



## **FORMATION OF CITIES IN ANCIENT KHOREZM BASED ON TERRITORIAL- GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION AND SPECIALIZATION**

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**Abstract.** This article explores the development of urban centers in Ancient Khorezm based on their territorial-geographic location and specialization. Using archaeological evidence, it classifies cities into categories such as border towns, trade hubs, craft centers, and religious sites. The study focuses on key archaeological sites like Khumbuztepa, Nurum, Koykirilgankala, and Qalaliqir-2, revealing detailed insights into craft production, religious infrastructure, and economic exchanges of the region.

**Keywords.** Ancient Khorezm, Khumbuztepa, border cities, craft center, temple, trade routes, archaeology, pottery, Kalalikir-2, Koykirilgankala.

**Introduction.** In the history of ancient civilizations, the emergence of cities, their geographical location, and functional specialization serve as key indicators of societal development. In particular, the cities that emerged in the territory of ancient Khorezm during the pre-Christian millennia are distinguished by their foundation on economic, cultural, religious, and defensive functions. These ancient urban centers typically operated as border cities, trade hubs, craft centers, and religious sites. Their location was closely tied to the natural geographic conditions of the Amu Darya River basin, proximity to water resources, and intersections with caravan routes. This article provides an in-depth analysis of the territorial and geographical features of ancient cities in Khorezm, focusing on specialized centers such as Khumbuztepa, Nurum, Qoyqirilganqala, and Qalaliqir-2.

**Literature Review.** A number of local and international scholars' works serve as key sources for the study of ancient Khorezmian cities and their specialization. The archaeological-ethnographic expeditions led by S.P. Tolstov between the 1930s and 1950s played a crucial role in identifying ancient fortresses, temples, and cultural strata. In particular, archaeological findings from Kalalikir-2 and Qoyqirilganqala shed light on the structural features of religious centers and their role within the broader state framework. The scientific research conducted by archaeologists such as M. Mambetullaev, S.R. Bolelov, S.R. Baratov, V.A. Livshits, and V.I. Vainberg has also provided significant material for the academic understanding of the subject.

**Methodological Framework.** The research is based on historical-archaeological approaches. Various scientific methods were employed to analyze the specialization of ancient Khorezmian cities. Comparative and chronological analyses enabled the examination and periodization of archaeological sites in relation to others. Stratigraphic methods were applied to analyze the sequence of archaeological layers. Intercultural comparisons allowed for the assessment of Khorezm's culture in relation to other civilizations. Cartographic analysis using GIS technologies facilitated the study of the strategic placement of these urban centers. This comprehensive methodological approach made it possible to determine the historical function and societal role of the archaeological sites.

**Analysis.** The formation of ancient cities depended largely on their geographical positioning and intended functions, which allowed them to evolve into different types of urban settlements. These cities can be classified as follows:

1. Border cities
2. Trade centers
3. Craft and artisanal production centers
4. Religious centers

One of the earliest specialized settlements formed in ancient Khorezm is the Khumbuztepa archaeological site, located in the southern part of Khorezm, along the banks of the Amudarya River. According to researchers, this site functioned as a ceramics production center. Through the Amudarya, the artisans delivered the ceramic products they manufactured to other cities and states. Pottery fragments (ostraca) bearing inscriptions found at this site indicate the presence of state-commissioned production.

The question of when exactly this monument was founded remains one of the debated issues among scholars. Some researchers associate its origins with the Achaemenid conquest, while others point to an earlier period, namely the end of the 7th century BCE.

Khumbuztepa is located 17 km east of the city of Khazarasp, on the left bank of the Amudarya. Today, a significant part of the site has been washed away by the waters of the Amudarya, while another part has been appropriated by the local population. Only 4.6 hectares of the site have been preserved. Khumbuztepa remained active from the beginning of the 6th century BCE to the 3rd century BCE.

In 1973, during the process of compiling the archaeological map of the Khorezm region, the archaeologist M. Mambetullaev identified the site of Khumbuztepa and conducted research there [8]. The researcher thoroughly analyzed the ceramic items, terracotta sculptures, water vessels, and their decorative motifs, discovered at the site. Inscriptions were also found at the site, which were studied by V.A. Livshits. These inscriptions, dating back to the 1st century BCE, are considered economic records, containing information about quantities of goods and names. Based on this evidence, researchers have described the site as a crafts center. It is suggested that ceramic products were produced on a state scale, and in return, the artisans received various goods.

In 1996–1997, S.R. Bolelov carried out research at Khumbuztepa. He identified three phases of construction in the site's development:

In the first phase, traces of semi-dug dwellings and huts were found. A two-tier kiln and a workshop were also discovered at the site.

The researcher noted that the construction technique of the kilns resembles those found at Uchtepa and Churnok in Margiana, which date to the second quarter of the 1st millennium BCE [3, p.31]. S.R. Bolelov dates this period to the late 7th century BCE – 6th century BCE [2, p.32].

In the second phase, the semi-subterranean dwellings and huts were filled with sand, and a new, large-scale monumental workshop was constructed. Traces of a place of worship from this period were also identified. The manufacturing technique of the ceramic items from this phase differs from that of the first phase. The neck of jug-shaped vessels is clearly separated; the body has a triangular curvature with a pointed end. Some surfaces of cylindro-conical ceramic vessels were painted in red or had red slip applied. The interior and exterior surfaces of bowls and small basins were also painted red. Such ceramic items are also characteristic of the Kozalikir site. This phase is dated to the 6th–5th centuries BCE.

No architectural remains from the third phase have been identified, but numerous ceramic sherds and wasters from this period have been discovered. It has been determined that this phase dates to the late 4th century BCE.

**Results.** At Khumbuztepa, kilns for firing pottery, heaps of defective vessels discarded during the production process, numerous ceramic fragments and refuse pits were discovered. The heights of the kilns ranged from 2.2 to 7.5 meters, and around them were found ash, broken figurines, supports used during firing, fragments of baked and unbaked bricks, and egg-shaped clay pellets weighing 50–100 grams. These finds substantiate the function of Khumbuztepa as a craft production center for ceramic wares.

Since 2011, the Southern Khorezm Archaeological Detachment of the Khorezm Mamun Academy, under the leadership of S.R. Baratov, has been conducting excavations at the Khumbuztepa site. Researchers discovered a Zoroastrian temple dating to the late 5th century BCE [1, pp.33–42]. Three construction phases of the temple were identified, and it has been substantiated as one of the oldest places of worship in Central Asia.

During the 4th–2nd centuries BCE, villages specialized in crafts began to take shape. Archaeologists have recorded such villages near the Dovdon tributaries, specifically in the Tarim-Qoya and Tuzqir hills, as well as in the Tuzqir and Nurum oases [4].

The Nurum site is located in the western part of the Sarykamysh delta, within the latitudes of the Middle Davdaka channel, northwest of the Tuzkir elevation. Today, it corresponds to the territory of the Dashoguz Province of Turkmenistan. Stationary archaeological investigations at the site began in 1989. This site represents a village intended for the production of ceramic goods, with a total area of 500 hectares. It is dated to the 1st century BCE – 1st century CE [5, pp. 72–83].

More than 20 fortified dwellings were discovered at the site. Each dwelling contained two kilns, and more than 40 kilns were identified in total. The construction techniques of the kilns resemble those found in other regions of ancient Khorezm.

The Nurum craft center, located at the border of ancient Khorezm, was specialized in the sale of craft products to nomadic tribes and served as a hub for mutual commodity exchange.

In border towns, at crossroads, and at crossings of the Amudarya River, cities were transformed into trade centers. Among the cities located along trade routes were:

on the left bank of the Amudarya – Kaparas, Khazorasp, Qal’ajiq, Kohnauaz, Gurganj, Okchagelin, Qanhkhaqal’a;

and on the right bank – Qoshqal’a, Toprakkala, Jigarbond, Sho’raxon, Govurkala, Khojayli, and others.

The fortresses built in border cities not only protected state territory, but also served as religious centers for trade, craftsmanship, and agricultural oases.

In the territory of ancient Khorezm, fortresses that functioned as state religious centers have also been identified. Large-scale temples of state significance were located at monuments such as Kalalikir 2, Yelkharas, Koykirilgankala, and Shovot Toprakkala.

The Kalalikir 2 site is located on the left bank of the southern Davdon River, 10 km west of Kalalikir 1 and 6 km northeast of Kozaliqir. It was discovered in 1938 by the Khorezm Archaeological-Ethnographic Expedition (KHAE) under the leadership of S.P. Tolstov. Excavations were carried out in the 1950s, and further studies were continued from 1980 to 1991 under the direction of V.I. Vainberg [7, p. 286]. The site was constructed in the mid-4th century BCE, and was destroyed by a major fire in the 2nd century BCE.

The plan of Kalalikir 2 is in the form of a regular isosceles triangle with a curved base. The eastern wall measures 192 meters, and the western wall measures 202 meters in length. The fortification walls have been preserved to a height of 5 meters. On the northern side of the defensive wall is the main gate, which leads into a rectangular entrance complex. Opposite the entrance lies a structure with a circular corridor. Traces of wall paintings have been found on the walls of this building.

**Conclusion.** A circular temple was constructed within the central area of the fortress. The diameter of the temple is 24 meters, and it was built on a 2-meter-high platform. The temple itself was also fortified with defensive walls. Its entrance gate was flanked by an oval-shaped tower and protected with battlements. Inside the temple were interconnected walls forming a corrugated structure, enclosing a rectangular central hall. Around this hall, more than 20 rooms were identified, associated with economic and ritual activities.

A large number of ceramic items were discovered at the site, many of which were found intact. Among them were ritons and water vessels. On some of the vessels, relief depictions of a rider on a camel in front of a tree, a mythical beast, and a deer were found. Numerous terracotta

figurines, molds for baking ritual bread, and ostraca with inscriptions in ancient Khorezmian script were also discovered. The inscriptions found at Kalalikir 2 were deciphered by Livshits. These contain lists of goods brought to and distributed from the temple, as well as names of individuals.

The Koykirilgankalashite is considered one of the major temple complexes and cultural centers of the ancient Khorezmian state, where astronomical observations were also conducted. The site functioned as a grand temple dedicated to the deity of fertility — Brazman [6, p. 205]. The center of the fortress was divided into two parts: one side was dedicated to the cult of water and fertility — Anahita, and the other to the solar deity — Siyavush.

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