

Shakhrisyabz (Uzbekistan)

No 885

Identification

Nomination Historic centre of Shakhrisyabz

Location Kashkadarya Region

State Party Uzbekistan

Date 27 April 1998

Justification by State Party

The town of Shakhrisyabz is over 2000 years old. It contains not only outstanding monuments dating from the period of the Timurids, but also mosques, mausoleums, and entire quarters of ancient houses. Despite the inroads of time, the vestiges remaining are still impressive in the harmony and strength of styles, an enriching addition to the architectural heritage of Central Asia and the Islamic world.

Although Samarkand may boast a great many Timurid monuments, not one can rival the Ak-Sarai Palace in Shakhrisyabz. The foundations of its immense gate have been preserved: this architectural masterpiece is astounding in its dimensions and bold design. The Dorus Saodat complex, the tomb of Timur covered in white stone, is also one of the finest memorials to be found in Central Asia.

Building has continued in Shakhrisyabz down the ages, and the succession of different architectural styles is fundamental to its unique character. The historic centre has retained its original appearance, thereby representing considerable historic, scientific, and cultural value.

Criteria i, ii, iii, and iv

Category of property

In terms of Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, the historic centre of Shakhrisyabz is a *group of buildings*.

History and description

History

Archaeological excavations have revealed traces of occupation by farming communities dating from the first millennium BC. In later periods, Hellenistic cities arose.

The town of Shakhrisyabz was constructed according to a model typical of the High Middle Ages, with a central structure similar to that of Samarkand and Bukhara. The town continued to develop throughout the 9th and 10th centuries, despite the incessant conflicts between the Samanid dynasties and then between Turkish tribes.

In the mid-14th century, a great empire was built up by Timur, who lavished constant attention on the town of his birth. Until his death in 1405, he ordered the construction of encircling walls, the grandiose Ak-Sarai palace, mosques, baths, and caravanserais, deporting the finest architects and artisans, captured during his military campaigns, to Shakhrisyabz.

After the fall of the Timurid dynasty, the town was relegated to a position of secondary importance, dependent on the Khanate of Bukhara.

Description

The nominated site consists of a number of monuments, including:

- The Ak-Sarai Palace

Construction of the "White Palace," as it was known, began in 1380, the year following Timur's conquest of Khorezm, whose artisans were deported to work on the palace and provide its rich decoration. The dimensions of this magnificent edifice can be deduced from the size of the gate-towers, traces of which still survive: two towers each 50m in height, and an arch with a span of 22m.

- The Dorus Saodat complex

This vast complex was destined as a place of burial for the ruling family and contained, in addition to the tombs themselves, a prayer hall, a mosque, and accommodation for the religious community and pilgrims. The main façade was faced with white marble. The tomb of Timur, also of white marble, is a masterpiece of the architecture of this period.

- The Chor-su bazaar and the baths

In the town centre, the covered Chor-su bazaar was built at the cross-roads of two main streets, in the form of an octagon with a central cupola, with no particular decoration but with an eye to the exterior effect of bold architecture. This construction dates from the 18th century, as do the baths, rebuilt on the site of the 15th century baths and still in use today. The baths are heated by an elaborate network of underground conduits.

In addition to its monuments, the town also offers a variety of interesting constructions of a more modern period, including the Mirhamid, Chubin, Kunduzar, and Kunchibar mosques. Period houses reflect a more popular architectural style, with rooms typically laid out around a courtyard with veranda.

Management and protection

Legal status

The town of Shakhrisyabz was entered on the List of Historic Towns under Resolution No. 339 of the Council of Ministers of Uzbekistan in 1973.

The town was also designated "Monument of Significance for the Republic" by an earlier Resolution of 1973.

Management

The major buildings and architectural ensembles are the property of the state, while the houses and other more modest buildings are privately owned.

The principal monuments are listed and protected by the decrees mentioned above. A plan for the protection of this historic town centre is currently in preparation.

The site as a whole is managed under the national responsibility of the Ministry of Culture's General Office for the Scientific Protection of Cultural Monuments, and under the municipal responsibility of the Mayor and of the Inspectorate for the Protection and Use of Cultural and Historic Monuments.

A programme known as MEROS, designed to promote tourism, is currently being implemented in association with the national tourist agency, Uzbektourism. In 1996, 23,000 domestic and 4200 foreign tourists visited the site, and numbers are increasing.

Conservation and authenticity

Conservation history

Proper archives have been kept since the early 1970s, listing the programmes of work carried out:

Ak-Sarai : 1973-75, 1994-95

Dorus Saodat : 1973-75, 1981-85, 1994-95

Chor-Su : 1976-85

Baths : 1986-90.

Conservation and restoration work is currently being carried out as part of the MEROS programme. An initial phase (1993-96) concentrated on consolidation of the architectural structures and the restoration of decorative elements. A second phase is planned, to restrict new construction in the protected zone and to rebuild period houses using traditional techniques while installing modern utilities.

Training

Management staff are recruited from graduates of the schools of architecture of Tashkent and Samarkand.

Training in restoration work is funded by a special department, and through the Usto-Shogird workshops for master's degree students who work on the sites.

Authenticity

The historic urban fabric of the town is intact, despite some insensitive insertions in the Soviet period. Care is being taken in current restoration works to ensure the use of traditional materials and techniques.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the site in February 1999.

Comparative analysis

The town of Shakhriyabz, with its monuments and traditional period houses, may be compared, although on a lesser scale, to the other capitals of the Timurid empire, Samarkand and Herat.

ICOMOS comments

At its meeting in June the Bureau requested the State Party to furnish precise details of the area proposed for inscription, the limits of the buffer zone and the regulations governing its use, and further material relating to the merits of Shakhriyabz in comparison with other central Asian cities (Samarkand, Bukhara, Herat, etc). Supplementary documentation was supplied by the State Party, but ICOMOS still felt that it was unable to make a firm recommendation, since the additional information was inadequate to permit a full evaluation.

At the Extraordinary Meeting of the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee, held in Marrakesh in November 1999, further consideration of this nomination was deferred on the recommendation of ICOMOS. Following discussions with the representative of the State Party, it was agreed that a special mission should visit Uzbekistan early in 2000 and that a training course would be held, funded as Preparatory Assistance from the World Heritage Fund, on the preparation of nominations.

Following these actions, revised documentation was supplied by the State Party and studied by ICOMOS. It is considered to meet all the outstanding points relating to proposed nominated area and buffer zone, and management of the site.

Brief description

The historic centre of Shakhriyabz contains a collection of exceptional monuments and ancient quarters which bear witness to the centuries of its history, and particularly to the period of its apogee, under the empire of Timur, in the 15th century.

Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria iii and iv*:

Criterion iii Shakhriyabz contains many fine monuments, and in particular those from the Timurid period, which was of great cultural and political significance in medieval Central Asia.

Criterion iv The buildings of Shakhriyabz, notably the Ak-Sarai Palace and the Tomb of Timur, are outstanding examples of a style which had a profound influence on the architecture of this region.

ICOMOS, September 2000