

Archaeological Research Of The Ruins Of The Earth Mould In The Karshi Oasis And The History Of Ancient Nakhshab

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Annotation: This article provides an in-depth study of the ruins of the city of Yerkurgan in the Karshi oasis and the history of ancient Naxhab based on archaeological research. As a result of research that began in Kashkadarya after World War II, the first layers of the city were discovered. Excavations carried out by S. Kabanov in 1946–1948, M. Masson in 1963–1966, and later by R. Sulaymonov and other scientists showed that Yerkurgan was a major cultural and political center from the 7th century BC to the 3rd century AD. During the archaeological research, defensive walls, the governor's palace, a temple, potters' and blacksmiths' quarters, dahmas, and various residential buildings were discovered. The ceramic finds from the excavations were studied in different stages, and their typological characteristics were found to be inextricably linked with the cultural traditions of the Sogdian and Achaemenid periods. It is also noted that the ancient names of the city - Nautaka, Nashebo, Bolo, Naxhab - are recorded in Aramaic and Greek sources. An ancient document found in Afghanistan confirms these ideas. The new period of rise of Naxhab, which began in the 3rd century, the construction of the governor's palace and temple, the development of pottery centers are highlighted as an important stage in the history of Central Asia. The article is important in reassessing the early civilizational development and cultural heritage of the region.

Key words: Yerkurgan, Naxhab, Archaeological research, Sogdian culture, Achaemenid period, Defensive walls, Navtaka, Pottery, Blacksmithing neighborhoods, History of Central Asia.

Introduction. The ruins of the city of Yerkurgan, located in the Kashkadarya oasis, are an important source for studying the history of the first urban civilization and statehood in Central Asia. The city's life, which lasted from the 7th century BC to the 3rd century AD, has been confirmed by archaeological excavations. The excavations revealed defensive walls, a temple, a governor's palace, potters' quarters, and various residential structures. In particular, the typology of ceramic finds indicates the development of local traditions and their connection with the cultural environment of the Sogdian and Achaemenid periods. Until the beginning of archaeological research in the Karshi oasis, there was almost no information about the ancient history of the city. Such archaeological research in Kashkadarya began only after the end of World War II. In 1946-1948, S. Kabanov conducted excavations in Yerkurgan (Sulaymonov R.Kh., 2000, p.6)[1] and found a house in the southeastern part of the city ruins that was inhabited by pottery of the 3rd-5th centuries. The scientist, trying to understand the lower layers of the city, concluded that it could be dated to the 2nd-1st centuries BC, and that the city itself should be Bolo, the main city of the Nashebo or Nashebo region, mentioned in Chinese written sources (Kabanov S.K., 1950, p.82-135)[2].

Main part. In 1963-1966, the largest city ruin in the Karshi oasis was studied by the Kesh archaeological and topographic expedition of Tashkent State University (now the National University of Uzbekistan) led by M. Masson. As a result of the research of this expedition, M. Masson linked the Yerkurgan monument in the Karshi oasis with the city of Navtaka in Greek sources describing the campaigns of Alexander the Great. According to Masson, the Greek historian Arrian in his work "Anabasis Alexandra" wrote that "in 328 BC, such Macedonian generals as Ken, Krater, Frathefern and Stanazor came to Navtaka with their detachments to Macedon. At that time, winter was in full swing. He ordered his troops to settle in the vicinity of Navtaka and rest (Masson M.YE., 1973, pp. 8-9) [3]".

When M. Masson wrote that the Navtaka mentioned in Greek sources was the ruins of Yerkurgan, he had no source to prove this idea. This could only be confirmed by conducting archaeological excavations. This opportunity became possible only in 1973, after the expedition of the Institute of Archeology of the Russian Academy of Sciences led by R. Sulaymonov began work in the Kashkadarya oasis. With the start of the expedition, the problem of determining the age of the ancient layers arose. This problem was solved in the late 70s. By this time, as a result of excavations in various parts of Yerkurgan, previously unknown parts of the city ruins were discovered, such as the governor's palace and fortress, the city temple, a dahma, potters' and blacksmiths' quarters (Rakhmatova D.J., 2012, p. 17)[4]. After that, it was concluded that Yerkurgan was indeed the earliest capital city in the Karshi oasis, that it was Navtaka mentioned in Greek sources. M. Turebekov, having studied the inner and outer defensive walls of Yerkurgan, determined that the inner wall dates back to the 6th-5th centuries BC, and the outer wall to the 4th century BC. R. Sulaymonov, agreeing with these ideas, dated the construction of the outer defensive wall to the 2nd century BC.

For many years, various conflicting opinions, assumptions, and hypotheses have prevailed in science about the ancient names of the city of Karshi. This city was called by scientists by the names Nautaka, Nashebo, Nashebolo, Bolo, etc. In 2010, an ancient document found in the northern regions of Afghanistan put an end to these disputes. This document is a letter written on cowhide in ancient Aramaic in 330-320 BC, which was sent by the satrap (governor) of Bactria under the Achaemenid Empire to the governor of the town of "Khulm" under his control, Bagavanta. The letter ordered the dispatch of soldiers to supervise the construction of defensive structures around the cities of Nikshapaya and Kish. The fact that this letter refers to the cities of Nikshapaya (Nakhshab) and Kish (Kesh) has been fully recognized by historians and source scholars (Raimkulov A.A., 2011, pp. 320-323)[5].

From the 3rd century AD, a new period of urban development begins in Nakhshab. A magnificent temple building is erected in the city center, the governor's palace is built, the inner and outer defensive walls are thoroughly repaired, and the potters' and blacksmiths' quarters expand. During this period, Nakhshab becomes a large and prosperous city of Central Asia (Suleymanov R.Kh., 2000, p.6)[6].

The ruins of this city have survived to our days in the form of a huge archaeological monument - the Yerkurgan monument, located northwest of modern Karshi.

Excavations in this area were carried out by a number of archaeologists. In particular, excavations in the potters' quarter were carried out by M.H. Isamididov, excavations in the fortifications were carried out by M.Turebekov, and the opening of the city temple was carried out by R.Suleymanov and N.Nefedov. BC. The ruins of Qorovultepa, dating back to the 5th century, were first discovered by B.D. Kochnev and studied by R.Suleymanov. The general leadership of the study of the city was carried out by R.Suleymanov. Archaeologists studied the pottery of the ancient city in different stages. In particular, in the book "History of Ancient and Medieval Ceramic Production of Nakhshaba" by M.Kh. Isamididov and M. Khasanov, published in 2000, it was studied in four stages (Isamididov M.Kh., Khasanov M., 2000, p. 200)[7], in the monograph "Ancient Nakhshaba" by R.Kh. Suleymanov (Suleymanov R.Kh., 2000, p. 338)[8] it was studied in three stages: Ancient Sogdian ceramics, Early Antiquity ceramics, Late Antiquity ceramics.

Ancient Sogdian pottery, reflecting the pottery of the Achaemenid period, was widespread in the southern oases of Central Asia and Afghanistan in the 8th-7th centuries BC, long before the formation of the Achaemenid state (Isamididov M.Kh., 1982, pp. 60-78)[9].

An analysis of the sources published by scientists who conducted research in the Kashkadarya oasis shows that the types of vessels found have almost the same shape. Like storage vessels, kitchen vessels are mainly cylindrical or cylindrical-conical in shape, differing mainly in size and structure. Kitchen vessels have retained a number of features characteristic of the ceramics of the early Iron Age in their structure. The neck walls of handmade vessels are distinguished by their thick and relatively rough processing.

Special works aimed at dividing the typology of ceramics of this period into specific periods have not yet been fully developed. However, in the studies of a number of archaeologists, the ceramic complexes of this period are conditionally divided into the first and last stages in their development. (Masson V.M. 1959, p. 39, Sagdullayev A.S., 1978, p. 10-12, Askarov A.A., Albaum L.I., 1979, p. 31)[10].

Comparatively, in the book of M.Kh. Isamiddinov it is noted that the Yerkurgan is divided into two stages - Yer-II and Yer-III. However, in recent years, reliable stratified materials obtained from the monument have clarified this classification. As a result, the previous Yer-III stage was divided into two relatively short intervals. Thus, it became possible to study the development of ancient Sogdian ceramics in three stages.

The Yek-2 complex is currently known only from materials obtained from a pit excavated in the potters' neighborhood in layers 23–20 in the Q-13 area during the first years of the expedition of the Institute of Archaeology of the Uzbek Academy of Sciences led by R. Sulaymonov.

Results and discussions. Among the pottery products, the main place is occupied by *tarnaya posuda*, that is, storage vessels, as well as rare cylindrical-conical cups (Fig. 1; 1–5). Important features of the ceramic complex of this stage are the abundance of handmade pottery products and the constant occurrence of crushed gypsum and sand in the composition of dense ceramic fragments. In the Yer-II complex, handmade vessels make up about 50%, the rest are made on a pottery wheel (Isamiddinov M.Kh., Xasanov M.Kh., 2000, p. 27) (Isamiddinov M.Kh., Xasanov M.Kh., 2000, p. 27)[11]. At this stage, handmade products are much more advanced than in the previous period. Their walls are thick, dense, and a large amount of fireclay mixture is added. Especially among the cylindrical vessels, the main share is occupied by models resembling cauldrons and large earthenware (Isamiddinov M.Kh., Suleymanov R.Kh., 1984, pp. 16-23)[12]. At the same time, large vessels with a horizontal recess under the triangular-footed flange and a rare horizontal circle in the middle of the goblet body (Fig. 1; 5) indicate the specificity of the early stage of this complex.

Among the finds, there are also many handmade vessels that have preserved the archaic typology typical of the Early Iron Age and are distinguished by their profile diversity (Fig. 1; 16–25).

In general, the complex is dated to the end of the 7th century BC - the first half of the 6th century BC.

Materials belonging to the Yek-3 complex were found in the 18th layer of the Q-13 site, in the 27th–26th layers of the Q-1 stratigraphic pit in trench-3, and in the first floor of the city's inner defensive wall. At the same time, pottery belonging to this period was also identified from the small ruined village monument of Qorovultepa, located in the southwestern part of the Karshi oasis.

The ceramic complex of this period further improved the typology of cylindrical-conical vessels. The storage vessels with hook-shaped and triangular flanges characteristic of the previous period were now replaced by vessels with flat and rectangular turns and core-shaped flanges. This is reported by experts in the sources.

Kitchenware, on the other hand, has a more elegant shape, and the production of wide dishes has begun.

However, the most important aspect is that during this period, rare examples of kitchenware made of red clay and with clearly defined edges appear. In particular, a pan with a rim turned in the shape of the letter "G" is typical for the cylindrical-conical, light-colored dishes of Yerkurgan, but its example was found in the first treasure of the city wall. Also, a small fragment of a saucer made of red clay with a rim turned in the very bottom of the inner first layer of the wall. In addition, a large and wide fragment of a red clay saucer with a rim oriented in the direction of the letter "S" was also found.

Rare dishes with a rim turned in the shape of the letter "G" were also found in the agricultural monument of Qarovultepa (Fig. 2: 5, 10, 12). This new type of vessel resembles in its shape and structure the "kilevidny" profiled bowls and plates that were popular in the central and western regions of the Achaemenid state from ancient times. This fact indicates the development of cultural ties between the central regions of Iran, which

were part of the Achaemenid state, and Sogd (Khasanov M., 1990, p. 62.)[13]. This pottery complex can be dated to approximately the end of the 6th century BC - the first half of the 5th century.

The main features of the Yek-3 pottery complex, dating back to the Early Iron Age, suggest a different view of the Yaz-3 complex. Based on the discovery of a small red clay saucer reminiscent of the Early Parthian type, as well as bronze bowpoints that are comparatively similar to those from Kozalikyr, researchers initially considered this site to be of the 4th century BC (Masson V.M., 1959, p.43)[14]. This single saucer is similar in shape to the rare red clay vessels from the Yek-3 complex. The set of bronze bowpoints found at the Yaz-3 complex is dated from the 7th-6th to the 4th-3rd centuries BC (Medvedskaya I.M., 1972)[15].

The similarity of the plate found in the Yaz-3 layer to the Yek-3 layer can be explained by the influence of the pottery of the central regions of Iran on the ceramic production of the oases of Central Asia after Cyrus's annexation of the Achaemenid state in the 6th century BC. It is also known that the three-pointed bow points found in Yaztepa were used by the Persians in their wars with the Greeks (Dandamayev M.A., 1985, p. 150)[16]. The end of life in Yaztepa during this period is associated with the suppression of the popular uprising in Margiya by Darius I in 522 BC after Cyrus. The Behistun inscriptions state that 55,243 people died during those events. After that, this area was deserted, and a new fortress was built in the upper reaches of the Murghab River in place of the Erk fortress.

The series of three-feathered bronze bowheads found at Yaztepa (Masson V.M., 1959, p. 201)[17] may be traces of the brutal war between the rebels led by the Margush dokhysi Frad (the name of the "mapishta" - the "dokhy" expected by the masses) [18] (Murtazaeva R.H., 1970, p. 74) and a group of punishers led by Dadarshin, as recorded in the Behistun rock inscriptions. V.M. Masson himself considered this coup to date back to the Yaz-2 period.

Complex Yek-4, R.Kh. Suleymanov noted that ceramics of this period were obtained only from the city (Q-1) temple, trench 3, layer 24-21, and the lower ash layer of trench 1 of this temple. In the collection of kitchen utensils of this period, along with traditional cylindrical-conical vessels, upright, wide-bottomed cylindrical cups (Fig. 3: 1-3), as well as wide and conical saucers and bowls (Fig. 3: 11, 12) are widespread. Cylindrical cups found in Afrosiab are dated to much earlier periods, as in Bactria (Turebekov M., 1990, p. 132)[19]. Conical dishes found in Yaztepa and Samarkand are also considered to belong to much earlier stages (Masson V.M., 1959, p. 28)[20].

Although the household storage vessels retained their local cylindrical-conical shapes, their profile became much softer at the corners, and the horizontal section of the walls decreased. The rims, while retaining their core shape, were made in a flattened, oval and lanceolate section (Fig. 2: 2-5). During this period, large hummocks with plant fibers found in porous ceramic fragments also began to appear. They consisted of handmade, circular rimmed vessels (Fig. 4: 1; 95: 11, 13).

Large, flat pots made of refractory clay were also developed. In addition, thick-walled pot rims decorated with archaic triangular patterns on the rims are also found. The last complex of this ancient Sogdian period is dated to approximately the second half of the 5th century BC - the beginning and middle of the 4th century.

Conclusion. In conclusion, the ruins of the city of Yerkurgan are one of the most ancient cultural and political centers of the Kashkadarya oasis. The fact that it went through a continuous development from the 7th century BC to the 3rd century AD indicates that it was a city of special importance. As a result of excavations, defensive walls, a temple, a palace, potters' and blacksmiths' quarters, dahmas and dwellings were discovered. Ceramic finds indicate the connection of local traditions with the culture of the Achaemenid period. At the same time, they testify to the consistent development of the Sogdian civilization. Yerkurgan is of historical importance as an important source in the study of the history of Central Asia and the processes of early urban development.

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