



TOWNS, FORTRESSES, AND RURAL SETTLEMENTS OF THE KARAKALPAKS IN THE 18TH–19TH CENTURIES

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Abstract: *This article examines the construction history, archaeological and topographical structure, and research history of the Aydos Qala fortress-settlement, which played a significant strategic role in the socio-political and economic life of the Karakalpaks during the Khiva Khanate. Based on written sources and archaeological data, the architectural dimensions of the monument, the structure of its citadel and rabad, the lifestyle of its population, and the reasons behind the decline and abandonment of the fortress are analyzed.*

Keywords: *Aydos Qala, Khiva Khanate, Takhtakupir, Kokozyak, archaeological site, citadel, qara uy (yurt), defensive wall, B.V. Andrianov, S.K. Kamalov.*

AYDOSQALA. Starting from the 1770s, relations between the Karakalpaks and the Khivan khans began to form. By the 1820s, the Khivan khan Muhammad Rahim Khan, aiming to completely subjugate the Karakalpaks politically and economically, took advantage of the betrayal of local clan leaders (*biys*) and elders. Among them, Aydos Biy played a leading role. Muhammad Rahim Khan began to strengthen the policy of the Khiva Khanate in this region by consolidating Aydos Biy's power over the local population. Aydos Biy received permission to build a fortress-town in the locality of Akzhagys on the Kokozyak River, which flows through the territory of the modern Takhtakupir district. Akzhagys was a crossroads of major routes used by trade caravans traveling from the cities of Khwarazm to the



peoples living in the lower reaches of the Yanydarya and Syrdarya, and back to Khwarazm. For this reason, this settlement was of great strategic importance for protecting passing trade caravans, collecting duties (taxes) from inbound caravans, as well as for subjugating the population of these territories to the Khiva Khanate. The construction of this fortress primarily relied on the labor of the working population living along the Kokozyak. The construction works continued for several years. During that period, the Khiva Khanate periodically sent military detachments to protect the fortress under construction from neighboring peoples who had not yet recognized the power of the khanate. Later, this fortress-town turned into one of the main defensive and administrative centers of the Khiva Khanate, serving first to subjugate the Aral Sea Karakalpaks and local Karakalpaks, and subsequently to govern them. Eventually, this fortress-town was named Aydos Qala [4, pp. 75-86].

Structure and Study of the Archaeological Site of Aydos Qala
The ruins of Aydos Qala are located 20–30 km north of the highway passing through the modern Takhtakupir district, east of the old riverbed of the Kokozyak, and 2.5 km south of Akzhagys. The plan of the fortress and its location were recorded in the 1950s by Doctor of Historical Sciences B.V. Andrianov, who also conducted an archaeological and ethnographic study of this territory [3, pp. 102-111]. Subsequently, based on written and oral accounts, the history of this fortress was supplemented by Associate Professor of Historical Sciences, Academician of the Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR S.K. Kamalov. The plan of the fortress ruins forms a trapezoid. The length of its defensive wall on the western side is 830 meters, on the eastern side — 772 meters, on the northern side — 370 meters, and on the southern side — 254 meters. The remains of the fortress wall currently rise 1–2 meters above the surrounding area, resembling a dam. The main gates of the fortress were located on the southern and northern sides. In the northern part of the fortress stood a citadel (*ark*), measuring 370 \times 200 \text{ m}. It was separated from the *rabad* (suburb) of the fortress by a defensive wall. Currently, the traces of house remains inside the fortress are barely noticeable.



Household items and fragments of ceramic pottery used by the people living there at that time are found in small quantities [1, pp. 47-67]. According to written sources and folklore data, it is known that the population inside this fortress lived mainly in yurts (Karakalpak *qara-uy*). For instance, according to some reports, there were about 2,000 yurts inside the fortress. However, in our opinion, the majority of the population lived along both banks of the Kokozyak River. The fortress was primarily used as a defensive structure in case of a military threat. It was erected in a highly defensible location. While the Kokozyak flowed along the western side of the fortress, its branches on the southern and eastern sides served as a natural defensive moat. We believe that solely from a military-strategic perspective, the northern side of Aydos Qala was somewhat weaker compared to the other sides [5, pp. 97-112]. Information regarding how long people lived in Aydos Qala is extremely scarce. Moreover, without conducting full-scale archaeological excavations, it is difficult to determine exactly how many years the population's life continued in this town. However, according to some oral accounts preserved to this day, Aydos Qala became deserted (was abandoned) in the third quarter of the 19th century (between 1850 and 1875). As we noted above, there were few monumental buildings inside this fortress. In Central Asian regions, houses built exclusively of simple clay (*pakhsa* or sun-dried brick) in the 19th and first half of the 20th century in most cases stood for no more than 20–25 years. We attribute Aydos Qala's loss of significance primarily to the period following the incorporation of the Karakalpaks into the Russian Empire. Clarifying the exact time and under which ruler Aydos Qala finally lost its status remains one of the important tasks for future research [2, pp. 76-88].

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