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ARCHAEOLOGY VII. ISLAMIC CENTRAL ASIA
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ARCHAEOLOGY

vii. Islamic Central Asia

The study of the archaeology of the Islamic period was initiated in Central Asia in the late 19th century by Turkestan amateurs and St. Petersburg scholars, and has been carried on with growing intensity in Soviet times. Important contributions have come from large regional expeditions: the Termeḏ Archeological Complex Expedition and South Turkmenistan Archeological Complex Expedition led by M. E. Masson, the Semirechensk Archeological Expedition, (see also A. N. Bernshtam, 1952, pp. 13-14), the Ḵᵛārazm Archeological-Ethnographic Expedition (S. P. Tolstov), the Afrāsīāb Expedition (V. A. Shishkin), and independent archeological groups working in Farḡāna (Ferghana), northern Qirghizestan, and provinces of the Central Asian republics. These researches on medieval Central Asia have been especially concerned with the development of towns and villages and the history of material culture, irrigation, trade routes, and the monetary system. They have illuminated aspects of the social and cultural history of Central Asia little reflected in written sources.

At the time of the Arab invasion Central Asia's population comprised autochthonous Iranian and Turkish-speaking peoples. The first Turkish wave

appeared here in the 6th-7th centuries, the second in the 4th/10th-5th/11th, the third in the 9th/15th-10th/16th; in the 7th/13th century the Mongol invasion took place. From the mid-1st/7th century to the early 2nd/8th, Central Asia came under the dominion of the Arab caliphs, and the religion of Islam became firmly established over the whole area by the 4th/10th century. Socially and economically the 3rd/9th to 7th/13th centuries represent the developing phase of feudalism, the 8th/14th and 9th/15th centuries, its full maturity, and the 10th/16th to 12th/18th centuries, late feudalism. In the 3rd/9th and 4th/10th centuries when a revival of local dominions, subject more to the religious authority than to the political power of the ʿAbbasid caliphs, was taking place in Central Asia, there began a general upsurge of material and spiritual culture and a growth of feudal towns and villages. The main occupations of the Central Asian population were handicrafts and commerce in the towns, and in the countryside irrigated agriculture and stock-breeding, both sedentary and nomadic; in the mountainous regions there was also the mining of useful minerals.

The most studied town ruins of the Islamic period include Marv, Nisa (Nesā), Šahr-e Eslām (Yazyr), Afrāsīāb (Samarkand), Termeḏ, Binket (Tashkent), Aḵsīḵat, Kūbā, Hūlbūk, Sayad, Kūnīa-Urgenǰ (Gorgānǰ, and village settlements of Ḵʷārazm (Qovād Qaḷʿa, etc.). The archeological data, supplemented by written sources, show that during the period of the developed Middle Ages there were in Central Asia more than two hundred large and small towns and several thousand villages. Like many Oriental towns, those of Central Asia usually consisted of three parts: the citadel (*arg* or *kohandez*), the town proper (*šahrestān*, *madīna*), and the trade and artisan suburb (*rabaż*). But there were cases of considerable divergence from this structure, with the town system including from four to six parts. Thus the ruins of Kanḡā (medieval Harškent) contain, besides the citadel and the *rabaż*, three *šahrestān*s; Binket (Tashkent) and Bokhara had two *rabaż*s—an inner (*al-dāḵela*) and an outer (*al-ḵāreǰa*); Keš (*Kitāb*) had a *kohandez*, a *ḥeṣn* (fortified castle), two *madīna*s—an inner and an outer, and two *rabaż*s; in Termeḏ there was a special quarter *sarādeqāt* (commercial port); many smaller urban centers possessed no citadel (Kūfān in northern Khorasan, Sadvar in Ḵʷārazm, etc.). The *madīna—ḵāreǰ* or *šahr-e bīrūn*—which had begun to take shape in the 2nd/8th-5th/9th centuries, becomes in the 6th/12th-7th/13th an independent part of the town surrounded by separate walls.

In the 3rd/9th-4th/10th centuries Central Asian feudal towns preserved a more

or less regular plan inherited from the past, but in the 5th/11th-6th/12th the old planning lines fade out or are radically altered. During that period urban development proceeded with alterations in the inner structure of the old towns and their expansion, together with the growth of large villages into towns. The essential life of the town passes into the *rabaż*s, the *šahr-e bīrūn* where market places (*bāzār*s), workshops, and dwelling quarters concentrate. The outer contour of the town walls is utterly changed by the angles and bulges formed by the buildings huddled against it. The pre-Islamic quarters—the *kohandez* and the *šahrestān*—remain administrative and religious centers. The most important cities of Central Asia during this period reach imposing dimensions, the *šahrestān* of Marv covered up to 3,500 hectares, Samarkand 1,900, Gorgānǰ 1,000, and Čāḡānīān 400. The population growth of these settlements is indicated by the massive archeological strata of the 3rd/9th-4th/10th centuries. The cities' defensive system included moats, walls flanked by rounded towers, and outer low barrier walls. The fortification system was on several levels; each part of the town—*arg*, *rabaż*, *šahr-e-bīrūn* and *šahr-e darūn*—was surrounded by its own special wall. The *arg* also contained the fortified *qaḷʿa* or keep. Special outworks defended the gates. Gates were usually directed toward principal highways; their number in each part of the city varied; the *arg* of Bokhara had two gates, its *šahrestān* had seven, and its outer and inner *rabaż*s had twelve each. Construction inside the city was chaotic and crowded, but the planned centers were distinguished by clearly disposed buildings situated near small squares. The towns were divided by main thoroughfares into several sections which were subdivided by streets and lanes into separate quarters. The streets were often paved with stone flags and had canals and irrigation trenches running alongside. Water tanks (*ḥawż*) and wells were built lined with baked brick; there were also underground conduits where baked brick and holster were utilized. The sanitary needs of the inhabitants were provided for by canalization lines (*tazar*), by water-absorbing wells (*tašnāv*) and rubbish pits (*badraf*).

The structure of medieval villages in the valleys was to a great extent determined by the system of field irrigation. Some, as before, closely crowded near the landlord's domain (*kešk*), others scattered along the course of the main canal. In hilly regions dwellings were disposed in terraces. In X̱ᵛārazm isolated fortified estates predominated.

The entire social existence of Central Asia was violently disrupted by the Mongol invasion of the 7th/13th century. Archeological traces of this invasion

have been preserved in ruined towns and villages, some of which never recovered. Some 8th/ 14th-century restoration of inhabited places, irrigation, and roads can be observed. The inhabited parts of towns were much smaller than in pre-Mongol times, and living had mostly shifted to new quarters. Thus the *šahrestān* of Samarkand (Afrāsīāb) remained deserted while the town developed southward, where under Tīmūr a fortified *ḥeṣār* was erected. Saljuq Marv (Solṭān Qaḷʿa and *rabaz*Îʷs) was abandoned, but in the 9th/15th century at some distance from it a small Timurid Marv (ʿAbdallāh-Khan Qaḷʿa and Bayram-ʿAlī-Khan Qaḷʿa) was built on a regular plan, surrounded by walls with semicircular towers and moats. Some town building work was also done in the 10th/16th century, e.g., in Bokhara, but it was mainly connected with repairs and the reinforcement of fortifications.

The vigorous building up of medieval Central Asian towns and cities promoted the advancement of architecture (see Architecture, Central Asian). Buildings of civilian architecture include dwellings of various types, castles (*kešk*), palaces, trading premises and storehouses (*čorsu*, *ták*, *tim*), forts, town and roadside caravanserais, covered tanks, baths, and bridges. Religious architecture is represented by mosques (*ǰāmeʿ*, *goḏar* [parish mosque], and *namāzgāh*) of varied composition (pillared, multidomed, with *ayvān*s, single-domed, flat-roofed on the shaft-beam system), with minarets erected at their side. *Madrasa*s and Ṣūfī hostels (*ḵānaqāh*) were built, and in the 4-6th/10-12th centuries a particular role was played by mausoleums of eminent Muslim divines, rulers, and feudal lords. During the early period palaces were situated in the *kohandez*, then later in the *šahrestān* and in the suburban zone; cathedral mosques mostly in the *šahrestān* near large town squares; commercial establishments at busy crossroads and in the *šahrestān* and *rabaz*Îʷs, where numerous workshops were also to be found. Cemeteries were mostly situated outside the town walls, but some grew around the mausoleums of revered spiritual and temporal personages. The funerary customs of the Muslim population of Central Asia varied a good deal, the main types of interment being faced graves (*laḥad*) in which the body was laid on its back or on its side with its head directed towards Mecca, or simple pits in the soil; and wooden coffins. Tombstones and monuments were also of different types: mausoleums, brick and stone platforms (*daḵma*, *sagānd*, *qabrtāš*) ornamented and inscribed in Arabic, plain earth mounds with a banner (*tūq*), smooth river shingle (*qāyrāq*), and baked bricks with lengthy Arabic epitaphs.

The main building material was loess, out of which *paḵsa* (clay block) or raw

and baked bricks were formed, the latter mostly for monumental structures. The most common building solutions were of clay, but in the laying of baked brick *ga(n)č-ḵāk* (a solution of gypsum with an admixture of loess and brick dust) was used. Brick was baked in field kilns (*ḵūmdān*), rectangular or square in shape, consisting of a furnace and a baking oven. In the *rabaż*s of large cities there existed special quarters of brick-bakers, but *ḵūmdān*s were also set up directly on building sites. Wood was utilized in architecture mainly for roofing, pillars, and doors. In mountainous districts stone was used. For the dwellings of the poor the materials used were *gūvala* (large lumps of raw clay), *čīm* (turf), and *būrīā* (reeds). Architectural decoration became much used on monumental buildings. In the 5-6th/11-12th centuries an important practice was the laying of building bricks in patterns or of specially shaped small decorative bricks, as well as wood and *gač* (stucco) carving. From the 6th/12th century decoration included terra-cotta and glazed paneling brick. Polychrome ceramic decoration that appeared in the 6th/12th century and subsequently came to play an important role included inlays of azure, blue and white glazed tiles, carved glazed terracotta, carved, partitioned and smooth polychrome majolica with under- and over-glaze designs, and carved and inlaid mosaic on a *kāšī* foundation.

The material culture of Central Asia during the Islamic Middle Ages had a great deal in common with that of the neighboring regions of Iran and Afghanistan, while retaining throughout its originality and showing regional differences.

The production of pottery achieved high standards. As the number of master artisans increased, so did the variety of vessels and the number of kilns. The most important of the many medieval centers of ceramic handicraft in Central Asia were Aḵsīkat, Binket, Marv, Nisa, and Samarkand. In the 7-8th/14th centuries Urganǰ was particularly important in the production of pottery; in the 9-10th/15-16th, Samarkand, Marv, and Tashkent. In such towns large quarters of potters often developed. In the 4-6th/10-12th centuries, the quarter of ceramists in the central part of the *šahrestān* in Samarkand housed up to fifteen workshops producing glazed and unglazed pottery as well as living and working quarters, plants for milling raw material, and baking kilns. In an extensive quarter of Marv situated in the *rabaż*, two workshops have been excavated covering an area of 450 and 500 m^2. They were situated on either side of a narrow lane and had chambers for various purposes grouped around small yards. In one of them there were seven kilns, in the other, four. Here

many kinds of glazed and unglazed pottery were produced. In the 3rd-5th/9th-11th centuries two-tiered rounded field kilns with furnaces and baking ovens were characteristic for the greater part of Central Asia, but in the 5-6th/11-12th, rectangular two-tiered kilns also came into extensive use. The construction of the kilns hardly altered in the following centuries, but the use also spread of round kilns with open fires without a division of furnace and baking oven. Many different utensils were used in kilns: tripods (*sepāya*) set between the vessels, pins inserted into holes in the walls of the kiln, C- and S-shaped holders for suspending vessels with handles, small yokes, and supports of many shapes. The composition and shape of unglazed pottery, mainly for household and general use, changed little throughout the centuries. Its ornamentation was limited to crenellated bands or waves, but in the 3rd-4th/9th-10th centuries molded ornamentation was sometimes affixed, while in the 6th/12th century decorative punching came into use and subsisted in Ḵᵛārazm till the 8th/14th century. Decoration of table vessels involved the use of glazes. The non-transparent potassium-alkali (*šeḵār*) glaze laid directly on to the clay appeared at the end of the 2nd/8th or in the first half of the 3rd/9th century; from the end of the 3rd/9th century a non-transparent tin glaze for monochrome covering and a transparent lead glaze laid in designs for a polychrome finish came into use. In the 2nd-3rd/8th-9th centuries simple ornamental designs in dull green make their appearance, while in the 3rd-7th/9th-13th centuries pottery with designs in three colors (black, yellow and green) laid on the clay becomes popular. Typical for the 4-5th/10th-11th centuries was pottery with designs and Kufic inscriptions in black or brown on a white background as well as ceramics with painted designs on red base. In the 6th/12th century appear vessels made of fine *kāšī* (earthenware) with colorless or azure glaze, sometimes with scratched or pricked decoration. Luster ceramics developed in the 6-7th/12-13th centuries in Dahestān, under the influence of Iran, and in the 7th/13th century Urganǰ became one of the leading centers of their production, exercising a strong influence on the art of pottery in other regions of Central Asia and in the dominions of the Golden Horde; the prevailing ceramics were fine *kāšī* with colorless glaze and slightly raised decoration outlined in green and blue. In southern Central Asia fine *kāšī* pottery with blue glaze over black designs became widespread. Pottery in the Chinese style (a white background decorated with cobalt designs) on a *kāšī* base became prevalent from the end of the 8th/14th into the 9th/15th century; the main production centers were Samarkand, Nisa, and Marv. During the following centuries *kāšī* pottery was replaced by clay ware with polychrome designs in black, pale blue, manganese-purple, and green.

A number of Central Asian towns held workshops producing glass objects for household use, beads, perfume and medicinal containers of different shapes, and vessels of all kinds, including goblets, jugs, mugs, phiales, inkpots, and chemical receptacles. The glassware was colorless or tinted black, blue, yellow or green. Household glassware was often decorated by impressing or by attached ornamentation. Everywhere windowpanes in the shape of flat discs were produced by glass blowing.

Of much importance for Central Asia were the extraction of ore, and the highly developed skills of metallurgy and metal refining. Extensive mining regions were situated in Šāš, Īlak, Farḡāna, Osrūšana, and Kizil-qom, while the "metallists' quarter" discovered in Termeḏ occupied an area of about six hectares, and smiths' quarters have been noted in Saraḵs and Čāgānīān. Side by side with an extensive range and quantity of household articles, tools, weapons, and artistic objects (kettles, *qalamdān*s, incense burners, lamps with Arabic inscriptions and miniatures) were produced. A large workshop for such articles was discovered next the Reḡestān of Samarkand.

The jewelers' art is so far represented by only a few items. The extensive development of medieval weaving and carpet making can be seen from the discovery throughout the area of ceramic weights and whorls.

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