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THE OLDEST CITY OF THE FERGANA VALLEY – THE DALVARZIN URBAN RUINS

Abdumuxtor Abdukhalimovich Khakimov
Andijan State Technical Institute, Head of the Department of Languages and Humanities, Doctor of Philosophy in History (PhD), Associate Professor
+998945619559
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Abstract: In this article, information regarding the history of the Dalvarzin urban ruins, belonging to the Late Bronze Age and recognized as the oldest city in the Fergana Valley, is elucidated on the basis of archaeological sources. Furthermore, material culture artifacts discovered as a result of archaeological research at the Dalvarzin urban ruins are examined.

Keywords: Dalvarzin, Central Asian civilization, Fergana Valley, Pamir-Alai expedition, Chust culture, Academy of Material Culture, urbanization.

The Fergana Valley is one of the major historical and cultural regions not only in Uzbekistan, but throughout Central Asia. According to the results of large-scale archaeological explorations conducted in the Fergana Valley, it has been established that this region possesses a unique and distinctive material culture. The processes occurring in the first half of the 2nd millennium BC– namely, the geographical environment characteristic of the eastern territories of the Fergana Valley, along with the thousands of spring waters provided by the Kara Darya water resources and the abundance of fertile arable lands created the foundation for the emergence of early agricultural culture. As a direct result of these processes, an early agricultural culture emerged in the eastern regions of ancient Fergana. In 1950, this culture was discovered and studied by M. E. Voronets near the spring known as Buvanamazor near the city of Chust. Consequently, the early agricultural culture of the Fergana Valley was named the Chust culture after the city near its first discovered monument. At present, more than 80 sites belonging to the Chust culture have been discovered and studied across the valley[1]. Special mention must be made of the contributions of Yu. A. Zadneprovsky, V. I. Sprishevsky, and B. Kh. Matbobayev in the study of Chust culture monuments[2].

In the last quarter of the 2nd millennium BC, early agricultural settlements belonging to the Chust culture spread widely across the valley region. According to the conclusion of the renowned Fergana scholar Yu. A. Zadneprovsky, more than 80 such monuments have been identified in the Fergana Valley[3]. Among them, the largest are the monuments of Dalvarzin (25 hectares), Ashkaltepa (13 hectares), and Chust (4 hectares). It was precisely the representatives of this culture who took the initial steps toward the emergence of urbanization processes. Subsequently, they nurtured the seeds of early oasis statehood and developed the features of early statehood. In recent years, new data regarding the study of early urban planning in ancient Fergana has been acquired. This data, while equating the age of the largest monuments of the Chust culture to the 12th–7th centuries BC, provides the basis to classify Dalvarzin as an ancient city, and monuments such as Chust, Ashkaltepa, and Khojambog as proto-urban settlements[4].

Dalvarzin is the largest and most thoroughly studied monument of the Fergana Valley. The Dalvarzin urban ruins represent a monument located 2 km east of the village of Oyim in the Jalakuduk district of the Andijan region, in the lower part of the Dalvarzin neighborhood. Occupying an area of 25 hectares, its cultural layers reach a thickness of 5 meters. At Dalvarzin,

starting from 1952 over the course of 16 field seasons, the St. Petersburg archaeologist Prof. Yu. A. Zadneprovsky conducted excavation works[5]. Excavation work was mainly carried out in the central part of the monument and along the eastern defensive wall. According to the research results, it was determined that Dalvarzin consists of three parts, each surrounded by separate defensive walls. That is, the urban ruins consist of three structural parts, named Dalvarzin I, II, and III. As a result of archaeological investigations, the functional role of each section has been determined.

1. **Dalvarzin I**
   Occupying an area of 18 hectares, it is surrounded by a wall constructed from earthen embankments*. When the wall was cut across at three locations, it was established that the city's defensive structures were erected on a sub-foundation (platform) built directly over cultural layers. On top of this platform, a massive wall was built by creating a "casing" of bricks on both sides, with the interior filled with stones (up to 60 cm in diameter), brick fragments, and mud mortar. The thickness of the wall ranged from 4 to 6 meters, with a height of 2.5 meters.
   Another segment of this wall was constructed somewhat differently. This wall was built over cultural layers using pakhsa (rammed earth) blocks (measuring 50×50 cm and 40×30 cm). The average thickness of the defensive wall was 4 meters, and its height was 1.25 meters. Parallel to this wall and at a distance of 2 meters from it, a second wall with a thickness of 1.2 meters was erected. It is clear that this second wall was constructed to reinforce the first. The space between both walls was filled with earth, bricks, clods of clay, and other materials. The total thickness of the defensive fortification reached 8 meters.
2. **Dalvarzin II**
   The eastern section, or Dalvarzin II, encompasses an area of 5 hectares protected by a defensive wall. However, this wall is poorly preserved; like the first wall, it was built over the lower cultural layer. Its thickness is 4 meters, and its preserved height is 1 meter.
3. **Dalvarzin III**
   The citadel (ark), located in the northwestern part (2.2 hectares), was protected by a third defensive wall. This wall was constructed of black and bluish large bricks over a 60–80 cm thick cultural layer. The thickness of the wall is 2.5 meters, and its preserved height is 2.6 meters [5].

As a result of excavations in the Dalvarzin I and II sections, residential remains were cleared and uncovered across almost all three construction phases. In the lowest layer, three distinct types of dwellings were excavated and studied [6]:

Type 1: Timber-framed (sinch) houses. Such houses have been recorded at both Chust and Dalvarzin. The timber-framed houses at these sites differ from one another primarily in size or functional purpose. In the conditions of the Fergana Valley, timber-frame construction is known starting precisely from this period, and this architectural tradition has continued down to the present day. The closest analogies to timber-framed houses are found in archaeological complexes of Eastern Turkestan. In particular, with the exception of the early medieval defensive walls in Khotan and Lop Nor, timber-frame construction was widely utilized in all building structures. In the architecture of Eastern Turkestan, four varieties of timber-frame house construction have been recorded [7].

Type 2: Houses constructed of pakhsa (rammed earth) and adobe brick. Both freestanding houses (an isolated house measuring 5×8 meters was uncovered in the middle construction phase) and multi-room residential complexes were excavated and analyzed.

Each complex consisted of three or four rooms, covering an area of up to 140 sq. m. Three complexes comprising 11 rooms are known from the excavations conducted in the citadel (ark). Among them, a four-room complex with a central hall (measuring 7.2×7 meters) is exceptionally well preserved. Stratigraphically, Type 2 dwellings appear in slightly later layers at Chust—for instance, in the upper construction phase. At Dalvarzin, however, they are recorded across all construction phases [8].

Type 3: Semi-subterranean dwellings (dugouts). At Dalvarzin, this category of residential structures has been studied in considerable detail. Semi-subterranean Dwelling No. 1 was identified in the northwestern part of the site. Rectangular in plan, its lower section was excavated into the virgin soil (bedrock layer), occupying an area of 60 sq. m. The walls were partially laid with brick and plastered over. At the center of the dugout stood a special rectangular hearth, with a pillar erected at each of its four corners (postholes for the pillars have been preserved). The structural differences of its walls compared to others and the absence of a domestic hearth led Yu. A. Zadneprovsky to conclude that this venue was a ritual chamber associated with fire worship [9].

Semi-subterranean Dwelling No. 2 was located in close proximity to the first. Despite being only partially excavated, it differs slightly from the previous one. For example, several postholes were identified beneath its brick-built eastern wall. Based on certain features, this dugout was constructed for residential purposes.

According to Yu. A. Zadneprovsky, the Late Bronze Age semi-subterranean dugouts of Dalvarzin can be grouped into two functional categories based on their purpose:

1. **Residential dugouts:** These are further subdivided into:
   a) Four-columned structures with a central smoke vent (covering an area of 40–80 sq. m);
   b) Circular structures covering an area of 10–12 sq. m.
2. **Economic dugouts built for production purposes.**

At the conclusion of the analysis of housing structures from this era, it is essential to emphasize the following points. Timber-framed houses and semi-subterranean dugouts emerged under the influence of architectural traditions of the steppe Bronze Age populations. Such monuments include the Kairakum sites, and the Vodil, Yapagi, Koramkol, Dahana, and Dashti Asht burial mounds (kurcans). The origin of the aforementioned Eastern Turkestan "timber-frame house design" also traces back to the northeastern regions of Central Asia. In contrast, houses built of pakhsa and brick were constructed in accordance with the architectural traditions of agricultural populations in the southern regions.

The urban fortification structures of Dalvarzin have been thoroughly investigated. Three lines of defensive walls (two outer and one inner) have been identified, dividing the settlement into three parts. According to data provided by Yu. A. Zadneprovsky, the following methods were employed in the construction of the walls:

1. Built from pakhsa blocks;
2. Constructed of adobe bricks;
3. Built with a brick "casing" on both sides, with the core filled with rubble and clay [10].

It has been noted that unbaked clay blocks (guvala) were used as construction material in the Fergana Valley for the first time at this site [11]. Each defensive wall of the Dalvarzin urban ruins holds distinct historical significance.

Archaeological research demonstrates that the defensive walls of the Dalvarzin urban ruins underwent the following stages of development throughout the site's history:

Stage 1: The period prior to the construction of the city's defensive walls, marked by the accumulation of the lowest cultural layers to a thickness of 50–80 cm;

Stage 2: The construction of defensive walls, their active utilization, and repair, during which cultural layers accumulated to a thickness of 2.5–4 meters;

Stage 3: The destruction of defensive walls, the cessation of life at the site, and its ultimate abandonment. This stage corresponds to the uppermost cultural layers, reaching up to 60 cm in thickness. According to the excavators, such a periodization of the defensive fortifications does not contradict the city's structural development phases [12].

Archaeologists studying ancient Fergana frequently encounter instances where residential structures are barely preserved. The question remains as to why the inhabitants of Dalvarzin—who were capable of manufacturing exquisite painted ceramics and unique bronze labor implements—did not leave behind well-preserved dwellings. The precise reasons remain unknown, though the primary explanation is believed to be that the houses were built predominantly of timber frames (sinch) [13].

In conclusion, the history of research into the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age monuments of the Fergana Valley provides sufficient scientific foundation for investigating early urban culture and the initial stages of state formation in the region. Furthermore, the presence of monumental defensive walls and a citadel (ark) at Dalvarzin demonstrates that the initial stage of urban planning culture in the valley was already formed 3,200–3,000 years ago.

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