

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE OF THE FERGANA VALLEY: CHRONOLOGICAL ANALYSIS AND SCHOLARLY RESEARCH

S.T. Mirsoatova

Associate Professor, Uzbekistan-China Joint
Department of Archaeology,
Fergana State University.

Abstract: This article reviews the history of archaeological research in the Fergana Valley, highlighting its key stages and major scholarly findings over the past sixty years. Special emphasis is placed on Paleolithic sites such as Selungur, Kapchigay, Chongara, and Sarykurgan, and their significance in understanding early human settlement in the region. The paper also discusses the origin of the Chust and Kayrakkum cultures and their possible connection to the Zarafshan Valley and Sarazm. Contributions of prominent researchers such as B.A. Latinin, A.N. Bernshtam, and B.Kh. Matboboev to the study of early medieval archaeology in the valley are analyzed. Recent discoveries from the Kutirbulak and Kushtapa sites are presented as evidence of long-term human habitation. The author underscores the importance of continued interdisciplinary research and suggests this topic as a foundation for a large-scale scholarly project.

Keywords: Fergana Valley, Paleolithic, Selungur, Chust culture, Sarazm, archaeology, Kayrakkum, early Middle Ages, archaeological sites, cultural interaction.

The Fergana Valley is one of the oldest and most historically and culturally rich regions of Uzbekistan, where archaeological research plays a significant role in shedding light on important stages of Central Asian history. The valley's natural-geographical conditions, ecological advantages, and strategic location have made it an attractive settlement for humans since ancient times. This article examines the archaeological monuments of the Fergana Valley from various historical periods, their scientific study, the chronology of cultural layers, and their interrelations to analyze the stages of historical development. Through this, the cultural heritage of the valley from the Stone Age to the early Middle Ages is highlighted, and the results of research in the field of archaeology are summarized.

The valley is an important crossroads of ancient Stone Age cultures and a region where the processes of intermingling ancient civilizations took place. This is closely connected with its advantageous geographical location.

In the upper reaches of the Sokh River, the famous Selungur and Chashma sites from the Early Paleolithic era in Central Asia were discovered and studied. Among them, the Selungur site is particularly significant as it is associated with the skeletal remains of "Homo erectus," introduced to science as the "Fergana Man" [1:8–9.; 6: 66; 7:12; 8:5–6; 9:7].

Scientific research on the archaeology of the valley began in the mid-20th century. Systematic studies of the Stone Age, initiated in 1953, led to the discovery of artifacts and settlements that were first studied by P.T. Konoplyya and later by A.P. Okladnikov [11:45–47.; 14: 37–38.]. In the southwestern part of the Fergana Valley, during the construction of the Qayrakkum



Western European Journal of Historical Events and Social Science

Volume 3, Issue 6, June 2025

<https://westerneuropeanstudies.com/index.php/4>

ISSN (E): 2942-1926

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Reservoir from 1954 to 1956, A.P. Okladnikov and V.A. Ranov identified and studied numerous Paleolithic sites [12:404]. From 1956 onwards, P.T. Konoplya discovered several ancient Stone Age sites, including Ayirboz 1–7, Karamkul 2, and the Kapchugay Stone Age workshop, among others. This workshop was studied in 1958–1959 by M. Kasymov, a member of the Stone Age group led by A.P. Okladnikov at the Institute of History and Archaeology (TAI) of the Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR [15:6–9].

From May 25 to June 15, 1964, an archaeological detachment of the Institute of History and Archaeology (TAI) of the Uzbek SSR Academy of Sciences, led by Y.G. G'ulomov, conducted excavations in the Fergana Valley. As a result, archaeological sites from various periods were identified, including those around the city of Fergana, in the mountains on the northern slopes of the Alay Range, and in the Sokh River Valley, which date back to the Stone Age. Additionally, the expedition members discovered two Neolithic settlements in the Karakalpak steppe, the ruins of the ancient city of G'arqiz (now Qirqhujra) and Munchoqtepa near the ancient city of Pop, as well as the previously known Selungur Cave located 30–40 meters above the ravine west of Haydarkon[10:28–29].

Artifacts from the Middle Paleolithic era were collected by M. Kasymov in the hills located 10 km northeast of the city of Fergana and 2 km northwest of the village of Qal'acha. Due to flooding, the upper layer of the hill had been eroded, exposing a layer of flint. In this area, five Middle Paleolithic sites were identified, from which only surface materials were collected. Nevertheless, these stone tools provided an opportunity to archaeologically investigate the region [10:30].

The Qal'acha IV–V sites stretch 10 km from north to south. The collection of stone tools found at these sites is made of flint and horn, characteristic of the Middle Paleolithic era. Notably, among the finds are approximately 150 retouched Levallois blades, scrapers, discoidal and bipolar cores, plates, and flakes.

During the research, the Kapchigay Paleolithic workshop, located in the Dangi Gorge on the northern slope of the Alay Range, was studied in greater detail. A total of 423 specimens of various types were found here, including discoidal, rectangular, single-platform, multi-platform Levallois, and atypical cores, as well as detachments from core platforms, blades, and numerous Middle and Late Paleolithic artifacts. Among these were 76 stone tools, including cores, plates, flakes, and other items. It was revealed that black flint emerged from the northern slope of Kapchigay, which was extracted and processed by primitive humans [10:31-32].

Another group of Middle Paleolithic sites was discovered around the villages of Chungara and Sarikurgan in the Sokh River Valley. On the left bank of the Sokh River near Chungara village, terraces are particularly prominent, especially the third terrace, which rises 30–40 meters high and extends toward the Pidau Mountains. Four sites around Chungara village were studied, and stone tools were found among accumulations of flint on separate sections of the third terrace. A total of 31 Middle Paleolithic stone tools-cores, blades, and flakes-were discovered across all the sites.

A relatively larger number of artifacts were found on the right bank of the Sokh River, at a site 2–2.5 km south of Sarikurgan village. From an area measuring 600x600 meters, 187 stone tools were collected. The stone tools found at Sarikurgan are older than those from Qal'acha and Karamkul and are distinguished by the presence of tools characteristic of the early phase of the Middle Paleolithic.



Western European Journal of Historical Events and Social Science

Volume 3, Issue 6, June 2025

<https://westerneuropeanstudies.com/index.php/4>

ISSN (E): 2942-1926

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The stone tools from Qal'acha, Karamkul, Chungara, and Sarikurgan are predominantly of the Levallois type, indicating a connection with the Middle Paleolithic culture of Qayrakkum and other neighboring regions of Central Asia [10:33].

There is a significant lack of Eneolithic and Bronze Age materials or monuments providing information about the early agricultural culture in the Fergana Valley. Consequently, the origins of the Chust culture, considered the earliest agricultural culture of the Fergana Valley, remain a topic of much debate in academia.

During the years of independence, alongside studies of the Stone Age, scholar G.P. Ivanov conducted comparative research on the Bronze and Early Iron Age cultures of Chust and Qayrakkum in the Fergana Valley. He noted that not only burial sites but also residential settlements belonging to the Qayrakkum culture were uncovered, emphasizing that this culture extended not only to the western but also to the southern parts of the valley.

Archaeologist M.H. Isomiddinov presented a new perspective on these issues. By studying pottery from the Sarazm culture of the Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age, discovered in the upper reaches of the Zarafshan oasis, he determined that the pottery-making technology of the Chust culture was identical to that of the Sarazm culture.

One of the scholars who made a significant contribution to the archaeology of the Fergana Valley is M.H. Isomiddinov. Conducting extensive archaeological research in the Zarafshan oasis, M.H. Isomiddinov proposed the idea that it was not the southern Turkmenistan regions but rather the Zarafshan oasis that culturally influenced northern Iran and southern Turkmenistan. This is because the pottery in Turkmenistan before the Geoksyur-3 period was distinct, and it was only during the Geoksyur-3 period that the pottery of both regions became similar.

If pottery from the pre-Geoksyur-3 period had spread to the Zarafshan oasis, one could believe in the cultural influence of southern Turkmenistan. However, based on his findings, M.H. Isomiddinov concluded that the culture in the upper reaches of the Zarafshan oasis originated from the interaction between the Sazogon culture of the Neolithic period in this region, the Hissar and Fergana Valley Neolithic cultures, and their connections with the advanced agricultural cultures of the south.

He argued that the Sarazm culture emerged as a result of these interactions and that the migration of these tribes toward southern Turkmenistan led to the formation of the Geoksyur-3 archaeological complexes [2:47].

The issue of the archaeology of the Early Middle Ages in the Fergana Valley was first raised by the prominent Fergana specialist B.A. Latinin. As a result of archaeological research conducted in 1930 and 1933–1934, this scholar identified four stages of development in the cultural history of the valley. Later, in 1961, he enriched this chronological framework with new materials and divided the ancient agricultural cultures into three phases.

Another researcher, A.N. Bernshtam, was the first to describe the cultural history of the valley during the Early Middle Ages. Based on investigations during the Pamir-Alay (1946–1948) and Pamir-Fergana (1950–1952) archaeological expeditions, he studied Early Medieval sites such as Mugqal'a (Mugtepa) in Kosonsoy, Akhsikent, and a group of monuments near Pop (Ayrtom, Munchoqtepa, Balandtepa). For this reason, A.N. Bernshtam was the first to propose the origins of the Early Medieval culture in the Fergana Valley.



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<https://westerneuropeanstudies.com/index.php/4>

ISSN (E): 2942-1926

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In 1954, another Fergana specialist, Yu.A. Zadneprovskiy, gathered substantial information about the Early Middle Ages and designated a distinct period in the valley's history as "Koson", named after a well-known archaeological site at the time [5:18].

When analyzing archaeological complexes of the Early Middle Ages, V.A. Bulatova's investigations at the Quva site in Southern Fergana hold significant importance. Notably, this researcher conducted extensive excavations in various parts of the site. As a result, an almost intact Buddhist temple – unique to the valley – was uncovered in the rabod (second shahristan) section of the site [3:241–242].

The contribution of N.G. Gorbunova to the study of the early medieval history and culture of the Fergana Valley deserves special recognition. Her scientific research also addressed issues related to the origins of early medieval culture [4:17].

At the ancient site of Akhsikent, another significant monument of the valley, the early medieval layers and complexes were initially studied by I. Akhrorov, followed later by A. Anarbayev and G. Mirzaliyev.

During the years of independence, research on the medieval archaeology of the Fergana Valley was carried out by B.Kh. Matbobjoyev. His findings from excavations at Munchoqtepa, the Kuktosh cemeteries, the ruins of Balandtepa, and sites in Andijan and Quva have greatly enriched our knowledge of the early medieval culture and history of the valley. A key feature of these discoveries is pottery, which reflects influences from both Sogdiana on one hand and Chach on the other, providing new insights into previously limited information.

B.Kh. Matbobjoyev conducted a thorough and comprehensive study of the materials collected on the history and culture of the early medieval period [13:405].

Archaeological research in the Fergana Valley continued during the years of independence, albeit not in a systematic or comprehensive manner. Unfortunately, in the early years of independence, significant archaeological investigations were not conducted in the valley. Apart from a few organized expeditions, it can be observed that archaeological research in the region had almost come to a halt.

For instance, G.I. Ivanov conducted excavations at the Qubo Shahristan and other sites, successfully defending his candidate dissertation titled "*The Archaeological Monuments of Fergana: Chronology and Synchronization*." Similarly, I.T. Yuldoshev's candidate dissertation focused on the history of the formation and development of urban planning culture in the Fergana Valley.

However, following the economic reforms that allowed the country to stabilize, progress began in various fields, including archaeology. Archaeologists from the Fergana Valley initiated studies that marked a new phase in the region's archaeological exploration. For example, research conducted in 2011 led to the discovery and study of Late Paleolithic findings at Sarikurgan-1, Jonobod (in Fergana Province), and Chodak (in Namangan Province).

In 2014, during archaeological research led by B. Abdullayev, a senior researcher at the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, stone tools were discovered near the Qushtepa site in the "Yangihayot" neighborhood of Qurgontepa District in Andijan Region, an area rich in Stone Age settlements located in the eastern part of the Fergana Valley. By 2016, targeted exploration began at the Qushtepa site, resulting in the collection of several stone artifacts.

The group's investigations in Buloqboshi District uncovered the Kutirbulak settlement, which dates back to the early stages of the Late Paleolithic era. Archaeological studies revealed that



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<https://westerneuropeanstudies.com/index.php/4>

ISSN (E): 2942-1926

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the inhabitants of Kutirbulak wore leather clothing, crafted hunting tools from wood and stone, and made ornaments from animal bones [16:25].

These studies demonstrated that the Kutirbulak settlement, discovered and researched in recent years in Andijan Region, is recognized as part of the Obirahmat culture in Tashkent Region. This globally renowned culture reflects the transition from the Middle to the Late Paleolithic periods, indicating that this culture spread across vast territories and that its bearers had already inhabited the valley regions during that time.

In conclusion, it can be noted that over sixty years of research have significantly enriched the history of the Fergana Valley through the discovery of Stone Age sites and the artifacts found at them. Recent studies have revealed that as early as 50,000 years ago, the valley established cultural connections with neighboring regions. This confirms the uninterrupted human habitation of the valley since ancient times.

Overall, it is encouraging to see an increase in both the number and scope of archaeological studies on the Fergana Valley in recent years. This article merely offers an overview of the research conducted on the valley's archaeology. In reality, this topic could serve as the basis for a large-scale study requiring detailed and specialized research.

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Western European Journal of Historical Events and Social Science

Volume 3, Issue 6, June 2025

<https://westerneuropeanstudies.com/index.php/4>

ISSN (E): 2942-1926

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