

Bronze age Material Culture of the Bukhara Oasis (as an Example of Zamonbobo Culture)

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Anatation:

The present article deals with the role of the Zamanbaba culture in the social and economic life of Bukhara oasis during the Bronze Age based on the results of archaeological excavations at the burial site and settlement of Zamanbaba, located 15 km to the north-west of Karakul district of Bukhara region, as well as findings of various objects made of stone, clay, metal etc. Firstly, the geographic and ecological conditions of Bukhara oasis in the Early Bronze Age that led to the emergence of the Zamanbaba culture are considered. The role of this culture in the emergence of economy based on agriculture and cattle breeding in the lower reaches of the Zerafshan river is also discussed. Moreover, the social and economic connections of Bukhara oasis population with the tribes in the other regions of Central Asia is considered based on the movement of the population, advances in metallurgy and archaeological finds. The role of Kaltaminor and Andronovo-Tozabogyab cultures in the formation of the Zamanbaba culture is highlighted. Finally, the development of material culture in the lower reaches of the Zerafshan river is discussed based on the tools, implements, jewelry and other types of objects found at Zamanbaba.

Keywords: Bukhara oasis, Bronze Age, Zamanbaba culture, lower delta of Zerafshan, grave, pottery, metallurgy, farming, domestic livestock.

Introduction

Bronze Age in Central Asia covers a period from the third until the beginning of the first millenniums BC. During this chronological period the first urban centers that replaced farmers villages developed in various ways and their importance as trading and economic, cultural and ideological as well as administrative centers steadily increased.

In archaeological periodization of human history, the Bronze Age comes after the Neolithic period. The place of rather soft copper tools that were not always convenient to use was taken over by bronze. Consequently, a new stage in the history of metalworking began and the development of metallurgy intensified. This, in turn, lead to the emergence of craftsmanship and other positive changes. Moreover, further deepening of production specialization resulted in the development of supra-regional social and economic contacts between various cultures.

Intensification of social and economic progress and the use of bronze tools lead to positive changes in the life of Bronze Age population of Central Asia. The present article will discuss some aspects of these changes based on the example of Bronze Age culture of Bukhara oasis.

Main part

By the middle of the third millennium BC Bukhara oasis enjoyed favorable natural and geographical conditions suitable for agriculture and livestock breeding. Therefore, a unique anthropogenic landscape was formed in the lower reaches of Zerafshan and Kashkadarya during the Bronze Age.

By the end of the third millennium BC, the amount of water in the lower reaches of Zerafshan drastically declined [1] and Bukhara oasis experienced shortage of water. Consequently, by the middle of the third millennium BC, the population of the arid areas in the region turned to livestock breeding, while the population that lived along the riverside practiced agriculture based on *liman* irrigation[2]. Hunting and fishing became an additional, secondary source of food for the population in the lower reaches of Zerafshan[3].

Based on archaeological finds it is clear that sites that were influenced by Kaltaminar and Andronovo-Tozabagyab cultures were spread in Bukhara oasis during the Bronze Age. These include, among others such archaeological sites as, Zamanbaba, Qizilqir I, Qizilqir II, Gujayli, Katta Tuzkon, Kichik Tuzkon and Mohonkul, where along with Bronze Age burials and metal tools, complete pottery vessels were found[4]. Moreover, metal axes, knives, bronze arrowheads that were found from around Varakhsha in the lower reaches of Zerafshan attest to the social and cultural life of Bronze Age population of Bukhara oasis.

Zamanbaba, in particular, is most probably, the best known archaeological site that reflects the social and economic relations in Bukhara during the Bronze Age. It is located around the Zamanbaba lake, some 15 km to the northwest from the center of Karakul district of Bukhara region and consists of a burial site and a settlement.

This culture emerged in the late third – early second millennium BC in the lower reaches of the Zerafshan river as a result of economical relations between the two regions on the basis of the local population of Bukhara oasis[5]. The mutual cultural and economical relations between the tribes in the lower Zerafshan and other southern tribes eventually brought to the formation of the Zamanbaba culture based on cattle breeding and farming[6].

The Zamanbaba cemetery provides facts reflecting the role of other peoples in the social and economic development of Zamanbaba culture. Forty-six burials were found here[7]. The bodies were buried with their hands and legs folded reminding the form of an embryo. According to some sources, men were buried lying on the right, while women on the left side[8]. The heads are oriented to the east, sometimes to the north-west. There is usually a single person placed in one burial, although burials with two bodies also exist. In each burial a single or two vessels are placed at the head[9].

The fact that the bodies were buried along with other objects shows that the population of Zamanbaba believed in the life after death. While various kinds of weapons are often found in men's graves, women graves contained precious stones, jewelry, copper mirrors and knives etc. Based on these finds we can infer the importance of women (mother) in the social life of Zamanbaba population. Another evidence to support this proposition is provided by the schematic symbolic representation of a single mother terracotta figurine found in the Zamanbaba burials, which is 15 cm

long and 4 cm wide and painted in red color[10]. Such terracotta figurines were also found in Namozgokh 5[11], upper layers of Shakhtepa[12], Khisortepa 3[13] and Anau[14]. This indicates the social and economic relations between Zamanbaba and other Bronze Age cultures of the region.

Zamanbaba settlement is located 500 meters to the east of Zamanbaba lake, along the old valley of Gujayli river. Its area is 0,10 ha. There is a 170 m² basement-type hut in its central part, remains of two further huts and pottery jars[15]. The basement is 23.5 meters long, 9 meters wide and 1 meter deep and there lived approximately 60-65 inhabitants[16]. Materials that were found in the north-eastern corner of the settlement were identified as belonging to the latest stage of the Kaltaminor culture and its ceramics with clay composition and oval-shaped vessels are reminiscent of ceramics from the oldest burials of the Zamanbaba cemetery[17].

Based on the analysis of Zamanbaba pottery we can conclude that the people of Zamanbaba were the first among the population of the steppe to use pottery wheel[18]. They fired pottery vessels in two-sector jars. This in turn was a very important technical development, since it was a big step in the production of ceramics. Another important innovation was the use of the pottery wheel instead of hand-made pottery[19].

Most of pottery finds were decorated in reddish color with a solar symbolism. Such pottery is often found in the Zamanbaba cemetery and settlement. The appearance of pottery vessels of this type indicates the connection between the beliefs of Zamanbaba population and later fire-worshipping[20]. Pottery fragments are in oval shape, without decoration with a spheroidal base featuring a thick profile. They are decorated in reddish color that is characteristic for the pottery of the Zamanbaba culture. The appearance of pottery produced in southern Turkmenistan among the findings of Zamanbaba culture indicates the wide social and economic relations of its population[21]. It shows that the technical discoveries of southern neighbors contributed to the development of economic life of Zamanbaba population.

People of Zamanbaba learned from them how to cultivate cereals and advanced methods of farming, to use pottery wheel, to create jewelry from various semi-precious stones etc[22].

The metallurgical products are also important in elucidating the social and economic life of Bukhara oasis during the Bronze Age. It is noted in the previous publications that a certain group of people who had an advanced experience in metallurgy as they came from Qizilqum mountains to the area of Zamanbaba and introduced metal objects in the second half of the third millennium BC.

The amount of tools from flint-stone dramatically decreased with the emergence of metal objects into the area of Zamanbaba culture. Consequently, many types of objects that were typical of the previous period disappear. The production of metal objects was closely connected to the material culture of the Kaltaminor culture[23].

Various metal vessels, fragments of knives, arrowheads, jewelry, some weapons and bronze mirrors found from burials show that people of Zamanbaba practiced advanced metallurgy during the Bronze Age.

Population of Zamanbaba used archaic technologies of metallurgy and there are enough metal objects among the finds. That is supported by jewelry made from Badakhshan lazurite, a knife that was also found from Baten, a round-shaped mirror that was also found from Teppa Hisar III[24], a hook of a fishing rod composed of a copper needle and a round wire[25], a silver pipe, a golden cylindrical jewelry, small metal shovels and other related objects that were also found at such sites,

as Shokhtepa II[26], Hisor III[27] and Qoratepa (southern Turkmenistan)[28]. Archaeological findings also indicate the relations between the inhabitants of Zamanbaba and population of Southern Siberia and Volga[29]. Moreover, the emergence of metallurgy in the Zamanbaba culture resulted in the growth of labor efficiency among the tribes in the lower reaches of the Zerafshan river.

The basis of Zamanbaba economy, as has already been mentioned, was agriculture and livestock breeding. The fact that agriculture played a major role in the life of Zamanbaba people is attested by various archaeological findings associated with farming, such as stone agricultural tools, flint sickles, remains of cereals (barley, wheat, millet etc.). Bones of domesticated animals found from the Zamanbaba cemetery and settlement indicate livestock breeding. There are bones of cattle among the large domesticated animals and sheep and goats among the small domesticated animals. It seems that horse and camel were not domesticated yet, since there are no horse or camel bones among the finds. However, there is a single bone of a domesticated donkey. Furthermore, there are bones of wild animals as well, which mostly belong to Bukharan deer, gazelle and boar. Based on the study of the complex material finds from Zamanbaba we can say that cattle breeding was not yet separated from farming. In the late second – early first millennium BC the water in Zerafshan decreased and there was almost no water reaching its lower delta[30]. Consequently, this did not allow the development of other aspects of the economy other than cattle breeding. That's is why starting from the late second – early first millennium BC the latter became the basis of the economy for Zamanbaba population.

It is during this period that the tribes of Andronovo culture that arrived here during the Bronze Age and occupied the political and military leadership did not allow the further development of agriculture. Consequently, by the middle of the second millennium BC the population of Zamanbaba became part of the steppe cattle-breeding tribes of Eurasia that came to Central Asia from the north-eastern territories[31]. That is why there are no sites of Zamanbaba culture in the area starting from the second half of the second millennium BC[32]. The members of Andronovo-Tozabagyab culture that came to the north-western parts of Bukhara oasis very quickly spread all over the valley of the Zerafshan river. This can be seen in archaeological sites of Bukhara oasis on the north-western borders of Karakul district, on the banks of the Gujayli river in Mokhondaryo, in Katta Tuzkon, Kichik Tuzkon, borders of Kaptarni qumi as well as in steppe areas extending to the borders of Qumsulton[33].

Conclusions.

Following conclusions were reached in the course of research on the role played by the Zamanbaba culture in reflecting the social and economic history of Bukhara oasis during the Bronze Age:

- Prior to the formation of the Zamanbaba culture, this area was inhabited by the population of Kaltaminor culture of the Neolithic period. The characteristics and material culture of Zamanbaba indicates that it emerges in the early Bronze Age;
- Despite the role played by farmers in the formation of the Zamanbaba culture, due to the geographic and ecological conditions of the regions cattle breeding and agriculture played a major role in the economy of the Zamanbaba;
- The fact that Zamanbaba is the most important culture in the history of Bronze Age steppe tribes of Bukhara region is reflected in the material finds from the cemetery and the site;

- The burials, pottery objects, tools and metal items that were found at Zamanbaba indicate that it enjoyed a relatively important role in the social and economic relations of Bronze Age Central Asia;
- The in-depth study of the Zamanbaba culture and its characteristics serves to clearly and vividly illustrate the socio-economic history of the Bronze Age of Bukhara oasis.
- The discovery and study of the Zamanbaba culture by archaeologists is a turning point in the study of prehistorical society of Bukhara oasis and led to a number of other archaeological discoveries;

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