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Specific Aspects of the Ancient Material Culture of Central Asia

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ABSTRACT

In the first centuries AD, there was a large Kushan Empire in the southern regions of Central Asia, the Indian Peninsula, Afghanistan, southern Uzbekistan, and southern Tajikistan, and the Parthian Empire in its western parts, Iran, Turkmenistan, and the Black Sea region. They had Hellenistic culture, and in the north of these countries, a union of large semi-peasant, semi-herding states – “Hellenized culture” was formed in the territories of the Kang state.

Keywords:

Kushan state, Parthia, Kang, Hellenism, Hellenistic culture, Hellenized culture, Buddhism, Kushan coins.

Even in the 1st-4th centuries AD, a culture dating back to the traditions of antiquity dominated the central regions of Central Asia. Such a situation was especially evident in the material culture of the Kushan Empire, a large centralized state that occupied the territories of the Indian Peninsula, Afghanistan, southern Tajikistan, and southern Uzbekistan. Culture during the Empire reached an unprecedented peak of development. It should be noted that archaeologists have been conducting archaeological excavations in Kushan period monuments for many years and have identified an archaeological complex called the “Kushan archaeological complex”, which was a culture created by the influence of the mixture of the Hellenistic culture and the Buddhist religion that emerged in the southern parts of Central Asia. Some archaeologists call this culture “Kushonian culture”, other archaeologists call it “Hellenistic culture”, and in very rare cases “Hellenized culture”.¹

The culture created in the Kushan Empire had a great influence on the Soghd regions. We would like to emphasize that such an effect is the fact that the pottery complexes are almost equally developed in both regions, especially the images of terracotta figurines, which are very close to each other.

In the south-west of Central Asia, in the south and south-east of the Caspian Sea, is the ancient Parthian state, which was founded in about 250 BC, and in its time, this state had absorbed the territory from Mesopotamia to India, the eastern satrapies.² In the 1st century AD, the power of Parthia increased and became a dangerous rival of the Roman Empire. In the territory of this country, the Hellenized culture was preserved as it was during the developed Hellenism. That is, here we see that traditionalism in culture has continued quite firmly. Therefore, big changes in culture are not so visible. The material culture of Parthia was very close to the regions of Soghd and

¹ Ставиский Б.Я. Кушанская Бактрия: проблемы истории и культуры. М.: “Наука”, 1977. -296 с.

² Кошеленко Г.А. Культура Парфии. М.: 1966; Его же. Парфянская фортификация. – С.А. М.: 1963, №2.

Khorezm.³ It has been emphasized by many scholars that the material culture of the north-eastern regions of this empire, in particular, is similar to the material culture of the Karshi oasis.⁴

It could be a threat to the development of both empires, the Kushan Empire and Parthia, to their state policy and system only from the north and northeastern regions. The kings of these countries, who noticed this at the time, built defensive fortifications in the transverse direction to the routes of cattle-breeding population. Whether it is the "Wall of Antioch" built in the southwestern regions of Central Asia, the defense structures of the Kushan empire that passed through the Hisar mountains between Surkhandarya region and Kashkadarya, or the "Kanpir wall" that surrounded the northern part of the Samarkand oasis, all these were structures built to keep the security of the great empires and to block the way of the herdsmen. A force that could suddenly disrupt the peace and tranquility of these great empires was always the threat of the invasion of cattlemen armed with horsemen, swords and daggers from the north-eastern regions. Only such a force could break the military might of such great powers.

Hence, by building defensive structures against such a danger, as mentioned above, this danger could be prevented even to a small extent.

The peace and quiet life in the Kushan empire, which surrounded itself from the north with strong stone walls, for nearly 400 years, led to the emergence of a truly developed urban culture and the development of Buddhism in the territory of this state.⁵ Due to the archaeological research conducted in this area, the developed culture of urban planning, the remains of the

Hellenistic culture mixed with the Buddhist religion were discovered and studied.⁶ One of the cultural monuments of the Kushon era, the Kanpirtepa monument on the right bank of the Amudarya, was fully opened and studied by E.V. Rtveldadze, and the material culture of this monument was thoroughly studied.⁷ Most importantly, the ancient culture of red ware bowls and cups, goblets, terracotta figurines were very similar to the same objects of Sughd. As described above, the culture of urban planning was discovered during the archaeological excavations in the cities and villages of Sughd. Especially during the archeological excavations conducted in the ruins of the main capital city of Karshi Oasis, the potters' neighborhood was studied, and we can learn from the fact that in the layers of the 1st-4th centuries AD, life continued smoothly and peace continued for many years. In particular, we can see that the pottery craft of this period reached the highest point in its development. The use of extremely fine clay for making pottery and the very fine processing of clay prepared for making vessels is reflected in all the ceramics. Fragments of dishes taken from the cultural layers of this period are distinguished by their very thinness, and the fact that they are polished with a red angob on top.⁸ Such success in pottery is certainly characteristic only of the developed culture of urban planning.

It should be said that monuments with similar cultural layers are characteristic of the Muydintepa monument of the Karshi oasis, especially the bowls and goblets made very thinly in the layers of Muydintepa-II are

³ Пилипко В.Н. Поселения северо-западной Бактрии. Ашхабад.: «Бълым», 1985 г. Табл. XLIII-XLIX.

⁴ Массон М.Е. Столичные города в области низовьев Кашка-дарьи с древнейших времен (Из работ Кешской археолого-топографической экспедиции ТашГУ (1965-1966 гг.)). Т.: 1973; Кабанов С.К. Нахшаб на рубеже древности и средневековья (III-VI вв.). Т.: Фан, 1981.

⁵ Рахмонов Ш. Тавка (Ўзбекистоннинг қадимги боғхона иншоотлари тарихига доир). Т.: 2001. -142 б.

⁶ Пугаченкова Г.А. Халчаян. К проблеме художественной культуры Северной Бактрии. Ташкент.: 1966;

Пугаченкова Г.А., Ремпель Л.И. История искусств Узбекистана (с древнейших времен до середины XIX в.). М. М.: 1965; Пугаченкова Г.А., Рtvеладзе Э.В. Северная Бактрия – Тохаристан. Т.: "Фан", 1990. С.41-119.

⁷ Рtvеладзе Э.В. Тохаристанская археологическая экспедиция 1999-2009. Страницы истории. Ташкент.: 2009. - 100 с.

⁸ Исамиддинов М.Х., Сулейманов Р.Х. Еркурган (стратиграфия и периодизация). Ташкент.: "Фан", 1984, с.91-93; Сулейманов Р.Х. Древний Нахшаб. Проблемы цивилизации Узбекистана в VII вв. до н.э., VII в.н.э. Ташкент.: «Фан», 2000, с.175-181(ЕК-11, ЕК-12, ЕК-13).

definitely painted and polished with red angob.⁹ It would be wrong to limit the description of pottery of the ancient period only to Muydintepa. Because this high level of culture of antiquity does not end with the ceramics from this one monument alone. Traces of the Hellenized culture of the 2nd-1st centuries BC can be found in the entire Sugdian region, including the Samarkand Sugdian and the upper reaches of the Kashkadarya. A similar pottery complex was found in Kalandartepa, a monument on the site of the city of Kitab.¹⁰ Despite the fact that the distance between the Kitab area and the Karshi oasis is more than 70 km, we would like to emphasize the similarity of these rare resources found in the layers of the II-I centuries BC and the I centuries AD.

We can see the above similarity when observing the archaeological monuments of the Samarkand oasis and the monuments in the basin of the Kashkadarya oasis, pottery and also terracotta figurines. There is no difference at all between the shape of the pottery found in the archaeological sites of the Jizzah oasis, about 200 kilometers north of the Karshi oasis, and the methods of polishing.¹¹

However, a slightly changed aspect of the state of similarity between the oases in pottery becomes noticeable when comparing the pottery complexes of the Bukhara oasis. In other words, we can see that in the layers of the Bukhara oasis monuments of the II-I centuries BC and in the layers of the I centuries BC, new forms of ceramics appeared.¹² In the oasis of Bukhara, the preserved part of the traditions of antiquity is primarily the form of ancient ceramics, and the rest can be seen in the

tradition of painting them in red, black and brown colors and polishing them.

In addition to the above traditions, we can see that the pottery belonging to the herding tribes of the northern and northeastern regions entered the oasis of Bukhara.¹³

In contrast, it is known that the influence of Hellenistic traditions is evident in the materials taken from the monuments on the right and left banks of Amudarya.¹⁴ In addition to the uniformity of such forms and coloring methods, we can see that from the first centuries AD, wavy patterns began to appear on the edge of large lycopoid vessels, on the outside of large vessels, as an example of layers VII of the Javanese monument of southern Tajikistan.¹⁵

The culture of ceramics, i.e., the technology of making very thin and light pottery and polishing it with red color, was the same in Ferghana as it was in the regions of Sugd. The only difference between Sughd and Fergana pottery was that their shape did not correspond to each other so much. Such a situation can be felt not only when comparing Fergana Valley pottery products with Kashkadarya Sugdi pottery products, but also when comparing Samarkand Sugdi pottery products with pottery products of the Karshi oasis. Because, precisely from the 1st century AD, the unique pottery of each oasis of Central Asia and forms of pottery vessels that correspond to the internal demand and taste of the inhabitants of that region appear.¹⁶

However, the archeology of the Khorezm oasis, unlike the above, pottery complexes of the middle of the 1st millennium BC were almost identical to other regions of Central Asia, but from the IV-III centuries BC, a completely different culture appeared in this area, which

⁹ Кабанов С.К. Археологические работы 1948 г. в Каршинском оазисе. Тр.ИИА АН УзССР. Т.II. Ташкент.: 1950., с.95, табл.71.

¹⁰ Крашениникова Н.И. Два комплекса керамики II-I вв. до н.э. из нижних слоев Китаба. – Т.: 1977. – с. 85.

¹¹ Пардаев М.Х., Пардаев А.Х., Пардаев Ш.М. Жиззах воҳасида шаҳар маданиятининг пайдо бўлиши ва ривжланиши боскичлари (ёзма ва манбалар асосида). Ўзбекистон археологияси. Самарқанд.: 2014. №1 (8). -15-39.

¹² Сулейманов Р.Х., Ураков Б. Результаты предварительного исследования античного городища селения Рамиш. ИМКУ. Вып. 13. – с.58, Рамиш – IV.

¹³ Ураков Б. Керамика с городища Рамиштепа. ОНУ. – Т.: 1978, № 2. Рамиш – IV.

¹⁴ Пиддаев Ш.Р. Материалы к изучению древних памятников Северной Бактрии. В сб. Древняя Бактрия. Вып. I. Л.: 1974; Ўша муаллиф. О генезисе штампованных орнаментов на керамике античной Бактрии. ОНУ, 1975, № 1.

¹⁵ Зеймаль Т.И. Вахшская долина в древности и раннем средневековье (Археологические памятники и динамика ирригационных систем левобережья долины). Дисс. на соис. уч. ст. канд. ист. наук. – Л.: 1969. С. 237-238.

¹⁶ Исамиддинов М.Х., Сулейманов Р.Х. Еркурган (стратиграфия и периодизация). Ташкент.: «Фан», 1984

archaeologists at the time called “Kang culture”. When the vessels belonging to this culture were produced, we see that large khums and khumchas are decorated with spiral patterns in color on the outside.¹⁷ Of course, such decorative vessels were not found in the Bactrian or Sugdian regions at all. However, we can be sure that such patterned dishes are widespread in the Syrdarya region, especially in its lower parts. Especially in the graves of the first half of the 1st millennium BC, if we see that the traditions of the Andronova culture continued, from the middle of this millennium, cylinder-cone-shaped urban culture vessels can be found.¹⁸ This is certainly not the era we are looking at and the area we are looking at.

We see that in the middle of the 1st millennium BC, the traditional dishes of the Saks, the successors of the herdsmen belonging to the Andronova culture, were widely used in everyday life. Also, the local urban planning culture - cylinder-cone pottery items were widely used in the daily needs of cattle-breeding tribes. So these vessels were placed in the graves of the Sak tribes, because in their eyes, people walked with the idea that after their death, the “real world”, “real life” begins. Therefore, when the dead body is placed in the graves, the weapons, household items used by him during his life, along with women, various jewelry, etc. are placed in the graves. Such concepts existed in almost all the tribes of that time.

Needless to say, the difference in material culture between the farming communities and cattle-breeding tribes in the Khorezm oasis was quite large. In the central cities of peasant communities, we can see that the influence of the Kangyu culture was much greater in the 1st-4th centuries AD, that is, the traditions of the Kangyu culture were preserved. Such a succession can also be known from the

materials of Tuprokala, the ruin of the capital city of Khorezm in the 2nd-4th centuries AD.¹⁹ At the same time, the influence of herding culture on the life of peasant communities in these regions was reflected in their material culture.²⁰ However, even if the influence on everyday dishes and household items is great, it is evident that the succession in the Khorezm oasis continued firmly in religious and divine items. We can see them as they were in ancient times.

One of the main signs of the development of ancient civilizations in the Khorezm oasis is the widespread use of terracotta figurines, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic terracotta figurines on the edges of various dishes, which is known from many literatures published on the Khorezm oasis.²¹

In conclusion, it can be said that the Hellenistic culture and its complications, which was widespread in all regions of Central Asia in the II-I centuries BC, and its complications until the later periods, until the I-IV centuries AD, even in the wall paintings of Central Sughd, it is possible to see that many episodes related to the legends of the Greek era have been preserved. The spread of Hellenistic culture was not limited to the territories conquered by Alexander the Great, but also in Khorezm, Bukhara, Tashkent oases and Fergana Valley, where he did not reach. But the culture in these regions was not “Hellenistic culture” as in Greece, Rome, or the Mediterranean countries, but rather “Hellenized culture”.

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¹⁷ Воробьева М.Г. Керамика Хорезма античного периода. В сб. Керамика Хорезма. ТХАЭЭ. Т. IV, М.: 1959, с.63-220.

¹⁸ Вишневецкая О.А. Культура сакских племен низовьев Сырдарьи в VII-V вв. до н.э. (по материалам Уйгарака). М.: 1973. – 160 с.

¹⁹ Топрак-кала. Дворец. Труды Хорезмской археолого-этнографической экспедиции. М.: «Наука», 1984. -303с.

²⁰ Левина Л.М. Керамика нижней и средней Сырдарьи в I-тысячелетии до н.э. М.: 1971, рис.30, с. 125.

²¹ Толстов С.П. По древним дельтам Окса и Яксарта. М.: 1962, с.192.; Левина Л.М. Керамика нижней... рис.15. с. 187-189.

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