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**VADIM MIKHAILOVICH MASSON  
AND HIS CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF CENTRAL ASIA<sup>1</sup>**

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One of the most prominent researchers of the antiquities of Central Asia, Vadim Mikhailovich Masson, was born on May 3, 1929 in the city of Samarkand, which was then the capital of the Uzbek SSR (now the administrative centre of the Samarkand viloyat of the Republic of Uzbekistan).

Vadim Mikhailovich's father, Mikhail Evgen'evich Masson, descended from the social estate of Honourable Citizen, abolished in 1917.<sup>2</sup> By the time of his son's birth he was the head of the Archaeological Department of the Uzbek Committee for Activities of Museums and Protection of the Monuments of Antiquity and Art in Tashkent. In 1936, he was placed at the head of the Chair of Archaeology at the Central Asian State University in Tashkent. In 1940, he became a university professor. His academic career was crowned in 1951 by election to the Academy of Sciences of the Turkmen SSR. Vadim Masson's mother, Kseniia Ivanovna Masson, born in the Kopytovski family in Samarkand, served in various Soviet institutions.<sup>3</sup>

Soon after his birth, Masson's parents took him to Tashkent – the city where he spent his childhood and younger years. In 1937, he entered Tashkent secondary school no. 80, and in 1945, having passed exams for his school-leaving certificate as an external student, he entered the Chair of Archaeology of Central Asia at the Historical Faculty of the Central Asian State University.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A comprehensive bibliography of the articles, books, reviews, etc., compiled by Lev M. Vsevirov (Saint Petersburg), is available on the *Anabasis* website as a pdf. It includes 627 entries.

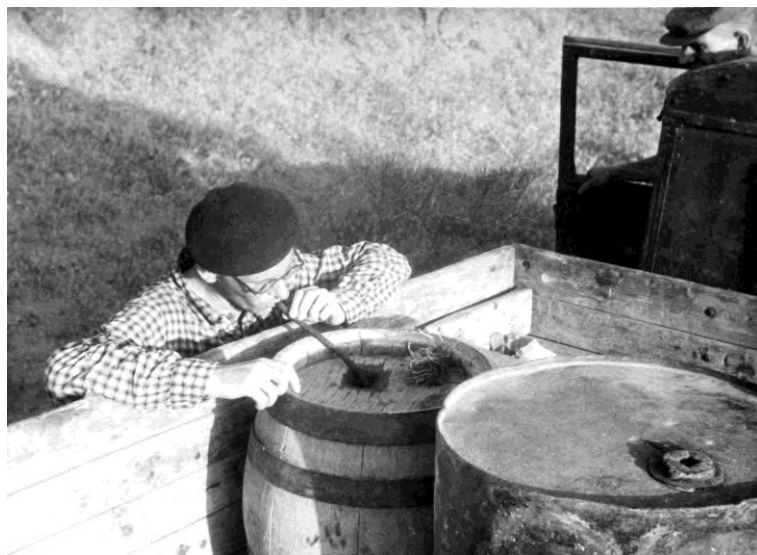
<sup>2</sup> RA, Reg. no. 6610, sheets 1, 115.

<sup>3</sup> RA, Reg. no. 6610, sheet 115.

<sup>4</sup> RA, Reg. no. 6610, sheet 3.



**Fig. 1.** Postgraduate student V.M. Masson. 1950. Photo from the private archives of V.M. Masson (RA, Reg. no. 6610, sheet 1).



**Fig. 2.** Masson in the field camp of the Kara-Kum Detachment of LOHMK AS USSR (excavation of the Neolithic site of Jeitun), (PhA, 02634/12).



**Fig. 3. Masson (lying) and V.I. Sarianidi during excavations of the Eneolithic site of Geoksiur 1 (1956), (PhA, 02634/45).**



**Fig. 4. Masson, 1960 (PhA, sheet 1942).**

From 1946, the student Vadim Masson participated in the field investigations of the South Turkmenistan Archaeological Interdisciplinary Expedition (hereafter referred to as IuTAKE) directed by his father. Throughout the years of his education in the university, the younger Masson conducted archaeological surveys along the routes of Ashkhabad–Kyzyl–Arvat and in the surroundings of Merv. He was also included in the team which carried out excavations at the townsite of Staraia (Old) Nisa near Ashkhabad.<sup>5</sup>

According to Masson, he started his scientific explorations in 1947; moreover, in 1948–1950, as the president of a student scientific archaeological circle, he delivered a number of lectures at the sessions of the Chair of Archaeology and student scientific conferences.<sup>6</sup>

In 1950, Masson successfully completed his university education in Tashkent with a major in archaeology, receiving a diploma with honours and a recommendation for a postgraduate course at the Turkmen Branch of AS USSR.<sup>7</sup> However, he passed his postgraduate exams in Leningrad.

<sup>5</sup> RA, Reg. no. 6610, sheet 3.

<sup>6</sup> RA, Reg. no. 6610, sheets 3, 6.

<sup>7</sup> RA, Reg. no. 6610, sheets 1, 6, 7.

On October 9, Masson passed the examination in English (mark “satisfactory”). On October 13, the exam in the speciality “History and archaeology of Central Asia” took place. His competence was tried by an authoritative commission including A.I. Iakubovskii (corresponding member of the AS USSR), K.V. Trever (corresponding member of the AS USSR), M.M. D’iakonov (doctor of history), and E.V. Skrzhinskaia (doctoral candidate in History). Masson’s answers were rewarded with an excellent mark. In addition, the applicant successfully passed trials in the language of his speciality (Persian). In this subject he was examined by a commission composed of M.M. D’iakonov, A.M. Belenitskii (doctoral candidate in History) and E.V. Skrzhinskaia.<sup>8</sup>

Following the results of the postgraduate examinations, Vadim Masson was accepted on November 1, 1950, with a half-year probation term, as a postgraduate student of the Turkmen Branch of the AS USSR in the speciality of archaeology of Central Asia. Furthermore, the Turkmen academic centre immediately applied to the Leningrad Branch of the Institute of the History of Material Culture (further on LOIIMK) with a request for his attachment to the latter institution for the entire term of his postgraduate education.<sup>9</sup> On April 1, 1952, he was transferred from the graduate course at the Academy of Sciences of the Turkmen SSR to that at LOIIMK AS USSR, which he completed on April 1, 1954.<sup>10</sup>

The choice of the scientific centre used for training was evidently determined by the fact that the authority of the departments of LOIIMK concerned with oriental archaeology was always high in the national republics of Central Asia and Kazakhstan. Soon after the Second World War, it was to none other than the LOIIMK Department of Archaeology of Central Asia that the director of the Chair of Archaeology of the Central Asian State University in Tashkent, Prof. M.E. Masson, applied for support, intending to organise the Southern Turkmen Archaeological Expedition (IuTAKE). In late December 1945, having heard Masson’s report, the Department approved all the organisational activities of the Institute of History, Language and Literature, the Turkmen Branch of AS USSR, which initiated the foundation of the IuTAKE. The Department stressed that the basic archaeological problems which the IuTAKE envisaged solving (investigation of the archaeological sites of the Palaeolithic, Eneolithic and Bronze Ages and those of the antique period in Turkmenistan) were not only of “national Soviet” but also of worldwide importance. In its resolution,

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<sup>8</sup> RA, Reg. no. 6610, sheets 11, 13, 15. On October 5, 1950, Masson gained a “distinction” in passing the exam in a course on “The fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism”, which was of essential importance in that period.

<sup>9</sup> RA, Reg. no. 6610, sheets 10, 17–19.

<sup>10</sup> RA, Reg. no. 6610, sheets 36, 39.

the Department expressed a desire to help the initiatives of the IuTAKE in the sphere of field and laboratory studies, as well as in personnel and financing (Alëkshin 2007, 47).

Besides, for M.E. Masson as a native of Saint Petersburg, it was probably impossible to overlook the “Northern Palmyra” as a city where his son would perfect his competence in the sphere of oriental archaeology.

Prof. M.M. D’iakonov (doctor of history)<sup>11</sup> was appointed the primary supervisor of the new postgraduate student. Originally, the subject of Masson’s candidate thesis was defined as “The ancient cultures of the Meshedi-Misrian region (in connection with the construction of the Main Turkmen channel)”<sup>12</sup>

During the years of the postgraduate course, Masson obtained solid scientific training, as suggested by the marks he was awarded in his graduate examinations: “History of Central Asia” – “excellent” (April 14, 1952), French – “good” (November 14, 1952), “Archaeology of Middle Asia” – “excellent” (March 4, 1953). The examination on the history of Middle Asia was conducted by Trever (the corresponding member of the AS USSR), D’iakonov, Belenitskii, and Skrzhinskaia, while that on the archaeology of Central Asia was conducted by Belenitskii, D’iakonov, and Skrzhinskaia.<sup>13</sup> The sphere of the field graduate student’s investigations was also expanding. In 1951–1953, in addition to the direction of the 10th detachment of IuTAKE, Masson also participated in explorations of the Sogdian-Tajik (Tajik since 1952) Archaeological Expedition of LOIIMK AS USSR, which until 1952 was directed by Iakubovskii and, in 1953, by D’iakonov.<sup>14</sup>

Upon completion of his postgraduate course on April 1, 1954, and presentation of the candidate thesis, Masson, as a promising researcher, was accepted into the staff of the LOIIMK as a scientific associate without an academic degree at the Department of Archaeology of Central Asia and the Caucasus.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The Russian “doktor nauk”, translated as “Doctor of Sciences”, is a higher doctoral degree, the second and higher postgraduate academic degree in the Soviet Union, Russia, and many post-Soviet states.

<sup>12</sup> RA, Reg. no. 6610, sheets 19, 22.

<sup>13</sup> RA, Reg. no. 6610, sheets 27, 31 rev., 33, 34, 49.

<sup>14</sup> Alëkshin 2007, 47, 51; Masson M. 1956, 9; Masson 1956, 388; RA, Reg. no. 6610, sheets 29, 31 rev., 33, 34, 49. It is to be noted that Masson was intensely occupied with public-political activities, without which at the time nobody was able to build a successful scientific career. It was precisely because of this fact that, in 1951 and 1952, the young postgraduate student was the secretary of a cell of the All-Union Lenin Communist League of Young People in LOIIMK AS USSR, the labour union organiser at the Department of Central Asia and the Caucasus and the assistant secretary of the united Komsomol organisation of LOIIMK and the Department of Manuscripts of the Leningrad Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies AS USSR. See RA, Reg. no. 6610, sheets 26 rev., 40, 61.

<sup>15</sup> RA, Reg. no. 6610, sheets 55, 58.



**Fig. 5. Masson and L.B. Kircho in the field camp of the Kara-Kum Expedition of LOIA AS USSR (Excavation of the settlement site of Altyn-Depe of the Neolithic Epoch and Bronze Age, 1974). Photo from the private archives of L. B. Kircho.**



**Fig. 6. Masson (sitting in the second row, sixth from the right) among the team of the assistants of the Kara-Kum Expedition of LOIA AS USSR (Excavation of Altyn-Depe, 1979). Photo from the private archives of V.A. AlĚkshin.**



**Fig. 7. Masson (standing in the third row, fourth from the left) among the participants of the 2nd Soviet-American Symposium on the Problems of Archaeology of Central Asia and Near East (Samarkand, 1983). Photo from the private archive of V.A. Alëkshin.**



**Fig. 8. Masson (Uzgen, Southern Kirgizia, 1999). Photo from the private archives of I.G. Kutimov.**

On April 21 of the same year, Masson defended his Candidate History<sup>16</sup> thesis, which in the new formulation was entitled “The Ancient Culture of Dakhistan (Historico-Archaeological Review)”. The formal opponents of the thesis were B.B. Piotrovskii (doctor of history), and A.M. Belenitskii (candidate of history).<sup>17</sup> The main results of the presented qualification study, based on the field explorations of the 10th Detachment of the IuTAKE, were published in the 7th volume of the transactions of this expedition (Masson 1956). In the work mentioned, the materials of excavations of two settlement sites in the Misrian plain in south-western Turkmenia (Izat-Kuli and Madau-Depe) were published. Through analysis of the ceramic complexes of these sites, Masson arrived at the conclusion that the early agricultural culture of Archaic Dakhistan in Caspian Turkmenistan had genetic links with the culture of the Astrabad Bronze Age (sites of Shah-Tepe and Tureng-Tepe in Iran), although the former is dated from a later period. The author dated the Caspian sites which he investigated generally to the second half of the 2nd millennium BC and the first third of the 1st millennium BC, i.e. to the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age.

In the same volume of papers of the IuTAKE, the young researcher published two more large articles. One (Masson 1956a) was devoted to a description of the clay pottery of the Anau culture widely distributed in the foothill plain of the Kopet-Dagh during the Eneolithic and Bronze Ages. This ceramic assemblage was obtained due to the efforts of Prof. B.A. Kuftin, who headed the 14th detachment of the IuTAKE in 1952. The main task of the latter included surveys and excavations of the early agricultural sites located south-east of Ashkhabad (Kuftin 1956). Only a single field season of investigations resulted in the development by this researcher of an essentially new system of periodisation of the Anau culture on the basis of stratigraphic studies of Namazga-Depe – one of the largest primordial sites, not only in the Turkmen SSR but also throughout the whole of Central Asia. Kuftin subdivided the levels of cultural deposits at the site into six cultural and chronological periods (Namazga I to Namazga VI).

The untimely death of the professor on August 2, 1953 shattered his plans to publish the results of his studies. In consideration of the fact that Kuftin’s excavations in the piedmont plain of Turkmenia were of principal importance for the archaeology of Central Asia, it was decided to present to the public the most numerous category of finds (pottery collections) obtained by the deceased professor. V.M. Masson was charged with the treatment and preparation of these artefacts for publication. The young scientist proved up to the task. He not only published the complexes under consideration, but also identified synchronous

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<sup>16</sup> The Candidate of Sciences (Russian “kandidat nauk”) was the first postgraduate scientific degree in the Soviet Union and Russia.

<sup>17</sup> RA, Reg. no. 6610, sheet 57.



materials yielded by excavations in a number of early agricultural settlements of Northern Iran (Sialk, Hissar, Shah-Tepe, Giyan-Tepe), as well as outlining, on the basis of the information then available, the absolute chronology of the cultural stages marked out by Kuftin.

Masson's other work, also published in the 7th volume of the papers of the IuTAKE (Masson 1956b), was a section of the chapter "*Pervobytno-obshchinniy stroi*" (Primordial Social System) which he wrote for the first volume of *Istoriia Turkmenskoï SSR* (History of the Turkmen SSR) (Masson 1956, 10). This paper was based entirely on the archaeological finds from excavations of sites of the early agrarian culture in the foothill plain of the Kopet-Dagh piedmont which existed in the given region from the Neolithic Epoch until the Early Iron Age.

Works on all the subjects mentioned above determined Masson's final choice of archaeological speciality, as he received his Candidate History diploma on October 4, 1954.<sup>18</sup> Secondly, it induced him to start, in 1954, at the Department of Central Asia and the Caucasus of LOIIMK, the development of a new scientific school concerned with investigations of early agrarian sites in Central Asia.<sup>19</sup> The excavations at the early agricultural site of Luka Vrublevetskaïa in Ukraine (1946–1948, 1951, 1953) were thematically close to this direction, although they were conducted prior to the publication of Masson's works. However, they were realised by S.N. Bibikov, an assistant of the Department of Palaeolithic Studies of LOIIMK and, besides, they were not continued at the Institute, whereas Masson, who from 1955 headed the Kara-Kum Detachment of the LOIIMK, until the beginning of the present century continued the studies of early agrarian sites of the Neolithic and Eneolithic Ages in the south of Turkmenia.

Masson's investigations in the foothills of Kopet-Dagh in the second half of the 1950s and early 1960s are marked primarily by the systematic excavations of the Neolithic settlement of Jeitun (1955–1959, 1962, 1963). These excavations were the first studies that really put forward the problem of the spread of the food-producing economy in Central Asia. First, preliminary results of the excavation of this site were published (Masson 1960), followed subsequently by a summarising monograph (Masson 1971), where the Jeitun culture was tied to the context of the early agrarian cultures of the Near and Middle East. The earliest cultural deposits of Jeitun indicate that at the turn of the 6th millennium BC, tribes spread in the foothill plain of Kopet-Dagh, which possessed the skills of clay pottery-making. Studies of this settlement allowed Masson to propose the hypothesis on the South-Turkmen centre of early agrarian cultures, later con-

<sup>18</sup> RA, Reg. no. 6610, sheet 66.

<sup>19</sup> RA, Reg. no. 6610, sheet 60.

firmed due to many years of research by Masson, I.N. Khlopin and V.I. Sarianidi in the south of the Turkmen SSR.

Simultaneously with the excavations at Jeitun, Masson investigated the large Eneolithic site of Kara-Depe (1955–1957, 1960, 1961, 1963). The studies of this settlement indicated (Masson 1960a, 1962) that, during the Eneolithic epoch, cultural standards were formed that predetermined the peak of the Bronze Age civilisation in the piedmont plain of the Kopet-Dagh.

Noteworthy too are V.M. Masson's pioneering studies in the delta of the Murghab River in the south-east of the Turkmen SSR. During three field seasons (1954–1956), the young scientist conducted excavations of settlement sites of the late Bronze Age (Takhirbaī 3 and Auchin-Depe) and Iron Age (Īaz-Depe). In the course of these studies, Masson established that the sites of the late Bronze Age discovered by him belonged to the Murghab variant of the cultural and chronological period of Namazga-VI marked out by Kuftin in the piedmont plain of the Kopet-Dagh. At the settlement of Īaz-Depe dated from the Iron Age, the researcher identified three cultural and chronological periods (Īaz I–III, the first dated to the 9th–7th centuries BC, and the last to the 5th–4th centuries BC. The artefacts which Masson retrieved during the excavations of these sites were presented to the scientific community and compared with all the supposable analogues from the neighbouring regions of Central Asia, the Middle East and the steppe zone of Eurasia (Masson 1959).

A summarising analysis of all Masson's abovementioned field projects was presented in his doctoral dissertation "The Earliest Past of Central Asia (since the Appearance of Agriculture until the Campaign of Alexander of Macedon)", which he defended in March 1963 at a meeting of the Scientific Council of the Leningrad State University (hereafter LGU). On September 14 of the same year, the scholar was handed a Doctor of Historical Sciences,<sup>20</sup> and on March 6, 1964, he was elected a Senior Scientific Assistant of the Leningrad Branch of the Institute of Archaeology AS USSR (hereafter LOIA AS USSR).<sup>21</sup>

Masson's doctoral dissertation was soon published under the title "*Sredniāia Aziā i Drevnīi Vostok*" ("Central Asia and the Ancient East", Masson 1964). In this monograph, a detailed characterisation of the Neolithic and Eneolithic sites of southern Turkmenia at the north-eastern fringe of the early agrarian *oikoumene* was first proposed within the context of the archaeology of the Near and Middle East. This work is distinguished by the wide scope of the problems, the novelty of the conclusions and the richness of the illustrative materials. The solidity of this fundamental study meant that for a long time it became a desk

<sup>20</sup> RA, Reg. no. 6610, sheets 106, 118.

<sup>21</sup> RA, Reg. no. 6610, sheet 108.

book for different researchers, including those who are not immediately concerned with the oriental archaeology to which the monograph was actually devoted.

In 1965, Masson started to realise the main project of his life – excavations of Altyn-Depe, a long-lived settlement of the Eneolithic epoch and Bronze Age in the south-east of Turkmenistan. These excavations would continue until 2001.

Studies of the stratigraphy of the site and excavations of its upper cultural levels dated to the end of the Early and Middle Bronze Age (last third of the 3rd–early 2nd millennia BC) yielded a comprehensive description of the material and spiritual culture of this very important centre of the early agrarian civilisation, which effected a significant influence upon its neighbours in the northern and eastern parts of the Central Asiatic region.

The field investigations at Altyn-Depe resulted in the discovery of the central entrance to the settlement. On both sides of the latter were two narrow passages for pedestrians. One of the hillocks at the site concealed the ruins of a cult structure adjoined by a well-preserved architectural complex composed of a suite of rooms. After its abandonment, the house was employed for burials. Unique finds from one of the rooms of the enfilade (the gold heads of a bull and a wolf, a small inlaid stone plaque with representations of a cross and a crescent, a stone seal with a representation of a swastika, a stone column and a staff, beads from lapis-lazuli, cornelian and gold) suggest that the inside of the house at some point evidently served for interring priests.

The types of the multi-chambered dwelling houses and the grave goods from collective burials at Altyn-Depe suggest the presence of at least three groups of population differing in their material prosperity. The artefacts uncovered at the site indicate a high level of development of local manufacture of handicraft. This fact is confirmed by finds of earthenware produced with a rapid-rotation potter's wheel and baked in kilns at a temperature of up to 1000°C, stone vessels, metal objects (knives, cosmetic rods and seals), as well as diverse ceramic plastics, primarily terracottas representing women. Copious evidence has been discovered of contacts of the population of Altyn-Depe with the early agrarian communities of Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. Stratigraphic studies of the deposits of the Late Eneolithic epoch and Early Bronze Age have enabled the process of formation of the early urban civilisation of Altyn-Depe to be traced.

The excavations of this site have demonstrated that the territory in which it is located was the northern fringe of a large agricultural *oikoumene* comprising certain regions of the Middle East and Southern Asia. The civilisations of the settled population established in this vast area in the 4th–early 2nd millennia BC were evidently interrelated through common origins and had constant cultural contacts. The results of excavations at Altyn-Depe were presented in a summaris-

ing monograph (Masson 1981), for the publication of which in 1989 Masson was awarded a State Prize of the Turkmen SSR.<sup>22</sup>

From 1985, V.M. Masson, along with the continuation of excavations at Altyn-Depe, started systematic investigations of the Eneolithic site of Ilgynly-Depe located nearby. Excavations of this site, uninterrupted until 1991, as well as those of 1993–1995, 1997 and 1999, have yielded magnificent examples of ancient architecture (dwelling rooms, sanctuaries) and art (anthropomorphic ceramic and stone sculptures) of the early agriculturalists of Central Asia. New materials characterising the spiritual culture of the populaces of the Copper/Stone Age could thus be discovered.

The sanctuaries of Ilgynly-Depe are marked by a rich and diversified interior (painted floors, wooden and clay benches covered with ochre; relief and painted patterns on the walls), specific layout and abundant precious finds uncommon for such an early period (metal tools, ritual vessels and anthropomorphic statuettes from stone and clay). These ceremonious chambers may have been periodically used both as ritual and dwelling rooms.

During the excavations, material traces of the rituals accompanying the abandoning of the ceremonial halls were also revealed. Rites of such a type were first recorded at early agricultural sites in the south of Central Asia.

At Ilgynly-Depe, a wall painting was discovered with a scene representing a tree and a mythological character standing nearby on two limbs combining anthropo- and zoomorphic features. In terms of its significance, this painting is comparable only with those revealed at the Neolithic settlement of Çatal Hüyük in Asia Minor. Properly speaking, Ilgynly-Depe, with its system of ceremonious rooms – presumably sanctuaries, is a Central Asian analogue of Çatal Hüyük (Turkey).

All the abovementioned field projects and the scientific results gained during their course demonstrate the considerable contribution Masson made to the development of the primordial archaeology of Central Asia and the Near and Middle East. When analysing the extremely rich archaeological collections which he recovered during excavations of ancient agricultural sites dated to the period from the Neolithic Epoch to the Early Iron Age, Masson considered the fundamental problems of the formation of the food-producing economy and development of complex societies of Eneolithic and Bronze Ages in Central Asia and regions adjoining it. His excavations added a vivid page to the advancement of oriental archaeology, particularly in studies of the social system of the early agricultural tribes (Masson 1976) and problems of cultural genesis (Masson 1989, 2006). Masson's achievements were honoured by the Academy of Sciences and the Government of the

<sup>22</sup> RA, Reg. no. 6610, sheet 250.

Turkmen SSR. In 1978, he was elected a Corresponding Member of the Academy of Sciences of the Turkmen SSR, and, in May the next year, he was awarded the title of an Honoured Science Worker of the Turkmen SSR.<sup>23</sup>

V.M. Masson was a brilliant scientific leader. From November 1, 1968 until March 31, 2003 he headed the Sector (as of 1986 Department) of Archaeology of Middle / Central Asia at the LOIA AS USSR (Institute of the History of Material Culture RAS – hereafter IIMK RAS). From January 4, 1982 until May 12, 1998 he directed the LOIA AS USSR / IIMK RAS).<sup>24</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, Masson headed the Inter-Republic Scientific Council on the Archaeology of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, which organised regional sessions on urgent problems of archaeology of that vast area. To a great extent owing to Masson, in 1991 the LOIA AS USSR was transformed into an independent institution (IIMK RAS).

By the beginning of the 1980s, the advance in archaeological knowledge of Central Asia, to which Masson so much contributed, was estimated at its true worth at many foreign scientific centres concerned with studies of early agrarian cultures of the period from the Neolithic Epoch to the Iron Age in the Middle East and Hindustan. Through the efforts of scholars from different countries, the diverse cultural links between the civilisations of all these vast regions has been studied. Therefore, it is not surprising that, precisely in those years, the necessity arose to exchange information on the routes of evolution of complex societies, the historical sites of which have turned out to be located in areas now divided by national borders. For this reason, a number of bilateral symposia were held (Soviet-French in 1982, 1985, 1987; Soviet-American in 1981, 1983, 1986; Soviet-Indian in 1984). Masson played a significant role in their organisation (Alëkshin 2007, 65, 66). At these scientific forums, such vital problems of the archaeology of Central Asia, the Near East, Afghanistan and Hindustan were discussed as the cultural transformations and appearance of handicrafts, ancient trade, cultural ties, social and economic processes in the period of the formation of states and ecological aspects of the cultural transitions.

In addition to his dealing with the proto- and prehistoric archaeology covering the Neolithic, Eneolithic, Bronze and Early Iron Ages of Central Asia and Iran, from the earliest stage of his scholarly career and for the whole period of his life Masson was greatly interested in the study of the antique civilisations within these territories.<sup>25</sup> He headed excavations that were conducted by expeditions of the Leningrad Branch of the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR at ancient sites containing cultural layers dated to Hellenistic times through Late Antiquity in Southern Turkmenistan (Old Nisa in 1982–

<sup>23</sup> RA, Reg. no. 6610, sheets 183, 183 rev.

<sup>24</sup> RA, Reg. no. 6610, sheets 129, 223, 242.

<sup>25</sup> This paragraph was written by V.P. Nikonorov.

1986 and Old Merv in 1992) and Southern Uzbekistan (Zartepa in 1972–1986 and Kampyrtepa in 1988–1991). Masson was one of the organisers of the International Merv Project, within which a joint team composed of archaeologists from Turkmenistan, the United Kingdom and Russia excavated the Old Merv sites in 1992 to 2000. The materials obtained from all these sites contributed very much to our understanding of the history and culture of the southern regions of western Central Asia during the Hellenistic, Arsacid and Kushan periods. Masson also published many works devoted to the archaeology, history, culture and numismatics of Bactria, Parthiense, Margiana, Chorasnia and Hyrcania, as well as general studies on the remote past, including the antique epoch, of western Central Asia, Iran and Afghanistan.<sup>26</sup>

Masson's scientific-pedagogical activities were also very extensive. From 1957, he delivered a course of lectures entitled "Archaeology of Central Asia" for archaeology students at the Faculty of History at the Leningrad State University,<sup>27</sup> and afterwards the course "Archaeology of the Ancient East". In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Masson led the student East Seminar at the Chair of Archaeology of LGU.

During the numerous years of his educational activities, Masson nurtured several generations of disciples. Under his guidance, postgraduate students and trainees from different archaeological centres of the USSR (Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kirgizia, Moldavia, the Russian Federative Republic, and foreign countries (Vietnam, Republic of Korea, Syria) were educated in Saint Petersburg. The Central Asiatic group of the assistants of the Department now is composed, almost without exception, of Masson's disciples. For the successful training of scientific personnel, on August 7, 1973 Masson was conferred the title of professor with the speciality of "Archaeology".<sup>28</sup>

Masson's achievements in the field of archaeology were honoured by the award of a number of scientific titles. He was elected an Academician of the Russian Federation, Academician of Turkmenistan, Academician of the National Academy of Kyrgyzstan, an Honoured Science Worker of the Russian Federation, and an Honoured and Full Member of several foreign academies and institutes (Great Britain, Germany, Denmark, Italy, Romania).<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> These publications are listed in: V.P. Nikonorov, "70 let posle 'Politicheskoi istorii Parfii' N.K. Dibvoiza: Bibliografiia rabot po istorii, kul'ture i sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi zhizni Parfianskogo gosudarstva i sopredel'nykh s nim territorii (1938–2008)", in N. C. Debevoise [N.K. Dibvoiz], *Politicheskaiia istoriia Parfii*, St. Petersburg 2008, 277–278, 353, 403, 459, 525–527, 636–637, 711, 743.

<sup>27</sup> RA, Reg. no. 6610, sheet 112 rev.

<sup>28</sup> RA, Reg. no. 6610, sheet 142. V.M. Masson succeeded in training 40 Candidates Phil. and 11 Doctors Phil.

<sup>29</sup> Masson 2000, 21–22.

From April 1, 2003 until his death on February 19, 2010, V.M. Masson was a Senior Scientific Assistant of the Department of Archaeology of Central Asia and the Caucasus at the IIMK RAS. Until his very last days he did not abandon his active scientific activity.

Assessing Masson's scientific life, we must pay the tribute to the firmness of purpose with which for over half a century he explored the antiquities of Central Asia, his amazing capacity for work and the acuteness of his analytical intellect due to which his scientific heritage will long retain its relevance for subsequent generations of archaeologists.

V.M. Masson left a distinct trace in archaeology having exposed to the scientific community and everybody interested in the earliest past of the East the brilliant inflorescence of ancient agrarian cultures of Central Asia which laid the foundations of the ancient civilisations of this huge historico-cultural region. From time immemorial, this region was a connecting link between the early urban centres of the Middle East and the world of the "barbarians" who settled the "Great Zone" of the steppes of Eurasia.

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### Abbreviations

- ZIIMK – *Zapiski Instituta istorii material'noi kul'tury RAN* (Papers of the Institute of the History of Material Culture RAS), St. Petersburg.
- IIMK RAS – *Institut istorii material'noi kul'tury RAN* (Institute of the History of Material Culture RAS).
- LGU – *Leningradskii gosudarstvennyi universitet* (Leningrad State University).
- LOIA – *Leningradskoe otdelenie Instituta arkheologii* (Leningrad Branch of the Institute of Archaeology).
- LOIIMK – *Leningradskoe otdelenie Instituta istorii material'noi kul'tury* (Leningrad Branch of the Institute of the History of Material Culture).
- RA – *Rukopisnyi arkhiv IIMK RAN* (Manuscript Archives of IIMK RAS)
- SAI – *Svod arkheologicheskikh istochnikov* (Corpus of Archaeological Sources), Moscow/Leningrad.
- IuTAKE – *Iuzhno-Turkmenistsanskaia arkheologicheskaiia kompleksnaia ekspeditsiia* (South Turkmenistan Archaeological Interdisciplinary Expedition).
- PhA – Photo archives of IIMK RAS.

### Abstract

Vadim Mikhailovich Masson (1929–2010) was one of the outstanding researchers of the antiquities of Central Asia. Vadim Mikhailovich's father, Mikhail Evgenevich Masson, was an archaeologist active in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, while his mother, Kseniia Ivanovna Masson (de domo Kopytovski) served in various Soviet institutions. In addition to his dealing with the proto- and prehistoric archaeology covering the Neolithic, Eneolithic, Bronze and Early Iron Ages of Central Asia and Iran, Masson was interested in the study of the antique civilizations of Central Asia. He headed a number of archaeological expeditions of the Leningrad Branch of the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR at ancient sites in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.