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YERBULAT SMAGULOV: CONTRIBUTION TO ARCHAEOLOGY

The article analyzes the activities of the archaeologist E.A. Smagulov (1952-2019). Under the influence of his mentors (L.B. Erzakovich, V.M. Masson, K.M. Baipakov), he made the city and the fortress of the oases of South Kazakhstan in ancient and early medieval times the main object of research. In 1996 he created the Turkestan expedition and concentrated on the study of the Turkestan oasis. For the first time he managed to explore and excavate large areas of important monuments with raw construction – the cities of Sauran and old Sauran (Karatobe), Shavgar (Shoytobe), old Yasy / Turkestan with the early citadel of Kultobe, the most important pre-Islamic religious center Sidak, the Golden Horde city of Zhayik. A significant topic of his work was the study of the early strata associated with the first state in the region – the “nomadic empire” of Kangjui and the descendants of its population. He considered the history and culture of Kangjui in connection with both more southern oases and nomadic Sarmatians. E.A. Smagulov fought for the creation of continuous protected areas around Sauran and old Turkestan to preserve historical landscapes; He paid much attention to the restoration and museumification of the studied monuments, the promotion of scientific knowledge. Most of all, he was interested in the history of the planning of settlements and dwellings, the development of burial structures and related rituals, crafts related to ceramics and non-ferrous metals, tamga signs. A special place in his research was occupied by the local pre-Islamic Mazdeanism, its temple complexes in Sidak and Kultobe and their comparison with the materials of the southern and eastern neighbors. An erudite specialist, he possessed an analytical mind and, on the basis of local materials, solved general issues of the history and culture of Central Asia.

Key words: Kazakhstan, Kangjui, early medieval dwellings and crafts, Mazdeism, historical landscape, tamga signs

THE FAMOUS Kazakhstani archaeologist Yerbulat Akizhanovich Smagulov passed away on October 5, 2019. Exactly half a century ago, he entered the S.M. Kirov History Faculty at Kazakh State University in the city of Alma-Ata (today's Almaty). During his student days he actively participated in field research in southern Kazakhstan. He often referred to the special role played by the famous researcher of the upper layers of medieval Otrar, Lev Borisovich Yerkovich (1936-1993) in the formation of his scientific interests. Following graduation in 1974, Smagulov began working in the Department of Archaeology of the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the Kazakh SSR, which in August 1991 was reorganized as the A. Kh. Margulan Institute of Archaeology of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. In that setting he worked as a senior researcher for many years. The scientific direction of Smagulov's archaeological excavations was determined in his early career at the ancient site of Otrar beginning in 1986, specifically in Altyntobe and Mardan-Kuyuk, as well as at Kokmardan in the

Otrar oasis as a part of the Southern Kazakhstan Archaeological Complex Expedition. He was very fascinated with sites containing large urban settlements, particularly, with their necropolises. Additionally, Smagulov worked as a member of the Archaeological Expedition on the Code of Monuments of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Southern Turkmenistan Archaeological Complex Expedition, the Uzbekistan Art History Expedition, the Western Kazakhstan Archaeological Expedition and several others.

In 1980-81, under the guidance of V.M. Masson, he completed an internship at the Leningrad branch of the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. This also noticeably affected Smagulov's areas of scientific interest in his connections with his St. Petersburg colleagues. His formation as a scientist was largely influenced by a continuous cooperation with the future director of the Institute of Archaeology and the head of the Southern Kazakhstan Expedition, Karl Moldakhmetovich Baipakov (Fig. 1). In 1990, in Samarkand, under Baipakov's leadership, Smagulov defended his Ph.D. dissertation on late medieval ceramics in southern Kazakhstan (*Smagulov*



Fig. 1.E.A. Smagulov with his scientific advisor K.M. Baypakov. 2015 (photo by S.A. Yatsenko)

1990b). However, from then on, he became more and more interested in the so-called “Kangju problem” related to a comprehensive study of the cultural history of the first major state formation in Kazakhstan – the “nomadic empire” of the Kangju (also known as Kanga, 1st century BC to the first half of the 4th century AD) which was initially associated with the northernmost oases of the region. Even today, we still know very little about this mighty empire of the past, which was apparently created from a combination of the Saka and Yuezhi tribes. The difficulty, among others, is that the settlement layers from this period are usually superceded by cultural layers of the later periods.

For many years, Smagulov was also interested in the cultural continuity from the succeeding generations of this state following its dissolution around the early 4th century up to the active Turkification and Islamization of the region. Even at an early stage of study, it became clear to him that the post-Kangju population made a considerable contribution to the culture of later, “ethnographic” Kazakhs.

From 1985, Smagulov regularly focused on the sites of the Turkestan oasis (*Towards History*, 2007). Among them were the necropolises of Chon-Kapka I and Konyrtobe I, studied from 1988 to 1990 (*Bai-*

pakov, Smagulov, Yerzhigitova 2005: 12-38, 41-62, 71-84) (Fig. 2). This work was further facilitated through the opening of the “Azret-Sultan” historical and cultural reserve museum in August of 1989. In 1996, the museum’s administration assisted Smagulov in the initiation of the Turkestan Archaeological Expedition. Its initial studies were associated with preparations for the celebration of the 1500th anniversary of Turkestan in the year 2000. He also provided archaeological supervision in the work of the Turkish restoration work on the mausoleum of Khoja Akhmet Yassawi and its vicinity (*Smagulov, Grigoryev, Itenov* 1999). The revered grave of this famous Sufi, who died in 1166, was located at this very site. The work of the expedition significantly facilitated in clarifying the tasks of restoration and revealed a necropolis near the mausoleum that existed from the 5th century AD. In connection with the general restoration of the famous monument in early 1997, Smagulov managed to conduct excavations in the Kazanlak hall, that revealed a series of burials and gravestones, the majority of which are associated with the nobility of the Kazakh Khanate. He also apparently traced the area of the sanctuary back to the Saka period. Smagulov assisted considerably with the creation of the Turkestan museum located in the a former Russian impe-



Fig. 2. A cruciform temple at the Kultobe citadel, excavated in 2010-2011. Photo from the archive of E.A. Smagulov



Fig. 3. Sidak in the process of excavation. Photo from the archive of E.A. Smagulov



Fig. 4. E.A. Smagulov at the excavation site of Sidak. Photo by S.A. Yatsenko

rial barracks, which was significantly reconstructed in 2014–2016. A significant part of the museum's exhibit were a result of excavations and surveys done by the Turkestan Expedition. Smagulov and his staff's work contributed to the inclusion of the mausoleum complex of Khoja Akhmet Yassawi on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2003.

In 1998, he began research of Eski-Turkestan (Kazakh for "old Turkestan"). Buildings from the Late medieval period were uncovered. However, the most significant findings were made on the southern outskirts of the old city in the oldest citadel of Kultobe spanning an area of 27 hectares (the location likely translates "holy hill") (Smagulov, Yerzhigitova, Torgoyev 2011; Smagulov, Yerzhigitova 2013; Smagulov 2017; 2019). While the first small-scale excavations allowed for the dating of the citadel to the 4th century AD, the large scale excavations started by Smagulov in 2010, enabled dating the oldest building in the citadel – a cross-shaped fire temple 18 × 18 m – to around the turn of the first century AD (Fig. 3). The oldest hexagonal-shaped citadel of Yassy (as Turkestan was

called until the early 17th century) existed from the 1st century until around the turn of the 3rd or 4th centuries, when it was destroyed. In the 8th century, with the arrival of Arab armies, the temple was destroyed. This was followed by the construction of a Turkic fortress lasting until the 10th century when it expanded into a city that flourished up to the Mongol invasion. Of course, the earliest Kultobe / Yassy was not the capital of the Kangju state, but rather, according to Smagulov, their capital was located where the greatest concentration of monuments from the 1st through 3rd centuries existed on middle Syr Darya River, the site on the Otrar oasis and the settlement of the same name, also called Mardan-Kuyuk (Baipakov, Smagulov, Yerzhigitova 2005: 167). However, Yassy was also an important center. The types of gold jewelry found at the temple are identical to those of the more western Sarmatians from the steppes of Europe. This is not surprising if we take into account the information of the Chinese chronicles about the dependence of a number of Sarmatian groups on the Kangju. The city of Yassy was the place where jewelry



Fig. 5. Sidak. Two sanctuaries, a cult courtyard and a residential area.

Photo from the archive of E.A. Smagulov

was made for vassal tribes. The temple with the sacred courtyards surrounding it as well as the walls of the citadel and the premises in it, as revealed in the initially extensive excavations are in a good state of preservation and represent an important Kangju site. Excavations advanced significantly after administrative changes shifted to Turkestan in June 2018, and financial sponsorship was provided by the private humanitarian fund ERG Komek (see, for example: *Privalov* 2019). In 2019, a geodetic scan of the site's entire territory was conducted to identify promising areas for excavation. The creation of the Kultobe Ancient Settlement archaeological park (*Kultobe* 2020) was started in December 2019, but, unfortunately, Smagulov passed away prior to its formal establishment.

Along with Turkestan, the Expedition paid much attention to the excavations of the ancient site of Shoitobe located 5 km east of the Yassawi mausoleum although the area had undergone significant plowing. Written sources seem to identify it with the city of Shavgar (*Smagulov, Tuyakbayev* 1997). Stratigraphic excavations conducted from 1996 to 2000 exposed 20 cultural layers beginning from the end of the Kangju period in the 3rd-4th centuries. The city was probably founded by former remnants of the Kangju immedi-

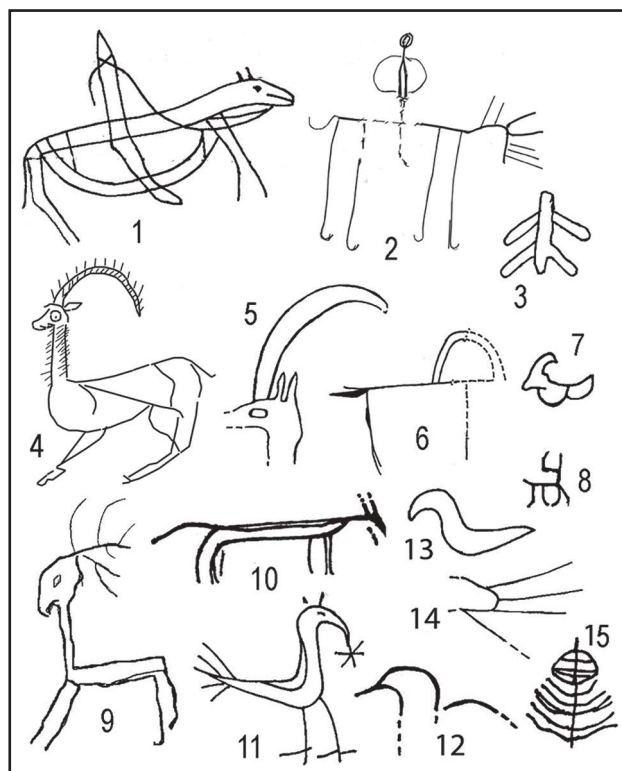


Fig. 6. Main subject compositions on votive ceramics from Sidak.

Drawing by E.A. Smagulov and S.A. Yatsenko

ately following the abandonment of Kultobe, which was located nearby. Shoitobe's fortress wall, dating to the period of Arab rule in the 8th and 9th centuries, are in a good state of preservation (*Smagulov* 1999).

For a long time, the ancient urban site of Sidak (Sida-ata) located 18 km west of Turkestan (Fig. 4) became another major focus for Smagulov as he sought to identify the continuity of culture with the Kangju. Its extensive destructive layer has long aroused curiosity in the archaeological community. Two stratigraphic excavations at the site revealed 22 cultural layers 16 meters in depth lying on an artificial surface. The earliest of them dates back two thousand years. It was an extensive religious center which apparently arose during the Kangju Empire and was destroyed by the troops of the Arab Caliphate around 740 (*Smagulov* 2004a). The Turkestan Expedition conducted large-scale excavations at Sidak from 2001 to 2012. To date, only the later layers of the 5th through 8th centuries have been uncovered over a large area (Fig. 5). The necropolis was also excavated (*Yerzhigitova, Smagulov* 2004). Sidak was considered a holy place, where, probably, the ancestors of the influential clans of the post-Kangju population in the area and its neighboring territories were first honored. There are two sanctuaries and an extensive sacred courtyard,



Fig. 7. Late medieval building near the central square of Sauran. Photo by S.A. Yatsenko



Fig. 8. General view of Karatobe before the start of excavations (*Smagulov 2011: 18*)

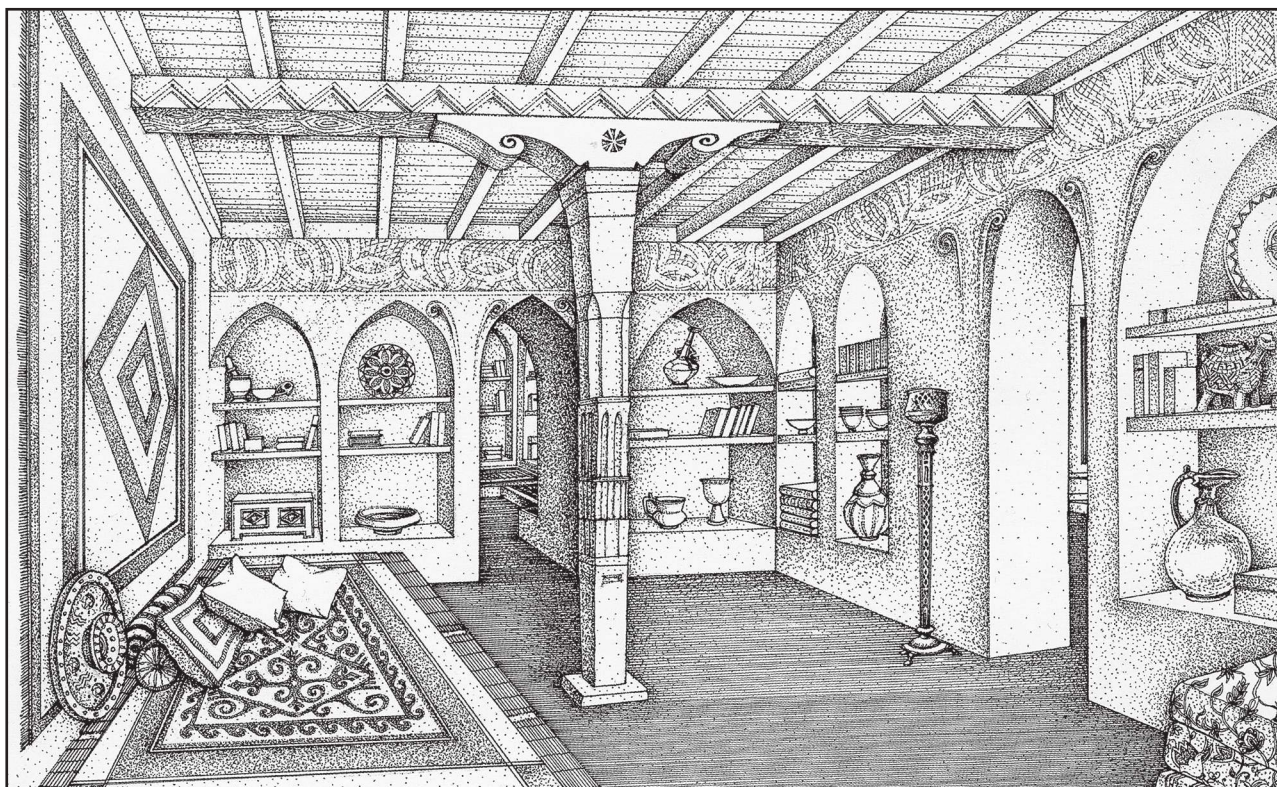


Fig. 9. Reconstruction of the interior of the house of the 13th century on Karatobe (excavation site 1, building 8, room 20) (Smagulov 2011: 192, fig. 4)

as well as housing for attendants and pilgrims (Smagulov, Yatsenko 2008; Smagulov 2008; 2013). Here, in several rooms are a series of *khums*, or storage jars, containing bones of the dead, cleansed according to the Mazdean (Zoroastrian) rite, and stored for some period of time. Numerous votive vessels with sacrificial food or drink have depictions not only of a variety of animals, people, and geometric patterns, but also approximately 150 *tamga* signs (marks giving tribal or ownership affiliation). These were left by pilgrims from the Otrar oasis, Chach, Bukhara and Samarkand, as well several Turkic clans that wandered around the neighboring Karatau mountains. This is the largest collection of *tamgas* in the oases of pre-Islamic Central Asia, which indicates the great interregional significance of the Sidak as a religious center.

As it turned out, just prior to the arrival of the Arabs, the location was evacuated by its clerics, and therefore, archaeologists did obtain much information concerning its religious attributes. Smagulov's particular interest focused on the graffiti of pilgrims on sacrificial dishes. These contained mostly images of wild animals, as well as horse and bulls with riders, also included were depictions, among others of the "World Tree" (*baiterek* in Kazakh) (Smagulov, Yatsenko 2010; 2013a; 2013b) (Fig. 6).

Smagulov gained international renown for the long-term study of the largest fortification system of medieval Kazakhstan – the city of Sauran (14th-17th centuries) which measured 800 m in length. Its predecessor site, early Sauran (the fortifications known today as Karatobe) was located 3 km from it and was founded in pre-Arab times. The site also had not been previously studied. Later Sauran began to be studied by the Turkestan Expedition beginning in 1998 and then to a larger extent, in accordance with the Kazakhstan Cultural Heritage Program, from 2004 (Baipakov, Smagulov 2006). Excavations revealed urban structures that are unique in value for the territory of Kazakhstan. They included a central square, containing a cathedral mosque from the 14th century; a Sufi *khanaka* (prayer cells); a madrasah of the 16th century; the main street, and a complex system of wall fortifications (Smagulov, Yerzhigitova 2009-2010; Smagulov 2016a) (Fig. 7). In addition to the later city, one site for examination was a ring of numerous estates located in a radius of up to 1.5 km around the urban features (following the excavations of V.A. Groshev, 1986). This included a well-preserved system of underground watercourses (*kyariz*) along the streams of Azhasay, Karachak, Maitandal and Aksay (235 locations covering a total length of 110 km) (Smagulov 2003) and sections of the city cemetery. Later Sauran

fell into decay due to climate change during the late 17th century.

The excavations in old Sauran (Karatobe), have proceeded since 2006 and have come with unexpected results. The city consisted of three fortifications enclosures and its citadel was built in the 8th century by the Arabs (Fig. 8). In the 14th century it was peacefully abandoned by residents who relocated to a new city in the vicinity by decision of the authorities. The significant results of the work at Karatobe involved the study of industry in the early feudal city (especially pottery and the production of non-ferrous metal products), as well as the system of residential development made possible due to the absence of extensive destruction and the later development on the site. It especially allowed for clarification of the various layouts of households (Fig. 9) and their evolution in the region (Smagulov 2011: 183-238). Smagulov's book, *Ancient Sauran* (Smagulov 2011), was highly appreciated by the scientific community, which was also noted in reviews by Russian and American colleagues (Yatsenko 2012; Waugh 2013).

Series of aerial photos from a hang glider revealed the wonderful archaeological complex of the Mirtobe 1,7 km from Sauran. This was a farmstead with a

vast, adjacent garden. According to the 15th century Tajik writer Vasifi, at the turn of the 15th-16th centuries this location belonged to a famous religious cleric who was the spiritual guide of the Bukhara khan, an Arab of Yemeni origin, Abdullah al-Arabi al-Yamani al-Hadramauti. The late-medieval garden in Mirtobe 1, which measures 800 × 470 m in size and is incredibly well-preserved compared to most Central Asian contexts, and was hardly damaged following its abandonment in 1515 (Smagulov 2011: 53-60). Even today, a specialist on the “gardens of Persian design” can easily “read” the parts of the *Charbagh* – the quadrilateral garden layout based on the Islamic concept of the four gardens of Paradise – and see the locations reserved for young trees and flowering herbs (Fig. 10). Unfortunately, the joint project of “The Mirtobe Archaeological Complex: The Study of the Medieval Gardens of Kazakhstan” was not published as originally planned for in 2015.

Smagulov was very concerned about preserving the historical landscapes around Sauran and ever since 2007 he had dreamed of creating a continuous conservation zone in the Sauran archaeological complex consisting of the well-preserved sites of Karatobe, Sauran, and Mirtobe. (Smagulov 2007, Smagulov

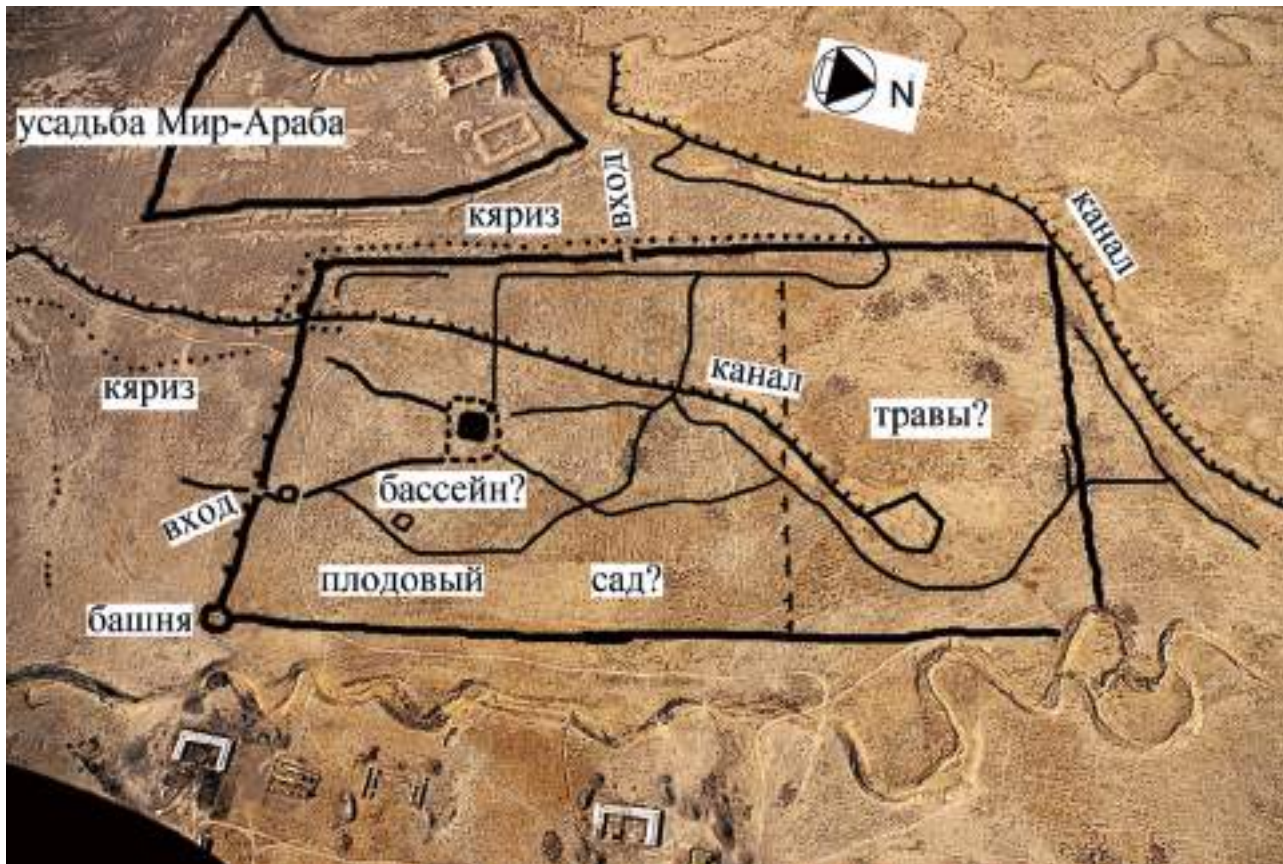


Fig. 10. Usalba Mirtobe of the 1st turn of the 15th-16th centuries and the reconstruction of the garden with her (drawing by S.A. Yatsenko)

2008; Smagulov 2011: 183-238) (Fig. 13), He also desired to develop tourism in this region that displayed the medieval cities, ancient *mazars* and the surviving *kyariz* system. Though this dream remains unfulfilled, the entire complex of sites has been nominated by Kazakhstan as a UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 2016. So far this has not happened and demonstrates the need for further efforts.

In addition to his main areas of study – the Kangju and early medieval times – Smagulov had the opportunity to pioneer the excavation of sites from other eras. Among these were the Sherbay necropolis connected to cattle breeders from the Bronze Age related to the Andronovo community; the previously undiscovered Golden Horde city of Zhaiyk near the city of Uralsk (Baipakov, Smagulov, Akhatov 2005); individual elite burials of the Hunnic and late medieval periods; a mausoleum on the dried bottom of the Aral Sea, etc. In 1999, The Turkestan Expedition conducted a

large-scale survey to identify new ancient settlements which revealed 22 previously unknown sites. Smagulov used to inspect places of various modern earthworks, such as construction sites or modern cemeteries. One especially exotic find was in a modern cemetery at Shaga village near Turkestan which was revealed to occupy the site a post-Kangju necropolis. While digging graves the residents often found whole pitchers with *tamgas* and patterns, which they did not destroy but put them on modern graves (Yatsenko et al. 2019: 179). In the last year of his life, Smagulov considered the option of archaeological surveys in the area of the Lebedyovka / Segizsay, the site of large burial mounds of the Savromat-Sarmatian period located in the southern Peri-Ural region. This area has more than 300 mounds and funeral temples in eight clusters originally discovered prior the the first excavations in 1966. However, this project was never supported.

During his study of various sites, Smagulov would focus on contacts and joint publications with professionals from other specialities such as numismatists (Burnasheva, Smagulov, Tuyakbayev 2006); experts in early Arabic and Turkic runic writing; as well as conservation and restoration services, which was particularly important as he sought to develop the expansion of tourism and the creation of museums for of the unique architectural structures at Sauran and Kultobe. He worked extensively with data from aerial photography, especially related to sites in the Sauran area. Smagulov liked to invite experts and young scholars from Uzbekistan, Russia, and Ukraine to his expeditions. From his youth, he was an expert digger of mudbrick structures and was nurtured on the basis of the best achievements of Central Asian archaeology from the Soviet period. He was a connoisseur of ceramics of different periods and a person who was always interested in improving excavation methodology (see, for example: Smagulov 1983).

Apart from various aspects of the “Kangju problem,” his study of medieval pottery and his study of the history of residential complexes (Smagulov 2010), Smagulov also paid much attention to the evolution of pre-Islamic, Mazdean funeral rites, particularly inhumation burials (Smagulov 2016b) and remnants of pagan culture in the local early Islamic culture. He was interested in traces of pre-Islamic rites in sanctuaries like Sidak and Kairagach in Ferghana, the fire temple in Kultobe, as well as the layout of the sanctuaries and their idols (Fig. 11), different amulets and other religious objects, and home altars. He recognized the need to have adequate criteria in distinguishing between different archaeological cultures. Thus, he did not agree with the special designation for the so-called Arys culture of late antiquity (Smagulov 2004b). Also, in agreement with the previous research of Akishev



Fig. 11. Idols from the early citadel of Kultobe in Turkestan. Photo from the archive of E.A. Smagulov



Fig. 12. E.A. Smagulov at the workshop of the IICAS project on tamgas of pre-Islamic Central Asia. Tashkent, August 2017. Photo by S.A. Yatsenko

and Levina, he considered the Kenkol culture only as a variation of the Kaunchin culture. He also desired to foster attempts to highlight the early sites of the Huns (Smagulov, Pavlenko 1998). Another object of his interest involved the ethnic composition of the urban populations of the northern oases of Central Asia as it was obvious that almost any city from antiquity had a rather mixed population (Smagulov 1990a). He was always attracted to studies that compared early medieval sites in this northern region with those excavated by colleagues in the Tashkent oasis, Ferghana, and Sogd. Unfortunately, because Smagulov was unable to dig pre-Islamic palace-type complexes on a large scale, his interest in the recently explored palace of the 8th century Turkic ruler Kulan is understandable (Akyzbek, Smagulov, Yatsenko 2017).

Even in his youth, while excavating the later layers of Otrar, Smagulov became interested in local *tamga* signs and their practical functions in the urban environment (Smagulov 1979). Later, he became fascinated by the use of the *tamga* supposedly used by the founders of the Kangju state in southern Kazakhstan (Smagulov, Yerzhigitova, Demidenko 2009). From 2005, in the midst of excavations of the Sidak

sanctuary, he began working closely with one of the authors of this article. It immediately became a tradition to conduct an annual joint study of the actively updating the collection of tamgas found at Sidak, and then, those from Turkestan Kultobe. This involved – identification and mapping their locations in the excavation, systematization, methodologies for their description, and comparison with materials from neighboring territories, etc. (Smagulov, Yatsenko 2006; 2010; 2010a; 2014b; 2014c). In 2014, as a result of our discussions we were invited to Samarkand by IICAS to discuss the topic of *tamgas* in pre-Islamic Central Asia. Smagulov suggested and gained support that this topic be shared on the international level. The result was seven researchers investigating “Family, clan and tribal emblems in the context of the culture of ancient and medieval Central Asia.” Smagulov co-authored three chapters of the resulting collective monograph (Yatsenko et al. 2019: 159-248). Throughout the entire period the book was being prepared, he actively participated in the creative discussion process with his colleagues (Fig. 12).

In his lifetime, Smagulov published more than 200 scientific works over the course of 22 years, that

including seven books he either authored or co-authored. He presented conference reports not only throughout the various cities of Kazakhstan, but also San Francisco, Paris, Moscow, Tashkent, St. Petersburg, Samarkand among others. He worked until his last days, although he suffered from a serious heart problem which intensified with the hot weather.

Yerbulat Smagulov was a wise man with a big heart and a sharp, skeptical mind. Yet, he remained a romantic and a dreamer despite all his practical experience. This side of him was evident in his ability to talk with sponsors, although he was often a dreamer with a sad smile since many of his plans went cruelly unfulfilled. However, he was still surprisingly able to achieve many accomplishments. His research on the oases of Central Asia resulted in successfully unearthing large areas across many seasons and, almost from scratch, opened a series of first-class sites such as Sauran, Karatobe, Sidak, and Kultobe to the scientific world and the general public, providing a heritage to the world.

He skillfully and actively advocated not only for individual archaeological sites, but also for entire historical and cultural landscapes. He never tired of propagating reliable knowledge of the past to the press and on television in various public forums. His

activity had considerable cultural resonance in society and governmental officials listened to him, thus, allowing him to preserve the best concerning the appearance and traditions of old Turkestan. In addition, he saved many important historical artifacts in the region from destruction.

He was not spineless and always spoke out against laziness and sloppiness in life and especially in archaeology. He openly criticized unrealistic plans, “far-out” ideas from a number of colleagues about the alleged sacred meaning of different images, false ethnic attributions, various kinds of classifications, the continuous search for “mysterious inscriptions,” and others. His historical and cultural findings were based on a broad outlook in ethnography and religious studies. His home and expeditionary libraries were an attractive oases of knowledge. This remarkable scientist died in the midst of yet another major work in the center of old Turkestan and the load on his heart was affected by the hot summer months. Yerbulat Smagulov worked on the expedition most of the year, from April to November, and often stayed at the base to process materials. He left unexpectedly, having managed to solve and pose many important questions for his colleagues and left a glowing mark on our souls.

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