The Archaeology of Central Asia, c. 500 BC – AD 200: Alexander in Afghanistan and Buddhas in Bactria

Rachel Mairs
Where is Central Asia?
The ‘Great Game’ between Britain and Russia (C19th)
Central Asia, from the Bronze Age, to Buddhism, to Islam
The Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC), c. 2300 – 1700 BC
Gonur-tepe (BMAC)
Buddhism, between India and China via Central Asia

Travels of the Chinese Buddhist monk Xuanzang, AD seventh century
Buddhism in Central Asia

Bamiyan, Afghanistan: Before and after

‘Graeco-Buddhist’ art, Gandhara (NW Pakistan, E Afghanistan): “Buddha in a toga”
Blue Mosque (Shrine of Hazrat Ali), Mazar-i Sharif, Afghanistan
Registan, Samarkand, Uzbekistan
Minaret of Jam, Ghor Prov., Afghanistan
Immense, multi-period tell sites
(–AD 1220-1221)
Persian (Achaemenid), Hellenistic (Graeco-Bactrian, Indo-Greek) and Kushan Central Asia, c. 500 BC – AD 200
Central Asian and Indian ‘Alexandrias’
‘Indo-Greeks’ (late third century BC - early first century AD?)
The Kushan Empire (AD first – third centuries)
Persian – Greek – Kushan
Central Asia

- **Continuities** in elements of material culture, land management, administration.
- **Changes** in other elements of material culture, religious practice, language use, etc. etc.
The ‘Two Sides of the Coin’
Why this is an exciting time to be doing Central Asian archaeology:

- You can go there.
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✦ You can go there.
✦ You can dig there.
Why this is an exciting time to be doing Central Asian archaeology:

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- Your parents might actually have heard of it.
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- More people are studying it.
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❖ Publications are easier to get hold of, and they’re not all in Russian anymore.
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- Current events a) have implications for cultural heritage management, and archaeological practice; and b) may lead us to reflect in particular ways on the region’s past.
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About this course

❖ Class 2 (Sept 9): Historical sources, the development of archaeology in Central Asia (1960-) and geography.

❖ Class 3 (Sept 12): Introducing the archaeology of Central Asia to popular and scholarly audiences (documentary film ‘The Forgotten Alexandria’).

❖ Further topics in the region’s history and archaeology, and the political and intellectual context.

❖ Topic 2: Alexander the Great (incl. in film and fiction).

Material culture: cultural interaction, cultural change, ethnic identities
Archaeological fieldwork: Field survey, satellite images and GIS
Sites: Ai Khanoum
Assignments

- Map quizzes (learn to tell your Tajikistan from your Kyrgyzstan, and your Bactria from your Sogdiana!). 5%

- Two papers on set topics (choice between two, c. 4-5 pages). 40% total. Due 21 Oct and 4 November.

- A review/critique of the ‘Forgotten Alexandria’ documentary, based on your studies. 15% Due 14 November.

- An extended essay (c. 12 pages) on individual topics, to be decided in consultation with me. A 5 minute presentation on this in the final class. 40% Due 7 December.
Questions?

忠实 rachel_mairs@brown.edu

Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 2-3 (Rhode Island Hall 210)