



ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Beyond "Little Mesopotamia": Rethinking Water Management and Power Dynamics in Ancient Central Asia

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Abstract

In his book, K. Wittfogel explored the connections between social complexity and water. While much of his theory has since been challenged, the intricate relationship between water and power remains a subject of debate. In recent decades, water management has garnered significant attention, with studies employing remote sensing and geoarchaeological methods, particularly in arid regions. Notably, Turkmenistan is home to the vast Karakum Desert. This region witnessed the rise of Chalcolithic societies along the Kopet Dag and the development of Bronze Age communities along the Murghab alluvial fan (the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex-BMAC). Despite its critical importance, the water system in this region has been far less studied than those in areas like Mesopotamia. Likewise, interpretations of Central Asia's hydraulic and agricultural systems, along with the region's water-power dynamics, have often been labeled as a "little Mesopotamia" (Kohl 1984). This paper seeks to challenge this notion by comparing water systems from southern Turkmenistan (Geoksyur oases) dated to Chalcolithic period with new archaeological and geoarchaeological data on the hydraulic systems of the Murghab region from the Bronze Age. The emerging picture reveals a unique model, characterized by an absence of water-related propaganda and a careful balance between labor force efficiency and available technologies.

Keywords

water management, central asia, turkmenistan, bronze age, Chalcolithic

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