Bronze Age Center of Oriental Civilization in the Karakum Desert (Turkmenistan) and its Connections with Mediterranean World

Nadezhda A. Dubova
Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology RAS, Moscow, Russia
In the late 1940s – early 1950s later world famous Greek-Russian-Turkmenien archaeologist Victor Sarianidi took part in his first excavations after graduating of the Historical faculty of the Middle Asian State University in Tashkent (Uzbekistan). His father borne in Trebizond and mother born in Yalta have married in Russia in the second half of 1920s and moved to Tashkent where there were more possibilities to find a job.
In the 1950-1970’s the South-Turkmenistan archaeological complex expedition (YuTAKE) under leadership of prof. Mikhail Masson and later Vadim Masson in collaboration with Turkmenian archaeologists excavated many new and well-known sites near Kopet-Dagh foothills – Nisa, Sultan-Kala, Namazga depe, Altyn depe, Meshed-Misrian, Ulug depe and in the ancient basin of Tejen river as well. They began to make excavations along the Murghab river also. Victor Sarianidi – was one of them – a young archaeologist who want to know all about the Turkmen ancient history.
Being a head of the Soviet-Afghan archaeological expedition during 1969-1979 and excavating Bronze Age sites there, in Tillya Tepe site in 1978/1979 Victor Sarianidi found 7 Kushan royal tombs, where there were more than 20,000 gold goods.
During excavations it became increasingly apparent to Victor Sarianidi’s inquiring mind that in prehistory people might have been able to master not only the foothills of the Kopet Dagh but also those territories which are now concealed by the desert. Clear evidence of this emerged from the work of Victor Sarianidi at Takhirbai and Yaz-Depe in the Merv oasis.
To the very beginning of 1990th in ancient delta of the Murghab River more than 200 sites were opened by prof. Sarianidi. Only 8 from then are excavated now. Togolok 21 and Gonur Depe are excavated as a whole.

More than 500 archaeological sites in the ancient Murghab delta (by Tozi, Cerasetti, 2010). Bronze Age and Iron Age sites are pointed by different colors.
Making excavations, working in museums and libraries Victor Sarianidi draws his attention to the similarity of monumental architecture, forms of ceramic, bronze objects, stone artifacts, "narrative" stories on seals and amulets, reconstructed beliefs and practices on the archaeological sites, scattered over a vast area from Mesopotamia, and sometimes modern Greece in the west to the Pamir mountains to the east, from the Iranian Kerman in the south to the north of the Zarafshan River.

Therefore, already in 1974, he formulated the idea of the existence of the Bactria-Margiana archaeological complex (BMAC). It’s very important to underline that similarities have taken place with the local features of cultures, those roots going back to the more ancient epochs.
Few goods from Gonur-depe site in Turkmenistan (2300-1600 BC)
Variant of the reconstruction of the wagon from royal tombs 3200, 3225 of Gonur Depe.

Few goods from Gonur-depe site in Turkmenistan (2300-1600 BC)
Silver vessel in the form of Mardvash (Iran). Silver vessel from the royal tomb 3220 at Gonur Depe (2250 BC).
Gonur Depe, Turkmenistan. Bird-headed man on the impression of the cylinder seal on the ceramic vessel.

Investigation of these distinctive objects indicates that, for all its originality, the BMAC shows clear parallels to the seals and amulets of Iran (especially Elam) and Mesopotamia. Famous French archaeologist Pierre Amiet (1986) was the first who draw attention to the fact that these parallels are not limited to Mesopotamia but extend as far as Syria and Anatolia.
Togolok 1, Turkmenistan. The cylinder seal and its impression.

Gonur Depe, Turkmenistan. Eagle-shaped stone pendant from the tomb № 2938 (a) and stone metal-casting mold (b).
Map of the distribution of similar motifs found on seals and amulets (by Sarianidi, 1994, p. 34).
“Harpoons” or “rods” from the tombs of Gonur Depe, Turkmenistan (a) and in the hand of Ishtar Goddess (her foot is on a lion's back) on the wall drawing in the Mari Palace (b) (Syria, II Mill. BC); Egyptian sword khopesh (c).
“Griffin in cartouche” from the royal tomb 3210 of Gonur Depe, Turkmenistan (a) and griffin from the wall drawing in the Mari Palace (b).
Marguş
Türkmenistan
Ancient Oriental Kingdom in the Old Delta of the Marghab river

Goňurdepe
Türkmenistan
City of Kings and Gods

GADYMÝY MARGIANANYŇ GENJI-HAZYNASY
Treasures of Ancient Margiana
Сокровища древней Маргианы
More than 60 years of archaeological excavations in Middle Asia, more than 300 scientific publications (including around 30 books) of Victor Sarianidi resulted in the discovery of the new center of Oriental civilizations in the Kara-Kum desert (Turkmenistan). Many of the world's leading experts agreed with this notion. Many ideas suggested by him some decades of years ago now are finding new evidences, and number of his adherents increases year by year.