

EARLY MEDIEVAL KHOREZM: SOCIO-ECONOMIC RELATIONS AND URBANIZATION PROCESSES

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Abstract: This article analyzes the socio-economic relations and urbanization processes in Khorezm during the early Middle Ages. It examines the development of agriculture, animal husbandry, craftsmanship, and trade, the formation of artificial irrigation systems, and the role of extended families in society. The study also explores Zoroastrian beliefs, temples, and religious symbols, including the significance of bird depictions.

Keywords: Khorezm, early Middle Ages, socio-economic relations, urbanization, agriculture, irrigation system, craftsmanship, Zoroastrianism, archaeological sites, Ayazkala, urban culture, trade routes.

ILK O'RTA ASRLARDA XORAZM: IJTIMOYIY-IQTISODIY MUNOSABATLAR VA URBANIZATSIYA JARAYONLARI

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Annotatsiya: Mazkur maqolada ilk o'rta asrlarda Xorazm vohasining ijtimoiy-iqtisodiy munosabatlari va urbanizatsiya jarayonlari tahlil qilingan. Dehkonchilik, chorvachilik, hunarmandchilik va savdo-sotiqning rivojlanishi, sun'iy sug'orish tizimlarining shakllanishi va jamiyatdagi katta oilalarning roli muhokama qilingan. Shuningdek, zardushtiylik e'tiqodi, ibodatxonalar va diniy ramzlar, jumladan, qush tasvirlarining ma'nosi ham tadqiq etilgan.

Kalit so'zlar: Xorazm, ilk o'rta asrlar, ijtimoiy-iqtisodiy munosabatlar, urbanizatsiya, dehqonchilik, sug'orish tizimi, hunarmandchilik, zardushtiylik, arxeologik yodgorliklar, Ayozaqal'a, shahar madaniyati, savdo yo'llari.

РАННЕСРЕДНЕВЕКОВЫЙ ХОРЕЗМ: СОЦИАЛЬНО-ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКИЕ ОТНОШЕНИЯ И ПРОЦЕССЫ УРБАНИЗАЦИИ

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Аннотация: В данной статье анализируются социально-экономические отношения и процессы урбанизации в Хорезме в раннем Средневековье. Рассмотрено развитие земледелия, скотоводства, ремесел и торговли, формирование систем искусственного орошения и роль больших семей в обществе. Также изучены зороастрийские верования, храмы и религиозные символы, в том числе значение изображений птиц.

Ключевые слова: Хорезм, раннее Средневековье, социально-экономические отношения, урбанизация, земледелие, ирригационная система, ремесленничество, зороастризм, археологические памятники, Аякала, городская культура, торговые пути.

Introduction. During the early medieval period, the socio-economic relations and urbanization processes in the Khorezm region led to significant changes in its economic, cultural, and political life. The development of agriculture, animal husbandry, craftsmanship, and trade influenced the social structure of society. The formation of artificial irrigation systems increased agricultural productivity, leading to the emergence of new residential complexes in settlement areas.

The formation and development of cities in the Khorezm region were closely linked to the passage of the Great Silk Road through this territory, which facilitated the expansion of economic interactions. In the process of urbanization, cities with defensive walls, fortresses, and agricultural territories expanded. Additionally, religious beliefs, particularly the presence of Zoroastrian temples, played a crucial role in the urban life of the region.

Information about early medieval Khorezm is derived from ancient written sources and modern archaeological research. Arab historians such as Al-Baladhuri, Al-Mukaddasi, and Al-Tabari provided detailed descriptions of Khorezm's socio-economic life, cities, and political structures. Abu Reykhan al-Biruni, in his work *Vestiges of the Past Nations*, offers valuable insights into Khorezm's history, culture, and economy. Furthermore, works such as *Hudud al-Alam* contain significant evidence regarding Khorezm's cities, trade routes, and cultural life.

Methodological Frameworks. This study employs historical-archaeological and socio-economic approaches: Historical analysis – The socio-economic development of early medieval Khorezm is examined through written sources, historical documents, and the works of Arab historians. Archaeological approach – The urbanization processes of Khorezm are analyzed through material cultural artifacts uncovered during excavations, including fortresses, defensive walls, temples, handicraft objects, and coins. Economic analysis – The role of agriculture, animal husbandry, craftsmanship, and trade in shaping the economic foundations of society is investigated.

Analysis. The socio-economic transformations of the early medieval period led to profound changes in the social, economic, and ethno-cultural life of the population of Central Asia, including the Khorezmian state. During this period, a new class of local landowners, known as *dehkonzodas*, emerged [5, p.381]. They played a significant role in the formation of rural governance structures and increasingly influenced regional administration.

In early medieval Central Asia, not only agriculture but also various branches of animal husbandry and craftsmanship experienced growth. The presence of the Great Silk Road, which passed through this region, also contributed to the expansion of trade. This trade network played a crucial role in the economic development of the states along its route.

The economic exchange between farmers and nomadic pastoralists facilitated the development of trade relations. However, nomadic invasions had a significant impact on the social and political life of the region during the early medieval period.

In this era, Khorezm experienced the emergence of a new cultural framework, distinctly different from that of earlier periods. Agricultural advancements led to transformations in the appearance of rural settlements. One primary reason for the change in village architecture was the formation of large farming households. Wealthy landowning peasants (*dehkonzodas*) managed vast

agricultural lands and employed laborers to work their fields. Around fortresses and korgans, residential settlements for local inhabitants were constructed. The population primarily served the dehkonzoda, who, in turn, maintained a retinue of warriors known as chokars [4, p.381] to protect his property. Each dehkonzoda owned extensive tracts of irrigated and fertile land.

Additionally, in the 4th century CE, the migration of various ethnic groups into Central Asia influenced the region's socio-ethnic interactions.

During the 4th–5th centuries CE, urban settlements such as Ichan Kala, Khazarasp, Left-bank Katkala, Toproqkala, Voyangan, Dargan, Devkeskan, Zamakhshar, and Almaotishgan 2 continued to be inhabited along the left bank of the Amu Darya River. Many ancient cities were reconstructed and renovated.

The urban layout of these cities remained largely unchanged during the early medieval period. However, the invasions of the Kidarites, Chionites, and Hephthalites in the 4th–5th centuries CE led to the destruction of many well-developed cities from the classical era. In some cases, the local population continued to reside in these ruined settlements and undertook restoration efforts. Some cities underwent structural modifications, while others were simply repaired and remained inhabited.

In Ichan Kala, restoration activities were conducted on the defensive walls, the citadel, and the southeastern part of the fortress. Between the 5th and 7th centuries CE, the defensive walls of Khazarasp were reinforced with an additional protective wall. Within the inner sections of medieval cities like Khiva and Khazarasp, kushks (fortified residential complexes) were constructed [11, p.141]. These cities were only partially inhabited.

In the 5th–6th centuries CE, residents of Toproqkala repaired existing homes from the classical period and continued living in them [7, pp.138–140]. A neighborhood-based settlement system remained in place. Similarly, in the 7th–8th centuries CE, the defensive walls of Voyangan were restored, and an additional fortification wall was built adjacent to the original defensive structure. Comparable construction activities were carried out in Katkala and other cities.

In Left-bank Katkala, following a period of conquest, the inner passageway of the defensive wall was filled with soil, creating a solid fortification. The loopholes in the walls were repositioned higher. In the early medieval period, residential areas in Katkala were located in the northeastern part of the city [12, p.74], while no settlement evidence has been identified in the northwestern section.

The primary defensive structures of Left-bank Katkala from the early medieval period have been preserved mostly in the eastern and southern sections. During this period, the fortress gate and defensive walls were restored. Some of the towers that had deteriorated over time were repurposed as residential dwellings during the reconstruction process [1, p.129].

Findings. Excavations in Left-bank Katkala indicate that life continued in three neighborhoods established during the late classical period. the city's eastern section contained two neighborhoods located north and south of the central street, while a craftsman's district was situated in the western section. on the eve of the arab conquest, urban life declined significantly. during this period, the defensive walls were repurposed as zoroastrian nauses (burial sites for ossuaries) [2, p.146].

within the inner sections of Burgutkala, residential areas and craft neighborhoods have been preserved [6, pp.63–76]. The neighborhood system, established during the classical period, continued to function. In Hayvankala and Korgonchakala, settlements constructed according to

well-planned layouts remained inhabited throughout the early medieval period. Within the historically significant cities of Khiva and Khazarasp, fortified residential complexes (kushks) were built, though only specific sections of these cities remained inhabited.

During the 6th–8th centuries CE, cities located along irrigation networks and trade routes remained occupied. The discovery of early medieval artifacts within the cultural layers of ancient cities has led scholars to conclude that urban life persisted in many classical-period settlements.

Arab historians such as Al-Baladhuri, Al-Mukaddasi, and Al-Tabari documented the expansion of existing cities and the construction of new urban centers in Khorezm during the early medieval period. The traveler Al-Mukaddasi described the existence of 32 cities in Khorezm, highlighting Kat as the most developed among Khorezm's 13 notable cities. In *Hudud al-Alam*, Kat is described as the capital of Khorezm in the 10th century, a splendid gateway to Turkestan, a commercial hub connecting Transoxiana and the Khazar territories, and a center of great wealth. The inhabitants of Kat were depicted as skilled warriors, particularly renowned for their expertise in archery.

During the early medieval period, adobe bricks measuring 37x37x10 cm and 38x38x10 cm were used as primary construction materials. These bricks were employed in the restoration of defensive walls and residential structures in Left-bank Katkala.

Political and economic crises during this period contributed to the decline of numerous cities, leading to a resurgence of rural life. Fortified settlements and kushks were established along irrigation networks, ensuring security and economic stability.

Excavations in Left-bank Katkala have revealed numerous traces of the Afrighid culture. Urban activity continued within structures originally built during the late classical period. A Zoroastrian temple was located in the central part of the site.

During the later phase of the early medieval period, ossuaries (ostodons) were placed along the defensive walls of Katkala. Ossuaries dating to the 7th–8th centuries CE were rectangular and box-shaped, some featuring short legs while others had no legs at all. The lids of these ossuaries were dome-shaped, with some having two-horned handles and others decorated with incised wave-like patterns.

The ossuaries were made of poorly mixed clay containing gravel, with surfaces coated in a grayish-green slip. One discovered ossuary had a lid with a large mushroom-shaped handle. Another example was crafted from low-quality, insufficiently fired clay and was painted orange. Similar ossuaries have been found at archaeological sites dating from antiquity to the 7th–8th centuries CE.

Zoroastrian cemeteries (nauses) dating to the 5th–6th centuries CE have been discovered in the Sultan Uvays Mountains, Kubatov, Mizdakhkan, and Koyikala. Some of the ossuaries from these sites contain inscriptions, prayers for the deceased, and various symbolic representations [3, p.141]. During this period, ceramic vessels (tuvaks) were also used as ossuaries.

In the 8th–9th centuries CE, ribats (fortified caravanserais) were constructed along the outskirts of Khorezmian cities, often integrated into city walls. During this time, small and medium-sized urban settlements also began to emerge. A distinctive feature of early medieval urban planning was the construction of kushks and fortresses in proximity to ancient cities and irrigation networks. According to Arab sources, approximately 12,000 kushks were built around Mizdakhkan. In fortresses located along border regions, defensive walls were equipped with

loopholes. In cities situated deeper within the oasis, some of these loopholes were merely decorative rather than functional.

During the early medieval period, fired bricks began to be widely used in Khorezmian construction. By the time of the Samanid dynasty, fired bricks became an essential material in all major architectural projects, a trend observed throughout Uzbekistan.

Fortified residential complexes built during this period were designed to accommodate large extended families. Based on historical records, researchers have identified large family dwellings as kad [9, p.112]. These fortifications not only housed the immediate family members but also provided living spaces for extended relatives. Additionally, they contained storage rooms, weapon stockpiles, and other utility spaces.

Analysis of historical written sources indicates that kadkhudas exercised absolute authority over their family members, including the right to sell them into slavery. A Sogdian document explicitly states that a man could sell his wife and children, demonstrating the institutionalized nature of slavery in early medieval society.

Slaves were classified into different categories, including individuals who became enslaved due to debt, those who were sold, and war captives. The sale of children by impoverished families appears to have been a widespread practice. Scholars have categorized the structure of families during this period as follows:

1. Immediate relatives – parents, spouse, and children. 2. Dependent workers – individuals engaged in agriculture, craftsmanship, and other trades, including teachers. 3. Slaves. 4. Warriors. [10, p.112]

All residents of a kad (fortified family estate) were subject to the absolute authority of the kadkhuda. A.Y. Yakubovsky compared the large patriarchal families of this period with ordinary peasant households and concluded that the only significant difference between them was their size rather than their internal structure [8, p.174].

No direct records have survived regarding the internal relationships within large patriarchal families. However, considering that Avestan principles were still influential at the time, it is plausible that interactions between family members and slaves were characterized by a degree of egalitarianism. The Avesta describes slaves as integral, albeit subordinate, members of the household. Furthermore, communities were governed through councils of elders, indicating a tendency toward collective decision-making and shared governance.

Findings from Khorezmian coinage and Abu Reykhan al-Biruni's account stating that "ultimately, Afrigh seized the throne" suggest that power struggles among ruling families were a recurring feature of this period.

The available historical data on family relationships in early medieval Khorezm remains limited. However, an analysis of the architectural features of fortresses and residential structures provides insights into the social hierarchy of the time. Housing structures indicate clear social stratification. Extensive archaeological studies of Burgutkala have revealed fortified settlements and residential areas with designated functions.

The lower levels of these fortresses housed ordinary family members, servants, and slaves, with each room containing a hearth. The presence of hearths in nearly every lower-level room suggests that individual families prepared their own meals. The donjon, or upper level, was reserved for the kadkhuda and his immediate family.

Conclusion. Due to the absence of a communal cooking area or large cauldron in these fortresses, researchers have concluded that each household prepared its own food. However, it is likely that these extended families also maintained communal property, which they jointly owned and managed—particularly in relation to agriculture. Fortified settlements were often constructed near irrigation networks, with surrounding houses presumably belonging to related kin engaged in farming, animal husbandry, or craftsmanship.

This social structure closely resembles traditional Uzbek customs and has been corroborated through ethnographic research. The extended family system, its hierarchical organization, and the practice of semi-independent living arrangements have persisted from ancient times to the present day. The father traditionally holds the central position in the family, and even after marriage, sons typically remain within the household, often occupying a separate room while continuing to share communal food storage. This pattern of social organization, observed in medieval Khorezmian fortresses, reflects a long-standing cultural continuity in the region.

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