

Formation and Division of Residential Buildings in the Centers of the Historic Cities of Samarkand

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Abstract: This article analyzes the process of formation and territorial division of residential buildings in the historical centers of Samarkand. Samarkand is a city with a long history, whose residential architecture and territorial structure have developed under cultural, social, and economic influences. The article highlights the planning of city centers in ancient and medieval periods, the significance of local traditions and urbanization processes, as well as modern urban planning experiences. Additionally, it examines the socio-economic aspects of residential areas and the challenges of preserving historical heritage.

Keywords: Kohandiz, Rabot, Shahri Berun, Shahri Darun, Koktepa Monument, Glazed Tile, Majolica, Panjikent.

Introduction

During the Early Middle Ages (5th-8th centuries), ancient Samarkand, Panjikent, and Kushaniya were among the most famous cities of Sogdiana. According to Arab travelers, historians, and geographers, most cities in Central Asia during this period consisted of three main parts: the citadel (Kohandiz) serving as the ruler's residence, the main urban area (Shahristan) which included trade and craft markets along with public and residential buildings, and the outer trade and craft zone (Rabot). However, research on 7th-8th century cities indicates that many of them were composed of only two parts—an ark (fortress) and a shahristan. In the 630s AD, the Chinese monk Xuanzang, who traveled through Samarkand, reported that the city wall had a perimeter of approximately 20 meters, with a total length of about 10 kilometers, comparable in size to Marakanda during the time of Alexander the Great. Researcher M. Pachos suggested that during early feudalism, Samarkand's construction followed a three-part model. The citadel was situated along the Siyob irrigation canal, encircled by a 1.5 km-long defensive wall. The second part, located south of the citadel, comprised noble residences and public buildings, while the third part, Rabot, lay outside the fortress walls without additional defenses.

Methodology

By the 6th century, the city expanded southward and was enclosed by a second defensive wall. Urban development followed the irrigation network, a characteristic also observed in Balkh and

Termez. The presence of Zoroastrian and Buddhist religious structures, such as fire temples and sanctuaries, indicates the coexistence of multiple religious traditions. The archaeological site of Afrasiab, covering 230 hectares, contains significant remains from the 5th-6th centuries, including the so-called "Palace Complex" and the "District of Noble Families." During the Timurid era, residential architecture evolved, but no complete examples of medieval houses have survived. However, illustrations in manuscripts, archaeological findings, and historical accounts provide insight into urban dwellings. These houses were typically courtyard-centered, built using mudbrick and wooden elements, with intricate ganch (plaster) decorations. Affluent residences featured multiple floors, balconies, and garden courtyards with fountains. Excavations in Afrasiab revealed luxurious palaces from the Samanid period (10th century), characterized by elegant ganch relief decorations. Residences of Samarkand's elite were no less impressive than royal palaces. In the city's southwestern part, a residential structure with intricately decorated guest rooms and domed ceilings was discovered, further proving the sophistication of architectural craftsmanship. By the 9th-10th centuries, Samarkand flourished as a major economic and cultural center, positioned at the crossroads of important trade routes. The urban structure was redefined under Amir Timur (Tamerlane), who, between 1371-1373, built his citadel in the highest part of the city and restored Samarkand's defensive walls. By the early 15th century, the city had gained a reputation as "Samarqandi Firdavsm'onand" (Paradise-like Samarkand), renowned for its grand monuments, public squares, and gardens. Timur named many surrounding villages after famous cities such as Damascus, Cairo, and Shiraz to emphasize Samarkand's superiority. According to historian Hafiz Abrū, when Timur conquered Samarkand, the city was largely constructed of mudbrick and wood, but he replaced these structures with baked brick buildings adorned with elaborate tilework.

Results and discussion

Timurid cities, including Samarkand, Shahrizabz, and Herat, featured fortified walls with evenly spaced towers and multiple gates. The city structure was defined by its citadel (ark), defensive perimeter (hisar), and central trading district. Covered bazaars (chorsu) were located at major intersections, while religious and civic buildings played a crucial role in city life. According to historian M.Q. Ahmedov, neighborhoods were organized based on craftsmanship, creating distinct guild-based districts. The renowned scholar G.A. Pugachenkova described Timurid urban planning as a reflection of state power: "The citadels symbolized the strength of the state, palaces embodied authority and grandeur, religious structures showcased Islamic culture, and marketplaces represented economic prosperity. Dense residential areas and districts formed the body and lifeblood of the city." Samarkand's urban development dates back to the first millennium BCE, with Afrasiab as its primary settlement. By the medieval period, the city had expanded into distinct districts—Shahri Darun (Inner City) and Shahri Berun (Outer City). Following the Mongol invasion in 1219, the city's infrastructure deteriorated, and the irrigation systems collapsed, leading to a period of decline. However, by the late 13th century, Samarkand began to recover, expanding southward beyond the original Afrasiab settlement. The Koktepa archaeological site, located 30 km north of Samarkand, is considered one of the earliest urban centers of Sogdiana. Excavations revealed four construction phases, dating from the 9th-8th centuries BCE. Artifacts, including ceramic molds, agricultural tools, and metalworking remnants, suggest that the inhabitants engaged in farming and metallurgy. Researchers believe Koktepa could have been the "Basileia" (royal city) mentioned by ancient authors.

Conclusion

Samarkand's historical city centers reflect a complex evolution influenced by geographical, economic, and cultural factors. The organization of residential buildings and territorial divisions transformed over centuries, adapting to changing political and economic conditions. Urban planning strategies from the early medieval to the Timurid era highlight the city's architectural advancements and strategic significance. The preservation of historical sites remains a challenge,

requiring sustainable urban planning and conservation efforts to protect Samarkand's architectural heritage for future generations.

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