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DEFENSIVE SYSTEMS OF BRONZE AND IRON AGE RURAL SETTLEMENTS AND THEIR ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDY

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Abstract. This study focuses on the defensive systems of rural settlements dating back to the Bronze and Iron Ages, their structural components, construction features, and archaeological investigation. The study analyzes the formation and development of defensive elements such as fortification walls, ditches, towers, gates, and other defensive structures in ancient rural settlements. It also examines the possibilities of obtaining information about the lifestyle, economic activities, social structure, and attitudes toward external security of the population of that period through the location and structural characteristics of defensive constructions. Particular attention is paid to the significance of archaeological excavations, topographical observations, and modern research methods in the study of these archaeological sites. The study contributes to a comprehensive historical and archaeological investigation of the defensive systems of settlements dating to the Bronze and Iron Ages.

Keywords: Bronze Age, Iron Age, rural settlements, defensive system, defensive wall, ditch, tower, gate, fortification, archaeological research, ancient settlement, urban planning, Central Asia.

Introduction. The Bronze and Iron Ages are distinguished in human history by the intensification of social, economic, political, and cultural processes. In particular, during these periods, the formation of settlement structures and defensive systems designed to protect settlements from external threats became an important historical process. Defensive walls, ditches, towers, and gates constructed in rural settlements not only ensured the security of the population but also played an important role in the planning and social organization of settlements.

There are numerous archaeological sites dating back to the Bronze and Iron Ages in Uzbekistan and throughout Central Asia, some of which contain well-developed defensive structures. The study of these sites makes it possible to identify the architectural experience of ancient populations, construction technologies, their approaches to military security, and processes of territorial organization.

In the archaeological investigation of defensive structures, their construction materials, architectural design, dimensions, location, and functional purposes are examined. Furthermore, identifying the stages of development of defensive systems makes it possible to trace changes in the formation and development of ancient settlements.

The relevance of this topic lies in the fact that defensive systems should be regarded not only as structures designed for military purposes but also as important archaeological sources reflecting the social, economic, and political life of ancient societies. Therefore, a comprehensive study of the defensive structures of Bronze and Iron Age rural settlements provides an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the historical development of ancient settlements.

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Analysis. The geographical location and geomorphological characteristics of Uzbekistan, situated in the central part of the Central Asian region, have determined its strategic significance within broader geo-economic zones. The distribution of various natural and geographical regions that shape the diverse physical-geographical landscape of Uzbekistan differs in terms of their natural and economic characteristics, population settlement patterns, and degree of development. According to data presented in geomorphological and geographical literature, the formation of mountainous, foothill, and plain landscapes is associated with repeated geological and tectonic processes. Human settlement in historical-geographical regions did not occur simultaneously within a single historical period or chronological stage.

The geo-economic regions of the area provided various natural opportunities for human habitation. These included natural caves in mountainous areas, springs and water sources along mountain ranges, as well as depressions and basins on the plains formed by snowmelt and rainfall. The surrounding areas of these water sources supported diverse vegetation and animal life, creating favorable conditions for early human settlement and economic activity.

In the plain areas extending along the foothills of the Kopet Dag in southern Turkmenistan, excavations were conducted at the Anau archaeological site in 1905 by American geologist R. Pumpelly, with the participation of German archaeologist B. Schmidt. Sections of the defensive wall were examined using technical methods, and the archaeological materials obtained were attributed to the Eneolithic period. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the settled agricultural population of Anau conducted farming and developed their productive economy under the protection of defensive walls [1].

The Anau I–IV chronological system developed by G. Schmidt retained considerable scientific significance and served as an important theoretical framework until the 1950s. Partial excavations at the Merv archaeological site also produced important materials, although the expected results were not fully introduced into the scientific community. Archaeological excavations carried out in the settlements of Khorezm, Bukhara, Surkhandarya, and the Fergana Valley during the early historical periods yielded materials that continued to be significant for understanding social processes in subsequent historical periods.

According to B.I. Bijanov, artifacts discovered in the cultural layers of archaeological sites such as Qoraquduq and Churuk in the Shakhpakhta basin of Ustyurt, Vaush and Ijond in the northern Zarafshan region, Qolbuloq in the Akhangaran Valley of the Tashkent oasis, and Selungur, Sokh, and Chashma in the Fergana Valley belong to the Early Stone Age [2]. The geo-economic areas inhabited by primitive hunters included mountain and cave sites, springs and water sources along mountain ranges, and plains adjacent to river and spring basins. These areas formed the territorial framework of early human settlement and ethnic processes.

As historical development progressed and the population of settlements increased, migration toward neighboring territories became an important adaptive strategy. Such movements played a significant role in the expansion of settlement areas, the development of new economic zones, and the formation of interconnected cultural and territorial communities.

During the Middle Stone Age, the descendants of the populations who had settled in the above-mentioned areas continued their traditional occupations and maintained ethnic relations, benefiting from the availability of sufficient natural resources. Given the increase in the number of hunters inhabiting Early Stone Age settlements, their descendants expanded into new territories during the

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Middle Stone Age. As a result of the development of the Teshik-Tash area in Surkhandarya, Omonqoton, Qotirbuloq, Zirabuloq, and Go‘rdara in the Middle Zarafshan region, as well as Obirahmat and Khodjakent in the Tashkent oasis, they skillfully utilized available economic resources and continued ethnic processes across a wider geographical area [3].

In 1930, an archaeological expedition led by M. E. Masson conducted partial archaeological investigations at Eski Axsikent in the Fergana Valley. Based on the artifacts discovered, the site was dated to approximately the 11th millennium BCE [4]. In 1934, the Termez Archaeological Complex Expedition, led by M. E. Masson, carried out excavations at Eski Termez. In the same year, M. V. Voevodsky conducted excavations at the Zamakhshar archaeological site in the Takhta district of Tashauz Province. The site was located on a plain and had a circular layout, covering approximately seven hectares. Artifacts dating to the medieval period were recovered from the upper cultural layer of the site [5]. The settlement was surrounded on all four sides by defensive walls, while the remains of several semicircular towers were preserved along the outer wall. However, the defensive structures themselves were not subjected to systematic archaeological excavation.

In 1936–1937, Y. G‘. G‘ulomov, T. Mirg‘iyozov, and R. Nabiyev conducted excavations at Kubatog‘ near Mang‘it and obtained archaeological materials relating to the pre-Islamic religious beliefs of the local population [6]. In 1937, during archaeological fieldwork in the To‘rtko‘l district of the Republic of Karakalpakstan, A. I. Terenozhkin documented and mapped 20 archaeological sites located along the irrigation systems associated with the Kaltaminor, Tozabog‘yob, and Amirobod cultures in the right-bank area [7].

These historical and archaeological data provided the basis for the establishment of a number of archaeological expeditions and research groups in various regions of the Republic. One of the most important of these was the Khorezm Archaeological and Ethnographic Expedition, led by S. P. Tolstov, which began excavating historical monuments and settlements left by ancient populations along the right bank of the Amu Darya. Between 1937 and 1940, the Khorezm Expedition conducted extensive archaeological surveys and excavations in the Lower Amu Darya region, the area around Sariqamish, the Uzboy region, and the lower and middle reaches of the Syr Darya. As a result of these large-scale archaeological investigations, numerous ancient settlements were identified, documented, and subsequently excavated.

In examining the historical-cultural relations and ethnic processes that developed within Bronze Age societies, it is necessary to take into account their uneven patterns of development. These processes were characterized by qualitative and quantitative changes that varied across different regions and historical stages. Therefore, the development of Bronze Age settlements, economic activities, defensive structures, and cultural interactions should be assessed within the specific historical and geographical conditions of each region. :

At the end of the 1930s, the Khorezm Expedition investigated the geographical conditions of the southern part of the To‘rtko‘l district on the right bank of the Amu Darya. Near the elevation of Yonboshqala, the expedition identified the Yonbosh-4 settlement, constructed by local communities in a circular layout with wooden posts. The economic achievements of the tribal communities inhabiting Yonbosh-4, as well as the socio-economic and ethnocultural processes that developed during the Eneolithic and Bronze Age, continued throughout the 4th–3rd millennia BCE [8].

Beginning in the 1950s, archaeological groups, working in cooperation with branches of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union and local ethnographic and regional studies specialists,

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began systematic excavations at Bronze Age sites discovered through archaeological surveys of ancient settlements in various regions of the Republic. In 1945, 1946, and 1947, the Khorezm Expedition continued excavations at the Yonbosh-4 settlement. The tools, pottery, and other material remains recovered from the settlement and associated with the material culture of its tribal communities date to the 4th–3rd millennia BCE.

In the Lower Amu Darya region, the Khorezm Expedition investigated a number of settlements, including Jonbos-Ko‘kcha and Tuyamo‘yin in the Aqchadarya basin; Saksavul, Tamin, Aymara, Baldjan, and Kosmala in the eastern plains of the lower Syr Darya basin; Angqa-5 and Qavat-3 in the Aqchadarya basin; and Jonbos-30, Jonbos-32, and Jonbos-33 located between the Jonbosqala and Ko‘kcha mountain ranges. The economic and cultural activities of the tribal communities inhabiting these settlements date to the final stage of the Neolithic period [9].

From the 1950s onward, archaeological research was conducted in residential settlements in the Lower Zarafshan Valley, the Tashkent oasis, and the Fergana Valley, while from the 1960s similar investigations expanded into the Surkhan oasis. These studies yielded artifacts attributable to the Bronze Age. Material remains recovered from pit-dwelling settlements of the Burgulyuk culture around the Tuyabo‘g‘iz Reservoir in the Tashkent oasis demonstrate the existence of ethnic and cultural processes in the region during the Bronze Age.

Although the geological foundations of these historical-cultural regions were relatively unified, their geomorphological characteristics, natural resources, settlement structures, topographical locations, construction materials, population concentration, demographic growth, and settlement patterns exhibited considerable diversity. These features had already begun to develop as distinct regional characteristics before the Bronze Age.

The historical-cultural regions under consideration included Ustyurt, the Southern Aral Sea region, the Lower Zarafshan plains, the Middle and Southern Zarafshan regions, and the mountainous and lowland areas of the Tashkent oasis. During the Neolithic period, tribal communities in these historical-cultural regions lived in surface dwellings and semi-subterranean structures, laying the foundations for the subsequent development of Bronze Age societies. Stone tools continued to be used in everyday economic activities, pottery vessels were produced by hand, and domestic animal husbandry played a dominant role. These processes continued during the Eneolithic period as well.

During the Bronze Age, particularly from the second half of the 3rd millennium to the 2nd millennium BCE, the development of social, economic, ethnocultural, and ethnic relations, together with changes in settlement patterns, allows the region to be divided into two major cultural-economic areas. These included the Ustyurt and Khorezm oasis regions on the one hand, and the Zarafshan and Tashkent oasis regions on the other. The uneven development of Bronze Age societies in these areas continued under the influence of the economic achievements attained by Eneolithic populations.

In his work, S. P. Tolstov noted that excavations conducted at the Qamishli-1 and Qamishli-2 settlements, located on elevated areas adjoining the shores of water bodies formed among the sand dunes of the Kyzylkum as a result of flooding of a tributary of the Aqchadarya in the northeastern area of Mount Sultan Uvays, yielded various hand-made decorated pottery specimens and stone tools. Based on their technological characteristics, these materials were attributed to the Eneolithic period [10].

M. A. Itina, in connection with excavations conducted at the Qushqala, Sultan Sanjar, and Qarriqizil settlements located near water bodies in the Tuyamo‘yin area in the southern part of the

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oasis, determined that the archaeological materials recovered from these sites belonged to the Bronze Age [11]. Based on archaeological surveys conducted in the Shakhpahta basin of the Ustyurt Plateau, Ye. B. Bijanov registered the Qoraquduq and Churuk-quduq sites and concluded that the descendants of Early Stone Age hunters continued ethnic and economic processes during the Eneolithic and Bronze Age, adapting their activities to the geographical characteristics and natural resources of the region [12].

Under the direction of Ya. G‘. G‘ulomov, archaeological investigations were conducted around the Small and Large Tuzkon lakes in the Lower Zarafshan Valley. Materials recovered from the cultural layers of the Darbozaqir-1 and Darbozaqir-2 settlements were identified as belonging to the Neolithic period [13]. These characteristics demonstrate that the historical processes of the Eneolithic period differed qualitatively and quantitatively from those of earlier periods. Such differences were reflected particularly clearly in population distribution, the topographical organization of settlements, and the development of construction knowledge and techniques. These features are also evident in the spatial mapping of settlements and are confirmed by the results of extensive archaeological investigations carried out by various archaeological, ethnographic, and research groups at settlements possessing the characteristics of villages in different historical-cultural regions.

The second major region includes the Fergana Valley and the Surkhan oasis, where fundamental changes occurred in virtually all spheres of Bronze Age society. One of the distinctive characteristics of these historical-geographical regions was the emergence and development of early urbanization processes. A second characteristic was the enclosure of settlements with defensive walls constructed on the basis of accumulated knowledge and experience in mud-brick and earthen construction. Third, pottery vessels and household wares were produced both by hand and on the potter’s wheel. Fourth, agricultural and household implements, as well as weapons of military significance, were manufactured from cast bronze.

In 1950–1951, M. E. Voronesh conducted archaeological excavations at the Chust settlement in the Namangan region of the Central Fergana Valley. As a result, its topographical location and approximate area of four hectares were established. The settlement was surrounded on all four sides by defensive walls, the remains of which consisted of pakhsa and mud-brick structures. The site was subsequently attributed to the Bronze Age [14]. V. I. Sprishevsky also carried out extensive excavations at the Chust settlement, during which new archaeological materials relating to the material culture of its inhabitants were discovered and studied [15].

Under the direction of Ya. G‘. G‘ulomov, archaeological researchers from the Archaeology Group of the Institute of History and Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan conducted archaeological surveys in the western part of the Bukhara oasis, in the vicinity of Varakhsha. During these investigations, they discovered stone tools dating to the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods, which created opportunities for further archaeological excavations at the identified sites [16]. In 1956, B. A. Litvinsky conducted excavations at settlements located in the Vakhsh Valley and the Isfara region of the Republic of Tajikistan. The materials recovered during these excavations were attributed to the Neolithic period [17].

An archaeological group led by Ye. Ye. Kuzmina conducted research in the Lower Zarafshan Valley. Based on the types of economic activities practiced by the population inhabiting the settlement near Lake Zamonbobo, particularly their effective utilization of the organic resources, flora, and fauna

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of the lake and its surrounding shores, the researchers concluded that the settlement dates to the 3rd–2nd millennia BCE [18].

Conclusion. The study of defensive systems of Bronze and Iron Age rural settlements is of considerable scientific importance for determining the characteristics of the development of ancient societies. Archaeological evidence demonstrates that structures such as defensive walls, ditches, towers, and gates occupied an important place in the organization and planning of ancient settlements.

Changes in the form and construction technologies of defensive systems were directly related to the architectural knowledge of ancient populations and their growing need to address external security threats. At the same time, defensive structures provide important information about the internal planning of settlements, patterns of population distribution, and the organization of economic activities.

The gradual improvement of defensive architecture during the transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age makes it possible to trace processes associated with the increasing complexity of social and political relations in ancient societies. From this perspective, defensive structures should not be studied merely as individual archaeological objects; rather, they should be examined in connection with the overall spatial organization, historical development, and socio-economic characteristics of the settlements in which they were constructed.

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