

FORMATION OF THE CITIES OF THE EARLY MEDIEVAL PERIOD IN THE KASHKADARYO OASIS

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Annotation. The stages of emergence and formation of historical settlements and cities located in the Kashkadaryo oasis have been identified. It has been substantiated that the territory of modern Karshi city developed in ancient and classical periods in areas such as Yerqorgon (5th–4th centuries BCE), Qal'ai Zahoki Moron (2nd century BCE), and Shulluktepa (3rd–4th centuries CE), while during the Middle Ages it evolved within the area of the Karshi fortress (late 14th century). It is also argued that medieval cities in this region developed in five distinct types.

Keywords: Kashkadaryo, Karshi, cities, Timurids, Kesh, form, side, ark, shahristan.

Introduction. Analyzing the history of the earliest cities based on primary sources, as well as archaeological and written data, plays a crucial role in understanding the ancient historical and cultural processes that occurred within society.¹

During the early medieval period, the Kashkadaryo oasis was one of the key cultural, economic, and political centers of Central Asia. At that time, major and medium-sized cities such as Nakhshab (Shahrisabz), Kesh (Shahrisabz), and Bozor (Guzar) flourished in the region. They served as crossroads of trade routes and saw the development of agriculture and handicrafts. In particular, Nakhshab (Kesh) became an important political and cultural center during the periods of the Samanids, Karakhanids, and Timurids.²

Yerqorgon (Nikshapaya – Nikshapa – Nakhshab) (5th–4th centuries BCE).

Yerqorgon is one of the oldest, most unique, and well-known archaeological monuments not only of the Kashkadaryo oasis but of all Central Asia. This site is located 8–9 km northwest of the present-day city of Karshi, along the Bukhara–Karshi–Koson highway. The city consisted of inner and outer sections, covering a total area of 150 hectares. The inner part occupied 42 hectares and was surrounded by pentagon-shaped defensive walls. The total length of the fortification walls reached 2.6 km.

Yerqorgon was destroyed in 565 CE during the war between the alliance of the Turkic Khaganate and the Sasanian Empire against the Hephthalite state. Unlike other ancient urban monuments such as Old Termez, Afrosiyob in Samarkand, and Bukhara, Yerqorgon lacks thick cultural layers from later, mainly Islamic, periods. Therefore, in the internal historical topography of Yerqorgon, it is possible to observe the pure structure and morphological characteristics of an early medieval Sogdian city. Let us examine the internal structure of Yerqorgon in more detail.³

¹ Eshov B. *The History of Ancient Cities of Central Asia*. – Tashkent: Fan va Texnologiya, 2008, p. 17; Hasanov A. *Specific Features of the Formation and Development of Cities in Southern Uzbekistan (Based on the Example of the 5th – First Half of the 14th Centuries)*. 2021, p. 67.

² <https://arxiv.uz/uz/documents/referatlar/tarix/ilk-o-rta-asrlarda-qashqadaryo>

³ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

City Citadel (Ark). Archaeological excavations were conducted in 1975–1977 by M. Turebekov in the citadel (ark), which served as the main defensive structure of the city of Nakhshab–Nikshapaya–Nikshapa.⁴ The ruins of the city citadel are located on the northern side of the Yerqorgon archaeological site, adjacent to the inner defensive walls of the city, and formed part of the same defensive system. The citadel mound is square in shape: its upper platform measures 70 × 70 meters, the lower base measures 90 × 90 meters, and its height reaches 11–12 meters. On the eastern side of the mound, there is a shallow depression believed to be the remains of the entrance to the citadel. Three sides of the city citadel were surrounded by a defensive moat about 20 meters wide.

At the center stood a large structure built atop a massive platform measuring 80 × 80 meters, with a height exceeding 5 meters. On the northern side of the structure, adjacent to the city's defensive walls, a complex of two-story rooms was discovered. The citadel was surrounded by thick defensive walls, along the outer surface of which a series of rectangular towers were constructed.⁵

The Palace of the Yerqorgon Rulers. This palace was built on a large platform or terrace about 10 meters high.⁶ This indicates that during its period of use, the palace was a grand and imposing structure. Several rooms and corridors located at the center of the palace were excavated and studied. The monument went through two main construction phases. During the first phase, two rooms arranged in an *enfilade* layout were built, each connected by corridors on both sides. From the second room, a large formal audience hall was constructed to the east. In the southern wall of this hall, arrow slits (*shinak*) were discovered.

According to N.Yu. Nefedov and Kh.R. Suleymanov, the palace was originally constructed in the 3rd century CE and, after undergoing several reconstructions, remained in operation until the 5th century.⁷

City Temples. The socially significant buildings of Nakhshab were located in the central part of the city. In the city center, there were two adjacent mounds: one was large and tall, square in shape, while the other, situated to its east, had a rectangular form.

In front of the eastern temple, there was an open portico measuring 18.5 meters in length and 7 meters in width. During archaeological excavations, several wall fragments were discovered on the outer side of this portico. These walls are believed to have belonged to a larger, more spacious portico constructed adjacent to the first one from the outside.

During the archaeological excavations, several wall fragments were discovered on the outer side of the portico. These walls are believed to have belonged to a larger portico built adjacent to the first one from the outside. From this large and spacious portico, visitors entered a smaller portico measuring 18.5 × 7 meters, and from there, they proceeded into the main temple hall.

⁴ Turebekov, M. *The Citadel of Erkgurgan*. IMKU, Vol. 17, Tashkent, 1982, pp. 51–60; Hasanov, A. *Specific Features of the Formation and Development of Cities in Southern Uzbekistan (Based on the Example of the 5th – First Half of the 14th Centuries)*. 2021, p. 69.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁶ Suleymanov, R.Kh., Nefedov, N.Yu. *Preliminary Results of the Excavations of the Yerqorgon Palace*. IMKU, Vol. 17, Tashkent, 1982, pp. 47–51; *ibid.*, p. 70;

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 71.

Shulluktepa has attracted the interest not only of local scholars but also of Russian Orientalists. In 1883, V.V. Krestovskiy visited the site, and in 1885, B. Litvinov also conducted observations there,¹² Litvinov described the site as follows:

*“Among the ruins surrounding Karshi, the most valuable for archaeology and history are the remains of the Shulluktepa fortress. Even today, local residents take fired bricks from this site for their own constructions; many houses and the famous baths of Karshi are built from these very bricks.”*¹³

As a result of construction activities, the upper topography of Shulluktepa has been completely altered. In later centuries, several irrigation canals were also dug through the uninhabited area of the shahristan to supply nearby lands with water. At present, only a small part of Shulluktepa - mainly the area around the citadel - has been partially preserved.¹⁴

In 1965, under the leadership of M. Ye. Masson, the Kesh Archaeological Topography Expedition (KATE) conducted exploration and excavation works on several major archaeological sites of the Qarshi region — including Yerqo'rg'on, Qal'ayi Zahoki Moron, Qarshi Fortress, Shulluktepa, and Kasbitepa. During the research, a test trench was excavated about 250 meters northeast of the Shulluktepa citadel, partially studying the stratigraphy of the city's cultural layers.¹⁵

Archaeological excavations at the ruins of Nakhshab-Nasaf, located at Shulluktepa, were carried out by B. D. Kochnev. The excavations were conducted in several parts of the city's citadel (ark), shahristan, and rabod, particularly in areas where the Qarshi main canal had eroded the terrain, revealing cultural layers. Valuable information about the city's history was collected as a result. In many parts of the Shulluktepa shahristan, layers dating back to the 5th - 6th centuries contained traces of ash, burnt reeds, and fragments of charred wood. B. D. Kochnev also discovered remnants of the shahristan's defensive walls at the point where the Qarshi main canal cuts through the site. The dimensions of the bricks led him to conclude that the Nakhshab shahristan was constructed in the 6th-7th centuries.¹⁶ The presence of a tall wall indicates that the Nakhshab shahristan had become the center of a large city during the 6th-7th centuries. In 1987, M.H. Isomiddinov and A.A. Raimqulov conducted research on the

¹² Masson, M.E. *Stolichnye goroda v oblasti nizov'ev Kashkadaryi s drevneyshikh vremen*. Tashkent, 1973, p. 85.

¹³ Litvinov, B. *Karshi. // Turkestanskije vedomosti*, 1910, Nos. 114–116. Abdussattor Jumanazarov. *Nasaf*. Tashkent, 2017, p. 89. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹⁴ Kabanov, S.K. *Archaeological Surveys in the Upper Part of the Kashkadarya Valley. // Proceedings of the Institute of History and Archaeology*, Issue 7, 1955.

— *The City of Nakhshab at the Turn of Antiquity and the Middle Ages*. Tashkent, 1977, p. 78.

Hasanov, A. *Specific Features of the Formation and Development of Cities in Southern Uzbekistan (Based on the Example of the First Half of the 5th–14th Centuries)*. 2021, p. 78.

¹⁵ Masson, M.E. *Capital Cities in the Lower Reaches of the Kashkadarya Region from Ancient Times*. — Tashkent, 1973, p. 41.

Kabanov, S.K. *Nakhshab at the Turn of Antiquity and the Middle Ages (3rd–7th Centuries)*. — Tashkent: Fan, 1977, pp. 56–57.

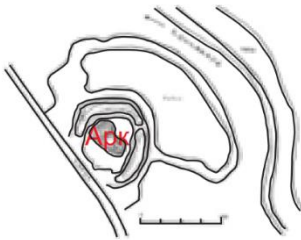
Isomiddinov, A., Yarkulov, A. *The History of Nakhshab Handicrafts*. — Tashkent: “Yangi Nashr”, 2014, p. 39.

¹⁶ Raimqulov, A. *Cities of the Century in the Kashkadarya Oasis*. Qarshi: “Nasaf,” 2018, p. 102; *Ibid.*, p. 79.

highest part of the Shulluktepa citadel and uncovered the remains of a building.¹⁷ Life in the Shulluktepa shahristan came to an end by the late 8th century. By the 10th century, the city's citadel had fallen into ruins, while the *rabad* (suburb) located along both banks of the Kashkadarya River remained densely populated. The *Dar al-imara* ("government house" or ruler's residence) and the prison were situated on the riverbank area known as *Ras al-qantara* ("the head of the bridge"). The city's main Friday mosque (*jami' masjid*) was located in the *rabad*, in front of the Ghubdin Gate, while the city bazaar operated between the ruler's

residence and the mosque. Historical sources also mention that in the *rabad*, near the Bukhara Gate, there was an *al-Musalla* mosque where festive (*Hayit*) prayers were performed.¹⁸

Шуллуктепа



Qal'ayi Zahoki Moron - the ancient city of old Nakhshab, located southwest of modern Qarshi. According to M.Ye. Masson, the Qal'ayi Zahoki Moron monument represents the ruins of an ancient fortified city built in a square plan and surrounded by three massive, tall defensive walls. At the center of the ancient city stood a citadel (*ark*) measuring **110 × 90 meters** at its base and rising **15 meters**

high.

The first ring of defensive walls around the citadel enclosed an area of **200 × 200 meters** (about 4 hectares), while the outermost defensive wall surrounded a much larger area measuring **400 × 400 meters** (about 16 hectares). Between the first and second defensive walls, there is an open space about **50–60 meters wide**. The entire fortress, covering an area of **16 hectares**, was surrounded by a **third line of defensive walls**, enclosing a vast, flat area measuring approximately **1.5 × 1.5 kilometers**.

According to **M.Ye. Masson**, the total area of the city, which occupied such an extensive territory, reached **225 hectares**, making it one of the **largest and most densely populated cities of the ancient world**. He also noted that the **ancient city of Nakhshab** was located on the site of this monument.¹⁹ According to its present topographic features, the fortress gate was located on the eastern side of the site.²⁰ (See Appendix 5).

In general, the ancient and classical cities that emerged in the territory of the Qashqadaryo region shared structural features common to other cities of Central Asia. These cities were divided into specific parts: the administrative center — the citadel (*ark*) — was separated and surrounded by fortress walls. Similarly, the main residential area, or *shahristan*, was also

¹⁷ Suleymanov, R. *Ancient Nakhshab*. Tashkent, 2000, p. 29; Hasanov, A. *Distinctive Features of the Formation and Development of Cities in Southern Uzbekistan (Based on the Example of the First Half of the 5th–14th Centuries)*. 2021, p. 79.

¹⁸ Kamaliddinov, Sh.S. *Historical Geography of Southern Sogd and Tokharistan According to Arabic Sources of the 9th – Early 13th Centuries*. – Tashkent: Uzbekistan, 1996. – p. 52; *Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹⁹ **Masson, M. E.** *Capital Cities in the Lower Reaches of the Kashkadarya Region since Ancient Times (From the Works of the Kesh Archaeological and Topographic Expedition of Tashkent State University, 1965–1966)*. – Tashkent, 1973. **Khasanov, A.** *Specific Features of the Formation and Development of Cities in Southern Uzbekistan (on the Example of the First Half of the 5th–14th Centuries)*. – 2021, p. 81.

²⁰ **Ravshanov, P.** *History of Karshi*. – Tashkent: "Yangi asr avlodi," 2006, p. 171; *Ibid.*, p. 81.

enclosed by defensive walls. Structurally, the ancient cities were classified as dual cities, cities formed in a free layout, or those designed in rectangular and square shapes.

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