Chapter 5  Architecture in Iran & Central Asia during Temürids’s Era

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In 7th decade of the 14th century when the last Ilkhante’s king of Iran territory, was elapsed, Temür, one of the central Asian tribe heads, gain power & could establish government of Genghis Mughals’ survivors on a great area of Europe & Asia. After a while, he, who had rose among nomadic tribes, made his own tribal tribe a center of decision for a great imperial in the world.

Samarqand, Bukhara, Shahr-e-Sabz (green city) & Harat that have been known as governmental cores of this system in central Asia & Afghanistan had important cultural & artistic centers working for exposure of Temürids’s power. They used culture & art as tools of introducing the glory & greatness of their court.

Best of art masters & skillful artisans from east & west, even by force, were hired in these culture & art centers & were working for realization of Temürids’s Kings wishes & requests.
Many of their works were destroyed among other centuries because of earthquake, invasion & neglect and also they are not available now.

Evaluating architecture of Temürids’s era, four levels must be considered:

1. Architecture on Temürids’s government (1370 – 1405)

2. Architecture on Shahrokh Mirza’s government (1405- 1447) & his wife Gowhar shad

3. Architecture on sultan Hussein Bayghara’s government (1470 - 1506) & his advisor Alishir Navayi

4. Architecture on Turkamanan’s government, Temürids’ rival on west of Iran like QaraQoyunluyan (1380 – 1486) & Agh Ghoyunloos (1378-1508)

Temür occupied IRAN, Anatoly & Bein-Ol-nahrain by widespread invasions & harsh attacks. Temür’s attack to Anatoly caused Bezants delay of triumph by Ottomans. Although previously Baghdad was the winter capital of Mughals but it didn’t stand upon the Temür’s attacks & after these attacks, it lost its former glory & grandeur.

Temür entered India from east & won the glorious, glamorous, rich government of Indian court. He was planning for an attack to china, fulfilling his own wishes for Genghis empire revival; that, unexpectedly, passed away.
Not only did great amount of plunders & vast regions which was gained by Temür after Indian’s triumph made his wish for world glory accent, but it also put great amount of tools & rich sources & precious materials specially for using in decoration & helped him to establish glorious works as evidences for his power exposure.

One of the macro programs of Temür was fixing of his own birthplace, Kash city, as his government capital & he named the city “Green city“. This pretty unknown city which was located in an arid desert, south of Samarqand in Zar-Afshan mountains neighborhood, became a Metropolis by Temür.

Nowadays there only remains THE entrance of Temür ’s residential palace “white house” or “Agasaray” (1379-1396) from the whole city. This massive huge entrance had an entrance hole by width of 22m surrounded with which it was made a glorious view.

Entrances & Arches of the palace which are made of ripe brick, have two kinds of surfaces with different sizes which are decorated by great tiles. The bigger surface is covered with tiles constructed of miniature parts & the smaller surface is decorated with colorful tiles & a multi- color epigraph with the name of Muhammad Yusuf “Tabriz artist” inked on it.
These colorful tiles are produced with a modern technique and are used in various, lucid & glaze colors in a tile in which there is a relief oily strip among them for preventing from mixture & mingling of colors while baking the bricks.

Not only Temür used lots of Mughul booties to establish a court for sheikh Ahmad Yasvi (died in 1126 A.C.) but he also made a very big cemetery just there.

Yasa, located in south of Kazakhstan, which is known nowadays as Turkestan, was one of the important cities, located in 3 trade ways in north of Tashkent & main roads of trading & business passed from there.

Ahmad Yasvy was one of the students of great dervish “sheikh Yusuf Hamadani “based Yasvy heresy & after his death, his monument became a shrine for his clienteles who were mainly Turks & habitants from central Asia & Volga.

The domes & arch’s outlook which are known on top of monuments surrounding about of the sea.

This cube- like structure which is built in (65/5 * 46/5) m is decorated with mosaic bricks and various epigraphs.

There is a vast arched balcony of 37/5 m high in the southern part of this structure. The door, used in this arch is a wooden one with a great carving.
The dome is equal in height with the entrance balcony. This room, in which there is a very big pot that is used to make porridge (made of wheat and meat) in the days of Ashura, was very likely the place Sufis got together. At the end of the middle axis of the main tomb (resting place), there is a dome covered with blue tiles on an arch decorated with paintings. This dome is constructed on a cylindrical mound of earth. The sitting room and dining room and other buildings, including a mosque, a meditation room, a library on the side area, from the whole construction. Many of these rooms including quadrangular rooms and rooms have multiple angles with domed arches. The design and architecture of these buildings go back to the kingdom of Temür. Some of these arches especially the ones with crossing arches have holes so that rays of sunshines can shine on the arches. These arches are invaluable and in fact they are reminder of the architecture previous to Temür in central Iran. On the wall of Ahmad Yasavi’s place of pilgrimage (resting place), the sentence “act of Haji Hassan Shirazi” is written and also the tile which is on Ahmad Yasavi’s grave, bears the signature of Shamsibneee Abdolahe Vahabe Shairazi as the constructor of this construction. The models remained of the architecture of those days of Shiraz, support the assumption that Temür took architects from Shiraz to central Asia by force and had them to work there.
Those architects had to teach their knowledge and techniques to the orders. Therefore crossing arches and dome-shaped arches maintained to those architects whose their ancestors and grandfathers were from shiraz and immigrate to shiraz. Using local and scales in designing the plan of a construction characteristic of Temürids architecture.

Researchers, about the construction of Ahmad Yasavi’s tomb (resting place), have come to a conclusion that the dimensions of this construction is 6016 cm based on historical texts. The first room which was designed in this construction and had the key role in designing the whole of construction, must be the central hall with the dimensions 30*30 cm. In fact, this room is located in center of construction and the other rooms and places are located around it. In the main design, dimensions and measures of the tomb is designed completely based on this central hall and that’s why doing the job became easier for the architects.

The main architect has used domed arches with plaster decoration on them to show main areas of the construction. The arch of Jamaat Khan (the place of congregation) was the main place to get together and it was garnished with plaster work on arches. The arch tomb and mosque also decorated with artistic and beautiful decoration and plaster work on the walls.

The arches decorated with plaster work were often applied in important places, just as we see in Abdol Sammad’s resting place in Natanz. But what is
applied in Ahmad Yasavi’s tomb was one of the first examples which has plastered work arches in large scales.

In architecture of the early years of Temür’s reign, decorating and plaster work was no longer the main principle and it was just applied as the subordinate principle in triangular arches. This kind of decoration was applied in small arches constructed on tombs in Torkestan. Of course Ahmad Yasavi’s tomb is a real museum for different techniques in constructing arches. In this construction, some arches are directly constructed on the walls and some others are constructed on an octagonal area of the same dimensions and the others are constructed on bows or compound bows.

Temür, eager and desirous to conquer the world, continued his wars and victories, shortly he felt that Shahre sabz is too small and remote to be the capital. That’s why he decided to transfer it to samarkand.

Roy Gonzales, on behalf of Henry 3, who visited Samarkand in 1404, praised the majesty and glory of the city in this way: “the garden with beautiful brooks, and a huge tent covered with gold and jewelareis was set up and around it, there were fabulous brick-made kiosks.”

In 1399, Temür ordered about constructing a glamorous and beautiful mosque that to be unique in Samarkand. This mosque is known as BibiKhanum (Temür’s wife) and its construction was finished in 1404.
built in a rectangular area with dimensions 109*167 m mosque, there are huge porches which are connected to each other by corridors and halls. Every one of the four porches lead to some chambers which are covered with towering and onion-shaped domes. Around the porch facing the south (kiblah), they are constructed some shops and this porch lead to the third magnificent dome.

The domes of this construction were ruined in 15th century. They are like two walls and the inside hollow crust, which was the outside surface of the dome, forms the arched ledge of the room. The walls of this mosque are decorated with sudatory bricks and the domes are decorated with blue galzerd tiles, this demonstrates the great and beautiful decorations during Temür's period...

Although the shape of mosque with four yards, like Bibi Khanum mosque are traditional shapes of Iranian mosques related to 12th century bc, its cycle rooms behind the yard are new designs of architecture. The proportion in the building of this mosque is also kept in other Temür's buildings. Design and map of this mosque is totally an imitation of the last big mosque which was built by Iljantine king, king of Ilkhante, in Sultaniah in Iran. Although it is destroyed now. Design and decoration of this big mosque which was built by Temür's order not only was supported to keep Ilkhante's tradition in building mosques, but also it was the symbol of Temür's power, achievements and victory.
According to Sharafaldin Ali Yazdi, writer of Temür’s history, architects of this huge building were from Iran and India and the building utilities were carried by 95 elephants from far eras to Samarkand. Of course the process of building and decorating this mosque was a great of imporetance that Behzad, one of the famous Iranian painters, painted this mosque. Also a big school was built in front of the main gate of this mosque, but unfortunately only Biblichaton’s tomb is remained today.

Shahzand is a cemetry on hills around Samarkand near Qesm Ibne Abbas's grave, who is mohammad’s cousin and martyred in an islamic war. Most of Temür’s relation’s tombs are there.

Temür’s tomb is somewhere else, it isn’t Shahzand’s cemetry. Temür liked to be burried in his birth place, but his sudden death in 1405 BC made people to berie him in Gour-Amir. Gour Amir’s building was built as a school before 1401 BC but when his grandchild and probable subsitution Soltan Mohammad died in 1403 BCburried him in this place temporarly. When in 1404 BC Temür came back to Samarkand orderded to make this place like a tomb. After Temür’s death his son Shahrokh was burried in this place. Then, Temür’s grandchild Alaq ordered to make this place like luxirious tomb. In fact, Gour Amir is a complex consist of a big yard which in its east part is a school and in its west
part is a Khan Qah and between them near to the southern part is a luxurious tomb which is the only left part for today.

A big dome which has covered burial room, outside is covered with blue tile like a cylele hat and shines in sunlight which is a nice example of architecture in Temür’s time.

This dome outside part is placed on a very basis. The part where the dome and basis cross is decorated in a very special way. Outside this dome is covered with several light woods which are placed vertically on a removeable part. Also, there are several woods, in inside there are supported by other woods. This clever idea in dome making has made this dome so intresting both in outsude and inside. Despite the past earthquakes, this dome is still there and has not been damaged, meaning that Iranian architectectors are so good in this manner. After Temür's death his son Shahrokh became the king in Khorasan an Harat. In that time Alaq-Beik was king in Mesopotamaia and Samarkand and Ibrahim sultan was king in Shiraz east of Iran. Because of Goharshad, Shahrokh’s wife, and her request Khorasan became the place of architecture and new buildings (15th century). In order to make Shite's happy and pleased and to make them calm, since they were gaining power in Iran, Goharshad ordered to make Imam Reza’s holly shrine so luxirious.
After that, Imam Reza’s holy shrine was rebuilt. He is Shiites’ Imam and prophit mohammad’s relatives who was martyred in the nineth century in Toos near east of Iran. The place where Imam Reza was martyred is callad Mashahd which means the place of martyrdom and is a holy place for Shiite and around this place a lot of buildings to house pilgrims.

This building is decorated with the best kind of stones and tiles. Goharshad and her husband Shahrokh who were observing that nunmber of pilgrims is increasing every day, decided to built a big mosque with two halls named, Darosiade and darol hofaz; near the holy shrine; Qavamedin Shirazi, famous Iranian architect was responsible to built the mosque near the shrine. This experinced architect, built this mosque according to the traditional pattern with two yards. Also there is a dome above this yard toward Kiblah.

To Alaq-Beik’s order a royal school and a friery was built in Rigestan square 1421-1417 near Samarkand. These days, there is no information about friery. In friery’s site a school named Shirdar is built which exists up to now.

The artistic support and success of Temürids has been spreaded out to central parts os Iran and thus at their Kavir like regions of Isfahan and Yazd and most of ancient buildings have been repaired as well. At the present time, only in Yazd more than 20 buildings are remained from that period. Meanwhile tens of other buildings can be traced which proves the construction of new buildings
in the region at the time of Temür. The largest complex, built at that period, was a complex comprised of four balcony mosques, friary chouse of Dervishes, subterranean water canals, water storage place, one water well beside bath and caravanseray and nourishes them. This complex has constructed under Mirchakhmaq, who was the governor of Yazd during the kingdom of Sharkh, with the support of his wife. The style of local architecture can be seen in the buildings of this region which have been made during Temür era, these style are somehow similar to the local styles and coxtoms of the big cities of north eastern part s of Iran during this period but are totally separated.

The building of the school had been designed according to that time standards, that is, a four-balcony design such as what had been done in the passages and had one entrance building with a yard balconies. Any how, the design and classification of the different parts of this building and its spaces are so complex and fantastic that one can point out to its square like yard. The four sides of the yard are designed in such a way so that the four sided entrances are similar and symmetrical and this is of the most advanced desgining which has been applied in the Goharshad mosque in Mashahd. The four baloconies of the yard are at the same size and its entrance complex is at its right side. The art and skill applied in construction as well as decoration of this entrance complex, is one fo the most outstanding ones at that ear, and by itself is a criterian and
standard for the architecture of Temür Dynasty and also for post-Temür dynasties. Olaq Beik school is in fact, the biggest and the most complete school among the school which have been built during Temür Dynasty. This rectangle like building, has 81 meter long and 56 meter wide, with four minarets in its four corners. It also has a big pre-arch faced towards Rigestan square. The high door top of this school with a height of 35 meters, has two high domes at the two sides which most part of these have not been remained today. The highest level of development in modern arch construction in the early times of Temür period can be seen in the building of Qiasoddin school in kharjerd-started by a famous architecture named Qavamoddin as his last work, and then finished by another architecture called Qiasoddin Shirazi in 1442-1443 ad. This school was built under the order of PirAhmad Khafi, the sovereign minister of Shahrokh who was a man from Khaf. At that times, Khaf was an advanced and thriving city, but todays a destroyed one in the frontier of Iran and Afganistan.

In spite of light, delicate and façade bearing construction materials which the architects of Temürids era used to apply in the building of large cities such as Harat, heavy and massive materials have been applied in the building of these regions, and one cannot see the arches with the style of crossing arches and toys of Haratian class in this region. Walls are usually covered with great
and plaster and only their lower part, which is the pulpits and plinths, are
decorated with tiles.

After the death of Shahrokh in 1447, his son Oloq Beik succeeded him, but
the period of his ruling was short and was killed after two years by his son.

After the assassination of Oloq Beik, his cousin -Abusa’ied (1459-1461
A.D.) decided to rule this realm and by overcoming his rivals and claimants in
east and west, he reign over the Mesopotamia and Afghanistan of today. The
most outstanding building of this era is one which is built by the command of
Abu Sa’ied’s wife in 1465 named as Eshrat Khan (house of joy). This building
which was a place for burying the women and kids of Temürids dynasty, was
comprised of a complex with the Temürids court architecture who’s its style of
constructing arches pursues the style of Temürids courts which existed in Gohar
shad temple and Khargerd school.

The person who mostly supported this kind of art in Temürids era was
Sultan Hossein Baqera who ruled Khorasan from 1470-1506 A.D. (the cradle of
Temürids culture) whose capital was Harat. During his era, some outstanding
scholars in the world of science and literature supported and collaborated him;
scholars such as Abdul Rahman Jami, the great poet (1414-149*2 A.D.), Behzad
the distinguished painter and Alishir Navaii, the great scholar (1440-1501 A.D.)
During the reign and ruling of Hossein Baqara, a number of buildings were built and reconstructed in Harat. One of these was a school by his name from which only four minarets used to surround the school have been remained. These minarets are 55 meters high, but the bars of these manifest designs on the tile-working which are enriched than the tile-workings on buildings related to Goharshad buildings. These minarets are decorated with special tiles and seven-colored tiles with colors of dark blue, light blue, black, white, buff, yellow and green elegantly. In the excavations made at the foot of the minarets, a gravestone on which was written –Mansur - (father of Hossein Baqara) was found. such an elegant carvings which are made embossed on different surfaces with the designs of plants, flowers and blossoms on the total surface of the stone, has made it so attractive and sentimental.

The carved designs on this gravestone and other grave-stones are of the best samples of carving on stone in the Temürids era which its designs were new and novice as the innovation in carpet designs and carving on the wood. All these indicate that the carving workers of this era were informed of the innovations in other fields of art.

Cooperation and collaboration of Ali-Shir-e-Navaee with Sultan – Hossein Baqara in creating various magnificent works, and also enriching his knowledge producing government was so prominent and effective. When Temürids were
ruling the eastern parts of Iran, two Turkman tribes named as Qaraqoyonlo in 1380-1468 A.D. and AQ – Quyonlo in 1378-1508 A.D. were reigning the western parts of Iran. At the end of 14th century A.D, they ruled the eastern parts of Anatolia and northern parts of Iraq, then expanded their victories in the 15th century towards the western parts of Iran, and assigned Tabriz as their capital. The most famous ruler of Qaraqaynlus, was an Amir (ruler) called Jahan Shah who held the reign from 1438 up to 1467. He expanded his ruling territory and overcame on all parts of Iran and at last ascended the throne of kingdom in Harat. A number of Turman buildings remained from the ruling era of Turkmen, are located in a geographical vast region around Isfahan and Tabriz so far as Hasan Kayfa in Turky. Although these buildings are built by weak and harsh materials, are so important since the show the innovation of Timurids architecture, and on the other hand are indicative of the method of architecture by the Turkmen in western regions and its expansion to other regions, especially in Turkey, even during the Ottomans authority.

The only building, remained from the Qaraqayonlu era and from their capital, i.e. Tabriz is Blue mosque or Turquoise of Islam which was built in 1465 A.D. this mosque which is unique considering the architecture and decoration in Iran, due to being covered with blue miniature parts of tiles is called as blue mosque. This mosque which originally was a complex comprised
of different buildings such as reservoirs for strong water, library, cemetery and friaries for the Sufis, is also known as Mozafarieh Mosque since it was built under the command and support of Abu-Mozafar Jahan shah.

Characteristic of Temürids architecture extended to western regions too; for example the tomb of Zeinol-Mirza the son of Uzun Hassan, who was killed in 1473 A.D in Hasan Kayfa and got buried there. Although the form of this tomb is cylindrical and conformity with the ancient custom of building tombs in Anatolia (Turkey), the onion shaped dome and its ornaments formed by backed bricks and tiles are totally derived from the Temürids methods and arts.

One if the most important characteristics of Temürids’ architecture is that, there are similar magnificent Temürid buildings both in central Asia and eastern part of the world of Islam- from Turkey as far as India- hence great and splendid buildings whose design and architecture are derived from Taymoorids style, can be seen in vast areas of Islam world.

The Expansion and development of Temürid’s style of architecture in various parts of the world has been done through the emigration of architects and artists who created these buildings and through the information gained by the architects of other regions directly from viewing these buildings in central Asia and obtaining their maps and drafts to the other areas. Because of the abundance of these glorious buildings and the repetition in constructing them
from the era of Temūr in his capital, a Royal Architecture Style was introduced which was considered as a pattern and symbol for other regions and even subsequent eras. But the subsequent dynasties such as Safavids, Ottomans, and Barbarians who used to rule on these regions, pursued Temūr’s procedure not only for establishing a capital for showing their power, but also for following his thought of world capturing and conquering.¹

¹ Sheila S. Blaire and Jonathan M. Bloom: The Architecture of Iran and Asia Minor during Ilkhanates and Temurids, Translated to Persian by Hashemi Golpaygani, pp 59-82