

Ethnic and Cultural Interactions of The Khorezm Oasis Population with The Peoples of The Lower Volga and Southern Siberia During The Period of Amir Timur and The Timurids

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Abstract

This article offers comprehensive insights into the cultural connections formed between the residents of the Khorezm oasis and the peoples of Rus' and the Volga region since ancient times. It notably presents well-supported facts illustrating the revival of cultural and economic interactions during the period of Amir Timur and the Timurids. Additionally, the article shares intriguing details about the social and ethnic kinship bonds linking Siberian peoples with those of Khorezm.

Keywords: Ramadan, Hijri Year, Historiography, Truce, Kasbah, Fortress, Numismatics, Ulama, Caravan Routes, Archaeological Findings, Amir Timur, Khorezm Oasis, Volga Region

1. Introduction

The key phase in Khorezm's cultural history in the 14th and 15th centuries, often called the second transitional period, is closely associated with Amir Timur's era and the rise of the Timurid dynasty starting in the 1370s. This period is marked by the creation of a strong centralized state, reconstruction of cities, the building of monumental structures, a boom in craftsmanship, and significant growth in international trade. As a result, the cultural development of the Aral Sea region and the Khorezm oasis during this time is characterized by long-lasting stability and peace [1, 2].

Thorough and objective research on the history of Khorezm, including its peripheral provinces and ethnic groups within Amir Timur's centralized state, highlights notable positive changes in socio-economic conditions. This era saw marked economic and cultural growth across the Khorezm oasis, especially in the southern and northwestern regions [3]. The study aims to systematically explore the cultural, ethnic, and economic links between Khorezm and the northern territories—specifically the Lower Volga and Southern Siberia—during the Timurid renaissance [4, 5].

2. Research Method

To gain a thorough understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics of the era, this study uses a historical-comparative and analytical approach. It is based on combining two main types of sources:

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: submitted; 2026/02/25 revised; 2026/03/13 accepted; 2026/03/29 published 2026/04/26

Historical manuscripts, such as Sharafuddin Ali Yazdi's Zafarnoma and Abulgazi Bahadurkhan's Shajarayi Turk, were examined to understand the political and geographical contexts of Amir Timur's campaigns and subsequent administrative decisions.

This study relies on extensive archaeological surveys conducted on the Ustyurt plateau and Sarykamysh basin, including research by S.P. Tolstov and Y. Gulyamov. It examines material culture, such as settlement patterns, defensive structures like kasbahs and forts, irrigation systems like Gurlan, Bagdad, and Eski-Ukuz, as well as coin discoveries from Bukhara, Samarkand, and Balkh, offering tangible evidence of active urban centers and regional trade routes.

3. Results

Military Campaigns and the Preservation of Infrastructure

Historical records show that the southern parts of the province were not severely damaged during Amir Timur's initial military campaigns in Khorezm. In his first attack in July 1372, Timur took Kat and then laid siege to Gurganj. However, after the death of Husayn Sufi, the heir to the throne, Yusuf Sufi, called for a truce. According to chroniclers, Amir Timur signed a peace treaty and then returned to Samarkand [6].

After Timur left, Yusuf Sufi reclaimed Kat and refused to submit, which led to Timur's second campaign in Ramadan of 774 AH (January 1373) through the Kyzylkum desert. This campaign was stopped near Bukhara after Hasan Surij, a Khorezmian emir, successfully negotiated a ceasefire, prompting Timur to accept a silver coin tribute without harming the Khorezmians. As a result, only the southern parts of Khorezm, including areas around Kat and Khiva controlled by the Chagatayids, were added to Transoxiana. A third campaign in spring 777 AH (March 1375) also ended without full-scale warfare. The lack of records of widespread destruction in these territories indicates they remained mostly unscathed [7].

Archaeological Evidence of Cultural and Economic Renewal

Archaeological excavations in northwestern Khorezm have revealed significant insights into the Timurid era. After the Mongol invasions, the diversion of the Amu Darya's waters into the Daryalyk and Uzbay channels toward the Caspian Sea and Balkans promoted widespread irrigation, farming, and craftsmanship in the area. As documented by Abulgazi Bahadurkhan (1604-1663), the river's flow enabled extensive cultivation, vineyards, and dense settlements, indicating a period of great prosperity [8].

Topographical and archaeological studies of medieval cities on the Ustyurt plateau, such as Shemaxa-kala (Kumkend), Adaq, Oqqala, and Vazir – along with Timurid-era irrigation networks like Gurlan, Bagdadik, and Eski-Ukuz, reveal strong connections with the northwestern populations of Khorasan. Historian and archaeologist Ya.G. Gulyamov noted that the irrigated lands of southern Khorezm and cities such as Khiva, Hazarasp, Khanka, and Kat not only endured through the Golden Horde and Timurid periods but also signified a broader economic and cultural revival [9].

Trade and Urban Fortifications

The placement of fortress-cities from the 15th-16th centuries along the Khorasan route shows they served both trade and military functions, helping maintain cultural development. These towns were protected by typical medieval Khorezmian crenellated walls, watchtowers, and embrasures, indicating major urban centers in western Khorezm during the Timurid period [10].

Despite Amir Timur's annexation of the Aral Sea Khorezm regions to Transoxiana in 1388, urban growth persisted. Caravan routes remained active, new infrastructure was developed, and artisanship thrived. Historical sources and archaeological findings reveal reconstruction efforts of defensive walls and residential areas in Hazarasp, Khiva, Kat, Gurganj, and Wazir. Moreover, ceramics and copper coins from the 15th and early 16th centuries – discovered in the Sarykamysch basin and minted in Bukhara, Samarkand, and Balkh illustrate a vibrant interregional trade network [11].

4. Discussion

Khorezm's geopolitical status during the Mongol period, and subsequently within the empires of Amir Timur and the Timurids, dictated its role in international relations. The region often acted in alliance with the Ulus of Jochi (the Golden Horde), a dynamic that occasionally catalyzed Timur's interventions [12]. However, under the centralized Timurid state, particularly during the governance of Emir Shahmalik and the reign of Mirza Shahrukh, Khorezm's international standing was significantly elevated.

Integration into the Great Silk Road

Many of Khorezm's cities were strategically located along branches of the Great Silk Road. Amir Timur's diplomatic correspondence prioritized expanding inter-state trade, which aligned with his vision for urban development. While major cities in Transoxiana (Samarkand, Bukhara, Tashkent) and Khorasan (Herat, Balkh) thrived, Khorezmian fortress-cities such as Urgench, Khiva, and Kat served vital defensive and commercial functions. Trade and diplomatic caravans traveling from China to Western Europe or from India to the northern domains of the Golden Horde, predominantly passed through the Khorezm corridor [13].

Cultural and ethnic influences on the Volga and Siberian regions

After quickly overcoming the impacts of the Mongol invasion, Khorezm regained its traditional role as a source of high culture for the northern areas. Notably, the region played a key part in the second phase of Islamic spread, following the initial phase in the 9th to 12th centuries, into the Volga region and Southern Siberia [14].

Between the 13th and 15th centuries, the linguistic heritage of the Khorezm oasis significantly shaped the ethnolinguistic landscape of the north. Studies show that the Khorezmian language was crucial in forming the Bashkir-Tatar literary language in the Volga and Southern Siberian regions. Khorezm had closer and more advanced cultural connections with the ethnic groups and tribes of the Lower Volga, the Southern Urals, and the Kama River basin than with its immediate southern or eastern neighbors [15].

The discovery of Khorezmian archaeological and numismatic artifacts in these distant northern areas validates robust economic connections extending from the Aral Sea to Eastern Europe and Siberia. This flow of material goods facilitated not only trade but also the exchange of spiritual and cultural concepts, allowing Khorezmian urban planning traditions to greatly influence city development within the Golden Horde.

5. Conclusion

The Khorezm oasis's rich cultural heritage, built over millennia, along with the insights of its native scholars and important academic works, significantly influenced global scientific progress. Serving as a key link between northern regions like the Volga area and Southern Siberia and the southern parts of the world, Khorezm played a crucial role in spreading cultural innovations across regions.

The historical and archaeological records unequivocally demonstrate that Khorezm played an irreplaceable role in the cultural evolution of the Golden Horde, the linguistic development of Siberian and Volga peoples, and the widespread establishment of the Islamic faith across these northern domains.

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