

## On The Question Of Amir Temur's Choice Of The State Capital And The Construction Of The Samarkand Citadel

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### Abstract

This article examines the historical and architectural significance of Amir Temur's decision to designate Samarkand as the capital of his vast empire, drawing on a range of historical sources and specialized scholarly literature. It investigates the political, strategic, and cultural motivations behind the establishment of the Samarkand Citadel, which served as the administrative and symbolic center of the Timurid state. The study provides a detailed description of the citadel's architectural layout, including its defensive structures, palatial complexes, and urban planning principles that reflected both military precision and artistic refinement. Special attention is devoted to the construction of Amir Temur's principal residence the Kuksaray Palace which functioned not only as a royal dwelling but also as the core institution of state governance and diplomacy. The article highlights how the architectural features of Kuksaray embodied Temur's vision of imperial power, order, and grandeur. Moreover, the study traces the historical transformations of the Samarkand Citadel and the Kuksaray during subsequent periods, particularly under the Uzbek khanates, revealing how these monumental structures continued to serve as centers of authority and cultural heritage. By analyzing historical records, the article contributes to a deeper understanding of the political symbolism and architectural legacy of Timurid statehood, illustrating how Samarkand became a timeless expression of Central Asian civilization's power, identity, and artistic excellence.

**Keywords:** Samarkand Citadel, location, fortress walls, Temur's residence, Kuksaray, Bustansaray, Kuktash.

### 1. Introduction

When Amir Timur (Tamerlane) began his struggle for power in the region of Maverannahr in the 14th century, he initially relied on the human, material, and economic resources of his native land the Kesh region (present-day Shahrisabz) [1]. At the early stage of his political rise, Kesh served as the main center of his administrative and military operations, and Timur regarded it as the natural nucleus of his emerging state. However, as his authority expanded and his ambitions grew beyond local influence, the limitations of Kesh as a political and strategic center became increasingly evident [2].

Following Timur's election as the ruler of Maverannahr at the Kurultai an assembly of tribal chiefs, regional leaders, prominent military commanders, and representatives of the religious elite the decision was made to transfer the state capital to Samarkand. This crucial choice was determined by a number of geographic, economic, and cultural factors. Situated

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at the intersection of major trade routes connecting East and West, Samarkand had for centuries served as one of the most important urban and commercial centers in Central Asia. Its advantageous location provided access to fertile agricultural lands, a strong artisanal base, and a population skilled in various crafts and intellectual pursuits [3].

Furthermore, Samarkand possessed profound historical prestige as an ancient city of learning and civilization, once flourishing under the Sogdians and later serving as a key point along the Great Silk Road. By selecting Samarkand as his capital, Timur not only demonstrated his strategic foresight but also sought to legitimize his rule by associating it with the cultural and political legacy of past empires that had once dominated the region.

The establishment of Samarkand as the capital marked the beginning of its transformation into one of the greatest centers of medieval architecture, science, and culture. Under Timur's direction, the construction of monumental buildings such as the Kuksaray palace, the citadel, and numerous religious and educational institutions symbolized both the consolidation of his power and the emergence of a new imperial identity that would influence the broader Islamic and Turko-Mongol world for centuries.

## 2. Research Method

The history of statehood in the modern territory of Uzbekistan by the time of Amir Temur's reign already spanned more than two millennia. Samarkand enjoyed the status of a capital city for most of this period: first as the center of the state of Sogd, then of the Sogdian Confederation. The history of Sogd in total covers approximately 1,500 years. The city's importance did not diminish in subsequent periods. Samarkand was the first capital of the Samanid state. True, during the time of Ismail Samani, Bukhara acquired the status of capital. But after the establishment of Karakhanid rule, Samarkand again became the capital of the western part of their state. It should not be forgotten that Muhammad Khorezmshah, literally on the eve of the Mongol invasion, moved his capital from Urgench to Samarkand. All this suggests that Samarkand was the most famous city in the region. Therefore, this city, more than others, corresponded to the goals and aspirations of Temur aimed at creating a large and strong state union.

His position effectively allowed him to govern the region in the prince's name. He assumed control of the city and surrounding areas for the second time in 1366, after the expulsion of Ilyas Khoja, as deputy to Amir Husayn, who had chosen Balkh as the capital of his state and left Samarkand in the care of Timur. In both cases, Timur's residence was located in Samarkand. Although his reign was short-lived, his attitude toward the people and his fair approach to resolving various vital issues earned him well-deserved authority among the people of Samarkand. His actions left the most indelible impression on the residents of Samarkand when the troops of Husayn and Timur entered Samarkand in the spring of 1366. Husayn then ordered the collection of the annual tax from the residents of Samarkand. In 1365, the people of Samarkand spent most of their savings organizing a resistance to the Mongol troops that appeared on the outskirts of the city. Thanks to their heroism, the Mongols abandoned not only the environs of Samarkand but also Transoxiana as a whole. Naturally, they expected a reward for their heroism. Hussein did not appreciate their feat and ordered the forced collection of taxes from the city's inhabitants. Timur, in order to help the people of Samarkand, donated all his property to the treasury as payment for the tax. All this contributed to Timur's growing authority among the citizens. And when the time came to choose a capital, Timur, aware of his popularity among the citizens, unhesitatingly chose Samarkand as the center of his state. It should be noted that the citizens' support for the ruler always played a significant role in the selection or even relocation of the capital. For example, Ismail Samani's popularity among the Bukharans contributed to the transfer of the capital from Samarkand to Bukhara at the end of the 9th century. This also explains the transfer of the capital from Samarkand to Bukhara by the Shaybanid Ubaydullahan in the 16th century.

Samarkand enjoyed the most favorable geographic location among the cities of Transoxiana. Protected by high mountain peaks from the harsh winter frosts and summer heat, it enjoyed the most favorable climate of any city in Central Asia. Samarkand also surpassed all other major settlements in Transoxiana in terms of water resources. The city was surrounded on all sides by three major waterways: the Zerafshan, Dargom, and Siyab. Samarkand was located at the center of the Central Asian region. The Zerafshan oasis was the most highly developed and advanced agricultural region in the country at that time. Furthermore, even after the devastating Mongol conquest, Samarkand remained a major artisan and cultural center. The city also surpassed other settlements in its logistical capabilities. Samarkand was located at the most advantageous crossroads of the Great Silk Road. Trade caravans from Samarkand were able to travel along five routes: Tashkent–Otrar–Kashgar, Kesh–Termez–India, Fergana–China, Bukhara–Iran–Turkey, and Bukhara–Khorezm–Russia. These routes were the most important along the entire Silk Road at that time. All of this created the conditions for Samarkand to become the most important and significant global trade center.

### 3. Result

During the Karakhanid period, Samarkand was not only the capital but also the largest city in Transoxiana. According to Academician V.V. Bartold, half a million people may have lived there at that time [4]. When the city was conquered by the Mongols, the entire city, especially its central part – Shahristan – was completely destroyed by order of Genghis Khan. During the Chagatai period, Samarkand, like other cities in Transoxiana, gradually began to recover. However, unlike Bukhara, Urgench, Otrar, and other cities destroyed by Genghis Khan, Samarkand was reborn not within the confines of Shahristan, its old center, but within Rabad, a suburb of the city. This is because Samarkand's old Shahristan was located on the site of the present-day ruins of Afrasiab, which had virtually no internal water source. Shakhristan's water supply was provided through suspended lead pipes originating from the Zarafshan, Dargom, and Siyab dams located upstream. Due to a lack of funds and highly qualified specialists, the previous water supply system could not be restored, and so the city began to be rebuilt on the outskirts of old Samarkand.

During the Karakhanid period, not only Shakhristan but also Rabad were surrounded by high defensive fortress walls. By the time Amir Temur established his rule, these walls had completely collapsed. As a result, the city was completely defenseless against enemy attacks. Therefore, from the very first days of his rule, Temur ordered the restoration of Samarkand's defensive walls. The wall he erected featured numerous minarets, strengthening the structure. At the top of the wall were loopholes and towers. It met the most demanding requirements of the military fortification science of the time. This wall followed the basic contours of the rabad wall, a suburb of Samarkand built in the 11th and 12th centuries. Samarkand was rapidly developing, acquiring new squares and avenues. Amir Temur personally designated locations for mahallas, bazaars, squares, streets, and palaces within the future capital. Under the direction of Sahibkiran, six large gates were erected to provide entry to the capital [5]. A large number of majestic mosques, madrassas, mausoleums, trading centers, gardens with palaces, and other grand architectural structures and complexes were built.

Amir Temur initially set himself the goal of transforming Samarkand into one of the most beautiful cities in the world. The city was intended to eclipse all other cities of the then civilized world with its grandeur and beauty and become an important political, economic, and cultural center.

Among the complexes of buildings erected, the Samarkand Citadel of Temur – the Arches of Oliy – occupies a special place. This structure was built on the highest point of what was then Samarkand [6]. The choice of location was determined not only by this circumstance. It had its own internal source of water, thanks to the presence of a large spring. In addition, mudflows and spring waters formed deep ravines that surrounded this area on three sides.

The construction of a dam at the end of the ravine, the construction of a canal on the southern side of the Ark and filling them with water made it possible to surround the Ark with a deep water barrier. The Amir Temur Citadel occupied an area of 34 hectares and was surrounded by walls in two rows along the perimeter. Round watchtowers rose at the corners of the citadel [7]. The Ark had an eastern Samarkand gate and a southern Bukhara gate. They were also fortified with minarets and met all the requirements of medieval military defensive architecture. The walls were very massive. To climb up to the platform and loopholes built on top of the wall, special stairs were built [8].

Amir Temur's creative work was always characterized by a broad outlook and grandeur. Central Asia was known for its seismic activity. Therefore, the construction of the Ark and other buildings in Samarkand employed innovative solutions to ensure their stability. This required the most advanced and extensive technical knowledge for the period, as well as the vast experience and talent of the architects commissioned by the ruler. Precise calculations were required for laying literally every brick [9].

The Ark of Amir Temur in Samarkand was not just a citadel, but a well-fortified administrative and military center of the capital and the state. The Ark housed the ruler's chancery, workshops for the manufacture of weapons and equipment, storage facilities for them, a mint, a prison, and the barracks of Amir Temur's personal guard [10]. The Ark's special attractions were the beautiful and majestic Kuksaroy and Bustonsaroy palaces. While Bustonsaroy was intended to house Amir Temur's family, Kuksaroy was his official residence. Kuksaroy translates into Russian as "Blue Palace" [11]. The building likely received this name because its walls and domes were decorated primarily with blue and green ornaments, with blue being the predominant color [12]. It's also worth noting that the main deity of the Turkic nomadic tribes was Tengri, the spirit of the sky. The sky during clear daylight hours was always blue. Therefore, for the Turks, blue had a divine connotation. Incidentally, it was for this reason that Temur's banner was painted blue [13]. The name Kuksaroy also reflects the harmonization of Turkic and Tajik traditions, combining the Turkic word "kuk" (blue) and the Tajik word "saroy" (palace). Kuksaroy was the most grandiose and majestic building in Samarkand. According to Babur, the palace had four floors [14].

Kuksaroy housed Amir Temur's throne, the state treasury, and a magnificent library. Here he received ambassadors and statesmen. Even after Sahibkiran, Kuksaroy remained the official residence of the Temurid rulers [15].

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendation

Under Amir Temur's direct supervision, more than 20 grand architectural structures were erected in the capital. Historians of the time, including Sharafiddin Ali Yazdi and Nizomiddin Shomi, attest that Sahibkiran personally reviewed the plans for these constructions, made adjustments, and only after the design had taken perfect form did he grant permission for construction.

Sahibkiran's enormous contribution to the construction of the capital is also recognized by modern European scholars. The renowned French orientalist Jean-Paul Roux writes: "Undoubtedly, without Versailles, Louis XIV would not have become the Sun King. Likewise, without the architectural miracle of Samarkand, created by the ruler's constant personal involvement and care, he would not have become Temur."

Temur's greatness lies not only in the fact that he built the most monumental and grandiose buildings of his time, and not only in Samarkand. His genius lies in the fact that he created a great empire. Through his domestic policy, based on principles of justice and an understanding of the laws of state and social development, he ensured stability and prosperity for his country. Samarkand became an increasingly beautiful city not only due to the construction of grandiose structures by Amir Temur. The buildings financed by Amir Temur constituted only a small fraction of the city's total. Thanks to the improved standard of living, the city's residents became active participants in the creative work of their ruler. This circumstance played a

leading role in transforming Samarkand into the most beautiful and majestic city of the civilized world of that time.

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