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CHACH'S PROMINENTS ROLE AT THE CROSSROADS OF TRANSCONTINENTAL TRADE ROUTES.

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Abstract: The article analyzes the settled oases of Central Asia, specifically the trade routes of Sogdia that connected the East, West, North, and South. These routes passed through historical and cultural regions, linking the entire province to transcontinental networks. It explores how trade caravans and diplomatic missions originating from Samarkand Sogdia moved through Chach, Fergana, and Semirechye (Zhetysu), incorporating representatives of Ustrushana into their ranks along the way.
Keywords and phrases: Nile, Tigris and Euphrates, Huang He and Yangtze, Ganges, Samarkand Sogdia, Chach, Fergana, Semirechye, Nuket, Kharashkent, Chinonchkent, Tuqkent, Tunkent, Khatunkent, Binket, Dinfighonkent, Benaket, Kharashket, Ardlankent, Khudaynket, Kabarna, Nujeket, Khatunkent, Jabghuket, Farnket; Tunkent, Sekeket, Banjkhash, Nuket, Balayan, Tuqkent, Arbilakh, Nemudlik, Khumrek, Bisket, Kukhisim, Dahket, Khash, Khanganket.

INTRODUCTION

In the modern global information age, the system of regional international relations has reached a high level of development. There is a growing need to study the historical realities of Central Asia's—and specifically Uzbekistan's—active participation and integration into these processes. This involves examining the rich historical experience of regional integration through the lens of transregional and transcontinental transit routes. Throughout the historical stages of human development, these transregional and transcontinental routes have played an incomparable role in political, socio-economic, and cultural processes

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

To date, a significant body of scientific work regarding the history of Central Asia has been produced both in world historiography and within our country. These studies contain serious reflections on various aspects of Central Asian history. It is appropriate to categorize them into three groups based on geographical and chronological aspects:

Literature published in foreign countries;Scientific works created during the Russian Empire and the Soviet era;Research published during the years of independence.

Information regarding the history of transregional and transcontinental routes of Central Asia can be found in the writings of scholars from various countries [1–28]. In foreign research dedicated to the early medieval history of Central Asia, specialized opinions on this specific topic are often limited. Nevertheless, scientific works published in France, Russia, Europe, America, Turkey, China, and Central Asian countries present several noteworthy points relevant to the scope of our research problem.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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It is well known that major river systems—such as the Nile, Tigris and Euphrates, Huang He and Yangtze, and the Ganges—played a crucial role in the emergence of early states. Among these, the rivers of Central Asia, including the Amu Darya, Syr Darya, Zarafshan, and Murghab, deserve equal mention. Historically, these regions are referred to as the "Ancient Oriental Civilizations" [1]. Tribes and ethnic groups inhabiting these river basins practiced agriculture on the fertile banks, established their first settlements, and founded city-states. The transformation of these city-states into oasis states dates back to the beginning of the first millennium BC. The unification of oasis states represents a subsequent stage of politically organized statehood. During this same period, processes of political organization also occurred among the tribes in the northern steppes of Eurasia [2].

This created a foundation for balanced relations between sedentary and nomadic populations, where mutual interactions served both political and economic interests. Consequently, communication routes between the Central Asian oases and the northern steppe nomads emerged and flourished. However, the Achaemenid conquests in the 6th century BC and the campaigns of Alexander the Great in the 4th century BC introduced new characteristics to the political systems, economic life, and social spheres. During this period, the network of communication routes shifted toward the southwest. While this was a characteristic of the Antiquity, the early Middle Ages (5th century to the first half of the 8th century) saw further economic development and the advancement of trade, providing a basis for the formation of new transit routes.

A distinctive feature of the early Middle Ages was that large states, specifically the Hephthalite and Turkic Kaghanates, fully preserved local administrative systems and local governance. For the central authority, political stability, economic growth, and the prosperity of social life within local provincial governments were of paramount importance. During this era, each historical-cultural province occupied a specific geographical position, and the transit routes passing through their territories connected to regional and international networks.

In particular, the trade routes of Sogdia, which linked the East, West, North, and South, passed through historical-cultural regions and integrated the entire province into transcontinental networks. The routes of **Ustrushana** (referred to in historical sources as *Strushana* or *Sui-du-shana*), considered a vital branch in the northeastern direction, served as a "contact zone" between sedentary and nomadic regions [3]. The trade-transit routes passing through this province directly connected the desert regions and the banks of the Syr Darya with the Zarafshan oasis in the southwest, the Chach oasis in the northeast, and Tokharistan in the south [4]. Furthermore, the villages of Eastern Sogdia (the Panch province) in the upper reaches of the Zarafshan were also accessed through Ustrushana [5]. To ensure the safe movement of caravans along these routes, the **"Kanpirak Wall"** defense system was constructed during the 6th–8th centuries [6]. This wall served to protect caravan routes and the sedentary population from nomadic incursions for a period of time.

Trade caravans and diplomatic missions originating from **Samarkand Sogdia** traveled towards Chach, Fergana, and Semirechye, incorporating Ustrushanians into their ranks along the way. According to the Chinese chronicle *"Tang Shu"* (History of the Tang Dynasty), in the years 618–626 and 627, the ruler of *Su-duy-sha-na* (Ustrushana) sent his own ambassadors to China alongside the envoys from the principalities of Kan (Samarkand), Bukhara, and Ishtikhon [7]. In this sense, the communication routes of Ustrushana during the early Middle Ages served as an integral part of transcontinental networks.

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The **Chach (Shi, Zhezhi) – Tashkent oasis**, which occupied a vital strategic position in the region, was distinguished by both its transport routes and its economic potential. Located along the water-rich Chirchiq and Angren basins and the middle reaches of the Syr Darya, the northeastern branches of the Silk Road passing through this oasis served not only commercial purposes but also facilitated centuries of migratory movements. Since Sogdia was frequently subjected to foreign invasions, a significant portion of the Sogdian population sought refuge in Chach during these perilous times. Notably, Sogdians first entered the Chach oasis during the Achaemenid and Greco-Macedonian conquests in the 6th–4th centuries BC. Settling in the mountainous and foothill regions of Chach, they lived alongside the local sedentary population as well as the semi-nomadic and nomadic peoples to the north, establishing a series of settlements [8].

The transition of Chach under the control of the **Turkic Kaghanate** in the second half of the 6th century further accelerated this process. Major residential areas, villages, and cities were established in geographically favorable locations where trade route networks converged. Under the Kangju state union and the Hephthalite period, increased attention was paid to the parts of the Silk Road passing through Chach as strategic routes [9]. The Sogdian urban planning culture, with its centuries of experience, significantly influenced the urbanization processes in Chach [10]. Specifically, during the early Middle Ages, approximately 255 settlements and more than 30 fortresses and cities emerged in the oasis. Economy and social life underwent profound positive changes in dozens of cities such as **Nuket, Kharashkent, Chinonchkent, Tuqkent, Tunkent, Khatunkent, Binket, Dinfighonkent, Benaket, Kharashket, Ardlanket, Khudaynket, Kabarna, Nujeket, Jabghuket, Farnket; Sekeket, Banjkhash, Balayan, Arbilakh, Nemudlik, Khumrek, Bisket, Kukhisim, Dahket, Khash, and Khanganket** [11]. The systematic establishment of agriculture, handicrafts, and trade, combined with regional peace and political stability, further improved the living standards of the population.

Like those of Sogdia, the rulers of early medieval Chach pursued independent internal and foreign policies. According to the chronicles *"Wei Shu"* (5th century), *"Bei Shu"* (7th century), and *"Tongdian,"* the state of *Zhezhe* (Chach) succeeded in establishing diplomatic relations with China by sending ambassadors in the year 437 and during the Sui Dynasty (581–618) [12]. Undoubtedly, transit routes played a massive role in establishing these diplomatic ties, as envoys typically reached their destinations by joining trade caravans. Simultaneously, the control of the Silk Road by the Kangju union, the Hephthalites, and the Turkic Kaghanates further bolstered the oasis economy [13].

While Chach entered the First Turkic Kaghanate as a vassal possession during the reign of **Istami**, it managed to re-establish diplomatic relations with China during the reign of **Tegin Tyanzhi** (605–609), a member of the Ashina dynasty, by utilizing the economic and political freedoms created by the Western Turkic Kaghanate [14]. The oases of Central Asia served as a vital strategic base and the economic backbone of the Western Turkic Kaghanate. Consequently, the Kaghanate was interested in these oases engaging in trade with Chinese dynasties. To this end, Kaghanate officials implemented security measures along transit routes to ensure that caravans reached their destinations safely.

During the period of the Arab Caliphate's conquests (second half of the 7th century to the first half of the 8th century), relations with the Chinese Tang Dynasty nearly ceased. Nevertheless, the economic capacity of Chach within the Western Turkic Kaghanate remained high, similar

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to Sogdia, and the people of Chach continued to participate actively in international trade in cooperation with the Sogdians. Among the goods produced in Chach, silver mined from **Lashkarak**, metal products from the craftsmen of **Tunket** and **Tuqkent**, and raw turquoise from **Kuramozor** held significant importance [15]. During this period, the rulers of Chach minted their own copper and bronze coins for the internal market [16]. The circulation of these coins aided economic growth and the development of international trade. It is also worth noting that Chach merchants exported products and lived as a single community with Sogdians, Ustrushanians, and Ferganese in various foreign trade settlements [17]. The specialist in the early medieval period, **L.R. Kyzlasov**, noted that in the 5th–8th centuries, the majority of commercial operations carried out in the East were performed by the people of Chach [18]. In general, during the era of the Kaghanates, the activity of trade caravans on transit routes and diplomats as mediators of international relations intensified. Furthermore, the political, economic, and military superiority of the Kaghanates in the region proved highly advantageous during this period.

One of the regions where Central Asian transit trade routes penetrated was the **Fergana Valley**, through which one of the Silk Road branches leading to China passed. The significant economic development of the Fergana Valley during this period is evidenced by the existence of more than 70 cities [19]. Cities such as **Akhsikent, Shavkat, Navkat** [20], **Kurkat**, and **Khuvakand (Kokand)** [21] were considered major hubs along the Fergana section of the Silk Road.

The trade routes passing through the valley were established approximately in the 4th–3rd centuries BC, with the western direction leading toward **Chach, Ustrushana, and Sogdia**. These routes reached Khujand via the Asht Pass or connected to Chach through the Kamchiq and Roziq passes in the Chatkal Mountains. This direction remained significant during the Kangju period and did not lose its importance in subsequent eras. The eastern transit routes of the Fergana Valley connected **Semirechye, Eastern Turkestan, and China**. According to Chinese chronicles, **Yuychen** (modern-day Uzgen) in eastern Fergana was the first city on the Semirechye – Eastern Turkestan – China route. From there, it connected to **Ershi** (often cited as the capital) and the valley's internal road network. This system of roads played a vital role in both regional and foreign relations [22]. Although the valley is geographically surrounded by mountains, the passes and gorges that connected it to the outside world were of great significance for transit trade.

The relations between the Fergana Valley and China occupy a special place in history. It should be noted that the Chinese side perceived all merchants coming from the territories of Turan as *Hu* (Westerners) or Sogdians. Perhaps for this reason, early medieval Chinese sources regarded **Fergana – Davan** (referred to as *Polona* in the 5th century BC, *Bohan* in the 6th–7th centuries, or *Ninyuan* in the 7th–8th centuries) as one of the principalities within the Sogdian sphere, much like Chach [23]. For instance, in the records of the *"Bei Shu"* chronicle dating to 435 AD, the Fergana Valley is not recognized as a separate state. This is explained by the fact that the language, anthropology, customs, and beliefs of the Fergana population were very close to those of Sogdia [24]. Although Chinese travelers **Xuanzang** and **Hui Chao** noted that the Ferghanians had a language distinct from neighboring ethnic groups [25], this proves that in the 7th century, the region was inhabited by peoples speaking closely related languages or dialects.

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In Fergana, sectors of the economy such as agriculture, horticulture, viticulture, livestock breeding (specifically horse breeding), handicrafts, and mining were highly developed. Products cultivated in the valley found their place in both internal and external trade. For example, in 479 AD, crimson-colored Fergana horses were sent as gifts to the Chinese emperor, and in 675 AD, green glass products were transported from Fergana to China [26]. Unlike other regions of Turan, the Ferghanians supplied alfalfa (*mu-su*) seeds and walnuts to Chinese markets. In the wealthy households of Fergana, wine was stored in large ceramic jars in quantities of up to 10,000 units. The high demand for such products further developed domestic and foreign trade. By the 4th–5th centuries, merchants from Fergana were able to compete freely with traders from other lands in terms of "profitability" [27]. In Fergana's foreign trade, **Sassanid and Sogdian drachmas** remained in circulation until the 7th–8th centuries. Commercial activity gradually became an economic necessity for the people of Fergana, leading to an improvement in their social status. Furthermore, the mutual cooperation between **Fergana, Chach, and Sogdia** served the collective economic interests of all parties [28].

In conclusion, the transcontinental routes branching across Central Asia connected not only Turan but also Eastern Turkestan, China, the Far East, Iran, and Asia Minor. These trade routes laid the foundation for political, economic, and social relations during the early Middle Ages. The interactions between the major powers of the early medieval era—the Sui and Tang dynasties of China, the Hephthalite State, the Turkic Kaghanates, the Sassanid Empire of Iran, and the Byzantine Empire—alternated between periods of peace and conflict. In every circumstance, the utilization of transit routes served the interests of all parties. In a true sense, these communication networks became a vital necessity for establishing and maintaining peace between these regional powers.

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