



GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION AND STRATIGRAPHY OF THE CITY OF AFROSIYOB

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Abstract: This article explores the geographical position, urban development, and stratigraphic periodization of Afrosiyob, one of the major political and cultural centers of early medieval Central Asia. The archaeological site of Afrosiyob provides material evidence of the formation of feudal society during the 5th to 8th centuries CE.

Keywords: Afrosiyob, early medieval period, archaeological layers, Samarkand, urbanism, Ikhshids, feudalism, archaeology.

Introduction

The 3rd–4th centuries CE in Central Asia were historically significant as a period marking the decline of the slave-owning system and the gradual rise of feudal relations. These transitions led to major changes in the sociopolitical structure — the emergence of large landowners, the decline of urban authority, and the growing influence of rural aristocracy. These transformations were also reflected in architecture and urban planning. Located near modern-day Samarkand, the city of Afrosiyob represents a prime example of these historical processes.

Geographical Location of Afrosiyob

Afrosiyob (ancient Samarkand) is situated in the Zarafshan River basin along the Siyob canal. This area offered favorable environmental and geographical conditions for irrigated agriculture, handicrafts, and trade. The city's territory spanned approximately 230 hectares and developed under complex natural and topographical circumstances. The availability of water resources, fertile lands, and proximity to mountainous regions contributed significantly to the city's dynamic growth.

When the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang visited the region in the 7th century, he recorded that the city's walls stretched around 10 kilometers, highlighting Afrosiyob's status as a major urban center.

Archaeological Layers and Periodization

The archaeological site of Afrosiyob is rich in material culture from the 5th to 8th centuries, offering insight into the city's phased development:

Early Feudal Stage (5th–6th centuries):

This era saw the construction of fortresses, fortified residences, and irrigation systems. Archaeological investigations revealed rectangular, heavily fortified structures surrounded by moats, likely built for feudal landowners. Similar buildings have been found in rural areas and settlements around Afrosiyob.

Period of Political Centralization (7th–8th centuries):

During this period, the city developed a tripartite structure typical of early medieval urban planning: the *ark* (citadel or ruler's residence), the *shahristan* (residential and craft

quarters), and the *rabad* (suburban area for trade and industry). However, in many Central Asian cities, only a bipartite model (*ark* and *shahristan*) dominated. Two distinct stages of development can clearly be observed in the stratigraphy of Afrosiyob. Buildings accidentally discovered during road construction in the 1960s support this theory. Of particular significance is the "elite residential quarter" in the city's center, where mural paintings provide important historical and functional context.

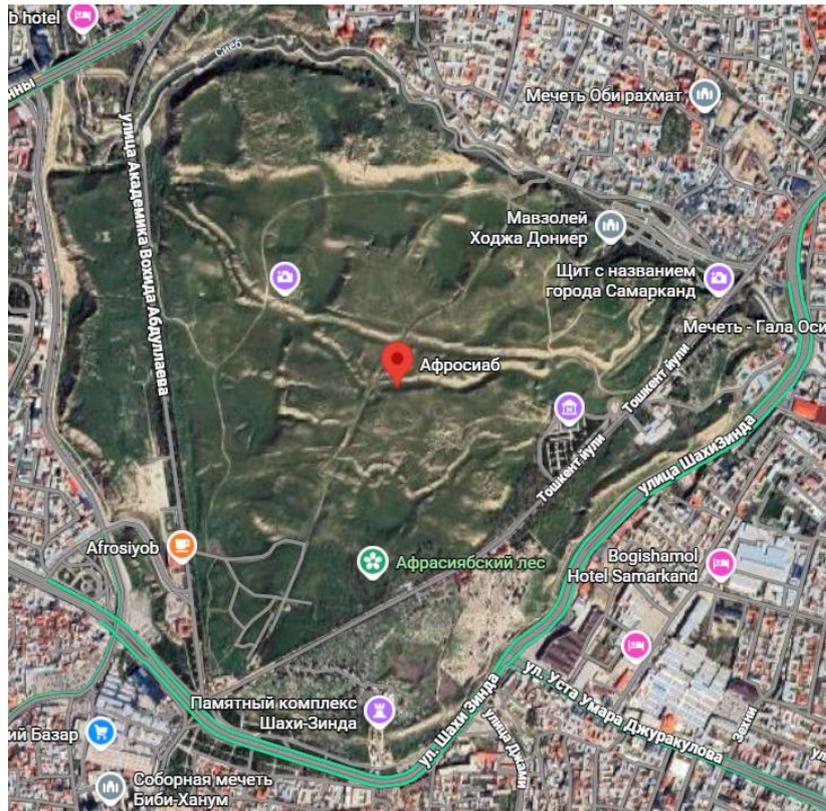
Afrosiyob Murals and Social Layers

Murals discovered in a guesthouse at Afrosiyob, painted in the tempera technique, depict scenes related to the political elite and religious culture of the era. Among these images are figures accompanied by Sogdian inscriptions, religious ceremonies, and diplomatic events. Researcher L.I. Al'baum attributed

these murals to the palace of Varhuman, the ruler (*ikhshid*) of Samarkand. This reinforces Afrosiyob's role as a significant political center of its time.

(Architectural examples from the early medieval period (5th–8th centuries): A residential complex with mural paintings discovered in the central part of ancient Samarkand (Afrosiyob).)





Conclusion

Afrosiyob was one of the major archaeological and cultural centers of the early feudal period in Central Asia. Its geographical location and archaeological stratigraphy provide valuable scientific insight into the socio-economic, political, and urban processes that occurred between the 5th and 8th centuries. Architectural and pictorial artifacts unearthed at the site serve as unique sources for understanding the lifestyle, religious beliefs, and political structures of the period

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