

PARTHIAN MERV

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Summary. Ancient Merv was an urban space in constant transformation, but the Parthian era signified a special, pivotal moment for the city's further development. In the archaeological record related to this period, we find for the first time primary evidence, such as locally minted coin issues, shedding light on the political and administrative status of Merv. Substantial shifts are also noticeable in the local material culture reflecting changes in patterns of consumption. In the present contribution, I trace individual aspects of these developments selecting a number of examples from the archaeological evidence to define general trends and attempt to interpret their significance. Pottery assemblages are once more of particular interest in this regard. Changes affected individual parts of the repertoire differently. While single vessel types developed slowly from early Parthian times onwards and continued into the Sasanian period, others gradually disappeared, and new stylistic features emerged during the first centuries of the Common Era but became dominant only in Sasanian times.

Key words: Merv, Parthian period, Archaeology, Pottery, Central Asia.

Резюме. Древний Мерв был городским пространством, находящимся в постоянной трансформации, но парфянская эпоха стала особым, переломным моментом для дальнейшего развития города. В археологических памятниках, относящихся к этому периоду, мы впервые находим первичные свидетельства, такие как монеты местной чеканки, проливающие свет на политический и административный статус Мерва. Существенные сдвиги заметны и в местной материальной культуре, отражающие изменение моделей потребления. В настоящей работе я прослеживаю отдельные аспекты этих событий, выбирая ряд примеров из археологических свидетельств, чтобы определить общие тенденции и попытаться интерпретировать их значение. Особый интерес в этом отношении вновь представляют гончарные комплексы. Изменения коснулись отдельных частей репертуара по-разному. В то время как отдельные типы сосудов развивались медленно, начиная с раннепарфянских времен, и продолжались до сасанидского периода, другие постепенно исчезали, а новые стилистические черты возникали в течение первых веков нашей эры, но стали доминирующими только в сасанидское время.

Ключевые слова: Мерв, парфянский период, археология, керамика, Центральная Азия.

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Parthian times at Merv, the period between the 2nd century BC and the 3rd century AD, are highly significant for the development of the city and its oasis. It is in this phase that the city receives its own mint and local coin issues are henceforth traceable across the city's stratigraphy providing a more reliable reference for dating. They also allow us to gain insights into the eventful political history of this region at the time. Another important aspect of Parthian Merv concerns the changes observable in the material culture within this period marking a departure from the strong Hellenistic influence visible in the pottery as well as architectural elements. Structural remains and finds from this period at Merv are far less spectacular than those from other

sites, especially Nisa, but they nonetheless help us to further shed light on a phase that in all its complexity remains elusive. In this contribution, I will trace the transformations palpable in the material assemblages in the city considering also nature and problem of the archaeological record at hand.

Specialist studies examining the various groups of numismatic, epigraphic and sphragistic data including coin finds (Nikitin, 1996; Smirnova, 2007), ostraca and inscribed vessels (Livshits, Nikitin, 1991) as well as bullae (Gaibov, Nikitin, 2018) have greatly contributed to our understanding of the political, administrative and religious history of Merv and its oasis during the Parthian period. In the following discussion I will explore

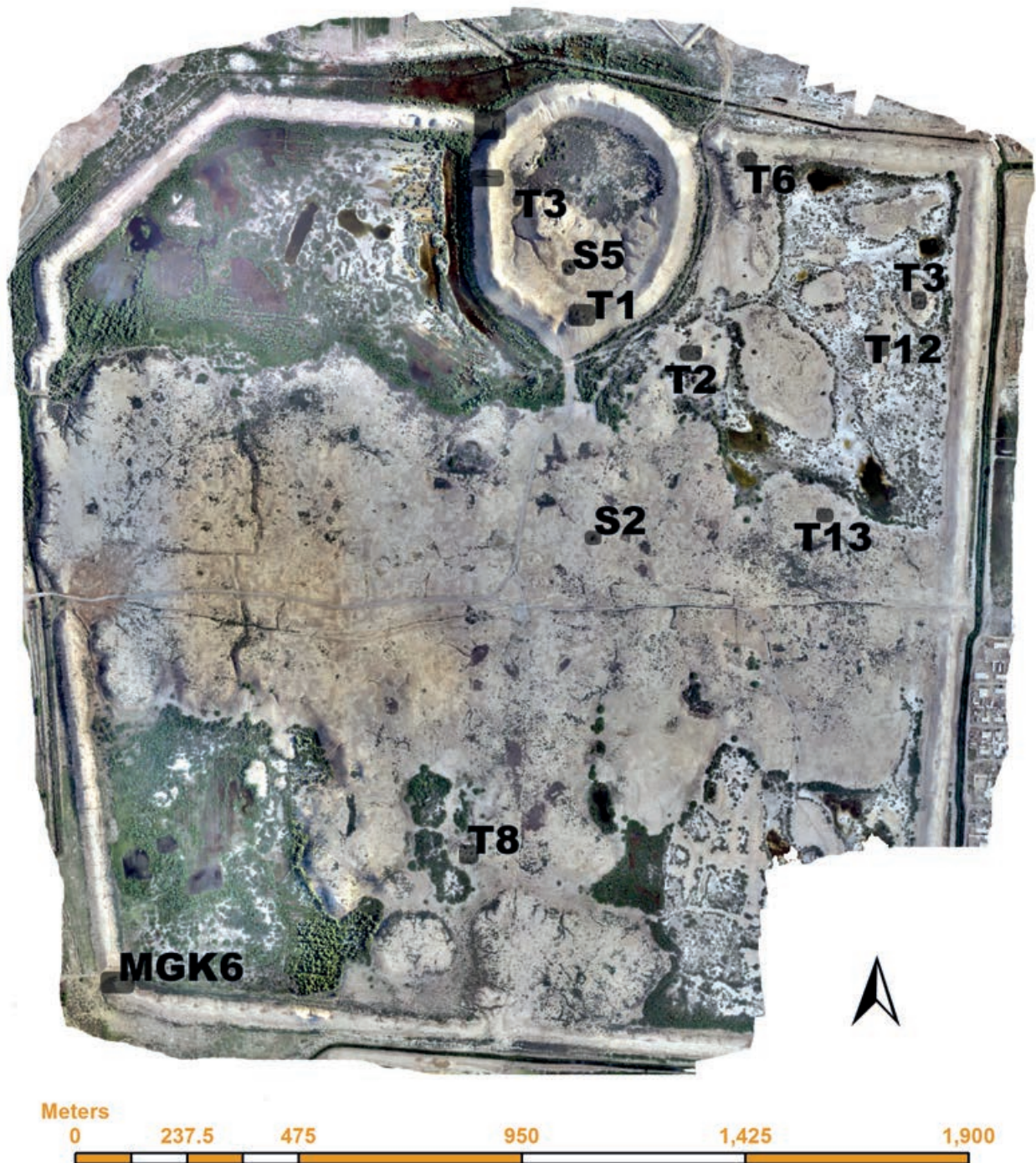


Fig. 1: Merv, Gyaur Kala (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) photomosaic), marks indicating locations of excavations reaching Parthian levels (Photo by G. Jorayev; courtesy of the AMP, Institute of Archaeology, UCL)

Мерв, Гяур-кала (фотомозаика с беспилотного летательного аппарата), метки, указывающие места раскопок, достигающих парфянского уровня (фото Г. Джораева; предоставлено AMP, Институт археологии, Университетский колледж Лондона)

the archaeological evidence aside of these political narratives to highlight the regions changing cultural fabric.

Parthian occupation at Merv. In the city's long history of archaeological exploration evidence for its development during Parthian times were recorded on several occasions. Apart from relevant military installations exposed in Erk- and Gyaur Kala (*Usmanova*, 1963a. P. 33–56; *Filanovich*, 1974. P. 36–49; *Zavyalov*,

2007), civil occupation levels dated to the Parthian period were excavated at least at 10 locations in the city. These include Erk Kala, Trench 3, and Soundings 5 and 6 (*Usmanova*, 1963a. C. 81–85; *Usmanova*, 1969. P. 23–26, 32), and Gyaur Kala Trenches 2 (*Usmanova*, 1963b), 3 (*Filanovich*, 1974. P. 68), 6 (*Katsuris*, *Buryakov*, 1963. P. 124–26), 8 (*Filanovich*, 1974. P. 97), 12 (*Filanovich*, 1974. P. 76), 13 (*Filanovich* 1974. P. 82–83) and Sound-

ing 2 (*Filanovich*, 1974. P. 50-51). These control points revealed Parthian habitation in the city along the main occupational area in the central part and the north-south axis but also on a number of individual mounds located in the northeast corner of the city (Fig. 1). Many of the relevant layers, however, were only documented within stratigraphic soundings inevitably resulting in relatively small areas of excavated deposits or 'keyholes' producing assemblages of variable size and often incomplete which may lead to distortions in comparative studies. The only substantial architectural structures of Parthian date were excavated in Gyaur Kala Trench 2 (*Usmanova*, 1963b). Usmanova interpreted the area as metal or copper workshop and dated their functioning from the 1st century BC to the 1st and 2nd century AD based on numismatic evidence and other finds including also a comparative study of the pottery (1963b. P. 173, 181-188). Illustrations of the ceramic material retrieved from levels below the workshop area in soundings 3 and 4 reflect particularly rich assemblages which Usmanova attributed to the 2nd century BC (1963b. P. 192. Fig. 21, P. 194 Fig. 23, P. 195 Fig. 24) and the 2nd to 1st centuries BC (1963b. P. 196. Fig. 25). Due to the position of the relevant levels early in the stratigraphic sequence of Gyaur Kala and usually deep below the present surface, our access is limited, though, and our data remains on the whole fragmented.

Absolute chronology is a complex issue in a mudbrick environment such as Merv, and the chronological phases described in studies of the city's archaeological stratigraphy are slightly variable in their extent and definition. Usmanova in her comprehensive report on sounding 5 in Erk Kala differentiates between an early antique (3rd – 2nd centuries BC), antique (2nd century BC – 1st century AD) and late antique (2nd – 4th c. AD) phase (*Usmanova*, 1969. Fig. 15), while *Filanovich* examining the occupational history of Gyaur Kala distinguishes between an early Parthian phase (end of 3rd to 1st centuries BC) and later Parthian phase (1st to 2nd centuries AD) (*Filanovich*, 1974. P. 101).

In general, absolute chronology tends to rely on coin evidence. Numismatic data for Parthian Merv is, however, sparse in comparison to that of the Sasanian period (*Smirnova*, 2007. P. 382, 384). This is also illustrated by the number of coins retrieved from the Gyaur Kala fortifications for these periods (*Puschnigg, Daghmehchi, Nokandeh*, 2019. P. 28, table 2), though quantities seem generally lower in military structures compared to domestic contexts (*Puschnigg*, 2006. P. 113–18). Still, this degree of uncertainty highlights the need to broaden the basis for chronological assessments, and stylistic and art-historical analogies are also widely used in the literature (cf. *Usmanova*, 1963b. P. 177-178) as well as epigraphic evidence, where available (cf. *Usmanova*, 1963b. P. 181). The dating of the individual construction phases of the Gyaur Kala fortifications, MGK6, are equally based on a combination of available evidence, including architectural parallels, coin finds and, in some instances, small objects or epigraphic data (*Zavyalov*, 2007. P. 326). Two phases were distinguished for the Parthian period, an early Parthian phase – phase 3, and a middle Parthian construction phase – phase 4 (*Zavyalov*, 2007. P. 325-326). The subsequent phase, phase 5,

is already dated to the early Sasanian period (*Zavyalov*, 2007. P. 326).

Ceramic evidence. Pottery remains an important source of information for Parthian Merv. Evidence for ceramic design and production at city is not consistent in quality and volume throughout this period, though. Assemblages for the early centuries of Parthian rule derive primarily from stratigraphic soundings but still reflect vessel repertoires rich in variety and forms (cf. *Usmanova*, 1963b. P. 192. Fig. 21, 194. Fig. 23, 195. Fig. 24; *Katsuris, Buryakov*, 1963. P. 125. Fig. 5), while those associated with the main occupation levels in Trench 2 in Gyaur Kala and dated to the turn of the era or the early centuries CE seem on the whole to show less diversity (cf. *Usmanova*, 1963a. P. 59. Fig. 31, 83. Fig. 42; *Filanovich*, 1974. P. 75-76 Fig. 19). This impression is reinforced by the presence in assemblages of pottery shapes, which already occur in preceding phases (cf. *Filanovich*, 1974. P. 102; *Katsuris, Buryakov*, 1963. P. 125-126. Figs. 5-6; *Usmanova*, 1963b. P. 187. Fig. 16, 191-192. Figs. 20-21) suggesting large-scale reverberations of ceramic designs (cf. *Usmanova* 1963a. P. 58) and a lack of innovation. The same situation prevails in assemblages from the more recent excavations of the Gyaur Kala defensive walls, where many of the vessel forms found in phase 4 were already part of assemblages from phases 2 and 3. With regard to MGK6, however, we need to bear in mind that the ceramic assemblages from the individual phases differ substantially in volume, and Phase 3 ceramics by far exceed those from Phase 4 in quantity (*Puschnigg, Daghmehchi, Nokandeh*, 2019. P. 26 table 1). The continuity between early and late Parthian repertoires suggested by the pottery evidence, however, might be deceptive for other reasons, too, as the large-scale reuse of deposits and their mixed, secondary nature is well documented for Merv and its oasis and relates to the characteristics of the dominant adobe architecture in this region (*Puschnigg*, 2006. P. 107-109).

We need to differentiate further to understand the development or composition of the pottery repertoires of the time. One aspect concerns the extent and state of preservation of relevant occupation levels in archaeological excavations in the city to date and the volume of material they contain. Another aspect relates to the ceramic finds themselves. As noted above, coherent architectural remains are sparse. Interpreting pottery assemblages from the various deposits at Merv, however, is not always easy.

Pottery assemblages: Almost all deposits in this mudbrick environment are secondary containing material from various chronological periods (cf. *Puschnigg*, 2006. P. 107-109). Relative dates for specific pottery types throughout the sequence gain in probability the more material is documented from different parts of the city. Still, there is uncertainty, how long specific shapes were being produced and stayed in use. Some indication may be obtained from the state of preservation of individual ceramic vessels, though this needs further corroboration. Small and abraded ceramic fragments are likely to have experienced a long history of re-deposition and are therefore likely to be chronologically farther removed from the actual date of occupation of a building (cf. *Orton, Tyers*, 1990. P. 86). Some of the illustrations of

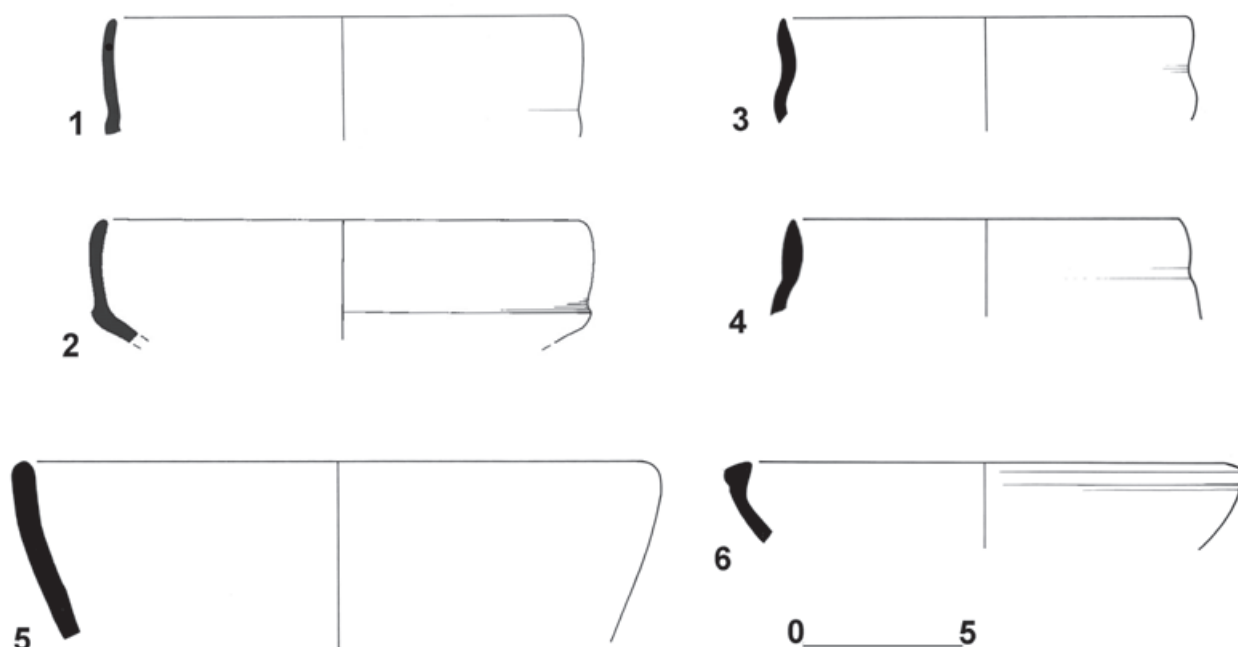


Fig. 2: Open vessel forms, nos. 1-4 – bowls with waisted profile, nos. 1, 3-4, Gyaur Kala MGK5 and MGK6, no. 2 Erk Kala T7. Drawings F. Vardy; nos. 5-6 – bowls with upright or internally thickened rim. Drawings K. Morton.
 Формы открытых сосудов, № 1-4 – чаши с зауженным профилем: № 1, 3-4, Гяур-кала МГК5 и МГК6, № 2 Эрк-кала Т7. Рисунки Ф. Варди; № 5-6 – чаши с вертикальным или утолщенным внутри венчиком. Рисунки К. Мортон

pottery from the 1st to 2nd centuries AD show complete vessel profiles, which for these shapes testifies to a date relatively close to that of their deposit. The shape of a deep rounded bowl (Usmanova, 1963b. P. 187. Fig. 16, 22), for instance, already occurred in phases assigned to the Graeco-Bactrian and early Parthian period of the defensive walls of Gyaur Kala, but the well-preserved specimens illustrated by Usmanova (1963b. P. 187. Fig. 16, 22) suggest, that these forms probably continued in use and production.

Usmanova noted that the ceramic assemblages of the early Sasanian period, 3rd century CE, do not show noticeable changes in relation to the later Parthian material (1963b. P. 170). Pottery contemporary with the functioning of the buildings in trench 2 already seem less various and rich in comparison to those of the preceding phase (Usmanova, 1963b. P. 185-187. Figs 14, 16).

How can we define the middle to late Parthian pottery repertoire at Merv and what are the developments occurring in this period? A closer look at selected vessel shapes might help to gain an insight into this issue.

Open forms: Open forms generally appear to play a significant role in the repertoires of the early Parthian period (Puschnigg, 2019. P. 336-37; Usmanova, 1963b. P. 192. Figs 21, 194. Fig. 23, 195. Fig. 24). Not all the shapes continue throughout the Parthian period. Equally, some bowl types seem to gradually change in appearance, being either further developed or new variants gaining preference. Already in the last two centuries BC, a bowl shape with waisted body profile emerged in the assemblages (R241, Fig. 2, 3). Bowls of this type show some degree of variation (R183, R358, R241, Fig. 2, 1-4) and are well attested in excavations in Gyaur Kala including Erk Kala Sounding 5 (Usmanova, 1969. P. 35,

Fig. 7), Gyaur Kala YuTAKE Trench 2 (Usmanova, 1963b. P. 191. Fig. 20, 1-2, 195. Fig. 24, 32 and 40) Trench 13 (Filanovich, 1974. P. 83. Fig. 22) and in more recent excavations of the defenses MGK6 (Fig. 2, 3-4). The early versions of this type found in MGK6 are plain, though the specimens from trench 2 often show a change in surface colour between the upper and lower body part (Usmanova, 1963b. P. 190). Open forms with waisted body profile continue in use until the early to middle Sasanian period, when they often show burnished decoration on the inside (Puschnigg 2006. P. 132. Fig. 6, 4).

Deep rounded bowls with upright or internally thickened rim (R236, R008, Fig. 2, 5-6) are another well-preserved vessel profile that appear to continue into the middle and later Parthian phases (Usmanova, 1963b. P. 187. Fig. 16, 21-22). Evidence accordingly is also found in the data from the MGK6 excavations. In Phases 3 and 4 of the Gyaur Kala defenses such bowl shapes are continuously represented (Puschnigg, Dagh-mehchi, Nokandeh, 2019. P. 36-37).

Closed forms: Overall, open forms lose significance in the later assemblages, though, while closed forms diversify increasingly. This phenomenon is not unique to the Merv assemblages but seems to signify a broader shift in the ceramic repertoires slowly emerging from the middle Parthian to Sasanian times (Puschnigg, 2019. P. 348).

Main innovations in this period concern a general increase in the decoration of rims, mainly grooving, and of neck- and shoulder areas. Small to medium sized closed forms also gain in popularity, though.

A small, single-handled jar or jug first occurs in a context of Phase 3 of the Gyaur Kala defenses, which is assigned to the early Parthian period (Zavjalov, 2007. P.

325). The rim of this early version is almost upright with a slightly outward bent and the rim-shoulder junction marks a horizontal rib (R248, Fig. 3, 1). From the specimens found in MGK6 Phase 3 it is unclear whether this shape had a handle or not. Material documented from Sounding 5 in Erk Kala and dated to the first centuries AD shows a similar form (*Usmanova*, 1969. P. 25. Fig. 8.1) but furnished with a single handle and already close in its appearance to the little juglet or mug so prominent in the early and middle Sasanian assemblages of Gyaur Kala (*Puschnigg*, 2006. P. 140-141). Possibly, this form began its development early in the Parthian pottery repertoire and, in the process, might have slowly replaced goblets as a drinking vessel or mug.

Double-handled jars with externally thickened and grooved rim and conical neck (R239, R269, R032 and Ref21, Fig 3, 2-5) represent a vessel type characteristic for the later Parthian to early Sasanian period. Jars of this shape are illustrated for the 1st to 2nd and 3rd centuries AD from deposits in YuTAKE Sounding 5 at Erk Kala (*Usmanova*, 1969. P. 23, fig. 5 (right), 25 fig. 7 (right)) and in Gyaur Kala YuTAKE Trench 2 (*Usmanova*, 1963b. P. 185, fig. 14. 15 without handles), Trench 13 (*Filanovich*, 1974. P. 84, fig. 23). In MGK6, the Gyaur Kala defenses, corresponding fragments occurred in Phase 5 identified as early Sasanian (*Zavyalov*, 2007) or in windblown deposits on the inside face of the wall (context no. 40, no phasing). It is important to note that the handles of the specimen from MGK6 shows the bean-shaped section, a form present in assemblages from the earliest phases of the Gyaur Kala defenses. In Sasanian times, handle sections are mostly oval or undulated in shape (cf. *Puschnigg*, 2006. P. 120. Fig. 6.3, 135. Fig. 6.6, 136. Fig. 6.7). Individual fragments are also documented from the middle Sasanian domestic area in Gyaur Kala, MGK5, though it is not clear, whether these specimens are already residual elements in these deposits. Double-handled jars are a significant part also of the Sasanian repertoire, but the later versions have a straight or slightly flared neck. Jars with conical neck do not form part of the common middle Sasanian repertoire (*Puschnigg*, 2006. P. 134-144).

This pottery type rather appears to be characteristic for the early centuries of the Common Era, the later Parthian period and the beginning of Sasanian times, though they might be regarded as precursor of the later amphora-shaped vessels. One complete profile is preserved from Sounding 5 in Erk Kala (*Usmanova*, 1969. P. 23. Fig. 5; cf. Fig. 3, 6). Occasionally, specimens of this type already show a rib around the neck, sometimes furnished with regular impressions (*Usmanova*, 1969. P. 23. Fig. 5; 1963b. P. 170. Fig. 6, 9). In subsequent phases, this type of decoration usually marks the neck-shoulder junction of jars (cf. *Puschnigg*, 2006. P. 136. Fig. 6.7). On vessels of late Parthian or early Sasanian date this feature often occurs around the neck (cf. Fig. 3, 3).

Neckless jars of medium size with everted rim constitute a regular part in the pottery repertoire from the Seleucid period onwards (cf. *Puschnigg*, *Houal*, 2019. P. 124-125. Fig. 2, R240) and seem to continue with slight modifications in the rim shape into later Parthian times (R302, R192, Fig. 3, 5-6).

Surface decoration appears to be generally sparse from the Seleucid and well into the Parthian phase, though some vessel types show specific decorative patterns from early on. Specimens illustrated from YuTAKE Trench 13 in Gyaur Kala show horizontal bands of incised wavy decoration (*Filanovich*, 1974. P. 83. Fig. 22). The fragments are assigned to the first centuries of the common era, though analogous shapes equally occur in domestic deposits in Ai Khanoum and are dated slightly earlier there (*Lyonnet*, 2013. P. 190-91. Fig. 85, 2,4).

One of the most difficult aspects in the interpretation of Parthian ceramics from Merv are coarse- or cooking wares. Vessels of this type only occasionally feature in texts or illustrations of the publications of previous excavations (cf. *Katsuris*, *Buryakov*, 1963. P. 126. Fig. 6, 5), and their quantities are generally small in the assemblages of the Gyaur Kala Fortifications, MGK6 (*Puschnigg*, 2016. P. 455-56) providing only restricted evidence. The data we have to date suggests that substantial innovations in cooking ware fabrics largely set in with Sasanian levels. This image is, however, likely to be still incomplete and more evidence is needed. Considering the shape and fabric of a globular jar with everted rim illustrated amongst pottery dated to the 2nd and 1st centuries BC from the sounding at YuTAKE Trench 6, Gyaur Kala, cooking wares begin to change already during the Parthian period. *Katsuris* and *Buryakov* note that the fabric of this jar is tempered with gravel or grit (*Katsuris*, *Buryakov*, 1963. P. 125), while most coarse ware fabrics recently analysed from pre-Sasanian levels are tempered with grog (*Puschnigg*, 2016. P. 456).

Inscribed pottery sherds and near-complete vessels occurred in almost every excavation at Merv (cf. *Puschnigg*, 2006. P. 39) and are also published from sites in the oasis, such as Göbekli-depe (*Livshits*, *Nikitin*, 1991). The use of the Parthian language for inscriptions on ceramic vessels continues well into the Sasanian period, as the example of a Sasanian jar from Göbekli-depe illustrates (*Livshits*, *Nikitin*, 1991. P. 112-113). This aspect of continuity is to a certain extent also mirrored in the enduring adaptation of some of the Parthian pottery types until the early and middle Sasanian period (*Puschnigg*, 2006. P. 144-146. Fig. 6.12).

Additional evidence. Amongst the various object categories testifying to Parthian Merv only a small selection is mentioned here again for illustration.

Details of architectural decorations from domestic buildings of Parthian date rarely survive. *Usmanova* published a column capital that was excavated from YuTAKE Trench 2 in Gyaur Kala (*Usmanova*, 1963b. P. 181, 183, 184. Fig. 13). The capital is made of a stucco containing gypsum, quartz and lime and shows a composite design with acanthus leaves and a female head at the centre (*Usmanova*, 1963b. Fig. 13). Based on stylistic comparisons with material from Bactria, *Usmanova* suggested a date of the 1st to 2nd century AD for the capital (1963b. P. 183).

During the excavations of a Sasanian bastion at the Gyaur Kala fortifications, MGK6, the fragment of another capital was retrieved (Fig. 4) (*Herrmann* et al. 2001. P. 21). The piece was, however, found outside its original archaeological context, and from its location it appears that surveyors had placed it inten-



Figure 3: Closed vessel forms, nos. 1-5 and 7-8, Gyaur Kala MGK6; no. 6 Erk Kala, Sounding 5 (after Usmanova, 1969. Fig. 15).

Drawings nos. 1 and 7 – F. Vardy, nos. 2-5 and 8 – K. Morton

Формы закрытых сосудов, № 1-5 и 7-8, Гяур-кала МГК6; № 6, Эрк-кала, зондаж 5 (Usmanova, 1969. P. 15);

Рис. 1 и 7 – Ф. Варди, рис. 2-5 и 8 – К. Мортон

tionally on top of a cemented trigonometry point during the Soviet period (Herrmann et al. 2001. P. 21-22). Despite its unknown primary find spot, the capital still reflects part of the city's architectural history. In contrast to the capital from Trench 2, this specimen is made of fired clay and is designed in Ionian style similar to that of decorative clay plaques found in the Parthian cemetery in New Nisa (Pilipko, 2015. P. 176. Pl. 10). Pilipko suggests a date for the functioning of the cemetery from the end of the 3rd/beginning of the 2nd century BC onwards for several centuries possibly up to early Sasanian times (Pilipko, 2015. P. 209). It is possible that the clay capital slightly pre-

dates the one crafted in stucco (cf. Herrmann et al., 2001. P. 21).

How does our evidence compare to assemblages from contemporary neighbouring regions?

The beginning of the Parthian period at Merv, the 2nd century AD, is still characterized by over-regional Hellenistic-inspired material assemblages that show significant overlaps with adjacent territories. Similarities are specifically strong with assemblages from Bactrian sites that share a common group of tableware forms (Puschnigg, Houal, 2019). Developments in ceramic technology, on the other hand, and the overall composition of the vessel repertoire have parallels

with assemblages from northeast Iran (*Puschnigg, Daghmehchi, Nokandeh*, 2019. P. 37-38). This trans-regional quality is also documented in architectural features, such as the column capitals, though our evidence from Merv is very limited in this respect. Aside of the strong cosmopolitanism of the time, there are always aspects of local traditions and particularities visible (*Puschnigg, Houal*, 2019. P. 136-137). From the late 1st century BC onwards, these interregional aspects change, and common pottery types are now mainly restricted to Bactria (*Houal*, 2021. P. 47. Fig. 25: O18-5, 49. Fig. 27: F3:7/4). This link extends into the early Sasanian period (*Puschnigg* 2006. P. 144), though in later Sasanian times connections are again noticeable with regions west of Margiana, such as Khosrow-Kala and northeast Iran (*Puschnigg*, forthcoming).

Discussion. Parthian times at Merv cover a period of considerable transformations in material culture in this city and its oasis. At the outset assemblages strongly reflect the cosmopolitan qualities of the Hellenistic material culture noticeable across the eastern Mediterranean and much of the Near East and Central Asia in the 2nd century BC (*Fenn, Römer-Strehl*, 2013; *Puschnigg, Houal*, 2019). These over-regional links gradually weaken towards the turn of the era. Our initial impression regarding lack of innovation in middle Parthian pottery repertoires certainly requires modification, though. Some of the vessel shapes introduced in early Parthian times, such as the bowl with waisted body profile, are further modified and continue to be produced in different versions well into the Sasanian period. Regarding closed vessel forms, a similar trend is noticeable with regard to the small juglets or mugs that appear early in Parthian times and represent likely precursors of the comparable middle Sasanian types. Interestingly, the jars with conical neck, often double-handled, show a shorter period of use restricted probably to the first three centuries of the Common Era. Some features of the rim, the grooving for instance, remain popular throughout much of the Sasanian period, though (cf. *Puschnigg*, 2006. P. 146. Fig. 6.12, P. 168. Fig. 7.11).

Overall, a number of decisive developments in the ceramic repertoire of Merv begin during Parthian times. These include the decrease of open vessel forms and an increase and refinement of small and medium closed shapes. A potential change in habits, the likely use of closed forms, mugs, rather than goblets for drinking, might underlie or further this trend. In the later Parthian period patterns of decoration, such as the ribs with rows of impression, set in and become a regular feature of specific pottery types for several centuries.

Political history and cultural developments do not evolve at the same pace. Administrative changes are not immediately shown in objects used for daily routines. Transformations in the design of utilitarian objects and domestic environment are all the more significant, as they are born out of interactions of various agencies. Economic exchange, transmission of technological know-how through travelling crafts persons as well as changes in social practices contribute to the processes of transformation in material culture. In this

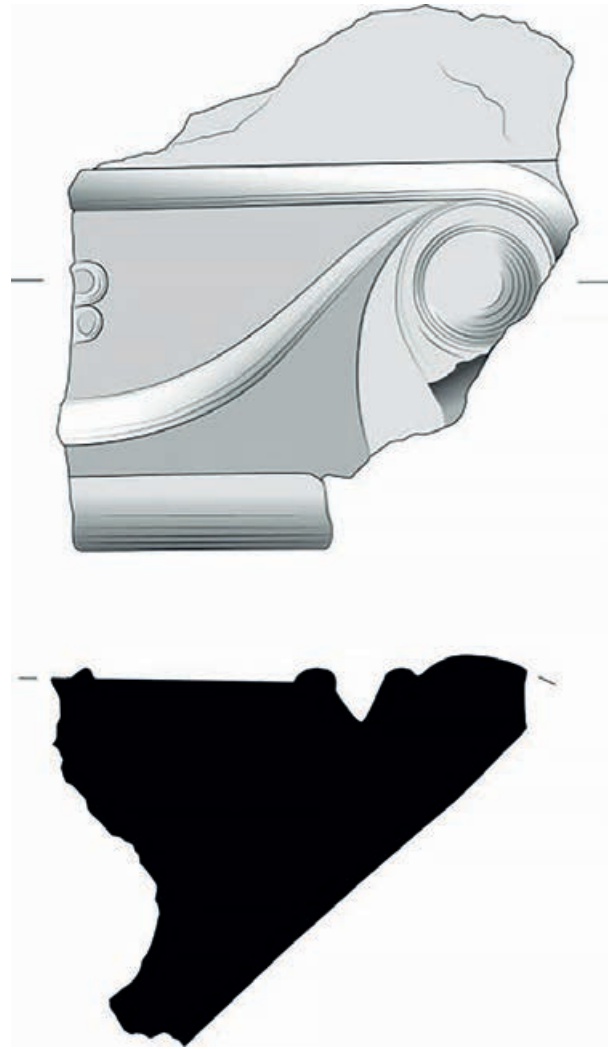


Figure 4: Clay Capital, MGK 6. Drawing F. Vardy
Сырцовая капитель, МГК 66. Рис. Ф. Варди

respect the Parthian period belongs to one of the most fascinating phases in the long history of Merv.

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