

## **Bozok in the history of Deshti-Kipchak**

Fifteen years ago when the country was making preparations for the presentation of its new capital (the city of Astana) excavations in the medieval site of Bozok started. The settlement is located on the left-bank valley of the Ishim River, in the south-western outskirts of Astana. The monument is surrounded by swamp. Its ruins along and agricultural neighbourhood of more than 30 hectares extend over the eastern bank of Buzukty Lake. Archaeological works on this historical monument reveal most unknown pages of ancient and medieval history of the area between the Nura and Ishim Rivers.

There are three periods in the history of Bozok. The central part of the monument, which consisted of three blocks, appeared during the earliest times. Analysis of buildings in the northern block, constructions, shape and architecture of defensive fortifications show that this part of the settlement was erected in the early Middle Ages.

The site of Bozok was founded by Turkic-speaking tribes of Kipchaks approximately in the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries. Appearance of this ethnos in the steppes of Saryarka was connected with rapid political event which originated from Central Asia and related with the history of Turkic Kaganates. The most significant developments of the 200 years of the history of Turkic Kaganates (542-744) became known thanks to Chinese chronicles and ancient Turkic runic inscriptions. According to them, Kipchaks established an alliance with Turks and Uighurs. They repeatedly became leaders of Turkic Kaganates and defined historical destiny of mentioned steppe empires. Kipchak tribes entered the political arena of medieval Kazakhstan in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

However, the first Kipchaks could appear in the Irtysh area in the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century after the collapse of the Xueyantuo Kaganate in 646. Massive arrival of Kipchaks to the steppes of Kazakhstan happened after the defeat of the Second East-Turkic Kaganate in 744. This event finished the earliest history of Kipchaks which was related to the region of Central Asia. In the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century a new period of “finding the Motherland” began. Later it turned into political domination of Kipchaks in Eurasian steppes in the 10<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries. This process is impressed in the name of this area – Deshti-Kipchak. Bozok is one of the first Kipchak headquarters constructed with the aim to conquer Eurasian lands and make Saryarka the centre of the Kipchak Khanate.

The discovery of Bozok plays a significant role in the history of Astana. First of all, it is the evidence that more than thousand years ago this place was chosen to be an urban centre. It is also still holds its high status of the special sacral area.

Geostrategic factor played a crucial role in choosing the place for living. The site of Bozok is situated in the centre of Saryarka where the rivers of the northern Siberian (Ishim, Selety, Shiderty) and Central-Asian basins (Nura, Sarysu) meet. Moving along the Ishim River one could reach the taiga zone of Siberia. Latitudinal section of the Ishim River was a part of a main line which connected eastern and western regions of Eurasia. Numerous tributaries, which flowed into the Ishim River from south and north, created a lot of suitable branches of trade caravan routs. The upper part of the Ishim area was connected with the lands neighbouring the Aral Sea and agricultural oases of southern Kazakhstan and Central Asia through the Nura River.

Topography and layout of the monument has preserved elements of culture that were specific to the Turkic-speaking tribes and confirm the date of foundation of Bozok.

Medieval site of Bozok has unusual for Saryarka topography. Its location provided security and created opportunities for farming. Inhabitants of Bozok were farmers which is evidenced by well-thought system of irrigation constructions. In addition, fragments of millstones were found on the flood of their dwellings.

Architecture of the site of Bozok has preserved memory of heroic epoch of Turkic Kaganates in its unusual fortifications: internal ditch and external barrage. Such construction is an analog of princes' burial fences of the ancient Turkic ages. In the 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century in the territory of Mongolia the special burial "temples" were erected for noble Turks. Today they look like rectangular fences surrounded by internal ditch and external barrage. This is another fact which confirms the early date of emergence of the Kipchak headquarters near the Ishim River. "Ancient Turkic" memory of historical Motherland can be seen in topography, layout and architecture of this place.

The site of Bozok appeared in the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries and continued to be inhabited in the 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries. According to archaeological materials, at that time Kipchaks cleaned ditches, added clay to the internal grounds, constructed there houses using clay bricks and wood.

At the period of the Golden Horde and Kazakh Khanate ruins of the settlement obtained the status of pilgrimage site and became the sacral centre of the area between the Nura and Ishim rivers. By the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century the settlement was deserted. Probably, it was connected with the military campaign of Mongols. Houses and central grounds were abandoned. Ruins of walls and buildings turned into the place where mausoleums and burial constructions were erected.

Nowadays Bozok is located within urban area. According to the general plan of Astana, external bypass of the capital goes behind Byzykty Lake. The territory of ancient settlement is at the main axis of Astana nicely fit the architecture of the city: the past (Bozok), the present (central square with the presidential palace Ak-Orda), and the future (University campus).

Very likely, it is not occasionally that location of the settlement became symbolic on the modern map as well. It is situated in the centre of eastern part of Eurasian region which played a crucial role in choosing the place for living by our ancestors.

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