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HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF TIMUR'S MONUMENTS

Abstract: Timur's descendants ruled as part of the Timurid Dynasty. Two of the most important Emperors were Shah Rukh and Ulugh Beg, both known as men of science and academics. They helped finance the work of local intellectuals and scholars, which led to great advances in the fields of Mathematics, Philosophy, Astronomy, and Physics. Although the Timurid Empire eventually fell in **1507**, a distant descendent of Timur named Babur, would eventually go on to found the Mughal Empire. The Mughals ruled over much of modern-day India and Pakistan, and they went on to create some of the world's most well-known buildings such as the Taj Mahal.

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INTRODUCTION

The architecture of the Timurid Empire is often bold, impressive, and awe-inspiring. Just about all of the major building projects contain some sort of Monumental Entrance – a massive facade and archway at the main doorway of a building. Here at the Bibi-Khanym Mosque in Samarkand, there are not one but two massive entrances. The above image is of the second facade, which stands 330 feet (100 m) behind the first facade.

Like nearly all other forms of Islamic Architecture, the Architecture of the Timurid Empire is highly decorated with geometric patterns and Islamic Calligraphy. Traditionally in Islam, it is forbidden to create images of people, places, animals, or nature. So instead most buildings in the Muslim World are decorated with shapes, patterns, and text. Here at the Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi in modern-day Kazakhstan, you can see the front facade is decorated with a combination of geometry and calligraphy.

MAIN PART

Just about every major building in the Timurid Empire was built using the same color scheme. This mixture of dark, and light blues is found throughout Central Asia, and it can also be found in many great examples of Iranian Architecture. The image above shows some of the surviving tilework at the Summar Palace of Timur. The palace was built by Timur himself in the town where he was born, Shahrisabz in modern-day Uzbekistan. Construction on the massive palace began in **1380**, which shows you that Timurid Architecture featured this same blue color scheme from the very beginning of the empire.

Another element that is found throughout Timurid Architecture, is the Dome. Domes can be found in many different types of buildings such as mosques, mausoleums, and madrasas. There are a few different varieties of domes that were popular, one of them being the bulbous dome. A bulbous dome, like the one here at Timur's Mausoleum in Samarkand, is unique because the middle of the dome is the widest part and has a larger circumference than the base of the dome. This was a technological innovation that was becoming very popular in Central

Asia during this time, and bulbous domes can be found throughout the architecture of Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Iran among others.

The architecture of the Timurid Empire also contains many of the unifying characteristics found throughout all Islamic Architecture. Courtyards, Minarets, pointed arches and **Muqarnas** are all examples of these Islamic motifs. The image above shows one of the main entrances to the Great Mosque of Herat, located in modern-day Afghanistan. Here you can see all of the typical elements of Islamic Architecture, such as the two Minarets at either side of the Monumental Arch, as well as the ornately carved Muqarnas above the central doorway.

Timur created a massive empire, that controlled much of Central Asia. The Timurid Empire borrowed heavily from older civilizations such as the Persians, and the Arabs, and they created some of the most incredible buildings that can be found throughout the region. This list will attempt to showcase some of the finest, most innovative, and impressive examples of Timurid Architecture; highlighting various buildings from throughout the former lands of the Timurid Empire.

Without a doubt, the single greatest example of Timurid Architecture is, of course, the Registan of Samarkand. The Registan is made up of three distinct buildings, The Ulugh Beg Madrasah, and Sher-Dor Madrasah, and the Tilya-Kori Madrasa. Madrasa is an Arabic word meaning school, and the three madrasas of the Registan were each founded for education, teaching some of the various topics that were popular in the Timurid Renaissance such as Astrology, Mathematics, and Religious Studies.

The Ulugh Beg Madrasah (depicted above) was built from **1417-1420**. Construction began 12 years after the death of Timur, during the reign of Ulugh Beg, one of Timur's successors. The Madrasa was constructed in the early stages of the Timurid Renaissance, but you can still see all of the key elements of Timurid Architecture. The multi-colored-blue tiles can be found throughout the exterior, and the monumental entrance and main facade are ornately decorated with geometric patterns.

Located directly across the square from the Ulugh Beg Madrasa, the Sher-Dor Madrasah was built much later on, beginning in **1619** and ending in **1636**. Although this was at the tail end of the Timurid Renaissance, you can still see many of the same characteristics. Although this newer building is known for the two domes and the bright orange tiger mosaics above the main entrance, it still has a cohesive appearance with all of the older monuments found throughout Samarkand. Thanks in large part to all of the Timurid-Style Architecture found in the city, Samarkand has a very cohesive appearance with much of the buildings borrowing the same elements from the original structures built during the reign of the great Timur.

In the year **1389**, Timur commissioned the construction of a massive mausoleum dedicated to the Turkic poet, Khoja Ahmed Yasawi. There had been an existing mausoleum on the site since the **12th century**, but Timur wanted to build a much larger and grander edifice to honor the poet. The mausoleum had several different entrances, the back (depicted above) is less monumental, but this side was completed during the time of Timur and it is festooned with typical Timurid-Style blue tilework.

The Bibi-Khanym Mosque is another incredible monument built by the Timurid Empire within Samarkand. Samarkand was the original capital of the empire, starting in **1370** until the capital was moved to Herat in **1405**. Samarkand is known as an oasis, a large patch of lush

green amongst an arid wasteland. Many traders stopped in Samarkand as they traveled along the **Silk Road** which connected China in the East – to Iran, Egypt, and the Mediterranean in the West. It's easy to see why Timur chose Samarkand for his capital thanks to its strategic location. Naturally, Timur wanted to fill his great capital will impressive works of architecture to showcase his wealth and power.

Timur himself commissioned the construction of the Bibi-Khanym Mosque to legitimize Samarkand as a powerful Islamic City. Construction began in **1399** and impressively, it only took the builders a few years to complete the job with most of the work being done by **1404**. The mosque is known for its two monumental archways that are spaced over 300 feet apart. Today it's part of a large **UNESCO** World Heritage Site known as, "**Samarkand – Crossroad of Cultures.**"

Shah-i-Zinda is also a very important site to Muslims because according to legend, a cousin of the great **Prophet Muhammad** is buried here. He traveled to Samarkand to preach Islam and he is responsible for the initial spread of the religion in the city. Today the site remains one of the most visited in all of Samarkand, and the buildings have been heavily restored in recent decades. Although often controversial, the government in Samarkand has spent millions preserving and repairing the city's monuments. However, some experts question if the work is being done in a way that changes the look from the original Timurid-era designs.

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