ISSUES OF THE GENESIS OF URBAN CULTURE IN CENTRAL ASIA: ON THE EXAMPLE OF RESEARCH BY M.KH. ISOMIDDINOV

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Abstract. *This article analyzes the historiography of the urban culture of Central Asia during the Early Iron Age and Antiquity, based on the scientific research of the renowned archaeologist M.Kh. Isomiddinov. From the perspective of the genesis of urban culture, the results of stratigraphic excavations conducted in Southern Sogdia, the Kashkadarya and Samarkand oases from the second half of the 20th century are examined, along with the chronology of ceramic complexes and stages of the urbanization process. Furthermore, the relationship between the material culture of the Early Iron Age and the Ancient period is scientifically analyzed using the examples of the Afrasiab, Erkurgan, and Koktepa monuments.*

Keywords: *urban culture, Early Iron Age, Ancient period, Sogd, Afrasiab, Koktepa, Erkurgan, stratigraphy, urbanization.*

Introduction. It is known that the territory of Uzbekistan is considered one of the ancient centers of human civilization. This land experienced continuous processes of cultural development starting from the Paleolithic era, with particularly rapid urbanization occurring during the Early Iron Age and Antiquity. The scientific study of these historical stages is closely linked to the formation and development of archaeological science in Uzbekistan.

Today, Uzbek archaeology is developing within the framework of international scientific cooperation, conducting comprehensive research jointly with French, Italian, Chinese, and other foreign expeditions. Modern methodological approaches – geoarchaeology, paleoecology, GIS technologies, and laboratory analyses – allow for a deeper interpretation of historical processes.

Thus, Uzbek archaeology serves as an important scientific basis not only for identifying examples of material culture but also for explaining the genesis of urban culture, the interaction of cultural traditions, and regional civilizational processes. Within this scientific tradition, the research of M.Kh.Isomiddinov holds a special place in the historiography of urbanization in Central Asia during the Early Iron Age and Ancient period.

The aim of this study. To analyze the scientific contribution of M.Kh.Isomiddinov to the historiography of urban culture in Central Asia during the Early Iron Age and Antiquity, focusing on his methodological approach, key findings concerning Afrasiab, Erkurgan, and Koktepa, and his influence on the understanding of urbanization processes.

Research Methods. In studying the genesis of urban culture in Central Asia during the Early Iron Age and Antiquity, this article relies on the principles of historicism, systematicity, and scientific objectivity. The research employed methods of historiographic analysis, comparative-typological comparison of archaeological materials, as well as the micro-stratigraphic and chronological analysis used by M.Kh.Isomiddinov. Additionally, the work utilized discursive analysis of the scholar's scientific works and a method of synthesizing field reports.

Analysis of Scientific Literature and Sources. The renowned Russian archaeologist A.V. Artsikhovsky highly appreciated the work of archaeologists, stating: "Nothing in history disappears without a trace. A historical event may leave no records in archives or chronicles, but it leaves a trace on the ground where it occurred, and finding and studying this trace is the task of archaeologists" [1,4]. As a result of archaeological research, material and cultural monuments of civilizations are discovered, and accurate ideas about the material culture of various historical periods are formed.

Although archaeology in Uzbekistan began to form in the late 19th – early 20th centuries, its development as a scientific system dates to the second half of the 20th century. Scholars such as Ya.G. Gulyamov, S.P. Tolstov, A.P. Okladnikov, M.E. Masson, and G.A. Pugachenkova made significant contributions to the formation of scientific schools for various periods and directions in the field of ancient history.

Thanks to the efforts of the outstanding archaeologist-academician Yahyo Gulyamov, a distinctive "Gulyamov school" of historians and archaeologists emerged. Information about the life and work of representatives of this school – namely academicians of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan A. Askarov, A. Muhammadjanov, O. Islamov, Yu.F. Buryakov, as well as Professors M. Kasymov, T. Mirsaatov, A. Abdurazzakov, M. Jurakulov, R. Suleymanov, M. Isomiddinov, B. Kochnev, B. Matbabaev, A. Sagdullaev, and T. Shirinov – serves as an inspiring example for young researchers [5,46].

In the second half of the 20th century, large-scale archaeological expeditions were organized in the republic, leading to a comprehensive study of ancient settlements, fortresses, cult sites, craft centers, and irrigation systems. In particular, stratigraphic excavations conducted in the Samarkand, Bukhara, Kashkadarya, and Surkhandarya oases clarified the gradual process of urban culture development in Central Asia.

Specifically, the study of monuments such as Afrasiab, Erkurgan, Koktepa, and Mingtepa scientifically substantiated the processes of political centralization, craft specialization, and the formation of urban planning traditions from the Early Iron Age to the Ancient period. Notably, the application of micro-stratigraphic methods, typological analysis, and radiocarbon research led to the development of a precise chronology of cultural layers.

This research is based on a qualitative historiographic analysis of M.Kh.Isomiddinov's published scientific works, including his Candidate's dissertation (1979), Doctoral dissertation (2000), monograph "The Origins of Urban Culture in Samarkand Sogd" (2002), and co-authored works. The analysis also includes a review of reports on stratigraphic excavations in Southern Sogd, the Kashkadarya and Samarkand oases conducted since the 1970s.

Biographical Context. M.Kh.Isomiddinov was born on December 26, 1946, in the village of Kochkorchi near the city of Kuva say, Fergana region. After graduating from the Fergana State Pedagogical Institute in 1968, he began his career in archaeology. From the 1970s, he worked at the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan. During his formative years, he studied ancient and early medieval ceramics of Southern Sogdia under Professor A.M. Belenitsky at the Institute of Archaeology of the USSR Academy of Sciences in Leningrad.

In 1979, he defended his Candidate's dissertation on "Ceramics of Southern Sogdia in the Ancient and Early Medieval Eras" at the Specialized Council of the Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) Branch of the Institute of Archaeology of the USSR Academy of Sciences [2].

In 2000, he defended his Doctoral dissertation on "The Genesis of Urban Culture in Samarkand Sogd (Problems of Interaction of Cultural Traditions in the Early Iron Age and Antiquity)" [3].

One of the significant results of M.Kh.Isomiddinov's scientific career was his book "The Origins of Urban Culture in Samarkand Sogd," which was awarded the title "Best Scientific Work of 2002" in Uzbekistan.

Methodological Approach.

The scholar's methodological approach is based on archaeological stratigraphy, chronological typology, and comparative-historical analysis. Particularly through the application of micro-stratigraphy methods, cultural layers were precisely identified, and each ceramic complex was studied in its specific chronological context. This provided an important scientific basis for determining the genesis of urban culture.

Key Sites and Excavation Methods. At the Erkurgan monument, identified with the city of Ksenippa mentioned in ancient written sources, M.Kh.Isomiddinov was the first to conduct archaeological excavations based on micro-stratigraphy methods. As a result of this research, a precise chronological framework was developed for the ceramic complexes of Southern Sogdia and adjacent territories.

Furthermore, within the inner wall of the ancient settlement of Erkurgan, a pottery quarter was identified for the first time, located in the eastern part of the inner city, parallel to the eastern defensive wall. More than 50 rooms were excavated in this area. Using stratigraphic methods – precise excavations conducted according to the upper building layers of the city – the main characteristics of the economic life of the pottery quarter, dated to the 7th–5th centuries BCE, were determined. The method of separately studying each micro-layer in which ceramic artifacts were found increased the scientific accuracy of the research and yielded effective results.

Survey and Inventory Work. M.Kh.Isomiddinov actively participated in the work of the Afrasiab Archaeological Expedition under the leadership of Sh. Toshkhojaev and G.V. Shishkina. He also made a significant contribution to the process of inventorying archaeological sites in Uzbekistan. Specifically, he organized a scientific expedition throughout the Namangan region, systematically recording the archaeological monuments of the region and compiling their comprehensive map. As a result of this research, many new archaeological sites were introduced into scientific circulation for the first time.

He participated in the scientific survey of archaeological sites in the zones of the planned Chartak and Zarkent reservoirs, as well as along the route of the Karshi Main Canal. In 1980–1983, he conducted large-scale excavations in the zone of the planned Chartak reservoir in Chartak district, Namangan region, studying ancient settlements including Karabagtepa, Domoloktepa, Chinormozortepa, and settlements near the village of Saray. Research was also conducted on the Kuyultepa monument, located near the city of Hakkulabad in Naryn district.

The scholar also conducted archaeological excavations at the monuments of Shullyuktepa, Kalai Zahoki Moron, Isaboytepa, and Kosontepa in the Karshi oasis, as well as Tortkultepa in Yakkabag district and Kurgancha in Guzar district.

International Cooperation. Since 1987, M.Kh.Isomiddinov began studying the history and culture of the Samarkand oasis and city. In 1987-1988, he participated in compiling a list of archaeological sites in the Samarkand region. In 1988, the Uzbek-French Joint Archaeological Expedition began work there. M.Kh.Isomiddinov was appointed head of this expedition from the

Uzbek side, and from the French side, Academician Paul Bernard, followed by Professor Franz Grenet.

In 2012–2014, together with his students, he participated in the Uzbek-Chinese Joint Expedition working at the Mingtepa monument in the Andijan region.

Results of His Research. *Chronological framework for the ceramic complexes of Southern Sogdia.* At Erkurgan, using micro-stratigraphy, M.Kh.Isomiddinov developed a precise chronological framework for the ceramic complexes of Southern Sogdia and adjacent territories. The method of separately studying each micro-layer increased scientific accuracy. The scholar's stratigraphic research was quickly recognized and included in the "Archaeology of the USSR" collection and published in 1985 in the scientific collection "The Most Ancient States of the Caucasus and Central Asia."

Identification of a pottery quarter in Erkurgan (7th–5th centuries BCE). Within the inner wall of the ancient settlement of Erkurgan, a pottery quarter was identified for the first time, located in the eastern part of the inner city, parallel to the eastern defensive wall. More than 50 rooms were excavated in this area. Using stratigraphic methods, the main characteristics of the economic life of the pottery quarter, dated to the 7th–5th centuries BCE, were determined.

New archaeological sites introduced into scientific circulation. As a result of Isomiddinov's expedition throughout the Namangan region, many new archaeological sites were introduced into scientific circulation for the first time. His excavations in the Chartak reservoir zone studied ancient settlements including Karabagtepa, Domoloktepa, Chinormozortepa, settlements near the village of Saray, and Kuyultepa near the city of Hakkulabad. In the Karshi oasis, he excavated Shullyuktepa, Kalai Zahoki Moron, Isaboytepa, Kosontepa, Tortkultepa in Yakkabag district, and Kurgancha in Guzar district.

Revision of Samarkand's age to 2750 years. Starting in 1988, within the framework of the Uzbek-French Joint Expedition (M.Kh.Isomiddinov – head from the Uzbek side), extensive archaeological research was conducted at Afrasiab. Changes in material culture and the history of urban planning were studied from the most ancient lower layers of the site to its upper layers. As a result, new artifacts were found proving that the age of the city of Samarkand is not 2500, but 2750 years. Furthermore, this expedition, with the scholar's participation, was the first to identify monolithic defensive walls made of mudbrick and dating to the 7th-5th centuries BCE [6].

Koktepa and the origins of defensive architecture. Construction systems related to defensive structures were later identified at a large archaeological site located approximately 35 km north of Samarkand, known to the local population as Koktepa, on the initiative and under the leadership of M.Kh.Isomiddinov. As a result of stratigraphic analyses, it was established that the formation of defensive architecture in Samarkand Sogd began in the late Bronze Age – early Iron Age. This is clearly confirmed by materials from the Koktepa fortress [4,39]. Archaeological finds from Koktepa, particularly the fact that the shape and size of bricks used in construction completely matched samples found in the ancient layers of Samarkand, led to scientifically significant conclusions. This situation was interpreted as evidence confirming that an urban center could have formed on the right bank of the Zarafshan River, even older than Samarkand.

Identification of Koktepa with "Basileia". As a result of comprehensive archaeological research by M.Kh.Isomiddinov in the Kashkadarya and Samarkand oases, large agricultural settlements dating to the Early Iron Age were identified, and the initial roots of urban culture in both regions were scientifically substantiated. Numerous settlements mentioned in ancient and medieval written sources were subjected to comparative analysis with existing archaeological

sites, clarifying problems related to their localization. In particular, a scientific hypothesis was put forward and substantiated that the Koktepa monument is identical to "Basileia" ("the second capital") mentioned in the works of Arrian.

International Academic Activity. The scholar presented reports at prestigious international scientific conferences held in Paris (1991), Rome (1994), St. Petersburg (1999), Moscow (2000), Kyoto (2005), Shymkent (2008), and Almaty (2010). Furthermore, in 2013 and 2015, he participated as an international expert in the First and Second Shanghai Forums of World Archaeologists, organized in the People's Republic of China. In May 2015, he delivered scientific lectures to scholars at the Institute of Archaeology of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and in May 2016, at the Central University for Nationalities in Beijing.

Publications. Approximately twenty scientific articles by M.Kh.Isomiddinov have been published in European editions. His textbooks "History of Ceramics of Central Asia" and "History of the Emergence and Development of Archaeological Science in Uzbekistan" were published, serving as important sources for specialists in the field.

Discussion. The research of M.Kh.Isomiddinov fills a critical gap in the historiography of urban culture in Central Asia, transitioning from general periodization to precise micro-stratigraphic and typological analysis. His work at Erkurgan provided the first scientifically dated ceramic sequence for Southern Sogdia, allowing for regional comparisons. The identification of a specialized pottery quarter indicates the presence of specialized craft production as early as the 7th–5th centuries BCE, a key indicator of urbanization.

The findings at Afrasiab (age 2750 years) and Koktepa (an even more ancient potential urban center) challenge previous assumptions that the urban origins of Samarkand date no earlier than the 6th century BCE. M.Kh.Isomiddinov's hypothesis identifying Koktepa with Arrian's "Basileia" opens a promising direction for future research, although it requires further verification through additional excavations and written sources.

M.Kh.Isomiddinov's methodology emphasizes high-resolution stratigraphy and direct correlation with architectural remains compared to earlier Soviet archaeology, which focused on broad cultural-historical reconstructions. This aligns with international standards in geoarchaeology and paleoecology. It is important to underscore his role in Uzbek-French, Uzbek-Italian, and Uzbek-Chinese cooperation, demonstrating how post-Soviet Central Asian archaeology integrated into global scientific networks.

Consequently, the scholar's active participation in international conferences and his publications in European journals indicate the growing recognition of Uzbek archaeology on the world stage. Moreover, his textbooks on the history of Central Asian ceramics and the history of archaeological science in Uzbekistan serve as vital educational resources for training the next generation of archaeologists.

The comprehensive inventory of archaeological sites in the Namangan region and the salvage excavations conducted ahead of major construction projects (Chartak Reservoir, Zarkent Reservoir, Karshi Main Canal) demonstrate M.Kh. Isomiddinov's commitment to cultural heritage preservation. These activities ensured that archaeological sites threatened by land development were documented and studied before being lost.

The identification of large Early Iron Age agricultural settlements in the Kashkadarya and Samarkand oases and the scientific substantiation of the initial roots of urban culture in both regions represent a fundamental contribution to understanding the origins of Central Asian urbanism. The comparative analysis of settlements mentioned in ancient and medieval written

sources with existing archaeological sites clarified long-standing problems related to their localization.

Conclusions and Suggestions.

The main conclusion is that the research of M.Kh.Isomiddinov has fundamentally advanced the understanding of the genesis of urban culture in Central Asia during the Early Iron Age and Antiquity. His methodological innovations in micro-stratigraphy and ceramic chronology have provided precise dating of key sites in Southern Sogdia, the Samarkand, and Kashkadarya oases. The identification of the pottery quarter at Erkurgan, the revision of Samarkand's age to 2750 years, and the discovery of early defensive architecture at Koktepa are major contributions.

Thus, the work of M.Kh.Isomiddinov confirms that large agricultural settlements and urban centers emerged in the Zarafshan and Kashkadarya valleys earlier than previously thought, with Koktepa potentially representing an urban predecessor to Samarkand.

Consequently, we believe that his hypothesis identifying Koktepa with Arrian's "Basileia" opens new directions for historical interpretation. His international collaborations, publications, and educational activities have firmly embedded Uzbek archaeology within global scientific discourse. We suggest that future research in this direction should continue the application of absolute dating methods and digital spatial technologies to further test the hypotheses generated by the foundational research of M.Kh. Isomiddinov.

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