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HISTORY OF THE STUDY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES OF THE KELES STEPPE

The article is devoted to the systematization and analysis of research conducted at the archaeological sites of the Keles Valley, which spans a history of more than one hundred years. The authors tentatively distinguish three periods in the study of these sites: the pre-revolutionary period, the Soviet period, and the modern stage. The first period is characterized by the recording and general description of the monuments. The second stage is marked by the first comprehensive studies using traditional archaeological methods. The third stage is defined by large-scale and systematic research, employing methods from the natural sciences. These modern approaches have made it possible to more accurately determine the dating of the monuments, classify samples of material culture, and gain deeper insights into the historical development of the region. As a result of the study, and based on the analysis of the works of 19th-century local historians and travelers, valuable information was collected regarding the region's history, ethnic composition of the population, and toponymy. Contemporary archaeological investigations have made it possible to obtain data on the structure of the monuments, their chronology, as well as the material and spiritual culture of the ancient population.

Keywords: Keles steppe, historical and cultural monuments, settlement, burial ground, relief, Kangly, interdisciplinary research.

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Келес даласындағы археологиялық ескерткіштердің зерттелуі

Мақала Келес алқабында орналасқан археологиялық ескерткіштерінде бір ғасырдан асқан уақыт жүргізілген зерттеулер нәтижелерін жүйелеу мен талдауға арналған. Авторлар атқарылған зерттеулерді шартты түрде үш кезеңге бөледі: біріншісі – қазан төркерісіне дейінгі, екіншісі – кеңестік, үшінші – қазіргі кезең. Бірінші кезең ескерткіштерді есепке алу және жалпы сипаттаумен сипатталса, екіншісі дәстүрлі зерттеу әдістерін қолдана отырып жүргізілген алғашқы кешенді зерттеулер. Ал, үшінші кезең жаратылыстану ғылымдарының әдістерін қолдану арқылы ауқымды және жүйелі зерттеулермен сипатталады. Осы әдістердің арқасында ескерткіштердің мерзімін нақты анықтауға, материалдық мәдениет үлгілерін жіктеуге және өлкенің тарихи даму ерекшеліктерін толығырақ зерттеуге мүмкіндік туды. Зерттеу нәтижесінде, XIX ғ. өлкетанушылар мен саяхатшылардың еңбектерін талдау негізінде өлкенің тарихы, халқының этникалық құрамы, топонимикасы туралы құнды деректер жинақталып, қазіргі археологиялық зерттеулер ескерткіштердің құрылымы, мерзімделуі, сондай-ақ ежелгі халықтың материалдық және рухани мәдениеті туралы мәліметтерді анықтады.

Түйін сөздер: Келес даласы, тарихи-мәдени ескерткіштер, қалашық, қорым, топография, қаңлы, пәнаралық зерттеулер.

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Исследования археологических памятников Келесской долины

Статья посвящена систематизации и анализу исследований, проведённых на археологических памятниках Келесской долины, которая насчитывает более ста лет. Авторы условно выделяют три периода в их изучении, первый – дореволюционный, второй – советский период и третий – современный этап. Первый этап характеризуется фиксацией и общих описаний памятников, а второй – первыми комплексными исследованиями с применением традиционных методов ис-

следований. Третий этап характеризуется проведением широкомасштабных и планомерных исследований с применением методов естественных наук. Благодаря этим подходам стало возможным более точно определить датировку памятников, классифицировать образцы материальной культуры и глубже изучить особенности исторического развития региона. В результате исследования, на основе анализа трудов краеведов и путешественников XIX в., были собраны ценные сведения об истории региона, этническом составе населения, топонимике, а современные археологические изыскания позволили выявить данные о структуре памятников, хронологии, а также о материальной и духовной культуре древнего населения.

Ключевые слова: Долина Келеса, историко-культурные памятники, городище, курган, топография, каню, междисциплинарное исследование.

Introduction

The Keles steppe starts in the east from the Karzhantau, Ogem and Kazygurt mountain ranges and runs westwards to the Syrdarya River, covering the border zones of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. As the Keles steppe includes the rivers Kurkeles, Keles, Shyrshyk and Angren with abundant water flowing into the Syrdarya River, this region is one of the most favourable regions of Central Asia for semi-nomadic cattle breeding and farming, abundant in animals, abundant in water and convenient for human life. It is known that the ancient people began to settle in the Keles steppe since ancient Stone Age, hunters and harvesters dwelt in caves on the banks of mountain rivers and streams (Taleev, 1995: 7). As a proof, one can cite the ancient sites of the Stone and Middle Stone Ages, such as Zhalpaksu 1, 2, 3, Susingen, Zhalgызarsha 1, 2, 3, located in the foothills of the mountain ranges Karzhantau, Ogem, Kosmola, Kazygurt, originating from the Keles River (Alpysbaev, 1978: 120-125; Taimaganbetov, 1990: 18-21). These sites indicate that mankind has lived in the region since the Stone Age.

In the 19th c., the travellers and local historians studied the historical and cultural values of the peoples of Central Asia and laid the foundations of Turkology. The scientists who carried out the first research works conducted large-scale studies, raising to a scientific level the study of language, customs, economic, material and spiritual culture of the peoples of Central Asia, rich in historical and cultural sites. During this period, he paid attention to comprehensive study of separate regions of Central Asia, conducted research in Keles steppe, Tashkent oasis. Thus, historical and cultural monuments of the Keles steppe of the 19th c. first began to be studied by historians and local historians. During this period, conducting field research, convincing scientific conclusions about historical and cultural sites were made, archaeological and historical topographical data were generalised. The results of the research

work were published in the local press and a scholarly interest in the history of the region's past began to grow. However, for the scientists who conducted their first research, it was not easy to describe, define the stages of the sites, which were unknown before the 19th c., preserved as earthen mounds. The scientists collecting historical data, conducted the first excavations, made a description of the site, determined their kind, type, registered and made recommendations on the need for extensive study by the government.

Material and methods

The results of archaeological research as well as the works of local historians and travellers who explored the region in the 19th c. were widely used in the course of writing this article. By analysing the works of local historians and travellers, valuable information related to the ancient history of the region, the ethnic composition of the peoples, geographical names, archaeological data, important information about the structure, layers and chronology of sites, material and spiritual culture of the ancient inhabitants were summarized. For this reason, the research work carried out in the region is still one of the most important studies.

While the research conducted in the 19th c. was based on the traditional research methods of the emerging humanities, modern research is conducted on the basis of interdisciplinary studies. In the 19th c., the local historians and amateur archaeologists made the first descriptions of sites and determined their stages on the basis of the comparative research method. Nowadays, on the basis of research methods in the field of natural sciences, the time frames of sites are determined. In addition, when studying the ethnic composition, economy, beliefs of ancient peoples who inhabited the Keles steppe, along with research methods in the field of humanities, the research methods in the field of natural sciences are used.

Discussion

Keles steppe starts in the east from the mountain ranges of Karzhantau, Ogem and Kazygurt and runs in the west to the Syrdarya River, covering the border zones of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The conditions of nature and favourable climate for the economy created conditions for the settlement of Keles steppe by people since ancient times. While the mountains Kazygurt, Ogem, Karzhantau and Kosmola at the source of the river had warm winters, cool summers and were used as pastures for cattle, lowland plains in the lower reaches of the river were ideal place for keeping cattle and farming, as well as for horticulture.

The Keles steppe began to appear in written sources for the first time in geographical works of the 10th c. (Volin, 1960: 78). In the historical work 16th c. of Hafiz Tanish "Sharaf-name-yi Shahi" the author mentioned the campaign of Abdallah Khan in 1580. Describing the campaign, Keles mentioned "there were beautiful auls and beautiful places" in the Keles (Suleymenov, 1969: 172). The Keles steppe was first discovered in the 19th c. Since the mid-19th c. it began to be studied by historians and local historians and widely mentioned in historical sources. The first research conducted during this period began in the form of collecting ancient artefacts and publishing information about them in the local press. As a result of the conducted scientific research, the convincing scientific conclusions about the architectural features and periods of the historical and cultural heritage of the Keles steppe were made, archaeological, historical and topographical data were collected.

The history and culture of the Keles region first began to be studied since the 1860s. Initially, historical and cultural monuments of the region were studied by specialists of various branches and a scientific descriptions were made. Archaeological excavations were carried out at the sites of ancient settlements and valuable data were collected. Academician, famous historian, local historian P.I. Rychkov was one of the first who conducted research in the Keles steppe. P.I. Rychkov wrote in his work that Shyrshyk, Arys and Keles districts were the main habitats of the Kazakhs of the Great zhuz (Rychkov, 1762: 27). These sources provide important information about the ethnic composition, economy, material and spiritual culture of the peoples who inhabited the Keles steppe.

One of the first archaeological excavations in the Keles steppe was carried out by N.I. Vesel-

ovsky in 1884. N.I. Veselovsky conducted the first research works at the Toitobe site and collected valuable materials providing information about the ancient history of the region. The results of his research N.I. Veselovsky published in the publications of the Imperial Russian Archaeological Society. In the 1880s N.I. Veselovsky drew the attention of archaeologists to the ancient sites of the Keles steppe and widely investigated the sites near Tashkent (Veselovsky, 1888: 221-226). N.I. Veselovsky's archaeological research in the Keles steppe received positive reviews. He made the first scientific conclusion that the mounds forming the hills are the sites of ancient towns and settlements (Buryakov, et al., 1973: 114). In fact, recent excavations on high mounds have shown that these mounds were the sites of cities or settlements consisting of several cultural layers.

The first extensive exploration works in the Keles steppes were carried out under the leadership of the amateur local historian E.T. Smirnov. Conducting extensive research of the middle reaches of the Syrdarya in the late 1880s-early 1890s and giving the first information about settlements and necropolises located along the large and small rivers of the Keles steppe, in his report posed the question: "for what purpose and what tribes built hills in the region and to what time these hills belong. In addition, E.T. Smirnov reported that the inhabitants of the Niyazbash settlement near Tashkent discovered ceramic pots on one hill along with human bones during the levelling of hills (Smirnov, 1896: 7-17). Archaeological research currently underway proves that this site is a necropolis of Kangly tribes and that the accidentally discovered sites were burials of ancient peoples.

One of the archaeological excavations in the Keles steppe was carried out by the amateur local historian N.P. Ostroumov in 1887. Excavating about 20 burial mounds in the Nikiforov necropolis near Tashkent, he first determined the architectural composition of dromos catacombs (Ostroumov, 1891). During the excavations he described and presented to the public ceramic dishes, weapons and jewellery found in ancient burials. The research group headed by N.P. Ostroumov systematically conducted and introduced into scientific circulation the work on collecting information about the history of the region, including information about Tashkent. Members of the circle collected data on the sites and written sources, held excavations and made translations. The research carried out by N.P. Ostroumov is one of the most important to date.

The archaeological excavations in the Keles steppe were continued by members of the Turkestan Circle of Amateur Archaeologists (Vrevsky, 1895: 4-5). The members of the circle described ancient towns, settlements and necropolises in the middle reaches of the Syrdarya and excavated a number of sites (Ostroumov, 1899: 118-137; Ostroumov, 1906: 32-44; Rudnev, 1900: 57-62; Kravaev, 1914: 8-10). In the 1890s about 100 local historians and archaeologists interested in the sites of the region, joined the circle. The members compiled a brief list of ancient sites of the Keles steppe and began to accumulate archaeological data (Ostroumov, 1891; Ostroumov, 1899: 118-137).

During the research work in the Keles region in the 19th c., a large number of ancient coins, ossuaries and jewellery were collected and introduced into scientific circulation. Excavations on the bank of the Karasu River revealed a large number of burials buried only in ossuaries. Having carried out a scientific analysis of ossuaries found in the Tashkent district of the Keles Steppe, E.T. Smirnov discovered that the handles of oval-shaped ossuaries depicted the heads of birds or people spreading their wings (Smirnov, 1896: 10). As a result of these studies, the Keles steppe was recognised as one of the regions with the most frequently occurring ossuaries. In the 1870s, orientalist A.L. Kuhn conducted research in the Tashkent region to collect materials for educational societies in Russia. He sent fifteen boxes of artefacts to St. Petersburg, collected during archaeological research conducted in the region in 1871 (Lunin, 1958: 25).

The members of the Turkestan Circle of Amateur Archaeologists have published articles, reports and papers in a systematically published "Bulletin of the Turkestan Circle of Amateur Archaeologists" since 1896 (Buryakov, et al., 1973: 114]. All the above works were the first historical archaeological studies conducted in the Keles steppe. As a result of these studies, the basis for systematic study, registration of sites and formation of the state protection case was created.

In 1919 the Academy of History of Material Culture was established, in 1920 – Turkestan Committee for Museums and Protection of Art, Nature and Ancient Monuments. At the suggestion of V.V. Bartold, the main task of the Committee was to compile archaeological maps. Thus, the work on registration, study and preservation of ancient sites continued (Kozybaev, 1996: 18).

In the 1920s, archaeological research began to be carried out intensively in the Tashkent part of the

Keles steppe. For the first time, the sites and found artefacts were taken into account from a scientific point of view and the Keles steppe began to be studied from a historical and topographical point of view. Since the late 1920s, A.A. Potapov, M.V. Voevodsky and M.P. Gryaznov have taken into account the sites of the Tashkent region and carried out excavations at burial grounds. During this period, M.E. Masson and T. Mirgiyazov conducted archaeological excavations near the village of Toitobe and collected valuable data on the spiritual and material culture of the ancient peoples who inhabited the region. The research revealed numerous towns and settlements, caravan roads and metallurgical centres. In the early 1930s Ya.G. Gulyamov worked on the protection of architectural monuments. He also studied epigraphic inscriptions and conducted excavations in burial grounds (Buryakov, et al., 1973: 8).

The archaeological research in the region began to be carried out regularly from the 1930s. In 1934-1938, the archaeological Expedition of Yangiyul under the leadership of G.V. Grigoriyev conducted archaeological excavations in the cities of Kaunchi-Tepa, Alimbay-Tepa, Shurali-Say, etc., mapped the location of ancient sites of the Keles steppe and in the necropolis of Kaunchi-Tepa (Grigorev, 1935: 3-42; Grigorev, Gromova, 1940: 2-40; Grigorev, 1940: 3-39; Grigorev, 1948: 47-67). G.V. Grigoriev's archaeological research in the ancient city of Kaunchi-Tepa and its adjacent necropolises revealed the identity of the Kangly culture in the middle reaches of the Syrdarya, including the Tashkent oasis and gave it the name "Kaunshy culture" (Levina, 1971: 90-91; Baipakov, Taymagambetov, 2009: 220).

In the 1930s and 1940s, the researchers T.G. Obolduev, V.A. Shishkin, A.I. Terenozhkin, M.Ye. Voronets, etc. conducted archaeological excavations and revealed connections between sites along large and small rivers. In addition, A.I. Terenozhkin and M.E. Voronets carried out extensive archaeological research and collected the necessary data to compile an archaeological map of the region. The Department of Central Asian Archaeology of the V.I. Lenin Tashkent State University under the direction of M.E. Mason, along with the study of architectural sites, registered archaeological sites in the Moscow region.

The Historical and Archaeological Expedition of the Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR (headed by Y.G. Gulyamov) conducted research at Vrevsk station, in the settlement of Khozhakent, at the Tuyabuguz Reservoir and adjacent mounds. During this period, G.V. Parfenov, A.P. Okladnikov, and Kh.

Nasreddinov studied Palaeolithic settlements in the Khozhakent and Bozsu districts. Thus, archaeological sites of Keles steppe were widely studied and introduced into scientific turnover (Buryakov, et al., 1973: 7-12).

The South Kazakhstan archaeological expedition first conducted research in the Kazakh part of the Keles district in 1947-1948. As a result, the location of burial grounds and settlements in the upper reaches of the Keles River was determined and a comparative analysis of their topographical features was carried out (Bernshtam, 1951: 87).

In 1948-1952, the members of the South Kazakhstan Archaeological Expedition under the leadership of A.N. Bernshtam, E.I. Ageyeva and G.I. Pacevich conducted an extensive reconnaissance of the Keles steppe, as a result of which they identified several ancient settlements and burial sites. In addition, the above-mentioned scientists conducted archaeological excavations in the settlements of Aktobe, Shaushikum, Myntobe, Uzun-Ata, located in the region and determined the chronology of the sites (Ageeva, Pacevich, 1958: 19-60).

In 1958-1962, members of the Shardara Archaeological Expedition under the leadership of A.G. Maksimova, M.S. Mershchiyev, B.I. Vain-

berg, L.M. Levina, A.A. Charikov and F.Kh. Arslanova conducted an archaeological survey in the middle reaches of the Syrdarya, along the Keles and Kurkeles rivers and determined the location of several ancient settlements and necropolises. As a result of this survey, an archaeological map of the Keles steppe was prepared for the first time (Fig.1). The above-mentioned scientists conducted archaeological excavations at the settlements of Aktobe I-II, Shaushikum and burial grounds of Zhaman-Togay, Aktobe, Shaushikum, Torebay-Tumsyk, Shardara, located in the region, determining the chronology, architecture and dates of the sites (Maksimova, Mershchiyev, 1960: 1-18; Maksimova, 1961: 1-60; Maksimova, et al., 1968: 1-252). As a result of this research, "Archaeological Map of Kazakhstan" published in 1960 indicates the location, description and period of existence of sites of the Keles steppe (Ageeva, Akishev, 1960: 342). Spending years of research in the Keles steppe, at the site of the Shardara reservoir, E.I. Ageyeva and G.I. Pacevits proved on a scientific basis that the ancient peoples inhabiting the region, along with semi-nomadic cattle breeding, were engaged in agriculture, even erected cities and formed the first urban culture in the region (Ageeva, Pacevits, 1958: 8).

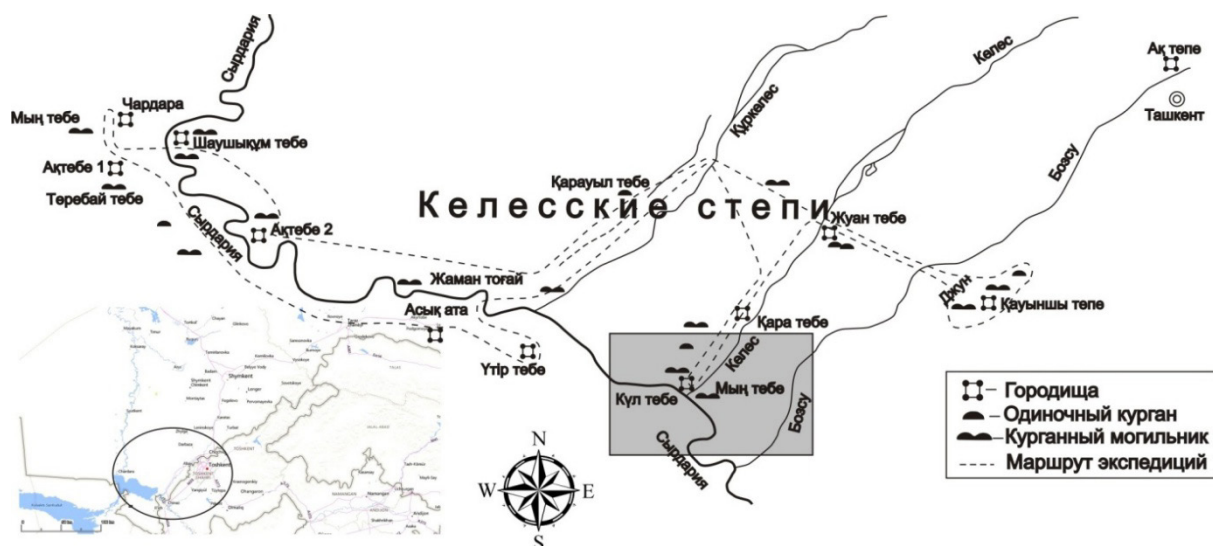


Figure 1 – Archaeological map of the Keles region (Maksimova, et al., 1968)

As a result of archaeological research conducted by the South Kazakhstan Archaeological Expedition under the leadership of Kh.A. Alpysbaev in 1973-1974, it was established that the earliest traces of life

in the Keles steppe belong to the ancient Stone Age, hunters and harverters lived in caves on the banks of mountain rivers and streams. As evidence, one can cite ancient sites of the Stone and Middle Stone

Ages, such as Zhalspaksu 1, 2, 3, Susingen, Zhalgysarsha 1, 2, 3, located in the foothills of the Karzhantau, Ogem, Kosmola and Kazygurt mountain ranges (Grigoriyev, 1948: 120-125; Nysanbayeva, 2002: 18-21). These sites indicate that mankind has been living in the region since the Stone Age.

Thus, In the Keles steppe, which began to attract the attention of archaeologists, the Archaeological Expedition of the Shymkent Pedagogical University under the leadership N.P. Podushkin conducted research, mapping the location of sites and determining their periodisation on the basis of surface materials (Nurgaliyev, 1994: 223-224). (Nurgaliyev, 1994: 223-224). The results of these researches were published in the work "The Code of the Monuments of History and Culture of Kazakhstan. South Kazakhstan Region".

In the 1990s D. Taleev, studying medieval sites of the Keles steppe, gave a brief overview of the history of the region by periods. As a result of the research work 65 sites of the Middle Ages were identified and on the basis of materials collected during exploration work, the chronology of the sites were established and introduced into scientific turnover (Taleev, 1995: 21).

Results

Currently, scientists from the Khoja Ahmed Yasawi International Kazakh-Turkish University, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University and Shymkent Pedagogical University are conducting research in the settlements of Kultobe, Utirtobe and burial grounds of Myntobe and Karatobe, located in the Keles steppe (Zhetybaev I.B., 2020: 409-419; Taleev et al., 2019 :48-62; Yeleuov et al., 2020: 195-200; Podushkin, Donetsk, 2018: 99-104; Podushkin, 2019: 153-167; Sizdikov et al., 2023: 192-201). Late nineteenth-twentieth century While research conducted in late 19th –early 20th cc. was conducted using traditional research methods of the emerging field of humanities, modern research is conducted using the established archaeological method and on the basis of interdisciplinary research. In the 19th c., local historians and amateur archaeologists made the first descriptions of sites and determined their stages on the basis of the method of comparative research; at present, the absolute dates of these sites are established on the basis of radiocarbon analysis, one of the methods of research in the natural sciences. According to the results of radiocarbon examination in the Keles steppe the burials of Myntobe and Karatobe mounds date to the 3rd

-10th cc. and burial grounds of Kultobe settlement belong to the 3rd -4th cc. (Fig.2-3).



Figure 2 – View of the city of Kultobe



Figure 3 – View of Myntobe burial ground

The initial investigations examined in detail the historical topography of the sites, current studies are surveying the defence systems of the sites, the layout of dwellings and architectural features. While the first researchers studied and scientifically analysed the ethnic composition, economy, material and spiritual culture of the peoples who inhabited the Keles steppe at that time, today the ethnic composition of ancient peoples is determined on the basis of genetic analysis, one of the methods of research in the field of natural science. On the basis of anthropological and archaeopathological studies, the valuable data on the origin, development, body structure and racial features of ancient people are collected and introduced into scientific circulation (Gursoy, et al., 2024: 173-190). The

petrographic analysis of ceramic vessels allows us to obtain specific results regarding the production technology, composition and distribution areas of ceramic dishes (Fig. 4).

On the basis of archaeozoological studies, species of animals obtained during hunting, as well as domestic animals and morphological features of animals were identified (Fig. 5) (Shagirbaev, Sizdikov, 2025: 217-233).

In addition, as a result of ongoing archaeological research, data on the history of the formation of urban culture of the region in the Kangly period, its architectural structure, funerary customs, beliefs and economy are collected and introduced into the scientific turnover (Sizdikov et al., 2022: 235-246; Gursoy et al., 2023: 225-243; Gursoy et al., 2023: 144-162).

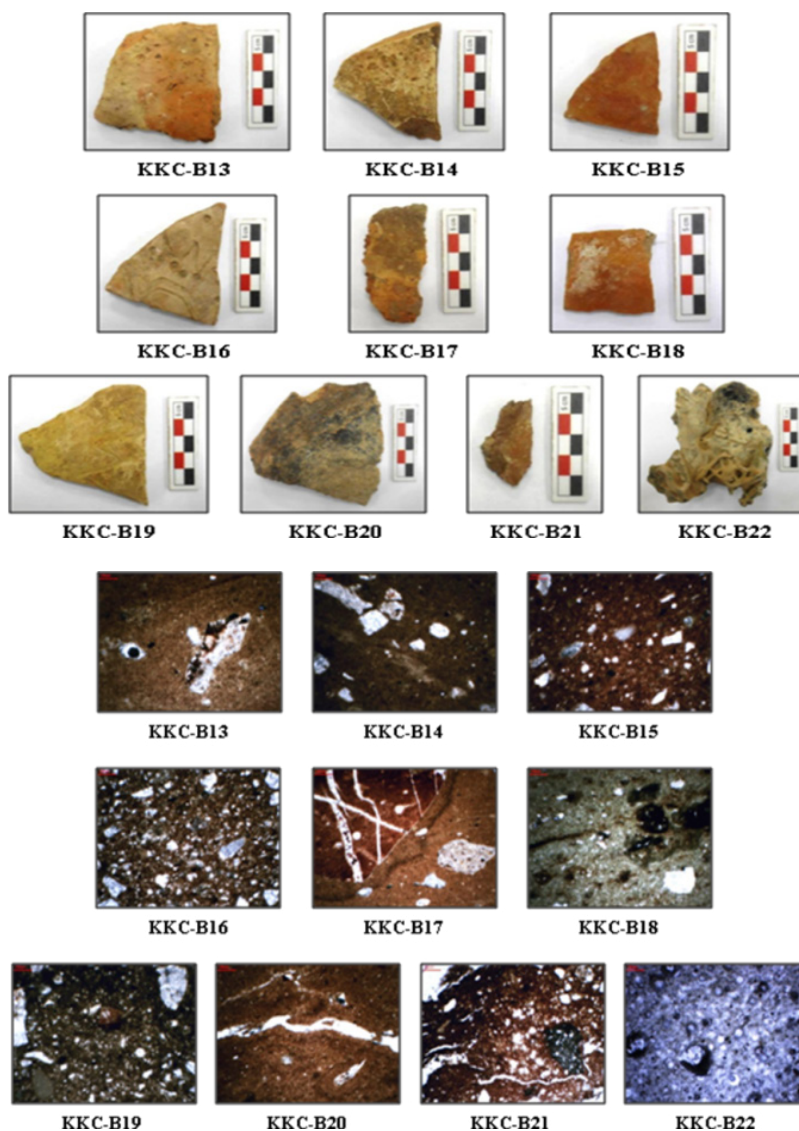


Figure 4 – Petrographic analysis of ceramic vessels from the Kultobe settlement (MACLAB Archive)



Figure 5 – Osteological materials found at the city of Kultobe, where archaeozoological survey was conducted
(Archive of the Laboratory of Zooarchaeology of the A.Kh. Margulan Institute of Archaeology).

Conclusion

The Keles steppe is one of the most important historical, cultural and archaeological regions of Central Asia. The archaeological study of the Keles Steppe began in the 19th c. and continues until the present day. The first studies conducted in the 19th c. were mainly descriptive and aimed at field reconnaissance and registration of historical and cultural monuments. During this period, researchers such as P.I. Rychkov, N.I. Veselovsky, N.P. Ostroumov and E.T. Smirnov identified the first archaeological sites and collected information about them. However, these studies had methodological limitations: precise periodisation of sites was not carried out and analyses often remained comparable.

The archaeological research methods have now been greatly improved. With the help of natural-scientific research methods, it has become possible to determine the specific timing of sites, to classify material culture samples and to study in greater depth the peculiarities of the historical development of the region. In addition, new scientific conclusions have been drawn about the ethnic composition, economic structure and belief systems of the ancient peoples who inhabited the Keles steppe. In addition, the systematic classification of material culture samples and the mapping of their distribution areas have been significantly improved. This allows for a deeper study of the economic structure and social organisation of the ancient peoples who lived in the Keles Steppe.

The research begun in the 19th c. continues today, with new interdisciplinary research methods being used to achieve new scientific results. The modern research allows for a deeper understanding of historical and cultural processes. The first studies of the 19th c. laid the foundation for the scientific study of this area, but modern methods clarify their conclusions and supplement them with new data. Therefore, further comprehensive study of the ar-

chaeological heritage of the Keles steppe will contribute to the discovery of new scientific discoveries concerning the ancient history of Kazakhstan and Central Asia.

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