



SHUROBASHAT ARCHAEOLOGY AT THE ROOTS OF FERGANA CIVILIZATION

Alisher Axmadjonovich Aloxunov

Associate Professor at the Uzbekistan-China

Joint Department of Archaeology

Tashmatov Bahtiyor Davlataliyevich

Lecturer at the Department of World History

Fergana State University

Abstract

This article analyzes the historical and archaeological significance of the Shurobashat archaeological site located in the Fergana Valley. Excavations conducted between the 1950s and 1990s, along with studies in 1993, revealed that the site comprises three distinct parts, is equipped with strong defensive walls, includes a massive foundation in the citadel (ark), and reflects multiple construction phases. The discovered pottery and construction methods indicate the continuation of Chust–Eylaton cultural traditions and date the initial formation of the site to the first millennium BCE. The article also highlights the strategic location, as well as the economic and political importance of the site. It explores the development of urban culture, its topography, and the potential comparison of Shurobashat with the city of Yu (Yuchen) mentioned in Chinese sources.

Keywords: Shurobashat, Fergana Valley, archaeology, urban culture, Eylaton culture, agriculture, ark, defensive walls, pottery, ancient city, Dawan, city of Yu, Qoradaryo.

INTRODUCTION

The irreplaceable witnesses of the past — ancient city ruins — serve as invaluable sources for today’s archaeological research. The Shurobashat (or Sho`robashat) city ruins are among such monuments, once being one of the major cultural and



strategic centers of the Fergana Valley. Today, the site is located in the territory of the Osh Region of the Kyrgyz Republic, approximately 8 kilometers from the city of Uzgen, on the right bank of the Yassy River, a tributary of the Qoradaryo. Its geographical location and archaeological findings highlight the site's role within ancient civilizations.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

In 1954, the Shurobashat archaeological site was first identified by Yu.A. Zadneprovskiy, a member of the Southern Kyrgyzstan archaeological expedition, and scientific-exploratory excavations were carried out there between 1954 and 1957. According to his findings, the site, covering an area of 70 hectares, was surrounded by walls equipped with fortified towers [4:116–118]. Excavations revealed that the site was composed of three main sections. Defensive walls were constructed on three sides of the city, while the fourth side – bordered by the Yassy River – was naturally protected, thus lacking a wall. Zadneprovskiy emphasized that, in terms of its social and territorial function, the site was clearly divided into three structured parts.

Shurobashat I served as a refuge for the population and livestock during times of unrest. Except for the southern side, it was enclosed by strong defensive walls. The cultural layer is relatively thin.

Shurobashat II was the main residential area. Nearly all sides were enclosed by walls, and the entrance likely lay in the northeastern corner. Excavations revealed houses built of mudbrick and adobe, along with numerous utility pits. The lower construction layers are poorly preserved, though parts of room floors were recorded. The abundance of household pits is typical of the ancient agricultural culture of the Fergana region.

Shurobashat III refers to the citadel (ark), located in the southeastern part of the city. It is enclosed by walls and has an irregular rectangular shape. Traces of towers are visible, and entrances may have existed on the eastern and southern sides. Mainly domestic housing remains were found in the ark area, and the lower layers remain largely unexcavated [3:10–11; 4:119–129].



In his later research, Yu.A. Zadneprovskiy identified Shurobashat II as the citadel (ark), but due to the absence of structural remains and the disturbance of stratigraphic layers, this view is considered an unfounded assumption.

In 1993, B.Kh. Matboboev conducted archaeological excavations at two locations within the Shurobashat citadel and achieved specific scientific results. During the excavations, the main construction phases of the site were identified [6:21–22].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As previously noted, all parts of the Shurobashat site were surrounded by defensive walls (earthen embankments). According to Yu. Zadneprovskiy's calculations, the total length of these walls is approximately 3 km [4:116]. In certain areas, elevated sections have been preserved, beneath which towers may have once stood.

The walls surrounding the main residential area were cross-sectioned during excavations, and their composition was studied. The results showed that the walls were multi-layered and built from horizontally compacted earthen embankments, forming a massive defensive structure. It was also established that a core of compacted soil had been filled between two facing walls constructed of baked bricks.

Research indicates that these walls were erected directly on natural soil, which serves as important evidence that the site originated during the early urban phase. The construction methods used for defensive walls in the Fergana Valley were based on ancient architectural traditions, and similar techniques were observed at Shurobashat. Specifically, the walls were built with a "shell" of brick on both sides, with the space between filled with densely packed earth. This technique has also been recorded at ancient cities like Dalvarzin and Eylaton [4:118–119], though it appears to have been less commonly employed at Chust.

These construction styles can be interpreted either as regional characteristics or as chronological differences. Most importantly, the application of this method at Shurobashat demonstrates that the site was built according to long-standing traditions and supports its dating to the 4th–1st centuries BCE.

Despite the limited quantity of archaeological materials uncovered during the excavations, the discovery of pottery characteristic of Eylaton suggests that



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Shurobashat emerged around the mid-1st millennium BCE. This stage is identified as the First Period. The similarities in urban layout between Eylaton and Shurobashat — particularly the presence of specially fortified areas for the protection of people and livestock — confirm shared traditional features between the two cities.

Based on the available evidence, the development of the city can be evaluated in three distinct phases:

First Period – Initial settlement by the population and the formation of a small fortress;

Second Period – Construction of defensive walls around the fortress, development of the citadel (ark), and expansion of all parts of the city;

Third Period – Decline and eventual abandonment of urban life.

According to topographic analysis, the different parts of the city were formed at different times, with all chronological phases primarily recorded in the area of the citadel.

Thus, the discovery of new archaeological materials from a major site like Shurobashat holds significant importance. Firstly, new data have been obtained; secondly, the understanding of the site's role in the history of the Fergana Valley has been further expanded. Among the important findings, one of the key discoveries was the presence of pottery dating to the Eylaton period. Although similar materials had been encountered previously, the new finds confirm that the cultural traditions of this period existed concurrently for some time. Overall, Shurobashat continued the ceramic traditions of the Chust–Eylaton period.

Another noteworthy result of the 1993 excavations was the discovery of a massive foundation (platform) in the citadel area. Such platforms had previously been identified at other sites including Qoradaryo, Mingtepa, and Qo‘rg‘ontepa. The large size of the foundation at Shurobashat suggests that a monumental structure, possibly a temple or a palace, once stood atop it.

The site’s large area, its division into three distinct sections, and the discovery of a foundation within the citadel are among the key indicators confirming its status as a city. These elements are of great importance in corroborating historical records. In particular, Shurobashat can potentially be identified with the city of Yu (Yuchen) mentioned in Chinese sources [5:311; 1:79–80]. According to these



records, a Chinese envoy was captured in this city, and many inhabitants were killed during its conquest [2:162–163]. This suggests that in the 2nd century BCE, Shurobashat was a major city of strategic importance in eastern Fergana.

CONCLUSION

The archaeological evidence and analyses presented above indicate that Shurobashat holds particular significance as one of the earliest examples of urban culture in the Fergana Valley. Its large territorial extent, well-structured division into three parts, highly developed defensive architecture, and monumental platform-based structures in the citadel all confirm that this was once a major political, economic, and cultural center.

The archaeological materials uncovered at Shurobashat – particularly pottery characteristic of the Eylaton culture – suggest that the city first emerged in the mid-1st millennium BCE. Such evidence reveals the deep historical roots of the settlement and highlights its contribution to the urban civilization of the Fergana Valley.

The construction methods and similarities in fortification styles demonstrate that Shurobashat shared common cultural traditions with other ancient cities such as Dalvarzin and Eylaton. The city's orderly layout, defensive walls, and economic infrastructure reflect a sedentary society specialized in agriculture. Therefore, Shurobashat should be recognized not only as a city but also as a major center representing the agricultural culture of its time.

Furthermore, Shurobashat's extensive defensive system and strategic location also underscore its military and political significance. In particular, when compared with information found in Chinese sources, it can be inferred that this site was one of the important cities on the eastern frontier of the Kingdom of Davan in the 2nd century BCE.

Thus, Shurobashat occupies a special place not only as an important archaeological site but also as a prominent example of highly developed ancient urban culture in the Fergana Valley, from cultural, political, and economic perspectives. The data obtained from the site serve as a vital scientific foundation for deeper study of the valley's history and for reconstructing ancient urban planning traditions.



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