

THE ROLE OF ANCIENT USTRUSHANA IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GREAT
SILK ROAD

Sirojiddin, Sharofov

Doctoral candidate of Jizzakh State Pedagogical University

sirojiddinsharofov1998@gmail.com

Annotation: This article presents the author's views on the role of the historical and cultural oasis of Ustrushana in the development of the Great Silk Road, based on a number of scholarly sources.

Key words: independence, statehood, Central Asia, written sources, Ustrushana, historical and cultural oasis, “contact zone”, Zaamin, Dizak, Great Silk Road.

Аннотация. В статье изложены взгляды автора на роль историко-культурного оазиса Уструшаны в развитии Великого Шелкового пути, основанные на ряде научных источников.

Ключевые слова: независимость, государственность, Центральная Азия, письменные источники, Уструшана, историко-культурный оазис, “контактная зона”, Заамин, Дизак, Великий Шелковый путь.

Thanks to independence, we have gained the opportunity to study our ancient history, the rich material and spiritual heritage left by our great ancestors, and their significant contribution to world civilization. It is precisely during the years of independence that special attention has been paid by our government to researching the history of statehood in our homeland.

The formation of the earliest state entities on the territory of Uzbekistan, their mutual relations, their historical–geographical domains, and the views concerning their boundaries constitute one of the important issues of Uzbek statehood. Indeed, the socio-economic processes that occurred in each period of our history represent an integral component of the history of our statehood.

From the very first days of achieving our sovereignty, the greatest objective set before us was to transform independent Uzbekistan into one of the most powerful and highly developed cultural nations of the world. To accomplish this, it is essential first and foremost to thoroughly study the history and heritage of our ancestors and to understand that our roots are strong and mighty like a sycamore tree. As our First President I.A.Karimov emphasized, “Historical memory holds an exceptionally important place in restoring the objective and truthful history of a people, of our beloved homeland, and of the territory of our state, as well as in the process of understanding national identity and, so to speak, fostering a sense of national pride”¹.

It is well known that the peoples who lived in the regions between the Amu Darya and Syr Darya have, since ancient times, made a significant contribution to the material and spiritual culture of humankind. Each historical–cultural oasis within Central Asia holds its own unique place in the formation of statehood traditions in the region. One such historical and cultural oasis is Ustrushana, which was situated in a “contact zone” linking the sedentary agricultural regions of the south with the nomadic pastoralist territories of the northern and northeastern steppes².

¹ Каримов И.А. Ўзбекистон XXI аср бўсағасида: хавфсизликка таҳдид, барқарорлик шартлари ва тараккиёт кафолатлари. – Тошкент: “Ўзбекистон”, 1997. – Б. 140.

² Pardayev M.H., Toshboyev F.E. Ustrushonaning qadimgi davr davlatchilik tarixi. – Toshkent: “VNESHINVESTPROM”, 2020. – B. 4.

In written sources, both the territory and the name of Ustrushana appear in several forms. In ancient sources, the region was initially referred to as the “Saka lands beyond Sogd,” and later it emerged as a distinct administrative territory under the name “Ustrushana.” Ustrushana was bordered by the Dasht-i Qipchaq in the north, Sogdiana in the west, Tashkent and Fergana in the east, and the Turkestan Mountains in the south. Its capital city, Bunjikat, served as the residence of the ruling authority³.

After the accounts of ancient authors, written sources provide little information for a long period regarding the history of the peoples inhabiting Ustrushana, the role of its cities and rural settlements, and their general and distinctive characteristics. However, this scarcity of information was remedied in the early medieval period by the Chinese dynastic chronicles. Later, Arab geographers who traveled along the Great Silk Road further enriched this knowledge. In their memoirs, they recorded extensive and valuable information about the state of Ustrushana⁴.

As is well known, one of the major factors in the formation of statehood in Central Asia was humanity’s discovery of metal. In Central Asia, the Copper–Stone Age (Eneolithic period) roughly encompasses the late 4th millennium BCE to the early 3rd millennium BCE. It is known that during this period, metal tools were not yet made of bronze; rather, they were produced from pure copper⁵. Copper was the first metal used by humans in production. Later, tools made from copper were gradually replaced by those crafted from bronze. Bronze - an alloy of copper with metals such as tin, lead, zinc, antimony, and manganese - produced tools of significantly higher quality than those made solely from copper. Metalworking tools used in production have been discovered at numerous ancient sites in the region, including Jarkutan, Sopolli, and Chust.

In particular, the helmet discovered near the Syr Darya in 1984 - crafted approximately 2,000 years ago - had a double-layered armor and was made from various metal alloys. Specialists assume that the local Qoramozor ore served as the primary raw material in its production.

According to the research of archaeologist S. L. Sverchkov, at an altitude of about 3,000 meters above sea level - northwest of the Turkestan Mountains lies the Morguzar range, while to the southwest is the Chimqartau range. Numerous springs in these areas form the headwaters of the Zominsuv and Sangzor rivers. During this period, four metallurgical zones were identified in the mountains of Ustrushana: Lataband in the Chimqartau range, and Shoyboqsoy and Miqsoy in the Morguzar Mountains. Centers for ore extraction and processing operated in Shoyboqsoy and Miqsoy, and this activity continued in practice up until the Mongol invasion⁶.

At the Miq mining center in northern Ustrushana, the Miq I, Miq II, and Miq III sections implemented the full production process - from extracting large ore deposits in Central Asia to producing items from ferrous metal. This established the operation of a specialized metallurgical center⁷. It is worth noting that all trade operations were concentrated precisely in this area. The region was more favorable than the surrounding villages in terms of its climate, as well as for practicing irrigated agriculture and pastoral livestock farming.

Historical sources indicate that more than a hundred prominent scholars, historians, religious clerics, jurists, traveling merchants, and military commanders emerged in Ustrushana. Their

³ Миллий ўзликни англаш ва мозийга назар. – Тошкент: “Наврўз”, 2013. – Б. 91.

⁴ Пардаев М.Х., Убайдуллаев И.Х. Жиззах ривожланган ўрта асрларда. // Ўзбекистон моддий маданияти тарихи. № 38-нашр. А.Э. Бердимуродов умум. тахр. остида. – Самарқанд, 2012. – Б. 168.

⁵ Эшов Б.Ж., Одилов А.А. Ўзбекистон тарихи. 1 жилд. – Тошкент: “Янги аср авлоди”, 2014. – Б. 60.

⁶ Pardayev M.H., Toshboyev F.E. Ustrushonaning qadimgi davr davlatchilik tarixi. – Toshkent.: “VNESHINVESTPROM”, 2020. – В. 16.

⁷ Сверчков Л.М. Поселение Мык – источник по истории средневековой Уструшаны: Дисс. канд.ист. наук. – Самарканд, 1991. – С. 145–146.

secular, religious, and Sufi-related knowledge was highly regarded in their time. According to researcher M. Atayev, during the Karakhanid period, the high respect and attention shown to scholars contributed to an increase in the number of muhaddiths, Sufis, and especially jurists (faqih) in Ustrushana. This process laid the foundation for the widespread establishment of the Hanafi school of thought in the region.

Moreover, this environment gave rise to renowned lineages of jurists, such as the Majduddin Ustrushaniy family. The lineage began with Majduddin Husayn ibn Ahmad Ustrushani, followed by his two sons, Ahmad and Mahmud Ustrushani, and his grandson Muhammad ibn Mahmud Ustrushani, all of whom were distinguished jurists. Members of this family were active in Ustrushana during the Karakhanid period and were considered leading figures in Islamic jurisprudence⁸.

According to Chinese sources, several artists from our region who traveled to China added the names of their native cities and provinces to their own names. For instance, in the 5th century CE, Sao-Polomey and his grandson Sao-Myao, who came from Ustrushana, as well as Sao-Pan in the 7th century, were recognized as highly skilled musicians in China.

Written sources also note that in the 7th and 8th centuries, rulers of Ustrushana sent ambassadors to China. Considering the region's significant economic and military-strategic importance in Central Asia, the Arabs launched military campaigns against it in the early 8th century, and in 749 CE, the Tang Empire also conducted military expeditions. Furthermore, records indicate that during the battle between the Arabs and the Chinese in 751 CE, Chinese forces suffered defeat⁹.

It should be noted that Ustrushana had a distinctive administrative and political system. The region also hosted active mints for coin production. Yaqut al-Hamawi, in his book *Mu'jam al-Buldan* ("Dictionary of Countries"), describes Ustrushana as a large oasis near Samarkand, located in the lower reaches of the Sayhun River. He notes that the region contained nearly four hundred fortresses and abundant deposits of gold, silver, iron, and other valuable minerals, which led to the minting of coins there during various periods¹⁰.

According to our archaeologists, coins were minted in the central city of Bunjikat during the late 9th - 10th centuries and the first half of the 11th century, while in Zomin, mints operated in the 6th century, the early 11th century, and the early 14th century. Symbols of three major world religions - Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity - are depicted on Ustrushana coins¹¹.

As is well known, the Amul ford in the middle reaches of the Amu Darya played a significant role in the economic and cultural relations between Transoxiana and Khorasan during the medieval period. Located near the present-day city of Chorjuy, this ford was part of a transit trade route connecting Bukhara to Marv, one of the major trade centers of Khorasan. In the medieval period, this route played a key role in linking Khorasan with the trade cities of Transoxiana.

According to the works of 9th - 10th century Arab geographers, the distance from Amul to Marv via the Karakum Desert was 36 farsakhs, or approximately six days' journey. Five to seven intermediate stations are mentioned in the sources (Ibn Khurdadbeh, Maqdisi). Notably, alongside these stations, signal towers such as Ayritom and Duniyotepa were constructed to guide caravans at night and prevent them from losing their way. This trade route, which carried goods from Fergana, Chach, Zomin, Dizak (Jizzakh), Samarkand, and Bukhara to Marv via the Amul

⁸ Атаев М. Уструшана уламолари. – Тошкент; “Фан”, 2024. – Б. 141 – 142.

⁹ Гафуров Б.Г. Таджики (Древнейшая, древняя и средневековая история). – Москва.: “Наука”, 1972. – С. 290; Грицина А.А. Уструшанские были. – Ташкент: Издательство народного наследия им. А.Кадири, 2000. – С. 26.

¹⁰ Атаев М. Уструшана уламолари. – Тошкент; “Фан”, 2024. – Б. 21.

¹¹ Миллий ўзликни англаш ва мозийга назар. – Тошкент: “Наврўз”, 2013. – Б. 94.

ford, was one of the main, heavily trafficked routes of the Great Silk Road passing through our region¹².

It should be emphasized that in the historical and cultural oasis of Ustrushana, science, trade, culture, art, mining, ironworking, and textiles were highly developed in their time. Additionally, irrigated and predominantly rain-fed agriculture, horticulture, and livestock farming flourished.

Information recorded by historian-travelers also indicates that in Ustrushana, particularly in the Jizzakh oasis, an extensive irrigation system was established. As a result, irrigated agriculture produced abundant harvests. The agricultural products cultivated in the oasis were in high demand and were sold in neighboring regions, including the markets of Khojand¹³. According to written sources and archaeological data, during this period the mirishkor farmers of the Jizzakh oasis primarily cultivated wheat, rice, barley, oats, sesame, chickpeas, beans, grapes, apricots, cherries, peaches, walnuts, almonds, pomegranates, melons, watermelons, and pumpkins¹⁴.

As noted above, because trade caravans of the Great Silk Road passed through the territory of Ustrushana, Yaqut al-Hamawi mentions in his work *Mu'jam al-Buldan* that there were nearly four hundred fortresses in the region. Some of these fortresses, caravanserais, ribats, and castles were constructed to provide resting places for the caravans along their routes and to ensure the safety of their goods. Only a portion of these structures have survived to the present day¹⁵. It should be noted that Bunjikat, the central city of the Ustrushana region, was strategically located on trade routes connecting Sogdiana to Fergana and Shash, Shash via the Dizak Desert, and Zomin to Fergana from Sogdiana¹⁶.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the peoples of Central Asia, particularly the Sogdians, had long-established social, economic, and cultural ties with the peoples of China and Eastern Turkestan, as confirmed by written sources and material evidence. The cultural oasis of Ustrushana occupies a unique and distinct place in the history of Uzbekistan, and its renown spread far due to its political, military-strategic, and geographical advantages, as well as its rich underground and surface resources.

From ancient times, urban planning and construction, along with irrigation networks, developed rapidly in this region. On one hand, the growth of agriculture, handicrafts, and trade, and on the other, the increasing presence of pastoralists around the oasis, combined with the expansion of internal and external trade and monetary relations, highlight the significant role that Ustrushana played in the development of the Great Silk Road.

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¹³ Пардаев М.Х., Суянов С.С., Пардаев А.Х. Шимолий-ғарбий Уструшонада суғорма дехқончилик хўжалигининг пайдо бўлиши ва тараққиёт босқичлари. // ЎММТ, 30-нашри. – Самарқанд, 1999. – Б. 233.

¹⁴ Данилевский И.Г., Кононов В.Н., Никитин А.А. Исследование растительных остатков из раскопок согдийского замка 7 в.в. на горе Муг в Таджикистане. // Растительность Таджикистана и её основание. – М – Л., 1940. – С. 550.

¹⁵ Мавлонов Ў. Марказий Осиёнинг қадимги йўллари: шаклланиши ва ривожланиш босқичлари. – Тошкент: “Академия”, 2008. – Б.166.

¹⁶ Бетгер Е.К. Извлечение из книги “Пути и страны” Абу-л-Касыма ибн-Хаукаля. // Труды Среднеазиатского государственного университета им. В.И.Ленина. – Ташкент.: САГУ, 1957. – С. 21.



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