnostic ceramic fragments** and **4 coins**. In **Kofrun village**, **11 archaeological sites and find spots** were documented. The site of **Munchoqtepa I**, previously studied by V.V. Mokroborodov, was identified as belonging to the **Kushan period** [Stančo et al., 2019]. However, newly analyzed pottery fragments collected during the recent research show that the site also contains material from the **Greco-Bactrian period**.

At the newly discovered **Panjobtepa site** in **Panjob village**, archaeological investigations revealed **ceramic fragments, metallurgical slag, and a grinding stone**. Analysis of the pottery indicates that the site dates to the **Kushan–Sasanian period (3rd–4th centuries CE)**. Surveys conducted in the villages of **Inkabod, Dashtig'oz, Pulhokim, and Bodina** revealed only one medieval site — **Dunyotepa** in Inkabod village — where diagnostic ceramics were examined and documented. **Findings of the 2018 Archaeological Season.** During the archaeological investigations carried out in **April and May 2018** in the **Boysun and Sherobod districts**, nearly **50 archaeological sites, 236 metal artefacts, and 1,318 ceramic fragments** were documented and studied. As a result, **three new Hellenistic-period sites** were identified — **Dahnaijom, Munchoqtepa I, and Munchoqtepa II**. Furthermore, the research once again confirmed that the **border between Bactria and Sogdiana** passed through the territories of the **Kohitang and Boysun Mountains**. Archaeological fieldwork was also conducted in and around the **village of Kofrun**, where a total of **11 archaeological objects** were examined.

The equipment and technology used during these studies played a crucial role in achieving accurate and reliable results. Since **2015**, the **Uzbekistan–Czech International Archaeological Expedition** has employed **metal detectors** during excavations and surveys in the **Sherobod and Boysun districts**. The first **systematic metal-detection survey** was conducted between **8–24 September 2019** at the archaeological sites of **Darband Wall, Dahnaijomtepa, and Qapchig'ay**.

Conclusion and Recommendations: The archaeological research conducted by the **Uzbekistan–Czech International Archaeological Expedition** in the **Boysun District** has led to the discovery of numerous **Hellenistic-period sites**, significantly enriching our understanding of the **ancient history of the Surxondaryo oasis**. The findings have clearly illustrated the **historical and cultural dynamics** of the region and its **geographical significance** within ancient Bactria. As a result of the expedition's long-term activities, numerous important archaeological monuments dating from the **Bronze Age and later periods** were identified. These discoveries have provided **new and more precise insights** into the historical development of the region and have **confirmed several existing historical hypotheses** regarding the cultural and political landscape of ancient Southern Uzbekistan.

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