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THE FORMATION OF THE FIRST URBAN CULTURE IN THE SOUTH OF CENTRAL ASIA AND ITS REFLECTION IN ARCHEOLOGICAL MATERIALS

Abstract: The following article discusses the factors of the formation of first agricultural cultures and early cities in the southern parts of Central Asia, the study is based on the results of archeological research conducted in different periods.

Key words: Bronze Age, urbanization, migration, Oltintepa, Namazgoh, Sopollitepa, fire-worshiper.

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Introduction

Throughout the history of Humanity, cities have been of decisive social, economic, and cultural importance. The necessity to clarify the laws of the development of urban processes requires the in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the results of archaeological research conducted in different periods in this direction.

The territories of Bactria and Margiana, the southern part of Central Asia, are the oldest civilizations of this region. In the second half of the twentieth century, extensive archaeological research was conducted in the area, and archaeologists such as M.M. Dyakonov, V.I.Sarianidi, G.G.Shmidt, V.M.Masson, A.A.Askarov, E.V.Rtveladze, I.N.Xlopin, B.A.Kuften, A.S.Sagdullaev and T.Sh.Shirinov made important scientific conclusions about the first agricultural culture of Central Asia, the factors of the emergence of the first cities dating back to the Bronze Age, as well as the issues of early civilizations. The collected materials show that in IV-III millennium BC, the Central Asian regions began to enter the system of trade, exchange and cultural relations, typical to the ancient East. In the archeology of southern Turkmenistan, the culture of Prayer (Namozgoh) is an integral part of the ancient Eastern civilization, during which the scope and boundaries of

inter-tribal relations expanded. Archaeologists point out that the first cities began to appear in Prayer V phase of the Anov culture (Ancient agricultural settlements and city ruins of the Early Eneolithic and Late Bronze Ages, located around the village of Anov near Ashabat). [1, p.107.] In the archeological periodic system, this corresponds to the advanced stage of the Bronze Age. Studies show that radical changes in socio-economic and cultural life in Central Asia took place in the III millennium BC precisely in the Bronze Age.

Main part

In the ancient farming communities of the Bronze Age, economic upheavals accelerated social stratification and paved the way to the emergence of new local centers of ancient Eastern civilization. As a result of socio-economic and cultural processes, the boundaries of the areas where ancient agricultural culture spread from south to northeast of Central Asia, and in the Murgab Valley and Bactria. New centers of urban culture typical to ancient Eastern civilization began to appear. Studies have confirmed the fact that the culture of this region in terms of ancient rural planning, construction techniques and architecture is much closer in its characteristics to the culture of the ancient cities of Mesopotamia and Iran.

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Experts claim that the following factors are necessary for densely populated areas to be risen to the level of cities:

- the existence of high monumental architectural structures among the buildings of citizens; the areas, where the buildings of social and religious ceremonies are located, are considered to be the center of the city. The center, in its turn, is the block where the mayor and monks live; mayor's palaces and religious buildings form its basis;
- the construction of defensive walls around densely populated areas; defensive walls are provided with a tower (guard tower), a solid and steady gate, target openings, etc.;
- the establishment of main streets and sewerage systems in urban neighborhoods;
- population growth;

But it should be noted that experts consider that determining the population of the ancient city is very controversial. In particular, "G. Chaeld speaking about the main features of urban planning proposed: an area with a population of five thousand and more could be considered as a city. As a result of special research, G. Frankfort concluded that the population density of the ancient cities of Mesopotamia was 400 people per 1 hectare. V.M. Masson based on the results of this comparative analysis, suggested that there may have been about 2,000 people in Kaykubodshah (Tajikistan) and about 6,500 in Zartepa (Uzbekistan)". [2, p.53.] At the same time an american archaeologist Braywood, points out that the population density in the agricultural communities of the Ancient East increased 100 times compared to the time of the hunter-gatherers. [3, p.134.]

- The occurrence of property and social inequality in society, as well as the change and complexity of governing bodies of society is another factor in the formation and development of urban culture.

The change in the structure of religious views and ideology is accentuated by scholars as another factor in the formation of urban culture.

The development of productive industries by the Bronze Age such as the transition from primitive hunting to farming and animal husbandry, the introduction of artificial irrigation in agriculture, ceramics, metallurgy, textiles, jewelry were the processes related to the origin and development of cities with a number of industries. The first cities were formed as a trade and handicraft, military-administrative management system and cultural center of the agricultural district.

During this period, the occurrence of the pottery wheel in handicrafts was of great importance and became an significant factor in the formation of cities. By the end of the Early Bronze Age, all pottery began to be made on a pottery wheel, and the patterns on the pottery began to disappear.

As it was mentioned above, the regions of Margiana and Bactria are the oldest civilizations in

Central Asia, and many scientific studies have been conducted on the origin of the most ancient culture in these regions, and experts have expressed differed opinions on this issue. Many researchers associate the emergence of these civilizations with migration processes.

When talking about the oldest cities in the south of Turkmenistan, experts first of all mention the Oltintepa monument. As a result of well-known archaeologist V.M. Masson's research, there were studied the remains of a Bronze Age defensive wall, residential complexes, a monumental temple resembling Sumerian ziggurats with a staircase made of clay and raw brick. In Oltintepa, during Prayer V period the Moon was the chief Deity of the first city, which was depicted in the image of a celestial bull (a statue of a bull with a golden head and gemstone eyes was found in the tomb of the priest. A crescent-shaped turquoise stone was attached on its forehead). And now the people of the city had a common image of the god. A city-wide temple was built in his honor. As mentioned above the existence of an ideological center is an important element of urban culture. Supplementary farm buildings and housing complexes for priests were built near the temple.

According to the scholar, the oldest first urban culture was formed in Oltintepa during Prayer V period.

The Oltintepa area was divided into residential neighborhoods and artisan blocks, which were connected by narrow streets. The width of the streets was 1.5-2m. The width of the main streets leading to the central square of the city was 4-5m, where carts could move.

The emergence of writing is another characteristic feature of urban culture. During the research in Oltintepa, V.M Masson found pictographic symbols drawn on more than a hundred female goddesses. "These signs are not only found in female goddesses, but they are also found in other objects. One of the important facts, proving that these symbols are ancient writings, is that the number of the symbols is very big, but their variety is limited, and there is a definite type of characters in figures." [5, p.157.] The presence of the above indicated factors allows us to consider Oltintepa as the first city, the city of temples.

Studies have shown that the village of Oltintepa began to be surrounded by a defensive wall from the end of the Neolithic period and the beginning of the first Bronze Age. According to V.M Masson, who had been researching the area for many years, the emergence of the first settlement in the Murgab River basin was due to migration processes from the Eastern regions to the foothills of the Kopetdag. Archaeologists I. Maksimov and A. Askarov also support V.Masson's opinion that the migration processes began in the foothills of the Kopetdag, spread to Margiana and then to Bactria. [6, p.44.]

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Although I.V.Sarianidi claims that tribes of southern Turkmenistan occupied the Murgab river basin, however the features of the archeological complex in Bactria-Margiyana are not similar to the culture of Prayer V in southern Turkmenistan, but relatively similar to the culture of that period in Iran. [7, p.54.] Archeological materials found in Oltyntepa also provide information about the social character of the first urban society of Prayer V period.

City life in Oltyntepa did not continue after Prayer V period. The population left the city and moved towards the Murgab Valley. According to experts, this may have happened due to the lack of water in the Oltyntepa region, which was necessary for the development of agriculture. As during the Bronze Age people began to own new lands in Central Asia, many tribes migrated to the northern and northeastern regions of the region. Thus, in the northeast of Murgab, in ancient Bactria, in the Ulanbulaksay and Bostonsay basins, the Sopolli culture of irrigated agriculture and developed handicrafts was formed. According to archeological excavations in the Sopollitepa, the role of the peasant communities of Southern Turkmenistan in the formation of the Bronze Age civilization of this country was great, i.e. the ancient peasant communities migrated to Bactria directly from the Murgab oasis of present-day Turkmenistan. [8, p.137.]

The first territory in southern Uzbekistan occupied by Murgab peasants was the Sherabad desert. Their first residence was Sopollitepa.

In 1968 Uzbek archaeologist A. Askarov found Sopollitepa historical place of the Bronze Age located in 70 km from Termez (Uzbekistan) to the north-west, in the lower basin of the Ulanbulaksay, and studied it in detail in 1969-74.

The total area of Sopollitepa is about 4 hectares. Its central part is square in shape, it is distinguished by its height and precise planning. It is 82 meters long on all sides and is surrounded by three rows of defensive walls. [9, p.139.] The thickness of the walls, built with a complex architectural plan, exceeds 2 meters. According to scientists, these walls, which were divided into precisely sized corridor blocks, were built in a snare way and designed to distract the enemy. The inner blocks, which used to be the gates leading to the castle, served as a trap. These blocks were used for various purposes in later periods.

Material sources indicate that metallurgy was highly developed in Sopollitepa. Bronze daggers, spears, knives, axes, needles and utensils were made of bronze. The development of bronze metallurgy led to the appearance of craft workshops.

Material sources show that a number of branches of handicrafts reached the height of development. All Sopollitepa pottery is processed on a pottery wheel and baked in two-tiered jars. The ceramics were so attractive, elegant, resonant and delicate that they differ little in quality from modern ceramics. They were vases with legs of various shapes, cups, teapots and

jugs with taps, palm and conical bowls, bowls and jars, ceramic pots and etc. Although no patterns were found on the pottery, it was discovered that in vases and cups, in wide round jars with flanges called khumcha, there were ribbon-like nine-colored stripes found in the pottery of the Murgab Valley Prayer VI period.

The masters of the Sopolli (pottery) period used the minerals mined in Afghanistan, Iran, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and possibly Kazakhstan. According to the excavations, "In the first stage (XVII-XIV centuries BC) the raw materials extracted from the iron deposits of Afghanistan and Iran were in the lead. In the last stage (middle of the XI century BC) the share of ore deposits of Northern Fergana-Tashkent, Kyzylkum, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan significantly increased" [10, p.16.]

During the research conducted in Sopollitepa, 29 signs were found on ceramic vessels. They were divided into 8 groups according to their shape:

- crescent-shaped
- in the form of a drawn bow, with a straight line in the middle,
- two straight lines
- cross-shaped,
- a straight line connecting the two circles,
- reminiscent of the letter "A"
- snake-shaped marks

The fact that similar signs were found in southern Turkmenistan, northern Afghanistan, Iran and India shows that they were the first inscriptions. [11, p.25.] Thus, the results of archeological research conducted in Sopollitepa showed that the formation of the Bronze Age civilization of this region was associated with the ancient peasant communities of the Murgab (Margiyana) oasis. Life in Sopollitepa lasted for two hundred years. Archeological evidence of the ancient cities described in the Avesta, a unique written source of the past history of the peoples of Central Asia and Iran, was obtained as a result of the planning of the village-fortress of Sopollitepa.

As new lands were acquired, the people of Sopollitepa gradually moved northeast along the foothills of the Kuhitong and Baysun Mountains. As a result, in the lower reaches of the Sherabad River, new villages of ancient farmers began to appear. This is how the historical place Zharkuton, located on the ancient tributary of the Sherabad River - Bustonsoy River emerged and came into existence.

In 1973 A.Askarov began archeological excavations in the historical place Zharkuton, located in the Sherabad river valley and uncovered important artifacts. It was a ruin of an old city, occupying an area of 100 hectares and consisting of two parts, "Arki Alo" and "Shahrstan". The residence of the mayor - the palace of the sovereign was situated in Arki Alo. The total area of Arki Alo (arch) was not less than 3 hectares. It was surrounded by a thick defensive wall. Connected to the arch, on its eastern and southern

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sides, "Shahristan" was inhabited by the main population of this ancient city - farmers and artisans.

Archaeological excavations discovered highly developed samples of pottery and bronze metallurgy, jewelry, tools, as well as the remains of textile workshops based on raw cotton and silk.

Among the three residential arrays opened in the Ark Square, a separate building stands out from the rest with its majestic construction. In the middle of the palace there was a platform with an area of about 20 m². The presence of a pedestal in the courtyard of the monumental building indicates that this palace was the residence of the mayor.

A metal smelting shop was discovered in the Ark Square, it is a unique find in the history of Central Asian archeology. There were opened two two-tiered circular-shaped metal smelting furnaces, built close to each other.

While studying another hill the researchers identified that it was a remnant of a monumental architectural complex - a temple of fire-worshippers. It is located about 350 meters southeast of the Ark, in the highest part of Jarkutan. If the ruler's residence in the arch was to the west of the ancient city, the fire-worshiping temple was to its east, a sacred place of worship for the townspeople and the surrounding communities. After the discovery of the fire-worshiping temples of the Bronze Age in ancient Bactria, many researchers put forward the idea that the roots of Zoroastrianism were originated in these regions. V.I. Sarianida, who had been researching the southern regions of Central Asia for many years, also noted that the temples of the sacred fire occurred in the Bronze Age in southern Central Asia. [13, p.30.]

These two monumental structures, on the one hand, were a symbol of the main urban culture of the ancient city in the system of religious and secular governance, and on the other hand, were two important factors that gave meaning and significance to name this large settlement as a city.

Conclusion

Thus, the radical changes in economic life occurred in the end of the third millennium BC to beginning of the second millennium BC such as – the development of various manufactures, the introduction of artificial irrigation system in agriculture, the discovery of pottery-based crafts, jewelry, metal melting and casting technology, and the growing density of population in certain areas as a result the high development of other sectors proved to be a factor contributed profoundly to the urbanization process.

According to the evidence found in archeological researches, it is claimed that the first urban culture was formed in the southern regions of Uzbekistan in the historical conditions typical for ancient Eastern civilization in the first half of the second millennium BC. The economic, social and cultural foundations of the lifestyle in the ancient city were studied on the example of the monuments in Sopollitepa and Jarkutan lying on the Sherabad oasis in Surkhandarya region. While Sopollitepa, with all its features of urban culture, is reminiscent of a proto-city that was mentioned in the Avesta as "vara", the monument in Jarkutan is truly the first ancient city in the territory of Uzbekistan.

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