Developments of Islamic Architectural Art in Central Asia
During the 10th-11th AH
(Relying on some remarkable examples of this era)
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Abstract:
Islamic architecture has included all architectural aesthetic elements with mystic viewpoints; however, this art shows different indicators according to developments in each period and region, which distinguishes it from other periods and demonstrates the culture of that specific region. This article studies Islamic architecture of Central Asia and changes in the early 16th/10th to late 17th AD/11th AH, respectively. In this regard, it briefly explains political, social, and cultural conditions of Central Asia in the mentioned period, which indicates the effectiveness of social conditions for architectural art, decorations, construction materials, and finally growth and progression or decline and stagnation. The architectural works created in this region have the most significant executive facades with highly pleasant designs, not only in Samarkand and Bukhara, but also in the entire Central Asia.

Among the main problems that prevent researchers from investigating Islamic architecture is lack of access to major historical monuments. Therefore, to select the samples and buildings of this article, some important types of Islamic architecture such as schools and mosques are emphasized.

The research method of this article is historical-analytical, in which social dimensions of the mentioned periods are considered through a scientific approach.

Most of the books in this regard have been written in the original language, some in English and a few in Farsi. Since this study is focused on visual details, documentary photography images with high resolution are needed.

Objectives:
Examining developments in Islamic architectural art and its special features in Central Asia during the 16th-17th AD/10th-11th AH;
Introducing remarkable monuments related to the 16th-17th AD/10th-11th AH in Central Asia and comparing their remarkable similarities and differences

Research questions
What are remarkable similarities and differences among Islamic architectural works in Central Asia during the 16th-17th AD/10th-11th AH?
What are remarkable monuments and major architectural centers in Central Asia during the 16th-17th AD/10th-11th AH?

Contemporary with Uzbek Sheybani dynasty in the 16th/10th AD/AH and Ashtarkhanian in the 17th AD/11th AH, a reduction in the political and economic contact between Central Asia and other countries as well as intensity of internal conflicts in the region led to social crisis along with architectural and urban decline in this region. But in general, it is possible to state that, in the second half of the 16th AD/10th AH, building construction and architectural processes have been almost improved and constructing new public and cultural buildings as well as bridges, caravan paths and roads, cellars, caravanserais, bathrooms, firms, schools, monasteries, mosques, and cemeteries have undergone a growing process.

The most important features of architecture in the 16th AD/10th AH have been reflected in Bukhara’s monuments such as Mir Arab and Abdullah Khan Schools and the new wall around Bukhara. Also, a famous bridge has been built over Zarafshan River, and Sheybani School has been constructed at the beginning of the century in Samarkand. Also, Ulugh Beg School, located in this city, has been restored and repaired.

Kalan Mosque, Boland Mosque, Haji Zeynolabedin Mosque, Tashkand Siunji Khan Tomb, and Abdollatif Sultan School (Kook Gonbad) in Uratapeh city in modern Tajikistan are some examples of the buildings constructed during this period. Charbekr Architectural Complex in Bukhara can also be added to the list.

By studying the buildings in Central Asia during the 16th AD/10th AH, it can be inferred that traditional and modern methods beside each other has been mostly applied in mosques and schools. But, regarding public buildings, there has been a tendency to construct modern buildings. Also, in constructing Central Asian buildings of the period, some innovations can be observed in terms of the design and plan of domes and cupolas and
also great attention has been paid to the proportionality of size of domes to surface area of buildings. Gradual evolution of decorations is remarkable in the middle of the 16th AD and 10th AH. In architectural art of the first half of the 16th AD/10th AH, Timurid traditions have been continued. For the decoration of monuments, inlay and brick tiles with different patterns and suitable blue, white, and indigo colors, which are considered the basis of decoration in this period, have been used in extensive fields. Enamelled clays with golden patterns also have a special ranking for the decoration of monuments in this period.

In the second half of the 16th AD/10th AH, decoration in luxurious buildings has been changed and relatively cheap and simple decoration materials such as white plaster and colors have been used; however, there is no decline in architectural art and artists have created significant masterpieces using the cheapest materials and tools.

Great and comprehensive architectural collections, including Kalan Mosque and Mir Arab School, suggest a non-breakable bond between religion and science. Also, in the crossroads of some streets, they have constructed four-sided buildings as well as arches and caravanserais along the street. A combination of such monuments has given a special look to squares, crossroads, and streets, all of which demonstrate urbanism art of the period.

In the 17th AD/11th AH, the huge amount of constructions, which represents architectural features of Bukhara in the 16th AD/10th AH, has been reduced; but, great collections still exist. Architecture in this period has been influenced by high-ranking Uzbek tribes who had a large amount of money available for construction, by which they intended to gain some fame and record names in history. Rigestan Square across from Ulugh Beg School can be mentioned as a mirror image of this school in Samarkand. View of Shirdar School is exactly the same as that of Ulugh Beg School, which is architecturally similar to buildings in Timurid dynasty; but, numerous innovations can be found in the details of building design and its decorations. Glided Mosque-School in Rigestan, Samarkand, is a building which is a mosque and a school at the same time. On three sides of the yard, there are chambers and the mosque is located on the fourth side. Great Pool Architectural Collection, which is known as “Labe Hoz”, is another building that includes a pool, a school, and a small monastery. Ulugh Beg and Abdulaziz Khan Schools in city of Bukhara, which are located across from each other, are also remarkable examples of this era. It is worth mentioning that constructing the two monuments across from each other has been one of the new ways invented by the architecture of that era.

In general, architecture of the 17th AD/11th AH in Central Asia has undergone a decline with greater attention paid to decorations, which can be found from the extensive use of inlay and tiling arts. Architects of the 17th AD/11th AH have continued the decoration style of the two previous centuries and partly had some accomplishments in this field, especially in plastering which is distinguished from other works owing to its complexities and delicacies.

Condition of the next period in Central Asia could not significantly help the growth of architecture and art. The first half of the 18th AD/12th AH has witnessed economic recession, intensified civil war conditions, destruction of cities and villages, civil uprisings, reappearance of attacks and invasions, and attacks from bedouin and strangers. It is natural that no important architectural and artful monument or work has been left from such a dark and turbulent period.

Keywords: “Islamic architectural developments”; “Central Asian architectural decorations”; “16th AD/10th AH”; “17th AD/11th AH”.