There was a large and powerful state of Parthia with the center in Nisa in the ancient times when the first caravans traveled back and forth on the territory of Turkmenistan via the Silk Road. One of the most famous towns of Turkmenistan in the ancient and Middle Ages was Merv, center of the Abbasid caliphate under caliph Mamun (813-833) and concurrently a capital of the Seljuk Empire under Sultan Sanjar (1118-1157). The town was famed for various handicrafts. Merv fabric and excellent non-glazed stamped ceramics were items of sale. It is no mere coincidence that one of medieval authors called Merv as “mother of Khorasan towns”. Caravans from Merv made their way for Serakhs, Nishapur (Iran), Abiverd, Nisa, Ferav, Dehistan, then along the Caspian littoral and further southwards to the Arab countries. Thus, a considerable segment of the Silk Road fell on Turkmenistan.

Amul. Caravans from China passed many thousands of kilometers to reach Amu Darya. Across Amu Darya they reached the town Amul, now its ruins scattered around the town Turkmenenbat (former Chardjou). From the south-west, at a distance of 10-15 km from the town there are sand dunes separated by a green belt of irrigated lands; Amu-Darya flows 12 km in the north-east [Burkhanov, 1991, p.27-29; 2005, p.35-37].

It should be noted that Amul was located at the cross roads of caravan routes from the West to the East, from Merv to Bukhara and further to China; from the North to the South, from Khorezm to Afghanistan and India. The first settlement in place of Amul sprang up at the turn of old and new eras, approx. 2000-2100 years ago. It was the abundance of water and advantageous geographical location at the crossing that created favorable conditions for the populated locality to expand and grow economically. In the early Middle Ages (5-7 centuries) the settlement grew into town. Subsequently, other ancient and medieval towns of Middle Amu Darya – Kelifa, Zemma-Kerkuha (Atamyrat), Navidaha (ruins of Keshka Zuhra-Tahir at Burdalik) and Firabr-Bityk (Farap).

The oldest period is considered to be the 1-4 centuries AD. In the reviewed period the town had an area of 50 ha with a shahristan and citadel as its center. Besides, there were numerous buildings and estates around the town. Going back to the same period are lower parts of shahristan’s walls of pahs, several meters thick and 1,1-1,2 m high. As a building material there was ordinarily used mudbrick, dimensions: 38 x 38 x 9 and 40 x 40 x 10 cm; rarely used was baked brick, dimensions: 41 x 41 x 8 and 45 x 45 x 8 cm.
Archaeological excavations revealed that in the 9-10 centuries Amul was composed of a shahristan with an arch inside and an outward part. The outward part included three gates - northern, eastern and southern. A rabad was in the outward part of Amul. Numerous earthenware is richly ornamented in the form of geometrical figures and vegetation fragments put on light angobe and glazed. There is a direct analogue between the ceramics of Amul and that of Bukhara oasis. Among the finds there are also metal, stone and glassware [Burkhanov, 1991, p.28-29; 2005, p.37].

According to the medieval Arab authors (Balazuri, Ibn Hordadbek, Istahri, Yakut), Amul came up in place of an ancient settlement in the 9-11 centuries to turn into a large, populous town, area 175 ha [Mamedov, in co-authorship, 1998, p.18].

No origin of the name “Amul” has so far been established. Historical sources refer to other variants as well, including Amuya, Amuye, Dehanishir, Chigirbend, Bukhara, sht-Faykend, Road from Merv to Khorezm and Amul or simply Amu, as well as Amul-Djayhuana, Amul-Zemma, Amul coastal, Amul desert to thus distinguish it from the town with the same name in Iranian Tabaristan. Since the end of the 15 century, sources refer to the name of Chardjuy, or “four ducts”, or Chahardjub [Masson, 1955, p.129, 133].

The site’s fortress has an area of 9 ha, its walls are of quadrangular form; a small citadel (arch) is prevalent in the north-western corner of the shahristan [Burkhanov, 1993, p.39]. It rises above an artificial mound by 13 m above a fortress around it; in turn, the latter towers above the town by 20 m. By the entire perimeter of citadel’s walls there were 5 towers. Note that this layout of the town was typical for the 8-9 centuries and had continued to the 19 century when Turkmenabat (Chardjou) was a part of the Bukhara emirate.

The beginning of the 1990s was marked by stationary excavations carried out by the Middle Amu Darya expedition of the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of Turkmenistan (head A.Burkhanov). Archaeologists drew up an instrumental plan of the site, identified a zone of the future historical-cultural preserve, laid down two excavations and discovered new finds of material culture of the town’s population [Burkhanov, 2005, p.18-19; p.35-37].

**Caravanserai Daya-Khatyn.** The trade played a crucial role in the medieval economy of the Central Asia. To provide trades caravans with convenient rest-places and ensure their security, large, well-equipped caravanserais were built and frequently reinforced with defensive walls, especially at remote and dangerous segments.

One of such caravanserais was built on the route from Amul along Amu Darya to the capital of Khorezm. This is a unique monument of medieval architecture and Turkmenistan’s single well-preserved caravanserai known under the title Daya-Khatyn. It is located 173 km away from...
Prominent Archaeological Sites of Central Asia on the Great Silk Road

Caravanserai Daya-Khatyn. Scheme

A highway Turkmenabat-Birata, not far from a railway station Khalkabad.

At present, it rises above Amu-Darya banks amidst sand hills and saxaul grove. The building has a square layout, dimensions: 53 x 53 m [Mamedov, in co-authorship, 1998, p.24]. In the middle there is an open courtyard, dimensions: 30 x 30 m, around which there is a covered arcade and numerous large and small rooms. Note that main walls, arches, vaults and domes were built of excellent baked brick. A wide and high arched entrance with a protruding portal looks north, riverside northwards. The caravanserai is encircled with a strong defensive wall that covers an additional area for maintenance of pack animals. The building is dated to the 12 century but existed till the 16 century when was repeatedly rebuilt and repaired.

The fortress under caravanserai Daya Khatyn was a large trans-shipment point on the trade route Amul-Khorezm. Perhaps, the river trade also mattered for Daya Khatyn’s prosperity.

Kunya-Urgench. As has been noted above, one of the caravan routes from Amul moved toward Urgench as referred to in Chinese written sources of the earlier 1 century AD as Yuye-gan [Khalimov, 1991, p.7]. Later on, the town had repeatedly been mentioned due to the major political developments in the country. Arab-Persian historians, geographers and travelers provided a lot of information about Urgench, particularly Arab historian Yakut al-Hamavi (1179-1229). He calls the main town of Khorezm as Djurdjaniy, while a local population called it as Kurkandj, Arabized Gurgandj [Medieval..., 2000, p.11,29-32]. Author of the 14 century al-Umari provides interesting information about traditions and customs of Khorezmians. In his words, residents of this country compete with each other in showing hospitality and money squandering, just as other people struggle for money accumulation.

Well-known Arab traveler of the 14 century Ibn-Battuta wrote about Urgench: “This is the largest, nicest and glorious town of Turks with excellent bazaars, wide streets, numerous buildings and places of interest. The life is boiling in the town, and it looks like a stormy sea. One day I went to the bazaar and when I reached the middle of it I could move neither back, nor forward” [The History..., 1957, p.316].

It was the geographical location of Kunya-Urgench between a nomadic steppe and a settled oasis that contributed to its economic growth. This, in turn, strengthened its political influence as the center of Khorezm. Scholars suppose that by the mid-6 century Kunya-Urgench maintained regular trade relations with Khorasan, on the one hand, and Northern Iran, on the other.
Following the Arab invasion of 712, the economic ties of the town increasingly expanded, and as a result of trade contacts with the Eastern Europe its impact on the Khazar and Bulgar Povoljye intensified.

Historian of the 10 century lstahri noted that “Urgench is the largest town of Khorezm after its capital (Kyat) and a place of trade in guzes, and caravans make their way to Djurdjan (Gurgan), Khazar and Khorasan” [Materials..., 1939. p.178].

It should be noted that medieval Khorezm was divided into two parts – southern and northern. The capital of South Khorezm – Kyat; of North Khorezm – Urgench (now ruins of Kunya-Urgench). In 996, ruler of North Khorezm Mamun ibn Mohammad created a unified state, adopted a title of Khorezmshah and made Urgench as its capital [Yusupov, 1989, p.10-11; The Middle Ages..., 2000, p.8]. Monumental civilian and cultural erections and trade-artisan centers appeared in the town and Gurgandj became one of the East’s largest towns.

Later 11 century, Kutb-ad-din Mohammad founded a new dynasty of great Khorezmshahs. During the reign of Ala-ad-din Tekesh (1172-1200) and his son Mohammad II (1200-1220), a large-scale engineering work was underway.

In April 1221, Gurgandj following a 7-month siege fell under pressures of Mongols; later on Gurgandj was ruled by Djuchi and the town was restored. After the death of Golden Horde khan Uzbek (1340) Gurgandj again became the capital of Khorezm, but not for long. In 1372-1388, Timur repeatedly campaigned against the town and finally captured it. In the 17 century, Khiva khans moved all the residents of Kunya Urgench to New Urgench, following which the life in the old town faded out. Numerous architectural monuments on the territory of Kunya-Urgench have continued to our days. These include scientifically and culturally valuable mausoleums of Il-Arslan (or Fahr-ad-din), Tekesh, Tyurebek-khanum, Nadjm-ad-din Kubra and Sultan-Ali. Two other minarets are also known – one minaret of pre-Mongolian period, now fully destroyed; another minaret in the town remained intact. Names of Golden Horde khans – Kutluk-Timur (1321-1336), Uzbek-khan (end of his rule – 1342) are engraved on the minaret. Height of the minaret is 60 m; it was supposedly built in 1320-1330. Note that 145 steppes of the internal winding stairs that start at the entrance at a height of 7 m above ground level lead to the top of the minaret [Pilyavskiy, 1974, p.39-41; Monuments..., 1974, p.192-193].

It has to be kept in mind that Kunya-Urgench, one of the medieval political and cultural centers of the orient, was included in 2005 in the UNESCO List of World Heritage.
Prominent Archaeological Sites of Central Asia on the Great Silk Road

The complex of monuments Gonur Depe

Merv oasis. After Karakum sands, one of the most difficult segments of the Silk Road, caravans entered a vast flourishing oasis located in the lower reaches of the river Murgab. That was a Merv oasis, one of the oldest historical-cultural regions of the Central Asia with its highly developed system of artificial irrigation and a dense network of settlements with monumental architectural erections, going back to the Bronze Age.

When excavating a settlement Togolok-21 located on a desert area, archaeologists unearthed the East's oldest proto-Zoroastrian temple. It goes to show that there was a center of original civilization here that maintained close contacts with identical civilizations of Iran, India and Mesopotamia.

Worthy of note is another monument of the Bronze Age – Gonur-depe, main center of the oasis. During the excavations carried out by V.Sarianidi, a palace – temple complex was discovered to go back to the end of the III millennium BC. It was established that the palace was encircled by administrative buildings. In the west of the site, there was discovered a large necropolis dating back to the end of the III – mid II millennia BC. Nearly 3,000 graves were unearthed with numerous gold, silver, bronze and ivory bone-made articles. At present, the artifacts are kept at the Chief Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts of Turkmenistan.

At different periods of the history the Merv oasis was called Mouru in Avesta, the scripture of Zoroastrians; Margush – in cuneiform texts of Ahemenid kings; Margjana – in the works of Greek and Roman authors; Merv – in the sources of Sasanid and Arab periods; Maru – in the later Turkmen legends. Merv as the largest town of the East was the center of the oasis. It was second to the capitals of big powers of the reviewed period only by its size and significance.
On the other hand, Merv is a group of sites that regularly sprang up and disappeared. It was called differently at different periods of its existence: Erk-kala (fortress – citadel); Gyaur-kala, Sultan-kala, Abdullakhan-kala and Bayramalikhan-kala.

Note that lower cultural layers of the oldest part of Merv (Erk-kala) go back to the 6-5 centuries BC, i.e. the period of its joining the ancient Persian power of Ahemenides. In the period under consideration, the town with an area of 20 ha was encircled by strong fortified walls made of mudbrick. Height of the walls is 25 m. Inside the fortified walls there were monumental architectural buildings, including a palace of a ruler, temples, barracks on high platforms (up to 15 m) made of mudbrick. In 522 BC, Merv saw a large uprising of the Margiana's population against Ahemenides that was mercilessly suppressed. In the 4 century BC Margiana was conquered by Alexander the Great. Sources report on the foundation of Alexandria of Margiana identifiable to the site Erk-kala.

In the end of the same century, Murgab lands became a part of the state of Seleucids. Strabo informs that Seleucid king Antioch I Soter (281-261 BC), shocked by fertility of Margiana lands, "ordered to wall it, 1500 stadiums (about 250 km) and found a town of Antiochus" [Vyazigin, 1949, p.260]. Antiochus is identifiable to the site Gyaur-kala, area of 360 ha. When erecting Antiochus, builders relied on great experience of Hellenistic town-planning [Masson, 1991, p.181]. Gyaur-kala is noted for its regular layout; a regular contour of walls with four gates in the center and two arterial lines that split the town from the south to the north and from the east to the west [Filanovich, 1974, p.15].

As one of the largest political, economic and cultural centers of the east, Merv maintained closest cultural and commercial ties with adjacent and even remote countries, as evidenced by finds in Margusha settlements, especially in Gonur-depe. Testifying to the profound historical roots are ivory ware, cylindrical seals with Assyrian plots and inscriptions; stone ritual pillars, and steatite vessels in the form of "buds" and a spindle. Following the finalization of the Silk Road in the Parthian period, Merv turned into one of the largest centers of international caravan trade that linked the East with western countries.

As a part of the Parthian state, Merv was an enormous town and a capital of rich province. Its populated regions were not confined to the borders of Gyaur-kala. An extensive suburb was shaped around it together with a strong defensive work. Its ruins, currently titled as Gilyakin-Chilburdj, have continued to this day [Pugachenkova, 1958, p.43; Mamedov in co-authorship, 1998, p.13].

A large-scale construction work was underway in Merv when the town formed a part of the Sasanid state. Together with civilian facilities there were built cultural erections as well.
A hallmark of this period was a tolerance of Sasanid rules. Along with the state religion – Zoroastrianism there co-existed Buddhism and Christianity. A large house of Christian community and a Buddhist sangarama with a stupa was unearthed on the site Gyaur-kala. Adjoining to the stupa there was a front staircase with large painted clay statues of Buddha on both sides. A head of the statue was discovered during the excavations. Next to it was a remarkable painted vase that depicted beautiful plots from the life of Sasanid nobility. A Buddhist manuscript of the 5-6 centuries was inside the vase. A reliquarium was found inside another Buddha stupa from Merv. It included several sculptural pictures of Buddha, his disciples, with remains of gilding and a manuscript, the oldest on the territory of Turkmenistan. A Zoroastrian necropolis with ossuary burials was discovered in the suburbs of Merv.

Numerous fortified feudal estates, reminiscent of knight castles of medieval Europe, were built in Merv, 6-7 centuries. A remarkable pattern of the castle architecture of Merv of the reviewed period is Grand Kyz-kala. Visitors are impressed by grandiosity of semicircular columns that grow out of strong adobe blocks. The building is rectangular, dimensions: of the sides are 42 x 7 m. Walls are well preserved up to the height of 15 m. Columns of the northern and western walls lost their initial relief; two other facades are notable for their goffering.

In the second half of the 7 century Merv was a part of the Arab caliphate; in the middle of the 8 century the town became a center of anti-Omayyad movement headed by Abu Muslim, who at one time brought Abbasid caliphs to the power.

At the date of Merv’s joining the Arab caliphate, trade routes of Merv had finally been established. Earlier Arab authors, including Ibn Hordadbek, al-Yakubi, Kudami, Istahri, Makdisi et al. provided a description of goods and caravan routes of Merv. Testifying to the trends and volume of the international trade of Merv are silver dirhams minted in many towns of caliphate and discovered in this town.

The town reached its height during the reign of Sultan Sanjar (1118-1157) who succeeded in turning Merv into the capital of the Seljuk state. Under the Seljuks, intensive construction work was underway in the town to cover 1500-1800 ha. By its size Merv exceeded not only the famous towns of the Near East, including Damascus, Haleb, Jerusalem, but also such big towns of the Western Europe of the 12-earlier 14 centuries as Paris, Bologna, Milan, Napoli.
etc. Identifiable to the town of the reviewed period is Sultan-kala (fortress of Sultan) fenced with fortress walls under Melik-shah (1072-1092).

Prospering in Merv were various handicrafts, including textile, pottery, metalworking, jewelry, construction and so on. Particularly impressive was progress reached by Merv potters who devised their own technology and manufactured highly artistic wares – chandelier, nonglazed stamped crockery decorated with zoomorphic, anthropomorphic plots and daintiest ornamentation of vegetation, geometrical and epigraphic motifs.

It was high level of culture development that conduced to the flowering of scientific thought. Merv was one of the major cultural centers of the Moslem Orient where a considerable part of material and spiritual values of the eastern peoples was created and preserved. Contributing to this, in no small way, was its location at the crossroads of trade-caravan routes. Merv was not only a large junction point of the Silk Road for foreign merchants but also sent trade caravans to other countries. Merv merchants took active part in the local and international trade.

Products of Merv craftsmen were widely known for beyond its limits. Medieval authors say that Merv exported raw silk, thin and soft cotton, sesame oil, honey, cheese, pear, grapes and melon. Artisans manufactured thin-walled stamped dishes, metal ware, silk and cotton fabric, cloaks, shawls, turbans, capotes. Widely spread was silk cloth “Kazin” and “mulham”. Testifying to the broad export and fame of Merv cloth are finds from Egyptian burials that were kept at treasuries of Abbasid caliphs.

Archaeological excavations on Sultan-Kala and its environs are illustrative of the goods that were imported to Merv. These include lusters, flasks, inkstands, cauldrons and gravestones from Iran, ivory articles from India. Embellishments took important place in the Merv import. These include beads of various forms and size made of precious and semiprecious stones – cornelian, turquoise, rock crystal, onyx, garnet, agate, jasper extracted in a valley of the river Zeravshan, Fergana, Badakhshan, Kerman, Nishapur; in the mountains of Nurata, Ilak, Sultan Uliz-dag; manufactured from coral and mother-of-pearl from the Indian ocean and the Mediterranean sea. It goes to show wide trade relations of medieval Merv.

A citadel Shahriyar-Ark with a sultan palace, a stationary office, state treasury and barracks rose above in the north-eastern part of the town. A canal Majan with numerous baked brick-made outlets traversed the town from the south to the north. At the intersection of main streets in the centre of the town – there was a charsu where important state acts were made; next to it were a cathedral mosque and a house board. In the 1140s, the ensemble became widened at the expense of a mausoleum of Sultan Sanjar, a remarkable creation of medieval architects of Turkmenistan. In the reviewed period, Merv was renowned for its splendid buildings, including mosques, madrasahs, libraries, mausoleums, palaces and houses of wealthy townsfolk.

It was the Mongolian invasion of the earlier 13 century that led to the downfall of Merv as a major cultural centre of the Central Asia. A new Merv was founded by Timurides earlier 15 century, the ruins of which are presently scattered to the south from Sultan-kala under the title “Abullahkh Khan-kala”. Its size is much smaller than that of Merv of the Seljuk period. Besides the site, there are several erections going back to the 16 century: two public snow depositories in the form of dome-shaped facilities; a large 2-portal structure with vaulted niches behind graves of Moslem preachers of Bureyda and Gifari.
Merv of the 18 century is identifiable to the site Bayramalikhan-kala, the territory of which is currently full of modern type town buildings. Remains of fortified walls and the north-western angular tower have continued to this day in the northern part only.

In 1999, the whole complex of these priceless monuments was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

**Dandanakan.** Dash Rabat is a site located at the border of the Merv oasis; remains of a small medieval town-fortress Dandanakan. No archaeological excavations have practically been carried out here, yet, some erections revealed on the site. In the Middle Ages, Dandanakan was a large settlement, square in plan, dimensions: 225 x 225 m. Its walls are preserved at a height of 5.5-6 m and fortified with towers in corners and at the gates [Historical-cultural..., 2000, p.115]. Flanked by towers on both sides, the entry was located in the middle of the south-eastern front. Around the town-fortress there was an extensive suburb-rabat with caravanserais and industrial districts. The archaeological material embraces the 9-12 centuries and partially the 13-14 centuries.

Dandanakan had first been referred to by Beyhaki and other medieval historians due to the political struggle of Seljukides and Gaznevides; an uprising of 733 in Khorasan under the leadership of Haris ibn Sureydj.

According to medieval sources, Dandanakan was located 10 farsahs (65 km) from Merv; a small, well-fortified area. The river Murgab did not reach the area, so it was supplied from wells. The site operated primarily as a fortress. As viewed by the historians above, Dandanakan was famed for a decisive fight that occurred between Gaznevides and Seljukides on May 24, 1040. A well-armed army of Gaznevid Sultan Masud was routed, and Khorasan went to Seljukides. In 1221, the town was destroyed by Mongols. However, the site was mentioned as a point on the trade-caravan route under the name “Dash Rabat” in the 16-17 centuries only.

**Serakhs** is a large point on the Silk Road between Nishapur and Merv, a centre of the oasis with the same name. It came into being in the late Stone Age (IV millennium BC). Encircled with cob wall, the settlement sprang up in place of the site Old Serakhs in the mid- I millennium BC.

In the III millennium BC the oasis was a part of the Greek-Bactrian kingdom. Serakhs was a large fortress at its western borders. During a campaign of the Seleucid king Antioch III, approx. 10,000 Bactrian cavalrymen were quartered on the area.

In the II millennium BC the Serakhs oasis became a part of the Parthian state and was called Sirakena; it depended politically and economically upon Merv. The history of the oasis in the early Middle Ages has been studied poorly. The oasis is known to have been a part of the Sasanid kingdom; its ruler was titled marzban, as were rulers of Nishapur, Herat and Merv.

*Map of Serakhs*
Following the conquest of the Central Asia by Arabs and the formation of local dynasties, the importance of Serakhs rose. It concurred with changes in Silk Road's main routes that now led from the central regions of Iran to Nishapur, and from here via Serakhs to Merv and further eastwards.

Seraks' involvement into the orbit of international trade contributed to the growth of its economy. The site turned into a large, densely populated town, total area of about 120 ha; had a citadel, dimensions: 320 x 360 m; a fortified shahristan, dimensions: 340 x 560 m, rising 12 m above an adjacent territory A suburb-rabad spread over the shahristan and the citadel within a radius of 300-400 m together with industrial districts.

Seraks architects achieved great successes and won fame in the Central Asia and Iran. They erected a caravanserai Rabati-Sherif in Iran, a mausoleum of Sultan Sanjar in Merv, a minaret in Jar-Kurgan, etc. that retained names of Seraks architects. Among the majestic buildings there stands out a mausoleum of Abul-Fazl called otherwise "Mausoleum of Seraks Baba". It was erected in the 11 century in a Seraks' suburb over a grave of the Moslem mystic Abul-Fazl who died in 1023 [Pugachenkova, 1952, p.236-237].

**Abiverd.** Ruins of Abiverd (also titled as Peshtag) are scattered not far from the regional centre Kaka in Akhal velayet of Turkmenistan. Note that Abiverd was one of the largest towns of Northern Khorasan, repeatedly mentioned in written monuments, especially those of the period of Arab invasion. Makdisi points out that "he liked Abiverd more than Nisa because its land was fertile and bazaar richer". There is a mosque at the bazaar" [Mamedov, in co-authorship, 1998, p.27]. A Persian geographical treatise "Hudud al-Alem" defines Baverd (Abiverd) as a place of numerous crops and ploughed fields". Haraj (tax collection) in Abiverd, the 9 century, comprised 700,000 dirhams and was as twice more than haraj in Seraks. It goes to show that Abiverd was larger and densely populated.

In the 11 century when Seljukides and Gaznevides fought for control over Khorasan, Abiverd had several times been mentioned in chronicles as a populated locality where both Togrulbek and Gaznevid Sultan Masud put up at, by turns. Later on, Abiverd, like scores of other towns of Khorasan, was destroyed following the Mongolian invasion. Note that the site was a fortress with defensive towers, area of 10,5 ha. A citadel was located in the middle of the north-eastern wall of the fortress and square in plan. Citadel's gates are in the south-western front. The citadel, square in plan and with dimensions:300 x 350 m, is reinforced with 20 towers and has a ditch, 1,5 m deep, broken by road embankments [Atagarryev, 2000, p.3-5].

Since the medieval town Abiverd was wholly covered by a cultural layer of the later period (15-18 centuries), it is hard to identify a layout of the early medieval town, so archaeologists had to confine themselves with materials unearthed so far. In particular, scores of ceramics of the 9-12 centuries; coins of local mintage going back to the later periods were discovered.
When surveying the Abiverd ruins, archaeologists were successful in discovering artisan districts in the south-eastern and north-western parts of the town where remains of iron slag and bloom were found. Also, the discovery of various woman’s adornments, bells, buckles, harness’ fragments gives weight to the fact that there were brazier’s and jeweler’s shops, as well as water reservoirs, aryks and wells to supply the above, in the central part of the town, not far from the citadel.

Contributing to the development of the town was its geographical location at the crossroads of trade routes that linked towns and regions of the northern slope of Kopetdag with Iran. Besides, abutting upon Abiverd from the north was a steppe as major market for sale of handicrafts and purchase of a product of nomadic economy.

**Meykhene** was a small town in Khaveran administratively subordinated to Abiverd. According to medieval authors, the town was encircled by a fortified wall, had a cathedral mosque and a bazaar; several villages around it. The town was located en route from Abiverd to Serakhs; unexplored archaeologically.

Meykhene was renowned for Abu-Said ibn Abul Khayr, a famous sheikh-mystic who was born and spent the last years of his life here. He played a crucial role in the political and spiritual life of Khorasan; enjoyed a great authority among the rulers of the reviewed period. Famed as Meana-Baba, an excellent mausoleum rose above his grave; it has a room square in plan, dimensions: 10.3 x 10.3 m. A cube-shaped building is crowned with a double-layer dome. The building was radically reconstructed in the 14 century and underwent architectural-artistic changes [Monuments..., 1974, p.94-95].

A portal was decorated with polychrome mosaic; main colors are blue, dark blue, white; some small inclusions are of yellow color. Multicolored decoration of the facade is based on geometrical ornament together with religious inscriptions in sulsi script. Interior, from floor to dome’s stop, is covered with the painting in dark blue, red, partly green colors against a white background.

Diversity and artistry of mosaic and paintings give grounds to recognize the mausoleum of Abu-Said Abul Khayr as a masterpiece of polychrome style typical for architecture of the 13-14 centuries.

**Anau** is a medieval town, 12 km to the south-east from Ashghabad. The site is identifiable to the ancient town Gatar as referred to by Isidore of Kharak, and with the medieval town Bagabad. Area of the town is approx. 9 he [Pugachenkova, 1959, p.8].

Small-scale excavations have been carried out on the site. Archaeological materials are indicative of multilayered nature of the monument; the earliest layer of the Anau fortress goes back to the antiquity. The site consists of a fortress with an irregular circumference, 300-350 m in diameter, and built on a hill, 10-12 high. The fortress is encircled with swollen walls, towers and a filled-up moat. An upper part of the fortified wall was built of mudbrick. Remains of
an earlier wall made of pahs go back to the early Parthian period.

The excavations made it possible to discover the ceramics of the pre-Arab period; a substantial layer of the 9-10 centuries, as well as non-glazed tableware with an engraved ornament of the 11-12 centuries when a decline fell upon the town. During the Mongolian invasion the fortress was destroyed; however, shortly after the urban life came to normal, as evidenced by a great number of finds of the 13-14 centuries [Historical-cultural..., 2000, p.39-41].

Also, there was a medieval mosque known under the title “Sayitjema-ad-Din”, built in the 15 century and destroyed by an earthquake of 1948. Of interest is a sardoba, dated to the 15 century, with a round reservoir, 6.5 m in diameter. A stepped downstairs into the sardoba, 2.8 m deep, is on the eastern part.

A maximum volume of the sardoba is 200,000 l.

Nisa is an ancient town in Kopetdag piedmont; now ruins of the two sites: Old Nisa and New Nisa. These are located 15 km to the west from Ashghabad. Old Nisa was the first capital of the Parthian state; had palace and temple structures, depositories and a treasury of the Parthian kings. Under Mitridate I (174-136 BC), a royal fortress Mitridatkert with an area of about 14 he, and 43 towers was erected in place of Old Nisa. Archaeological excavations revealed approx. 2,700 ostraks, i.e. texts written in black paint on earthenware. The written language of Old Nisa is of Aramaic origin and dated to the 2 century BC Documents in writing went back to the Parthian archives.

When excavating Old Nisa, archaeologists found monumental buildings – round and tower temples, a large square audience-hall. A tower temple was built on a monolith platform, square in plan, dimensions: 20 x 20, and a round temple, 17 m in diameter, had three passages. A floor of the square hall was wooden, rested on walls and four large brick pillars; light came from a sky-light. The floor was covered with luxurious carpets.

Of particular interest are rytons – ritual vessels of ivory with fantastic creatures – gryphons. Other essential discoveries were also made on the site Nisa – wall painting, a warrior’s head in helmet, all going back to the 1 century BC.

Following the collapse of the Parthian Empire, Old Nisa was destroyed, by
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Sasanides, and, instead, New Nisa arose. In 651, Arabs captured the region, and in the first quarter of the 9 century the town became a part of the Tahirid possessions. In the 10 century, the town was captured by Samanides. In 1017, Nisa joined Gaznevides; since 1040, it was a part of the Seljuk Empire. As a whole, Nisa had continued till the 19 century. A state historical-cultural preserve "Nisa" was set up in 1987 under S.A.Niyazov's decree. In June 2007, Old and New Nisa was included in the UNESCO List of World Heritage.

Shehr Islam. Located 20-22 km to the north from the regional center Baharly, Shehr Islam was identifiable to the fortress Tak-Yazyr. It is of great interest for the history and culture of Turkmenistan. Numerous archaeological finds, first of all, handicraft articles, give weight to the fact that Shehr Islam was a trade-handicraft town of North Khorasan; imported goods – precious stones that pointed to the developed trade relations.

Archaeological excavations in various parts of the town revealed residential districts, kilns and workshops, town walls, a large storehouse for iron ore and limestone. It should be noted that a thickness of cultural layers on the monument reached 10.5 m in some places [Historical – cultural heritage... 2000, p.310].

There were numerous buildings on the eastern citadel; an entrance was in the form of vault, and a façade decorated with ornamental brick and covered with turquoise glaze. Well-preserved fortified walls and defensive towers (about 90) are illustrative that the townspeople paid a great attention to the fortification matters. Thus, the northern wall from the nomadic steppe side was strongly fortified. Of great interest are logs under a foundation of the western citadel to amortize at earthquake or protect brickwork against salt ground waters.

Many residential houses were attached directly to the town wall with strategic and economic objectives: houses served as fortified walls of the town, had high ceilings due to the hot climate.

Of particular interest is the town's water supply system, especially as the town was far from water sources. Residents of Shehr Islam erected a unique hydro-technical facility of baked brick, 20-22 km long. The water-pipe is dated to the 11-12 centuries [Mamedov, in co-authorship, 1998, p.27]. Worthy of note is the fact that its capacity was 250 l/sec. As compared with other hydro-technical facilities of the Central Asia and contiguous countries of the East of the reviewed period, the water-pipe of Shehr Islam is of particular interest.

Thus, the research revealed that the town developed in the 9 century, and prospered in the 12-earlier 13 century. In the second half of the 13-14 centuries the craft industry sharply declined, dwelling houses decreased and the population reduced. After a short-term reanimation period at the turn of the 14-15 centuries Shehr Islam (Tak-Yazyr) ceased to exist as an urban structure, though some authors are prone to prove that it had still existed in the 16 century [Litvinskiy, in co-authorship, 1949, p.318].
**Ferava.** The site Ferava (Parau) is located 25 km to the north-west from the modern centre Serdar (former Kizyl-Arvat) near a village with the same name. An area of the circular wall is about 35 he [Mamedov, in co-authorship, 1998, p.27]. The town is encircled by 4 walls of the said type. Ferava's rabat has 3 gates.

Medieval author of the 10 century al-Istahri wrote: "Ferava is a frontier fortress to protect against Ghuzes, on the edge of desert and far from villages. It has a mosque; there is also a few frontier guards with proper outfit, and some people come over there. Its population is less than 1,000" [Materials..., 1939, p.176]. It is believed that initially designed as rabat, Ferava was built by Tahirid Abdullah ibn Tahir (830-844).

A southern part of the site sides with a vertical rock of Kopetdag. There is also a kyariz, the oldest water supply source.

To judge by ceramic complexes, the site Ferava existed in the 9-14 centuries, though the ceramics of the 14 century is found in a small quantity. There are a number of architectural facilities on the territory of the site. Of great interest is an architectural design of a mausoleum under the Parau-bibi mosque on the slope of Kopetdag. Two edges of the building abut upon a rock. It has an octahedral form with deep niches in each edge. The dome rests on console-cellular pendentives [Monuments..., 1974, p.71].

**Dehistan.** It should be noted that archaeological monuments of Dehistan are divided into three chronological periods. In the first period (end of the II – beginning of the I millennium BC), local tribes were primarily engaged in farming based on artificial irrigation. Besides, the cattle-breeding was spread. In the second period (3-8 centuries AD), various ethnos penetrated the area; large fortified settlements arose (Shauduz-kala, Akdja-kala, etc.). The third period (9-13 centuries) is studied thoroughly. The largest monument of medieval Dehistan is the site Misrian. It consists of shahristan and rabat to cover an area of about 200 he together with industrial districts.

Note that medieval Dehistan was one of the largest economic, handicraft and cultural centers of South-Western Turkmenistan, maintained close relations with a south-eastern part of the Caspian Sea. Located at the junction of settled oasis and nomadic steppe, the town was a crucial trade hub and traversed by an international caravan route that connected Khorezm with Arab countries.

The town was encircled by a double ring of defensive walls with semi-circular watch-towers. A distance between the walls was 25 m; the towers stood one from another each 50 m [Atagarriyev, in co-authorship..., 1977, p.101].

Remains of baked brick abutments are still found at the three gates of Dehistan from the outward part of the town wall. There were also numerous remains of kilns and potter's workshops, as well as foundations of three caravanserais conventionally called eastern, southern and western, - in rabats that encircled the town from four sides. Gardens and parks, as well as a
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bazaar square were located in the southern rabat; traces of dense residential districts were revealed in the western rabat; a cemetery Mashata with a mosque-mausoleum Shir-Kabir in the northern rabat. The most densely populated were the eastern and southern rabats: there were irrigation arylks and a main canal that supplied the town with water. [Historical-cultural heritage, 2000, p.118-119].

A distinctive feature of town’s structure and layout were public buildings and facilities that demonstrated the social structure of the reviewed period. Among monumental buildings there were mosques, minarets and other cult erections.

Noteworthy are 2 minarets; remains of a mosque’s portal with brick ornament. The height of the minarets is about 2 m; diameter of pillars – 7-8 m (in the lower part) [Atagarriyev, 1986, p.68-69]. The northern minaret is dated to the 11 century; the southern one – to the 13 century. An inscription with a name of Khorezmshah Mohammad (1200-1220) was discovered on the mosque’s portal. Remains of the foundations of another 4 mosques of the pre-Mongolian period (2 on shahristan and 2 on rabat) were found on the site.

There were also bath-houses and numerous water reservoirs in the town. As distinct from other medieval towns of the Central Asia, a lot of highly glazed pottery was discovered here. This pottery is of a great historical-cultural value; has inscriptions in verse on many vessels. In particular, there are fragments from “Shah-nameh” by the greatest medieval poet of the Orient Firdawsi [Atagarriyev, 1986, p.103-104].

It would be appropriate to recall that the Dehistan glazed pottery is close to the Iranian and Gorgan (Djurdjan) ones by its ornamental and graphic motifs. This is explained as being due to the fact that Dehistan, northern Atrek oases bordered by North-Western Iran, and Djurdjan (downstream river Gorgan) were a part of common state in the Middle Ages, as was during Gaznevides, Seljukides and Hulaguides. Thus, the political and economic community left its imprint on the cultural life of the medieval population of Dehistan and Gorgan.

As distinguished from towns of Khorasan with their predominantly mudbrick buildings, the baked brick had for thousands of years been used in the region when erecting not only public buildings but dwelling houses and fortresses as well [Historical-cultural..., 2000, p.118-119].

Thus, the Silk Road that traversed steppes, seas and deserts in the ancient and medieval periods played an imperative rule in establishing ties between peoples, contributed to the mutual enrichment of different cultures and civilizations. With its intermediate location between the West and the Far East, the Central Asia made its contribution to the development of the ties above. The Silk Road routes led from the central regions of China via the Central and Western Asia to the ports of the eastern littoral of the Mediterranean [Staviskiy, 1997, p.21].
Turkmenistan, with its territory having been used as the Silk Road in the ancient and medieval periods, served as a connecting link between the East and the West, Asia and Europe.