

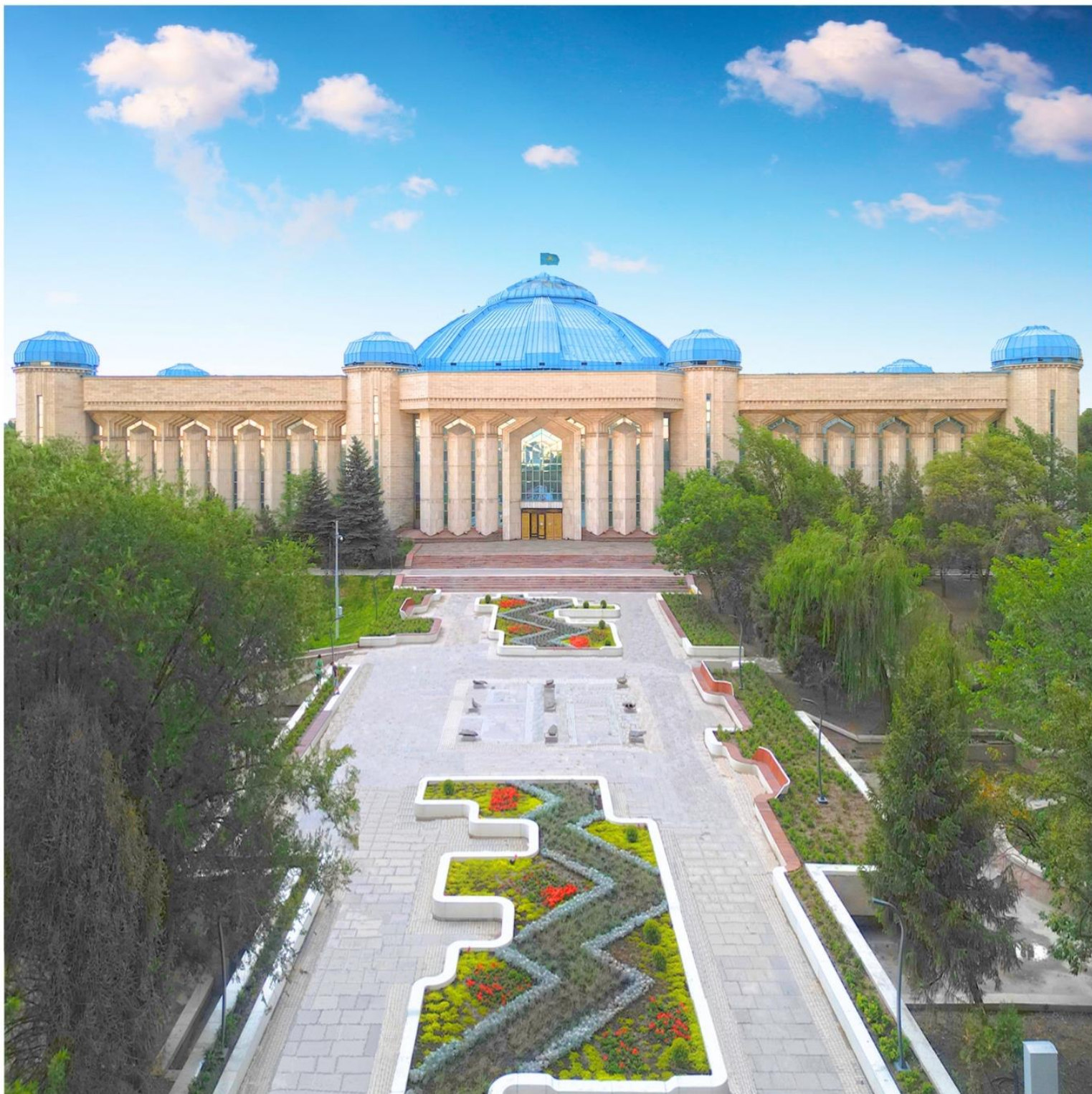
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**THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL COMPLEX RAKHAT AND
KAZAKH-CHINESE SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION:
RESEARCH OUTCOMES AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES**

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Abstract. The article is based on materials obtained during the joint archaeological, scientific, and cultural activities carried out at the «Archaeological complex Rakhat» by the State Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve «Esik» in cooperation with Chinese research institutions, including Shaanxi Provincial Institute of Archaeology in Xi'an and Collaborative Research Center for Archaeology of the Silk Road, Shaanxi Province. The research materials include archaeological fieldwork data, reports of joint expeditions, documentation of excavated objects, museum records, photographic materials, scientific publications, and information related to exhibitions, seminars, conferences, documentary film, and other forms of Kazakh-Chinese cooperation within the framework of the «Belt and Road» Initiative.

The aim of this article is to analyze the development of cultural and scientific ties among the countries of the Great Silk Road through the experience of international cooperation in the study and preservation of archaeological heritage. Particular attention is given to Kazakhstan as one of the key regions of the historic Silk Road. Drawing on the example of joint Kazakhstan-Chinese research at the Rakhat archaeological complex, the article examines the potential of inter-state scientific cooperation in the field of archaeology. It demonstrates that joint research projects contribute to expanding knowledge of the historical and cultural heritage of Semirechye region, improving methods for the scientific study of archaeological sites, and strengthening cultural and humanitarian cooperation between Kazakhstan and China.

Materials and methods. The methodological basis of the study includes historical and chronological methods, archaeological description, source analysis, the systematization of field and museum materials, and an interdisciplinary approach. The historical-chronological method made it possible to examine the formation and main stages of development of cooperation between Kazakhstani and Chinese research institutions. Archaeological description and analysis were applied to identify the historical and cultural significance, structural features, and scientific value of the Archaeological complex Rakhat. Comparative analysis was used to assess the role and importance of the complex in the study of Silk Road archaeology. In the course of source analysis, archaeological research reports, scientific publications, museum documents, and materials collected within the framework of international cooperation were examined. The systematic approach allowed the research outcomes, institutional interaction, and future development perspectives to be analyzed comprehensively as interconnected components of long-term scientific cooperation.

Keywords: archaeology, research, Archaeological complex Rakhat, cooperation, museum-reserve, Institute of Archaeology, Kazakhstan, China.

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ҚАЗАҚСТАН-ҚЫТАЙ ЫНТЫМАҚТАСТЫҒЫ АЯСЫНДАҒЫ РАХАТ АРХЕОЛОГИЯЛЫҚ КЕШЕНІН ЗЕРТТЕУ: НӘТИЖЕЛЕРІ МЕН КЕЛЕШЕГІ

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Аңдатпа. Мақала «Бір белдеу, бір жол» бастамасы аясындағы қазақ-қытай ынтымақтастығына арналған. Зерттеуде «Есік» мемлекеттік тарихи-мәдени музей-қорығы, Қытай Халық Республикасының Шэньси провинциясындағы Сиань қаласының Археология институты және Жібек жолы археологиясы бойынша бірлескен зерттеу орталығының «Рахат археологиялық кешенінде» жүргізген археологиялық, ғылыми және мәдени қызметінің нәтижелері қарастырылады. Мақалада археологиялық далалық зерттеулердің қорытындылары, бірлесіп атқарылған реставрациялық жұмыстар, ұйымдастырылған көрмелер, ғылыми жарияланымдар, семинарлар, конференциялар, деректі фильмдер және өзге де іс-шаралар туралы мәліметтер берілген.

Мақаланың мақсаты – Ұлы Жібек жолы бойындағы елдер арасындағы мәдени және ғылыми байланыстардың дамуын археологиялық мұраны зерттеу және сақтау саласындағы халықаралық ынтымақтастық тұрғысынан талдау. Тарихи Ұлы Жібек жолының маңызды аймақтарының бірі ретінде Қазақстанның рөліне ерекше назар аударылады. Рахат археологиялық кешенінде жүргізілген бірлескен қазақстандық-қытайлық зерттеулер мысалында археология саласындағы мемлекетаралық ғылыми өзара іс-қимылдың мүмкіндіктері қарастырылады. Бірлескен ғылыми-зерттеу жобаларын жүзеге асыру Жетісудың тарихи-мәдени мұрасы туралы білімді кеңейтуге, археологиялық ескерткіштерді зерттеудің ғылыми әдістерін жетілдіруге және Қазақстан мен Қытай арасындағы мәдени-гуманитарлық ынтымақтастықты нығайтуға ықпал ететіні көрсетіледі.

Зерттеу материалдары мен әдістері. Зерттеудің әдіснамалық негізін тарихи және хронологиялық әдістер, археологиялық сипаттау, деректанулық талдау, далалық және музейлік материалдарды жүйелеу, сондай-ақ пәнаралық тәсіл құрайды. Тарихи-хронологиялық әдіс қазақстандық және қытайлық ғылыми мекемелер арасындағы ынтымақтастықтың қалыптасуы мен даму кезеңдерін саралауға мүмкіндік берді. Археологиялық сипаттау және талдау әдістері Рахат археологиялық кешенінің тарихи-мәдени маңызын, құрылымдық ерекшеліктерін және ғылыми құндылығын айқындау мақсатында қолданылды. Салыстырмалы талдау әдісі аталған кешеннің Жібек жолы археологиясын зерттеудегі орны мен маңызын бағалау үшін пайдаланылды. Деректанулық талдау барысында археологиялық зерттеу есептері, ғылыми жарияланымдар, музейлік құжаттар және халықаралық ынтымақтастық аясында жинақталған материалдар қарастырылды. Жүйелі тәсіл зерттеу нәтижелерін, институционалдық өзара іс-қимылды және болашақ даму келешегін ұзақ мерзімді ғылыми ынтымақтастықтың өзара байланысты құрамдас бөліктері ретінде кешенді түрде талдайды.

Тірек сөздер: археология, зерттеу, Рахат археологиялық кешені, ынтымақтастық, музей-қорық, Археология институты, Қазақстан, Қытай.

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ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ АРХЕОЛОГИЧЕСКОГО КОМПЛЕКСА РАХАТ В КОНТЕКСТЕ КАЗАХСТАНСКО-КИТАЙСКОГО СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВА: РЕЗУЛЬТАТЫ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ

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Аннотация. В статье анализируется казахстанско-китайское сотрудничество в рамках инициативы «Один пояс, один путь». В исследовании рассматриваются результаты археологической, научной и культурной деятельности, проведённой на «археологическом комплексе Рахат» Государственным историко-культурным музеем-заповедником «Есік» совместно с Институтом археологии города Сиань провинции Шэньси (КНР) и Совместным исследовательским центром археологии Шёлкового пути. В статье представлены сведения об итогах археологических полевых исследований, совместно выполненных реставрационных работах, организованных выставках, научных публикациях, семинарах, конференциях, документальных фильмах и других мероприятиях.

Цель статьи заключается в анализе развития культурных и научных связей между странами Великого Шелкового пути через опыт международного сотрудничества в области изучения и сохранения археологического наследия. Особое внимание уделяется роли Казахстана как одного из ключевых регионов исторического Шелкового пути. На примере совместных казахстанско-китайских исследований археологического комплекса Рахат, рассматриваются возможности межгосударственного научного взаимодействия в сфере археологии. Показано, что реализация совместных исследовательских проектов способствует расширению знаний об историко-культурном наследии Семиречья, совершенствованию научных методов изучения археологических памятников и укреплению культурно-гуманитарного сотрудничества между Казахстаном и Китаем.

Материалы и методы исследования. Методологическую основу исследования составляют историко-хронологический метод, археологическое описание и анализ, источниковедческий анализ, систематизация полевых и музейных материалов, а также междисциплинарный подход. Историко-хронологический метод позволил рассмотреть становление и основные этапы развития сотрудничества между казахстанскими и китайскими научными учреждениями. Методы археологического описания и анализа были применены для определения историко-культурного значения, структурных особенностей и научной ценности археологического комплекса Рахат. Сравнительный и источниковедческий анализ позволил рассмотреть археологический комплекс Рахат в контексте изучения Шёлкового пути, а также обобщить материалы, связанные с результатами исследований и международным научным сотрудничеством. Системный подход дал возможность представить полученные данные, институциональное взаимодействие и перспективы дальнейшего развития как взаимосвязанные элементы долгосрочного научного сотрудничества.

Ключевые слова: археология, исследование, археологический комплекс Рахат, сотрудничество, музей-заповедник, Институт археологии, Казахстан, Китай.

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Introduction. The Belt and Road Initiative is an international project proposed by the People’s Republic of China in 2013. Its main purpose is to develop economic, cultural, and scientific ties among countries along the Great Silk Road, and one of its important areas of activity is the study and preservation of archaeological heritage. Kazakhstan occupies a special place within the initiative, as one of the main branches of the Great Silk Road passed through Zhetysu. A significant project within this framework is the Kazakhstan-China joint research at the Archaeological complex Rakhat.

In 2015, Professor Wang Jianxin, a Chinese researcher specializing in the Silk Road of Central Asia, visited the State Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve «Esik» (hereinafter, the «Esik» Museum-Reserve) for the first time and expressed interest in the Rakhat site as a research object (Fig. 1). This laid the foundation for the first joint archaeological study between the two countries.

On 1 June 2016, as part of the Belt and Road Initiative, an agreement was signed with the Shaanxi Provincial Institute of Archaeology. In 2017, Kazakh-Chinese joint archaeological research began at the Rakhat site. The project was led by G. Mukhtarova on the Kazakh side and Ding Yan on the Chinese side.



Fig 1. Professor Wang Jianxin and Mukhtarova G.R., Xi’an, 2026. Photo by W. Yingying.

The site chosen by both sides lies above the village of Rakhat in the Rakhat rural district of Enbekshikazakh District, Almaty Region, on the northern foothills of the Ile Alatau. The choice of this location was not accidental. This site is hereinafter referred to as the Rakhat site (Fig. 2).

The Rakhat site, which consists of eight hills, was once interpreted by archaeologist Bektukhanbet Nurmukhanbetov (commonly known as Beken ata) as a possible residence of the Golden Man and the White Horde of the Saka [Nurmukhanbetov, Tulegenov, 2014: 248-256]



Fig 2. Archeological complex Rakhat. Aerial photography by «Esik» museum-reserve.

Results and discussion. In 1999, members of the joint comprehensive archaeological reconnaissance expedition of Kainar University and the Golden Man Association, led by archaeologist Beken Nurmukhanbetov, conducted the first reconnaissance at the Rakhat site. In 2004, the A.Kh. Margulan Institute of Archaeology excavated a 4×4 m. stratigraphic test pit. The excavation confirmed that the hills were artificial rather than natural formations, and it was concluded that the area may have been inhabited from the Early Iron Age through the medieval period. In 2005, the sites were described as part of the project to publish the Collection of Historical and Cultural Monuments of Almaty Region [Turatin, 1999].

Alongside the Rakhat site, the Orikt settlement, located nearby and consisting of several small mounds, has also drawn the attention of the museum-reserve staff. The site was first identified in 2000 during archaeological reconnaissance conducted by the archaeologist B. Nurmukhanbetov. Although the two sites have come to bear different names in recent years as a result of toponymic changes, their historical and cultural connection remains evident.

At the official opening ceremony of the State Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve «Esik», held as part of a regular field meeting of the Council for the implementation of the strategic national project «Cultural Heritage», the museum-reserve's director, G. Mukhtarova pointed out that the land plots on which the Rakhat and Orikt settlements stood were not being used for their intended scientific, cultural, museum, educational, and tourism purposes, and she further proposed transferring these monuments to the jurisdiction of the museum-reserve [Gosudarstvennaya programma Respubliki Kazakhstan «Kulturnoe nasledie», 2005].

In this regard, on 10 May 2011, the Akimat (local executive authority) of Enbekshikazakh District, Almaty Region, adopted Resolutions № 388 and № 389, «On the protection and preservation of the «White Horde» of the ancient Saka king, located southeast of Rakhat village, and the ancient Saka city, located southwest of Orikt village». Under these resolutions, the museum-reserve was entrusted with carrying out awareness-raising activities; burials in the Orikt area were suspended and construction, gardening, and other forms of land use within these territories were prohibited.

Within the framework of the applied scientific project, the «Issyk Burial Ground and the Culture of the Saka of Zhetysu» under the republican program of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Kazakhstan, № 005 «Applied Scientific Research» for 2011-2012, led by G. Mukhtarova, with T. Zh. Tulegenov, as expedition leader, organized the first archaeological field

expedition at the Oriky site in 2012. A general topographic plan was prepared, a topographic survey was carried out, a topographic plan was compiled, a 2×2 m. stratigraphic test pit was excavated, and archaeological excavations were conducted at mounds № 1 and № 2 of Site № 1.

By the decision of the Almaty Regional Maslikhat (regional legislative bodies) dated 9 August 2013, the Oriky settlement and the Rakhat site were legally included within the protection zone of the State Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve «Esik». Both monuments dated from the Early Iron Age, spanning the VII century BC to the XI century AD. The Oriky settlement was assigned a protection zone of 19.5 ha and a protected natural landscape zone of 44 ha, covering a total protected area of 63.5 ha. The Rakhat site was assigned a protection zone of 5.2 ha, a construction regulation zone of 15 ha, and a protected natural landscape zone of 63 ha, covering a total protected area of 83.2 ha. Since that time, the museum-reserve has conducted its own archaeological reconnaissance surveys at these monuments.

Under the applied research project «The Issyk Burial Ground and the Culture of the Zhetysu Sakas» (2015-2017), led by G. Mukhtarova, with T. Tulegenov as expedition leader, reconnaissance and research work were carried out in 2015 one kilometer southeast of the Rakhat site. As a result, plans were drawn up for the archaeological features identified, and their geographical coordinates were recorded. The Rakhat site consists of eight hills formed by high earthen mounds. The total area of the Rakhat settlement is approximately 250,000 m². Its GPS coordinates are **N43° 20.250', E 077° 22.614'**. The central hill 20-25 m high and 70-75 m wide, is a tall, cone-shaped mound with a narrower summit and a broader base, giving it a platform-like appearance; Its height is 18 m, and the area of its upper surface is 3,200 m². The central part is surrounded by ditches with an outer-wall diameter of approximately 220 m., and the surrounding area is enclosed by five elongated earthen embankments.

At this stage, the area comprising these sites began to be studied by specialists as a single archaeological complex. The Chinese side's interest in the Rakhat site was regarded as an opportunity to carry out a comprehensive investigation of the monument.

Although excavations at the Rakhat site were conducted continuously from 2017 to 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic subsequently slowed the progress of the work. After an interval of several years, research resumed only in 2023.

In the first year of joint research with Chinese colleagues, excavations were conducted in three areas of the Rakhat site covering 32 m², namely domestic and household pits («Madeni mura» khattamasy, 2009-2011), as well as at burial complex sites dating to the Early Turkic period. In addition, 25 mounds forming an irregular chain were identified on the upper floodplain of the western bank of the river of the same name, southeast of the Rakhat site. Scientific data were recorded, excavation was carried out at Mound M1, and this area was subsequently designated the Rakhat II site.

The field research clearly showed that the nearby Oriky settlement was closely connected with the Archaeological complex Rakhat, in other words, a system of small adjacent settlements existed within a limited area.

In 2017, alongside the joint work with Chinese colleagues at the Rakhat site, the State Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve «Esik» (Fig. 3), together with the Beken-Ata Charitable Foundation, organized its first public volunteer archaeological expedition. The expedition, entitled «*Nurmukhanbetov Excavations*», was conducted at Mound №4 of the Oriky I burial ground, also known as the Rakhat IV group.



Fig 3. Members of the Kazakh-Chinese joint archaeological expedition.
«Esik» museum-reserve's archive photo.

The work was carried out within the framework of the applied research project «The Issyk Burial Ground and the Culture of the Zhetysu Sakas», under the Program № 002 «Applied Scientific Research» of the Ministry of Culture and Sports. The project was led by G. Mukhtarova, while T. Tulegenov was an expedition leader.

Between 2015 and 2018, based on formal agreements, the State Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve «Esik» organized joint Kazakh-Korean archaeological research expeditions in cooperation with five research institutions of the Republic of Korea: the Institute of Historical Studies of Seoul National University, the DONG-SEO Institute of Cultural Heritage, the Central Institute of Historical Heritage, the Mahan Culture Research Center, and the Daehan Institute of Cultural Heritage.

In 2017, the joint Kazakh–Korean international expedition investigated two mounds at the Oriktly III burial ground. In 2018, further research at the same site led to the identification of 32 burial and ritual monuments within the burial ground, for which full registration documentation was prepared.

In 2018-2019, archaeological research was conducted at the Rakhat camp site under an agreement with the Institute of Archaeology of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The site is located in the northern foothills of the Ile Alatau, on the right bank of the Rakhat River. The expedition was led by D. Ozherelyev.

The research showed that the monument belongs to the early stage of the Upper Paleolithic and is comparable to sites in other regions of Europe and Asia. Rakhat became the second Paleolithic site in Zhetysu for which a complete stratigraphic analysis was carried out. The materials recovered from the site significantly expanded the chronological framework of the Archaeological complex Rakhat.

In 2019-2020, archaeological research was conducted at the Rakhat site under the applied research project «*The Semiosis of the Material Culture of Zhetysu Based on Materials from the Archaeological complex Rakhat from the Saka Period to the Thirteenth Century*», within the program of the Ministry of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan for grant and program-targeted funding of scientific and/or scientific-technical activities. The project was led by G. Mukhtarova, with T. Tulegenov as expedition leader. Within the project, a 200m² plot in an open area south of the main Rakhat site, within the Archaeological complex Rakhat, was investigated, focusing on domestic and household areas, and a stratigraphic test pit was excavated. In 2020, the

Orikty I, II, and III burial mounds were identified in the upper part of the Orikty settlement, site passports were registered, and plans were prepared. Excavations were also carried out at two small mounds dating to the Turkic period, along with stratigraphic test-pit work.

In 2021-2023, within the priority area «*Research in the Social Sciences and Humanities*» of the Ministry of Culture and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan, an applied research project entitled «*Study of the Archaeological complex Rakhat: Reconstruction of History from the Bronze Age to the Late Medieval Period*» was implemented. The project was led by G. Mukhtarova, with Kh. Aitkul as expedition leader. Research was conducted at the Rakhat site, at Bronze Age and Early Iron Age sites, and in the Orikty burial ground.

In June 2025, specialists of the Shaanxi Provincial Institute of Archaeology (PRC) jointly carried out archaeological reconnaissance in the Rakhat III group and excavated Mound M6. It was established that the Rakhat III burial ground consists of 45 mounds, and a full description of them was prepared.

Initially, the monument provisionally referred to as the Rakhat site, which was under the jurisdiction of the State Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve «Esik», covered an area of 50.2 ha. It had an approved protection zone and consisted mainly of eight hills. As a result of several years of research, the site was reinterpreted as the broader Archaeological complex Rakhat, covering an area of approximately 250 ha.

The Archaeological complex Rakhat has been divided into the main Rakhat site and five zones: Rakhat I, Rakhat II, Rakhat III, Rakhat IV, and Rakhat V. This division was based on information set out in the 2005 Collection of Historical and Cultural Monuments of Almaty Region [Mukhtarova, 2018].

Thus, the Archaeological complex Rakhat, studied since 2012 by the «Esik» Museum-Reserve in cooperation with foreign partners, is currently divided into the following zones:

The Rakhat site is the main area of the complex. Here, a Turkic-period burial site, medieval semi-subterranean structures (F1 and F2) , burials, and household pits were identified.

Rakhat I is located east of the main site and contains Saka-Wusun mounds.

Rakhat II is located south of the main site and contains Saka-Wusun mounds. An excavation was carried out at Mound M1.

Rakhat III is located east of the main site and contains Saka-Wusun mounds. An excavation was carried out at Mound M6.

Rakhat IV is located east of the main site and includes Saka-Wusun mounds, Turkic-period monuments, the Orikty settlement, and the Orikty I burial ground.

Rakhat V is located southeast of the main site and includes a Paleolithic camp site, Bronze Age mounds, Saka-Wusun mounds, and the Orikty III burial ground [Mukhtarova, Aitkul, 2025: 23-181]

As a result of archaeological research, more than 8,000 finds have been discovered within the territory of the complex. Most artefacts consist of ceramic sherds, lithic implements and fragments, human skeletal material, and faunal bone. A total of 155 items have been officially accepted into the main collection of the museum-reserve. The remaining objects have been accepted into the temporary collection, and expert studies are ongoing. In conclusion, the study of the Archaeological complex Rakhat is still only at its initial stage. The materials accumulated in recent years can only outline the general framework for reconstructing the historical processes that took place within this complex. Large-scale interdisciplinary research is still required to supplement and refine our understanding of the developmental stages of the ancient and medieval cultures of the population of Zhetysu.

The joint research with the PRC was not limited only to excavations at the monument. To gain a deeper understanding of the Archaeological complex Rakhat, reconnaissance was also carried out in Enbekshikazakh District, Almaty Region, including excavations at Mound 8 of the «Esik» burial ground, as well as the identification and study of petroglyphs in Kegen District.

In 2024, specialists from the Shaanxi Provincial Institute of Archaeology in Xi'an (PRC), conducted a condition survey of valuable items in the collection of the «Esik» Museum-Reserve.

The survey established the need to clean and restore many metal objects. In 2025, conservation and restoration work were carried out on 50 inventory items made of metal, textile, ceramic, and bone, using specialized tools and modern methods. The work included cleaning, joining fragments, shaping, bonding, smoothing, applying protective coating, and color matching. At the same time, chief artist D. Bektemirov, the chief curator E. Aitkulova, and the researcher Kh. Munkebayev undertook practical training and enhanced their professional skills. The joint work of the two sides is an important example of international partnership in the preservation of archaeological and historical heritage. It represents not only scientific cooperation, but also a responsible step aimed at protecting the shared historical and cultural heritage of the Eurasian region.

More than 45 scholarly articles have been published on the Archaeological complex Rakhat, the majority of them joint works by Kazakh and Chinese specialists. In addition, with the sponsorship of the Shaanxi Provincial Institute of Archaeology, the five-year Report Album of the «Esik» Museum-Reserve was published [Esik-albom, 2020]. The Report Album broadly presents the results of research cooperation between the two countries.

On 23 October 2025, the «Esik» Museum-Reserve, together with the Shaanxi Provincial Institute of Archaeology (PRC), held the «VI Issyk Readings» International Scientific and Practical Conference, themed this year: «*International Research in Archaeology: Experience, Results, and Priority Areas*». The conference was dedicated to the 55th anniversary of the discovery of the Golden Man, the 15th anniversary of the establishment of the «Esik» Museum-Reserve, and the 90th anniversary of the birth of the archaeologist B. Nurmukhanbetov. Following the conference, a scholarly collection was published with the sponsorship of the Shaanxi Provincial Institute of Archaeology (PRC) [Mukhtarova, Aitkul, 2025: 316]. In 2025, a monograph was published based on the results of archaeological research conducted at the Archaeological complex Rakhat between 2012 and 2025 [VI Esik oqulary, 2025].



Fig 4. The exhibition «A Prosperous World on the Path of Partnership: Cooperation Exhibition Dedicated to the 10th Anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative». Photo by Mukhtarova G.R.

On 28 September 2023, the exhibition «*A Prosperous World on the Path of Partnership: Cooperation Exhibition Dedicated to the 10th Anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative*» opened in the Forbidden City palace complex, also known as Gugong, in Beijing, the capital of China (Fig. 4).

The exhibition displayed 23 valuable items from the collection of the State Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve «Esik» of the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan. These included original ceramic vessels dating to the V–IV centuries BC (the Saka period), found near the Golden Man, as well as artefacts discovered during joint Kazakhstan-China

archaeological excavations. Alongside the Kazakh items, the exhibition presented more than 80 items from China, Uzbekistan, and the United Arab Emirates.

In September 2023, an exhibition entitled «*The Rakhat Site: Results of Archaeological Research in 2017-2022*» was organized in the temporary exhibition hall of the «Esik» Museum-Reserve. The exhibition offered visitors a chance to see the finds recovered from the territory of the Rakhat site from the mid-twentieth century to the present day, as well as artefacts discovered through archaeological research. These materials reflect the life, worldview, rituals, and history of the communities that created diverse cultures from the Stone Age to the late medieval period. The exhibition also included osteological materials, drawings and photographs of burial complexes, and a collection of joint scholarly articles.

In 2023-2024, the PRC television channel Shaanxi TV News produced a documentary film titled «*The Golden Man of the Silk Road: «Issyk» – In Search of the Saka Horde*» as part of the Chang'an – «Esik» China-Kazakhstan Joint Archaeological New Achievements Project. The film is dedicated to the joint archaeological expedition conducted at the Archaeological complex Rakhat. It engagingly presents the progress of joint archaeological research by the scholars of the two countries. Viewers can learn about the Saka-Wusun culture of Zhetysu, the structure of Saka-Wusun mounds, the pristine nature and archaeological monuments of Zhetysu, its historical and cultural heritage, and the state of its research. The premiere of the 50-minute documentary took place on 31 December 2024 on Shaanxi TV News in the PRC. The film was translated into Kazakh and shown on the newly established Qonaev Media TV channel of Almaty Region.



Fig 5. The Opening Ceremony of the Collaborative Research Center for Archaeology of the Silk Roads (CRCASR). Photo by W. Yingying.

On 25 April 2023, the General Assembly of the Alliance for Cultural Heritage in Asia was held in Xi'an, PRC. As part of the event, the Collaborative Research Center for Archaeology of the Silk Roads (CRCASR) was officially opened with Northwest University (PRC) designated as its executive institution. The CRCASR was established on China's initiative in cooperation with the five countries of Central Asia (Fig. 5). It operates as an open international platform aimed at developing archaeological research, protecting cultural heritage, promoting cultural exchange, and training specialists. Professor Zhao Rong was elected Director of the CRCASR.

On 14 October 2024, the first branch of the CRCASR in Central Asia was opened in Kazakhstan, specifically at the «Esik» Museum-Reserve [Qazaqstan Respublikasy Madeniiet zhane aqparat ministrligi, 2025].

The branch operates within the framework of international cooperation and works to study, preserve, and promote archaeological and historical-cultural heritage monuments along the Silk Road. G. Mukhtarova was appointed the Kazakh representative of the center, while Ding Yan was appointed as the Chinese representative.



Fig 6. Opening Ceremony of the Branch of the Collaborative Research Center for Archaeology of the Silk Roads (CRCASR) at the State Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve «Esik», 2024. «Esik» museum-reserve’s archive photo.

The joint Kazakh-Chinese research work will continue. Research plans for the coming years have been approved. These also include the museification of Mound № 8 in the «Esik» burial ground, the creation of an exhibition for the new building of the State Historical and Cultural Museum-Reserve «Esik» called «Issyk Visit-Centre» under construction, and the development of the Archaeological Map of Almaty Region.

The Kazakhstan-China joint archaeological research conducted at the Archaeological complex Rakhat has demonstrated an effective model of interdisciplinary and transnational scientific cooperation in contemporary archaeology. Research under the Belt and Road Initiative has made it possible to consider archaeological heritage not merely as an individual monument, but as a component of a broader historical and cultural space. In this respect, the Archaeological complex Rakhat is an important scientific object for studying the social structure, settlement system, burial traditions, and cultural continuity of ancient societies in the Zhetysu region. The archaeological materials identified within the territory of the complex reveal the continuous cultural development of the region from the Bronze Age to the medieval period and provide a basis for rethinking the processes of urbanization and the interaction between nomadic and sedentary cultures in Zhetysu.

Conclusion. The results of stratigraphic, typological, and comparative analyses of archaeological data make it possible to demonstrate the special place of the Rakhat complex within the system of regional historical processes. At the same time, the conservation, restoration, digitization, and museification work carried out within the framework of international scientific cooperation has paved the way for the introduction of modern theoretical and practical principles of archaeological heritage preservation. This, in turn, strengthens the scientific paradigm of cultural heritage research and preservation and allows issues of historical and cultural integration in Central Asia to be considered at a new methodological level. Future comprehensive and interdisciplinary study of the Archaeological complex Rakhat will contribute to a deeper understanding of cultural links between Eurasian civilizations, of historical communications along the Silk Road, and of the historical and cultural dynamics of the Zhetysu region.

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