



TREASURES OF
ANCIENT
MARGIANA

N.N. MIKLUKHO-MAKLAY INSTITUTE OF ETHNOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY
RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
RUSSIAN-TURKMEN MARGIANA EXPEDITION

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TREASURES OF ANCIENT MARGIANA

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*Dedicated to the 25th Anniversary
of Turkmenistan Neutrality*

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Treasures of ancient Margiana. Photoalbum.

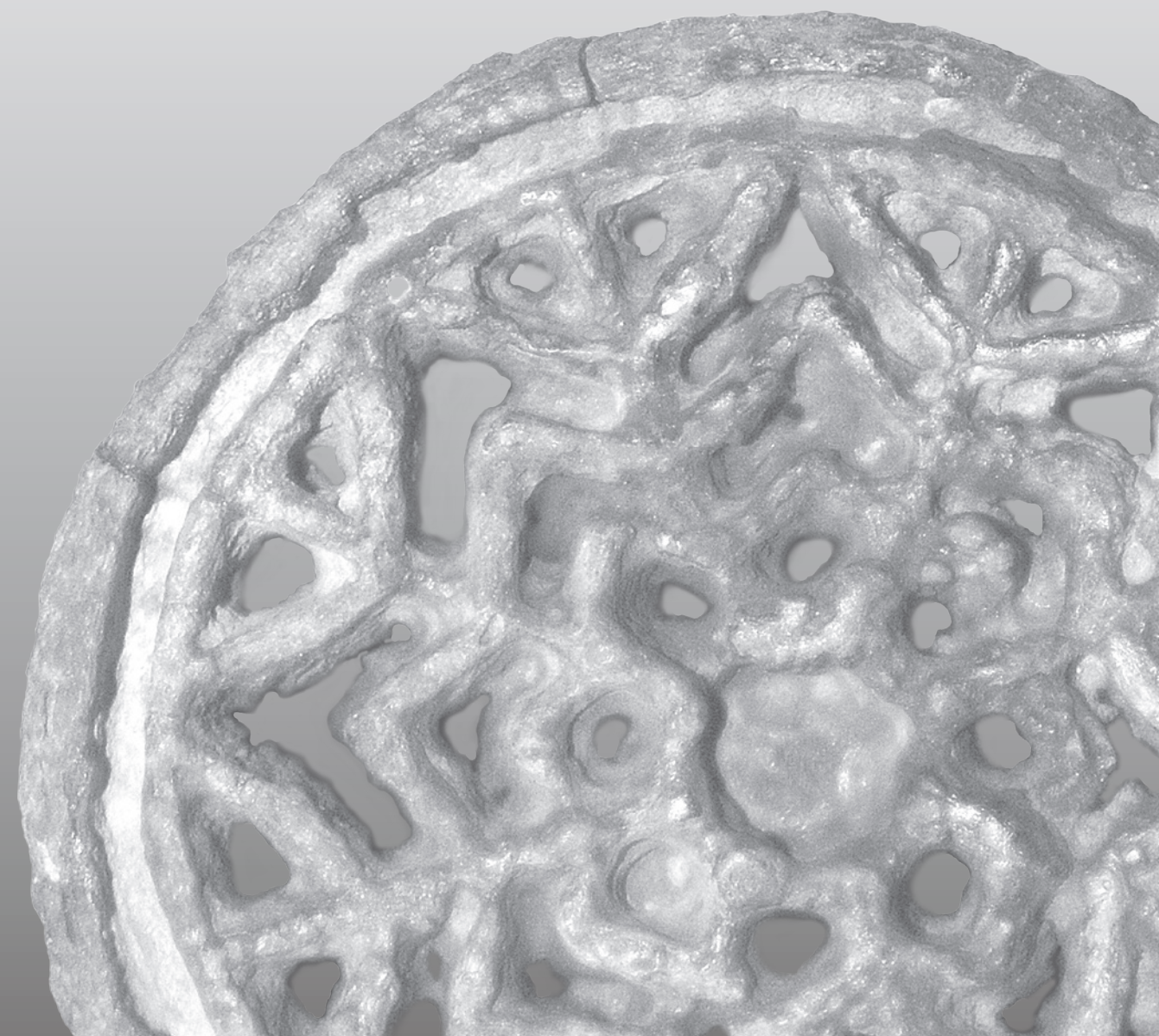
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This book in a popular form narrates about the Bactria-Margiana archaeological culture (BMAC), also known as the Oxus Civilization. This culture existed in the late 3rd – mid 2nd millennium BC in the South of Central Asia and in the part of Afghanistan, adjacent to Amu Darya. The book presents the main findings made during the excavations of BMAC settlements in the ancient delta of the Murghab River in the southeastern Kara Kum desert (Turkmenistan). This center of the ancient Eastern civilization was discovered by Soviet archaeologists in the 1970s, and by now the fieldworks have been underway for the fifth decade. The findings show that the culture that existed here had extensive connections with the Indus, Mesopotamian, Eastern Mediterranean and Achaean Greek civilizations.

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2010 Victor Sarianidi at Gonur. Each new season begins with the fact that the territory for the excavation need to be clear of the mountains of ground, which was excavated in previous years.

The first edition of this book came out in the autumn of 2013 in Ashgabat with a welcome speech by the Turkmen leader Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov. «Treasures of ancient Margiana» was the last book to be published during the life of Viktor Sarianidi, the pioneer and explorer of the new center of ancient Eastern civilization on the land of Turkmenistan. In 2015, the Turkmen State publisher service participated in the XXVIII Moscow International Book Fair, where it, for the first time, presented its publications in five categories of the 12th International Contest «The Art of Books» of the CIS countries. The publisher won prizes in each of the five categories, and «Treasures of ancient Margiana» received a diploma in the «Science and innovation» category.

Time has passed, and the print run of this book, though of considerable size, was completely sold out. However, it is still much-in-demand among both specialists and people interested in the ancient history of the East. Therefore, it was decided to prepare a second electronic edition, which we would like to dedicate to the 25th anniversary of Turkmenistan Neutrality, proclaimed by the UN on December 12, 1995, and since then celebrated annually in this country as a national holiday.

Over the past years, new and unique discoveries have been made in Margiana, but we believe they are worthy of independent publication. Considering that the book represents a photo album based on the photographs made by Kirill Samurskiy, we think it possible to include him as a co-author. Cherishing the memory of Viktor Sarianidi, the founder of the expedition, who led this work for more than four decades and made the remarkable discoveries briefly described in this book, we did not introduce any changes to the original text, although the appearance of the book had to be modified, primarily because in the electronic form it is presented in separate Russian and English editions.

The authors express their most sincere gratitude to Alevtina Sukhorukova for loving and creative attitude to the makeup of this book, to Ruslan Muradov for constant assistance and support during the preparation of this publication, to our colleagues from the National Administration for the Preservation, Study and Restoration of Historical and Cultural Monuments of Turkmenistan for assistance in organizing the current work, as well as to all Russian and Turkmen participants of the Margiana expedition.



Above Gonur depe blue sky is most often.



Triangular «embrasures» of Gonur kremlin wall were only its decoration.



TURKMENISTAN IS AN INDEPENDENT NEUTRAL STATE formed in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union. During the 20 years of its development, it has made remarkable progress in economy and culture, in the circumstances of political stability and sustainable civil peace. President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, elected by nation-wide voting, has become a true national leader, won the deep respect of his fellow citizens and reinforced the international authority of the country. After his election for the presidency in 2007 he began a policy of New Revival and great reforms, which was strongly supported by the Turkmen people. After five years of successful implementation, this policy allowed him to proclaim the advent of the era of power and happiness.

Eighty percent of Turkmenistan's territory is occupied by Kara Kum, one of the largest deserts of the world. The southern frontiers of the state are Atrek Valley, Kopet Dag mountain range and Paropamiz Foothills – Badkhyz and Karabil uplands. Its northern borders are flat, partly passing along the precipitous ledge of Ustyurt Plateau, which borders the desert in the north-west. The eastern border of the country is stretched along the valley of the Amu Darya, and the western frontier is the shore of the Caspian Sea. The location in the inner parts of Eurasia and the distance from the ocean of more than three thousand kilometers explains another feature of Turkmenistan: its nature was formed in a sharply continental climate. With low rainfall and scarce water resources, the arid landscape of Turkmenistan is represented mainly by deserts with sparse vegetation. Such environment has led to development of the two major forms of farming: cattle breeding on the vast plains of the steppe zone and agriculture in the oases.

Kopet Dag foothill has been the breadbasket of the country since the ancient times. Here, at least, already in the VI millennium BC small villages were inhabited by tribes that shifted from hunting and gathering to growing crops and breeding



Professor V.I. Sarianidi is telling workers about Gonur depe – the city of kings and gods.

livestock. Over the next several thousand years, the rapid progress of farming and animal husbandry has allowed the tribes living in the Kopet Dag Valley, who have mastered by then the Tejen and Murghab deltas, to create here one of the earliest centers of world civilization.

Turkmenistan is rich in historical monuments! Three major archaeological parks: Ancient Merv, Koneurgench and the Parthian Fortresses of Nysay are included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. Right until the Mongol invasion in the beginning of the XIII century, there were fortress cities with mosques, madrasahs, caravanserais and rich bazaars in this area. They have flourished thanks to intensive trade along one of the most important routes of the Silk Road. But long before the rise of the medieval culture, the industrious people from this fertile region had created outstanding architecture, engineering, jewelry and crafts masterpieces.

For years, scientists believed that the society that had made remarkable progress from the Stone Age to the Palaeometal Age only existed in the foothill community of Kopet Dag, while Kara Kum had always been a lifeless desert, where no foot may tread. But in 1970s, archaeologists who ventured out in the sands discovered a new, previously unknown center of ancient oriental civilization.

Of course they were not pioneers. Back in 1904 the first real archaeological expedition to Turkmenistan, led by Raphael Pumpelly, Professor of Geology, was organized by the Carnegie Institution of Washington (USA). The excavations, which have touched Anau, a Chalcolithic site, and, partly, the ancient Merv, were led by the German archaeologist Hubert Schmidt, who had excavated the legendary city of Troy, along with the famous Heinrich Schliemann. Members of the American expedition also noticed the sand dunes, which began north of Merv, and formed the beginning of the Kara Kum. The scientists went into the desert for only a few kilometers, but it is difficult to overestimate the importance of the discoveries that they made. Already behind the first sand ridges, they found traces of small, ordinary-looking settlements that clearly indicated that



Modern inhabitants of one of the greatest deserts of the world – Kara Kum.

To find treasures all workers of expedition sorted out tons of ground by their hands and spades pils.



the area was inhabited by people already in ancient times!

Decades passed. Archaeologists over and over studied numerous ancient monuments in the foothills of the Kopet Dag, thinking about the mysteries of the sands near the ruins of ancient Merv. Since 1949, a special team led by Mikhail E. Masson began operating within the Southern Turkmenistan archaeological expedition (YUTAKE). Its main objective was to study the Parthian-Sasanian monuments north of Merv. The team included Sergey N. Yurénev, who was educated before the Soviet Revolution, the experienced Ashgabat archaeologist Sergey A. Ershov and young scientists Victor Sarianidi, Vadim Masson, Yuri Buryakov, Igor Khlopin and others. It was them who began to discover ancient settlements every year, including such well-known sites as the Yaz Depe, Takhirbai, Auchin Depe and a number of cities which were previously unknown to science.

Since 1972, in-depth studies of Gonur, Togolok, Keleliy, Taip, Adjikui, Adambasan and Egribogaz oases have begun. Excavations were conducted jointly by Geoksyur Team of the Institute of Archaeology of the USSR Academy of Sciences (Moscow) and Sh. Batyrov Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of Turkmenistan (Ashgabat). One team was led by V.I. Sarianidi, the second one by I.S. Masimov. Since 2001, Margiana expedition is a joint project of the National Administration for the Preservation, Study and Restoration of the Historical and Cultural Monuments of Turkmenistan and of N.N. Miklukho-Maklai Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences. To date, four volumes of Proceedings of the expedition have been published, not to mention some monographs and numerous scientific and popular books by V.I. Sarianidi. They presented enough evidence to show that here, in the heart of Asia, among the sand and desert plains, there were once not just isolated settlements, but an entire country, which was previously completely unknown.

It turned out that at least four thousand years ago, the modern Murghab River flowed far to the

east of its current location. The source of the river goes into the foothills of Afghanistan. A part of this source enters the territory of modern Turkmenistan where its final deltaic fan was located, generously irrigating a land of no less than three thousand square kilometers. It is here, where for a long time there was no water, and no signs of human activity were visible on the surface, among the lifeless barren dunes and takyr, that archaeologists have found hundreds of ancient settlements.

What was the name of this mysterious land? Most researchers believe that this is the country mentioned in the Avesta under the name of Mo-uru, and in the famous Behistun inscription of the middle of the first millennium BC, under the name of Margush. In a much more ancient Mesopotamian cuneiform writing, Marhashi, a kingdom independent of Mesopotamia is mentioned. This brought about the hypothesis of its possible location at the site of the Hellenistic Margiana – an area that during the campaigns of Alexander of Macedon, and later, at the Parthians era, was uniquely associated with the old delta of Murghab River. Whatever the case, in the scientific literature, the culture of the Bronze Age Murghab oasis is known as the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC), or Oxus Civilization. There are also two popular concepts: Margush country and Ancient Margiana. The last four decades of excavation and research of its capital city, now known in Turkmen as Gonur Depe, showed the highest level of construction, craftsmanship, engineering culture, rich spiritual life, complex social stratification of the local population in the second millennium BC. Now it became obvious that the delta of the Murghab River enclosed one of the oldest centers of world civilization.

Gonur Depe is a major archaeological park in the desert area on the border of the Kara-Kum and Bayramali districts (etrap) of Mary province (velayat), and the largest of the more than three hundred villages located in the ancient delta of the Murghab River. Archaeologists have found that it was founded in the years 2300–2250 BC and existed for about 600–800 years. By the moment when



Unique bronze plate which depicts five archars climbing the rock which was discovered in 2012 spring, centered on the eight-petaled flower with four petals in the heart, just waiting their exploration.

it was abandoned (the middle of the second millennium BC), the central part of the monumental buildings of the Gonur complex alone occupied about 25 hectares. Another 10 hectares of the city are occupied by the necropolis. The splendor of the funerary objects and jewelry buried in the human tombs is dazzling. These are highly artistic items of stone, metal, ivory, and, of course, clay, which was the material for skilled potters and sculptors who created the finest ceramic vessels and pagan deities' figurines of exquisite forms. All these innumerable objects that accompanied the life of the Gonur inhabitants today are exhibits of several museums of Turkmenistan, while their houses, the Royal Palace and the temples became the objects of the State Historical and Cultural Park «Ancient Merv».

Since 1974, when Professor Viktor Sarianidi and his Turkmen colleagues found Gonur and began their excavations, which continue under his direction to date, thousands of people have visited the ruins of the ancient Kingdom, which had been previously completely unknown. This pilgrimage expands from year to year, because everyone, interested in history, wants to see with his or her own eyes a truly fantastic city. This city, lost until recently in the Kara Kum desert, now, after four thousand years, reveals traces of its grandeur and unique culture. This is what the book you are reading is devoted to.

Multi-chamber fireplace-stoves were constructed in each of the 21 towers of Gonur Kremlin. The igniting a fire in them on major holidays Margush residents joined their prayers for the well-being of life.





*Mozaics «Griffin» from the royal tomb 3210 (Restoration and partly reconstruction by A. Shayimova).
At the time of discovery of mosaics in the royal Gonur necropolis paints buried for over 4000 years
highlighted superbly particular features of powerful imaginary animals.*

NUMEROUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES OF THE BRONZE AGE are located in the former Murghab Delta in a compact group.

Evidence of the highest agriculture and cattle breeding standards of the ancient inhabitants of this area, called the ancient Margiana, or the Margush country, was discovered already in the early 1970s. It has been documented that the first humans appeared in these places at the end of the third millennium BC. The population of the northern foothills of the Kopet Dag had enough land and water resources for many centuries, so they explored only the neighboring areas. But once, the so called xerothermic, or arid period began in the Middle East. Precipitation was sharply reduced, rivers began to dry up, which brought about gradual yearly reduction in cereal harvests. Living in drought became impossible, and people had to abandon their dry arable land and their homes and to go searching for new lands suitable for agriculture and cattle breeding. This situation was global and was observed from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indus Valley. At present, plenty of evidence, including archaeological, has been accumulated indicating that it was the end of the third millennium BC when dozens of settlements perished from the vast territory of the ancient East.

One day the growing population of the Kopet Dag foothill also began suffering more and more from the shortage of fertile land, which led to the need to search for new ones. There were people who couldn't abandon their native land, but some families and even clans were to prepare with all their goods and chattels for a

The seals in Margiana were made in different ways: stone carving, wax casting, stone casting, etc. And the result of the casting was different. Compartment mostly bronze seals are the most characteristic of the BMAC, but voluminous ones made of silver also found.



long journey to the east. So, they went along the Tejen River, descending to its delta lost in the sands, reached the Murghab River, and began to move down its current, founding numerous settlements. Perhaps this great migration went further to the east, reaching the very Amu Darya, and tribes from Southern Turkmenistan settled in the fertile river valleys of Bactria, with abundant free arable land, generously irrigated by turbulent rivers. The numerous discoveries made by archaeologists in the southern regions of the modern Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, as well as in the north of Afghanistan are so similar to the items found in Margiana that the cultural unity of the Bronze Age Bactria and Margiana is doubtless.

Palaces and temples, like those found by archaeologists in the Margush country, were built on the newly explored land. They were surrounded by strong walls and towers, which, however, have hardly ever been used for defense. Perhaps it would be more correct to consider the monumental walls of such fortresses as Gonur Depe, Togolok 21, Gonur Temenos, Kelleli, Ajikui in Turkmenistan, Dashly in Afghanistan and Sapallitepa and Djarkutan in Uzbekistan a tribute to the ancient architectural traditions.

Traditions were preserved in the manufacture of ceramic products, as well. All the pottery was made using the potter's wheel, baked in a pottery kilns at a very high temperature, and it was of excellent quality. Each of the mentioned sites had its specific form of items, which bears evidence for the local tradition preservation. Adoptions of similar forms are common as well. For example, the so called Namazga V and VI light clay pottery continued their existence



Burial rite for animals similar to people – is an important feature of the culture of Margush country.

and development in ancient Margiana. At the same time, however, we observe the appearance of pots that are similar to the pots found on the typical sites of the ancient civilizations in the Indus Valley, on the territory of modern Syria and in southern foothills of the Kopet Dag.

All Bronze Age sites, discovered in Margush country, were represented mainly by small rural settlements, inhabited by people who were engaged mainly in agriculture and cattle breeding. Local tribes grew rich harvests of wheat and barley, millet, lentils, chickpeas and peas on the fertile lands irrigated by delta ducts of the Murghab River. Apples, pears, cherry plums, cherries and grapes were abundant in gardens. Melons were already growing in plantations. Flooded river meadows, with their abundant herbaceous vegetation, were a perfect place for pasturing countless flocks of goats, sheep and cattle (cows). Camels and donkeys were used as draft animals. The most privileged Margush country inhabitants had horses, which, of course, were elite animals, but could be used for riding as well.

Among the many rural settlements of ancient Margiana, the most distinguished one is the capital city, which bears the modern name Gonur Depe (the literal translation from Turkmen is «gray hill»). Its size exceeded the other settlements significantly. At the time of its discovery, the urban complex represented a huge melted hill. As it was revealed later, this hill concealed a fortress and a palace within, as well as several temples erected on all four sides near the fortress wall. And all this was surrounded by another monumental wall with towers.

It has been over four decades since regular excavations of Gonur began, and each year



To which gods these almond-shaped eyes are addressed – is the question the scientists are still wondering.

brings astoundingly splendid discoveries. Unfortunately, so far no evidence of the name of this city during the period of its prosperity has been found. But thanks to the things that have been discovered, we know many important facts about the establishment of human civilization.

Many of the Gonur discoveries were unique and never found before in the world. The architecture of the fortress and the Gonur Palace, built in the last centuries of the third millennium BC by local builders, indicates the existence of a stable and very old architectural tradition. Ancient Margiana fortification and palace architecture, for all its originality and uniqueness, doubtlessly, belongs to the building



The holes in the crown of terracotta figurines show that it was suspended on a string or a thin leather strap. In some cases the buried girl or teenager holds female figurine in their hands, crossed in front of chestlthese.



*Some terracota figurines have no signes of sex.
But on their shoulders they have star-signs, the meaning
of which is still not known.*



*The image of «tree of life» can be seen on the body
of the figurine very rare.*



Most figurines depicting winged deities with legs and bird's heads are male.



Only two female figurines with legs were found in Margiana.



Female terracotta figurines of deities are distinguished by majestic crowns on their heads and necklaces around necks.

culture of Mesopotamia, Asia Minor and the Aegean world. This is confirmed by such elements of architectural decoration as «blind windows», wide low thresholds with a column in the center, corner niches of the «dovetail» type and many others.

On the eastern facade of the fortress the inhabitants of Margush country built a fire temple – perhaps the earliest known in the world. In the center of the temple, behind a long, blank wall builders dug up five deep rectangular chambers, carefully laid out with bricks from the inside. Fire was constantly maintained in these altars, sacrifices were offered in its honor in other units. Ash from the altars was never thrown away, but carefully collected and preserved in special «holy ash storages (containers)». They were «sealed» with bricks in order to avoid possible «desecration» in the future. This custom was widely practiced by local tribes only in relation to the pure and sacred objects.

An elaborate complex related to communal eating is located on the northern facade of the fortress. These were, of course, not just collective feasts. Apparently, there must have been a rather complex system of rituals, prayers and sacrifices. Its main meaning, in contrast to the daily priestly rites, was, obviously, everyone's participation in such dinners. These meals can be compared to some extent with the Sadaka sacrifice of modern Turkmens. Attending them and taking sacrificial food by the rich and the poor, warriors and rural workers, priests and local nobles made everyone feel they belong to the same community, to a common socius. The sacrificial food included not only the meat from slaughtered animals, but, perhaps, plants as well,



Grains or wine must be saved to the future life of the rulers of Margush country in such large jars.

because in modern Sadaka, one of the main dishes is Yarma from the wheat grains. At later times, such squares were arranged successively in the northwest of the complex, then in the south and the south-west. Although many ancient nations had similar custom of collective meals, it is here, in Gonur Depe that the first reliable archaeological evidence was found, supporting its existence in such an ancient time period

The sacrificial meat for communal eating was fried in special double-chamber ovens, and



In different periods of life at Gonur different vessels were used for pouring liquids.

More than 20 ceramic vessels of different forms were placed in some sheep's burials at Gonur.





Pottery of Margush country amaze not only by its brilliant quality, but also by the diversity of forms and quantity.



Small stone flacons for storing of makeup as well as ceramic table vases look equally solid and fundamental.



a ritual drink of Soma-Haoma kind was prepared in special white rooms. The ready drink was bottled in unique ceramic vessels of several types, so far found only in Margiana. The walls of one of them show the world tree, on each side of which two goats are standing. The rim of the second type of the vessels is decorated with figures of animals and people. Often figurines of frogs and fish are attached to the bottom of these vessels. There are vessels with walls decorated with relief snakes that crawl up to the rim. A modern Zoroastrian myth states that in the midst of the World Ocean, Vorukasha, grows the Tree of Immortality, the World Tree or «Tree of all Seeds» – Haoma. According to the myth, frogs and other amphibians (for Zoroastrians, the personification of the forces of evil) are trying to get to the roots of this tree to gnaw them. The Kara Fish is to protect Haoma against these fiends. Possibly, a version of this legend is illustrated on the mentioned ritual vessels.

While common people of the Margush country participated in the common meals that took place in the squares, in order for the leader and the highest priests to take part in these ceremonies a «royal sanctuary» was constructed near the Palace behind a massive defense wall. Its interior was designed with numerous «blind windows» and a double-chamber oven between them. The core of the sanctuary is a special construction without walls, with only four brick prominences in the corners, decorated with folded corners. Instead of walls, low, wide thresholds were built between these constructions with a post in the center, which may have served for the attachment of double doors.





In this chamber «sanctuary» the king and his attendants also took part in the communal eating but far away from the common people who were sitting in the square. The items found in the «royal sanctuary» also indicate its special purpose. They include a steatite statuette of a person in a praying position, several quadrangular «fortune-telling sticks», made of ivory with carved one-type signs, the tips of these stick are worn out due to prolonged spinning with fingers, several alabaster chalices and ceramic ritual vessels with spouts designed as heads of longhorn

bulls (this is another kind of ritual vessels). All these items were apparently for religious purposes, and most closely resemble the ones that come from the Indus Valley from the excavations of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. Moreover, the general layout of the Gonur sanctuary finds the only and very close parallels to the synchronous monuments in that same Mohenjo-Daro.

The most important feature of Gonur, the city of kings and gods, was the presence of a large number of pools arranged in front of each of its four entrances, oriented to the sides of the



This mosaic plaque of different stones decorated chest of a young camel who left with one of Gonur rulers to eternal life.

Mosaic inserts were made of soft rock stone held high heat (perhaps repeatedly) in special ovens.





The use of various combinations of minerals, shades of red, black and white colors, shapes and compositions sequences in Gonur mosaics show the highest skill of the ancient inhabitants of the Murghab delta.

A combination of inserts in stone and ivory as well as drawing on a stone engraved lines of varying thickness were skillfully used in mosaics.



The ability of the ancient masters of Gonur mosaics amazes how they can convey the volume, texture and expression of character by small number of receptions.

A new page that will give an opportunity to clarify the origin and pathways of different art schools is opened for researchers of Art history.

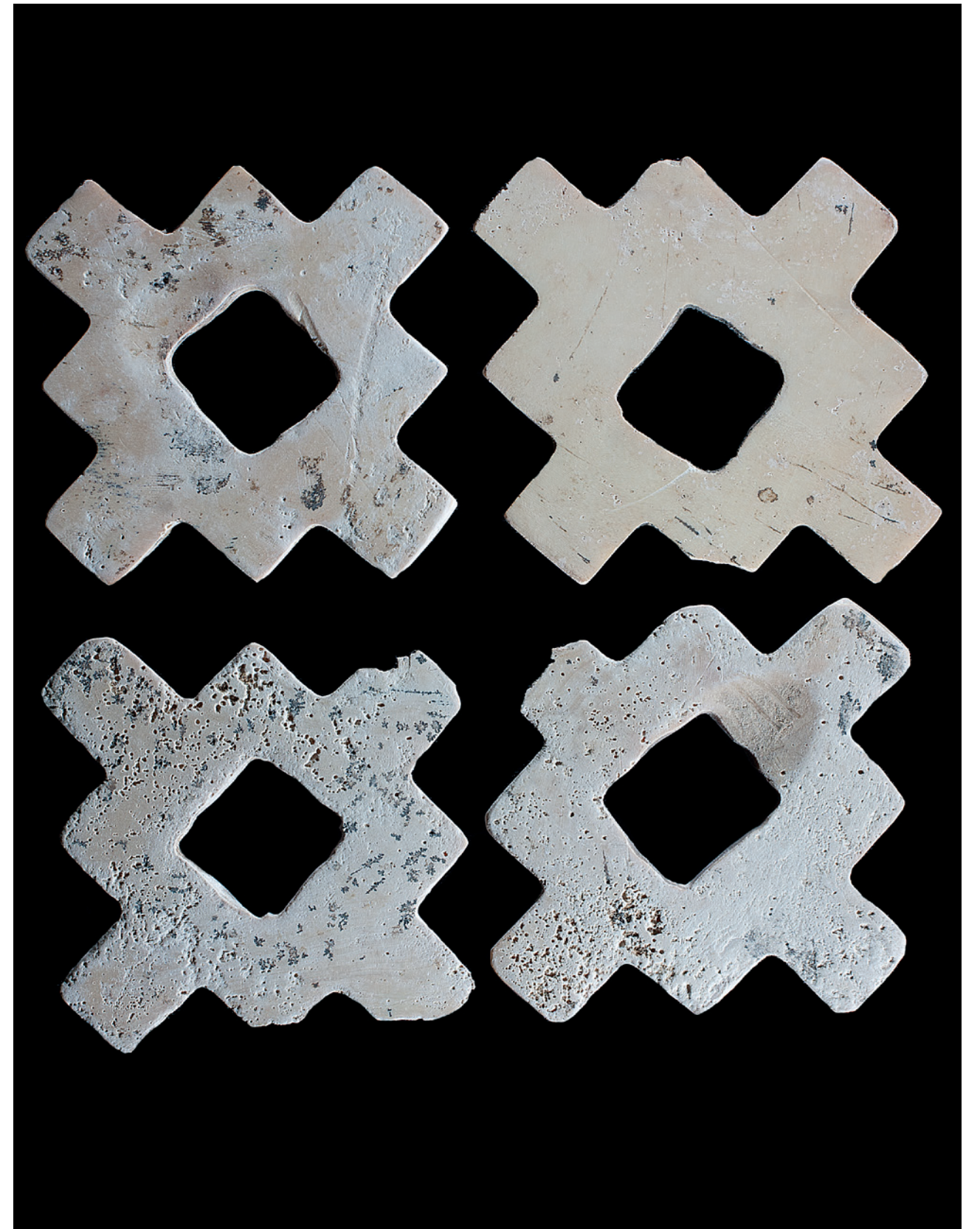
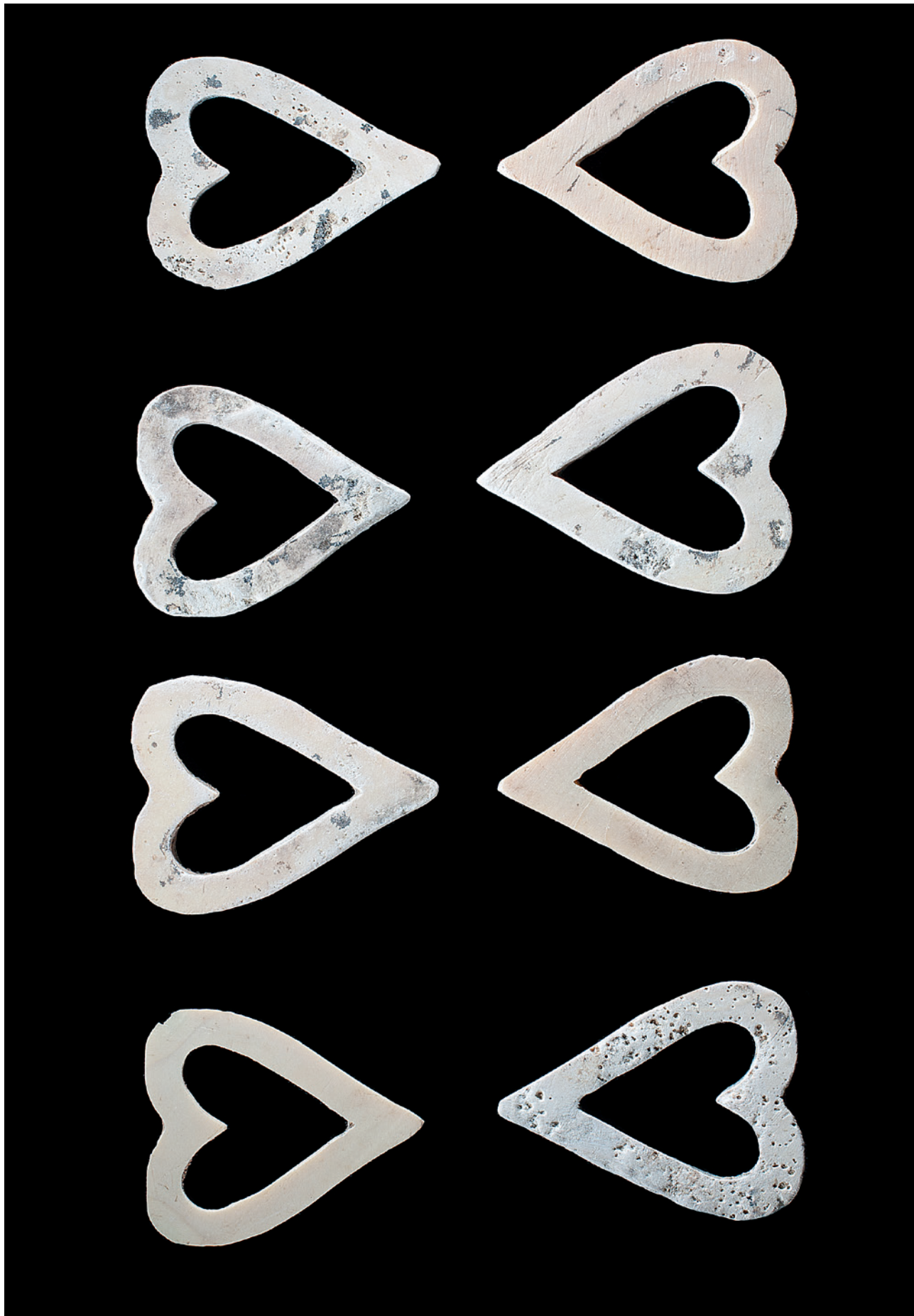


Accuracy and authenticity in details of animals' and birds' images as well as a bizarre combination of various minerals and colors – these are the characteristic features of Gonur mosaics.

world in a way that visitors could not enter the city without ablution. For the Bronze Age, such settlement layout was observed the first time. In the south of the complex a system of three reservoirs was set up: a large pool, a small pool equipped with a water purification filter and an ordinary pool, just like on other facades of Gonur. A water pipeline right from the large pool went to the opening near the bottom of the rectangular structures of mud bricks, filled with reeds. The second opening of this filter is positioned one meter above the floor. Water filled the internal space of this construction and reached the level of the upper opening. As this process was time-consuming, most of the suspension of sand and mud remained in the reeds, and pure water poured out of the filter through the upper opening into the small pool, at the bottom of which this filter was located.



The meticulous work of skilled restorers NA Kovaleva and GE Veresotskaya now allowed thousands of people to enjoy the real colors of «carpet» mosaic composition of the tabernacle from the royal tombs 3230.



Even a simple form of stone mosaic inserts, which number is more than a few thousand, being put together, make a strong impression.

It must be noted that such an ancient method of water purification is still used in some regions of Turkmenistan. Adding camel thorn to the filters as a disinfectant, along with cane, is an effective means of cleaning and preventing infections from spreading.

The fortress, the Palace and the religious buildings, located along its four facades, were enclosed from the outside by defensive walls. These walls formed a square and were reinforced with military towers. Not limited to this, the royal city administration ordered to erect around this gigantic complex an encircling wall of more than 400 meters in diameter, enclosing an area of about 25 hectares, which, at the time, corresponded to the size of a small city.

Excavations have shown that the society of ancient Margiana was marked with complex social stratification. This did not end with the life of a person, but was taken into account during the funeral rites, and was to remain the same in the other world. In all of the burials the body of the deceased, dressed (as indicated by the presence of buttons), was usually laid on its right side in a flexed (sleeping) position. The funerary offerings were usually placed near the head. Most commonly these were ceramic products, present even in the tombs of infants. In some of the rich graves were as many as two or three dozen of vessels. In addition to pottery, the deceased were provided with its bronze, gold or silver equivalents to be used in the afterlife, such as plates, cups, bowls, glasses... Both men's and women's graves contain jewelry: bracelets, earrings, rings, a wide variety of stone and metal beads, hair pins, bronze mirrors, bronze (sometimes bone) knives, ritual axes.



That is one more mystery of Margush country: do these different in size but similar in shape inserts for mosaics depict the kidneys (the organ which is often used in divination), or legume, or the leaves of other plants?



There were found only six such huge wings of fantastic birds (or deities, griffins?). All of them are turned to one side and unfortunately have fallen from the ancient walls, on which they have been laid down thousands of years ago. As well as the other inserts they are made of stone specially calcinated in a oven.



Many women, especially those involved in house management, had bronze, stone or even silver amulet seals near their shoulders (perhaps they were suspended on a thread around the neck) or near the waist. These amulets were to ward the evil forces off the vessels, bags and other containers in which grain and other supplies were stored. In men's graves there were flint-tipped arrows (from a single to several dozen), weapons (spears tipped with bronze, daggers), rods of different forms as a symbol of power, various tools. For example, a tomb of a «stone-carving master» contained small bronze knives and a number of unfinished stone artifacts. In many tombs, terracotta or stone statuettes, as well as a variety of amulets, were found. Loving family sought to ensure

Beautiful mosaic portrait of Gonur beauty was deposited on clay basis, once was included in a rectangular frame from which only angles made by bone survived.

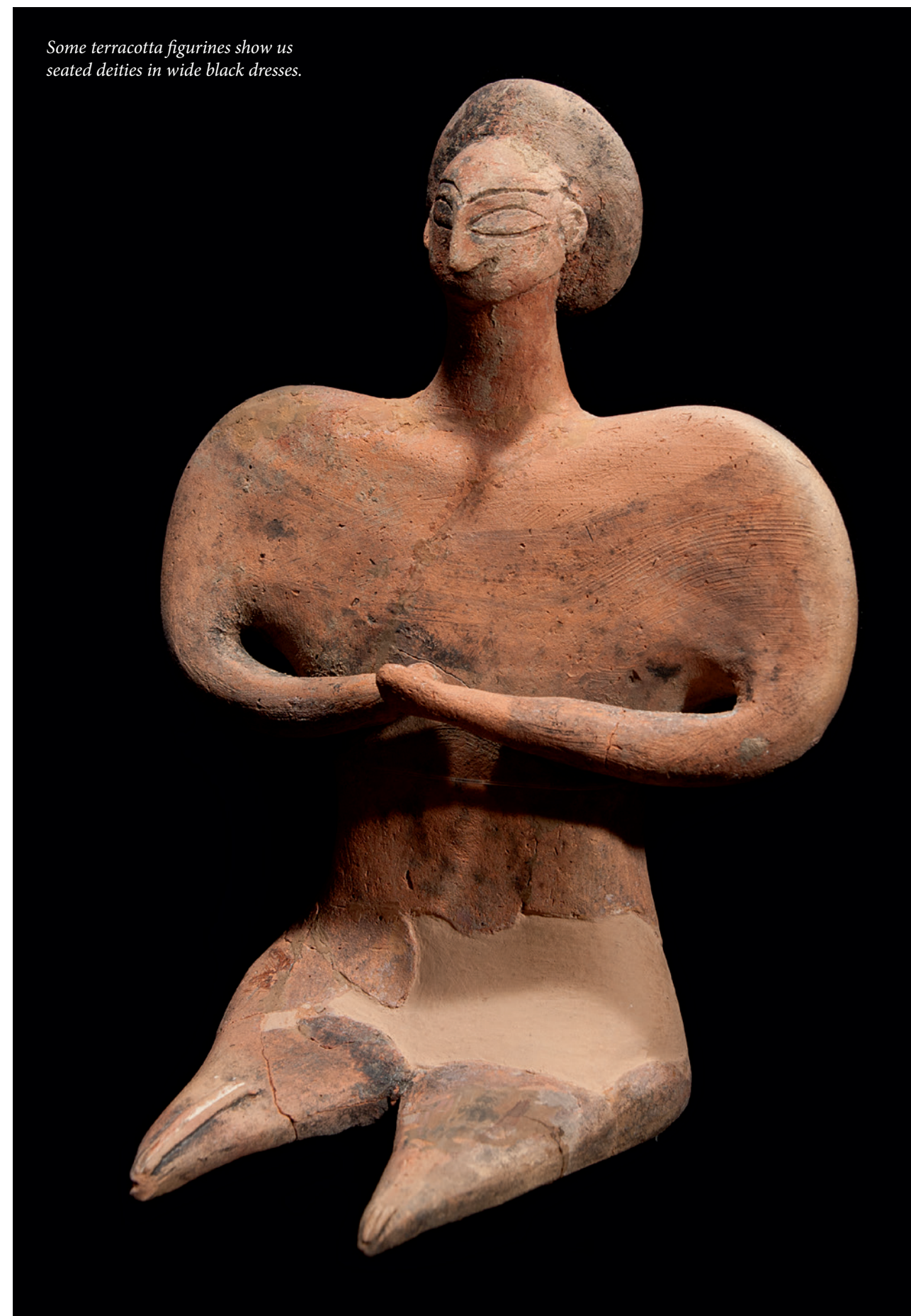




Whose faces were reproduced on composite statuettes: buried in the grave? deity? someone else? While questions remain unanswered. But the common feature of all items is that they are made of white stone, the hair and hats are usually made of dark stone. On a well-preserved statuettes it is seen that the eyebrows were painted and lips and eyes were colored.



Sometimes, instead of the whole composite statuette only the heads of such were placed in the grave. For example, this beautiful head was entombed in a small alcove near the floor in the royal tomb of 3210, where archaeologists happen to find well-preserved mosaic composition.



Unfired clay figurines of sitting people seem to have been made in the image of composite statuettes, but not for the aristocracy and for ordinary citizens.



that their dead had all that, in their opinion, would be necessary in the afterlife.

There were very different kinds of tombs. Thus, ordinary citizens were buried in the so-called shaft tombs, i.e. vertical shafts with catacombs at the bottom, where the dead were placed. After all the necessary rituals, the entrance to the catacomb was tightly laid with mud bricks, and the shaft was covered with earth, which rose to the surface as a burial mound. This type of burial is still used in Central Asia.

I.e. the graveside constructions were changing; the varieties of mausoleums had been built in the past and are built nowadays. Following the spread of Islam, the body of the deceased was wrapped in a cloth, laid in a pit in the upright position, with no funerary offerings placed in the tomb. The head orientation of the buried also changed. But the type of the burial pit containing the catacomb remains unchanged to this day. It is often associated with the Muslim tradition, but, in fact, as is now proven, its roots go back



Silver head of the hair pin that were once a seal is one of the best examples of BMAK art. Thorough implementation of kaunakes dress, beautiful hairdress, a characteristic profile – everything speaks of the highest craftsmanship of Gonur jewelers.



This composite statuette was found in the tomb of the last ruler of Gonur. It is the only one known in the world which was found on the same place where it was placed at the burial.



All stone composite statuettes were found in the aristocratic burials. Their clothes are always made of dark steatite, and the head and hands – of white marble.

The necklace with separators from the royal tombs of 3200 contains nearly 1,000 of gold, lapis lazuli and carnelian beads.





Bracelets of gold and stone beads are often found in the tombs of the aristocracy. In addition to the usual forms Margiana masters sometimes used teardrop. According to experts on stone processing in some cases beads are polished even more smoothly than it can be done with the use of modern laser equipment.



deep into millennia. Apart from the shaft tombs, most popular in the Margush country (about 80%), there were simple pit graves. As a rule, funeral offerings deposited in the pit graves were far less rich than the shaft ones, and included a few vessels and one or two beads.

For nobles, special underground mausoleums were arranged instead of pit or shaft graves. At least three types of such burials have been discovered. First of all, these are cysts, i.e. rectangular pits lined from the inside with mud bricks. Cyst coverings were arranged of two bricks set at an angle to each other and fixed using a locking brick or its fragment. The cyst could have one or two chambers. Usually one of them contained the deceased person, while the burial offerings were in the second chamber. The cyst had no entrance, and, in the vast majority of cases, it represented a single interment.

The second type of mausoleums represented chamber tombs, designed as one-, two- or three-room underground houses. It was possible to enter the mausoleums through stepped entrances, and this is probably their main distinction from the cysts. The chamber interiors were decorated as real houses: a table in the center, a bench and oven next to the wall. At least one of the side walls (usually, however, two or three) contained little niches, where several precious vessels, or even entire “services”, were found during excavations. Among the nearly three thousand graves in the Great necropolis of Gonur, only 45 such aristocratic mausoleums were found, and almost as many cysts, which usually contained the remains of more than one person.

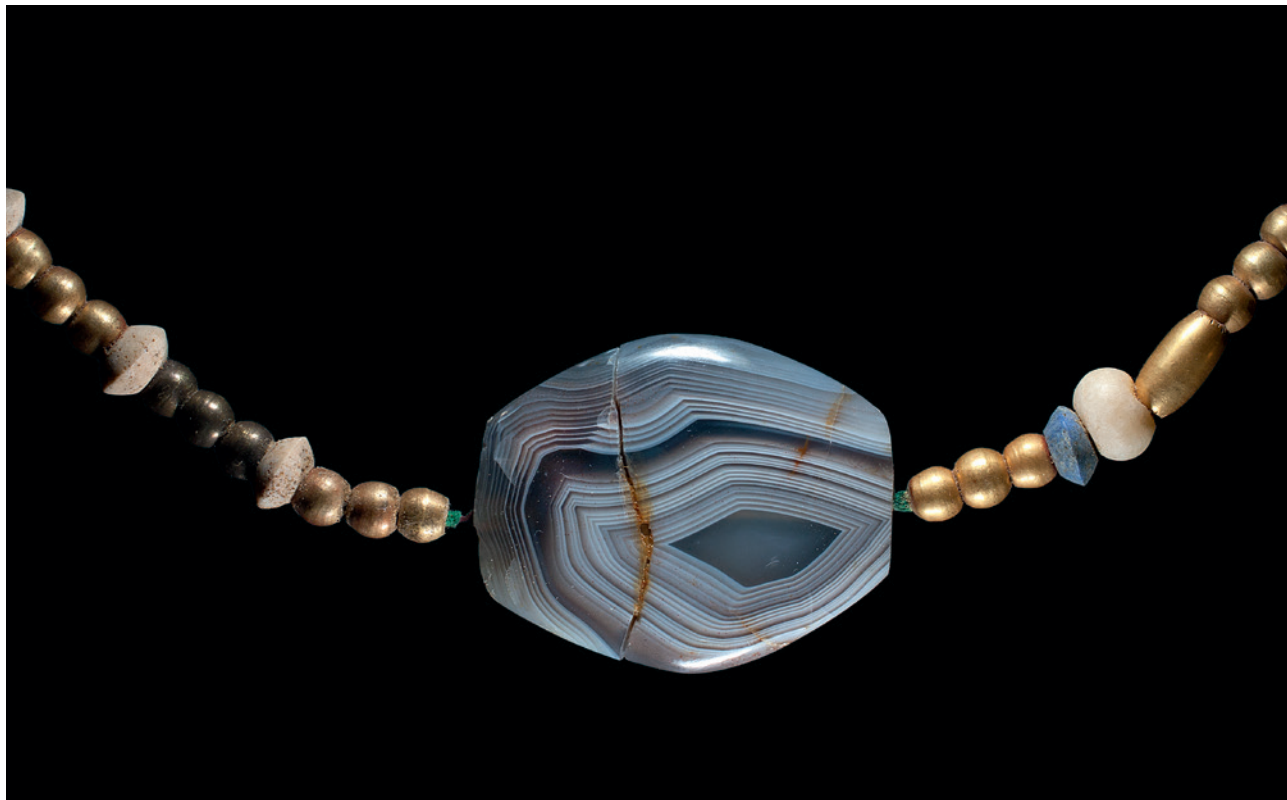
A special type of graves was constructed for the ruling elite - the governor, and, apparently,



the highest priests. Such graves were found on the eastern shore of the Gonur's large southern basin. They formed the so-called Gonur Royal Necropolis, where eight royal sepultures-»homesteads» and three accompanying huge «ditches-pits» were arranged. The only difference between the royal and the chamber tombs is in their size and layout – instead of three, the former had four to eight chambers. Five of the eight tombs belong



Despoiling rich burials antiquity burglars lost part of their loot for luck of archaeologists. Thus a necklace of the gold wire with a pendant in the form of three gold snake heads, complemented by turquoise and carnelian beads has reached us.

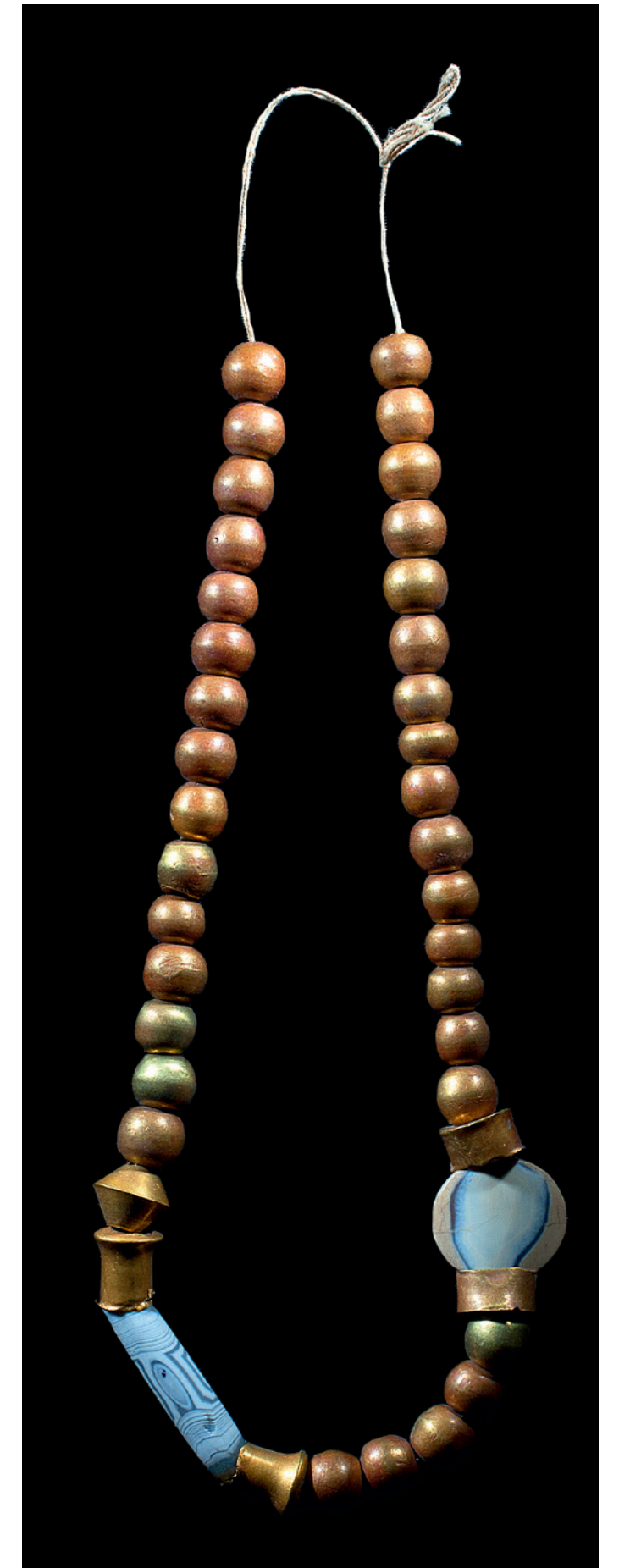


Margiana rich ladies wore stone, silver, gold and ivory bracelets on both hands and feet. In ordinary burials bracelets usually are thin and bronze. Jewelers showed their skills and here: they use twisted wire, sometimes bracelets' ends were made in the form of heads of snakes.

Large agate beads with a well-selected picture is usually inserted in a massive gold holders. Just made out and large fragments of turquoise. No less impressive are inlaid with semiprecious stone tops of hair pins.



Gold beads in the royal decorations are perfectly combined with a turquoise and lapis lazuli as well with agate.





Many wonderful gold beads decorated with semiprecious stones were found in aristocratic burials.

to the very same type: mud multi-chamber constructions are arranged in the southern part of the large ditch (at least 5–6 meters in length and width) with large «yards» adjacent to them from the north. The other three tombs are subterranean multi-chamber «palaces». Large ground pits up to 2 m in depth and 7 meters in diameter, the so-called «ditches», are adjacent to them.

The most valuable discoveries have been made in chamber tombs and royal sepultures (hypogea). Most of these tombs, with very few exceptions, have been looted in antiquity. Quite often «the accuracy» of the looting hole so exactly corresponded to the location of the richest funeral gifts that one can't help thinking that

a person, involved in the funeral, took part in the looting. But fortunately for the archaeologists, the items that remained unnoticed by the tomb raiders included golden and silver objects, various ivory masterpieces, splendid stone and terracotta artifacts and many other things. This leaves no doubt that the people buried in the chamber mausoleums belonged to the richest and most prosperous strata of ancient Margiana society, and those whose remains lay in the tombs, to the governing elite.

Elaborate funerary constructions of this type were first to be found in Turkmenistan, and nowhere else to date. The only geographical locations where burials resembling chamber

tombs have been discovered include the Middle Bronze Age cemetery of Tuttul (Tell Bi'a) along the middle Euphrates in the Middle East, found by German archaeologists, and the necropolis of the ancient Egyptian city of Avaris (second millennium BC) in the Nile Delta, found by Austrian scientists. By design, they well may be the early precursors of European crypt burials. This is why it would not be an exaggeration to say that these burial structures located in the Murghab Delta are one of the wonders of the Bronze Age world. And they are what another priceless treasure of human history is related to: the most amazing and dazzling discoveries of Margush country craftsmen.

These are wall mosaics with elements of painting found in almost all Gonur royal sepultures. They are unique. Archaeologists have previously never seen anything of the kind, neither in more ancient monuments, nor in later ones. This technique is not known neither in the southern regions of Central Asia, nor in such centers of ancient civilizations as Egypt, Mesopotamia, or China. The front walls of all the «houses of the dead» in Gonur royal sepultures were decorated with magnificent multi-figure subject compositions. Some of them have survived even after ancient tomb raiders trampled upon the fallen walls. Most compositions were painted, and some elements were made as mosaic.



These beautiful inlaid pectorals with two silver pendant figures in one case of bulls, in another – of falcons belonged to men, remarkably similar to each other, but were found in two different graves.



Soapstone, steatite was popular among the Margush masters. Due to its susceptibility to processing manufactured products (from simple biconical beads to miniature models of shoes and small stone reliquary chests) always attracted attention, even if not the most decorated fanciful patterns.

Interestingly, none of the chambers of the monumental Palace of North Gonur had such mosaics. Thus, it seems that the decoration of the governors' and priests' «afterlife houses» was regarded to be more essential than of their daily private apartments.

Restoration experts and other specialists have put much effort into learning the techniques of manufacturing these mosaics. As it turned out, ancient craftsmen used a variety of methods. Apparently, the general area of the mosaic was divided into rectangles and squares united in bands running along the entire wall. This is suggested by similarities observed be-

tween the Gonur mosaics and paintings in one of the halls of the Mari Palace in Syria. The painters and the mosaic artists must have had a general drawing of the composition or, at least, of its separate elements. This is confirmed by the fact that stone insertions of certain dimensions were manufactured in large amounts by craftsmen. They used preheated (maybe calcined) sedimentary rocks, with predominating siliceous component, mostly gaize (opoka), diatomite or bergmeal. Other craftsmen prepared the basis for drawing the image. For that, a mixture of lime and silica was used, as indicated by the results of analytical studies. In some cases, the base was

One of the remarkable features of the BMAC culture is the abundance of tulips images made in different techniques and presented with sufficient reliability, the plant which is still encountered at Gonur. Research shows that people of ancient Margush country could have rituals associated with the rebirth of nature, carried out at the time of flowering tulips.



Most often, cosmetic flacons have just such a form. With few exceptions, they are thick and heavy. Though there are those that are made from very thin metal. The side surfaces of bottles can be decorated by sculptures of animals or geometric engraving.



Small flacons for storage of cosmetics are of stone, bronze, silver and clay. But so called applicators (that sticks with one thicker end for the application of cosmetics for face and body) is always bronze. Applicators are almost always inside of cosmetic bottles.



Formerly wooden cases for storage of bronze mirrors were decorated with mosaics also.



Gold and white wheat ears adorned figures
of Margiana deities.





applied directly to the wall, in others – to the wooden panels. Then the artists and mosaicists began their work. Using organic paints (ocher, charcoal, lapis, cinnabar and other substances), they created picturesque compositions, partly made of stone inserts. Craftsmen skillfully selected these inserts according to the texture of the stone, its shades varying from white to gray or yellowish, and where necessary, adjusted the image lines between the inserts in place.

All the identified scenes show one of the most popular ideas of the time, also noted for the seals and amulets of Bactria and Margiana: struggle between the forces of Good and Evil. These stories, as well as those depicted on many Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC) seals and amulets, represented kind of «abstract» or «summary» of the myths that were

Literalism of peregrine falcon's species peculiarities on the figurines from the royal tombs of 3200 can say that the Gonur people knew falconry.





A large number of ivory found at Gonur showing a close relationship between the populations of the basins of two great rivers – the Indus and Murghab. But the subject of import was raw bone. Engraving and its other processing were conducted in Margiana. An evidence of that are typical BMAC scenes: snake or «winged griffin swallows the kid».

widespread in ancient Margush country. Such items made of stone or metal (copper-bronze, silver), were thought to possess magical power destined to protect its owner from any misadventure. Most of them were decorated with simple geometric ornaments, and a few with images and plot compositions. Along with amulets, the so called compartment copper and bronze seals with similar images were present. The seals often depict various entities such as eagles in the heraldic posture with widely spread wings and proudly turned heads; longhorn mountain goats, ravenous lions and panthers turning back their snarling heads; people, sometimes with wings,

quietly seated on thrones or riding predators (even fantastic ones), or else fighting with a pair of snakes or snake-dragons... This is a far incomplete repertoire of masterpieces made by Margiana craftsmen as early as four thousand years ago.

While seals and amulets constituted almost an indispensable accessory of every Margush country inhabitant, only the elite possessed stone cylindrical seals of the Mesopotamian type. The latter were quite rare due to the difficulty of manufacturing, because all the heroes of the composition had to be allocated on a round surface. Though the form of such



*Silver cups were very popular
among Gonur aristocrats*



The vessels were made not only of natural but also from stone specially calcined in the ovens.



Huge size bronze cauldron have once again confirmed the highest skill of Margiana artisans.

cylinders resembles those from Mesopotamia, the subjects and compositions engraved on them are distinct, forming a specific Margiana group of glyptics. Only one cylinder with paired images of a struggle between the hero and the ravenous animal had a decipherable cuneiform inscription in Akkadian. It turned out that the seal dates back to the reign of Naram Sin, King of Akkad and Sumer (2250–2200 BC), and the inscription states, «Lucas, holder of the chalice and servant». This was a high position in the palace, often related to sacrifices. We can only guess how this unique seal got to the Kara-Kum Desert, but the existence of direct links between

Mesopotamia and the ancient Margiana is evident. This in itself is an important historical discovery.

Margush country inhabitants kept close contacts with the Indus Valley population, as well. Beside the above mentioned similarities in architecture and pottery, even more striking evidence of such contacts is in the great amount of ivory items («fortune-telling sticks», bracelets, game tokens, cosmetic spatulas etc.), as well as in the discovery of a typical Harappan seal, also with an inscription. There is every evidence that the Margush country inhabitants were on the verge of creating their own writing system.



*Golden goblets and jugs were accessory
of the highest aristocracy.*





Gold plate is a rare finding from the treasury in one of Gonur royal sepultures.

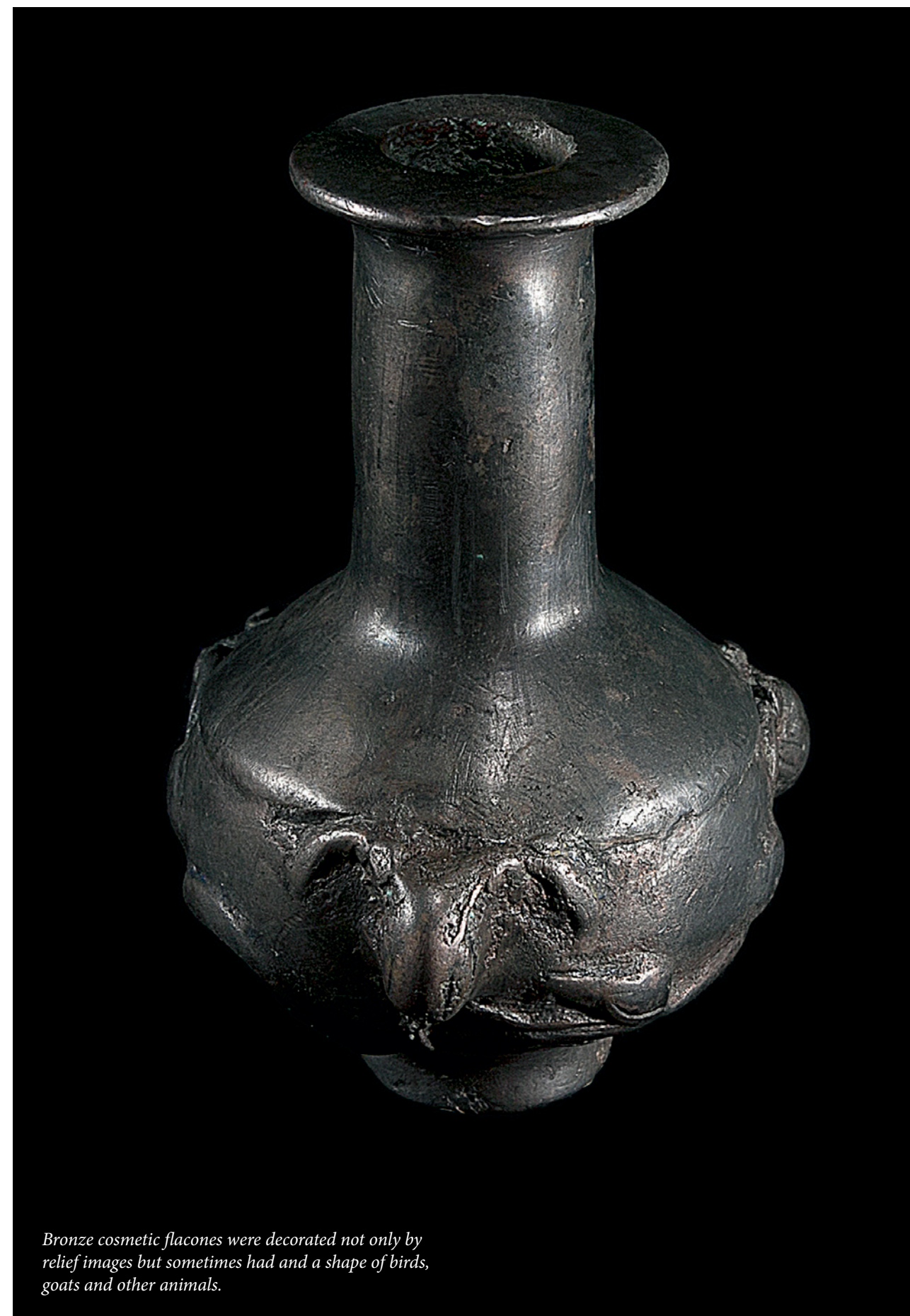


Some of the king's vessels were marked by skillful engravings on the bottom.





Silver vessels often repeat the form of pottery.



Bronze cosmetic flacons were decorated not only by relief images but sometimes had and a shape of birds, goats and other animals.



Corollas of several silver vessels from the hiding place in one of Gonur royal tombs were decorated with the same popular in Margiana and Bactria ornamentation in the form of a pair of intertwining snakes.

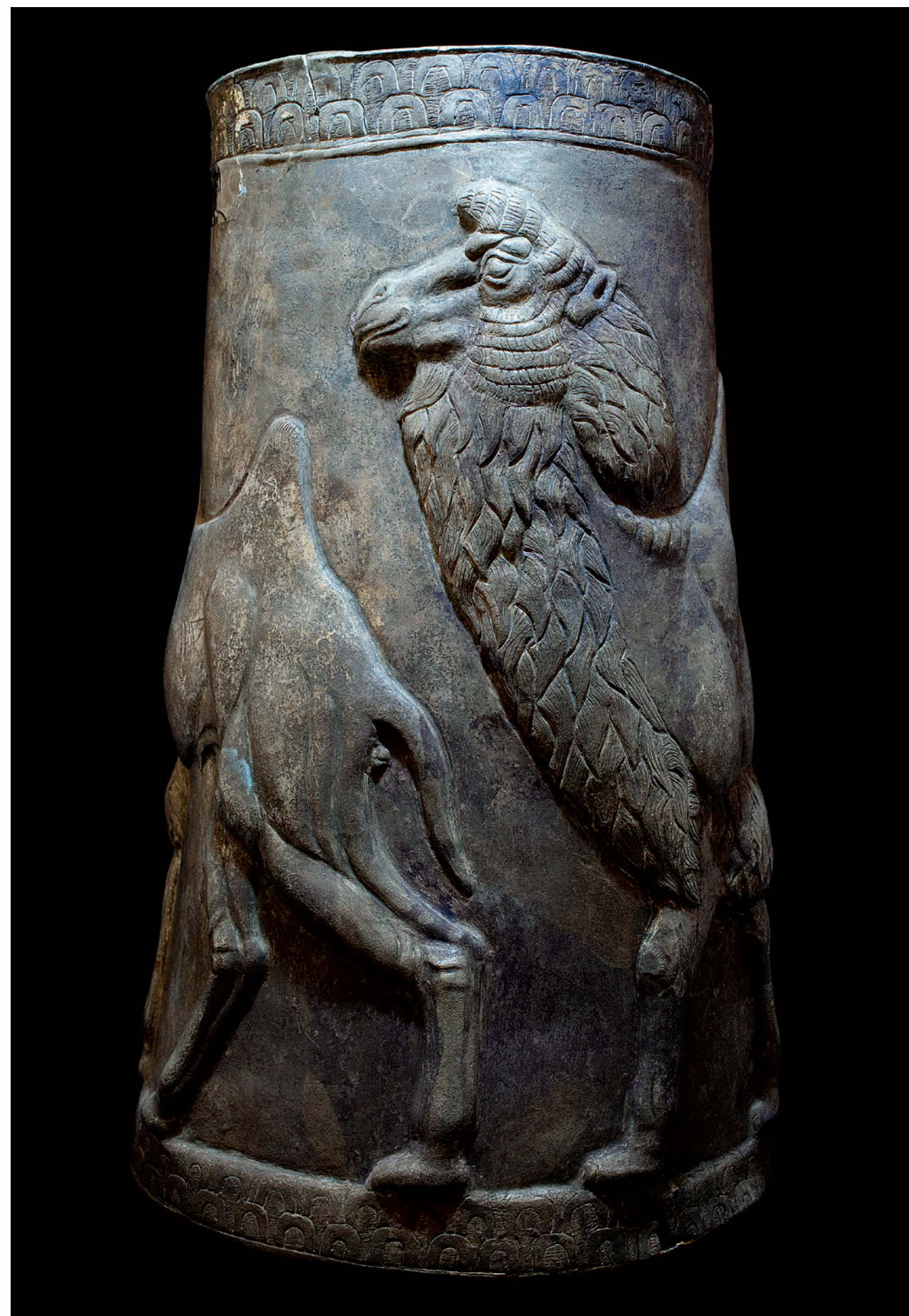




This includes, tokens found at the main gate of Gonur with different signs engraved on them, as well as other signs depicted on the pottery fragments and on the terracotta female figurines.

Various crafts had reached a high level of development in the Margush country. Numerous pottery kilns were constructed both in Gonur and its vicinities as well as in other Murghab Delta sites. Those were double-decker ovens with fireboxes in the bottom, from where the

hot air through special perforations got into the chamber, containing raw vessels of different shapes and sizes. Usually, such kilns (round or rectangular) had an average size of 2–3 m, but in the ancient palace ruins, a huge kiln over 7 m in length with two fireboxes was discovered. This construction enabled not only to dramatically increase the productivity, but also to attain very high temperatures. The hotter the furnace gets, the higher the quality of the products.





Reliefs on silver vessels cent whole subject compositions. Most often it is a hunting scene or field work, holiday feast or images of animals. On a silver vessel from one of Gonur royal tombs various animals scrambling in the mountains or living there, magic plants that animals sniffing and fish swimming in the lake are shown.



We can see this in the vessels of various shapes found on various Margiana sites. As the only trade existing at that time was probably in the form of exchange, the manufactured items were exchanged for various food products, which further stimulated the progress of ceramic craft technology.

As a rule, the pottery had no ornament, and only few vessels of religious purpose had scratched or molded same-type compositions on them. Among the local pottery, the vases and pitchers with wavy rims do stand out, their origin leading us to the Syro-Anatolia; while cylindrical vessels with multiple apertures clearly reflect the influence of the Indus Valley ceramic art tradition.

In addition to the tableware, ancient potters also made male and female figurines depicting local Southern Turkmen goddesses. This tradition goes back to as early as the fourth millennium BC. Female figurines, unlike male ones, usually have no legs. But often their heads are adorned with caps or crowns, and there are images of beads or pendants around the neck. The male figurines are distinguished by the presence of belts tied around the waist and legs, with feet sometimes resembling flippers or wearing broad sandals. The hands of these male figurines are often depicted as wings, stylized to some degree, while the heads have a bird-like appearance.

The everyday life of the Margians had already widely included copper-bronze and silver items,



Margiana stone and silver vessels have often the same shape. All of them met only in aristocratic burials.



Onix vessels attract special attention. They are met not only in the rich burials, but just as often in the temples, in the rooms, related to the various rituals and in altars.



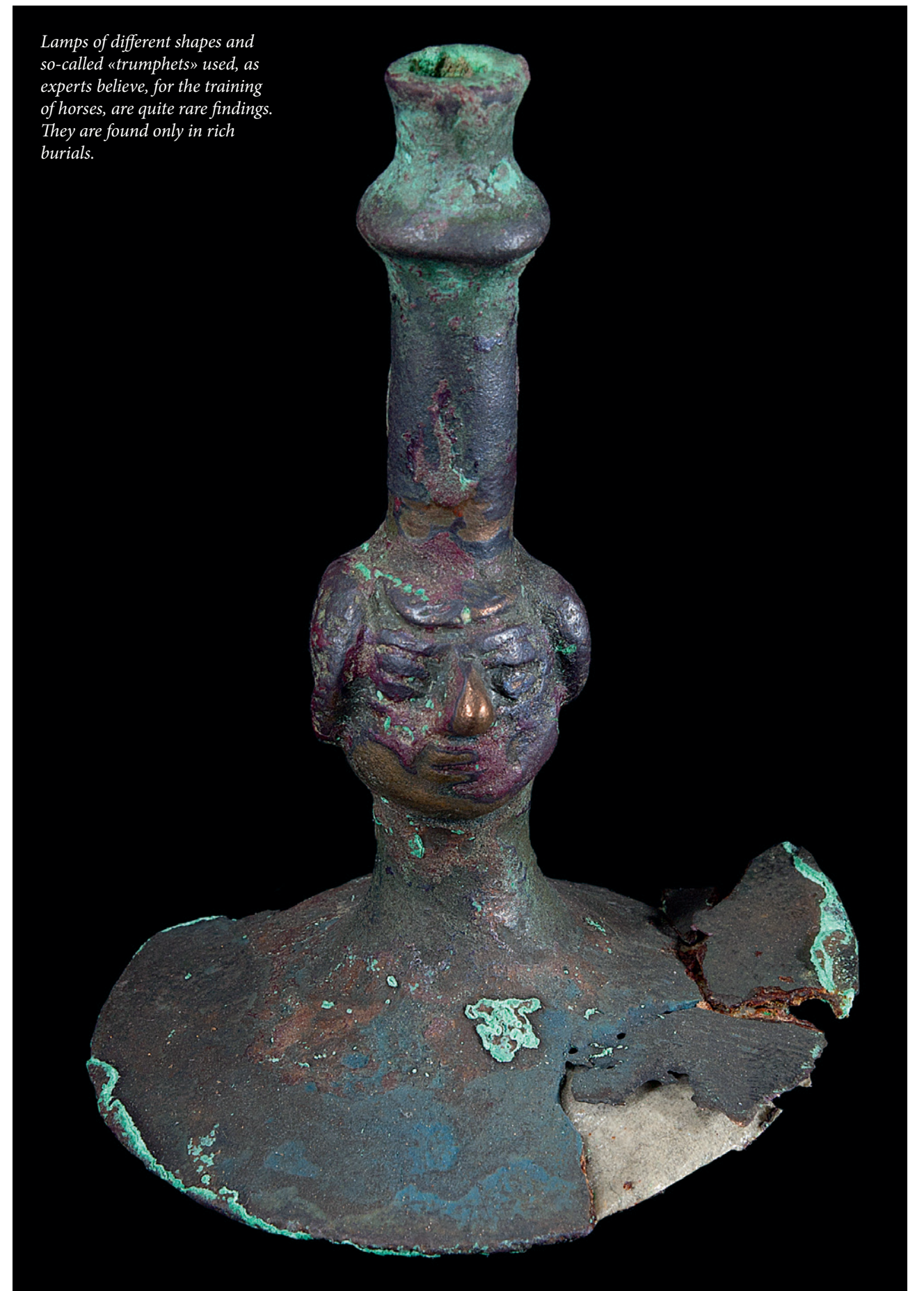


As well as metal containers, vessels and bowls of onyx repeat the forms of ceramic, often very simple products.





Bronze cups and bowls are quite typical funerary offerings. Usually they are thin-walled, so oxidized over time, they actually destroyed.



Lamps of different shapes and so-called «trumpets» used, as experts believe, for the training of horses, are quite rare findings. They are found only in rich burials.



Circle (solar) ornament, despite its simplicity, makes any product elegant.



Soft soapstone (steatite) enables master even by applying a relatively simple cuts to achieve the three-dimensional images.



The variety of images of snakes on the stone Margiana amulets leaves an indelible impression.

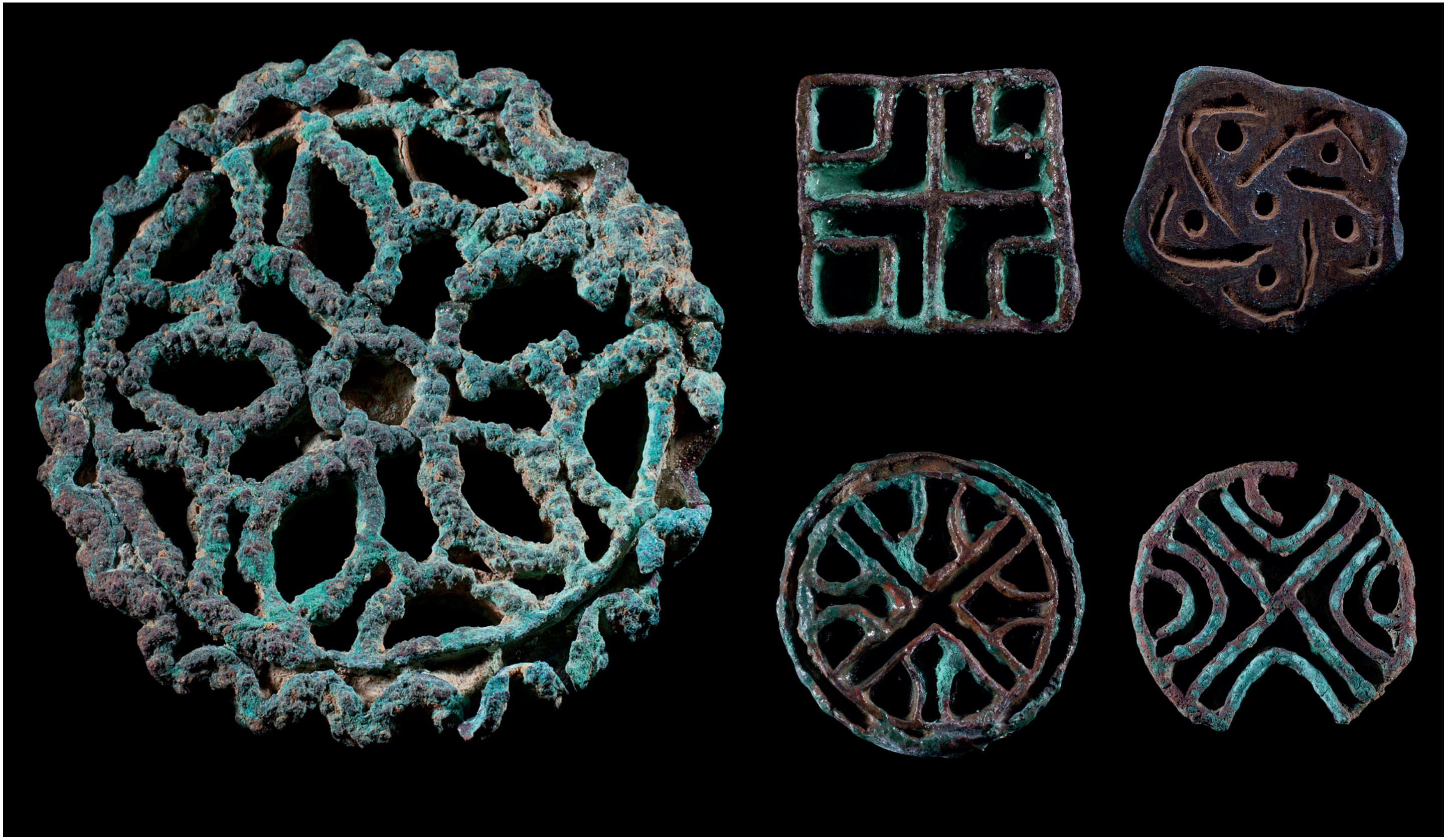
and among the richest strata also the golden objects. Copper and bronze objects include numerous and diverse manufacturing tools, mirrors and jewelry. Among the metal items the most distinguished are copper-bronze pins with scalloped tops depicting different animals, as well as skillfully made cosmetic perfume bottles. Zoomorphic vials and sophisticated pin tops are very characteristic of BMAC.

Many items of the highest artistic level were found in Gonur. A real masterpiece of toreutics is a small silver vessel found in the secret place of one of the royal tombs. It is decorated with a relief depicting animalistic scene. The action takes place in the mountains. The center of the composition is most likely the figure of a lion descending from a mountain. He is shown crouching upon his front paws, mouth slightly



Five stone cylinder seals, each of which could be the subject of a special study, given the complex interesting compositions carved on them have been found at Gonur. The seal with Akkadian inscription, confirming the close links of Margiana with the Middle Eastern center of an ancient civilization, has the particular interest. Typical Harappan rectangular stamp found at Gonur also is an additional argument in favor of ties with the Indian center.





Geometric and floral ornaments were ones of the most common on the Margush bronze seals. Often there is an image of solar symbols, including crosses.



Bronze BMAC compartment seals were women belongings. They were worn at the waist or neck. Stamps of the documents is not on. They found their place on the pots, vessels before roasting in the oven or on the so-called «bulls» that holds bags' ties. The main objective of all the images on stamps was to drive off damage and the evil forces of the stored product.



parted, but his posture is not aggressive. His entire attention seems directed to an interesting plant with a small thin stalk. According to botanists, this is a germ of a young juniper. On the other side of the plant, but clearly on the «other mountain», is depicted an Indian humped bull, Zebu. Behind its back there is a second similar plant. On one side, a small bear is going down the mountain, on the other, a wolf with tongue hanging out and tail lowered, which seems to mean that the animal is tired or very hot. The wolf might have gotten tired chasing the hare, which is depicted in quite a relaxed posture on

the neighboring hillside. Another plant, also not in bloom, grows on the opposite mountain. A young goat is touching it with its front hoof. On the other side, turning his head toward the plant, a big mountain goat is lying in a calm posture. Directly in front of him, on top of the mountain, grows a flower, most likely a tulip bud. At the foot of this mountain a lake with two fish are depicted. On one side of the lake lies a lioness, and on the other one, a thin-limbed goat. The bottom part of the vessel is adorned with three rows of small arches that symbolize mountains, too. The rim is decorated with two rows of

The masters of Margush country have used only bronze baffles of varying thickness and length to create whole dynamic images of animals on the seals.



Glyptics of Bactria and Margiana can be divided into two main classes: copper-bronze compartment seals and stone amulets. There are some insignificant exceptions: a small quantity of stone seals and of copper-bronze amulets. Several ceramic seals and amulets are also known. All pieces with a handle or a loop in the middle of the back are considered to be seals; amulets have a perforation (sometimes two perforations) for a cord.



The great majority of images of kneeling persons depict deities. They were engraved on stone amulets. The deities usually have a humanlike figure and an avian (most probably an eagle) head with a curved crest or coggled comb. The images of male figures are more rare.



The bull was almost everywhere considered to be a personification of strength and might. Bactrian seals and amulets depict a humped (zebu?) bull, usually standing in a quiet static posture.



Big horns adorning the head of the Being shown seated as well as solar oval surrounding the central image on a stone cylinder seal that was found near the round altar at the North Gonur say about its divinity.



On the both sides of sitting central Deity on the same seal are female figures – the goddess of vegetation, from the bodies of which the branches of plants are growing and animals and fish are around them.



similar arches that form an ornament. Since both the upper and lower friezes are much smaller than the mountains of the main composition, it is logical to assume that only a small fragment of a large mountain range is shown here. The entire composition is calm and soothing, with no hint whatsoever of a rivalry or confrontation between such different representatives of the animal kingdom as lions, wolves, bears and bulls, on the one side, and fish, hare and goats, on the other. The whole scene is performed with great skill and naturalism, most likely, as an il-

lustration to a myth or a symbolic image of a ritual meaning. Finally, from the outer side of the vessel's bottom a crying head of a baby-goat is engraved.

The above-described upper and lower friezes are repeated on another Gonur item: a large cylindrical silver vessel, also discovered in a royal tomb. Two large two-humped Bactrian camels are depicted on its surface in relief technique, one following the other. The hair on the head, nape and the neck of both camels is shown neatly combed and carefully arranged. Of particular



It is not easy definitely say what master wanted to depict on this seal: the trees or the road? why in the lower part separate «branches» are connected?

All variety of amulets and seals are difficult to imagine. They are depicted flowers and magical plants, animals, birds, insects and snakes...



Winged deity seated on the snakes also.



Scorpio is a quite popular figure of Margiana seals.



On this seal the hero holds two argali by their horns.



The decoration of ceramic vessels as well the images of seals, that kept the contents from evil forces talk to specialists about the myths, legends and views on the world of the ancient inhabitants of Margiana.



Diverse types of stone and the most skilful methods of application images as well were used for the manufacture of seals and amulets.



Some seals reproduces the shape of bizarre flowers, in which curves specialists may be see a deeper meaning.



One side of the saiga figurine which was found in 2012 spring in the grave where there were sheep buried was made of gold, the second one – of silver. Additionally it is decorated with turquoise inlays.

interest is a small Tamga-like image (two brackets and a triangle) depicted near the left thigh of the animals as well as an engraved image of another camel on the vessel's bottom. A characteristic feature of this engraving, recurring on other four vessels from the same tomb (its crypt enclosed a total of 24 vessels, including 2 golden, 17 silver and 5 copper-bronze), is a bow depicted above each camel. A very similar engraving was found on the bottom of a large golden jug weighing about 1 kg and having no images other than this. Another golden plate from the same treasure presents an image of a small plant, possibly a spike of wheat, engraved on the outer surface of its bottom. All of these works represent the earliest images of the Bactrian camel in the art of the ancient East. Such a thorough depiction of the two-humped animals, both in relief and in graphical form, clearly indicates that these items were not imported. Because Margiana and Bactria were the only habitat of these species, the artists could depict these animals so realistically only if they knew them very well.

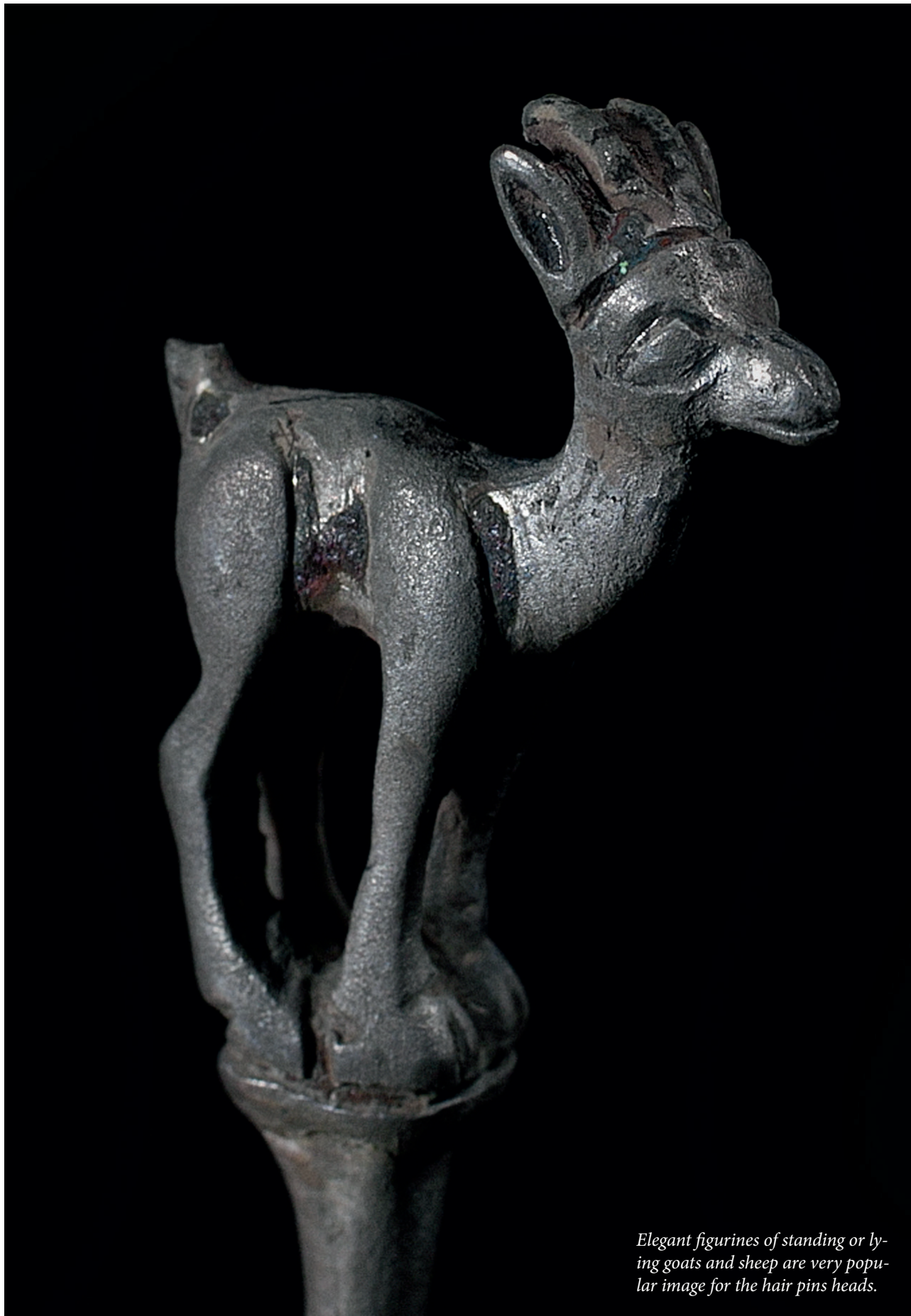
Among the other sixteen silver vessels of this set, two more interesting articles stand out, their total weight makes up 8 kg. One of these is a large-diameter dish with high walls, specially bent in half, and an object resembling a gramophone, with a wide flare. In the rich tombs of the Gonur necropolis, silver vessels were found with corrugated walls of rounded forms, almost exactly repeating similar stone artifacts. Among the outstanding discoveries at the Gonur Royal Necropolis, we cannot but mention a huge copper-bronze cauldron with a diameter of about a meter and its copy twice smaller in another tomb. None of these items have any analogs, ex-

cept for two or three vessels below 25–30 cm in size. The very ability to manufacture such giant cauldrons at that time confirms, once again, that ancient craftsmen were very skillful.

Extremely interesting are metal axes that were obviously used for ceremonial purposes. Of these, two items should be mentioned. One such axe has the blade shaped as a rooster's head, and the butt is shaped as a fishtail. The second one represents a running wild boar entwined by a snake. Such ceremonial axes are typical for BMAC, but were never seen in any other ancient civilization.

Fashionistas of the Margush country adorned themselves with golden and silver earrings, rings, brooches, bracelets, tiaras and necklaces. The ancient jewelers, as the modern craftsmen, were able to cast convex, but thin as a tissue paper ornaments made of precious metals, making an impression of massive heavy jewelry. Embossment was also used. Evidently, clothes were also richly decorated. In one of the royal tombs multiple bone buttons covered with gold foil were found. Another tomb contained a cover with the edges lined with alabaster beads. Yet another tomb contained a little dog, instead of a human, covered by a small blanket thickly studded with alabaster beads.

The skilled stone-carvers produced a variety of jewelry (beads, necklaces, cosmetic boxes and flacons). These items were often covered with fine gold foil, giving the impression of authentic gold. Rich women of fashion, of course, wore golden necklaces, as well as bracelets, consisting not only of stone, but also of golden beads. Beads were made of a variety of local and imported semi-precious stones: turquoise, carnelian,



Elegant figurines of standing or lying goats and sheep are very popular image for the hair pins heads.



hematite, lapis lazuli and agate. The large agate beads in golden holders were impressive. The whimsical combinations of colors and shapes, the use of a variety of rigid fasteners and pendants – everything speaks of exquisite taste and the highest craftsmanship of the manufacturers.

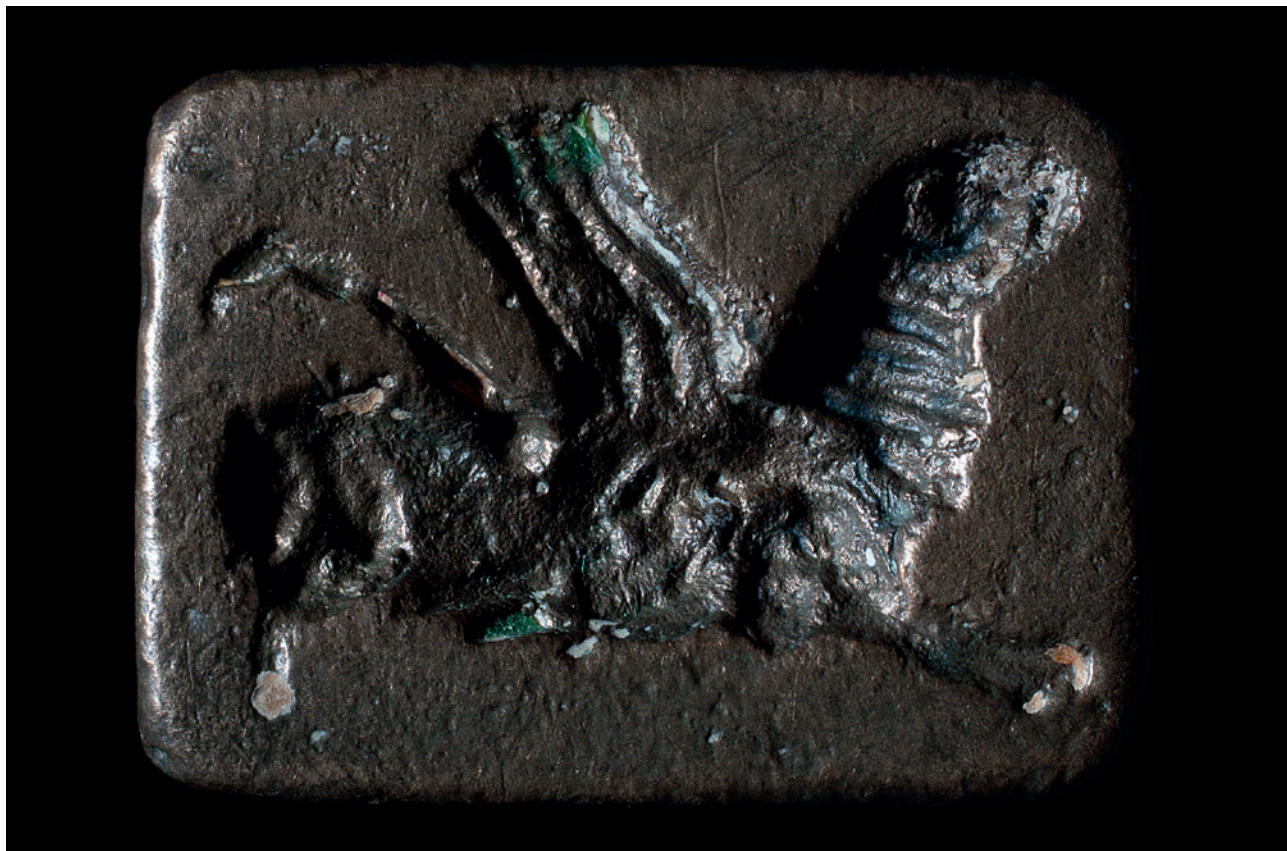
There is yet another find made in Gonur, which has no analogues. It is a male chest decoration made in the mosaic technique, very similar in form to traditional Turkmen tumars. It has a trapezoidal or triangular shape, decorated

with several rows of stone mosaic inserts with differently colored cores – blue and red. The inserts themselves accurately reproduce the above mentioned motive – arch-formed depiction of mountains. A large round bead of hematite is suspended from the bottom of the «tumar».

Along with jewelry, ancient stone-carvers produced a variety of vessels from soft soapstone (steatite) and pale yellow alabaster. Among them the most prominent are the cups with tall, slender stalks, apparently intended for religious



Camels' images with manicured hair in Margiana are perfectly made and on silver vessels, and on hair pins and on stone amulets.



Images of real and fantastic animals decorate the different sides of the same bronze amulet.

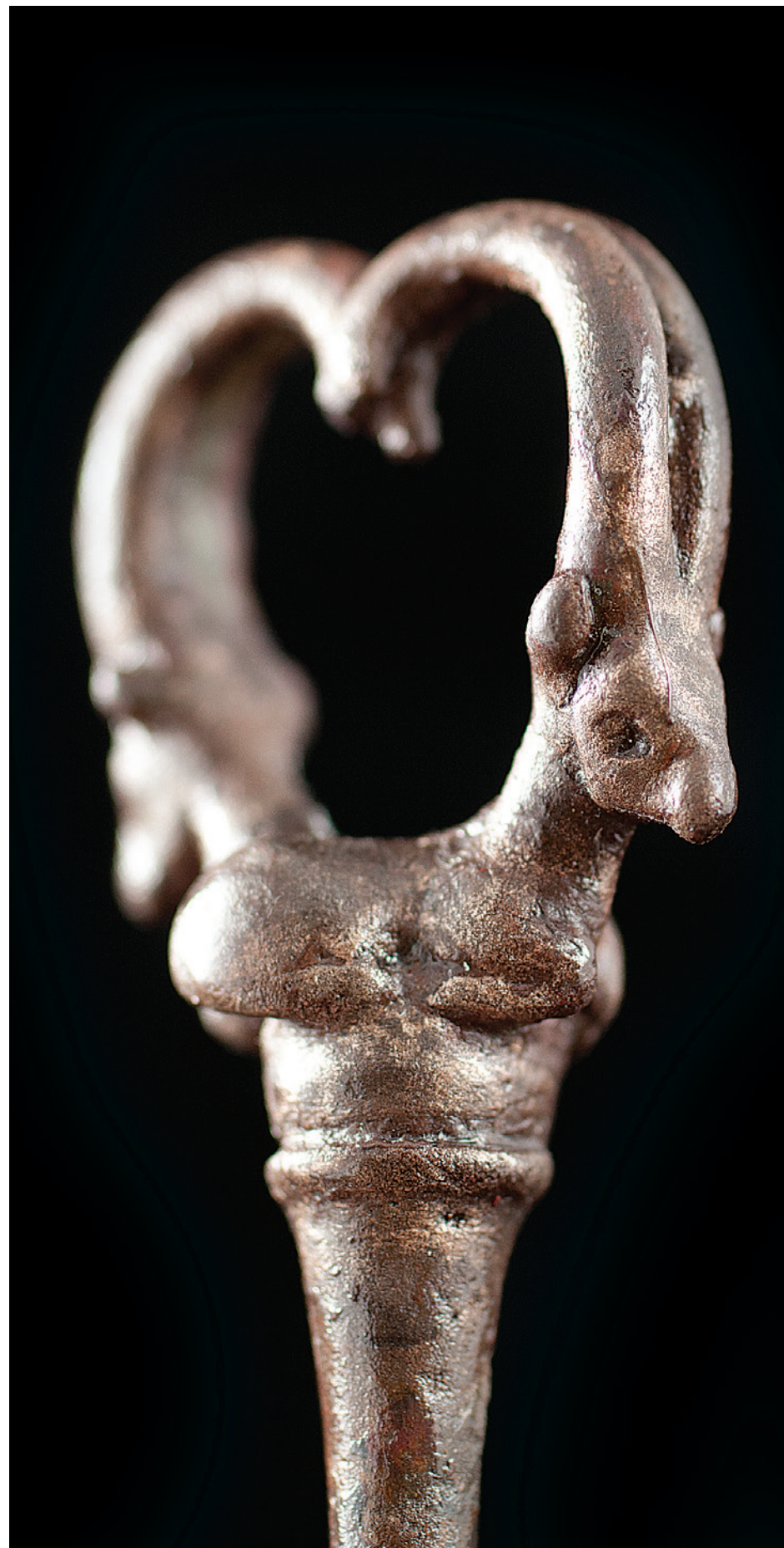
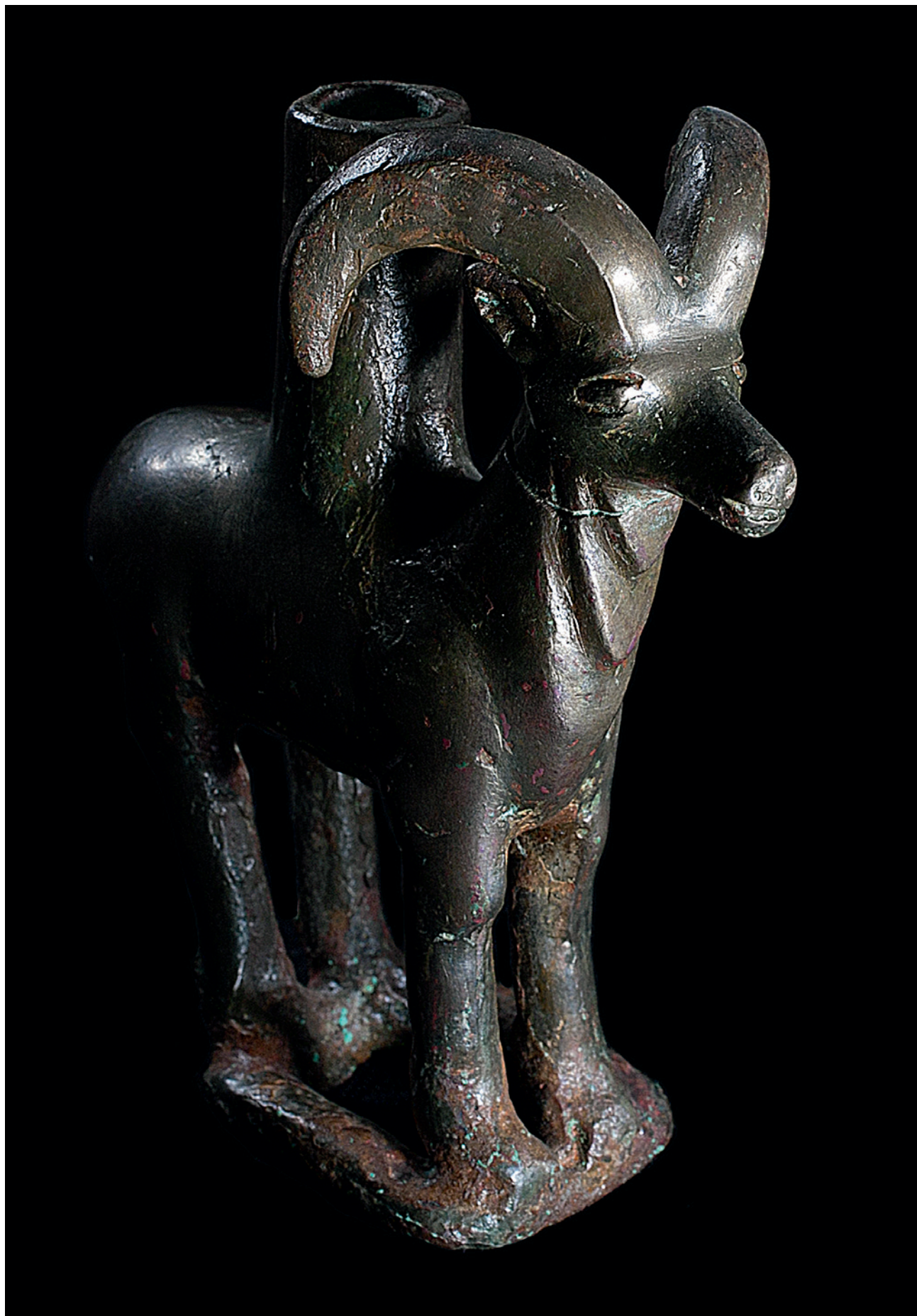


Animal figurines are made of clay or different stones. A significant number of them were found in Margiana. At given instance attention is drawn to the eyes, made in the form of two concentric circles – the same method as decorate many other items.

ceremonies, square jewelry boxes with four compartments and ribbed vessels. Wand and scepter tops were carved of different types of stones. One such product made of ivory marble was found in the Palace and, perhaps, once formed the top from a royal scepter.

Another type of artistic items very characteristic for the Bronze Age Bactria and Margiana, likely of ceremonial purposes, is anthropomorphic composite statuettes. They all depict people in a sitting position. The body of the statuette, dressed in loose clothing and the headdresses or the hairstyles were carved of black steatite; while the head and hands were made of white alabaster or even marble. Beside these items, an-

cient potters manufactured similar «composite statuettes» of soft pliable clay, artfully painting them in bright ornaments. A vast majority of known composite statuettes exhibited in the world's largest museums come from looting excavations. Only three such figures have been discovered in scientific excavations at Gonur. Two of them were found at the very place they were left over three thousand years ago, in the tombs. Whom did these statuettes depict? Some researchers believe that they are images of a deity, others that it was the image of the deceased, yet others that it was an image of someone close to the deceased; also some specialists believe it to be the embodiment of the soul of the deceased.



Extant Turkmen tradition of honoring mountain sheep, argali are rooted in antiquity. These animals are one of the favorite subjects of the ancient masters of Margiana. Cosmetic bottles were made in their shape, they decorated the tops of hair pins, they are present on the seals and amulets.



Stone, and sometimes silver images of tortoiseshell perform an important ritual functions at the burial of aristocrats.

The first point of view is based on the common form of the composite statuettes: all figures are wearing the same kaunakes-like clothes – wide and spacious dresses, with wide neckline. The second and the third points of view are based on the physiognomic differences between the figures: when depicting a deity, the face is usually more generalized, without individual traits. Dresses depicted on statuettes are usually found on female figures (for example, on those from the famous seals), while the male torsos are fully or partially bare. But one of the two Gonur statuettes mentioned above was found in a male grave, and its face physiognomically most likely depicted a male. Therefore, the assumption that composite statuettes are sculptural embodiments of the souls of the dead seems to be the most credible.

Ancient bone carvers made different pins from the bones of domestic animals, decorating them with simple ornaments. Most ceremonial hear pins, which Margiana fashionistas used to pin their hair, were decorated with sculptural images of an open palm or a fist. There are ivory items, some of which are imported from the cities of Harappan civilization in the Indus Valley. One of the most brilliant creations by the ivory carvers is a handle of a cosmetic spatula. The carving on it is relief and two-sided, depicting a fearsome winged dragon leaping to swallow a young goat. The goat raised its head and is struggling to get out of the dragon's mouth, but its fate cannot be changed. With just a few lines, the craftsman managed to express the suffering of the poor animal. This plot, so typical for Margiana and Bactria, doubtlessly indicates that this masterpiece has been created in Margush country.

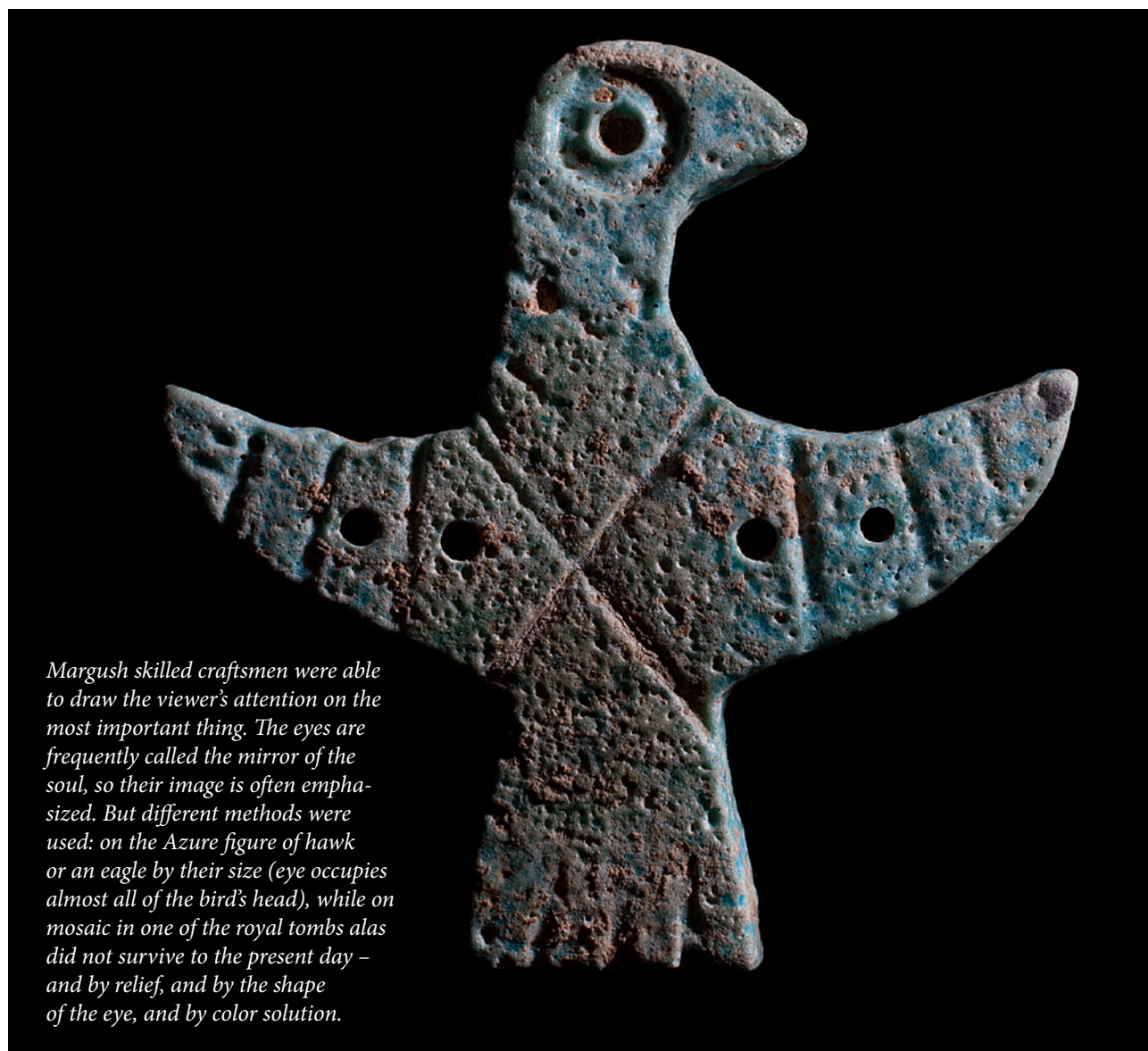
The discoveries made in the old Murghab Delta showed that as early as four thousand years ago the population of the country shared a common ideology. These were not independent cults of different deities, but, apparently, a well-organized system of ideas, rites and customs. For example, it is here, so far, that the temples involved in preparing Haoma (the hallucinogenic drink) have been excavated, a drink so passionately described later in the Avesta, the holy writing of the Zoroastrians. Remains of alkaloid plants such as ephedra, hemp and poppy seeds, used to prepare psychedelic drinks, were found in almost all open temples of Margiana (Togolok-1 and 21, Gonur Temenos). All the necessary tools to make haoma-type juice were found along with these plants, the first time in the world archaeological practice.

Along with the cult of hallucinogenic drinks, Margush tribes held the Cult of Fire that was perhaps just as important. Monumental temples with round altars were erected, and sacrifices were offered to the God of Fire. Significantly, this tradition continued in Margiana almost to the end of the second millennium BC. This is confirmed by the presence of round altars in the Togolok-21 temple, where remains of fat and milk sacrifices have been found. In many Margiana temples, near the rectangular altars of the «Eternal Fire», the so-called «depositories of the sacred ash» are located. These depositories are placed underground, dug in the mainland and are laid with bricks from the inside.

Another cult, practiced in the Margush country and clearly seen from the available archaeological evidence, was the Cult of Water. This is supported by several evidences: a complex



Images of animals in Margiana are numerous and diverse. That are and a large stone sculpture of quietly lying argali, which served as a headrest for one of Gonur rulers; and at all simplicity – just a realistic clay figurine of two-humped camel; and the head of the silver pin in the shape of fantastic creatures, which has two bodies of winged lions and only one head, which is more likely belongs to a dragon.



system of basins of Gonur, where ritual ablutions were performed; a filter to clean the river water; and a set of units and buildings on the southern and northern shores of the large southern basin, somehow related to water, which can be interpreted as a kind of water temple.

Burial rites of the Margush country, according to archaeological evidence, on the one hand, reveal the presence of the Cult of Earth. This was embodied primarily in the ritual protection of clean earth from the decaying corpses. On the other hand, archaeological evidence indicates the presence of the rite of exposing the bodies of the deceased in special places to purify them from flesh. In later periods, this rite was observed only among Zoroastrians, and nowhere else. One of the most striking evidence of the similarity between the rites of the Margush country population and those of Zoroastrians, were the findings of a large number of special animal burials, including that of dogs, sheep and donkeys.

These, as well as many other discoveries obtained while excavating various sites of the ancient Margush country doubtlessly indicate that the rites, customs and traditions, popular among the local tribes, later became the base for the Zoroastrian religion. The prophet Zarathustra could not just invent a doctrine, which eventually became the faith of many thousands of people. To make people follow the preacher, he had to incorporate into his teachings things they already knew that were related to and did not contradict strongly the ideas, rules and customs of the people. For nearly two hundred years, scientists around the world have been searching for the homeland of the first world

religion – Zoroastrianism. There were as many hypotheses about its place of origin as there were authors. Nevertheless, the discoveries made in Margiana show that in the ancient East no other site contains so much evidence of the connection between the customs and traditions of the local population and the following Zoroastrian religion.

Summarizing, we can conclude that from the end of the third and throughout the second millennium BC a relatively independent art tradition existed on the territory of modern Turkmenistan. This tradition has a specific place in the system of the art of the ancient East. Being among the monuments of the world's first civilizations, the Margiana Bronze Age treasures were not just copies of pieces of art, made by other people, but were unique and original. Ancestors of the Turkmen people achieved great skill in their crafts and were in no way inferior to their contemporaries – craftsmen from Mesopotamia, Egypt, India and China. It is no accident that their products were exported to neighboring countries and even reached the steppe tribes that roamed the vast expanses of Eurasia.



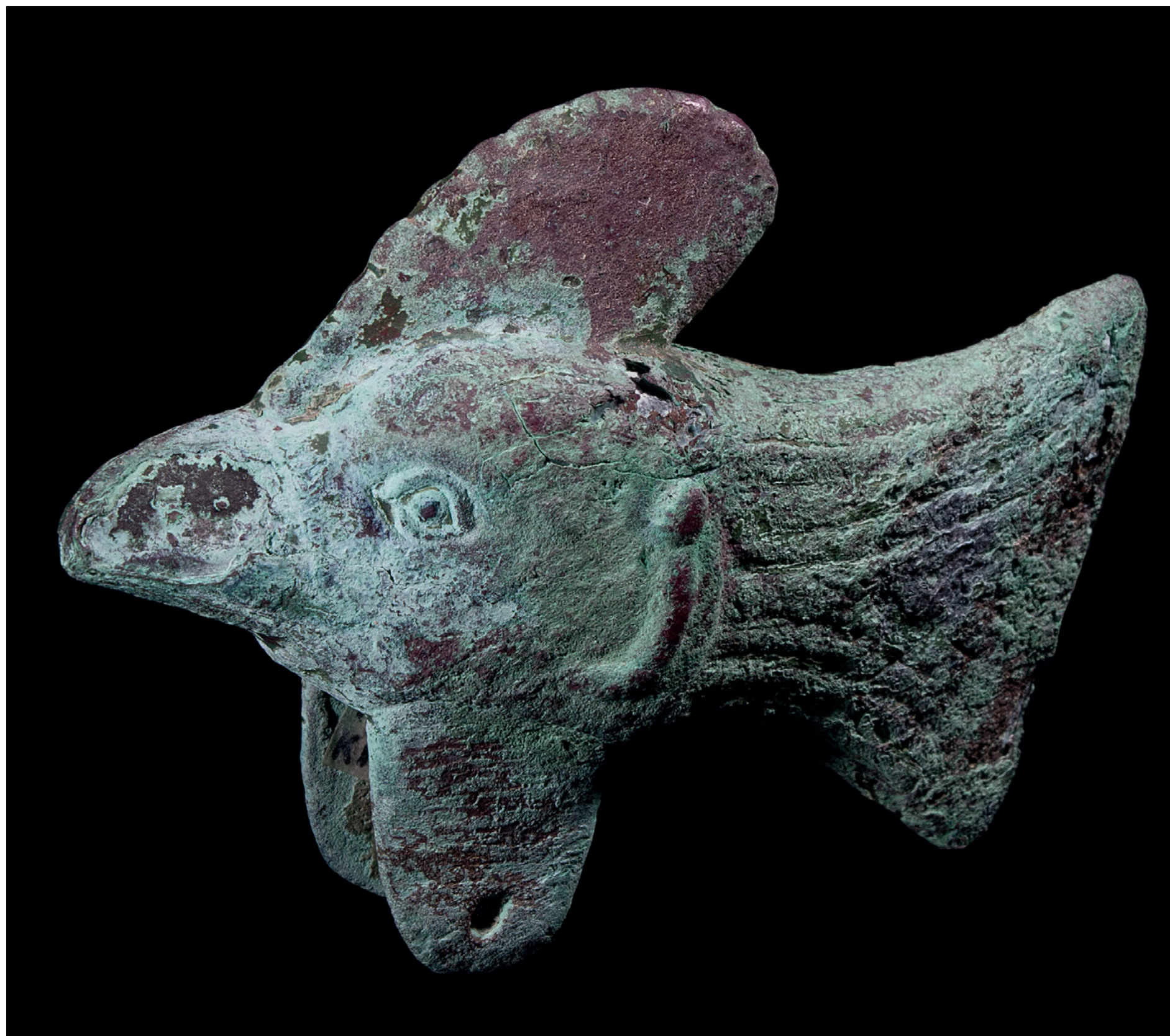
Long stone (up to 2 m long) and small wood (40–50 cm) rods were symbols of power in Margiana. They always have decorated tops (mace-heads) – bronze, stone, lead.

A few images of horses have been found at Gonur depe. One of the best of them is shown in the photo. This is a bronze mace head that was found in the tomb of a warrior. He died, as it was shown by anthropological research, as a result of falling from a great height over the head. It is possible to suggest that he fell down just off his horse.





Three similar bronze scepters – a symbol of high administrative power have been found at Gonur-depe. All of them are very similar to those which are holding the rulers depicted on the paintings of Mari Palace in Syria. Artfully handle of wands are made of silver. The end is rounded, what indicates that the object was not a battle weapon.



This is one of the unique form of ritual ax found at Gonur. Its keen is made in the shape of a fish tail and a butt in a shape of a cock head. This kind of «hybrid» fantastic animals is one of the typical pattern of oriental art.

Flint arrowheads, the first of which started to make even 8-9 thousand years ago, continue to exist in Margush country. They are belongings of men only. In every one royal tomb such items were found. In two of sepultures the number of arrowheads reached 50.





One of the results of the archaeological excavations at Margiana is a numerous finds of bronze products: household and everyday pruning hooks, hoes, knives, and weapons – spears, arrows, knives, and other artifacts. Special group formed ritual axes, often with fine jewelry. Ritual axes differs from the usual ones by not the sharp edge and by mount handles which is not at right but an acute angle to the blade.



Maybe so – by lighting the fire in four altars surrounding his tomb – the final farewell ceremony or commemoration of the ruler of Margush country was ended and four thousand years ago.



Museum of Fine Arts in Ashgabat, being a great work of architecture itself, keeps a lot of of magnificent examples of art of the ancient and modern people of Turkmenistan.

TODAY, THE RICH HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE of the Turkmen people is becoming the brand that opens Turkmenistan to the world. More and more people from different countries are eager to see all this with their own eyes, including the priceless treasures of the ancient Margiana, presented on the pages of our book. The leaders of Turkmenistan are making considerable efforts to further study and preserve the national heritage. In the largest cities of the country, new well-equipped Museum buildings have been built, and here priceless finds made by archaeologists are stored and displayed. International tourism is one of the most effective means to publicize the achievements of the state in reviving spirituality and preserving the historical heritage. In the XXI century, Gonur Depe and other monuments of Margiana come out of the past shadows and become bright symbols of the inextricable connection of times, the continuity of generations and the universal value of the world cultural heritage.



The most valuable artifacts from the treasury of Margush country decorate the National Museum of Turkmenistan in Ashgabat.



Mary museum accumulates and shiny, and ordinary finds from the ancient sites of Murghab delta from the first years of excavations of Margiana archaeological expedition. Here you can see the largest collection of seals, pottery and bronze artifacts as well.

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