

URBANIZATION OF THE KHOREZM OASIS IN THE ANTIQUE PERIOD: A HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract. This article examines the formation and development of cities in the Khorezm oasis from the 4th century BC to the 3rd century AD. The study aims to identify the specific features of urbanization in ancient Khorezm through the analysis of historical and archaeological evidence. Special attention is paid to the administrative, military, religious, and economic functions of urban centers, as well as their internal structure and spatial organization. The article highlights the distinctive characteristics of Khorezmian urban development in comparison with Bactria and Sogdiana. Issues related to residential quarters, fortifications, craft production areas, and trade centers are analyzed in the context of state policy.

Keywords: Antique period, Khorezm oasis, urbanization, ancient cities, urban planning, craftsmanship, trade, fortifications, state policy.

Introduction. Ancient Khorezm was one of the oldest centers of civilization in Central Asia, where processes of urbanization and the formation of state governance systems can be observed starting from the 4th century BCE. In the antique period, the cities that emerged in the Khorezm oasis served not only as population settlements but also performed important functions as administrative, military, religious, and economic centers. These cities developed in close connection with irrigation-based agriculture, crafts, and trade relations.

Existing scholarly works have primarily focused on individual monuments or general processes of urbanization, while issues concerning the internal structure of cities, their functional characteristics, and their role in state policy have been addressed only in a fragmentary manner.

Literature Review. The archaeological-ethnographic expeditions in Khorezm led by S.P. Tolstov provided a crucial scientific foundation for the study of Khorezmian urbanism. The scholar analyzed such key sites as Jonboskala, Tuprokkala, and Okchakhonkala, paying particular attention to their topographic structure and defensive systems.

V.M. Masson interpreted ancient cities as cultural and administrative centers and emphasized the necessity of their in-depth archaeological investigation. E.E. Nerazik, focusing on the large number of cities in antique-period Khorezm and their territorial distribution, proposed the concept of a distinctive model of Khorezmian urbanization.

Methodological Foundations. The study is grounded in the fundamental methodological principles of historicism, objectivity, and systematicity. The formation and development of cities in antique Khorezm are analyzed in the context of the consistent progression of historical processes, as well as in inseparable connection with the natural-geographical environment and socio-economic factors.

A comprehensive approach was employed, integrating historical-comparative, archaeological, historical-typological, historical-geographical, and source-critical methods. This methodological framework enabled a systematic examination of the urbanization processes in Khorezm from territorial, functional, and historical perspectives.

Analysis. No dedicated specialized study has been created on the history of the cities of ancient Khorezm (4th century BCE – 3rd century CE). This topic has found reflection only in individual chapters of monographs and, more frequently, in scholarly articles.

In M.M. Mambetullaev's dissertation work, the cities of the antique period in the Khorezm oasis are classified into groups based on topographic and defensive system features: cities with an inner citadel surrounded by defensive walls and towers, or those without such a citadel.

V.M. Masson defines ancient cities as cultural centers and notes the relevance of studying their architectural structure from an archaeological perspective [5, pp. 3–12]. According to E.E. Nerazik, numerous cities emerged in Khorezm in the 4th–3rd centuries BCE, and by the 4th century CE, at least 16–17 cities had developed. These include Okchakhonkala, Bazarkala, Khiva, Katta Oybuyirkala, Voyangan, Hazorasp, and others [6, p. 549]. However, the majority of these cities have not been extensively studied through large-scale archaeological excavations. Therefore, the data obtained regarding their production, economic, cultural, administrative, and military-political functions are uneven in terms of chronological coverage.

Tuprokkala, established in the 2nd century CE as the religious-dynastic center of the kings in the Khorezm oasis, is considered the best-studied city among the ancient oases' cities. Its area containing the large palace was fortified with an inner defensive wall, separating it from the residential quarters. The city's population is believed to have been engaged in serving the royal dynasty's palace. However, a city like Tuprokkala represents a unique case, as its inhabitants—craftsmen, farmers, and others performing various duties—were exclusively occupied with servicing the palace economy. Consequently, this dynastic center and palace economy is a unique example in the history of Khorezm during the 2nd–3rd centuries CE. At the same time, it should be emphasized that in ancient society, cities specializing in crafts and trade occupied a primary economic role.

According to E.E. Nerazik, unlike the cities of antique-period Sogdia and Bactria, no quarters inhabited by craftsmen, merchants, nobles, and other social strata of the population have been identified in Khorezmian cities. For comparison, the researcher cites Dalvarzintepa in the Surkhandarya oasis as an example of such a well-studied city.

The structure of the ancient city of Dalvarzin consisted of buildings and quarters performing various social and production functions, separate craftsmen's quarters, residences of ordinary city dwellers, and large houses of wealthy individuals [7, p. 240]. Based on the topographic features of Jonboskala dating to the 3rd–2nd centuries BCE, S.P. Tolstov proposed a reconstructed appearance of the city. During investigations, the city's defensive walls without towers, a single main gateway with a labyrinth-like entrance structure, and ruins of another structure at the northern edge of the inner part of the city were relatively well preserved; however, the published photographs do not show remains of other buildings in Jonboskala. In the reconstruction of Jonboskala, a single main street is depicted running from the city gate along its central axis, with residential quarters on both sides and a fire temple at the end of the central street. According to S.P. Tolstov, members of separate clans lived in the houses in the two parts of the city divided by the street, but the scholar provides no information about their social strata or professions. This approach is understandable, as views on Jonboskala are based on hypotheses. Nevertheless, hypothetical ideas about the residential areas of the population in Jonboskala's layout, the central street, and the narrow streets between the center and the houses have influenced conclusions in subsequent works on the internal structure of antique-period Khorezmian cities, leading to their use in research.

According to E.E. Nerazik, the classification of Khorezmian cities developed by M.M. Mambetullaev is based on external features (the presence or absence of an inner citadel, the presence or absence of towers on defensive walls), making it difficult to consider such an approach successful. It should be emphasized that archaeological excavations conducted by M.M. Mambetullaev at Katta Oybuyirkala revealed remains of residential structures dating to

the 4th–2nd centuries BCE, built of mud bricks, within this type of fortress located in northern Khorezm on the border with deserts [4, pp. 102–105]. For example, in Bazarkala and Okchakhonkala, apart from the inner citadel and palace-temple, no residential houses for the city population were built; similarly, no remains of residences were found in Katta Kirkizkala, Kaparas, Ankakala, and Dumankala. The results of investigations at Katkala, located on the left bank of the Amu Darya, are noteworthy. According to them, starting from the 4th–3rd centuries BCE, residential quarters of the city were noted in its eastern part, while craft workshops were located in the western part.

Results. Based on the data analyzed above, it should be noted that directly transferring the processes of urbanization observed in antique-period Bactria or Sogdia to Khorezm and using them as a basis to explain the specific features of urban development here would be an incorrect approach. In the southern regions of Central Asia, ancient urbanization during this period represented a fusion of local and Hellenistic traditions. In the Khorezm oasis, cities emerged and developed under different conditions, which gave rise to the main factors influencing urbanization processes in the oasis.

First, Khorezm was surrounded by deserts and territories inhabited by nomadic tribes. For this reason, in the state policy of city construction in Khorezm, not only protection from potential nomadic invasions but also the establishment and large-scale development of trade relations with pastoral tribes led to the construction—along the royal borders—of medium-sized cities with military fortifications that held trade and economic significance. For example, in Katta Oybuyirkala, which belonged to this group of cities, remains of grain storage facilities—large khums for storing barley, wheat, and millet—were discovered. These agricultural products were intended for exchange with nomads. A similar situation was identified at Kurgashinkala, located near the Kyzylkum desert. Inside the fortress, large quantities of grain products were stored in khums and special containers. These agricultural reserves belonged to the farming communities living around Kurgashinkala and, according to researchers, the fortress served as a refuge for the population during external invasions [3, pp. 90–141]. In our opinion, grain products were used not only for internal consumption but also for external trade.

Thus, city-type settlements and individual fortresses built along the borders of Khorezm held significant military and economic importance in state policy. This crucial factor has also been noted in scholarly works [1, pp. 79–80]. In addition, cities along caravan routes and fortresses located within agricultural oases became supporting centers of state authority. In general, in the process of formation and development of the new state—the Khorezm kingdom—a close interconnection is observed in the system of cities and settlements. Military-administrative fortresses were constructed for protection against external invasions and for controlling internal relations.

This is, in fact, a natural phenomenon that first manifested itself in the regions of the East where early states and civilizations emerged, from both socio-economic and political perspectives. In Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley, territorial administrations possessed their own fortress-residences, from which control was exercised over the reserves of agricultural products produced by surrounding communities and the quantities of crafted items. Community members satisfied their needs for certain products, while the surplus was withdrawn from consumption and deposited in fortress storehouses. On this basis, a taxation system emerged. A similar system of territorial-administrative units and taxation developed in the Khorezm kingdom. Alongside this, as in other historical-cultural regions of the Ancient East and Central Asia, the existence of large-family households, palace economies, and temple economies has

been established in Khorezm. This testifies to the many common features in the socio-economic structure of statehood based on artificial irrigation.

The issue of the role of crafts in the cities of ancient Khorezm remains particularly relevant. Although some studies mention the existence of craftsmen's quarters and production workshops in cities, these remain unexamined. Therefore, the view has been put forward that cities in Khorezm were primarily administrative and religious centers and, to a lesser extent, places of trade and crafts. This interpretation is, to a certain degree, substantiated. For example, in the largest cities by area—Okchakhonkala (42 ha) and Bazarkala (33 ha)—no remains of craft workshops have been identified. Archaeological data obtained from Okchakhonkala indicate that the city performed dynastic-religious and administrative functions.

It has been established that craft production in the Khorezm oasis was primarily organized within agricultural oases. In the Nurum agricultural oasis-district, located on the border with the Karakum in the western part of Khorezm, more than 40 pottery kilns for firing clay vessels were found, along with traces of bronze casting and ironworking, as well as large ceramic vessels used for producing and storing wine.

Conclusion. It is known that in the antique period in Sogdiana, Bactria, Parthia, and Khorezm, large fields were allocated for vineyards, and wine production and trade were widely developed. For example, at Dalvarzintepa in Bactria mentioned above, a wine production, storage, and sales facility-shop yielded large khums together with jugs, goblets, bowls, cup-shaped vessels, and 15 Kushan-period coins scattered in various places in the room.

The location of oasis-districts such as Nurum along the borders of Khorezm can be explained by economic ties between Khorezmian farmers and desert pastoral tribes—that is, craft production was organized as close as possible to pastoral consumers. To provide additional evidence for this situation, researchers have cited information from written sources indicating that even during the Khiva Khanate period in Khorezm, markets existed around agricultural oases close to the pastures of populations engaged in animal husbandry. Markets consisting of craft workshops and trade shops were organized around the residence of the khan's representative-governor, meaning that trade activities were conducted with the permission of the central government.

Positive changes occurred in the culture and socio-economic relations of antique-period Khorezm, manifesting themselves in the rise of urbanization processes with distinctive characteristics. Compared to the Achaemenid period, numerous new urban centers emerged and developed. Their quantitative growth reflected the targeted urban development policy of the Khorezm state, including the development of trade-craft cities (Katta Oybuyirkala, Kat, Khazorasp) and dynastic-religious centers (Okchakhonkala, Tuprokkala).

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