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ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

A fresh look at rural development in antique northern Bactria: the Kulal Tepa Archaeological Project (2023-2024)

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Abstract

Archaeological research on the Kushan Empire in northern Bactria (1st-3rd centuries CE) has long suggested remarkable development occurred during this period of antiquity, including massive urbanisation. However, closer examination indicates this picture is surprisingly fragile and fragmentary, not least because comparatively little attention has been paid to rural units of settlement – the basis of society and the economy. As part of a new research programme concerned with the scope and reality of this phenomenon, the Kulal Tepa Archaeological Project of the Czech-Uzbek Archaeological Expedition was initiated, a pilot multidisciplinary study to examine the development of an entire rural micro-oasis and its prime settlement – the small multiperiod Kulal Tepa – in the Kugitang foothills of southern Uzbekistan. This presentation introduces the project, and outlines preliminary results of excavation and survey activities during 2023–2024, with emphasis on settlement activity over the 1st-6th centuries CE and use of coined money over time. Particularly intensive activity was found in the Kushano-Sasanian period (3rd-4th centuries CE), including the site's main occupation phase with a large residence built on a pakhsa platform. I conclude by reflecting on the implications of these new data for broader historical and historiographic paradigms.

Keywords

Bactria, Central Asia, Kushan, Kushano-Sasanian, Economy

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