

PASTORAL TRIBES OF THE BRONZE AGE IN THE OXUS VALLEY (BACTRIA)¹

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THE migration of tribes and the resettlement of large numbers of people, evidence of which is provided by Indo-Iranian linguistics, necessarily produced changes in the pattern of ancient cultures. In some cases, as in Margiana and Sapalli in southern Uzbekistan, new features appeared in the midst of highly developed settled cultures: innovations in burial rites or new themes in the visual arts. At the same time, there appeared in Soviet Central Asia tribes of herdsmen whose culture contained features going back to the traditions of settled civilizations, though these features were far from dominant. More is known of the migratory herding tribes from their burial grounds than from their settlements, since they spent too short a time in the latter to leave substantial cultural deposits. An entire series of such archaeological assemblages was discovered in the middle reaches of the Amu Darya (Oxus).

The cemeteries in the Oxus valley (in Bactria), located both outside and within settlements, present a different picture. The appearance of cemeteries situated outside settlements become typical from the time of Namazga VI; in other words, during the period when most of the Bactrian cemeteries considered here were built. The cemeteries are spread over three regions – northern Afghanistan, southern Tajikistan and southern Uzbekistan.

¹ See Map 11.

The Bronze Age cemeteries in northern Afghanistan were discovered by a Soviet-Afghan archaeological expedition. The most extensive work was done in the Dashly oasis, beginning in 1970. The cemeteries were excavated and the research published by V. I. Sarianidi.

A series of Bronze Age remains were found in a valley running southwards from the Amu Darya. In one of them, in the Farukhabad oasis, now a desert, there are a number of settlements. A feature of the central settlement, Farukhabad I, is that a large cemetery is situated in its centre and three others along its periphery. The graves had been plundered.

In the Dashly oasis, 30 km south of the Amu Darya, in a broad steppe setting, watered in Antiquity by the delta channels of the Balkhab river, a large number of Bronze Age remains were found. The Dashly 1 cemetery is situated on the ruins of a derelict fortified settlement of the same name. This is not an isolated, compact cemetery but is situated on the actual site of the settlement. Altogether ten graves have been uncovered. Some 3 km away is the Dashly 3 settlement, with the ruins of a temple. Here a scattered burial ground containing five graves has been found, as well as a cemetery built in the ruins of the temple and containing eighty-seven graves. The upper parts of the graves have been destroyed by erosion. The actual graves are rectangular in shape, with rounded corners, measuring 1.7×1 m, or more seldom circular or oval. They were frequently lined with mud-bricks, and it is possible they were also covered over in the same way. When the graves were built on unused or derelict sites, tunnel-like recesses were let into the walls. Children were sometimes buried in large containers. In addition to burials with entire skeletons (which are in majority) there are others with only part of the skeleton placed in the grave, but with extensive grave goods. The latter are fractional burials. Mention should also be made of the ritual burials of sheep, also with grave goods. In one such sheep burial food for the deceased was placed in the grave too – the front portion of a sheep's flank.

In the Dashly 18 and 19 sites large cemeteries were found, though unfortunately they had been plundered. The graves were of the recess and catacomb type. In one of them a horse was buried. The majority of the graves are single burials. The body is crouched lying either on the left or the right side; in a few cases it is laid on its back or stomach. Generally speaking, the burials tend to be oriented towards the north. As food for the deceased, joints of sheep were placed in the grave. The grave goods are rich and varied, and consist for the most part of pottery, between one or two and fifteen or twenty items in each tomb. About 90 per cent of the items have been turned on the potter's wheel. The principal forms are vases with and without stems, as well as pots, jars, goblets, basins, vessels in the form of teapots with spouts, etc. Among the metal artefacts mention should be made of bronze mirrors, bracelets, pots, pins, fillets (bandeaux) and daggers. Other items placed in the

graves included stoneware and woven baskets. The graves, including the plundered ones, have also produced numerous seals.

From 1965 to 1969, A. M. Mandel'shtam investigated two Bronze Age cemeteries in the low country of the Kafirnigan river, in the narrow intramontane Beshkent valley. These cemeteries – early Tulkhar, with seventy-five graves, and early Aruktau, with twelve tumuli – represent a new type of Bronze Age cultural complex (Fig. 1), exhibiting various burial techniques and different kinds of graves. Some of the burials (fifty-four, all in the early Tulkhar cemetery) showed a departure from the normal pattern by the standard nature of the ceremonial and grave goods, and were related by Mandel'shtam to the Beshkent culture.²

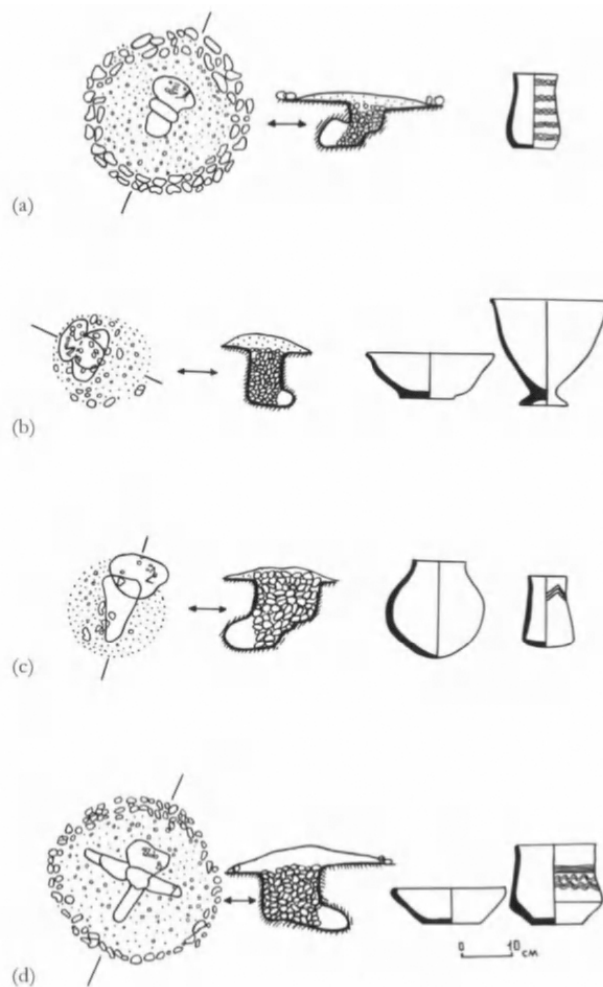


FIG. 1. Southern Tajikistan: Early Tulkhar burial grounds. Main types of burials: (a) hole with a slope (Beshkent culture); (b) grave with cremated corpse; (c) catacomb (Vakhsh culture); (d) burial of bones of a dismembered skeleton in a stone box. (After A. M. Mandel'shtam.)

² Mandel'shtam, 1968.

In the 1960s a number of Bronze Age kurgan burial-sites (tumuli) along the lower reaches of the Vakhsh and Kyzyl-su rivers were investigated under the supervision of B. A. Litvinsky. Five sites were investigated in full or in part: Vakhsh 1, Tigrovaya Balka, Oikul, Jara-Kul (in the lower reaches of the right bank of the Vakhsh) and Makan-i Mar (in the lower reaches of the right bank of the Kyzul-su). In all, 233 tumuli were excavated. A feature of all the sites is the uniform mode of interment and the identical composition of the grave goods. Litvinsky relates them to the Vakhsh culture.³ In 1981 a new burial site of this culture was discovered – Sarband in the neighbourhood of the village of Kyzyl-kala, in the middle portion of the Vakhsh valley, on the right bank of the river. A number of other single graves have been found there in southern Tajikistan.

In 1973 a study of the Beshkent valley cemeteries was continued. Three cemeteries were excavated: Beshkent I (BM I), which by the design of the burial structures resembles the cemeteries of the Vakhsh culture; Beshkent II (BM II), which consists of structures of the steppe type; and Beshkent III (BM III), in which only commemorative structures are represented.⁴

During the 1970s a number of Bronze Age cemeteries were investigated along the northern border of the Afghan-Tajik depression: Tandyriul and Zarka-mar in the Hissar valley, and two cemeteries near the town of Nurek. They relate to the late Molali period of the Sapalli culture.⁵

The cemeteries on the right bank of the Panj and Amu Darya rivers include complexes representing various cultures. The largest number of remains are of the Vakhsh culture (Fig. 2). Cemeteries of this culture are sited on the upper loess river terraces, on land leading up to low mountain ridges. The largest site is situated in Tigrovaya Balka. It measures 680 × 800 m, and contains 130 tumuli, 116 of which have been excavated. Vakhsh 1 measures 180 × 200 m (fifty tumuli, forty excavated), Oikul 220 × 260 m (fifty-two tumuli, all excavated), Jarkul 240 × 250 m (eighty tumuli, thirteen excavated) and Makan-i Mar 200 × 300 m (forty tumuli, twelve excavated).

Burial sites of the Vakhsh culture are visible on the surface by means of low mound-like artificial barrows (0.1 to 1.1 m high), circular or slightly oval in shape, made of loess, sometimes with the addition of pebbles or stones. Most of the barrows are surrounded at the base by a ring of stones lying horizontally in one to four rows. Sometimes the ring is situated up the slope of the barrow. Some tumuli are ringed by a further outer circle of stones, between 9.5 and 30 m, beyond the base of the barrow. With few exceptions the

³ Litvinsky, 1964, p. 158.

⁴ Litvinsky, et al., 1977, p. 76–92.

⁵ Antonova and Vinogradova, 1979; P'yankova, 1979.

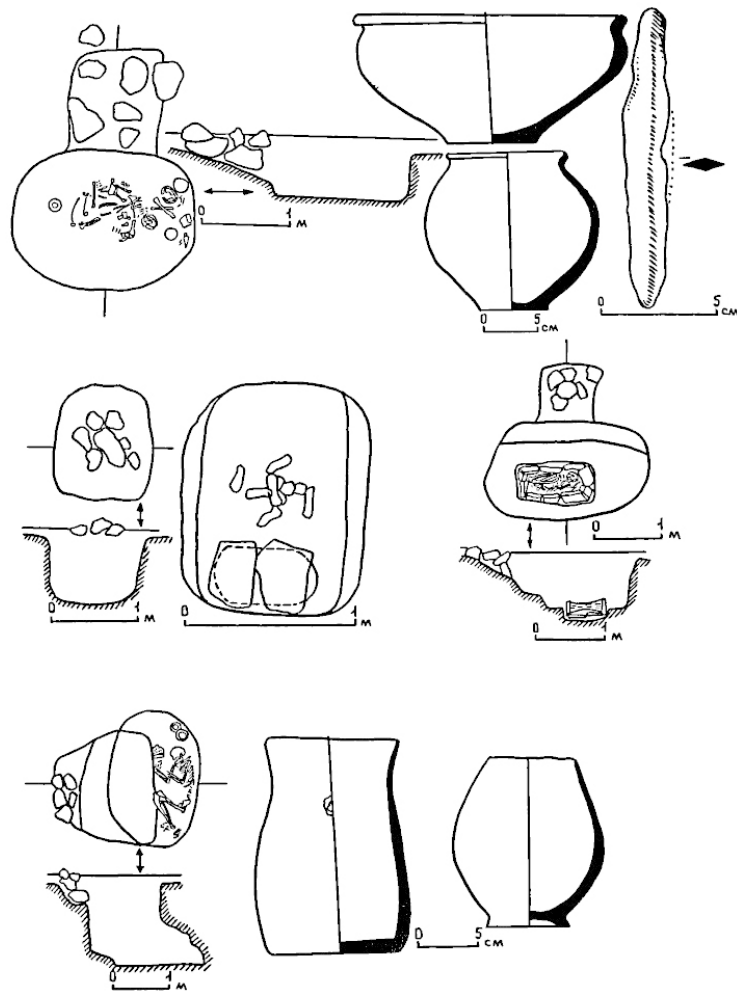


FIG. 2. Southern Tajikistan: Main types of burials of Vakhsh Culture. 'Tiger Gorge' burial ground.

graves are of the niche-recess or catacomb type. The entrance passage leading down is sealed by large cobble-stones, the interstices between which are filled with friable loess. The burial chambers are niches cut into the soil on one or other side of the passage. In accordance with the terminology most widely used in Central Asian archaeology for similar tombs in later historic periods, we shall call the chambers hollowed out in the long wall of the passages, niches, and those in the short wall, catacombs. The structures have various forms of entrance passage and, taking also into account the particular type of chamber, fall into the following categories:

1. Tombs with an oval or rectangular passage and a catacomb burial chamber.
2. Tombs with an oval or rectangular passage and niche burial chamber.
3. Tombs with a trapezoidal passage and a catacomb burial chamber.

4. Tombs with a T-shaped passage and niche chamber.
5. Tombs with an arc-shaped passage and a niche chamber.
6. Multiple burials in simple pits form a separate type.
7. Individual cases of tombs with a U- or L-shaped passage and burials at former ground-level under the soil used for the barrow.

Most typical of the Vakhsh culture are tombs of Types 1 (about 43 per cent) and 2 (about 30 per cent). The other designs are not common. No regular pattern is observable in regard to the orientation of the passage or the burial chambers relative to the cardinal points.

In cemeteries of the Vakhsh culture the bodies were invariably placed in a crouching position on their side (in a few cases on their backs or stomachs), the arms being folded at the elbow and the legs at the knee. The skeletons are lying directly on the floor of the chambers, the depth below the original ground level varying from 0.8 to 3 m. In some cases the skulls are resting on rectangular clay 'pillows'. The orientation of the bodies varies, but most frequently it is towards the north (about 30 per cent) and least frequently towards the south. Most of the burials are single, though there are also double burials (of one sex or both sexes), and in some cases a woman was buried with a child. Some of the couples were buried at the same time, others at different times. In the Oikul and Makan-i Mar cemeteries a few cases have been identified where two to three graves are found beneath each barrow. For single male burials, except in isolated cases, the body was typically placed on its right side, facing the entrance to the burial chamber. The female skeletons are placed in various positions: the commonest is on the left side (about 50 per cent), facing the entrance to the chamber. The people of the Vakhsh cemeteries are related to a Europoid, dolichocephalic, leptomorphic type.⁶

The grave goods are made up primarily of pottery, there being very few metal artefacts (from all the tumuli excavated only fourteen have daggers, mirrors and knives). Several stone and bone artefacts were also found. In the cemeteries along the Vakhsh the number of items found in each grave is from one to six (usually one or two). The burials at Makan-i Mar are accompanied by a larger number of objects – from two to eight in single graves (generally four to five) and from eight to fourteen in double burials (most commonly eight to nine).

Over 70 per cent of the pottery is hand-made. In many cases hand-made and wheel-turned ware are identical in shape and even in dimensions. Generally speaking, pottery of the Vakhsh culture relates to the range of designs commonly found among sedentary

⁶ Kiyatkina, 1976, p. 25.

agricultural populations in Soviet Central Asia and contiguous territories during the Late Bronze Age. Some of the designs are widely distributed throughout the region. The closest analogies can be found in the sedentary agricultural remains of ancient Bactria, practically all types of Vakhsh pottery (except for round-bottomed kitchen pots) being comparable with the ware produced by the sedentary agriculturalists of northern Afghanistan.⁷

The pottery found among the southern Bactrian remains also has analogies with all types of vessels specific to the range of materials produced by the Vakhsh culture – egg-shaped, biconical and jar-shaped. These types are not found among the northern Bactrian remains of the Sapalli culture. Close analogies are also to be found in northern Afghanistan for the stemmed goblet and the vase on a tall hollow stem which are unique specimens as far as the Vakhsh culture is concerned. The collections of pottery found in southern Bactria also include types of vessel that could serve as genetic prototypes for the Vakhsh ware. All metallic and other artefacts of the Vakhsh culture are related to types commonly encountered among agricultural cultures. The burial arrangements were also those of the agricultural population living in the Bactrian region.

The origin of the Vakhsh culture is in probability linked to the northward movement of one part of the tribes from southern Bactria. These people, at the close of the Bronze Age, went over predominantly to animal husbandry, which, along with land tillage, constituted a developed branch of the economy among the early agricultural societies of the Bactrian region. A factor conducive to this switch was the favourable natural conditions they encountered. It is possible that their constant contacts with steppe bronze tribes also contributed to this process. At the end of the second millennium B.C. there is evidence of a strong incursion by these northern tribes into Soviet Central Asia, right up to the borders of the sedentary-agricultural oases. In southern Tajikistan, steppe bronze sites and individual finds of steppe-type pottery have come to light in the immediate vicinity of the areas where the Vakhsh culture occurred. The possibility that new arrivals from the steppes took part in the formation of the Vakhsh culture is supported by the design on some cooking pots and also by certain details in the design of burial structures, such as the ring of stones surrounding a barrow. To judge from the sheep bones found in many Vakhsh culture graves, its bearers were primarily engaged in pasturing and rearing sheep and goats.

The burial remains bear witness to a number of cults connected with funeral rites. That most clearly evinced is the cult of fire, to which 25 per cent of all Vakhsh culture graves bear witness, represented in the tombs by: (a) charcoal and embers from braziers consisting of three small pebbles with a kitchen pot standing on them (in no case, however, are there any signs of a fire being lit in the passage of the chambers, the charcoal must have been

⁷ Sarianidi, 1977; Francfort and Pottier, 1978.

brought into the tombs from a funeral pyre outside); (b) a funeral pyre at the original ground-level, before the soil was brought in to form the barrow; and, (c) in the case of two chiefs buried in the Tigrovaya Balka cemetery, round each tomb a ring of funeral pyres (in one case numbering forty-one, in the other twenty) which burned for several days. The Vakhsh tribes also typically had a cult of the deceased and ancestors, as is evident from the construction of many commemorative structures. The Vakhsh culture dates from the last centuries of the second millennium B.C.

The Beshkent valley graves reflect a variety of cultural traditions. The most numerous group is made up of graves of the Beshkent culture (early Tulkhar). The burial structures are uniform: quasi-rectangular or rounded pits with an inclined descent or shaft from the former ground level. Externally such structures are visible as a covering of stones. The pits are filled with loess, and stones are found only in the upper portion of the descent. In most cases the long axis of the pits extends in a west–east direction. The orientation of the descents relative to the cardinal points varies. The bodies are laid on their sides, hunched up, with arms bent at the elbow and legs at the knee. Most of the burials are single, but there are eight pair-burials, all of different sexes, some buried at the same time, others at different times. Four of the tombs were found to contain multiple child burials, the children's necropolis being situated at some distance from the adult cemetery.

All the men buried at early Tulkhar in pits with an inclined descent are laid on their right side, facing the descent, while the women are laid on their left side, either facing the descent or with their backs to it. In pair-burials (whether at the same or different times) the woman always lies with her back to the entrance and facing the man. The corpses are not oriented uniformly, except in the case of pair-burials, where both the dead lie with their heads to the east.

Anthropologically the early Tulkhar population falls into the category of southern proto-Mediterranean types, though morphologically speaking it is not closely related to the people of the Vakhsh culture and the sedentary agricultural remains of Bactria. The group of skulls from early Tulkhar stand out among other craniological series for their exceptional size in all dimensions.

The Beshkent culture grave goods consist of pottery and metal and stone artefacts. About 70 per cent of the pottery is hand-made. The main forms of ware are pots, dishes and basins. The metal products include foliated knives, usually with the end of the blade curved outwards and sometimes with a midrib, daggers, 'razors', adzes, round mirrors with a lateral handle and pins. Stone objects are represented by a few flint arrowheads and also various forms of bead, mainly barrel-shaped. Economically the Beshkent culture was based on animal husbandry.

Early Tulkhar also contains a group of graves where the bodies have been cremated (nine tombs). Externally, they are visible by means of a covering of seven stones. The burial structures are shallow pits usually extending from north to south. At the bottom of the southern part of such pits an oval depression has been hollowed out and covered with flagstone chips or elongated stones. On its floor lie fine calcined human bones, ashes and charcoal. The pit is laid with stones, giving the form of a swastika or a circle with four 'spokes'. These pits also occasionally yield small fragments of modelled, ill-fired pottery. It is not possible to reconstruct the shape of the pots. Seven burials at early Tulkhar were carried out in catacomb-like tombs. They contain typical Vakhsh grave goods and can be attributed to this culture.

A small group of burials (three graves) also in pits with an inclined entrance reflect fundamentally different funeral arrangements. In these graves a rectangular depression has been hollowed out in the centre of the base of the pit, its floor and walls being lined with flagstone chippings to form a box. In this miniature stone box are buried the bones of the dismembered skeleton, the skull being always laid in the eastern part of the box, the leg-bones in the western part, the arm-bones between them and the remaining bones underneath them. This open box was then covered over with reeds. There are no grave goods.

A final type of burial structure in the early Tulkhar cemetery consists of stone surrounds enclosing a pit. There are two such cases. The surrounds are roughly square-shaped, and the corner-stones are extremely large. The burial pits are oval. The bodies were laid in the graves on their sides in a hunched-up position (the man on the right, the woman on the left). Around the skull of each of the deceased is a narrow band of ashes and charcoal chips, which indicates that a fire was lit in the tomb for ritual purposes of some kind or another. The grave goods consist of vessels, round mirrors and sheep bones. In the man's grave there is also the skeleton of a lamb (but without the skull).

In the early Aruktau cemetery we find two types of burial structures. The first consists of round or rectangular stone surrounds, sometimes paired. The bodies were buried at the original ground level, and stones strewed above (eleven graves). Within each surround the graves are identical. All the skeletons are lying on the right side, hunched up, with the head towards the north or north-east. The grave goods consist of bronze sickles, ornaments, sheep bones and pottery similar to that found in the Beshkent graves. The second consists of a pit beneath a stone cairn (one grave). The pit is rectangular and extends from west to east. The body is that of a girl lying on her left, hunched up, with her head to the east. The grave goods consist of pottery (also similar to the Beshkent pottery), bronze mirrors and ear-rings.

The Beshkent I cemetery comprises two types of structure: (a) catacomb-type tombs with a trapezoidal passage (nineteen cases); and (b) commemorative structures, consisting of stones laid out in the form of a ring (seven cases). The Beshkent II cemetery also consists of actual burials and structures of a commemorative character. The Beshkent III cemetery consists entirely of commemorative structures (six), made of circles of stones enclosing areas of paving made of flagstones laid flat on the ground.

To judge from the materials found in the burial complexes, the ethnic situation in the Beshkent valley area, as reflected in the cemeteries, would appear to be fairly complicated in relation to the size of the area, which is not large. For the early Tulkhar cemetery, A. M. Mandel'shtam proposed a date of the fourteenth to eighth centuries B.C., including the thirteenth to eleventh centuries B.C. for the Beshkent culture itself. We can now identify with certainty the centre from which the pottery found in the Beshkent valley cemeteries comes – these are remains from the late Molali stage of the Sapalli culture (Fig. 3), such as have now been found both in southern Uzbekistan and southern Tajikistan.

Thanks to the comparative chronology worked out by Uzbek archaeologists for remains of the Sapalli culture, materials of the Molali period can today be dated unambiguously to the eleventh to tenth centuries B.C. The presence of pottery from the north Bactrian sedentary agricultural area among the materials that have come down to us from the Beshkent culture makes it possible to say something about where this culture took shape. Of the population groups taking part in forming the Beshkent valley complexes was one belonging to the late stage of the Sapalli culture; this was in line with a process that was characteristic of the economy of the agricultural tribes of Bactria during the final Bronze Age, namely that whereby some of the tribes switched to animal husbandry as their principal occupation. As has been seen from the example of the Vakhsh culture, this process occurred concurrently in northern and southern Bactria, though the formation of the pastoralist complexes in the Beshkent valley involved a greater degree of participation by the steppe bronze tribes. Traces of the incursion of such tribes into the Beshkent valley are documented both by the finds of pottery (BM III) and metal artefacts typical of steppe cultures (in the early Tulkhar pits with entrance ramps investigators have found a dagger of eastern Kazakhstan type and two knives similar to classic specimens of the timber grave (*srubnaya kul'tura* and Andronovo culture) and by the burial arrangements typical of a steppe population (graves with cremation in early Tulkhar, stone boxes in BM II). The marked degree of mixing of the population here probably explains the emergence of the distinctive anthropological type that characterizes the Beshkent culture. The appearance of catacombs with typical Vakhsh-culture grave goods in early Tulkhar is evidently linked to the direct incursion of some group of the bearers of this culture into the Beshkent valley.

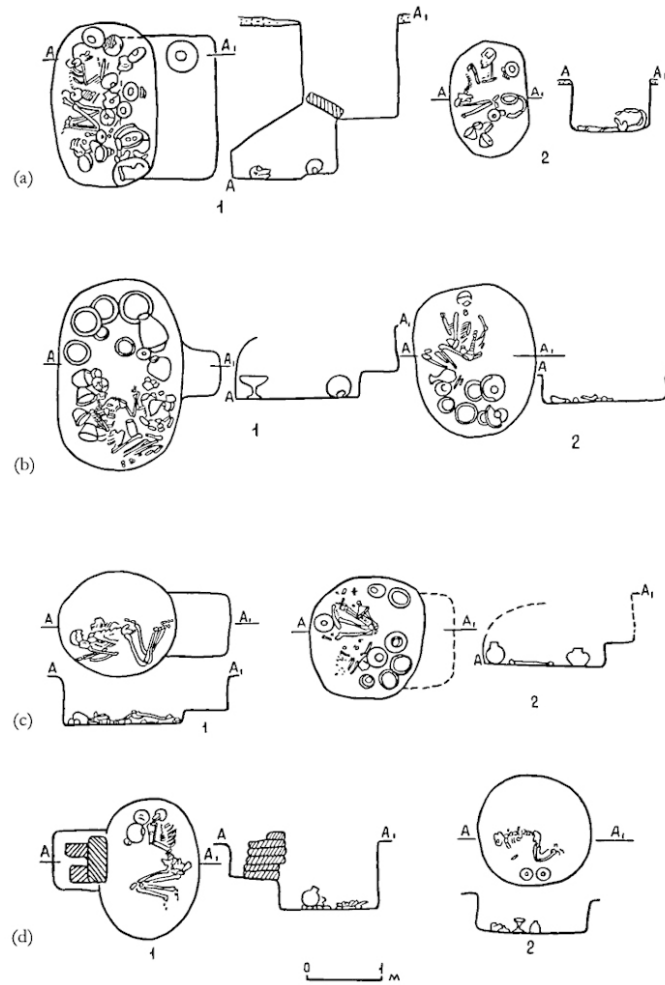


FIG. 3. Southern Uzbekistan: Burial grounds of Sapalli culture: (a) Sapalli stage; (b) Jarkuntan stage; (c) Kuzalinski stage; (d) Molali stage. (After A. A. Askarov and B. N. Abdulaev.)

From the materials found in the cemeteries along the lower reaches of the Kafirnigan it is also possible to trace a certain transformation in the kind of representations associated with the burial ritual. The Beshkent culture is characterized by the mandatory standardized appearance of the fire cult for each and every burial, as evinced by the construction of the distinctive small hearths in the graves. In male burials the hearths are square and made of pieces of broken flagstone, while in female burials they are circular hollows. When the body was interred, a fire was lit in these hearths. As has been said above, for the Vakhsh culture manifestations of the fire cult varied from one burial to another and were not mandatory. In the catacomb tombs of early Tulkhar a fire ritual accompanies each burial (this being the pre-eminent link with Beshkent culture burials), but it is different in form: there are no standard hearths but a small funeral pyre is lit on the top step of the entrance shaft, while the charcoal and ashes are carried into the chamber in ready form

on a shaving of flagstone or a fragment of a pottery (ideological influence of the Vakhsh culture). Tribes of the Vakhsh culture as well as those of the Beshkent culture took part in forming the Beshkent I complex. The BM I cemetery contains in addition a large group of commemorative structures, a characteristic feature of Vakhsh complexes.

Cemeteries from the Molali stage of the Sapalli culture have been found in the Hissar valley and in the area of Nurek. In the Tandyriul cemetery thirty-four graves have been excavated, one in Zarkamar, and sixteen in one of the Nurek cemeteries. The main type of burial structure is a pit in the ground, identified on the surface by a number of stones. In Tandyriul a number of catacomb tombs have also been discovered. The bodies were buried hunched up, lying on their sides. The skeletons are very poorly preserved. In the Nurek cemetery they have been almost completely destroyed through leaching by salty gypsum.

The grave goods comprise pottery, almost exclusively wheel-turned and of high quality, with white slip and burnish (principally pots, vases and basins), though there are also modelled articles (jugs, pots and dishes). Metal items at Tandyriul are represented by bronze votive knives, and cylindrical beads. A bell-mouthed pendant of typical Andronovo design has also been found here. In the Nurek cemetery excavations have brought to light a fragment of a bronze knife-blade with the tip drawn backwards and a golden fillet with five protuberances into one of which is inserted a piece of turquoise. Both cemeteries have yielded lazurite and azurite beads in the shape of miniature axes.

The origin of these complexes is associated with the migration of bearers of the Sapalli culture in its late stage to the north-east, up the Surkhan Darya valley where it joins the Hissar valley. In its material appearance, however, the Tandyriul cemetery is closer to the remains of the Molali stage in Uzbekistan. In the Nurek cemetery the proportion of hand-made ware is higher, most of the pots having a biconical body, untypical of the pottery collections found in Uzbekistan, and among the materials found here there is one modelled basin decorated in the manner of Kuchuk-tepe, Tillya-tepe and similar sites. All this suggests that the Nurek cemetery is somewhat, though not a great deal, later than Tandyriul.

Historical Evolution

We have described above the interrelationship of the various local and chronological variants of the Bronze Age Bactrian culture, of which cemeteries provided the main evidence.

The problem of the origin of this culture as a whole has aroused lengthy discussion. Immediately after having excavated the Bronze Age cemeteries in the Beshkent valley, A. M. Mandel'shtam raised (1966 and 1968) the question of the genesis of the culture he had discovered. In this connection he put forward the view that it was appropriate,

above all, to start from two fundamental premises, that of the culture's pastoral character and the manifest evidence of its being affected by other population groups of Bactria or contiguous countries. He laid special stress on the northern links, analysing in a somewhat one-sided fashion the grave goods and, to some extent, the burial rites, and paying attention principally to the links and similarities with the zone of steppe cultures. In this connection he emphasized that 'we do not have available any materials that would enable us to posit a local origin for the Beshkent culture'. The conclusion drawn from all this was that 'the earlier but probably not original places of residence of the bearers of the Beshkent culture must be sought somewhere to the north of Bactria'. One possible alternative put forward was the steppe region to the north of the Syr Darya, though the possibility of this region's lying to the south of the Syr Darya was not ruled out. The tribe that left the Beshkent cemeteries, he writes elsewhere, moved 'southward', but from where it came remained a mystery for Mandel'shtam. He simply pointed out in this respect that attention should be paid to the Tazabagyab culture and other steppe bronze cultures allied to it.⁸

This concept was supported and developed by E. E. Kuz'mina who suggested that 'a new archaeological culture took shape in Central Asia as a result of the crossing of two groups of pastoralists – descendants of the Zamanbaba and Andronovo peoples', none other than the culture of the people who built the southern Tajikistan cemeteries. Since the same period had seen publication of the data concerning the sedentary agricultural remains of Bactria, the fact that the grave goods included many objects of a sedentary agricultural type was explained as the consequence of an exchange between steppe dwellers who had come down from the north and the inhabitants of southern agricultural settlements.⁹ This hypothesis has proved to be incorrect.

Another hypothesis was advanced by B. A. Litvinsky.¹⁰ He drew attention to the close similarity – in some cases identity – with the culture of southern Turkmenistan of Namazga VI, especially its Murghab variant, while recognizing the influence of steppe bronze cultures. It was suggested that the advent of these cemeteries is linked to the movement of tribes from south-western Turkmenistan.¹¹ Subsequently he modified this hypothesis,¹² which is also currently accepted by A. Askarov.

The hypothesis is now formulated as follows. In the central and eastern part of southern Turkmenistan in the second half of the second millennium B.C. there were settlements of

⁸ Mandel'shtam, 1966, pp. 256–9.

⁹ Kuz'mina, 1972B, pp. 120–1.

¹⁰ Litvinsky, 1964, pp. 157–8.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Litvinsky, 1967, pp. 121–7, 1973, pp. 9–13, 1981, pp. 155–6.

an archaeological culture known as Namazga VI with its eastern, Murghab variant.¹³ Settlements and cemeteries of a very similar (and in some points identical) culture (especially by comparison with the 'Murghab' variant) have been investigated, as had been indicated, in the Bactrian region. All these settlements and cemeteries, separated from one another (from east to west) by nearly 1,000 km, were left behind by communities with a single life-style. At the same time the nature of the settlements, the tribes' movement from one small oasis to another around centrally fortified settlements, the mode of construction, the planning, the form taken by the material culture were likewise similar, notwithstanding certain regional differences. This also relates to the anthropological aspect of the population. All this points to the existence of a huge historico-cultural area of Central Asia, on the territory of what was to become Parthia, Margiana and Bactria. Here in the middle and second half of the second millennium B.C. lived closely related tribes who had moved eastwards from the western foci of this culture at the beginning of the second millennium B.C. By the middle of the millennium Margiana and Bactria were densely populated.

Whence came the colonizing wave? Obviously one of the basic foci was the oases of southern Turkmenistan as a whole, the leading role of the Ahaltekin and Etek centres being taken, after their population declined, by the centres of Margiana as well as those of Iranian Khorasan. Iranian Khorasan is in fact regarded by V. I. Sarianidi as the original focus of migration, but the arguments in support of this hypothesis are insufficient.

On arriving in Bactria, these tribes initially continued to preserve their own economic and cultural patterns. This was facilitated by the fact that Bactria, or those parts of it where they initially settled, offered comparable ecological conditions. Peoples with a traditional mud architecture, an economy based on primitive irrigated tillage with a considerable admixture of stock-raising, a high level of craftsmanship, in particular the potter's craft, the products of which developed and varied the Anau tradition, such were the characteristic features of the Bactrian population. The spiritual culture also by and large retained initially its original features. However, the ecological conditions were not wholly identical. Moreover the newcomers did not live in a vacuum: they were subject to the influence of the local substrate population as well as the steppe tribes, and intermingled with them. As a result of their severance from the original foci and the above-mentioned factors, the paths of development were not absolutely identical, and there were gradual but fairly marked changes both in production and also in the material and spiritual culture. Typical are the existence of catacomb burials under the floors of the houses, and the ritual burials of sheep.

Part of the population continued to migrate. In particular, large groups from northern Afghanistan and, subsequently, from southern Uzbekistan pushed forward into the

¹³ Litvinsky, 1952; Masimov, 1976.

valleys and hills of southern Tajikistan. Coming upon ecological conditions that were not propitious for a primitive agricultural economy, they switched to one based primarily on stockraising. This transition was facilitated by their continual contacts with the 'steppe-dwellers'. This group of newcomers from the area of agricultural cultures (which is represented by the cemeteries of southern Tajikistan) underwent certain changes in their economic arrangements and cultures. There were also major changes in their burial rites; for instance, they began to erect over the tombs structures of a type borrowed from the bearers of the steppe cultures. There were a number of ethnographic population groups who led a semi-sedentary life-style, raising herds they had driven away from their natural pastures.

The links between the Bactrian Bronze Age culture and other cultures were directed primarily towards the west. It must be said that investigators differ in assessing the relative importance of the various westward links. A. Askarov and B. A. Litvinsky give priority to the links between Bactria and Margiana; V. I. Sarianidi, while not denying their importance (he even speaks of the Margiana-Bactria archaeological complex), stresses the special significance of the Iranian links.¹⁴ Detailed attention is also being paid to links further westwards, as far as Mesopotamia.

On the other hand, there are evident links and points of correspondence in certain directions with the Bronze Age culture of the Swat valley (Pakistan). Drawing attention to these points of correspondence (on the basis of materials from the cemeteries in southern Tajikistan), Litvinsky noted that the material from the Swat cemeteries is more closely related to Iran and the Caucasus.¹⁵

Another point of view was expressed by E. E. Kuz'mina who argued that the cemeteries of southern Tajikistan and Swat were identical in most of their features, that there was cultural affinity between them, and that the question of the origin of the Swat cemeteries must be solved taking this identity into account.¹⁶ However, as detailed analysis has shown, this similarity is of a general character, and there are not so many specific points where the two coincide.¹⁷ Moreover, the excavations of other remains in Bactria, especially in northern Afghanistan, have shown that in fact the culture of these sites has a much more evident link with the cultures of the Swat valley.¹⁸ Kuz'mina's idea of a genetic link between the Swat cemeteries and those of southern Tajikistan must accordingly be rejected; all that can be said is that there are 'common sources to these cultures.'¹⁹ For the location of these

¹⁴ Sarianidi, 1977.

¹⁵ Litvinsky, 1967, pp. 122–4, 127.

¹⁶ Kuz'mina, 1972a.

¹⁷ Antonini, 1973.

¹⁸ Ibid.; Sarianidi, 1977, pp. 146–7.

¹⁹ Litvinsky, 1973, p. 12.

common sources we are referred either to north-eastern Iran²⁰ or to southern Turkmenia – to the culture of Namazga VI and its local variants in Margiana and Bactria.²¹ In our view, the two suggestions may possibly be combined. Complex historic, cultural and ethnic processes ultimately led to the establishment in the Bactrian region of an eastern Iranian eth-nos, known as the Bactrian.²²

Such is the complex nature of the problem of the people of the Bactrian cemeteries. In the Beshkent cemeteries we have cremation rites; ritual hearths were built in the graves; and swastikas were used in marking the site. In the Vakhsh cemeteries funeral pyres were lit around the grave of a leader. A number of beliefs and cult practices that can be reconstructed from the materials found in the Vakhsh cemeteries recall common Indo-European rites and beliefs or specifically Indo-Iranian ones. Moreover the genetic link between the material and spiritual culture of the final stage of the Bactrian culture and the Bactrian culture of Achaemenid times point to cultural and also linguistic continuity. The language of the Bactrians of Achaemenid and later periods was Iranian or, more precisely, eastern Iranian. Thus the hypothesis can be advanced that the ethnic character of Bactrian Bronze Age culture was predominantly Proto-Iranian.

Taking account the hypothesis put forward by Gray and Burrow,²³ we can reconstruct this process as follows. The ‘aryanization’ of Central Asia began at the end of the third and during the first half of the second millennium B.C., when it was connected with the Proto-Indo-Aryan wave. The process became much more intense in the second half of the second millennium B.C., when it acquired a ‘Proto-Iranian’ hue. The process by which Iranian-speaking tribes came into existence was exceedingly complicated, a proto-Iranian wave being superimposed on the local substrate and its aryanized component. This was accompanied by cultural synthesis and a synthesis of socio-economic structures. This process lasted a considerable time.²⁴

²⁰ Sarianidi, 1977, p. 147; Stacul, 1979, p. 242.

²¹ Antonini, 1973, pp. 242–4.

²² In Swat, where the substrata were different and another wave of Aryan tribes and entered the land, the people who left the cemeteries took shape as a proto-Dard population. Litvinsky, 1967, p. 127, n. 30; Tucci, 1977, pp. 34–8.

²³ Burrow, 1973.

²⁴ Litvinsky, 1981, pp. 160–1.