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Masson, G. A. Pugachenkova, O. I. Smirnova, S. K. Kabanov, and Z. I. Usmonova [1]. Through the analysis of written sources and numismatic materials, they have advanced various scholarly views on the process by which Kesh-Shahrisabz took shape. The question of where the historical center of Kesh was located remains a matter of scholarly debate to this day. According to M. Ye. Masson and G. A. Pugachenkova, the settlement at present-day Shahrisabz acquired city status only in the periods after the 12th century [2]. S. K. Kabanov, by contrast, asserts that Shahrisabz had already formed as a city in the 9th–10th centuries [6]. As scholars note, Kesh began to take shape during antiquity and the early Middle Ages on the right bank of the Oqsuv, at the site of present-day Kitob, and by the mid-7th century it became the center of Sogd (the Kashkadarya and Zarafshan oases). Relying on the dense population of Kitob in the early Middle Ages, M. Ye. Masson firmly argued that the center of Kesh was located precisely at the site of Kitob [3]. Archaeological investigations carried out in the 1980s within the historical center of Shahrisabz shed light on this question. Near the southwestern corner of the city's fortress wall, a cultural layer approximately 200 m long and 2.5 m thick was identified, along with similar early-medieval cultural layers in the area north of the Oqsaroy monument and around Chorsu in the city center. At Balandtepa (Zindontepa), Qalqontepa, and a number of other monuments along the city's boundary, numerous finds of the same period have likewise been recorded. These examples of material culture evoke the image of a large settlement with a complex urban structure, resembling the central Kesh mentioned in the Chinese written sources ("Beishi"). Numismatic materials also confirm the status of Shahrisabz as a city. In excavations within the territory of Shahrisabz, five coins minted by the Kesh ruler Akhurpat were found. O. I. Smirnova, who studied these finds, drew on the sources of Chinese and Arab historians to construct an approximate chronological table of the reigns of the



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Kesh rulers of the 7th–8th centuries, and demonstrated that the coins were in circulation and used in trade [4]. V. A. Livshits, having deciphered the Sogdian inscriptions on the coins, established that they bear the phrase "ruler of Kesh" [8]. A noteworthy fact is that no coins bearing the "ruler of Kesh" inscription have been found in the territory of Kitob. This substantiates the view that it was precisely Shahrisabz that functioned as a large trading city based on coin circulation, whereas in the territory of Kitob (at the site of the bek's citadel) settlements such as a dehqan (landed nobility) palace may have operated.

According to the research of Z. I. Usmonova, the earliest settlement of Barknon existed in the 5th–6th centuries at the site of present-day Shahrisabz, and the early city began to rise at the site of the Balandtepa (Zindontepa) ruins, located 300 m north of the historical center [7]. In this territory, as early as the early Middle Ages, a local ruler built a fortified palace and a Zoroastrian temple. Even until the 19th century, some members of the local population held fire-worship rituals here and organized public festivals each year on Navruz. The city's territory expanded considerably in the 7th–8th centuries and became an important center of trade and crafts in the 9th–10th centuries. Thus, Kesh — which for a time stood at the level of the center of Sogd — already existed in the territory of Shahrisabz in the 6th–7th centuries and developed further in later periods. M. Ye. Masson recorded that at the site of Zindontepa there had existed a house-fortress on a high foundation dating to the 6th–8th centuries; the present height of the monument is 15–20 m [3]. According to oral accounts, a city prison (*zindon*) operated at the site of the mound in the 14th–15th centuries, which is why the monument acquired the name Zindontepa. The analysis of the archaeological and written sources studied shows that the historical region in the eastern Kashkadarya oasis and its center bore different names in each historical period: Gava Suguda in the 9th–8th centuries BCE, Nautaka in the 7th–4th centuries BCE, and Kesh in the



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6th–15th centuries CE. As the oasis's earliest center, the Uzunqir monument took shape in the 8th century BCE and developed until the 3rd century BCE; subsequently, the city's life continued in connection with the Kitob-Shahrisabz territory. Thus, the integration of written sources, numismatic materials, and archaeological evidence substantiates the conclusion that the period of historical development of the city of Nautaka–Kesh–Shahrisabz spans at least 2,700 years. This conclusion is also consistent with the fact that, in folklore connected with the history of Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, Termez, and Merv, the Shahrisabz-Kitob oasis is recognized as an ancient urban center.

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