BG Pulse Journal USA
ISSN:1947-2536 http://www.bgpulseusa.com/index.php/bg

ECONOMIC FACTORS INFLUENCING THE EMERGENCE OF CITIES IN CENTRAL ASIA. DEVELOPMENT OF ECONOMIC SECTORS DURING THE NEOLITHIC AND BRONZE AGES AND THE GENESIS OF CITIES

Qalandarova Maftuna Turaboyevna
First-year Master's student in history
Khorezm Branch of Asia International University
Doi: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21262204

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: Urban planning, urbanization, Neolithic, Bronze Age, territory, factors, beliefs, culture, caravan routes, settlements.

Introduction

The Eneolithic period represents a transitional stage in human history. It is the period between the end of the Stone Age and the beginning of the Metal Age and is also referred to as the Copper-Stone Age. In Central Asia, the Eneolithic period dates back to the 4th–3rd millennia BC. During this time, people began to use copper in the production of tools, although stone tools continued to play a significant role.

In the Eneolithic , Neolithic and Bronze Ages period, early forms of agriculture, animal husbandry, and handicrafts emerged. Eneolithic settlements have been discovered in various regions of Central Asia, particularly in Southern Turkmenistan, the Bukhara oasis, the Zarafshan Valley, and the Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya regions. Archaeological findings indicate that the social life, religious beliefs, and economic activities of people during this period became increasingly complex.

Methodology

The research methodology is based on historical-comparative analysis, a systemic approach, and archaeological research methods. During the research process, materials from sites in Central Asia were studied comparatively. The main sources included the results of archaeological excavations, artifacts of material culture, remains of architectural structures, as well as scientific publications and historical-archaeological data presented by leading researchers.

nditions, beliefs, culture, caravan routes, settlements.

The Neolithic period is regarded as one of the most significant turning points in the history of humankind. It was during this period that fundamental transformations occurred in the development of primitive society, as human communities gradually shifted from a subsistence economy based primarily on hunting and gathering to a productive economy founded on agriculture and animal husbandry. In historical and archaeological scholarship, this process is commonly referred to as the Neolithic Revolution. The concept was first introduced into academic literature in 1936 by the

British archaeologist V. Gordon Childe, who used the term to describe the profound socio-economic changes associated with the emergence of farming and livestock breeding.

Chronologically, the Neolithic period spans approximately from the eighth to the third millennium BCE, although its chronological boundaries varied considerably from one region to another. According to numerous scholars, the productive economy first developed in the Near East before gradually spreading to neighboring regions, including Central Asia. As the distinguished historian Peter Frankopan has argued, many of the most influential social and economic transformations in human history originated in the ancient civilizations of the East and subsequently spread to other parts of the world, profoundly influencing the development of later civilizations [1].

Archaeological evidence further demonstrates that Neolithic communities no longer relied exclusively on the direct exploitation of natural resources but increasingly engaged in the production of their own food. One of the defining characteristics of the Neolithic period was the emergence and continuous improvement of new categories of tools. During this era, stone implements were significantly enhanced through advanced techniques such as grinding, polishing, and drilling. These technological innovations resulted in the production of efficient agricultural implements, including axes, hoes, and sickles, which substantially increased agricultural productivity [2].

In addition to agricultural development, various forms of craftsmanship also flourished during the Neolithic period. Pottery production, textile weaving, and other specialized crafts experienced remarkable progress, reflecting the growing complexity of economic life. Archaeological investigations indicate that it was precisely during this period that human communities established permanent settlements, replacing temporary camps with stable village-type habitations. The emergence of sedentary life represented a decisive stage in the evolution of human society and created favorable conditions for further economic and social development.

From the perspective of societal development, the Neolithic period is also significant because of the increasing complexity of social organization. The establishment of permanent settlements, the development of the division of labor, and the expansion of productive economic activities contributed to the emergence of a new stage in the evolution of primitive communal society. These processes created the historical foundation for the rise of Bronze Age civilizations. Consequently, the Neolithic period is widely regarded as the beginning of a new phase in the economic, social, and cultural development of humankind.

The principal objective of the present study is to examine the formation of the productive economy during the Neolithic period and to assess its impact on the subsequent development of human society. Drawing upon archaeological evidence, historical research, and contemporary academic literature, this study analyzes the fundamental characteristics of the Neolithic period and evaluates its significance in the broader context of human history.

The Neolithic period occupies a unique position in world history as an era marked by profound socio-economic transformation. It is distinguished by the emergence of fundamentally new forms of economic activity. Rather than relying exclusively on hunting and gathering, which were based on the exploitation of naturally available resources, human communities began to cultivate crops and produce their own food. This transition from a subsistence economy to a productive economy represented one of the greatest milestones in the history of civilization. Consequently, numerous historians and archaeologists regard the Neolithic period as a decisive turning point in the development of human society.During the Neolithic period, several distinctive archaeological cultures emerged across Central Asia, reflecting the region's environmental diversity and economic

adaptation. In the southwestern part of Central Asia, particularly in the foothills of the Kopetdag Mountains, the Jeitun Culture developed as one of the earliest agricultural societies, with an economy primarily based on settled farming. In contrast, the lower reaches of the Amu Darya and Zarafshan rivers, together with the Kyzylkum Desert, were inhabited by communities belonging to the Kelteminar Culture, whose subsistence was largely based on hunting and fishing.

Meanwhile, in the Hisor Mountain region and its surrounding highland pastures, the distinctive Hisor Culture emerged. Archaeological evidence indicates that the communities of the Hisor Culture maintained close cultural and economic contacts with the agricultural populations of the Jeitun Culture. These interactions illustrate the coexistence of different economic systems within Neolithic Central Asia and demonstrate that agricultural, pastoral, and hunting communities were interconnected through networks of cultural exchange and mutual influence.

The diversity of these Neolithic cultures reflects the complex processes of cultural adaptation and economic specialization that characterized prehistoric Central Asia. Their development laid the essential foundations for subsequent demographic growth, technological innovation, social stratification, and, ultimately, the emergence of the first urban centers during the Bronze Age.

In the subsequent stages of the Neolithic period, several additional archaeological cultures emerged across Central Asia. The Central Fergana Culture developed in the Fergana Valley, while the Sazagan Culture flourished in the middle reaches of the Zarafshan River. At the same time, Neolithic communities became established on the Ustyurt Plateau, contributing to the cultural diversity of prehistoric Central Asia. Although the Jeitun, Kelteminar, and Hisor cultures have been investigated relatively extensively, many aspects of the remaining Neolithic communities-including their origins, chronological framework, economic organization, and ethnic identity-continue to be subjects of scholarly debate. These unresolved issues remain among the most significant challenges in the archaeology of prehistoric Central Asia.

The material heritage of the Neolithic populations of Central Asia has been the subject of extensive investigation by prominent archaeologists, including A. P. Okladnikov, Ya. G. Gulyamov, V. A. Ranov, V. M. Masson, A. V. Vinogradov, U. Islamov, V. I. Timofeyev, G. F. Korobkova, M. R. Qosimov, T. Mirsoatov, E. Bijanov, M. Jo'raqulov, and N. U. Xolmatov. Their scholarly contributions have significantly advanced our understanding of the archaeological record of the region. Moreover, recent excavations have yielded numerous new archaeological discoveries, providing valuable insights into the material culture, technological achievements, economic activities, and spiritual life of Paleolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic communities. These findings continue to refine current interpretations of prehistoric cultural development in Central Asia.

Ethnic processes that occurred within the region are clearly reflected in the material culture of Mesolithic and Neolithic societies. This perspective is supported by the research of distinguished scholars such as V. M. Masson, S. P. Tolstov, A. V. Vinogradov, U. Islamov, V. A. Ranov, and M. Jo'raqulov. In particular, V. A. Ranov regarded the Neolithic period as a crucial stage in the formation of ethnic groups [3]. He argued that the Jeitun, Kelteminar, and Hisor cultures should not be interpreted merely as archaeological cultures or collections of material remains but rather as large ethnocultural communities representing distinct stages in the ethnogenesis of the region.

According to V. M. Masson, the principal criteria for distinguishing and classifying these archaeological cultures are the characteristics of their ceramic assemblages, particularly pottery forms, manufacturing techniques, and decorative patterns. He emphasized that ceramic typology provides one of the most reliable indicators for identifying cultural affiliation and reconstructing the ethnic composition of prehistoric populations. Consequently, pottery analysis has become a

fundamental methodological approach in the archaeological classification of Neolithic societies in Central Asia.

The combined results of archaeological excavations and interdisciplinary research demonstrate that the Neolithic cultures of Central Asia were neither isolated nor static. Instead, they developed through continuous interaction, adaptation, and cultural exchange, processes that played a decisive role in shaping the demographic, economic, and social foundations upon which the Bronze Age civilizations of the region subsequently emerged.

According to the conclusions of A. V. Vinogradov, who extensively investigated ethnic evolution during the Neolithic period, the territorial expansion of tribal communities and their adaptation to diverse environmental conditions resulted in the emergence of several regional variants of the Kelteminar ethnocultural community, including the Akchadarya, Lavlakan, and Lower Zarafshan groups. A similar process of ethnic differentiation has also been identified within the Hisor Culture. V. A. Ranov classified this cultural tradition into the Classical Hisor group, represented by the Tutkaul and Sayyod archaeological sites, and several regional variants associated with Kangurttut, Bulyoni-Payon, Kulob, and Yavan. Overall, ethnic differentiation intensified considerably during the Neolithic period, a phenomenon reflected in the regional diversity of the Jeitun, Kelteminar, Hisor, Central Fergana, and Sazagan cultures.

Archaeological investigations further demonstrate that Stone Age communities were not confined to a single geographical area. Instead, they were highly mobile, continuously moving in search of natural resources, food supplies, and suitable raw materials for the manufacture of tools. These population movements facilitated extensive cultural interaction among neighboring tribes. As a result, communities either adopted the traditions and technological innovations of adjacent groups or, conversely, influenced the lifeways of surrounding populations. Such intercultural contacts are clearly reflected in similarities observed in stone-working technologies, tool typology and function, the selection of raw materials, pottery production techniques, ornamental objects, residential architecture, and burial practices. These shared cultural features provide convincing evidence of sustained interaction and exchange among prehistoric communities throughout Central Asia.

The emergence of cities occupies a pivotal place in the history of human civilization. The processes of urbanization and state formation developed in close association with one another, and the appearance of cities represents one of the principal indicators of a society's transition to the stage of civilization. Consequently, the study of the origin and development of cities, particularly in connection with the emergence of the earliest forms of statehood, constitutes one of the fundamental research priorities of historical scholarship.

Urban centers gradually evolved into political, economic, administrative, and religious hubs that coordinated the activities of surrounding territories. Their emergence not only reflected increasing economic productivity and demographic growth but also signified the development of more sophisticated social institutions, administrative structures, and systems of political authority. Therefore, investigating the origins of urbanization is essential for understanding the broader processes that shaped the earliest civilizations of Central Asia and the historical evolution of statehood in the region.

The formation of cities and systems of statehood constitutes an intrinsically interconnected historical process. On the one hand, the emergence of the state required the existence of urban centers functioning as political, economic, and religious hubs; on the other hand, the development of cities was facilitated by the institutional and organizational conditions created by the state. The

fact that the earliest forms of statehood in Central Asia appeared in the form of city-states further underscores the importance of studying the history of cities and urban development [4].

Cities emerged at different times in different regions of the world. The earliest urban centers appeared in Sumer, Elam, and the Indus region during the fourth and third millennia BCE. In China, the first cities developed somewhat later, during the third and second millennia BCE; in Mesoamerica, urban centers emerged toward the end of the first millennium BCE; and in Northern Europe, they appeared during the second half of the first millennium CE.

Following the attainment of independence, significant progress was made in the study of ancient cities and urbanization in Central Asia. Recent archaeological and historical research, together with new methodological approaches to the interpretation of the past, has made it possible to formulate important conclusions regarding the origins, development, and characteristics of Central Asian cities.

Scholars have proposed different theories concerning the emergence of the earliest cities. One group argues that cities appeared through a revolutionary process, while another maintains that urbanization developed gradually through an evolutionary process. In order to clarify these debates, it is essential to identify and analyze the conditions that contributed to the formation of cities.

The first major factor in urban formation was the natural environment. This included favorable ecological conditions, fertile land, abundant water resources, and a suitable climate. The combination of fertile soils, reliable water supplies, and favorable climatic conditions made it possible to obtain high agricultural yields with relatively limited labor and expenditure. As a result, societies were able to produce a surplus product, which became the economic foundation for social differentiation and urban development.

The accumulation of surplus production eventually found its material expression in cities through the construction of monumental architectural structures such as palaces and temples. In regions with particularly favorable environmental conditions-such as the valleys of the Nile, Euphrates, and Tigris rivers-surplus production could be achieved with comparatively less effort and lower costs. It was precisely this accumulation of surplus resources that created the conditions necessary for the emergence of statehood and, simultaneously, for the rise of the earliest cities.

Consequently, the exceptionally favorable natural environment of Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia enabled urban centers to emerge there earlier than in many other regions, already during the fourth and third millennia BCE. These regions therefore represent some of the earliest and most influential centers of urban civilization in world history.

It was precisely the continuous accumulation of agricultural surplus that stimulated the emergence of state institutions and, simultaneously, the development of urban centers. The favorable environmental conditions of Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia enabled these regions to generate agricultural surpluses considerably earlier than many other parts of the ancient world. Consequently, the earliest cities in these civilizations appeared as early as the fourth and third millennia BCE, significantly preceding the emergence of urban settlements in many neighboring regions.

In Central Asia, however, the first cities emerged somewhat later, during the third and second millennia BCE, as a consequence of gradual economic transformation within local societies. Compared with Egypt and Mesopotamia, the relatively later development of urban centers in Central Asia can largely be explained by the region's more complex environmental and climatic conditions. Agricultural production required considerably greater human labor and investment, resulting in a slower accumulation of surplus products-the essential economic foundation for urbanization and state formation.

By the Bronze Age, agricultural production in Central Asia underwent a profound transformation with the transition from simple flood-water farming to artificial irrigation agriculture. Agricultural lands were systematically cultivated and irrigated through the construction of canals, greatly increasing the efficiency and stability of crop production. This technological innovation fundamentally altered patterns of human settlement, leading to the concentration of populations within fertile river oases. As oasis communities expanded, major administrative centers gradually emerged, eventually developing into the earliest urban settlements that served as the political, economic, and religious capitals of agricultural regions.

Accordingly, the earliest Bronze Age cities of Central Asia originated through the expansion of irrigated agriculture and the transformation of certain settlements into regional centers exercising political authority, economic coordination, and religious functions. These settlements became focal points for population concentration, administrative organization, craft production, and commercial exchange, thereby laying the foundations for the development of early urban civilization throughout the region.

Understanding the factors that contributed to the emergence of the earliest cities in Central Asia is therefore of considerable historical importance. Favorable natural conditions alone were insufficient to stimulate urbanization. Equally essential was the development of increasingly sophisticated productive technologies and implements. During the third and second millennia BCE, the discovery and widespread use of bronze represented a major technological breakthrough that profoundly transformed economic life. Bronze tools proved substantially more efficient and durable than those manufactured from stone or copper, significantly increasing labor productivity across agricultural and craft activities.

The remarkable increase in productivity generated by bronze technology enabled societies to produce larger agricultural surpluses, creating the material basis necessary for population growth, occupational specialization, and the accumulation of wealth. These developments, in turn, provided the economic conditions required for the emergence of cities and the establishment of increasingly complex systems of political organization and early statehood. Consequently, technological innovation, together with advances in irrigated agriculture, constituted one of the principal driving forces behind the process of urbanization in Bronze Age Central Asia.

References

1. Gulyamov A.G., Islamov U., Askarov A.A. Primitive Culture and the Emergence of Irrigated Agriculture in the Lower Reaches of the Zeravshan. Tashkent, 1966 // Childe, V. G. Man Makes Himself. London: Watts & Co. – P. 74-95.
2. Frankopan, P. The Silk Roads: A New History of the World. London: 2015, Bloomsbury Publishing. –P.11-15.
3. Masson V. M. The Jeitun Settlement (Problems of the Formation of a Producing Economy). MIA, 1971. – P. 180. (In Russian).
4. Dzhurakulov, M. D., & Kholmatov, N. U. The Mesolithic and Neolithic of the Middle Zarafshan. Tashkent: Fan Publishers, 1991. –P. 3-122. (In Russian).