BUKHARA AND SAMARKAND

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1. The urban organism

Like any city, Bukhara and Samarkand are living organisms that are constantly undergoing processes of change and being enriched by them. For this reason they cannot be analysed as totalities in a general manner, but must be broken down into their three component parts: i) the building fabric, which includes the basic (residential) fabric and specialised (public and commercial) fabric; ii) movement, consisting of the routes and their hierarchical relationship to the building fabric, and iii) the nodes, or focal points, and poles, including not only monuments, but also moments of discontinuity in the building fabric, such as squares, gateways and fords. At the same time, it is important to recognise how each of these components is interconnected, how the building fabric is related to the routes, the routes to the nodes and the nodes to the building fabric. Starting with the plan of the city we shall analyse and classify these three components, then focus on the monuments individually.

2. Urban Fabric and Monuments

The building fabric of modern Bukhara and Samarkand dates from the beginning of the sixteenth century to 1868 under the suzerainty of the Uzbek Khan dynasty. Anything built prior to this must be analysed retrospectively through the traces left in the urban layout by a typological process. This procedure applies above all to the three great periods that shaped the history of these cities: the pre-Islamic era, and in particular the Hellenistic layout of the Bukharian shahristan, the Samanid period, and the Timurid period.
In his essay, Heinz Gaube describes ninth century Bukhara in terms of the position of its gateways and main streets. The picture painted by contemporary literature is that of a city which had spread beyond the shahristan into the outskirts of the rabad known as Hisar-i Nau, to the west beyond the registan and to the south beyond the Shahrud canal. To the north the city stretched to the tomb of the Samanids, some 500 metres beyond the present wall. At some point during the Samanid period the city’s defences must have been relaxed in favour of this fairly sparse fabric, which is not unlike an urban garden. The markets and commercial activities were concentrated to the south of the shahristan, where the caravans arrived, beyond the Narshakh-i Dar Bazar gate.

The shahristan is characterised by two different types of urban fabric in terms of orientation and density: (1) more homogeneous and densely grouped courtyard houses, with facades based on a 12–15 metre module and (2) more sparsely grouped monuments, the dimensions of which conform to a higher numerical module and which show up in the plan of the city with the consistent thickness of their walls. This sequence of large buildings with courtyards, connected to shops and domed crossroads by a network of smaller modules, is similar to the great bazaars of Isfahan or Kashan in neighbouring Iran.

The shahristan comprises five horizontal main routes and nine vertical secondary routes. As demonstrated by Bol’shakov’s (1973) simple line drawing of the urban layout and his analysis of the alignment of the walls, the layout of the shahristan and part of the rabad to the south of the bazaar gate generally follows the orientation of the cardinal points secundum coelum.

Even though it is difficult to say whether this layout relates to the old Hellenistic/Kushan fabric, or whether the oblong and rectangular houses hypothesised by Bol’shakov are related to the alignment of the walls, the continuity of the foundations would seem to point to the

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