

PAPER

THE FORMATION OF MULTICULTURALISM IN THE FUNERAL RITES OF THE OXUS CIVILIZATION

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Abstract

The Oxus civilization (2250–1700 BCE) is the collective name for the Sapalli, Dashli, and Namazgoh cultures. Geographically and territorially, it encompasses the regions of Southern Uzbekistan, Southwestern Tajikistan, Northern Afghanistan, and Southern Turkmenistan. The Oxus civilization maintained constant cultural contact with the nomadic world to the north and settled agricultural communities to the south. As a result of these integration processes, multiculturalism becomes evident in the funeral rites of the Oxus civilization, influenced by various cultures.

Key words: Ancient East, Oxus civilization, Sapalli, Dashli, Namazga, Sopollitepa, Djarkutan, Kuzali, Mulali, Bustan.

INTRODUCTION

The Oxus civilization (2400 – 1700 BCE (Winkelman, 2014:199–229) // 2250–1700 BCE (Хамидов. Каттаева, 2024. С. 83–91) // 2200–1750 BCE (Bendezu-Sarmiento, 2024, p. 122–125) // 20 th – 15th centuries BCE (Kaniuth, 2020. p. 460–469) // 2300–1750 BCE (Francfort, 2009, p. 111) // 2500–1350 BCE (Kattayeva, Xamidov, 2024. с. 31–33; Xamidov, Kattayeva, 2024. с. 55–57) // 2300–1450 BCE (Xamidov. Kattayeva, 2024, с. 26–28) // 2350 – 1750 BCE (Francfort, 2009, p. 91–111) // 2500 – 2000/1900 BCE (Kristiansen, 2018. P. 32)) Consists of a complex of cultures including the Sapalli culture of Southern Uzbekistan (Аскаров, 1977), the Dashli culture of Northern Afghanistan (Сарианида, 1977), and the Namazga culture of Southern Turkmenistan (Массон, 1959). In scientific circles, this civilization is referred to by various names such as the “Bactrian or Murgabo – Bactrian culture” (Winkelman, 2014:199–229), “Fifth Civilization” (Bakiyev. Yuldasheva, 2020, p. 39–45), “Turan Civilization” (Аскаров. Ширинов, 1993. с. 50; Tosi, 1977), “ВМАС” (Сарианиди, 1999, с. 53–73; Сарианиди, 2001; Кузьмина, 2009, с. 79), “Oxus Civilization” (Lamberg-Korlovsky, 1994. p. 398–405; Бокиев, 2015. с. 175; Francfort, 2005; Lyonet, Dubova, 2021) and “Little Mesopotamia” (Сарианиди, 2001), “Little Central Asian Mesopotamia” (Kohl, 2016), “Kharali” (Шайдуллаев, 2015. с. 63–69), Ancient Greater Khorasan” (Desset, 2022, p. 21–40). It is considered a newly discovered center of civilization in the Ancient East. To date, approximately 200

archaeological monuments have been identified in the territories of Southern Turkmenistan, Southern Afghanistan, Southern Uzbekistan, and Southwestern Tajikistan. Of these, 46 are located within the territory of Southern Uzbekistan. (Хамидов. Каттаева, 2024. с. 83–91).

At the Sapallitepa monument of the Oxus civilization, a total of 138 graves have been studied, of which 125 are individual graves and 13 are communal graves. In particular, 104 are middle-aged, 7 are adolescents, and 47 are children under 10 years old. A total of 149 graves were excavated and studied at the Djarkutan 4a cemetery, while 38 graves were examined at the Bustan III cemetery. (Аскаров, 1977, с. 58; 1973, с. 172). V. I. Sarianidi excavated and studied the largest necropolis dating back to the 3rd–2nd millennia BC in Central Asia. He uncovered more than 2,323 graves on an area of 10 hectares and conclusively linked the emergence of ВМАС with the migration of the Aryans. (Сарианиди, 2001, С. 167).

The Oxus civilization, recognized as the fifth civilization of the Ancient East (Bakiyev, 2020, p. 39–45), exhibited influences of southern culture in burial rites during its formative period. However, during its crisis period, the influence of northern nomads has been proven through archaeological material evidence. Without denying traditional burial rituals, cremations and nomadic material culture predominate in the tombs of Bustan VI. (Аванесова, 2013, с. 37). Alternatively, the oval-shaped male grave in Zardcha Khalifa of the Zarafshan Valley, where the right

hand was placed under the head, the left hand in the abdominal area, and the body was buried along with ram horns, is more likely to have served as a "cultural bridge" between nomadic and settled communities. (Kristiansen, 2018. P. 32). In the Late Bronze Age, a high level of integration between nomadic and sedentary populations was evident at the Takhirboy III settlement. The presence of an Andronovo cemetery there serves as an example of ethno-cultural transformation processes. (Cattani et al., 2008. P. 39-44).

The funeral ceremonies and burial customs of the Oxus civilization were traditional. Women were laid on their left side, and men on their right side, replicating the position of a fetus in the womb. Such burial customs are observed not only among the Oxus people, but also among the pastoral steppe inhabitants of Central Asia, particularly in Kazakhstan, the Ural region, and areas where the Srub culture is widespread: along the northern Black Sea coast, as well as in the major civilizations of the Ancient East. (Абдуллаев, 1981, с. 18-26). Burial ceremonies were primarily conducted according to strictly established rules and regulations, with specific protocols for men, women, adolescents, children, and cenotaph graves. Each burial ceremony adhered to rigidly defined guidelines. Particularly, based on the results of archaeological excavations carried out in the last decades of the 20th century, the following conditions predominate in the graves uncovered at the Djarkutan V settlement:

- bodies positioned in a lateral supine position;
- joint burial of animals and humans;
- legs of adolescent children placed in a rhombus shape;
- collection of fragmented bones;
- presence of ceramic and bronze objects, animal bones observed in cenotaph graves. (Ионесов, 1990, с. 139-147).

RESULTS

The construction of the Djarkutan burial mounds repeats the architectural similarity of the Bronze Age burials of Iran and Baluchistan. (Ширинов, 1993, с. 245). According to the results of archaeological expeditions conducted in the 1990s, it should be noted that in the "Djarkutan Fire Temple", where the earliest signs of Zoroastrianism were observed, and in the Djarkutan 4 V cemetery, approximately 40% of cenotaph graves contained buried 10-12-month-old lambs. (Ионесов, 1990, с. 8-18). Additionally, animal bones were found in the skull area of human remains in grave 19 of the Bustan III cemetery, (Аскапов, 1977, с. 58). as well as in graves 15, 34, 62, 67, 69, 114, and 115 of the Djarkutan cemetery. (Аскапов, 1977, с. 53). In addition, in the Djarkutan 4 V cemetery, the headwear of skeletons in male graves and red ochre paint on it and the burial of the deceased in a dark brown bed were found, (Ионесов, 1988, с. 3-13) while in the Bustan VI cemetery, ochre was laid as a bed, (Аванесова, 1999, с. 27-36) or in two graves in Sapallitepa, the body was buried in a wooden sarcophagus. (Каниут, 2006, с. 45-63) The above archaeological data testifies, firstly, to the diversity of the religious and mythological life of the Oxus. The presence of "royal tombs" adorned with wall mosaics in Gonurdepe, (Francfort, 2009, p. 99-11) firstly, indicates the diversity of religious and mythological life among the Oxus civilization people, and secondly, demonstrates the division of tombs into several types based on their structure.

In the Late Bronze Age, a high degree of integration between nomadic and settled populations was evident at the Takhirboy III settlement, where the presence of an Andronovo cemetery serves as an example of ethno-cultural transformation processes. (Cattani et al., 2008. P. 39-44).

Throughout different stages of the Sapalli culture within the Oxus civilization, burial orientations varied: during the Sapalli stage, the head of the deceased was directed northward; in the Djarkutan stage, it was oriented north and northwest; during the

Kuzali period, westward; and by the Mulali stage, as the impact of transformational processes intensified, the orientation shifted to the southwest. (Абдуллаев, 16, с. 18-26). Naturally, these changes in orientation are attributed to different chronological phases. For example, the burial orientation of the Joytun culture from the Neolithic period in Turkmenistan changed to face northward, while at the Eneolithic monument of Karadepe, it shifted to a southern direction. (Сарианиди, 2001, С. 164).

DISCUSSION

The author proposes comparing the position of the body at funeral ceremonies with the orientation of worship rituals in the Zoroastrian religion. In Iran, temples face south during worship, while the Parsi tribes in India face north. (Дорошенко, 1982, с. 52). The "Avesta" records the timing of rituals performed in temples and the five daily acts of worship to fire and sun, noting their similarity to the forms of worship found in the holy "Kuran". (Dhalla, 1922, p. 380). This indicates that the origins of the transformational processes in the religious sphere of the Near and Middle East regions can be traced back to the distant past, while their evolutionary processes are connected to the present day. The directional aspects are explained by the fact that they have been changing periodically from a chronological point of view in each cultural monument of the Oxus civilization. Following the decline of the Oxus civilization, gradual transformational processes occurred in the monuments of its territory. Instead of burying the deceased, they began cremating them in special chambers. Subsequently, special clan burial chambers were established for representatives of large patriarchal families connected by kinship ties. One such monument is Pshaktepa (7th-6th centuries BC), located 250-300 meters northeast of the Kuchuktepa site. (Аскапов, 1982, с. 30-41). On the eve of the decline of the Oxus civilization, the role of the elite in the architecture of religious monumental temples declined. During the flourishing period of the Oxus civilization, the temples of Gonur and Altindepe were observed, and by the time of the crisis, they were abandoned, which is connected with the factors that led to the emergence of Zoroastrianism at the beginning of the Iron Age. (Курбонов, 2024, с. 322-337). This indicates the beginning of a new culture without graves. This likely occurred in connection with the construction of "dahma" (tombs) for the political elite. The "dahma" known in the Avesta as "zad-marg-khana," were located in two square rooms to the southwest of the northern ruler's palace in Gonur. Approximately 10 "members of the royal family" were buried there, with the last body placed in the dahma in a crouched position. (Сарианиди, 2001, С. 78). The use of the Sopollitepa and Gonur 1 sites as cemeteries in later periods is one of the traditional cultural characteristics typical of the Oxus civilization. (Salvatori, 2008, P. 75-98)

In addition, the manifestation of multiculturalism in the burial rites of the Oxus civilization is studied using the example of the grave discovered at the Ulugdepe monument. In particular, a belt made of limestone, 15 ceramic items, 8 pottery pieces, and 1 painted ceramic item were found in the woman's grave, brought from Baluchistan. In addition, scattered throughout the woman's grave were bracelets and beads made of precious stones such as gold, carnelian, and lapis lazuli. (Bendezu-Sarmiento, 2024, p. 122-125). The disappearance of such rich graves during the Yaz 1 culture signifies the introduction of a "culture without graves?" into science. (Шайдуллаев, 2009, с. 202; Хамидов, 2023, с. 96-104).

In the regions of the Oxus civilization, particularly in Margiana, Bactria, and Baluchistan, "temporary graves" also existed. These graves were a manifestation of proto-Zoroastrianism. According to researchers, these "temporary graves" contained small bones, where the remains were cleaned of flesh. Ash, sand, and animal

dung were used to keep the body separate from the earth. (Каримов, 2001, с. 203). It was the BMAC (Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex) carriers who introduced the burial rite of "temporary graves" to the nomadic culture.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, many studies have been conducted on the burial rites of the Oxus civilization, and dissertations have been defended. (Каримова, 2017, с. 44). In this article, an attempt was made to describe the multiculturalism that occurred in funeral rites as a result of the integration factor of the Oxus civilization with neighboring peoples.

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