
Czech Archaeologists in Uzbekistan Discover Bronze Age Irrigation System

When a team of three researchers of the [Institute of Classical Archaeology](#), CU FA set off for the Paschurt Valley, their initial plan was to inspect kurgans, funeral barrows typical of steppe cultures. A discovery they made in a nearby site meant a complete change of their plans. What they discovered was settlements dating back to the Iron and Bronze Ages, including a well-preserved irrigation system.

The Paschurt Valley is located in the south of Uzbekistan, a country which has become a traditional destination for Czech archaeologists: 2014 has been the thirteenth year in a row for the team of the CU FA's Institute of Classical Archaeology.

The team, including [PhDr. Ladislav Stančo, Ph.D.](#), Bc. Hana Vondrová, a student of anthropology and postgraduate in classical archaeology, and Bc. Adam Pažout, an archaeology student, came to the steppe to inspect the kurgans, "open" one of them, place it on the timeline, and analyse the funeral rite. "As we were leaving the site, where we had been deciding which tumulus to focus on, we came across a much more accessible necropolis with burrows in excellent condition. Thus our decision to concentrate on this new site," says Ladislav Stančo.

Surface investigations of the site near the village of Kayrit revealed eleven kurgans as well as six new settlements. Commenting on the surprising discovery, Mr. Stančo said: "This was absolutely unbelievable. The localities were only hundreds of meters apart and what's more, they were right next to the road. Quite a few expeditions must have passed the place when they came to work in the surrounding area."

The main discovery, a locality called Burgut Kurgan, dates back to the early Iron Age, i.e. to the latter half of the 2nd millennium BC. For years, researchers had been searching in vain in this part of Central Asia for an intact locality that would provide valuable findings about the Iron Age, a period which saw the intermingling of the culture of settled farmers with that of newly arriving nomads.

Irrigation Canals Survive Despite Later Construction

The locality, covering an area of 60 by 50 meters, is found on an elevated place and is fortified with a stone wall. "The fortification makes us believe that this place provided refuge for other nearby settlements when in danger. We have found huge amounts of pottery, which helps us determine how old this settlement is. We assume this to be a settlement of half-dugout dwellings, but we will know more once we have uncovered the whole area," says Ladislav Stančo.

Future research plans include exploring the irrigation canals which were used to bring water from abundant springs in the nearby micro-oasis of Zarabag, with branches leading to several localities. If the canal is confirmed to have originated in the late Bronze Age, this will be a unique discovery since few surface water supply systems have survived; most were destroyed by later construction or ploughing.

Kurgans to Wait for Czech Archaeologists

As for the kurgans which had been the Czech team's initial subject of research, the archaeologists lacked time to uncover the burial chamber itself. What they managed to do was to make a cross-section of the barrow and get as deep as two meters below surface level. The human remains, however, remain uncovered.

"Hopefully, we will receive enough funds next year to be able to return to Kayrit and complete our research," says Ladislav Stančo. What archaeologists working in Uzbekistan appreciate is that, unlike in other parts of the world, historic monuments are not destroyed or robbed by local people, and amateur "archaeologists" with metal detectors are non-existent. Therefore, all the Czech team needed to do was to conserve the uncovered barrow with a layer of stones.