Humanities and Social Science Research; Vol. 8, No. 1; 2025
ISSN 2576-3024 E-ISSN 2576-3032
https://doi.org/10.30560/hssr.v8n1p17

Paikend and Bukhara as Symbols of the "Copper City": A Historical Examination of Oasis City Defense Systems and Cultural Significance

Yang Wenbo[1] & Han Zhongyi[1]

[1] School of History and Culture, Shaanxi Normal University, China

Correspondence: Yang Wenbo, School of History and Culture,Shaanxi Normal University, Xi'an, Shaanxi, 710000, China.

Received: November 18, 2024; Accepted: January 13, 2025; Published: January 15, 2025

Abstract

Paikend was once a core city of the Bukhara oasis, renowned as the "Copper City" for its robust defense systems and strategic position. However, due to water resource depletion and geopolitical changes, Paikend gradually declined, and Bukhara rose to replace it as the regional center. Bukhara achieved its key position in Central Asia through a more sophisticated defense system, closer proximity to the Zerafshan River, and political and cultural innovations. The rise and fall of Paikend and Bukhara were not only closely tied to natural resources but were also deeply influenced by changes in geopolitical and military dynamics. The designation of "Copper City" symbolizes the defensive ingenuity and cultural heritage of oasis cities. While Paikend's formidable walls represented an earlier singular defensive model, Bukhara transitioned to a comprehensive strategy through its triple-layered defense structure. By comparing the two cities, this study aims to reveal the dynamic changes of Central Asian oasis cities in terms of natural environment, technological innovation, and cultural integration, providing a new perspective on the historical development of this region.

Keywords: Paikend, Bukhara, Copper City, urban defense

1. Introduction

Bukhara, an ancient city in the Central Asian oasis, is world-renowned for its strategic geographical location and historical role. In Arabic, Bukhara is referred to as Madinat al-sufriya (the "Copper City") or Madinat al-tujjar (the "City of Merchants"). According to The History of Bukhara, these names first appeared in the works of Narshakhi, though their origins were not explained in detail. However, other historical documents more often associated these names with Paikend, a city within the same region. Paikend was celebrated not only as the "Copper City" and the "City of Merchants" but also as the core city of the oasis before the rise of Bukhara. With its fortified defenses and thriving commercial activity, Paikend became a vital hub in the early Central Asian trade network. This phenomenon has sparked discussions about the historical relationship between the two cities and highlights the dynamic evolution of Central Asian oasis cities in terms of natural resources, geopolitics, and cultural interactions. By examining the rise and fall of Paikend and Bukhara, we gain a deeper understanding of the historical significance carried by the "Copper City" as a cultural symbol and of how cities in this region balanced resources, strategy, and cultural integration.

2. Paikend and Bukhara: Power Transitions in the 7th–8th Century Oasis Center

Although the written records of Bukhara's ancient and medieval history are diverse and rich, with detailed accounts of this extensive agricultural oasis, documentation about Paikend is relatively scarce. Medieval works by Arab and Persian scholars like Firdausi, Istakhri, and Biruni mention Paikend multiple times, but their information is limited and less detailed compared to Narshakhi's accounts. According to Narshakhi, Paikend was the second-largest ancient city in the oasis after Bukhara, even referred to as the "Ancient Bukhara." Before Bukhara became the regional center, key settlements in the Bukhara oasis included Paikend, Tavavis, Firab, and Ramitin. These settlements typically centered around a city surrounded by numerous villages, with Paikend being one of the largest in the oasis. Historical records indicate that early rulers of Bukhara, such as Abrui, resided in villages near Paikend, such as Qalʿa-i Dabūsī. This association earned Paikend the name "Royal City," possibly derived from the Sogdian term Patikanta, meaning "City of the Ruler."[1] Narshakhi further notes that "every ruler of the Bukhara oasis resided in Paikend." [2] The residents of Paikend took great pride in their city, insisting on its identity as a city rather than a village. When traveling to Baghdad, a resident of Paikend would proudly claim to be from Paikend rather than from Bukhara.

As Abrui's ruling power expanded, he began to impose tyranny, prompting some local leaders and wealthy merchants to flee to Taraz and Turkestan, seeking assistance from the Turks. Qara Jurin Turk, ruler of the Western Turkic Khaganate at the time, dispatched his son Shir-i Kishvar to aid the nobles of the Bukhara region. Shir-i Kishvar led an army that killed Abrui and requested his father to grant him the region as a fiefdom. Upon receiving approval, the Bukhara region became a territory under Shir-i Kishvar's rule within the Western Turkic Khaganate. Shir-i Kishvar governed for 20 years, during which he constructed Bukhara's urban area and established villages such as Mamastin, Saqmatin, Samatin, and Firab. His son inherited the throne and continued to develop settlements within the oasis, including Iskijkat, Shargh, and Ramitin. During this period, Bukhara and its surrounding villages began to form an autonomous political entity, maintaining a vassal relationship with the Western Turkic Khaganate, while Paikend gradually lost its status as the center of the oasis. [3]

After the fall of the Sassanian Empire in 651, the Arabs began direct interactions with the region of Transoxiana. When the early Arab forces arrived in Bukhara, they found a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and decentralized community governed by the Bukhar Khudah. However, the historical records provide little information about the origins of the Bukhar Khudah family, the initial timeline of their rule, or the reasons for their ascension. Narshakhi mentions that the Bukhar Khudah was a noble (dihqan) from an ancient aristocratic family, possessing great wealth, numerous servants, and farmers who worked his lands. [4] The first ruler referred to with the title Bukhar Khudah in Narshakhi's work was Bidun, who was killed by the Umayyad general Salm ibn Ziyad during the first Arab conquest of Transoxiana. This event is corroborated by Arab historical sources.

After Bidun's death, his young son, Tughshada, ascended to the throne, though actual governance was handled by his mother, who held the title of Khatun. Renowned for her wisdom and administrative skill, the Khatun earned great respect in the region. It is said that she devoted herself to "managing state affairs, issuing commands, and enforcing regulations" daily. [5] During her reign, the Arabs launched several incursions into Bukhara, but stability was generally maintained through ransom payments and hostage exchanges. In 709, the governor of Khorasan, Qutayba ibn Muslim, reconquered Bukhara, ordering the residents to allocate half of their buildings for Arab occupancy. He also constructed the first grand mosque and commanded the local populace to perform Friday prayers there. This marked a significant transformation of Bukhara, not only as an important Muslim military base but also as a foundation for its future role as a center of Islamic scholarship. [6]

Although Qutayba's conquest caused considerable destruction within Bukhara, it had certain positive outcomes. The fragmented and disorderly noble forces within the city were weakened, paving the way for greater unity and stability in the future. With Qutayba's support, Tughshada reclaimed the title of Bukhar Khudah, becoming the sole de facto ruler of Bukhara. While Qutayba appointed a new Arab governor, this role was largely nominal. By preserving the local dynasty's authority, Qutayba strengthened Tughshada's rule, who declared allegiance to Islam, aligning himself with the Arab forces. Tughshada ruled for 32 years and, to maintain favorable relations with the Arabs and secure Qutayba's support, named his newborn son Qutaiba ibn Tughshada. Upon Tughshada's death, his son inherited the throne, and the Tughshada family continued to hold power in Bukhara until 784, when Ismail ibn Ahmad of the Samanid family took over the city, establishing the Samanid Dynasty.

3. The Impregnable "Copper City": The History and Symbolism of Paikend

Paikend, located in the southwestern part of the Bukhara oasis in present-day Uzbekistan, is an ancient city with a long history. Scholars generally agree that Paikend belonged to the Western Sogdian cultural sphere. The site is situated along the lower reaches of the Zerafshan River, approximately 45 kilometers southwest of Bukhara and about 60 kilometers from Amul-Farab, the oldest and most significant ferry crossing of the Amu Darya River. According to historical records, the area between Paikend and Firab consisted of a desert that stretched along the Amu Darya River for about 72 kilometers. The Zerafshan River flowed near Paikend and emptied into a large lake, which was referred to as "Paikend Lake" (Avaza of Paykend) in Hudud al-'Alam (The Regions of the World). [7]

Archaeological research on Paikend began in the early 20th century. From 1913 to 1914, Lev A. Zimin, secretary of the Turkestan Circle of Enthusiasts of Archaeology, conducted preliminary surveys of the site. Further excavations were carried out from 1939 to 1940 by the Zerafshan Expedition in collaboration with the Institute for the History of Material Culture. However, systematic archaeological research did not commence until 1981, when extensive excavations were conducted on the site's citadel (ark), residential areas in the shahristan, and the surrounding suburbs. The findings have been published in several monographs, papers, and annual archaeological reports since 1999.

The excavations revealed that as early as the latter half of the 4th century BCE, permanent settlements had emerged on the highlands along the Zerafshan River, where Paikend was located. This period, along with the artifacts unearthed from the site, aligns with Š. T. Adylov's hypothesis that the formation of new settlements in the Bukhara

oasis, including the city of Bukhara itself, was partly driven by migrations of Sogdian people fleeing Alexander the Great's military campaigns in eastern Sogdiana (Samarkand and its surrounding mountain regions) to the lower reaches of the Zerafshan River. [8] By the early medieval period, Paikend had developed into a large city covering an area of 18 to 19 hectares. Between the late 8th and early 10th centuries, several rabads (suburbs) formed outside the city walls, expanding the area to approximately 70 hectares, with thriving crafts and commerce. However, due to the depletion of irrigation water in the early 11th century, Paikend was ultimately abandoned and became a lost city in the annals of history.

Paikend was situated at the crossroads of several significant trade routes: one extended from China, East Turkestan, Tashkent, and Samarkand to Margiana (Merv) and further into the Near East; another connected Eastern Europe and Khwarezm to the south, passing through Tokharistan and the Indian subcontinent. This strategic location made Paikend an important intermediary in trade between China and Iran, especially during the early medieval period (6th–8th centuries CE). However, Paikend's location near a critical ferry crossing on the Amu Darya River also made it a frequent target of invasions from southern Iranian powers and other regional forces. While Paikend enjoyed the reputation of being the "City of Merchants," it also faced immense military pressure for much of its history.

In 709, after completing the conquest of Tokharistan, the Arab general Qutayba ibn Muslim crossed the Amu Darya River and launched an attack on the Sogdian region, including Paikend. Narshakhi vividly described the siege of Paikend by Qutayba's forces:

Upon learning of the approaching Arab army, the residents of Paikend quickly fortified their city's defenses. Known for its formidable defensive structures, Paikend had long been referred to as the "Copper City" or "Copper Fortress." Qutayba led a fierce assault on the city, but the Muslim army encountered significant resistance during a prolonged 50-day siege. Despite their efforts, the Arab forces failed to breach the city's defenses and suffered heavy casualties.

To break the stalemate, the Arab army resorted to a strategic ploy. A small group of soldiers dug tunnels beneath the city walls and eventually emerged in a stable within the city. They created a breach in the wall, but even then, they were unable to penetrate the city's core stronghold. Faced with this impasse, Qutayba issued an inspiring command: "Whoever passes through this breach and enters the stronghold, I will reward him generously; if he dies in the battle, I will honor his descendants." Motivated by this promise, the soldiers courageously charged through the breach, ultimately capturing the inner city. Following this victory, the residents of Paikend negotiated peace with Qutayba, agreeing to pay a specified tribute to the Arab forces. [9]

Paikend was located atop a hill known as Bagir Mountain, with a modest elevation. The city had an approximately rectangular shape, surrounded by two layers of sturdy walls with a total circumference of about 1,447 meters. The inner city and its suburbs each had their own bazaar (bazār), and the inner city was accessible through a single gate, emphasizing its defensive design. Due to these impressive defensive features, Paikend earned its nickname as the "Copper City" or "Copper Fortress," referred to in Arabic as Madinat al-sufriya, in Turkic as Baqir baligh, and in Persian as Dizh-i Royin (dizh meaning "fortress" or "walled residence"). [10] The term "Copper City" likely originated from mythological geography, involving tales of the legendary enmity between the Turanians and Iranians during the mythic era, as well as the epic conflict between the Iranian hero Esfandiyar and the Turanian chieftain Arjasb.

In Zoroastrian tradition, the Turanians, led by King Afrasiyab, were portrayed as adherents of the evil deity Ahriman—"false believers" and "heretics." They were considered destroyers of Iranian lands and the arch-enemies of the Iranian people. As a result, the struggles between the Iranians and Turanians were unending. During one invasion, the Turanian Hyaona tribe's leader, Arjasb, captured Esfandiyar's two sisters, Homay and Behafarid, and imprisoned them in the Turanian capital known as the "Copper City." This city, situated atop Bagir Mountain, was surrounded by robust walls with a single entrance, making it highly defensible. To rescue his sisters, Esfandiyar led the Iranian army to Bagir Mountain, disguising himself as a merchant to infiltrate the "Copper City." He deceived Arjasb with gifts and then launched a surprise attack in the chieftain's palace, killing him. Following a signal from Esfandiyar, the Iranian forces led by Pashotan swiftly broke through the city's defenses, liberated Homay and Behafarid, and seized the abundant treasures within the "Copper City." [11]

Another epic tale about the ancient "Copper City" is associated with Bahram VI Chobin, a Sasanian king. Before ascending the throne, Bahram Chobin was a distinguished military commander during the reign of Hormozd IV. In 588 CE, the Hephthalites, vassals of the Western Turks, invaded the eastern provinces of the Sasanian Empire, threatening areas like Badghis and Herat. In response, Hormozd IV appointed Bahram Chobin as the governor of Khorasan and commander of the Persian army, tasking him with leading a force of 12,000 elite troops. The

Sasanian army first engaged the Western Turks in fierce battles, capturing Bactra (Balkh) and advancing into Hephthalite territory. Bahram Chobin's forces crossed the Amu Darya, confronted the Eastern Turkic armies directly, and achieved a decisive victory. During this campaign, the Eastern Turkic khan, Mohu Khan (Ashina Chu-lo-hou), was killed in battle. After their defeat, Mohu Khan's son Parmuta retreated with his remaining forces to the fortified "Copper City."The "Copper City," with its formidable defenses, initially allowed Parmuta to seek refuge. However, Bahram Chobin demonstrated his strategic acumen and diplomatic skills, ultimately persuading Parmuta to surrender, thereby bringing the "Copper City" under Sasanian control. Subsequently, the "Copper City" became Bahram Chobin's royal residence in the Turkic regions, symbolizing Sasanian dominance over the area. [12]

Paikend, with its dual-layered walls and exceptional defensive works, earned its title as the "Copper City," serving as a key military and economic hub in Central Asia. The city, perched atop Bagir Mountain and accessible only through a single entrance, was nearly impregnable. This designation not only reflected its physical attributes but also carried deep literary and cultural significance. In Zoroastrian tradition and The Shahnameh, the "Copper City" symbolized the triumph of justice over evil and light over darkness, representing the resilience of the Turanian-Iranian conflicts. This dual symbolism elevated the "Copper City" beyond a geographical landmark to a profound cultural emblem. The name reinforced Paikend's role as the defensive core of the oasis, securing its place in Central Asia's military history. In addition to its military reputation, the city's security advantages sustained its prosperity as a trade hub.

At the same time, the legacy of the "Copper City" persisted during the Arab conquests of the 7th and 8th centuries. The recorded 50-day defense of Paikend showcased the residents' military ingenuity and resilience, projecting its image beyond regional boundaries and embedding it in the narrative of Iranian culture. Moreover, the "Copper City" as a symbol imbued Paikend with cultural tension, bridging its mythical identity with its historical role in Central Asia's power transitions. From an invincible city of legend to a witness of political changes, Paikend's fate reflected the rise and fall of oasis cities shaped by environmental shifts and geopolitical dynamics. Through this title, Paikend's historical image became a symbol of Central Asian cultural and military heritage, connecting geography, history, and literature into a significant emblem. In summary, the "Copper City" was not just a mark of Paikend's defensive and strategic significance but also a multilayered cultural identity, granting it a unique position in Central Asian history as a model intertwining culture and history.

4. The Defensive System and Historical Evolution of Bukhara

Although Paikend and Bukhara served as the central cities of the oasis during different periods, their roles in the region's historical development are closely intertwined. Paikend, as the earlier center, earned its title as the "Copper City" not only for its exceptional defensive structures but also for establishing a tradition of military-focused urban development within oasis cities. As Bukhara gradually replaced Paikend as the oasis center, it not only inherited this defensive emphasis but also enhanced and innovated it, creating a more complex and advanced defensive system. From the single-entry design of Paikend to the triple-wall layout of Bukhara, this evolution in defensive strategy reflects the wisdom and adaptability of oasis cities in confronting external threats. These layered defensive structures not only made Bukhara an impregnable military fortress but also underscored its importance as a strategic hub in Central Asia. The city's urban design exemplified ancient construction techniques and highlighted the oasis society's prioritization of security and order, laying a solid foundation for its subsequent historical status and cultural heritage.

4.1 Origins of the Citadel and Its Early Defensive Function

Bukhara's citadel, known in Persian as Kuhindiz, meaning "ancient fortress," is a large mud-brick defensive structure located in the northwest of the city. It is also referred to as the inner city or royal citadel. Modeled after the ancient Iranian town of Kuhindiz, it is the oldest architectural site in Bukhara and is preserved today as a historical museum. Ibn Hawqal referred to the citadel as a qalʿa, with its structure comprising three main components: the inner citadel, the Hisar (fortress walls), and other buildings, such as the Emir's palace, treasury, and prison. [13]

The ancient citadel stood at the same location as the present-day Bukhara Citadel, built on a small hill and extending in a rectangular shape from east to west. Typical Iranian towns featured a fortress and an external fortified city (shahristan); however, in cases like Penjikent and Bukhara, the fortress and city formed two independent defensive systems. [14] Unlike cities such as Samarkand, Bukhara's citadel was not located within the shahristan but was situated to its west, separated by an open, sandy square known as the Registan (Rīgistān). The citadel had two gates: the western gate, called "Sahl" (meaning "sand plain") or "Hay Market" (Kah-Furushan) Gate in the 12th century, remains preserved. The eastern gate faced the Great Mosque on the square and was

therefore named the "Jami Gate" or the "Great Mosque Gate," referred to as the "Churiyan Gate" by Narshakhi. These gates were connected by a street running through the citadel.

Between 1976 and 1978, Ye. G. Nekrasova, a renowned archaeologist, led the Uzbekistan Research and Restoration Institute in a detailed study of the citadel walls. The findings revealed that these walls dated back to around the 4th century BCE. Based on archaeological evidence, the citadel's construction likely occurred between the 4th and 3rd centuries BCE. However, the specific design and construction methods of the citadel remain unclear due to the lack of records until Narshakhi's accounts. By 500 CE, the inner citadel served as the residence of Bukhara's rulers, housing officials, their families, and servants. It also contained palaces, treasuries, prisons, and fire temples, functioning as a small town. Narshakhi noted: "The citadel was the residence of rulers, emirs, and generals, and it also housed prisons and assembly halls, while the inner citadel was the primary residence of the ruler." [15]

In 712, Qutayba ibn Muslim constructed Bukhara's first mosque on the ruins of a fire temple within the citadel, symbolizing both the physical and ideological dominance of Islam over other beliefs and their followers. During the Samanid period, the citadel became the residence of the dynasty's emirs, generals, and judges. It housed palaces, treasuries, courts, reservoirs, and other key buildings, serving as the political center of Bukhara.

In the 7th century, Bukhar Khudah ruler Bidun repaired the citadel and inner fort, hanging an iron plaque inscribed with his name on the citadel gate, where it remained until the 12th century. The citadel and inner fort were repeatedly destroyed and rebuilt during this period. According to legend, the inner fort repeatedly collapsed during its initial construction until Bidun consulted wise men, who suggested using seven stone pillars arranged in the shape of the Great Bear constellation to stabilize the structure. This measure resolved the instability and collapse issues. [16] Despite subsequent destruction and decay, the citadel was rebuilt multiple times by rulers such as Arslan-Khan in the 12th century, Atsiz of Khwarezm in 1140, and Alptigin of the Karakhanids in 1142. However, it faced major destruction by Genghis Khan in 1220, when the entire structure was leveled [17]

Despite these repeated devastations, Bukhara's citadel gradually recovered from the Mongol invasions by the late 13th century. During the 16th century, under the Uzbek Shaybanid dynasty, the citadel was restored to its current form. The inner citadel's perimeter measures 789.6 meters, with an area of 4.2 hectares. The outer walls of the citadel stretch about 1,609.3 meters, enclosing a total area of 9.3 hectares. The walls stood at heights of 16 to 20 meters. [18] Within the citadel, numerous structures were built, including palaces, mosques, reception halls, music pavilions, jewelry workshops, clothing warehouses, treasuries, libraries, courts, and prisons. Unfortunately, during the Battle of Bukhara in 1920, the citadel was destroyed by Soviet forces under Mikhail Frunze, leaving 80% of the structures in ruins. Only about 1.1 hectares of the original structures remain today. Another account suggests that the last Emir of Bukhara, Mohammed Alim Khan, fled to Afghanistan with the royal treasury and ordered the citadel's destruction to prevent its desecration by Soviet troops.

4.2 The Core Layout of Shahristan and Its Religious Influence

The term shahristan originates from the Persian words šahr (meaning "city" or "town") and stān (meaning "province" or "region"). In ancient Iran, it referred to a larger urban administrative district. In Arabic, shahristan was called Madina and served as the central urban area of Bukhara, also referred to as the "main city" or "old city." Archaeological evidence suggests that the shahristan dates back as early as the 2nd century BCE. Located to the east of the citadel, its area was about twice that of the citadel and sat on slightly higher ground. Due to its elevation, both the shahristan and the citadel were unable to access direct water sources. Al-Umari noted in Masalik al-absarfi mamalikal-amsar: "Since the inner city (citadel) and fortified city (shahristan) of Bukhara are located on higher ground, they lack water supply and depend on canals from the upper reaches of Samarkand for their water." [19] Additionally, while bazaars (bazar and suqs) were primarily located in the surrounding suburbs, the shahristan housed most of the residential buildings, mosques, and other densely arranged structures.

The shahristan was surrounded by fortified walls, initially featuring four gates, later expanded to seven. These seven gates were said to have religious significance, mirroring the design of seven stone pillars used to stabilize the citadel, symbolizing the protective and divine power of the heavens. In ancient Persian cosmology, every terrestrial phenomenon corresponded to a celestial archetype, often associated with Platonic ideals. [20] Cities were considered to have mythical prototypes. In this context, the seven stars of the Great Bear constellation were seen as protectors and defenders against evil forces. Consequently, the seven stone pillars supporting the citadel and the seven gates of the shahristan were believed to safeguard the rulers and inhabitants from enemies or demonic threats.

Prominent scholars such as Istakhri, Ibn Hawqal, and Narshakhi have documented the seven gates of shahristan. According to Narshakhi, the gates were as follows:

1. The Bazaar Gate (Bāzār), also referred to as the Iron Gate or the "Gate of the Spice Merchants" (Attārān).
2. The Fortress Gate (Kubriya), leading directly to the citadel.
3. The New Gate, built most recently, also called the Niyān Gate.
4. The Sa'd Gate (Saʿd), named after its proximity to the Banu Sa'd Mosque.
5. The Asad Gate (Asad), known in pre-Islamic times as the "Mukhra Gate," meaning "The Gate of Truth."
6. The Haq-Rah Gate (Ḥaqq-Rah), meaning "The Gate of Justice."
7. The Ala Gate (ʿAlāʾ), attributed to the hero Hasan ibn Ala Sughdi. [21]

In 708, following Qutayba's fourth conquest of Bukhara, Narshakhi described the division of the shahristan between the Arabs and the local inhabitants. He provided detailed information about the seven gates in the context of the city's partition and the interactions between the Arabs and the original residents. His account, intertwined with typical stories from Persian literature, offers valuable insights into the shahristan's internal structure.

Narshakhi began with the southern Bazaar Gate, noting that it was the only gate near the marketplace. The central area of Bukhara's bazaar remained south of the shahristan until the 20th century. Through the Bazaar Gate, one could reach the Sa'd Gate, located near the Sa'd Mosque. The Asad Gate, situated near the Sa'd Gate, was called the "Mukhra Gate" in pre-Islamic times, meaning "The Way to Truth." Heading eastward, the path led to the Khorasan governor's court. The Haq-Rah Gate lay farther north, away from the inner city. In Narshakhi's narrative, this gate was associated with the renowned scholar Abu Hafs Kabir Bukhari, whose tomb was located in the northwest corner of the shahristan. Near the Haq-Rah Gate was the Fortress Gate, which led downhill to Bukhara's oldest defensive structure—the citadel. This gate was likely the sturdiest among the seven, featuring a large arch about sixty paces long, reportedly built by the Turkic chieftain Subashi Tagin. The Ala Gate, constructed by the native hero Hasan ibn Ala Sughdi, and the New Gate, also known as the Niyān Gate, completed the set. Entering the New Gate, one would find the Quraish Mosque to the left. The Bazaar Gate, Haq-Rah Gate, Sa'd Gate, Asad Gate, and Fortress Gate were located along a line extending from the outskirts toward the city center. [22]

While Arab accounts of Bukhara's shahristan often emphasized its structural layout, Narshakhi's descriptions—though occasionally disorganized—remain a crucial reference for understanding the city's subdivisions during the medieval period. Narshakhi mentioned that after the Arab conquest of Bukhara in 708, Qutayba divided the inner city into two parts: one-half was allocated to the Arabs, while the other was retained by the original residents. The dividing line extended from the Fortress Gate to the Niyān Gate. The southern shahristan was designated for the Arab tribes of Mudar and Rabia, while the northern part remained for the local population. This division is supported by the naming of the city gates. Two of the gates in the western and southern sections of the inner city carried the names of Arab tribes, reflecting the Arab presence. Among these, the pre-Islamic name for the Asad Gate was Mihr, indicating continuity from earlier eras. [23]

Inside the city, to the left of the main street was an area known as "The Street of the Drunkards" (Ku-i-Rindan) or "The Street of Libertines." This area reportedly housed a Christian church, which was later converted into a mosque named Bani Hanzala. To the right of the street lay "The Street of Wazir ibn Ayyub ibn Hassan," also known as the "Citadel District." Wazir ibn Ayyub was the first Arab-appointed emir of Bukhara under Qutayba's rule. Subsequent emirs also resided in this district, each maintaining an independent court. The district's southern boundary was marked by the city wall, beyond which lay the "Agricultural Market." To the east of the wall was the "Pistachio Merchants' District," while the northern boundary was defined by a street leading to the Niyān Gate.[24]

4.3 The Defense and Expansion of the Rabads (Outer City)

The rabads (outer city or suburbs), also referred to as Birun in Persian, constituted the area outside the citadel and shahristan, extending to the outermost city walls built in the 9th century. Initially, the term rabad appeared to denote the defensive wall itself, but later it came to represent the area enclosed between the outer wall and the shahristan. [25] According to Narshakhi, when the Arabs first arrived, Bukhara only consisted of the shahristan. However, during this period, important settlements, markets, and other structures already existed beyond the shahristan. These external settlements were not formally incorporated into Bukhara until the construction of the outer wall.

The outer wall was commissioned by the Khorasan governor Abu Abbas Fazl ibn Sulaiman Tusi. This decision came after complaints from the local population about frequent Turkic raids and plundering. Additionally, Yazid ibn Ghurak, a nobleman from Samarkand, cited the earlier construction of Samarkand's protective walls under a Sogdian king as an example of successful city fortification. Persuaded by these arguments, Tusi ordered the Emir

of Bukhara, Muhtadi ibn Hamad ibn Amr al-Dahli, to build the outer wall to encompass all villages and settlements around Bukhara, similar to Samarkand's defenses. The project was overseen by the judge Sa'd ibn Khalaf al-Bukhari, with gates and towers constructed at half-mile intervals.

Narshakhi's account offers little detail about the area between the shahristan's inner wall and the outer wall surrounding the suburbs. However, Ibn Hawqal provides the names of eleven major gates along the rabad's outer wall, [26] beginning at its southwestern corner:

1. Maydan Gate (Darb al-Maydān), leading toward Khorasan.
2. Ibrahim Gate (Darb Ibrahim).
3. Riw Gate (Darb Riw), located east of the Maydan Gate.
4. Mardakhshan Gate (Darb Mardakhshān), referred to by Istakhri as Mardqusha.
5. Kalabad Gate (Darb Kalabādh), providing access to two routes toward Balkh.
6. Nawbahar Gate (Darb Nawbahār).
7. Samarkand Gate (Darb Samarqand), leading to Samarkand and other parts of Transoxiana.
8. Baghashkur Gate (Darb Baghāshkūr).
9. Ramitan Gate (Darb Ramāmithana).
10. Jadasarun Gate (Darb Jadasarūn), opening to the road toward Khwarezm.
11. Ghashaj Gate (Darb Ghashaj), connecting to the route toward Nasaf (Karshi) and Balkh. [27]

According to Narshakhi, the construction of Bukhara's outer wall began around 782 CE and was completed by 830 CE. The Emir Muhtadi ibn Hamad al-Dahli later ordered additional structures around the wall to ensure its maintenance. While these fortifications protected the population from nomadic incursions, the annual upkeep required considerable time and resources, creating a significant burden on the residents. As Narshakhi described, "This wall was a great inconvenience and expense for the people of Bukhara, requiring substantial funding and labor every year to maintain." [28]

During the Samanid period, the outer wall was often neglected, and no new fortifications were built around the shahristan. The famous declaration of Ismail Samani—"As long as I am alive, I am the wall of Bukhara"—symbolized his refusal to rely on outdated fortifications. [29] By allowing the protective walls to decay, Ismail both freed the population from their maintenance burdens and established himself as the city's protector. Following his reign, the outer wall gradually crumbled, earning the nickname Kanpirak ("The Old Woman") by the 12th century. Today, remnants of the wall can still be seen, resembling an earthen embankment, locally referred to as Kempir duval.

The defensive walls surrounding oases in Central Asia and northern Afghanistan were not uncommon; cities like Merv, Samarkand, Balkh, Termez, and Isfara also had fortifications built at different times to encircle their urban areas. Among these, Bukhara's Kanpirak stands out as particularly significant. Since the 19th century, scholars have conducted extensive studies of the wall. However, the precise period of its origin and its construction motives remain debated. Narshakhi's accounts do not mention earlier walls or their origins. Al-Masudi, in his Kitab al-Tanbih wa l-Ishraf (The Book of Admonition and Revision), provides what may be the earliest reference to this wall, stating: "A Sogdian king constructed this wall to prevent attacks and plundering by Turkic tribes." Salmawayh, in his work on the Abbasid Caliphate and the governors of Khorasan, noted that the wall was rebuilt during the reign of Caliph al-Mahdi but was later dismantled by Abu Abbas Tusi, the governor of Khorasan [30]

In this somewhat ambiguous description, the wall mentioned by Al-Masudi likely refers to an earlier version of Kanpirak from the pre-Islamic era. In 2011, the Samarkand Archaeological Institute of the Uzbekistan Academy of Sciences launched the "Archaeological Investigation of Bukhara's Great Wall" project. Excavations in the western and northeastern segments of the wall revealed shards of pottery from the early medieval period. Ceramic samples from the wall's original layers were dated to the late 4th or 5th century CE, with the construction of the barricade possibly occurring in the 6th century. Notably, rows of observation holes and arrow slits were found in the wall, typical features of Sogdian military architecture from the 5th century. This evidence suggests that the earliest layers of the wall could indeed date back to the late 4th or 5th century, supporting Al-Masudi's assertion that a Sogdian king initially built the fortifications.

While the origins of Bukhara's outer wall have been clarified, discussions about the motivations behind its construction continue. Both Narshakhi and Al-Masudi attribute the wall's construction to the need to defend against frequent Turkic raids and ensure the safety of the population and their property. However, was the wall

primarily built to counter threats from the northern steppes? This question requires a nuanced analysis of the historical context, particularly in light of the Mukanna Rebellion. In the years leading up to 782 CE, the rebellion posed a serious threat to Abbasid rule in Transoxiana, partly because Mukanna and his followers successfully allied with several Turkic tribes, even forming a coalition with the Qarluq khan. Narshakhi vividly described the devastating consequences of this alliance:

“Mukanna invited the Turks and permitted them to seize the lives and property of Muslims. Many armies came from Turkestan to raid. They plundered the region, capturing Muslim women and children while killing others.”[31]

Barthold noted that Kök or Kökshebagan village, east of Tavavis, served as a staging area for Turkic raids into Bukhara province. [32] This location lay within the valley corridor connecting eastern Bukhara to Kermine (modern-day Navoiy). To ensure communication between the vital cities of Bukhara and Samarkand and to secure this strategic corridor, the Abbasids likely considered the wall a matter of paramount importance. Abu Abbas Tusi’s efforts to extend the wall eastward to encompass this region likely reflected a desire to protect Bukhara’s vulnerable areas and maintain control over a critical route. This theory is supported by maps drawn by D.G. Bolshakov, which indicate that the eastern segment of the outer wall covered a distance approximately twice that of the corresponding western section. This suggests that political considerations played a significant role in the wall’s expansion. Large-scale barrier construction and reconstruction projects were likely seen by authorities as a means to stabilize volatile regions and maintain control over key urban centers, ensuring order amidst ongoing unrest. [33]

The rise of Bukhara was not only due to its advantageous geographic location but also its more complex and effective triple-layered defensive system. This system consisted of the shahristan (main city), inner and outer rabads (suburbs), and the core citadel, demonstrating remarkable military planning and innovation. The shahristan, as the central district, was protected by its walls and served as the administrative and religious center of the city. The rabads provided an additional defensive buffer, housing craft workshops and marketplaces, while the citadel functioned as the ultimate defensive stronghold, equipped with substantial reserves and self-sustaining resources. This layered urban design significantly enhanced Bukhara’s security, enabling it to withstand more complex and prolonged external threats.

In contrast, while Paikend earned fame as the "Copper City," its defense primarily relied on its robust double walls and single-gate design, which emphasized physical inaccessibility. However, this relatively singular defensive model proved inadequate against larger-scale invasions employing advanced tactics. Bukhara’s triple-layered defense marked a transition from passive fortification to proactive and strategic urban planning. The shahristan took on governance functions, while the expansion of the rabads not only deepened the city’s defensive capabilities but also supported sustained economic activity. Moreover, the citadel’s independence allowed Bukhara to maintain governance and organizational capacity during prolonged sieges, an advantage Paikend could not match.

Through its triple-layered defense structure, Bukhara not only repelled external invasions but also solidified its role as a political and economic center. In addition, the city’s cultural and religious influence spread through the mosques, schools, and marketplaces embedded within its triple walls, showcasing its multifaceted strengths. In comparison, while Paikend’s "Copper City" moniker holds an important place in military history, its lack of multifunctional features led to a rapid decline once its natural resources were depleted.

5. Conclusions

Before the rise of Bukhara, Paikend was the core city of the Bukhara oasis and was often referred to as "Ancient Bukhara." Its title as the "Copper City" symbolized its exceptional defensive structures, including towering walls, elevated terrain, and a single-entry design, which reflected its strategic importance along the Zerafshan River and its role as a hub in the Central Asian trade network. However, as natural resources diminished and geopolitical dynamics shifted, Paikend gradually declined. In contrast, Bukhara, with its more sophisticated defense system, superior geographic location, and adaptable political strategies, emerged as the new center of the oasis. This transition reveals the underlying historical dynamics of oasis city development in Central Asia.

First, changes in natural resources were a key driver of power transitions. Paikend’s loss of access to water sources led to its decline, while Bukhara’s proximity to the Zerafshan River allowed it to thrive. This highlights the importance of environmental adaptability for the development of oasis cities, where ecological resources were critical to sustaining prosperity. Second, shifts in regional politics and military strategies accelerated the transfer of power. While Paikend initially dominated as a trade hub, Bukhara gradually supplanted it by building an advanced triple-layered defense system and consolidating power under the Samanid dynasty. Finally, the integration of cultural and political influence further cemented Bukhara’s dominance. While Paikend’s "Copper City" title symbolized military defense, Bukhara extended this legacy by fostering religious dissemination and

establishing itself as a center of knowledge. This cultural influence not only surpassed Paikend but also solidified Bukhara's stable position as a regional leader.

The inheritance of the "Copper City" title reflects the dynamic nature of power transitions among oasis cities. The decline of Paikend and the rise of Bukhara were driven by a combination of natural resource management, geopolitical strategies, and cultural integration. This process underscores the core competitive advantages of Central Asian oasis cities—ecological adaptability, technological innovation, and cultural transformation.

In summary, the "Copper City" is not just a metaphor for the historical relationship between Paikend and Bukhara but also a key to understanding the rise and fall of oasis cities in Central Asia. It offers a unique perspective on the logic of regional power transitions and the development of urban centers.

Acknowledgements

This paper is supported by the National Fund for the 2023 Major Bidding Project of the Chinese Academy of History, titled "Research on the History of China-Central Asia Relations" (Approval No. 23VLS025).

References

[1] Omel'chenko, A. V. (2019). New excavations in the Paikend city-site: The Sogdian pottery assemblage of the Hellenistic period. In Urban Cultures of Central Asia from the Bronze Age to the Karakhanids (p. 206). Harrassowitz Verlag. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvrnfq57.17

[2] Narshakh, A. B. M. I. (1954). The history of Bukhara (R. N. Frye, Trans.). Cambridge, 18.

[3] Xu, X. (2000). A study on the history of the Samanid dynasty in Central Asia (p. 37). Guizhou Education Press.

[4] Narshakh, A. B. M. I. (1954). The history of Bukhara (p. 18).

[5] Ibid. (1954), p. 9.

[6] Frye, R. N. (1954). Bukhara: The medieval achievement. University of Oklahoma Press, 16.

[7] The Regions of the World. (1970). V. Minorsky (Trans.). Stephen Austin and Sons Ltd, 73.

[8] Muhamedžanov, A. R., Adylov, Š. T., Mirzaahmedov, D. K., & Semenov, G. L. (1988). Городище Пайкенд: К проблеме изучения средневекового города Средней Азии. Изд-во "Фан" Узбекской ССР, 20–40.

[9] Narshakh, A. B. M. I. (1954). The history of Bukhara, 43–44.

[10] Asatrian, G. (2017). SWIran: Didā—"Fortress, walled residence" in Iranian toponymy. Iran & the Caucasus, 21, 399. https://doi.org/10.1163/1573384X-20170406

[11] Markwart, J. (1938). Wehrōt und Ārang. E. J. Brill, 5, 97, 113.

[12] Czegledy, K. (1958). Bahrām Čōbīn and the Persian apocalyptic literature. Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae, 8, 21–43.

[13] Taheri, J. (2021). Celestial and mythical origins of the citadel of Bukhara. *Endeavour, 45*, 5. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.endeavour.2022.100801

[14] Naynark, A. (1999). The size of Samanid Bukhara: A note on settlement patterns in early Islamic Mawarannahr. In A. Petruccioli (Ed.), Bukhara: The myth and the architecture (p. 45). Cambridge: Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

[15] Narshakh, A. B. M. I. (1954). The history of Bukhara, 24.

[16] Taheri, J. (2021). Celestial and mythical origins of the citadel of Bukhara, 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.endeavour.2022.100801

[17] Narshakh, A. B. M. I. (1954). The history of Bukhara, 24–25.

[18] Gibb, H. A. R., Kramers, J. H., Levi-Provencal, E., & Schacht, J. (1986). The Encyclopaedia of Islam, Volume 1, A-B. Brill, 1294.

[19] Al-Umari, A. (1984). Masālik al-Abṣār fī Mamālik al-Amṣār (L. Kaning, Trans.). Reference Materials for Mongolian History Studies, 32–33, 96.

[20] Eliade, M. (1959). Cosmos and history: The myth of the eternal return. Harper Torchbooks, 6.

[21] Narshakh, A. B. M. I. (1954). The history of Bukhara, 53–59.

[22] Xu, X. (2000). A study on the history of the Samanid dynasty in Central Asia, 37.

[23] Gnube, H. (1999). What Arabic and Persian sources tell us about the structure of tenth-century Bukhara. In

A. Petruccioli (Ed.), Bukhara: The myth and the architecture (p. 25).

[24] Yadgarov, N. Dj. (2019). Bukhara: Open-air museum. *Oriental Art and Culture, 4*, 53–54.

[25] Barthold, V. V. (1984). An historical geography of Iran. *Princeton University Press, 13.* https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400853229

[26] Ebn Haukal. The Oriental Geography of Ebn Haukal, 246.

[27] Bartold, V. V. (2007). Туркестан в эпоху монгольского нашествия (Z. Xitong & Z. Guangda, Trans.). Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 119–120.

[28] Narshakh, A. B. M. I. (1954). The history of Bukhara, 34.

[29] Michailidis, M. (2014). Dynastic politics and the Samanid mausoleum. *Art Orientalis, 44*, 27. https://doi.org/10.3998/ars.13441566.0044.003

[30] Reference to al-Masʿūdī. Kitāb al-Tanbīh wa l-Ishrāf entry. https://isaw.nyu.edu/research/bukhara-project/sources

[31] Narshakh, A. B. M. I. (1954). The history of Bukhara, 68.

[32] Bartold, V. V. (1984). Туркестан в эпоху монгольского нашествия, 116.

[33] Crone, P. (2012). The nativist prophets of early Islamic Iran: Rural revolt and local Zoroastrianism. Cambridge University Press, 120. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139088459