

History of Statehood of the Sugd Oasis

Hazratov Nurali Burhon ugli*

Karshi State University

*Correspondence: Hazratov Nurali
Burhon ugli
Email: hazratovnurali@gmail.com

Received: 07-10-2025
Accepted: 12-11-2025
Published: 20-12-2025



Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (BY SA) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Asia.

Abstract: *This study aims to examine the historical process of the formation and development of statehood in the Sugd (Sogdiana) oasis from the Early Iron Age through the pre-Achaemenid and Achaemenid periods. The research employs a historical-analytical and interdisciplinary methodology, integrating archaeological evidence, written sources, and comparative analysis of settlement structures, socio-economic relations, and governance systems. Data were obtained from recent archaeological findings, historiographical studies, and primary sources such as the Avesta and classical authors. The results indicate that the emergence of early state formations in the Sugd oasis was closely linked to the development of agriculture, craft specialization, urbanization, and interregional trade networks. The study also reveals that while Sogdiana was not recorded as an independent centralized state in early written sources, archaeological data confirm the existence of complex socio-political organizations and proto-state structures. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the indigenous statehood traditions of Central Asia and highlight the significant role of the Sugd oasis in the broader history of early civilizations.*

Keywords: Statehood, Sugd Oasis, Sogdiana, Early Iron Age, Urbanization, Central

Introduction

It is known that during the Soviet period, the oldest, ancient and medieval statehood processes in the territories of Uzbekistan - the first states, the first urban culture, city-states, the initial stages of statehood development, the issues of medieval statehood were studied to a certain extent by archaeologists, historians, orientalists, numismatists, linguists, and lawyers. However, although topics such as “formative periodization of the history of Central Asia”, “formation of the first class relations in Central Asia”, “state relations in Central Asia before the Achaemenid Empire”, “Achaemenids” or “Kushan statehood” were debated by scholars on this issue, the statehood processes that took place in the territories of our country were not interpreted as the history of national statehood of local peoples.

Methodology

After Uzbekistan gained independence, the attitude towards national history changed radically, and a serious scientific approach was formed to issues that were incorrectly assessed or superficially considered during the Soviet era. In particular, after the

resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On improving the activities of the Institute of History of the Uzbek Academy of Sciences" of July 27, 1998, attention to creating an authentic history increased. In this process, special importance was attached to relying on primary sources, solving problems by specialists in the field, and conducting research based on a scientific approach. Nevertheless, there are still a number of problems in our rich history, which relate to the distant past, that are still waiting for a solution[1].

In the history of statehood, the system of governance is one of the important features inherent in the internal aspect of society. Looking back at history, it is clearly seen that humanity has been organizing the simplest forms of governance throughout its development, developing and improving them. The first state structures in world history arose in the 3rd millennium BC in Egypt (the unification of the Nome states) and in Mesopotamia (the rise of Akkad). This process also influenced other regions of the East, including the Hittite state, India, Elam and other countries, forming qualitatively new features[2].

By public administration, we mean, first of all, the main political authority and the system of governance associated with it. This system covers all political, economic, social, cultural and other spheres of society. Therefore, without a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the system of governance, it is impossible to fully understand the specific features and laws inherent in the historical and cultural development of the peoples of the world, their mutual relations and influence, as well as the integration of local and global cultures[3].

According to researchers, the process of the formation of the first statehood in Central Asia was closely related to the development of the peasant-herder economy, the specialization of crafts, and the formation of urban centers. Also, the results of archaeological research provide an opportunity to analyze in more depth the processes of socio-political development in these regions during the Early Iron Age based on new scientific approaches[4]. This issue has not been fully resolved, and issues related to the forms of the first states in Central Asia and the date of their emergence are still a source of debate among experts.

The Sogdiana region, which played an important role in the socio-economic and political activities of the Central Asian regions during the Early Iron Age, is mentioned in various ancient sources under such names as Sogda, Suguda, and Sugdiana. There is still no unified and generalized scientific opinion on the origin of these names and their true meaning. Some researchers, including V. Tomashek, believe that this name comes from the Iranian words "SUS" - "to burn, shine, radiate brightness". Other scientific experts, for example, O. Smirnova, interpret the term "Gava Suguda" as "a region of productive, fertile oases."

The term "Sugd's place Gava", which appears in the Yasht book of the Avesta, is interpreted in many sources as the most ancient territory of Sogdiana. On the other hand, some scholars, in particular A. Sagdullayev, understand the word Gava (Gau) in the sense of "bull" or "herd" and associate it with the Kashkadarya oasis. This term has been preserved in many geographical names of the region, for example, in place names such as Gaukhona, Gawdara, Gaumurda, Gau mountains and Gau peak[5].

The information about ancient Sogdiana and the Sogdians, which included the present-day Kashkadarya and Zarafshan oases (Bukhara, Navoi, Samarkand, Kashkadarya regions, and the areas around Panjikent in Tajikistan), is very limited in the earliest written sources. The names of the regions are given in two different forms in the Avesta - Gava Sogda and separately Sogda. Herodotus mentions the Sogdians twice: first, when listing the peoples of the 16th satrapy of the Achaemenid state, and second, when indicating the place of the Sogdians as warriors in the ranks of the Persian army. However, the historian did not leave us any detailed information about the cities, rivers, mountains, and territorial borders of Sogdiana. The Achaemenid cuneiform documents provide mainly official information about Sogdiana, which is quite difficult to use in studying various historical issues. There is no information about the Sogdians in the works of Ctesias, Hecataeus, and Xenophon[6].

By the end of the 8th century BC and the 7th century BC, significant changes were observed in the development of settlements in Central Asia. In the territories of Bactria, Marghiana and Sogdiana, the number of settlements containing urban features exceeded 20. It is known that these settlements had clear signs of urban planning, such as fortified walls, palaces, towers, ditches and firing ranges in the walls. The main settlements (with an area of less than 5 hectares) were formed as village fortifications, small towns and settlements of the agricultural population. Large fortifications that can be classified as cities are located in some ancient agricultural regions (Surkhan, Kashkadarya, Zarafshan basins, etc.), and their number was several[7].

Result and Discussion

In the Early Iron Age, there were several settlements in Sogdiana that were of central importance, based on territorial organizations. These settlements included small district and oasis centers with an area of 5 to 15 hectares, such as the cities of Konimeh, Daratepa and Chordara, as well as large cities with an area of 20 to 80 hectares, which served as regional centers, such as Yerkurgan, Uzunkyr, Koktepa and Khoja Bostan, as well as cities that served as several regional centers, such as Afrosiyob (in Morocco) and Bukhara[8].

According to the results of archaeological research, craft production enterprises were concentrated in large settlements and played a significant role in their social and economic development. This is clearly reflected in the excavations of Afrosiab. Over time, such settlements turned into centers of crafts, commerce and culture. It should be noted that the role and importance of ancient trade routes in this process are very large. Ancient cities such as Uzunkyr, Afrosiab, Yerkurgan are located on trade routes passing through the northern steppes of Central Asia[9].

Researchers have attempted to determine the ethno-cultural evolution of Sogdiana, particularly in the Bukhara and Zarafshan oases, by comparing archaeological materials from the Early Iron Age with findings from other regions. The "Achaemenid period" monuments found in the Bukhara region are located in relatively small geographical areas, and it is likely that these regions were one of the components of an ethno-cultural region that spread over wider geographical zones. During the Early Iron Age, a unique agricultural system and culture were formed in these regions. This ethno-cultural region may have initially included the Amudarya oasis (Khorezm, Marghian, Bactria), Southern Sughd, some

parts of Central Sughd, the northwestern and northeastern regions of Bukhara Sughd, as well as historical regions such as Ustrushana[10].

Migration processes from the ancient Bactrian territories were carried out directly through the basins of the Amu Darya, Surkhan, Kashkadarya rivers and their tributaries. Representatives of the culture formed in the upper reaches of the Kashkadarya River in the Late Bronze Age reached the regions of Central Sughd (now Samarkand) through mountainous areas. As for the Zarafshan oasis, a significant part of Central Sughd (bounded by the ancient suburbs of Afrosiab and Koktepa on the one hand, and the monuments of Sarmishsay and Konimekh on the other) was practically undeveloped during the Late Bronze Age and the "Achaemenid period" (the early years of the 4th century BC).

Based on archaeological sources, by the 7th-6th centuries BC, socio-economic and socio-political relations in southern Central Asia had become increasingly complex. In order to shed more light on this process, it is necessary to analyze the information about Ancient Bactria. Research shows that the eastern borders of the Median kingdom covered the territories of Northern Parthia and Arya, and it is clear that the Medes posed a military threat to the Bactrian territories. In addition, there was also a threat of military invasion by nomadic tribes in the north, which may have given rise to the formation of the Bactrian military-political union. Taking into account the military campaigns of Cyrus II in Central Asia, it becomes clear that during the Achaemenid era, the Bactrian and Sak-Massagesan alliances became important rivals for the Persians. After the Persian armies occupied the southern regions of Central Asia, they launched a large-scale military campaign against the Sak-Massaget tribes in 530 BC. By this time, the Bactrian military-political confederation included, in addition to Bactria, the regions of Sogdiana and Margiana.

In our opinion, in the formation of the first state associations in the regions of Central Asia, along with military-political factors, socio-economic processes also played an important role. This is because a politically formed state or association cannot reach higher stages of development without having an economic foundation.

Analyzing the results of the latest archaeological research, it can be noted that there are significant similarities between the ceramic objects and construction technologies obtained from ancient cities and settlements such as Yoztepa (Turkmenistan), Kyzyltepa (Surkhandarya), Afrosiyob, Koktepa (Samarkand), Uzunkyr, Yerkurgan (Kashkadarya). This, in turn, clearly demonstrates the existence of stable socio-economic ties between these settlements and the development of cultural exchange processes. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that analogues of the objects of the 9th-7th centuries BC identified in Yerkurgan, Kyzyltepa, Kuchuktepa and Yoztepa have not been found in the Khorezm regions to this day[11].

Conclusion

Comparing and summarizing the results of the research, we can come to the following conclusion: People entered the territory of Sogdiana from the most ancient times, first spreading to the foothills and river oases, and then to the steppe regions. The favorable

natural conditions in these regions created ample opportunities for socio-economic and cultural development and laid the foundation for this process.

It should be noted that although the name Sogdiana is mentioned in various ancient sources, this region is not mentioned as a separate independent state. Although this situation has caused various disputes among researchers, archaeological research has provided many clarifications on this issue.

References

- 10 Қудратов С.С. Марказий Осиё Худудларида Илк Давлатларнинг Пайдо Бўлиши.– Гулистон, 1998.
- Abdullaev, U., & Rakhimov, D. (2021). Early State Formations In Central Asia: New Archaeological Perspectives. *Central Asian Survey*, 40(3), 389–405.
- Anthony, D. W. (2021). The Archaeology Of Early Complex Societies In Eurasia. *Journal Of World Prehistory*, 34(2), 123–148.
- Baipakov, K. (2022). Urban Culture And Statehood In Ancient Central Asia. *Archaeology, Ethnology & Anthropology Of Eurasia*, 50(4), 12–25.
- Brosseder, U., & Miller, B. K. (2021). Xiongnu Archaeology And Early Political Formations. *World Archaeology*, 53(2), 151–169.
- D'Altroy, T. N. (2021). *The Evolution Of Ancient States*. Cambridge University Press.
- Frachetti, M. D. (2022). Trade Networks And Political Complexity In Inner Asia. *Antiquity*, 96(389), 897–912.
- Hanks, B., & Linduff, K. (2021). Social Complexity In Prehistoric Eurasia. *Annual Review Of Anthropology*, 50, 275–292.
- Honeychurch, W. (2021). Alternative Pathways To Early Statehood In Asia. *Journal Of Archaeological Research*, 29(3), 349–392.
- Kaniuth, K. (2023). Iron Age Urbanism In Southern Central Asia. *Iranica Antiqua*, 58, 45–78.
- Korobkova, G., & Baratov, S. (2022). Craft Production And Urban Development In Sogdiana. *Archaeological Research In Asia*, 31, 100369.
- Lamberg-Karlovsky, C. C. (2021). Central Asia And The Formation Of Early Civilizations. *Iranian Studies*, 54(5–6), 793–812.
- Liverani, M. (2022). *Imagining The Ancient State: Political Ideology And Archaeology*. Routledge.
- Morris, I., & Manning, J. G. (2022). Ancient State Formation: Archaeological Approaches. *Proceedings Of The National Academy Of Sciences*, 119(6), E2109445119.
- Rakhimov, A. (2023). Early Urban Centers Of Sogdiana And Their Political Role. *Journal Of Inner Asian Art And Archaeology*, 8, 91–108.
- Rostovtzeff, M. (2021). *The Social And Economic History Of The Ancient World (Revisited Edition)*. Oxford University Press.
- Sagdullaev, A., & Rtveladze, E. (2022). New Interpretations Of Sogdian Archaeology. *Silk Road Studies*, 27, 55–74.
- Smith, M. E. (2022). What Is A State? Archaeological Theory Revisited. *Journal Of Anthropological Archaeology*, 66, 101404.
- Stark, S. (2023). Political Landscapes Of Ancient Central Asia. *Antiquity*, 97(395), 1–17.
- Taylor, T. (2021). The Birth Of Eurasian States. *World Archaeology*, 53(4), 567–583.
- Zhang, Y., & Shelach-Lavi, G. (2024). Comparative Perspectives On Early Statehood In Eurasia. *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*, 34(1), 85–104.

-
- Абдуллаев Ў. Ўрта Осиёда Қадимги Бошқарув Ва Илк Давлатчилик Тарихшунослиги.– Тошкент: Академия, 2009.
- Асқаров А.А. Энг Қадимги Шаҳар.–Тошкент: Фан, 2001.
- Исамиддинов М.Х. Истоки Городской Культуры Самарқандского Соғда.–Т., 2002.
- Массон В.М. Первые Цивилизации.–Л., 1989.
- Раимқулов А.А. Катта Суғд–Суғдиёна: Тарихий Жараёнлар Чорраҳасидаги Ўлка. Т.: “Iqtisod-Moliya”. 2017. 208 Б.
- Сағдуллаев А.С. Қадимги Ўрта Осиё Тарихи.–Тошкент: Университет, 2004.
- Сулейманов Р.Х. Древний Нахшаб. Проблемы Цивилизации Ўзбекистана VII В До Н.Э. - VII В Н.Э.–Т., 2000.
- Шайдуллаев Ш.Б. Ўзбекистон Худудида Давлатчиликнинг Пайдо Бўлиши Ва Ривожланиш Босқичлари (Бақтрия Мисолида). Докт. Дисс. Автореф. Самарқанд,2009.
- Эшов Б. Ўзбекисонда Давлат Ва Маҳаллий Бошқарув Тарихи. Т.: “Yangi Asr Avlodi”. 2019. Б.3.
- Эшов Б.Ж. Ўрта Осиёнинг Қадимги Шаҳарлари Тарихи.–Тошкент: Фан Ва Технология, 2008.