

THE ROLE OF THE CITY OF KUVA IN THE URBAN CIVILIZATION OF THE FERGANA VALLEY

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Abstract

This article analyzes the archaeological study of the city of Kuva in three distinct stages. It covers the initial observations beginning in 1916, the extensive archaeological expeditions of the 1950s–1990s, and the systematic scientific investigations conducted from the 1990s to the present. Special attention is given to the 2022 excavations carried out in the ark area of the Kuva Shahrstan by researchers and students of Fergana State University. These excavations revealed three main construction phases, reflecting social, architectural, and cultural transformations beginning in the Qarakhanid period. The article also highlights the historical and cultural significance of Kuva within the broader context of the Fergana Valley and Central Asian civilization. It serves as an important resource for reassessing, preserving, and promoting the archaeological heritage of Kuva.

Keywords: Kuva, Fergana Valley, archaeology, urbanism, Qarakhanid period, ark, shahrstan, defensive wall, Buddhist temple, archaeological research, cultural layer, Central Asia, civilizational heritage.

INTRODUCTION

The Fergana Valley is considered one of the historical and cultural regions that holds a unique place in the chain of world civilizations. Several groundbreaking discoveries of great importance in our history have been made in this area. For example, archaeologists have studied some of the oldest known human settlements in Asia, discovered in the Selungur Cave near the city of Haidarkon. These findings are estimated to be between 750,000 and 1 million years old [1].

Additionally, the valley is one of the earliest centers of agricultural culture to emerge and develop in Central Asia. Archaeologists have identified and studied more than 80 sites of ancient farming culture in this region, dating back to the late 2nd millennium BCE and the early 1st millennium BCE [2].

ANALYSIS OF LITERATURE AND METHODOLOGY

It should be noted that for the emergence and development of urbanization processes, certain external and internal factors – or in other words, specific urban characteristics – must be present. These indicators for the ancient cities of Central Asia have been thoroughly developed by Uzbek archaeologists such as A.A.Asqarov, T.Sh.Shirinov, E.V. Rtveladze, and M.H. Isomidinov [3].

Recently, B.Kh. Matboboev categorized archaeological sites in Uzbekistan that, based on specific features, qualify as “the earliest” and “ancient cities” into two major groups [4]. According to his classification, Dalverzin was included among the earliest cities in the Fergana Valley, while Eylaton, Mingtepa, and the ruins of Kuva were listed among the ancient ones. However, during the Soviet period, a group of “central scholars” held a controversial opinion that urban culture in the Fergana Valley appeared later compared to other regions. They denied the city status of sites such as Dalverzin and Chust, which resulted in the region’s urban history being limited to a span of just two millennia [5].

Nonetheless, one of those very “central scholars”, Yu.A. Zadneprovsky, argued that the Fergana Valley did possess an ancient urban culture with deep historical roots – a viewpoint he defended until the end of his life. He proposed five archaeological criteria for identifying early cities in the valley [6]. These criteria remain relevant to this day. According to him, a site must meet the following conditions to be considered a city: a large territory, a well-developed defense system, a distinct citadel (ark), and the presence of agricultural, artisanal, and trade centers.

It took over a quarter of a century in Fergana studies to identify and substantiate these archaeological markers. The most encouraging development in recent times is that scholars such as A. Asqarov, V. Masson, and A. Sagdullaev have recognized the ancient roots of urban culture in the valley. In particular, earlier assertions that Dalverzin emerged as a city as early as the 9th(?), 8th–7th centuries BCE are now being supported by modern academic research [7][8].

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

One of the most important economic and cultural centers not only in the Fergana Valley but also in the history of Central Asia is the ancient city ruins closely associated with the present-day city of Kuva. The local population refers to the preserved site as “Shahristan”.

The study of Kuva (referred to as “Qubo” in written sources) has long attracted the attention of archaeologists, as excavations and archaeological finds serve as the primary sources in uncovering its secrets. Although some historical sources first mention Qubo in connection with events of the 8th century as a residence of a crown prince [9], it is from the 10th century onward that Kuva is frequently referenced in written records.

The study of Kuva’s history has spanned nearly a century and can be divided into three main stages.

Stage I lasted from the early 20th century until the beginning of the 1960s. During this period, the ruins of the city were studied for the first time by representatives of the natural sciences.

That is, the Shahristan of Kuva was first mentioned by V.N. Veber in connection with the nitrate reserves of the Fergana Valley. In 1916, another geologist, A. Voznesensky, dug a test trench in Kuva and, for the first time, identified cultural layers (including bricks, pottery, ash, etc.) [10].

In 1939, during the construction of the Great Fergana Canal, V.D. Zhukov surveyed the site of Kuva, collected some materials, and determined its location [11]. Another participant in the observations during canal construction, M.E. Masson, studied the towers on the southern side of Kuva's Shahristan and ceramics dating from the 11th to 17th centuries [12].

Later, V.D. Zhukov returned to Kuva during the construction of the Southern Fergana Canal, although he did not conduct any further investigations [13]. Therefore, during this stage, no systematic archaeological excavations were carried out in Kuva; only surface material collection took place.

Stage II spans from 1951–1952 to the 1980s–1990s. During this period, large-scale and systematic archaeological excavations began to draw the attention of major expeditions to Kuva. In particular, in 1951, a team led by Yu.A. Zadneprovsky, a participant of the Pamir-Fergana Complex Archaeological Expedition, conducted archaeological work in Kuva. For the first time, the materials found at Kuva were classified into three historical periods. Zadneprovsky's work laid the foundation for more extensive research in subsequent years.

Beginning in 1956, large-scale and systematic excavations were carried out by the staff of the Institute of History and Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan under the leadership of Ya. Ghulomov. These scientific investigations were broad in scope and were conducted in various parts of the site. Each excavation had a specific goal and focused on different aspects of the city's history. For instance, H. Mukhammadov studied the defensive walls, I. Akhrorov worked on cultural layers and their chronological classification, while V.A. Bulatova focused on the citadel (ark) and other areas [14].

Unfortunately, many of these projects were left incomplete, and much of the gathered information was not preserved. Various reasons led to the loss of many findings, although some were published later [15]. One exception was V.A. Bulatova's excavation of the Buddhist temple and nearby residential structures in the second shahristan. This temple in Kuva is the only known Buddhist religious structure in the territory between China and Sogdiana. Numerous theories – both domestic and international – have been proposed regarding its origin and characteristics [16].

In summary, archaeological excavations in Kuva continued until the 1970s, but their outcomes did not fully satisfy the expectations of specialists.

Stage III began in the 1990s and continues to this day. During this period, attention to Kuva significantly increased. This was due, firstly, to the fact that Kuva is one of the major archaeological sites in the Fergana Valley. Secondly, much of the earlier material from Kuva had not been published, and many aspects of its history remained obscure to researchers.

During this phase, the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan and the Fergana Regional Museum of Local History conducted extensive excavations. Between 1994 and 1997, G.P. Ivanov, head of a department at the Regional Museum, with the support of local authorities and his own initiative, led scientific investigations at the site. The research mainly focused on the construction date of Kuva's defensive walls, the structural features of the citadel (ark), and the history of local craftsmanship. A team from the Institute of Archaeology also participated in this work.

In December 1997, in preparation for the anniversary celebration of Ahmad al-Fergani, the government of Uzbekistan decided to conduct a large-scale archaeological excavation in Kuva. A major archaeological expedition was organized by the Institute of Archaeology in cooperation with the Fergana Regional Museum, under the leadership of T.Sh. Shirinov. The excavation took place from January to October 1998.

Archaeological digs were carried out at 10 different locations within the Kuva Shahristan, resulting in the discovery of remains from three historical periods:

1. The earliest phase of the city;
2. The Antique and Early Medieval periods;
3. The Medieval period [17].

Based on the collected materials, a museum was established at the site. The results of the excavations were published in a bilingual (Uzbek and English) book, as well as in articles and reports featured in various academic journals [18].

After the anniversary celebrations, G.P.Ivanov continued archaeological excavations in Kuva [19], with support from several international academic institutions. These efforts led to the collection of new data on the historical structure and development of the city.

At the initiative of the Fergana Regional Administration, archaeological excavations were carried out in 2022 in the ark area located in the northeastern part of the Kuva Shahristan (coordinates: 72.062242, 40.525401) by professors M. Isamiddinov, M. Khasanov, A. Alokhunov, and N. Qambarov, along with students from the Faculty of History of Fergana State University.

The main goal was to identify the internal and external architectural structure of the ark, and to re-examine and systematize the layers that were partially uncovered but not documented in the previous century.

The excavation site measured 40x10 meters and was divided into three sectors (1A, 1B, 1C). Three main construction phases were identified:

1. First Phase – Qarakhanid Period: A wall with a thickness of 145 cm and its underlying floor were studied. Collapse layers measuring 60–70 cm in thickness were observed. Pottery and metalware from the Qarakhanid period were found.
2. Second Phase – Final stage of ark use: The walls of the ark were partially preserved, but new residential structures had emerged inside. In sector 1A, rooms with semi-basement structures were uncovered. This condition resembles findings from archaeological observations in Ahsiket. A kitchen, a veranda, utility rooms, and a bath (badrab) were discovered.

3. Third Phase – Construction of courtyard-type dwellings: Courtyards built with baked bricks and a system of doorways leading to the rooms were identified. In sectors 1B and 1C, courtyards with brick-paved surfaces were uncovered.

The excavations demonstrate that the Kuva ark served as a central hub of urban life for an extended period. Architectural analysis indicates that the ark was initially used as a political or administrative center, but was later replaced with residential dwellings. The findings – pottery, metal vessels, baked bricks, hearths, bath structures, and courtyards – reflect chronological socio-economic transformations in the city's history [20].

CONCLUSION

Thus, the archaeological study of Kuva has gone through three major stages and today it is considered one of the best-researched cities in the Fergana Valley. In our opinion, the historiography of archaeological research has led to the following conclusions:

~ Kuva has long been a major trade, economic, religious, and cultural center of the Fergana Valley. The presence of a mint in the city indicates that it also played an important political role.

~ The time has come to synthesize the collected archaeological materials. It is necessary to publish a dedicated monographic study.

~ Considering the historical role and significance of the city of Kuva, it is appropriate to place the issue of officially celebrating its anniversary on the agenda.

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