

PAPER

THE PROBLEM OF URBANIZATION PROCESSES IN SOUTHERN KHOREZM AND THEIR REFLECTION IN ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONUMENTS

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Abstract

This article examines the processes of urbanization in Southern Khorezm, their reflection in archaeological monuments, and the socio-economic and ethnocultural relations of rural communities during the Early Iron Age. Drawing on the research of scholars such as S.P. Tolstov, M.A. Itina, S.B. Bolelov, Kh. Matyoqubov, and V.N. Pilipko, the study analyzes archaeological sites of the Bronze and Early Iron Ages in the Khorezm oasis — including Tozabogyab, Suvyorgan, Amirobod, Yakkaparon, Kozaliqir, Odaytepa, and Khumbuztepa. Particular attention is given to the development of urban planning, agricultural culture, artificial irrigation systems, and craft production, as well as the emergence of social and political structures. The author emphasizes that urbanization processes were influenced by natural-geographical factors, external migrations, and technological innovations. The article also explores issues of social stratification, the formation of governance systems, and the rise of early state structures such as the daxyupati. Overall, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the ancient urban history of Khorezm based on archaeological evidence and comparative analysis.

Key words: Southern Khorezm, urbanization, archaeological monuments, Early Iron Age, Tozabogyab culture, Amirobod culture, Suvyorgan, Yakkaparon, Kozaliqir, Khumbuztepa, agricultural culture, animal husbandry, social stratification, slavery relations, daxyupati, Aral region, Khorezm oasis.

Introduction

The region of Southern Khorezm has long been recognized as one of the most ancient centers of

civilization in Central Asia. In this territory, the processes of urbanization — that is, the transition from an agricultural to an urban culture, the sedentarization of the population, the growth

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of productive forces, and the formation of social stratification — took place over an extended historical period. At the same time, the precise period when agricultural and urban cultures emerged in the oasis, the role of the local population in these transformations, and the influence of southern Central Asian civilizations on Khorezm remain subjects of active scholarly debate [1].

Urbanization processes embody a complex interplay of economic, ethnocultural, and political transformations. In the Khorezm oasis, the beginnings of these processes are closely associated with the final phase of the Bronze Age and the onset of the Early Iron Age. During this period, natural and geographical conditions – such as the expansion of the Amu Darya delta, the water regime of the Sarykamysh lowlands, and the fertile floodplains suitable for sedentary agriculture – determined the settlement patterns and economic activity of the population [2].

According to researcher S.B. Bolelov, early urbanization in Khorezm developed in two main stages that occurred between the 7th and 5th centuries BCE: (1) the Sak–Kuyisoy stage and (2) the Early Iron Khorezm stage [3]. During the first stage, sedentary or semi-sedentary pastoralism and floodplain farming predominated; in the second stage, the introduction of iron tools, the construction of large-scale irrigation systems, and the diversification of economic activities led to the flourishing of agriculture and crafts [4].

Urbanization in Khorezm, however, was not limited to economic causes. These processes were also deeply connected with social organization, patriarchal governance, local traditions, and religious beliefs. The Avesta mentions the institutions of “vis” (clan community) and “vispati” (head of the clan), which constituted the social foundation of rural communities in Khorezm during the 7th–6th centuries BCE [5].

Therefore, studying the processes of urbanization in Southern Khorezm requires not only the analysis of archaeological evidence but also a comprehensive approach that integrates economic, political, ethnic, and cultural dimensions. The aim of this research is to identify the early stages of urban development in the Khorezm oasis, to analyze the economic and cultural factors

reflected in archaeological sites, and to reveal the social essence of these processes.

Literature Review

The historiography of urbanization processes in Southern Khorezm began to take shape in the mid-20th century, closely linked with the activities of the Khorezm Archaeological and Ethnographic Expedition led by S.P. Tolstov. In his seminal work “Po drevnim del’tam Oksa i Yaksarta” (Along the Ancient Deltas of the Oxus and Jaxartes), Tolstov laid the theoretical foundations for understanding the development of irrigation systems in Khorezm and their connection to the formation of early political structures [6]. According to his findings, the construction of large-scale irrigation canals and the establishment of complex agricultural systems served as the primary catalyst for the emergence of early urban centers.

M.G. Vorob’eva, through her research on the Dingilja settlement, analyzed the economic and architectural structures of rural communities of the Early Iron Age [7]. She noted that the expansion of sedentary agriculture and the flourishing of handicrafts led to the strengthening of patriarchal family governance within Khorezm’s early agrarian society.

C.B. Bolelov, in a series of studies, examined the stages of craft production in ancient Khorezm and demonstrated that these developments provided the economic foundation for urbanization [8]. He emphasized that the appearance of the potter’s wheel, the standardized use of rectangular mudbricks, and the construction of specialized kilns marked a new stage in architectural and cultural advancement.

M.A. Itina, in her monograph “Istoriya stepnykh plemyon Yuzhnogo Priaral’ya” (The History of the Steppe Tribes of the Southern Aral Region), analyzed the transition from primitive communal systems to slave-owning societies based on archaeological materials [9]. By studying sites such as Yakkaparsan-2, Suvyorgan, and Amirobod, she concluded that the emergence of social stratification and the formation of craft centers were integral characteristics of the urbanization process in Khorezm.

Kh. Kh. Matyakubov, in his research on the

Bronze and Early Iron Ages of the Khorezm oasis, emphasized the continuity in the population's economic activities, particularly the integration of agriculture and animal husbandry [10]. He argued that this synthesis constituted the economic foundation of early urban culture, which eventually gave rise to permanent settlements and fortified communities.

V.N. Pilipko, drawing on archaeological excavations at Odaytepa and Khumbuztepa, demonstrated that urbanization in southern Khorezm accelerated as a result of external ethnocultural interactions [11]. His findings indicate that groups of farmers and craftsmen migrating from the southern regions of Central Asia established close cultural and economic relations with local pastoral tribes, leading to the emergence of new architectural and economic traditions [12].

Finally, the Avesta, the sacred text of Zoroastrianism, provides valuable insights into the ideological aspects of the urbanization process. The "Yasna" and "Yasht" sections of the Avesta reflect the religious and ethical foundations of early agrarian societies, highlighting ideas of sowing, livestock tending, and collective labor as sacred duties that shaped the economic worldview of ancient communities [13].

Methodological Framework

The present study is based on a set of interdisciplinary methodological approaches aimed at providing a comprehensive understanding of the urbanization processes in Southern Khorezm.

1. **Historical–Typological Analysis.** Archaeological sites of the Khorezm oasis – such as Tozabog'yob, Suvyorgan, Amirobod, Yakkaparon, Ko'zaliqir, and Khumbuztepa – were examined comparatively according to their chronological, economic, and architectural characteristics, which belong to different historical stages. This method allows the researcher to identify distinct phases of urban development and trace the evolution of settlement organization and economic specialization [14].

2. **Comparative–Archaeological Method.** The Bronze and Iron Age cultures of Khorezm were analyzed in comparison with the southern cultural

regions of Central Asia — Merv, Margiana, and Bactria. Through this approach, it becomes possible to determine external cultural influences and to define the position of Khorezm's urban development within a broader regional context. Such comparative analysis also clarifies patterns of cultural diffusion, trade relations, and technological exchange [15].

3. **Ethnocultural Analysis.** This method focuses on exploring the interrelation between everyday life, tools of labor, production methods, family hierarchy, and religious traditions of ancient communities. By studying these factors, the mechanisms of social structure formation and the transformation of household-based economies into complex communal and urban societies are identified.

4. **Geoarchaeological Approach.** The natural and environmental conditions of the Amu Darya delta, the Sarykamysh lowlands, and the Tunidarya basin are assessed to determine their influence on economic systems and urbanization processes. Particular attention is given to changes in water resources, climate fluctuations, and soil fertility as decisive factors shaping settlement patterns and the sustainability of agricultural production [16].

5. **Civilizational Approach.** Urbanization in Khorezm is interpreted not merely as an economic phenomenon but as a multifaceted civilizational process, encompassing spiritual, religious, and technological integration. Within this framework, the emergence of early urban centers such as Hazorasp, Ko'zaliqir, Qang'qala, and Odaytepa is regarded as a civilizational stage of social progress, representing the synthesis of material culture and ideological transformation [17].

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