

Pre-Islamic Central Asia

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ABSTRACT: This article analyzes the cultural, economic and political development of Central Asia in the pre-Islamic period. The role of ancient civilizations such as the Sogdians, Bactrians, Parthians and Kushans in the region and their role in strengthening the cultural and economic ties between the East and the West through trade routes considered. The influence of religious beliefs, including Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and Buddhism in the region, and their contribution to cultural heritage are analyzed. The introduction of Islam to Central Asia and its influence on religious, cultural and political life are also covered. The article emphasizes the importance of preserving the high cultural heritage of Central Asia in the pre-Islamic period.

KEY WORDS: Pre-Islamic period, Sogds, Bactria, Parthia, Kushans, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Buddhism, Great Silk Road, cultural heritage, spread of Islam, religious beliefs, trade routes.

INTRODUCTION

Central Asia is distinguished by its rich history and complex culture, especially the period before the introduction of Islam played an important role in the cultural and religious development of this region. During this period, Central Asia became famous for cultural and trade relations between different civilizations, and these relations also influenced the social and political structure of the region. The ancient states, including the Sogdian and Bactrian states, occupied a unique place culturally and economically. The Sogdians played a crucial role in trade, and their cultural heritage suggests that this region continued into the Islamic period [Frye, 1967; page 35]. Religiously, in the pre-Islamic period, Central Asia had a unique harmony between religious movements such as Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and Buddhism. Zoroastrianism was especially widespread in Central Asia, and the influence of this belief was preserved even after the introduction of Islam. The role of Zoroastrianism in Central Asia and its cultural heritage have been studied in detail in many studies [Harmatta, 1979; page 102].

RESEARCH METHODS

Religious currents such as Manichaeism and Buddhism are also widespread among different peoples in the region, and these religions have developed a process of mutual cultural exchange [Bivar, 1983; page 200]. Also, in the pre-Islamic period, the political structure of Central Asia was complex and formed by relations between different forces. Huns, Turks and other tribes played an important role in ensuring political stability in the region. The influence of the Hun Empire in Central Asia, their interactions with the Turkic tribes and the political actions they took made the history of this period even more complicated [Gibb, 1923; page 210].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The pre-Islamic period of Central Asia is of decisive importance in the further historical development of the region. Culture and belief systems formed during this period laid the foundation for new cultural and religious forms with the introduction of Islam. Through this article, it is possible to understand more deeply the cultural and religious influence of the pre-Islamic era in modern Central Asia.

1. Ancient Central Asian civilizations

The ancient civilizations of Central Asia played an important role in the historical and cultural development of the region. The Sogdian and Bactrian states, in particular, achieved high cultural and economic development. The Sogds established active relations with China, India and Persia through their trade routes. Their cultural influence is also reflected in architecture and art [Frye; 1967, page 35]. Bactria is a culturally rich country, where elements of Greek, Persian and Indian culture intermingled and became an important center for cultural exchange [Bivar, 1983; page 200]. The Parthian and Kushan empires also played an important role in Central Asia. The Parthians established control over the main part of the Great Silk Road and ensured trade and economic stability in the region [Gafurov, 1974; page 75]. The Kushan Empire played an important role in the spread of Buddhism in Central Asia and left a cultural heritage of Buddhism in this region [Bivar, 1983; page 215]. These civilizations made a great contribution to the cultural heritage of Central Asia. Especially, his achievements in the field of architecture and art, as well as his legacy in the

field of writing and literature, have retained their importance to this day. The Sogdian and Bactrian states, as well as the Parthian and Kushan empires, were not only powerful states of their time, but also greatly influenced the cultural and religious development of the region.

2. Religious beliefs

Before the introduction of Islam, various religious sects ruled in Central Asia. Zoroastrianism is one of the most widespread religious beliefs in this area, and its influence has been significantly preserved in the Islamic era [Harmatta, 1979; page 102]. Manichaeism and Buddhism also played an important role in the cultural and religious life of the region. The spread of Buddhism during the Kushan period and the deep roots of this religion in the region had a great impact on the religious landscape of Central Asia [Bivar, 1983; page 220]. The influence of Zoroastrianism in Central Asia is reflected in many cultural monuments, temples and other religious buildings. Manichaeism, due to its syncretic features, strengthened the ties between different cultures and religions. The spread of Buddhism in Central Asia contributed to religious exchange and development in the region. The interaction of religious beliefs and cultural life, in particular, the influence of Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism and Buddhism in Central Asia had a significant impact on the cultural development of this region. These religious beliefs retained their place in the religious and cultural life of the region even after the introduction of Islam.

3. Political structure

In the pre-Islamic period in Central Asia, the political structure was complex and formed by relations between different forces. Huns, Turks and other tribes played an important role in ensuring political stability in this area. The influence of the Hun Empire in Central Asia, their interactions with the Turkic tribes and the political actions they took made the history of this period even more complicated [Gibb, 1923; page 210]. Turkic tribes formed their own states in Central Asia and played a decisive role in the political life of the region. Their military power and strategic importance, as well as alliances with various tribes, were an important factor in ensuring the political stability of the region [Lee, 2010; page 56]. There was strong competition between various countries in Central Asia, which was reflected in the political, economic and military spheres. Conflicts between different states and tribes, especially the struggle between Huns and Turks, complicated the political situation in the region. However, this competition also caused cultural exchange and development, which left a deep mark on the cultural and political life of the region [Gibb, 1923; page 215].

4. Trade routes and economic development

In the pre-Islamic era, Central Asia became the center of trade between East and West through the Great Silk Road. Through these trade routes, Central Asian countries actively traded with countries such as China, India, Persia and Byzantium. As a result of the development of trade routes, economic stability was ensured in the region, which in turn accelerated cultural exchange [Bentley, 1993; page 125]. The Sogdian merchants brought silk from China, spices from India, and precious goods from Persia through the Great Silk Road and delivered them to the East and West. In this process, the Sogdians were not only engaged in trade, but also managed to spread their culture widely [Hansen, 2012; page 57]. He sought to establish peace and cooperation between the states and tribes in Central Asia to ensure the security of trade routes and maintain economic stability. This played an important role in strengthening political stability in the region. However, the struggle for control of trade routes continued, which sometimes led to conflicts and wars [Beckwith, 2009; page 89].

5. Development of culture and art

In the pre-Islamic period of Central Asia, culture and art were highly developed. Architecture, visual arts, and manuscript art were especially developed in the Sogdian and Bactrian states. The temples, palaces and other monuments built during this period are still of great importance as the cultural heritage of the region [Whitfield, 2004; page 142]. Art was greatly influenced by Zoroastrianism and Buddhism. Temple murals, sculptures and other works of art reflect the place of these religious movements in the region. Also, traces of exchange between different cultures can be seen in these works of art [Grenet, 2006; page 92]. Cultural development in Central Asia has influenced not only the region, but also other regions. For example, the development of Buddhist art in the Kushan Empire influenced India and East Asia. The works of art and cultural monuments created during this period also influenced the development of Islamic art [Rowland, 1977; page 203].

6. The introduction and influence of Islam

In the second half of the 7th century, with the entry of Arab troops into Central Asia, Islam began to spread in the region. Along with the introduction of Islam, great changes took place in the religious, political and cultural life of the region. As a result of the rapid spread of Islam, religious movements such as Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and Buddhism gradually lost their place [Gibb, 1923; page 215]. With the introduction of Islam, new cultural and religious forms appeared in Central Asia. Arab culture and Islamic teachings left a deep mark on the cultural life of the region. Mosques, madrasahs and other Islamic monuments built during this period played an important role in the development of the Islamic culture of Central Asia [Bosworth, 2007, page 67]. With the spread of Islam, the Arabic language and writing spread widely in Central Asia. This has taken an important place not only in religious, but also in scientific and cultural life. Scholars of Central Asia have achieved great achievements in Islamic sciences, including philosophy, mathematics, astronomy and medicine [Dani, 1996, page 243].

CONCLUSION

Thus, the pre-Islamic period of Central Asia was of decisive importance in the cultural, economic and political history of the region. During this period, powerful states such as Sogds, Bactria, Parthia and Kushans strengthened mutual cultural and economic ties and created a rich cultural heritage of the region. The location of these countries in the center of trade between East and West through trade routes ensured economic stability and cultural exchange in the region. The security and development of trade routes increased cultural exchange and led to the development of new forms of art, architecture and literature in the region. In terms of religious beliefs, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and Buddhism played an important role in the religious life of the region. These religions fostered cultural and religious exchange not only in Central Asia, but also in the wider region. Cultural monuments and works of art created during this period formed the rich cultural heritage of the region. The introduction of Islam started a new era in the religious and cultural life of the region. Islam spread rapidly in the region, replacing older religious beliefs such as Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and Buddhism. Islamic teachings, Arabic culture and writing have been of great importance in the cultural and scientific development of the region. The achievements of Central Asian scholars in Islamic sciences made the region an important center for the entire Muslim world. Therefore, the pre-Islamic period of Central Asia occupies a decisive place in the modern history of the region. The cultural and religious heritage formed during this period left its mark on the cultural life of the region even after the introduction of Islam. Studying the pre-Islamic era of Central Asia not only helps to understand historical processes, but is also important for preserving the region's rich cultural heritage and passing it on to future generations.

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