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# THE ROLE OF TIMUR AND THE TIMURIDS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARCHITECTURE OF CENTRAL ASIA

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## Abstract

This paper examines the role of Amir Temur and the Timurids in the formation of Central Asian architecture. It reveals the features of the construction culture using examples of civil and religious architecture.

**Keywords:** Amir Temur, Timurids, monumental structures, civil structures, imperial style, khonakokh, gurkhana, tim.

Wonders are many on earth,  
and the greatest of these is man.

**Sophocles**

## Introduction

Architecture is influenced by various factors such as politics, economics, religion, climate, social norms, and the environment. Aesthetic canons of a particular era also have an impact on architectural development. Often, in history, the fame is attributed not to the architects, but to the rulers who surrounded themselves with talented masters of their time. The human factor, embodied by the ruler and the nobility, played a crucial role in the development of architecture. This can be observed in the architecture of Central Asia and in examples from the world history of architecture. The character of the ruler, his attitude, and his tastes were reflected in the architectural style of a



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particular era. Architecture always personifies the time and bears witness to the development of a particular society.

During the era of Timur and the Timurids, the architecture was a significant aspect of their political activity. They were great patrons of the arts, including monumental ones. They developed and improved streets and created architectural works that were meant to be more splendid than anything created in the conquered countries. Under the Timurids, Samarkand and Herat became the main centers of Transoxiana and Khorasan, respectively. The construction of monumental structures involved not only architects, who combined the qualities of a designer, construction manager, and direct executor, but also markers, plasterers, masters of artistic ornament, brick makers, masters of making tiles, stonemasons, ganch and marble carvers, alabaster burners, and more. [1, p. 73].

Amir Timur was a skilled strategist and organizer, and the greatest commander in Asia. His biographer, Sharaf ad-Din Ali Yezdi, referred to him as Sakhibkiran - the owner of the star of the highest happiness, Humayun - the brightest, and 'Kamkori oftob davlatiturk' - the powerful sun of the Turkic state. His reign was marked by a fascination with grandiose, monumental structures that expressed the ideology of the ruling classes and symbolized the triumph of the military-bureaucratic aristocracy. He not only initiated significant conquests but was also the primary participant in the construction of numerous monumental structures, not only in Samarkand but also in Shakhrysb, which became the second capital of the state and a summer residence. In 1370, reconstruction of Shakhrysb began under his leadership. According to Sharafiddin, Timur "ordered to found a citadel (kala) and a city wall (khisar) of Samarkand and erect majestic buildings." [4, p. 31] The emir of Ak Buga was entrusted with overseeing the general construction work, for which a substantial amount of funds was allocated. Although Timur held a high regard for practical sciences such as medicine, astronomy, and mathematics, architecture was his main area of interest.

The most characteristic feature of Timur's architecture, according to R.G. Muradov, was "the pomp of the imperial style of hypertrophied structures expressing the political ambitions and megalomania of the ruler" [5, 142]. Timur's reign contributed to the formation of the synthetic style of architecture, which was created by captive artisans and craftsmen brought to Samarkand from Azerbaijan, India (1398), Iran (1387), Iraq, Baghdad, and Turkey (1400). Persian craftsmen played a pivotal role in the construction of the mausoleum of Khoja Ahmad Yassawi, with Khoja Hasan and Shams Abd-al-Wahab from Shiraz laying out the tiles, and Izz-ed-Din from Isfahan inlaying with silver.



[6, p. 6]. Azerbaijani architects made a significant contribution to the architecture of their time. However, their talent was not lost but blended perfectly with the masterpieces of Central Asian architecture. Their names are still remembered and immortalized on the buildings themselves, such as the architect-calligrapher Sheikh Muhammad ibn Khojabek Tabrizi, whose name is imprinted on the portal of the Tuman-aka mausoleum. Muhammad Yusif Tabrizi's name is also found in the Ak-Saray Palace in Shakhrisabz. According to Ibn Arabshah, Amir Timur ordered the construction of a structure in Samarkand similar to what he saw in India, faced with white marble plates, dotted with elegant carvings [8, c. 314]. Although there were local masons in Samarkand, stone processing specialists were brought from India. According to Bobur's memoirs, Timur built a cathedral mosque made of stone "near the Akhanin gate, inside the fortress. Most of the stonemasons who worked there were brought from Hindustan" [9, p. 60]. The number of masons from Azerbaijan who worked on the construction of the porticoes of the mosque is also known [10, p. 68]. During the construction of the Bibi-Khanum mosque, many stonemasons from the local population extracted stone blocks from the mountains of Zarafshan. Gray-blue marble mined at the Amarkutan deposit near Samarkand was used as cladding for the panels of the mosque, for the portal with stone and decorative arches depicting stylized cypress trees, as well as for relief carvings. It is worth noting that the marble portal collapsed during the earthquake of 1897. Samarkand stonemasons have long been considered the best in Transoxiana.

The architectural traditions laid down by Amir Timur were continued by the next generation of Timurids, which can be seen not only in Samarkand, but also in Herat, Isfahan, Kabul, etc. "Central Asia, which was influenced by neighboring civilizations, not only formed advanced examples of its own culture, but also dynamically spread them among the highly-experienced peoples of the west and south, thereby earning their respectful recognition" [11, p. 10]. Ulugbek also paid attention to the development of architecture and continued the development of the center of the capital - Samarkand. During his reign (1409-1449) and by his order, Registan Square was formed; it consisted of a madrasah, a khonakoh, a caravanserai of Mirzoya (bequeathed as a waqf to the Registan madrasah of the ruler), the Alike Kukeltash mosque and the Juma mosque of Muqatta. The Juma Mosque had a vast courtyard and numbered up to 280 columns on marble bases. Among the Samarkand khonakohs, the khonakoh built by Ulugbek on the Registan was especially famous, its dome, according to Babur, was one of the largest in the world [12, p. 131]. Although there is no data on the architecture of this structure, according to M.E. Masson, the khonakoh was not a mirror image of the madrasah



located opposite: “both in terms of the front facade and area, the khonakoh occupied less space than the mentioned above religious structure” [13, p. 78]. According to G.A. Pugachenkova, the dome on the drum was the main element of the three-dimensional composition of the khonakoh.

According to Bobur, the Muqatta Mosque (“Carved Mosque”) was an elegant, intimate-aristocratic building located south of the Ulugbek madrasah. In its decorative design, the walls and roof were decorated with a light set of individual wooden pieces - kuta-kuta with the “islimi” and “hitoi” motifs, which gave the name to this mosque. Ulugbek Madrasah (56x81 m), planned by him in the 2nd decade of the 15th century to the west of Tuman-oko tim, “from the outside was covered with a panel of marble slabs,” in which the mosaic inscription on the portal stated that “the founder of this building of science is the great sultan, the son of the sultan, the satisfyer of peace and faith, Ulugbek Guragan” [14, p. 4]. Ulugbek Madrasah, in the presence of traditional elements for this type of structure (a square courtyard surrounded by 2-story hudjras, an oblong mosque and domed darshona), differed from nearby madrasahs in the lightness of its architectural forms and a special selection of colors in the architectural ornament. Light, slender (once 2-link) minarets with spiral-shaped ornamentation were also a special feature of this madrasah.

It should be noted that the sovereigns and princes paid great attention to the construction of civil structures - bridges and baths, which brought in a certain income. Their opening was celebrated as a festive event with the invitation of honored guests. Thus, Ulugbek built baths to the west of Registan, called “Hammomi Mirzoi” [15, p. 44]. They were distinguished by the use of different types of stone as floor coverings and, according to Bobur, “there were no others like them either in Samarkand or even in Khorasan” [3, p. 69]. There are known baths built by Muhammad Sultan (grandson of Amir Timur) in the south-western part of Samarkand in the bazaar named after him, as well as by Khalil Sultan (who seized the throne in 1405) in the Muhammad Qasim bazaar. The bridges erected under Ulugbek are also known - the Bridge of Prince Abdullah and the Mirza Bridge, spanning the Siab River.

Under Ulugbek, the formation of the Shakhi-Zinda ensemble, called in the 15th century “Mazar-Shah” was completed: a presentable front entrance group, a 2-domed spectacular tomb of the “Mother of the Sultan” (known as the mausoleum of Kazi-zade Rumi), a two-way approach to the Shahi-Zinda complex were erected; these structures “were part of the grandiose state project of the ruler, associated with the construction of the observatory” (the main entrance of the complex served as a place of worship for



astronomers and mathematicians on the way to the observatory). [16, p. 225]. It was under Ulugbek in the 30s of the 15th century that an original architectural and planning composition was created, and the entrance portal - chortak, was built on behalf of the young son Abdulaziz. The entrance complex also included a darvazakhona, a winter mosque and a bathhouse for winter ablutions. From the mausoleum of the "Mother of the Sultan" (Timur's nurse Uljay Inaga and her daughter Bibi-Seneb) the overview of the ensemble begins, and the tomb itself was 2-chambered and differed from the surrounding buildings in height (24 m) and in the decorative style characteristic of the Ulugbek era, "combining grace and severity" [16, p. 229]. The way of thinking of the great enlightener also left its mark on the development of architecture and decor, "which did not allow wastefulness, overflowing pomp, excessive abundance of colors and gilding" [18, p. 125]. The decor lacks a bright color (a blue line on white ground), a colored background (the ornament was placed on a white background), and occasional use of gilding. In general, the architecture erected under the reign of Ulugbek was distinguished by a new style, characterized by more advanced engineering designs (double domes on high cylindrical drums, an original crypt in plan behind the "Nameless"-2 mausoleum), more elegant, even strict decorative designs (for example, a geometric blue pattern with stars, ovals, diamonds with lace of stylized floral patterns in the mausoleum of the "Mother of the Sultan" or marble slabs in the Ulugbek madrasah, inlaid with blue tiles), new creative ideas when using traditional patterns (arrangement of platform terraces with short stepped transitions to Shahi-Zinda, frontal turn of the main facade in the Kok-Gumbaz mosque).

Ulugbek continued the traditions of Amir Timur in constructing gardens, as evidenced by the Bagcha country garden, fed by water from the Obi-Rakhmat ditch, and Bag-i-Maidan and Bag-i Jehan-namo. Bobur writes about the Bagcha Garden: "There he built an ivan, a huge stone throne was built on the ivan... This garden also has a gazebo, the entire lower part of its wall was made of porcelain, it was called Chini-khana." This garden, the construction of which began under Timur and continued by Ulugbek, was of an intimate nature and was built in the large Baghi-Maidan garden. According to historians, during the looting, "mosaic paintings ordered from China were...knocked off the walls of Chini Khana, the rich gilding of the hall was scratched" [3, p. 77]. Chilsutun Palace was a compact structure, decorated on 4 sides with tower-like structures with spiral staircases and the presence of an open hall with a wraparound terrace on the top floor.





During this period, there was a tradition of erecting monumental structures during the lifetime of rulers. Thus, Ulugbek, on behalf of his young son Abdullah, built a madrasah of the same name at the felt bazaar in Samarkand, and on behalf of his father Shahrukh, the Kok-Gumbaz mosque: in 1437, “he ordered the construction of a mausoleum (meaning Gumbazi-Saidon), called “Avlad al-Mubarak" (Blessed Descendants), Great Sultan...Ulugbek Kuragan" [19, p. 126]. This inscription was found on the frieze of this monument. This mosque was part of the planning complex erected by Ulugbek in Shakhriyabz, which consisted of 2 mausoleums and the Dorut Tilyavat madrasah, in which “the mutual interconnection of buildings, their location and scale were subordinated to a single architectural and planning idea.” [4, p. 83] The mosque, which consisted of a central volume completed by a double dome, was distinguished by a non-standard compositional solution in the form of 2 wings of a summer mosque, adjacent to the main volume and forming a frontal composition.

Also noteworthy is the construction of the Observatory (where Ulugbek wrote the “Gurgan Tables”), a huge astronomical instrument built in 1424 on the bank of the Obi-Rakhmat (“Water of Mercy”) ditch according to Ulugbek’s design, during the creation of which “the entire constructive scheme and the general architectural design was entirely subordinated to the functional task” [20, p. 41]. The observatory during the time when Alisher Navoi was in Samarkand was still decorated with tiles (with black bricks), and in the interior, there were images of the celestial spheres, seven planets, stars, and astronomical drawings.

It should be noted that women of Amir Timur’s family were also engaged in construction activities, among whom Sarai-Mulk-khanym and Tuman-oko, the commander’s wives, and Shahrukh’s wife Gauhar-Shad and Abu-Said Habib-Sultan-begim’s wife should be mentioned. For example, by order of Sarai-Mulk-Khanym (with her own income), the Madrasai Khonim madrasah (which existed until the 17th century), distinguished by its monumentality and pomp, was built in Samarkand for charitable purposes [21]. In the southern corner of the madrasah, the Bibi-Khanym mausoleum was built, with interesting wall paintings of a landscape nature. Gauhar-Shad, the daughter of Emir Giyasiddin Tarkhan from the famous Jagatai family, like Tamerlane’s wife, strongly supported the servants of science and art, building up the capital of Khorasan - Herat and its surroundings (for example, Kuhsan, 100 km from the capital), with new buildings. She was active in not only political life, but also conducted creative activities. An extraordinary woman of her era, with a subtle artistic taste, she was an active organizer of state construction work, attracting the best architects and masters of their



craft, headed by the brilliant Qavam-addin Shirazi, who was entrusted with the construction of the Gauhar-Shad mausoleum in Kukhsan [22, p.134]. (He was also the architect of the ensemble consisting of the madrasah and musalla Gauhar Shad in Herat). It was a multi-room structure consisting of a gurkhana (tomb) on the main axis, a room for commemoration and a mosque. The complex was distinguished by a free layout, integrity of the composition, and the octagonal shape of the gurkhan's plan both outside and inside, which was the main dominant feature of the entire ensemble. In addition, the mausoleum used a new system in organizing the space under the dome in the form of intersecting girth arches and shield-shaped sails formed by it. In general, the architectural school of Khorasan of the 15th century, which was an innovative phenomenon, was associated with the name of this royal person: "The Gauhar-Shad school is solemn and brilliant, full of radiance and beauty, it is majestic, its creations surpass all other buildings of Herat in sophistication and harmony", wrote Hondemir [23, p. 18] at the beginning of the 16th century. On her initiative, a mosque was built at the tomb of Imam Riza in Mashhad (1418-1419), a ceremonial complex of madrassas and a musallah mosque in Herat (1418-1438).

Tuman-oko (Temur's wife) built several buildings, including a khonakoh, (located outside hissar) and quite a spacious one (Amir Timur himself sometimes stayed there), named after her, tim Timi-kulyakh-furushan in the shopping arcade on Samarkand Square, "it is a vast closed building with brick abutments, brick pillars supporting arches and domes, between which there were benches and counters" [24, p. 301]. It was bequeathed to the waqf of the above-mentioned khonakoh. It is also known that the mausoleum and funeral mosque (1405) were built on her initiative in the middle group of the Shahi-Zinda complex, in which Iranian masters took part, as evidenced by the mosaic inscription indicating the name of the master - Sheikh Muhammad Khoja Bendkari from Tabriz [25, p. 130]. This mausoleum differed from nearby monuments in its high drum, and decor - kashin mosaics (whereas in other buildings the decor was in the form of carved terracotta and majolica) and blue-on-white paintings in the interior depicting trees and bushes (like miniatures of the Shiraz school). The construction of a large khonakoh in Samarkand (located outside the city fortifications), in which Amir Timur himself stayed in 1399 after returning from India, is also known.

Architecture has always been a reflection of political reforms and, as history shows, during the period of state upsurge, "there is a desire to build forever, sparing no effort" [26]. This article is only part of a larger study on the role of the Timurids in the development of architecture in Central Asia. Here, greater emphasis is placed on the



role not of Amir Timur himself, but of his loved ones and relatives, for whom architecture was, to some extent, one of the significant symbols of power and might.

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