



## The Ordazy cities. The first archaeological research works in the cities of Sortobe 1, 2<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

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The article presents written data on the sites, located in the lower reaches of the Syr Darya river and extensive information about the archaeological research conducted in the Sortobe group of cities. It examines the main written sources, works of Arab-Persian researchers of the 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries, including rare information related to sites of the Oghuz period in the lower reaches of the Syr Darya river, which is presented for the first time. In addition, detailed information concerning events in the lower reaches of the Syr Darya, mentioned in the works of Western researchers in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is considered, memories of some local historians of the Tsarist Russia times and archival data of the Khorezm archaeological-ethnographic expedition are analyzed. The article highlights the process of studying the site and the archaeological excavations conducted there with results. This paper discusses the current state of the medieval city of Sortobe. It highlights that half of the city has been eroded by the Syr Darya river, leading to the cultural layer of the site being in an emergency condition without state protection.

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## Introduction

Today, Kazakhstan's national media culture is at the stage of further recognition and rethinking of the least studied period of Kazakhstan's history. The process of interaction between sedentary agriculture and nomadic lifestyles has long been the focus of attention of domestic researchers, as the myth of the historical backwardness of nomadism is still alive in the public consciousness. Therefore, the study of this problem should aim at a system of interaction and integration of the cultures that made up the nomadic economy, which was the basis of urban life. The use of new methods, including multidisciplinary ones, is necessary for the current level of historical research and for the various aspects of the settlements functioning. The knowledge of the historical past is aimed at maximizing the use of written sources in which the analysis of the data results is scientifically based. Thus, the surviving pre-revolutionary records of travelers, as well as the medieval maps and personal references, allow to determine the extreme points of origin and decline of the medieval city of Sortobe belonging to Oghuz (Fig. 1).

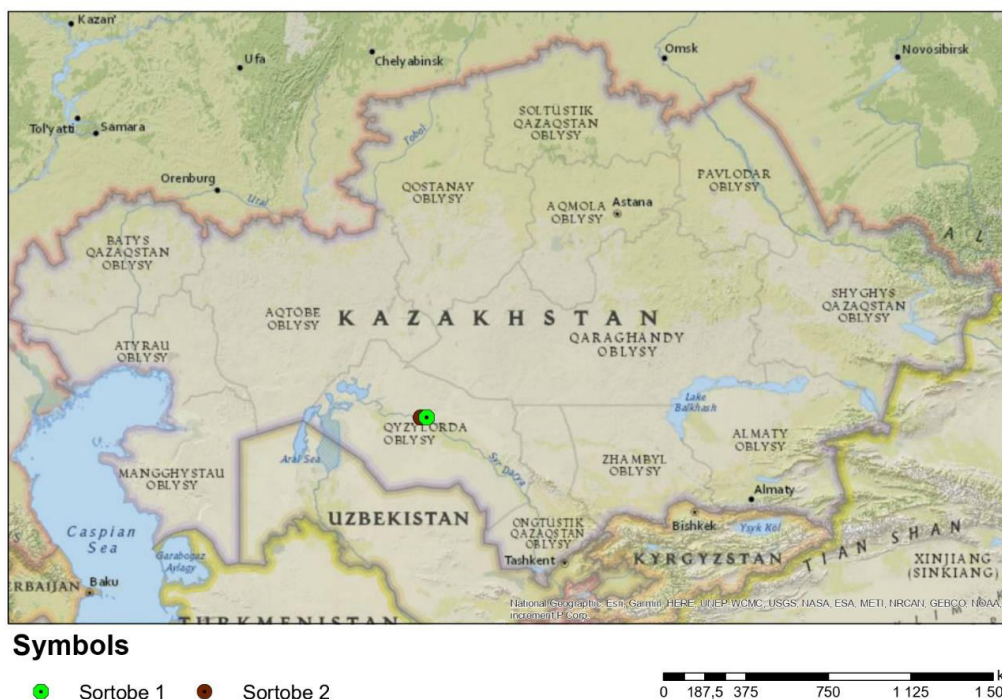


Fig. 1. Map of the Ordazy group of cities location

The study of archaeological reports on excavations conducted both in the Soviet era and during the independence period allows to reconstruct the scheme of the settlement, and consequently, to restore the configuration of the settlement.

We can visually restore the past by studying the scale of the medieval cities of the Syr Darya, the system of their protection referring to new sources and conducting deep and thorough archaeological excavations.

In the course of archaeological research of urban sites and typological classification of sites, such as the structure of the city, economy, crafts, ethno-cultural background, demographic image and etc., it is possible to determine its role in the history of the region, relations with distant and near countries, the level of development and processes.

At present, there are enough sites in the country, which need to be investigated. We have to get a lot of information by studying historical sites. The people living on the banks of the river have a great influence on the development of world cultures, including the growth of cities. The tribes, inhabiting the territories between Syr Darya and Amu Darya, were able to create a remarkable model of construction. The Saka, Kangju, Oghuz and Kipchak tribes that inhabited our region, played an important role not only in the ethnogenesis of the Kazakh people, but also in the formation of modern peoples of Central Asia and Eastern Europe. The medieval Sortobe group of cities is widely discussed in the article. The results of the conducted research are considered. The purpose of the research is to introduce the ancient city of Sortobe into scientific circulation that is on the verge of destruction by the Syr Darya flood, to publish new information about the Oghuz period, to raise the question of preservation and restoration of buildings there, to turn this complex into the open-air museum, to make it a tourist attraction site of national importance.

### **Scientific description of research**

In the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD in the lower reaches of the Syr Darya, the stable original culture flourished. In the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> periods of Zhetyasar (half of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium AD) we can see that in addition to the cultures of the Central Syr Darya region (Otyrar-Karatau, Kauynshy), there were close contacts with neighboring regions. Due to the large number of people and factors convenient for living, it is possible that the local area, i.e. the lower valley of the river Syr Darya was populated at that time. The territory of the Zhetyasar culture was expanded as much as possible, covering the territory between the right bank of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya, and most of the Zhetyasar population moved to these areas. According to L.M. Levina, during the period of Zhetyasar III (6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries) most sites of the Zhetyasar gorge ceased to exist (Levina, 1996, 1997). At the end of the third period, the Zhetyasar gorge turns into a desert and the Zhetyasar culture disappeared in the lower reaches of the Syr Darya. However, in the northwest of the Zhetyasar gorge, on the left bank of the modern Syr Darya, the cities such as Sortobe1, Sortobe 2 continued to exist and in the eastern vicinity of the Aral Sea, Kesken-kuyik city, Kuyik city, Zhankent, i.e., “swamp cities” began to form (Tolstov, 1962).

### **Materials and methods**

The research was based on the construction, location, defensive system and excavations of the Sortobe settlement in the lower reaches of the Syr Darya, related to the history of the region. The data collected by the Khorezm Archaeological and Ethnographic Research expedition are considered in this paper, the scientific data and conclusions about the city of Sortobe, as well as an annual comprehensive scientific research are analyzed.

The historical and comparative scientific analysis of the quantity and chronology of Oghuz cities, including sites of the lower reaches of the Syr Darya was carried out along

with the analysis of the contribution of the construction of cities, architectural features, including, pottery and etc., of Ordazy group of cities to the development of urban culture. The archaeological materials carried out in the Sortobe complex were subjected to primary chamber processing and differentiation, the historical and topography of the site and the discovered construction objects, medieval cities and settlements that were previously unknown to science during exploration and introduced into scientific circulation.

### History of research

The earliest Arabic geographical treatise to date is 1604\الوالماملل امساللك كتاب Masqal Kitab al-masalik wa-l-mamalik. The author is Ibn Hawqal. In this work while describing the Oghuz in the lower reaches of the Syr Darya, it is said about the sites located there: "The Shash River originates in the rivers connecting with it on the border of Turkic and Islamic countries. Its main source is the lands of the Turks within the Uzgent district, from there the riverbeds of Harshab, Urast, Kuba, Zhigil and others were connected, expanded and filled with water. Then, they were passed through Akhsiket, Khujand, Benaket and Syutkent" (Materialy po istorii turkmen i Turkmenii, 1939: 166).

In his book the Arab historian of the 9<sup>th</sup> century Ibn Rustah "ال نفيسة علاق . ال كتاب" – Kitab AlAalak an – Nafisa "Book of Precious Necklaces" provides a number of information concerning the Zhaikhun River (Amu Darya), Khorezm, Aral Sea. On the western side of the edge there was a mountain called Siyakukh and besides the road with dense trees on the eastern side along which wild boars walked, there was a narrow and uneven road in the north direction. He reported that only the King of the country known as the New Village used that road (Materialy po istorii turkmen i Turkmenii, 1939: 166).

In a geographical treatise in the Persian language, the work of an unknown author Khudud alalammin al-Mashreqil-l-Maghreb – "East-West Borders of the World", published in 982, it is said about three cities, located on the banks of the Shash River and there was the Oghuz governor's winter quarter in one of these cities (Materialy po istorii turkmeni Turkmenii, 1939: 166).

In 1245, the traveller Plano Karpini wrote that he passed through the region during his journey to Mongolia. He wrote that he had come from the Kangju country to the Bisermine country and that people spoke the Koman language, adhered to Sarracian law and that he had seen countless cities, fortresses and settlements, destroyed in that region. There was a large river with an unknown name (Puteshestviya v vostochnyye strany, 1993: 64 ).

The historian of the 13<sup>th</sup> century Jamal Karshi noted that the region was very rich and its development was in decline after the establishment of Genghis Khan's rule for almost half a century and in the subsequent periods the situation in the region immediately normalized, large markets and trade centres revived. It was served as a spiritual and scientific centre in the Islamic world (Istoriya Kazahstana v persidskih istochnikah, 2005: 155).

In his work a Persian historian of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Rashid ad-Din called "Jami' al-Tawarikh" (Collection of Chronicles) wrote how Jochi conquered the Kipchak cities in the lower reaches of the Syr Darya one by one, and how he brutally destroyed some cities and massacred their inhabitants (Rashid al-Din, 1957: 199-200).

In 1834, in the scientific work of the French historian D'Osson K. «Genghis Khan and the Mongols: till Temir state», published in Amsterdam, he named the cities in the lower reaches of the Syr Darya referring to the data of Plano Karpini (D'ohsson, 1834: 113-114).

In 1889, Kallaur V. conducted exploration in the cities of the lower reaches of the Syr Darya and concentrated on the location of cities (Kalaur, 1904).

In 1896, Smirnov E.T. studied the location of medieval sites in the lower reaches of the Syr Darya. He made assumptions about the location of a number of cities (Smirnov, 1897: 12).

In 1910, an English historian Emilius Bretshneider in his work «Asia and Europe in the Middle Ages: a comparative study of the geography and historical sources of Central and Western Asia in the 13th and 17th centuries» described historical events in the lower reaches of the Syr Darya (Bretschneider, 2018: 69).

In 1946-1990 the Khorezm Archaeological and Ethnographic Expedition began to study the sites of the lower reaches of the Syr Darya. The study was carried out by means of aerial reconnaissance, which revealed the sites of Shirik-Rabat culture (settlements of Shirik-Rabat, Balandy, Babish-Mola) in the ancient riverbeds of the Syr Darya-Incardarya and Zhandarya, as well as the cities and settlements of Saka tribes (Tugusken, Uygarak), medieval (Zhankent, Zhent, Bestam, Zhent, Kum cities) and later medieval sites (the Kazakh graves of the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries) (Tolstov, 1962: 315).

In early 2000s, the expedition led by the Head of the archaeological group of the Korkyt Ata Kyzylorda State University Mami T. conducted research on a number of late medieval archaeological sites in the middle and lower reaches of the Syr Darya, and excavations in some of them, as well as analyzed, classified and introduced into scientific circulation (Mami, 2007: 36). However, the scientific monograph of the researcher «Archaeological sites of the Aral Sea in the Late Middle Age» does not contain any information about the medieval Sortobe complex.

In 2006, the researcher of the A.Kh.Margulan Institute of Archaeology Abu A. visited it and found out that it was a destroyed medieval site. The researcher drew attention to the Sortobe scheme and photographed vessels protruding from a part washed away by water, bone and stone objects, as well as a fragment of a vessel in the shape of a ram, which was found there and is currently stored in the department of the Korkyt Ata Kyzylorda Regional Historical and Local History Museum of Karmakshy District (Eleuov, Kurmankulov, 2008).

In July 2007, the archaeologists-researchers Eleuov M. and Kurmankulov Zh. conducted excavations in the city of Sortobe. The level of the Syr Darya is 2.5 m lower than the natural land (mainland), where the cultural layer of the hill is located and in the spring months the water level was 3-3.5 m higher than now. According to local residents, during the spring flood, the northeastern part of Sortobe was washed away by 2-3 m and in some places the water washed away the cultural layer of the city by 4-5 m. There were about 15 types of pottery, bone and metal objects, and intact and broken hand mills were among them (Eleuov, Kurmankulov, 2008: 5-7).

From 2017 to 2020, the Zhankent archaeological expedition of the scientific centre «Archeology and ethnography» of the Korkyt Ata Kyzylorda University with the funding of the Municipal State Institution for the Protection of Historical and Cultural Monuments of Kyzylorda region of the Department of Culture, Archives and Documentation of Kyzylorda

region held a comprehensive research work in medieval Sortobe (Head Tazhekeev A.A.) (Tazhekeev et al., 2021: 142-151).

In the course of primary research in 2017, the cases of destruction of Sortobe 1 settlement from natural and anthropogenic factors were identified; fossil conservation measures were considered (Fig. 2). The first (excavations 1) and second (excavations 2) objects are located on the territory of the Sortobe 1 city. The third (excavations 1) and fourth (excavations 6) objects are located on the territory of the Sortobe 2 city. In addition, as a result of excavations carried out in the city of Sortobe 1 in 2017-2018, the excavation sites 2 were restored. In the 2019 field season, a number of lamps was found in Sortobe 1. This is the inherent ceramic value of inhabitants of many medieval cities. The Sortobe 3 site was discovered during exploration in 2020. Until this time the site was unknown and the field appeared in this place.

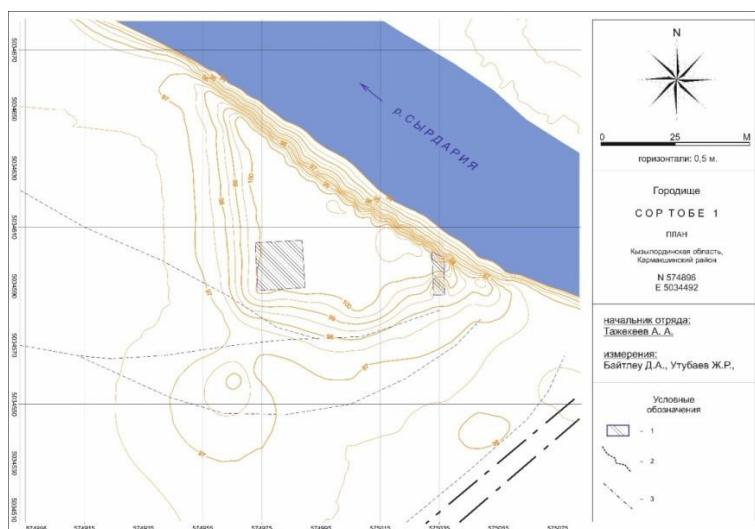


Fig. 2. Topographic plan of Sortobe 1, made in 2017. 1 - excavations 2017, 2 - roads, 3 - the subsequent riverbed. (Tazhekeev et al., 2019: 594)

The results of excavations, carried out from 2017 to 2020, convincingly proved a special role of the Eastern Aral Sea region as a stable region of cultural, ethnic and trade relations between ancient nomads and farmers of the Central Asian oasis. According to the archaeological materials, the city of Sortobe 1 dates back to the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries. The archaeological artefacts, found in the city of Sortobe 2, show that Sortobe 2 existed later than Sortobe 1. The upper period of the city of Sortobe 2 corresponds to the period of existence of the state of Khorezmshakh in the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## Analysis

The origin, history, formation and development of medieval cities and settlements in Kazakhstan are one of the most difficult issues. A difficult topic is the determination of the characteristics of individual cities in the history of their development and the identification of common characteristics with other cities in their development. The medieval archaeology

of Kazakhstan, including the history of the formation of sites of the Oghuz era, has not been thoroughly studied, including the cities of Karashyk, Sutkent and Utirtobe. The site of the medieval city of Sutkent, known for its early medieval inscriptions, was first discovered in 1949. The South Kazakhstan archaeological expedition, led by A.N. Bernstam, conducted small scale excavations (Ageeva, Pancevich, 1958: 121). In 2009, South Kazakhstan archaeological expedition (head D.A. Taleev) with the funds allocated under the state program “Cultural Heritage” conducted archaeological research in a group of cities of the Kazakh Khanate with the aim of studying the late medieval cities of the left bank of the Syr Darya from a historical and topographic point of view. The results of archaeological research on the left bank of the Syr Darya date back to the 10th century. It was found that the well-known city of Sutkent was actually located in three places, alternating with the time of its existence (Taleev, 2010: 158-159). From 2009 to 2016 “The Myrzashol” archaeological expedition (head M. Eleuov) with the financial support of the Syr Darya university, conducting archaeological research in the city of Utirtobe, declared that this site belongs to the Oghuz period (Eleuov, Moldakhmet, 2017: 28-30). It is also known that there was a number of cities in the lower reaches of the Syr Darya. There are many cities among them, the names of which are often found in written sources and historical literature. Many Oghuz-Kipchak cities can be mentioned among such cities, as Zhankent, Zhent, Barshinkent, Ashnas, Zhuvara (Yeleuov, Moldakhmet, 2023: 34).

The city of Sortobe is located 12 km west of the village Zhosaly of Karmakshy district of Kyzylorda region. It is located on the left bank of the Syr Darya, on the right bank of the ZhosalyTorebay bi.

At the moment it is in an emergency condition, the half of the site was washed away by the river. The preserved part of the city, located on a natural hill, forms a triangle of 80x85x120 m. Its height is 2-3 m above the surrounding plane (Bilalov, 2017: 65).

On July 13, 2007 the article “Sortobe goes under water” was published in “Aikyn” newspaper (Akanuly, 2007) and on August 29 the article «Kupiyakala» was published in «Egemen Kazakhstan» newspaper (Pirnazar, 2007). On December 20, 2007 an article «This is not Sortobe, but Ordazy» was published in the newspaper «Akmeshit aptalygy». The author of the article Anis Zhakypuly proposed to name Sortobe as «Ordazy» and cited various data related to the history of the site (Zhakypuly, 2007).

In 2007, in the cities of Sortobe1 and 2 the expedition led by Zh Kurmankulov, the archaeological exploration detachment of Shirik-Rabat archaeological expedition (head of the detachment Tazhekeev A.A.) and the archaeological group of LLC International Research Centre “Archaeologist” (director Eleuov) visited Sortobe, drew its scheme, took pictures, carried out cleanup activities on a washed-out steep bank, collected objects lying on the water and made their sketches (Eleuov, Kurmankulov, 2008).

On 23 July 2007, the level of the Syr Darya River was 2.5 metres below the natural site (mainland) where there was the hill’s cultural layer and in the spring months the water level was 3-3.5 m above the present level. According to local residents, during the spring flood, the north-eastern part of Sortobe was washed away by 2-3 m and in some areas the water dipped the cultural layer of the city up to 4-5 m. At the foot of the cliff, on the shore there are many objects scattered in the water, including about 15 kinds of ceramics, bone and metal objects,

intact and broken hand mills. In order to study the cultural layer of the north-eastern part of the hill, washed away by the Syr Darya River and the construction of surrounding fortress, the clean-up activities were carried out in the destroyed fortress site in the eastern corner (excavation 1) and in the vertical steep bank adjacent to it (excavation 2).

*Excavation 1.* The length of the cleaning excavation made on the flooded southeast slope of the fortress in the eastern corner of the hill is 7.6 m, and depth is 4 m. During the clean-up activities it was found that fortress surrounding tortkul was built in two stages. In the 1<sup>st</sup> stage of construction (counting up from the bottom) the volume of natural land of yellow sandstone is 0.8x0.9; 0.85x0.9; blocks of pakhsa of 0.9x1.0 m were built in two rows and the fortress is built with a total thickness of 1.7 m. Its current height is 3,5 m. Cleaning the inside of fortress, the south wall of one room was opened at a distance of 3 m. The walls were built from 35-36x19x8-10; 40x20x9-10 cm bricks, several rows of plaster on its surface have a total thickness of 7-8 cm. On the surface of the plaster at the distance of 0.3 and 0.6 m from the east corner, the upper side of which is rounded towards the room, 5 cm wide and 1.5 cm high fragments of brown colored coatings were preserved. The surface of the 0.6 m long extant outer coating is not embossed and 25 cm from it the surface of the inner coating (0.25 m extant length) is printed with solid matter.

On this wall, located 1.5 m from the east corner, the length of the niche at the base of 0.5 m, the top is in the form of a semicircle, the height is 0.3 m. The floor, walls and the top of this 0.2 m deep niche are carefully plastered. The jar and a broken lid were found in the ruins of room. The vessel, made of a mixture of crushed dish fragments, has a slightly curved outward neck, a length of 11 cm, the fingerprints are embedded on the outer side of moulding. The upper side of the hook-like handle of the vessel is attached to the lower part of the edge and the lower side is attached to the shoulder of the vessel. The moulding on the vessel shoulder (just below of the vessel shoulder) is 1.5 cm and the height is 1 cm. The vessel of this type was found on the floor of room of the 8th stage of the construction of the citadel of Karashik I (Eleuov, 2003: 9). The lid of 18 cm, slightly convex in the middle, made of quality-low mixture and was burned. The remaining 4/1 part of the lid is decorated with a semicircle pattern. The depth of the pit outside the fortress (0.8 m from its edge) is 0.75 m. Three rows of sediments of pure sand of different thicknesses lied outside this fortress. The thickness of the lowest sand sediment, starting directly from the edge of the fortress, outside the fortress is 0.25 m, inside the pits is 0.35 m. The thickness of sand sediments 2 and 3, starting at distance of 1.4 m from the outer side of fortress, is 0.2 and 0.25 m. The thickness of sand sediments 2 and 3, starting at distance of 1.4 m from the outer side of fortress are 0,2 m and 0,25 m. These sand sediments were formed as a result of the Syr Darya flood. No other substances were found among the pure sand sediments and their composition is similar, so it is possible that these sediments were formed by floods that occurred within one year. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage of construction, above the sandy sediments outside the fortress (from the bottom up) is fortress 2 m wide was built from 0; 0.5; 0.9; 0.5; 2 m high pakhsa layers. The fortress of the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage of construction was preserved at a height of 2.9 m and a fragment of the lid was found in the outer (lowest) ruins of pakhsa. The area is 20 cm, the centre slightly convex, the lid thickness is 1-1.3 cm.

The lid is made from a low-quality mixture, fired to a dark brown colour, it has linear patterns. The coatings of this type with a convex centre were found in the upper layer of excavation 1 (the first half of the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries), carried out in the city of Zhankent (Kurmankulov et al., 2007: 4; 75).



Thus, during the cleaning activity carried out, it was found that the fortress surrounding the eastern corner of tortkul from the outside had a thickness of 1.7 m at stage 1 and at the second stagea thickness was 3.7 m.

*Excavation 2.* Excavation 2, built in a vertical steep bank 10 m to the west of excavation 2, has a length of 4 m and a depth of 4 m. In order to account the constructions and items, found during clearing a steep bank from top to bottom, the excavated land was divided horizontally into squares (1 m) and vertically into tiers (0.5 m). During the cleaning work carried out in the natural site, the construction fragments were found, built during three stages of construction.

At the construction stage 1, the platform 0.6 m high was built from mud brick (42x21-22x9-10cm) in orange sandstone natural land. The path, found in the eastern part of the platform (squares 1 and 2) has a width of 2 m and a depth of 0.2 m. Several thin flakes have been preserved at the level of the path.

At the 2nd construction stage, the wall with a thickness of 0.7 m (preserved height of 0.75 m) and sufa with a width of 1.1 m and height of 0.4 m was built on top of the platform (in 4 squares) made of mud bricks (42x21-22x9-10 cm). During the cleaning work, various vessel fragments were found in a dense ruins mixed with mud thickness of 0.7-0.75 m (tiers VIII-VI) lying on the path and sufa, above it, covering all the squares of the excavation, in the ruins of mixed with loose soil 0.15-0.45 m thick (tiers VI-V) and the ruins mixed with sand 0.05-0.25 m thick in the V-tier. Bowls, vessels and a small khum are among them. The bowls are made of a mixture of fine sand, a high-quality mixture, pink-coloured in section. They divided into two types, depending on the external version: the first is a bowl with a flat bottom, the side is bend, the walls of which are curved outward on the sides to the edge and the second is a bowl with a rounded bottom and underside, the walls of which are slightly curved outward. Both types of bowls are covered with pink plaster (angob). The sides and walls curved outward vessels were found in the cultural layer of the 7th-8thcenturies of Otyrar (Fig. 3), in the ruins on the floor of a room, built in the 8th stage of construction in the citadel of the city of Karashyk 1 (Eleuov, 2003: 9). A bowl with a rounded bottom, a straight wall and hollow, was spread in the cultural layer of the 10th-11th centuries in Otyrar (Fig. 4).

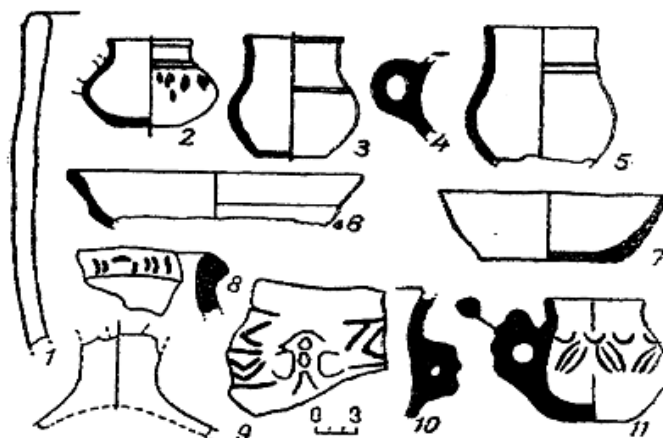


Fig. 3. Ceramics of 7th-8th centuries, found in Otyrar. (Akishev et al., 1972: 91)

The neck of the vessels is short, slightly thickened, the neck is vertical, triangular in section. The vessel is made of a mixture of crushed dish fragments, poorly fired.

A small vessel is made of high-quality mixture, evenly baked, cylindrical in shape with a short neck.

In the 3rd construction stage, the fortress 3.5 meters thick was built on top of the ash-mixed embankment, which occupies the fifth and fourth tiers at a height of 1.8-2 m. Apparently, the fortress was built in a hurry. Between two floors on the inner (western) side of the fortress (the upper floor is 1.7 m lower than the highest point of the excavation (reper) and the lower one is 1.9 m lower) is densely compacted soil. Fragments of vessels lying above the upper floor were found in a dense layer of soil with a thickness of 0.95-1 m, in the ruins mixed with pakhsa of the 2nd tier and in the ruins of the 1st tier, among which: mugs, jugs, lid and vessel. Mugs are spherical, the edge is vertical.

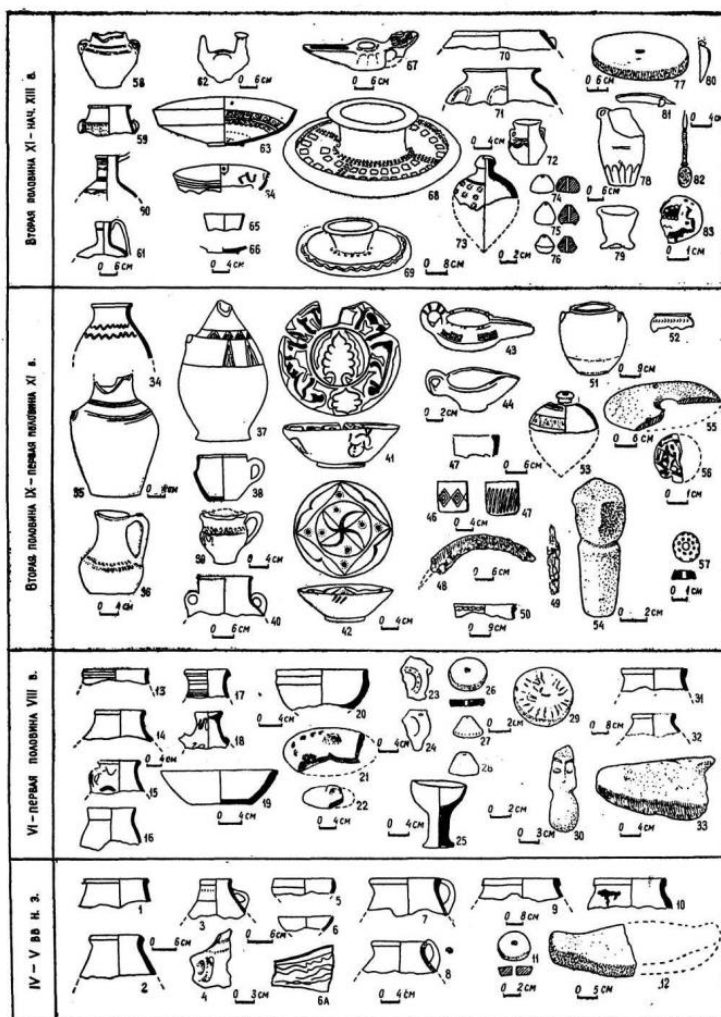


Fig. 4. Ceramics of the 10th -11thcenturies, found in Otyrar. (Mershchiev, 1968: 155)

The mug is hand-made of a grayish mixture of fine sand, quality fired. The side of the bowl is spherical, the edge is vertical. The vessels are made of a mixture of dishes shards. The thickening edge is slightly bent outward, triangular in cross-section. A pattern is printed on the molding on the outside of the product. The centre of 7 cm lid was convex, the small handle in the middle was broken. The upper surface of the lid is divided into four parts and a pattern is drawn on them with a solid substance. The pear-shaped vessel, slightly bent outward, has a triangular cross-section. The vessel is made of a mixture of fine sand and lime mixture. It is burnt poorly and the center is dark-red in the cross section. The pear-shaped vessel was found in the cultural layer of the city of Aktobe 1 in the second half of the 9th century – the first half of the 10th century (Fig. 5). Small flaps with a convex center were found in the excavation 1, conducted in Zhankent in 2005 (Kurmankulov et al., 2006: 119).

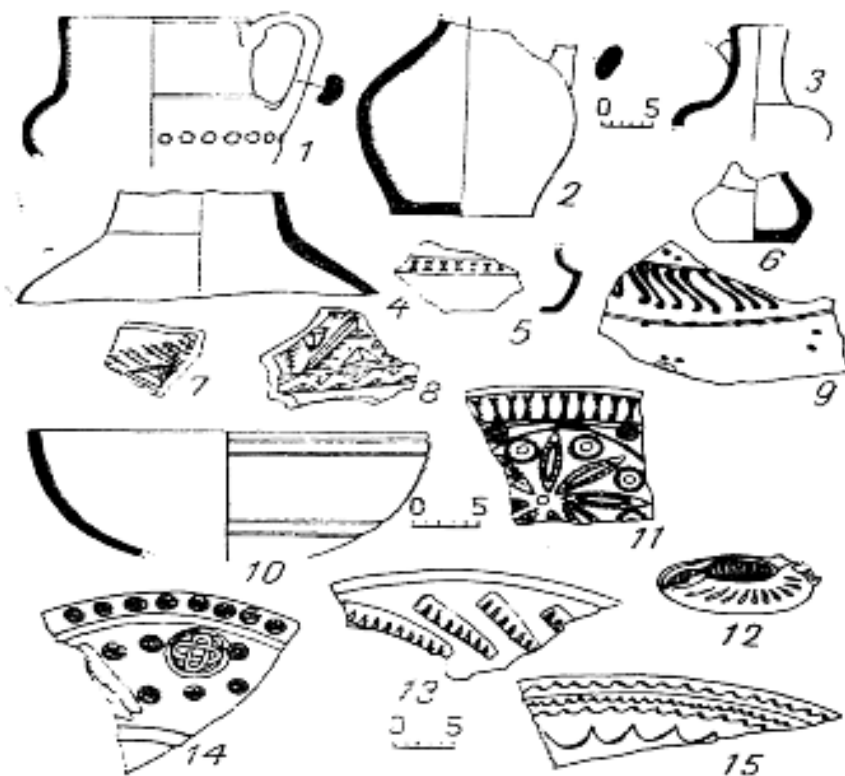


Fig. 4. Ceramics of the 10th -11thcenturies, found in Otyrar.  
(Mershchiev, 1968: 155)

As a result of cleaning works, it was found that the thickness of the cultural layer on this part of the hill is 4 m and remnants of buildings from three construction stages were found there.

According to the physical data obtained during the cleaning activities in a short period of time (2 days) on the steep bank of medieval Sortobe, washed away by the Syr Darya, the hill dates from the 8th-10th centuries. Apparently, the life on the hill stopped due to the

change of the Syr Darya riverbed. This is just a guess for now. The time of Sortobe's origin, the periods of its existence and the conditions that led to the cessation of life there, can be established as a result of future archaeological research of this site.

First of all, the research studies in Sortobe should begin with the part of the hill that was washed away by the river and it is necessary to preserve and strengthen this part. In addition, the definition of the historical and topographic structure of the site and the creation of its protection zone is also an urgent task. It is also necessary to conduct archaeological research in the vicinity of Sortobe, reveal and take into account other site, located in this area, and to determine their connection with Sortobe. Secondly, the preservation, consolidation, restoration of structures discovered during archaeological excavations and the transformation of Sortobe into an open-air museum, its introduction into a tourist destination should be carried out simultaneously. The peculiarity of scientific research conducted in Sortobe is that as a result of their study, one of the unresolved issues of medieval archeology of Kazakhstan can be obtained – the archaeological culture of the Oghuz period (Eleuov, Kurmankulov, 2008: 30-31).

Since 2017 the research centre “Archaeology and Ethnography” of the Korkyt ata Kyzylorda University has been conducting excavations in this ancient city.

The ceramic complex of Sortobe is very rich where the bowls (red angob) with a bend side, the walls of which are bent outwards from the side to the edge (red angob) were found in sites dated to Zhetyasar III period and in the city of Otyrar (Levina, 1971; Akishev et al., 1972). In addition, many lids with linear patterns, vessels with a pattern inscribed with a solid substance on the molding on the outside, and “ram's heads» used for various purposes belonging to the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries in Otyrar were found in Zhankent excavations (Kurmankulov et al., 2007).

Among the data found in the vicinity of “Swamp cities”, the ceramic fragments belonging to the Bronze Age (end of the 2nd and the beginning of the 1st millennium BC) indicates that people settled in that region since ancient times. According to S.P. Tolstov the traditions of the Bronze Age can be seen from the patterns of ancient ceramics during the existence of these cities (Tolstov, 1962). In addition, this complex is characterized by Khorezm red-glazed vessels of the Kangju-Kushan period and a group of the Zhetyasar vessels with moldings.

In the field season of 2017, two excavations were carried out at the site. In the course of archaeological work in the settlement, the complex methods of field archeological research were used in the excavation of sites with elements of architectural constructions (Tazhekeev, 2018).

From 2017 to 2020 results clearly showed that the Eastern Aral Sea region played a special role as a sustainable region of cultural, ethnic and commercial relations between ancient nomads and farmers of the Central Asian oasis.

From 2017 to 2019 scientific reports noted the uniqueness of archaeological sites of the region and their special historical significance for the history and ethnogenesis of the contemporary Kazakh people (Tazhekeev, 2019). The next task of researchers of the city of Sortobe 1 is to include the site, located at the transport route “West China - Western Europe”, in the tourist map of the regional and republican level. For this purpose, the restoration and conservation works of the construction objects are carried out in Sortobe 1. In 2017, the first studies determined the degree of destruction of Sortobe 1 under the influence of natural and anthropogenic factors, considered measures for the preservation of excavation objects. The

city of Sortobe 2 is located 13 km west of the village of Zhosaly and 2 km west of the city of Sortobe 1. Shakhristan is rounded in plan, its diameter is 310 m from north to south in a meridional direction, 260 m in the direction from east to west in a latitudinal direction. The citadel of the city has a square shape and is located in the central part of the fortress. The citadel size is 120x120 m (Fig. 6). The citadel has one tower in the corners and central part of the eastern, southern and western walls and two towers in the northern wall, the total number is nine towers. The remaining walls are 6-8 m wide and 2 m high. In the northeastern inner corner of the citadel there are traces of a structure measuring 40x20 m. The main gate is probably located on the southwestern wall of the citadel. In the 2017 field season, during a survey of Sortobe 2, at a height of 20-50 cm above the daytime surface, the remains of several of the first brick buildings measuring approximately 10x10 m were found on the southeastern side.

Most buildings were rectangular in plan. These buildings may be mausoleums or tombstones of early medieval tribes that inhabited the settlements of Sortobe 1 and Sortobe 2.

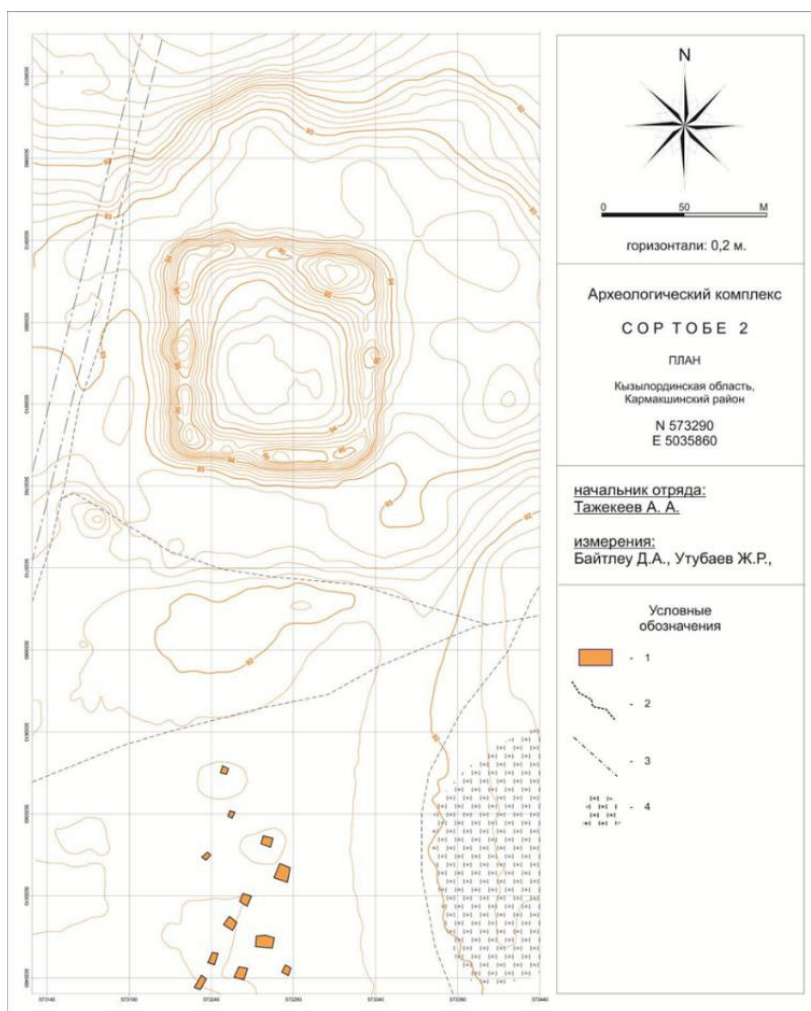


Fig. 4. Ceramics of the 10th -11thcenturies, found in Otyrar. (Mershchiev, 1968: 155)

The variety of ornaments in the decor on ceramics suggests that several techniques were used in its creation. Among them there are carving raw clay with the edge of a sharp object, welding preprepared clay labels, glaze on raw clay, printing fingerprints on the outside of an unpainted product, drawing curved and vertical drawings on the shoulders, and stamped patterns. Geometric images are a common ornament for all products. These are triangles formed by the stamping technique and rectangles formed by cutting lines. The plant ornament is found in the form of double petals made of a cut line, as well as in the form of a “rosette” stamped only on the tablecloth. (Amirgalina, 2019: 422-424).



Fig. 7. Ceramic complex and decorations, found in Sortobe from 2017 to 2019 (Amirgalina, 2018: 378-379).

From 2017 to 2020 the items made of animal bones, metal, glass, wood and rocks were revealed during the excavations, carried out in the city of Sortobe and most of the excavated ceramics were analyzed in the laboratory (Fig. 7).

Sortobe (Ordazy) is the closest Oghuz settlement to the Korkyt Ata architectural complex. Korkyt is a literary character of the Oghuz-speaking peoples formed over several centuries (Zhirmunsky, Kanonov, 1962: 3).

The upper floor of the city was built in the 9th century. The inscription corresponds to the period of life of Korkyt Ata. Thanks to archaeological excavations in the city of Sortobe, we

can find out what people were like in the time of Korqyt Ata or the house in which he lived. The ancestral cemetery of Korqyt and the city of Sortobe belong to the same period and the Sortobe site may be the city “Ordazy”, found in ethnographic data (Käribozuli et a., 2018: 328).

## **Results**

According to archaeological research conducted in Sortobe, it can be considered as one of the cities and fortresses of the Oghuz tribes who lived in the lower reaches of the Syr Darya in the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries. The head of the Khorezm archaeological and ethnographic expedition, Academician Tolstov S.P. considered “swamp cities», revealed in the 50s of the last century, as a separate archaeological culture (Tolstov, 1962). However, as a result of recent archaeological research conducted in the “swamp cities», it is assumed that their foundations were laid by representatives of the Zhetyasar culture. As a result of the analysis of construction structures, discovered during archaeological excavations, a new opportunity has emerged for the restoration of intra-tribal and intra-communal relations of medieval tribes who lived in the lower reaches of the Syr Darya. Similar buildings can be seen in early medieval settlements in the neighboring Khorezm oasis (Kurmankulov, 2011: 2).

This article presents the collected data of medieval authors, including Ibn Hawqal, Ibn Rustah and Al-Masudi about the contribution of the settled peoples of the lower reaches of the Syr Darya to the development of urban culture. These data have been introduced into scientific circulation.

We will divide the complex of dishes found in the Ordazy complex into the following categories:

- for food containing – khums, platters;
- kitchen utensils – tablecloths (round tables with legs), mugs;
- cooking utensils – pans, pots, jars;
- candlesticks, sphericonuses, stumps, stands in the form of sheep’s heads, pulleys.

The colour of ceramics is different – from red to reddish brown, from light gray to dark gray, from pale yellow to brick red. There are single elements of light green colour.

Archaeological research carried out in the cities of Sortobe 1, 2 provided new information. During the study of the eastern wall and residential complexes of Sortobe 1, an analysis of the cultural layer, material complexes of the city was conducted, and based on the findings, the Ordazy complex was dated to the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The archaeological study of city sites and typological classification of sites: city structure, crafts, economy, ethnocultural background, demographic image, and etc. allow to determine the role of cities in the history of the region, relations with distant and near countries, the level of development and processes (Fig. 8).

## **Conclusion**

According to physical data obtained during the short-term works on a steep bank, washed by the Syr Darya River and on the only intact part of the site, the upper cultural layers of the city date back to the 8<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Apparently, the life in the city stopped due to the change in

the Syr Darya River and the population moved towards Zhankent. This is just a guess for now. The time when Sortobe appeared, the periods of its existence and the conditions that caused the cessation of life there can be determined as a result of future archaeological research.

Sortobe (Ordazy) – the nearest Oghuz city to the ancestral cemetery of Korkyt ata. That is why it is necessary to include into a tourist route along the routes of the complex Korkyt ata – Zhosaly-Sortobe. The upper part of the city was built in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. This corresponds to the period of the life of Korkyt Ata.

Our point of view on the latter opinion is based on the materials studied in recent years in Sortobe, we fully agree with the expressed opinion. The opening of a tourist route to this site is a very welcome decision. It can be noted that the city is located near the Korkyt Ata complex and the village of Zhosaly.

At present, there are enough sites in the country that need to be studied. We must get a lot of information by studying historical sites that are at risk of flooding. The people living on the banks of the river have a great influence on the development of world cultures, including the growth of cities. The tribes that inhabited the Syr Darya and Amu Darya were able to create an excellent model of construction.

The archaeological research, conducted in the cities of Sortobe 1, 2 provided new information. The study of the eastern wall and residential complexes of the city of Sortobe 1 analyzed the cultural layer and material complexes of the city. Thanks to the found artifacts we have the opportunity to date the city of Sortobe (Fig. 9). The peculiarity of the scientific research conducted in Sortobe is that as a result of its study, we can obtain extensive and comprehensive data on the archaeological culture of the Oghuz period – one of the most unresolved problems of medieval archaeology in Kazakhstan today. In the future, Sortobe can become one of the exemplary sites of medieval Kazakhstan archaeology, belonging to the Oghuz period.

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### **Ордазы қалалары. Сортөбе 1, 2 қалашықтарындағы алғашқы археологиялық зерттеу жұмыстары**

**Аннотация.** Мақалада Сырдарияның төменгі ағысы бойында орналасқан ескерткіштерге қатысты жазба деректер және Сортөбе қалалар тобында жүргізілген археологиялық зерттеу жұмыстары жайлы кең көлемді ақпараттар берілген. Ескерткіш түркі халықтарының исламға дейінгі қасиетті орны саналатын Қорқыт ата сәулет кешеніне жақын жерде орналасқан. Мақалада негізгі жазба дерек көздері ретінде IX-XI ғасырларда өмір сүрген араб-парсы зерттеушілерінің еңбектері қарастырылып, оның ішінде Сырдарияның төменгі ағысындағы оғыз заманының ескерткіштері хақындағы сирек кездесетін мәліметтер жинақталып, ұсынылып отыр. Сортөбе қалашығы жайлы жазылған бірқатар шетелдік және отандық әдебиеттер жинақталып, мақаланың ғылыми дерекқор

базасы жинақталды. Атап айтқанда, ескерткіштің зерттелу тарихы, археологиялық маңызы, бұзылу тарихы, қазіргі жағдайына қатысты бірқатар ақпараттармен толықты. Сонымен қатар ХІХ ғасырдың соңғы ширегінде батыстық бір топ зерттеушілердің өз еңбектерінде сөз болған Сырдың төменгі ағысындағы оқиғаларға байланысты ақпараттары егжей-тегжейлі қарастырылып, патшалық Ресей заманындағы өлкедегі бірқатар өлкетанушылардың естеліктері мен Хорезм археологиялық-этнографиялық экспедициясының мұрағат деректері сараланады. Мақалада біз қарастырып отырған ескерткіштің зерттелу тарихы және онда жүргізілген археологиялық қазба жұмыстары мен оның нәтижелері қамтылып, қазіргі кезде ортағасырлық Сортөбе 1 қалашығының ахуалына тоқтала келіп, оның бүгінде тең жартысын Сырдария өзені шайып, бұзып, соның салдарынан күннен-күнге ескерткіштің мәдени қабаты табиғи эрозияға ұшырап, мемлекеттің қорғауынсыз өте апатты жағдайда тұрғаны жайлы баяндалады.

**Кілт сөздер:** Сырдария, арна, ортағасыр, Ордазы, Сортөбе, қалалық мәдениет, барлау, қазба.

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### **Города Ордазы. Первые археологические исследовательские работы в городах Сортөбе 1, 2**

**Аннотация.** В статье представлены письменные данные, относящиеся к памятникам, расположенным в нижнем течении Сырдарьи, и обширная информация об археологических исследованиях, проведенных в группе городов Сортөбе. Памятник расположен в непосредственной близости от архитектурного комплекса Коркыт Ата, который является доисламским святилищем тюркских народов. В статье рассмотрены основные письменные источники, труды арабо-персидских исследователей, живших в IX-XII веках, в том числе впервые представлены читательской аудитории редкие сведения, относящиеся к огузским временам в низовьях Сырдарьи. Сбор и анализ ряда отечественных и зарубежных источников позволил пополнить научную базу исследования и получить новые данные, касающиеся истории изучения

городища, его археологической значимости, периоде упадка и разрушения, а также современного состояния памятника. Кроме того, будет подробно рассмотрена информация группы западных исследователей, относящаяся к событиям в низовьях Сырдарьи, о которых говорилось в их работах в последней четверти XIX века, проанализированы воспоминания ряда краеведов края времен царской России и архивные данные Хорезмской археолого-этнографической экспедиции. В статье освещены история изучения рассматриваемого нами памятника, проведенные на нем археологические раскопки и его результаты, а также рассказано о состоянии средневекового городка Сортобе 1, половина которого сегодня смыта и снесена рекой Сырдарья. В результате сообщалось, что культурный слой памятника изо дня в день подвергался естественной эрозии и находился в очень плачевном состоянии без охраны государства.

**Ключевые слова:** Сырдарья, русло, средневековье, Ордазы, Сортобе, городская культура, разведка, раскоп.

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