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# **Pottery and chronology of the Early Iron Age in Central Asia**



# Pottery and chronology of the Early Iron Age in Central Asia

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## **The Jaz II and III period pottery. Classification and chronology viewed from Bandykhan, Southern Uzbekistan**

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### **Abstract:**

*The archaeological site of Yaz depe has been a reference for the Iron Age in Central Asia for over 50 years. Monuments of this period were discovered around Bandykhan, southern Uzbekistan, in the 1970s. Here are presented results from renewed work since 2005, which give a new understanding of the pottery evolution for the Yaz I to Yaz III periods, also allowing a subdivision of Yaz II into phases A and B. Radiocarbon analyses of stratified samples provide absolute dates.*

*In the conclusions the historical context is sketched, with a brief discussion of the Frāda revolt crushed by the Achaemenid Empire, and of the Kavi kingdom and its connections to the Zoroastrian tradition and chronology.*

### **Key-words:**

*Central Asia, Uzbekistan, Iron Age, Yaz I, Yaz II, Yaz III, pottery typology, chronology, Achaemenid history, Frāda revolt, Kavi kingdom, Avesta*

About 50 years ago V. M. Masson, based on the materials from the excavations at Yaz depe in the Murgab oasis, Turkmenistan, proposed a basic periodization of the Early Iron Age in Central Asia, which has been generally accepted and is still mostly used today (Masson 1959). The article here treats three archaeological complexes, which were named Yaz I, Yaz II and Yaz III. The discussion on their origin, genetic interconnection, chronology and, especially, ethnic attribution did not cease at any time, unfortunately, frequently without any concrete archaeological data. It is thus no surprise, that in the 1990s the extensive application of radiocarbon dating from various layers of different monuments, including such of the Yaz phases, seriously questioned the ideas about the chronology and successions of the cultures of Central Asia from the Late Bronze Age up to the 4th century BC.

Previously the Bactro–Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC) was dated from the middle to the end of the 2nd millennium BC, and the Yaz I pottery was positioned at the end of the 2nd millennium/beginning of the 1st millennium BC, possibly surviving until the 7th century BC. After some discussion Yaz III was definitely correlated with the Achaemenid time (second half of the 6th – end of the 4th century BC), i.e. beginning with the conquest under Cyrus II (the Great) and ending with the conquest of Central Asia by Alexander the Great. The complex of Yaz II stratigraphically occupied an intermediate position between the last layers with the hand-made painted ceramics of the Yaz I period and the overlying layers with the characteristic cylindrical-conical vessels of the Yaz III period. Accordingly, Yaz II was dated between the 7th and the 6th century BC (Masson 1959: 29–34).

After the revisions, the BMAC is now dated to approximately 2100–1500 BC, al-

though some questions of the chronology of its last Molali stage still remain open. Not one settlement site or cemetery of Molali has, so far, been fully studied, so the upper boundary of the BMAC is far unclear. The Yaz I period, or more precisely the culture of hand-made painted pottery of Yaz I type is now definitely dated within the period 1500–1000 BC, while, let us repeat, the Yaz III period begins around the middle of the 6th century BC and ends in the late 4th century BC judging from historical sources. As a result the Yaz II period, when after a long interruption the BMAC traditions revived and a strictly Bactrian culture re-appears, is unreasonably extended to the period 1000–550 BC. Such a long period clearly contradicts the stratigraphy of the eponymous site of Yaz depe on the one hand, and on the other hand gave rise to the negation of the radiocarbon dates, or pseudo-innovative attempts at new periodizations of the entire Yaz period. However, there is no reason to break up the periodization of the Early Iron Age of Central Asia based on Yaz depe; on the other hand, to ignore the results of the newest methods is also impossible.

The most vividly indicated problem is stated in the recent article by Z. I. Usmanova, in which, knowing the archaeological material intimately, the key question of the present situation is resumed as the fact that “thus far it is not possible to accurately indicate the boundary between the periods of Yaz I and Yaz II” (Usmanova 2010: 90).

At present materials of the Yaz II complex and its traditions have increasingly been found in a whole series of sites in southern Central Asia, which gives rise to an increased interest in the discussion about the chronology of this period, its place in the history of the East and even about the existence of the very concept of Yaz II. The



essence of the question is complicated by the fact that, firstly, to an inexperienced viewer, the ceramics of Yaz II and Yaz III are practically identical, and have therefore frequently simply been combined as a complex Yaz II–III, in spite of the original stratigraphic differentiation and the possibility for experienced

specialist to define explicit differences.

It seems to us that the results of the last excavations in the well known group of sites from the Bandykhan oasis, for the first time allow us to partly solve the existing contradictions, without denying, for this case, either the universality of the periodization of

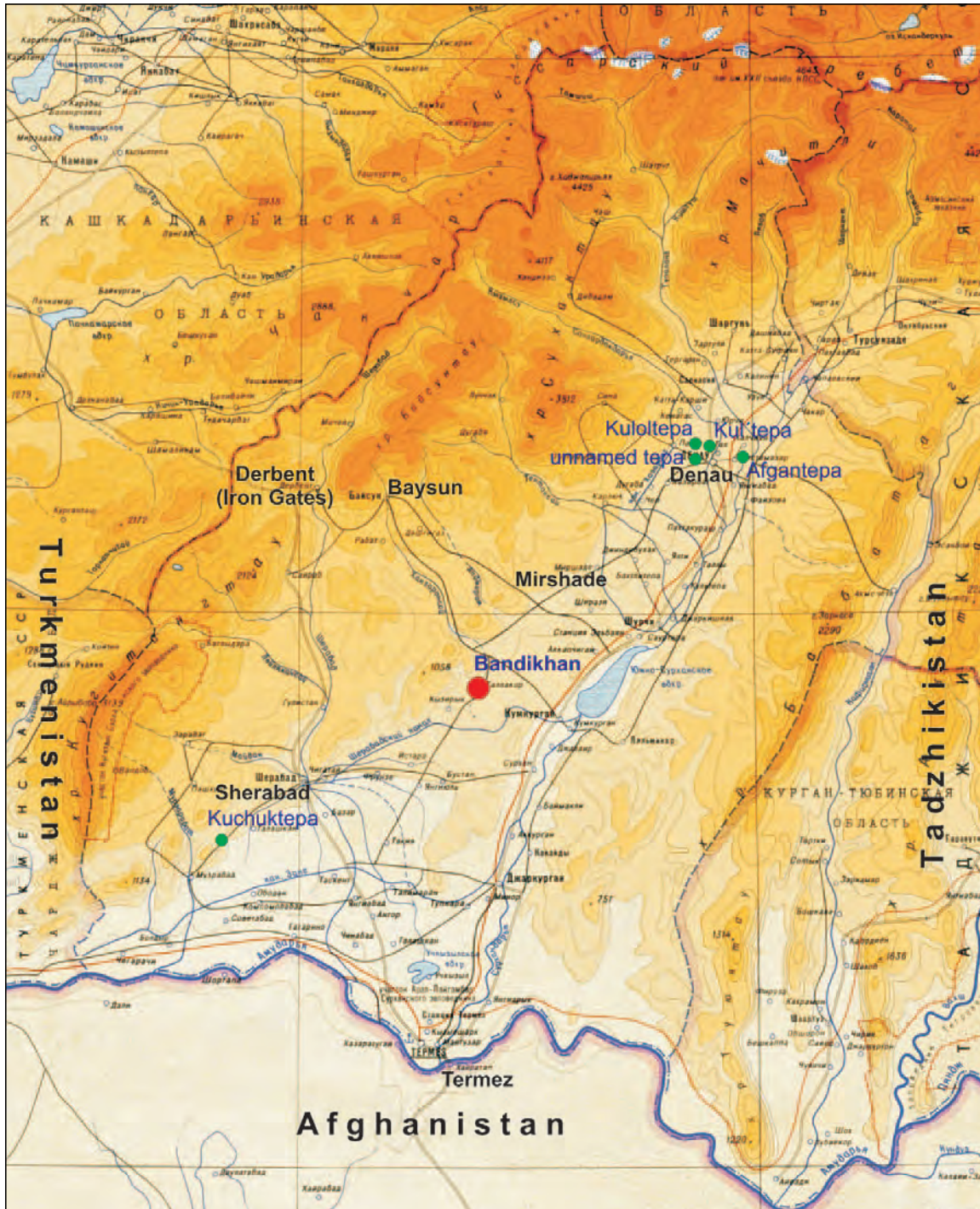


Fig. 1. The central location of Bandykhan in the Surkhandar'ya region

Yaz or the data of radiocarbon analysis.

Bandykhan is located in the very center of the Surkhandar'ya region – on the crossroads between Sherabad – Denau on the one hand, and the eastern Amu Dar'ya crossings and the Iron Gates at Derbent on the other [Fig. 1]. In the locality and its neighbouring region there are monuments of all three Yaz periods [Fig. 2]. The period Yaz I is represented by the settlement of Maydatepa (Bandykhan I); the period Yaz II is documented in the lower layers of Bektepa (Bandykhan II) and Gazimullatepa (Bandykhan III), as well as on some smaller

open sites; the period Yaz III is present in the upper layers of Bektepa and at Kindyktepa. A major advantage in the Bandykhan oasis, is the fact that the settlement core is evidently shifted, probably following changing hydrological conditions, and gave rise to the formation of “clean” sites, dating from only one or, at most, two periods. Thus there is no risk of mixed materials, as is often the case when settlement of one site is continued over very long periods and older layers are disturbed by later human activity.

In the settlement of Maydatepa (Bandykhan I) the remains of mul-

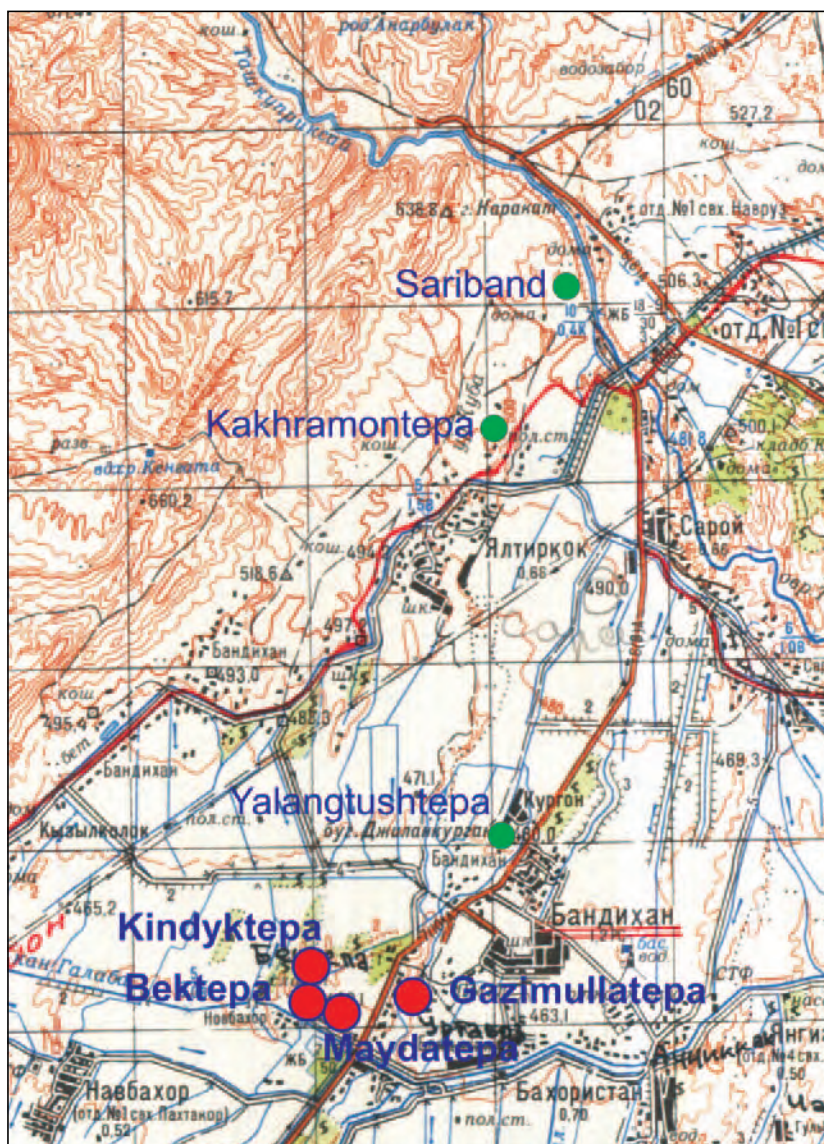


Fig. 2. Location of the sites around Bandykhan

ti-roomed buildings were uncovered, which were rebuilt repeatedly and existed during the Yaz I period (1400–1000 BC: Görzdorf 2007: 132. See also below *Fig. 11*). The Yaz I sequence has several building phases. The pottery, quite different from the preceding material of the BMAC, is mainly hand-made, with simple rounded forms dominating [*Figs 3–4*]. Sometimes it is decorated with dark paint on the lighter background (in polychrome around 10–15%), very rarely with light paint or in polychrome fashion. Wheel-made pottery is present in roughly 10%, the forms corresponding to those made by hand [*Figs 3–4*]. Then the site was deserted for some time, being covered by erosional layers and loess deposits. After this apparently brief interruption shallow pit-houses or lightly built structures without apparent system appeared, as well as round and oval pits, which all yielded fragments of Yaz II pottery. The first to mention the Yaz II finds from the upper layers of Bandykhan I (Maydatepa), was A. S. Sagdullaev (Sagdullaev 1978: 34). E. V. Rtveladze published material from the adjacent settlement of Bandykhan II (Bek-tepa), which evidently belonged to the Yaz II period, and it is important to emphasize, that this represented an early stage of the period (Rtveladze 1976: 97–99, fig. 4; Rtveladze 2007: 81–86, figs 17–18).

In 2005 the lowest layers of Bektepa (Bandykhan II) could be excavated during the summer of a dry year – they are normally below the groundwater level, which is fairly high due to the surrounding rice fields. The lowest layers revealed a structure which may be interpreted as a pit-house, and which exclusively contained pottery of Yaz II type (see Sverchkov, Boroffka 2007: 111–122). The pit-house was roughly diamond-shaped in plan, with a size (in the

limits of the trench) of 4.1 x 3.8 m, and had a depth of 0.35 to 0.50 m, the walls being very well smoothed.

This pit-house was completely overlain by a thin “sterile” layer of sand with a thickness of 0.02–0.03 m, sometimes 0.05 m, above which lay another equally “sterile” layer of light brown clay, evidently washed in by water (thickness 0.5 cm). Above this a dark brown loamy clay followed, containing numerous rounded pebbles and stones of different sizes and weights of up to 20 kg or more. This actually represents the foundation of the fortress of the Yaz III period, i.e. Achaemenid time.

In the filling of the pit-house 646 fragments of ceramics were found, 123 of them rims or bases [*Figs 5–6*], which by shape and technology may be connected to the older tradition of the BMAC. In particular, vessels with conical lower parts, fashioned in moulds separately from the upper part re-appear, which had been practically completely absent in the Yaz I period. As with the BMAC pottery, the seam between the lower formed part and the upper wheel-thrown parts in the Yaz II period has clear-cut lines, but is not marked by distinctive ribs. The rims of the pots have rims bent over outwards with a beak-shaped profile, which has long been considered as the distinctive special feature of Yaz II pottery. On the shoulders of the pots, where the rim part joins the body, we may find plastic applied horizontal ribs, which are a technical feature due to the forming technique, well known from older periods in the Late Bronze Age roller-pottery culture (Kul'tura Valikovy Keramiki – KVK). Some contact with the KVK may have existed as documented by few ceramic fragments from the Yaz I complex of Maydatepa, while in Bektepa itself no such material was found. In contrast

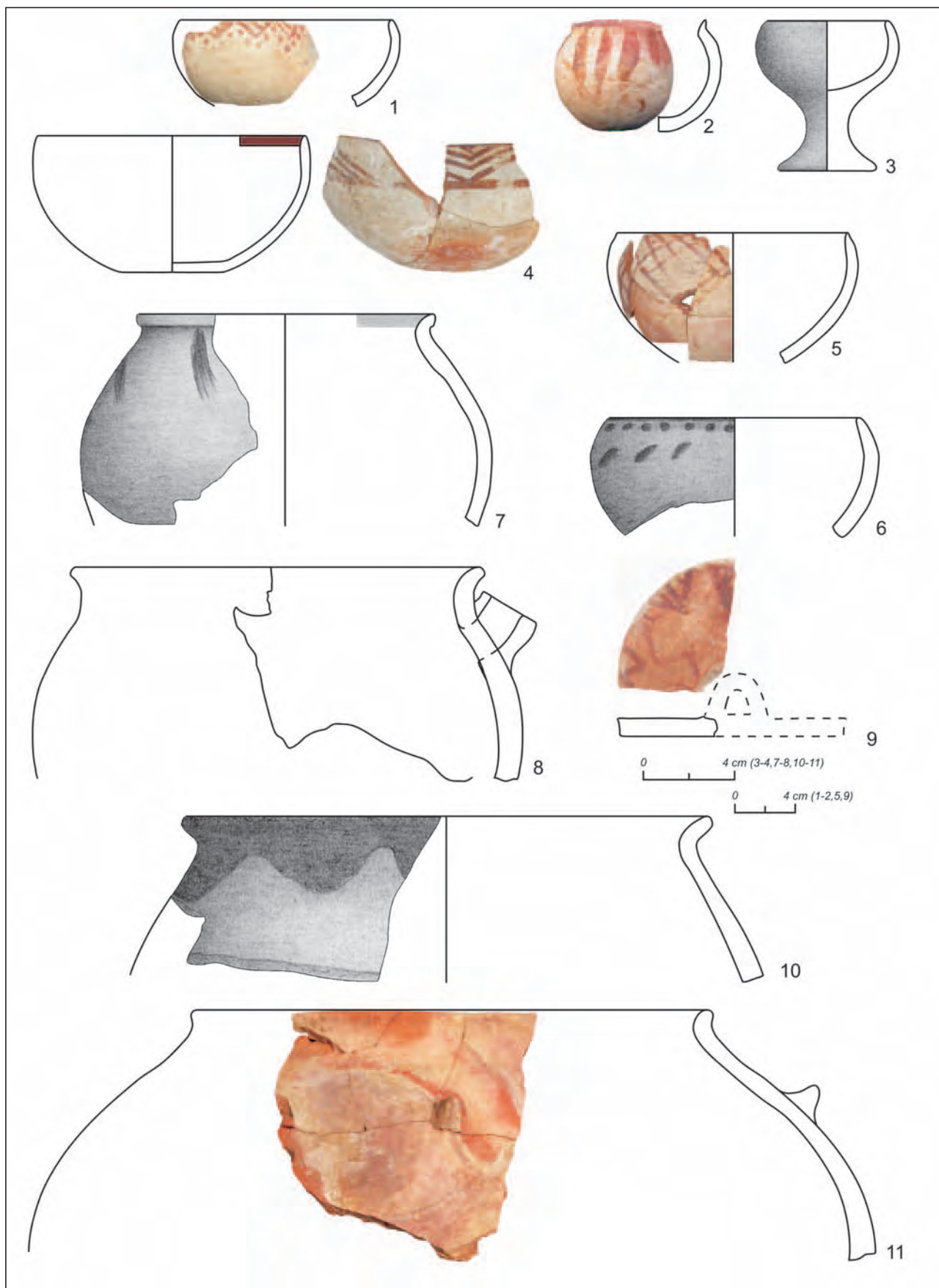


Fig. 3. Pottery of the type Yaz I (14th–11th century BC) from Maydatepa. 1–11 hand-made

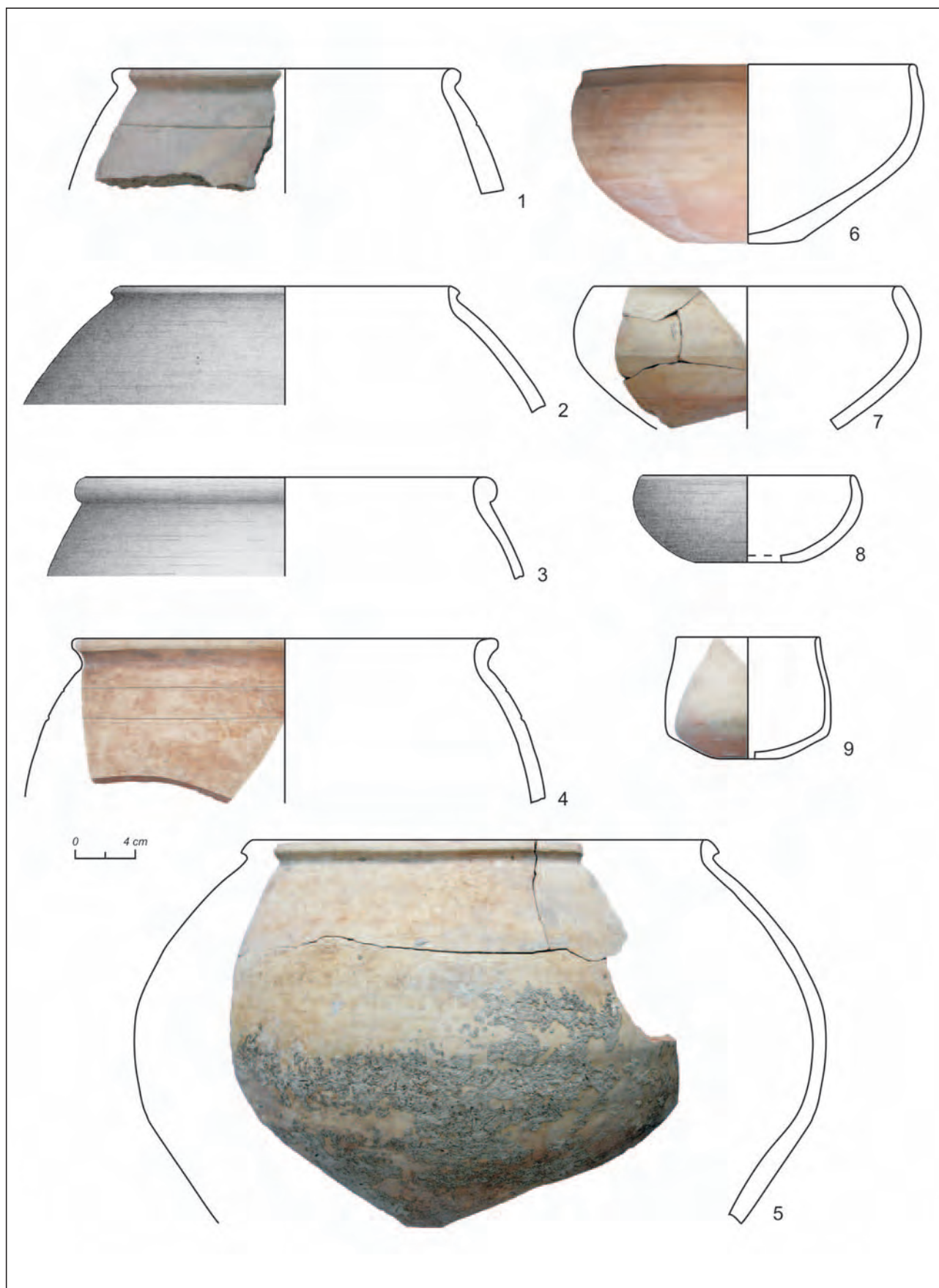


Fig. 4. Pottery of the type Yaz I (14th–11th century BC) from Maydatepa. 1–9 wheel-made

to Maydatepa, in Bektepa tamga-shaped signs are incised on some pottery: rhomb, swastika, inverted trident. The appearance of marking pottery with signs in the Yaz II period was already mentioned in the 1970s (Rtveladze 1976: 99) and is, most likely, connected to the revival of the older Bronze Age traditions of Namazga VI type (BMAC). In the complex from Bektepa there is also one fragment of a hemispherical cup fired under reducing conditions (blackish-grey), which is usually considered characteristic for the culture of archaic Dakhistan far to the west.

The hand-made vessels of Yaz II time from Bektepa were already prepared in another manner, closer to the technology of the Yaz I period, but its quantity is very reduced (about 23%), and there is generally no painting. Among the hand-made vessels attention may be drawn to the cauldrons with short lateral spout and a kind of “beard” immediately below. Similar cauldrons, although slightly different in shape, have been discovered at the site of Karim Berdi in southwestern Tadjikistan, where they have been dated by the analogies from Kuchuk IA and Kuchuk IB to the time of Yaz I (Vinogradova 2004: 106–107, 182, fig. 61, 9–11), although in Karim Berdi for this period there is almost no painted pottery published, and in Kuchuktepa spouts with “beards” do not appear (see Shaydullaev 2000). One such spout has been found at the site of Uzunkyr in the upper reaches of the Kashkadar’ya; the complex of Uzunkyr I, in which painted ceramics are also absent, is dated to the first third of the 1st millennium BC (Lushpenko 2000: 82–83, fig. 2, 16).

As a whole the material from the Bektepa pit-house corresponds very well to the finds from Tillyatepe (northern Afghanistan) and the second period of Kuchuktepa (Ku-

chuk II) (Askarov, Al’baum 1979: 101, pl. 11; Shaydullaev 2000: 27, fig. 10; 88, fig. 61; Shaydullaev 2002: 261–262, figs 9–10). Some ceramic fragments from Bandykhan of the Yaz II time have analogies in Kuchuktepa IB (from the layers 21–23 of the soundings at Kuchuktepa), especially those that were found in the late pits of the upper layers of Maydatepa.

Another, possibly local, variant of the Yaz II culture has recently become known as a result of surveys in the Denau region of the Surkhandar’ya region, where four sites with pottery from the period we are looking into were identified (Strayd, Sverchkov 2004; Sverchkov, Boroffka 2008 – with better illustrations). These are Kuloltepa, where 50 pottery fragments were collected, 50% of them wheel-made; Kul’tepa, with 22 wheel-made fragments and only one hand-made; a nameless mound, where all 67 fragments were wheel-made. The fourth site – Afgan-tepa – lies not far from the famous fortification of Khalchayan. On its surface 46 fragments of ceramics were recovered, of which 26% were hand-made.

The collection from the Denau region, although it differs in part, is undoubtedly connected to the Yaz II period by the basic characteristics, among which the most relevant is the beak-shaped rim-profile. Comparing the materials of the Denau sites with Kuchuktepa and Bektepa it is apparent that the pottery from Denau, characterized by the same manner of production, as a whole is analogous to the complexes from Bektepa and Kuchuk II and, partly, Kuchuk IB.

Based both on the stratigraphy of the settlement of Maydatepa (Bandykhan I) and on the radiocarbon dates from the pit-house of Bektepa, the “sterile” alluvial layer above the pit-house indicates a longer interruption between the periods Yaz II and Yaz

III at the site, since the older settlement is deserted no later than 800 BC, while the later one begins not earlier than 550 BC. Dur-

ing this break, because of the special hydro-logic situation of the Bandykhansay, or for some other reasons, the population moved

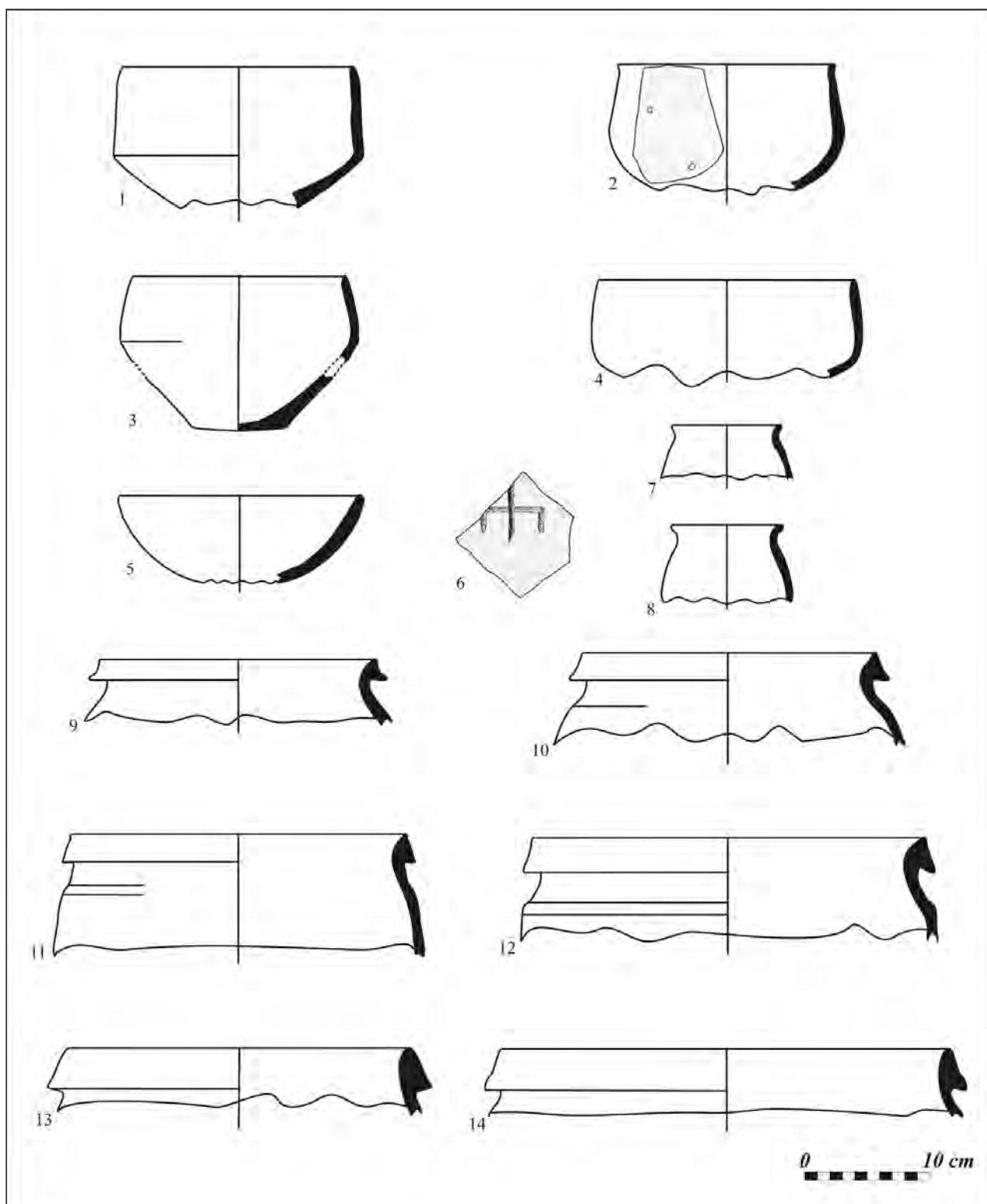


Fig. 5. Pottery of the type Yaz IIA (10th–9th/8th century BC) from the pit-house of Bektepa. 1–4, 7–14 wheel-made, 5–6 hand-made

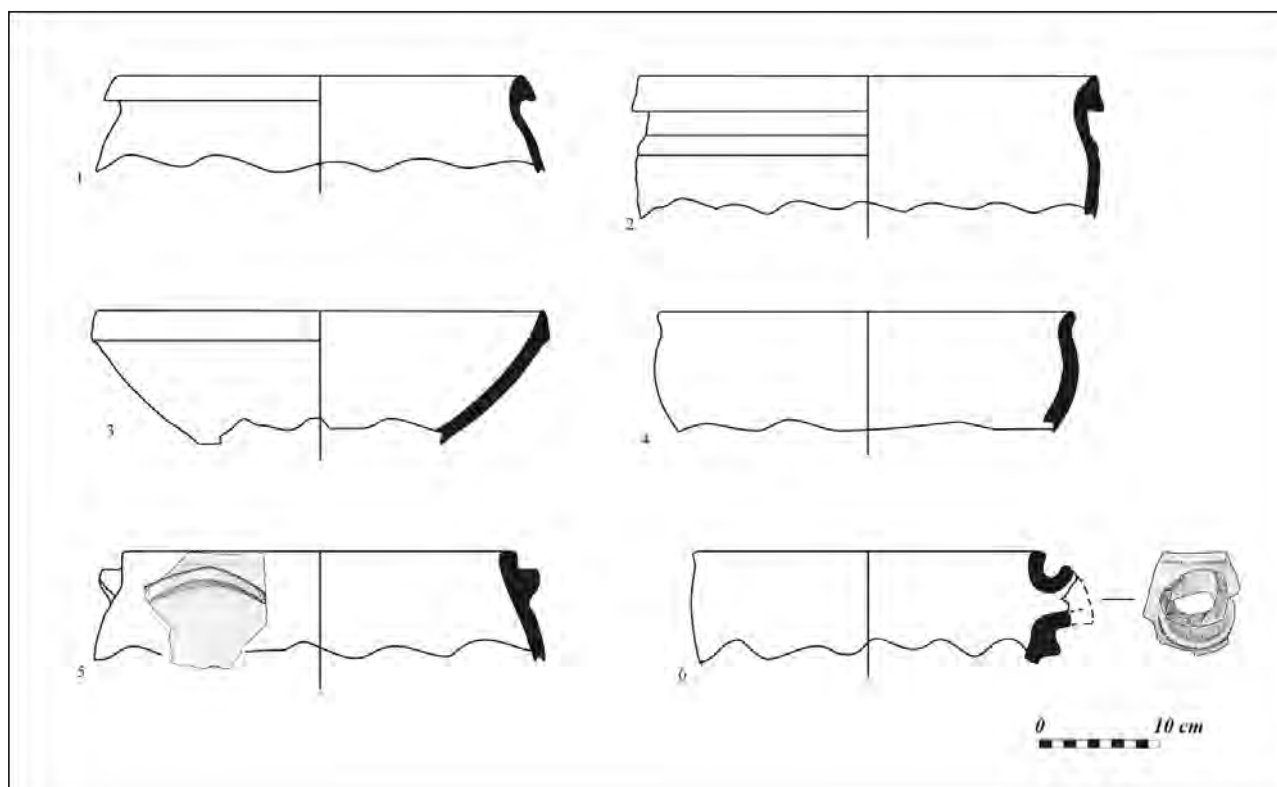


Fig. 6. Pottery of the type Yaz IIA (10th–9th/8th century BC) from the pit-house of Bektepa. 1–3 wheel-made, 4–6 hand-made

to the opposite bank of the river, where the chronologically following settlement of the Bandykhan oasis begins, the Gazimullatepa fortified site.

Gazimullatepa (Bandykhan III) was discovered and first investigated by E. V. Rtveladze, who classified the stratigraphy into four basic stages (Rtveladze 1987: 60–64). The cultural layers of the monument reach 3.6 m thickness and appear to span the period between 800 and 550 BC (see below).

The building technique now changes to *pakhsa* and large-format unfired bricks with sizes of 0.60 x 0.30 x 0.12 m. The pottery also changes somewhat, since the classical Yaz II beak-shaped profiles now are flattened out to become sleeve-like, a feature which will continue into the Yaz III period later. Hand-made vessels are practically absent and the shapes receive sharper outlines. Smaller forms are characterized by concave walls

and strongly profiled transitions between the upper wheel-thrown body and the formed conical lower part [Figs 7–8]. The external surface of the vessels, in the process of firing, becomes whitish, sometimes with a slight grey nuance.

Initially similar complexes were frequently dated to the older Achaemenid period, i.e. the beginning of Yaz III, and only fairly recently these ceramics have been correlated with increasing confidence to the pre-Achaemenid period of Yaz II. Specifically, similar material was discovered in the excavations of Erk-Kala (Merv), where it was dated to the 7th–6th centuries BC (Usmanova 1989: 40–41, figs 10–11; Usmanova 2010: 90).

Gazimullatepa, without any clear reasons, was deserted in the Achaemenid period, but at that time in fact life is taken up again at Bektepa, where an outer city formed, which consisted of the sanctuary at



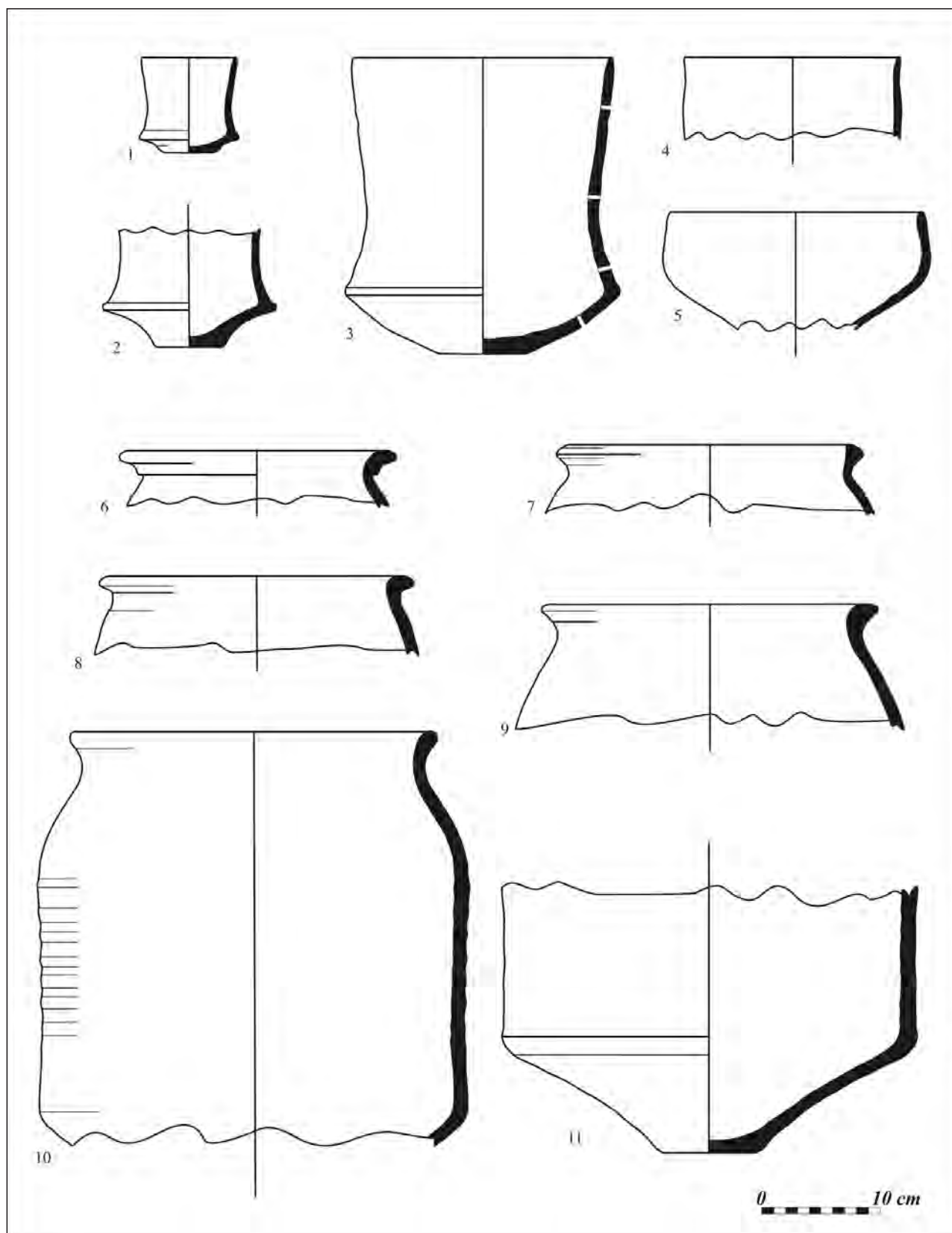


Fig. 7. Wheel-made pottery of the type Yaz IIB (8th–7th/6th century BC) from Gazimullatepa

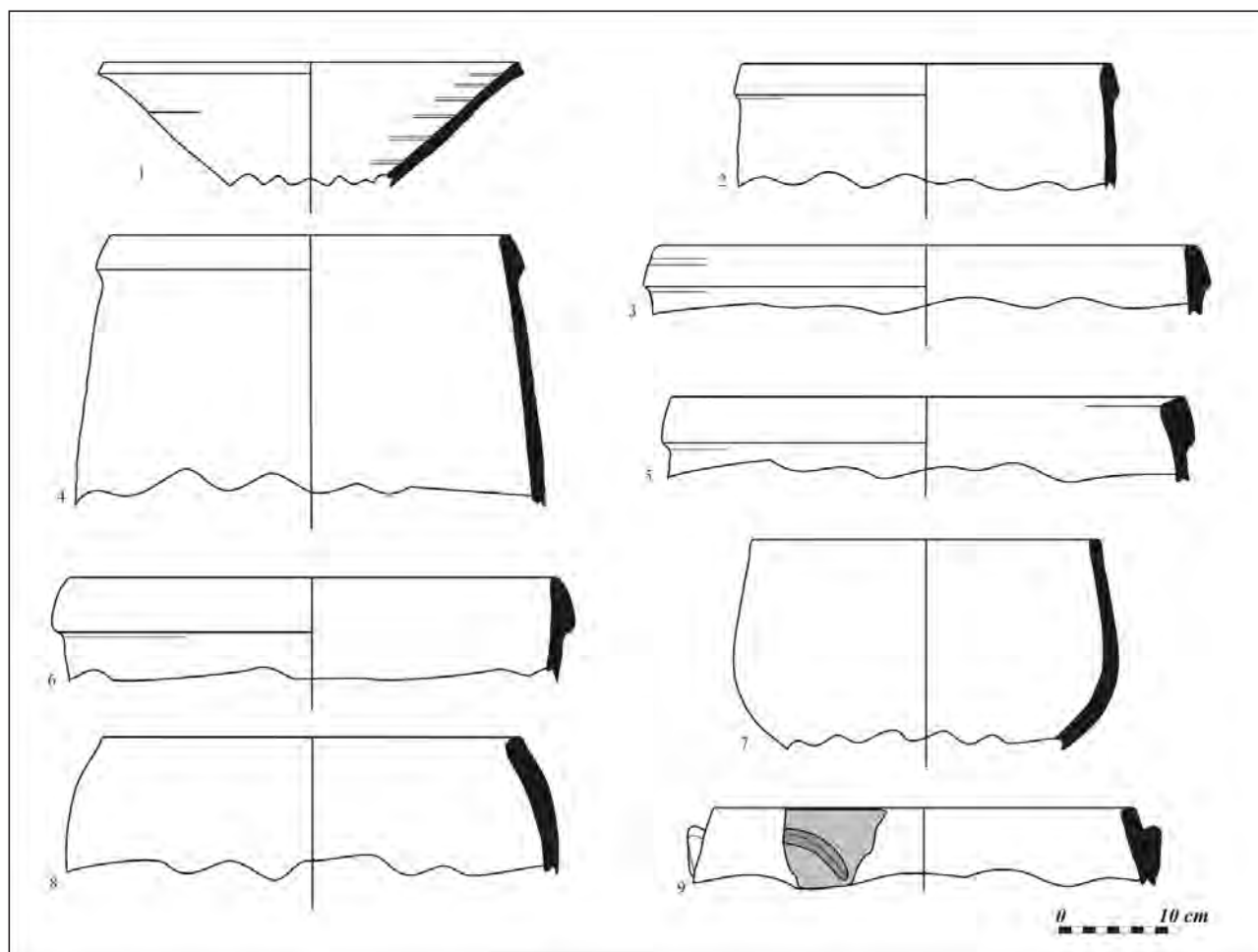


Fig. 8. Pottery of the type Yaz IIB (8th–7th/6th century BC) from Gazimullatepa.  
1–6 wheel-made, 7–9 hand-made

Kindyktepa, the fortress of Bektepa and an open settlement area in between, comprising roughly 13 ha. In the building technique unfired bricks of slightly smaller dimensions are adopted, with sizes of  $0.46\text{--}0.52 \times 0.28\text{--}0.30 \times 0.10\text{--}0.12$  m. Especially at Kindyktepa the repertoire of pottery obtained from the excavations appears to be very typical of the Yaz III period [Figs 9–10]. It includes the well known cylindrical-conical vessels with sleeve-shaped rims, frequently with profiling in three ribs. The surface of the vessels is now no longer greyish-white, but has a yellowish nuance.

The radiocarbon analyses from the Bandykhan sites give a good sequence [Fig. 11], on which the dates given in this article are

based. There is some difficulty towards the end, when the calibration curve goes into what is often described as the “Hallstatt plateau” (based on research in Europe), where the calibration curve is very flat and the precision is therefore seriously reduced. This is where the later dates for Gazimullatepa and Kindyktepa fall, but on account of unpublished dates from other sites, in the archaeological sequence Gazimullatepa is clearly older than Kindyktepa and the upper layers from Bektepa.

Thus, in the Bandykhan oasis the period we are looking into, Yaz I is represented by one “clean” site (Maydatepa), and Yaz II and Yaz III by two “clean” sites of the Yaz II period, a clearly separated layer of the Yaz III

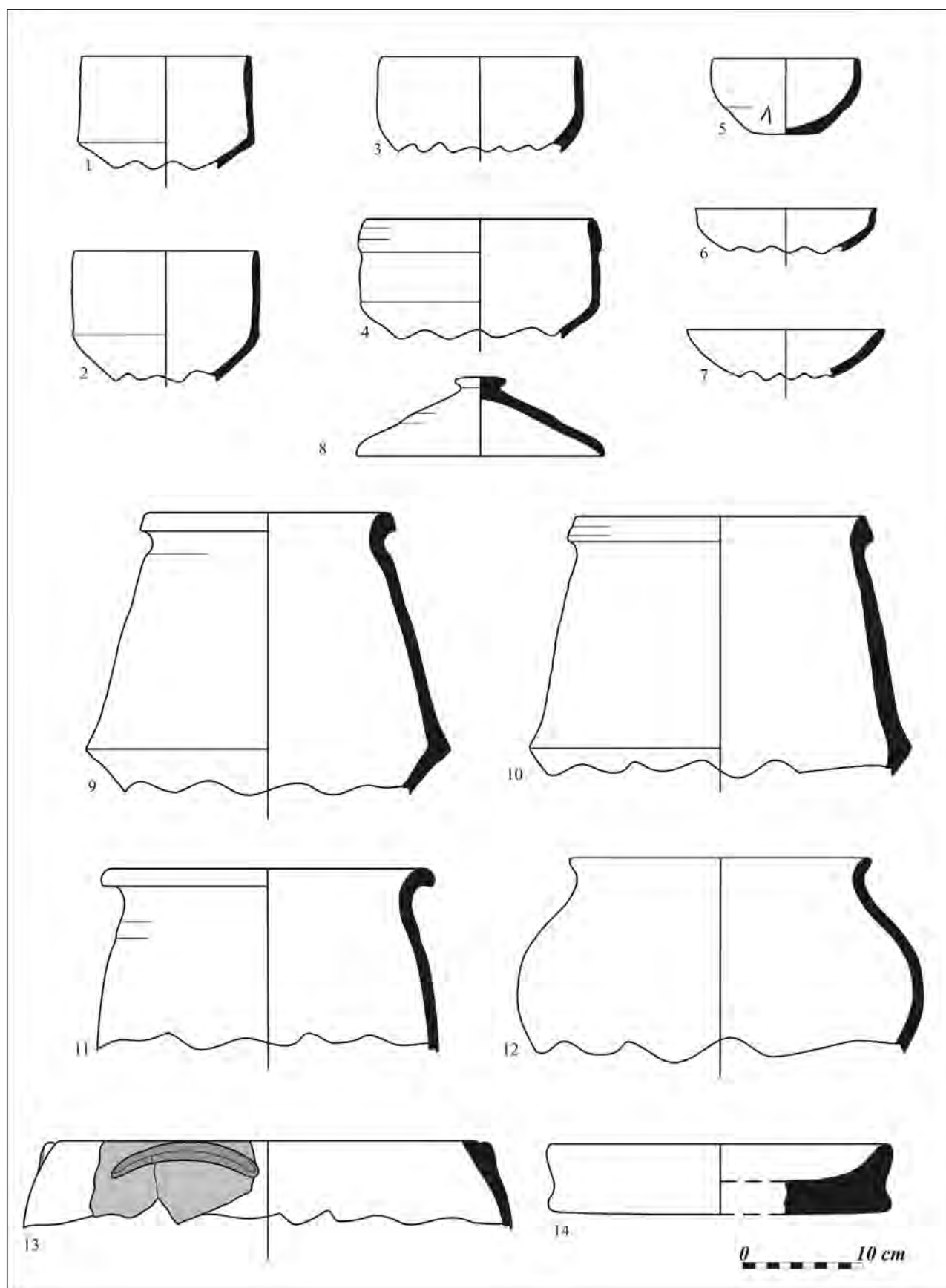
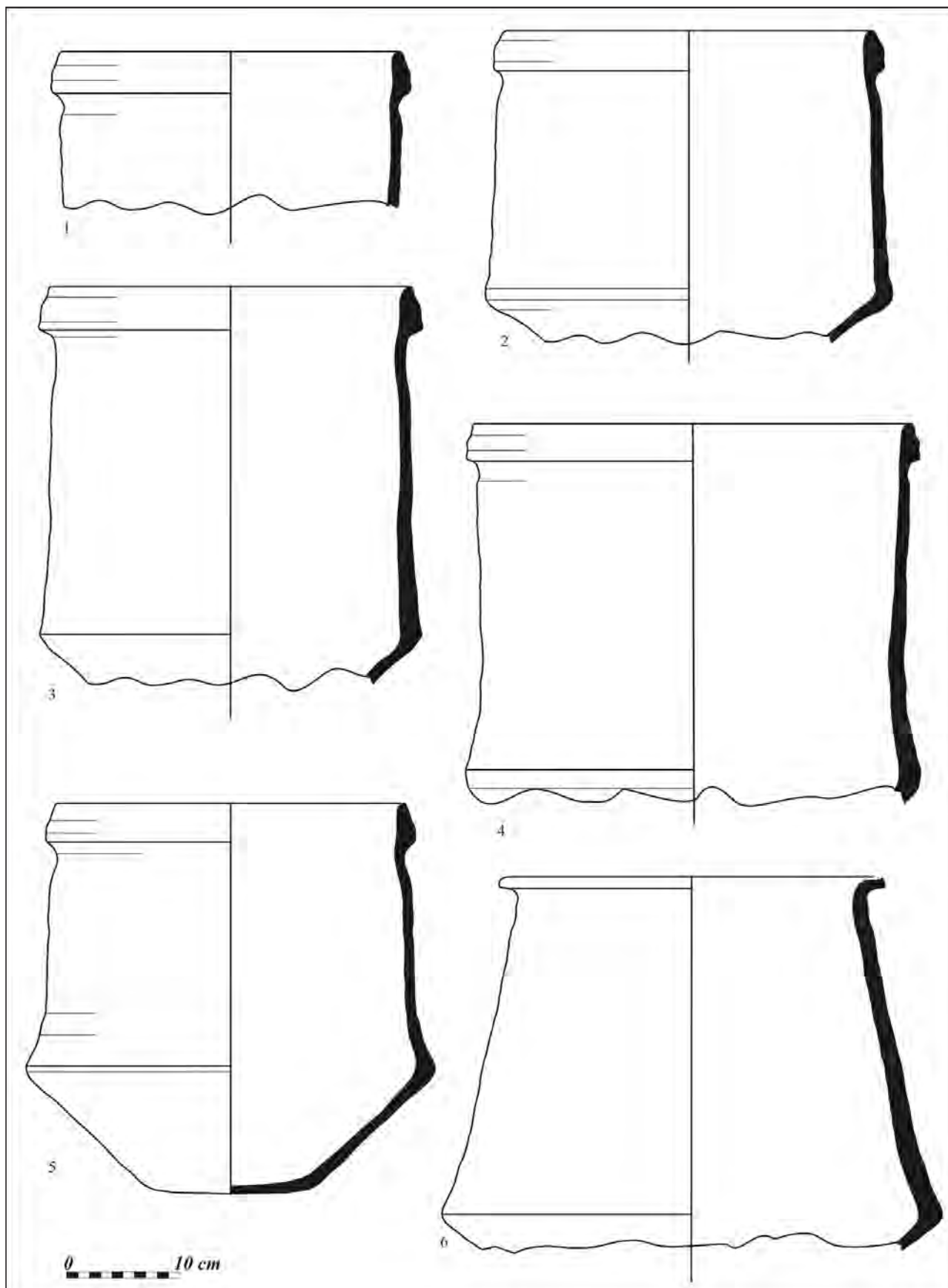


Fig. 9. Pottery of the type Yaz III (5th–4th century BC) from Kindyktepa.  
1–12 wheel-made, 13–14 hand-made



*Fig. 10. Wheel-made pottery of the type Yaz III (5th–4th century BC) from Kindyktepa*

period at Bektepa and a completely “clean” site of the Yaz III period at Kindyktepa. On this basis, in the Bandykahn oasis, it is possible to subdivide the Yaz II period into two stages: Yaz IIA (early stage), which may be

dated approximately to the 9th–8th century BC, and Yaz IIB (late stage), which belongs to the 8th–7th/6th century BC. The dating of the Yaz III (6th–4th century BC) period is not changed.

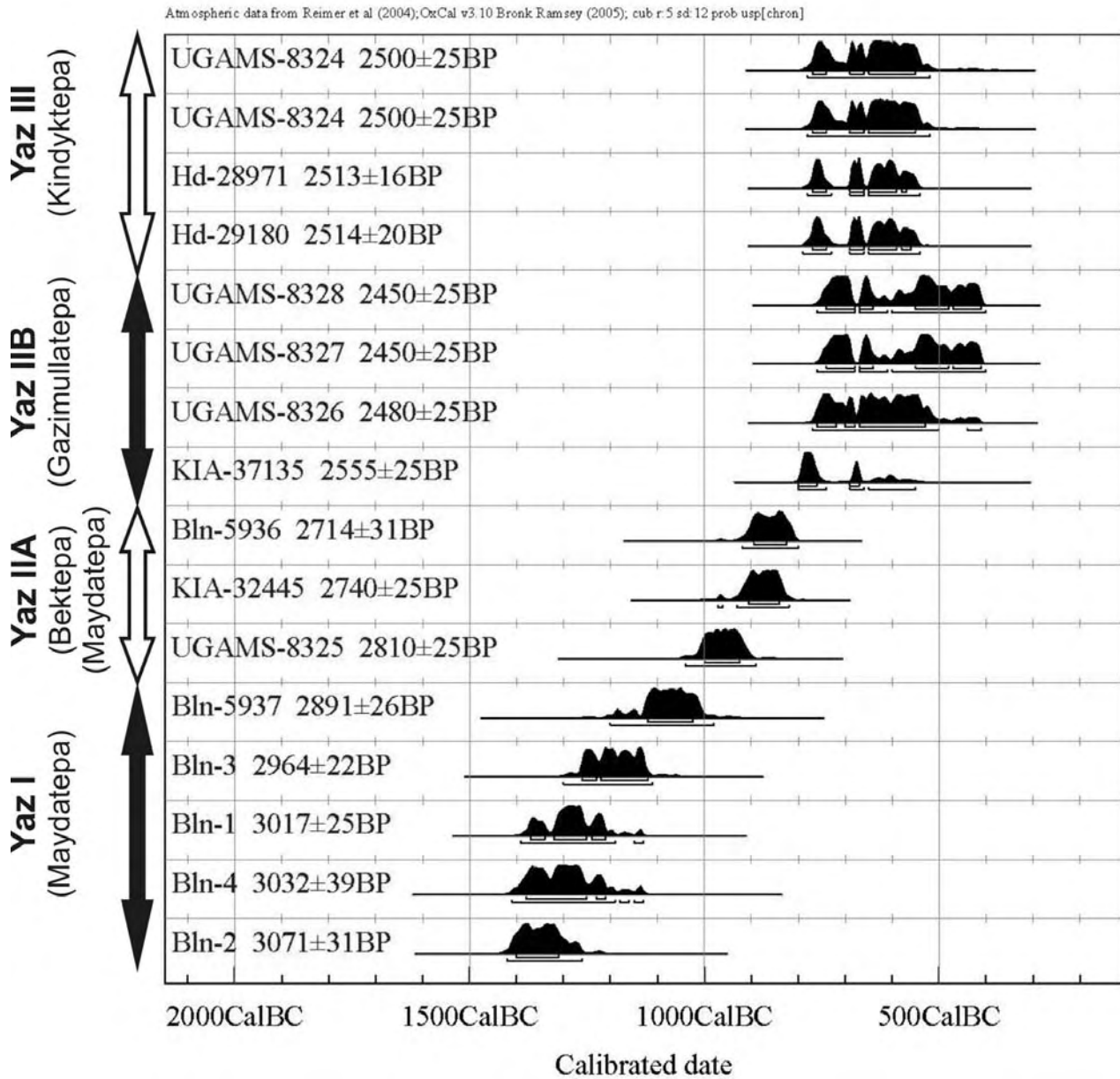


Fig. 11. Radiocarbon dates of the Bandykhan sites

## CONCLUSION

Summarizing the above, the period Yaz I is represented, in Bandykhan, by a longer sequence of building phases at Maydatepa, the period Yaz IIA by the upper layer of Maydatepa and the pit-house at Bektepa, to which we may add Tillyatepe, Kuchuktepa (stage Kuchuk II, and perhaps partly Kuchuk IB) and four monuments near Denau. Analogies for some of the hand-made shapes are found on the eastern boundary of the Yaz IIA distribution at Karim Berdi in southern Tadzhikistan and to the north at Uzunkyr in the southern Kashkadar'ya region of Uzbekistan. Direct analogies for Yaz IIA are also located in central Afghanistan and in western Turkmenistan, to which we shall return below, but they are not found either in the region of Sogd, or in Khorezm, nor, of course, in Chach and Fergana.

The later stage, Yaz IIB, in Bandykhan is represented by the entire sequence of the Gazimullatepa site, to which may be added the "Yaz II" material from Yaz depe itself, and survey finds from northern Afghanistan, although in Yaz depe, and in the surveys, they are not properly separated from the Yaz III materials (Masson 1959: pls XXXVII–XL; Lyonnet 1997: 368, fig. 29). Certainly, the Yaz IIB complex can be found at many more sites in northern Afghanistan and in southern Uzbekistan, as for example at Kuchuktepa (stage Kuchuk III) (Shaydul'laev 2000: 89–92, fig. 62). Probably, during a more detailed analysis it will be possible to identify it more precisely in southern Sogd, as well as along the lower and upper Kashkadar'ya, but in northern Sogd Yaz IIB, as is the case with Yaz IIA, is not known at all. As far as other territories are concerned, situated further to the north, some elements of Yaz IIB appear to be present at Khumbuzte-

pa (Kht I) in Khorezm, but in fact the pottery of all three stages at Khumbuztepa is closer to the late Achaemenid period (Yaz III) (Bollelov 2004: 50–51, 414, I). As before, Chach and Fergana have a separate position, where pottery of the Yaz IIA and Yaz IIB type has never been found, even as rare discoveries.

For non-specialists it is not at all easy to distinguish Yaz IIB from Yaz III, sometimes perhaps even impossible, taking into account the potential variety of potter's workshops, local traditions, in some places more innovative, in others more conservative. But it is only in the Yaz III period, i.e. after the inclusion of Central Asia into the Achaemenid Empire at the end of the 6th century BC, that we see the appearance of the cylindrical-conical vessels in Samarkandian Sogd and the propagation of the Baktrian pottery technology far to the north, to the Syrdar'ya shores.

Sometimes only the discovery of two-winged arrowheads with protruding sockets helps in identifying the Yaz II period, for example at the site of Kuyusai 2 in the pre-Sarykamysh delta of the Amudar'ya (left-bank Khorezm) (Vaynberg 1975: 43), where a group of imported vessels do have clear similarity to the Yaz IIB material from Gazimullatepa in the Bandykhan oasis. The same type of arrowheads has been discovered in Yaz depe, which, at that time, served as a major reason to date Yaz II to the pre-Achaemenid period (Masson 1959: 40, 46–47).

It is important, in this respect, to note that the eponymous site, Yaz depe, which also served for the periodization of the entire Yaz period (I–III), does not actually contain the early stage Yaz IIA. In actual fact, this could be noticed in the stratigraphy of

the site, by remarking the interruption between Yaz I, separated from the architectural remains of the Yaz II period by pure layers of “reddish earth” (Masson 1959: 30, fig. 8). A similar situation may also be observed on another known monument of the Murghab oasis, Erk-Kala, in the lower layer of which Yaz II ceramics were discovered, dated to the 7th–6th century BC (Usmanova 2010: 89–90).

It seems that at the end of the Yaz IIB period the entire Murghab oasis is deserted: life at Yaz depe and Aravali depe ceases, as well as in Takhirbay depe (Masson 1959: 91–92; Diakonoff 1985: 130–132). Apparently, the most probable explanation for this fact of a general desolation of sites in ancient Margiana was proposed by V. M. Masson, who connected this to the revolt of Frāda in 522 BC (Masson 1959: 142). The degree of the crushing defeat by the imperial Persian troops in Margiana can be judged from the quantity of those killed and taken in captivity; more than 55000 dead and 6500 prisoners according to the Bīsūtūn inscription, even if we take into account a certain exaggeration usual in such reports. Similarly, at Merv after 522 BC life ceased for a long time, and the formerly huge city of Erk-Kala lay in ruins for the major part of the Yaz III period. Most likely this also explains the absence of Margiana in the lists of satrapies of the Achaemenid Empire.

To the west of the Murghab oasis, in the foothills of the Kopet-Dagh, pottery of both the early and the late stages of Yaz II is present, first of all, in the complex at El’ken depe III. A. A. Marushchenko considers this culture as a continuation of Namazga VI, “the development of which was interrupted by barbarian conquest in the previous period” (Marushchenko 1959: 68). El’ken depe is identified with the capital Patigraban of Parthia, where the Anti-Achaemenid uprising

of 522 BC was suppressed (Marushchenko 1959: 71; Masson 1959: 141). In the upper part of layer III clear traces of the destruction of the fortifications were observed, and, judging by the ceramics of Yaz type (Yaz IIB) found in the same layer, the end of the city was dated precisely to the end of the 6th century BC.

In adjacent Ulug depe, as far as can be judged from the published data, there is also material of Yaz II type, but it has been published as belonging together with Yaz III (Yaz II–III), and dated generally to 1100–329 BC (Lecomte *et alii* 2002: 124, pl. 1; Lecomte 2004: 169; Boucharlat, Francfort, Lecomte 2005: 489–490, 494). If overall the pottery of Achaemenid time is not known there, the presence of cylindrical-conical vessels by themselves does not necessarily indicate a dating to the period Yaz III. In any case, the fragments of pottery that have been published recently may undoubtedly be attributed to Yaz IIB (Boucharlat, Francfort, Lecomte 2005: 509–514, figs 12e–h, figs 15–19). Relying on the available data, we may assume that Ulug depe, like El’ken depe, ended its existence at the same time, i.e. towards the end of the 6th century BC, most probably for the same reason.

The examples of misunderstandings connected with the complexes Yaz II–III are numerous: we may mention the small collection of survey material from Nishapur (Khorasan, northern Iran), represented by only six pottery fragments of the “period Namazga VI” (Hiebert, Dyson 2002: 121–122, 142, fig. 9). In fact all illustrated material is characteristic for the complex Yaz IIA, except for a cup (№ 1), which is most similar to finds of the archaic Dakhistan culture. In Iranian Khorasan further ceramics of Yaz II type have also been found, both of the early stage (Venco Ricciardi 1980: 58, fig. C), and of the late one (Venco Ricciardi 1980: 61, fig. E).

Perhaps in a more attent view the presence of grey-black fired ceramics of the archaic Dakhistan culture type could serve as an excellent indicator of the Yaz II period (both early and late stages). It certainly disappears at the chronological boundary between the periods of Yaz II and Yaz III, and simply does not exist at all in the Achaemenid time. The firing technology of the vessels in a reducing atmosphere is absent in Central Asia from the end of the 6th century BC up to the arrival of the Greeks, who revived (or re-introduced) this tradition at the end of the 4th century BC. In this respect the monuments on the boundary of the areas of the two cultures – Yaz II and archaic Dakhistan, located on the territory of Turkmenistan are of special interest.

Around 50 to 57 km northwest from Ashkhabad two sites are known with typical materials of Yaz IIA and Yaz IIB – the fortress of Garry-Kyariz I and Khyrlydepe. According to the very qualified opinion of V. N. Pilipko, here “there are seemingly transitional forms from the large cylindrical-conical” jars “to the pots with the sleeve-rims” (Pilipko 1984: 44). In all stages of the site, without any exception, there are also fragments of imported (“hirkanian”) black-clay and red-slipped vessels of archaic Dakhistan (Pilipko 1984: 36, 56–57; Pilipko 2005: 66, 70, 74). Nevertheless, by the inertia of habit, Garry-Kyariz I and Khyrlydepe are dated to the 7th–4th centuries BC, i.e. to the periods Yaz II and Yaz III, in spite of the fact that the pottery presented by V. N. Pilipko is completely uncharacteristic for Yaz III. Both sites lay on the boundary of the two cultures, Yaz II and archaic Dakhistan, where the sites of the latter, in particular Benguvan, have been dated to the period Iron Age II of northern Iran (1000–800 BC) on the basis of analogous vessels. There we also find the well known larger vessels with beak-shaped and

sleeve-rims (Muradova 1984: 74, 76).

It is significant that typical ceramics of the period Yaz II, moreover the early stage, were found in the excavations of Nad-i Ali (Sorkh Dagh) fort in Afghan Seistan. We cannot know exactly from which layers the Yaz II pottery (remarked already by Diakonoff 1985: 55) at Nad-i Ali comes from, as published by R. Girshman, but at the site there are three components distinctly outlined: Yaz I (or related pottery), Marlik (or archaic Dakhistan) and Yaz IIA. The first is represented by painted vessels; the second by the black-grey pottery (Ghirshman 1939: 18) as well as the characteristic bill spouts with connection to the main rim (Ghirshman 1939: 19, fig. IV, N.A. 85); the third by larger vessels with typical Yaz IIA rims and lower parts (Ghirshman 1939: 19, fig. IV, N.A. 75). Further beak-shaped rims, related to the early Yaz II pottery were again found at Nad-i Ali during the excavations by G. Dales in 1968 (Dales 1977: Pl. 16), who also found much later material, such as fish-plates, typical for the Greek period (Dales 1977: Pl. 18, FI). Although Dales admits that he did not, at the time of publication, have a good knowledge of the pottery, he changed the dating of Girshman insofar as the older layers were dated to the “Median (Iron Age III) – Achaemenid Period”, while the later layers were rather widely said to include “material ranging from Hellenistic to Sassanian times” (Dales 1977: 101). Dales redated the beginning of Nad-i Ali to “perhaps as late as the eighth – seventh centuries B.C.” (Dales 1977: 111). However, Girshman was probably right in a somewhat older date, not only on account of the gray spouted vessel, but also for the metal strap-fittings (Girshman 1939: 18, Pl. V N.A. 40 & N.A. 68), which now find excellent analogies further north, in the Saka burials from South Tagisken (Itina, Yablonskiy 1997) and Uigarak (Vishnevskaya



1973), dated to the (8th) 7th–6th centuries BC. Interestingly enough, in Kurgan 39 a small typical cylindrical-conical Yaz II vessel was found, with strongly profiled transitions between the upper wheel-thrown body and the formed conical lower part, quite similar to the cups from Gazimullahtepa [Fig. 7, 1–3]. Vishnevskaya correctly made a connection to the Material from Yaz depe, layer II (Vishnevskaya 1973: 78), dating it, at that time, to the 7th–5th century BC – a date, which must now, of course, be revised. Returning to the discussion of the Yaz II material, the discoveries from Nad-i Ali, although without completely clear context, have fundamental value, at least because Seistan occupies a separate important position in the Zoroastrian tradition (Gnoli 1980: 129–136; Gnoli 1989: 46). The ruins of the ancient city of Nad-i Ali near the mouth of the Hilmend river into the Khamun lake, which R. Girshman studied as an outstanding scientist, and which he dated to the 9th–8th century BC, has rightly been identified with the capital of the kingdom of the early *Kavi* (ITN 1998: 242) by many historians. Thus, the period of the rule of the dynasty of the early *Kavi* coincides with the early stage of Yaz II (10th–8th centuries BC). Accordingly, the later stage of Yaz II (7th–6th centuries BC) must be correlated with the ruling time of the late *Kavi* with their capital at Balkh, which corresponds perfectly with the traditional dating of the activity of Zoroaster (Gnoli 2006).

As we see, the Yaz II complex was distributed in the territory, which after the scientific rebuttal of the “theory of great Khorezm” is correlated with the “Aryana Vaējah” – that is the settlement area of those tribes which spoke in the Avestan Iranian (obsolete Zendan) language. This language occupied an independent position in the Iranian group and differed both from eastern Iranian and

western Iranian, which is why it was called “Avestan Iranian” or Central Iranian. It was replaced by the eastern Iranian languages only at the end of the 1st millennium BC, after the so-called “Storming of Bactria” (IDV 2004: 712). Possibly the Saka type discoveries from Nad-i Ali, mentioned above, as well as the Yaz II imports at Ujgarak, may also be seen in this light.

Therefore, the study of the Yaz II complex, whether we like it or not, is closely connected to questions of the origins and geography of the Avestan Iranians. In this case we must recognize that Yaz II is not simply a stage in an allegedly firm chronological sequence, nor simply a material complex and not just a period, but a completely self-contained culture of the 1st millennium BC. In this sense the Yaz II complex can also serve as quite a good indicator for the relative determination of the borders between Iran and Turan.

The geography of the Yaz II pottery is very limited, and unfortunately to a considerable degree by the state of our knowledge. To the south of the Amu-Dar’ya, in Afghanistan, besides Nad-i Ali, Tillyatepe and Balkh, undoubtedly, more important sites of the Yaz II type will eventually be found. In adjacent Tadjikistan at this time, it seems, another culture appears to have existed already, known from burials, but so far difficult to date: analogies are so far limited to the similarity of isolated characteristics from the excavations at Bektepa and the site of Karim Berdi. To the north of the Hissar range the culture of hand-made painted pottery of Yaz I type appears to have continued its existence, probably gradually replaced by the bearers of the Yaz II culture. Unfortunately, we do not have radiocarbon dates for the numerous sites of the Kashkadar’ya region and for Samarkandian Sogd so far there is only one date from

the lower layers of the Koktepa fortification – given as beginning in the 1st millennium BC (Isamidinov 2002: 64), which perhaps allows us to synchronize this period of Koktepa with Yaz II. However, the date is not properly published, with neither the laboratory data, nor the precise context given. In Fergana and Tashkent, beyond the limits of the conquests of Iran, even in the Achaemenid period (Yaz III) traditions of Yaz I type survived.

In the west the Yaz II culture reached the distribution area of the culture of archaic Dakhistan (Marlik), presumably including bearers of the western Iranian dialects. The archaeological boundary is marked by the find of Yaz II ceramics, of both phases, in Nishapur and in the fortress of Garry-Kyariz I in the northern foothills of the Kopet Dagh. In the distant northwest, in the Pre-Sarykamysch delta of the Amu-Dar'ya (left-bank Khorezm) ceramics of Yaz IIB kind are found at sites of the Kuyusai culture, in one context together with typical pottery of archaic Dakhistan and hand-made ceramics, at present of unique kind, which do not have analogies in the neighbouring territories (Vaynberg 1975).

In the further distant north-western periphery, on the lower reaches of the river Syrdar'ya completely different sites of the steppe groups appear at this time, apparently of eastern Iranian origin. These are the well known kurgan burials of Uygarak and Tagisken, which have direct analogies in the Sauromatian culture. For some reason they are considered classical and, even more astonishing, they are thought to be central monuments of Turan, identified with the region of Kangkha or Kang, the capital of the legendary king Afrasiab (Litvinskiy 1972: 174–175; ITN 1998: 630, footnote 264; 633, footnote 309).

I. V. P'yankov also supports this opinion

about the attribution of the Syrdar'ya burials of Tagisken (northern group) and explains their origin by a mixture of the Late Bronze Age roller-pottery culture (Kul'tura Valikovoy Keramiki) and the Karasuk culture, naming the “bearers of the last two” as “karasukoid” cultures (P'yankov 2006: 226). We may ask the question, where in Central Asia there are Tagisken type monuments, apart from the lower reaches of the river Syrdar'ya, and do they generally exist? This even if we disregard the problem of synchronizing the roller-pottery (14th–9th century BC) with the rule of the *Kavi*.

The proposed localization is an echo of the very same “theory of Great Khorezm”, and it is based primarily on the false idea, that the peoples of Iran and Turan spoke in closely related languages, although there was actually never any basis whatsoever for this assertion and there is still none. Certainly, the simplest would be to consider the language of the Turanians as one of the ancient Iranian ones, as is indeed most frequently done. However, neither the very name Turan, nor the name of Frangras'yan, as I. V. P'yankov himself has acknowledged, have an Iranian etymology (P'yankov 2006: 232–233). Moreover, when the king of Turan, Afrasiab (Frangras'yan), changed to his own native language, the Aryans perceived his speech as abrakadabra (*Avesta. Yašt* 19, VIII: 138).

Generally, in the history and archaeology of Central Asia Khorezm with its adjacent territories always had an exceptional position, and does not reflect the general situation. It is absolutely incomprehensible, why almost all significant historical events of the early 1st millennium BC are supposed to have occurred on the periphery, in the lower reaches of the main rivers of Central Asia, and why Sogdiana, the real center with strategic position, is neglected in the

discussion of ancient geography? Maybe this is because Turan is not only, and in fact to only a small degree, Khorezm, but also include Fergana, Chach, and Sogdiana, and was then the region of Kanga actually Samarkandian Sogd?

In this connection it would be highly desirable to look at the results of the archaeological work at the above mentioned Koktepa fortification more attentively, since it is located at a distance of only around 25 km to the north of Samarkand. The lower layers of the site – the period Koktepa I – includes hand-made painted pottery of the Yaz I type<sup>1</sup>. In the following period Koktepa II, at this site, the first monumental construction was built, erected from plano-convex bricks. The pottery of this period was made by hand, with no definitely identified wheel-made pottery, with isolated fragments of painted vessels. The period of Koktepa III is correlated with the Achaemenids, i.e. the period Yaz III. The final period, Koktepa IV, is described as early Hellenistic (Isamiddinov 2010: 131–136).

In the opinion of I. D. Ivanitskiy and O. N. Inevatkina, in the pre-Achaemenid period, i.e. in the first half of the 1st millennium BC, on the area of future Samarkandian Sogd the most intensely settled part was the right bank of the Zaravshan. Accordingly, precisely here the first, earliest urban center of the entire region grew – Koktepa fortification with an area of 17 ha., but the Samarkand – Afrasiab fortress already replaced it in Achaemenid time, not earlier than the end of the 6th century BC (Inevatkina 2010: 7–9). The researchers of the monument assume that this – Koktepa – is “*basileia Sogdiana*” mentioned by Arrian, i.e., the capital

of Sogd, to where Spitamen was forced to withdraw from Samarkand (Isamiddinov, Rapin 1999: 78). It is very likely that the text of Arrian did not undergo distortions, and in the source realities of that time were still reflected, when in Sogdiana there was actually the capital of Achaemenid time – Samarkand (the fortification of Afrasiab) and also the pre-Achaemenid capital – “*basileia of Sogdiana*” (the fortification of Koktepa). In any case, among the many other monuments of the area, it is indeed Koktepa which can claim the most probability of being identified with the main city of the region of Kanga and all of Turan, as the residence of the legendary Afrasiab.

As follows from the analysis of archaeological finds, in southern Central Asia there is an archaeologically established sequence of development from the Bactro – Margiana complex to the Achaemenid period inclusively. Laying aside the problem of the ethnic attribution of the Bactro – Margiana complex in the initial stage, the bearers of the BMAC in their later stages came to speak an Iranian language, and this process began, judging by the general picture, by the advance to the south of Andronovo groups. A proposed genetic connection of the complexes BMAC – Yaz II – Yaz III, which is usually not taken into account by Central-Asian archaeologists, was in fact already written 40 years ago by B. A. Litvinskiy (Litvinskiy 1967: 125–126).

In this context the Yaz I complex is a completely alien phenomenon in Bactria and Margiana, which was wedged into the otherwise normal evolution of local cultures during the second half of the 2nd millennium BC, and which is probably connected

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1. For the single radiocarbon analysis, allegedly taken from the upper layer of the period Koktepa I, directly under a wall of the period Koktepa II see Isamiddinov and Rapin (1999: 71) and our brief comment above.

with the migration of peoples<sup>2</sup>. Possibly, on the eastern periphery of the Bactro – Margiana complex of the Bronze Age, for example in the Denau region or in north-eastern Afghanistan, the sequence of development from BMAC to Yaz II was not interrupted so sharply or completely. The culture of Yaz II appears in most of Central Asia sometime in the 10th century BC, occupying new territories and gradually displacing the carriers of the Yaz I type materials, moving increasingly further to the north and northeast. On its basis the political group was formed, which in later sources became known by the name of Bactria, the appearance of which, appar-

ently, actually belongs to the pre-Achaemenid time, probably the stage of Yaz IIB (8th/7th century BC). Approximately at the end of the 6th century BC, after the area was integrated into the Achaemenid Empire, the culture of Yaz II was smoothly transformed, preserving and developing all its basic features, into the culture of the period Yaz III. In the slow expansion of the distribution of Yaz II and Yaz III materials, which extended over centuries, there is reflected the expansion of Iran – for some heroic, for some dramatic – besung by the great poet Firdousi, which reached the banks of the Syrdar'ya in the late 6th century BC.

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2. On the ethnic attribution of the complex of hand-made painted pottery see Sverchkov (2010).

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