

MILITARY AND POLITICAL FACTORS IN THE EMERGENCE OF STATEHOOD IN ANCIENT KHOREZM (7TH–6TH CENTURIES BC)

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Xorazm, Ko‘zaliqir, ilk davlatchilik, saklar, ko‘chmanchi chorvadorlar, harbiy demokratiya, ijtimoiy tuzilma, Orolbo‘yi, arxeologik yodgorliklar.

Аннотация

В статье рассматривается процесс формирования ранней государственности в Хорезме в VII–VI вв. до н.э. на основе археологических, исторических и историографических данных. Особое внимание уделяется памятнику Кёзаликыр как одному из ранних военно-административных и культовых центров региона. Анализируется социальная структура кочевых сакских обществ, роль военных объединений и политических институтов, а также концепция «военной демократии» в контексте истории Хорезма. Автор критически переосмысливает классовый подход, характерный для советской историографии, и обосновывает вывод о том, что становление государственности в Хорезме было обусловлено прежде всего территориальными, военно-политическими и социальными факторами.

Ключевые слова

Хорезм, Кёзаликыр, ранняя государственность, саки, кочевники-скотоводы, военная демократия, социальная структура, Приаралье, археология.

Abstract

This article examines the formation of early statehood in Khorezm during the 7th–6th centuries BC based on archaeological, historical, and historiographical sources. Particular attention is given to the Kozaliqir site as one of the earliest military-administrative and cult centers in the region. The study analyzes the social organization of nomadic Saka communities, the emergence of military alliances, political leadership structures, and critically reassesses the concept of “military democracy.” The author challenges the class-based interpretations dominant in Soviet historiography and argues that the rise of statehood in Khorezm was primarily driven by territorial, military-political, and social necessities rather than internal exploitation mechanisms.

Keywords

Khorezm, Kozaliqir, early statehood, Saka tribes, nomadic pastoralism, military democracy, social structure, Aral Sea region, archaeology.

Introduction

The ancient territory of Khorezm occupies a significant place in the history of Central Asian civilizations, and the issue of the formation of its early state system has long been the focus of attention for historians and archaeologists. In particular, the political, social, and military processes that occurred in the Lower Amu Darya basin in the 7th–6th centuries BCE manifest as important factors in the emergence of the initial state structures in Khorezm. The Kuzaliqir culture formed during this period and its associated archaeological monuments indicate the existence in the region of centralized governance, military-administrative structures, and religious centers.

While in scholarly literature the origins of statehood in Khorezm have often been interpreted in connection with socio-economic and class relations, recent research shows that military-



political factors, territorial defense needs, and the organization of nomadic pastoral communities against external and internal threats played a significant role in this process.

Literature Review

Scholarly views on the history of early statehood in Khorezm began to take shape from the 1930s. In initial studies, this process was explained within the framework of the concept of transition from a primitive communal society to a class society, with the disintegration of the tribal system, property inequality, and social stratification presented as the main reasons for the emergence of the state. Especially in Soviet-era historiography, priority was given to economic factors, with the development of irrigation systems interpreted as the primary indicator of statehood.

In recent years, as part of the Khorezm Archaeological Expedition, new materials related to the Kuzaliqir, Hazorasp, and Sariqamish regions have been introduced into scholarly circulation.

Methodological Foundations

In this research, the principles of historicity, objectivity, and systematic approach were applied as leading methodological criteria. The process of formation of early statehood in Khorezm was analyzed in organic connection with the sequence of historical events, natural-geographic conditions, and social and military-political factors.

The study employed a complex use of historical-comparative, archaeological analysis, historical-ethnographic, historiographical, and paleogeographic methods.

Analysis

In the 1990s, employees of the Khorezm Archaeological Expedition began to revisit the history of early statehood in Khorezm. According to O.A. Vishnevskaya and Yu.A. Rapoport, the emergence of an archaic (ancient) state in the Lower Amu Darya basin should be dated to the boundary of the 7th–6th centuries BCE. When speaking about the initial stage of Khorezmian civilization, its earliest monument, the ruins of the city of Kuzaliqir, undoubtedly provides the most grounds for this [3, pp. 150–151]. It is evident from this that the Kuzaliqir fortress is recognized as the earliest monument of civilization and a center of statehood in Khorezm; however, for many years, no response was given in scholarly literature to the approaches and views on the history of ancient Khorezmian statehood that had been in practice and had become subjects of debate, nor were they critically evaluated and examined. A noteworthy aspect of the issue is that these views were developed by employees of the Khorezm Expedition itself.

It should be emphasized that in Soviet-era historiography, the initial views on the history of early Khorezmian statehood began to develop from the late 1930s. Among the existing approaches, especially in the 1950s–1960s, explanations such as changes in economic and social relations, property inequality, social stratification, and the emergence of classes remained traditional among the reasons for the transition from the tribal system to the state system. At the same time, the importance of irrigation–artificial watering–was unreasonably exaggerated in ideas regarding the process of state formation in Khorezm.

According to V.N. Yagodin's viewpoint, during the emergence of the Kuzaliqir culture in Khorezm, the main social institutions of the kinship system were preserved in the life of pastoral communities. At the same time, the Saka of the Lower Amu Darya organized raids on southern civilization centers, which contributed to the increase in wealth of tribal leaders, the rise in their social status, the exploitation of ordinary tribal members, social stratification, and the development of processes of class differentiation within the tribe. In these views as well, a class approach was applied to the issue of statehood.

In the 8th–7th centuries BCE, pastoralists living in the Aral Sea region achieved technical advancements in the military field and in the production of weapons. The weapons made of bronze and iron by the Saka resemble those of the nomadic tribes of the Eurasian steppes (Scythians, Sarmatians). Livestock was the greatest wealth of nomadic herders. In the "Yasht" section of the Avesta, various information related to this topic is available, including accounts of



tribal leaders offering hundreds of camels, thousands of cattle, and countless sheep as sacrifices. The source states regarding livestock husbandry and directly about livestock: "livestock is the source of life," "we call for providing peaceful pastures and fodder for livestock."

Livestock husbandry served to materially enrich communities. As the level of provision with livestock increased, the organizational structure of livestock farming changed; however, communal principles remained stably preserved within the system of large families and tribal pastures.

In nomadic livestock husbandry, the necessity of dividing pastures for different types of livestock gave rise to competition among tribes. Inter-tribal conflicts, during periods of disagreement, led to the use of force and the violent seizure of property and livestock herds from others. As a result, military affairs, combat strategy, and tactics developed. Military associations began to acquire political significance.

In the Avesta, bows and arrows used for attack and defense, daggers, spears, and other weapons, as well as mounted warriors, are mentioned. Raids and the use of force, by the Early Iron Age, had significantly advanced military affairs and tactics, leading to further development of military formations in the society of steppe pastoralists.

The need for such formations was determined not only by internal conflicts and inter-tribal struggles but, to a greater extent, by the organization of campaigns to distant territories and the demands of plunder. In particular, during such turbulent periods, defensive structures and military fortifications began to be constructed in settled agricultural provinces such as Bactria and Sogdiana [5, p. 79].

Results

These processes, linked to the implementation of the political-economic interests of nomads, indicate periods of alarming situations for the settled population—epochs of invasions organized by steppe pastoral tribes. In such dangerous conditions, nomads employed new military tactics involving archer cavalry; in response, fortified castles were built with defensive walls and towers featuring arrow slits for shooting, which served as refuges for the agricultural population. In this militarized environment, a new social-political system emerged among nomadic communities: while tribal assemblies and councils of elders were preserved, the social status of armed shepherd-warriors and military leaders rose. As wars occurred regularly, large military-political unions (alliances) were formed.

Military formations also began to take shape on the borders of the Aral Sea region. As V.N. Yagodin emphasizes, according to historical-ethnographic data, military invasions arose during the "military democracy" stage in the history of nomadic pastoral communities.

In this regard, in our opinion, the researcher's conclusions about the aspiration of military nobles in pastoralist history to "exploit" tribal members and the emergence of classes within the community are debatable. These ideas are interpreted in connection with the concept that attributes universal significance to the emergence of military leaders and a "noble society" in the transition from primitive society to statehood [1, p. 45].

In the history of ancient pastoralists, the emergence of political associations and processes of militarization was determined not only by the organization of campaigns and invasions against neighbors but, primarily, by the necessity to protect their own territories, pastures, settlements, dwellings, and livestock herds from external invasions. Consequently, every shepherd was armed, and mounted and foot troops were ready to strike the enemy in formation. The social-political environment that united such tribal communities was far removed from the hypothetical picture of "internal exploitation" and "class differentiation" described above.

According to V.N. Yagodin, by the end of the 7th century BCE – mid-6th century BCE, the Kuzaliqir fortress in the western part of Khorezm became a new center of statehood, with the state's borders limited to the Sariqamish region. State governance was based on the authority of the leader—"king," tribal nobility, and military forces. Reception ceremonies were held in the



palace of Kuzaliqir's inner fortress, and rituals related to fire worship were also performed [7, pp. 28–29].

In the researcher's view, Kuzaliqir had the appearance of a military-administrative and religious center. Therefore, conclusions were drawn that the Saka king sat on a throne in the spacious courtyard of the palace located in the inner fortress, surrounded by tribal nobles, while directly opposite the throne, in the center of the courtyard, a fire burned on a high pedestal in a sacred fire temple.

In the author's work on this dissertation, the idea that the process of state system formation in Khorezm during the 7th–6th centuries BCE boundary was based on socio-economic and military-political factors is approved, but with a somewhat different approach: the state in the oasis is emphasized as likely having separate rulers (pados) in individual districts (Kuzaliqir, Hazorasp) as territorial units [4, p. 187].

This approach was significantly influenced by the results of re-evaluating the history of early statehood on a regional scale in the 1990s – early 21st century, reviewing it based on new data, and developing archaeological indicators of the state system.

At that time, based on new information, important issues regarding the emergence of states in Margiana and Bactria—much earlier than in Khorezm, during the Bronze Age—were examined. These were revealed through analysis of discoveries in the city ruins of Jarqo‘ton in southern Uzbekistan [2], and materials found at the Dashli and Gonur sites in northern Afghanistan and the Lower Murghab oasis. Various opinions were expressed regarding the origins of the state in southern Central Asia. Even the issue of the development of a kingdom like Margush of the ancient Eastern type in the Lower Murghab oasis was raised [6, p. 272]. At the same time, issues of statehood history during the transition to the Iron Age and directly in the Iron Age were illuminated.

Conclusion. Based on data related to the Kuzaliqir culture, the following military, economic, and social indicators of the origins of statehood in Khorezm at the boundary of the 7th–6th centuries BCE are distinguished:

A military and religious center, a general defense system, the existence of an inner fortress and palace;

Refuges for the population and livestock, military fortifications;

Development of craftsmanship, processing of iron and bronze, production of various metal items and weapons, pottery, architecture, and high-productivity livestock husbandry;

Social stratification of society: pastoralists, craftsmen, builders, tribal and clan leaders, warriors.

In the table of governance and control functions developed and published by researchers regarding the period of state formation and development in agricultural oases, the following economic, social, and military factors characteristic of Khorezm history in the late 7th century BCE – mid-6th century BCE correspond:

Communal economy and social division of labor, organization of economic and construction works;

Production of craft products, exchange of finished goods and raw materials;

Control and coordination of the community's social relations, resolution of disputed issues;

The need to protect the population from the danger of external invasions, preparation of various weapons for attack and defense;

Organization of military forces and defense works;

Distribution and delimitation of pastures;

Resolution of territorial problems arising between communities;

Performance of religious rituals.

All these factors created the necessity to manage relations in the internal and external activities of communities, leading to the selection of individuals engaged in governance tasks.



In the 7th–6th centuries BCE, in comparison to Khorezm, the principles of settlement and territorial distribution of the population in Sogd, Bactria, and Margiana were based on a separate cultural-economic district-oasis system. District-oases consisted of settlements, irrigation systems, irrigated fields, lands not used for economic and construction purposes, and pastures.

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