

THE SETTLEMENT BOUNDARIES AND ETHNIC GEOGRAPHY OF EARLY IRON AGE POPULATIONS IN THE ARAL SEA REGION

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Annotation. This article examines the settlement of ancient tribes in the Aral Sea region and its adjacent areas, their cultural interactions, socio-economic development features, and archaeological studies. It highlights the history of nomadic and semi-settled pastoral tribes inhabiting this region during the 7th-4th centuries BCE, including their defensive structures and settlements in agricultural oases.

Keywords. Aral Sea region, saka tribes, massagetae, Qyzyl Qir, Chirik Rabat, archaeology, agricultural oase, Turan ethnic geography, Syr Darya and Amu Darya deltas.

Introduction. The study of the ethnic geography and territorial distribution of nomadic tribes represents one of the significant topics in ancient history. This subject is particularly important for understanding how tribes inhabiting Central Asia adapted to various environmental and historical conditions. This article discusses the historical and geographical distribution of Massagetae, Saka, and other nomadic tribes, their depiction in Greek and Persian sources, and scholarly analyses based on modern archaeological findings.

Literature Review. Greek and Persian authors, including Herodotus, Strabo, and other ancient historians, provide valuable information about the geographical distribution of the Massagetae and other nomadic tribes. Archaeological studies, referencing the Behistun inscriptions and Herodotus' accounts, examine the territorial location of the Saka Tigraxauda and Massagetae. German orientalist A. Herrmann considered the Massagetae and Saka Tigraxauda to be a single tribe, while B. A. Litvinsky argued that they inhabited the western regions of Central Asia.

Methodological Framework. The research employs historical, geographical, and archaeological sources. Comparative analysis and synthesis of these materials facilitated the identification of the geographical distribution and migratory patterns of nomadic tribes.

Analysis. Settlement patterns and territorial development in the Aral Sea region were significantly influenced by hydrological factors, particularly the stability of water flow in the ancient channels of the Lower Amu Darya and Syr Darya. Variations in water levels during different historical periods, including the Early Iron Age (7th–4th centuries BCE), had a profound impact [9, p. 20].

By the late 8th century BCE, water supply to the Akcha-Darya channel ceased. However, during this period, the Dovdon channel on the left bank of the Amu Darya had high water levels, prompting pastoralist communities to settle in the western part of the Khorezm oasis, specifically in the Sarykamysh steppe [2, pp. 5–20].

In the early 7th century BCE, the waters of the Inkar-Darya, Zhan-Darya, and Kuvan-Darya tributaries flowed into the Aral Sea from the left bank of the Lower Syr Darya, forming the Eastern Aral basin. This area became home to the Saka tribes. According to the evidence, the

early Saka inhabited the Eastern Aral basin and the Dovdon channel in the Sarykamysch region in the 7th century BCE.

However, by the late 7th century BCE, due to changing ethno-cultural processes, pastoralist groups began to construct fortified settlements such as Kozaliqir fortress on the steep slopes near the Quisay settlement. Spanning an area of 25 hectares, Kozaliqir is considered the oldest defensive structure in the Aral Sea region. Earlier Bronze Age Amrobod communities and the initial Saka groups lacked the technical knowledge for building fortifications or settlements using pakhsa (compressed earth) or adobe bricks.

Initially studied by S. P. Tolstov, Kozaliqir was later extensively examined under the leadership of O. A. Vishnevskaya. Archaeological excavations revealed the fortress's defense system and a large architectural complex within it, including remnants of a palace.

The concept of "Kozaliqir culture" was introduced into the field of science based on research findings, attributed to the period from the late 7th–6th centuries BCE to the 5th century BCE. This culture is associated with the processes of territorial development in southern Khorezm, specifically on the left bank of the Amu Darya. Initially, archaeological materials dated to the 5th century BCE were discovered in the ruins of the city of Khazoraspa [6, pp. 197–200], and later, they were identified at sites such as Khumbuztepa, Khiva, Toshseka, and Qoratosh [12, pp. 21–38].

Among these, the pottery workshop uncovered in Khumbuztepa, complete with kilns for firing clay vessels and wheel-thrown ceramics, has been dated to the late 7th–5th centuries BCE. Subsequent research revised the establishment of Khumbuztepa to the first half of the 7th century BCE [1, p. 31]. However, the evidence for this earlier dating remains an open question.

Additionally, in the Dingilja valley of the Akchadarya delta of the Lower Amu Darya, more than 50 farming homesteads built from pakhsa (rammed earth) and adobe bricks and dating to the 5th century BCE were discovered and studied. These homesteads were constructed along river tributaries at intervals of 60–120 meters, forming a densely populated agricultural region. Among these, the Dingilja large homestead was fully excavated [5, pp. 7–15].

Results. The data suggest that during the 7th–6th centuries BCE, the Eastern Aral Sea basin and the Sarykamysch region were primarily developed by pastoral tribes. The Saka tribes, who left behind burial mounds such as Uygarak and Janubiy Tagisken, led a nomadic lifestyle, leaving no permanent settlements. These tribes migrated along the Lower Syr Darya channels, the Akchadarya delta, and the Lower Zarafshan basin, extending into the Kyzylkum desert.

This conclusion is supported by burial mounds such as Meshekli and Uchochoq on the right bank of the Amu Darya (opposite Khazoraspa), as well as Hazara and Qalqonsoy burial mounds in the lower Zarafshan, all dated to the 7th–6th centuries BCE [13, pp. 107–109].

By the 5th–4th centuries BCE, the situation in the Eastern Aral Sea region began to change as the Saka tribes transitioned to a semi-sedentary and sedentary lifestyle. During this time, a large fortified settlement was constructed along the Jandarya, featuring a moat, defensive walls, and an inner citadel. Known as Chirikrabort, this settlement, according to S. P. Tolstov, served as both the military-political center and a sacred site for the Saka tribes. The inner citadel contained four large burial mounds of pastoralist military leaders, and two additional mausoleums constructed from adobe bricks were studied around the citadel.

Simultaneously, in the Kuvandarya oasis, located north of the ancient Jonadarya channel of the Syr Darya, the remnants of the Jetiosar ("Seven Cities, Monuments") culture were discovered. These include fortifications and burial mounds, with more than 50 fortresses identified. Studies of their topography, architecture, defense systems, and residential structures

have revealed significant scientific data, indicating that alongside the local Saka tribes, irrigated agriculture was practiced [10, pp. 42–59].

From the mid-1st millennium BCE, nomadic pastoral tribes utilized the southeastern part of the Ustyurt Plateau adjacent to the Lower Amu Darya as winter pastures. Archaeological materials from burial mounds such as Devkeskan 3, 4, Oybuyir, and Qalaliq attest to this. These sites indicate that the seasonal movements of these nomads were connected to the Savromats (Sarmatians) in the southern Ural region.

Researchers of the time hypothesized that the Sarmatians from the Pre-Ural region had close interactions with Khorezm, facilitated by the Khorezmians' economic ties with the Achaemenid Empire [17, pp. 106–107]. Additionally, burial mounds of nomadic pastoralists were discovered and studied along the banks of the Upper Uzboy River.

The archaeological geography of the 7th–4th centuries BCE, including the topography and spatial distribution of sites, reflects the settlement patterns of nomadic, semi-sedentary, and sedentary ethnic groups in the Aral Sea region.

These groups inhabited steppe regions and riverine oases shaped by the courses of rivers. Their distribution was influenced by the diversity of ethnic and cultural connections and their various orientations.

The issues of ethnic geography in Central Asia, particularly those related to nomadic tribes, have been extensively studied by scholars such as S.P. Tolstov, I.M. Dyakonov, B.A. Litvinsky, I.V. Pyankov, B.I. Vaynberg, R.Kh. Suleymanov, and V.N. Yagodin. Their research is based on historical sources and historiographical data spanning various periods [11, pp. 158–174].

In Achaemenid-era Old Persian inscriptions (e.g., Behistun and Naqsh-e Rostam inscriptions), the Saka are mentioned under several names: Saka tigraxauda (“Saka wearing pointed felt hats”), Saka tyaiy para Sugdam (“Saka beyond Sogdiana”), Saka tyaiy paradraya (“Saka beyond the sea”), and Saka haumavarga (“Saka who prepare and exalt haoma”) [14, p. 14]. Knowledge of their territorial distribution, as accumulated up to the 1970s, was summarized by B.A. Litvinsky.

This study focuses not on the overall historical geography of all Saka groups but rather on the settlement issues of the Saka and “Chorasmian” ethnicities in regions surrounding the Aral Sea, including the lower Amu Darya and Syr Darya basins, the Ustyurt Plateau, and along the Uzboy channel leading to the Caspian Sea.

Greek authors often described the geography of nomadic tribes in terms of their association with seas, mountains, steppes, and rivers. For instance, Herodotus wrote about the Massagetae, stating:

"The Massagetae are said to be a vast and brave tribe. They lived to the east, beyond the Araxes River, opposite the Issedones. Some consider them a Scythian tribe."

Herodotus also described the Araxes River and the Caspian Sea in detail [7, pp. 202–203].

According to the geographer and historian Strabo: "From the Caspian Sea onward, the majority of the Scythians were called Daes, while the tribes living further east were known as the Massagetae and Saka.

Other tribes were collectively referred to as Scythians, though each had its own specific name" [19, Book XI, VIII.2].

Elsewhere, Strabo identifies the Chorasmian people as part of the Massagetae and Saka tribes. Similarly, in Achaemenid-era reliefs at Naqsh-e Rostam, Chorasmian figures are depicted alongside Bactrians and Arians, resembling the Saka in appearance [4, p. 168].

In a paper dedicated to the Massagetae living between the Caspian and Aral Seas, V.N. Yagodin highlights the conclusion of German orientalist A. Hermann, who suggested that the Saka tigraxauda and the Massagetae were different names for the same tribal group. Furthermore, Greek sources often referred to the Massagetae as Derbices or Apasiacae, indicating that the Massagetae likely comprised various tribes.

In the Behistun inscriptions, the Saka tigraxauda are described as living "beyond the sea." Based on this information, B.A. Litvinsky located the Saka tigraxauda in the western part of Central Asia. The Behistun inscriptions also mention a campaign by Persian King Darius I against the Saka tigraxauda in 519 BCE, describing an unnamed river the Persian army crossed to engage the Saka [8, pp. 100–101].

This unnamed river may correspond to the Uzboy channel of the Amu Darya. Herodotus also refers to this river as the Araxes, describing it as originating in the mountains, flowing through open terrain, and emptying into the Caspian Sea.

The Early Massagetae and Their Territorial Distribution: An Academic Overview

K.F. Smirnov consolidated the Massagetae and Dahae tribes, locating them in the middle and upper basins of the Ural River. He associated the river's name with the ethnonym of the Dahae (or Daes) tribes, interpreting it as "Daik" or "Daicus" [18, pp. 74–77].

I.V. Pyankov concluded that the nomadic camps of the Massagetae were situated along the lower reaches of the Ural and Syr Darya rivers, as well as in Mangyshlak and the Ustyurt Plateau.

Their summer pastures extended to the oases of the Emba River and the upper basins of the Irgiz and Tobol rivers. Pyankov argued that during their southern migrations, the Massagetae encountered the Persians in 530 BCE, situating their movements within regions such as the Southern Urals, Mangyshlak, the Ustyurt Plateau, and the Uzboy Channel basin.

S.P. Tolstov noted that Herodotus and other Greek authors lacked precise knowledge about the territorial settlement of the Khwarezmians and were unaware of their habitation along the Amu Darya.

Tolstov described the Khwarezmians as "agriculturists of fertile oases surrounded by urban culture, encountering mounted nomads on all sides." These nomads were identified as the Massagetae tribal alliance mentioned in historical texts. Strabo linked the Khwarezmians ethnically to the Massagetae, but his information aligns with the historical geography formed after the Greco-Macedonian incursions into Central Asia.

Tolstov identified several nomadic tribes in the Eastern Aral Sea region: - apasiacae in the lower reaches of the Zhanydarya, - tocharians and Augasians near the Kuvandarya, - saka-uvarakaians along the Inkardarya.

Tolstov further asserted that the lower Syr Darya region resembled the "land of islands and marshes" described by Strabo, leading to the conclusion that the Massagetae lived there. Greek sources referred to them as Apasiacae or "river Saka."

O.A. Vishnevskaya cautioned against correlating the nomadic tribes buried in the Uygarak burial mounds of the lower Syr Darya with specific tribes mentioned in written sources, suggesting that this issue requires further archaeological evidence [3, p. 132].

The Avesta refers to the pastoral tribes called "Tura" or "Tur." According to I.V. Pyankov, their central hub was located in Kangha, within the lower Syr Darya region. He proposed that the Aryans invaded this region, and their leader, Kavi Khausrov (Kay-Khosrow), plundered and burned the capital of the Tur at Kangha.

Pyankov linked the traces of destruction and fire discovered during excavations of the Northern Tagisken tombs to Kavi Khausrov's campaigns in the lower Syr Darya region [16, p. 243]. However, this interpretation remains speculative and lacks corroborating evidence.

In his work on the ethnic geography of Turan, B.I. Vaynberg defined Turan (the Turan Lowland) as extending from the Caspian Sea in the west to Central Kazakhstan and southward to the borders of the Karakum and Kyzylkum deserts, including the Khwarezm oasis.

Scholars have indicated that the central Syr Darya basin and the steppe lands east of the river (the Karatau region) were inhabited by "Tur" tribes. Researchers analyzing the campaigns of Persian kings Cyrus II against the Massagetae and Darius I against the Saka tigraxauda have offered diverse interpretations of these nomadic tribes' territorial distribution [16, pp. 67–68].

Conclusion. Before the advent of archaeological research, conclusions about these tribes were primarily derived from Herodotus' accounts and the Behistun inscriptions. These sources suggest that the Massagetae inhabited the vast plains east of the Caspian Sea, beyond the Araxes River, while the Saka tigraxauda lived beyond an unnamed river. The Araxes and the unnamed river have been compared to the Uzboy Channel of the lower Amu Darya.

Recent archaeological findings demonstrate that the steppes surrounding the Uzboy River were densely utilized by ancient pastoral tribes. Based on this evidence, B.I. Vaynberg situated the Saka tigraxauda between the Caspian Sea and the southwestern Ustyurt Plateau. The Massagetae tribes were located between the Kara-Bogaz-Gol Bay and the Sarykamysk Lake, with the Apasiacae positioned along the right bank of the Uzboy, the Derbices on the left bank of the middle Uzboy, and the Khwarezmians near the Sarykamysk region and the Dovdon Channel.

As with sedentary populations, the precise delineation of territorial distribution for nomadic tribes in ethnic cartography poses significant historical and methodological challenges.

Due to the seasonal migrations intrinsic to the economy and traditional lifestyle of nomadic pastoralists, it is crucial to consider the shifting patterns of land use across different times of the year.

These seasonal migratory zones (spring, summer, autumn, and winter pastures) are integral to defining the inhabited territories of nomadic pastoralists. However, the distances between these seasonally utilized areas were often substantial.

It is suggested that the Khwarezmians initially emerged around the Sarykamysk region and subsequently expanded into Southern Khwarezm and the Akcha Darya basin. In the eastern Aral Sea region, Saka tribes were located around the Ustyurt Plateau and Upper Uzboy areas, encircling the Khwarezm oasis.

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