

Samarkand Jame' Mosque (BibiKhanym Mosque)

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Abstract: The most important mason remaining from Timurid dynasty is BibiKhanym Mosque or Timur'sJame Mosque. Timur named this mosque after his legendary wife, BibiKhanym. Construction of this mosque altered architectural style and played an important role in introducing new operational approaches for building Jame' mosques. In this paper, important characteristics of this historical mosque have been presented by further research, study and introduction of this mason. Some designing innovations for this building include four minarets at external corners and a pair of minarets at both sides of southern porch, which was prevalent in Iranian architecture in eastern areas. For example, other innovations including design and construction of two domes behind east and west porches of mosques such as Imam Mosque in Isfahan were taken into consideration.

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Introduction

Timurid era is an important part of the history of Iranian architecture, which has not been considered sufficiently by Iranian researchers and scholars, since firstly in Iranian architectural methodology and its classification, Timurid architecture is a subset of Azeri architecture, receiving little attention as a subset. In other word, at that time, it was located at a world-wide Iran, the geographical extent of which was much more widespread than current political borders. For example, Khorasan's boundaries in medieval were far beyond eastern part of present Iran, covering many parts of Afghanistan, Central Asia and former Soviet Union. Today, this mason lies in Uzbekistan and it is not subject to Iranian researchers due to lack of easy access. Historical masons of Timurid dynasty changed the Iranian architectural style in a comprehensive and lasting manner. These changes are particularly obvious in terms of new techniques of arching and creation of interior spaces as well as application of colorful tiles especially in azure. Timurid masons were indeed the most beautiful samples of the use of coloring in architecture, constructed up to now.

Religion had a flourishing status in Timurid Khorasan (Hillenbrand, 2007). Timur and his clan highly respected sadat (plural form of sayyed i.e. Prophet Muhammad's descendants). In the book of "Timurid Architecture in Khorasan" O'Kane has mentioned; Sultan Hossien was greatly fond of sayyeds, as his ancestors were. He built a Darossyadah (House of Sayyeds), which had a preacher. Also, he ordained an appropriate fund to feed the pour and dervishes, but at that the number of those who claimed to be on the

profitable position of sayyeds grew so much that the head of sayyeds (Naqib) entrusted to prepare a genealogical tree to distinguish true sayyeds from false ones (O'Kane, 1987). Certainly, Amir Timur used religion to canonize his regime. Construction of big mosques such as BibiKhanym Mosque was a sign to show off the power of his empire. Timur chose artists and architects among prisoners of war and sent them to Samarkand to make his capital bigger and more beautiful by producing artistic architectural monuments. In constructing BibiKhanym Mosque, Indian, Azerbaijani and Iranian bricklayers, stonecutters and artists were used. Research on this mosque can be a good way to identify Timurid architecture.

History of the mason and historical background

This mosque was built under the order of Amir Timur and according to the literatures and it was named for the sake and in the name of his -seemingly, Chinese- wife (Manzo, 2003).

The name of architect and designer is not obvious and in historical texts someone called Muhammad Jaled has been mentioned, who was in charge for building the mason. He endeavored a lot in building and founding the mosque and made his utmost efforts in beautifying and decorating it, where he erected four minarets. He was boasting to all architecture masters as if no one else could afford such a huge work (Ibn Arabshah, 1960).

The earthquake, which occurred in Samarkand in 1897, demolished important and elevated parts of the structure (Wilberand Golombek, 1989). The mosque was reconstructed in 1970s. This mosque has been regarded as one of the most important Timurid masons and some

views it as the most magnificent mason of this epoch; a symbol of his power and tendency to dignify his monuments (Blair and Bloom, 2009) and expressed that Samarkand was a jewel for the orient and BibiKhanym Mosque was its jewel (Bulatova and Shishkina, 1986). Ibn Arabshah briefly states in “The Wonders of Destiny..” how the mosque was constructed. “Timur passed by a mosque in India, which its beauty attracted his sight, its ceiling and portico were in the most perfect state. The courtyard and walls were made by white marble. Those figures pleased him so that he decided to build a similar one in Samarkand. Then he selected a place and ordered to establish a mosque with marbles the sameway. This work was assigned to one of his companions-Muhammad Jaled. He endeavored a lot in building and founding the mosque and made his utmost efforts in beautifying and decorating it, where he erected four minarets. He was boasting him to all architecture masters as if no one else could afford such a huge work. Soon, Timur appreciated him and gave him a high-level position (Ibn Arabshah, 1960). Yazdi states how Timur decided to begin constructing Jame Mosque in Samarkand in 1398.”as inferred from the holy verse ‘only he shall visit the mosques of Allah who believes in Allah and the latter day’ constructing a mosque is a sign of inherent true belief and divine

characters and giving credence to afterlife. The great Tamerlane, in invading India, when he was destroying the foundations of polytheism and demolishing fire temples and pagodas, intended to build a Friday mosque in Samarkand. On one Sunday in Ramadan, 801 HQ, in a blessed day he gathered artists and skillful masters to design it and outstanding laborers and professionals of many countries to found it. Almost 200 Stonecutters from Azerbaijan, Fars and India and other countries were working in the mosque and 500 were cutting stones from mountains...”.

The interesting point that both Yazdi and Ibn Arabshah’s reports hinted at was design and construction of four minarets, which seemed new to both historians. To decorate the mosque, all around the wall-interiorly and exteriorly- was decorated with cut stone, on which Al-Kahf Chapter and some other holy verses were engraved. It is possible that abundant use of stones and choice of stony structures for the shabistan was inspired of Indian masons; however, definitely Iranian architects have been used to build domes and porches as shown in figures1, 2 and 3. Apparently, this resulted in two types of structure in the mosque’s plan which is presented in figure 4 and 5 respectively.

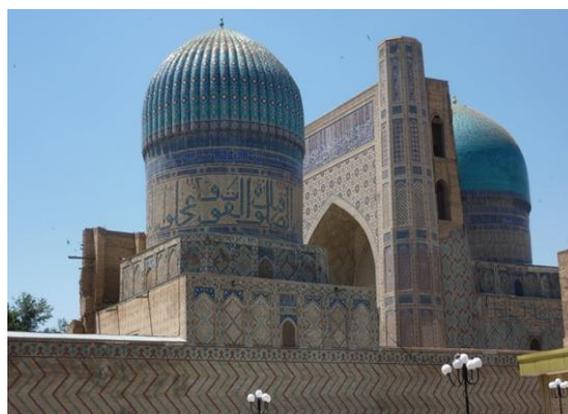


Figure1. BibiKhanym Mosque

In Yazdi and Ibn Arabshah’s- two historians at that time-writings, when Timur returned to Samarkand after the war and observed that the mosque portal was higher than the tall madras built under orders of BibiKhanym opposite the mosque, he got annoyed and ordered to execute Muhammad Davood and Muhammad Jaled, who were in charge to supervise the construction in his absence. He also ordered to destroy mosque’s portal and rebuild it.

The text of Ibn Arabshah’s report states that “When Timur returned of travel and was informed of what had happened in his absence, went to see the mosque. As soon as he saw it, ordered to fell Muhammad Jaled and

drag him on the ground, while his feet were tied and invaded his family and property”.

Most importantly, the queen, Timur’s wife, had collected architects and engineers to build a madrasa opposite the mosque. They founded it firmly and erected its portico. In firmness it was more lasting and in height it was higher than the mosque. Timur was a brutal person and no one could stand against him, those who did this were either suppressed or beheaded. There was no difference between stranger and relative or friend and foe. When he saw the elevation of the madrasa opposite his mosque got so annoyed that did what mentioned above to the miserable supervisor.



Figure2. Dome of BibiKhanym Mosque



Figure3. Painting of Behzad, building of BibiKhanym Mosque

The stones were heavy, so burdensome that he was not able to bear it. Timur failed to collapse that mason and the fracture was still evident. Then he asked his companions to surround it and say prayer there. This went on until in his life and after he died. When the people were saying their prayer there, they were frightened that God's fear may cause a stone fall from the ceiling (Ibn Arabshah, 1960).

After construction of the mosque finished in 1401, constructional activities started there again, which there

are many theories for it. In historical texts, insufficient height and glory of arc former and portal is one reason for further activities (Yazdi, 1986). In Ibn Arabshah's book, structural weaknesses have been pointed in some parts such as dome chamber (Ibn Arabshah, 1960). Pugachenkova believed constructional activities were for increasing sections of the building including dome chamber and entranceway. She reminded that the entranceway was rebuilt (Pugachenkova, 2007).

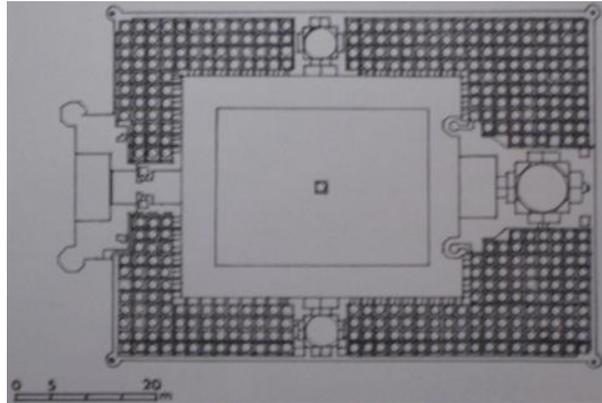


Figure4. Plan of BibiKhanym Mosque

Architectural characteristics of BibiKhanym Mosque

Use of denticulate domes is another form of innovations and features of architecture in this era, applied in this mosque. Gur-e-Amir dome is also one of the most famous domes of this kind. Another innovation in this mosque is two domes behind eastern and western porches. Mosaic tile-worked seven-colored tiles were used for decorating exterior surfaces, but for interior surfaces mainly plasterwork were used. Engraved stones

have been mounted on the entranceway portal and on the epigraphs together with gilded pieces (Golombek and Wilber, 1989) since gilded decorations had flourished in this era. To design the architectural form of the mason, a plan consisting four porches and dome chambers were used, inherited from Seljuq architecture. A pair of minarets on both sides of the entrance porch was common in Ilkhanate era. In this mosque, one more pair of minarets was used each on a side of the porch of Kiblah Shabistan.

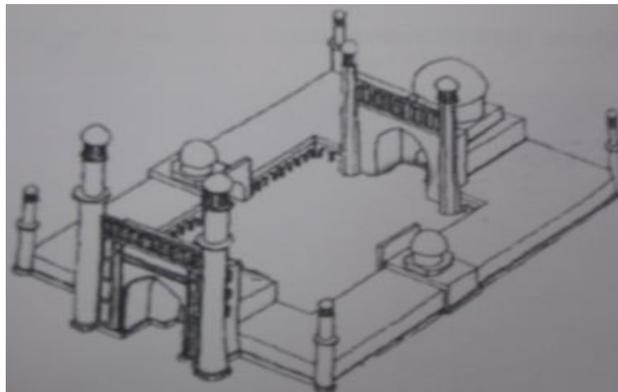


Figure5. 3D of BibiKhanym Mosque

Conclusion:

At the present paper a deep research in historical documents has been carried out to find the methodology of Timurid architecture characteristics. For this case the Bibikhanym Mosque which is the biggest and greatest architectural mason building of Timurid era was selected for detailed study. The obtained results of the study show and suggest that this mosque as a symbol of Timurid architectural is capable to compare with Isfahan Jame' Mosque which is the evolution of Iranian history and a perfect sample, methodology and modifications of Timurid architecture. The evidence of this study showed that this mosque is the best found in the biggest and most magnificent mosque of that period.

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