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AN ANALYTICAL REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH ON THE HISTORY OF PILGRIMAGE SITES IN THE ERA OF AMIR TEMUR AND THE TIMURID DYNASTY (RUSSIAN RESEARCHERS)

Abstract. *The cultural and architectural heritage of the Amir Temur and Timurid periods has attracted sustained scholarly attention from both Eastern and Western researchers. Early studies, conducted under the Russian Empire, focused on the ancient cities of Samarkand, Afrasiab, and surrounding regions, documenting monuments such as the Gur-e Amir, Bibi-Khanym Mosque, and Shah-i Zinda. Russian archaeologists, Orientalists, and photographers—including N. I. Veselovskiy, S. M. Dudin, V. L. Vyatkin, and V. V. Vereshchagin—systematically recorded architectural, epigraphic, and decorative elements. Research continued during the Soviet period and was complemented by Uzbek scholars. These studies provide critical insights into Timurid architecture, pilgrimage sites, and material culture in Central Asia*

Keywords: *Amir Temur, Timurid, Samarkand, architecture, archaeology, Afrasiab, mausoleums, heritage*

INTRODUCTION

The cultural milieu of the era of Amir Temur and the Timurid dynasty has long remained at the center of attention of scholars from both the East and the West. Indeed, this period marked a time of profound political and administrative transformations in the history of the peoples of Movarounnahr, associated with the rule of the great military commander and statesman Amir Temur and his descendants—the Timurid dynasty—as well as significant developments in the fields of economy, culture, and other spheres

of social life. Consequently, the history of Amir Temur and the Timurid period, during which a powerful empire was established and which occupies a *достой* and recognized place in the history of Uzbek statehood and the art of warfare within world history, represents a universally acknowledged stage in the development of world civilization and therefore necessitates extensive scholarly research (Fayziyev et al., 2021:3).

Research on the ancient cities of the era of Amir Temur and the Timurid period, as well as the historical monuments located within them, was conducted even before the Soviet period, namely during the era of colonial rule by the Russian Empire. It should be particularly emphasized that while Central Asia was under the occupation of the Russian Empire (1721–1917), the majority of articles published in Russian periodicals of that time portrayed the personality of Amir Temur in a highly negative and biased manner (Orziyev & Latipov, 2018:23).

MAIN PART

A number of archaeologists and Orientalist scholars were dispatched to the region, where they carried out historical and archaeological investigations. In particular, with the aim of studying the ancient monuments of Turkestan—primarily the architectural heritage of the city of Samarkand—and conducting archaeological research, a scientific expedition was organized between 1895 and 1917. The activities of this expedition were later systematized and published in book form under the title “The Imperial Archaeological Commission (1859–1917)”, dedicated to the history of the Imperial Archaeological Commission, the first state archaeological institution in Russia.

In this regard, the Russian Orientalist and historian B. V. Lunin (1906–2001) notes the following:

“The pre-revolutionary activities of Russian scholarly societies in Central Asia have largely remained forgotten. In our view, it is necessary to reconstruct the contributions of certain local figures who actively participated in historical research in the Turkestan region and to provide an objective assessment of their work. The subject of our historiographical essay is one of the scholarly societies operating in pre-revolutionary Central Asia—the Turkestan Circle of Archaeology Enthusiasts—and is concerned with its emergence and development. This organization was a public scholarly association specializing in the humanities, which for more than twenty years (1895–1917) conducted

systematic research on the archaeology of Central Asia and the history of its material culture” (Lunin, 1958:10).

According to M. Hamidova, it is noteworthy that the majority of studies conducted on the basis of scientific expeditions dedicated to the investigation of historical monuments were specifically focused on examining monuments from the Amir Temur and Timurid periods in the ancient city of Samarkand. These expeditions, composed of specialized professional teams, were deliberately organized to study Samarkand’s most renowned architectural monuments, namely the Gur-e Amir Mausoleum and the Bibi-Khanym Mosque (Hamidova, 2022:16).

In introducing the ancient monuments of Central Asia to both the scholarly community and the wider public, as well as in documenting them, the contribution of professional and amateur Russian artists holds particular significance. In this regard, foremost among them is V. V. Vereshchagin (1842–1904), who visited Central Asia to conduct research expeditions in 1867–1868 and 1869–1870 (Lunin, 1958:34).

Among such works, particular attention should be drawn to the study entitled “An Expedition to Samarkand for the Scholarly Documentation of Monuments of Ancient Architecture and Their Publication” (*Ekspeditsiia v Samarkand dlia nauchnogo opisaniia pamiatnikov drevnego zodchestva i izdaniia ikh*), compiled by A. A. Bobrinskaya (1800–1868), which includes articles and the results of field research. This work encompasses the findings of studies conducted on ancient architectural monuments in Samarkand. The expedition was organized with the aim of investigating architectural monuments, documenting them visually and metrically, and publishing the results in scholarly form.

The expedition team consisted of N. I. Veselovskiy as the principal researcher, S. M. Dudin (1863–1929) as artist and photographer, and P. P. Pokryshkin (1870–1922) as architect. As noted above, they carried out detailed measurements and studies of the Gur-e Amir Mausoleum and the Bibi-Khanym Mosque, conducted excavations at Afrasiab, compiled inventories of archaeological finds, and continued systematic research activities (1895, file no. 69). In addition, the archaeologist and Orientalist N. I. Veselovskiy, who was dispatched to Turkestan, conducted research on the history of fourteenth–fifteenth-century pilgrimage sites and examined the epigraphic inscriptions of the mausoleum of Amir Temur (Veselovskiy, 1882:123–132). During his visit to Samarkand in 1895, he published an album comprising 315 photographs, arranged in thematic series, depicting mosques and mausoleums. Photographic materials documenting historical sites in Central Asia were also produced by Orientalist

photographers such as D. I. Ermakov (1845–1916), M. Papazyan (1864/1866–1920), and O. Kyurkchyan (1851–1903). In addition, S. M. Dudin's work in 1905 included the detailed photographic documentation of the ornamental elements of the Shah-i Zinda mausoleum complex in Samarkand.

Furthermore, between 1905 and 1907, he recorded more than 1,600 decorative elements and architectural fragments associated with monuments of the Amir Temur and Timurid periods. The sources also provide information on the discovery of clay burial grounds in the local quarters of Samarkand (1899, file no. 243) (Musin, 2009:67).

Based on available sources, it can be observed that the principal objects of research undertaken by Russian archaeologists and Orientalist scholars in the city of Samarkand included Afrasiab, the Gur-e Amir and Shah-i Zinda mausoleums, the Bibi-Khanym Mosque, Registan Square, as well as ancient cemeteries within the city, archaeological finds, epigraphic inscriptions, and architectural remains. One notable example of such work is the independent archaeological investigations conducted by V. L. Vyatkin (1869–1932) at Afrasiab in 1905, as well as the discovery of the remains of Mirzo Ulugh Beg's (1394–1449) famous observatory in 1908–1909 in the vicinity of modern Samarkand. Vyatkin identified these remains on Kuhak Hill, located to the north of Samarkand.

In addition, among Russian scholars engaged in astronomical research, V. V. Stratonov (1869–1938) examined the astronomical activities of Mirzo Ulugh Beg, while V. N. Milovanov (1883–1957) prepared research reports on the development of astronomical sciences in Samarkand and on the excavation works of Ulugh Beg's Observatory. Furthermore, scholars such as M. E. Masson (1897–1986), V. A. Shishkin (1893/1894–1966), V. A. Nielsen (1871–1949), and Yu. F. Buryakov (1934–2015) continued and expanded upon the work initiated by V. L. Vyatkin. In this regard, Uzbek scholars, including T. N. Qori Niyoziy (1897–1970) and Y. G. Gulomov (1908–1977), also made significant scholarly contributions.

Today, the mausoleum of Ahmad Yasawi, located in the city of Turkistan in the Republic of Kazakhstan and revered by Amir Temur and the Timurid princes, has been studied by a number of Russian archaeologists and scholars (Gilmanova, 2021:32).

Another archaeologist who studied the Bibi-Khanym Mosque in Samarkand was N. N. Shcherbina-Kramarenko (1863–1913). In 1895, he began examining the mosque and conducted excavations in its courtyard. As a result, he uncovered not only the foundations of columns made from sandstone but also finely crafted inscriptions and

ornamental decorations. In 1896, he continued his in-depth study of the Bibi-Khanym Mosque and surveyed the eastern regions of Bukhara, reaching as far as Termez, collecting a set of vessels decorated with inscriptions and ornaments, and studying the inscription on the tomb of Hakim at-Termezi (824–892) in Termez. In 1897, the artist turned his attention to the historical and architectural monuments of Shahrisabz, where he also succeeded in making a series of significant observations.

CONCLUSION

During the Soviet period, these studies continued, in a sense, albeit under different conditions. Research was conducted not only in the Samarkand region but also in other areas, such as the Kashqadaryo Valley, focusing on Timurid-era pilgrimage sites and architectural monuments. In particular, the research conducted by scholars such as G. A. Pugachenkova (1915–2007), I. E. Pletnev (1925–1990), L. Yu. Mankovskaya (1932–1988), and Yu. Z. Shvab (20th century) focused on monuments in Shahrisabz, including the Dor us-Siyodat or “House of Sayyids” Mausoleum (1379–1380), the tomb of Shaykh Shamsiddin Kulol (1370) located to its west, and the Kok-Gumbaz Mosque, which is part of the Dor ul-Tilovat (“Place of Recitation”) complex dating to the 14th century (1435–1436).

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