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HISTORY OF EASTERN TURKESTAN CULTURE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF TURKIC CIVILIZATION

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ABSTRACT

Uighur Turks have a deep-rooted history and a cultural richness. In the formation and development of this culture, the geography of the Uyghur Turks living being in a central location as well as their fusion of many religions and cultures have been effective. In the historical periods, Uighur Turks have accepted the religions such as Buddhism, Manichaeism, Nasturilik and Islam that have had a significant influence on developing their cultural structures. In this study, factors affecting the cultural history of the Uyghur Turks in the East Turkestan which is a region including important cultural capitals of the Turkish world such as Turfan, Khotan, Yarkand and Kashgar were examined.

Keywords: Uighur, Cultural History, East Turkestan.

TÜRK KÜLTÜRÜ BA LAMINDA DO U TÜRK STAN KÜLTÜR TAR H

ÖZET

Uygur Türkleri, köklü bir tarihe ve zengin bir kültür birikimine sahiptir. Bu kültürün olu umu ve geli iminde ise Uygur Türklerinin ya adı ı co rafyanın merkezî bir konumda olmasının yanı sıra onların birçok din ve kültürle kayna ması etkili olmu tur. Uygur Türkleri, tarihî dönemler içinde Budizm, Maniheizm, Nasturilik ve slamiyet gibi dinleri kabul etmi ler ve onların kültürel yapılarının geli iminde de bu dinlerin büyük etkisi olmu tur. Bu makalede, Turfan, Hoten, Yarkent ve Ka gar gibi Türk dünyasının önemli kültür ba kentlerinin yer aldı ı Do u Türkistan'da, Uygur Türklerinin kültür tarihine etki eden faktörler incelenmi tir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Uygur, Kültür Tarihi, Do u Türkistan

Turkic civilization is a distinctive and complex phenomenon. It gave the world the unique history and culture, both spiritual and material, of the Turkic speaking peoples. These peoples added to the history a number of exciting, at times victorious and sometimes dramatic pages of their life, enriched the world culture with the invaluable creations of visual, literary and musical arts.

Eastern Turkestan – the ancient homeland of the Uighurs – is one of the historic centers of Central Asian Turkic culture. The initial data about the Turkic speaking tribes in the territory of Eastern Turkestan appear within the Chinese chronicles since the second half of IV century. During the second half of the VIII century, oases of Eastern Turkestan have passed under the control of the Uighur Khanate (Northern Mongolia). After the downfall of the Uighur Khanate in 840, the majority of Uighurs settled in the territory of Eastern Turkestan, which from that time turned from

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the state periphery to the main area of ethnos dwelling¹. Since that time, the process of its Turkisation has completed.

In the middle IX century, in Eastern Turkestan there for several subsequent centuries have emerged and flourished powerful states such as Uighur, Turfan and Qarakhanid, which left behind a glorious memory of majestic cities, grandiose architectural buildings and high-level culture. Cultural achievements of these countries go well beyond the significance of just regional scope.

It is difficult to cover within this paper all the diversity of Turkic culture of Eastern Turkestan, so in order to avoid a mere listing of cultural achievements, we would like to focus on a brief analysis of architecture pertaining to each era.

The construction of architectural structures had always been associated with the political situation in the country, as well as social setup, ideological demands, living conditions, the system of religious beliefs, folk traditions, etc. The monumental construction was within the power of only prosperous states with a stable political regime. It is not surprising, therefore, that the epochs of powerful ruling dynasties left behind a memories in the grandiose architectural erections. Religions raised to the status of the state ones have also significantly impacted the architecture. Every religion along with its new outlook introduces the cult, or worship, culture, which includes, besides other things, the canons of construction and decoration of temples and shrines.

There are no records of architectural monuments of Ancient Turkic epoch in the territory of Eastern Turkestan. The ancient Turks had left their mark in the architectural structures within Northern Mongolia. They date back to the period of existence of the last and the most powerful of the Uighur Khanates (745-840). The art of urban building of ancient Uighurs has reached the significantly high level. Archaeological expeditions under the direction of well-known Russian archaeologist L.R. Kyzlasov have identified and explored the remains of 17 forts and 2 bastions in the territory of the present-day Tuva². One of the cities that supposedly was an initial quarters of Eletmish Kagan and later the quarters of his tutuk – the vicegerent of Tuva, appeared to be a well-fortified castle with a citadel. In the cities, there were numerous palaces, large skeleton-type buildings and buildings of columnar structure covered with heavy concave tiled roofs. The palaces, judging by the findings of archaeologists, were bricked ones. L.R. Kyzlasov writes that “...it have been the very Uighurs who began to seriously implant in the Central Asian steppes the settled civilization with the construction of large multi-quarter cities and fortresses”³. These urban planning traditions and culture which generally formed in Northern Mongolia and later in Eastern Turkistan as a result of complex synthesis with local cultural achievements, have been given new impetus to the development, which was reflected in the new rise of culture of the Eastern Turkestan region.

In VI century, Buddhism, Manichaeism and Nestorian Christianity have spread among the Turkic speaking peoples of Central Asia. With the adoption of Manichaeism in VI-VII centuries, in the cities of Eastern Turkestan there were built Manichaean temples. According to Chinese ambassador Wang Yan-De, the Manichean temples were all over the Uighur Turfan state, in particular, the “Temple of the Pearl”⁴. Uighur Manichaean text of X-XI centuries mentions the Manichaean monasteries located in three large cities of the Turfan state – Yar-Hoto, Khocho and

¹ . . Kamalov, *Drevnie Uyuri*, VIII–IX vv., Nash mir, Imati 2001; S.G. Klyashtornyi, . . . olesnikov, *Vostochnyi Turkestan Glazami Russkikh Puteshestvennikov: (Vtoraya Polovina XIX v.)*, Nauka, Alma- ta 1988, p. 35.

² L. R. Kyzlasov, *I Istoriya Yuzhnoi Sibiri V Srednie Veka*, . . . Vysh. Shkola, 1984, p. 51.

³ L. R. Kyzlasov, *Istoriya Tuvi V Srednie Veka*, . . . : Izd-vo Mosk, Un-ta 1969, p. 86.

⁴ V. V. Grigoriev, *Vostochnyi, ili Kitayskiy Turkestan*, SPb., 1873, p. 268-269.



Sol'mi. Along with these monasteries, there were also less significant ones⁵. The information about the Manichaean temples, or manistans, is extremely scarce. It gives the opportunity to gain only a very oversimplified impression of their architectural appearance. Manistan is a rectangular walled complex with several close-by located isolated buildings. Some of these buildings were designed to serve as a library. Flat roofs of the buildings are alternated with domical ones. The buildings were constructed of large-sized mudbricks. At the center of complex, there was a sanctuary in the form of a square cella open to the East (i.e., without Eastern wall). Cella's walls and floors were richly painted. Buildings had corridors, columns, staircases, vaulted ceilings⁶.

With the spread of Christianity in Eastern Turkestan, in the cities there appear Christian churches and chapels. Marco Polo, who visited Eastern Turkestan in the XIII century, writes that in the city of Kashgar which at that time was an outpost of Islam and Muslim scholarship in Central Asia, there were Nestorian churches⁷. A fragment from one of Sogdian Christian documents reports that a missionary had been sent presumably to Karashahr to lay the foundations of a chapel⁸. We keep even less information on the architecture of Christian churches. According to the available data, as well as taking into account the Central Asian and Iranian analogies⁹, one can suggest that the Christian churches were of rectangular shape, replete with turrets, arched ceilings and arches.

No other religion being spread in Eastern Turkestan can compare to the influence of Buddhism and Islam, which at various times were state religions in the main territory of the region. The spreading of these religions, especially Islam, had impacted all aspects of life of the region's population. Introducing something new, the religions did not deny the cultural traditions of the countries, but as though were refracted through the prism of local achievements. It could not be otherwise. The innovations were brought in to the environments having its own characteristics, such as, for example, geographical relief, climatic conditions, natural raw materials for constructions, historically formed predilections of the population, etc. Thus, the architectural appearance of the city during the reign of one or another religion had been getting a pronounced specificity, so to say immixed with the local distinctiveness. What actually it was expressed in?

Buddhism for ten centuries firmly held a position of the main religion in the region. Along with Buddhism as a belief, there was brought the whole diversity of the Buddhist culture. In the cities and abroad, there in large numbers began to be build temples, monasteries, stupas and other sanctuaries. Buddhist temples and monasteries constitute the entire building complexes. The abundance of cult buildings of that period determined the architectural appearance of cities. Some cities (Idikut-Shari, Assa-Shar) because of presence of a great number of religious buildings received the definition of "monastery-temple" ones.

In addition to religious constructions, in the cities there were erected structures of public importance: governmental, administrative buildings, military barracks, bazaars, caravanserais, etc. Among them, of paramount significance were the ruler's palaces. These were, along with temples, the most luxurious buildings of the city mostly located in the central part. In Idikut -Shari, for

⁵ A. Le Coq, **Chotcho**, 1913 (Nachdruck – Graz, 1979), p. 526-529.

⁶ B.A. Litvinsky, **Arhitektura I Stroitelnoe Delo // Vostochniy Turkestan V Drevnosti I Rannem Srednevekovie**, : Vostochnaya Literatura, 2000, p. 210-213.

⁷ Marco Polo nig, **Perevod Starofranzuzkogo Teksta I**, P. Minaeva: Redakziya I Vstupitel'naya Statya I. P. agidovicha, : Geografiz, 1955, p. 77.

⁸ O. Hansen, **Der Anteil der Iraner an der Ausbreitung der Christentums nach Zentralasiens**, ZDMG. Suppl. 1. 1968, p. 1034; . B. Nikitin, **Christianstvo v Zentralnoy zii (Drevnost I Srednevekovie)**, Vostochniy Turkestan i Srednyaya ziya, : Nauka, 1984, p. 537.

⁹ **Churches of Iran**, Esfahan: Rasaneh Kaj, 1988.



example, the “Orda Shähär” or “Khan-Tura” – the “Khan’s Palace” (a name given later by local people) occupies a large area of 300 to 150 meters surrounded by a wall with a gate. Presumably, this was the residence of the Uighur rulers. It was a complex of buildings consisting of several groups of premises. On the terrace, there were a number of vaulted halls with a staircase to approach to. The buildings were decorated with fine paintings of the Uyghur period¹⁰.

Mud-bricks of various shapes and sizes were the basic material for the construction of above-surface architectural structures of the Buddhist period. These raw bricks, as concluded by A. Grünwedel, were of excellent quality. More rarely, the burnt bricks were also used. In general, the Eastern Turkestan architecture is characterized by a combination of flat saddle-shaped roofing, domes and vaulted ceilings. Vaults and domes were proficiently bricked and could withstand the terrible storms and earthquakes not infrequent in these areas. The vaults of often quite complex, as if a two- or three-component design, were constructed in the technics of oblique segments bricking. Researchers identify the arched ceilings as one of the main characteristic of the Eastern Turkestan architecture. The domes of small, large and very large sizes were slightly elongated and hemispherical. Eastern Turkestan domes in their size exceeded the size of the very premises so that the dome turned behind the walls. Flat and saddle-shaped roofings were covered with large flat tiled slabs. The ridge beams of rich houses and temples had on both ends the opposing birds, and in the center were decorated with a symbol of an ignescent pearl¹¹.

Eastern Turkestan architecture of Buddhist period, including figurative means of its design, had its own specifics. In the decoration of architectural structures, for example, it impacted a choice of compositions, the influence of local traditions upon the artist’s handwriting and the ethnic exemplars of the characters, which reproduced the local mental material.

Eastern Turkestan became the world’s largest center and stronghold of Buddhism. Precisely because of this, many monuments of Buddhist literature, which were lost in India itself, survived here¹². In Uighur Turfan state, Buddhism continued to be the state religion up to the XIV century, that is, the time when it was conquered by Chagataid Hyzr Hodja Khan.

Islam has begun its triumphal march through the territory of Eastern Turkistan from its western part. Initially, it was adopted in the Qarakhanid state; the Qarakhanids became Muslims in the middle of the X century. Musa, a son of Satuq Bogra Khan, who ascended the throne in 955, declared Islam the state religion¹³. The Qarakhanid State (its eastern part) took over the sacred mission of spreading Islam in Eastern Turkestan. The Qarakhanids were forced to fight an uphill battle against Khotan and Uighur Turfan state – the strongholds of Buddhism in Eastern Turkestan. Qarakhanids not once had to leave even their capital – the city of Kashgar – to budparasts, i.e. the supporters of Buddhism. At that, the Qarakhanids were good rulers. They cared about the

¹⁰ M. Maillard, *Grottes et Monuments d’Asia Centrale*, 1983, p. 24-26; A. Grünwedel, *Bericht über Archäologische Arbeiten in Idikutschari und Umgebung im Winter 1902–1903*, München, 1905 (ABAW. I. Klasse, Bd. XXIV. Abt. I), p. 333-335.

¹¹ B. A. Litvinsky, *Arhitektura I Stroitelnoe Delo // Vostochniy Turkestan V Drevnosti I Rannem Srednevekovie*, .: Vostochnaya Literatura, 2000, p. 119-121; A. Grünwedel, *Bericht über Archäologische Arbeiten in Idikutschari und Umgebung im Winter 1902–1903*, München, 1905 (ABAW. I. Klasse, Bd. XXIV. Abt. I) p. 72; S. . Dudin, *Arhitekturnie Pamyatniki Kitayskogo Turkestana (Iz Putevih Zametok)*. ., 1916 // Otd. . iz zhurn. «Arhitekturno-hudozhestvenniy yezhegodnik», 1916, p. 10, 31-32; A. Gabain, *Das Leben in Uigurischen Konigreich von Qoco (850–1250)*, Textband, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 1973, p. 80-85; S. . Dudin, *Arhitekturnie Pamyatniki Kitayskogo Turkestana (Iz Putevih Zametok)*. ., 1916 // Otd. . iz zhurn. «Arhitekturno-hudozhestvenniy yezhegodnik», 1916, p. 10, 31-32.

¹² M. I. Vorobyeva-Desyatovskaya, *Indiyzi v Vostochnom Turkestane v drevnosti (nekotorie soziologicheskie aspekti) // Vostochniy Turkestan i Srednyaya ziya*, .: Nauka, 1984, p. 94.

¹³ V. V. Bartold, *Istoriya Kulturnoy Zhizni Turkestana // Sochineniya: v 9 t.*, .: Nauka, 1963, T. 2, ch. 1, p. 245-246.



improvement of the state, strengthened the existing cities and founded the new ones, decorating them with lofty and elegant buildings¹⁴.

Early medieval architectural structures in Eastern Turkestan were created mainly of perishable materials – adobe bricks and wood, so the earliest known architectural structures of the Muslim period date back to the XIII-XIV centuries.

Muslim temples – mosques and theological schools-seminaries – madrasahs in Eastern Turkestan were built in accordance with the traditional plan of space arrangement over the perimeter of vast rectangular courtyard with galleries. The joist ceilings of galleries reposed upon equilateral and horseshoe arches resting on small columns or pillars-piers of rectangular section. Shrine sanctuaries were oriented towards Mecca; this direction was fixated by mihrab – the altar niche located in the center of the wall facing Mecca. The outer side of main facades of the mosques was designed with large arched portal.

The architectural landmark of Yarkend is Azna mosque, the former Jami Masjid of the city. Mosque attendant informed us that during its surveying, the inscription has been revealed, which indicated that the Azna mosque was built during the reign of Abdullah Khan in 1227. According to its stylistic characteristics, it corresponds to the development of Central Asian architecture of XIII - XIV centuries.

Mosque structures are located on the perimeter of a small dwarf-walled courtyard with a total area of 1420 square meters. Outside of the courtyard, on the right there is a small mosque, on the left – keeper's abode. The entrance to the mosque is decorated with slightly extended portal in the shape of vertically elongated rectangle, with a huge two-row unilobar lancet arch, of which the lower one is open-end. This open-end reach-thru arch through the gallery space faces the same parallel arch with a door (the motive of a perspective-arched entrance). Opposite the entrance to the center of main axis, there is a building of a mosque itself. From the portal on the two sides of the courtyard it is approached by the bypass gallery.

The mosque is a structure in the form of a high rectangular room with a domed vault. The entrance to the mosque is decorated by a portal similar to that described above. The four walls of the hall are cut with unilobar lancet arches: in one of them (western) there is an altar niche, in the other – the front door, while in the two side ones – the out-ways to the bypass gallery. The passage from the walls of the hall foundation to high dome is performed with trumpet arches. Between these arches, there are shallow ogival niches with lancet windows in each. Above them along the dome, there are placed decorative, laced through one open-end rosettes, apparently, serving the purpose of lighting and ventilation. The dome in the center of inner surface is decorated with a double-layer polypetalous rosette. The bricked spheroidal dome is plastered from outside and decorated on the top with a miniature laced rotunda-type turret. The decor of the dome surface consists of narrow convex verges radially extending from the turret. The decorated wooden door of the mosque is framed by a small lancet arch.

The bypass two-row arch-domed gallery is formed by massive rectangular pillars, over which there are thrown over the equilateral arches supporting the small dome in the shape of high hemispheres. The gallery and its 51 dome are mud-bricked and plastered along the surface. From outside, the gallery with each side faces enters through the arch spans to the wooden aiwan (courtyard).

Azna mosque is distinctive in its amazing harmony of forms, colors and decor. In its design, there is nothing superfluous, standing out of the general refined composition. The slender

¹⁴ V. V. Bartold, *Srednyaya Aziya do XII v.* // Sochineniya: v 9 t. – M.: Nauka, 1963. – T. 1. – S. 238-285, p. 378.



lines of arches and domes, as if flowing from one to another sections of the bypass gallery, modest and at the same time festive white color of buildings – all is united by a single concept. The decor of aiwan's wooden columns consisting of vegetative carving and painting is also subject to the general mood of the restrained beauty.

The mausoleum of Tughluq Timur Khan erected in XIV century (1363-1369) at the tomb of the first ruler of Mogulistan, is located outside the ancient city of Almaly. It represents a unicameral portal-domed structure, consisting in its inner part of the two tiers. The dome of heaven resting on a high drum passes to a square body of the structure through pendentive arches. The sides and corners of the two walls are supported by wall columns. An entrance to the mausoleum is decorated with a vertically elongated rectangular portal cut by a huge lancet arch. In-depth of the arch, there seen two apertures: in the bottom part – for wooden doors decorated with carving, at the top – for the window. The maximum height of the structure in its dome part reaches 14 meters; the overall wall thickness is 80 cm, the thickness of the domical vault walls – 30 cm¹⁵. Despite such the massive walls, the proportions of the construction are svelte and majestic enough. It is bricked and covered with a sleek clay plaster. Inside the mausoleum, there are galleries. The basic decorative message is brought by a portal part of the building. It is lined with glazed ornamented polychrome tiles with mosaic pattern. In the vertical stripes framing the arch as well as along its contours, there are applied white on turquoise background letterings in canonized script. The dome-bowl in its inner part is also lined with glazed tiles. The mausoleum of Tughluq Timur Khan is an extant to nowadays outstanding monument of the early period of Central Asian Muslim monumental architecture.

Mongol conquests and the formation of the Mongol Empire, which covered within its bounds the territories of the Central Asian states, led to the destruction of recalcitrant cities and huge casualties, and for centuries turned into ruins and devastated the lands of Kazakhstan and Central Asia. States of Eastern Turkestan that voluntarily accepted vassalage to the Mongols, for some time preserved certain semblance of former prosperity, but the result of loss of sovereignty appeared for them to be even more deplorable.

Consequences of the Mongols' sway can be illustrated by the example of development of architecture in the region, which indicates that while the architectural structures of the pre- and early-Mongol periods demonstrate a flourishing urban planning and architectural achievements, aligning Eastern Turkestan with the most developed cultural regions of Central Asia, then during the subsequent centuries, it has been gradually moving to the level of the cultural periphery. In particular, the analysis of development of stylistic features of the Eastern Turkestan architecture in the end of XIV-XVI centuries (the epoch of Central Asian architectural renaissance) revealed that it has been experiencing the same phases as the architecture within the main territorial limits of Timurid domains (Central Asia, Afghanistan, Eastern Iran), but as if, going behind, just followed their achievements. The architectural structures of Eastern Turkestan are less monumental, more modest in forms and decorations. Nevertheless, the Muslim architecture of Eastern Turkestan should not be perceived as a mere imitation of aesthetic canons of the "Timurid era". Local architecture has its own individuality, giving in whole the originality to the Eastern Turkestan cities of the Middle Ages.

In the mid-XVIII century, Eastern Turkestan was conquered by Qing China. Its territory has become subject to the formation of military-administrative region of Xinjiang, which in Chinese means the "New Possession" or "New Territory". The Qing government had been doing

¹⁵ Shenĭ Chzhan, *Iskusstvo Sinzzyanskoy Tradizionnoy Architekturi*, Sinzzyanskoe Izdatelstvo Nauchno-Technizheskoy I Medizinskoy Literaturi (), Urumchi 1989, p. 143-147.



its utmost to protect the newly acquired region from any contact with the outside world. If up to the middle of the XVIII century, there was observed the free movement of people (among others – poets, scientists, theologians, musicians, architects, construction masters, art craftsmen, etc.) and a kind of cultural intermixing in Central Asia within the states covering the territories of Eastern Turkestan and Kazakhstan (including Qarakhanid State and Moghulistan), then later the political isolation of Eastern Turkestan had taken turn, resulting in a loss of historically established cultural interaction. After the deprivation of cultural links with the Turkic states of Central Asia, Eastern Turkestan entered the domain of active, top-driven impact of Chinese culture. The result of these changes could be illustrated by a quite convincing example of emergence of the so-called Muslim-Chinese or Sino-Muslim style of architecture in the region. This style had appeared in the XIX century, being based on a synthesis of traditions of Eastern Turkestan Islamic and Chinese architectures. It became most developed in the north of Xinjiang.

Currently, it is rather difficult to predict the prospects of development of culture of the Turkic speaking peoples of Xinjiang (modern Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China). However, apart from the historically formed common origins of Turkic culture, the culture of Turkic speaking peoples of this region would be devoid of powerful civilization impetus.

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