

THE UNIQUENESS OF THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE MANGHIT PERIOD

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Abstract. During the 20th century, in the architecture of Central Asia, the palaces of the Mangite dynasties and the architectural works carried out in the territory of the Bukhara Emirate are extremely important and at the same time very interesting.

Key words: Architecture, construction of palaces, construction history, oriental styles, Central Asia, dynasty, social life, cultural influence, nation, people, diaspora, expedition, desert region, nomadic population, daily activities.

УНИКАЛЬНОСТЬ АРХИТЕКТУРЫ ПЕРИОДА МАНГЫТА

Аннотация. В архитектуре Средней Азии в XX веке дворцы династий Мангыта и архитектурные работы, выполненные на территории Бухарского эмирата, чрезвычайно важны и в то же время очень интересны.

Ключевые слова: Архитектура, строительство дворцов, история строительства, восточные стили, Средняя Азия, династия, общественная жизнь, культурное влияние, нация, народ, диаспора, экспедиция, пустынный регион, кочевое население, повседневная деятельность.

The **Mangit era** (1753–1920), associated with the **Mangit dynasty** that ruled the Emirate of Bukhara, saw significant developments in palace architecture and construction. This period in Central Asia is known for blending **Persian, Islamic, and Central Asian traditions**, with palaces serving as political centers, residences, and reflections of the emirate's power. Below is an overview of the historical background and characteristics of palace construction during the Mangit era.

1. Historical Context

The Mangit dynasty emerged after the decline of the **Ashtarkhanid dynasty** (also known as the Janids) and led the Emirate of Bukhara into a period of revival amidst challenges from neighboring powers, such as the **Qajars, Russians, and Khivans**. Palaces built during this era reflect the emirate's efforts to solidify its legitimacy, power, and wealth, especially in Bukhara and other key cities.

2. Key Features of Palace Construction

1. Architectural Influences

- Strong **Persian-Islamic elements**, such as **iwan (vaulted halls)**, **muqarnas (stalactite-like decorations)**, and intricate **tilework**.
- Influence from **Timurid architecture**, reflecting continuity from earlier Bukhara rulers.
- **Central Asian local styles**, including domes, courtyards, and vibrant use of colored tiles.

2. Symbolism in Palaces

Palaces served as more than residences; they symbolized **authority, spirituality, and the divine right** of the emir to rule. Gardens and mosques were often integrated to demonstrate the emir's connection to Islamic values.

3. Functionality

- The palaces were not just private residences but included **administrative spaces** for meetings with foreign envoys, officials, and military commanders.
- Reception halls and **divans (councils)** were central components, reflecting the emir's need to host formal events.

3. Notable Palaces of the Mangit Era

1. Ark of Bukhara

- Although the Ark is older, it was significantly **renovated and expanded** under Mangit rule.
- This citadel served as the **emir's primary palace and a fortress** that housed not only royal quarters but also government offices, a treasury, a mosque, and military facilities.
- The palace included **reception halls, throne rooms, and residences**, underscoring the centralization of power.

2. Sitorai Mokhi-Khosa Palace

- Located on the outskirts of Bukhara, this **summer palace** reflects both local and **European architectural influences**, as it was built in the late Mangit period during increasing Russian influence.
- The palace is known for its **luxurious interiors** with intricate mirrors, stucco decorations, and frescoes, showing the emirate's desire to project opulence.

3. The Kosh Madrasah Complex and Adjacent Palatial Spaces

- Built during the reign of **Emir Nasrullah Khan (1827–1860)**, this complex reflects the tradition of pairing educational institutions with royal infrastructure. Palatial quarters near such madrasahs reinforced the emir's role as both a **political and spiritual leader**.

4. Impact of Russian Influence

By the late 19th century, the emirate was heavily impacted by **Russian expansion**, and palace construction began incorporating **European stylistic elements**. Russian advisors and architects introduced **neoclassical and eclectic designs**, especially in decorative elements and residential layouts, as seen in later additions to the **Sitorai Mokhi-Khosa Palace**.

5. Legacy and Preservation

- After the collapse of the Mangit dynasty in **1920**, many of the palaces were repurposed or abandoned. The **Ark of Bukhara** was partially destroyed in 1920 by Soviet forces but remains an important historical site today.

- The surviving **palaces and complexes**, such as **Sitorai Mokhi-Khosa**, are now preserved as museums, offering insight into the architectural grandeur of the era and its place in Central Asian history.

In summary, palace construction during the Mangit era reflects a fascinating fusion of **traditional Central Asian forms with Persian-Islamic influences** and later **European styles**.

These palaces were not only centers of power but also symbolic representations of the emirate's ambitions and cultural identity amidst changing political landscapes.

During the **Mangit era** (1753–1920), the palaces of the Emirate of Bukhara were more than just architectural marvels or political centers; they played a **vital role in shaping the social, cultural, and religious life** of the region. These palaces were hubs where the emir's power was enacted and where public and private life converged, reflecting the deeply interconnected nature of **politics, society, and religion** in the emirate.

1. Palaces as Centers of Governance and Administration

Palaces, especially the **Ark of Bukhara**, were integral to the **daily governance of the state**. The presence of the emir and his court attracted **government officials, tribal leaders, military commanders, and foreign envoys**, making these palaces places where key **decisions were made and alliances were forged**.

- **Divans (councils)** held within the palaces provided a forum for resolving disputes among citizens and dealing with inter-tribal tensions.

- The emir's **role as a mediator and dispenser of justice** was enacted through public sessions in palace courtyards, where ordinary people could seek rulings on disputes.

This governance function tied the palaces to the **social stability** of the emirate, as they were seen as places where justice was administered and state authority was visibly upheld.

2. Public Ceremonies and Symbolic Rituals

The palaces hosted important **state ceremonies, religious rituals, and public celebrations** that reinforced the emir's legitimacy and connection with both divine authority and his subjects.

- **Festivals** like **Nowruz (Persian New Year)** were celebrated in palace courtyards, with the emir giving **gifts** and **feasts** to the population.

- **Military parades** and displays of wealth, such as the presentation of exotic animals or new conquests, were organized to project power and inspire loyalty among citizens.

The public nature of these events made palaces places where **state and social life intersected**, and participation in such rituals fostered **a sense of unity and continuity** within the community.

3. Spaces for Cultural Exchange and Art Patronage

Palaces were **cultural hubs** where poetry, music, and intellectual debates flourished under the **patronage of the emir**. Emirs and nobility invited **poets, musicians, scholars, and artisans** to perform and showcase their work in palatial settings, promoting a sophisticated cultural life.

- Court poets such as **Umar Khayyam** and local scholars were often associated with these palace gatherings, contributing to the transmission of **literary and philosophical traditions**.

- Music, particularly traditional **maqom**, was performed during **banquets and ceremonies**, creating a rich artistic environment.

This patronage of the arts ensured the **continuity of Bukhara's cultural heritage**, which was rooted in Islamic and Persian literary traditions, while also reinforcing the emir's status as a cultured and enlightened ruler.

4. Religious Life and Symbolism

The palaces of the Mangit era were often built in proximity to **mosques and madrasahs**, reflecting the close connection between **religion and governance**. Emirs presented themselves as **defenders of Islam**, and their palaces became places where religious leaders, or **ulama**, were consulted.

- Important **Friday prayers** and sermons were sometimes held in palace-adjacent mosques, reinforcing the spiritual legitimacy of the emir.

- **Charity events**, such as food distributions during Ramadan or in times of need, were also organized by the palace, strengthening the emir's image as a **benevolent ruler**.

The integration of religious elements into palace life made these structures **sacred spaces**, symbolizing the emir's responsibility to uphold both the temporal and spiritual well-being of his people.

5. Elite and Domestic Social Life within Palaces

The palaces also hosted **private gatherings** for the elite, including nobility, tribal chiefs, and foreign dignitaries. Banquets, weddings, and diplomatic receptions were common and provided opportunities to **maintain alliances** and **consolidate power**.

- **Family life within the palace** was crucial, as marriage alliances between the emir's family and other powerful clans were a key tool for **political strategy**.
- The harem quarters, often secluded, were centers of **domestic power and influence** where the women of the emir's household managed affairs and nurtured relationships that shaped court politics.

These private gatherings fostered **solidarity among the elite** and helped maintain the emir's network of loyalty, which was essential in an era marked by internal rivalries and shifting political alliances.

6. Economic and Social Support Functions

The palace also played an economic role in supporting local communities.

- **Craftsmen and artisans** were employed to decorate palaces with elaborate **tilework, stucco, and calligraphy**, generating income for the artistic class.
- Seasonal **feasts and celebrations** brought **merchants and vendors** to palace grounds, stimulating local commerce and trade.

Furthermore, the distribution of **alms and food** from the palace during religious festivals or times of hardship fostered goodwill among the population, reinforcing the emir's role as a **provider and protector** of his people.

7. Interaction with Foreign Powers

In the **late Mangit period**, as Russian influence grew, the palaces hosted European diplomats and travelers, making them sites of **cross-cultural exchange**.

- Palaces such as **Sitorai Mokhi-Khosa**, with its blend of Central Asian and European architecture, reflected the emirate's shifting social dynamics and interaction with global trends.
- The hospitality extended to foreign guests in the palace not only showcased Bukhara's **wealth and culture** but also allowed the emir to **project his authority internationally**.

Conclusion

The palaces of the Mangit era were central to **social, political, and cultural life** in Bukhara.

As centers of governance, cultural exchange, religious practice, and social interaction, these palaces embodied the **emirate's identity** and ensured **social cohesion** in a time of political and economic challenges. They were not just residences but **powerful symbols of authority and community**, shaping the rhythms of life for both the elite and the general population.

Their role in **festivals, justice, charity, and the arts** made them **indispensable pillars of Mangit society**, leaving a lasting impact on the region's history and cultural legacy.

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