

Some Considerations About Kesh, The Political and Cultural Center of Sugd in the Early Middle Ages

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Abstract: This article analyzes the position of the city of Kesh as the political and cultural center of Sugd in the early Middle Ages, the historical geographical classification of the state and region of Kesh in Chinese historical sources, the fact that the territories from the Chu River to Shakhrisabz were called the Land of the Sulik, the fact that the city of Kesh was one of the political, cultural and economic centers of Sugd in antiquity and the early Middle Ages, and the fact that the city of Kesh was one of the developed centers of Sugd in cultural and international relations based on historical sources, including Chinese sources.

Keywords: Shi state, Duma River, Li, Tukhulo state, Mi, Sulik country, Kesh king, ruler Shishpir, “Kitob-al Buldon”, Han Shu, Suse, Hun Yan, Chitragandha, Xuysa

Introduction. There is evidence in historical sources and literature that the city of Kesh was the central city of Southern Sughd. This article aims to analyze the information on the position of the city of Kesh in the region of Southern Sughd, Turkestan, as well as in international relations, in sources and historical literature on the history of the East, in particular China, in the ancient and early medieval periods. An attempt was also made to show the role of Kesh as an economic, political and cultural center. Chinese historical sources provide a historical geographical classification of the Kesh state and region, which cites information that “the capital of the Kesh (Shi) state also bears the same name, the capital is located 10 li (1 li-479 m) south of Duma (Tankasdarya), these lands are the lands of the ancient Kang'yu state, the ruler is called Zhao-u, the ruler's residence is surrounded by a defensive wall 2 li away, the number of permanent troops is 1000 people, the lands around Kan (Samarkand) state 240 li in the north, Tukhulo (Tokhoristan) state 500 li in the south, Nashebolo (Nasaf) 200 li in the west, and Mi (Maymurg') 200 li in the northeast are under the jurisdiction of this state” [1:274].

Main part. There is sufficient evidence to say that Kesh was one of the important cultural centers in the Turkestan region even in the early Middle Ages, when the Sogdians, in the developed Middle Ages, the Transoxiana and Khorezmians, and in the late Middle Ages, the Bukharas and Khivas played a significant role in international relations and became the main mediators in connecting different countries [2:360]. The fact that Kesh was one of the cultural and political centers in the region is also confirmed by the information of Xuan Jiang. In his information, it can be seen that the territories from the Chu River to Shakhrisabz were called the country of Sulik. He also wrote that this region was inhabited by peoples with a single language and culture. Academician V.V. Bartold cites Sulik as a modified form of the word Sugd in Buddhist-Manichean pronunciation. In addition, we can see that the lands from the northwestern regions of Fergana to Shahrisabz were part of the Qing state in the 2nd century BC, and that Chinese sources also mention opinions related to the fact that this was considered a single cultural region. [3:179] Also, in the memoirs of Xuan Jiang; “The lands from Susheshui (Chu River) to Szeshuanna (Shakhrisabz) were called Suli in ancient times, there were about 30 scripts

used in the country, they wrote and read the scripts from top to bottom, their clothes were made of leather and wool, and partly of cloth, their clothes had short hems, women had long hair, men had short hair or shaved it completely, and they wore a soft ribbon with patterns on their foreheads” [4:40], providing valuable information about the customs and lifestyle of the population. Relying on written sources, in particular on information from the early Middle Ages, V.V. Bartold puts forward the idea that the city of Kesh was the first political leader not only in southern Sughd, but also in the entire Sughd region. In particular, to substantiate his opinion, the scientist considers it appropriate to cite the information in the work of the Arab historian Yaqubiy “Kitab al-Buldan” about the fact that Shahrisabz-Sughd was the ancient capital [5:188]. Archaeological sources also contain evidence that the city of Kesh was one of the cultural and political centers in the Sughd region at the beginning of our era. As a result of archaeological research conducted in the Kashkadarya oasis in the 60s of the 20th century, some scholars read the Sogdian inscriptions on coins dating back to the 3rd-4th centuries AD in the style of King Kanishka. However, later, the famous Sogdian scholar, O.I. Smirnova analyzed the inscriptions on these coins and interpreted them as “Kesh Shahi (ruler)” [6:273]. It is clear from the above considerations that the city of Kesh was considered one of the central cities not only of southern Sughd, but also of the entire Sughdiana at the beginning of the 2nd century AD, and was a cultural, economic and political center. Because the issuance of coins and the depiction of the ruler on them, along with factors indicating the status of the city and the power of the state, also indicate that the city pursued an independent policy. The first Ikhshid of Sughd, Shishpir (who ruled in the 40s-60s of the 7th century), is considered one of the rulers who first established local coinage. The fact that the largest of the coins he minted was 25-26 mm in diameter, weighing 5 grams, and the smaller coins were 19-22 mm in diameter, weighing 2.4 grams, and most importantly, the information that he was the ruler of Kesh indicates that the city of Kesh was one of the political, cultural, and economic centers of Sogd in antiquity and the early Middle Ages [7:168]. We can see that in some historical literature, opinions are cited that the origin of the word Sogd is also derived from the ancient name of the city of Kesh. In the 96th chapter of the Han Dynasty chronicle, “Han Shu” (“History of the Han Dynasty”), in the “About the Qing State” section, one can find information that Suse was the first of the five small principalities (xiao wan) in the state, that the princely capital and the country were also called Suse, and that the distance from the princely residence to the Chinese border post in Dunhuang was 8025 li [8:273]. From this, one can conclude that the Sogdian region was named the same as Kesh and that its central city was also Kesh. The information provided by V.V. Bartold also serves to confirm the above opinions. In his work on the historical geography of the Turkestan region, the scholar says that Kesh was considered the ancient capital of Sughd, and that the term Sughd later originated from the Chinese name of the city of Kesh, Suse [9:488]. However, it should be noted that the researcher did not provide any basis for analyzing the changes in these terms over time. The above-mentioned numismatic evidence also indicates the position of Kesh as the region's primary political, cultural and economic center. There is abundant historical literature proving that Kesh's political position was a leading position not only in southern Sughd, but also in the Turkestan region during the Arab conquest. Even after the Arab Caliphate conquered Transoxiana, local dynasties managed to retain control for a certain historical period. The rulers of the city of Kesh also managed to retain their local dynastic power. Kesh also continued to play an important role in political and cultural relations in the Sughd region. For example, in 738, the troops of the Kesh state also participated in the political struggles in the Turkic (Turkish) state. We can learn from the evidence cited by the Russian traveler G.Ye. Grum-Grzhimailo that the ruler of the Kesh state formed an alliance with the ruler of Chach in this year and participated in political struggles [10:329]. Although the leadership in Sughd passed to the city of Samarkand in the early Middle Ages, Kesh remained the center of southern Sughd, and there is a lot of information in historical literature about its active participation in international economic and cultural relations. It is worth mentioning a lot of information about trade and embassy relations with the city of Kesh in Chinese historical chronicles as an example. According to the analysis of information provided in historical literature, during the Sui Dynasty (586-618 AD), Kesh

maintained cultural and economic relations with China through ambassadors and caravans from 604 to 618 AD. During the above-mentioned years, Sui ambassadors who came to Western countries took various rare items and products from various rulers to the imperial palace. When the ambassadors were in the city of Kesh, they were given 10 dancing girls, lion fur, and a rare product called "xoshu" by the Chinese, which in translation means "fire mouse fur" (?), as a souvenir, according to historical literature [11:66]. Among the rare products taken to China, there is a lot of information about the export of medicines known as "Black Salt" ("xey yan"), "Red Salt" ("xun yan"), and "Chitragandha" (miracle medicine). Historical literature mentions that black salt is used for stomach aches, red salt for eye diseases, and the medicine "Chitragandha" for various injuries. The composition of the medicine "Chitragandha" is mentioned in historical literature as being made from tamarind (minna), shirinmia and "Rahnannia", as well as substances known as "boiling blood". Due to the complex composition and high cost of this medicine, its production and sale in counterfeit form also brought great profits. Therefore, there is information about testing this medicine when buying it, that is, cutting a place, moistening the medicine with the mouth, applying it to the wound, and if the effect is felt quickly, it is confirmed that it is of good quality [12:247]. Information in the literature on the history of China indicates that in the first half of the 8th century AD, musicians and dancers from various countries in our country, in particular from Kesh, were taken to China several times to entertain the Chinese nobility. Western music and dances in the Chinese palace and noble palaces became especially popular during the Tang Empire. In the chronicles of the Tang Dynasty, there is information about the Shi (Kesh) dancers, their dances, and their festive red color, their clothes made of sable cloth, their shoes made of red suede (precious leather), and the dancers performed the dance by jumping back and forth on the ball on a platform designed for dancing on the ball, entertaining the audience [13:85]. We can see that the cultural and economic relations between the Kesh state and the Chinese Tang Dynasty intensified with the development of trade and economic relations on the Great Silk Road. In the History of the Tang Dynasty ("Xin Tan Shu"), the city of Kesh was called Shi. In the History of the Tang Dynasty, Kesh was also named Xuysha and Szeshuanna. The information about the Kesh state indicates that there were 500 cities on its territory, which is another indication that the city was the leader in all of Sughd. Because for the 7th century AD, such a large population could only have been in the entire Sughd region. Regarding the establishment of contacts between Kesh and the Chinese state, it is said that it began during the Da-ye era (605-617), when Prince Dizhe tried to develop good relations with China. In the sixteenth year of the reign of Cheng-Guan (642-643), Prince Shasebi (Sughd Shishpir) sent local products to the Tang palace as a gift, as recorded in historical literature [14:85].

In conclusion, it can be noted that since the end of the early Middle Ages, the increasing influence of the Arab Caliphate in the country, the weakening of the Tang dynasty, along with a certain decrease in these cultural and economic relations, and the gradual decrease in information about the city of Kesh in Chinese historical chronicles. However, from the end of the 2nd century BC to the 8th century AD, Chinese historical chronicles cite information about the city of Kesh as the first important economic, cultural and political center in the south of Sogd, which also indicates that in the early Middle Ages, the city of Kesh was one of the developed centers of Sogd in cultural and international relations.

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