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SHAH-I-ZINDA: A THOUSAND-YEAR LIFE OF A SHRINE

The oldest shrine in Samarkand, the Shah-i-Zinda, is a small complex of burial sites displaying classical Islamic architecture. Not a single collection of sites in the entirety of the Central Asian region and neighboring countries has received such scientific interest nor such rich literary attention. This article is devoted to the analysis of the new book by Dr. Nina Nemtseva about this unique archaeological site. Her monograph under consideration is the result of several decades of archaeological and architectural research carried out by the author and recreates a comprehensive biography of the monument. Shakh-i-Zinda, now for the first time, is presented as a complex, multifaceted phenomenon from the medieval culture of Central Asia shown against the backdrop of the history of the region with its political and socioeconomic changes. N.B. Nemtseva carefully follows the stages of structural development, monumental spatial forms, decor, as well as many other aspects of the spiritual and material culture of Maverannahr and its neighboring historical regions over the past millennium. She identifies several historical, cultural, and chronological stages in the functioning of the Shakh-i-Zinda complex, whose zenith occurred during the era of the Karakhanids (11th-12th centuries) and Timurids (14th-15th centuries), when Samarkand twice acquired the status as the capitals of these empires. These periods were the most active in the ensemble's construction and associated with the state and socioeconomic stability of the two empires.

Key words: Samarkand, N. B. Nemtseva, shrine, *mashhad*, *madrasah*, Karakhanid architecture, Timurid architecture.

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THE POMP of the imperial style of gigantic structures expressing political ambitions and the megalomania of its ruler is perhaps the most characteristic feature of Timur's architecture. As already noted by many researchers, his striving for the colossal was fueled by the peculiarities of the Mongol onslaught: "moderate and clear harmony, based on the coherence and balance of all components of the composition, was broken. The next generation after Timur softened the extremes and returned to proportionality" (Mozzati 2009: 189). However, even during the great conqueror's life, in addition to giant palaces, mosques and pretentious mausoleums, some traditional type tombs were also built whose distinctive feature was its noble simplicity of form and an exquisite taste in the use of color. They were relatively small and were intended for Timur's inner circle. The best examples have been preserved in the Shah-i-Zinda necropolis which is the most famous shrine of Samarkand and is only indirectly connected with Timur. Most of its famous patrons were the Timurid princesses, wives, and sisters of the ruler, who built their own family tombs around the *mashhad* (shrine) of *Ḳuṭham b. al-ʿAbbās* (Arabic: *قثم بن العباس*) – a cousin of the Prophet Muhammad. More than twen-

ty mausoleums and mosques from different periods have survived at the surface level of the necropolis. The results of archaeological excavations have established that there were approximately fifty buildings of this type on the site.

The portals of the Shah-i-Zinda mausoleums make an indelible impression with their splendor and variety of ornamentation. They represent a colorful repertoire of skillful and undoubtedly expensive techniques.

Painted majolica tiles, carved glazed terracotta, and sets of fine *kashin* mosaics are combined with exquisite Arabic and Persian calligraphy inscriptions intertwined into whimsical floral and geometric patterns in which elegiac verses are often found alongside Quranic texts. The precious decorations of each mausoleum have their own unique character. The mausoleums' entrance facades are visual examples of imperial ornamentation, but the inner walls, which were not designed for viewing, and, instead, were left as modest brickwork with figurative details typical for the architecture of the pre-Mongol period. This testifies to the fact that the "old style" was not completely forgotten, but rather pushed into a corner (Chmel'niz-kij 2000: 422).

Shah-i-Zinda, like a bridge spanning from pre-Mongol Afrasiyab to Timurid Samarkand, connects different eras of the city's history. Along the length of only about 200 meters on the southern slope of the legendary settlement is found such immense archaeological and architectural material that it can hardly be contained in only one book. Nevertheless, such a book truly exists. It represents the results of several decades of hard work by Nina Borisovna Nemtseva and her fellow archaeologists and architects. This is the seventh book devoted to the largest architectural ensemble of the entire region. It was prepared within the framework of the international project *The History of Central Asian Architecture* initiated by IICAS.¹

The first book was a collective monograph edited by Dr. Pulat Zakhidov. It was published as the second volume of the series *Architecture of Uzbekistan* (Zakhidov 1970). In particular, it contains a large article by N. B. Nemtseva, summarizing the results of the first decade of her excavations at Shah-i-Zinda. The history of that ensemble and the historical topography of southern Afrasiyab became the topic of her dissertation for the Candidate of Sciences degree she defended in 1972. Then, a monographic historical and architectural essay appeared written together with the architect Judith Zelikovna Schwab. These two women studied Shah-i-Zinda for many years together (Nemtseva, Schwab 1979). Twelve years later, another dissertation from Harvard University appeared with the poetic title *Beyond the Architecture of Death: The Shah-i-Zinda Shrine in Samarkand* (Marefat 1991). Its author, Roya Marefat, a graduate student of prof. Oleg Grabar and prof. Renata Holod, began with a review of the city's history which focused on the Shah-i-Zinda shrine. It combined archaeological evidence (in particular, she was advised by N.B. Nemtseva) and primary sources on the epigraphy of the buildings. That dissertation, although never published as a separate book, has long been digitized and available on the Internet. It illuminates the nature of Islamic burial architecture with an emphasis on the features of female patronage in the 14th and 15th centuries.

The luxurious book of the French specialists in oriental and Islamic art, *The Tombs of Paradise: Shah-i-Zinda in Samarkand and the Architectural Ceramics of Central Asia* (Soustiel, Porter, Lesieur 2003), has a different focus. As the title itself suggests, Jean Soustiel and Yves Porter devoted their work to the purely artistic aspects of the facade and interior decor of the complex, presented in detail by the magnificent

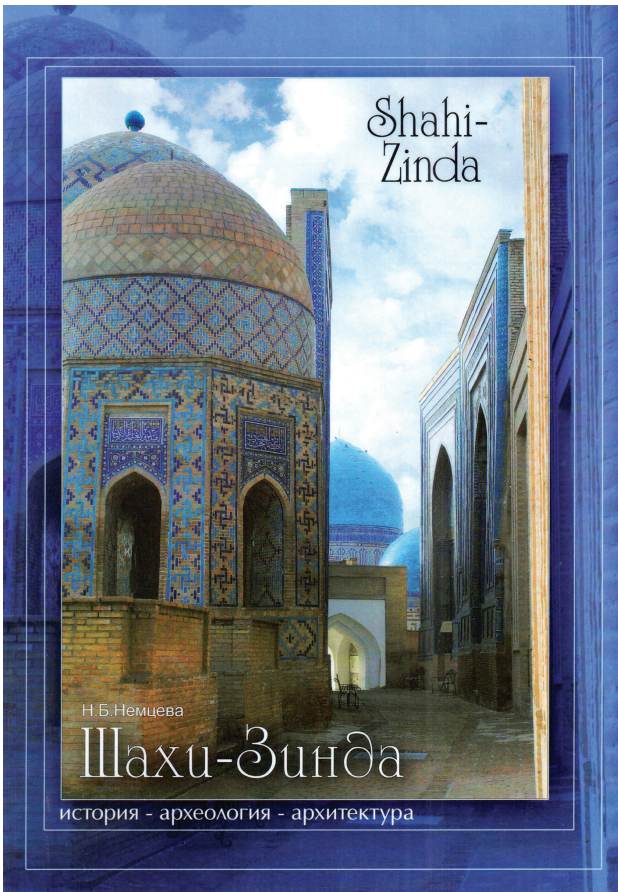
photographs of Antoine Lesieur. And again, 12 years later (what an amazing periodicity!), the monumental anthology under the title *Shah-i-Zinda* was published in the multivolume series *Architectural Epigraphy of Uzbekistan* (Babajanov, Rakhimov 2015).² As a result, taking into account the colorful photo album with popular scientific text (Nemtseva 1987), there are now currently seven books covering this one particular site. Stated more precisely they survey a small conglomerate of sites of classical Islamic architecture. Not a single complex of monuments in the entire Central Asian region and neighboring countries has received such interest nor been so richly portrayed in literature. Furthermore, the fact is obvious that dozens of scientific articles by different authors in different languages are devoted to the complex and few survey books, textbooks, or albums on the art and architecture of Islam, wherever they are published, do without descriptions, references, and photographs of Shah-i-Zinda.

The Karakhanid objects in this section of Afrasiyab were briefly but thoroughly described by Thomas Leisten in his monograph on the burial architecture of the Islamic world (Leisten 1998: 249-252). The most convenient English language catalogue of Timurid objects of the complex is presented in the two-volume book by Lisa Golombek and Donald Wilber, based on the analysis of numerous Russian sources including the works of N.B. Nemtseva (Golombek, Wilber 1988: I – 233-252; II – pl. I-IV, 17-59, fig. 14-23). In addition to several reprints in Russian, Uzbek, and English of a short architectural guide, which Nemtseva prepared jointly with J.Z. Schwab, there are many other Russian language texts about Shah-i-Zinda (Zasytkin 1948: 78-88; Pugachenkova 1968: 31-60; 1983: 167-189, 387-390; Starodub-Yenikeyeva 2004: 332-345, etc.), which reflect different stages in the study of the complex.

Over the past 55 years, since the first publication of the results of excavations under the leadership of N.B. Nemtseva in the “western corridor” of Shah-i-Zinda until the appearance of the final monograph; 25 scientific works devoted to various aspects of the study of the complex came from her pen alone. This does not include her reports at conferences, popular scientific articles, and brochures. During her long field

¹ Nemtseva, N. B. (2019). Ansambl' Shahi-Zinda. Istoria – Arheologia – Arhitektura (*The Shah-i-Zinda Ensemble: History, Archeology, Architecture. 11th–21st centuries*). Executive editor E.V. Rtveladze. Samarkand, IICAS Publ. 310 pp. (in Russian).

² The work actually includes the article by V. A. Shishkin *Inscriptions in the Shah-i-Zinda Ensemble*, published posthumously in the aforementioned collection *Architecture of Uzbekistan* (Zakhidov 1970) and reprinted as an appendix to the new book by N. B. Nemtseva. Although B. Babajanov and K. Rakhimov used the readings of V. A. Shishkin, carried out with the help of A. Nosirov, they note that his readings are incomplete, which he himself warned about in his article, and in some of them there were omissions and errors which are now corrected (Babajanov, Rakhimov 2015: 19).



practice, she explored several other important sites which became the subjects of her deep and complex analysis. This was reflected in more than one hundred publications, among which two of her monographs stand out: *The Khanqah of Saif ad-Din al-Bokharzi in Bukhara* (2003) and *Rabat-i Malik* (2009), which was a detailed study of the Karakhanid steppe residence near the modern city of Navoiy (Muradov 2015). In fact, through her scientific publications, N.B. Nemtseva strengthened the foundations of architectural archeology in Central Asia whose foundation was laid by her teachers Michael Masson and Galina Pugachenkova. A special role in her development as a scholar was played by Boris Zasyplin (1891–1955), under whose leadership she began her professional work in the early 1950s.

Returning to the new work of N.B. Nemtseva, it should not be perceived as an expanded and supplemented reprint of her 1979 monograph. Both in structure and in content, this is a completely new work. Of course, it absorbed some fragments of the first book and the materials that were accumulated by the author over the subsequent 40 years, but conceptually it is constructed differently. In the new book, for the first time ever, Shah-i-Zinda appears as a complex, multifaceted phenomenon in the medieval culture of Central Asia and shown against the backdrop of the

region's history with its political and socioeconomic changes. As the executive editor of the monograph, Academician E.V. Rtveladze noted in his foreword to the book, "The third book by N.B. Nemtseva differs from the previous ones taking a broader view. It analyzes many issues of stratigraphy, historical topography, and water usage in the south-eastern part of Afrasiyab."

The result of the archaeological and architectural research carried out by the author involved the reconstruction of a comprehensive biography of the monument. N. B. Nemtseva carefully followed the stages of development of the structures, their volumetric-spatial forms, the decor, as well as many other aspects of the spiritual and material culture of Transoxania and its adjacent historical regions over the past millennium. She identified several historical, cultural and chronological stages in the functioning of the Shah-i-Zinda complex, predominately related to the era of the Karakhanids (11th–12th centuries) and the Timurid dynasty (14th–15th centuries), when Samarkand acquired its status as a capital twice. Those were the periods of most active construction in the architectural ensemble that was associated with the state and socioeconomic stability of the two empires.

In the *Introduction* (pp. 8-15), the author gives a general description of the complex and provides a schematic plan showing all the sites and features on both sides of the "street" along which the mausoleums are built. Then follows the section under the title *Written Data and History of Study* (pp. 15–29), which contains, perhaps, all the comprehensive information about the sources associated with the place starting from the *waqf* (also known as *hubous*) of the 11th century which will be discussed below. All identified references to the *mashhad* (shrine) of Kutham and Shah-i-Zinda in the historical documents are noted. The chronology of descriptions and studies of the ensemble as well as all restoration works begun from the middle of the 19th century before its radical improvement in 2005 to 2007 is also traced.

The following introductory sections *Stratigraphy and Historical Topography of the South of the Afrasiyab Settlement* (pp. 29–32) and *Water Supply of the Shah-i-Zinda Complex* (pp. 32–49) are based on the materials of the historical and topographical study of the site and the written data that were not taken into account earlier. In particular, the fragment of the message of Ibn Battuta, which mentions the channel flowing near the *Mashhad* of Kutham is included. Its streambed was revealed during excavations in the 1960s. As noted by N. B. Nemtseva in her monograph co-authored with J.Z. Schwab, an incorrect assumption was made that the channel towards Shah-i-Zinda, as well as throughout Afrasiyab, ceased to function after the destruction of its main tributary,

the Joui-Arzi, by the Mongols in the 13th century. But was it really destroyed, and if so, to what extent? Raising that question, the author emphasizes that the water supply along the old channel could be quickly restored in the 13th century since there was simply no other source of water in the area. The topic of the Shah-i-Zinda water supply throughout the Middle Ages was first mentioned by Nemtseva even earlier (Nemtseva 2006) but in her new book she summarizes all the data known to date. It should be added that the issues related to the water supply of the Afrasiyab plateau are also analyzed in light of the Uzbek-French archaeological expedition (MAFOUZ-Sogdiane) and still remain the subject of discussion by its participants.

The last section of the Introduction, *The Southern Gates of Samarkand in the 10th–12th Centuries* (pp. 49–56) shows the stratigraphic complexity involved in clarifying the topography of that part of the city. As in her separate publication on this topic (Nemtseva 2012), the author emphasizes that the question of the fortress wall's gates of Afrasiyab being located on the axis of the Shah-i-Zinda ensemble, which supposedly connected the shrine with the rabat, was not even raised in the early 1950s. At that stage of the study of the monument, a different idea was popular. One publication after another (Galina Pugachenkova, Lazar Rempel, Boris Zasyplin, Vera Bulatova) assumed that the Mongols destroyed the fortress wall and the Shah-i-Zinda complex of the 11th to 12th centuries when conquering the city. However, Ibn Battuta's testimony, cited by Nemtseva, refutes that well accepted opinion. Only by the 1970s, after the archaeological excavations carried out by that time, did a general picture emerge of the stages of the Shah-i-Zinda complex formation and of the stratigraphy of southern Afrasiyab. Nemtseva shows the inconsistency of modern ideas about the existence of some "new" gates on the site of the 15th century portal in front of the entrance to the Shah-i-Zinda and brings clarity regarding the Iron Gates, also known as the Kesh Gates, which are located in the area of the present Khazret-Khyzr mosque.

The book consists of four chapters, each of which is devoted to certain historical, cultural and chronological stages of the functioning of Shah-i-Zinda. At first, these were the periods of the most active construction activities at the shrine, associated with the state power and socioeconomic stability of the two large empires of Central Asia. That was followed by a period of stagnation and loss of interest in the Samarkand shrines on the part of the new ruling dynasties who settled in Bukhara.

The first chapter (pp. 57–154) is devoted to the most difficult stage of study which falls during the Karakhanids era which ruled in the 11th and 12th

centuries. This occurred when Samarkand became the capital of the Western Turkic Khaganate and when, in fact, Shah-i-Zinda began. Nemtseva describes the ideological surroundings against which the shrine was created and still functions not only as a treasury of the construction art and artistic culture of Transoxania, but also as an important factor in the spiritual life of modern Muslims. The earliest architectural and ideological basis of Shah-i-Zinda – the mashhad of Kutham with an imaginary grave of a *shahid* (the Kutham b. al-'Abbās complex in the north-eastern part of the architectural ensemble) arose at the beginning of the 11th century. The appearance of that shrine three and a half centuries after the death of the eponym was caused by nothing more than the need of the recent nomads – the Turkic Karakhanids who conquered Transoxania – to legitimize their power in the conquered lands. They achieved their goal not only by adopting Islam, but also by accepting a stable local tradition of pagan origin.

As is known, the famous Samarkand toponyms *Afrasiyab* and *Shah-i-Zinda* are, first of all, based on two characters from Iranian-Turkic mythology associated with the idea of eternal life. Afrasiyab, a hero, progenitor, king of the Turkic peoples, made sacrifices to the goddess of water and fertility, Aredvi Sura Anahita, hoping in vain that she would give him immortality (Basilov 1990: 76). Shah-i-Zinda, which means "The Living King," according to local legends is identified as Kutham b. al-'Abbās, who did not die during prayer at the hands of pagans, but miraculously disappeared through the *mihrab* (or the rock). According to other versions, he took in hands his own severed head and went down into the well (or the cave), where he still lives. Analyzing the mythologeme of "The Living King" in connection with the *mashhad* of Kutham, other researchers (Rakhimov, Terletskiy 2006) draw attention to another well-known shrine – the Chashma-Ayub Mausoleum in Bukhara. That cult complex, which developed starting in the 14th century until the 16th century, includes the imaginary tomb of Ayub, a Quranic character, a prophet who corresponds with the biblical Job; as well as a sacred wellhead (*chashma / bulak*) with fresh water, apparently a natural spring. That water is believed to have healing properties (Babajanov, Muminov, Nekrasova 1998).

The aforementioned example, which is almost directly a personification of healing water, sheds some light on what R.R. Rakhimov and N.S. Terletskiy hypothesized about the origin of the name for the Shah-i-Zinda complex. Indirect evidence seems to link the residents of Samarkand with the subterranean water source that existed between the well at the small mosque Khazret-Khyzr on the site of the Kesh Gates of Afrasiyab and Shah-i-Zinda. Indeed, Khaz-

ret-Khyzr (also known as al-Khadir) is a character in Islamic mythology associated with the spirit of the waters as a source of global fertility and purification, as well as with immortality (Piotrovsky 1988). Other authors note the syncretic nature of the figures of Kutham and Khyzr found in later legends. (Bosworth 1986: 551; Leisten 1998: 249). It seems hardly coincidental that a bath was erected next to the well at Shah-i-Zinda which was built on Timur's order for his own use. Such a hypothesis is affirmed by scholars. Perhaps, the construction of that bath for Timur was inspired by the legend of Alexander the Great bathing in a source of living water providing him with worldwide fame and greatness. In a similar way, the legend of Kutham b. al-'Abbās causes some experts to see a connection with the legend of the "Headless Horseman."

Kutham's legends also associate him with the Central Asian New Year, known as *Nowrus*, in which he is attributed with elements from the ancient Iranian heroes, primarily Siavash (Avestan *Syāvaršan*), as well as the Muslim Khyzr (Rempel 1972: 43-47). To understand the origin of the name Shah-i-Zinda, one should consider this as a phenomenon of the re-mythologization of places of worship in combination with the Tajik word for *well*, which is "chokh." On that basis, one hypothesis speculates that Shah-i-Zinda comes from the assonant name *Chokhi-Zinda*, which literally means "living well" or a "well of living water." (Rakhimov, Terletskiy 2006: 179-180). Of course, every legend carries traces of beliefs and myths from deep antiquity; therefore, one cannot dismiss them as purely folklore. On the contrary, a thoughtful analysis of such sources can significantly expand a basis of fact for researchers.

According to *The Smaller Kandiya*,³ the actual grave of Kutham b. al-'Abbās was in the 7th century Arab cemetery known as Banu-Nahiyah located at the southern gates of Samarkand (Vyatkin 1906: 260-262). Apparently, by the 11th century this site no longer met the size needed for the established funeral

rite (*ziyarat*) and the requirements of the time. It is known that the graves of the first Muslims in the early stages were unmarked. In the 7th century an earthen mound was constructed with a pole placed the head. The more the earthen mound eroded, the more holiness the tomb acquired. The *mashad* of Kutham with its imaginary grave of an important person in the history of Islam constituted a group for the initial construction which was a functional and interconnected location for the tomb of Kutham that included the *gurkhana* (the burial vault) and *ziyaratkhana* (mausoleum), as well as a mosque, minaret, *chillahana* (prayer cell) for the forty-day seclusion of *khalwa*, a main emphasis in Sufism which includes the ceremonial rite of worshipping at holy places.

As excavations have demonstrated, during the 11th and 12th centuries the aristocratic necropolis of the Karakhanids which includes richly decorated tombs was constructed at the shrine. Simultaneously, in connection with the spread of the Sufism and the revival of the cult of saints, sacred complexes or individual mausoleums at the "holy graves," including *mashhads* (shrines), became widespread in Muslim countries. Nemtseva conducted several studies of these shrines, clarifying their definition from different eras and in different regions of the Muslim world (Nemtseva 2008a). She paid much attention to a detailed descriptions of the architecture of the *mashad* of Qutham both in a separate article (Nemtseva 2008b) and in the monograph currently under review. Carved wooden structures from the 11th century preserved *in situ* are examined in detail by Nemtseva (such as a corbel and frieze). The finest of design and exquisite in execution, the carvings from Shah-i-Zinda, with all their originality in the motifs, allow us to speak about the stylistic relationship of wood carving from pre-Mongolian Samarkand with the wood carving in Upper Zarafshan (locations such as Isfara, Chorku, Oburdon, Urmitan). Such examples do not go beyond Central Transoxania.

Much attention in the book is paid to the mausoleum of the Prince Kutham, which survived two construction periods in the 11th and 14th centuries. The general assessment of the composition, typology, and style of the *mashhad* of Kutham is given. It is difficult to disagree with Nemtseva's opinion that that it is "one of the most sophisticated, multi-layered, and intricate architectural complexes of Central Asia, and it is not surprising that there are still many unresolved problems in its history and structure" (Chmel'nizkij 1996: 165). Meanwhile, significant insight is provided by Nemtseva and future researchers will gain much from a careful reading of her monograph.

Remains of walls uncovered by excavations and a collection of architectural decor of the 11th and 12th centuries from the Shah-i-Zinda complex allowed

³ Imam Abu-l-Fazl Muhammad b. Abdaljalil b. Abdalmalik 'Ali b. Khaidar as-Samarkandi (12th century) wrote a short Persian version of a larger Arabic book of Abu Hal'f an-Nasafi as-Samarkandi (d. 1142/1143) entitled *Kitab al-kand fi tarikh-i Samarkand* (*The Sugar book of the History of Samarkand*). This large *Kandiya* did not survive. There are six copies of *The Smaller Kandiya* in the Collection of the Oriental Manuscripts of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan (Tashkent). The content of *The Smaller Kandiya* is quite varied, but its main focus is devoted to the description of the *mazars* (tombs) of saints and the rules for performing prayers at them. At the same time, however, information is given about the founding of the city of Samarkand; its conquest by the Arabs; anti-Islamic uprisings of the inhabitants; details on irrigation; the inhabitants of the cities; and biographical sketches about different persons, etc. Most of the information is considered legend.

the author to formulate her judgments about the architecture of pre-Mongolian Samarkand. This is also true in discerning the specificity and local features in accordance with the general development of the architecture of Transoxania from that era. The book provides significant detail concerning the facades and whole blocks of decor made of carved, rough terracotta in various shapes (flat, curved, oval, sub-triangular) and the comparisons allow one to imagine the external appearance of the now destroyed or eroded buildings of the Shah-i-Zinda complex during the Karakhanid period. The last of the excavated mausoleums from that time period were the ruins of a mausoleum discovered in 2004 which Nemtseva identifies with the tomb of Lachin-bek. He is mentioned in a *waqf* of the 13th century. An unusual feature of that building is the antechamber of a narrow vestibule that protrudes into the mausoleum's interior. After the Karakhanid dynasty exited the political arena at the beginning of the 13th century, their necropolis began to collapse and during the construction of new tombs in the Timurid period they were dismantled and the spolia was used for mausoleums of the 14th and 15th centuries.

One of the most controversial results from the archaeological research at Shah-i-Zinda involved Nemtseva's discovery of the walls and foundations from the Karakhanid period on the western side of the upper section of the site. Nemtseva confidently connected them with the remains of the Hanafi madrasah which in 1066 was ordered to be built near the mashhad of Kutham by the second supreme ruler from the dynasty of the great Khagans of the Western Karakhanid Khaganate, Ibrahim ibn Nasr Tamghach Bugra Khan also known as Bōritigin. It is also identified with the Kuthamiya madrasah, which the Khwarezmian author Nasir ibn Abduseyid mentioned at the end of the 12th century (*Volin* 1940: 69-70). This site is located behind the partially preserved portal of the "Anonymous 2" mausoleum (dated to the 1390s) which has now been completely reconstructed. It also included the cross-shaped crypt of the 15th century adjoining it from the west along with a group of features from the north which contains a section of a crypt dating to the 16th century, a crypt from the mausoleum of the 16th or 17th century, the mausoleum of Emir Burunduk (also 1390s) and a section of the Tuman-aka mosque (1405–1406).

Nemtseva presented her findings in three earlier publications (*Nemtseva* 1970; 1974; *Nemtseva, Schwab* 1979), which brought severe criticism from Sergey Chmelnizkij. He did not accept the presented evidence and denied that the excavated ruins dating to the 11th century belonged to the Tamghach Bugra Khan madrasah described in written sources. He believed that the revealed architectural remains

could not belong to this integral, unique building and in reality represented traces of various buildings from the pre-Mongol period (*Chmelnizkij* 1993). A public controversy ensued between the two scholars (*Nemtseva* 1996; *Chmelnizkij* 1999). The scholar of Arabian history, Oleg Bolshakov initially located the Bugra Khan madrasah as being near the al-Naubahar gates, which, in his opinion, were also called the "Iron Gates" and were to be found in the western part of Afrasiyab (*Bolshakov* 1971: 172, notes 13; 174; 1973: 221, 225, 229). The same view was shared by S. Chmelnizkij. But other researchers have proven that the Bugra Khan madrasah was located in the southern part of Afrasiyab, near the Kesh, or Iron Gates (*Nemtseva* 1974: 127-130; *Buryakov, Tashkhozayev* 1975: 16, note 28; *Shishkina* 1975: 23, 25-26, 40-41; *Davidovich* 1978: 114). Western researchers have also supported Nemtseva's hypothesis (*Haase* 1997, *Leisten* 1998).

Obviously, further excavations of the site adjacent to the specified group on the western side of the Shah-i-Zinda mausoleums and now partially occupied by a later cemetery could bring final clarity, but this seems unfeasible in the foreseeable future. An in depth analysis of the 11th century *waqf* that has come down to us from the Kutham madrasah is still possible. That document testifies to the important role of the mashhad of Kutham in the ideology and politics of the Karakhanids. Although the original text and translation of this tremendously important and rare thousand-year-old manuscript has been published several times,⁴ no serious attempts have been made to correlate its data with the cultural material revealed in the Shah-i-Zinda complex until recently. Nina Nemtseva was actually the very first person to do so rather convincingly.

Most of the Central Asian and Iranian madrasahs are laid out according to the iwan-courtyard type of building whose genesis can be traced at least from the Parthian period. In the Middle Ages, their composition enhanced the inclusion of perimeter buildings and corner premises (e.g. auditoriums or a mosque) and became the universal pattern of construction of various functions. Nemtseva considers the Quthamiya madrasah, constructed in the 11th century, as the typological forerunner in the development of the Transoxanian madrasahs of the 14th through 17th centuries. The architectural type of synchronous madrasahs in the Middle and the Near East (as found in Khargerd, Shahr-e Rey, and Baghdad) took their design in accordance with some different architectural standards. In the 1220s, all power in the region passed into the hands of the Mongol-shamanists, creating a pause of more than a century in the development of

¹ The most accurate and carefully verified Russian translation was made by *Kamoliddin*, et. al. in 2012.

Shah-i-Zinda. The conquests also, to some extent, lowered the status of Islam. But even at that time, the Muslim shrine remained an important religious and cultic center. It is possible that the mashhad of Kutham was restored under the patronage of Chagatai, the second son of Genghis Khan, or one of his family members as early as the middle of the 13th century (Haase 1997: 218-219). According to the testimony of Ibn Battuta, the suburban shrine at this stage was regularly visited not only by the people from Samarkand, but also by Mongols themselves who also came with generous donations.

The second chapter of the book under review (pp. 155–223) describes the main section of the Shah-i-Zinda architectural ensemble which arose under Timur and with construction beginning in the 1370s and lasting until the first years of the 15th century. But that brilliant period was preceded by the construction of two earlier mausoleums, that of Khoja Akhmad (1340s) and an anonymous female mausoleum of 1360 or 1361. Legends attribute this latter grave to one of Timur's wives, Kutlug-aka. In total, it was during the life of the great conqueror, that eight of the most well-preserved mausoleums and a number of destroyed ones were erected. These were revealed during excavations. Basically, they are single-chambered tombs, not overwhelmingly large in mass or scale, unlike other monuments of Timurid Samarkand. On the contrary, the components of this 14th century ensemble are secluded and graceful. Their effect, as the author notes, is in harmony and proportionality to the scale, as well as in a consistent polychrome palette of facades that make up the ensemble's panorama.

Nemtseva's third chapter (pp. 224–257) is devoted to Shah-i-Zinda under Ulugh Beg, who ruled from 1409 to 1449. At that time, the so-called "lower group" of buildings appeared in the collection along the outer slope of the Afrasiyab settlement. This included an entrance portal, a *darvazakhana* (gatehouse), a mosque, and a bath for winter ablutions that were excavated in 2004 (Nasreddinov 2006). The renovations of Shah-i-Zinda was part of Ulugh Beg's state program related to his construction of an observatory on the *Kukhak* (whose modern name is *Chupan-ata*) northeast of Afrasiyab. For the first time, two entrances appeared in the Shah-i-Zinda – the old western one used for ordinary pilgrims extending from Timurid Samarkand through the former Kesh or Iron Gates; and the southern one, with a monumental portal constructed in 1434/35 which led from the country road leading to the observatory. This road was used for a solemn *ziyarat* or pilgrimage of the ruler with his retinue to the mashhad of Kutham.

Many publications have described the existing architectural ensemble which dates from the 14th and

15th centuries as a masterpiece of Central Asian medieval architecture. It represents an important page in the history of culture and ornamental architecture of Samarkand in particular and Transoxania in general. The royal tombs of Shah-i-Zinda are the highest order of rich architectural and artistic design. The best local and foreign craftsmen – the latter of whom Timur brought to his capital as a part of his conquests – were involved in its construction. Some of their names are engraved on the main facades and included in the complex ornamental patterns. However, most of the huge army of engineers, architects, epigraphists, and designers who created the masterpiece remain anonymous.

"Shah-i-Zinda of the 14th to 15th centuries," writes Nemtseva, "is a kind of living encyclopedia, in which, through its consistent development, presents monumental architecture of not only Samarkand, but also the entirety of Central Transoxania where the Samarkand school of architects set the tone. There is no equal architectural site on such a huge scale or with such historical and cultural significance that reveals the construction details, aesthetic priorities, traditions, and cultural innovations of the region across the centuries in Central Asia." She emphasizes that the primary advantage of the ensemble is found in its artistic appearance, its extraordinary variety of design and applique techniques, and in the diversity of its geometric and epigraphic patterns. In Shah-i-Zinda, the applique materials changed, transformed and combined over a short period of time. In the mausoleums of the 14th and 15th centuries all known types of painted majolica, carved glazed terracotta, inlaid kashin and brick mosaics, multicolored paintings on ganch carving with a large amount of gilding, ganch carving and ceramic pillars, draped engineering structures that are transitions into the dome, pandjara lattices with openwork patterns and colored glass inserts are all present. All those elements and structures give an extraordinary charm to the Timurid ensemble. Finally, experts agree that Shah-i-Zinda's monumental calligraphy remains unique among all surviving architectural ensembles of the Islamic world in terms of its richness and diversity. Ten different types of stylized calligraphy have been identified. In addition, if one takes into account their individual variations, in which the synthesis of various styles is obvious, then the number increases significantly (Babajanov, Rakhimov 2015: 536).

In the course of only one century – from the middle of the fourteenth to the middle of the fifteenth century – Shah-i-Zinda clearly demonstrates the evolution of the structural and architectural composition of a single-chambered tomb. The early mausoleums of the 14th century had squat proportions, single-layer domes, small foundations, no basement and a

structural connection between the surface and the crypt. Shortly thereafter, around the turn of the 14th–15th centuries other vertical dimensions were already appearing. The tombs were extended by double domes mounted on a faceted or cylindrical pedestal or tholobate. This particular construction technique is found especially in the Tuman-aka mausoleums in the northern part of Shah-i-Zinda and in the tomb of the ‘Mother of the Sultan’ in the southern part. Here powerful buttresses holding the helmet-shaped domes are hidden by high pedestals. This technique increased the height of the 15th century mausoleums by almost three times (from 8 m to 24 m) in comparison with the tombs of the 14th century.

The nature of the crypts also changed and, with it, therefore, the funeral cult in the royal court environment changed as well. In the early crypts of the 14th century all burials were made on top of the floor and the entrance corridor was then walled up. In the crypts at the turn of the 14th to 15th centuries and, especially in the 15th century, the burials were placed under the floor into the ground (for instance, in the mausoleum of the Mother of the Sultan and in the 15th century crypt behind the Anonymous 2 mausoleum). This change enabled the site to be visited repeatedly, thus combining the funerary and memorial rites. This feature is also seen in the crypts of other mausoleums in Samarkand dating back to the 15th century, where, in addition to the entrance corridor for the burial, there are separate stepped descents into the underground *gurkhana* (e.g. Gur-i Amir, Ak Saray, Bibi Khanym, Ishrat Khana mausoleums) allowing for subsequent visits to the tomb.

In the final chapter, *Shah-i-Zinda in the 16th–19th Centuries* (pp. 258–275) Nemtseva describes the life of the site following the collapse of the Timurid state. It deals with the so-called *dakhmas* – a new type of burial structure that no longer resembled the portal-domed masterpieces of the bygone era. Austere wooden “sarcophagus” appeared at that time which were simple log structures with short legs. They also had marble gravestone blocks, completely covered with carvings with epigraphy in ornamental frames. These tombs were only located in the “lower courtyard,” where at the beginning of the 19th century to the west of the *darvazakhana* of the Ulugh Beg era, the small provincial-type madrasah of Davlet Kushbegi appeared. To the east, at the beginning of

the 20th century, a summer mosque was built in the iwan style on wooden columns with a painted ceiling, friezes and ganch carved walls.

Over the course of its existence, the Shah-i-Zinda ensemble was rebuilt many times, but the initial general layout, based on the urban plan of southern Samarkand (a channel with a street perpendicular to the channel) remained unchanged. The final reconstruction of the complex took place before our very eyes and somewhat changed the usual structure of the ensemble that had existed for hundreds of years in the form of a narrow corridor along the road of the 9th and 10th centuries. While making it more convenient for the flow of modern tourists, at the same time it destroyed, together with the various sections of the Karakhanid walls, the elusive aura of its authenticity. At one point, Nina Nemtseva expressed significant criticism about the practical reconstruction of a number of the Shah-i-Zinda objects that took place between 2004 to 2007; but the scholar’s lone voice could not influence the result that we have today. Sadly, the restoration actually swallowed up many of the medieval ruins and made the authenticity of a number of areas with glazed cladding questionable.

This reality severely contradicts the restoration principles proclaimed by the Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites. However, at the level of Uzbekistan national legislation with regard to the protection of historical monuments, there is no contradiction. Moreover, the excessive reconstruction of Shah-i-Zinda has not caused condemnation at all by the local society, but, on the contrary, is perceived as a manifestation of the care and attention provided by the modern state to the living shrine.

In a slight paraphrase of Mircea Eliade: An architectural historian is used to finding his or her problems, as well as the means to solve them, not in the texts of one’s predecessors and colleagues, but in the objects of research themselves. The more complex these objects are, the more interesting they are to deal with. Such words clearly describe Nina Borisovna Nemtseva’s methodology. She presented to professional scholars not only the primary sources that she first introduced into scientific circulation, but also a number of her comments for the purpose of attracting scholarly attention and to encourage further research.

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