

DOI: 10.31857/S086919080012664-7

## ALEXANDER THE GREAT AND CHORASMIA

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**Abstract:** *The article discusses E.V. Rtveladze's idea about two kingdoms in the ancient Chorasmia in the time of Alexander the Great. E.V. Rtveladze after analyzing the reports of Arrian and Curtius Rufus about the Chorasmian embassy to Alexander, came to the conclusion that the sources dealt with two different embassies: the first was headed by Pharasmanes, the king of the western (left bank) Chorasmia, and arrived in Bactria in winter or early spring of 328 BC; and the second was sent by Phrataphernes, the king of the eastern (right bank) Chorasmia, and visited Alexander in Marakanda in summer of the same year. The authors suggest this conclusion was wrong and different royal names can be best explained by the assumption that by the time the embassy was sent, the ruler of the unified Chorasmia was Phrataphernes, who died while his son (and possibly co-ruler) Pharasmanes was in Marakanda, and after that Alexander recognized the right of Pharasmanes to the title of king. The long-term existence of Chorasmia – it became independent to the end of the 5th century BC – played the main role in Alexander's decision. Besides, material culture of Chorasmia does not give any reasons to suppose the existence of two different states there. In our opinion, these facts indicate the formation of a single centralized economic system throughout Chorasmia.*

**Keywords:** Chorasmia, Alexander, Pharasmanes, Phrataphernes.

**For citation:** Balakhvantsev A.S., Bolelov S.B. Alexander the Great and Chorasmia. *Vostok (Oriens)*. 2020. No. 6. Pp. 32–38. DOI: 10.31857/S086919080012664-7

In 2016 E.V. Rtveladze [Rtveladze, 2016, p. 343–349], after analyzing the reports of Arrian and Curtius Rufus about the Chorasmian embassy to Alexander the Great, came to the conclusion that the sources dealt with two different embassies: the first was headed by Pharasmanes, the king of the western (left bank) Chorasmia, this embassy arrived in Bactra in winter or early spring of 328 BC [Arr. Anab. IV. 15. 4, 7]; and the second was sent by Phrataphernes, the king of the eastern (right bank) Chorasmia, and visited Alexander in Marakanda in summer of the same year [Curt. VIII. 1. 8]. However, we suggest that this conclusion was wrong.

Firstly, to assess the accuracy of Arrian's data concerning the time and place of the arrival of the Chorasmian embassy to Alexander, the following facts must be taken into account. As A. Bosworth wrote, Arrian divides his narration about military events in Sogdia in 329 and 328 BC into two parts inserting between them a timeless excursus consecrated to Alexander's orientalism [Arr. Anab. IV. 7–14]. Arrian begins with the punishment of Bessus (winter of 329/8 BC), then jumps to the Cleitus affair (late summer of 328 BC) and ends with the Pages' Conspiracy (spring of 327 BC). Because of these rearrangements in the Arrian's narrative about the campaigns of Alexander in 328 BC there is a six months lacuna in which the summer of 328 BC almost disappeared, they also caused numerous doublets and inconsistencies [Bosworth, 1981, p. 29, 33].

Secondly, Arrian [*Arr. Anab.* IV. 15. 1–3, 5] and Curtius [*Curt.* VIII. 1. 7, 9–10] unanimously testify that at the same time when the Chorasmian mission arrived, Alexander was also visited by the second embassy of the European Scythians with his own envoys sent in summer of 329 BC. This allows us to conclude that both historians of Alexander reported about the same event.

Thirdly, it is unlikely that Chorasmia (especially, the left-bank one) felt an urgent need to send ambassadors to Alexander in winter of 329/8 BC when a significant part of Bactria and Sogdiana was up in revolt. Also, Alexander said to Pharasmanes that his mind was on India [*Arr. Anab.* IV. 15. 6], and these words could not be uttered at that time. The mission of Pharasmanes and Alexander's words correlate much better with the situation of the late summer of 328 BC, when the main centres of revolt were suppressed and Alexander himself after the capture of rock of Arimazes returned to Marakanda [*Curt.* VII. 11; VIII. 1. 7]. Exactly at that time Chorasmia could try to appease the victor as well as to use the Macedonian army against the Colchians<sup>1</sup>, while Alexander was already plotting an invasion of India. Judging by the fact that Alexander entrusted Pharasmanes to the satrap of Bactria Artabazus [*Arr. Anab.* IV. 15. 5], the embassy arrived before the resignation of the latter and the slaying of Cleitus, that is in August of 328 BC.

Fourthly, in the 4th–2nd centuries BC the ancient Chorasmian archeological complex which is characterized by the surprising uniformity of material culture was forming in the region of the lower reaches of the Amu Darya. It was the most evident in the standard modules used for manufacturing ceramics, as well as in the organization of handicraft industry: both were common to the entire region. At this period, certain objects and categories of artifacts that don't have even distant analogues in other regions of Central Asia appear on the territory of the whole Chorasmia. Such objects and artifacts included hemispherical flasks with reliefs on the flat side, household and package vessels with paintings on the external surface, certain types of diminutive vessels with characteristic décor [Bolelov, 2004, fig. 3/27], certain types of ceramic rhytons, etc. (fig. 1)<sup>2</sup>.

There is precise standardization of ceramics and uniformity of ceramic complex that attracts attention. Every vessel, such as table or household ceramics is characterized by specific set of discrete parametric and morphological indications that are distinctive only to this type of ceramics, and regardless from the area of the region where this vessel was found, and therefore manufactured. E.g., big jug-like vessels without handle, which were used as shipping containers, were manufactured using the specific modulus of volume, which, as it comes from the analysis of ceramic complex, was a constant for the whole territory of Chorasmia [Bolelov, 2004, p. 108–109].

In course of archeological research the data on organization of handicraft production on the territory of the whole region were also collected. In Chorasmia there can be distinguished several types of handicraft that are varying in level of organization. On the area of rural settlements it is fixed communal handicraft production – small workshops where a master worked to meet the daily needs of the inhabitants of the settlement. In the area of small oases – irrigation microdistricts – there were specialized craft workshops that functioned and most probably accomplished some orders during a specific period of time, e.g. during the harvest, and met needs in handicraft ceramics of several settlements' population within the oasis. In these centres apparently worked associations of artisans, including masters, apprentices and laborers [Bolelov, 2013, p. 29–44].

Besides, there were multifunctional artisans' settlements on the territory of the region, and in the north-western and western borders of the region, in the areas settled by the groups of cattle-breeding population there were large specialized handicraft potteries focused primarily on meeting needs of cattle-breeding and nomadic population in handicraft production [Bolelov,

<sup>1</sup>One note about the Colchians. In our opinion, the Pharasmanes' words along with the archaeological sources indicate the existence of the Caspian waterway, linking Chorasmia and Colchis on Oxus-Uzboi, Kura and Phasis-Rioni [Balakhvantsev, 2017, p. 129].

<sup>2</sup>Figure 1 is on the color plate.

2012, p. 487]. There is good reason to believe that specialized works also existed near religious centres. In any case, a pottery centre in the ancient settlement of Kiuzeli-g'ir<sup>3</sup> was situated on the territory of the left bank of Chorasmia, not far from Kalal'i-gir 2. Some potteries functioned in the nearest neighbourhood of Koi-kr'ilgan-kala.

Material culture of the region in this period of time is known by the excavations of several monuments situated both on the left bank (fig. 2) and on the right one (fig. 3) of the Amu Darya. First of all, this is two large religious centers – Koi-kr'ilgan-kala in right bank Chorasmia and Kalal'i-gir 2 in the left bank Chorasmia. In addition to that, the Chorasmian expedition conducted research of rural settlements and fortresses in the outlying districts of the oasis. On the territory of southern Chorasmia (the left bank of the Amu Darya) the excavations of cultural layers of antiquity were conducted on the territory of modern towns of Khiva and Khazarasp and also on the sites of ancient settlements of Toprak-kala (Shovot), Kaladzhik (Khiva). In Tuyamuyun kettle on the southern borders of the region the antique site of Kaparas and religious monument of Elkharas were explored.

As a result of all these investigations, considerable amount of archeological material was obtained and the Chorasmian culture of the early statehood period can be fully characterized on its basis.

The economics of the region was based on artificial irrigation. Traces of irrigation installations (main canals, agricultural and irrigation layouts) were fixed in the oases which water supply was based on the canals put from delta channels of the Amu Darya. On the right bank of the river it was the Kel'teminar and the canal of Gavhore, on the left one it was southern and middle Daudan. According to archaeological data, a high level of architectural engineering was recorded for that era, which is most clearly manifested in fortification works and monumental religious buildings. Based on the archaeological complex of the ancient Chorasmian period, there is reason to speak about a fairly high level of handicraft production, primarily pottery

The data obtained as a result of long-term archaeological research give reason to believe that in the last third of the 1st millennium BC, in the lower reaches of the Amu Darya, a single interconnected economic system was formed within the historical and cultural region. Geographical situation of Chorasmia played an important role in this process. Exactly at this period transcontinental trade route from Bactria to the Caspian Sea was finally formed, and on this route Chorasmia was the most important transit point. This is where the waterway from Uzboy to the Caspian sea began, as well as land branches from the main route: along the eastern gorge of Ustyurt, the caravan route went North to the territories where the Sarmatians roamed, along the low mountain range of Beltau, along the southern shore of the Aral sea, caravans moved to the sites of ancient settlements in the lower reaches of the Syr Darya (Chirik-Rabat archaeological culture) and further to the steppe regions of Eastern Kazakhstan and the Trans-Urals [Bolelov, 2017, p. 85–89].

Thus, in the last third of the 1st millennium BC (ancient Chorasmian period), very favorable socio-economic conditions for the formation of an early state emerged in the lower reaches of the Amu Darya. The basis of Chorasmia economics in this period was undoubtedly agriculture founded on artificial irrigation and outrun cattle-breeding in north-western outlying districts. The social basis consisted of free farmers who lived in open rural settlements, and professional artisans who met the needs of the population in tools and means of production. Reliably determined existence of written language common for all Chorasmia and findings of documents testify the presence of such social stratum as clerks-scribes, and existence of fortified settlements which, apparently, were the administrative centres of irrigation districts suggest the presence of state administration and, consequently, civil servants.

So, according to archeological data the structure of the united Chorasmian state can be reconstructed rather clearly. The borders of this state formation can be well-fixed by the fortresses built

<sup>3</sup> The same Cyrillic letters can sometimes be transliterated in different ways: *û* as *y*, *j* or *i* (like *u*); *ы* as *y* or *'i*; *ю* as *iu* or *yu* and *я* as *ya* or *ia*. Consequently, there are different transliterations of the same names in the literature. For example, Kalaly-gyr = Kalal'i-g'ir, Tuyamuyun = Tuiamiun, Koi-Kr'ilgan-kala = Koy-Krylgan-kala, etc.

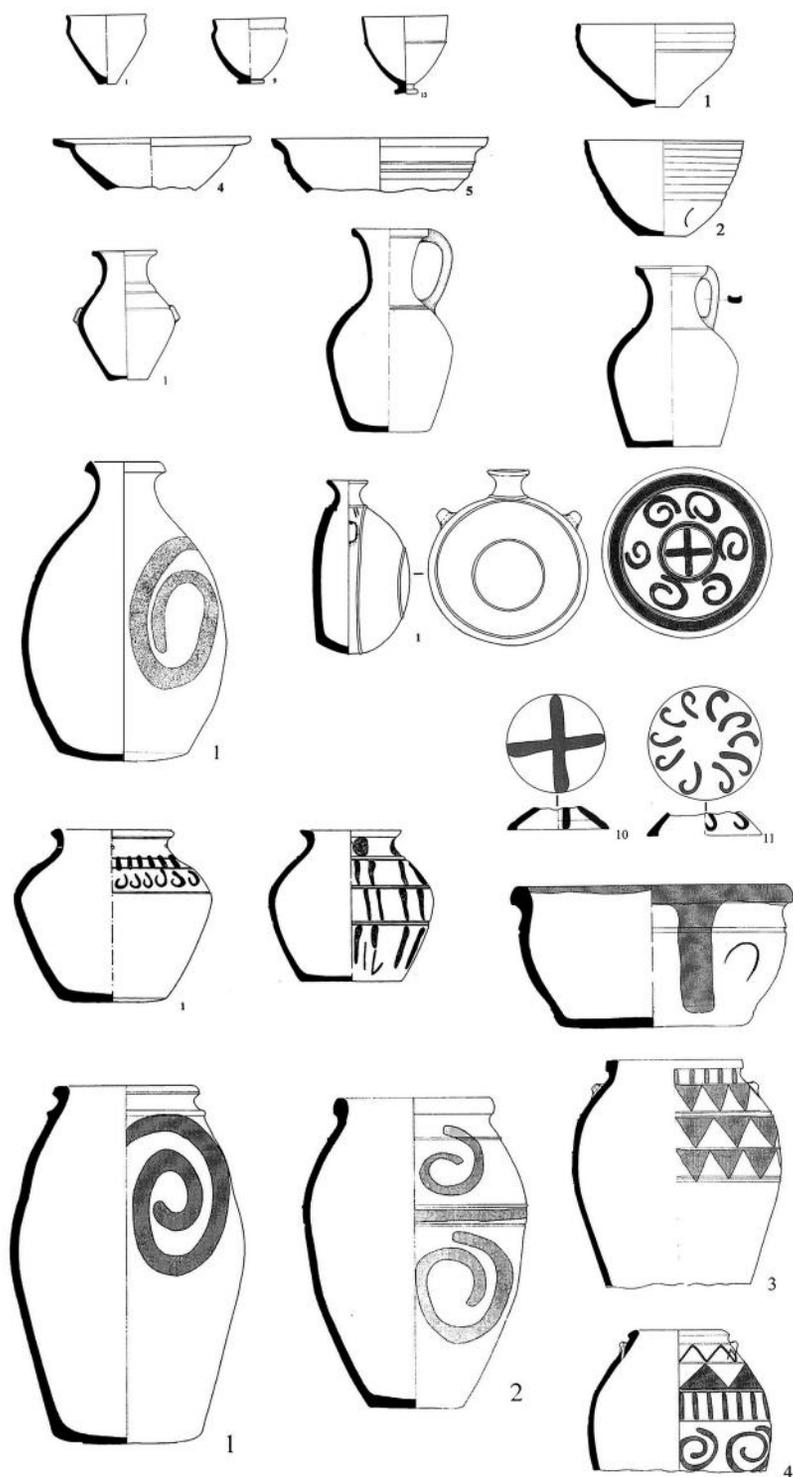


Fig. 2. Ceramic complex IV–II BC. Kalal'i-gir 2 (left bank Chorasmia)

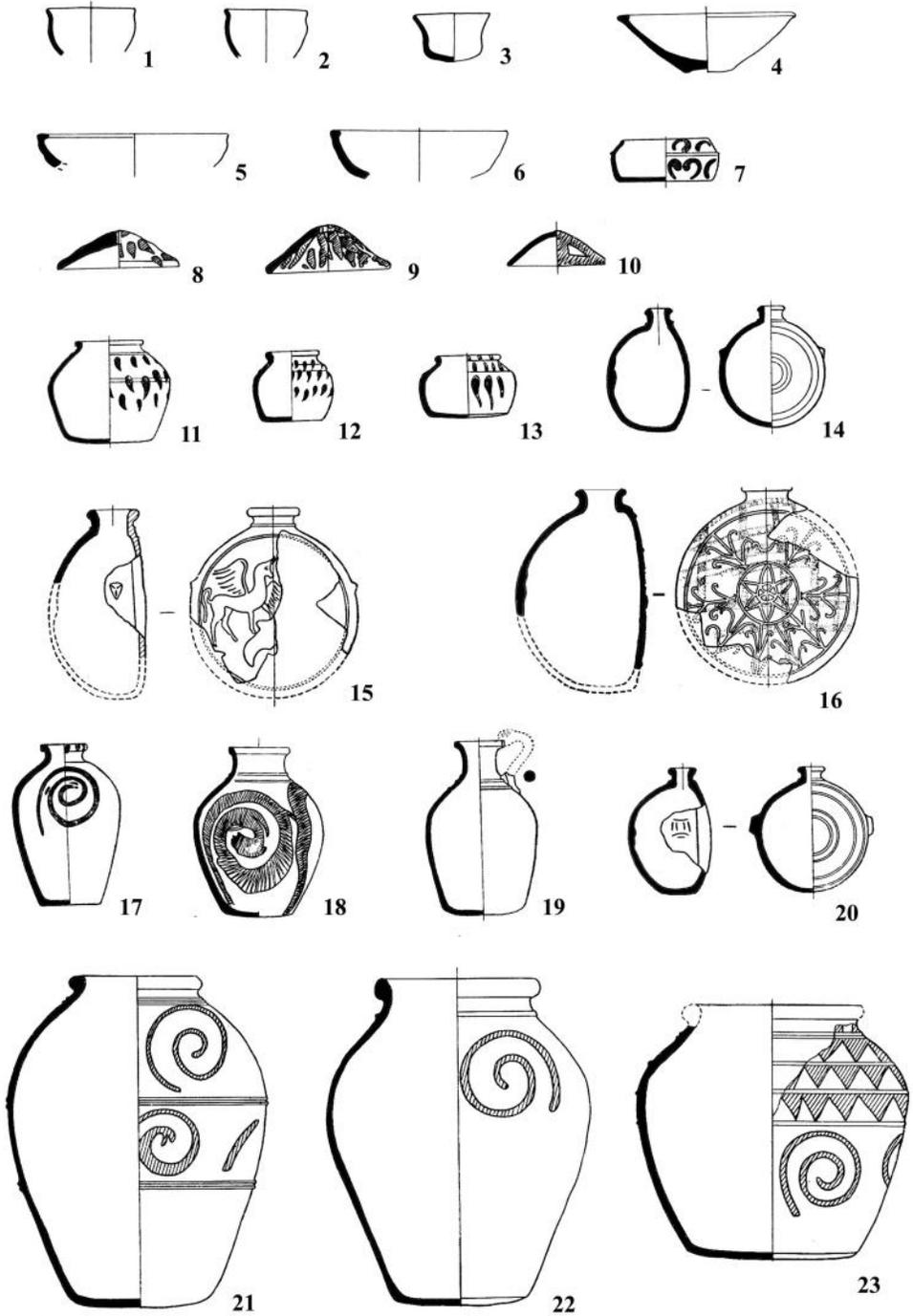


Fig. 3. Ceramic complex IV-II BC. Koi-kr'ilgan-kala (right-bank Chorasmia)

on the north-eastern (the right bank Chorasmia) and western (the left bank Chorasmia) frontiers of the state (fig. 4). It is very remarkable, that the building of all these fortresses is dated to the period not earlier than the beginning of 4th century BC, that is it is related to the initial stage of the formation of the new Chorasmian state.

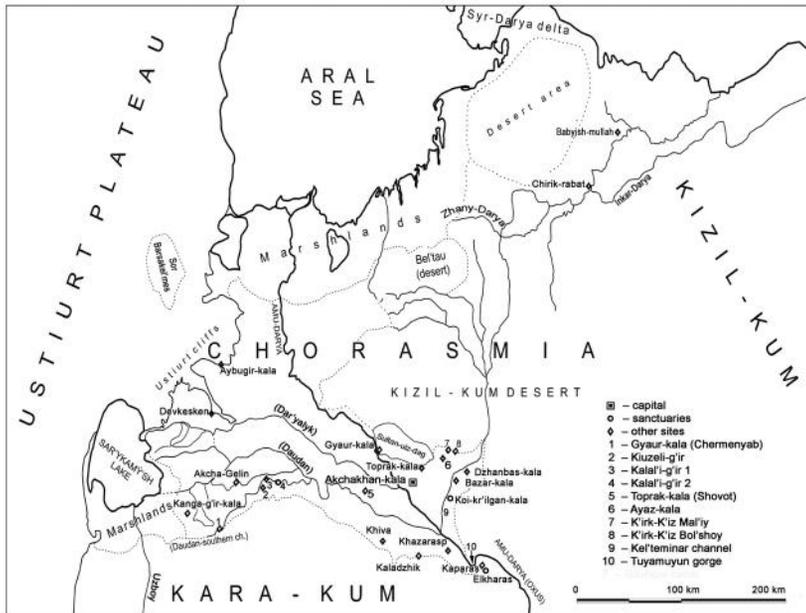


Fig. 4. Map of Chorasmia IV–II BC

We assume that unified socio-economic policies may be indicated by another fact. In the last third of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC, the main specialized centers of ceramic production as well as multifunctional handicraft settlements existed only in the left bank Chorasmia which was a zone of close cooperation between agricultural and pastoralist population. In the right bank Chorasmia, on the contrary, sites of this type and burial mound are not discovered. In all likelihood, these centers might be organized not only by economic reasons (to move the manufacturers closer to the trading areas) but also for socio-economic purposes, scilicet central government's protectionist policy towards pastoralist population which at that time seems to be incorporated into the Chorasmian state system [Vainberg, 1981, p. 121–129; Vainberg, Bolelov, 1999, p. 59–60].

Thus, material culture of Chorasmia does not give any reasons to suppose the existence of two different states there. In our opinion, these facts indicate the formation of a single centralized economic system throughout Chorasmia. The only major settlement that stands out for its size and its scale and wide scope of monumental construction among all monuments of antiquity and could very likely be the capital centre of Chorasmia at that time is Akchakhan-kala located on the right bank of the Amu Darya.

Different royal names used by Arrian and Curtius Rufus can be explained best of all by the assumption that by the time the embassy was sent, the ruler of the unified Chorasmia was Phrataphernes who died while his son (and possibly co-ruler) Pharasmanes was in Marakanda, and after that Alexander recognized the right of Pharasmanes to the title of king. The long-term existence of Chorasmia – it became independent to the end of 5th century BC – played the main role in Alexander's decision [Balakhvantsev, 2017, p. 130].

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Иллюстрации к статье А.С. Балахванцева и С.Б. Болелова



*Fig. 1. Ceremonial and ritual ceramics*

1– flask (Koi-kr'ilgan-kala); 2 – flask (Kalal'i-gir 2); 3 – flask (Kalal'i-gir 2); 4 – lid (Kalal'i-gir 2);  
5 – rhyton (Kalal'i-gir 2); 6 – rhyton (Kalal'i-gir 1)