



Tangible Cultural Heritage of the Silk Road from the Area of Modern Uzbekistan

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Monuments of South Sogd on the Great Silk Road

Abstract

This article is dedicated to the monuments of South Sogd (Kashkadarya Valley). Due to its natural and climatic features since ancient times, it has been divided into two areas of settlement of ancient Greek tribes: the eastern – in the upper reaches of the Kashkadarya River and the western – in its lower reaches.

In the Achaemenid era, there were two historical and cultural regions of Nautak and Xenippus on this site, which are mentioned in ancient sources from the time of Alexander the Great. The division into two areas is noted in sources and later, until the beginning of the 20th century.

In addition, the difference between the two regions within the Kashkadarya valley was also due to closer traditional ties between the western regions and Bukhara, and the eastern ones with Samarkand. Their border passed approximately in the area of present Guzar. In the Early Period and the developed Middle Ages, these areas were called Kesh and Nakhshab.

Keywords: Sogd, Nakhshab, Kashkadarya, Great Silk Road, Kesh, Nesef, monuments, archeology.

Southern Sogd was located on the southern side of the Samarkand Sogd. These territories were separated by the Zarafshan ridge. Southern Sogd was one of the regions with developed urbanisation.

This territory was divided into two historical and cultural areas: the eastern Nautaka (name in the ancient era), in the Middle Ages this territory acquired the name Kesh, and the western centres of which was the city of Xennippa, in the Middle Ages it was renamed as Nakhshab; the Arabs called it Nesef [3].

Yerkurgan was one of the most ancient urban centres. It was located 10 km west of modern Karshi, which at present is the Kasan region. Suleimanov R. Kh. called this city the mother of the cities of the Karshi oasis [13, p. 24].

According to the results of the archaeological excavations carried out at this monument, led by R. Kh. Suleimanov, it turned out that the early stage of Yerkurgan refers to the 9th–8th centuries BC. The wall that surrounded the first city was dated to



the end of the 8th–7th centuries BC. In the 6th century BC an internal wall was built that surrounded the city on an area of 34 hectares.

By the 3rd–2nd centuries BC the city grows to an area of 150 hectares. In the 3rd century AD on the territory of Yerkurgan palaces, temples, mausoleums and also citadels are built. In the 4th century AD both defensive walls of the city are rebuilt [13, p.25].

Yerkurgan, according to R. Kh. Suleimanov, during the period of Saka domination played the role of a trade and craft centre of the oasis.

Based on the results of archaeological excavations, the city undergoes decay, during the conquest of the Hephthalite State by the Turks together with Sasanid Iran. Thus, transferring the functions of the capital of the oasis to the settlement of Shulluktepe [13, p. 26–28].

In the course of research carried out at the Shulluktepe settlement, it turned out that Shulluktepe in the 7th–8th centuries expanded and turned into a fiefdom with a citadel. According to researchers, Shulluktepe in medieval sources is given as Nakhshab or Nesef [10].

The era of the Middle Ages for Nachsheb is a qualitatively new stage in territorial, ethnosocial and economic life. Written sources report the addition in the middle of the 1st millennium AD a confederation of small holdings, which, according to Chinese sources, included Nashebo-Nakhsheb. In the 5th century it is part of the Hephthalite state, which successfully fought with the Sassanian Iran, which was trying to seize the lands north of the Amu Darya, which included the Kashkadarya oasis. In the first half of the 6th century the mighty Türkic Kaganate is formed, moving in the middle of the century to Central Asia. In the years 563–567 the Turks defeated the Hephthalites. Since that time, the capital of Karshi has been moving from Yerkurgan to the south.

The ruins of the largest urban-type monument identified with the mediaeval Nesef are now known as Shulluk-tepe, located in the valley of the Kashkadarya River, 1.5 km south of the desolate Yerkurgan, and the necropolis of Nesef even merges with the burial complex of the ancient capital.

The culture of the population of the early mediaeval Nakhsheb is a vivid picture of the active interaction of sedentary and nomadic tribes.

The central part of the settlement is occupied by an impregnable castle, typologically representing a tepe with an adjoining site of hypertrophied dimensions. At the base, its dimensions are about 150x80 m, the height of the tower from the base exceeds 25 m, the height of the site is 12–13 m. The long axis of the castle is stretched from north-west to south-east; from the northeastern side, the castle is adjoined by the second, lower (8–10 m) building block with an area of 100x70 m of a sub-triangular plan. This central core of the settlement, formed in the early Middle Ages, is surrounded by a vast lowland of the former moat, now swampy in its southern and eastern parts.

Further along the perimeter rises the second row of flat hills of a small shakhristan that surrounded the castle. It is oriented to the cardinal points and has 500 m from north



to south, and 400 m from east to west. The hills of the ruins of the former shakhristan reach a height of 6–7 m.

Written sources of this era have preserved in their toponyms the names of large temples of Nakhshab. They report on the village of Khurbagn, which, according to R. N. Fry, means the “Temple of the Sun”. The village of Iskibagn is mentioned; in Sogdian – “High Temple”, in Turkic – “Old Temple”.

The rise of economic life is evidenced by the release of Nachsheb in the 7th–8th centuries an independent coin with a portrait of the ruler on the obverse, and a horse and a legend on the reverse, in which scientists see the name of the ruler of Nakhshab.

From the beginning of the 8th century in the history of Nakhshab – a new stage in the heroic and dramatic events associated with the invasion of the Arab Caliphate. The stubborn struggle of Nakhshaba with the active participation of the Turkic Kaganate took place in 701–702. Particularly hot battles unfold with the military invasion of Qutaiba ibn Muslim, who set the task of conquering Maverannahr. Sources mark memorable places of hot battles: the village of Nessefa, among which the village of Al-Mukhtarika is often mentioned, burnt from a powerful fire that engulfed it during one of the battles. Nessef was one of the centres of anti-Arab movements in the mid 770s and an adherent of the Mukanna rebellion. The Nessefians also supported the uprising of 806–810 against the central authority of Rafi ibn Leys. From the second half of the 8th century life in the country is beginning to change. The coming to power in the Caliphate of the Abbasids, who relied on the help of the inhabitants of Central Asia, contributed to the revival of the merchants here, the active participation of the Nessefians in the political and economic life of the Caliphate.

The Arab geographer of the 10th century, who knew Maverannahr well. Ibn Haukal describes the capital of Nakhshab as follows. “Nessef is a large city with a ruined citadel and a rabad (or suburb) with four gates: Nejaria, Samarkand, Kesh, Gubdinsk. The city lies on the big Bukhara and Balkh roads. Nessef has one river flowing in the middle of the city. It receives the waters of the Kesh, and from here it flows rapidly across the plain. The ruler’s palace is located on the banks of the river in the area called the Head of the Bridge. Near the palace there is a prison, a cathedral mosque at the Gubdin gate. Place of Friday prayer at the gate of Nejaria. Bazaars are concentrated in the rabad between the ruler’s palace and the cathedral mosque.”

Studies have shown that the location for the new capital was well chosen. Vast territories of the left bank of Kashkadarya form a large bend. Here is the mediaeval Nessef. In its northeastern part, a military-administrative centre, marked by sources, is formed – a citadel, the core of which was a powerful castle of the 6th century with a stepped tower rising to almost 30 meters in height. Shakhristan Nessef surrounded the citadel from all sides and expanded in the northern direction, where the river made a sharp turn towards the Karshi plain. Dorus-Imarat, mentioned by contemporaries, grew up here – the House of Government, in which the administrative centre of the city was concentrated. The main hydrotechnical structures for supplying water



to the northern and western lands of the oasis were also concentrated here. There was also the main bridge across Kashkadarya. To the south and east of Shakhristan, the industrial suburb of Nesef grows with its famous artisan quarters, bazaars and caravanserais. Excavations of archaeologists have revealed the quarters of metallurgists who processed iron. They contained iron bars – a commercial semi-finished product of ferrous metallurgy, which came from the mining centres of the Gissar and Zerafshan ranges. Workshops for iron and steel smelters were opened. To the south of them, the blacksmiths' workshops were adjacent to the quarters of bronze castors and jewelers. Workshops with forges for processing copper and golden bronze were discovered, various items and decorations found. The metalworkers' quarters were active until the beginning of the 13th century.

Nesef appears as a flourishing centre of a fertile oasis with an abundance of fruits and vegetables that entered the markets, valued for their early ripening, handicraft products of metallurgists, ceramists and jewelers.

Great economic potential and a favourable geographical position at the crossroads of important connections between Maverannahr and Khorasan contributed to the development of trade routes in mediaeval Nesef. The main routes connected Nesef with the major centres of Sogd and Bactria – Samarkand, Bukhara, Termez, Balkh. One of the busiest routes in Khorasan was the path to the west to the ancient fortress Zem-Kirkukh, which stood on the banks of the Amu Darya. This branch operated until the 19th century. The northern route from Nesef led to Bukhara and further towards Khorasan.

The most detailed description of the caravan routes and their regional sections can be found in the works of eastern historians and geographers of the 9th–12th centuries. The busiest routes connected Nesef with Samarkand, where the paths went through the mountain pass with the Dargoh caravanserai – a place in the gorge and a longer, but calm path through the Karnapchul steppe and the low Jamsky pass, where the paths were divided into Samarkand and Bukhara near the famous village of Mukhtarik tracks. A well-known local highway connecting the capital with the flourishing settlements – the cities of Bezda, Kasby and Kesh.

Mediaeval Nesef deservedly entered the circle of centres of Maverannahr, which were “a collection of science and culture.” Many scientists-theologians, historians, geographers came and lived and worked from Nesef. Researchers of Central Asia note for the stage from the 9th century 45 scientists, poets and theologians. The flourishing of the economy and culture of Nesef was interrupted by the Mongol invasion.

The main irrigation canals of the oasis are diverted from Nakhshab: there was a mediaeval centre for regulating the water distribution of the low-water Karshi oasis. In the 9th–13th centuries it is one of the largest and most important centres of Maverannahr on the Silk Road.

The second interesting city centre located within Karshi is the Kalai Zakhoki Maron settlement.



This is a fortified city unique in Central Asia in terms of its scale. In essence, it is a single architectural structure erected in one step. An extremely simple compositional and planning scheme of the city consists of a giant central tower approximately 100x100 m in size and about 15 m high; it is surrounded by three rows of powerful walls: the first at the level of the upper ridge has dimensions of 210x210 m, the second row of walls is 400x400 m, their height is on average 8–10 m, width at the base is 30–40 m. And finally, the third line of walls, which has not been preserved, measured 1.5x1.5 km on the sides.

Kalai Zohaki Maron was erected with a deviation of the facades from the meridian to the west by about 20 degrees, which approximately corresponds to the deviation of the walls of the inner rampart and Yerkurgan.

This is the largest city in the history of ancient urban development of Sogd in the late 2nd and early 1st centuries BC. It is built in the form of a central tower – a palace surrounded by three rows of walls. It is characteristic that the wall does not have the defensive flanking towers usual for fortified settlements of that time, but it is possible that they were weakly protruded and simply had not yet been opened; however, traces of towers in the form of protrusions on the wall were not visually traced. It can be assumed that the walls of the settlement had no defensive towers at all. This also explains the arcuate rounded corners on the first defensive wall, which resisted battering technique well.

In the 4th–5th centuries AD the settlement was fundamentally reconstructed within the second walls: two rows of walls and the central castle-citadel were built on and fortified, and the third row of walls, which had lost its significance and, apparently, already significantly destroyed by that time, was abandoned. It is difficult to say anything about the features of the fortification elements, except for the assumption that a wall with an in-wall corridor, similar to the synchronous walls of Yerkurgan, could go on top of the high and monolithic foundation.

And finally, in the 7th century AD on the high central tower of an abandoned ancient city-fortress, the castle of a petty feudal lord was erected, the economy of which was limited by a wall that runs along the perimeter of the ridge of the first wall of the settlement 200x200 m on the sides. Some residential buildings were erected on the top of the ruins of the central hill and later, in the 9th–12th centuries AD.

Judging by the fact that the closest analogy and an earlier prototype of the settlement of Kalai Zohaki Maron is the citadel of the settlement of Babish-Mulla of the 1st century. in the lower reaches of the Syr Darya, dating from the 4th–2nd centuries BC, such a transfer of the architectural and fortification canon and its reproduction on a grand scale in the Karshi oasis is logical to explain the occupation of Sogdiana by the Aral Saks during the reign of Eucratides in the first half of the 2nd century BC. Following this, judging by the ceramic complex, somewhere in the second half of the 2nd century BC in the left-bank part of the Karshi oasis, the grandiose fortress city of Kalai Zohaki Maron was built – the seat of the military and political power of the new owners of the oasis,



and, possibly, of the whole of Sogd. Yerkurgan, as the heir to the old Hellenised cultural traditions, was assigned the role of a trade and craft centre of the oasis.

In the 4th–5th centuries AD the city is being reconstructed, but already loses its supreme power, in the 7th century AD there was already only a castle of a petty feudal lord [7,13,14]. In the eastern part of Kashkadarya, the urban centres of which are Kesh-Shakhrisyabz, the development of urbanised culture also begins from the Early Iron Age – 8th–7th centuries BC. From this period, oases of a sedentary culture were formed, the first cities were born and the foundations of statehood were laid [7].

The first settlements appear in the 8th–7th centuries BC on Shurabsai, where the fortified settlement of Sangirtepe grows.

Sangirtepe was a small settlement in the form of a rounded hill up to 7 m high, surrounded by a square outer rampart. Its area is no more than 3–4 hectares. Excavations have shown that the earliest layers of Sangirtepe precede the appearance of the city on Uzunkyr. They date back to the time of the 8th–7th centuries BC. In the lowest layers, the ruins of an early Zoroastrian temple were discovered. A rectangular altar of fire was opened here, and in the floor was a series of ritual pits filled with sand, gravel and ash. Above were the structures of architectural structures of the 1st centuries BC and AD. The most recent building goes back to the 4th–5th centuries AD. It was the remains of a large cult complex, surrounded by a wall rounded in plan with an in-wall corridor. Human burials have been found at this level.

It should be assumed that Sangirtepe emerged as a cult centre of the population of the early Iron Age, who mastered the territory of the Kesh oasis. This monument retained its function as a cult shrine of Kesh, possibly until the era of the Turkic Kaganate.

And also the city, now known as the Uzunkyr settlement, presented by researchers as the first capital of ancient Nautaki.

The Uzunkyr settlement, rectangular in plan, with an area of about 70 hectares, was surrounded by fortress walls on the southern, western and eastern sides. The northern part of the settlement was adapted to the relief of the Shurobsai terrace, but here, too, the remains of the rampart have survived. The inner fortress of Uzunkyr-Podayataktepe, apparently serving as a citadel, was also located here. A deep and wide (about 20 m) ditch ran along the outer perimeter of the defensive walls. The territory of Uzunkyr is completely plowed up, so the nature of the construction of the settlement remains unknown. Small remnants of former structures that have survived indicate that the thickness of the cultural layer was at least 2–3 m. The rampart of the defensive wall, 450 m long, up to 6 m high and about 26 m wide at the base, preserved only in the southern part of the settlement, testifies to the grandiose nature of the fortification construction.

The earliest settlement at the Uzunkyr settlement appears in the 8th century BC, as indicated by a complex of materials (ceramics, charred grains of cereals) obtained from a pit in its northwestern part. In the subsequent period, the settlement continued to expand geographically and it became necessary to build fortifications to protect



the population. The section of the Uzunkyr defensive wall, and the excavations along its outer façade made it possible to reveal the design features of a rather powerful fortification system, consisting of three rows of walls, and the analysis of the material obtained from the masonry and floods made it possible to establish the time of construction. In the 7th century BC a defensive wall is being erected of rectangular mud bricks of a large format with massive rectangular towers protruding beyond the line of the wall and internal towers. The plane of the walls and towers was framed with pilasters. In the curtains and in the towers themselves, there were combat and false loopholes of lancet outlines, located on the pilasters and in the intervals between them. There were no intra-wall rooms or corridors, and the approach to the loopholes from the territory of the settlement was open. In the 6th-5th centuries BC close to the first wall, from the inner façade, a second wall of a similar raw material was attached, which closed the approaches to the loopholes in the curtains, but the inner towers continued to function. At the next, third stage, a third (clay) wall is attached to the second wall from the inner façade, which closed the passages to the towers, and the room itself and the entrance to it are blocked. At the base of the brickwork, an earlier wall, made of bun-like bricks, was identified, which was apparently used as a foundation platform for an early mud wall. The total thickness of the Uzunkyr defensive wall after the addition of the last wall reached almost 6 m and surrounded an area of 70 hectares.

Stone objects in the complexes of Uzunkyr archaeological materials are represented by grain grinders, pestles, grater pestles, burnishes, spinning wheels, throwing balls for slings, etc. During the opening of the outer edge of the early Uzunkyr wall, a bronze three-pointed arrowhead with a strongly protruding sleeve was found. Another bronze three-bladed arrowhead with a protruding sleeve was found on the floor of the inner tower room.

Analysis of ceramic material obtained from a pit in the northwestern part of Uzunkyr, masonry of fortress walls and drifts, as well as lifting material, made it possible to distinguish three chronological periods of habitation of the monument. The Uzunkyr I complex (8th century BC) is represented mainly by the forms of molded kitchen boilers, some of which have loop-shaped handles or sinks. This stage is associated with the emergence of an early settlement at the site of Uzunkyr. The Uzunkyr II complex (7th-6th centuries BC) is characterised by a decrease in the amount of molded ceramics and the appearance of large vessels with an oblique bottom part and a cuff-like rim profile. An interesting fact is the discovery in the masonry of the Uzunkyr defensive wall of a single fragment of the bowl wall, with a beak-shaped rim and a sharp bend in the walls in the middle part of the body of the vessel. The construction of the first fortress wall from a rectangular raw material belongs to the Uzunkyr II period. The Uzunkyr III complex (5th-4th centuries BC) does not differ significantly from the ceramics of the Uzunkyr II period. Modelled ceramics are still few in number, and easel tableware repeats previous forms. The only exception is a fragment of a red-embossed goblet with traces of polishing on the outside. At this stage, it becomes necessary to strengthen the



fortification of the fortress. As a result, along the entire perimeter of the inner face of the wall, the second wall is made of rectangular raw material, and then the third wall is made of clay.

The formation and development of Uzunkyr as an early urban centre in the Kitabo-Shakhrisabz oasis and the ancient region of Nautak in general was closely connected with the socio-political and socio-economic processes that took place in the agricultural areas of the Central Asian region in the 7th–6th centuries BC. Uzunkyr had a fortification that met the requirements of the need to defend a large territory, its internal development was scattered, certain sections of the settlement were purposefully not built up and, in the event of a military threat, the population of the district and livestock could hide here, being safe – the main measure of social wealth. Thus, Uzunkyr played the role of not only an administrative and economic centre, but also served as a military refuge for the population of the district.

In the Uzunkyr district, there were rural homesteads and vast agricultural lands. Irrigation and water use was based on the small river Shurobsai. In the oasis, traces of a network of small canals with a length of 1.0–3.5 km are noted. The need for their arrangement was caused by the conditions of the sai irrigation and the topography of the cultivated lands, located directly at the river bed or at a small distance. Ultimately, such a system of land use and irrigation was supposed to lead to the decline of the ancient oasis (soil salinisation during long-term use for irrigating the same plots, limited land resources with an increase in population and intensification of agriculture, unstable water regime in Shurobsai, depending on the number of annual precipitation, accumulation of snow and ice in the mountains, etc.).

An extensive paleobotanical material was obtained from the territory of Uzunkyr (more than 1000 seeds of scarious barley, 8 grains of naked barley and 5 grapes). According to the studies carried out by Z. V. Yanushevich, the emergence of cultivated hulled barley was associated with the introduction of irrigation, since this species was physiologically adapted to irrigation conditions, and, therefore, was more productive. The appearance of bare-grain barley, which arose under cultivation conditions, is not associated with a prerequisite for irrigation, but it was cultivated mainly on moist soils, in the lower part of intermountain valleys, where a sufficient amount of moisture accumulated. However, bare-grain barley does not tolerate soil salinisation and gives way to chalky barley where the soil salt content is high. The soils of the Kashkadarya valley are saturated with salts, therefore the ancient farmers gave preference here precisely to filmy multi-row barley, the cultivation of which, apparently, ensured the favourable development of plants of this species and, as a consequence, a high yield.

Of particular interest is the discovery in Uzunkyr, in the layers of the 8th–7th centuries BC, of grape seeds. It was found that the farmers of the oasis grew not only a cultivated small-berry, but also a cultivated variety of table grapes with a relatively large berry.

The presence of the predominant amount of barley seeds in the cultural layers of Uzunkyr, which could be widely used as a fodder crop, indicates a significant role in



the economic activity of the population of Uzunkyr of cattle breeding. Extensive and convenient pastures in the foothills of the Gissar and Yakkabag ranges stimulated the intensive development of livestock raising, which coexisted with irrigated and rainfed forms of agriculture.

Uzunkyr is a vivid example of an early urban organism in South Sogd. Unfortunately, we are unable to talk about the structural organisation of the city due to the destruction of its territory in connection with agricultural work. However, the constructive features of the fortress architecture revealed in the process of archaeological excavations characterise the high level of urban planning and civilisation of the Early Iron Age in Southern Sogd. Such large cities, of course, had a dedicated citadel (traces of it were marked on Uzunkyr), palace and cult centres, craft districts and highly developed craft. In socio-political terms, Uzunkyr was a multifunctional city, being the economic and administrative centre of an agricultural oasis in the eastern part of Kashkadarya. Apparently, the territory of the region completely coincided with its borders.

Uzunkyr is a kind of phenomenon of regional significance, one of the centres of urban culture in the south of Central Asia, which developed according to the laws common to the entire Ancient East. However, this process stops at Uzunkyr, which is explained, first of all, by the violation of the rhythm of the artificial water supply system of the territory of Uzunkyr and its environs, as well as by the state of the fortification of the ancient city, which did not meet the requirements of the town planning canons of that time, which were widely used in the construction of fortifications on other monuments. Central Asia.

In the Seleucid and Greco-Bactrian periods, Uzunkyr fell into decay, and the centre of the oasis moved to the Kitab site, where, apparently, there were more favourable conditions for the development of urban culture.

It was a large city of the early Afrasiab type with a powerful fortress wall and an aristocratic centre acropolis, described by historians of the era of Alexander the Great. Soon the city moved to the bank of the Aksu River in the centre of modern Kitab. Here grows up a large ancient and early mediaeval Kesh, which at one time was even considered the capital of Sogd. It is mentioned many times during the period of the struggle against the Arabs as the area of numerous Arab campaigns, and as one of the largest centres of the many years of struggle against the invaders and anti-Arab liberation movements. Stubborn resistance and years of war led the city and region to decline. Its return begins in the era of the Samanids, but city life is gradually shifting to a new place, where a new capital is being formed, which received its modern name Shakhrisabz under Temur. It was distinguished by a wealth of good lands and a healthy climate.

Shakhrisabz (Kesh), one of the most ancient cities of Central Asia, where the masterpieces of mediaeval architecture have been preserved, is of great interest to us today, since this beautiful city of Uzbekistan is closely connected with the biography of Amir Temur. Under him, Shakhrisabz turned into a “foot of the throne”, the residence



of the Barlas and the second capital of the state after Samarkand, on the improvement of which significant funds were spent to turn this city into the pearl of the East. Amir Temur achieved his goal, judging by the enthusiastic descriptions of the Spanish Ambassador Clavijo of Shakhrisabz's architectural monuments, such as the Jahangir mausoleum, the Dorustilavat and Dorusiadat complexes and the Aksaray palace.

Archaeological research in Shakhrisabz has revealed powerful cultural layers of the 5th–6th centuries AD throughout the city. They were noted in the Chorsu region, in the southwestern part of the city on the territory of the cemetery of the 15th–17th centuries. The finds of coins of various minting should be noted: with coins of Akhurpat, the ruler of Kesh of the 7th century, copper coins of the Abbasid minting of the 8th century, a Sogdian coin with a square hole minted by Ikhshid Shishpir (642–655). All numismatic material from Shakhrisabz was identified by E. V. Rtveladze, who considers Akhurpat to be the ruler of Kesh in the second half of the 7th century. His name is mentioned in the Chinese chronicles only once in connection with the embassy he sent to the Chinese emperor in 642. Akhurpat's coin in Shakhrisabz was met for the first time. The presence of a significant number of them in one pit at different levels indicates the intensity of money circulation in the Southern Sogd of the 7th and early 8th centuries. Thus, we can more or less confidently say that it was on the site of Shakhrisabz that the central city with a developed money trade was located. Kitab is gradually losing this status.

By the period of the 7th and early 8th centuries on the site of Shakhrisabz there was a large urban-type settlement with dispersed inhabited areas – Zindantepe (Balandtepe), discovered 250 m from the Aksaray palace and the city walls of Shakhrisabz. The monument is oriented along the north-south line, rectangular in plan, on top of its dimensions 60x50 m, the height of the hill is more than 20 m. On a powerful platform there is a building (15x4 m) with a vaulted corridor-like room, apparently of a cult purpose. Under the platform was a cultural layer with early mediaeval ceramics. Analogies with the monuments of Central and Bukhara Sogd and the Chach region make it possible to assume the presence of a Zoroastrian temple of fire on Balandtepe and consider it a monument of the pre-Muslim cult of the 5th–8th centuries.

After the Arab conquest, Balandtepe did not settle down. It is interesting that Balandtepe was considered by the population to be an “infidel place”, associated with a pre-Muslim cult, and therefore, during the construction of the city walls, it was left outside the Temurid city. The hills to the south and west of it include mediaeval material from the 11th to 12th centuries. Archaeological research of Shakhrisabz first of all touched upon the city walls.

There is an opinion in the literature that there are no traces of earlier walls in Shakhrisabz than the wall of 1380, built by the order of Amir Temur. In this regard, one should recall the report of the Persian historian Hafiz-i Abru (died in 1430) that “Kesh had an ancient wall (bandi kadim), but it was destroyed”, and that Amir Temur rebuilt the fortress walls of this city. Apparently, this statement corresponds to reality,



for Hafiz-i Abru, by the definition of “ancient”, meant the pre-islamic time. At that time, on the site of Shakhrisabz, there was indeed an early mediaeval Kesh, which had these walls.

During the work, all four façades of the city fortifications were examined. It was found that about 70 semicircular towers or burjs were preserved at a distance of 50 m from each other along the perimeter of the walls. The walls with towers are made of good dense layered clay. The maximum height of the preserved walls is 11–13 m, the towers are 10–12 m, the width of the walls is from 3.5 to 9 m. On the western face, the cleared tower protrudes 4 m beyond the wall line and has a height of 13 m. A passage with a staircase led to the upper platform for fighting.

Unfortunately, only a 10 m long section of the wall along the northern face has survived, located opposite the Aksaray palace and the former Urda. The height of the sagging wall is 7.5 m. Beneath it there is a cultural layer with the inclusion of fragments of ceramics of the 10th–12th centuries. At the base of the wall, a Juchid coin was found of 1362/63 (Saray-Berke), which confirms the correctness of the written sources about the erection of the walls of Shakhrisabz in 1378/79 by the decree of Amir Temur himself.

The pits laid at the base of the walls of the hisar (or inner city) gave the same picture: the walls were erected on a cultural layer with material from the 11th–12th centuries. They cover a rectangle measuring 1x1.5 km. It stretches from north to south. The centre of Chorsu is located at the intersection of two main street highways connected with the four gates of the city. The gates of the city were called: the northern – Arka, the eastern – Kunchikar, the western – Kushkhana and the southern – the gates of Termez, which were called Chorymgar at the time of the measurement work. The southern wall turned out to be of a later construction. It was originally located 500 m south of the late wall. Therefore, the Chorsu building on the plan turned out to be shifted to the south. Thanks to the work carried out, it was possible to resolve the issue of the presence of two southern gates: the gates of Termez were in the original wall of the Temurid time, and the Charymgar gates were in the later wall. An amendment has also been made to the calculations of the area of the city (1x2 km).

The study of the cultural layers of Shakhrisabz showed that after the layers of the early Middle Ages of the 5th–8th centuries. there are strata with material of the 11th–12th centuries. A complete picture of the stratigraphy of cultural strata was provided by the pits laid within the hisar of the 14th century. In one of these pits, located to the west of Chorsu, material from different times was obtained. Ceramics of the 14th–15th centuries were found in the upper layers on a circular base with a blue underglaze painting on a white background – local production of ceramics of the “cobalt” type. Below there is a cultural layer with unglazed ceramics (cauldrons, tagorahs, jugs and hums) and glazed utensils (bowls, dishes) painted on a white background with brown and red paints, several fragments with good quality green glaze dating from the 10th–12th centuries. Ceramics of the 6th–7th centuries were obtained in the underlying layer. Not far from the Aksaray palace, at a depth of 1.5 m from the floor level of the inner buildings of the



palace, a layer containing ceramics of the 9th–11th centuries was noted, and at a depth of 3 m – material from the late 8th and early 9th centuries. Thus, the intensive settlement of the territory of the city falls in the period of the 10th–11th centuries.

During the excavation work on the territory of the Aksaray palace, the floors were opened behind the eastern pylon of the entrance portal, as well as in the southwestern part of the palace structure. Mosaic and majolica glittering in the sun with juicy multicoloured glaze give the floors beauty and grace. The mosaic made with glaze of white, azure, cobalt and gold colours is distinguished by the richness of motives, compositions and colour range. The ornament is based on a geometric girih. The girih patterns are varied and fit into a square or triangle. The main decorative theme of the pavements is rectangular panels of various sizes, made of eight-pointed stars on a blue background, between which are located equally-pointed blue crosses.

For the history of Shakhrisabz, new facts obtained from the study of architectural monuments are interesting. To the north of the Darut-tilavat complex, the remains of two crypts of the 14th century mausoleums were uncovered. Once they belonged to the cemetery where the father and relatives of Amir Temur were buried. They are characterised by building material, angular conical vaults, herringbone masonry and balkhi-type vaults.

Excavations over Temur's crypt in the Dorus-siadat complex revealed the remains of a gurkhana, where, among the numerous glazed tiles, an unusual disc with a diameter of 41 cm was found with an image of a relief plant shoot on a blue background, from which looms a scaly yellow dragon with gilding. The shoots are made with green, white, red and gold paints. This unusual graceful disc apparently adorned one of the walls of the ceremonial gurkhana or burial chamber. It competed with the colourful coat of arms (lion in the sunbeams) of Amir Temur in his Aksaray palace. Together with the disc, a square majolica tile was found, on which, in an almond-shaped cartouche, the Chinese hieroglyph “yes” is depicted, meaning “large”, “great.”

With the arrival of the Mongols in Central Asia, the image of a dragon in works of art and architectural decoration has become common. Suffice it to recall the arches of the Anau mosque, or the medallion of a warrior of the 13th–14th centuries from Tashkent, on the front side of which there is a hunting scene, and on the back – an image of a dragon. The dragon motif in China was the emblem of the imperial power and through the Mongol environment was transferred to the west not only to Central Asia, but also to the Golden Horde, where the Turkic-Mongol tribes worshiped the dragon as a deity of heaven and fire.

Speaking about the era of Amir Temur, one should mention the rich memorial structures of the 14th–15th centuries in the rural district (mauz) of Shakhrisabz. On these lands, according to Hafiz-i Abru, on a relatively small territory (3x3 farsakhs), representatives of the Barlas nobility built magnificent tombs for themselves, not inferior in their architectural merits to the monuments of Shakhrisabz, Samarkand and Herat. Such burials include the mausoleum of Amir Temur's commander Amir



Muhammad bin Amir Ayyuk (died in 1419), 16 km from Shakhrisabz at the Yakkabag crossroads. Another rich unnamed mausoleum of the same time is located in the village of Katta Tol of the Qamashi region.

The memorial complex 17 km north-west of Shakhrisabz, in the village of Saparchi, through which the ancient trade route from Shakhrisabz and Kitab to Chirakchi and further to Karshi passed, has been only partly preserved. Of the five mausoleums, two have survived. The first mausoleum is built in the form of an octagon. Remnants of panels made of majolica tiles have come down to us in the preserved foundation of the gurkhana or burial chamber walls, and the floor is lined with fragments of glazed slabs. Under the floor there was a crypt (3x3.20 m) with a balkhi-type ceiling. From the south, a vaulted passage with a height and width of 90 cm and a length of 5.9 m led to the crypt. The rich architectural decoration of the octagon in the form of luster and majolica slabs with an inherent colour scheme is characteristic of the monuments of the late 13th–14th centuries.

To the south of the octahedron there is a second mausoleum, consisting of a ziaratkhana or memorial prayer hall (11x12 m) and a gurkhana or burial chamber (7–6.75 m) with a crypt of 3x3 m and a height of 1.40 m. The roof structure uses a “balkhi” vault, lined with burnt bricks. Partially mosaic panels have survived on the floors of both rooms, and ornamental stripes of majolica tiles were located at the base of the walls. The outer façade of the gurkhana or burial chamber walls also retained the majolica cladding extending from the base of the walls. The set of square majolica tiles, including those with carved ornaments, is very rich and original. Foundations of three more mausoleums have been preserved nearby. Apparently, the barlas in their places of residence created rich ancestral memorial complexes – kabrstans, erecting capital architectural buildings that are not inferior to the city memorials of Shakhrisabz and Samarkand.

Valuable information for the topography and socio-economic history of 14th–15th century Shakhrisabz was found in a handicraft quarter, opened in a trench during the construction of a city department store, 350 m west of Dorustilavat. Two pottery kilns were cleared, in one of which architectural glazed tiles with white and blue glaze were fired. An accumulation of clay blanks for square and rectangular tiles was found. In the second kiln, glazed ceramic dishes were fired on supports of different sizes. A workshop for the manufacture of ceramic animal figurines in the layers of the 17th–18th centuries is fixed to the northern part of the pit. In the same area, a glass-blowing workshop of the 5th–8th centuries was opened.

Thus, as a result of archaeological research in Shakhrisabz, completely new data relating to the history and topography of the city were obtained. Also interesting are new data on the numismatics of South Sogd, which allow a new look at the history of its monetary circulation. After all, the name “Kesh” in written sources refers both to the region (Nautaka-Kesh), and to various and different settlements, identified with the territory of modern Kitab and Shakhrisabz.



Apparently, the reports of the Arab-Persian sources of the 9th–10th centuries, characterising Kesh, relate only to Shakhrisabz, but not to Kitab, where there are no traces of its habitation either in the 9th–10th centuries or in the subsequent time, while the layers of the 9th–10th centuries and 11th–12th centuries recorded over the entire area of Shakhrisabz both within the city walls and outside them. On this territory, according to written sources, all the structural units of the mediaeval city could fit well: kuhendiz, inner madina, outer madina, inner and outer rabad. There is no doubt that the capital Kesh already from the 6th–8th centuries was located on the site of Shakhrisabz and developed here in the following centuries.

In 1220, the Mongol army led by Genghis Khan conquered Maverannahr, which was allocated to the inheritance of Genghis Khan's son Chagatai (1227–1242). The Mongol tribes settled here, for which the rights to this territory were assigned. The Barlas clan settled in Eastern Kashkadarya. Gradually, they moved to settled life, choosing for themselves the city of Kesh (Shakhrisabz), which became their fiefdom. It was here in 1360 that Amir Temur's father Taragay was buried next to his grandfather and relatives, and in 1370 Shams ad-din Kulal, the spiritual mentor of Taragay and Amir Temur, was buried. Even later, the sons of Amir Temur, Jahangir and Omarsheikh, were buried here.

History of Shakhrisabz from the beginning of the 13th century before the reign of Amir Temur was almost not covered in written sources, but in parallel with the ancient name "Kesh", a new name for the city began to be used – Shakhrisabz (Green City). It was recorded for the first time on the silver dirhams of Buyan Kuli Khan in 1351. His coins also bear the name Kesh.

Under Amir Temur, the Mongolian Kesh-Shakhrisabz finally took shape in an urban organism. Fortress walls, the Aksaray palace were erected, the architectural ensembles Dorustilavat and Dorusiadat, and a number of civil structures that have survived to this day were laid. Some of the monuments, laid down under Amir Temur, were completed and underwent rebuilding and repairs under his grandson Ulugbek.

At the end of the 15th century the invasion of the Shaybanids into Maverannahr began. Shakhrisabz in 1497–1500 was the main support for the Temurids in their struggle against the Shaybanids.

Shakhrisabz loses the status of a capital city since the moment of its subordination to Abdullah Khan (1574), under him the architectural complex Dorusaodat and the famous Aksaray palace were destroyed.

In the 17th century Ashtarkhanids come to power in the Bukhara Khanate. In Shakhrisabz at this time the tribes of Kenegas and Jabut rule, which in every possible way ignore the supreme power of Bukhara. At this time, a kind of defensive wall "Chim" was erected to protect the Kitab-Shakhrisabz oasis.

The general social, political and economic crisis that gripped the entire Central Asia at the beginning of the 18th century is associated with the reduction of the city's territory. The constant enmity of the Keneges with the Mangyts led to the fact that in the 1840s



Shakhrisabz was greatly deserted and only after the death of the founder of the Mangyt clan, Muhammad Rakhim, in 1759 the life of the city began to gradually recover.

Under Emir Nazarbek, a new period of independent existence of the Shakhrisabz bekdomb was laid. At this time, the aforementioned new southern wall was being erected, for by reducing the area of the deserted city it was possible to quickly restore normal city life. By the 1760s in the northern part of the hisar, the Urda (Ark) is being built, including the ruins of the Aksaray palace, which had two gates, and the city walls are being renovated. The city continues to live. To the south of the Urda was Registan Square, a place of festive spectacles and public executions.

In the southern part of the city, new Guzars are formed and handicraft production is located. Until the beginning of the 20th century, Shakhrisabz remains a provincial city of the Bukhara Khanate. Today Shakhrisabz, one of the ancient and most beautiful cities of independent Uzbekistan, celebrated its 2700th anniversary, preserving its traditional historical appearance, became a city of international tourism, glorifying the deeds of the Great Amir Temur.

Central and Western Sogd have been associated with Nesfef and Kesh since ancient times, as can be seen in the objects of material culture, architecture and coins. The most complete descriptions of the trade routes connecting these areas date back to the mediaeval era in the works of oriental historians and geographers of the 9th–12th centuries.

From Bukhara, the main route of the caravan route went along the Big Bukhara road. The journey lasted 4–5 days. Of these, the caravans travelled from Bukhara to Tavavis in one day. Then to Miancal is also one day's journey. From it to Maimurg there was a big day's march (sometimes stretching for two days). And after that the caravans entered Nesfef [12]. From here the path went to Chaganian and Balkh. Two main routes led from Samarkand to Nesfef and Kesh in the mediaeval era.

The first path, a long but calm one, led from Samarkand to the south-west through Juma, then along the green foothills to the low, easily overcome the Jam pass to the Karshi steppe. This path merged with the international Bukhara-Balkh highway and through stationary stops, the landmarks of which were the Iskander wells, Charkazy Uzunkuduk, the town of Chandarak mentioned in written sources and then led past the gardens to Nakhshab-Nesfef.

From Nesfef, caravans went east to the second capital of the Kesh region. According to some data, the journey took two days, but Istakhri reports that the journey from Nesfef to Kesh takes 3 days [8]. The path led along the lowered left bank of the Kashkadarya, covered with gardens and arable lands with large villages and cities, the ruins of which are known today as the fortifications of Kamaytepe, Altyntepe, Kishmishtepe [11, p. 24]. Probably not by chance, a geographer of the end of the 10th century, Ibn Haukal, reports that there are many villages near Nesfef, and two of them with cathedral mosques [1]. One of the sections of this path allowed to turn east along the steppe to Kesh, not reaching Nesfef.



The second route from Samarkand to South Sogd was shorter. It connected it with Kesh through the Zarafshan Mountains, but it did not function permanently, since it was necessary to overcome a more difficult mountain pass (near the modern Takhtakaracha pass). This path was covered in 2 days, and the route, judging by the distance, was quite tense. The intermediate point was called Dirzdeh, “village in the gorge” or dargoh, “border”, “gorge”. Ibn Rust mentions Dirzdeh among the points to which from Samarkand it was 1 day’s journey and to Kesh 1 day’s journey [6]. V. V. Bartoldi and M. E. Masson, who studied this route, place a point to the south of the pass in the Oynalitepe area, 6 km from Kitab. Having considered this issue in the last decade, Sh. S. Kamariddinov notes that by his time a caravanserai was found north of the pass, but connects it with a rabad, erected in the middle of the 10th century by Sheikh al-Jahzoni as-Samarkandi, and also considers it possible to locate the village of Dirzdah south of the Takhtakaracha pass within the Kashkadiri region, approximately 12 km north of Kesha-Kitab in the area with Kainar [9].

As a result of excavations carried out in the Samarkand region in the 1980s, the remains of a destroyed caravanserai were uncovered. It was 5 farsahs from Samarkand, the way to Kesh was 4 farsakhs. This location was identified by the researchers as Dirzgeha.

Dirzgeha served as a caravanserai and a defensive fortress on the border of Samarkand and South Sogd.

In Arab and Persian sources, Nesef is described as an important point on the way to Bukhara and Balkh. A river flowed inside Nesef, there was a palace, a cathedral mosque and also numerous bazaars. Paths from four gates led to the centre of Nesef: Samarkand gate, Bukhara gate, Gubdin gate and Kesh gate.

Geographer Ibn Haukal described Nesef in the following lines: “Nesef is on the great Bukhara and Balkh roads on the plain. The mountains are about two passages from it from the side of Kesh. Between the city and Jeyhun (Amu Darya) there is a desert, there are no mountains in it. There is one river in it, flowing in the middle of the city, and its water comes from Kesh. On the bank of the river, together, called the “head of the vault” – the palace of the ruler and in front – the prison. Cathedral mosque near the Gubdin gate, and the place of festive prayer near the Bukhara gate. Bazaars are in the rabad, between the ruler’s house and the cathedral mosque” [1].

Al-Maqdisi mentions that ancient Nesef was also called “dear Nakhshab”. He also notes that the citadel of Nesef is located on ruins, and part of the rabad is inhabited by numerous houses. Based on the words of Al-Maqdisi, Nesef can be defined as a big city. In the era of the Karakhanids, Nesef grows and turns into one of the main centres of the entire region.

Kepekhan in the 14th century raised a palace (in Mongolian karshi), as a result of which a city appeared around it. The city of Karshi is the administrative centre of the Kashkadarya region. A large number of cultural heritage monuments are located on this territory.



Mahmud ibn Wali described Karshi: “Nahsheb is from the cities of Maverannahr, formerly called Nesef. The new name is Karshi from Mongolian – “palace” built by Kepekhan. It is noted that the city with a good climate, small, but built systematically and spacious, with gardens and arable land, water from the rivers flowing from the Kesh side. The yields are high. Under Sheibanihan, it was abundant and competed with the major cities of the East [15, p. 79–80].

During the reign of Amir Temur and the Temurids, Shakhrisabz reaches its heyday. As a result, construction work in this era, Shakhrisabz turns into one of the most beautiful cities in the East.

A system of fortifications is being formed on the territory of the city. Monumental complexes of a secular and cult nature are being erected. One should note the palace of Amir Temur Aksaray, which shone in beauty in the whole East. The palace has been noted by diplomats and travellers from different countries. Rui González de Clavijo, who was a Spanish citizen, noted that the palace was decorated with gold, azure and other different colours [5].

At the same time, the capital cities were surrounded by numerous villages and towns. When it comes to Nesef, two locations should be noted – Kasbah and Bazda. Both were on the way to Bukhara.

Kasbi (Kasbah) was located not far from Nesef. The remains of the settlement were studied in the territory of the modern Kasbi, south-west of Karshi. The citadel had a pentahedral shape and was located in the centre of the shahristan, and traces of a rabad were also found.

Some travellers believed that Kasbi was larger than Nesef. According to the results of excavations, archaeologists came to the conclusion that the area of the city reached about 200 hectares. Judging by the reports of Lunin, Kasbi had antique layers, in the early Middle Ages it was a fortress, which grew in the 9th–12th centuries to a city with a cathedral mosque [11, p. 23].

The Kasbi was on the way from Bukhara to Balkh and was a major trade point. The Kasbi mainly supplied to the markets such goods as fast camels, black and green astrakhan skins, slaves [15 p. 79–87].

To the west of Nesef was the settlement of Bazda (Fazli's Kitchen). Bazda was one of the largest trade points on the Bukhara-Balkh route. Many oriental geographers and travellers wrote that Bazda was a cathedral mosque, one of the important elements of the city. Bazda had a huge kuhendiz, a rectangular shahristan, and a rabad that did not have a defensive wall.



The base had an area of about 100 hectares. Archaeological excavations have shown that the lower layers of the city have features of Hellenism. In the 7th–12th centuries AD Bazda reached its peak. During this era, the city served as a trade centre and a defensive fortress on the border of the oasis [11 p. 27–28].

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