

## THE ZARAFSHAN AND KASHKADARYA VALLEYS

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**Abstract:** The Bukhara Oasis. Thanks to Narshakhi's *History of Bukhara*, we have a clear understanding not only of the capital but also of the smaller towns of the oasis, about which we know more than about the cities of any other region. The mention of a number of settlements in connection with the Arab conquest helps form an idea of their relative importance in the 8th century. Historical works (apart from *The History of Bukhara*) refer to Paykend, Ramitan, Tavavis, and Vardana.

**Keywords:** oasis, history, imagination, oasis territory, region, conquest, century, Paykend, Ramitan, Tavavis, Vardana, shahristan.

## ЗАРАФШАНСКАЯ И КАШКАДАРЬИНСКАЯ ДОЛИНЫ

**Аннотация:** Бухарский оазис. Благодаря «Истории Бухары» Наршахи мы не только хорошо представляем столицу, но и о небольших городах оазиса знаем больше, чем о городах какого-либо другого района. Упоминание ряда пунктов в связи с арабским завоеванием помогает составить представление об относительной значимости их в VIII в. В исторических сочинениях (кроме «Истории Бухары») называются Пайкенд, Рамитан, Тававис и Вардана

**Ключевые слова:** оазис, история, воображение, оазисная территория, регион, завоевание, век, Пайкенд, Рамитан, Тававис, Вардана, шахристан.

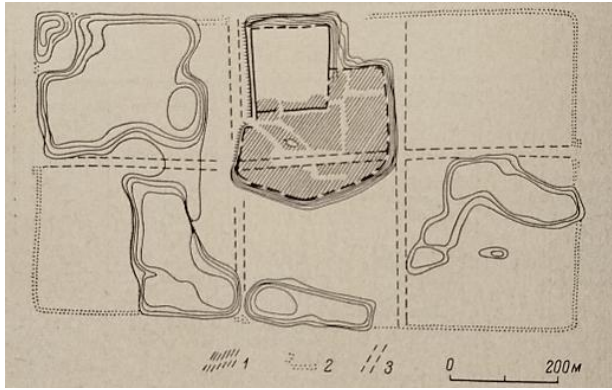
## ZARAFSHON VA QASHQADARYO VODIYLARI

**Annotatsiya:** So'z arab tarixchisi va olimi Nanshahining Buxoro to'g'risidagi fikrlari to'g'risida boradi. Ya'ni: **Buxoro vohasi**. Narshaxiyning "Buxoro tarixi" asari tufayli biz nafaqat poytaxtni yaxshi tasavvur qilamiz, balki vohadagi kichik shaharlar haqida ham boshqa hududlardagi shaharlardan ko'ra ko'proq ma'lumotga egamiz. Arab istilosiga oid bir qator joylarning tilga olinishi ularning VIII asrdagi nisbiy ahamiyati haqida tasavvur hosil qilishga yordam beradi. Tarixiy asarlarda ("Buxoro tarixi"dan tashqari) Poykent.

**Kalit so'zlari:** Oasis, tarix, tasavvur, voha, xudud, istil'o, asr, poykent, ramitan, tavavis, vardana, shaxriston.

**Bukhara Oasis.** Thanks to Narshakhi's work "*History of Bukhara*", we can not only form a clear idea of the capital itself, but also obtain more information about the smaller towns in the oasis compared to cities in other regions. The mention of several sites related to the Arab conquest helps to understand their relative importance in the 8th century. Historical sources (in addition to "*History of Bukhara*") also mention the towns of Poykent, Romitan, Tavavis, and Vardana.

After Bukhara, the second most prominent town in the oasis was **Poykent**, a wealthy trading city covering 20 hectares. It consisted of a citadel divided into two parts by an inner wall.



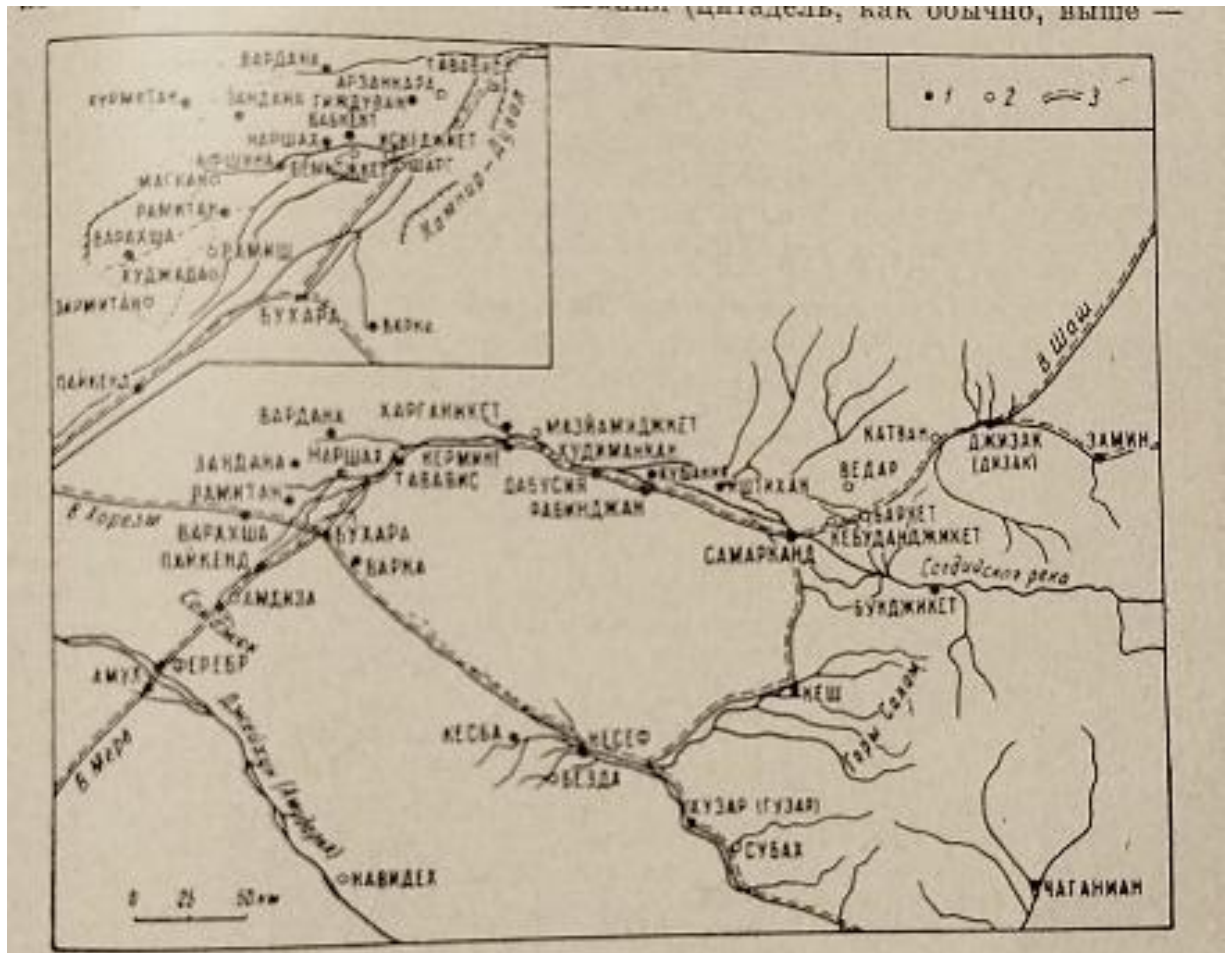
**Fig. 1. Plan of the city of Romitan, reconstructed.**

According to local tradition, Romitan was once the center of the oasis. Before the Arab conquest, it functioned as an independent political entity and concluded a separate treaty with Qutayba, apart from Bukhara (Tabari, II, p. 1198). However, the remains of the ancient city near the present-day village of Romitan do not seem to indicate that the city was of significant size.

The central part of the village occupies a high square citadel mound ( $140 \times 165$  m), which rises from half of a large pentagonal fortification and is considered the citadel (approximately 5 hectares). In addition, there are three other mounds located to the south, west, and east of the citadel.

V.A. Shishkin referred to these as the remains of the rabod (1940, Fig. 17: 75). However, some features of the city ruins (as noted in the plan) cast doubt on this interpretation. First, the uniform height of the central mound (south of the citadel) and the northwest, southwest, and southern mounds is striking. This suggests that they were inhabited over the same period in antiquity (the citadel is usually higher – on the plan, two horizontal levels). Such uniformity in height is never observed between the citadel and the rabod, even if the latter was densely populated.

The second feature is the precision of the ancient layout, still noticeable in the present remains. The northwest mound retains the straight-line, angular shape of the city fortification; its southern boundary is defined by the edges of the southern and southwest mounds. Extending these lines would form the now-lost southwestern corner of the city.



**Fig. 2. Sogd and Bukhara cities.**

The eastern part of the city fortification is in worse condition, yet the eastern edge of the mound there seems to have preserved the alignment of the wall, because the distance from the center of the main mound to the northwest and eastern edges is almost equal. Thus, a rectangular area measuring  $1020 \times 550$  m (56 hectares) with a 2:1 ratio is formed. Such a regular layout of city citadels is typical for most ancient cities but is generally not characteristic of rabods.

Moreover, judging by the plan, some internal planning elements can be inferred. The straight division of the northwest and southwest mounds, continuing toward the east, suggests that the city's main street passed through this line. Two meridional streets divided the city into three equal parts, even though the number of cross streets was probably 5–10 times greater.

If this hypothesis is correct, pre-Islamic Romitan was indeed the principal city of the oasis for a certain period, standing alongside regional capitals such as Termez, Ahsikat, and Chaghaniyan. Thus, in the 8th century, Bukhara was not the largest city of the oasis, or at least it did not have a decisive advantage over other cities under the control of provinces such as Merv, Kiyat, or Chaghaniyan. This likely reflects its political role during the Arab conquest. Later, as we will see, in the 9th century, Bukhara became significantly larger than both Romitan and Poykent.

10th-century Arab geographers mentioned nearly thirty cities in the Bukhara oasis. As observed, the number of cities in the Bukhara oasis was nearly comparable to a large region like Khwarezm. The significant difference between the lists of al-Istakhri and al-Muqaddasi for the 10th century cannot be taken as evidence of new cities emerging, because some cities absent in al-Istakhri's list, such as Afshina and Iskajket, are mentioned by Narshakhi, along with several other cities missing in both geographers' accounts, indicating their antiquity.

It appears that most towns in the 8th–10th centuries were small fortified settlements of peasants, which did not play a major role in the oasis life (although al-Muqaddasi notes that one

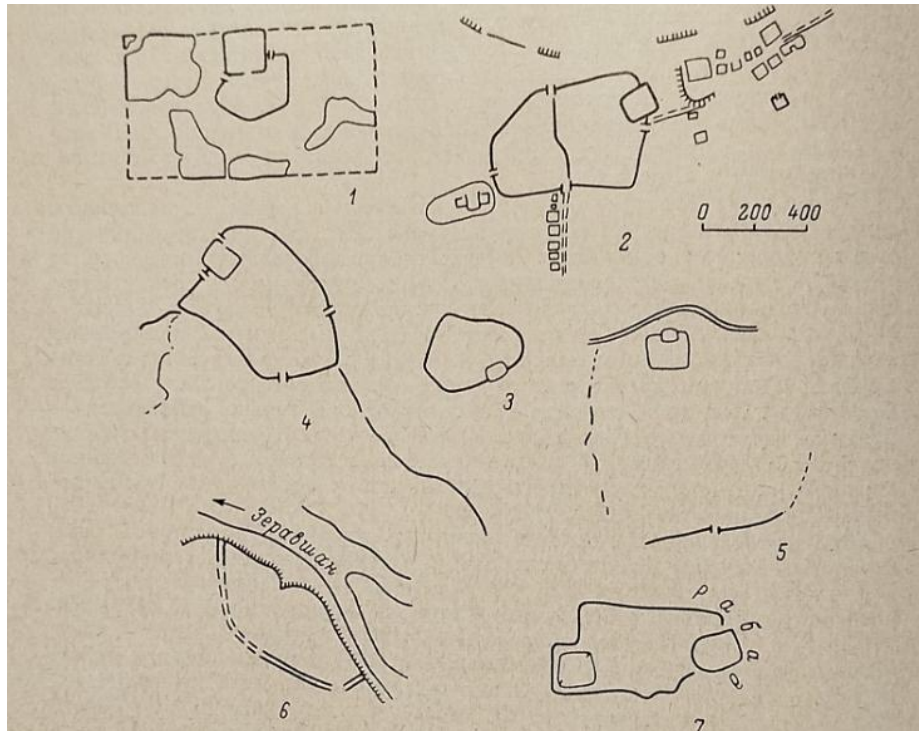
of them, Vahsun, was a large city). Conversely, although Narshakhi mentions many small villages, he does not refer to Magkan (a large city with a rabod, according to al-Muqaddasi) and Bemijket, which were mentioned by other geographers. Undoubtedly, these differences partly result from chance and largely from the level of the author's knowledge. Al-Muqaddasi had precise information about the Bukhara oasis, including the placement of Shargh and Iskajket among villages resembling cities, which aligns with Narshakhi's description.

Although Narshakhi provides invaluable information about some smaller Bukhara cities, their growth and development cannot be precisely traced. Out of about twenty cities, six retained their ancient names, and the location of three is known through city ruins. Of these nine, aside from five—Zandana, Vardana, Varqa, Afshina, and Gijduvan—nothing is known, as their monuments remain unexamined, and their dimensions are uncertain. In reality, the oasis remains largely unstudied. Archaeological research has only examined the western edge of the oasis, where Varakhsha is located, while other cities were situated in inhabited areas. Studying the entire oasis is not only interesting and important but also relatively straightforward and inexpensive compared to average-sized excavations at a single site.

The locations of some cities merit attention. Bemijket, an important city of the oasis (notably associated with the Muqanna revolt), is described by al-Istakhri as "located four farsakhs to the left of a traveler going to Tavavis, with approximately half a farsakh in between" (BGA, I, Fig. 315). Nearby were the Shargh townlet and the village of Shirvan (Yaqt, III, p. 352; Bartold, I, p. 187). The exact location of Shargh is unknown, except that it was 4 farsakhs (25–30 km) from Bukhara on the postal route to Samarkand, i.e., near the start of the canal irrigating Bukhara in Zarafshan, opposite Iskajket at the Haramkam canal (Narshakhi III, pp. 12–13). The village of Shirvan, which has preserved its name, lies between Gijduvan and Vobkent. Considering medieval maps, Bemijket was on the right bank of the Zarafshan; its precise location can thus be identified: half a farsakh (3–4 km) from the right bank of Zarafshan, near the beginning of Shohrud, approximately 5 km east or southeast of Vobkent (Fig. 2).

In the 10th century, Tavavis was considered the second-largest city of the oasis after Bukhara, but its ruins are so destroyed that even an approximate size of the city cannot be determined. Rabods are mentioned only for Zandana and Magkan; a rabod might also have existed in Romitan, as 250 meters south of the site wall remains were found (Shishkin, 1940, p. 38), and also in Varakhsha (Fig. 3). Most oasis cities were fortified settlements of peasants, lacking both a rabod and a city area much larger than the ruler's citadel (cf.: Yalpak, Kata-Khoja-Ishon, Tarob, Ramish; Shishkin, 1940, pp. 6–7, 31–34, Figs. 5 & 15). After losing political importance, these towns gradually became villages.





**Fig. 3. Plans of Sogd and Bukhara cities.**

Administratively subordinate to Bukhara, five cities were located outside the oasis; one of them, Ferebr, was mentioned above, while the others were situated between Sogd and Bukhara.

By the 12th century, some cities and villages of Bukhara had become abandoned. Due to the drying of the western edge of the oasis, Varakhsha was destroyed, and Poykent suffered the same fate. As-Samani mentions several other abandoned villages (it is not always possible to determine whether they were located in the depopulated part of the oasis). In place of the declining old cities, new settlements such as Gijduvan and Vobkent began to rise; as evidenced by a beautiful minaret dating from the 12th century, Vobkent had grown from a small village into a thriving city.

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