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Annotation: *This article discusses the Kuchuktepa site in southern Uzbekistan, which contains layers from the Late Bronze, Early Iron, and Ancient Bactrian periods. Since this site spans several centuries, the finds specific to each period, especially pottery, are noteworthy. While some periods contain simple but well-crafted pottery, others contain colorful, intricate pottery.*

Key words: *Kuchuktepa memorial, Southern Uzbekistan, colorful pottery , pattern, bronze age, early iron age, sondage, cultural layer, settlement, ruin.*

The study of the lifestyle of our ancestors, the rich cultural and spiritual heritage left by the Uzbek people, who have long made a worthy contribution to the history of world civilization, and the discovery of their colorful and bright sides, is a pressing issue today. In providing information about the lifestyle, culture, and economy of our ancestors of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages, the Kuchuktepa culture, which was archaeologically researched by L.I. Albaum and A.A. Askarov on the southern borders of Uzbekistan, deserves special attention.

Kuchuktepa is located on the southern side of Mount Kuhitang, in the southwestern part of the Sherabad Valley. This monument was built on the right bank of the Amu Darya, one of the largest rivers in Central Asia, on the basis of the Ulanbulaksay River, flowing through the gorges of Mount Kuhitang. It is located 1 km southeast of the center of the present day Muzrabod district of Surkhandarya region. The monument was discovered by L.I. Albaum in 1962. The Kuchuktepa monument appeared on the banks of the Ulanbulaksay River as a village of ancient peasant communities living in the Late Bronze Age.

Extensive excavations were carried out at this site in 1963-1965 and 1967. As a result, various archaeological materials were found, including decorated pottery. These pottery items date back to the late 2nd and early 1st millennium BC, that is, to the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages [1]. The central part of this Late Bronze Age settlement covers an area of 440 square meters [2]. The monument consists of three cultural layers, and the settlement was originally surrounded by a defensive wall on three sides (north, west, and south). The eastern part consisted of an open area. The entrance to the fortress was from the east, and the width of the entrance was 1 meter.

The total area of the site is approximately 0.5 hectares, forming a small hill extending from west to south [3]. Initially, the highest, central part of the monument was excavated and stratigraphic excavations were carried out in several places. As a result, it was determined that the monument belongs to two historical periods. The lower layer of Kuchuktepa dates back to the Late Bronze Age, while its upper layer dates back to the Early Iron Age.

The central core of Kuchuktepa was built on an 8-meter-thick platform and was a large patriarchal family palace surrounded by a thick defensive wall, the lower third of which dates back to the Late Bronze Age.

The lower part of the settlement platform is 320 meters, the upper part is 150 meters [4]. Analysis of the above layers The lower layer of Kuchuktepa is called Kuchuk I according to the chronological period system. Excavations began in 1963 in the ruins of the upper part of the settlement area, in the central part of the hill, and continued until 1964-1965 and 1967. During this period, many farm and residential complexes were discovered. At the same time, stratigraphic pits were dug in various parts of the settlement. The first large-scale excavation began in the eastern part of the hill [3].

During the study of the monument, four construction periods were identified. During the first construction period, the Kuchuktepa consisted of three large patriarchal family groups. During the second construction period, the number of residential houses reached 6. During the third construction period, the houses expanded to the east and south, and the number of family houses reached 7. Hearths were the main factor in determining the number of houses, and the number of houses was determined by hearths. Among the residential complexes, house 7 turned out to be a family temple intended for religious ceremonies. During this construction period, the number of rooms reached 11. The fourth construction period corresponds to the final stages of the Bronze Age. The dwellings of previous periods were abandoned, and this may have been a period of crisis for the population of Kuchuktepa.

However, after some time, life began to revive at this site. The old buildings were razed and new dwellings were built in their place. The remains of walls 2-3 bricks high, preserved in three places of the site, indicate that the uppermost layer of Kuchuktepa was divided into another construction period. 23 rooms belonging to the fourth construction period have been discovered. The main part of the rooms was intended for household purposes. The entrance to the settlement was mainly through the corridors on the east and south sides. During this period, the settlement was surrounded by thick defensive walls, and a strong fortress was built in its center. Room 17, which dates back to this period of construction, has a unique appearance, and the discovery of special objects here indicates that the room had religious significance.

The Kuchuktepa monument belongs to two periods: the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age, and consists of five cultural layers. The area surrounded by defensive walls in the center of the settlement has remained unchanged throughout all construction

periods. Its eastern part has been renovated. Here, among the monumental architectural structures, the construction of a central fortress with an excellent appearance and the surrounding of residential areas with a defensive wall are observed. This gives the settlement a fortress look, and it is not surprising that the excellent arch in its center was one of the most remarkable structures in the middle of the 1st millennium BC.

Hand-made, undecorated pottery from the lower layer of the layers known as Kuchuk I is found alongside pottery from the final stage of the Sopolli culture, which was made on a pottery wheel. At this time, the custom of decorating pottery with colorful flowers had not yet begun, and later, in the colorfully decorated pottery layer of the last Bronze Age, pottery wheel-made pottery disappears. Now the main part of the vessels is made up of hand-made, undecorated pottery. Among these pottery vessels, occasionally, along the pottery wheel, red-black colored flowered pottery begins to appear. In addition, there are stone and terracotta urchins, bone needles, awls, and small-handled three-pronged bronze arrowheads.

The longest period of the Kuchuktepa site in Northern Bactria is the Kuchuktepa I period, and experts have observed three construction periods here. If each construction period is calculated with a time interval of 100 years, the Kuchuktepa I period covers 300 years, that is, the 12th - 10th centuries BC [5].

Some monuments that served as oasis centers during the period of Kuchuk I gradually lost their political status during subsequent historical processes, that is, during the period of the Ancient Bactrian culture. This is because they were located in an inconvenient geographical location, on small watercourses. During the period of the Ancient Bactrian culture, we observe the strengthening of monuments located along large rivers and the emergence of new political centers [6]. The process of the emergence of the monument of Khaitabad-tepa, located on the banks of the Surkhandarya, is an example of this idea.

The fourth construction layer discovered in the central part of Kuchuktepa is about 50-60 cm thick. However, in this layer, various geometric patterns of pottery painted on white enamel are abundant. The pottery was mainly handmade. This layer was called Kuchuk II [4]. Cultural layers of this period are found at the sites of Kuchuktepa and Kyzyltepa in Northern Bactria, and Tillatepa in Southern Bactria. As a result of archaeological research, it is observed that the houses in this layer are becoming smaller. In the Kuchuk II layer, two-bladed bronze bowls are found for the first time. Its second important feature is the appearance of a new form of pottery made on a potter's wheel. They are cylindrical-conical in shape and are made into a circular hook-shaped structure [4]. According to the observations of archaeologists, such types of pottery are not found in the monuments of the Late Bronze Age. Another important feature of this layer is the decrease in the number of flowered pottery and the appearance of pottery with a hook-shaped rim. As a result of archaeological research conducted in 1977, it was established that the construction phase of Kuchuk II was surrounded by 4 rows of defensive walls.

This period is called the transition from the Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age, or the beginning of the archaeological period of ancient Bactria. Thus, Kuchuk II or the beginning of the Early Iron Age in ancient Bactria was the beginning of the Early Iron Age. The material culture of the Kuchuk II period is found only in the regions of Bactria and Marghiana, that is, in the regions where the ancient agricultural culture was widespread during the Bronze Age.

In the fourth construction layer unearthed in the central part of Kuchuktepa, there is an increase in the frequency of ceramics decorated with various geometric patterns applied over a light-colored slip (angobe). These ceramics are predominantly handmade. This layer is identified as Kuchuk II [7, 8]. Cultural layers corresponding to this period are also recorded at the sites of Kiziltepa in Northern Bactria and Tillatepa in Southern Bactria. Archaeological evidence indicates a fragmentation of residential structures within this horizon. The Kuchuk II layer marks the first appearance of bronze socketed arrowheads with two lobes and a leaf-shaped (rhombic) base. Another significant feature is the emergence of new ceramic forms produced on a potter's wheel. These include jar-shaped and cylindrical-conical vessels with hook-like rims [8]. According to the observations of A. Askarov, such ceramic types are absent in Late Bronze Age sites. A further distinguishing characteristic of this layer is a noticeable decrease in the quantity of painted (decorated) pottery.

The upper layers of Kuchuktepa are divided into the Kuchuk III and Kuchuk IV construction periods. The material culture of the Kuchuk III period is observed in a cultural layer two meters thick at Kuchuktepa, and the scientist proposes to determine this period as the time from the second half of the 8th century BC to the middle of the 6th century [5].

The material culture of the Kuchuk IV period is recorded in the monuments of North Bactria at Kuchuktepa, Tallashkantepa, Kyzyltepa, Bandikhan 1, Hayitabad and several others. At Kuchuktepa, Kuchuk IV ceramics are found in a cultural layer about 2 meters thick. In terms of distribution area, it is very extensive, extending overland to the Bukhara oasis in the north, and by water to the Khorezm region, and to the Iranian territories in the south. Among the monuments of North Bactria, the monument with the longest lasting material culture of this period is Gazimulla Tepa. According to E.V. Rtveladze, objects of this period were observed there during three construction periods. Based on the two pieces of evidence mentioned above, namely the 2-meter cultural layer observed at Kuchuktepa and the three construction periods observed at Gazimulla, archaeologists propose to date the Kuchuk IV period from the middle of the 6th century BC to the end of the 5th century BC [5].

The pottery of the fourth construction period is well-represented by patterns. The pottery of the lower layers is characterized by triangular and line drawings. The pottery of the later periods is characterized by flag-like, wavy patterns, and animal images. Therefore, the production of pottery products, bronze and iron weapons played a key role in the development of the Kuchuktepa monument.

It should be noted that the upper layer of the site dates back to the Ancient Bactrian period and is characterized mainly by wheel-made pottery. The lower layer is characterized by the discovery of pottery objects dating back to the Late Bronze Age of the site. The vessels found in the lower layer of the site are half-bowls, accounting for 20% of the total number of pottery [3]. According to the production of pottery vessels in the Bronze Age layer, they were mainly decorated on the surface, and they were made using a decorative mold made of fabric. Some of them have preserved traces of fabric.

Kuchuktepa, with its pottery, belongs to the type of the Chust culture in the Fergana Valley, the Anov IV in southern Turkmenistan, the Yaz I in the Murghab Valley, and the Tillatepa culture in northern Afghanistan. However, the chronology of the above-mentioned cultures is determined differently. Its date was determined based on the analysis of archaeological materials. Accordingly, the archaeological complexes of the Kuchuktepa monument indicate that it belongs to the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages.

It is essential to emphasize that the upper layer of the settlement belongs to the Ancient Bactrian period [3, P.8]. In its time, this site played a crucial role in the formation of the earliest class relations in Uzbekistan. Regarding the pottery from the Bronze Age layer, the vessels are primarily decorated; their ornamentation was created using fabric-based stamps or molds. These decorative patterns were applied by pressing the molds onto specific parts of the vessels to leave distinct impressions.

The Bronze and Early Iron Age archaeological complex of Kuchuktepa was also found at Maidatepa in the village of Bandikhon. E.V. Rtveladze conducted research at this site and proved the existence of the Kuchuk I and Kuchuk II complexes at Maidatepa. Monuments belonging to the Kuchuk I and Kuchuk II complexes were also found in the depressions in the upper layer of Jarkotan at the Kyzyltepa, Boyrachitepa, and Mirshodi sites in Shorchi district. In general, Kuchuktepa is characteristic of the Bronze Age Sapalli culture, except for its monumental architecture, which is reminiscent of the Chust culture. This indicates the existence of cultural, economic, and ethnic ties between them.

At present, Kuchuktepa serves as a vital scientific benchmark for archaeologists studying Iron Age settlements in the Pashkhurt Valley, located at the foothills of the Kohitang Mountains. In particular, the study of new sites from this period is being productively carried out by the scholar's student, Sh. Shaydullaev, alongside international specialists. Notable in this regard is the joint Uzbekistan-Czech archaeological expedition led by L. Stančo and Sh. Shaydullaev [9]. In 2017, the Uzbekistan-France archaeological expedition, under the leadership of Sh. Shaydullaev and J. Lhuillier, continued these investigations, exploring five Early Iron Age villages (Burguttepa, Kayrittepa, Gazo Qoton, Boyqoshtepa, and Qamishtepa), as well as another settlement reflecting the transition from the Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age [10]. In recent years, these sites have been further researched by young specialists, among whom the work of O. Khamidov [11] is noteworthy. In his scientific research, he has focused specifically on the identification and study of new archaeological objects belonging to the Kuchuk I period, namely the

Burguttepa and Kayrittepa sites. These studies have enabled the scientific reconstruction of the initial stages of human development in the Pashkhurt Valley.

Three of the aforementioned settlements (Burguttepa, Kayrittepa, and Gazo Qoton) [12] are considered large fortified villages of the Early Iron Age, possessing unique characteristics within Central Asia. In the study of these monuments, the Kuchuktepa site, previously investigated by A. Askarov and L. Albaum, serves as the fundamental primary source.

In conclusion, it should be said that the Kuchuktepa monument is a monument belonging to the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages, and the objects found there, especially the pottery, are a vivid example of the culture of that period. This monument is of great importance in the study of the Ancient Bactrian civilization. This monument played an important role in the formation of the first class relations that emerged in Uzbekistan at that time. These ongoing and continuous research efforts demonstrate that this site – identified, first excavated, and introduced to science by A. Askarov – will serve as a cornerstone for numerous future studies. It continues to provide vital insights into the lifestyle of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age populations in Southern Uzbekistan

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