

Samarkand (Uzbekistan)

No 603rev

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Samarkand – the place of crossing and synthesis of world cultures
<i>Location</i>	Samarkand Region
<i>State Party</i>	Republic of Uzbekistan
<i>Date</i>	7 July 2000

Justification by State Party

The city of Samarkand is a historically well known social, political, cultural, and economic centre of Central Asia. Being situated on the crossing of the Great Silk Roads, Samarkand has preserved the values of cultures, religions, and arts of the ancient world. Nowadays in the historical part of the city there are magnificent examples of the architecture and culture of ancient civilizations (Afrosiab, Shakhi-Zinda, Registan, Gur-Emir, and others). As Samarkand was the capital of ancient states various religions concentrated there: Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. The material remains related to these religions are evidence of cultures that have disappeared.

The historical part of Samarkand and its elements reflect the creativity of human genius and a synthesis of world arts. The ancient city of Afrosiab has preserved its original forms and unique wall decorations, which are now conserved.

The monuments reflect the achievements of material culture in Central Asian history. The architectural ensembles of the Timurid epoch have played a great role in the development of town planning, architecture, and arts in this region.

These monuments are unique and there is nothing comparable known elsewhere in the world.

These architectural ensembles and archaeological monuments are the only examples that illustrate the important stages of Central Asian and world history.

Criteria i, ii, iii, and iv

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *group of buildings*.

History and Description

History

Located on the crossroads of the great trade routes that traversed Central Asia, Samarkand has a multi-millennial history. Archaeological excavations in present-day Samarkand have brought to light the remains of settlements related to the first half of the 1st millennium BCE. The ancient Afrosiab (the predecessor of Samarkand) had a strategic location at the time of the formation of the first large states in Central Asia, such as Khorezm, Baktria, and Sogd, and it was the capital of Sogdiana. It was part of the Achaemenid Empire (6th–4th centuries BCE) and that of Alexander the Great (4th century BCE). Situated at the crossing of trade routes from China, Afghanistan, Iran, India, and the Caucasus, the city became prosperous and an important centre of silk trade in the 2nd century CE. The city was part of a Turkish kingdom in the 6th century, and was conquered by Kuteiba-ibn-Muslim in 712 CE, starting the penetration of Islamic culture into the region of the present-day Uzbekistan (*Maverannah* or *Transoxiana*). The Arabs rulers turned the ancient temples into mosques, administrative centres, places of learning, courts, and treasuries.

The Samanids of Iran occupied the place from the 9th to 10th centuries and Turkic peoples from the 11th to 13th centuries; it was part of the Kingdom of Khwarezm in the 13th century, until it was devastated by the Mongol invasion of Genghis Khan in 1220. The city emerged as a major centre through the efforts of Timur the Lame (Tamerlane) (1369–1404). It was rebuilt on its present site, south-west of Afrosiab, and became the capital of Timur's powerful state and the repository of the material riches from conquered territories that extended from Central Asia to Persia, Afghanistan, and India. It remained a cultural capital of the Timurids until the end of the 15th century, during the reign of Ulugh Bek (1409–49) and his successors. Timur built a citadel, the Blue Palace (*Kuk-Saray*), and other important buildings. The period was characterized by a new synthesis of arts; local traditions were influenced from other regions of the empire (Persian Khorasan, Khorezm), resulting in the construction of major religious ensembles, such as Bibi-Khanum Mosque in front of the main city gates, the Gur Emir complex, and the Grave of Emir near the palace of Muhammad Sultan. The eastern gates of the town linked with the city centre, known as Registan Square, where Ulugh Bek started the construction of a major complex in 1447.

In the 16th century, during the Uzbek occupation (1500), Samarkand became the Khanate of Bukhara and gradually lost its earlier importance, though some notable construction works were still undertaken in the 17th century. These included the Madrassah of Shir-Dor built by Yalandtush Bahadur on Registan Square opposite the Ulugh Bek Madrassah, followed by the Tilla Kari Madrassah, a new Friday mosque, to complete the ensemble. In the 18th century, the city suffered a serious economic decline.

In 1868 the Russians conquered Samarkand, making it a provincial capital (1887) and thus reviving its economy. The Caspian Railway was brought to the town in 1888, linking the European part of Russia and Central Asia and again reinforcing the role of Samarkand as an important trade centre. The Russian administration constructed

schools, churches, and hospitals, and the western part of Samarkand was redeveloped according to current town-planning ideas. The period, however, also led to the destruction of the city walls and gates, as well as of several monuments, such as Timur's citadel. At the beginning of the 20th century the city thus included three main sectors one next to the other: the archaeological area of the ancient city (*Afrosiab*), the medieval Timurid city, and the modern city, the construction of which started in the 1870s. The city was the capital of the Uzbek SSR from 1924 to 1930 and later an administrative centre.

Description

Samarkand is located in a large oasis in the valley of the Zerafshan river, not far from the Kara-Kum desert, in the north-eastern part of Uzbekistan. Surrounded by high mountains and having enough water, a fertile soil, and a rich fauna, this valley has always attracted people. Evidence of settlements in this region goes back to 1500 BCE. The historical part of Samarkand consists of three main sections: in the north-east there is the site of the ancient Afrosiab (founded in the 7th century BCE) including the necropolis of Shakhi-Zinda; to the south of this there is the medieval Timurid city; and to the west there is the area of the 19th century expansion in European style. The modern city extends around this historical core zone.

The nomination proposes a series of monuments for inscription to the World Heritage List. The most important of these are the following:

1. Shakhi-Zinda ensemble, Hazrat-Hizr Mosque, and remains of the city walls in the Afrosiab archaeological area;
2. The Bibi-Khanum ensemble;
3. The Registan ensemble;
4. The ensembles of Gur-Emir and Rukhabad;
5. Ulugh-Bek's Observatory;
6. The ensembles of Abdi-Darun and Ishrat-khona;
7. The City Garden ensemble in the 19th century town.

Afrosiab is the ancient site of the town before the Timurid period dating from the 7th century BCE to the beginning of the 13th century CE. It has the form of a triangle and an extent of about 289ha. Archaeological excavations have revealed the ancient citadel and fortifications, the palace of the ruler, and residential and craft quarters. The ruler's palace (7th century CE) has important wall paintings, and there are also the remains of a large ancient mosque built from the 8th to 12th centuries. In 1962 the road to the airport was built across the territory of Afrosiab and a new access road was provided to the archaeological site.

The medieval town of Samarkand was built by Timur starting in the 14th century and it retained its integrity intact until the 19th century. There are several major monumental ensembles and over 300 ancient monuments. Since the 19th century, there have been losses, particularly in the western part (the Timurid citadel), the area around the Registan Square in the centre of the old town, and the area around the Bibi Khanum Mosque in the north-east. In addition, some modern roads have been built across the traditional urban fabric. Nevertheless, the old town still

contains substantial areas of historic fabric with typical narrow lanes, articulated into districts with social centres, mosques, *madrassahs*, and residential housing.

The traditional Uzbek houses have one or two floors and the spaces are grouped around central courtyards with gardens. Built in mud brick, the houses have painted wooden ceilings and wall decorations. Before 1982, when Samarkand was provided with legal protection, some large modern constructions were built in the historic area. Since the proclamation of the independence of the Republic of Uzbekistan such large-scale construction works have been stopped.

When Samarkand was occupied by the Russians at the end of the 19th century, an extension was designed to the west of the old town. This area was built according to the European town-planning ideas of the period, and it was designed with a series of streets radiating from the former citadel area. It included a large city park with public buildings, churches and a synagogue. Much of the residential housing was still built using traditional techniques.

- THE SHAKHI-ZINDA ENSEMBLE

The ensemble of Shakhi-Zinda, on the southern edge of Afrosiab, contains a magnificent series of mosques, *madrassahs*, and mausolea dating from the 11th to the 19th century. These domed structures are covered with glazed tiles, mosaics, and paintings from the different centuries, and in effect form an architectural museum which hardly has any parallel elsewhere.

- THE BIBI KHANUM ENSEMBLE

Timur built the Bibi Khanum Mosque in memory of his wife close to the northern gate of the city in 1399–1405. Additions were made later in the 15th century. It is an imposing Friday mosque, built around a central courtyard and richly decorated with marble carvings, glazed tiles, minarets, and domes. The original upper part of the building had collapsed and was recently rebuilt in reinforced concrete. The ensemble includes the Bibi-Khanum Mausoleum across the road.

- THE REGISTAN ENSEMBLE

Registan Square was identified as the centre of the new city after the destruction of Afrosiab in 1220. The site was constructed in several phases, and it now includes three large *madrassahs*, originally built in mud brick and covered with decorated ceramic tiles. The Ulugh Bek *Madrassah* is the oldest, dating from 1420. The *Madrassah Shirdor* (1619–32), opposite this, reflects its facade, and the Tilla Kari *madrassah* (1641–60) closes the square on the north side. The buildings have been partly rebuilt in recent decades.

- THE RUKHABAT MAUSOLEUM AND GUR-EMIR

The Rukhabat Mausoleum is situated south-west of Registan Square. The building was intended for the burial of Burkhan ad-Din Sagardji, who died in the 1380s. It is a simple brick structure with a central plan and covered with a dome; it has no portal. It was restored in 1996, on the occasion of the Timurid anniversary. The surrounding urban fabric was demolished, leading to the discovery of the remains of related buildings. The Gur Emir ensemble is situated to the south of the mausoleum and connected with

it via a stone-paved alley. The central building has been restored and its dome rebuilt; the large portal is restored and the remains of the other constructions of the ensemble are displayed after excavations.

- ULUGH BEK'S OBSERVATORY

Over a hill north-east of Afrosiab there are the remains of the Observatory of Ulugh Bek, the 15th century ruler and noted scientist and astronomer. The site includes a large semi-circle dug into the ground (11m deep), forming the lower part of the 15th century astronomical instrument built in marble and with indication of degrees. The site is of great scientific significance.

- THE CITY GARDEN

The ensemble of the City Garden is situated in the 19th century part of Samarkand. It includes several religious and public buildings: Alekseyevsky Cathedral, the Roman Catholic Church, the Armenian Church, Georgievsky's Cathedral, the Synagogue, the Palace of the General Governor, the Russian-Chinese Bank, the Public Meeting Building, the Military Meeting Building, and Hotel Zarafshan.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The monuments are state and national property under the provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Safeguarding and Using of Historical and Cultural Monuments, and the Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan (26 May 1982) concerning the establishment of the State Samarkand Historical-Architectural Reserve. The status of the Reserve prohibits construction of new buildings or carrying out changes that violate the condition of the territory or cultural monuments within the boundaries of the Reserve.

Management

After the proclamation of independence of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Government adopted a number of Decrees directed to the preservation of historical and cultural monuments in historic cities. Some large-scale works were carried on the basis of a long-term programme in two stages: the first up to 1996 and the second up to 2000, connected with the 600th anniversary of Mirzo Ulugbek and the 660th anniversary of Amir Timur. In the first stage measures on engineering, strengthening, and conservation of preserved fragments of architectural decoration were implemented. The second stage has included works directed to improve the geological situation of the territory, strictly limiting construction works in the protected areas, reconstruction of old dwellings with relevant roads and public centres, and the provision of these areas with modern technical facilities.

The protected historic sites are managed following the Instruction on Organization of Protective Zones of Immovable Historical and Cultural Monuments, dated 24 January 1986, which defines the boundaries of the areas, the norms for the use and repair of protected zones and monuments, as well as defining the content and procedures of projects. The overall responsibility of the management

of protected areas is with the Ministry of Cultural Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, shared with the Office for Scientific Production of Cultural Monuments, the Board of the Samarkand Historical-Architectural Reserve, the Khokimiyat [Municipality] of Samarkand and the Siab District of Samarkand.

The long-term national heritage programme, "Meros", is developed in collaboration between State and municipal authorities, the Ministry being more focused on monuments and the municipality on historic areas. The National Company Uzbekturism conducts projects with the objective of including architectural and archaeological monuments in tourist itineraries. The principal financial resources are provided by the State, but there is growing participation by non-governmental organizations and the private sector interested in the preservation of historic monuments. The technicians and specialists involved in the preparation and execution of the projects are trained by national universities and in practical field seminars. An example of such activity has been the recent involvement of the Aga Khan Trust in pilot projects on the restoration and rehabilitation of historic residential areas.

Earlier, several industrial enterprises were located in the historic area, but these have been systematically removed since the protection process started in 1982. The aim is to remove all such activities and locate them outside the historic area. Samarkand is in a seismic area and relevant measures are taken, such as strengthening the foundations of historic buildings. The state of conservation of protected monuments is regularly monitored by specialists and materials are tested in scientific laboratories.

The city of Samarkand is a large tourist centre, and the historic area of the town has some 185,000 inhabitants. The National Company Uzbekturism as well as International Charitable Foundation Oltin Meros (Golden Heritage) publish various brochures, albums, books, tourist guides, and maps.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

The historic town of Samarkand has suffered several losses since the 18th century, when its decline started. These have included the demolition of the fortifications and the ancient citadel at the end of the 19th century, as well as several areas of traditional residential buildings even in the recent past. The ancient religious monuments, *madrasahs*, and mosques have also suffered, and many were already in a poor state of repair in the 19th century. Since then a substantial amount of restoration work has been carried out, following a variety of principles. Some of the repairs have been carried out as a minimum intervention, fully respecting the original fabric; in other cases, there have been different degrees of restoration and reconstruction. It should be noted that the restoration and reconstruction of ancient Timurid monuments has become a special priority since the independence of Uzbekistan, because of their identity value to the newly independent state.

The Shakhi Zindar ensemble has retained its important religious significance throughout the years, but the repair and restoration works have remained minimal until today. In fact, many of the monuments are in need of repair and

consolidation. The Guri-Emir ensemble and the Rukhabad mausoleum have been restored and they are in satisfactory condition. The ensembles of Registan and the Bibi-Khanum have been subject to partial reconstruction using reinforced concrete structures and reproduction traditional-type glazed tiles.

So far as the traditional urban fabric of the historic area is concerned, the conditions vary. Until recently little attention has been paid to guaranteeing maintenance and repair of the residential housing, except within the limits of resources provided by individual inhabitants. The houses are generally built in mud brick and timber. It should be noted that the relevant skills still exist in the region and several work sites have been conducted in recent years for the rehabilitation and restoration of historic houses. In this context, the pilot projects of the Aga Khan Trust have been significant. Generally speaking, the state of conservation of the existing urban area is variable; some parts are in satisfactory condition, while others may be close to collapse.

The nomination document illustrates a project for the reconstruction of the central part of Samarkand in which it is proposed to integrate the Timurid city and the 19th century part of the old town into a large-scale urban planning scheme. The proposed central axis links the former citadel area of the old town with a new administrative structure and public facilities in the south. No details or explanations are provided about the impact of such a scheme on the historic town core.

Authenticity and integrity

The question of authenticity in reference to the various monuments proposed to the World Heritage List varies from one case to another. The ensemble of Shakhi-Zinda has been subject to decay and some of the buildings are in need of repair. Past repairs have been minimal and as a result the existing structures and materials have retained their authenticity.

Some of the mosques and *madrasahs*, however, have been subject to restoration and reconstruction. The important Bibi-Khanum Mosque was partly in ruins, having lost its upper part in an earthquake some two centuries ago (about 50%). It has now been rebuilt using reinforced concrete over the existing historic structures. It should be noted that the tone of the new tiles is slightly lighter than the original. Similar restoration has been undertaken in Registan and Gur-Emir, though on a smaller scale and over a relatively long period of time. The reconstruction has been based on research of the original architecture and using old photographs and documentary evidence. Caution is expressed regarding the limits of this type of work.

In other cases, in fact, new parts have been treated as "neutral," clearly distinguishing modern intervention, such as the large portal structure of the Gur-Emir complex. Limited repairs have been carried out in Shakhi-Zinda, which has preserved its historic authenticity, but the ensemble is in urgent need of consolidation and repair (obviously to be done with great care and following internationally accepted guidelines).

On the question of integrity, which is essential in the case of a historic town, the situation is complex. The different historic phases of Samarkand's development from Afrosiab to the Timurid city and then to the 19th century development have taken place alongside rather than on top of each other.

This core area is surrounded by a more recent development. Afrosiab has been partly excavated and the Timurid city could be conserved as a living historic urban area. The latter has lost some of its medieval features, such as the city walls and the citadel, as well as parts of the traditional residential structures in areas surrounding major monuments. Nevertheless, it still contains a substantial urban fabric of traditional Islamic quarters, with some fine examples of traditional houses.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

The site of Uzbekistan was first proposed for nomination in 1990, but it was deferred because some major monuments had not been included in the proposal. The site was again proposed in 1991, and the Bureau again deferred consideration, proposing that only Muslim monuments be included in the proposal. The site was visited by an ICOMOS expert in November 1991. ICOMOS recognized the potential universal value of the site, noting that the designation should focus on the Timurid achievements and the pattern of survival of the capital city of Tamurlane. In respect of the current nomination, a new ICOMOS mission visited the site in April 2001. ICOMOS also consulted its International Scientific Committee on Historic Towns and Villages (CIVVIH) and other members.

Qualities

The historic town of Samarkand is well known from history as a symbol of ancient oriental culture. Although much has been lost in the past, the existing remains still retain a flavour that recalls the splendid past of the place. The Timurid architecture of the mosques, *madrasahs*, and mausolea is of fundamental importance to the history of Islamic art and architecture, leading to the achievements of the Safavids in Persia, the Moghuls in India, and even the Ottomans in Turkey. Even in its present state, the city represents documentary evidence of the development over several centuries, including the ancient civilizations represented in the area of Afrosiab and the scientific achievements of Ulugh Bek's Observatory.

The principal significance of the historic town of Samarkand relates to its being at the crossroads of different cultures and to its role in the development of Timurid architecture and building types. In this evolution the historic town should be seen as a whole rather than as a collection of separate monuments. Even though the residential part of the city obviously dates from the post-Timurid period, it does represent traditional continuity and qualities that are reflected in the neighbourhood structure, the small centres, mosques, and houses. Many houses retain painted and decorated interiors, grouped around courtyards and gardens. The medieval Timurid city should be seen as a fundamental part of the integrity of the place, a setting and a support to the value of the ancient monuments. ICOMOS considers that Samarkand has the potential for inscription on the basis of criteria i, ii, and iv.

Comparative analysis

The significance of Timurid architecture (14th–15th centuries) should be seen as part of the chain of the cultural and architectural developments in Western and

Central Asia. Following in the footsteps of the great Seljuk builders (10th–13th centuries) of Isfahan, Tabriz, Bukhara, or Herat, the Timurids continued and enriched these building traditions, which were then further developed by the Safavids in Persia (eg the Meidan-Emam of Isfahan, inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1979: criteria i, v, vi) and by the Moghuls in India (eg the Taj Mahal (1983: i).

Of the other Uzbek sites, the historic centre of Itchan-kala (1990: iii, iv, v) is distinguished by its medieval fortress in the form of a rectangle, which is exceptionally well preserved. The Historic Centre of Bukhara (1993: ii, iv, vi) was the second largest city in the Timurid period, but its main development was in the 16th and 17th centuries when it became capital of the Sheibanid city state. The historic centre of Shakhrisyabz (2000: iii, iv) was a minor centre during the Timurid period in the 15th century. All three centres have ancient origins; they developed in the Islamic period, were devastated by the Mongols, and were then revived. In this context, the role of Samarkand is significant as the most important cultural capital of the Timurid period in the 14th and 15th centuries; it not only absorbed ideas but also enriched and contributed to such traditions. Its fame as an icon of an Oriental city is an important indication of its influence.

ICOMOS recommendations

The importance of Samarkand is recognized. However, it is noted that an historic town is an intricate compound of different elements, as stated in the 1976 UNESCO *Recommendation regarding historic areas* (paragraph 3): “Every historic area and its surroundings should be considered in their totality as a coherent whole whose balance and specific nature depend on the fusion of the parts of which it is composed and which include human activities as much as the buildings, the spatial organization and the surroundings.”

Considering that Samarkand is proposed as a historic place related to the crossing and synthesis of world cultures, it is all the more relevant that due consideration be given not only to a selection of monuments but to the historic site as a whole. It is unfortunate that several areas surrounding major monuments such as Registan, Bibi-Khanum, and Gur-Emir have suffered losses. Nevertheless, considering that most of the traditional urban fabric is still intact, serious consideration should be given to its future protection and conservation as an essential part of the significance of the historic town.

While recognizing the outstanding universal value of Samarkand, ICOMOS recommends that the nomination be redefined to include the archaeological area of Afrosiab, the medieval Timurid city, and relevant parts of the 19th century development in a single large buffer zone. The nominated units within this buffer zone should be identified as compounds that include relevant parts of their surroundings.

Consequently, coherent urban conservation and planning policy should be developed for the management of the whole historic town (including the nominated areas and the buffer zone). Such a master plan should provide for an integrated conservation strategy for the existing residential quarters, as well as for the sympathetic reintegration and rehabilitation of the surrounding areas that have previously been demolished. The large-scale urban planning schemes, such as the

proposed “Project for the reconstruction of the central part of Samarkand,” should be reviewed in this light. Any further demolition of traditional housing areas should be avoided and measures should be taken to encourage their sustainable development and rehabilitation as part of the whole. Furthermore, ICOMOS draws attention to the need to review the issues of authenticity and integrity in the light of accepted international principles and guidelines within the framework of the World Heritage Convention.

Brief description

The historic town of Samarkand is defined as the crossing and synthesis of world cultures. Developed from the 7th century BCE in the area of Afrosiab, Samarkand had its most significant development in the Timurid period from the 14th to the 15th centuries. The major monuments include the Registan mosque and *madrassahs*, the Bibi-Khanum Mosque, the Shakhi-Zinda compound, and the Gur-Emir ensemble, as well as Ulugh-Bek’s Observatory.

Statement of Significance

The historic town of Samarkand has been considered a symbol of ancient oriental cultures. It has been an important crossroads of ancient civilizations, documented in the archaeological area of Afrosiab and the Timurid city. The principal development of the city coincides with the 14th and 15th centuries, when it was the capital of the powerful Timurid realm. The contribution of the Timurid masters to the design and construction of the Islamic ensembles, such as Bibi Khanum Mosque and Registan Square, have been crucial for the development of Islamic architecture, exercising an important influence in the entire region, from the Near and Middle East to India.

ICOMOS Recommendation

That the nomination should be *referred back* to the State Party in order to redefine the nominated site and its buffer zone, aiming at a more unified proposal, taking into consideration the whole Timurid town, the archaeological area, Ulugh-Bek’s Observatory, and the 19th century development. ICOMOS further recommends that the State Party should provide protection and a coherent conservation master plan for the historic town as a whole as well as preparing a strategy for the restoration of historic buildings, consistent with the principles guiding the implementation of the World Heritage Convention. ICOMOS additionally proposes that the title of the nominated property might be simplified to “Samarkand – crossroads of culture.”

Under these conditions, ICOMOS recommends the inscription of the site on the basis of *criteria i, ii, and iv*:

Criterion i The architecture and townscape of Samarkand, situated at the crossroads of ancient cultures, are masterpieces of Islamic cultural creativity.

Criterion ii Ensembles in Samarkand such as the Bibi Khanum Mosque and Registan Square played a seminal role in the development of Islamic architecture over the entire region, from the Mediterranean to the Indian subcontinent.

Criterion iv The historic town of Samarkand illustrates in its art, architecture, and urban structure the most important stages of Central Asian cultural and political history from the 13th century to the present day.

Bureau Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria i, ii, and iv*.

Considering that Samarkand is an historic place related to the crossing and synthesis of world cultures, the State Party is strongly urged to extend the nominated site and its buffer zone to include the whole Timurid town, the archaeological area, Ulugh-Bek's Observatory, and the 19th century development. The Bureau further recommends that the State Party should provide protection and a coherent conservation master plan for the historic town as a whole as well as preparing a strategy for the restoration of historic buildings, consistent with the principles guiding the implementation of the World Heritage Convention.

The Bureau recommended to the Committee that, with the approval of the State Party, the name be changed to "Samarkand – Crossroads of Culture."

ICOMOS, September 2001