

THE DEVELOPMENT OF URBAN CULTURE IN THE ZARAFSHAN OASIS

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Abstract. This article analyzes the emergence, developmental stages, and role in Central Asian history of the urban culture that formed within the territory of Sogdiana and the Zarafshan Oasis. Since ancient times, Sogdiana has been one of the vital hubs of economic, political, and cultural life. The favorable geographical location of the Zarafshan Oasis, its developed irrigation systems, and its integration with international trade routes laid the foundation for the establishment of major cities in this region. Based on archaeological discoveries, historical sources, and contemporary research, this paper highlights the urban planning traditions, craftsmanship centers, and cultural progress of the oasis.

Keywords: Sogdiana, Zarafshan Oasis, Samarkand, urban planning, archaeology, Great Silk Road, culture, craftsmanship, irrigation system.

Аннотация. В данной статье анализируются возникновение, этапы развития и роль в истории Центральной Азии городской культуры, сформировавшейся на территории Согдианы и Зарафшанского оазиса. С древних времен Согдиана являлась одним из важнейших центров экономической, политической и культурной жизни. Благоприятное географическое положение Зарафшанского оазиса, развитые оросительные системы и связь с международными торговыми путями заложили основу для формирования здесь крупных городов. На основе археологических находок, исторических источников и современных исследований освещаются градостроительные традиции, ремесленные центры и культурный прогресс оазиса.

Ключевые слова: Согдиана, Зарафшанский оазис, Самарканд, градостроительство, археология, Великий шелковый путь, культура, ремесло, оросительная система.

Annotatsiya. Mazkur maqolada Sug'diyona va Zarafshon vohasi hududida shakllangan shahar madaniyatining vujudga kelishi, rivojlanish bosqichlari hamda Markaziy Osiyo tarixidagi o'rni tahlil qilinadi. Sug'diyona qadim zamonlardan boshlab iqtisodiy, siyosiy va madaniy hayotning muhim markazlaridan biri bo'lib kelgan. Zarafshon vohasining qulay geografik joylashuvi, rivojlangan sug'orish tizimlari va xalqaro savdo yo'llari bilan bog'liqligi bu hududda yirik shaharlarning shakllanishiga zamin yaratgan. Arxeologik topilmalar, tarixiy manbalar va zamonaviy tadqiqotlar asosida vohaning shaharsozlik an'analari, hunarmandchilik markazlari va madaniy taraqqiyoti yoritiladi.

Kalit so‘zlar: Sug‘diyona, Zarafshon vohasi, Samarqand, shaharsozlik, arxeologiya, Buyuk Ipak yo‘li, madaniyat, hunarmandchilik, sug‘orish tizimi.

Introduction. Central Asia has long been regarded as one of the most important regions connecting the civilizations of the East and the West. Located at the heart of this region, Sogdiana was one of the most developed historical and cultural areas of the ancient world. A major part of Sogdiana encompassed the Zarafshan Oasis, where agriculture, handicrafts, and trade had flourished since ancient times.

Due to its favorable natural and geographical conditions, the Zarafshan Oasis became one of the earliest centers of settled human habitation. The fertile lands, abundant water resources, and favorable climate of the oasis created suitable conditions for the emergence and development of urban culture. Throughout historical development, major urban centers such as Samarkand, Karmana, Dabusia, and others emerged within the oasis. The growth of these cities contributed not only to economic prosperity but also to the advancement of science, art, and culture. Therefore, the study of the history of Sogdiana and the Zarafshan Oasis is of great importance for a deeper understanding of the history of Central Asian civilization.

Research Methodology. This study is based on the principles of historicism, objectivity, and a comparative analytical approach. The research examines the development of urban culture in the Zarafshan Oasis through the analysis of archaeological materials, historical written sources, and modern scholarly literature. Archaeological data obtained from sites such as Afrosiyob, Ko‘ktepa, Erkurgan, Karmana, and Dabusia were used to identify the stages of urban development and cultural transformations within the region. Comparative and chronological methods were applied to determine the evolution of settlement patterns, urban planning traditions, handicraft production, and trade relations. In addition, interdisciplinary approaches incorporating archaeology, history, and cultural studies were employed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of the Zarafshan Oasis in the development of Central Asian civilization. The findings are interpreted through the synthesis of archaeological evidence and historical records, allowing for a more objective reconstruction of the region’s urban culture and historical significance.

Literature Review. The issues of urban culture in Sogdiana and the Zarafshan Oasis have been widely studied in Central Asian historiography. M.Kh. Isamiddinov analyzed the origins of urban culture and the processes of urbanization in Samarkand Sogd based on archaeological evidence. The work “History of the Uzbek SSR” examines the historical development, economic activities, and cultural life of the region. U.M. Mavlonov highlighted the formation of the Great Silk Road and the role of Sogdian cities in international trade. The studies of A. Muhammadjonov and A.R. Mukhamedjanov are particularly important for understanding the development of ancient cities and irrigation systems. These scholarly works provide a valuable foundation for investigating the emergence and development of urban culture in the Zarafshan Oasis.

Discussion and Results. Sogdiana was a historical and cultural region located in the basins of the Zarafshan and Kashkadarya rivers. The territory was bordered by desert zones in the north and mountain ranges in the south. The Zarafshan River served as the main source of water for the oasis and played a decisive role in the development of agriculture and human settlement. Favorable natural conditions encouraged the population to adopt a sedentary lifestyle from ancient times. The availability of water resources made it possible to establish irrigation systems, leading to the cultivation of vast areas and the development of agriculture.

The abundance of natural resources, proximity to trade routes, and favorable climate increased the economic significance of the region. These factors later contributed to the emergence of major urban centers.

The formation of urban culture was the result of a long historical process. The first urban centers in the Zarafshan Oasis began to emerge at the beginning of the first millennium BCE. The growth of agricultural production and the development of handicrafts led to an increase in population.

Early cities were surrounded by defensive walls and functioned as administrative and economic centers. Within these cities, separate areas were designated for rulers' residences, temples, workshops, and marketplaces. Archaeological research indicates that ancient cities were built according to complex urban plans. The arrangement of streets, residential quarters, and public buildings confirms the high level of architectural culture during that period.

Samarkand, regarded as the ancient heart of Sogdiana, served as its political, economic, and cultural center from ancient times. It is considered one of the oldest cities in the world, with a history spanning more than two and a half millennia.

The geographical location of Samarkand created favorable conditions for the development of trade and cultural relations. As one of the major points along the Great Silk Road, the city became a meeting place for various peoples and cultures.

Archaeological discoveries in Samarkand provide important evidence of its history. Palace remains, wall paintings, pottery, and coins discovered in the city demonstrate its advanced level of cultural development.

The flourishing handicrafts and trade of Samarkand formed the foundation of its economic prosperity. Products made by potters, blacksmiths, jewelers, and weavers were renowned not only in local markets but also in distant regions.

The Great Silk Road played a crucial role in the development of Sogdiana. Through this trade network, economic relations were established with China, India, Iran, Byzantium, and other regions. Sogdian merchants were known as some of the most active traders of the ancient world. They traveled thousands of kilometers, conducting trade with numerous countries. Silk, precious stones, metal goods, spices, and other commodities were exchanged along these routes.

These commercial connections also facilitated the influx of various cultural influences into Sogdiana. New ideas in art, architecture, religion, and science spread throughout the region, transforming the oasis into an important center of international cultural exchange.

Handicrafts reached a high level of development in the cities of Sogdiana. Pottery, metalworking, glassmaking, and jewelry production were particularly advanced. Pottery products were distinguished by their elegant forms and decorative designs. Metalworkers produced weapons, tools, and ornaments, while jewelers created items that were regarded as true works of art.

Handicraft centers played an important role in economic development and contributed significantly to urban prosperity. Many products were exported, which further increased the volume of trade.

The inhabitants of Sogdiana possessed a rich spiritual and cultural life. Various religious beliefs coexisted in the region and significantly influenced cultural development. Zoroastrianism remained the dominant religion for a long period. Later, Buddhism, Christianity, and other religious traditions also spread into the area. The coexistence of different faiths encouraged cultural tolerance and diversity.

Art and literature also flourished. Wall paintings, sculptures, and decorative arts vividly demonstrate the richness of Sogdian culture.

Archaeological investigations conducted in the Zarafshan Oasis and Sogdiana have played a vital role in studying the region's history. Excavations at sites such as Afrosiyob, Koktepa, and Erkurghan have uncovered thousands of artifacts. These findings provide valuable information about the lifestyle, economy, and worldview of ancient populations. Coins, inscriptions, and

architectural remains serve as key sources for reconstructing historical events. Modern technologies, including satellite imagery and geophysical methods, continue to expand the possibilities of archaeological research and facilitate the discovery of new sites.

Sogdiana occupies an important place not only in the history of Central Asia but also in the history of world civilization. Sogdian merchants made a significant contribution to the development of economic relations between East and West. The advanced urban infrastructure, flourishing handicraft centers, and vibrant cultural environment demonstrate that Sogdiana was one of the most developed civilizations of its time.

Certain elements of Sogdian culture also influenced the cultures of neighboring peoples. Today, the heritage of Sogdiana remains an important part of Uzbekistan's historical and cultural legacy. Its study and preservation continue to be essential tasks for future generations.

Conclusion. The Zarafshan Oasis was one of the most developed regions of Central Asia in ancient times. Favorable natural and geographical conditions, advanced irrigation systems, and extensive international trade networks created the foundation for the emergence and growth of a highly developed urban culture. Cities led by Samarkand played significant roles as economic, political, and cultural centers.

Archaeological research continues to reveal important aspects of Sogdiana's history. The discoveries made in the region confirm the high level of cultural and urban development achieved by the inhabitants of the oasis. Today, the heritage of the Zarafshan Oasis retains its scientific and cultural significance and remains an integral part of the history of world civilization.

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