

Khoja Ahmed Yasawi (Kazakhstan)

No 1103

1. BASIC DATA

State Party: Republic of Kazakhstan

Name of property: The Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi

Location: South Kazakhstan Oblast, City of Turkestan

Date received: 29 January 2002

Category of property:

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is an architectural monument.

Brief description:

The Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, in the town of Yasi, now Turkestan, was built at the time of Timur (Tamerlane), from 1389 till 1405, remaining unfinished in some parts. In this building, the Persian master builders experimented architectural and structural solutions under the supervision of the emperor. These solutions were then adopted in the construction of Samarkand, the capital of the Timurid Empire. At present it is one of the largest and best preserved constructions of the Timurid period.

2. THE PROPERTY

Description

The Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, a distinguished Sufi master of the 12th century, is situated in southern Kazakhstan, in the city of Turkestan (Yasi). The mausoleum is placed in the area of the former citadel, in the north-eastern part of the ancient town, now an open archaeological site. To the south, there is a nature protection area; on the other sides the modern city of Turkestan surrounds the site. The nominated property is limited to the mausoleum of Ahmed Yasawi (0.55 ha); the buffer zone covers the archaeological area of the ancient town (88.15 ha).

The Mausoleum was built at the end of the 14th century by the order of Timur, replacing a smaller mausoleum of the 12th century. It is one of the largest built in the Timurid period. There are some other buildings in the vicinity, including mausoleums for distinguished persons, small mosques, and a medieval bath house. A site museum is placed in the former Russian barrack building of the 19th century. On the north side, the mausoleum is separated from the new town by a section of the ancient citadel wall, which has here been reconstructed.

The Mausoleum is rectangular in plan, 45.8 x 62.7 m, and is oriented from the south-east to north-west. Its total height is 38.7 m. The structure of the building is in fired brick with mortar of gypsum mixed with clay (*ganch*). The

foundations were originally built in layers of clay (1.5 m deep), but these have recently been rebuilt in concrete. The main entrance is from the south-east through the Iwan into the large square Main Hall, *Kazandyk*, measuring 18.2 x 18.2 m, covered with a conic-spherical dome, the largest in Central Asia (18.2 m in diameter). In the centre of this hall there is a bronze cauldron (*kazan*, 2.2 m diameter, weight: 2 tons), dated 1399 for ritual purposes. The tomb of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi (Gur khana), the most important space, is situated on the central axis at the end of the building in the north-west. In the centre of this space, there is the sarcophagus. The hall has a double dome; the inner dome is 17 m high, and the outer dome 28 m, and its extrados is covered with green and golden decorated tiles. The drum of the dome is tiled with hexagonal green glazed tiles adorned with gold pattern. The building has spaces assigned for several functions: such as meeting rooms, a refectory (*Ash khana*), a library (*Kitab khana*), and a mosque.

The mosque is the only room where fragments of the original wall paintings are preserved, which are geometric and floral ornaments in light blue colour. The intrados of the domes is decorated in alabaster stalactites (*mugarnas*). In the exterior, the walls are covered with glazed tiles with large geometric patterns with epigraphic ornaments, characteristic of Timurid architecture. There are fine Kufic and Suls inscriptions on the walls, and texts from the Qu'ran on the drums of the domes. The building remained unfinished at the death of Timur in 1405, and was never completed. Therefore, the main entrance still lacks the surface finish and the two minarets that were planned.

History

Sufism (*tasawwuf* from 'wool' in Arabic) is a mystic movement in Islam. It has been considered as the inner, mystical, or psycho-spiritual dimension of this religion, developing as a spiritual movement from the 9th and 10th centuries. Sufist ideas evolved particularly in the 12th and 13th centuries in the thoughts and writings of people such as: Attar (perished in 1221), Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) and Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207-1273).

Starting in the 12th century, Sufism also developed into several regional schools, of which the Turkic branch was headed by Khoja Ahmed Yasawi. Sufism has been seen as one of the forces that sustained the diffusion of Islam, preventing its downfall, especially in the difficult period after the Mongol invasion in the 12th century. Yasawi was born in Yasi or in Ispidjab (Sairam), in 1103. After initial education by his father he studied in Bukhara, one of the principal centres of Islam at the time. He spent most of his life in Yasi, and died there in 1166. His contribution was crucial for Central Asia, where he popularized Sufism, and contributed to the diffusion of Islam.

The town of Turkestan: The modern town of Turkestan is referred to ancient Kazakh towns, and its origins go back to the early Middle Ages. Until the 16th century, it was called Yasi. At first it was a suburban area of Shavgar, in the region of Syr Daria, the crossroads of agricultural and nomadic cultures. Shavgar developed into a large handicraft and trade centre, but from the 12th century, Yasi gained importance over this. It was also one of the few places that do not seem to have been destroyed by the

Mongols in the 13th century. Pilgrimage to the tomb of Ahmed Yasawi was another factor that contributed to its development.

In the 1370s, Timur (Tamerlane) (1328-1405) became the new ruler of Central Asia, and his reign extended from Mesopotamia and Iran to Transoxiana. His capital was in Samarkand. Timur's policies involved the construction of monumental public and cult buildings (mosques, mausoleums, *madrasahs*) in regions such as Syr Daria, where towns were vital outposts on the northern frontier of his possessions, including the Mausoleum of Ahmed Yasawi. Timur's wish was to contribute to the diffusion of Islam, but even more so to fulfil specific political objectives. Considering that the Sufi orders determined the support of nomadic tribes in the steppes, the construction of this remarkable sanctuary aimed to gain the support of the Sufis and of the large nomad community, who otherwise might have presented a risk for his ruling. He is reported to have participated personally in the design of the Mausoleum, which was built parallel with the Mosque of Samarkand. For the first time here, Timur used a team of immigrated skilled master builders from Shiraz and Isfahan. The building also represented an experiment, where he introduced innovative spatial arrangements, types of vaults and domes, that were later implemented in the capital cities.

From the 16th to 18th centuries Turkestan was the capital and residence of the Kazakh Khanship, developing into its largest trade and craft centre. The Mausoleum of Ahmed Yasawi was the outstanding monument of the town, and several prominent personalities were buried close to it. However, the political struggles and the shift of trade to sea routes resulted in the decline of urban life. In 1864 Turkestan was invaded by the Russian army. The old town was destroyed and deserted. A new railway station was built far from the old town, becoming the new centre for development. Some vernacular dwellings were built closer to the old town, called 'Eski Turkistan'. Today, the old town is an archaeological site, and one of the 14 Reserve Museum sites in Kazakhstan.

The Mausoleum: the construction took place between 1389 and 1399, continuing until the death of Timur in 1405. The building was left unfinished at the entrance and some parts of the interior, thus providing documented evidence of the working methods at that time. In the 16th century, the mausoleum went through some repair and reconstruction on the main portal; the arch was repaired by the order of Abdullah-Khan, the governor of Bukhara. From this time until the 19th century, Turkestan was the residence of the Kazakh khans. In the 19th century, Kokand khan turned the mausoleum into a fortress, and built a defence wall around it in mud brick. In 1864, when the Russian army took over Turkestan, the building was in a poor state of repair. In 1872, the authorities decided to preserve it. From 1938 there has been regular maintenance, and since 1945 several restoration campaigns have been carried out, the latest from 1993 to 2000. In the Soviet period, this monument was treated as a historic building and a museum. Since the independence of Kazakhstan in 1991, its spiritual function has prevailed, and it has even come to epitomize national identity.

Management regime

Legal provision:

The Mausoleum of Ahmed Yasawi is a national monument, included on the List of National Properties of Kazakhstan, and protected by the decree 38 of 26.01.1982. The site of the mausoleum is included in the Protection Zoning Plan (1986) of the city of Turkestan, prepared under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture, by the State Institute for Scientific Research and Planning on Monuments of Material Culture (NIPI PMK, Almaty). The plan has been approved by the Committee of Culture, and confirmed by the decree 628 of 22.11.1988. The adjacent secondary monuments and the archaeological remains of the medieval town of Yasi are included in the 'Azret-Sultan' State Historical and Cultural Reserve Museum (decree 265, 28.08.1989). The museum was opened in 1990.

Management structure:

At the national level, the management of the site is under the responsibility of the Committee of Culture of the Ministry of Culture, Information and Public Accord. Locally, the care is the responsibility of the 'Azret-Sultan' State Historical and Cultural Reserve Museum. The museum staff prepares the annual programmes and plans for the repair and management of the property. There is a long-term development plan (2000) for the whole city of Turkestan, respecting the protection zoning. The Tourism Department of the South Kazakhstan Region has a regional plan for tourism, including Turkestan as a main destination. A five-year management plan for the property has been prepared by the 'Azret-Sultan' Museum, to be approved in 2002. This plan includes guidelines for safeguarding, research, conservation, monitoring, and maintenance of the property, as well as for the development of the planning control zone and the nature protection area, in order to preserve important views from and to the mausoleum.

Resources:

The 'Azret-Sultan' Museum has 19 permanent staff, including technicians, custodians, guides, and administrators. Additional staff is contracted according to needs. Yearly funding is provided from the State budget (8,500 \$/year), and additional funds are collected from entrance fees and offerings (ca 75,000 \$/year).

Justification by the State Party (summary)

The State Party stresses the uniqueness of the mausoleum, which was built in the 14th century by order of Timur over the tomb of Ahmed Yasawi, the great 12th-century Sufi master. The earlier mausoleum was already a pilgrimage place, but the new construction increased its religious importance so that it became one of the most significant sacred places for Moslems. The mausoleum is a characteristic example of Timurid style, and a most impressive testimony of the architectural attainment of Timur's empire in the late 14th century. The mausoleum provides important advances in building technology, displaying an unsurpassed record of all kinds of Central Asian vaulted constructions and showing some innovations. Its main dome is the largest existing brick dome in Central Asia, 18.2 m in diameter. The original

architectural details show the highest level of craftsmanship. To date, the results of many years' work by scientists prove the outstanding universal value of the Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi as a highly significant architectural monument in itself, for the period it represents, and a unique survival of one of the four largest buildings of that period. It was one of the greatest architectural achievements of its age, a landmark chapter in the history of Central Asian architecture, and has influenced further developments. It was a striking structure thought to be one of the greatest mausoleums of the Islamic world.

The State Party proposes that the property be inscribed under the *criteria i, iii, iv, and vi*. Criterion i for its architectural achievement; criterion iii for its being one of the great mausoleums of the world; criterion iv as a characteristic example of Timurid architecture; criterion vi for its association with Ahmed Yasawi as the great master of the Turkic branch of Sufism.

3. ICOMOS EVALUATION

Actions by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the site in August 2002.

Conservation

Conservation history:

After its construction, the building underwent a first intervention in the 16th century on the main portal, when the arch was repaired. In the 19th century, it was turned into a military depot; a defence wall was built around it. The building was in a poor state of repair, and was proposed to be demolished. However, in 1872, the authorities decided to repair it. This meant preparation of survey drawings, whitewashing the interiors, and constructing buttresses to support the north-west corner (1886-87). From 1938, a workshop was responsible for its maintenance on a permanent basis, under the direction of an architect. There have been restorations in 1945, in the 1950s, in the 1970s, and again from 1993 to 2000. The last restoration was sponsored by the Government of Turkey, and the works were implemented by 'Vakif Insaat', a Turkish firm, with the participation of Kazakh specialists. During these works the foundations were remade in reinforced concrete, the walls were consolidated, the roofs were water-proofed, and the domes were newly covered with tiles, as most of the old tiles had been lost. The form and colour of the new tiles is reported to correspond to the old, of which fragments have been found in place.

The surrounding area (buffer zone) corresponds to the former medieval town with the defence wall. The area was destroyed in the 19th century, and a new town centre was built further to the west. Some of the surviving remains next to the mausoleum have been demolished during the recent campaigns involving earthworks. The northern part of the old citadel wall was rebuilt in the 1970s, providing an enclosure for the mausoleum and its adjacent buildings. A drainage system has now been implemented in order to remove excess water from the site.

State of conservation:

After the recent works, the structure is considered stable, but the authorities still report on problems of rising damp and salts, due to high water table. There is also need to continue monitoring the behaviour of the structure of the building and the materials after the restoration.

Management:

The ICOMOS mission observed that the NIPI/PMK department has qualified specialists, but it should improve the collaboration with the 'Azret Sultan' office. This office would require a qualified permanent technical team, consisting of specialised technicians and skilled craftsmen dedicated to the maintenance of the heritage site. It would also be necessary to establish a documentation centre in the site museum, prepare a detailed report on the works over the past 130 years, encourage research on the history and conservation of the Museum Reserve, and develop appropriate methods for the restoration of wall paintings, metal works, wood works, and surface finishes. The mission has also noted that there was need to encourage appropriate academic institutions in the country to initiate training in the conservation of cultural heritage. A new management plan has been prepared, and it is expected to have been approved in 2002.

Risk analysis:

Considering that the town of Turkestan is situated in a vast plain, any high-rise buildings outside the buffer zone would have an impact on the visual integrity of the place. This is not an immediate risk, in view of the current planning regulations. The building of the Arys-Turkestan water canal and the creation of large agricultural fields in the region have been the cause of the rise in the water table. It will be necessary to study ways to reduce the impact in the area of the mausoleum and its buffer zone. No serious seismic risk is reported. The number of visitors is growing in Turkestan, being some 200,000 in the year 2000, and the mausoleum is the main target of tourism and pilgrimage. Bearing in mind that the winter climate in Turkestan can be rather cold, the increasing number of visitors is causing the risk of condensation in the interior.

Authenticity and integrity

Authenticity:

The Mausoleum of Ahmed Yasawi has suffered from inappropriate use and neglect especially around mid 19th century, until the interest for its safeguarding started gaining ground. Even so, it has been better preserved than some other Timurid monuments, such as Bibi Khanum Shrine in Samarkand, which is of comparable size. In fact, the mausoleum of Ahmed Yasawi has preserved its original vault construction and a large part of the external decoration. The external decoration has been partly renovated in recent restorations, including the upper part of the large inscription, as well as the tiled extrados of the domes. Some original remains of the wall paintings are visible in the interior, and it is possible that future restoration may discover more of them under the whitewashed surfaces. The *muqarnas* of the ceilings are still in place. The mausoleum has not been subject to any major changes over time, and it can be considered a genuine representation of the architecture of the Timurid

period. Of added interest is the stage of the unfinished parts, preserved as a documentary evidence of the construction methods. The mausoleum has preserved an exceptionally high degree of authenticity as a monument.

Integrity:

Regarding the context, the mausoleum remains standing within the old town area, where the houses have been destroyed in the 19th century. The fact that this area has not been rebuilt, however, provides a valuable opportunity for medieval archaeology. On the other hand, the new town of Turkestan has kept a low skyline, so that the Mausoleum of Ahmed Yasawi continues to stand out as a major monument within its context, thus maintaining the required visual integrity.

Comparative evaluation

Even though the Mongol and Timurid periods in the Western and Central Asia caused much suffering and destruction, they also promoted a highly important development in art and architecture. The Timurid Empire extended from Mesopotamia to Western India and from the Caucasus to the Arabian Sea, including the present-day Uzbekistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. The capital cities of the empire, Samarkand and Bukhara, already inscribed on the World Heritage List, comprised some of the principal buildings and ensembles, in particular the Bibi Khanum Mosque, which is comparable with the Mausoleum of Yasawi in its size and architecture.

There are also important works of this period in Iran (Yazd, Mashad and Tabriz, as well as in Herat in present-day Afghanistan), which are the key references for developments in architecture since the pre-Islamic period and well into the 17th century. The master builders from the conquered cities and lands such as Shiraz, Isfahan, Yazd, Tabriz, south Caspian, and Damascus, as well as stone cutters from India, were involved in the construction of the masterpieces in the Timurid period.

The significance of the Mausoleum of Yasawi in this context lies in its being a prototype, where the architectural and artistic solutions were experimented under the control of the emperor himself. The Mausoleum has also better preserved its integrity and authenticity than most of the other buildings, such as those in Samarkand, which have later been partly rebuilt or modified.

Outstanding universal value

General statement:

The Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi is an outstanding example of Islamic religious building, designed and constructed under the supervision of Timur Tamerlane, at the end of the 14th century. The building became a prototype for the contemporaneous construction of other major buildings in the Timurid period, particularly in the capital city of Samarkand, being a pilot project for the design of spatial arrangements, and the construction of vaults and dome structures. The site itself, the burials and the remains of the old town of Turkestan (Yasi) offer significant testimony to the history of Central Asia. The mausoleum is closely related to the diffusion of Islam in

this region with the help of the Sufi orders, as well as having political significance in relation to the political ideology of Timur (Tamerlane).

Evaluation of criteria:

Criterion i: The Mausoleum of Yasawi is a significant architectural achievement in the history of the Islamic architecture. It was a prototype for the innovative development of spatial and structural solutions as well as ornamentation in Timurid architecture.

Criterion iii: While recognizing the importance of the mausoleum in the Islamic architecture, this criterion would more appropriately refer to the cultural traditions that the monument and its site represent. The building also provides an exceptional testimony to construction methods in the Timurid period, especially due to the parts that remained unfinished.

Criterion iv: The mausoleum was a significant prototype in the development of a type of religious building, which had significant influence in Timurid architecture and in the history of Islamic architecture.

Criterion vi: The origins of Sufism can be detected in the 9th and 10th centuries, involving several spiritual leaders. While recognizing the importance of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi in the Turkic branch of Sufism, this was one of several branches that developed from the 12th century onwards. His significance was thus important in the regional context. ICOMOS does not consider this justification sufficient for the use of criterion vi.

4. ICOMOS RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation for the future

While recognizing the efforts made by the authorities, ICOMOS recommends that special attention be given to the control of the built environment outside the buffer zone in order to avoid any high-rise constructions. The State Party is also encouraged to increase the resources for conservation management, and to establish a training strategy for those involved in the conservation of the site.

Recommendation with respect to inscription

That the nominated property be inscribed on the basis of **criteria i, iii and iv:**

Criterion i: The Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi is an outstanding achievement in the Timurid architecture, and it has significantly contributed to the development of Islamic religious architecture.

Criterion iii: The mausoleum and its site represent an exceptional testimony to the culture of the Central Asian region, and to the development of building technology.

Criterion iv: The Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi was a prototype for the development of a major building type in the Timurid period, becoming a significant reference in the history of Timurid architecture.