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# SAMARQAND REFASHIONED

*Editor's preface*

The historic cities of Central Asia are a never-ending source of fascination for the traveller. For here, after all, is the heart of the Silk Roads, the homeland of the Sogdian merchants and savants such as al-Biruni and al-Kashgari, where some of the great monuments of Islamic architecture were erected. The traveller, whether there for the first time or re-visiting familiar friends, may well wonder though, what, exactly, is it that one now sees. That is, to what extent do the city spaces and the historic buildings correspond to those which were there in an earlier era? And, to the extent that they do or do not, why? Elena Paskaleva's travel notes reflect on such questions, inspired by her recent trip to Uzbekistan.

If lured by the appeal of Silk Road travel to almost any place one might choose, be it Turkey, Iran, Uzbekistan, China..., arguably one should expect to witness the impact of modern development, for economic, political or other reasons. That is, to anticipate recapturing historic vistas and their buildings "as they once were" would undoubtedly be naive, even if such sites are now inscribed by UNESCO as part of "World Heritage." This hardly should come as a surprise. After all, "tradition" and "history" in a sense have always been moving targets. Sites that are still lived in or ones that are abandoned have never been immune to change, decay, re-building or "restoration," in general reflecting the priorities of those in whose times they are being altered. Sensibility about "preservation" and "restoration" of some original conception is a modern development and one fraught with controversy. Is there a standard of "preservation" or "conservation" which might be generally accepted, and if so, how then does one determine exactly how in practice it might be applied at a location where little that has survived to the present is arguably "original"? All too often, even with the best intentions, "restorations" end up constructing an imagined past or running roughshod over evidence that might point in a direction of a different answer to questions about what once was there.

Some of the most controversial examples of the modern treatment of historical sites may be found along the routes we term the "Silk Road." Modern development in China and Iran, for example, has raised grave concerns over the preservation of historically important remains. The issue is not merely one of undertaking projects to "modernize" living spaces and promote economic development, but often involves more complicated questions of perceptions about identity and tradition, where political regimes or economic interests have ideas which are at odds with what scholarly experts may advocate. How then are such matters illustrated in Uzbekistan?

It is well known that many historic Central Asian cities have various chronological layers, which often can be distinguished even on the superficial level of looking at a map. Students of the Russian colonial regime, for example, will point to maps showing regular grids of streets in the areas of a city that housed the Russian colonial population and administration, quite distinct from the irregular, narrow and meandering alleyways that characterized traditional city residential quarters. In Samarqand, the pre-Islamic Afrasiyab on what is now the outskirts sits alongside the area which was developed most fully under the Timurids, and that in turn abuts the Russian and Soviet colonial town. Arguably, since independence in 1991, we have entered yet another phase of city construction or re-construction, which can hardly be seen to respect any of these earlier delineations. If that is the case then, what is to be made of Samarqand's status on the UNESCO World Heritage list?

– Daniel C. Waugh

## A TRAVELLER'S IMPRESSIONS, AUGUST 2013

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Down through the centuries, Samarqand has inspired poetic superlatives for the richness of its location, its flourishing economic and cultural life, and its dazzling architecture. Travel brochures today invariably highlight the city's architecture and bazaars as one of the chief attractions of any adventure along the historic "Silk Road." As a historian of Timurid architecture, I find the city endlessly fascinating, having first been there in 2006. My visit again in August 2013

If it is said that a paradise is to be seen  
in this world, then the paradise of this  
world is Samarqand.

– quoted by 'Ata-Malik Juvaini  
(Boyle transl.)

highlighted how rapidly the urban landscape of this famous city is being altered, alas not necessarily for the better. What follows here are some impressions from that recent trip, ones which invite an examination of the policies that underlie the ongoing transformation. This is a subject that will reward future study in greater depth.

Fig. 1. The Ulugh Beg madrasa before 1910 (photograph by Friedrich Sarre, *Denkmäler persischer Baukunst* [Berlin, 1910] and in 2006 (photo by author). Note: Except where otherwise indicated, the photos which follow are by the author.

A little historical background is in order. Even though the city's history is very ancient, much of what attracts us to Samarqand traces its origins in the era when Timur/Tamerlane (d. 1405) had his capital there beginning around 1370. Clavijo, the Spanish ambassador from the king of Castile, who visited Samarqand in the early fifteenth century witnessed dramatic changes that were underway. The mausoleum Timur had erected for his grandson, what we now know as the Gur-i Amir, had recently been completed, and work on the huge Friday Mosque, the Bibi Khanum, was ongoing. But the ruler's attention was not confined to building monumental religious structures. On his way to Samarqand, Clavijo had passed through Kesh (today's Shahr-i Sabz), where he described the imposing Ak Saray palace Timur had built. And, of particular relevance here is Clavijo's observations on the urban renewal project to create a main commercial thoroughfare through the centre of Samarqand that would be the focal point for the flourishing international trade that was being promoted by the ruler. The street was to be an integral part of the urban fabric, even though it came at a cost. As Clavijo reported (1928, pp. 278–80), Samarqand citizens tried to claim compensation for their land and the houses levelled on Timur's orders, especially in the surroundings of the Friday Mosque and the bazaar. Timur's angered reply was that he was the sole owner of the land in Samarqand and he could produce written evidence of this within a day.

Timur's successors, notably starting with his grandson Ulugh Beg (r. 1409–1449), continued to adorn the city with major buildings, even as, it seems, ones recently built (the Friday Mosque in particular is in question here) may already have begun to decay. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when we begin to get foreign travel accounts, drawings and photographs to document the state of the monuments, most of the great buildings were in ruins. Plans to rebuild or restore some of them were developed as early as the first Soviet years, but the most significant projects were not implemented until the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century beginning in the years prior to Uzbekistan's declaration of independence in 1991. Much of the Friday Mosque and the missing minarets on the Gur-i Mir were rebuilt; several mausolea in the Shah-i Zinda complex on the outskirts of the city were re-created from the ground up and missing elements of the upper facades "restored". These projects have been controversial, not in the least because it may be impossible to document precisely



what was "original" to the buildings that are now being "restored." Beyond the major buildings, now, as in Clavijo's day, portions of the old city are being levelled to create open spaces around Timurid buildings, though not, it seems, with the intent of integrating those buildings into the fabric of a living city.

### Redevelopment around the Registan

Although the present layout of the Registan Square evolved during the 15<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the current state of the madrasas (Islamic religious schools) is the product of numerous restorations campaigns. The northern and southern facades of the Ulugh Beg madrasa (1417–1420), the oldest surviving monument on the square, were piles of rubble at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as testified by the photographs of Friedrich Sarre, published in 1910 (Fig. 1). Thus, its entire courtyard had to be rebuilt and the epigraphic program designed anew. The characteristic *hauz* (water tank) to the southeast was destroyed. One of the western minarets collapsed in 1870. In the autumn of 1918 it was noticed that the north-eastern minaret of the Registan façade had started to tilt. As a result, a lot of engineering effort went into the straightening of the original minarets along the Registan. The first reconstruction project was initiated in 1920 by Mikhail F. Mauer, the chief architect of Samarqand since 1917, and A. N. Kuznetsov. After a decade of preparations



Fig. 2. The straightening of the northeastern minaret of the Ulugh Beg madrasa in 1932. (Source: <<http://mytashkent.uz/2012/12/09/k-80-letiyu-vypryamleniya-minareta-vladimir-grigorevich-shuxov/>>.)

(1922–1932), the northeastern minaret was straightened in 1932 (Fig. 2) based on the second plan by the Moscow engineer Vladimir G. Shukhov and with the technical assistance of G. I. Solov'ev (Masson 1968). In the 1950s E. O. Nelle produced the drawings for the straightening of the south-eastern minaret, the work executed by the engineer E. M. Gendel in 1965 (Kriukov et al. 2004, p. 574).

The earliest restoration work at the Shir Dor madrasa (1616–1636), the second oldest monument on Registan Square, was carried out by Boris N. Zasytkin and started in 1925. Unlike his later Soviet colleagues, in the 1920s Zasytkin was pleading for: “preservation of the monuments in the same manner as they came down to us.” He insisted on collaboration with local craftsmen and masons, and on the usage of materials already found in the monuments themselves such as the original brick and locally produced alabaster (Iakubovskii 1940, p. 322).

What had been little more than a shell with a facade of the Tilla Kari madrasa (1646–1660), the new Shaybanid Congregational mosque in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, was re-built. The much-photographed dome one sees today was added during a long restoration campaign that ended in 1975 (Fig. 3). There are no existing photographs or drawings of the original dome.

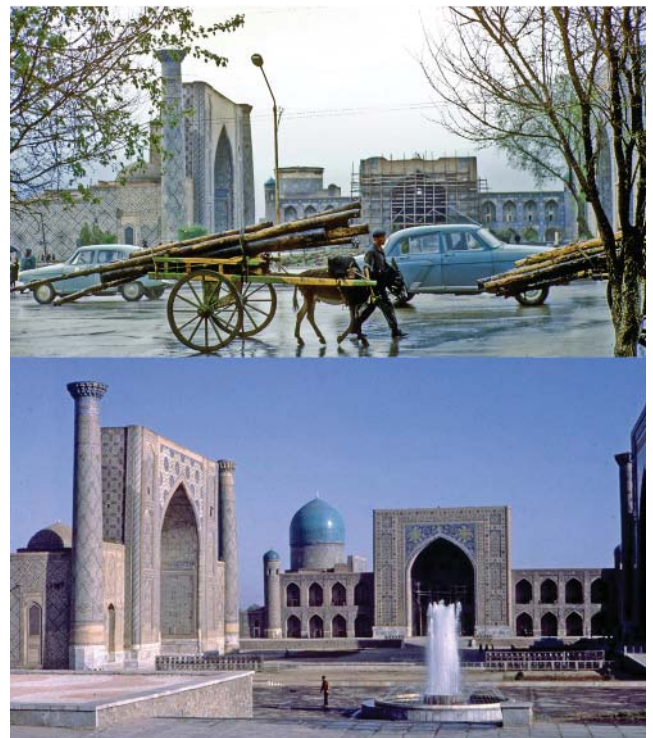
In 1982 the Registan was revealed to the Soviet public in its presumed former glory, and the restoration team honored (Kriukov 1989, p. 102).<sup>1</sup> The later Soviet

Fig. 3. The Registan in 1969 (top) and 1979, showing the rebuilding of the Tilla Kari madrasa. (Photos © Daniel C. Waugh)

restorations focused mainly on the rebuilding of the three Registan madrasas with reinforced concrete. The main scientific adviser, Konstantin S. Kriukov, believed that the exterior decoration was a sheer garment worn by the construction itself (Demchenko 2011, p. 73). Thus the refurbishment of all Registan madrasas with newly manufactured glazed tiling was merely a question of efficiency. The reinforced concrete dome shells were a manifestation of Soviet technological progress that would ensure the longevity of the madrasas beyond the frequent tremblors of Central Asian earthquakes.

In the summer of 2013, the visible impact of the Samarqand regeneration campaign is the clearance of “unattractive” mud brick housing and the creation of unobstructed vistas allowing tourists easy and strictly controlled access to the celebrated Timurid and Shaybanid monuments at the center of the Timurid city. The Registan wall was erected in the heart of the old town functioning as a demarcation line between the traditional mud brick houses and the three Registan madrasas. Large numbers of houses behind the wall were bulldozed and a new wide road was laid out in August 2013.<sup>2</sup>

The Registan wall starts at the tourist bus stop behind the Tilla Kari madrasa (17<sup>th</sup> century) and continues along the northern border of the square (Figs. 4, 5, next page), running parallel to the Ulugh Beg madrasa (15<sup>th</sup> century). In 2006 the bare bricks of the wall were not decorated (Fig. 6). In 2013, however, their enhanced touristic appeal bore superficial



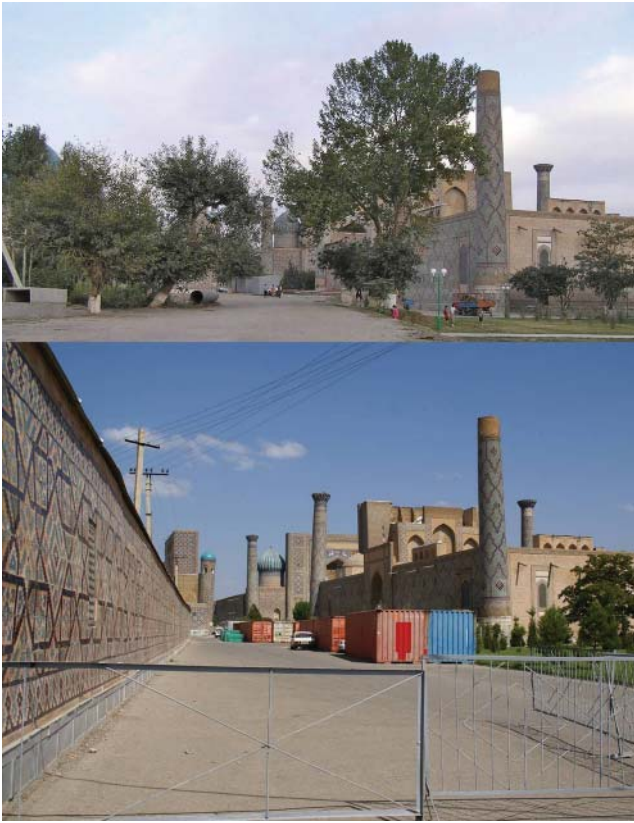


Fig. 4. View along northern side of Ulugh Beg madrasa in 2005 (photo courtesy of Gwen Bennett) and after the erection of the wall in 2013.

manship. Although relatively new, the wall is in a very bad state of repair, due to rainwater from broken gutters. Its straight vertical lines have caved in at several spots, which has resulted in unusual curves and bulges with decorative bricks already breaking and falling down, and glazes wearing off.

However, if one walks through the threshold of the superficial wooden doors, the green serenity of the symmetrically trimmed fir trees on the side of the Registan Square is unexpectedly interrupted by the demolished houses with piles of broken chairs, tables and beds cluttered on enormous heaps of rubble on the other side of the wall (Fig. 8). Barking dogs could easily discourage any further explorations. The inquisitive tourist gaze is met by the surprised looks of a few local men chatting on a bench amidst the bulldozer noise and dust. The state of the houses is striking as it seems that their inhabitants have left a few moments before the bulldozers; the furniture is still in the rooms with feeble walls, ready to collapse. This regeneration campaign has resulted in the demolition of multiple residences, mainly in the

resemblance to the square Kufic exterior decoration of the three Registan madrasas executed in the *banna'i* technique. In the *banna'i* technique, the brick is glazed only on one side in light or dark blue and arranged as decorative geometrical ornament. At present, the Registan wall consists of simple geometrical patterns (Figs. 7a, b) applied only on the side facing the square; the other side facing the old town has no decoration. The enormity of the wall is sporadically broken by a few wooden carved doors and windows, celebrating the modern equivalent of traditional Uzbek crafts-

Fig. 5. Composite image showing the north side of the Registan wall, with work underway on the new road and the destruction of the adjoining houses in August 2013.

Fig. 6. On the left, south side of the Registan wall in 2006 soon after its construction but before the decorative tile work was added.





old Timurid town. Similar urban renewal campaigns have been going on in Samarkand since 2009,<sup>3</sup> and only a few families have received compensations so far. Of course it is impossible to know what will replace the houses which I saw in their partially demolished state, although the observer who knows about the analogous process of “urban renewal” that is going on in another of the historic Silk Road cities, Kashgar in Xinjiang, would have little cause for optimism.

### The Bibi Khanum and its surroundings



If one proceeds northeast from the Registan, following the route of the street first laid out by Timur’s redevelopment of the city, one arrives at his great Friday Mosque (1399–1405), the Bibi Khanum, one of the masterpieces of Islamic architecture (Paskaleva 2012). At the nadir of its decay, it had been reduced to a core of the main sanctuary, its dome having collapsed and the *iwan* (monumental gate) of its façade reduced to a perilously suspended fragment. The small northern and southern mosques facing on the courtyard were also in ruins and without their domes (Fig. 9). Of the huge entrance *iwan* only the side pillars remained.

Fig. 9. The Bibi Khanum Mosque in 1968. (After: N. Aleskerov, Samarkand [Tashkent, 1970], pp. 118–19.)



Figs. 7a, b. South side of the Registan wall in 2013.

Fig. 8. The old town behind the Registan wall (composite photo 2013).



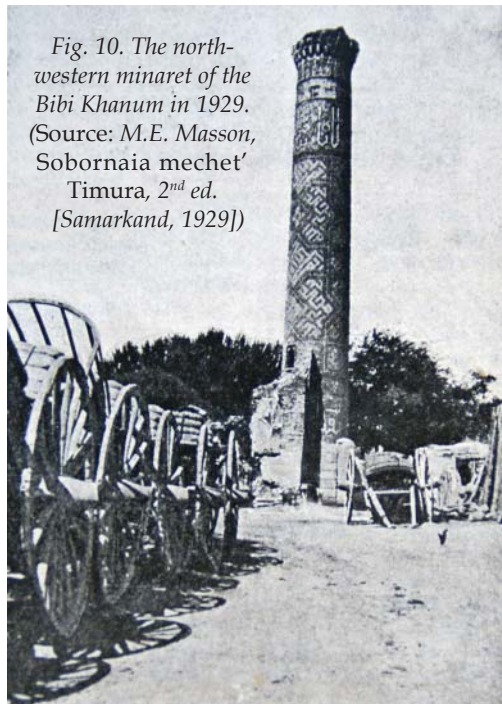


Fig. 10. The north-western minaret of the Bibi Khanum in 1929. (Source: M.E. Masson, *Sobornaia mechet' Timura*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. [Samarkand, 1929])

Nothing was left of the domed galleries that connected all these elements; only the north-western minaret had survived (Fig. 10). As observed during the reconstruction of the building, some pieces of original tile that had remained ended up discarded in heaps of rubble.

The Bibi Khanum Mosque was comprehensively studied by Sh. E. Ratiia in the 1940s. Ratiia drew up the first restoration plans based on its ruins and produced reconstruction watercolours (Fig. 11; Ratiia 1950). The renowned Soviet archaeologist and architect Galina A. Pugachenkova finalized the restoration plans for the mosque at the beginning of the 1950s. Further archaeological research was performed by L. Iu. Mankovskaia in 1967. After 1974 the restoration project was led by the architect Konstantin S. Kriukov, one of the most influential restorers in the Soviet

Fig. 11. Reconstruction of the Bibi Khanum by Ratiia (1950).

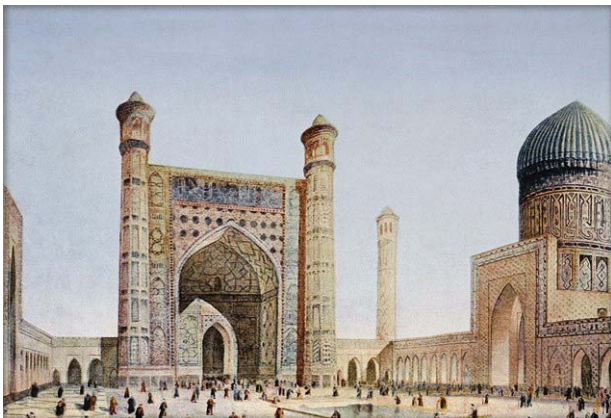
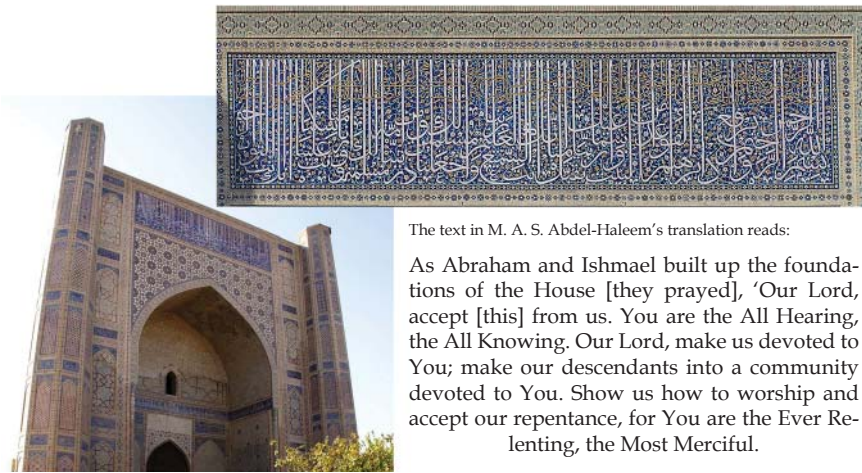


Fig. 12. View of the Bibi Khanum from the northeast, showing the newly constructed pylon of the main sanctuary whose upper part had not yet been re-decorated with new tiles. (Photo © 1991 Daniel C. Waugh).

period, who initiated the replacement of all brick load-bearing structures with reinforced concrete frames (Demchenko 2011, p. 73). Throughout the 1980s and 90s the collapsed domes of the side mosques were rebuilt with reinforced concrete and new tiling was inserted along the domes' ribbed outer shells. After 1985 the main sanctuary was adorned with massive pylons, decorated in mass-produced tiles (Fig. 12). By the end of the 1990s the epigraphic programs were executed anew. The new Koranic epigraphic band on the main sanctuary at Bibi Khanum contains Sura Al-Baqarah (The Cow), Aya 127/128 (Fig. 13, next page). It is interesting to note that exactly the same text can be found above the entrance to the Gok Gunbad Mosque in Shahr-i Sabz, initially commissioned by Timur's grandson Ulugh Beg (1435–36) and rebuilt after Uzbek independence. The present Koranic epigraphy of the exterior and interior of Bibi-Khanum, Gok Gunbad and other Timurid monuments, was designed by the Uzbek calligrapher Habibullah Solih. It is possible that during the restoration campaigns similar calligraphic templates were reused for completely different monuments, situated in different cities and dating from different centuries.

The Bibi Khanum southern small mosque is closed for tourists at the moment. There are pigeons living in the disintegrating vault of its entrance *iwan*.



The text in M. A. S. Abdel-Haleem's translation reads:

As Abraham and Ishmael built up the foundations of the House [they prayed], 'Our Lord, accept [this] from us. You are the All Hearing, the All Knowing. Our Lord, make us devoted to You; make our descendants into a community devoted to You. Show us how to worship and accept our repentance, for You are the Ever Relenting, the Most Merciful.

Fig. 13. The Koranic epigraphic band above the iwan of the main sanctuary of Bibi Khanum. (Photo by author and the detail courtesy of Gwen Bennett.)



Fig. 15 (right). View of the back section of the iwan screen of the Bibi Khanum, showing separation between it and the reinforced concrete of the towers, 2013.

The modern bricks forming the arch are falling down (Fig. 14). The northern small mosque, open to tourists, has been turned into a dusty, unwelcoming souvenir shop with wobbly floors and old unframed pictures hanging on the walls. The state of the main sanctuary is alarming. One can now see colossal holes between the two massive polygonal towers rebuilt in reinforced concrete and the back side of the *iwan* screen (Fig. 15). Rain water is continually penetrating the sanctuary through broken gutters. The dome had been severely damaged by the earth-

Fig. 14. The iwan arch of the southern small mosque of Bibi Khanum, with its disintegrating brickwork, 2013.



quake in 1897. The remnants of its shell were visible until the late 1960s; the present dome was rebuilt in 1979 (Fig. 16). The pigeons have now entirely taken

Fig. 16. The dome of the main sanctuary of the Bibi Khanum, still broken in 1969, and rebuilt but not yet tiled in 1979. (Photos © Daniel C. Waugh.)







Fig. 17. Back side of the main sanctuary of Bibi Khanum in 2006 (top) and in 2013.

over the dome. Entering the main mosque may soon require wearing a helmet.

A huge piece of the original Kufic script on the outer western wall of the Bibi Khanum sanctuary has vanished in the last five to six years (Fig. 17). The wooden gutters are broken, so that rain water flows directly along the wall. Moreover, the back side of the mosque is exposed to fumes and road vibrations from the traffic to the nearby Siyob bazaar (Fig. 18). The bazaar, which is in a sense emblematic of Samarqand, has always been a major tourist attraction. It is accessed currently through Chorraha Street, which runs right along the back of the Bibi Khanum sanctuary. The proximity of this narrow and yet very busy road with extensive fumes from old Soviet cars, is a real threat



Fig. 18. Congested traffic behind Bibi Khanum, 2013.

to the architectural substance of the building, its profound tile decoration and Kufic inscriptions. In the late 14<sup>th</sup> century Timur shattered numerous livelihoods in the area in order to clear the site for his magnificent mosque. The massive destruction of old urban fabric allowed Timur to decorate the exterior of Bibi Khanum with huge Kufic texts that could be read from a considerable distance, a novel approach in the Islamic world. The inscriptions are unique and together with the Kufic texts on the Yasawi Shrine in Turkestan (1390s) form the first examples of exterior epigraphic decoration in the history of Islamic architecture. Yet in 2013, the exterior Kufic inscriptions of the Bibi Khanum mosque are being allowed to disappear.

During the urban regeneration of Samarqand prior to the 2007 celebrations, the whole square between the Bibi Khanum Mosque and the Bibi Khanum Mausoleum (15<sup>th</sup> century) was completely refurbished. In 2005–6, the mausoleum, which had been reduced to ruins (Fig. 19), was adorned with a new pseudo-Timurid dome on a high drum and rebuilt facades with arched portals. The outer wall of the Bibi Khanum madrasa was built up above ground level with modern brick, to replicate the presumed position of the original *guldastas* (corner towers) (Fig. 20).

Fig. 19. The Bibi Khanum Mausoleum, early 20<sup>th</sup> century. (Source: Marakanda facebook <[https://content-a-pao.xx.fbcdn.net/hphotos-ash3/1381789\\_644965535547634\\_549468625\\_n.jpg](https://content-a-pao.xx.fbcdn.net/hphotos-ash3/1381789_644965535547634_549468625_n.jpg)>.)

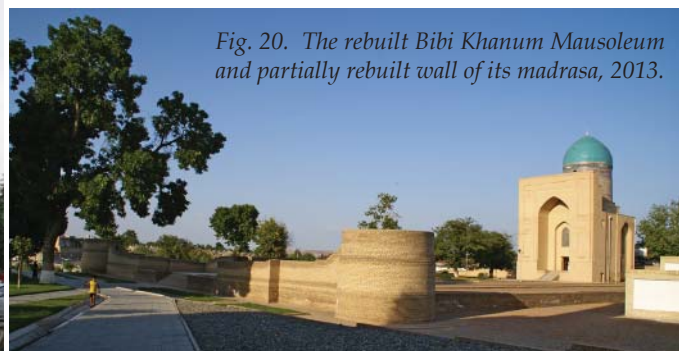


Fig. 20. The rebuilt Bibi Khanum Mausoleum and partially rebuilt wall of its madrasa, 2013.

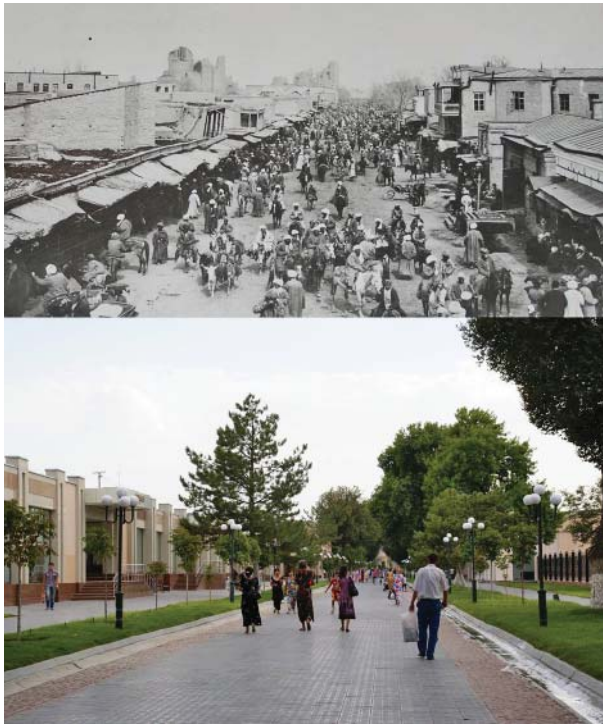


Fig. 21. Tashkent Road, late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century and 2013. (Sources: Marakanda Facebook <[https://scontent-a-pao.xx.fbcdn.net/hphotos-prn1/72929\\_457441794305816\\_557072960\\_n.jpg](https://scontent-a-pao.xx.fbcdn.net/hphotos-prn1/72929_457441794305816_557072960_n.jpg)>; photo by author.)

The Bibi Khanum Square is situated at the end of the Tashkent Road which connects the Registan Square with the Timurid Friday Mosque. It used to be the most vibrant trading hub of Samarqand with buzzing shops and caravan stalls (Fig. 21). There is no trace of this effervescent market at present. The new handicraft shops and empty low-rise office buildings erect-

Fig. 22. The “renewed” Tashkent Road with its shops and doorways blocking out the old residential areas but for an occasional glimpse through an open door, 2013.



Fig. 23. The gate to the Siyob bazaar, 2013

ed along the Tashkent Road, as part of the Samarqand regeneration plan, evoke a painful sensation of loss and desolation. The shopping area is severed from the houses of the old city by yet another wall with occasional gates that offer quick glimpses into the life of Samarqand citizens (Fig. 22). In August 2013, very few tourists strolled down the Tashkent Road and were there not because of its welcoming atmosphere but out of sheer necessity: the road hosts one of the very few supermarkets in the old town and a post office.

The only witness to the buzzing entrepreneurial spirit of the Tashkent Road is the Chorsu, the market Siyob, to the north of the Bibi Khanum Mosque. The bazaar has been severed from its surroundings by a massive gate and a black metal fence in recent years (Fig. 23). The new additions to the Chorsu obstruct the view of the Bibi Khanum Mosque from the east for the tourists approaching from the Shah-i Zinda





Fig. 24. The outer wall of the Siyob bazaar concealing much of Bibi Khanum, 2013.

necropolis (Fig. 24). The market stalls, apparently intended to entertain these tourists on their way from Shah-i Zinda to the Timurid mosque, are in a very dilapidated state. Most of the windows and doorframes are blocked with bricks (Fig. 25) or turned into a mini biomass landfill site with all the remnants of the daily garbage from the market.

### Gur-i Amir and Ak Saray

The unimaginative approach of building walls at the Registan, along the Tashkent Road and around the Timurid dynastic mausoleum of Gur-i Amir (early 15<sup>th</sup> century), reveals an attempt to push the local population away from the tourist sites and artificially cut through the organically grown neighbourhoods of the old Timurid city. This reality thus flies in the face of the underlying philosophy of a report drawn up by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture in collaboration with local authorities in Samarqand in 1996 (its focus was on the areas around the Gur-i Amir). At the outset, the report warned (Aga Khan 1996,



Fig. 25. Market stalls between Shah-i Zinda and Bibi Khanum, 2013.

p. 5): "If individual monuments are exhibited at the expense of the surrounding urban fabric, their isolation can be detrimental to the unique character of the historic nucleus without really adding to the appreciation of the monuments themselves."

During the Soviet restorations (1943–1956) Zasytkin had opened up the area around the Gur-i Amir in order to create a stunning view of the whole complex, including the main octagonal mausoleum, the madrasa to the east and the *khanaqah* (Sufi lodge) to the west. The present urban situation is quite different.

In 2013, the Gur-i Amir wall encircles the whole complex. The wall's decoration, visible only on the side facing the mausoleum, is very sparse. A few geometric patterns of glazed brick executed in the *banna'i* technique adorn the otherwise rather blank wall clad in yellow brick. Several gates in the wall provide access to the adjacent streets of the old town (Fig. 26). In August 2013, new mud bricks were being made, presumably for the further extension of the wall.

When I saw the Gur-i Amir portal for the first time in September 2006, Iosif I. Notkin's 1950s brick restoration was intact (Fig. 27). In the 1950s the founda-



Fig. 26. Door along the Gur-i Amir wall, 2013.

Fig. 27. Restorations of the main entrance to Gur-i Amir. On left, photo by Sergei Prokudin-Gorskii, 1905–1910; in center, in 1999; on right, in 2013. (Sources: Library of Congress <<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/ppp/prok/02200/02290v.jpg>>; © 1999 Daniel C. Waugh; author.)



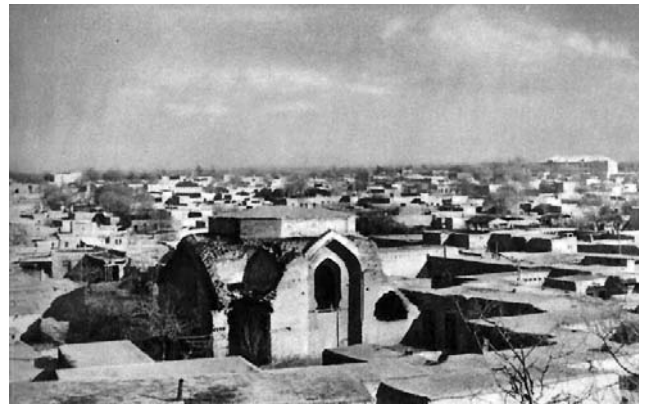
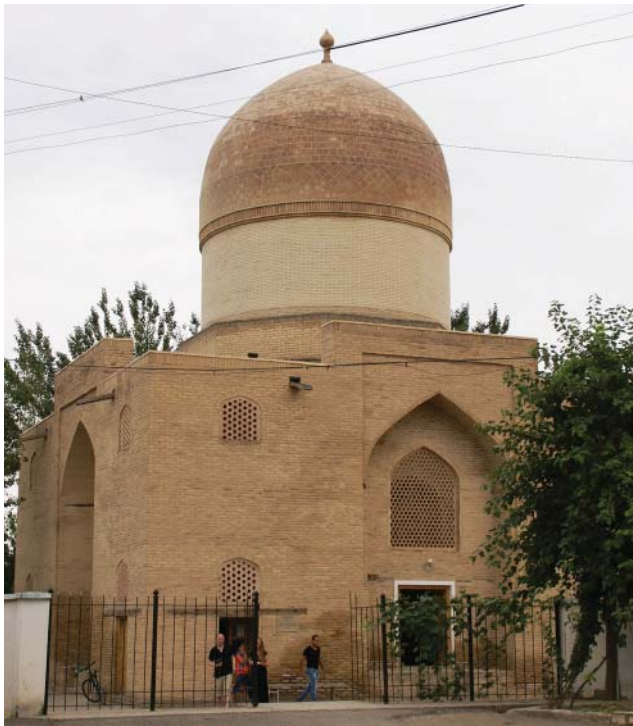


Fig. 28 (left). The Ak Saray after restoration, 2013.

Fig. 29. The Ak Saray prior restoration, undated photo. (Source: <<http://www.ast.uz/en/catalog.php?bid=74&sid=37&aid=215>>)

tions of the gate had been stabilised with reinforced concrete and the damaged *muqarnas* (stalactite vault) restored (Kriukov 2004, p. 459). The first pictures by Prokudin-Gorskii from around 1910 show the state of the main entrance prior to the Soviet interventions. After September 2008 the whole *iwan* surface was tiled and a Koranic inscription was added above the archway. The text is Sura 'Ali 'Imran (The House of Imran), Aya 104. The addition of newly designed epigraphy seems to be a common practice in present Uzbekistan. The monuments turn into a landscape of layered restorations, each political regime leaving its own mark based on its own ideology. Unfortunately, the approach of Zasytkin, who insisted that all tiles be inserted by hand on the Gur-i Amir dome and was constantly present on the site to assure this was properly done, has been replaced by the desire to present mass-produced fictional works of art to the flocks of international tourists. The fact that this epigraphy is being added after the monuments had been listed by UNESCO as World Heritage in 2001 has been conveniently forgotten.

The newly rebuilt Ak Saray has recently opened its doors behind the Gur-i Amir complex (Fig. 28). The original Ak Saray (Fig. 29) was built under Sultan Ahmad (1469–1494) to the southwest of Gur-i Amir. As Pugachenkova observed in 1963 (p. 186), “The total lack of decorative covering of walls – all these features create a bare skeleton of a construction hardly likely to attract the attention of the wandering visitor.” This makes one think that the present dazzling interior is largely a modern invention (Fig. 30; Color Plate

VII). A newly devised epigraphic band runs along the interior of the main chamber. The tourists are led from the Gur-i Amir mausoleum to the Ak Saray palace along elaborately decorated uninhabited houses (Fig. 31, next page) that have replaced the traditional residential architecture. The spookiness of their glassless windows and broken ceilings adds a flair of a bad, monochrome spectacle – much different from the splash of colour at Registan during the endless repetitions for the ‘Melodies of the Orient’ festival and the vibrant flags adorning the city center.

Fig. 30. The Ak Saray interior decoration after restoration, 2013.





Fig. 31. The residential street behind the Gur-i Amir in 1979 (photo © Daniel C. Waugh) and rebuilt in 2013.



Fig. 32. Advertising for the “Melodies of the Orient” festival.

### “Melodies of the Orient” Music Festival

The hectic speed of all regeneration activities, and in particular of the road that was being laid out in August 2013 behind the Registan, can be perhaps explained with the frantic preparations for the long-

advertised 9<sup>th</sup> international biennial music festival “Sharq Taronalari” (Melodies of the Orient) (Fig. 32) that took place on 27 August 2013 on Registan Square.<sup>5</sup> Even the director-general of UNESCO Ms. Irina Bokova attended the celebrations during her first official visit to Uzbekistan. In her address, Ms. Bokova said: “Cultures do not grow in isolation – they prosper through contact, they flourish through exchange.”<sup>6</sup>

Ironically, the Samarqand walls seem to be celebrating in particular the concept of isolation and destruction – the idea of shielding off the original old city fabric from the tourists.

Of course the use of the square for public performance was hardly new, as its sprucing up in earlier years created a stage for “sound and light” extravaganzas to appeal to the tourists, and rehearsals for events were common sights (Adams 2010). In August 2013, Registan Square was closed for tourists most of the time but for the hours from 12 noon until 3 pm. Needless to say that visiting the square during the early afternoon at temperatures above 40° C could be quite demanding even for the younger tourists. The closure was necessitated by the unending rehearsals for the “Melodies of the Orient” festival. The dancers had become a tourist attraction themselves. Hidden behind enormous white flags, numerous fences and stringent police control, the young men and women relentlessly performed their acts over and over again under the scrutiny of high officials who would regularly come to inspect the progress of the rehearsals (Fig. 33).



Fig. 33. Rehearsals for the “Melodies of the Orient” festival on the Registan.



Fig. 34. The wall and gate behind the Ulugh Beg madrasa, 2013.

Most of the dancers would enter the Registan through the police checkpoint at the north-western corner of the Ulugh Beg madrasa. The checkpoint is set within yet another brick wall (Fig. 34). That wall makes impossible the exploration of the oldest Registan madrasa from the north. So, standing at the southwestern minaret of the Tilla Kari madrasa, the tourists find themselves trapped between two walls – the Samarqand Registan wall and the wall to the north of the Ulugh Beg madrasa. These walls are completely superfluous and have nothing to do with the original design of the square. Registan Square used to be the most pulsating spot in Samarqand for centuries, the real crossroad of cultures and religions, and not a confined encampment losing its allure among clouds of continuous construction dust.

### Government and UNESCO priorities in the rebuilding of Samarqand

While this is not the place to explore in detail the official decision-making, even if documentation were to be available, at least a tentative outline is useful, in order that we might better begin to understand the dramatic changes being effected in Samarqand. Not the least of the interesting issues raised by a visit to the city concerns the relationship between the realities one observes and the mandates of UNESCO.

The historic centre of Samarqand – “Crossroad of Cultures” obtained UNESCO World Heritage status in 2001. Interestingly, Samarqand was the last Uzbek city to obtain this status after Khiva (1990), Bukhara (1993), and Shahr-i Sabz (2000). UNESCO has had a Tashkent office since 1999 and collaborates closely with the Uzbek Ministry of Culture and Sport Affairs, and the Board for the Protection of Cultural Heritage. In its own words, the UNESCO office “has always corresponded to the priority orientations of the Government of Uzbekistan in the field of study, preservation and revitalization of tangible and intangible culture of the country.” The Uzbek authorities “consider preservation and conservation of culture as one of the most important strategies of socio-economic and cultural development as well as the basis for forming a national

identity and ideology of the Uzbek youth in the conditions of transition.”<sup>7</sup> The 1992 Uzbek constitution (§49) postulated for the first time in the history of Uzbekistan that “cultural monuments are preserved by the state.”<sup>8</sup> This is in line with the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972, §4), which entrusts cultural heritage to the state.<sup>9</sup> Thus, in theory, Uzbekistan complies with international conventions and norms regulating heritage. During its 33<sup>rd</sup> session held on 20 October 2005 UNESCO initiated the celebrations which were to take place in 2007 on the occasion of Samarqand’s 2750<sup>th</sup> anniversary. State support for the event was secured by a decree issued by president Islam Karimov on 25 July 2006.<sup>10</sup> One of the projects launched in preparation for it was the building of the Registan wall.

In its unflattering report from December 2007, UNESCO insisted on the development of a new management plan for Samarqand.<sup>11</sup> The major concerns of previous UNESCO reports<sup>12</sup> were: a) Lack of strategic approach to urban conservation; b) Lack of a proper management plan; c) Detrimental impact of new roads; d) Conservation of urban fabric.

One has to wonder whether measures initiated by the Uzbek government in subsequent years effectively responded to these concerns or rather promised to exacerbate the conditions about which UNESCO had expressed concern. In 2009-10, 3,762 million sum were reserved for the creation of 17.4 km new roads.<sup>13</sup> A ministerial decree from 7 June 2011 set the restoration and preservation goals for the city until 2015. The programme envisages the restorations of 22 historical sites in the Timurid capital. The two major sites to undergo a reconstruction are the Ishrat Khaneh (15<sup>th</sup> century) – 1.48 billion sum and the Bibi Khanum complex (late 14<sup>th</sup> – early 15<sup>th</sup> century) – 1 billion sum (= USD 460,000 at current exchange rate). It is worth recalling that these two monuments were deemed to be destroyed beyond repair in an inventory carried out in 1924 by the archaeologist Vasilii L. Viatkin and the architect Boris N. Zasyrkin prior to the first Samarqand “restorations.” The present site of the Ishrat Khaneh is being redeveloped (Fig. 35a, b, next page); large amounts of new brick for building that is imminent are stored in front of the main gate. It is already evident that that a new monument is being created in order to draw even more tourists. As far as the Bibi Khanum is concerned, in August 2013 there was no visible evidence of any reconstruction or repair work on the mosque itself. The present policy focusses rather on the attraction of international tourists, who are deemed to bring much needed foreign currency to the city. The Uzbek authorities have now set aside 6,140 million sum to be spent on the “development of new tourist routes, new tourism amenities

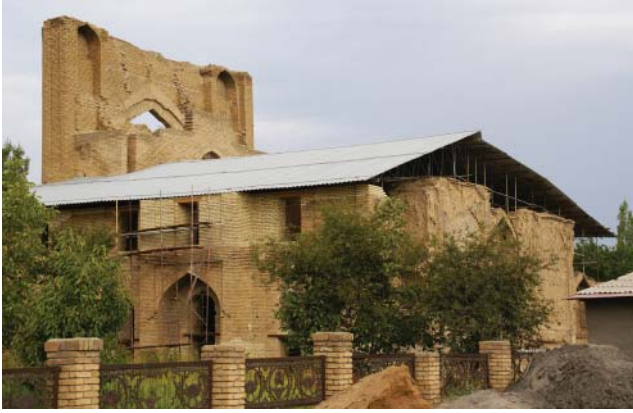


Fig. 35a, b. The Ishrat Khaneh under reconstruction, 2013, where the contrast with Pugachenkova's photo from 1963 demonstrates how much of the interior decoration is being created de novo.

and infrastructure services with the expectation of a 1.5 growth rate with '1.7 billion sums' expected in the state budget within 5 years."<sup>14</sup>

On 1 February 2012, the Uzbek authorities submitted a state of conservation report in response to recommendations of the World Heritage Committee. In the report they state that "within the general plan, property preservation activities are developed for the condition analysis and partial preventative intervention into damaged or vulnerable structures of both large ensembles and separate monuments."<sup>15</sup> The management framework was set to be completed by March 2012 and was submitted to the World Heritage Centre by 1 February 2013. The preparation of the plan was granted USD 50,000 from the Spanish Funds-in-Trust.

In 2013, the approved Management Plan named "Document on Management Frameworks and Processes for the World Heritage Property of Samarqand – Crossroad of Cultures" was praised by the World Heritage Committee as it provided "a clear and sound basis for preservation of the property and its buffer zone". The main conservation principle according to the plan is "to safeguard all the attributes that directly express or contribute to the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV)".<sup>16</sup> The building of the new, wide road in August 2013 behind the Registan wall and the demolition of the adjoining houses was one of the first results of the adoption of this new plan.

Might one not read in the 2011-15 general plan for the conservation and rehabilitation of the historic city a short-sighted emphasis on developing tourism, without taking the necessary precautions to protect the monuments? At very least, the visitor to Samarqand today cannot but notice the discrepancy between statements promising a "sound basis for preservation" and "intervention into vulnerable structures," and the actual state of the greatest building commissioned by Timur – the Bibi Khanum Mosque. As



John Urry (2011) has observed "the tourist [is] a kind of contemporary pilgrim, seeking authenticity in other 'times' and other 'places' away from that person's everyday life" (Urry and Larsen 2011, p. 10). Is it possible for the tourists who would visit Uzbekistan to find any authenticity in the city of Samarqand anymore?

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## Notes

1. The Uzbek SSR Hamza award (a high distinction) was given to Konstantin S. Kriukov as the main scientific advisor, Khudaikulov as leader of the production works, the architects A. Zainutdinov, I. Pinkhasov, the artist A. Stupin, the engineer Ia. Aradovskii and the master restorers M. Asadov, Anvar Kuliev, T. Kurbanov and Sh. Saifiev. For an overview of the restoration work in Samarqand, which specifically recognizes a good many of the other master restorers, see *Istoriia Samarkanda 1969–70*, II, pp. 390–406.

2. This road cannot be seen on the Google 2013 maps yet [accessed November 2013]

3. <[http://www.uznews.net/news\\_single.php?lng=ru&cid=30&nid=13885](http://www.uznews.net/news_single.php?lng=ru&cid=30&nid=13885)> [accessed November 2013].

4. A. A. Asanov was the construction engineer. His engineering project was published in 1972 in the Soviet volume celebrating Samarqand’s 2500<sup>th</sup> anniversary (Asanov 1972). Ia. Aradovskii, A. Tsepenuk and Hamburg were also involved as engineers. Yu. Gorokhov was the main artist (Kriukov 1989, p. 104).

5. <<http://www.Samarqand.uz/rus/news/item/857>> [accessed November 2013].

6. <[http://www.unesco.org/ulis/cgi-bin/ulis.pl?catno=222869&set=5281242E\\_0\\_419&database=ged&gp=0&ll=1](http://www.unesco.org/ulis/cgi-bin/ulis.pl?catno=222869&set=5281242E_0_419&database=ged&gp=0&ll=1)> [accessed October 2013].

7. <<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/tashkent/culture/>> [accessed November 2013].

8. <[http://www.lex.uz/Pages/GetAct.aspx?lact\\_id=35869](http://www.lex.uz/Pages/GetAct.aspx?lact_id=35869)> [accessed October 2013].

9. <<http://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/>> [accessed October 2013].

10. <<http://uza.uz/ru/documents/2219/>> [accessed November 2013].

11. UNESCO Mission report. Samarqand - Crossroads of Cultures World Heritage site (Uzbekistan) (603 rev) from 19 May 2008.

12. UNESCO document WHC-SOC-1903. Samarqand - Crossroad of Cultures (Uzbekistan). Decisions at: <<http://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/5081/>>.

13. <[http://www.lex.uz/Pages/GetAct.aspx?lact\\_id=1509346](http://www.lex.uz/Pages/GetAct.aspx?lact_id=1509346)> [accessed August 2013].

14. UNESCO document WHC-SOC-404. Samarqand - Crossroad of Cultures (Uzbekistan) (C 603rev).

15. UNESCO document WHC-SOC-254. Samarqand - Crossroad of Cultures (Uzbekistan)

16. UNESCO document WHC-SOC-1903. Samarqand - Crossroad of Cultures (Uzbekistan). Decisions at: <<http://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/5081/>>.



