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ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN PLANNING IN CENTRAL ASIA DURING THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES (5TH–8TH CENTURIES)

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Abstract. This article examines the architectural and urban development processes that took shape in Central Asia in the early Middle Ages based on historical sources and archaeological research. The study analyzes the emergence of new urban centers, the expansion of fortress-type settlements, and the planning of large centers such as oasis cities - Varakhsha, Afrosiyob, Poykent, Panjikent - against the backdrop of political and economic changes in the 5th-8th centuries. The urban structure typical of this period - the formation of ark, shahristan, and rabot, the development of defensive walls, towers, gate systems, and the structure of main streets - is scientifically examined. The structural and stylistic features of temples, palace complexes, fortresses, and monumental structures related to Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and local religious traditions are analyzed in a scholarly manner.

Keywords. Central Asia, fortress, urban structure, citadel, Panjikent, arch, rabot, shahristan.

Introduction. This period is characterized by the decline of the culture of antiquity and the slave system in Central Asia during the Greco-Bactrian, Parthian, and Kushan kingdoms and the transition to a culture based on peasant farm associations formed during the early Middle Ages, such as the Chionians, Kidarii, Ephthalites, and the Turkic Khaganate. This, in turn, became the basis for the emergence of feudal relations. As a result, buildings that gave rise to a new social life in Central Asian architecture - peasant mansions - appear. The ancient ruins of such mansions are found throughout Central Asia in the form of mounds. Thus, the early Middle Ages (V - VIII) centuries are characterized as the period of the formation of feudalism in Central Asia and are therefore called the period of early feudalism in historical and scientific literature.

Main part. According to the information of Arab travelers, historians and geographers, most of the Central Asian cities of the early Middle Ages consisted of three parts. One of these three parts was the City Arch (kohandiz) - the residence of the ruler, the second was the shahristan (including the medina), the main part of the city

included trade and craft stalls, other public and residential buildings. The third part was called the rabot and constituted the trade and craft zone outside the city. However, the results of the study of the cities of the 7th-8th centuries showed that most of them consisted of only two parts - the arch and the shahristan. According to the information of the Chinese priest Xuan Zhan, who passed through Samarkand in the 30s of the 7th century AD, the length of the perimeter of the city wall was 20 meters, which was about 10 kilometers. In addition, according to his information, both paganism and Buddhism flourished in Samarkand. Therefore, among the houses and public buildings in the city, there were sacred buildings related to these two religions - temples, and dakhmas equipped with pagan shrines, idols, and statues.[1]

According to one of the researchers of ancient Samarkand, M. Pachos, the city construction in the early Middle Ages consisted of three parts. The fortress part of the city was located in the north along the Siyob canal and was surrounded by 1.5 km long defensive walls. The second part of the city was located further south and consisted of noble residences and public buildings. The third part, the rabot, was located outside the fortress walls and did not have defensive walls.[2] In the 6th century, as the city expanded further south, it was surrounded by a second defensive wall. The city developed intensively along its canals.

It is known that in the early Middle Ages the city of Samarkand was called Afrosiyob. Afrosiyob actually began to appear as a settlement in the 9th-8th centuries BC. In the early Middle Ages, its total area was 230 hectares. Layers of the 5th-6th centuries are found almost throughout the city. Among the best studied of these, one can point out the complex of buildings located in the central part of the city, which was originally called the “palace complex” and now the “neighborhood of influential families”.[3] Although some parts of this quarter were discovered during archaeological excavations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a coincidence in the construction of a highway along Afrosiyob to Samarkand and its northern region in the 1960s played a major role. It was during this construction process that several large fragments of a colorful wall were found underground. As a result, specialists were called in, construction work was stopped, and archaeological excavations began. As a result of the excavations, the ruins of several rooms were discovered, some of which were

[1] Xuan Tsang. 1857, p. 18. 3.
[2] M. Pachos. On the Study of the Topography of Early Medieval Samarkand. "Joint Scientific Session Dedicated to the 2500th Anniversary of Samarkand." Tashkent: "Fan," 1969, p. 18.
[3] Akhmedov M.K. History of Architecture of Central Asia. Tashkent: “Uzbekistan”, 1995.

decorated with murals made with colored paints - tempera (made by mixing egg yolk with colored mineral powder). Judging by the Sogdian inscription on the hem of the tunic of a man in the murals, it is assumed that the buildings belonged to the Samarkand shah (ikhshidi) Varhuman.[4] Murals were also found in the ruins of Panjikent, Bolalik Tepa, Varakhsha, Yer Kurgan and many other towns dating back to the 5th - 8th centuries.

It is known that Bukhara was also a large city in the early Middle Ages. According to L. I. Rempel, the shahristan, located near the Bukhara arch, was crossed by two streets facing the four sides of the sky.[5] The arch had two gates, Registan and Guryan, and the shahristan had six gates, Attoran, Mihra, Ark, Khoki Roh, Nur, and Shahristan. The city was crossed by the Rudi-zar (Shahrud) ark. According to Narshahi, there was a market for idolaters, or rather, **idol-worshippers**, and their large temple near this ark. Considering that the area of the arch is 3.5 hectares, we can see that the city was relatively large. There is information that its rabat was located in the zone of the shahristan where the canal flowed.

Another well-studied city of the early Middle Ages is Ancient Panjikent. As usual, the main part of the city is the Shahristan, to the west of which is a city arch with a strong defense system of separate hills. Panjikent was built on a steep hill in the southern bank of the Zarafshan River. The Shahristan of the city is located in the form of a trapezoid on both sides, with a slightly convex southern side. The main street of the city begins from this convex end and heads north. The ruins of two temples have been excavated from the approximately central part of the city. Also, 1-2-story main residential buildings have been excavated on both sides of the central street running from south to north. It is assumed that Panjikent had three gates. One of these is the main gate, located in the south and fortified with towers. The second gate faces east, and the third faces west. The western gate connected the city to the citadel (kohandiz).

The ancient city of Poykent, located in the lower reaches of the Zarafshan River and considered the southern gate of the Movarounnahr, is located 44 km southwest of Bukhara, in the area adjacent to the Jondor and Karakul districts. Poykent in ancient times consisted of 4 parts: 1) a gated arch with an area of 1 ha; 2) a gated inner city with an area of 11 ha; 3) a gated outer city with an area of 6 ha; 4) a huge rabota with an area of more than 100 ha, which rose to the east, west and south. Written sources prove that 1,000 rabot quarters were built around Poykent. The city of Poykent was built on a natural hill, and the arched fortification in it was built in the form of a square

[4] L. I. Albaum. Painting of Afrasiab. Tashkent: "Fan", 1975.
[5] Rempel, L. I. Architectural complex of the Bukhara arch. – Moscow: Nauka, 1961.

90 x 90 meters. By the turn of the 5th-6th centuries AD, Poykent was expanded. A 13-hectare city was built in the southwestern part of the arch. The discovery of the "Poykent Pharmacy" dating back to the 8th-9th centuries, as a result of archaeological research carried out in collaboration with archaeologists from the Louvre in France, the Hermitage Museum in Russia, and the Italian state, was a world-famous discovery. As a result of the research, a large number of glass bottles, objects, and a collection of blood-sucking vessels, commonly known as alembics by scientists, were found there. Regarding alembics, the head of the Bukhara archaeological expedition, Professor G.L. Semenov, based on the motifs depicted in the 13th-century miniature, came to the conclusion that these vessels were intended for medical purposes and specifically for sucking blood from the body. A total of 12 alembics were found in the "Poykent Pharmacy" opened in Poykent in the 1980s. These chemical vessels were made of blue glass, and tubes 6-9 cm long were attached to the vessel.

The city of Varakhsha is also of particular importance in the study of the urban development of Central Asia. Varakhsha is located 40 km northwest of Bukhara, in the ancient Rajfandun oasis of Lake Dashti Urgenji. The total area of the ruins of Varakhsha occupies 9 hectares and is preserved in the form of a large hill 10-20 meters high. In the 3rd-4th centuries, Varakhsha fell into decline. In the 5th century, Varakhsha was rebuilt again and became the residence of the ancient rulers of Bukhara - the Bukharkhudots. During this period, Varakhsha was surrounded by a strong wall, an arch was built in its southern part. Varakhsha and its surroundings were irrigated by 12 canals, becoming one of the largest and most central fortresses in the Rajfandun oasis. Among the buildings in the city, the ruler's palace stood out. The eastern hall of the palace was 11.5 x 17 meters, and the western hall was 6.6 x 7.25 meters. In addition, the palace had a main hall called the "Red Room", which was 8.5 x 12 meters. The walls of the room were made of thin plaster over fine straw clay plaster, and the murals were decorated with red, yellow, black, blue, pink and brown paints. On the wall of the eastern reception hall, there is a queen kneeling with a goblet in her hand, a king with a sword on his waist and a pin in one hand, a sacred fire burning in a vase-shaped fireplace in the middle, and a prince kneeling and praying with a dagger on his waist to the right of the fireplace. The walls of the palace's famous Red Room are particularly noteworthy with images of a prince riding an elephant, chokars fighting tigers, and the ruler sitting on a golden throne in the shape of a winged camel.

Although two major religions—fire-worship and Buddhism—were predominant in Central Asia during this period, historical evidence shows that a number of other religious sects also existed. Consequently, various types of temples and cult structures

were constructed, among which fire temples and Buddhist shrines formed the majority. Fire temples typically contained *chortoq*[6] structures, as well as smaller sacred fire altars known as *algar,* which resemble mandala-type residential forms found in ancient India. Buddhist temples of this era were widespread and were generally characterized by tower-like forms, inner chambers arranged in a sequential manner, and a front-facing portico. Fire-worshippers, and more specifically adherents of Zoroastrianism, regarded water, air, earth, and the sky as sacred elements. Therefore, they refrained from burying the dead in the ground. Instead, the bones of the deceased were separated and placed in special containers—*ostodans* (ossuaries)—which were stored in designated chambers. These chambers were called *dakhma,* also referred to as **"naus."** In addition to these, there were also structures known as *mughkhona*,[7] which likewise served as funerary spaces.

Conclusion. The architecture and urban planning of Central Asia in the early Middle Ages (V-VIII centuries) developed inextricably linked with the political and economic development of the region, ethnocultural processes, and the formation of new feudal relations. The urban centers formed during this period - settlements such as Afrosiyob, Panjikent, Poykent, Varakhsha - became not only centers of regional administration, but also strategic points of economic, religious, and cultural life. Research shows that the main elements of the urban planning system - the ark, shahristan, and rabot model - served as a common typological criterion for this period. In particular, developed forms of this structure were identified in centers such as Samarkand, Bukhara, and Panjikent, which indicates the maturity of local architectural schools. Archaeological materials, in particular, the Afrosiab wall paintings, the Panjikent temple ensemble, the paintings of the Varakhsha palace, and the alembics found in the Poykent pharmacy, indicate the complexity of cultural life of that time, religious pluralism, and a high level of development of practical knowledge. The constructive structure of these objects, facade decorations, monumental art examples, and engineering solutions prove the formation of an independent architectural school in Central Asia. In particular, the wall paintings found in palace complexes, two-story dwellings, multi-room temples, complex defense systems, and central street layouts indicate the advanced stage of urban engineering.

[6] Chartaq - in Persian, it means "four arches, that is, four porches." A cube-shaped building with four open doors on the four sides of the latitudes and a dome on top.

[7] The separation of the bones of the corpse and their protective treatment were carried out by people with certain knowledge. Their knowledge was considered magical and they were called "mugs" (in Russian, "mag").

The system of temples, based on the harmony of Zoroastrianism and Buddhism in religious architecture, highlights the religious syncretism of the region. Atashkhans, idols, dakhmas and ossuaries are complex structures specially designed for different confessions and their ritual practices, which demonstrate the diversity of architectural thinking. At the same time, the urban traditions formed in the 5th–8th centuries had a strong influence on the subsequent urban development of Central Asia. Thus, the architecture of the early Middle Ages serves not only as a monument of material culture, but also as an important scientific source for understanding the political, religious and social history of the region. The rich monuments of this period still offer science new scientific questions and research directions.

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