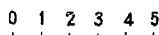
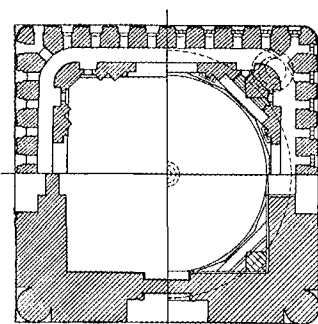
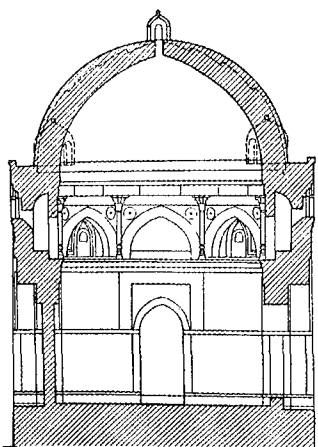


*G. A. Pugachenkova*

## The Role of Bukhara in the Creation of the Architectural Typology of the Former Mausoleums of Mavarannahr

Mausoleums have a great significance in the monumental architecture of the Muslim world. The Ash-Shafiya cemetery in Cairo (13<sup>th</sup> century), the Shah-i-Zinda necropolis in Samarkand (14<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> century), Taj Mahal in Agra (17<sup>th</sup> century) and many others rank among the masterpieces of world architecture. However, different from mosques, the mausoleums came into existence later, well after Islam had been stabilized. To erect a burial monument was strictly forbidden in earlier times, as it was against the basic tenets of Islam. The Hadith ascribes this interdiction to the Prophet Muhammed himself, who preached that a Muslim grave should be ascetically simple and not marked by any structure or roof. The corpse, wrapped in a shroud, was laid with its face directed to Mecca in a grave distinguished only by a small mound and eventually by a headstone and/or by two sticks in the ground at the head and the feet of the body. The ascetic manner of burial had deeper meaning given the modest lifestyle of the former Arab nomads. The lack of funerary monuments, as well as any other burial paraphernalia, indicated Islam's opposition to the rituals of the ancient heathen cults and Christianity at the time. It was also an expression of the policy of Islam in its struggle with other religions. That interdiction was strictly observed during the Caliphates of the Ommayyads and the early Abbasids. However, the situation had been changing over time. The glorification of a powerful person was a significant feature of Eastern cultures even in pre-Islamic times. It grew more pronounced during the formation of the great khalifat or Caliphate. Thus, the Caliph, and nobody else, might be worthy of a burial-vault. When the Caliph al-Muntasir died in 862, his Greek mother requested permission to construct his tomb in Samarra. She was granted permission and subsequently, the Caliphs al-Muttazi and al-Muhtadi were also buried there. The ruins of this mausoleum, called the Qubbat as-Sulabiyya, were found during the excavation of a hill at the west bank of the river Tigris. The excavation revealed the structure: a high platform and walls, preserved up to a height of five meters, and three graves (the discovery of graves confirmed it as a mausoleum). The architectural composition is reminiscent of Byzantine architecture. The mausoleum is octahedral in plan, with its walls crowned by a dome, including a square space with four



Bukhara.  
The Samanid mausoleum.  
Plan and section.

openings, on axis. Since then, the interdiction of the Hadith was invalid and the Caliphs took the lead in constructing mausolea in all eastern Islamic countries.

One of the earliest architectural traditions to adopt this innovation was that of Central Asia. At the turn of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, a mausoleum was erected for the ruler of the Samanid dynasty in Mavarannahr. It was constructed during the reign of the outstanding Samanid king - Ismail (892 - 907). An ancient waqf document contains evidence of the donation of land by Ismail for the *nazar* (grave) of his father Ahmed b. Asad. The *nazar* was located outside the ancient citadel of Bukhara and is now on the Char-Gumbazon street, in the western part of the city, which topographically was the same location as the Samanid mausoleum. In addition, there was a wooden plate on one of the facades above the entrance. The script on the plate, in classic Kufic calligraphy, includes the name of the grandson Ismail-Nasr II b. Ahmad (who ruled between 914 - 942).

There are three tombs in the mausoleum, and this fact eliminates a possible contradiction in dates. Constructed by Ismail the Samanid for his father, the mausoleum became the burial place for himself as well as for Nasr II b. Ahmad. Existing sources also tell us that at the Naukand cemetery, located far south of the Samanid mausoleum, there was the mausoleum of his son Ahmad, who died in 914. Following the first dynastic burial vault, there was widespread construction of mausoleums around Mavarannahr.

Another mausoleum of the Samanid epoch survives until the present day. In the high mountains in the Narpai district of the Samarkand region, there is a small hidden cemetery containing a mausoleum named after a person called Arab Ata. The Kufic calligraphy of the Arabic script that frames the mausoleum portal contains the date of construction, erected by the order of the Samanid ruler, Huh b. Mansurabi in 367 AH / October - November 977. The significance of this monument has been proved by the fact that a famous architect from Bukhara was appointed for that project, and the emir himself sponsored its construction.

Altogether, there is evidence of the high authority of the person in whose honor the mausoleum was constructed. The name of this person did not remain in the memory of the local residents. "Arab Ata" is only a nickname (which means "father of Arabs"). Presumably, he was one of the high-ranking Arab clergy, who had settled in this remote mountain district. Until today his cult is still observed by the locals, mainly a cattle-breeding population. The evidence of the existence of this cult over the centuries is another building near the mausoleum, the Ak mosque, which dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century (the date is based on the architectural forms and methods of construction). Thus, the existence of two Samanid monuments proves that mausoleums in Mavarannahr had been constructed for the nobility as well as for honored Muslim clergy.

From an architectural viewpoint, the monuments represent two basic types of composition: one with a central dome and the other with a portal dome. Both types experienced a long process of development seen in funerary monuments in Central Asia. It should be emphasized that from

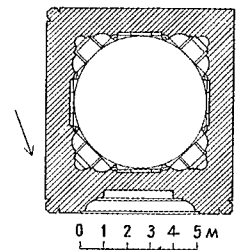
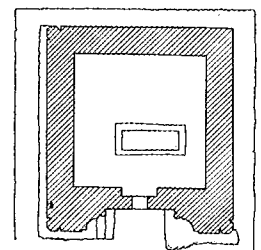
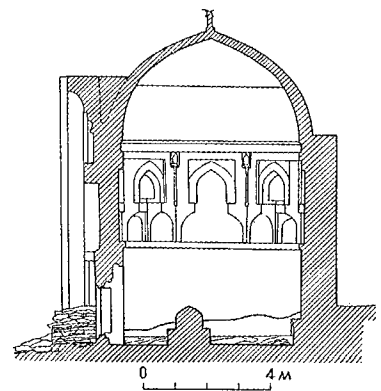
the early medieval ages on the basic construction material in the monumental architecture of Central Asia was clay (in its variations as stucco or adobe brick). However, by the 10<sup>th</sup> century baked brick became the dominant material. The use of baked brick opened up for architects new possibilities of construction, design and decoration. This is amply demonstrated in the both the mausolea mentioned above, which are further described in the following section.

The baked brick used to construct the mausoleum also serves as the principal material for architectural decoration. This is achieved with bricks laid either horizontally or vertically, angled or flat, and/or by double bricks with a wide seam between them. The Samanid mausoleum was constructed of baked bricks of a smaller dimension. The form is designed as a cuboid space crowned by a hemispherical dome. A low plinth supports the cube. The entire composition is strictly symmetrical and all facades are equal in dimension. A large arch is in the center of the facade surface, behind which is an arched passageway. A series of small arches is at the top of the facade, behind which is the narrow encircling gallery, which serves here as a reveal for the masonry. The corners are flanked by strong, short, three-quarter columns at the top of which are small domes (supposedly of later origin).

The simplicity of the exterior architectural details reflects the design of the interior. The flat walls are broken at the axis by the arches. Above them is the octahedron drum supported by corner squinches and which serves as a transition to the bowl of the dome above it. Together these elements create the texture of the walls and extremely expressive details. In addition, the borders are made of polished bricks in the form of disks or four-petal rosettes.

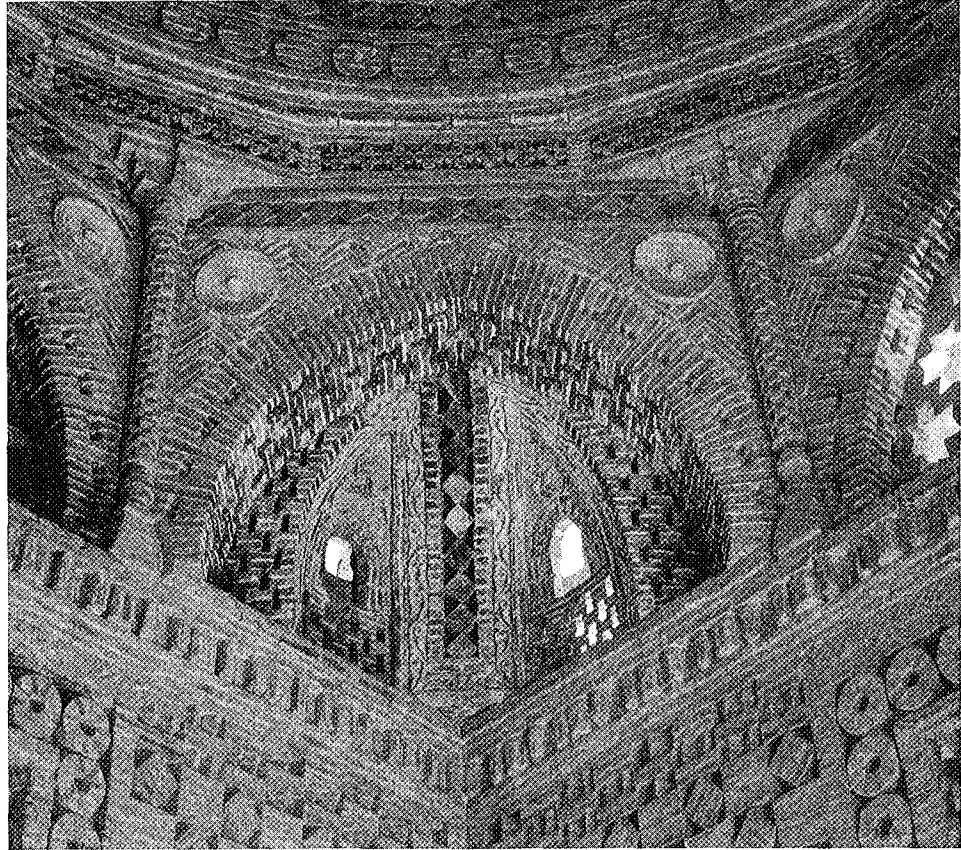
The close study of the detailing in the Samanid mausoleum reveals the existing connection with the architectural traditions of pre-Islamic Soghd (the ancient region which was comprised of the territories of Samarkand, Bukhara and Kashkadarya regions of present Uzbekistan, and part of Tadzhikistan). The mural paintings from the Soghdian temple at Penjikent (5<sup>th</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup> centuries) had attracted attention to the image of a catafalque, depicted with a hemispherical dome, arcature and short corner columns. This organization is similar to the general structure of the Samanid mausoleum. Terracotta disks and rosettes are known in Soghdian architecture, again, similar to those on the wall borders of the Samanid mausoleum. There are further similarities in the corner columns of the interior. Though essentially innovative, the Samanid mausoleum had a definite connection with the local pre-Islamic architecture.

The Arab-Ata mausoleum is a special monument. It exhibits the dominance of new stylistic features, which belong to the new stage of development of medieval architecture, more closely correlated to the ideas of Muslim culture. The building is also constructed in baked brick, and is square and small in dimensions. The masonry work is in coupled bricks with wide joints in between. This constructively rational method enhances the texture of the masonry, and thus generates the general expressiveness



*Celernie Tim.  
Arab-Ata mausoleum.*

*Bukhara.  
The Samanid mausoleum.  
Interior decoration.*



of decoration. The building is a square in plan, crowned by a high pointed dome. However, the spatial symmetry of the entire composition is broken by an enhancement of the front facade as a raised portal where the principal decorative details are concentrated. Regarding formal development, the low plinth and large, pointed entrance arch are highlighted. Above the arch, there is a triple arcature and all these elements are flanked by U-shaped frames (the top part of which has not survived). There are octagonal columns in the corners of the portal. The portal is partially decorated with a masonry design and partially with carved stucco. Two types of ornaments are used: geometric (*ghiriland*), which appear in different variations at the lower end of the front arch and in the arcature; and a wide strip of epigraphic decoration filled with Arabic script in Kufic calligraphy which contains information on the date mentioned above. The interior is characterized by its squinches, which are constructed on two levels. They form small hemispheres and create a three-leaf figure, which is repeated on the walls of the lower ends of the arches. The decorative brick columns between them create a smooth transition to the spiral masonry of the dome. Similar to the Samanid mausoleum, they imitate the forms of the wooden columns of Soghdian architecture and have wide capitals with curving end volutes.

The idea of a portal was widespread in Central Asia and in the far reaches of the Iranian kingdom even in pre-Islamic architecture. Since then, however, this idea acquired special significance and became almost a standard element in monumental architecture of various functions. An innovation in the Arab Ata mausoleum was the inscription bounding the portal. Arabic epigraphy played, at the time, a special didactic and esthetic role in architecture.

The analysis of the proportions of the Samanid and Arab Ata mausoleums allows us to conclude that, in general, a geometric regularity dominates in the design of their plans, facades and sections. The design is based upon the correlation of sides and diagonals of the squares in progressively descending order.

We need to remind ourselves that the period of the 9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> century was a remarkable one in the history of the Eastern world and characterized by significant developments in mathematical science. As well as learned treatises scholars invented the methods of practical geometry, which were widely used by the engineers and architects of the time. In the 11<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, a great number of magnificent tombs were erected in Central Asia. They were built for sultans and *khans* as well as for founders of Sufi orders and honored Sunni clergy. Architects endeavored to incorporate unique features in each building. But the basic typology remained the same as that created by the Bukhara architects under Samanid rule, when two types of graves were developed – the center-domed type and the portal-domed type.<sup>1</sup>

#### NOTE:

1. The literature on Samanid mausoleums is very wide ranging, attracting the attention of scholars since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A bibliography of these mausoleums can be found in the book of M.S. Bulatov "Mavsovei Samanidov-hudojectvernaia djemchuzchine architecturi srednei aziv," Tashkent, 1976. There are a few other publications about these monuments. The mausoleum Arab Ata, due to its location far from the city, was discovered only in 1958 by Mr. V.I. Leonov. It was studied further in 1960 by Ms. G.A. Pugatchenkova, see "Mavzolei Arab Ata. Isskusstvo zodchih uzbekistane," II, Tashkent, 1968.