

Archaeological Monuments of The Lower Reaches of The Aravansay

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Abstract: This article analyzes the formation, spatial distribution, and historical-cultural significance of archaeological monuments in the lower reaches of the Aravansoy basin. The aim of the study is to identify the interrelation between petroglyphs, ancient settlements, and irrigation systems located within the Aravansoy region. The research is based on historical-geographical analysis, comparative study of archaeological data, and synthesis of expedition materials.

The results indicate that the lower Aravansoy basin was intensively inhabited as a micro-oasis since the Bronze Age. Archaeological sites such as Shortepa, Zarg'aldoqtepa, and the Bulakboshi area demonstrate the development of ancient agriculture, animal husbandry, pottery production, and metalworking traditions. Water resources and seasonal streams played a decisive role in the formation and sustainability of human settlements in this region. The Aravansoy basin represents one of the earliest settled areas of the Fergana Valley, and its archaeological heritage is of significant importance for understanding the historical development of the region.

Keywords: Aravansoy, micro-oasis, petroglyphs, Bronze Age, irrigation, archaeological sites.

Introduction: The Fergana Valley, due to its geographical location, has served as a unique “bridge” connecting the western regions with the Chinese Empire since ancient times. Mapping the archaeological sites investigated in the valley clearly demonstrates that a sedentary agricultural culture emerged in its eastern part during the Late Bronze Age (the end of the 2nd millennium BCE – the beginning of the 1st millennium BCE) [1. Baratov, 2007, pp. 19–21]. The purpose of this study is to determine the formation, distribution, and historical-cultural significance of archaeological sites located in the lower reaches of the Aravansay.

According to geological studies, during the Tertiary period the sea in this area gradually began to dry up, while in the Quaternary period the surrounding mountains rose and the lowland part of the valley started to subside. Numerous streams flowing down from the mountains in the southeastern part of the valley, including the Sokh, Isfayram, Shahimardan,

Aravan, and Akbura rivers, converge toward the central part of the region, with some eventually joining the Syr Darya River. The tributaries of the Aravansay contribute to the reclamation and cultivation of lands within the micro-oases. The landscape of the valley is an anthropogenic landscape that has undergone significant transformation over many centuries as a result of irrigated agriculture and continuous human activity. The increase in humus content within the soil profile and its distribution along soil horizons, together with the presence of agro-irrigational deposits, distinguish it from natural landscapes. As a result of intensive agricultural cultivation over many centuries, the natural soil and vegetation cover have largely been replaced by a cultural layer. In soils subjected to long-term irrigation, fine sedimentary materials and agro-irrigational deposits continue to accumulate and thicken over time [2. Boymirzayev, 2007, p. 5].

According to the hydrologist V. L. Shults, the rivers of Central Asia are primarily fed by the melting of

permanent and seasonal mountain snow, while rainfall and floodwaters play an important role in sustaining mountain rivers and streams throughout the year. Physical and geographical information can also be found in the work *Baburnama* by Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur. Describing the nature of Andijan, Osh, and their surrounding areas, Babur noted the humid climate of the eastern districts of the valley, the abundance of water resources, and the richness of its flora and fauna. Babur writes: “On the side of Akhsi, along the Sayhun River, lies the steppe where white gazelles are abundant. On the Andijan side there are dense groves where deer, pheasants, and wild rabbits are numerous and exceptionally well-fed” [3. Bobur, 2019, p. 16].

Differences observed in later periods are largely associated with intensive human economic activities. Moreover, the information presented above indicates that the northern part of the valley had a relatively drier climate, whereas its eastern part was more humid and temperate.

METHOD

This study employs historical-geographical, archaeological, and comparative analytical methods. The natural-geographical environment of the region, its hydrological network, and the spatial distribution of settlements were examined through an integrated approach.

Between 1946 and 1948, the Academy of Sciences of the USSR organized the Pamir-Alay Archaeological Expedition under the leadership of A. N. Bernshtam. The primary objective of this expedition was to investigate archaeological sites across the Alay, Pamir, and Tien Shan mountain systems, as well as within the Fergana Valley region [Bernshtam, 1948, pp. 160–161].

The archaeological investigations conducted by N. G. Gorbunova during the 1960s and 1970s contributed significantly to the study of Early Iron Age and Classical-period urban centers. In particular, she emphasized that all settlements belonging to the Marhamat group along the Aravansay River were situated within the river basins originating from the mountain ranges of the Fergana Valley [Gorbunova, 1977, pp. 114–118]. The Fergana Valley is characterized by a distinctive fan-shaped irrigation system, which differs substantially from irrigation practices observed in the western regions of Uzbekistan [Latinin, 1962, pp. 27–28]. Upon entering the Aravan District, the Aravansay River divides near the Mangit area, where one branch extends northeastward and joins the Akbura River. In the southwestern part of Bulqoboshi District, a tributary of the Aravansay intersects with the South Fergana Canal. The Aravansay flows predominantly in a

northwestern direction, whereas the South Fergana Canal follows a northeastern course. Along the administrative boundary between the Asaka and Marhamat districts, the waters of the Aravansay merge with those of the Shahrixansay. The headwaters of the Aravansay originate in the Alay mountain range of Osh Region, Kyrgyzstan, at an elevation approaching 5,000 meters above sea level. Its lower reaches extend into the territory of Asaka District in Andijan Region. The earliest agricultural communities of the valley did not establish farming activities along the major rivers. Instead, cultivation began in areas where mountain streams lost much of their discharge upon reaching the plains, yet continued to receive seasonal floodwaters and possessed deep, fertile sierozem soils. The gradual construction of irrigation infrastructure by local populations was largely driven by the need to divert runoff generated by mountain and foothill precipitation toward agricultural fields [Galiyeva, 2017, pp. 205–226]. The southern part of the Fergana Valley is situated along the foothills of the Alay and Turkestan mountain ranges, which constitute the principal sources of water for the oasis. Ancient rural and urban settlements were typically established in close proximity to water resources, particularly at locations where streams emerged from the mountains onto the plains and within the micro-oases situated beyond the foothill zones [Anarbayev et al., 2022, p. 7]. The southeastern part of the Fergana Valley is supplied with water primarily by the Akbura and Aravansay rivers, both originating in the Alay mountain system.

RESULTS

The results of the study indicate that the lower reaches of the Aravansay River constituted an intensively exploited micro-oasis from ancient times. Originating in the Aravan District, the Aravansay River joins the Akbura River near the Mangit area, while its lower reaches extend as far as the Asaka District. The complexity of this hydrological network played a decisive role in the emergence and development of ancient settlements.

The Akbura irrigation region consists of two oases, each subdivided into several micro-oases. The first oasis is situated on the plain east of the Aravansay River. Its southern boundary is marked by a belt of foothills. While settlements are concentrated primarily within the plain, burial grounds are more frequently recorded in the foothill zone.

The abundance of water resources created favorable conditions for the early occupation of this oasis. Springs located along the southern foothills also played an important role in irrigation practices, a fact reflected in local toponyms such as Bulakboshi (“head of the

spring”) and Shirmanbulak (“sweet spring”).

The earliest occupation of the oasis dates to the Late Bronze Age. The settlements of Shortepa and Zargaldoktepa, attributed to the Chust culture, were investigated by V. I. Kozenkova in 1956. These sites are located within the delta of the right branch of the Aravansay River near the village of Uchtepa in present-day Buloqboshi District.

The most intensive phase of settlement development occurred during the first centuries CE. Archaeological surveys identified nine micro-oases and recorded twenty sites dating to the Antiquity period, thirteen of which lacked substantial cultural deposits. Bulakboshi appears to have been the largest center and may have served as the administrative and economic core of the oasis [Kozenkova, 1959, p. 57].

The site was first documented by V. I. Kozenkova in 1956. Based on surface finds and preliminary investigations, it was dated to the period between the third century BCE and the second century CE.

In 1956, researchers of the Andijan Regional Museum of Local History initiated the first independent archaeological investigations in the region. Their primary objective was to compile an archaeological map of the northern, northeastern, and southern parts of the Fergana Valley and to identify and document archaeological monuments representing all historical periods. The expedition was headed by V. I. Kozenkova. Five survey campaigns conducted in different districts resulted in the identification of more than forty archaeological sites. Following an analysis of the burial grounds, Kozenkova concluded that the largest cemetery was located approximately four kilometers south of Marhamat village [Kozenkova, 1966, p. 224].

The first large-scale archaeological expeditions in the southern part of Andijan Region were carried out during the 1950s, and the results were regularly published in contemporary periodicals. Reporting on investigations conducted in Buloqboshi District, Kozenkova described the discovery of a Bronze Age settlement represented by a mound-like archaeological feature. Excavations revealed residential remains containing stone-lined storage pits and hearths. Numerous pottery fragments were recovered from the surrounding area. The ceramic assemblage indicates a relatively early stage of pottery production, as the vessels were handmade rather than wheel-thrown and exhibited coarse surfaces and uneven walls. Evidence of firing activities was also documented.

Archaeological excavations demonstrated that the inhabitants of the settlement, dating to approximately 3,000 years ago, were engaged in agriculture. This conclusion is supported by the discovery of stone

sickles and grinding stones used for grain processing. Faunal remains, including bones of camels, cattle, and sheep, indicate that animal husbandry constituted an important component of the local economy.

Fragments of pottery bearing textile impressions, together with weaving implements, suggest that spinning and weaving were well-developed crafts among the local population. Metal played a significant role in the economy of the Bronze Age communities of the Fergana Valley. Bronze, an alloy of copper and tin, was widely used in the manufacture of tools and weapons. Excavations at the settlement yielded bronze spearheads and arrowheads, highlighting the technological capabilities of the local population [Kozenkova, 1957].

Kozenkova further noted that the Zargaldok site represented the third Bronze Age settlement identified in the Fergana Valley and that its investigation contributed significantly to expanding knowledge of the ancient history of Uzbekistan. She also emphasized the considerable interest shown by local residents in archaeological research. Public lectures, mobile exhibitions, and outreach activities were organized to raise awareness of the importance of archaeological heritage. In addition, information obtained through interviews with local inhabitants facilitated the identification of previously unknown archaeological sites.

Unfortunately, most of the Bronze Age settlements recorded during the 1950s had been destroyed or incorporated into agricultural fields by the early decades of the twenty-first century as a result of the continuous expansion of cultivated land.

DISCUSSION

The Aravansoy basin has been developed since ancient times, and the lower parts of the area indicate that people have continuously lived a settled lifestyle here since the Bronze Age. Indeed, 34 ancient monuments dating back to antiquity and the early medieval period have been identified in the Buloqboshi district (Table 1). The region’s natural landscape, climate, and loess soils are considered highly fertile for agriculture.

The relatively high concentration of early settlements in the southeastern part of the Fergana Valley can be explained by the following factors:

- favorable geographical structure of the land
- abundance of seasonal streams and mineral-rich mountain sediments
- mild climate conditions
- fertile loess soils suitable for agriculture

To this day, several factors have contributed to the

gradual decline in the number of registered archaeological sites in the region:

- expansion of residential areas due to population growth
- insufficient public awareness regarding the protection of archaeological sites
- conversion of sites into agricultural land
- lack of comprehensive protective measures for all monuments
- impacts of climatic and geological changes

CONCLUSION

The lower course of the Aravansoy River is one of the most ancient areas of settlement in the Fergana Valley. It can be observed that a continuous sedentary way of life has existed in this region since the Bronze Age.

Water resources and natural conditions played a fundamental role in the formation of micro-oases. Today, however, the preservation and scientific protection of archaeological monuments has become an urgent task.

In an increasingly globalized world, preserving and respecting ancient settlements that reflect the identity and roots of a nation is the duty of every individual. The Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Chapter XI "Duties of Citizens," Article 61 states that citizens are

obliged to preserve the historical, spiritual, cultural, scientific, and natural heritage of the people of Uzbekistan. These are protected by the state. In recent years, a number of decrees have been issued in the republic aimed at the protection and study of valuable cultural monuments. When viewed externally, the process of preserving material culture and transforming it into tourism objects is reflected in the development of "archaeo-brands."

The 43rd session of UNESCO was held in 2025 in Samarkand. Within the framework of the session, on November 5, an international scientific conference titled "Samarkand: Three Thousand Years of Heritage" was organized. At this conference, Lazare Eloundou Assomo, Director of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, stated: "Humanity must have cultural roots; every monument is a sign of genius, and my child should also know Samarkand."

Not only in our country but also worldwide, efforts are being made to preserve cultural heritage. One of the most important and essential stages in this process is strengthening public awareness and attitudes toward archaeological monuments. In the 1950s, this was carried out in the form of traveling exhibitions, whereas today, it is considered more effective to promote it through creative ideas on social media.

A monument is a nation's memory.

Table 1

Period	from	to	Settlement	Burial-ground	Unidentified	Total
Paleolithic (Buloqboshi – Qo'tirbuloq)			1	-	-	1
Late Bronze Age (Zarg'aldoktepa, Sho'rtepa)	12th century BCE	7th century BCE	2	-	-	2
Early Iron Age	-	-	-	-	-	-
Antiquity	2nd century BCE	4th century BCE	18	1	-	19

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