

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Coverage of The History of The City of Turtkul In Historiography

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## Abstract

The article is devoted to a historiographical analysis of the study of the history of the city of Turtkul — the first administrative center of Karakalpakstan and an important city of the Khorezm oasis. The author emphasizes the significance of cities as centers of socio-economic, political, and cultural life, and also notes the growing interest in their history in connection with modern processes of urbanization.

Special attention is paid to the role of Turtkul as a key center of transformations in the region in the modern and contemporary period. The work analyzes the main stages in the study of the city's history: Eastern written sources (works of medieval and early modern authors), the writings of Russian travelers and military researchers during the period of colonization, and studies of the Soviet period based on statistical and scholarly materials.

The author concludes that, despite the extensive historiography, the history of Turtkul, especially during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, remains insufficiently studied and requires further comprehensive research taking into account new sources and methodological approaches.

## KEY WORDS

Turtkul, Karakalpakstan, Khorezm oasis, historiography, urbanization, Khiva Khanate, Petro-Aleksandrovsk, Eastern sources, Russian researchers, colonial period, Soviet period, demography.

## INTRODUCTION

The cities of Central Asia, their past and present, constitute an inseparable part of our glorious history and, naturally, are an eternal theme and object of research, since from ancient times they have been, are, and continue to remain centers of the socio-economic, political, and cultural life of society, a cradle of human civilization. The land of modern Karakalpakstan has from ancient times been famous as the land of five cities ("Bes qala"): Khojeyli, Chimbay, Kipchak, Mangit, and Kungrad. These cities set the tone in everything, and from them the achievements of human civilization spread throughout the Khorezm oasis. Among these cities, in the modern and contemporary period, Turtkul became the focus of a number

of important socio-economic transformations, socio-political and historical events that were of decisive significance for the peoples of the Khorezm oasis and their interrelations.

One of the reasons for the ever-growing attention to the history of cities is connected with the increasing interest in modern cities and in the socio-economic, socio-political, and spiritual processes taking place in them. Precisely in connection with their rapid development, new complex problems of an ecological, economic, ethical, and psychological nature arise, the successful resolution of which to a certain extent depends on a clear and comprehensive scholarly understanding of their historical past, present, and

partly the prospects for future development. Today, the problem of modern urbanization stimulates the heightened interest of researchers in the history of cities.

The role of cities in the socio-economic, spiritual-cultural, and political development of the state, and their influence on civilization, has long been known, and this in turn has influenced the emergence of a new sphere of research in national historiography. The significance of Turtkul — the first capital of the Republic of Karakalpakstan — is enormous; its role and place in the historical, social, and cultural development of the Khorezm oasis are enduring.

Today, when we strive to build a renewed society in a renewing state, the study of the cities of Karakalpakstan, especially its first capital — the city of Turtkul — will undoubtedly serve the benefit of the profound reforms of our country today.

The city as a phenomenon in the history of human society had important and determining significance. In world history, cities were formed as centers of the organization of statehood, the concentration of the entire productive process, and the satisfaction of the needs of society. Referring to the history of Eastern state formations, we can also assert that agrarian civilization initiated the formation of cities as centers of intersection of the interests of various strata of society. Cities, as centers of crafts, culture, and administrative governing bodies, functioned primarily due to and for the satisfaction of the needs of the rural population. Gradually, cities became concentrations of population due to the development of industry and production.

The modern territory of Karakalpakstan is rich in a distinctive urban civilization. The Karakalpak people have an ancient and rich history. They are known throughout the world for their national culture, distinctive art, classical literature, spiritual values, customs, and traditions. For example, in 1993, the public of the Republic of Uzbekistan widely celebrated the 120th anniversary of the glorious city of Turtkul.

Turtkul is one of the large urban formations of Karakalpakstan, its first capital. During the conquest of the Khiva Khanate, the Russians built a fortress near the city of Turtkul, which they named Petro-Aleksandrovsk. In 1925, the city regained its historical name, Turtkul, and until the move to the new capital in 1939, it was considered the administrative, political-economic, and cultural center of the Karakalpak ASSR.

In historiography, there are a number of generalizing studies

on the history of the cities of the Southern Aral Sea region, and there are also a number of monographs in which, on the basis of extensive factual material, the history of cities and the formation of administrative and trade centers in Karakalpakstan are revealed.

As O. A. Sukhareva notes, "The development of cities and urban life is one of the important aspects of the history of society, its productive forces and production relations, its material and spiritual culture. Only in the interrelation of urban and rural economy, complementing each other in providing society with the necessary means of existence, are the forces created that move it forward. Therefore, the problem of the history of cities, their emergence and development, and their role in different epochs, is one of the most urgent in historical science."

The issue of studying the history of the city of Turtkul remains very acute to this day; it needs new scientific development and interpretation, and first of all, the later periods, the Soviet and post-Soviet times, require research. Turtkul has always remained one of the large populated cities of Karakalpakstan. It played an important role in the development of agricultural production, in trade and commodity production, and, of course, in the development of the country's culture.

Today, as in other sciences, new facts of history are being accumulated and discovered. At the same time, theory is being improved with account taken of the development of other branches of knowledge, as well as methods of processing and analyzing sources. Many facts, events, and phenomena of our history, with the discovery of new sources, the expansion of our outlook, and the improvement of theoretical knowledge, are assessed differently today than they were twenty or thirty years ago.

The city, like any other socio-territorial community of people, undergoes certain economic, social, and demographic changes.

The historiographical legacy in this area of the problem amounts to hundreds of publications.

All the literature devoted to the history of the city of Turtkul can conditionally be divided into two large groups. These are works mainly covering the history of Khorezm and Karakalpakstan, where there is fragmentary information about the foundation of the city and the socio-economic and cultural development of this region, and research works devoted directly to the city.

There is a large number of Eastern works that, in one way or another, touch upon the history of Khorezm from ancient times to the first half of the 19th century. In *Shajara-i Turk* (Genealogy of the Turks) by the great statesman and historian Abulghazi Khan, one can find much information about the cities of Khorezm, the occupations of the population, in particular, the cities of Kyat, Shurakhan, Gurganj, and others. In his works, these cities are vividly described, and much information for reflection is contained.

Particular interest is aroused by the work of Khudayberdy ibn Koshmukhamed, *Dil-i-garaib* (1830s), which contains rich information about changes in the course of the Amu Darya, about the cities and villages of Khorezm, and about their landmarks. The Khivan court historians Munis and Agahi, in their famous work *Firdaus-al-iqbal* (Paradise of Happiness), set forth in chronological sequence the history of Khorezm from ancient times to the 1840s and describe the location of the ancient cities of the region. These written sources were translated and introduced into scientific circulation through the joint efforts of historians and geographers of Uzbekistan, which allows us, without dwelling on each of the works of Eastern scholars, to make use of the achievements of national historians.

In addition, there is another group of works left by foreign travelers, especially from the Russian Empire, and prisoners of war, who, being willingly or unwillingly on the territory of the Khiva Khanate, managed to collect and partially publish valuable information about the local population, its economic occupations, way of life, features of everyday life, and to compile topographic and geographical schemes of the location of the cities of the Khorezm oasis. These most important accounts of travelers, geographers, and scholars of the 16th to the first half of the 19th centuries were also published in the form of documentary collections, the materials of which served as the basis for writing this work.

The conquest of the Khiva Khanate in 1873 served as the basis for an in-depth study of the political, socio-economic, and cultural life of Khorezm as a whole, and of the cities of the oasis in particular. Major works containing valuable information about the campaigns of the Russian army in Khiva, the conquered cities, the construction of new fortified garrisons, the topographic condition of the lands, and so on, belonged to the pens of the pioneers of the khanate — Russian researchers and military specialists A. Butakov, G. Gelmersen, V. Grigoryev, Yu. Gagemeister, M. Galkin, Girshfeld,

Danilevsky, N. Zalesov, M. Ivannin, S. Zhukovsky, G. Kilevein, V. Kaulbars, S. Kondranyuv, P. Kostenko, Kun, V. Lobachevsky, F. Lobysyevich, N. Sobolev, M. Terentyev, and O. Shkapsky.

In the historiography of Karakalpakstan, there is a series of materials by researchers of the period of Tsarist colonialism concerning the study of the history of the cities of the Southern Aral Sea region. They reflect the trade and economic relations of the cities and contain information about the administrative structure, the population, their economy, and trade.

In this regard, the work of the Russian researcher and orientalist A. Kun is of great interest. His works reflect the issues of the emergence of a number of cities of the Southern Aral Sea region, including Chimbay, Turtkul, Khojeyli, Sheikh-Abbaz, and Nukus. He reports on the trade of the cities, the population, mosques, madrasahs, and others.

Interesting information on the history of the cities of the Southern Aral Sea region during the colonial period is contained in the work of the Russian artist N. Karazin, who made a journey from the mouth of the Amu Darya to the city of Petro-Aleksandrovsk (Turtkul). He visited many cities of the Southern Aral Sea region, and the result of the trip was his travel essays *To the Lower Reaches of the Amu*.

The enormous contribution of scholars of the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries has already received its assessment in the works of S. Kamalov, R. Kosbergenov, and A. Koshchanov.

With the establishment of Soviet power in Karakalpakstan and in Khorezm, a new stage began in the study of the history, geography, demography, culture, and economy of the Khorezm oasis. In this respect, we find extremely valuable information in the materials of the All-Russian censuses of 1920. This census was carried out only in the summer of 1921 because of the continuing military actions, in connection with the national-state delimitation of Central Asia. The book by P. P. Ivanov, devoted to the demographic problems of the population of the region, is of a reference nature.

The beginning of the collection and study of the history of Karakalpakstan was laid by the first conference on the study of the productive forces of the Karakalpak ASSR, held in 1933. The proceedings of this conference (two volumes were published) contain extremely valuable research on the national economy of the region, including fragmentary

information about the cities of the area.

The study of the history, ethnography, and archaeology of the Karakalpak people in the prewar years is most closely connected with the activity of the Khorezm Archaeological-Ethnographic Expedition of the USSR Academy of Sciences under the leadership of S. P. Tolstov. It should be noted that it was S. P. Tolstov who proposed the methodology for studying the cities of the Oghuz. Thanks to the work of the Khorezm expedition, the first scholars from the local nationalities grew up: S. K. Kamalov, R. K. Kosbergenov, U. Kh. Shalekenov, and others, who devoted their research to the history, archaeology, and ethnography of the region, at the same time covering some issues of the history of Turtkul. The third volume of the works of the Khorezm Archaeological-Ethnographic Expedition is devoted entirely to the history of the Karakalpaks, where extremely valuable information about the cities of Karakalpakstan was also published.

The first most detailed historiographical material on the history of Turtkul is the article by Ya. M. Dosumov, published in the first issue of the proceedings of the Karakalpak Comprehensive Scientific Research Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR. The author for the first time brought together scattered information about the construction of Petro-Aleksandrovsk — a European-type city in the Khorezm oasis — and identified little-known aspects of this problem.

Brief information about the city of Turtkul is contained in the two-volume *Essays on the History of the Karakalpak ASSR* — the first major study by the scholars of Karakalpakstan. Studying Russian-Karakalpak relations, S. K. Kamalov undoubtedly noted the enormous significance of the city of Turtkul in the life of the peoples of the Khorezm oasis.

The significance of the city of Petro-Aleksandrovsk in the revolutionary events of the beginning of the 20th century in Karakalpakstan is noted in the work of Zh. Ubbiniyazov; the same topic was continued by A. Toreyev in his study of the events of 1916.

A notable milestone in the historiography of Karakalpakstan was the publication of the monograph by S. K. Kamalov *The Karakalpaks in the 17th–19th Centuries*, which summarizes the most significant achievements of previous historiography and introduces into scientific circulation valuable documents of this vast period of time, including those relating to the cities of Karakalpakstan.

The achievements of scholars in collecting materials from archival sources on the history of Karakalpakstan for 1917–1970 were summarized in major fundamental works, such as the two-volume *History of the Karakalpak ASSR*, published in 1974. These materials were later supplemented with new data in the one-volume *History of the Karakalpak ASSR* (1989).

The urban culture of the cities of the Khiva Khanate is examined in the article by A. S. Sadykov.

Analyzing the above-mentioned works of national historians, it should be noted that up to the 1970s of our century, materials about the city of Turtkul itself and its new part, Petro-Aleksandrovsk, had not been brought together. This difficult task was first accomplished by S. K. Kamalov and A. Koshchanov, who prepared for the 100th anniversary of the city of Turtkul the collection *Əmiy shamshyraǵy* (*Light of the Amu*). The book presents various legends about the construction of the city, different versions of its origin and location — in a word, the reader was for the first time convinced of the glorious past of Turtkul. The 120th anniversary of the city was also marked by the publication of the book by S. K. Kamalov, A. Koshchanov, and G. Khadzhiiev *Turtkul — the First Capital of Karakalpakstan* (Nukus, 1903). Thus, only in the 1990s, through the efforts of S. K. Kamalov and A. Koshchanov, was the most realistic picture of the construction of the city recreated, along with the dramatic and at times tragic pages of its history during the periods of the colonial Tsarist and totalitarian Soviet regimes.

During the years of independence of the Republic of Uzbekistan, new, significantly supplemented and revised editions appeared, in which the results of many historical studies were summarized, including those concerning the problem of interest to us. These works contain much interesting material contributing to the correct, that is, unbiased and objective, coverage of the chosen topic.

The collection *The Late Feudal City of Central Asia* (Tashkent, Fan, 1990) is devoted to pressing problems of historical science in the field of studying the history of cities. It covers questions of the dynamics of development, administrative structure, and social stratification of the population of the late feudal city of Central Asia; the role of the clergy in urban life; the craft activities of townspeople; the culture of the city from the 16th to the mid-19th centuries; and so on. All these issues are examined on the basis of a wide range of written sources.

In 1996, A. Kozhageldiev successfully defended his

dissertation on the topic History of the City of Turtkul: 1873–1941. This work is devoted to the study of the problems, tendencies, and features of the emergence and development of the city of Turtkul. The structure of this dissertation allows the reader to gain a systematic understanding of the history of the population, territories, and also of toponymic names, where the etymological origin of the name Turtkul is explained in detail. In it, the author attempted to carry out a sufficiently detailed analysis of the history of the city of Turtkul, highlighting the geographical, socio-political, and demographic position of one of the centers of national-state formation in Karakalpakstan.

Nevertheless, in fairness, it should be noted that a complete comprehensive history of the city of Turtkul has still not been written. There are still many problems concerning the construction of the city, the emergence of industrial facilities, and cultural and бытовые structures that should be filled in. The city has not yet been studied in the aspect of urban studies problems. It is necessary to recognize the obvious fact that throughout the previous historiography, a whole series of key and fundamental problems of the history of Turtkul were covered far from sufficiently. For example, the life of the townspeople has been studied weakly; there is no unified structure of its main elements, of the composition of the city's population throughout the entire period under study, of their occupations and duties. The question of the place and role of the feudal state in the history of the city, the organization of administrative governance, and the socio-economic and political history of Turtkul in the period of the establishment of new commodity-money relations in the country remains unstudied and not concretized.

Thus, evaluating the degree of study of the topic, it can be stated that an enormous layer of historical material has been accumulated, which makes it possible to expand the range of scientific interests.

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