

History of Timurid architecture in second half of 14th and 15th Century In Khorasan and Transoxiana

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Abstract: Timurid architecture, in many aspects, is impressed by Seljuq to Ilkhan architecture, which is viewed by the experts as normal substitute of Ilkhan architecture. In this paper, by use of historical evidences and monuments remained from Timurid dynasty and mentioning significant initiations of this period; it is suggested that the developed Timurid architecture differs from Ilkhan one from the type point of view, grade and rank. Also, the role of Timur in creating the new style of 'Timurid architecture' is identified and its features are classified in order to draw a distinction between Timurid architecture and previous styles. Here, the effects of Timurid style architecture on the architecture in next eras have also been studied. Timurid dynasty as an important part of the history of architecture due to its current geographical extent and political borders has less been studied by the researchers, since historical buildings of Timurid dynasty are located in a variety of countries such as Iran, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, where are hard to access. This paper, by presenting introducing historical evidences, identifies the style and characteristics of Timurid architecture and will expose it to be criticized further by the experts.

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INTRODUCTION

Timurid architecture is usually thought of as an achievement of Iranian architects delegated to Transoxiana (*Mawarannahr*). For example, Timurid buildings in Herat (Afghanistan) have many similarities to those in Khorasan (Iran). The major Timurid architectural style emerged within a triangle of three cities; Mashhad, Samarkand and Herat. Emphasis on maximum greatest, attention to variety both in- and outdoor, logical and proportionate design, introduction of new types of domes and arches, and richness of color decorations are important features of Timurid architecture style, which originated from Iran and fruited in Central Asia. Architecture of 15th century in Central Asia, known by researchers 'consensus as the climax of Islamic architecture in the region, has an inseparable link to Timurid clan. For better understanding of Timurid architecture, it would better consider the geographical scope of study as vast as possible. Current political borders between Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia (in the former Soviet Union) are a great obstacle to reaching an accurate understanding of the situation of Timurid architecture. For this reason, perhaps it would be better to use a composite term: 'Iranian world'. It should be borne in mind that Khorasan borders in middle centuries were far beyond present eastern borders of Iran and it covered many parts of Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Timurid era was a brilliant period from the viewpoint of national cultural and artistic development. In particular, a large number of monuments were created in architecture and associated arts, and innovations were made in order to uplift the art of this country. Timur was a cruel man, but since he visited other countries during his wars, he got

familiar with their architecture and certain arts and tried to find a social and cultural reputation for himself, thus he commanded to separate artists and professionals from prisoners of war and sent them to his centers of government such as Samarkand and other adjacent areas to produce artistic monuments and artifacts. On one hand, this resulted in architectural development, and some scientific experiences were expanded on the other.

PROBLEM EXPRESSION AND METHODOLOGY

In the present paper, a historical base research methodology was carried out. In this method, all materials are prepared by referring to historical texts, old historians' books and ancient documents on historical buildings and monuments, and conclusions are made based on analysis of historical texts and remaining monuments leading to answers to requested questions.

By establishing a comparison between Timurid architecture and its predecessor, i.e. Ilkhan's, this paper aims to find appropriate responses for these questions.

- Does Timurid dynasty have a distinct style of architecture to be distinguished from other styles? If yes, then what are the characteristics of this style?
- What was the impression of Timurid architecture on its successor, i.e. Safavid dynasty?

DISCUSSION

The most outstanding artistic monuments dating back to MpngolianIlkhan dynasty in Iran are those buildings in this period, but in this regard it is important to pay attention to an issue and that is Iranian architecture in Ilkhanate era was affected by foreign elements less than

other arts. In fact, architectural style in Ilkhan era was directly adopted from the style of constructions in Seljuq. In other words, Seljuq architecture is a primary form of Ilkhan style" (Wilber, 1995). Bayani is a researcher who has conducted many researches on Timurid architecture. She writes in 'al-e-Jalayer': "when Ilkhanate sultans adopted Islam as their religion and began to establish ties with European and oriental states such as China, a great evolution appeared in Iranian Architecture while the phenomena of the styles from recent to 8th century, that is, the peak of its magnificence still continued until Timur came to throne and brought a new style" (Bayani, 1967). Bayani holds that Timurid architecture has new style compared to older ones, and writes conclusively in her book that this new style has been created, when Timur came to throne. Timur started his bloody attacks from Iran, and obviously was his first field of battle was Khorasan. Two main factors were main motives for him to attack Iran. First, chaotic interior situation of Iran, of which Timur was fully aware and second, tendency and even invitation of some Iranian high authorities for him to enter Iran. "After Shah Mansour was murdered, Al-e-Mozafar was dethroned and Persia and Persian Iraq were totally occupied by Great Gurkhan Timur and his eldest sons in 795" (Dolatshah Samarkandi, 2007).

In Isfahan, ruled by Shah Shojaa Mozafari, an awful catastrophe happened after the people of Mashhad resisted and a number of his army were killed. Under commands of Timur, seventy thousand of people were decapitated, the heads of which formed the material to construct a "pate minaret" (Nezamodin Shami, 1937). Pate minaret was a row of human skulls in between to rows of soil and mud. The range of so large that Khandamir-famous Timurid historian- says; "in Isfahan, no one survived but Zayandehrud" (Khandamir, 1984).

All historians of Timurid era have precisely recorded Timur's wars and his bloodsheds. After Timur captured new lands, he sent architects and artists to Samarkand. The aim Timur claimed for sending artists to Samarkand was to change that city to the most beautiful capital of world. His intent was certainly not only the pleasure from beauties those artists created by constructing such buildings, but it was creation of such artistically gigantic buildings that terrified his subordinates. Sharafodin Ali Yazdi writes in Zafarname; "he (Amir Timur) opened an independent space in his mind for masons. Thus, his primary constructional activities appeared through giving great deal of importance to Agh Sarai porch in Sabz city and subsequently through commands to destroy and reconstruct buildings, which displayed his special glory" (Sharafodin Ali Yazdi, 1957).

Russian orientalist, Bartold, believes that architecture in Timurid era has a new style and he writes in his book (Ulugh Beg and his period); "Timur's services for from the perspective of architecture constructed in this period in Samarkand were achieved by Iranian architects; from experts' standpoint in magnificence they were superior to Iranian architecture" (Bartold, 1957). Timur particularly favored development of the city of Samarkand and as Sharafodin

Ali Yazdi quotes; "for this purpose, he had gathered experienced engineers and swift architects from Persia, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Darussalam and other countries to the capital". (Sharafodin Ali Yazdi, 1957).

Clavijo, Spanish ambassador, who visited Timurid palaces in 1404, describes them surprising as Kesh palace in Sabz, the ruins of which reflect its ancient magnificence. About Kesh palace, Mazaheri mentions; "magnificent portals and porches of this palace are also reminders of Sassanid dynasty". (Mazaheri, 1997). As we know, Sassanid dynasty prior to Islam was characterized with masons such as Ctesiphon, which was a symbol of glorious architecture at that time.

To have an evident and glorious architecture, a change in plan and structure was necessary leading to modifications in indoor and outdoor dimensions. At that time, architectural decorations developed in an unusual form and new methods were devised in decorations. Cambridge in Timurid History declares; "polychromatic decoration of facades was unique feature of Iranian architecture. Gold and paintings were also used. Hence, in 15th century stucco boss decorations increased, on which was subsequently covered by paintings and gold".

In spite of the fact that Iranian governors and Timurid princes honored the artists, this group and their monuments were somehow at stake. For instance, Khafi, a famous historian in Timurid dynasty writes: "in 807, when Timur returned Samarkand and saw that the porch of 'Saray Mulk Khanum Madrasa' had been built higher than Jameh Mosque, treated two architects of that building (Khajeh Davood and Mohammad Jaled) with anger and ordered them to be executed" (Khafi, 1960).

The largest unique mason of that era was Timur's Jameh Mosque (Friday Mosque) in Samarkand, which named it BibiKhanum Mosque (for his wife) as shown in figure1. This mason was constructed by using the materials plundered from attack to India in 1399-1404. Harold Lamb says about this mosque; "Timur decided to construct a new and renowned mason in memory of victory over India, apparently he had made up his mind before entering Samarkand" (Harold Lomb, 1957).



Figure1. Bibikhanym mosque, Samarkand, Uzbekistan

Ulugh Beg was the biggest and most perfect sample of Timurid madrasas (schools). Sheila Beller describes the architecture of this building; "the mason is a triangle, 81m long, 56m wide with four minarets at each corner.

Elevated portal of this madrasa is 35m high" (Beller and Bloom, 2003).

Hillenbrand writes in 'Aspects of architecture in Timurid dynasty;' "Timurid evolved architecture differs with Ilkhanate architecture with respect to type or grade" (Hillenbrand, 2008).

Taking a look at important buildings of Timurid dynasty such as Shahr e Sabz (Kesh) palaces, BibiKhanum Mosque or tomb of the Mausoleum of Khawaja Ahmed Yasawi in Turkistan deliberate choice of gigantic sizes is a major feature of Timurid masons. Parabolic and denticulate domes are another feature of architecture of that era, seen in [Gur-e Amir](#) and Goharshād shrine. Several examples of the mentioned pointed are shown in figure 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

Timurid architects fundamentally altered traditional arching techniques, which were the legacy of their ancestors and introduced a kind of two-shell dome found in Shah-i-Zinda Ensemble. Once, Timur ordered to kill the architect of his mosque in Samarkand because he was not satisfied by his work.

Another time he charged a group of master to build a labor-intensive mason and warned them if they can not finish the work in ten days, the all will be killed. The group by night and day work, half of which was carried out under the light of torches, could fulfill the order few hours before the deadline. For these reasons, Timurid masters invented some tricks to coat vast highly decorated surfaces. Decorations of walls played an important role and apparently, paintings were neither drawn by hand or instrument but by templates. Pirnia states about Timurid architecture; "in the past, brick facades were together with masonry and the structure became more stable and the façades were more lasting, but in Timurid procedure the building was primarily finished with adobe or brick without any façades, then decorations and façades were added" (Pirnia, 2003). About this, Wilber says; "in Timurid dynasty, as finishing terminated, decorator groups including brick workers, tile-trimmers, painters, calligraphers, etc. came to work (Wilber, 1995). Timing was highly effective in creating Timurid style. At that time, there a need for constructing a variety of structures that had to be prepared at the soonest possible time. Therefore, construction hastened, and use of identical architectural elements as decorations became prevalent.

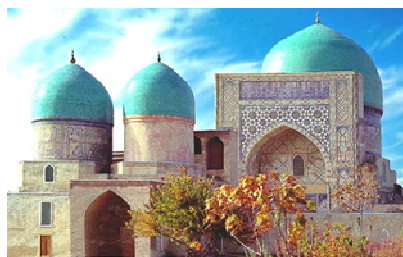


Figure2. Kokgumbaz mosque, Samarkand, Uzbekistan



Figure3. Tomb of Amir (Goore Amir), Uzbekistan



Figure5. Rigestan square, Uzbekistan



Figure4. Goharshad mosque, Mashhad, Iran



Figure6. Herat mosque, Herat, Afghanistan

CONCLUSIONS

To answer the answer to the first question, most researchers and historians contemporaneous to Timur believed that he played a significant role in creating large-scale architecture in order to terrify his subordinates and display the power of his empire. This led to changes in architecture of that period and in introducing a new style. It is obvious that such style never appeared with his vivid authority and influence. In brief, the style and features of Timurid architecture are as follows:

1. Exterior and apparent magnificence of the building as the most important feature of this period.
2. Decorative work apart from the building skeleton
3. High porches and minarets
4. Extensive use of azure color in tile work
5. Innovation of new types of arches and domes as well as high drums
6. Use of gold color or its streaks in painting and tiling
7. Introduction of special patterns in tile work, plasterwork and painting

As an answer to the second question, it is noteworthy that Ilkhanate architecture is exactly the identical to Seljuk's. As it is seen in historical books, Mongolians spend most of their time in battles, but in Timurid dynasty despite a large number of wars and bloodsheds, Timur and his descendants were interested in art and literature. This resulted in changes in Timurid architecture, making it different with previous architectural styles.

For the third question, spread and development of Timurid architectural style throughout the world via migration of architects and artists, who created these kinds of masons, to other regions, also via the information architects of other regions obtained from visiting these masons in Central Asia and receiving their plans. Abundance and high quantity of glorious buildings and frequent construction of them under the rule of Timur in the capital of this powerful king led to royal architectural style, which then became a model other regions and even future dynasties. Dynasties including Safavids, Ottomans and Barbarians ruling these regions not only pursued Timur's approach for establishing a capital to exhibit their power but they followed his universal thoughts.

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