

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH OF NEOLITHIC SETTLEMENTS IN THE LOWER ZERAFSHAN AND SOUTHERN AMU DARYA BASINS

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Annotation. *This thesis presents the results of archaeological research conducted by the Khorezm Expedition and other scientific teams in the Lower Zerafshan and Southern Amu Darya basins. Excavations at sites such as Jonbos-4, Darbazaqir, Qavat, and Burli-3 revealed cultural layers from the Mesolithic, Neolithic, and Bronze Ages. The research highlights the settlement patterns, material culture, and subsistence strategies of early communities, emphasizing their adaptation to seasonal water reservoirs, river systems, and desert landscapes. These findings provide crucial insights into the social, economic, and technological development of Neolithic tribal communities in the region.*

Keywords: *Neolithic, Mesolithic, Khorezm Expedition, Lower Zerafshan, Southern Amu Darya, settlement patterns, material culture, archaeology*

Introduction. Archaeological research in the Khorezm region began with excavations at the Jonbos-4 site conducted by the Khorezm Expedition in 1945, 1947, and 1948. From the 1950s onward, under the leadership of Ya.Gh. Ghulomov, the Archaeology Group of the Institute of History and Archaeology, Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, carried out extensive excavations in the Lower Zerafshan Valley and Southern Amu Darya basin. These studies focused on settlements from the Mesolithic, Neolithic, and Bronze Ages, providing a comprehensive understanding of the region's prehistoric human activity.

The primary goal of this thesis is to analyze the spatial distribution, architectural features, and material culture of Neolithic settlements, as well as to explore how environmental conditions shaped the economic and social organization of tribal communities.

Analysis. The Jonbosqala plateau, located in the southern Amu Darya region, consists of sites such as Jonbos-4, 5, 8, 10, 11, 12, 31, and 32. Excavations revealed six cultural layers at Jonbos-4, divided into upper and lower sections. Artifacts include over 200 ceramics, stone tools, and bone implements. Sites like Jonbos-31 and Jonbos-12 yielded decorated pottery, stone tools, and evidence of daily domestic and craft activities.

The plateau's settlements were strategically situated on elevated terrain adjacent to seasonal water reservoirs, which formed due to Amu Darya floods, creating lakes and

marshes. These water systems influenced settlement locations, agricultural and fishing practices, and resource management.

Sites such as Qavat-5, Qavat-7, Bayram Qazigan, and Ma'mur demonstrate Neolithic habitation in the southwest region of the plateau. Excavations yielded stone and bone tools, pottery fragments, and evidence of community organization. These findings indicate dispersed settlements in northern areas due to limited water supply and resource availability, while southern regions supported denser populations.

Excavations at sites including Burli-3, Tuyamuyin, Kaparas, Sulton Sanjar, and Darbazaqir in southern Khorezm and the Lower Zerafshan Valley revealed Neolithic settlements adapted to seasonal river flows and diverse ecological niches. Artifacts indicate hunting, fishing, and early domestication practices.

The Lower Zerafshan Valley sites, including Darbazaqir-1, 2, and Chorbakti, reveal wooden post-built houses, central hearths, and material evidence of fishing tools, hunting equipment, and agricultural implements. These settlements reflect a continuity of traditions from Mesolithic hunters to Neolithic tribal communities, adapted to water availability and desert environments.

Neolithic tribal communities utilized seasonal water reservoirs, floodplains, and desert landscapes to sustain agricultural, hunting, and fishing activities. Settlement distribution shows adaptation to environmental conditions, with denser habitation near rivers and more dispersed settlements in arid zones. Artifacts from sites such as Sazagon-1 and Ust-Yurt Chinki suggest gradual social complexity, with evidence of intergenerational knowledge transfer, technological advancement, and ethnic interactions.

Excavations employed systematic trenching (e.g., 3x2 m, 3x4 m, 4x5 m), stratigraphic analysis, and detailed recording of material culture. Collaborative fieldwork with the Samarkand State University Archaeology Department enabled comprehensive documentation of over 300 sites, enhancing understanding of Neolithic tribal organization, economic practices, and technological development.

Conclusion. The archaeological evidence from the Lower Zerafshan and Southern Amu Darya basins demonstrates that Neolithic tribal communities successfully adapted to seasonal water resources, desert landscapes, and floodplain environments. Settlements reveal a complex social organization, diverse economic activities, and technological innovations. The Khorezm Expedition's work, along with collaborative research, has provided crucial data for reconstructing prehistoric life, settlement patterns, and cultural evolution in Central Asia.

These findings underscore the significance of water management, environmental adaptation, and intercommunity interactions in the development of Neolithic societies in Khorezm and the surrounding regions.

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