

The Development Of Archaeological Science In Arab Countries And Research On The History Of Turan

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Abstract: This article systematically analyzes the scientific activities and contributions of foreign scholars who first conducted archaeological research in Arab countries, as well as the national research efforts undertaken by Arab scholars and the operations of scientific research centers in this field. It provides significant information regarding the establishment process of the “Arab Archaeologists Union,” its historical importance, and its current activities. Additionally, the scholarly works of Arab researchers who have investigated the history of Turan are thoroughly examined, their methodological approaches are identified, and the distinctive features of these studies are elucidated.

Keywords: Turan, Babylon, Egypt, Arab Archaeologists Union, Islamic Caliphate, Central Asia, Turkestan, Gaspard Monge, Johann Ludwig, Mawarannahr.

Introduction. The history of Turan, spanning from ancient times to the present day, represents one of the significant topics in global scholarship. Studying the developmental processes of this region allows for a deeper understanding of the general patterns of human progress. This subject holds not only regional but also global importance, playing a critical role in illuminating Turan’s contributions to world history.

Within this context, research on Turan’s history has also been conducted in Arab countries¹, with a particular emphasis on the period of Turan’s subjugation to Arab rule—specifically, the advent of Islam and the subsequent historical developments. However, studies on the earliest history of Turan remain relatively scarce compared to the scientific works conducted in Europe, America, and other Asian countries. It was not until the late 20th century that the volume of research on this topic began to increase noticeably. Several factors can be cited as contributing to this development: the attainment of independence by Central Asian countries; the onset of a new phase in their socio-political life; the growing focus on national archaeology in Arab states; and the establishment of new scientific centers dedicated to this field. To this day, research into the ancient history of Turan continues at a vigorous pace.

The attainment of independence by the Central Asian republics sparked significant interest in the Arab world. Previously, as part of the Soviet state, this region had remained largely inaccessible not only to researchers from various countries but also to Arab scholars. Following independence, Arab states sought to establish political and economic ties with the Central Asian republics. This, in turn, created a need to better understand the region, its history, culture, and peoples, fostering a demand for more comprehensive knowledge. Independence also facilitated the establishment of new scientific collaborations and provided opportunities to study archival materials.

Analyzing the level of research on the ancient history of Turan in Arab countries requires a methodologically complex and multifaceted approach. Prior to conducting such an analysis, it is essential to thoroughly examine the stages of development of archaeological science in Arab countries and the formation processes of their scientific research centers. To systematically study the research in this field, it is expedient to conditionally divide the history of archaeological science in the Arab world into two primary chronological and methodological phases:

¹ Arab countries — a group of 22 states located in North Africa and the western part of Asia; For details, see: Sh. Ikromov. PhD dissertation... Tashkent. 2022. pp. 16–17.

First Phase: Archaeological Research Conducted by Foreign Scholars. This phase primarily spans from the late 18th century to the first half of the 20th century. During this period, extensive archaeological excavations were carried out in Arab countries, driven by the growing interest of European and American scholars in exploring the East. These excavations yielded a wealth of archaeological materials related to the civilizations of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and other regions. However, a notable limitation of this period is that the primary objective of many of these studies was often to enrich European museums with valuable artifacts, resulting in insufficient attention to the in-depth study of local history.

Broadly speaking, archaeology was introduced to Arab countries in the late 18th century alongside Western colonial policies. Consequently, the initial archaeological excavations in regions regarded as cradles of ancient civilizations—such as Mesopotamia (the land between the two rivers), Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon—were predominantly conducted by Western scholars. As a result, much of the early scientific research pertaining to the archaeology of the Arab world was published in English, French, and German languages.

The earliest research efforts are associated with Napoleon Bonaparte's² invasion of Egypt in 1798. In that same year, on Napoleon's orders, the Institute of Egypt was established near Cairo with the aim of studying Egypt. Under the leadership of Gaspard Monge³, this institute brought together specialists from various fields, including archaeologists, who conducted their activities. The scientific outcomes of their work were published between 1809 and 1829 in a comprehensive 29-volume collection titled *Description de l'Égypte*⁴.

Archaeological investigations by European researchers continued actively throughout the 19th century. The Swiss orientalist scholar Johann Ludwig Burckhardt, who changed his name to Ibrahim ibn Abdullah, organized expeditions to Nubia, Syria, and Saudi Arabia, publishing several of his studies⁵. This process persisted until the late 20th century.

Second Phase: Independent Research by Local Scholars. This phase encompasses the period from the second half of the 20th century to the present day. With the attainment of independence by Arab countries, the role of local archaeologists increased significantly. The establishment of national scientific research centers and universities led to an expansion in both the quality and scope of archaeological studies. The research conducted by local scholars has primarily focused on reconstructing national history and preserving cultural heritage. By the late 20th century, the establishment and activation of national research institutes and scientific centers in Arab countries marked the beginning of a new stage in the development of archaeological science.

Notably, since 1998, the "Arab Archaeologists Union"⁶ has organized annual international scientific conferences, which have become a tradition. These events, held in various cities, provide a platform for presenting the latest research by Arab archaeologists and historians. An analysis of the scientific collections published within the framework of these conferences reveals that a number of Arab scholars engaged in studying the ancient history of Central Asia have published their articles on this platform⁷.

Although the majority of these studies are not directly dedicated to the history of Turan (Central Asia), they exhibit certain aspects related to the region's past. This indicates an indirect interest among Arab scholars in exploring pertinent issues concerning the ancient periods of Turan. In recent times, specialized programs focused on the in-depth study of Central Asian history have been established within scientific research centers and higher education institutions in Arab countries, placing research activities in this field on a systematic foundation. Within this process, the history of the Turan region, particularly the past of Uzbekistan, has emerged as a distinct focal point of scholarly inquiry. Overall, research on Central Asian history in the Arab

² Napoleon Bonaparte — (1769–1821) A significant figure in French history. Emperor of France.

³ Gaspard Monge — A French statesman who lived from 1746 to 1818. Minister of the French Navy.

⁴ *Description de l'Égypte; ou, Recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'expédition de l'armée française* / Published by the orders of His Majesty the Emperor Napoleon the Great. Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1809–1828.

⁵ John Lewis Burckhardt. *Travels in Nubia*. 1819. p. 655.; *Travels in Syria and the Holy Land*. 1822. p. 724.; *Travels in Arabia*. 1829. p. 494.

⁶ Although the idea of establishing the Arab Archaeologists Union was proposed in 1994 by scholars from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan, this goal was only achieved in 1998. Today, the union boasts a membership of 2,768 individuals.

⁷ <https://jguaa.journals.ekb.eg/>

world has developed unevenly, with countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq demonstrating significantly greater engagement in this domain compared to other Arab states.

Institutions such as Al-Azhar University⁸ in Cairo and the Supreme Council of Egyptian Antiquities⁹ serve as pivotal centers for Oriental studies and historical research. These establishments have conducted studies on Central Asia's connections during the Islamic period, particularly within the context of the Silk Road. In Saudi Arabia, universities in Riyadh and Jeddah, along with the Royal Institute of Archaeology and History, have undertaken investigations into the history of the Turan region, covering both the pre-Islamic and post-Islamic eras. The American University of Beirut¹⁰ in Lebanon's capital, alongside other academic centers, has been a leader in Oriental studies, advancing research on various aspects of Turan's history, especially its medieval period. In Syria, the University of Damascus¹¹ and its historical research centers have focused on exploring the interactions between Central Asia and the Islamic Caliphate during its era.

In addition, centers dedicated to researching Uzbekistan's late medieval, modern, and contemporary history have also been established and operationalized. The King Faisal Center for Islamic Research in Saudi Arabia¹² – one of the most significant scientific institutions in the country – focuses not only on Islamic studies but also on investigating issues related to Central Asia, including Uzbekistan's modern history and Islamic heritage. The center's research primarily concentrates on the period of Islamic revival among the Uzbek people and the developmental processes following independence. The King Saud Al-Faisal Institute for Diplomatic Studies, Center for Asian Studies¹³ – this institute operates in the fields of diplomacy and international relations, specializing in the analysis of Uzbekistan's foreign policy and regional integration processes in the post-independence era¹⁴.

The Center for Asian Studies at Cairo University in Egypt conducts research focused on Uzbekistan's contemporary socio-political and economic transformations. These studies primarily emphasize post-Soviet state-building processes and issues of national identity. The Institute of Asian Studies and Research at Zagazig University¹⁵ specializes in examining Uzbekistan's economic development following independence and the geopolitical changes in the region, with particular attention to the energy sector and international cooperation. Given that the scientific research centers, institutes, and higher education institutions in the Arab countries mentioned above are predominantly specialized in the study of modern and contemporary history, an analysis of the data pertaining to these institutions falls outside the primary objectives of this research. It is worth noting that the activities of these centers are directed more toward modern and recent historical processes rather than the ancient history of Turan. When focusing on the ancient period of Turan, particularly the earliest historical stages of Central Asia, it becomes evident that the systematic establishment of specialized scientific centers or research institutes dedicated to the in-depth study of this period has not been fully realized in Arab countries.

The Concept and Territory of Turan and Turkestan in Arab Countries. In numerous scholarly studies conducted in Arab countries, various terms are employed to refer to the geographic and historical nomenclature of the region. These include Turan (طوران), Turkestan (تركستان), Mawarannahr (بلاد ما وراء النهر, "the land beyond the river"), Western Turkestan (تركستان الغربية), and Central Asia (آسيا الوسطى).

Sayyid Abdulmumin Sayyid Akram, in his work titled "Highlights on the History of Turan (Turkestan)"¹⁶, defines the term "Turan" as follows: "*Turkestan (Turan) is ethnically composed of Turkic peoples who share a common linguistic and religious (Islamic) unity. Geographically, Turan extends from the Caspian Sea and the Ural Mountains in the west to the Great Wall of China in the east, and from Siberia and Mongolia in the*

⁸ <https://www.azhar.edu.eg/>

⁹ <http://www.moantiq.gov.eg>

¹⁰ <https://www.aub.edu.lb/>

¹¹ <https://www.damascusuniversity.edu.sy/>

¹² <https://www.kfcris.com/ar/about>.

¹³ <https://www.my.gov.sa/wps/portal>

¹⁴ Ikromov Sh. The Coverage of Transformation Processes in Independent Uzbekistan in Arab Countries. Ph.D. dissertation in Historical Sciences... – Tashkent. 2022. – p. 18.

¹⁵ <http://www.iars.zu.edu.eg/>

¹⁶ Al-Sayyid 'Abd al-Mu'min al-Sayyid Akram. Adwā' 'alā Tārīkh Tūrān (Turkistān). Rābitat al-'Ālam al-Islāmī - Makkah al-Mukarramah. –P. 220.

north to Iran, Afghanistan, India, and Tibet in the south. Its total area spans 5,607,013 km². Comparatively, this territory exceeds the combined area of countries such as Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. In ancient Arab and Greek geographical sources, Turan (Turkestan) is noted as a conglomerate of historical regions (Khorezm, Mawarannahr, Sogdiana, Margiana, and others)¹⁷.

Thus, in defining the territory of Turan, the author emphasizes that its geographical scope is significantly broader than the boundaries of present-day Central Asia. The issue of delineating these borders assumes critical importance in the study of Turan's ancient history, as these boundaries are represented differently not only in local sources but also in historical and scientific literature in other languages. The author's definition of the Turan concept underscores its notable divergence, in both geographical and historical contexts, from what is currently referred to as Central Asia. While modern Central Asia typically encompasses countries such as Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, in ancient times, the term Turan may have denoted a much larger region—potentially including areas extending north to Kazan and the Urals, east to the borders of China, south to Iran, and west to the regions surrounding the Caspian Sea. This expanded geographical definition is regarded as a fundamental factor in understanding the cultural, social, and political dynamics of Turan in antiquity.

According to the author, the toponym "Turkestan" emerged during the period of the region's conquest by the Russian Empire. The use of this name is linked to the political and geographical changes resulting from imperialistic expansion. The influence of the Russian and Chinese empires on the region led to the emergence of the concepts of "Eastern Turkestan" and "Western Turkestan." China's territorial expansion shaped the term "Eastern Turkestan," while Russia's territorial expansion gave rise to "Western Turkestan." Research conducted in Arab countries has established that the formation of the political boundaries of present-day Central Asian states is generally associated with the overarching designation "Western Turkestan." This analysis indicates that these terms continue to be used. In summary, the term "Turkestan" is a geographical construct formed as a result of political transformations. The regional division emerged from inter-imperial competition and territorial delineation. Even today, the concept of Western Turkestan remains in use within the scientific literature of Arab countries.

It is possible to challenge the author's assertion that the term "Turkestan" became widely adopted during the Russian Empire's conquest of the region. As highlighted in studies from Arab countries, the toponym "Turkestan" is not exclusively tied to the 19th century but was also in use in earlier periods. Analysis of archaeological findings and written records from the 7th century demonstrates that the term "Turkestan" was employed in the geographical naming of the region during the Middle Ages as well. This suggests that the historical roots of the toponym "Turkestan" are considerably deeper and not limited solely to the 19th century.

Conclusion. Research conducted in Arab countries reveals that there is no unified consensus regarding the historical and geographical definition of the Turan or Turkestan region. Scholarly diversity is observed concerning the region's boundaries, composition, and status. Furthermore, the terms applied to the region and their meanings have evolved over time and in response to historical processes. These changes are intertwined with political, social, and cultural factors. The geographical naming of the region has also varied across different historical periods and scholarly traditions. These variations are linked to differences in research methodologies. In conclusion, there is no singular scientific perspective in Arab countries regarding the historical-geographical conceptualization of the Turan or Turkestan region.

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¹⁷ Al-Sayyid 'Abd al-Mu'min al-Sayyid Akram. Adwā' 'alā Tārīkh Tūrān (Turkistān). Rābitat al-'Ālam al-Islāmī - Makkah al-Mukarramah. pp. 9 – 10.

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