

ABOUT THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF ANCIENT POYKENT

Akhmadov Akhmadjon Asror ugli

Associate Professor, Department of “Foreign Languages and Social Sciences”, PhD, Asia
International University

Abstract: This article provides a scientific analysis of the role of artifacts and antiquities from various periods found in the ancient Poykent region in the field of modern science, the discoveries made as a result of efforts to reveal information about our past history that is unknown to us, and their research.

Keywords: Poykent, Bukhara, archeology, Zarafshan, Central Asia, Movarunnahr, material culture, mosque, Great Silk Road, treasure.

Bukhara, rich in archaeological monuments, is of great scientific importance for studying the history of Uzbekistan and Central Asia. There are about 300 archaeological monuments in the Bukhara region, which preserve the reasons for the prosperity and collapse of cities, states and civilizations that existed in their time. These monuments are still the focus of attention of archaeologists around the world, and archaeological expeditions are being conducted at many sites. Among the archaeological monuments that shed light on the past events of our great history, the samples of material culture found as a result of archaeological excavations in the ancient Poykent area, which is considered an ancient and magnificent city of its time, are a clear proof of the above information.

Poykent is one of the settlements located in the ancient delta of the Zarafshan River, 40-50 km southwest of Bukhara. It was a city that existed in the 4th and 12th centuries BC. The drying up of the Zarafshan River is the reason why the beautiful city, located at the crossroads of the Great Silk Road and considered one of the largest trading centers, is in decline.

Initial research in Poykent began in 1913-14 and 1939-40, and since 1981, an archaeological expedition has been conducted in cooperation with the Russian State Hermitage and the Samarkand Institute of Archaeology. This is the longest-term international scientific project in the field of archaeology in Uzbekistan. This project was led by J.K. Mirzaakhmedov from Uzbekistan and G.L. Semyonov from the Russian Hermitage, who laid the foundation for the expedition. At the 45th session of the World Heritage Committee in Riyadh in 2023, Poykent was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List as the most important site of the Zarafshan - Karakum corridor, part of the Great Silk Road.

In order to study the history of Poykent in more depth and preserve its material culture, to scientifically study it, and to reveal its place in the civilization of the ancient world, in the 90s of the last century, several objects were studied as a result of archaeological research in the area located in the Ark (citadel) part of the fortress, in the north-western part, and it was possible to open a fire temple. This temple was discovered and studied by G.L. Semyonov. During subsequent seasonal archaeological excavations, a number of new information and artifacts related to the temple were discovered and studied. These included small ceramic vessels (for drinking special drinks during religious ceremonies), unusually shaped geometric (trapezoidal) baked bricks and signs or inscriptions on them (unstudied to this day), coins, and a number of objects. During the last period of study of the temple, a rectangular sofa was located in the

middle, which may have been intended to house the altar, a special container used to store fire, which is considered one of the sacred elements of the Zoroastrian religion.

The annual expeditions in the Poykent area once again proved that they correspond to the information given in Narshahi's History of Bukhara. That is, the Arab invasion of Movarunnahr could not but affect the social life of all cities. The city of Poykent is no exception. Because with the widespread spread of Islam, mosques replaced temples. According to the results of the research, the remains of mosques were identified and studied in the city's ark, shahristan, rabots, and also caravanserais. Among them, the Jome Mosque found in the ark (citadel) and the minaret made of raw bricks with an external diameter of 9-11 m next to it really proved the existence of the Jome Mosque in Poykent, mentioned in the works of medieval scholars.

Among the cities of Western Movarunnahr, Poykent, located close to Khorasan, is better studied than other cities. Several mahalla areas of the 10th-11th centuries were discovered in Poykent by the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan and the Bukhara Archaeological Expedition of the State Hermitage. Since Poykent received the status of a city in the 6th century, mahallas have been the main unit in its territorial and administrative structure.

Houses in mahallas were densely built, and their borders were marked by streets or fortress walls (Semyonov, 2002, p. 21). In all excavations where stratigraphic studies were conducted, continuous activity of buildings was observed within several houses, whether in the territory of Shahristan I or Shahristan II, and even temporary abandonment cases were not detected. By the 8th century, the limited space within the city became the main problem, forcing the population to use each plot of land efficiently. No area was found in the studied mahallas within the inner walls of the city that remained undeveloped or deprived of economic activity.

In Bukhara ethnography, mosques were not only official places of worship, but also gathering places for the community, the center of daily communication of the population (Suhareva, 1976. P. 23). These traditions have been preserved to this day. According to archaeological research, the remains of similar mosques were found in the shahristan and rabot parts of Poykent. The remains of a mosque found in rabot, located in the southwestern part of the city, are an example of this.

The most interesting aspect of this topic is the western part of the dwelling. In the northeastern corner of this part is a large, almost square room (8.7x8.6 m). On the floor of this room there is a partially preserved burnt brick coating. A beautifully carved altar with a gancha was found inside the hut, which was repaired at least once and covered with a new layer. As a confirmation of our idea, the fact that the mihrab was repaired and renewed once was studied during the conservation and restoration process. This room was probably a neighborhood mosque. It is also possible that the entire house was for public use.

The hypotheses about when the quarter mosques, the types characteristic of Poykent, appeared have not yet been clearly proven. Perhaps, prayer halls where daily prayers were performed by the residents of the quarter appeared at the end of the 8th century, because at that time Islam became the dominant religion among the residents of Poykent and, possibly, the entire Bukhara oasis.

As a result of archaeological research conducted in the 90s of the last century, fragments of a wall painting were found in one of the rooms in the southern part of the Poykent arch. The room in which this wall painting was found is located in the eastern part of the southern passage of the roundabout.

The remains of wall paintings were discovered on the southern wall of the room (Fig. 2). A bearded male figure depicted from left to right on a red background is preserved, his head turned to the right. He holds a sphericonical vessel in his hand, decorated with a horizontal band in the middle and a vertical chevron-like ornament along the column. His other hand is extended upwards and forwards. He is wearing a collarless, open-necked garment, and T-shaped decorative fabrics are on his shoulders. This character is probably depicted kneeling, looking at a large object. The upper part of this object resembles a vessel decorated with circles.

To its right is another human figure, but on a much larger scale. Only its lower part has been preserved, where two rings decorated with bracelets or pearls are visible. The calf of the right leg is covered with trousers, repeating the shape of the foot on the outer edge, and forming soft folds on the inner side. The decoration of the fabric resembles sharp leaves pointing upwards. This style may also have been used to represent other materials, such as fur. A similar style of clothing is also found in images from the 4th-5th centuries found in the Dare-Gaz region of the Khorasan province of Iran.

The central vertical line is decorated with colored circles, probably depicting a sword with an ornate scabbard. At the bottom, two circles surrounded by pearl patterns are visible.

In general, this image represents a kneeling worshiper. It is located in front of the altar, and behind it there may be an image of a god.

In conclusion, it can be said that all the archaeological research and scientific studies conducted over the years indicate that the material culture of ancient Poykent is truly rich. These examples of material culture not only illuminate the historical life of the ancient and immortal Bukhara, but also help us to learn how great the past history of the entire Central Asia was, how our ancestors lived, how skilled they were in both crafts and science, and also serve to further enrich and expand historical knowledge. Proud of the great heritage left to us by our ancestors, to pay tribute to them and, being a worthy generation, to study the past of our country more deeply and conduct scientific research is one of the great tasks facing us, young researchers.

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