



From Reading to Russia

With the help of funding from the Wainwright award one of our undergraduate students, Paulina Drzewinska, spent last summer in Russia, working in the dirt and dust of a Scythian kurghan. Read her account below.



"Thanks to the kind help and encouragement of [Dr Heinrich Härke](#), I managed to get involved in a project led by 'Nasledie' (Cultural Heritage Unit for Stavropol Region, southern Russia) and Moscow State University, which took place near Novopavlovsk in the North Caucasus. A team of archaeologists, students and a number of keen locals uncovered a Scythian noble burial mound from the second half of 7th century BC. The estimates of date and cultural origin of the site were made prior to excavations, based on geophysical survey, information from two small trenches dug across the kurghan, as well as the amazing intuition and experience of the team leaders. In the course of excavations the kurghan turned out to be slightly older than expected. This information, however, was not so easy to obtain as previously thought. Unlike most of other Scythian kurghans, this one was covered by a protective layer of stones. The mound's substantial dimensions (4m height and c. 20m diameter) provided enough stones for the first three weeks of excavations. After that things could only get better. A JCB (Or rather its Russian version, but an amazing view on archaeological site, anyway!) dug through four meters of sand and clay to get to the part that everyone was eagerly looking forward to see. The burial. A circle of wood was uncovered (and carefully, thoroughly cleaned to the great disappointment of most of the team), under which there was the tomb itself. At this point I ran out of time and had to leave (due to important dissertation obligations), but the excavations carried on and a wooden construction with a number of small finds were uncovered, such as decorative fittings (beads and plaques) from gold, faience or glass to name but a few.



As all archaeologists know, digging is not the only part of an archaeological expedition. I had a unique chance to experience Russian culture, meet many interesting people and adopt a role of a myth buster in fighting the long-established stereotypes. There are no bears playing 'balalaikas', which my fellow traveller (a postgraduate UCL student) previously thought and the Russians do spend their time on other activities than drinking vodka. The North Caucasus is an area with very complex history so the social relations among its inhabitants are difficult to grasp, unless one visits the region, but also extremely interesting and thought-provoking. For an archaeologist such adventure can not be compared with anything else. It is so important in our field to gain a lot of experience and become familiar with excavation techniques in different parts of the world."

Paulina Drzewinska