

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH OF THE KHOREZM OASIS AND  
LOWER ZARAFSHAN VALLEY: NEOLITHIC TO BRONZE AGE  
DEVELOPMENTS**

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**Abstract.** *This paper presents a comprehensive review of archaeological studies conducted in the Khorezm oasis and Lower Zarafshan Valley, focusing on human settlements from the Late Paleolithic through the Bronze Age. Excavations carried out from the 1940s to the present have revealed key Neolithic, Eneolithic, and Bronze Age sites, providing insight into settlement patterns, subsistence strategies, material culture, and social organization. The findings demonstrate the gradual development of complex human communities in Central Asia, shaped by environmental, hydrological, and geographical conditions.*

**Keywords:** *Khorezm oasis, Lower Zarafshan Valley, Neolithic, Eneolithic, Bronze Age, archaeology, settlement patterns, material culture, Central Asia.*

**1. Introduction.** The Khorezm oasis and the Lower Zarafshan Valley, located in modern-day Uzbekistan, represent one of the most significant regions for understanding prehistoric human activity in Central Asia. Archaeological research in this region began in the mid-20th century, initially focusing on the Jonbos-4 site in 1945, 1947, and 1948. The Khorezm Expedition, led by scholars such as A.V. Vinogradov and later Ya.G. Ghulomov, systematically explored settlements across the South Amu Darya basin and the Lower Zarafshan Valley. These investigations aimed to uncover the settlement structure, economic practices, and material culture of prehistoric communities, particularly those of the Neolithic, Eneolithic, and Bronze Age periods.

Environmental and geographical factors played a critical role in the formation and development of these settlements. Seasonal water flows from the Amu Darya and Zarafshan rivers created a network of water bodies and fertile floodplains, which in turn facilitated the establishment of interconnected and sometimes isolated communities. Archaeological evidence suggests that early settlers strategically occupied elevated hills and riverbanks, utilizing local flora and fauna for subsistence, shelter, and tool production.

**2. Analysis.** During the Neolithic period, the Khorezm oasis and Lower Zarafshan Valley experienced significant developments in human settlement and economy. Excavations at key sites such as Darbazakir 1 and 2, Sazagon 1 and 2, Uchashi-131, and the Ohalik settlement have revealed surface-level habitations supported by wooden posts, hearths, and storage pits. Houses were generally arranged in small clusters, likely

reflecting family or tribal units, and suggest an emerging sense of social organization and spatial planning.

Economic activities of Neolithic communities were diverse and adaptive to local environmental conditions. Inhabitants engaged in hunting, fishing, and plant gathering, while evidence of early animal domestication indicates the beginnings of pastoral practices. Such subsistence strategies reflect a gradual transition from mobile foraging to more settled, semi-sedentary lifestyles.

Material culture from this period includes stone tools, pottery fragments, and ornamental items. For example, excavations near the Ohalik settlement uncovered 486 stone implements, demonstrating technological continuity from the Mesolithic and highlighting the development of tool-making skills. These settlements also suggest the beginnings of organized resource management, enabling communities to sustain themselves across varying seasonal conditions.

Overall, Neolithic settlements laid the foundation for more complex social and economic structures that would later emerge during the Eneolithic and Bronze Age periods. The interplay between environmental adaptation, settlement planning, and material culture development

The Eneolithic period represents a transitional phase between the Neolithic and Bronze Age, characterized by the intensification of agricultural and pastoral practices and the emergence of more complex settlement structures. In Khorezm, sites such as Kamishli 1 and 2 demonstrate continuity from Neolithic subsistence strategies, with evidence of more developed household economies and cultural practices. Similarly, settlements in the Lower Zarafshan Valley, including Darbazakir 2, reveal that tribal and clan communities gradually enhanced their agricultural and craft activities, reflecting social differentiation and technological progress.

Material culture from Eneolithic sites indicates innovations in pottery, tool-making, and ornamentation. Stone and bone implements coexisted with early copper artifacts, marking the onset of metallurgy in the region. The evidence suggests that communities in both Khorezm and the Lower Zarafshan Valley maintained traditional Neolithic practices while simultaneously experimenting with new technologies, which would influence the subsequent Bronze Age societies.

Environmental adaptation remained critical during the Eneolithic period. Settlements were typically located near seasonal water bodies, allowing communities to exploit both aquatic and terrestrial resources effectively. The spatial organization of these settlements indicates deliberate planning and reflects increasing social complexity among Neolithic-descended tribal groups.

The Bronze Age in the Khorezm oasis and Lower Zarafshan Valley witnessed the emergence of larger, more complex communities influenced by both internal developments and migratory pastoral groups from the north and northeast. Excavations of sites such as Angqa-5, Qavat-3, Kokcha-3, and Zamon-Baba reveal semi-subterranean

wooden structures and cemeteries that reflect sophisticated settlement and mortuary practices.

Burial customs during the Bronze Age, as documented in the Kokcha-3 cemetery (70 graves), involved rectangular pits with bodies placed in fetal positions accompanied by personal ornaments such as bracelets and stone beads. These findings indicate both social differentiation and continuity of ritual traditions. Communities engaged in agriculture, herding, and craft production, while material culture demonstrates the integration of local and introduced technological elements.

The Bronze Age also marked increased mobility and cultural exchange. Migratory pastoralist groups settled in Khorezm and Lower Zarafshan, intermingling with local populations and contributing to the formation of hybrid cultural complexes. This period solidified the economic and social structures that would dominate the region into later historical eras.

**3. Conclusion.** Archaeological investigations in the Khorezm oasis and Lower Zarafshan Valley provide a detailed understanding of human settlement and social development from the Neolithic through the Bronze Age. The evidence demonstrates that environmental and hydrological conditions shaped settlement patterns, subsistence strategies, and material culture. Neolithic communities established the foundations of organized social structures and diversified economies, which were further elaborated during the Eneolithic period through innovations in agriculture, craft production, and early metallurgy.

The Bronze Age saw the expansion and intensification of these processes, with larger communities, complex mortuary practices, and cultural interactions between local and migratory populations. These findings highlight the region's significance in Central Asian prehistory and underscore the continuity and transformation of human societies over millennia.

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