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THE IMPACT OF CRAFT PRODUCTION, TRADE, AND EXCHANGE RELATIONS ON URBAN DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract.
The territory of Uzbekistan has long been one of the most important cultural and economic centers of Central Asia. Studying the traditional formation, structure, location, and development principles of urban planning systems, as well as establishing their theoretical foundations, is considered one of the urgent tasks of modern scholarship. This article provides a detailed analysis of the geographical and economic factors that contributed to the emergence and development of cities in Central Asia. Special attention is given to the role of the development of economic activities during the Neolithic and Bronze Ages in the formation of the earliest settlements and urban centers.

Keywords. Handicrafts, Traditional crafts, Artisan production, Craft specialization, Trade, Commerce, Market economy,Trade networks, Exchange relations, Exchange systems.

The formation and evolutionary development of ancient urban culture in Central Asia were closely associated with the profound socio-economic transformations that occurred during the Bronze and Early Iron Ages. Beginning in the third millennium BCE, the specialization of agriculture and pastoralism, the emergence of craft production as an independent economic sector, and the expansion of interregional exchange created the economic foundation for the rise of the earliest urban centers.[1]

During the Bronze Age, historical and cultural regions such as the Oxus Civilization (Bactria–Margiana), Sogdiana, Bactria, and Khorezm witnessed significant advances in metallurgy, pottery production, textile manufacturing, and other specialized crafts. The increasing specialization of production generated surplus goods and promoted the concentration of economic resources within particular settlements. As a result, these settlements gradually developed into important centers of production and distribution.

The growth of craft production stimulated the expansion of trade and exchange networks. Initially based on local barter, these economic relations gradually evolved into long-distance trade connecting Central Asia with Iran, Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley, and the Eurasian steppes. Metals, tin, lapis lazuli, turquoise, ceramics, and various craft products were widely exchanged, strengthening the economic importance of urban centers located along major trade routes.

Settlements situated at strategic crossroads experienced rapid economic growth and gradually evolved into complex urban centers. This process influenced urban planning through the emergence of specialized functional zones, including craft workshops, storage facilities, marketplaces, administrative buildings, and religious complexes. Consequently, cities became not only political and religious centers but also major hubs of production, commerce, and regional communication.[2]

During the Early Iron Age, the widespread adoption of iron metallurgy significantly increased agricultural productivity. The use of iron tools facilitated the expansion of irrigated agriculture, the cultivation of new lands, and population growth. These developments contributed to the territorial expansion of existing cities and the emergence of new urban centers. At the same time, urban fortifications became more sophisticated, with monumental defensive walls, towers, and fortified gates reflecting the increasing complexity of urban architecture.

The development of craft production and trade also transformed the social structure of society. The economic influence of artisans, merchants, religious elites, and administrative authorities increased, leading to greater social stratification. As cities evolved into major economic, political, and cultural centers, systems of governance became more complex, creating favorable conditions for the emergence of the earliest state formations in Central Asia.[3]

In conclusion, the development of craft production together with the expansion of trade and exchange relations during the Bronze and Early Iron Ages constituted one of the principal driving forces behind urbanization in Central Asia. These processes significantly influenced urban planning, economic functions, social organization, and the scale of urban development, thereby establishing the socio-economic foundations for the formation and consolidation of earl V. M. Masson characterized the earliest cities by emphasizing the significant role of craft production and trade in their development. This interpretation, however, was challenged by V. I. Gulyaev, who argued that the importance of crafts and commerce in the emergence of the earliest cities-whether in the Ancient Near East, Mesoamerica, or Peru-has been overstated. According to Gulyaev, the relatively underdeveloped technology and economy of Neolithic and Bronze Age early class societies suggest that the dominant component of these urban centers consisted primarily of representatives of the ruling elite and state authorities, whose livelihood depended on the exploitation of the surrounding agricultural population. Consequently, the largest cities generally functioned as major administrative, political, and religious centers rather than as purely economic or commercial hubs.

In contrast, V. M. Masson, in his discussion with C. Lamberg-Karlovsky, presented a different interpretation. He argued that the "trade model," widely accepted among many Western scholars, represents a modernization and exaggeration when applied to early societies. According to Masson, the principal prerequisite for the development of urban civilizations in the Ancient Near East was the existence, by the third millennium BCE, of a balanced agricultural economy capable of producing a stable surplus under various forms of irrigated farming. This economic foundation, together with the complexity of coordinated production cycles within unified irrigation systems, facilitated population concentration, the emergence of large settlements, and the formation of distinctive early agricultural capitals.

The earliest urban communities of Bronze Age Central Asia appear to have developed at a broadly comparable socio-economic level, reflecting similar patterns of agricultural production, settlement organization, and the formation of early urban centers.

The earliest cities of Central Asia were, above all, economic centers that served as the focal points of agricultural micro-oases. Owing to their geographical location and cultural traditions, the majority of their inhabitants were primarily engaged in agricultural production. According to B. P. Ilyushechkin, cities simultaneously performed the functions of state, religious, cultural, and craft-trade centers. Craft production developed partly as a communal activity but was largely organized within state-controlled workshops to satisfy the needs of the ruling authorities, aristocracy, and military institutions. In his view, administrative and religious functions were of primary importance, whereas craft production and trade remained relatively underdeveloped.[4]

O. G. Bolshakov and V. A. Yakobson likewise regarded cities primarily as central places performing administrative and organizational functions. Although they recognized the concentration and redistribution of surplus production as an essential feature of urban centers, this criterion alone does not adequately define the nature of a city or distinguish it from non-urban settlements. As A. V. Korotayev emphasized, "every city is a center for the accumulation and redistribution of surplus product, but not every such center is a city," since monasteries, fortresses, and similar institutions also fulfilled comparable redistributive functions.

By contrast, V. M. Masson proposed a more differentiated interpretation, suggesting the existence of several functional categories of early cities, including centers of agricultural districts,

craft and trade centers, military-administrative centers, and cultural-ideological centers. This classification reflects the functional diversity of early urban settlements and highlights the complexity of urban development in ancient Central Asia.

During the Bronze Age (third–second millennia BCE), the number and size of settlements continued to increase. New agricultural oases were developed, irrigation canal systems expanded, and economic production intensified. These processes promoted demographic growth, strengthened regional economic integration, and created favorable conditions for the emergence and consolidation of increasingly complex urban centers.

Ultimately, quantitative growth resulted in qualitative transformation. Several large settlements-Altyn-depe, Gonur-1, Jarkutan, and Dashly-3-displayed internal layouts that differed markedly from those of other contemporary sites. Monumental architectural structures, including palaces, temples, craft workshops, fortified citadels, and defensive walls, became characteristic features of these emerging urban centers.[5]

The formation of early urban culture in Central Asia was the outcome of a long evolutionary process that developed directly from the earliest agricultural settlements. As G. M. Lapko has emphasized, the first cities emerged in regions that possessed the most favorable geographical and economic conditions for irrigated agriculture. This observation indicates that the agrarian economy constituted the fundamental basis of the urbanization process in Central Asia. The transformation from ordinary farming settlements to the first urban centers, spanning from the sixth millennium BCE to the beginning of the first millennium BCE, can be divided into three major stages:

Stage I (Eneolithic Period). This stage was characterized by small communal settlements composed of dispersed single-room dwellings. There is little archaeological evidence for pronounced social inequality or architectural differentiation between households, and buildings were loosely arranged without formal planning. Agricultural settlements exhibited a relatively homogeneous and egalitarian spatial organization.

Stage II (Late Eneolithic and Middle Bronze Age, third–second millennia BCE). During this stage, certain settlements experienced significant population growth accompanied by the emergence of more organized internal layouts, including streets and proto-neighborhoods. Proto-urban sites such as Kara-depe, Geoksyur, Anau I, and, to some extent, Altyn-depe and Namazga-depe differed from fully developed urban centers because they lacked monumental architecture and substantial defensive fortifications. Nevertheless, archaeological evidence, including seals and other indicators of social prestige and administrative authority, points to increasing social complexity.

Stage III (Late Bronze and Early Iron Age, beginning of the first millennium BCE). This stage marks the full emergence of early cities. Urban settlements acquired complex spatial organization, monumental public architecture, defensive fortifications, and specialized administrative, religious, economic, and craft-production districts. These developments reflect the consolidation of urban institutions and the formation of the earliest state-level societies in Central Asia. These were large, compact, and densely populated settlements characterized by complex internal organization. Their architectural layout included both monumental and ordinary buildings, residential quarters, craft workshops, fortified citadel areas enclosed by massive defensive walls, as well as administrative seals and luxury artifacts that reflected increasing social differentiation. Among the earliest urban centers of southern Central Asia are sites such as Jarkutan, Dashly-3, Togolok-1, Gonur Tepe, Altyn-depe, and Namazga-depe.

Alongside the agrarian economy, another equally significant driver of urban formation was the social environment of an increasingly stratified society. It was within this social framework that the administrative core, represented by palace complexes, and the religious core, represented by temples, emerged as the principal integrating elements of the earliest cities. The urban structure subsequently developed and expanded around these administrative and religious institutions.

Scholarly interpretations differ regarding the contribution of craft production and technological development to the process of urbanization. Some researchers, including Saiko, tend to overemphasize the role of technological innovation in the emergence of cities. However, the historical evidence suggests a more nuanced picture. Although highly specialized craft production had already developed during the formative stages of early urbanization, artisans had not yet become a distinct social class or organized corporate group.

As V. V. Andreev has rightly observed, even in settlements where craft production reached a particularly high level of concentration, artisans nevertheless constituted only a relatively small proportion of the overall agricultural population. This indicates that while specialized crafts played an important economic role, agriculture remained the dominant demographic and economic foundation of the earliest urban communities.

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