JOURNAL OF APPLIED SCIENCE AND SOCIAL SCIENCE
eISSN 2229-3113 pISSN 2229-3205

**Volume 15 Issue 12, December 2025**

Impact factor: 2019: 4.679 2020: 5.015 2021: 5.436, 2022: 5.242, 2023: 6.995, 2024 7.75

# THE HISTORY OF DEFENSIVE SYSTEMS OF MEDIEVAL CITIES (BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE ANCIENT PERIOD)

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**Abstract:** This study is devoted to the analysis of the formation and development of defensive systems of cities in the ancient period. It examines the military-strategic location of ancient cities, the emergence of defensive walls, towers, gates, citadels (arks), and inner urban districts (shahristans), as well as their role in social life. It is substantiated that ancient urban defensive systems served as an important foundation for medieval urban planning, and that their architectural and planning solutions had a significant influence on defensive structures of subsequent periods. Based on examples of ancient cities in Central Asia, the research provides a scholarly analysis of the evolution of defensive systems and the impact of natural-geographical factors and military-political conditions on this process.

**Keywords:** Ancient period, medieval cities, defensive system, city walls, fortress, citadel (ark), shahristan, military architecture, urban planning, Central Asia.

**Introduction:**In the history of humanity, the emergence and development of cities have been closely connected with the political, economic, and cultural progress of society. In ancient and medieval times, cities functioned not only as centers of trade and craftsmanship, but also as important military-strategic strongholds. Therefore, urban defensive systems became one of the key factors ensuring the survival and stable development of cities.

The defensive structures that emerged in the ancient period—high walls, fortified gates, watchtowers, and inner fortresses—later became integral elements of medieval urban planning. Ancient cities located in Central Asia were particularly distinguished by their complex defensive systems, which were formed under conditions of political and military interaction between nomadic and sedentary populations.

This study analyzes the defensive systems of ancient cities based on historical sources and archaeological research and highlights their influence on the development of defensive architecture in medieval cities. The research aims to reveal the historical significance of urban defensive systems and to generalize scholarly views in this field.

Although such types of mounds are not widespread, a considerable number of examples are found in the Nakhshab–Nasaf and Kesh oases. Their main characteristic is that these mounds are mostly two-tiered, consisting of a separately elevated central mound and the remains of residential structures located on a lower tier surrounding it in a rectangular or square form. The central mound—interpreted as a koshk or citadel (ark)—is separated from the lower tier by an open area. Based on these features, such mounds can be interpreted as the remains of fortresses.

In their initial stage of construction, these sites consisted of a citadel or koshk surrounded by a defensive wall. Over time, residential buildings were constructed inside the defensive wall, and in many cases these dwellings were built very close to the central structure.

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The earliest form of such monuments can be compared to the site of Qal'ayi Zohaki Moron, which measures approximately 200 × 200 meters and contains a central citadel. Considering that the space between the citadel and the defensive walls of Qal'ayi Zohaki Moron was an open area and that the total area of these monuments is similar, it can be assumed that the formation of these mound-type sites and the city of Qal'ayi Zohaki Moron share common origins. It is also possible that such monuments were constructed by nomadic groups.

Smaller examples of this type of site also exist, including Dursuntepa (110 × 110 m), located in the Dursun village area of the Chiyali massif in Chirakchi district, and Naimantepa (61 × 61 m), situated near the Chaydari village in Yakkabog district.

Rectangular-plan mounds are widely distributed throughout the Kesh oasis, including mountainous, foothill, and artificially irrigated lowland areas. Their topographic characteristics indicate that most of these mounds are the remains of fortresses and rural settlements surrounded by thick external defensive walls. They represent another feature of early medieval settlement patterns.

In most cases, such monuments are single-tiered with a flat upper surface. Therefore, based solely on their topographic appearance, it is difficult to make assumptions about their morphological characteristics.

An example of such mounds is Ovultepa, discovered and studied by S.K. Kabanov in the Chimqorgon reservoir basin, in the border area between the Kesh and Nakhshab oases. Ovultepa is a small mound with a nearly circular shape, though a protrusion at its southeastern corner gives it a square-like appearance. Archaeological excavations revealed the remains of a monumental two-story palace, measuring approximately 34 × 30 meters, constructed according to a carefully planned and well-developed layout [1]. Despite the near-circular external shape of Ovultepa, the presence of a rectangular building within it demonstrates the difficulty of determining the characteristics of internal structures solely based on the external topographic form of such mounds.

Rectangular-shaped mounds that have been studied through archaeological excavations include **Kunjutlitepa** (57 × 54 m), located in the Karshi oasis near the Erkurgan archaeological site. Excavations conducted by **A.A. Raimkulov** revealed the remains of a small rural settlement measuring approximately 39 × 35 meters, enclosed by thick external defensive walls. Kunjutlitepa consisted of a cluster of interconnected residential units, where a patriarchal family head lived together with the families of his sons (and possibly servants – E.F.). The residence of the household head was two-story in structure [2].

According to the results of archaeological investigations, the rectangular or square layouts of such mounds provide grounds to assume that the majority of these sites represent small and large rural settlements, fortresses, or religious structures dating to the ancient and early medieval periods.

Monuments of this type are widely distributed in both the Kesh and Nakhshab oases. According to **R.H. Sulaymonov**, more than 80 such sites have been recorded in the Nakhshab and Guzor oases [3], while 71 sites have been identified within the territory of the Kesh oasis [4].

With few exceptions, almost all monuments of this type contain fragments of early medieval pottery. At the same time, pottery fragments dating to the ancient period and even to the 16th–18th centuries are also occasionally found on the surfaces and surrounding areas of some mounds. The size of these monuments varies considerably: alongside small mounds

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measuring approximately 20 × 15 meters, there are larger examples reaching dimensions of about 100 × 80 meters. Their height ranges from 1.5 meters to 10–11 meters. Most mounds of this type are characterized by one elevated side, with three sides having steep slopes and one side gradually descending. In some cases, the highest point is located at the center, with the surface sloping evenly in all directions.

One example of elongated-shaped mounds belonging to this group is **Qizilqir I**, studied by the Zarafshan Archaeological Expedition in the Bukhara oasis. Archaeological excavations revealed a fully exposed residential complex formed over several construction phases, with a rectangular plan measuring approximately 45.5 × 40–48 meters [5]. Architecturally, Qizilqir I is similar to the rural settlement at Kunjutlitepa in the Karshi oasis, studied by A.A. Raimkulov. However, the external topographic appearance of Kunjutlitepa as a mound is nearly square in shape, having become closer to a circular form as a result of erosion.

In our view, the preservation of square or rectangular topographic forms of these mounds is directly related to the presence of defensive towers at their four corners. In cases where square-plan structures lacked corner towers, erosion often transformed such mounds into circular forms, while mounds originating from rectangular structures tended to acquire elongated shapes. Nevertheless, there are instances where circular or elongated mounds also contain remains of structures equipped with corner defensive towers. A notable example is **Ovultepa**, discovered and studied by **S.K. Kabanov** in the Chimqorgon reservoir area. Although Ovultepa appears as a circular mound, excavations revealed a square palace structure with four massive defensive towers at its corners. Similar examples can be cited elsewhere [6].

**Conclusion:**In conclusion, the defensive systems of ancient cities served as a significant historical foundation for the formation and development of medieval urban planning and military architecture. The natural and geographical location of ancient cities, their political conditions, and the level of military threats determined the form and structure of their defensive installations. Defensive elements such as walls, towers, gates, citadels (arks), and shahristans emerged as integral components of urban life and were continuously improved over time.

The defensive principles developed during the ancient period were further refined in the Middle Ages and proved to be effective mechanisms for protecting cities from external threats. Particularly in the case of cities in Central Asia, defensive systems demonstrate a high degree of complexity, characterized by multilayered and multifunctional structures. This complexity enhanced not only the military significance of cities but also strengthened their role as political and economic centers.

Overall, the study of defensive systems of ancient cities enables a deeper understanding of the historical development of medieval urban centers. The results of this research are of considerable scholarly and practical importance for the study of urban history, the analysis of the evolution of military architecture, and the preservation and restoration of cultural heritage.

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