

HISTORY OF THE SOCIO – POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHOCH OASIS IN THE 6TH-8TH CENTURIES

Tursunov Asror Allanazarovich

Associate Professor at the University of Information Technology and Management

Cho'liyeva Maftuna Sobir kizi

1st-year Master's Student at the University of Information Technology and Management

Annotation: This article explores the socio – political development processes of the Choch oasis in the 6th-8th centuries. As a result of the choch Oasis being part of the Turkish Khaganate, political and economic life developed rapidly in the area. Trade and craft centers expanded in the cities and irrigation systems were improved. Cultural ties between Sughd traders and the local population were strengthened. However, as a result of the Arab Caliphate's raiding campaigns in the first half of the 8th century, the Oasis faces an economic crisis and most of the cities are destroyed. The study analyzes the political life, cities, defense system and influence of arab invasions of the choch Oasis based on historical and archaeological sources.

Keywords: Choch Oasis, socio-political processes, Turkish Khaganate, Sugd culture, urban culture, trade and crafts, arab invasions, defense system, irrigation system, Choch cities.

It is impossible to fully understand the roots and formation of urban culture in the Tashkent oasis without studying the socio-political processes that took place there in the early Middle Ages. Therefore, let us first examine the impact of socio-political processes in the 6th–8th centuries on the economic and cultural life of the oasis.

Unlike other regions of Central Asia, the territories between the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers were distinguished by their suitability for irrigated agriculture and a sedentary economy. As a result, urban planning and culture developed significantly in this region from ancient times. Additionally, this oasis was one of the areas where the interaction and symbiosis between the agricultural and pastoral populations were particularly intense. By the early Middle Ages, these processes had become even more active.

It is known that during the early Middle Ages, the regions between the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers included historical and cultural provinces such as Chach, Fergana, Ustrushana, Sogd, Bukhara, Tokharistan, and Khwarazm. Each of these was an independent political-administrative entity, ruled by separate dynasties, with its own governance system, capital, military force, defined territorial boundaries, and coinage system.

In the 5th–6th centuries, the Chach oasis became part of the Hephthalite state. According to Chinese sources, during this period, the oasis flourished, and urban culture advanced due to the development of mining and trade relations. Written sources do not provide precise information about the ruling dynasties of Chach during this time. However, according to "Xin Tang Shu," the oasis was governed by a dynasty belonging to the Chjaovu family. This source also provides details about the geographical location of the Chach oasis and its neighboring states: "The Shi state borders the Western Turks to the northeast and the Bola (Farab) state to the northwest. Two hundred li to the south lies Szyuchjan (Khujand), and 500 li to the southwest is the Kan (Samarkand) state. This country (Chach) is about 1,000 li in width, with its right side bordering the Suyye River. The ruler's family name is Shi, and the administrative center is the

city of Chje-chje. The Shi state is located where the ancient Kangju state's xiao-wang (minor ruler) resided in the city of Yuni. To the southwest flows the Yosha (Syr Darya) River."

In 552, the Ashina Turks overthrew the Rouran Khaganate in the southern foothills of the Altai Mountains and established the Turkic Khaganate. Soon after, the Turks launched a campaign westward, first capturing the Chach oasis. The first confrontation between the Turkic Khaganate and the Hephthalites took place in Chach. In 555, the armies of the Khaganate, led by Istemi Yabgu, reached the Syr Darya (Injukuz). In the ensuing battle between the Turks and the Hephthalites, the latter suffered a severe defeat. However, it was in subsequent battles around 563 and 567 near Bukhara that the Hephthalites were finally crushed.

The westward expansion of the Turks triggered a large-scale migration of Turkic tribes. As a result, vast mountainous and steppe regions in northern East Turkestan and eastern Central Asia became settled by Turkic peoples. The local Turkic-speaking tribes in these areas were also incorporated into the military-administrative system established by the Turks.

Chach became a vassal territory under Istemi Yabgu's authority, and after the division of the Khaganate in 603, it was incorporated into the Western Turkic Khaganate. At that time, the Chach oasis encompassed territories bordering Otrar and Isfijab (Sayram) to the north, the Ilak (Ohangaron) Valley to the east, the middle reaches of the Syr Darya to the south, and Ustrushana to the southwest.

After the establishment of Turkic rule in Chach, the proportion of Turkic-speaking peoples in the region's ethnic composition increased. This was because the local Turkic-speaking population began to identify themselves as "Turks," just like the Khaganate's representatives. The Turkic-speaking population in Chach, Ilak, and Fergana is believed to have been indigenous to these regions. Archaeological materials also confirm that Turkic-speaking peoples constituted the majority of the oasis population during the early Middle Ages. Notably, a badge depicting Tengri, the chief deity of the ancient Turks, was discovered among the ruins of the city of Kanka, along with fragments of pottery from the 5th–6th centuries bearing the inscription "Chach" in ancient Turkic runic script⁵.

According to Chinese chronicles, in 605, the local dynasty ruler of Chach, Nyue (Nieh), was killed by Sheguy (610–618), and Dele Tyanchji (Tegin Tyanchji) was appointed as the new governor of the region. The Chinese transcription of the name Nyue (Nieh) has been reconstructed as Inal. Thus, the rule of the Chach Tegins (605–750), who were part of the Ashina dynasty of the Khaganate and held the status of the main ruling dynasty in the region until the mid-7th century, was established in the oasis. From the mid-7th to the mid-8th century, Chach was governed by Khaganate deputies, including Tegin Tyanchji (605–620), Gantutun – Khontudun (640–660), Moxedu-tutun – Bahodir Tudun (713–740), and Inay Tudun or Gule-Inay Tudun (741)².

Chinese sources indicate that the rulers of this Turkic dynasty in Chach held the title tutun/tudun. Arab-Persian sources also provide information that the rulers of this region bore the title tudun. For example, in Tabari's work, the phrase "tudun malik ash-Shosh" is mentioned. Similarly, in the Sogdian document A-14, the title of the rulers of Shosh is recorded as tōwn (tudun)⁵. Moreover, on ancient Chach coins from the 7th century, the Sogdian inscription tōwn c'cynk (Chach Tudun) is inscribed. On the reverse side of the coin, the ruler is depicted with

⁵ Буряков Ю.Ф. К истории раннесредневекового Чача ... С. 11.

² Бабаяров Г. Древнетюркские монеты Чачского оазиса ... С. 46–49.

⁵ Согдийские документы с горы Муг. Вып. 2. Юридические документы и письма. М., 1962. С. 82–84.

distinctly Turkic facial features, further proving that the Chach Tuduns were of Turkic origin. In fact, the title tudun was one of the administrative ranks within the Khaganate's governance system. It referred to an official responsible for organizing tax collection in subjugated territories and overseeing local rulers, essentially serving as a viceroy⁷.

Dele Tyanchji (Tegin Tyanchji) relocated his headquarters to the northern part of the oasis, leading to the formation of new cities in the region. During this period, five cities emerged in the northern territories: No'g'oyqo'rg'on, Xonobod, To'g'aytepa, Oqota, and the largest among them, the ruins of Mingo'rik. Researchers believe that the ruins of Mingo'rik, referred to in Arab sources as Madinat al-Shash/Chach, served as the administrative center of the Turkic Khagan's deputy¹.

In 618, Tun Yabgu Khagan ascended to the throne of the Western Turkic Khaganate. In order to strengthen his control over the territories under his rule, he relocated his headquarters to Mingbuloq (Chinese: Syan-syuan), near Chach. During his reign, he implemented a series of reforms and sent his representatives, such as tudun and eltabar, to the vassal regions. By sending tudun to the vassal territories, he was able to exert direct control over them¹.

G.B. Boboyorov suggests that the reason Tun Yabgu Khagan moved his headquarters from Yettisuv to Chach was likely due to the strategic importance of the region. Chach, with its geographical location, served as a bridge for political, cultural, and trade connections between the nomadic herders in the northeast and the sedentary farmers in the southwest of the region. In particular, after Chach became part of the Khaganate, the flourishing of trade in the region would have undoubtedly drawn the attention of the Khagans. Thus, the relocation of the capital was not only a political move but also aimed at addressing economic issues, including trade control along the Silk Road and the revitalization of commerce. Even before Tun Yabgu Khagan, earlier Khagans such as Chulo Khagan (603–610) and Ishbara Khagan (Ashina Xelu) (651–657), the last independent ruler of the Ashina dynasty, had chosen Mingbuloq as their headquarters. This information shows that the Chach oasis always held strategic significance for the Western Turkic Khaganate².

In the 6th and 7th centuries, there is evidence of the presence of Turkic Khaganate headquarters and military fortresses in Chach. Specifically, in works written in Arabic and Persian, it is mentioned that the capital of Shash (Chach) was located two farsakh (12-13 km) away from Binkat, in a city named Jabg'ukat. The fact that Jabg'ukat was established during the 6th and 7th centuries, along with its name, which contains a title associated with the ancient Turks—Jabg'u city, meaning "City of the Ruler"—provides a direct link to the Turkic Khaganate's influence in the region. The location of this city has been identified as near the current city of Tashkent, almost 4 km away from the Oq-ota archaeological site, located near the village of Do'rmon³.

Furthermore, the information in the works of Arab geographers stating that "Jabg'ukat was once the military headquarters of the rulers of Shosh" indicates the purpose behind the establishment of this city. It is also significant that the city of Xotunkat, located almost adjacent

⁷ Толстов С.П. К истории древнетюркской социальной терминологии // ВДИ, № 1-2. М., 1938. С. 72-81.

¹ Буряков Ю.Ф. Средневековый Чач в системе торгово-экономических связей Мавераннахр // Ташкент: вчера и сегодня. Т., 2007. С. 35.

¹ Бичурин Н.Я. Собрание сведений о народах... Т. 1. С. 283.

² Бобоёров Ф.Б. Чоч – Ғарбий Турк хоқонлигининг бошқарув марказларидан бири сифатида // Ўзбекистон пойтахти Тошкент 2200 ёшда. Халқаро илмий конференция маърузалари. Т., 2009. Б. 121.

³ Буряков Ю.Ф. Историческая топография ... С. 74-75.

to Jabg'ukat, is mentioned in these sources. The location of this city corresponds to the site of the Tog'aytepa monument, located 4 km south of the village of Do'rmon, northeast of the city of Tashkent, near the Oq-ota ruins⁴.

In fact, the city named Xotunkat is mentioned in Chinese annals in the 640s, when one of the Western Turkic Khagans, El-Bilga Tulu Khagan (Ibi Dulu kexan; 638–642), fled to Choch and sought refuge in the city of Koxotun-chen (which means "Xotun city"). It should be noted that the Russian sinologist N.Y. Bichurin, due to translating the name of the city as "gorod Xansha" instead of its original form, did not allow most researchers to draw a connection between this city and Xotunkat. According to researchers, the name of the city is related to the ancient Turkic title "khatun." Additionally, the fact that Xotunkat is located adjacent to the city of Jabg'ukat suggests that it was founded in connection with the Khaganate. Other Turkic-based cities from the Khaganate period further confirm that the Turks established their administrative centers in this region. In particular, many researchers consider the majority of the city names in the Choch region, such as Sobliq, Qalas (Keles), Chatqal, Nahri Turk, Olmaliq, Arpalig', Ardlanket, Namudlig', Itliq, Neqaliq, Barsket, and Tukket, to be Turkic in origin².

Recent research has revealed that the ruling system of the Western Turkic Khaganate was headed by rulers with the title "Jabgu-Khagan." The discovery of inscriptions on several coins with words such as "Tardu Khagan," "Jabgu Khagan's money," and "Tun Yabgu-Khagan's money" confirms that the Western Turkic Khagans minted coins bearing their own names. The inscriptions found on coins from the ruined cities in the Tashkent region, such as Qanqa, Quloqtepa, Oqtepa, Khonobod, Qavardon, and Kindiktepa, have been corroborated by written sources. The reading and scholarly analysis of the numerous coins discovered in the Choch region have clarified several controversial issues in the early medieval social, political, and ethnocultural history of the area.

In particular, numismatists' research has shown that some of the coins from the Choch region were minted by the Western Turkic Khagans, while others were issued by the Turkic dynasties that ruled Choch in the 7th-8th centuries, namely the Tegin and Tudun dynasties, as well as by representatives of the local dynasty. The region's strategic and economic importance provided the Western Turkic Khagan rulers with the basis to mint their coins specifically in the Choch region. Based on this and other factors, several researchers have concluded that the Choch region was one of the administrative centers of the Turkic Khaganate².

On the eve of the Arab invasion, the Choch, Fergana, and Sogdian rulers united under the leadership of the Turk Khaganate and formed a military alliance to fight the Arabs. The ruler of Choch, together with the ruler of Fergana, sent military forces to assist the Sogdian rulers in their fight against the Arabs. In the frescoes of Afrasiab, among the Chinese and Chaganiyan envoys who visited the Sogdian ruler Varakhman (650/655-675), there is also an envoy from Choch depicted. This embassy was possibly sent by the ruler of Choch, Khontudun (640-660), to his ally, the Sogdian ruler. During the Arab conquest, Choch was ruled by its local ruler, c'cyk xwb/chachinak xvabu, and the Turkic tudun. Specifically, the relations of Moxedu tutun (Bahodir tudun; 713-740) with Sogdiana are reflected in the A-14 document of the Mug archives⁴.

⁴ Буряков Ю.Ф. Историческая топография ... С. 73-74.

² Буряков Ю. К истории раннесредневекового Чача ... С. 16; Бобоёров Ғ.Б. Илк ўрта асрларда Чоч ... Б.113; Камолиддин Ш.С. Древнетюркская топонимия ... С. 81-84.

² Бобоёров Ғ.Б. Чоч – Ғарбий Турк хоқонлигининг ... Б. 118-125.

⁴ Согдийские документы с горы Муг ... С. 77.

In the years 723-724, during the battle near the Syr Darya, an alliance of the Choch, Fergana, and Nasaf armies inflicted a heavy defeat on the Arabs. Despite several such battles, Choch was eventually conquered by the Arabs and a governor was appointed. Thus, after the fall of the Turk Khaganate, Choch came under the control of the Arab Caliphate⁶.

Thus, during the 6th to 8th centuries, three ruling dynasties governed the Choch region in connection with the Turk Khaganate. The first dynasty was the Turkish Tegins (605-750), who were considered the supreme rulers. The second dynasty consisted of the Tuduns (640-750), who were secondary rulers subordinated to the Tegins. The third dynasty was made up of local Sogdian rulers, who did not have Turkish titles. The coins of these rulers bear the inscription "chachinak xvabu" – "Ruler of Choch" in Sogdian script, indicating that they did not hold Turkish titles. Based on this, it can be concluded that there were no co-rulerships in Choch, but rather, the governance system was formed in connection with the administrative system of the Turk Khaganate. Several Turk Khagans establishing their headquarters in the Choch region further proves its strategic importance for the Khaganate. During this period, urbanization in Choch flourished, with numerous new cities and settlements bearing Turkish and Sogdian names.

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