



Ancient Panjakent

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The ancient settlement of Penjikent is located near the modern city of Panjakent (Sughd Region, Republic of Tajikistan) on the second terrace above the floodplain of the Zarafshan River, in an oasis, bounded from the north and south by two mountain ridges – Turkestan and Zaravshan. This area is very convenient for agriculture, people mastered here since ancient times.

Geographically, the valley is in the middle reaches of the Zarafshan River. The river, which brought fame to the valley, originates in the Zarafshan glacier and represents a large water artery of Central Asia. The length of the river is 877 km, within Tajikistan – 316 km. Tajiks call it Zarafshon, their ancestors Sogdians called Namik, and Greeks Politimet.

The Zarafshan Valley was the main part of the country of Sogd (Sogdiana) in the past. On the banks of the mountain rivers and streams flowing into Zaravshan, were found the remains of numerous settlements and monuments left by the Sogdians.

The fate of ancient Panjakent interested the scientists after the finds in 1932 by the herdsmen living in the village of Khayrabad in the ruins of the fortress on Mount Mug (modern Ayni district of Sughd region) a wicker basket with manuscripts and documents written on leather, paper and sticks.

The documents mention the villages in the upper reaches of Zaravshan, which to this day retain the Sogdian names of Madm, Kum, Hushekat, Iskodar, Vota, Rarz, Urmetan, Fatmev, Veshab, Yagnob, Kishnut, Mogiyon, Falgar, Maschoh and others.

There live the descendants of Sogdians – Tajiks, who for centuries gradually changed the Sogdian language into Tajik.

The population of Sogd spoke in the Indo-European East Iranian language. It was an originally settled agricultural people. The Sogdians settled in the Turkic environment, basing their cities on the territory of modern northern Kyrgyzstan and southern Kazakhstan. They also lived on the lands of modern Mongolia, western and northern China. Modern Tajikistan includes only a relatively small part of Sughd, the rest of Sughd – Uzbekistan.

Many people of Central Asia consider themselves as heirs of Sogdian culture to some extent. Although the Sogdian language, like many traditions of the material and spiritual culture of Sogd, was lost after the Arab conquest of Central Asia.

The Sogdians disappeared without a trace; their direct descendants are the oldest settled people of the Zaravshan valley – the Tajiks. Through the Iranian-speaking Tajiks, the traditions of the ancient East Iranian tribes also reached another settled people, who now

live on the territory of ancient Sughd, the Turkic-speaking Uzbeks. The experience of urban development, accumulated by these peoples, has become the cultural property of all modern peoples of Central Asia.

Ancient fortress of ancient Panjakent today is the most expressive Sogdian monument of V-VIII cc. This dead buried city lies about 60 km from Samarkand – the former capital of Sughd.

Now more than half of this early medieval city with its blocks of two-story multi-room houses, palaces and temples, shops and workshops, streets and defensive structures, unique painting and sculpture, discovered in more than one hundred rooms of the V-VIII century, is in the heyday of Sogdian culture. Painting and sculpture introduce us to the customs and myths, folklore of Sogdians.

Although the capital of the whole of Sughd was considered Samarkand, on the territory of this state there were many independent possessions. Panjakent headed one of them. It, like other Sogdian possessions, can be called a city-state. Early class public entities of this type in earlier periods of history were widely distributed in Ancient Greece, Italy, the near and middle East, and everywhere they blossomed culture. However, by the beginning of the era of the early Middle Ages, these city-states were almost everywhere absorbed by despotic descent, while in Central Asia – the periphery of major political formations – this form of statehood continued to exist until the Arab conquest.

Sughd had extensive trade ties. Sughd merchants could be found in China and in Byzantium. The valley of Zarafshan lay on the central trade road of the Middle Ages – the Great Silk Road from China to the Mediterranean Sea. One of the trails of this route passed through Panjakent. The Great Silk Road has long been at the center of attention of the world scientific community. UNESCO has an extensive program for its study; a whole series of international exhibitions and conferences was devoted to it. Now it is firmly established that Sogdian traders prevailed on the Great Silk Road, acting as intermediaries between the West and the East. And although the excavations were conducted at different points, only Panjakent gives an integral view of the urban culture of not only Sogdiana, but the entire Great Silk Road.

Excavations on the territory of ancient Panjakent attracted the attention not only of scientists but also of the public. Every year, many tourists visit the site of ancient settlement with full visibility to show how high the culture of Central Asia reached in those days. At the same time, its relationship with all the main centers of world civilization is revealed. The visitor will be convinced that the roots of the local culture go deep into pre-Islamic times. Showing the historical truth will not only evoke a feeling of patriotism, but will once again underline the obviousness of the wrongness of the nationalist approach to the past.