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THE NEOLITHIC OF MIDDLE ZERAVSHAN RIVER

Abstract: The article is devoted to the results of the study of the Neolithic site of the Sazagan culture of the Middle Zeravshan. On the basis of the new data, the characteristic features of the material calculus, the genesis of culture, its economy and cultural ties with synchronous cultures are highlighted.

Key words: Stone age, mezolit, neolit, Middlte Zarafshon, Sazagan culture, Samarkand settlement, Chorbakty, Sazagan 1,2, Tepacul 3,4, Ochilgor.

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Introduction

The Zeravshan River flowing from the Pamirs is the third large river in the Middle Asia; its basin area is 41.880 square kilometers in size and 781 km long. By some significant features the Zeravshan Valley is clearly divided into three parts: the Upper Zeravshan, the Middle Zeravshan (Zeravshan or Samarkand depression) and the Lower Zeravshan (continental delta with numerous old river-beds). The Zeravshan depression is stretching in sub-meridian direction between spurs of Turkestan and Zeravshan ranges. Its southern part is limited with by western end of Zeravshan range (Chakylkalyan, Karatyube and Ziadin-Zirabulak Mountains).

Materials and methods

Neolithic (New Stone Age) being the final stage of the Stone Age on the Middle Asian territory according to the archaeological periodisation is better researched than Paleolithic and Mesolithic (fig. 1). As a result of many researches such Neolithic cultures as Djeytun (Southern Turkmenistan) [1, p. 242], Kel'teminar (the Lower Amudarya and the Zeravshan in the Kyzylkum) [2, p. 172], Gissar (Middle and Southern Tajikistan) [3. p.1-5-123], Central Ferghana (the Ferghana Valley) [4. p. 304], Sazagan (the Middle Zeravshan) [5, pp. 3-122] and Ustyurt (Ustyurt Plateau) [6. pp. 3-24] are known and scientifically proved. The chronologic frames of these cultures are 7-6th – 3rd millennia BCE; it allows

identifying rather typical features of the material culture of Neolithic tribes in this area.

The sites of Sazagan culture placed on the northern foothills of Karatyube Mountains (the Middle Zeravshan) and area of Samarkand city were discovered in 1966 and they are still researched by the archeological group of Samarkand State University in nowadays. Karatyube Mountains with sites of Sazagan culture (more than 30 in number) located on their northern slopes are cut through by a system of deep terraced valleys. All known Late Mesolithic and Neolithic sites are linked to the third terrace. By the present period such five sites as Sazagan 1, 2, Djangaly 1 and Tepakul 3, 4 situated in different valleys have been already studied. Also more than 20 sites of open type have been disclosed, but not researched yet; more than 10 sites of cave type with traces of primeval culture (Karakamar, Ochil cave, etc.) have been discovered.

The base for stone industry of Sazagan sites was pebbles derivable from the alluvial sediments of the Zeravshan Valley. Basically it was pieces of siliceous schist; flint itself was rarely used. According to all indices the industry of Sazagan sites is attributed to flake-plate type (fig. 2). Tools made of the primary flakes were mainly wrongly and accidentally shaped, but plates and tools made of them were correctly shaped and faceted. One more significant feature of plate type of this industry was the leading role of micro and small plates 1sm wide (82%). In nowadays it is possible to research the

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chronological issue of Sazagan culture basing on new facts. Also more detailed geological and geomorphologic researches dealing with dating of terrace complex of valleys were carried out and number of archaeological sources was highly increased. The geological-geomorphologic data indicate that the terrace complex of Sazagan piedmont plain and complex of Sazagan terraces were formed during Golodnostep Syrdarya period. The third terrace of Sazagan site is age-dated back to Golodnostep period, and people settled at it during late Golodnostep and early Syrdarya period, i.e., late Pleistocene or early Holocene. Now these deductions are more corresponding to concepts based on archaeological data.

Now the archaeological expedition of Samarkand State University is continuing researches at sites of Sazagan culture. Together with it the systematic archaeological surveys at adjacent valleys, during which Paleolithic site of Olmabulak of open type and more than 30 caves were included into the archaeological map, took place. Traces of pristine culture were revealed at Lolab, Kara-Kamar and Ochilgor sites. In particular Lolab site of Neolithic period, Kara-Kamar site of Mesolithic period and Ochilgor site of Mesolithic-Neolithic period should be noticed.

In the present period the research at Ochilgor cave is carried out. It is placed 700-800 meters above Sazagan 2 site. Ochil cave has been studied since 2004 till now. During the investigation the archaeological layer more than 60 square meters in size was disclosed. In some parts the cultural deposits are 2.20 m thick [7. pp.19-24]. Approximately 2000 stone tools, numerous fragmented bones of animals and interesting fragments of Neolithic ceramics were disclosed [8. pp. 220-226].

We have managed to state preliminarily four archaeological layers linked to hearths. The typological analyse of stone tools from layers allows dating previously the lower layers back to Mesolithic and, probably, to Upper Paleolithic, and the upper layers with ceramics of New Stone Age back to Neolithic.

As a result of researches at sites of Sazagan culture rather interesting archaeological material allowing solving the question of Neolithic period in this area has been obtained.

Summary:

1. Materials from sites of Sazagan culture and newly discovered sites of Ochilgor, Karakamar and Lolab will allow revealing typical features of Neolithic culture on the territory of the Middle Zeravshan.

2. The sites disclosed in valleys of the northern slope of Karatyube Mountains are considered to be independent historical-cultural formations in frames

of "mountainous" Neolithic. The base for attribution of materials of Sazagan areas to the mountainous Neolithic was flake-plate type of industry, in particular, such types as pebble tools, high scrappers on flakes, chisel-shaped instruments and some other materials very similar to materials from Central Ferghana (Central Ferghana culture). Also sites in this area are characterized in frames of the mountainous Neolithic by clear peculiarity expressed, in particular, by very significant role of plate component in industry and very high index of micro-plates, ceramics decorated in technical traditions of plains (pressed, scratched, etc. decorations). The new materials found in this area are not contradicting to the deduction, but in the opposite they enlarge and reveal typical features of Sazagan culture (7-6 – 3rd millennia BCE).

3. Till the recent time all studied sites of Sazagan culture were linked to terraces of large valleys. However, the recent researches indicate that Neolithic population preferred staying in grottos and caves placed in gorges of the same large valleys. Thus, sites of open and cave types became known.

4. The recent researches indicated that the area of Karatyube is a kind of "micro-cultural region" with sites of not only Neolithic, but also Mesolithic (Karakamar, Sazagan 1 and Ochilgor) and Paleolithic (Olmabulak) periods. It is important, because it allows revealing the genesis of Sazagan culture. Till now the origin of Sazagan culture has been linked by researchers to Samarkand Upper Paleolithic site [9. p. 171]; but there was no disclosed Mesolithic layer at that time. The discovery of Mesolithic sites of Chorbakty [10. p. 204], Karakamar and Ochilgor allowed filling this lacuna up. Thus, it became clear that Sazagan culture was originated and developed on the base of cultures of Mesolithic sites mentioned above and it is quite possible to assume that Sazagan culture is autochthonous.

5. The researches revealed that Sazagan population lived not in isolation, but they had a cultural contact with Neolithic tribes of adjacent areas (Kel'teminar, Gissar, Central Ferghana etc. cultures). Materials from Sazagan allow stating the cultural contacts of population from mountains and plains. We have made typological comparison of collections from Sazagan and the Lower Zeravshan; as result we have stated the fact of interpenetration of some instruments made of stone. In particular it is a small group of knife-shaped plates with sharp strengthening retouch of struck plate along both sides (or rarely along one side). These tools are common now only for Kel'teminar collections of the Lower Zeravshan and other areas in the Kyzyl-Kum from one side and for Sazagan collections from another one. The most interesting fact is that almost all of them were produced of spotted, light yellow-grey or brown-grey siliceous schist. This material is not typical for Sazagan culture, but at the same time it is

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characteristic for sites of Zeravshan old river-beds. If it is fortuity, then it can be a valuable evidence for the study of mechanism of cultural contacts.

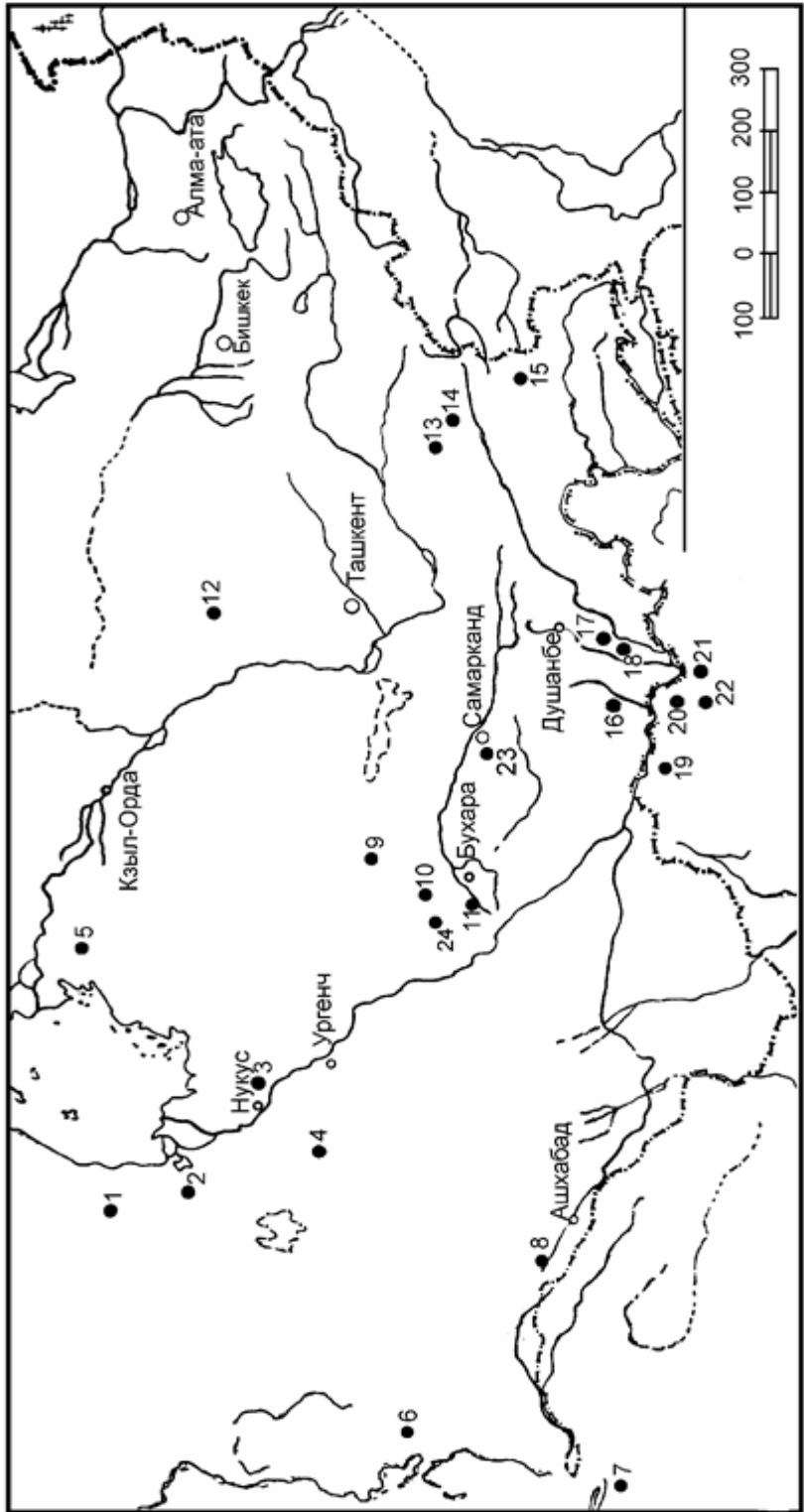


Fig. 1. The map of location of Neolithic sites in Middle Asia. 1, 2 – Ustyurt plateau; 3 – Kel’taminar; 8 – Djeytun culture; 13-14 – Central Ferghana culture; 16, 17, 18 – Gissar culture, 23 – Sazagan culture.

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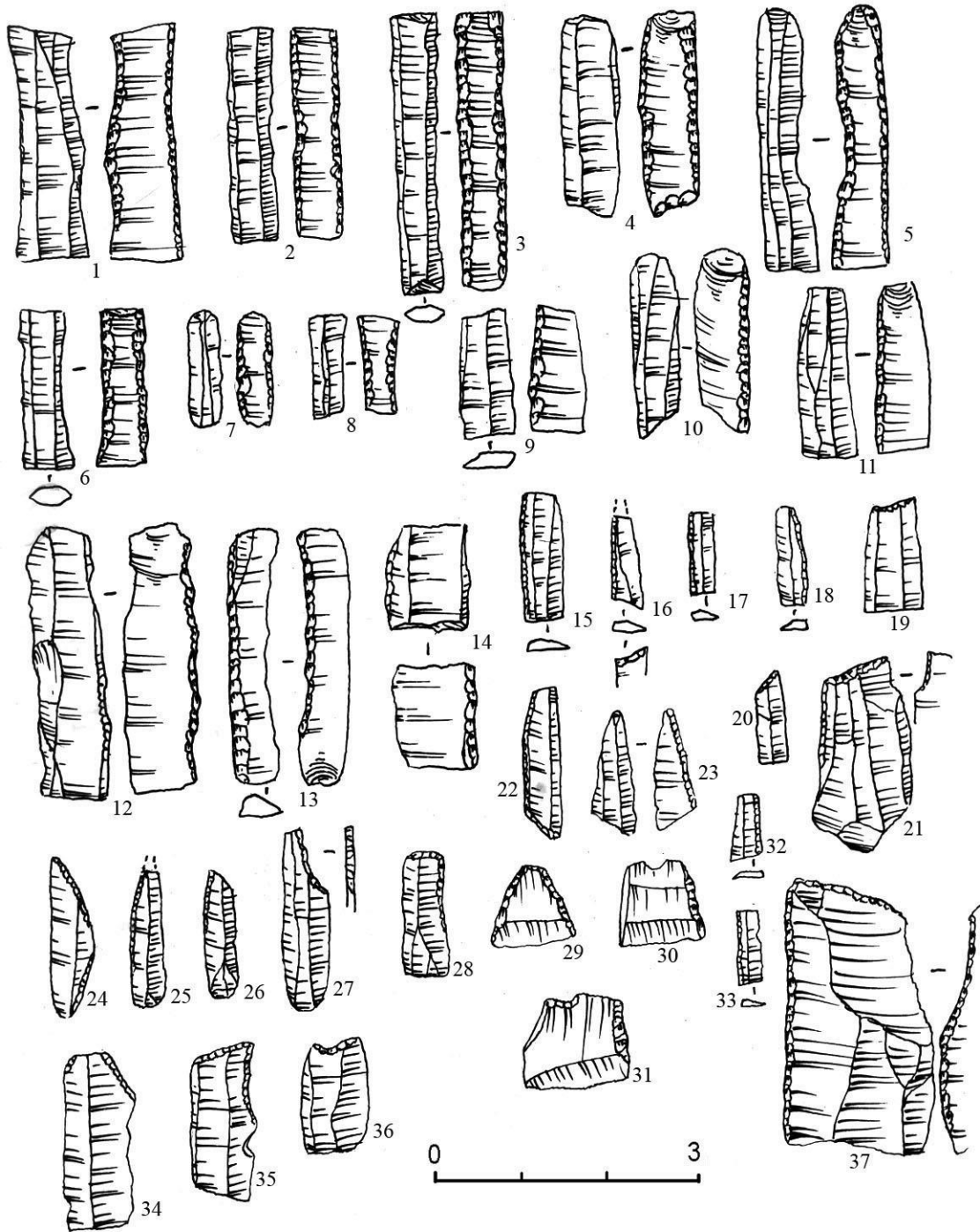


Fig. 2. The stone instruments of Sazagan culture.

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