

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH CONDUCTED IN THE RURAL DISTRICTS
(RUSTAQS) OF CENTRAL SUGD DURING THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD*Jurakulov Shaxriyor Bakhtiyorovich**Tutor of Samarkand State University*

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Abstract: This article discusses the rustoks formed in the Central Sughd region and the archaeological research conducted in them. Rustoks were a specific administrative-economic area in the early and developed Middle Ages, and were formed as a specific unit during historical development. Research conducted in this area also confirms these ideas.

Keywords: Turkistan, Zarafshan, Hissar, defensive wall, pottery, glassmaking, blacksmithing, handicrafts, Afrosiab, Varaqsar, Shavdar, Sanjarfag'n, Central Sugd.

Ключевые слова: Туркестан, Зарафшан, Гиссар, оборонительная стена, гончарное дело, стеклотделие, кузнечное дело, ремесла, Афросиаб, Вараксар, Шавдар, Санжарфагн, Центральный Согд.

Аннотация: В статье рассматриваются рустоки, образовавшиеся на территории Центрального Согда, и проведенные в них археологические исследования. Рустоки представляли собой особую административно-экономическую область раннего и развитого Средневековья и сформировались как самостоятельная единица в процессе исторического развития. Исследования, проведенные в этой области, также подтверждают эти положения.

Between the Turkistan and Zarafshan mountain ranges lies the upper mountainous part of the Zarafshan Valley, through which flows the Zarafshan River, the main source of water for the oasis. As the third-largest river of Central Asia, it originates in the Zarafshan glaciers in the east and flows westward for an average length of 781 km. Since ancient times, the river has irrigated nearly all the fertile plains of the valley, covering tens of thousands of hectares, while the remaining waters seep into the Sanduqli sands in the west. According to the character of the local relief and geological structure, this ancient riverbed is composed of Paleozoic strata and filled with Meso-Cenozoic deposits.

Between the Zarafshan and Hisor mountain ranges are located the small relatively river valleys of the Yaghnob and Iskandardarya. These narrow river basins lie at relatively high elevations of 2000–3000 meters. One of them, the Yaghnob Valley, is separated from the Zarafshan River by the Zarafshan range, and in certain areas it flows parallel to the Zarafshan River. In its upper reaches, the river's banks are low, while in the wider mountainous part it emerges from the steep ridges of the Gulbos mountain valley.

The favorable geographical position of Central Sugd and the fertility of its soil created a microclimate highly suitable for human habitation since ancient times. During antiquity and the early Middle Ages, and especially in the developed medieval period, the artificial irrigation networks of Samarkand Sugd expanded greatly. The Zarafshan River formed the main axis of the water system in the valley.

According to the data of Tsarist Russian irrigation specialists who studied the Zarafshan Valley, 83 main canals of various sizes were drawn from the Zarafshan River into the territory of Samarkand province, not including the numerous smaller irrigation ditches. The earliest irrigation facility originated near the present-day village of Rovot Khoja, in the ancient settlement of Varakhsha¹. From this point, the large Dargom Canal drew water from the left bank of the Zarafshan. In the same area, the Tuyatortar and Bulungur canals branched from the right bank of the river. The Tuyatortar Canal supplied water to the lands of the Jizzakh oasis in the region of Ustrushana, while the Bulungur Canal, together with its offshoot, the Pay Canal, irrigated a vast territory on the right bank of the Zarafshan. As a result, highly complex systems of artificial irrigation had already developed in this area since ancient times.

Among the medieval cities of the Zarafshan Valley, the largest and most extensively studied monument is Samarkand and its ancient site, Afrasiab. Scholarly interest in this monumental archaeological site of Samarkand began in the nineteenth century. In historiography, the earliest information about Samarkand and its monuments was provided by the Russian mission of engineers KF Butenev and F. Bogoslovskii, who were dispatched to the Emirate of Bukhara in 1841. Alongside their work in mining, this mission was also tasked with scientific collecting data about Central Asia. One of its members, the orientalist NV Khanikov, recorded important details concerning the topography of the ancient city.

Interest in the history of Samarkand intensified especially after the city was incorporated into the Turkistan General-Governorship. Among the scholarly contributions of this period, the observations of the young scientist AP Fedchenko, who studied the natural environment of Central Asia, are of particular importance. In his work *Journey to Turkistan*, Fedchenko provided a detailed description of Samarkand's ancient monuments. He special expressed fascination with the ruins of Afrasiab and the early archaeological remains of the Zarafshan Valley.

In 1883, historian and orientalist NI Veselovskii was commissioned to conduct archaeological excavations in the Tashkent oasis and Samarkand. When he arrived in Samarkand in 1885, Veselovskii carried out excavation work at several points of Afrasiab, digging exploratory trenches of various sizes².

Although some architectural remains were occasionally uncovered during these excavations, the work itself was far removed from proper archaeological methodology and was aimed primarily at finding rare artifacts. This circumstance later provoked serious criticism from scholars such as VV Bartold, A. Yu. Yakubovskii, and others.

In 1904, VV Bartold visited Samarkand and began excavations to the west of the citadel of Afrasiab. Drawing upon medieval written sources, the scholar hypothesized that the congregational mosque of Samarkand had been located at this very site, a hypothesis that was later confirmed. In the same year, VL Vyatkin also began his first excavations at Afrasiab. His work initially sought the location of the Namozgoh, located some distance west of Afrasiab on the left bank of the Novadon irrigation canal, and its area was subsequently identified.

In the 1930s, no specialized archaeological excavations were carried out at Afrasiab; however, archaeological monitoring was conducted during the construction of the airport road passing along the western side of the site. During these observations, remains of residential dwellings, potters' kilns, and clay ovens (tandir) were documented.

¹ Муҳаммаджонов А. Р. Қуйи Зарафшон водийсининг суғорилиш тарихи. // (қадимги даврдан то XX аср бошларигача). Т., 1972. -Б.24

² Бартольд В.В. Н.И.Веселовский как исследователь Востока и истории русской науки. ЗВО, XXV, 1921 -С. 337-355

Large-scale archaeological research at Afrasiab was conducted under the direction of VA Shishkin between 1958 and 1966. Members of this special archaeological team carried out excavations in 26 locations to study the historical topography and stratigraphy of Afrasiab. Among the active participants were GV Shishkina, OV Obelchenko, MN Fedorov, LG Brusenko, EB Pruger, and M. Pachos. Excavations were conducted in almost all parts of Afrasiab, leading to the discovery of the city's and citadel's defensive walls, various craft quarters, and the remains of the congregational mosque.

The first systematic archaeological excavations initiated by the expedition organized on the initiative of the Directorate of the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cities began in 1973. Participants in this expedition included Yu. F. Buryakov, I. Akhrorov, Sh. S. Toshkhojaev, M. N. Fedorov, L. G. Brusenko, E. Yu. Buryakova, GV Shishkina, NB Nemseva, MJ Juraqulov, and NA Avanesova.

The study of archaeological monuments of Sugdian Samarkand was largely carried out beginning in 1934 by the expedition of the State Hermitage of Russia under the leadership of A. Yu. Yakubovskii. During this period, large archaeological sites between Kattaqorgon and Bukhara were investigated. It was also in this era that the remains of the famous city of Kushoniya were sought in the vicinity of the village of Kashan in the Kattaqorgon district³.

In 1974, archaeological surveys were conducted in the Tosinsay micro-valley by scholars of the Institute of Archeology of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, during which 65 archaeological sites from various historical periods were recorded.

Varakhsar. The rural district of Varakhsar occupied the territories along the left bank of the Zarafshan River, extending from the present-day Ravotkhoja dam to the villages of Tayloq, in the area between the Dargom Canal and the Zarafshan River. At a certain period, the rural districts of Varakhsar and Sanjarfaghni were part of the larger Maymurg rural district, from which they later separated⁴.

Shavdor. In written sources, Shavdor is mentioned as a mountainous region located to the east and southeast of the Varakhsar and Maymurg *rustaqs*. According to Abu al-Karim al-Sam'ani, the province of Samarkand extended as far as the mountainous lands of Shavdor. Al-Istakhri refers to the villages of Vazd or Vizard located in this region, noting that they were located four *farsakhs* from Samarkand. In VV Bartold's view, the length of this district was no less than ten *farsakhs*, and the Christian village of Vazkard, mentioned by Ibn Hawqal, was located precisely within the territory of Shavdor. In our opinion, although this district is not explicitly listed among the Samarkand *rustāqs*, it nevertheless possesses defined territorial boundaries, and at times it was described as a mountainous area. The Shavdor *rustāq* lay to the south and southeast of Varakhsar and Sanjarfaghni, separated from Kash (Shahrisabz) by the Zarafshan mountain range. The name *Shavdor* itself derives from the Sugdian roots *s'w* ("black") and *b'r* ("height," "uneven land").

Sanjarfaghni. Sanjarfaghni was located in the territory south of Samarkand, approximately in the smaller area between the Dargom Canal and the city itself. Because of its relatively limited size, it was incorporated into the Maymurg *rustāq* in certain periods. It seems likely that the ruins of the Tali Borzu site represent the remains of the central town of this *rustaq*. According to later research by AN Sandiboev, Sanjarfaghni may be identified with the Qorğontepa site in the village of Eshonrabort in the Urgut district. This site covered an area of six hectares and consisted of a citadel (*ark*), a town proper (*shahristan*), and a suburb (*rabod*). Over time, the

³Якубовский А.Ю. Краткий полевой отчет о работах Зарафшанской археологической экспедиции Эрмитажа и ИИМК в 1939 г., // ТОБЭ. Т. 2. Л., 1940 -С.158-159

⁴Ибн Хавқал. "Китоб сура ал-ард. Мовароуннахр". // Тошкент, 2011, -Б.61

suburb of this settlement was transformed into a cemetery known as Zanjirbogh ota. In VL Vyatkin's opinion, the term *Zanjirbogh* may represent a later corruption of the name Sanjarfaghn. According to al-Istakhri and Ibn Hawqal, Sanjarfaghn was a relatively small *rustaq* containing several villages. Al-Muqaddasi described it as “densely inhabited, with a climate superior to that of other villages, producing sweet fruits and fertile lands.” In sixteenth-century waqf documents, the name of this *rustaq* appears in the form *Sanjar Fighan*. In later medieval sources, it was recorded as Zanjirbogh, situated between the Abbas and Karaunas canals.

Dargom. The Dargom *rustaq* can be located further downstream, in the southwestern and western territories of Samarkand, corresponding to the present-day districts of Pastdargom and Guzalkent. The length of the Dargom *rustaq* was equivalent to a day's journey. In antiquity, the famous “Great Khorasan Road” passed through this territory. The principal town of the *rustaq*, mentioned in written sources, may have been the city of Zarmon. The ruins of this large site are located in the Pastdargom district, about 500–600 meters north of the village of Chimboyobod. Another site that may also have served as the central town of this *rustāq* is the Dormon-tepa site, located three kilometers east of the center district of Juma in Pastdargom. Measuring 715 by 415 meters, with a total area of about 30 hectares, this site has been interpreted by some specialists as the ruins of the medieval city of Isbiskat⁵. We also do not object to the views of ON Inevatkina and AA Suchilin regarding the issue of the center of the Dargom rural district.

Abgor. The Abgor rural district may be located in the territories south of the old Dargom Canal, extending as far as the village of Jom and covering the present-day area of Nurobod district. According to the sources, there were no artificial irrigation systems in the lands of the Abgor district. A part of the population practiced rain-fed dry farming on large tracts of land, while the majority of the inhabitants sustained themselves through nomadic and pastoral livestock breeding. Ibn Hawqal noted that the district contained a large number of villages, and this information is confirmed by archaeological research. From Samarkand to Jom and in the territories beyond the Dargom Canal, known as the Dargom desert, hundreds of archaeological sites have been identified, many of which are the ruins of medieval villages mentioned by Ibn Hawqal. In later years, these territories were studied by the Uzbekistan - Italy joint expedition as well as by scholars of the Institute of Archaeological Research of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and a significant number of archaeological monuments were recorded⁶. In our view, the center of the Abgor rural district was located at Kattatepa in the territory of the present-day village of Jom. This is because Kattatepa represents a major urban archaeological site located at the crossroads of the great trade routes leading from Samarkand to Kesh, Termez, and Nasaf. The very name of the village, Jom, also supports this assumption, as the word *jom* or *yom* carries the meaning of “station” or “postal stop.” To this day, the citadel (*ark*) of Kattatepa remains intact, while only a small part of the *shahristan* has survived; the rest of the city was destroyed as a result of the construction of modern residential buildings.

Burnamad. The Burnamad rural district was centered on the large village of Burnamad, located along the ancient caravan route from Zomin to Samarkand. The distance between Zomin and Burnamad was 4 *farsakhs* (approximately 28–30 km). This route passed along the northern and western foothills of the Zarafshan mountain range. The territory of the Burnamad district approximately corresponds to the modern-day area of Bakhmal district and the

⁵ Иневткина О.Н., Сучилин А.А. Транспортные пути Самаркандских земель. Scripta – Antiqua. Том пятый. М., 2015, - С.94-95

⁶ Бердимуродов А.Э., Суюнов С.С., Сориёв Х.Я. Ўзбекистоннинг археологик ёдгорликлари каталоги. // 1-том. Самарканд вилояти, 2-қисм. Нуробод тумани. Самарканд, 2015

southern part of Gallaorol district. Written sources mention this district only by name, but it is highly probable that artificial irrigation systems operated here, supplied by canals drawn from the Sangzor River. This conclusion is supported by the fact that the neighboring Yorket district to the north is explicitly described as unirrigated, which implies that Burnamad lands were cultivated with irrigation. Many Muslim historians noted that there were no cities in the Burnamad district and only a few villages. Al-Sam'ani referred to this district as Burnamaz, while Yaqut stated that it belonged to Ustrushana, and al-Istakhri reported that Furnamaz contained several villages⁷.

Yorket. The Yorket rural district was located to the north of Burnamad, extending across the western foothills of the Jizzakh and Qoytosh sections of the Nurata mountain range, from Gobdin to Qarokchitog'. Today, this territory coincides with the modern Gallaorol district. Medieval written sources report that the cultivated lands of Yorket were primarily rain-fed and that its territory consisted of vast and fertile pastures. Even today, much of the Gallaorol district comprises unirrigated dry-farming lands and wide pasture areas. Yorket was the northernmost rural district of central Sugdiana, located along the border with Ustrushana. The sources state: "It has no congregational mosque. Its water comes from natural springs, and thus the population does not go to the River al-Sughd (the Zarafshan River - AA). There are both rain-fed lands and irrigated lands supplied by streams, but the rain-fed fields are more extensive; they include pure, grassy pastures." Al-Sam'ani considered Yorket to belong to Ustrushana.

Marzbon (Kurgontepa). Kurgontepa is located near the present-day village of Qulchora in the Ishtikhon district, to the northwest of the village of Orlat, and about 200 meters south of Sag'anoqsoy, a tributary of Tosinsoy. Archaeological evidence and the analysis of written sources indicate that this site was located within the Marzbon rural district. Written sources contain references to Marzbon as one of the rural districts located to the north of Samarkand⁸. The name of the Marzbon rural district is mentioned after the districts of Buzmajon, Kabudanjaket, and Vidor. The territory of Marzbon lay in the northern parts of the Vidor and Ishtikhon districts. It would be inappropriate to localize Marzbon and its center with the city of Sog'arj, for Sog'arj is always referred to in the sources as a major city in its own right. Had this city been the center of the Marzbon district, medieval travelers would undoubtedly have noted this fact.

Quldortepa. Archaeological investigations were first carried out at the site of the small town of Quldortepa on the eve of the Second World War by GV Grigoryev and IA Sukharev. Subsequently, in 1953–1954, partial excavations were conducted here by VI Sarianidi. In the autumn of 1955, systematic excavations were launched through a joint project of the Museum of the History of Culture and Art of Uzbekistan in Samarkand and the State Hermitage Museum in Leningrad. These works were directed by the archaeologists B. Ya. Stavisky and M. Kh. Urmanova. The purpose of these excavations was to test the hypothesis that the site represented the ruins of the city of Boside, which, according to some scholars, had been the capital of the Maymurg' rural district in early medieval Sugdiana.

The city of Boside is indeed mentioned as the center of the Maymurg' district in the *Tangshu* ("History of the Tang Dynasty," 618–907), one of the most important Chinese dynastic histories. Maymurg', one of the most famous historical regions of Samarkand, is also noted in the works of al-Istakhri, Abū'l-Qāsim ibn Ḥawqal, al-Sam'ānī, al-Muqaddasī, al-Ṭabarī, Abū'l-Qāsim Firdawsī, and other travelers, historians, geographers, and poets.

⁷A.P.Aslanov. SamDU ilmiy axborotnomasi. 2023-YIL, 6-SON 2-SERIYA. 57-61 b

⁸Истахрий. Китаб ал-Масалик вал-Мамалик. Йўллар ва ўлкалар китоби. // Тошкент., 2019. –Б.164

According to the Arab traveler Ibn Hawqal, the Maymurg' district was located one day's journey, about 35 km, southeast of present-day Samarkand. The great Dargom canal and the dozens of irrigation channels branching from it had, since ancient times, created highly developed artificial irrigation systems in the territory of this district. On this basis, a thriving agricultural culture emerged, which in turn provided the foundation for economic, and ultimately even political, development. Written sources further confirm that in certain periods of the early Middle Ages, Maymurg' functioned as a politically semi-independent principality, and that envoys were even dispatched from this district to China⁹.

The territory of the Maymurg' rural district extended from the Dargom canal up to the Zarafshan Mountains, its western boundaries approximately reaching as far as the Ohaliksoy and Mironko'lsoy streams. In modern terms, Maymurg' may be placed within the present-day districts of Tayloq and Urgut.

Zarmon. Written sources, particularly the works of al-Ṭabarī, mention the village of Zarmon, located seven farsakhs from Samarkand on the road towards Bukhara. According to the opinion of VV Bartold, this settlement lay on the site of present-day Chimboy village, approximately one farsakh from Ishtikhon. The distance from Zarmon to Robinjon (Arbinjon) was reported as five or six farsakhs. Despite these references, the precise location and identification of the town of Zarmon has scarcely been addressed by archaeologists. It is noteworthy, however, that the name of Zarmon has survived into the present day in the form of a village in the Pastdargom district of the Samarkand region. Around this village, a number of small archaeological sites are known. Yet it remains doubtful whether these are indeed the ruins of the Zarmon referred to in al-Ṭabarī's accounts, especially given that the distances mentioned in the sources, such as the village being only one farsakh from Ishtikhon, do not correspond precisely to the archaeological remains.

At present, the ruins consist of a citadel (ark) and a shahristan, with traces of a possible suburban district (rabad) located 150–160 meters northeast of the site on a small mound, as well as to the south of the shahristan where ceramic finds are common. Much of this area, however, has since been converted into farmland or a cemetery. The shahristan itself measures 370 by 270 meters (10.5 hectares), with a citadel in its northwestern part measuring 230 by 116 meters. Portions of both the shahristan and the citadel, covering about 2–2.5 hectares, have been washed away by the river. Taking into account the eroded sections and the surrounding land now under cultivation, the total area of the city may be estimated at approximately 18–20 hectares.

Robinjon. The city of Robinjon, mentioned in medieval sources, was one of the largest and wealthiest towns of Sugd during both the early and high Middle Ages. The sources emphasize that it surpassed even Dobusiya in size and importance. The Arab traveler Ibn Hawqal describes the area of Robinjon as follows: “When the river leaves Samarkand two days' journey behind, the canal called Fay is drawn from it. In all of Sugd, there is no other canal with such extensive cultivated fields, such dense population, so many farmers, such magnificent fortresses, and such renowned villages. It is the heart of Sugd, and from it flow numerous canals that irrigate the land for two days' journey.” The city of Robinjon was located in a highly favorable location along the Great Silk Road—on what was known as the “Great Khorasan Road” or the “Royal Road.” According to al-Istakhri, it was only two farsakhs from Kushaniya. Robinjon also played a significant role in international trade; in particular, winter cloaks (plash) made of red wool cloth were produced there, much of which was exported abroad.

⁹Истахрий. Китаб ал-Масалик вал-Мамалик. Йўллар ва ўлкалар китоби. // Тошкент., 2019. –Б.164

Dobusiya (Dobusqala). Another of the largest medieval cities of the Zarafshan valley was Dobusiya, the ruins of which survive in the form of the archaeological complex known as Dobusqala. The site is located in the Paxtachi district of the Samarkand region, 4 km from the Samarkand–Bukhara highway, northeast of the modern village of Dobusqala, on the left bank of the Zarafshan River. The city was composed of three main parts, with the citadel (ark) forming its core.

The citadel, located in the northern part of the site, was nearly square in plan and separated from the rest of the city by a deep defensive moat. Surrounding the citadel on three sides, north, east, and south, was the shahristan, also nearly square in layout, with a total area of 23 hectares. It was defended by massive fortification walls within which a broad internal corridor has been identified. The northern part of the shahristan was once washed away by the Zarafshan River, while on its southeastern and southern sides a wide defensive moat, 50–60 meters across, separated it from the rabad.

Although archaeological work has been conducted here by GA Pugachenkova, EV Rtveladze, BA Turg'unov, Yu. F. Buryakov, O. M. Rostovtsev, and Sh. T. Adilov, no large-scale specialized excavations were carried out for many decades. The site was included in the “Corpus of Archaeological Sites of Uzbekistan” after reconnaissance surveys, but systematic research began only in 2006, when the joint Uzbek–Japanese expedition of the Institute of Archeology of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan initiated large-scale excavations. These investigations explored the citadel, the shahristan, and the rabad.

According to al-Ṭabarī, in 723 the governor of Khurasan, Saʿīd al-Kharashī, crossed the Amu Darya and designated Qasr al-Rīḥ as the assembly place for allied forces preparing to fight the rebellious Sugdians. Addressing the localization of these fortresses, Sh. T. Adilov identified the Kamarja fortress with Kofīrqaʿa in the village of Charxin (Narpay district), the Farzavan fortress with Xoʻja Karzontepa in the village of Xoʻja Karzon, the Qasr al-Rīḥ fortress with Polvontepa in the village of Suluvqoʻrgʻon, and the Qasr al-Bakhiliy fortress with either Oqtepa on the Zarafshan or Qoratepa in Narpay.

Archaeological excavations at Dobusqala revealed ceramic slag, melted glass, grinding stones, fragments of baked brick, and other materials, all of which attest to the flourishing of crafts such as pottery, glassmaking, and metalworking in the city.

In conclusion, the cities of Central Sugd, with Samarkand at their center, stood for more than two millennia as some of the greatest commercial hubs of Central Asia. Analysis of written sources further confirms that a substantial portion of the goods exported along the Silk Road originated in the economy of Sugd, with Samarkand serving as its focal point.

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