

The medieval town of Koilyk: written sources and archaeological research

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ABSTRACT

The article considers the historical development of archaeological exploration of the medieval town of Koilyk (known in written sources as Koilyk, Pulad) located in the northeastern Zhetisu region. Koilyk was one of the most important political, economic and cultural centers along the Great Silk Road in the Middle Ages. The study offers a comprehensive analysis of written sources and archaeological materials, thereby determining the role and significance of the town in the regional historical context. Particular attention is devoted to the accounts of the European traveler and French envoy Guillaume de Rubruck, who traveled to Mongolia through the Zhetisu region in the thirteenth century. His records constitute an important source for the study of medieval Koilyk, providing valuable information about the town as a major commercial center and describing the ethnic and religious diversity of its population. The article also reviews the scholarly perspectives of both domestic and foreign researchers, including V.V. Bartold, A.N. Bernshtam, M. Tynyshbayev, K.M. Baipakov. Their interpretations concerning the location and historical significance of Koilyk are comparatively analyzed. Archaeological evidence confirms that the site of Koilyk corresponds to the settlement of Antonovka, located in the eastern part of the village of Koilyk in the Sarkant district of the Almaty region. Systematic excavations conducted since 1998 have made it possible to reconstruct the internal structure of the city. The citadel, shahristan, and rabad were identified, and the urban layout was established. Excavations revealed the remains of various religious

structures, demonstrating that Islam, Buddhism, and Manichaeism coexisted in Koilyk. In particular, the locations of a mosque, a Buddhist temple, a Manichaean church, and a Sufi khanqah were identified. In addition, public and residential buildings – including bathhouses, mausoleums, residential buildings and economic complexes, and new data were obtained on the social structure of the town. Since 2004, within the framework of the state program “Cultural Heritage”, archaeological research has intensified, allowing for a more detailed study of the cultural layers of the site. These investigations have clarified the role of Koilyk not only within the Zhetisu region but also within broader international trade networks. Archaeological finds included both locally produced goods and imported items from China and Iran. Coins (tenge) minted in Koilyk were also discovered, indicating the town’s extensive economic connections and the high level of development of crafts and trade. Overall, the article provides a comprehensive assessment of the significance of Koilyk in the processes of urbanization and in the cultural and economic development of medieval Zhetisu.

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Ортағасырлық Қойлық қаласы: жазба деректер мен археологиялық зерттеулер¹

Аннотация. Мақалада солтүстік-шығыс Жетісу жерінде орналасқан ортағасырлық Қойлық қаласының (жазба деректерде Қойлық, Пулад атауларымен белгілі) тарихи дамуы мен археологиялық зерттелу кезеңдері қарастырылады. Қойлық – орта ғасыр-

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ларда Ұлы Жібек жолы бойындағы маңызды саяси, экономикалық және мәдени орталықтардың бірі болған қала. Зерттеу барысында жазба деректер мен археологиялық материалдар кешенді түрде талданып, қаланың аймақ тарихындағы орны айқындалады. XIII ғасырда Жетісу өңірі арқылы Моңғолияға сапар шеккен еуропалық саяхатшы әрі француз елшісі Гильом де Рубруктың еңбектері орта ғасырдағы Қойлық қалашығының тарихын зерттеудегі маңызды дереккөздердің бірі болып табылады. Оның жазбаларында Қойлықтың ірі сауда орталығы ретінде сипатталуы, сондай-ақ қала тұрғындарының этникалық және діни құрамының алуандығы жөнінде құнды мәліметтер берілген. Сонымен қатар мақалада В.В. Бартольд, А.Н. Бернштам, М. Тынышбаев, К.М. Байпақов сияқты отандық және шетелдік зерттеушілердің ғылыми көзқарастары қарастырылып, Қойлық қаласының орналасуы мен тарихи маңызына қатысты пікірлері салыстырмалы түрде талданады. Археологиялық зерттеулер нәтижесінде Қойлық қаласының орны қазіргі Алматы облысы Сарқант ауданы аумағында, Қойлық ауылының шығыс бөлігінде орналасқан Антоновка қалашығына сәйкес келетіні дәлелденді. 1998 жылдан бастап жүргізілген кешенді қазба жұмыстары қаланың ішкі құрылымын анықтауға мүмкіндік берді. Зерттеу барысында цитадель, шахристан және рабад аймақтары белгіленіп, қаланың жоспарлы құрылымы қалпына келтірілді. Қазба барысында әртүрлі діни ғимараттардың қалдықтары табылып, Қойлық қаласында ислам, буддизм және манихейлік сенімдердің қатар өмір сүргені анықталды. Атап айтқанда, мешіт, будда ғибадатханасы, манихейлік шіркеу және сопылық бағыттағы ханака тәрізді нысандардың орындары зерттелді. Бұдан бөлек, қоғамдық және тұрмыстық сипаттағы құрылыстар: моншалар, кесенелер, тұрғын үйлер мен шаруашылық кешендер анықталып, қаланың әлеуметтік құрылымы жөнінде жаңа деректер алынды. 2004 жылдан бастап «Мәдени мұра» мемлекеттік бағдарламасы аясында археологиялық зерттеулер ауқымы кеңейіп, қаланың мәдени қабаттары тереңінен зерделенді. Бұл жұмыстар Қойлықтың Жетісу өңіріндегі ғана емес, халықаралық сауда қатынастары жүйесіндегі орнын нақтылауға мүмкіндік берді. Қазба нәтижесінде табылған археологиялық олжалар арасында жергілікті өндіріс бұйымдарымен қатар Қытай мен Ираннан жеткізілген заттар, сондай-ақ Қойлықта соғылған теңгелер анықталды. Аталған материалдар қаланың экономикалық байланыстарының кең болғанын және қолөнер мен сауданың жоғары деңгейде дамығанын көрсетеді. Жалпы алғанда, мақала Қойлық қаласының ортағасырлық Жетісу тарихындағы қалалану, мәдени және экономикалық үдерістердегі маңызын кешенді түрде ашып көрсетеді.

Кілт сөздер: Жетісу, орта ғасыр, Жібек жолы бойындағы қалалар, Қойлық, Антоновка, археология, зерттеулер, қазба, монша, мешіт, ханака, ғибадатхана

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Средневековый город Койлык: письменные источники и археологические исследования

Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются историческое развитие и этапы археологического изучения средневекового города Койлык, расположенного на территории северо-восточного Жетысу, известного в письменных источниках под названиями Койлык и Пулад. В эпоху Средневековья город являлся важным центром политической, экономической и культурной жизни региона и занимал ключевое место на торговых маршрутах Великого Шелкового пути. Его стратегическое положение и развитая транспортная сеть способствовали формированию активного торгово-ремесленного узла с разнообразными культурными и социальными функциями. В работе особое внимание уделено анализу письменных источников, прежде всего заметок французского путешественника и посла XIII века Гильома де Рубрука, который фиксировал сведения о структуре населения, экономических связях и многообразии религиозных общин. Дополнительно рассматриваются научные позиции и выводы В.В. Бартольда, А.Н. Бернштама, М. Тынышбаева и К.М. Байпакова, внесших значительный вклад в локализацию Койлыка и реконструкцию его исторического облика. Сопоставление разных интерпретаций позволяет уточнить роль города как регионального и трансрегионального центра в средневековый период. Археологические данные подтверждают, что городские остатки сосредоточены на территории городища Антоновка, восточной окраине современного села Койлык Сарканского района Алматинской области. С конца 1990-х годов здесь проводятся систематические раскопки, выявившие основные элементы градостроительной структуры: цитадель, шахристан и рабад. Их организация отражает типичную модель восточного города Средневековья с хорошо развитой планировкой. В ходе исследований были обнаружены религиозные сооружения различных конфессий, включая мечеть, буддийский храм, манихейскую церковь и ханака. Эти объекты демонстрируют сосуществование нескольких религиозных традиций и подчеркивают многоэтничный характер города. Также изучены общественные и хозяйственные объекты: бани, мавзолеи, жилые дома и производственные постройки, что позволяет реконструировать повседневную жизнь населения. С 2004 года в рамках государственной программы «Культурное наследие» археологические работы получили дальнейшее развитие. Это позволило подробно исследовать культурные напластования, социальную инфраструктуру и экономическую деятельность города. Среди находок – изделия местных мастеров, бытовые предметы, а

также импортные артефакты из Китая и Ирана. Нумизматические материалы, включая монеты местной чеканки, свидетельствуют о развитой денежной системе и высокой экономической активности. В целом Койлык представлял собой значимый центр урбанистического, культурного и экономического развития средневекового Жетысу, активно вовлеченный в межрегиональные торговые и культурные обмены.

Ключевые слова: Жетысу, Средневековье, города шелкового пути, Койлык, Антоновка, археология, исследования, раскопки, баня, мечеть, ханака, храм.

Introduction

The main purpose of the study is to comprehensively analyze the historical and civilizational role of the medieval town of Koilyk and the Zhetisu region in the Middle Ages, as well as to determine its position within the international trade system, its economic autonomy and its distinctive features as a cultural center.

To achieve this aim, the following tasks are set:

- first, to describe the socio-economic development of the town based on archaeological and numismatic data;
- second, to determine the strategic significance of Koilyk along the Great Silk Road;
- third, to reveal its character as a multicultural space by analyzing religious sites and cultural complexes within the town;
- fourth, to assess the historical place of the monument at the regional and international levels in the XIII-XIV centuries by comparing written and material data.

The medieval town of Koilyk is of particular historical significance as a point of convergence of urban development processes, international trade relations, and a multi-confessional cultural space in the Zhetisu region. Located in the Ili valley, the town was one of the strategic centers on the northeastern Zhetisu branch of the Great Silk Road. Archaeological and numismatic evidence indicate that in the XIII century, Koilyk had reached a high level of political and economic development, emerging as a major urban center actively integrated into both interregional and international trade systems. As a result of written sources and archaeological identification, the alignment of Koilyk with the modern settlement of Antonovka made it possible to clarify its historical and geographical location.

Numismatic materials constitute an important indicator of the economic autonomy of Koilyk. In the first half of the XIII century, approximately between 630 and 640 AH, both silver and copper coins (tenge) were minted in the city. The findings that the copper coins found during the excavations were utilized in local circulation and they were produced within the town indicate the existence of a mint operated in Koilyk (Baipakov, Petrov, 2007). This fact underscores the political importance of the Koilyk town as the only major center in Zhetisu capable of issuing its own coinage during the period of the Mongol invasion. In addition, the discovery of coins dating back to the Golden Horde period indicates that the city sustained its economic activity until the XIV century (Baipakov, 2012).

The international reputation of Koilyk is closely associated with its status as one of the key junctions along the Great Silk Road. The fact that the road originating from Iki Oghuz and directed toward Kayalyk, the capital of the Karluk yabghus, indicates that the town possessed not only regional but also transregional significance (Baipakov, Voyakin, 2012). In 2014,

the inclusion of the transnational nomination “The Great Silk Road: Chang’an Tian Shan Corridor” inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list facilitated the global recognition of several monuments located along the Kazakhstani part of the Silk Road, including Koilyk. This decision confirmed the civilizational importance of the cities along the historic road within the international scholarly community.

Archaeological research demonstrates that Koilyk functioned not only as an economic center, but also a multi-confessional cultural hub. The discovery of a Buddhist temple, a central mosque, a khanqah belonging to the Yasawi tariqa, a Manichaean complex, and mausoleums within the town indicates the complex structure of medieval urban culture. Christian monuments dating back to the XII-XIV centuries, including a carved tombstone with distinct iconographic features, provide evidence for the presence of Nestorian communities in this region (Baipakov, Zheleznyakov, 2022). These data indicate that Koilyk served as a model of religious tolerance and cultural diversity in the Zhetisu-Ili-Shu region.

Thus, the study of Koilyk, based on archaeological, numismatic, and written evidence, allows for a comprehensive assessment of its role within the international trade system, political organization, and spiritual and cultural landscape of the thirteenth–fourteenth centuries. The article analyzes the socio-economic conditions, international standing, and multifaceted cultural heritage of Koilyk on the basis of relevant scholarly literature.

Materials and research methods

The study is based on comprehensive data directed to determining the history and archaeological character of the medieval town of Koilyk. The data base of the article consists of a various content of written and material evidence. Written sources include the works of medieval authors, among them the accounts of the XIII century European traveler Guillaume de Rubruck who carried out valuable observations during his journey to the Zhetisu region, as well as works of scientists (V.V. Bartold, A.N. Bernshtam, M. Tynyshpayev and K.M. Baipakov) on location and historical role of the town are the core scholarly foundation of the article.

The studies were considered as significant sources for comparative analysis, and historical-typological and systematic analysis methods were utilized. Stratigraphic methods and typological classification methods were used for dating archaeological materials, and by comparing written and archaeological data, the historical development of the town, its cultural space, and its social structure were depicted. Through such a comprehensive methodological approach, the history of the medieval town of Koilyk was revealed a more complete and objective way.

Degree of research of the topic

Archaeological work in the medieval town of Koilyk had begun in 1964. In the same year, the Zhetisu archaeological expedition (led by K.A. Akishev) first recorded the monument, documented its plan, and carried out preliminary exploratory excavations in several areas. Expedition member K.M. Baipakov, comparing the painted and unpainted ceramic vessels found in the excavations with materials from southwester Zhetisu, dated the settlement to the period between the IX-XIII centuries (Baipakov, 1966: 78-79).

Systematic excavations in the town were first initiated in 1998 by the South Kazakhstan comprehensive archaeological expedition. In that year, excavations were conducted on a hillock later identified as a “Buddhist temple”. Over several years of fieldwork, there was discovered the site of a building with a central main room surrounded by corridors on all four sides, with thick outer walls and round towers at the four corners. Fragments of ceramic vessels including large storage jars (khum), vase, jugs, bowls, an iron knife, door hinges, small bronze objects and bricks with sun image in their surface were found on the floor of the central room and corridors. The characteristics of the ceramic vessels correspond to materials from the region of the XII-XIII centuries. The architectural layout of the building and findings provide strong evidence that it was a Buddhist temple. Similar temples have been discovered in several towns of Central Asia. In addition, during the same year, excavations were also carried out in the residential complexes located within the citadel of the town (Baipakov et al., 1998: 112)².

Excavation works at the medieval town of Koilyk were continued in 1999-2000. During this period, the remains of the house “wealthy city resident” located in the southeastern part of the town were investigated. Covering a total area of 540 square meters, the house consisted of 15 rooms. The architectural design, the quality of the materials, features of the interior design, and the findings served as a basis for providing that it was the private residence of wealthy city inhabitant. Within the interior space of the house, installations were discovered including various sizes of stoves, tandoors, places of chimney and structures for a heating system. Glass blocks discovered inside this house, which was destroyed by a massive fire, indicate that the windows of the rooms were indeed closed (Baipakov, 2007: 13-19).

During the excavation works in 2001, the site of a bathhouse (hamam) built in the Eastern style of burnt bricks was discovered. The bathhouse, consisting of eight rooms, was heated by an underfloor heating system. The bathhouse contained a boiler for heating water, as well as rooms for changing clothes, bathing, massage, and relaxation. This building, with walls preserved to a height of 2–2.5 m, was temporarily reburied. If properly restored, it is a monument that is ready to become an excellent tourist attraction (Fig. 1).

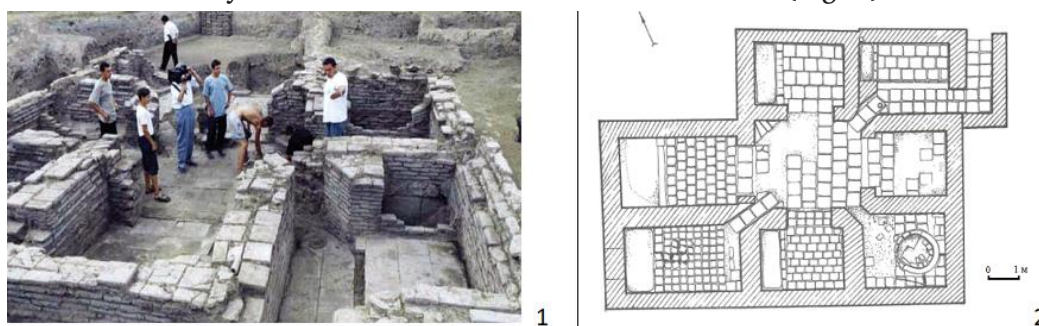


Fig. 1. Koilyk. Photo and plan of the bathhouse: 1) Photo of the bathhouse; 2) Plan of the bathhouse (Baipakov, 2005: 99, 105).

1-сур. Қойлық. Моншаның суреті мен сызба жоспары: 1) моншаның суреті 2) моншаның жоспары (Байпақов, 2005: 99, 105).

Рис. 1. Койлык. Фотография и план-чертеж бани: 1) Фотография бани; 2) План бани (Байпаков, 2005: 99, 105).

²Baipakov, K.M. Report on the Field Research of the South Kazakhstan Complex Archaeological Expedition (YuKKAЕ) in 1998. Archive of the A.Kh. Margulan Institute of Archaeology. Almaty. File 2504. Inventory 40. 420 p.

In 2006, within the framework of the state program «Cultural Heritage», excavation works at the “Buddha Temple” further continued and archaeological investigations were carried out in several locations in the Koilyk town, as a result of which the sites of several mausoleums were discovered and identified as belonging to a group of domed mausoleums with protruding facades. During the excavation works, 5 residential sites were revealed, and a total of 669 vessel fragments were found, of which 113 were painted, 556 were unpainted, most of the objects found were bone products (processed horns) and were collected various bronze materials. In addition, initial data on the historical and topographic structure of the Koilyk town have been presented.

The total area is 90 hectares, the longest part of the town is 1290 meters from northeast to southwest, and 840 meters from northwest to southeast, the remains of a surrounding defensive ditch measuring 10-17 meters in width and 1-2 meters depth have been identified, and it was determined that the shakhristan and rabat areas of the monument are well preserved (Baipakov et al., 2006: 41-45).

The excavation works carried out in 2003 were aimed at studying the topography of the town. A three-level digital topographic model of the monument was created. In addition, temporary preservation and protective covering were implemented in the “Buddhist temple”. Thus, the town of Koilyk was clearly identified as one of the major medieval centers of Zhetisu through both written records and archaeological research. The issue of determining its precise location was discussed for many years and was ultimately resolved through its scientifically proven identification with the town of Antonovka. The discovery of religious buildings, residential constructions, baths and household items during the excavations demonstrates a high level of cultural, economic and religious life of the town in the XX-XIII centuries (Baipakov, 2003)³.

In 2009, the main excavation works were carried out on a rectangular hill in front of the northern gate. During the excavation, four construction layers were revealed. The excavation, measuring 20x12 meters, covered a total area of 240 square meters. Several residential structures built of pakhsa (rammed earth) blocks were discovered. Internal construction elements such as tandoors, chimney, and complex heating systems were identified in the rooms of the houses. Based on the pakhsa blocks used in the construction of the walls, the excavators suggested that this might have been a Sogdian quarter. This indicates the persistence among some archaeologists of the outdated view, formed during the Soviet period, that the sedentary culture of Zhetisu was influenced by Sogdian colonization (Baipakov et al., 2009: 26)⁴.

In 2012, excavation works continued, examining the external defense systems and their elements of the town of Koilyk which had been a major political and economic center of Zhetisu. In addition, excavation works were conducted in the citadel located in the middle section of the northern wall (Baipakov et al., 2012: 18)⁵.

In 2013, excavation work was mainly focused on clearing, protecting and preserving the private property of a wealthy resident that had been studied in 1999–2000. The object was improved and measures were taken to turn it into a tourist attraction. Digital photographic

³Baipakov, K.M. Report of the South Kazakhstan Archaeological Expedition (YuKKA) for 2003. Archive of the A.Kh. Margulan Institute of Archaeology. Almaty. File 2209, Inventory 45. 172 p.

⁴Baipakov, K.M.; Voyakin, D.; Seraly, N.; Kudabaev, Ch.; Kuzminova, A. Report on research work: Koylyk settlement. Archive of the A.Kh. Margulan Institute of Archaeology. Almaty. File 2948, Inventory 51. 56 p.

⁵Baipakov, K.; Sorokin, D.; Slavonevsky, V.; Gurulev, M. Report on research work “Kayalyk settlement.” Archive of the A.Kh. Margulan Institute of Archaeology. Almaty. File 3076, Inventory 54. 53 p.

documentation was made, and the excavation project was recorded using an electronic tacheometer. Furthermore, an analysis of teңge circulation in Koilyk and other medieval cities during the periods of the Great Mongol Empire and the Chagatai state was carried out. This study was based on hoards and coins found during excavations in the cities of Otyrar, Sauran, Taraz and Koilyk (Baipakov et al., 2013: 86)⁶.

The final excavation works were carried out in the settlement in 2018. During the excavations of that year, a private residential structure consisting of several rooms was discovered (Baipakov et al., 2018)⁷.

The interior features of the rooms are: the granary, the chimney, and the heating systems were mostly constructed from burnt bricks. In one of the rooms, two large khum jars were found inside a granary built in a corner. One of them was intact, the other was partially cracked from the pressure of the collapsed soil. In addition, imported artifacts were Chinese jars (Fig. 2).

In the article “Medieval ceramic pot handles in southern Kazakhstan: morphological features and chronology” published in 2025, “it is stated that comprehensive information is provided on the ceramic complex of the medieval town of Koilyk, particularly on the two main types of pot handles, and it is concluded that the period of existence of Koilyk town corresponds to the IX-X centuries and the XIII-XIV centuries” (Akhimbek, Nurgali, 2025: 17-39).



Fig. 2. Koilyk. The progress of the archaeological excavation work conducted in 2018. (Baipakov, Zheleznyakov, Taleev, 2018: 42).

2-сур. Қойлық. 2018 жылы жүргізілген қазба жұмыстарының барысы. (Байпақов, Железняков, Талеев, 2018: 42).

Рис. 2. Койлык. Ход археологических раскопок, проведённых в 2018 году. (Байпаков, Железняков, Талеев, 2018: 42).

⁶ Baipakov, K.; Kamaldinov, I.; Akymbek, E. Report on research work “Medieval urban culture of Kazakhstan in the 12th-15th centuries based on written sources, archaeological research, and numismatic materials.” Archive of the A.Kh. Margulan Institute of Archaeology. Almaty. File 3135, Inventory 55. 110 p.

⁷ Baipakov, K.M.; Zheleznyakov, B.A.; Taleev, D.A. Brief report on archaeological research in 2018. International Center for the Rapprochement of Cultures under the auspices of UNESCO. Manuscript. Almaty, 2018. 45 p.

Discussion

Archaeological research conducted in the Koilyk town provides valuable evidence for investigating the establishment and development of Islamic culture in the Zhetisu region. Excavation works carried out within the framework of the “Cultural Heritage” program have made it possible to comprehensively analyze at the religious and institutional structure of the town, its architectural features, and the role of spiritual institutions in public life. The identification of Muslim religious complexes belonging to two periods demonstrates that the Islamic tradition in Koilyk was not a short-lived phenomenon, but rather the result of a historical evolution.

In 2004, during excavations carried out in the Koilyk town within the framework of the “Cultural Heritage” program, Muslim religious complexes belonging to two distinct periods were identified. The first is - the mausoleums of the rulers of the Karakhanid dynasty and a Sufi khanate (late XII - early XIII centuries). The second is - a Friday mosque built in the central square in the middle of the XIII century, to which an additional construction with a minaret was later built (Baipakov et al., 2005: 105).

The first period is associated with the rule of the Karakhanid dynasty and was characterized by the formation of a religious space with a Sufi orientation. The construction of mausoleums and khanaka indicates that Islam had become not only an official ideology, but also a social institution based on spiritual practice. During this period, Islamic culture was firmly established in the urban environment, influencing local architectural styles and building traditions. The construction of the Friday mosque in the central square in the middle of the XIII century marks the beginning of a new qualitative stage in the religious life of the town. The construction of such a large-scale mosque testifies to the strengthening of the state and public status of Islam, and the transformation of the town into a regional religious center.

The construction of the mosque indicates that Islam was widespread among the urban population and was firmly established as a state religion. Archaeological data confirm that the mosque was used for a long time and was renovated several times. The tenge coins dating to the XIII c. 40s-50s, discovered during the excavation works testify to the political and economic importance of the city. The mosque had a rectangular layout, with internal dimensions of 34×28 meters, the walls built of mud brick (thickness 1.7-2 m). The internal space was divided by eight rows of columns, forming nine naves. There was probably a dome in the central part. The mihrab, made of burnt brick, was oriented toward Mecca. The remains of the minbar (the place where the imam of the mosque delivered the sermon) were also preserved. The excavation works revealed heating furnaces and air ducts, as well as ceramic elements of water pipes, indicating that the mosque was equipped with heating and sanitary systems.

In the first half of the X century, Islamic culture began to spread widely in the Karakhanid state. Mosques, necropolises, and mausoleums were constructed in the cities. Examples of this include the Burana Tower in Balasagun, the mausoleums of Aisha-Bibi and Babaji-Khatun, as well as the remains of a mosque discovered during excavations in the ancient city of Ornek (medieval Kasrybas). The mausoleums and Sufi khanaka complexes of this period prove that the initial spread of Islam in the region was carried out not only through political

influence, but also through spiritual and ideological mechanisms. It is evident that, prior to the institutionalization of Islam, its Sufi forms played a dominant role in this area.

The followers of Khoja Akhmet Yasawi conducted religious preaching in southern Kazakhstan and Zhetisu. The existence of such a community is evidenced by a manuscript dated 1281, which deals with the genealogy of the Turkestan Khojas. The Khojas considered themselves to be of Arab origin. The legend about the Arabs who lived in the Arabsay gorge near Koilyk (Antonovka) has survived to this day. Written sources and legends have been confirmed by archaeological excavations: the remains of a mosque and a khanaka were found, which served as cultic structures for the dervishes (Baipakov, 2005: 53).

The Koilyk Mosque, as the first large Friday mosque in the northeastern part of Zhetisu, testifies to the establishment of Islamic culture and the unification of architectural styles. This proves that it was built on the model of religious centers in states such as the Golden Horde, the White Horde, and Moghulistan (Fig. 3) (Zheleznyakov 2014: 340-342).

The emergence of the Friday mosque in the middle of the XIII century demonstrates that Islam had reached a new qualitative level in the town. The construction of a large-scale, complex-layout mosque indicates that Islam has established itself not only as a religious, but also as a socio-political institution.

The structural features of the mosque architecture – a square layout, the division of the internal space into naves by rows of columns, the construction of the mihrab made of burnt bricks, as well as the preservation of the remains of the minbar (the place where the imam of the mosque delivered the sermon) - demonstrate the established canons of Islamic architectural models in the region. At the same time, the discovery of a heating system and water supply pipes indicates that the building was not only a cultic object, but also an advanced engineering complex. These data confirm that the monument is one of the first large Friday mosques to be built in northeastern Zhetisu.

Excavation works carried out in the residential quarters of the town also complement the socio-economic context of the religious center. The eight-room residential complex identified during the 2014 investigations, and elements such as a chimney, tandoor, furnace, and heating system in its internal structure characterize the living standards of the urban population. The found household items and artifacts related to economic activities indicate a developed urban culture and a stable settled lifestyle of the monument. This information can provide as a basic guide for analyzing the role of religious buildings in the urban structure and their interaction with residential areas.

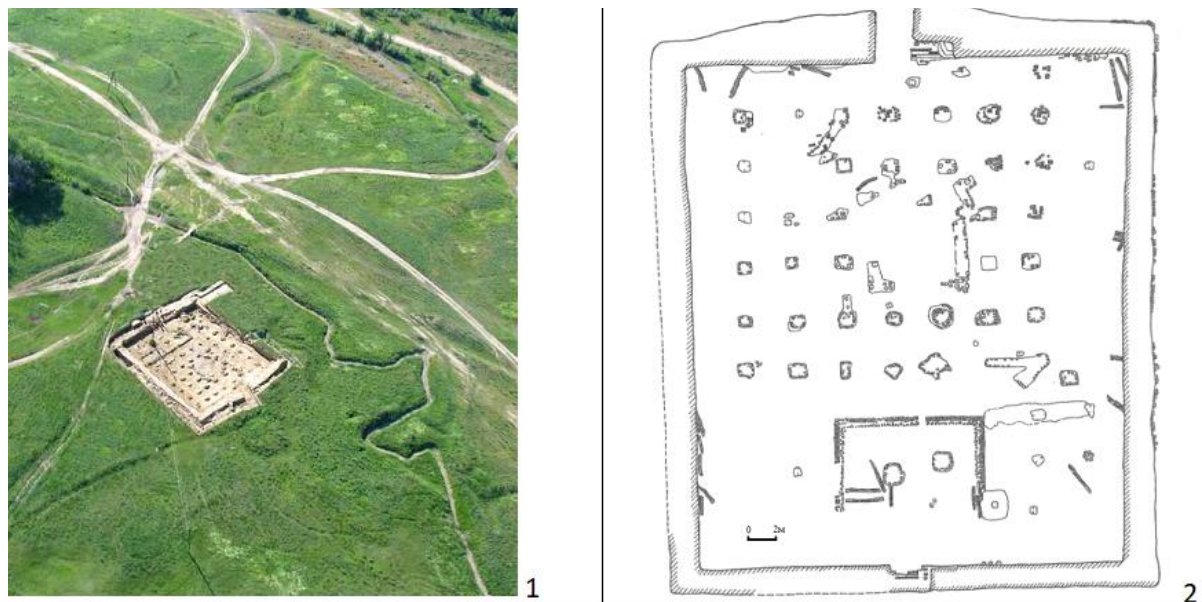


Fig. 3. Koilyk. Photo and plan of the mosque: 1) Aerial photo of the mosque;
2) Plan of the mosque (Zheleznyakov, 2023: 137).

3-сур. Қойлық. Мешіттің суреті мен жоспары: 1) мешіттің әуеден түсірілген суреті,
2) мешіт жоспары (Железняков, 2023: 137).

Рис. 3. Койлык. Фотография и план мечети: 1) Аэрофотоснимок мечети;
2) План мечети (Железняков, 2023: 137).

During the 2014 field season, a large residential structure (excavation 20) located in the southern part of the settlement was investigated. Prior to the excavation, it was preserved as a rectangular mound, approximately 2 meters high, with a base measuring 32 meters long, and 28 meters wide. The northern slope was steep, the southern side was more gently flatter. Nearby, there was a ditch (Kalmak) and another small mound. The total area of the excavated area was 18.5×10 meters. The remains of a private dwelling consisting of eight rooms was discovered. The rooms contained internal structures (interior) such as chimney, tandoor, furnace and a heating system. During the excavation, small ceramic vessels, a stone mortar, a fragment of grain grinder, a small altar fragment, a comb and a stone whetstone, and small livestock bones were found (Kamaldinov, 2014: 346-347).

The process of Islamization, which began in the Karakhanid period, continued in subsequent periods. The spread of the teachings of Khoja Akhmet Yasawi in the territory of Zhetisu and Southern Kazakhstan was closely connected with the activities of Sufi centers. The discovery of the remains of a khanaka and a mosque in Koilyk, as well as information about the community of khoja found in written sources, indicate the widespread Sufi tradition in this region. The correlation of legendary and genealogical data with archaeological evidence clarifies the historical basis of religious life in the town.

At the same time, the coins and samples of material culture found in Koilyk allow us to consider the political and economic significance of the town in connection with religious institutions. It is known that the construction and functioning of religious complexes depended on economic stability and the support of government structures. From this perspective, the

mosque and its adjacent buildings are a comprehensive indicator of the town's status as a regional center.

In this discussion section, the chronology of Muslim religious complexes in the Koilyk town, their architectural features, and their role in the socio-cultural space are comprehensively studied based on archaeological and written data.

During the research, a residential complex equipped with a sophisticated heating system (kan) was identified. It is noticeable that the structure included not only living rooms, but also spaces for household and ritual purposes. The presence of a special place for collecting water, that is, a hauz, in the central courtyard of the house indicates the development of engineering solutions.

These new archaeological findings make it possible to gain a deeper understanding of the daily life, social organization, and religious and cultural beliefs of the inhabitants of Koilyk town. Such collection of data clearly clarifies the historical significance of Koilyk as one of the major medieval urban centers in Zhetisu region.

Regarding the reputation of the medieval town of Koilyk in international trade, in the article "Koilyk is – a town of the Great Mongol Empire: numismatic and archaeological aspects" was stated: "...Thus, most of the silver dirhams known to us were discovered in the territory of the settlement in the village of Antonovka. Considering that in the XIII century copper tenge was mainly used only in the local market in the town and its surrounding area, the discovery of a copper coin during excavations proves that they were minted in this settlement". Numismatic data indicate the economic independence of Koilyk and its participation in the international trade system. As a town that minted its own coins tenge, Koilyk had a high political weight in the region. However, the exact geography of tenge circulation, its trade partners, and the sphere of its economic influence require additional data. In this direction, there is a need for a broader comparative analysis of numismatic materials.

During the era of the Mongol invasions, the only major town in the Zhetisu region known to travelers and chroniclers that could mint its own coins was Koilyk. The collected numismatic materials clearly indicate that a mint or institution for coin production operated in Koilyk. According to the Hijri calendar, silver, copper and gold coins dated to the 630-640 AH contain the inscription "minted in Koilyk" (Baipakov, Petrov, 2007: 14-21).

In the study entitled "The process of building cities of Kazakhstan in ancient and the Middle Ages: cities of the XIII-XV centuries", it is noted that a number of coins found in Koilyk were minted by the khans of the Golden Horde, and the mosque constructed in the middle of the XII century was functioned until the XIV century, and its architectural similarity to the mosque discovered in the Vodyansk settlement in the lower flows of the Volga river was described (Baipakov, 2012: 60-67).

In the UNESCO serial nomination "The Kazakhstani section of the Great Silk Road", there is information about the international status of the town: "...The road from the Iki Oghuzs continued to the town of Koilyk, which had been the capital of the Karluk yabghus" (Baipakov, Voyakin, 2012: 24). In another study, it was stated: that "unique cultural monuments discovered during archaeological excavations in the medieval Koilyk town were described, and they date back to the XI-XII centuries, that is, to the era of the Karakhanid state" (Zheleznyakov, 2018: 361-369).

Academician K.M. Baipakov in his article “Medieval cities of the Ili Valley along the Great Silk Road (north-eastern Zhetisu - Zhetisu region) of the VIII-XIV centuries”, through the analysis of Arabic, Persian, Chinese and European sources, as well as archaeological research materials, for the first time determined the location of all Zhetisu cities of this period, they were correlated with archaeological monuments, and as a result, the discovered archaeological sites were accurately compared with the cities in written sources. In particular, the city of Urung-Arj was identified with the town of Kastek, the city of Almaty with the town of Almaty-2, the city of Talkhir (Talkhiza) with the town of Talgar, the ruins of the fortress with the town of Shingildi, the city of Iki Oguz with the town of Dungene, the town of Koilyk with the town of Antonovka, the settlement of the Nestorian religion with the town of Lepsi, the capital of the region with the town of Koktuma, and the city of Ilanbalyk (Ile-balyk) with the town of Usharal (Baipakov et al., 2018: 24; Baipakov et al., 2020: 7-34).

In 2014, “The Great Silk Road: Chang’an – Tien Shan Corridor” was included on the World Heritage List as a transnational nomination. Eight sites from the territory of Kazakhstan were included in this nomination. This was a highly significant event, when the scientific and expert community presented to the world community the key heritage sites located along the historical route from Talas to Xi’an (Zheleznyakov, 2023: 127-153).

In 2014, the medieval town of Koilyk was inscribed on the World Heritage List. In 2016, a local resident found a round stone with a deeply carved image of cross in the southern part of the town, within the inner area of the defensive walls.

As a result of the analysis conducted in 2018, this material was interpreted as a tombstone installed on a burial, and it was suggested that the small size of the artifact and the absence of an inscription may be a mark placed to the grave of a young child.

Nestorians and other Christian communities have left a clear imprint on the cultural layers of urban cultural monuments across Central and East Asia. During archaeological investigations carried out in the town of Koilyk, a number of religious sites – a Buddhist temple, a main mosque, a khanaka belonging to the Yasawi tariqa, mausoleums, and a Manichaeian temple were identified and introduced into scientific circulation.

This first tombstone found in Koilyk makes it possible to better understand the broad historical and cultural scope of the Christian tradition in the region. In addition, a spatial and chronological analysis of Christian monuments dating back to the XII-XIV centuries in the Zhetysu-Ili-Shu region was conducted, and their place in the structure of the multi-confessional urban culture of the region was determined (Baipakov, Zheleznyakov, 2022: 209-219).

The medieval town of Koilyk is proven by archaeological and numismatic data to have been one of the most important center of political, economic and spiritual life in the Zhetisu region. The operation of the mint in the city, the circulation of silver and copper tenge indicate its economic autonomy and active participation in the international trade system. Its strategic location along the Great Silk Road made Koilyk a key hub of interregional communications.

Furthermore, monuments discovered within the town such as a mosque, Buddhist and Manichaeian temples, a khanaka and a Christian tombstone demonstrate that Koilyk developed a multi-confessional and tolerant urban culture. These data indicate that the population of town was ethnically and religiously diverse. Although, archaeological data is clearly proven that Koilyk was a multi-confessional cultural space, issue about the exact nature and extent

of this phenomenon are also controversial. The coexistence of various religious structures may reflect religious tolerance, but further research is required in order to draw definitive conclusions about their mutual relations, the degree of influence and social boundaries. In particular, the place and role of Buddhist, Manichaean and Christian communities in the urban structure have not been fully revealed.

XIII-XIV centuries, Koilyk is described as a major center recognized at the international level, possessing developed infrastructure and well-established spiritual life. Its historical heritage leads to a deep understanding of the medieval civilization of the Zhetisu region. Archaeological research conducted in the Koilyk town makes it possible to comprehensively consider through real data, the process of formation and establishment of Islamic culture in the Zhetisu region. However, it is insufficient to limit the study only to the description of the available materials, it is important to analyze them from a comparative and interpretative perspective. In this regard, the division of Muslim religious complexes in Koilyk into two periods indicates that the process of Islamization is not a one-sided, but a multi-stage and historically dynamic phenomenon.

Results

It is known from written sources that there were several large cities in Zhetisu before the Mongol invasion and during the period of Mongol domination (the Golden Horde). Among them, the well-known and recently becoming the object of research are the cities of Talhir (Talkhiz), Ekvus (Iki-Oguz), Ilanbalakh (Ilanbalyk), Lavan and Koilyk. Information about the city of Kailak in Zhetisu is found in the Russian translation of the travel account of G. Rubruck, the envoy was sent by the French king Louis IX to the Mongol Khan with the aim of forming a military alliance. In the translator's commentary, it is noted that a medieval Iranian author called this city as Pulad or Pula. It is written about the passage of the Chinese traveler Chang-de through Pulad in 1253 (Travel, 1993: 110-111). G. Rubruk wrote: "... we came to a large town called Koilyk, where there was a market visited by many merchants. We rested here for 12 days" (Travel, 1993: 211). During his stay in the town, the envoy recorded what he saw and learned. From his notes, it is understood that the embassy stayed in Kailak until a special permission came from Mongke Khan. Rubruk, who freely exploring the town, visited the market and religious buildings there, and left his impressions of the mosque, church, and temples. The town of Koilyk, which the envoy called Kailak, was the capital of the Karluk yabghus in the X-XIII centuries. Experts have attempted to determine its location at different times.

V.V. Barthold was one of the first scholars to suggest that Kailak was most likely identical with Kayalyk, the capital of the Karluk khan Arslan mentioned in Muslim sources, and proposed that the site of the town could be a small town located north of Kapal, along the Buyen river (Barthold, 1966: 105).

A.N. Bernshtam suggested identifying Kaylak with the town of Dungene, situated along the Koksu river to the west of Taldykorgan city (Bernshtam, 1948: 88).

In his article "The Koksu ruins and the town of Koilyk", M. Tynyshbayev, after analyzing the legends recorded by Kerimkul Nazarov who was a prominent citizen of Kapal district, connected the ruins of a destroyed city near the village of Dungene, close to the confluence

of the Koxsu and Karatal rivers, with the Kailak mentioned in the recordings of Rubruk (Tynyshbayev, 1926: 119-127).

Academician K.M. Baipakov, as a long-time researcher of the medieval cities of Zhetisu, by comparing written sources and archaeological materials, identified the location of the town of Koilyk, where the French envoy stopped, with the town of Antonovka, situated on the eastern outskirts of the present-day village of Koilyk, on the banks of the Ashybulak river (Baipakov, 1986: 36).

The ancient name of this place, which was renamed the village of Antonovka during the Russian Empire, was Koilyk. After Kazakhstan gained independence, its historical name was restored. Therefore, K.M. Baipakov's version corresponds to reality. Moreover, the description left by G. Rubruk's confirmed by the results of archaeological research. The name of the city, which was the capital of the Karluks, is found in the sources and in modern usage (Pulad, Koilyk) in several forms. Which of these forms is true remains an unresolved issue. The researchers often rely on Russian translations of the sources, the name given by the translator has been accepted as the main one.

And the possibility of verifying its accuracy is limited. As a result, different variants of the names are formed. However, a solution can be found through deeper research. One way to correct such inaccuracies to translate original not into Russian, but directly into Kazakh. For example, when Bichurin translated the title of the Huns ruler from ancient Chinese into Russian, it was given as "Shanui", while scholars who translated Chinese sources directly into Kazakh indicate it as "Tanirkut". Similarly, the Davan kingdom is translated as Daduan, and the Tocharians are given as Nukist. These versions are considered to convey the true meaning of the names in the sources. It is also necessary to consider the data related to the town of Koilyk from this perspective. In the article, it was decided to use the name "Koilyk", which is natural to the Kazakh language.

During many years of excavation works, four construction layers dating back to the VIII–XIV centuries were identified at the site of the town of Koilyk (Baipakov et al., 2013)⁸. The discovered bathhouse, mosque, khanaka, mausoleum and Buddhist temple mainly belong to the latest cultural layer. These represent the sites of public buildings from the period when the city flourished as a major trade and economic center during the Golden Horde era. Traces of a complete fire were found in the upper construction layer. The majority of archaeological materials were also taken from this layer. Among them was not only objects made by local craftsmen, but also artifacts brought from China and Iran (Fig. 4).

Among the excavated finds were painted and unpainted vessels, jugs, jars, lids made of glass and copper. Part of the archaeologically valuable artifacts are coins minted from copper, bronze, and silver. Among them, coins minted in the town of Koilyk were also identified. The discovery of the remains of numerous towns of various sizes located at the distance of 5–20 km around Koilyk confirms its regional importance. The sites of social construction identified during the research excavations represent monuments with strong potential to become excellent tourist attractions in the future. With the change in the political situation, namely the centralization of power in the Mongol Empire, a complete centralization was also

⁸ Baipakov, K.; Kamaldinov, I.; Akymbek, E. Report on research work "Medieval urban culture of Kazakhstan in the 12th–15th centuries based on written sources, archaeological research, and numismatic materials." Archive of the A.Kh. Margulan Institute of Archaeology. Almaty. File 3135. Inventory 55. 110 p.

carried out in the spiritual sphere. As a result of research conducted in the Koilyk town, it was determined that two mausoleums of representatives of the Karakhanid dynasty and a khanate built on the basis of the Yasawi tariqa were the first Muslim centers in this large town at the turn of the XII–XIII centuries. By the middle of the XIII century, Islam had firmly established itself in spiritual culture. The communal mosque built in the middle of the century shows that the Muslim population had become predominant in the town, and its culture acquired common features characteristic of all regions of the Islamic world.



Fig. 4. Koilyk. Local and imported ceramics: 1) Local pottery; 2) Chinese jars; 3) Iranian pottery (Baipakov, 2005: 99).

4-сур. Қойлық. Жергілікті және импорттық ыдыстар: 1) жергілікті ыдыс, 2. Қытай құмыралары, 3) Иран ыдысы (Байпаков, 2005: 99).

Рис. 4. Койлык. Местная и импортная керамика: 1) местная посуда; 2) китайские кувшины; 3) иранская керамика (Байпаков, 2005: 99).

Conclusion

The significance of Koilyk is also mentioned in written sources. In 1253, Guillaume de Rubruck visited the city, described its bazaar and religious buildings, noting that the large number of merchants gathered there. These data fully correspond to archaeological evidence. As the capital of the Karluk yabghus, the town served as a political center during the X–XIII centuries, and later experienced a period of commercial and economic prosperity under the Golden Horde era. The name of the town is appeared in sources in various forms (Kaylak, Pulad, Kayalyk, Koylyk), but in modern scientific community the name “Koilyk”, identified with the town of Antonovka, is considered the established form.

During the scientific research conducted at the monument in 1964, the Zhetisu archaeological expedition led by K.A. Akishev, and later the complex archaeological expeditions headed by K.M. Baipakov, identified four construction layers of the town and investigated its cultural and economic life in the VIII–XIV centuries.

The town of Koilyk, which investigated in this study, has been confirmed by archaeological and written evidence as one of the major medieval political, economic and cultural centers of

Zhetisu. It has been scientifically proven that the site of this town is a monument located on the eastern outskirts of the village of Koilyk (former the town of Antonovka) in the Sarkant district of the modern Almaty region. Glass windows, Chinese vases, locally produced and imported goods, as well as coin tenge minted in Koilyk, found during the excavations testify to its important role on the international trade route. The remains of a wealthy resident's fifteen-room house, an oriental-style bathhouse (hamam), a Buddhist temple, Muslim religious complexes (mosque, khanaka, mausoleum) and public buildings demonstrate to the social stratification and cultural diversity of the town.

The excavation works carried out at the monument revealed that the town consisted of three main components typical of medieval urban architecture (citadel, shakhristan, rabad), and that the dwellings were equipped with complex heating systems, and household elements such as tandoors, chimneys, granaries. The mosque, bathhouse, mausoleum, Buddhist temple, residential buildings, and farm structures discovered during the excavations indicate the high level of cultural, religious, and domestic life of Koilyk. Among the discovered artifacts was not only products of local craftsmen, but also items imported from China and Iran proves the town's international connections. In addition, the remains of other settlements near the town further strengthen its influence as a regional center.

Thus, the town of Koilyk occupies a special place in the medieval history of Zhetisu. It was of particular importance as the political center of the Karluks, a religious center where Islam and Buddhism coexisted, and a major economic hub on international trade routes. The combination of long-term archaeological research and written sources determines the contribution of Koilyk to the development of Zhetisu civilization and gives opportunities for its broader promotion in the future both in scientific and as a tourist perspective.

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А.А. Молдахмет техникалық жұмыстармен шұғылданды, атап айтқанда: мақала суреттерін іздеу және дайындау, кіріспе, материалдар және зерттеу әдістері бөлімін жүйелеп, мәтінді редакцияға икемдеп, баспаға беру дайындаумен айналысты.

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Author contributions:

D.A. Taleev is the author of the main concept of the article. He carried out archaeological excavations at the medieval town of Koilyk, processed the archaeological materials, and developed the overall research framework.

A.A. Moldakhmet was responsible for technical tasks, including the selection and preparation of illustrations for the article, drafting the Introduction, Materials, and Research Methods sections, adapting the manuscript in accordance with editorial guidelines, and managing the submission process for publication.

S.N. Apasheva translated the abstract into Russian and English, contributed to the preparation of the Results and Conclusion sections, and compiled the bibliographic database.

Вклад авторов:

Д.А. Талеев является автором основной идеи статьи. Им были проведены археологические раскопки на территории средневекового городища Койлык, осуществлена обработка археологических материалов и разработана общая концепция исследования.

А.А. Молдахмет выполнял техническую работу, в частности: поиск и подготовку иллюстративных материалов к статье, подготовку разделов «Введение», «Материалы и методы исследования», редактирование текста в соответствии с требованиями редакции и организацию подачи статьи к публикации.

С.Н. Апасхева осуществила перевод аннотации на русский и английский языки, приняла участие в подготовке разделов «Результаты» и «Заключение», а также составила библиографическую базу статьи.



Conflict of Interest.

There is no conflict of interest related to this article.

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