

Boykand Urban Heritage: An Architectural Monument of the Medieval Bukhara Oasis

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DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.47134/jiai.v1i1.3835>

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Received: 21-12-2024

Accepted: 21-01-2025

Published: 21-02-2025



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Abstract: Baykand is one of the oldest cities in the Bukhara oasis. The article presents the first signs of the development of urban culture in the Bukhara oasis of Baykand and information about the period of their development. As is known, medieval cities consisted of 3 parts, and this feature was present in all cities formed in the Middle Ages. However, the strategic location of Baykand led to the emergence of more than a thousand rabbats in the city and the development of trade. This feature distinguishes Baykand from other cities formed in the Middle Ages. Recently announced archaeological finds, namely the discovery of weapons and objects related to religion, indicate the development of urban culture in Baykand.

Keywords: Urban Planning, Rabot, Architectural Features, Khumdon, Defense System, Poykandi, Urbanistic Processes

Introduction

As is known, today the study of national history and cultural heritage and its promotion on an international scale are one of the most pressing issues. In the work of President Sh. Mirziyoyev "The Present Time and New Uzbekistan", it is stated that "The truth that has passed the tests of history is that a people who are able to change themselves, who are able to turn time into an opportunity, opportunity into an achievement, and achievement into the foundation of development are great people." These spiritual foundations are relevant in studying the formation of urban culture in historical cities, architectural and cultural achievements made in cities (Gomes, 2022).

Boykand, one of the largest medieval cities of the Bukhara oasis, is located in the lower reaches of the Zarafshan River. The city's strategic location, which is one of the main trade routes along the Great Silk Road, made it an important trading center. Boykand's unique architectural structure, namely the arch, inner and outer city walls, as well as more than a thousand rabbats, is a vivid example of the urban development of that era.

The city of Boykand, which was under the rule of the Bukharakhudots, is mentioned in Chinese written sources as "Bi" and in Arabic sources as "Baykent" (Mirzaakhmedov et al, 2021). It is said that the total area of Boykand, surrounded by walls, was approximately 18.5 hectares, including the ark part of 0.9 hectares, the area in front of the ark 0.6 hectares, the area of the 1st shahristan 11 hectares, and the area of the 2nd shahristan 6 hectares (Mirzaakhmedov et al, 2021).

Methodology

The first written sources about Boykand are found in the works of Arab geographers and historians. Also, Narshahi's "History of Bukhara" contains valuable information about Boykand's role in trade and crafts.

Archaeological research of the city of Boykand began in the first half of the 20th century, and the opportunities for studying the urban features of the city through the found archaeological objects and material sources were widely opened. Among the archaeological researchers, L.A. Zimin conducted the first excavations in Boykand in 1913-1914. The collection of articles by archaeologist L.A. Zimin entitled "Archaeological Researches of Poikand" provides important information about the topography and architectural structure of the city. In 1939-1940, scientists such as A.Yu. Yakubovsky, M.M. Dyakonov and V.A. Shishkin conducted research on Boykand. As a result of the excavations, the city's water supply system and other infrastructure elements were studied. The studied materials are presented in the work "History of Central Asian Cities". In 1998-2003, I.K. The Bukhara expedition led by Malkiel explores the dwellings, craft workshops, and trade facilities of Boykand. The collection "Materials of the Bukhara Archaeological Expedition" provides information about the urban culture and architectural features of Boykand (Sehgal, 2021).

The study of the urban planning features of the city of Boykand was carried out, first of all, by analyzing historical sources. Mainly, the work of the historian Narshahi was analyzed, and information about the urban structure and functions of Boykand was collected. Archaeological data was analyzed. The results of previously conducted archaeological excavations, including the research of L.A. Zimin, A.Yu. Yakubovsky and I.K. Malkiel, were studied, and conclusions were drawn about the architectural and infrastructural features of the city (Cherkasova, 2023).

Result

The ancient city of Boykand is still an area of significant archaeological research. New archaeological finds are important in studying the city's medieval urban culture. It is known that medieval cities consisted of ark, shahristan, and rabot, which were surrounded by strong walls. The city of Boykand is no exception. In Boykand, the Ark area was the area where the rulers and administrative buildings were located. It is said that there were two shahristan parts and up to three thousand rabots. The rabot, which was considered the outer part of the city, had craft workshops, caravanserais, and bazaars, where pottery, blacksmithing, and other types of crafts were developed. The discovery of various types of ceramic products during archaeological excavations, including glazed and unglazed

vessels, weapons, and armor, indicates that various types of crafts developed in the city (Tu, 2021).

There was a complex system of wells and unique ceramic pipes for the city's water supply. This fully satisfied the population's need for water. Due to the fact that Boykant was located at the crossroads of trade routes, trade and exchange activities were very developed in the city. Caravanserai and bazaars played an important role in the economic life of the city. Archaeological finds and construction methods indicate that the city was in contact with different cultures. This confirms that Boykant was one of the cultural centers of that time (Subbotin, 2019).

Discussions

According to the historian Narshahi, "There were more than a thousand rabats in Boykand, as many as the villages of Bukhara. Boykand was a large and good place, and the inhabitants of each village built a rab there, settled a group of people in it, and sent their provisions from the village. In the winter, when the infidels (gathered) and attacked, many people from each village gathered there and went on a raid. (Then) each tribe came to its rabat" (Narshakhi, 1991). As is known, Boykand was of great strategic importance as the main strategic city outside the "Kanpirak" wall of the Bukhara oasis, leading to the center of the oasis through the guzars on the Amu Darya. During the spread of Islam in Central Asia, Boykand became the site of many armed clashes. Narshahi Qutayba ibn Muslim reported that it was difficult to conquer Boykand because it was a very fortified city, that the city was called a city built of copper, and that Boykand was older than Bukhara (Narshakhi, 1991).

The first to study the city of Boykand was the orientalist V.V. Bartold. The first archaeological excavations were carried out by the orientalist and archaeologist L.A. Zimin in 1913-1914. He drew up a topographic plan of the city and conducted the first archaeological excavations. L.A. Zimin's excavations revealed that the walls of the houses were made of raw brick, some walls were additionally reinforced with baked brick, a wall (frame wall) about 22 cm thick was found, the remains of a brick-covered floor, and many well-like recesses and "ovens" were found in the rooms (Shishkin, 1963).

In the early Middle Ages, cities consisted of three parts. The palace, where the Arkings lived, the shahriston - the inner city, and the rabot - the outer city. Each of these parts was surrounded by separate walls and had gates. There was an inner and outer shahriston in Boykent. In the rabot, there were caravanserais, domed caves of fire worshipers, and potters' kilns (History of Uzbekistan). Some sources indicate that the city of Boykent was the capital of the Hephthalite state. This city was one of the largest and most prosperous cities of its time, and handicrafts, trade, blacksmithing, and construction were developed in the city. Trade caravans from different countries came to Boykent to trade in various products. There were many market stalls and caravanserais in the city (Golender, 2012). During the excavations conducted in Boykand, coins from the period of the Tang Empire of China and small fels minted at the Bukhara mint dating back to the second half of the 10th century and the beginning of the 11th century were found (Mirzaakhmedov et al, 2021).

The 9th-10th centuries are considered the heyday of Boykand. It served as an important transport and trade center on the major trade route to Khorasan. The city's population increased, and new villages emerged around it. Also, markets, caravanserais equipped with warehouses, and craft workshops were built in various parts of the city. Brick kilns and workshops producing various ceramic products developed in a special potters' neighborhood. Public baths were built in the city, and mosques and residential complexes were built in the neighborhoods (Mirzaakhmedov et al, 2021).

As a result of the study of the Boykand Arch, the ruins of a mosque dating back to the 9th-10th centuries were discovered. The foundations of a minaret with a diameter of 11 meters were studied near the mosque. During the excavation, numerous ceramic products were found, including in residential buildings, bakeries, special warehouses, and garbage dumps in the northern part of Shakhristan I (Smirnova, 2015).

In the second half of the 10th century, at the beginning of the 11th century, as a result of the drying up of the lower reaches of the Zarafshan River, the water flow ceased to reach the city of Boykent, and the population moved out of the city. At that time, the territory of Boykent was 70 hectares. There is a lot of archaeological evidence about the struggle of the city's population against water shortages and the efforts to preserve the city. As a result of excavations conducted in 1939-1940 in the territory of Shahrison II by archaeologists such as A.Yu. Yakubovsky, M.M. Dyakonov, V.A. Shishkin, V.N. Kesaev, S.K. Kabanov, A.R. Mukhammadjonov, deep wells built along the dried-up streams of the Zarafshan River and water networks consisting of large ceramic pipes interconnected with each other were discovered. In the first quarter of the 12th century, by order of the Karakhanid ruler Arslan Khan, an attempt was made to dig a canal to restore Boykand, but this attempt ended in failure. The inhabitants of Boykand moved to the free lands of the Bukhara oasis, which were supplied with water. At this time, a settlement of immigrants, known as "Poikandi", was established in Bukhara (Mirzaakhmedov et al, 2021).

In 1998-2003, a Bukhara expedition was organized under the leadership of I.K. Malkiel, and this group of archaeologists studied a 130-meter-long house structure. A kiln for the production of ceramics was discovered in one of the houses, and a store of special molds and semi-finished products for applying patterns to ceramics from another house. Shops of food vendors, healers, stone potters, and blacksmiths were discovered in the market square near the southern gate of Shahrison II. In the southeastern part of the territory, the remains of a building measuring 26.5×17 meters, a small caravanserai and a hotel with areas of 450 and 262.5 square meters were found (Mirzaakhmedov et al, 2021). Ceramic vessels produced in Boykand were decorated with green or blue-green plant motifs, geometric patterns, rhombuses, and curved lines, which indicated their uniqueness.

Archaeological excavations in Boykand, which began in 2016, were carried out inside two 4.5-meter-wide brick walls. The result was a garbage dump consisting of ceramic shards, slave layers, broken lids, kettles, broken jars, and the remains of various containers. Similar garbage dumps are also found in other residential quarters of Boykand. Archaeologists have determined that the garbage was deliberately collected by people and was often used to strengthen the foundations of buildings, floors, and repair streets.

Ceramic shards were a convenient insulating material to prevent moisture accumulation and the release of salts to the surface. The garbage dumps and well-shaped depressions found in Boykand reveal unique aspects of urban planning practice. These archaeological finds reveal the ecological, engineering, and socio-economic characteristics of the city's culture. It is important to study these aspects of the city through archaeological finds. The development of pottery in Boykand, metalworking, trade relations, and the social life of the city reflect the level of development of the city at that time. The city's development of trade relations with China and the maritime countries made an important contribution to the development of the city's culture. The dumps found during the excavations indicate the development of crafts and trade. Sirli (Polivli) and unglazed (unpolished) The demand for vessels indicated that the city was a trading center. The use of broken ceramic vessels in the construction of floors and walls indicates that the city had a tradition of resource economy. The voluminous cisterns and pipes found in the excavations in Baykand indicate that the city had a developed household and water supply system. The reconstruction of Baykand during the reign of Arslan Khan Muhammad and the construction of a new and luxurious palace indicate that urban planning reforms were carried out (Narshakhi, 1991). Also, the vastness of Lake Somjan, the accumulation of excess water from the city of Bukhara in Lake Somjan, were considered important for Baykand.

As we know, for 43 years, the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan and the State Hermitage Museum of Russia have been conducting joint research as part of the Bukhara Expedition. In January 2025, archaeologists reported the discovery of a unique collection of metal weapons used for battles and rituals in the southern part of a temple belonging to the Saka and Massagetae periods in this area. The archaeological discovery is a collection of weapons dating back to the 1st century BCE and the 1st-2nd centuries CE. These findings can be considered as early evidence of military capability and the formation of urban culture in the initial period. The finds show that the military infrastructure and defense system were developed in Boykand, and the weapons found, including acinaces (daggers) 30-40 cm long, bow and arrow shafts, and helmet fragments, indicate that territory's had a strong defense system. This indicates the importance of territory's defense system and its preparation for external threats (Longhitano, 2021).

At the same time, a firecracker and a bell used in religious ceremonies were also found among the material finds. The surface of the bell was made of iron, the inside of which was made of non-ferrous metal, and the inner "tongue" was made of bone. The discovery of these religious ritual objects indicates that the city was in contact with different cultures, that is, it points to the city's multinational population and the processes of cultural exchange. The discovery of religious ritual objects such as bells and firecrackers indicates that there were temples in area where special ceremonies were held (Graff, 2024). This played an important role in the spiritual life of the city. Currently, work is underway to restore and conserve the finds. The joint discovery of religious finds and weapons indicates the close connection between military and spiritual life in the city. This is of great importance in studying the cultural heritage and traditions of the city. These finds provide valuable information about the city's strong defense system, its role in controlling trade routes, and its religious

traditions. They are also of great importance in understanding the processes of urban planning (Kradin, 2020).

Conclusion

In general, the city of Boykand was one of the most important trading and urban-planning cities in the Bukhara oasis. The city was a manufacturing and economic center, possessing the features of a medieval city. Historical written sources and archaeological research provide information about the unique architecture and urban structure of Boykand. The city, with its arch, inner and outer city walls, and more than a thousand rabads, reflect the high urban traditions of that era. The study of the urban culture of Boykand is of great importance not only for understanding the history of Uzbek cities, but also for understanding the development of global urban culture.

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