

## THE SYSTEM OF STATE ADMINISTRATION IN ANCIENT KHOREZM IN THE 4TH–2ND CENTURIES BC: BASED ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND NUMISMATIC EVIDENCE

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**Abstract.** This article analyzes the system of state administration in Ancient Khorezm during the 4th–2nd centuries BC based on archaeological and numismatic evidence. The study examines the administrative and territorial organization of agricultural oasis districts, forms of local governance, the role of councils of elders, and the interaction between local authorities and central power. Special attention is paid to temple complexes and their economic and administrative functions, as well as the role of religious centers in political governance. Archaeological materials from Ayaz-Kala, Kalaly-Gyr, Koy-Krylgan-Kala, Akchakhan-Kala, and Toprak-Kala are used to reconstruct the evolution of central and local administrative structures.

**Keywords:** Ancient Khorezm, state administration, local governance, oasis districts, temples, archaeology, numismatics, Khorezmian rulers.

**Introduction.** Ancient Khorezm was one of the earliest and most developed centers of civilization in Central Asia, and its socio-political and administrative governance system holds significant scholarly importance for the study of regional history. The period from the 4th to the 2nd centuries BCE stands out particularly as a formative stage in the establishment of Khorezmian statehood and the development of centralized governance institutions. During this time, the economic system based on agricultural oases, the irrigation infrastructure, and the relations between local and central authorities became key structural components of state administration.

**Literature Review.** The research conducted under the leadership of S.P. Tolstov occupies a prominent place in interpreting Khorezm as an independent historical-cultural region. The scholar emphasized the existence of a territorial-administrative structure in Khorezm based on agricultural oases, and pointed out that state governance consisted of both local and central levels. In the studies of B.I. Vaynberg (Weinberg), certain aspects of the Khorezmian governance system are comparatively analyzed in relation to Achaemenid state traditions, with particular attention devoted to the economy of temples and the administrative activities of priests.

**Methodological Foundations.** The present study was carried out on the basis of established scientific-methodological principles. In the research process, the principles of historicism, objectivity, and systematicity served as the leading methodological criteria. The system of state governance in ancient Khorezm was analyzed in the context of the consistent development of historical processes, as well as in inseparable connection with natural-geographical and socio-economic conditions.

The study employed a comprehensive application of historical-comparative, archaeological, numismatic, and historical-logical methods of analysis. This approach enables a comparative examination of Khorezm's governance institutions with those of other agricultural regions of Central Asia, as well as the identification of the functioning of local and central power structures on the basis of archaeological sites and material culture remains.

**Analysis.** In the case of Khorezm, particularly the history of governance from the 4th–2nd centuries BCE, it remains largely unexplored. Archaeological data testify that local governance in oasis-districts was based on the following system: head of the large family – head of the territorial neighborhood community – council of elders – oasis-district administrator (local



governor). The existence of such governance at the local level is also evidenced by archaeological findings.

For example, in the western part of the Ayazkala oasis, a large fortress with an area of 5 hectares, fortified with defensive walls and towers, has been identified. To the north of it, the remains of a large building containing 40 rooms have been discovered and investigated. There is a stark contrast between this building and the dwellings of ordinary community members in the oasis, and in many respects, it resembles the residence of the oasis-district administrator – the "governor." Additionally, no other structures were built in Ayazkala; its interior was empty and served as a refuge for the farming population during threats of external invasions.

The territories of ancient agricultural oases formed such associations where irrigation-based agricultural communities always strived for collective labor organization and the social unity necessary to fulfill production tasks. In this process, the activities of local governance and authority played a crucial role in dividing and demarcating the areas of cultivated lands and pastures for livestock, organizing irrigation works, digging ditches, resolving disputes between communities, and ensuring the safety of the population.

In the 4th century BCE, temples and their associated economies began to form in Khorezm. According to B.I. Vaynberg, Khorezm inherited from the Achaemenid Empire not only many traditions of state institutions but also temples and their economic associations. It is known that in the satrapies of the Achaemenid period, temples were large landowners, owning herds of livestock and craft workshops, and temples and priests combined administrative functions as well. Here, regarding the Khorezm state and its governance system, only hypothetical conclusions can be drawn based on the study of written sources from other regions of the Ancient East. In the works of researchers addressing the history of the ancient Khorezm state, B.I. Vaynberg's views on the origins and governance system of this state have not been critically examined.

As for the issue of the emergence of centers of religious beliefs in Khorezm, they appeared here before the Achaemenid period, at the boundary of the 7th–6th centuries BCE. In the inner fortress of Kozalikir, in the palace-residence, remains of a fire altar where fire once burned have been identified. Religious rituals were performed in such a large courtyard. It is unclear why this fact escaped B.I. Vaynberg's attention. In general, in the agricultural provinces of Central Asia, large temples dedicated to the cults of water, fertility, and fire emerged during the Bronze Age. In the same historical stage, temple economies were established, and according to researchers, the high priest and his administrative assistants supervised and managed the socio-economic life of the population in the agricultural oases [4].

This information was obtained from the study of monuments in Margiana and Bactria. Additionally, large temples were built in Sangirtepa and Koktepa in Sogdia in the 6th–5th centuries BCE, before the Achaemenid arrival [1, pp. 101-102]. Therefore, the process of temple emergence in Khorezm reflected regional traditions and heritage distant from the policies of the Achaemenid dynasty.

In the 4th–2nd centuries BCE, the construction of temples in the eastern and western parts of Khorezm was connected to the policy of the centralized state, where, alongside religious customs and the performance of rituals, functions such as coordinating inter-community relations, control, and governance were likely also envisaged. Temples such as Kuykirilgankala, Elkharas, and Kalalikir 2 from this period have been identified as state-level main religious centers [6, pp. 237-238]. Like temples in the East, they were defensive structures with highly developed fortification systems. For example, the inner part of Kalalikir 2 consisted of a wide, large area intended for the performance of mass rituals. Additionally, temples such as Govur 3 and Toshkala 2, associated with the performance of religious customs by individual oasis communities, have been identified.



**Results.** Turning now to the issue of central governance, by the last quarter of the 4th century BCE (more precisely, in 328 BCE), Khorezm was ruled by a supreme sovereign named Pharasmanes in Greek written sources, who held the title of “basileus,” i.e., “king” or “monarch.” However, the names of the rulers who stood at the head of the Khorezm kingdom both before and after Pharasmanes, up to the late 2nd century BCE, remain unknown in scholarship. The dynasty to which Pharasmanes belonged continued to rule until the last quarter of the 2nd century BCE, as this period saw the invasion of the Yuezhi-Tocharians into Khorezm, which resulted in the burning and destruction of many fortresses. Following these events, in the late 2nd century BCE, a representative of a new (second) dynasty came to power and began minting his own silver coins. According to researchers, these coins imitated those of the Greco-Bactrian king Eucratides: the obverse depicted a crowned king, the reverse showed a solitary horseman, and they bore the distinctive emblem of the kings of the second dynasty.

In the 1st century BCE – 1st century CE, the depiction of the state symbol on Khorezmian coins changed, and in the ancient Khorezmian script, the name of the dynasty’s founder appears in Aramaic form as MLK – “king” along with the name “Artav.” Another ruler, Artamukh, is known from inscriptions on bronze coins dating to the late 2nd – early 3rd century CE, while King Vazamar ruled the Khorezm kingdom from the last quarter of the 3rd century CE to the early 4th century CE. Numismatic evidence clearly indicates that the state was undoubtedly governed by the king.

Researchers note that governing the country’s population required a large administrative apparatus, yet data on its composition are scarce [5, pp. 73–74]. Therefore, studying this problem relies heavily on information derived from archaeology, numismatics, ancient Khorezmian inscriptions, and examples of representational art.

As discussed earlier, the main territorial-administrative unit of the Khorezm state consisted of agricultural oasis-districts, while the lowest levels of the state administrative structure were managed by the large (extended) family and the agricultural community, headed by the patriarchal household head and the council of elders. From this it follows that throughout the 4th century BCE – 3rd century CE, state governance in Khorezm consisted of local and central levels and was organized into its own specific branches. Central governance must have been concentrated in the royal court-palace, which dealt with issues related to the internal and external life of the state. Such palaces have been investigated at Tuprokkala (2nd–3rd centuries CE) and Okchakhonkala.

Particularly noteworthy in this regard are the recent discoveries at Okchakhonkala. The architectural complex of the palace-temple at the fortress had its circular corridors decorated with polychrome paintings (2nd century BCE – 1st century CE), among which a special place is occupied by images conventionally called “portraits of Khorezm rulers” or the “gallery of portraits.” The human figures are depicted bust-length in a style characteristic of ruler representations on Khorezmian coins. Most of the rulers in the Okchakhonkala gallery wear crowns, each featuring the image of a bird placed above the forehead [3, pp. 143–147].

Most importantly, fragments of Khorezmian script inscriptions beneath the paintings-portraits in the Okchakhonkala gallery contain the words “king” and “son,” pointing to the dynastic nature of these images [2, p. 153]. Initially, after their discovery, these images were regarded as portraits of “unknown rulers.” Subsequently, scholarly opinions on the subject evolved.

According to V.N. Yagodin’s hypothesis, the Okchakhonkala images represent the traditional depictions of Khorezmian rulers, and given their large number, they reflect the entire dynasty of kings who ruled from the time Khorezm emerged from the Achaemenid Empire. In our view, only artists familiar with narratives about the kings could have executed such drawings.



F. Kidd approaches the issue differently. According to the researcher, these images are not realistic portraits but idealized representations associated with the veneration of ancestors, i.e., “royal ancestors.” In Central Asia, the emergence of ruler worship based on a synthesis of Iranian and Greek (Hellenic) practices has been observed.

The veneration of royal ancestors is a separate and specialized topic. However, it is noteworthy that more than 40 such “portraits” have been discovered to date. Among the identified images, alongside crowned kings, there are also figures without crowns. According to V.N. Yagodin, these may represent individuals from lower social strata. Nevertheless, taking into account the presence of the words “king” and “son” in the Khorezmian inscriptions beneath the images, it is quite possible that the overall composition depicts kings and their heirs.

**Conclusion.** Political, economic, and social issues pertaining to the life of the Khorezm state were managed by the king. According to S.P. Tolstov, until the royal residence was transferred to the city of Kat in 305 CE, the palace-residence of the Khorezmshahs was located at Tuprokkala. Based on its construction date, it could have been built during the reign of King Artav, founder of the third dynasty of Khorezm rulers (2nd century CE).

The palace complex at Tuprokkala has been extensively studied. While the king, his family, and close relatives resided in the palace, court officials, their families, palace servants, craftsmen, and others performing various duties lived in the residential quarters of the lower part of the city. Tuprokkala served as the dynastic and religious center of the Khorezm kings. It should also be borne in mind that until the 2nd century CE, the ancient capital of Khorezm may have been at one site, while from the 2nd century CE onward Okchakhonkala could have claimed this role; however, apart from the palace-temple complex, no remains of other structures or dwellings have been identified in its interior.

Certain issues related to central governance—such as the state treasury, taxpayers, and officials responsible for collecting and receiving taxes—have been studied on the basis of wooden tablets and documents written on leather surfaces discovered at Tuprokkala and introduced into scholarly circulation.

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