

DEFENSIVE STRUCTURES OF CENTRAL ASIA (FROM THE 4TH CENTURY BC TO THE BEGINNING OF THE 10TH CENTURY AD)

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Annotation: This research analyzes the formation and evolution of defensive structures in Central Asia from the 4th century BC to the 10th century AD. The article examines the architectural features, construction materials, and defensive systems of fortresses, city walls, and military fortifications belonging to the Antiquity and Early Middle Ages. Additionally, it highlights the influence of political changes and the development of military art in the region on the structural design of these fortifications.

Key words: Defensive structures, fortresses, fortifications, antiquity, early middle ages, pakhsa and raw brick, military archaeology.

Central Asia has long been one of the regions that has played an important role in the development of world civilization. This region served as a crossroads of major trade routes connecting the East and the West, and it gained particular strategic importance with the passage of the Great Silk Road. Although trade routes contributed to the development of interactions among various peoples, cultures, and economic relations, at the same time the region became a field of political and military conflicts among different states and tribes. For this reason, the construction and improvement of defensive structures in the cities of Central Asia became one of the most important tasks. Starting from the 4th century BCE, major states such as Bactria, Sogdiana, and Khorezm emerged in the territory of Central Asia. Urban development expanded in these states, and cities were surrounded by strong defensive walls, fortresses, and watchtowers. Defensive structures played an important role not only in protecting cities from external enemies but also in maintaining internal order and strengthening political authority. Archaeological research shows that complex defense systems existed in Central Asia from ancient times. These systems included thick walls, high towers, moats, gate complexes, and inner citadels. In particular, historical monuments found in the Khorezm region, such as Ayaz Kala, Topraq Kala, and Koy-Kirilgan Kala, demonstrate the high level of development of ancient military architecture. These fortresses stand out for their complex architectural structure, high walls, and strategic location. During the rule of the Kushan Empire in the 1st–3rd centuries CE, cities developed even further and defensive structures were improved. In this period, fortresses were reinforced with double or triple defensive walls, and moats were dug around them. This made it more difficult for enemy troops to approach the fortress and increased the effectiveness of the defense system. In the early medieval period, cities were usually divided into three main parts: the ark (citadel), the shahristan (main urban area), and the rabad (suburban area inhabited by craftsmen and traders). Each of these parts had its own defensive system. During the Arab conquests of the 7th–8th centuries, many cities in Central Asia were also known for their strong defensive walls. Arab historians particularly noted the high walls and complex gate systems of cities such as Samarkand and Bukhara. Later, in the 9th–10th centuries during the Samanid period, cities were restored and their defensive structures were further strengthened. The purpose of this article is to analyze the formation, stages of development, and architectural features of defensive structures that existed in Central Asia from the 4th century BCE to the 10th century

CE from a scientific perspective. In addition, the historical significance of these structures and their role in the development of Central Asian civilization are also examined.

In the 4th century BCE, states such as Bactria, Sogdiana, and Khorezm existed in Central Asia. In these regions, cities were usually surrounded by high defensive walls built from pakhsa (rammed earth) and mud bricks [2]. The thickness of these walls sometimes reached several meters, and they were regularly reinforced with towers. Afrasiab was the ancient central part of Samarkand and was surrounded by strong defensive walls. Archaeological research shows that the height of the city walls reached 10–12 meters. Guard passages and towers were located on top of the walls. This played an important role in protecting the city from enemy attacks [3]. Historical monuments located in the Khorezm region, such as Ayaz Kala, Topraq Kala, and Koy-Kirilgan Kala, are remarkable examples of ancient defensive architecture. These fortresses were built on elevated platforms and were surrounded by strong defensive walls. Inside the fortresses there were residential buildings, military garrisons, and economic facilities [4].

During the Kushan Empire (1st–3rd centuries CE), urban development expanded significantly. Fortresses were strengthened with double or triple defensive walls. In addition, moats were dug around the fortresses, making it more difficult for enemy troops to approach the walls [5].

Between the 4th and 8th centuries, Central Asian cities developed a three-part structure consisting of the ark (citadel), shahristan (main city), and rabod (suburban area). The ark served as the ruler's residence and was considered the most fortified part of the city. The shahristan was the central urban area, while the rabod was inhabited mainly by craftsmen and traders [6]. In the city of Panjikent, towers were constructed along the walls every 30–40 meters. The city of Bukhara was also surrounded by several layers of defensive walls, and its gates had complex protection systems. This made the city capable of withstanding long-term sieges [5]. During the Arab conquests of the 7th–8th centuries, many cities in Central Asia were besieged. Arab historians emphasized that the defensive walls of Samarkand and Bukhara were very strong. City gates were made of wood reinforced with iron [6]. During the Samanid period (9th–10th centuries), cities developed economically and culturally. City walls were rebuilt and the use of baked bricks became widespread. During this period, the defensive systems of Bukhara and Samarkand were further strengthened [1]. The defensive structures of Central Asia consisted of several main elements: thick walls, watchtowers, moats, and complex gate systems. These elements played an important role in protecting the cities.

Conclusion. The period from the 4th century BCE to the 10th century CE represents an important stage in the development of urban planning and military architecture in the history of Central Asia. Although various states ruled the region during this period, all of them paid great attention to strengthening and protecting their cities. Archaeological sources indicate that the defense system of Central Asian cities was highly developed, with thick walls, watchtowers, moats, and complex gate structures widely used. These constructions were important not only for military purposes but also played a significant role in the development of cities as political and economic centers. The fortresses in the Khorezm region, as well as cities such as Afrasiab in Samarkand, Panjikent, and Bukhara, clearly demonstrate the advanced development of defensive architecture in Central Asia. In particular, the system of ark (citadel), shahristan (main city), and rabod (suburban area) created a complex and multi-layered defense structure for the cities.

During the periods of the Kushan and Samanid dynasties, defensive structures were further improved and construction technologies developed. In addition to pakhsa (rammed earth) and

mud bricks, the use of baked bricks became widespread. As a result, city walls became stronger and more durable. In general, the defensive structures built in Central Asia from the 4th century BCE to the 10th century CE serve as important sources for studying the military, political, and economic history of the region. These constructions demonstrate that the people of that period possessed advanced engineering and architectural knowledge. Today, these historical monuments are considered an important part of the cultural heritage of Uzbekistan and the entire Central Asian region. Their study and preservation are of great importance not only for historians and archaeologists but also for future generations. The period from the 4th century BCE to the 10th century CE is considered an important stage in the development of military architecture in Central Asia. The fortresses and walls built during this time still have great historical and archaeological significance today and reflect the rich cultural heritage of the region.

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