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ETHNOCULTURAL PROCESSES IN THE NUROBOD OASIS AND ITS CONNECTIONS WITH THE CIVILIZATION OF CENTRAL SOGDIANA IN ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL TIMES

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Annotation. This article examines the ethnocultural processes that developed in the Nurobod Oasis during ancient and medieval times and explores their connections with the civilization of Central Sogdiana. The study focuses on the oasis’s geographical position, agricultural and pastoral economy, settlement patterns, craft production, trade routes, religious beliefs, and cultural interaction between sedentary and nomadic communities. Nurobod is considered as a historical-cultural space connected with the Zarafshan Valley and the wider Sogdian world. The research argues that the oasis functioned as an important contact zone where local traditions interacted with the cultural, economic, and political processes of Central Sogdiana. The article uses historical, comparative, geographical, archaeological, and ethnocultural approaches. Particular attention is paid to the continuity of local traditions, the influence of interregional trade, and the transformation of cultural practices during the transition from pre-Islamic to Islamic society.

Keywords: Central Sogdiana, ethnocultural processes, Zarafshan Valley, ancient history, medieval history, sedentary culture, nomadic communities, trade routes, archaeology, cultural interaction.

Introduction. Central Asia has historically been one of the most important regions of interaction between different civilizations, ethnic groups, religions, and economic systems. Among the ancient cultural regions of Central Asia, Sogdiana occupied a particularly significant position. Its historical core was located in the valleys of the Zarafshan and Kashkadarya rivers, while its cultural influence extended far beyond these geographical boundaries. Sogdiana was characterized by urban development, irrigated agriculture, craft specialization, international trade, and close contacts with nomadic communities.

The Nurobod Oasis formed part of the wider historical and geographical environment associated with the Zarafshan Valley and Central Sogdiana. Its location between mountain and lowland zones created favorable conditions for the development of agriculture, pastoralism, craft production, and regional exchange. The oasis also served as a contact area between settled agricultural communities and mobile pastoral groups.

The study of Nurobod is important because ethnocultural processes in Central Asia did not develop only in large urban centers. Rural settlements, mountain valleys, and border zones also played an important role in the formation and transmission of cultural traditions. The interaction of different communities in such regions influenced language, customs, religious beliefs, economic practices, material culture, and social organization.

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The main purpose of this article is to analyze the ethnocultural development of the Nurobod Oasis in ancient and medieval times and to identify its historical connections with Central Sogdiana. The article also aims to demonstrate that Nurobod should be studied not as an isolated territory, but as part of a broader network of cultural and economic relations.

Analysis of literature. The history and archaeology of Sogdiana have been studied by a number of international and Central Asian scholars. Étienne de la Vaissière emphasizes that Sogdiana was an Iranian-speaking region whose historical center was located in the Zarafshan and Kashkadarya valleys. His research demonstrates that the region developed through the interaction of agriculture, urban settlements, long-distance trade, and nomadic communities.

Pavel Lurje's research on the historical geography of Sogdiana provides important information about the changing boundaries and political geography of the region. According to Lurje, the meaning of the term "Sogdiana" changed over time, and its geographical interpretation depended on political and cultural developments.

Bertille Lyonnet's studies of the Classical Period of Sogdiana draw attention to the importance of the nomadic component in the population of the region. Her research shows that Sogdian society cannot be understood exclusively through sedentary urban culture. Contacts with steppe communities and the movement of different populations were important elements in the formation of Sogdian society.

Research on Sogdian archaeology also demonstrates the importance of agricultural settlements and urban networks. Archaeological investigations of Afrasiab, Panjikent, Varakhsha, and other sites reveal the development of city-states, craft production, religious architecture, wall painting, and regional trade.

The Smithsonian Institution's project on the Sogdians describes them as an Iranian people whose homeland was located in present-day Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. It also emphasizes their role in the Silk Roads, their multilingual environment, and their ability to incorporate artistic and cultural elements from neighboring societies.

Studies of Sogdian art and religion indicate that the cultural life of the region was characterized by religious diversity and artistic interaction. Sogdian wall paintings, metalwork, religious iconography, and literary traditions reflect connections with Iranian, Indian, Turkic, and other cultural environments.

Although the general history of Sogdiana has been studied extensively, the specific ethnocultural role of the Nurobod Oasis requires further systematic research. In particular, the relationship between local settlements, mountain communities, agricultural areas, and the major centers of Central Sogdiana remain an important research problem.

Research methodology. The study is based on an interdisciplinary approach combining several research methods:

1. Historical method: used to examine the development of the Nurobod Oasis within the political and cultural history of Central Asia.
2. Historical-geographical method: applied to determine the importance of the oasis's location, natural environment, water resources, and connections with the Zarafshan Valley.
3. Archaeological method: used to interpret settlements, fortifications, ceramics, tools, architectural remains, and other material evidence.

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4. Comparative method: applied to compare cultural features of Nurobod with those of Samarqand, Panjikent, Afrasiab, and other Sogdian centers.

5. Ethnocultural method: used to analyze the interaction of settled and nomadic communities, religious practices, customs, craft traditions, and forms of social organization.

6. Systemic approach: applied to understand economic, political, social, and cultural processes as interconnected elements of one historical system.

Research discussion. The geographical position of the Nurobod Oasis played an important role in its historical development. Located in a zone connecting mountain and lowland areas, the oasis possessed conditions suitable for both agricultural and pastoral activities. Water sources supported cultivation, while mountain and foothill areas provided pastures for livestock.

This geographical diversity encouraged the development of a mixed economy. Agricultural communities cultivated grain and other crops, while pastoral groups raised livestock and moved between seasonal pastures. Such economic complementarity created opportunities for exchange and cooperation between settled and mobile populations.

The historical geography of Sogdiana shows that the Zarafshan Valley was one of the central areas of Sogdian civilization. Therefore, the Nurobod Oasis can be understood as part of the wider cultural and economic environment of Central Sogdiana rather than as a separate and isolated territory.

Agriculture was one of the foundations of Sogdian civilization. The development of irrigation systems made it possible to cultivate fertile lands and support growing populations. At the same time, pastoralism remained important, especially in mountain and steppe zones surrounding the agricultural oases.

The Nurobod Oasis probably developed through the combination of these two economic traditions. Agricultural communities depended on water management, land cultivation, and settled villages, while pastoral groups supplied livestock, wool, leather, meat, and other products. In return, they received grain, tools, textiles, and agricultural goods.

The coexistence of agriculture and pastoralism influenced not only the economy but also the social and cultural structure of the oasis. Seasonal movement, exchange, intermarriage, and shared use of natural resources contributed to the formation of a complex ethnocultural environment. The importance of nomadic-sedentary interaction is also confirmed by broader studies of Sogdian history.

Sogdiana was one of the major cultural and commercial regions of the Silk Roads. Sogdian merchants connected Central Asia with China, India, Iran, and other parts of Eurasia. The trade network included not only major cities but also smaller settlements, mountain passes, agricultural villages, and regional markets.

The Nurobod Oasis was geographically connected with the Zarafshan Valley and therefore could participate in local and regional exchange networks. Goods moving through the oasis may have included agricultural products, livestock, metal objects, ceramics, textiles, and raw materials.

Trade routes also transmitted ideas and cultural practices. Along with goods, merchants and travelers carried languages, religious beliefs, artistic styles, technologies, and social customs. The cultural influence of Sogdiana across Eurasia was largely based on this combination of mobility, trade, and cultural adaptation.

Material culture and craft production. Material culture is one of the most important sources for studying ethnocultural processes. Pottery, tools, weapons, ornaments, architectural remains, and

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household objects can provide information about the lifestyle and cultural contacts of ancient communities.

In the Nurobod Oasis, the development of pottery, metalworking, weaving, and other crafts would have been closely connected with local resources and regional exchange. Similarities between ceramic forms, decorative motifs, construction techniques, and household objects in Nurobod and Central Sogdian settlements may indicate technological and cultural interaction.

Sogdian archaeology demonstrates that material culture was not static. It changed as a result of migration, political transformation, commercial exchange, and contact with neighboring populations. Archaeological research in Sogdiana has identified cultural changes associated with the arrival and movement of different groups, especially during the late antique and early medieval periods.

The ethnocultural development of Nurobod should not be understood as the result of one-time migration or the dominance of a single ethnic group. It was more likely a long-term process involving local continuity, population movement, economic cooperation, political change, and cultural adaptation.

Settled farmers, pastoral communities, craftsmen, merchants, and military groups interacted with one another in different historical periods. These interactions influenced forms of dress, food, housing, marriage traditions, burial practices, religious beliefs, and patterns of social organization.

The history of Sogdiana shows that the region was culturally diverse and multilingual. Sogdian society interacted with Iranian, Turkic, Indian, Chinese, and other cultural traditions. The emergence of hybrid cultural forms was especially visible during the early medieval period, when Sogdian and Turkic elites developed close political and social relations.

Religious life was an important part of ethnocultural development in the Nurobod Oasis. In ancient Sogdiana, religious practices included local forms of Zoroastrianism, worship of natural forces, ancestor veneration, and other traditional beliefs. Later, Buddhism, Manichaeism, Christianity, and Islam also influenced different parts of Central Asia.

Sogdian religion was characterized by diversity and interaction. Archaeological evidence from Sogdian cities reveals temples, cultic spaces, religious paintings, and representations of different deities. These materials show that religious culture was closely connected with artistic expression and social identity.

During the medieval period, the spread of Islam transformed the cultural and institutional life of the region. Mosques, educational institutions, Islamic burial traditions, and new forms of social organization became increasingly important. However, the adoption of Islam did not necessarily eliminate all earlier customs. Many local traditions were adapted and incorporated into the new religious and cultural environment.

Central Sogdiana was known for its urban centers, including Samarqand and Panjikent. These cities served as political, economic, religious, and cultural centers. Nevertheless, their development depended on the surrounding rural areas, where agricultural production, livestock raising, and craft activities took place.

The Nurobod Oasis should therefore be viewed as part of the rural and foothill environment that supported the broader Sogdian urban system. Rural communities supplied food and raw materials, while urban centers provided markets, administrative institutions, specialized crafts, and cultural influence.

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The relationship between city and countryside was reciprocal. Urban culture influenced rural settlements through administrative systems, religious institutions, trade, and craft technologies. At the same time, rural and mountain communities preserved local traditions and contributed to the cultural diversity of the wider region.

The transition from pre-Islamic to Islamic society was gradual and complex. Local elites, farmers, craftsmen, and pastoral communities adopted new cultural forms at different speeds. Some earlier practices disappeared, while others continued in modified forms. The long-term result was the formation of a layered cultural environment in which ancient Sogdian traditions, Iranian cultural elements, Turkic influences, and Islamic institutions interacted with one another.

Conclusion. The Nurobod Oasis played an important role in the ethnocultural history of Central Asia during ancient and medieval times. Its geographical position between mountain and lowland areas, its connection with the Zarafshan Valley, and its mixed agricultural and pastoral economy created favorable conditions for cultural interaction. The study shows that Nurobod should be interpreted as an active contact zone within the broader Sogdian civilization. Its ethnocultural history reflects the continuity of local traditions as well as the influence of migration, trade, religious change, and political transformation.

Further research should focus on the systematic archaeological investigation of Nurobod settlements, the mapping of ancient communication routes, the study of ceramic and architectural materials, and the comparison of local findings with the archaeological record of Samarqand, Panjikent, Afrasiab, and other Central Sogdian centers.

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