



SAMARKAND - THE PEARL OF THE EAST 2750th ANNIVERSARY



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Establishment of Samarkand and wheel of the history

When has this «place of delight on Earth» been established? What data gives the scholars an assumption on such considerable age of this great city? Where have the first stones of its history been laid?

The hills named after Afrasiyab, the legendary hero of «Shakh-name», are spread at the spacious area of the northern suburbs of Samarkand.

After careful study of the area, the archeologist discovered high towers at the core of the citadel, city planning with residential area, blocks of craftsmen and monumental ruins of Juma mosque and several rings of defensive walls with bastions and gates equipped with traps systems. This is the ancient Samarkand. The big numbers of buildup layers, discovered during excavations, testify to the city's centuries-long history. As a result of their continuous excavations, the archeologists finally reached the first cultural level that revealed the data of the earliest human settlements in this area of more than 27 centuries ago.

For over the past several years the research fellows of the Institute of archeology at the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan along with French scholars have carried out excavations of yet another big city named Kuk-tepa, located thirty kilometers towards northwest from present Samarkand. The archeologists learned that the date of establishment of this city is absolutely equal to the date of Samarkand's establishment, which is 2750 years ago. This was proved by radio-carbon analysis of the coal found in Kuk-tepa - the strong evidence on determining the date of establishment of Samarkand.

Its first establishments and items of material culture are peculiar to ancient oriental society of 8th and 7th centuries B.C. This is a period of establishment of the Sogd state, capital city of which was Samarkand. The state was headed by military elite who built an enormous acropolis, well defended both outside and inside. This is the exact society mentioned in holy hymns of Avesto. According to Avesto, the mighty men, ratkha-eshtar governed the city «standing at chariots». Holy Sughud (Sogd) was described as a place, created by Akhuramazda. The book also mentions Bakhdi (Baktria) and Mouru (Margiana).

While comparing these regions, one can notice numerous relations of their cultures. The poetic description of Turan's leader Afrasiyab in «Shakh-name» is not quite far from the reality. The historians say about the unity of two ancient Baktrian kingdoms and their alliance with ancient Sogd. Ancient authors have described it as a huge state stretched from Amudarya in the west to Sirdarya - in the east having close relations with the people living beyond its borders, especially with their southern neighbors - Baktria, Afghanistan, India.

Sogd along with Baktria was occupied by Akhemenids during the second half of 6th century B.C. and became one of its important regions, supplying gold and azure to royal palaces of Persia. At that time Samarkand was fenced by the powerful system of defensive constructions with in-wall galleries and loopholes. The core of the city was its military-administrative center - acropolis. Monumental residential houses and blocks of craftsmen gradually enhanced the city.

New cities were established in neighboring regions next to Samarkand, such as the cities of metallurgy, weaving and ceramics. These settlements were discovered at the center of modern city - in the region of University avenue, at the Sartepo location close to Afrasiyab on the way to present airport. Archeologists unearthed there the labor tools, ready outputs, decorations from bronze, gold, stone and bone. And the multifarious ceramics, formed at pottery circle and burnt at huge dual-chambered furnaces were as best as ceramics of Baktria, Margiana, Khorezm and distributed far beyond the frontiers of Sogdiana. There was also a complicated system of channels, supplying the city and settlements with water.

«It is more beautiful than I could have imagined»

In 329 B.C. Alexander the Great entered the Central Asia, overcoming the Persian army in several battles. This is the first time Samarkand was mentioned in written records. It is well-known that Alexander passed through mountain trade routes from Baktria in 329 B.C. and came to Samarkand. First the Greeks were greeted as liberators from the Persian

oppression, but their robbery led to uprisings in Sogd, led by brave Spitamen. He besieged the Greek garrison in the acropolis of Samarkand. Alexander the Great, who was in Syrdarya area along with his army, dispatched troops of cavalry and infantry against Spitamen, but he had ensnared them and defeated in one of the islands of Zarafshan. This was the first defeat for the Greeks during their eastern military campaign.

Alexander, leaving his all other tasks, immediately moved to Samarkand with his main army. The struggle lasted for almost three years before Spitamen's death in 327 B.C. Alexander's following words about Samarkand are well known: «All what I heard about Samarkand is true, with one exception, that it is more beautiful than I could have imagined». Nevertheless, Samarkand was badly destroyed during the conquest. The country suffered a lot. Therefore, when Alexander began to lead his policy of an alliance with the local elite, he had to rebuilt the cities here. The great power had collapsed following Alexander's death. New states emerged: Salavkids, Greek-Baktria, Kushan Empire, where Greek elements were mixed with Eastern traditions.

Poet was wrong

During the second half of the 7th century when Arabs started to conquer Central Asia. The Sogd leaders headed the opposition. In 712 Samarkand was conquered by the army of Kutaiba ibn Muslim, but one year later the local people revolted. The struggle against Arabs led by Gurek, Divashtich, Mukanna continued for almost hundred years. Samarkand was badly destroyed during these battles and one of Sogd poets of the 8th Century Abud Taki Tarkhan bitterly wrote: «Samarkand! You are in ruins. How damaged are your ornaments. You are no better than Chach, you will never recover from this!»

But poet was wrong. As early as the middle of the 8th century, the city emerged again from the ashes and developed into one of the biggest centers of Islamic world. It has become the residence of deputy-caliph in Maverannakhr and blossomed, turning into the biggest trade-crafts and cultural centers of Maverannakhr. All important caravan roads of the East and West passed through this city.

The life in Samarkand during the 9th and 10th centuries splashed out of the walls of shakhristan and spilled to the wide square of Zarafshan Valley from Chupanata hills to Dargom river. According the ancient historians, Samarkand was famous for its green apparel. As Istakhri had beautifully described, castles of the city were hidden by green apparel and the sculpture of parks were reflected in the mirrors of water reservoirs. The water was provided by special leaden channels - Jui-arziz, constructed through the city walls over the domes of the central market Ras at-tak and spread through the main underground waterway - kuburs to citadels and main mosque.

The 9th century saw Samarkand joining the state of Turk-Karakhanids as an independent principality, then becoming the capital of this state. During this period magnificent palace of Tamgachkhan Ibrahim and multi-tower Juma (Friday) Mosque, hospitals, madrassahs, caravansaries, market domes and bathhouses had been constructed in Samarkand. The Sogd aristocracy was among the high elite of Abbasid caliphate, while the Turkic guards were its support.

In caliphate Islam firmly takes the place of different cultures, its ideas penetrate into the life of city-dwellers, rural population and nomads. The authority of sheiks - religious scholars of Samarkand sees its rise. Among them are - Imam Ismail al-Bukhari, the most famous collector of khadis, author of a multivolume book «As-Sahih»; Sheik Abu Mansur Maturidi, who was named the head of scholars, teacher of the right path, «chief of the people of Sunnah»; Abul Hasan Samarkandi; historians - Muhammad al-Nasafy, as-Samarkandy, as-Samany; poets - Huraym Sugdy, Abu Khafs Sogdy, Abu Said Samarkandy, Bakhouddin Karimi, and others.

According to a historian Ibn Haukal, who visited Samarkand between 960-970, the city was «the center of refined people of Maverounnakhr, and the best among them received education in Samarkand».

From early 13th century the city had become a part of the Khorezmshah's state. On

the decree of Muhammad Khorezmshah the walls of Samarkand had been fortified, the central mosque had been rebuilt and new palace and citadel had been established. The architecture of Samarkand had been widely decorated by polychrome and glazed decor. Chinese porcelain and Syrian glass, military armors and golden plates of Khorezm are the evidence of broad trade relations of this epoch.

But the city was about to face a dangerous catastrophe. In March 1220 Samarkand was occupied by the huge army of Genghiz Khan. Following four days of heroic struggle, the people had no choice but to surrender. Historian of this period Rashid ad-Din wrote, that «thousands of brave men and soldiers took shelter in the central mosque of Samarkand and continued to fight. The Mongols bombarded the mosque with fireballs and burned it with its defenders». Unique leaden channel Jui-araiz was destroyed and the supply of water to Shahristan stopped. The life in Afrasiyab fade away, it was not restored, however it continued in suburbs like ruined rabad for almost another 150 years. The people heroically struggled against aggressors. The heroism of Manguberdi in the struggle for Khorezm, Samarkand and other cities were not in vain. It was just a matter of time before the next renaissance of Samarkand.

The land haven of Maverounnakhr

The establishment of big empires such as Han Empire in China and Roman Empire in Europe had promoted a transcontinental trade between the East and West. The formation of enormous routes for land trade was named after the most demanded product of that time - the silk, thus known as «the Great Silk Road» among the scientists of late 19th century.

During this period in Rome the silk served as the best present, it was in the list of cardinal's official full dress, covered holy relics in cathedrals. Decorations of palaces and temples from Iran to Eastern Turkestan demonstrate that the silk was a prestigious dress among the elites of East as well and worn by both men and women. It was valued as gold.

During the epoch of western Hellenism Samarkand raised from the ashes as did Phoenix, and enjoyed its new golden age. Located at the heart of Central Asia it has become the center of trade relations with Eurasia. The handicraft products of this epoch - elegant slim glasses with ring stems, delicate cups and piyolas - bowls, lacquered with red and black, remind Greek and Roman lacquered vessels.

The fortress cities and flourishing settlements have emerged around Samarkand. Minted coins of that period demonstrate examples of Sogd letters. The ascent of trade activity, vigorous travels of Sogd merchants to the most remote countries had started exactly at this period, i.e. 4th and 5th centuries A.D. The merchants had taken under their control many important partitions of land routes of the Great Silk Road, created their trade settlements close to the Great Wall of China, established cities with temples in Eastern Turkestan, traveled with caravans through difficult and dangerous mountain routes of Kara Korum in Pakistan and Northern India.

Special places for the exchange of goods with Indian merchants had been established along the roads next to the crossing points of "Shatial" and "Chilas" bridges, as well as mysterious «hanging bridge» of Ind canyon. Thanks to the support of Turkic khagans, interested in the sale of their silk, merchants of Samarkand linked sandy routes to cities and caravansaries.

While the ruler of Sasanid Iran rejected the offer of the mission of Turkic khagan headed by Sogd envoy Maniakh, on the joint control of Southern routes of the Great Silk Road and demonstratively burned at the capital square the silk, brought to him as a present, the embassy of khagan chose another route - northwards to Khorezm around the Caspian Sea, through Caucasus to Byzantium. Soon, following the military arrangement against the Sasanid ruler and thanks to the trade union, the new directions of business relations had emerged with Byzantium, Caucasus and Russia.

The Sogds had not only traded the Chinese silk, but also produced this precious product. Decorated with unique pictures, the silk had served as a prototype for numerous compositions that later furnished fabrics of Byzantium, Iran and China. Chinese traveler

Suyan Jian, who visited Samarkand in 629, described it as a center of blossoming state with bountiful harvests, most precious goods from various countries, numerous population, exceeding each other in crafts and arts.

The Sogd writings in vessels, coins, and bone-sticks demonstrate excellent literacy among the craftsmen. In a mountain castle "Mug" at the hills of Zarafshan archeologists had discovered a unique royal archive of Sogd ruler Devashtich. The documents, written with inks in parchments, leathers, wood branches and small plates inform us on business and diplomatic relations of the ruler with neighboring and distant states up to China. Embassies and trade caravans came to this place and the Sogd letters, its musical culture, dance and songs expanded to other places.

An example for its neighbors

The most ancient chess collection of the world made from ivory, which was found in Afrosiyob, can reveal the level of culture in this region. It was narrated that the people of Samarkand were fine examples for their neighbors and Sogd led the union of premises of the Central Asian area between the two rivers - both in civilian and military affairs. New cities such as Panjikent, Kushanya, Dabusiya, along with castles to defend the road and royal residences emerged along the caravan routes around Samarkand.

The Arab geographer of the 10th century Istakhri named the city as «Land haven of Maveraunnakhr» that gathers merchants from around the world for the exchange of goods, resulting in a huge profits for the state. The merchants of Samarkand were famous from Egypt to China and India.

The products of Samarkand craftsmen - elegant vessels from color glasses, famous glazed ceramic plates with multicolor paintings of local sayings and geometric compositions, military armors and weapons, multicolor fabrics - silk, golden brocade and wool, marvelous soft velvet, decorations, different stones and stamps and number of other goods had composed the fame of trade in the markets of caliphate. The paper produced in Samarkand was also famous far beyond the borders of Central Asia, while the treasures of first-class coins of Samarkand were found in the medieval cities of Italy, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Ghotland Islands and dukes of Kiev Rus.

The capital of a powerful state

The next Golden Age of Samarkand is linked with the activity of Amir Temur, who decided to unite all separated lands. Starting from 1370, for over 35 years he created the most powerful state in the East, which included Middle Asia and Iran, India, Turkey, and Caucasus. Brilliant military commander of his time, Amir Temur had equipped his army with numerous types of assault weapons, including firearms and introduced new techniques of battling in both - field struggle and besieging the cities, thus becoming victorious in every battle.

His socio-economic policy helped develop and irrigate the new lands, deserts and flourishing of trade. Trying hard to reestablish economy of the united state, Amir Temur directly linked the well being of people to the prosperity of the state. «The ravage of the working-people makes the state treasury thin. This will first result in undisciplined army and then weakening of the state», - he wrote in his layouts on collecting the taxes. On developing new lands, some privileges were provided, resulting in stimulation of development of agriculture.

Realizing the importance of developing the trade-economic relations Amir Temur had constantly called on the leaders of different states to a fair trade through active diplomatic correspondence. He had taken care of trade routes and always protected them.

After taking control of international routes of the Silk Road, Amir Temur had taken appropriate measures to maintain the security of caravans' travels. He had paid a special attention to the development of caravansaries and markets. Ambassador of Spain Rui Gonzales de Clavijo recorded his admiration on the reconstruction of the central market in

Samarkand, where Amir Temur had built numerous domes, passages, and trade streets. Amir Temur had chosen Samarkand as a capital of his Empire and believed that this city should be the first center of the world power. The best architects and constructors, jewelers and metallurgists gathered in Samarkand, there were scholars, artists, poets, preachers, dancers and musicians, and Embassies of European and Eastern states. On the basis of original distinctive culture of Maverounnahr, as it had become the main center of creative forces of Middle and Near East, the Eastern renaissance of art, architecture had taken place in Samarkand. During this period the defense walls with high towers had surrounded Samarkand and the city had been well equipped with squares and streets, system of channels and rivers. Registon had become the biggest public and trade center of Samarkand.

«The heavens have lowered in front of him and become close»

Following the death of Amir Temur, his grandson Mirzo Ulugbek had governed part of the power. Alisher Navoi described great scholar of his time Ulugbek as a «light of the world. All his fellow-countrymen went for non-existence. Who remembers them now? But he stretched his arms to the sciences and achieved a lot. The heavens lowered in front of him and become close». It happened in Samarkand, where he made his world-known inventions. As noted by the President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov: «The scientific deed of such incomparable scholar as Mirzo Ulugbek accomplished during the Middle Ages still continues to surprise modern scholars. He studied thousands of stars, created the perfect map of the sky and calculated complicated astronomic tables, nearly as exact as found by the modern science.

The fact that the astronomic tables, called «Ziji jadidi Kuraghani», were translated into Latin during the Middle Ages and achieved wide recognition among the scholars of Europe, is a bright evidence of this».

Continuing the traditions of his grandfather, Mirzo Ulugbek had gathered poets and musicians, artists and scholars at his court.

Mirzo Ulugbek paid a great attention to the betterment of his capital - Samarkand, aspiring to preserve everything left by his grandfather Amir Temur and promoting the further development of the city.

As recorded by academician Y.G.Gulyamov, Registon was established by Mirzo Ulugbek in a slight different design, not as we see it today. According to the initial plans, Registon included Mirzo Ulugbek Madrassah (in the west), its khonaqo (in the east) and Aleyke Kukeldash Mosque (in the south). The countryside gardens of Mirzo Ulugbek - Chil-situn and Chinnikhana in Bashmaydan amazed his fellow countrymen with their magnificence and exclusive architectural decor. His observatory on the banks of Obi-Rakhmat at the hills of Talli-Rasad deserves a special attention. But it was not well preserved until these days, with its underground building remaining only. Besides, Mirzo Ulugbek had constructed Ulugbek Madrassah in Bukhara and Gijduvan, Kuk-gumbaz mosque in Shakhrisabz.

Samarkand became the center of scientific and creative life led by Mirzo Ulugbek himself. His madrassah in Samarkand taught astronomy and math along with religious classes.

Besides Ulugbek, constellation of the oriental astronomic school was studied by Kazi-zade Rumiy and Giyasiddin Jamshid, maulana Muhammad and Ah Kushchi. Along with their studies at madrassah, scholars were occupied with observations of the movement of stars; famous astronomic table «Ziji jadidi Kuraghani» was a result of these observations. The works of Mirzo Ulugbek in the field of astronomy, distinguished by its quite accuracy, made noticeable contribution into the science. The latitude of Samarkand observatory, determined by Ulugbek, was examined in the 19th century by Russian astronomer V.Y.Struve, and in the modern days by academician V.P.Tsheglov, who noticed just few insignificant declinations. Examining calculations of Mirzo Ulugbek's observatory, modern scientists confirmed, that in most cases they had high accuracy. And most importantly, it

was all calculated before the invention of telescope. The works of Mirzo Ulugbek and its discoveries made great contribution into the world science.

During this period many scholars worked and lived in Samarkand, such as historians Mirkhond, Khondamir, Khafizi Abru, famous doctor Maulana Nafis, philosopher Fayzullah Abu Lais, poets Sirojiddin Samarkandi, Kheyali, Bukhari, Durbek, Alisher Navoi, and Abdurakhman Jamiy.

The life and activity of famous Islamic scholar of Middle Ages Khoja Akhror is also related with the epoch of Temurids.

Born in Tashkent province, he carried out his religious activity in Samarkand. As part of the Middle Asian branch of Nakshbandi, he combined politics with the issues of mysticism of Sufism. Among his spiritual followers were number of Temurid sultans of Samarkand. He build mosques, khonaqoh. The funeral complex of Khoja Akhror is located in the southwestern part of the city.

The main role in forming Samarkand's magnificent appearance was played by architects, who united the main directions of architectural elements of the Eastern Renaissance. The fruits of their activity are beautiful secular and cultural complexes of Samarkand - mosques, madrassah and khonaqoh, mausoleums, magnificent palaces.

The Renaissance of culture and science laid by Amir Temur and Mirzo Ulugbek always made itself felt in this region. Here we can witness the development of humanitarian sciences - archeology, history, arts, natural sciences - biology, geography, technical sciences, which help to uncover mysteries of Samarkand. Wonderful architectural monuments of Samarkand today testify to the development of distinctive culture of people, fruitful activity of students, businessmen, statesmen and other people, worthy successors of their famous ancestors. Samarkand today is one of the centers of trade. And at the same time, it is one of the main tourist destinations of the Great Silk Road.

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