HSR (LONDON),
HOUGHTON STREET REVIEW JOURNAL
ISSN: 2058-5519|Impact factor-15.9
http://houghtonstreetreview.com/index.php/hsr

THE WOMAN WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN PLANNING DURING THE REIGN OF AMIR TEMUR

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Abctaract: This article examines the historical role of Bibikhonim during the reign of Amir Temur, highlighting her exceptional intellect, resilience, and profound devotion to the development and prosperity of the state. Portrayed as an exemplary wife, a compassionate mother, and a woman of refined taste and wisdom, Bibikhonim significantly influenced the socio-political landscape of her era. The study emphasizes that state policy under Amir Temur placed a high priority on the status of women in society. Furthermore, it underscores Bibikhonim's substantial contributions to urban development, specifically focusing on her innovative initiatives in city planning and the advancement of education.

Keywords: Amir Temur, Bibikhonim, material and spiritual heritage, mosque, Saray Mulk Khanum, state, Samarkand, science, enlightenment, urban planning, madrasa.

Today, interest in our material and cultural heritage has been revitalized, and our traditions have regained well-deserved recognition. The lineage of great historical figures like Bibikhonim, Nodirabegim, Tomaris, and Uvaysiy lives on in the spirit of modern Uzbek women. These outstanding female figures left behind a valuable legacy of material and spiritual knowledge, notably reflected in historical urban planning. A prime example of this can be seen in the ancient city of Samarkand, where magnificent architectural structures continue to captivate both domestic and foreign tourists alike.

Bibikhonim (whose birth name was Saray Mulk Khanum) was the daughter of Kazan Khan of the Chaghatai Ulus. She was initially married to Amir Husayn, the grandson of Amir Qazaghan, in 1355. Following Husayn’s execution, she married Amir Temur. Through this marriage, Amir Temur attained the prestigious title of "Kuragan" (son-in-law). Belonging to a royal dynasty, Saray Mulk Khanum held the highest rank among all the princesses in the harem, earning the titles of "Great Khanum" and "Bibikhonim." Historical sources attest that Bibikhonim was exceptionally intelligent, perceptive, resourceful, and a wise counselor, while also possessing unparalleled beauty. As a true patriot, she was well-versed in the political, social, economic, and cultural life of the realm, frequently participating in state affairs with her astute advice. She placed a particular emphasis on education and enlightenment, regularly sponsoring students and scholars. Furthermore, she frequently accompanied the sovereign, Amir Temur, on his military campaigns. Bibikhonim actively contributed her prudent counsel to resolving various governance challenges within the empire. Although Amir Temur did not openly defer to her, he felt an inherent need for her wise guidance.

As a woman of remarkable intellect, foresight, and resourcefulness, Saray Mulk Khanum actively participated in the governance of the empire as a politician, humanitarian, and benevolent queen. She earned a great reputation for her involvement in the social and cultural construction of the country, particularly for her comprehensive support of students. Historical accounts indicate that she commissioned the construction of a madrasa on the eastern side of the current congregational mosque

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in Samarkand. This madrasa was incredibly grand and adjacent to the grand mosque built by Amir Temur. However, due to various historical factors, it was subsequently destroyed.

By order of the Amir Temur, the congregational mosque was constructed and completed between 1399 and 1404. According to certain historical legends, Amir Temur presented this mosque as a gift to his wise and intelligent wife, Saray Mulk Khanum. This is presumably why the congregational mosque of Amir Temur became widely renowned under the name of Bibikhonim. In close proximity to Amir Temur's headquarters, various administrative offices (devonkhona), guesthouses, and specialized buildings for preserving royal documents were also erected. Given that the architectural ensembles and urban development of Samarkand in the first decade of the 15th century strictly adhered to the principles of proportion and harmony, Amir Temur's activities and creativity in this field remain deeply remarkable and worthy of attention, not only for his era but also today. Erected opposite the Saray Mulk Khanum Madrasa along the major highway leading from the Hazrat Khizr Mosque to the Registan, the congregational mosque of Amir Temur stood as a monumental masterpiece of the architectural art of that period. The construction of the Saray Mulk Khanum Madrasa was entirely funded by the personal resources of Saray Mulk Khanum herself. This grand madrasa featured a towering portal (arch) on its exterior façade, measuring 12 meters in height and 2 meters in width, while its interior was designed in a circular fashion and covered with a majestic dome. The dome was equipped with circular lattice windows on four sides to ensure ventilation. The internal walls of the dome were adorned with colorful depictions of flying swans and cranes, while the center of the dome was decorated with countless representations of stars. The madrasa also contained two-story student cells (hujra) located on both of its wings. Within the courtyard of the madrasa, several fruit-bearing trees were planted, and a water canal flowed through the area. From the perspective of architectural style and decorative art, the Bibikhonim Madrasa was considered one of the most beautiful examples of architecture, possessing global significance due to its uniqueness.

Nevertheless, varying historical perspectives exist regarding this madrasa. Some accounts suggest that the Bibikhonim Madrasa was built simultaneously with the congregational mosque after Amir Temur's return from his Indian campaign. According to the work "Kitab al-Maqdur fi Akhbar Timur" (The Book of Destiny in the History of Temur) written by Sharaf al-Din Ahmad ibn Abdullah al-Dimashqi, widely known as Ibn Arabshah, the engineers and architects responsible for the project unanimously agreed to construct the madrasa on the eastern side directly opposite the congregational mosque. By doing so, they deemed it appropriate to build the two structures in the classic "Kosh Imorat" (paired buildings) style. Furthermore, Sharaf al-Din Ali Yazdi, in a chapter of his "Zafarnama" dedicated to the construction of the Samarkand congregational mosque in 1399, noted: "During those times, Amir Temur frequently stayed at the Khanum Madrasa and the Tuman Agha Khanqah near the mosque." Academician V. V. Barthold, in his 1924 article "Archaeological Works in Samarkand," similarly asserted that "The Saray Mulk Khanum Madrasa was built by Temur's wife prior to the construction of Temur's congregational mosque." Evidently, both the historian and the archaeologist argue that the Bibikhonim Madrasa predates the congregational mosque. Additionally, in Mawlana Fasihi's work "Mujmal-i Fasihi," under the chronicle of events for the years 1404–1405, he records concerning the congregational mosque and the Madrasa-i Khanum: "The Bibikhonim Madrasa,

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intended for travelers, is situated opposite the congregational mosque. It is assumed to have been built during the 14th–15th centuries."

In our view, the following perspective regarding the "Bibikhonim Madrasa" from Sharaf al-Din Ali Yazdi's "Zafarnama" may be the most accurate. He states: "Temur arrived and stayed at the Saray Mulk Khanum Madrasa, which is opposite the congregational mosque." Corroborating this, Mirkhwand writes in his book "Rawzat us-Safa": "Upon his return to Samarkand, Amir Temur lodged at the Saray Mulk Khanum Madrasa... He summoned Amirzoda Pir Muhammad and dispatched him to Zabulistan. He then presented a robe of honor and a belt to the Egyptian ambassador, granting him permission to return to his country. Mawlana Abdullah Keshi





and several others were appointed to accompany the Egyptian envoy, and a letter written in gold leaf addressed to the ruler of Egypt, Malik Farrukh, was sent with them... Subsequently, Amir Temur departed from the Saray Mulk Khanum Madrasa, mounted his horse, and proceeded to the Koksaray Palace, which he had constructed."

Indeed, we subscribe to the validity of this historical account. Regrettably, the original and complete appearance of the Bibikhonim Madrasa—a masterpiece of Oriental architecture—has not survived intact to the present day. According to the Uzbek Soviet Encyclopedia (Volume 2, page 267; Tashkent, 1972), the structure was demolished in the 16th century by the decree of Abdullah Khan, the ruler of Bukhara. In contemporary times, the sole remaining hall of the Bibikhonim Madrasa has been thoroughly restored and repurposed as the Mausoleum of Bibikhonim.

The congregational mosque was erected between 1399 and 1404 based on the architectural designs of the master builders and engineers Mahmud Dawud and Muhammad Jald. As a classic paradigm of Central Asian architecture, the monumental grandeur of this majestic building continues to profoundly awe any observer. Supported by 400 marble columns, the sheer scale of this colossal congregational mosque evokes a legendary ambiance. Looking at the sky-scraping portal (arch) at its façade and the soaring minarets flanking both sides, one is naturally compelled to ponder the brilliant genius of the architects who conceived it. The courtyard of Amir Temur's congregational mosque spans nearly one hectare. The mihrab (prayer niche) of the mosque, oriented westward toward the Qibla, is as visually striking as the main portal, featuring a wide pishtaq (entrance portal) adorned with vibrant, colored stones. However, due to the passage of time, the upper sections of the structure suffered degradation and collapsed. Similarly, the elevated chambers (hujra) on the left and right wings of the building have not been fully preserved. Situated at the center of the courtyard is an exquisitely carved marble lavh (Quran stand), distinguished by its intricate ornamentation. Over time, this grand congregational mosque became enduringly designated by the name of Bibikhonim.

The upbringing and education of the Timurid princes were directly intertwined with the mentorship of Bibikhonim. She acted as a vital guiding figure in fostering the intellectual and educational enlightenment of prominent heirs, including Shahrukh Mirza, Mirzo Ulugbek, Muhammad Sultan, and Khalil Sultan. Notably, Bibikhonim's dedication was paramount in ensuring the healthy upbringing of Mirzo Ulugbek and his comprehensive mastery of both religious and secular sciences.

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The exceptional status and respect accorded to women during the reign of Amir Temur are highly commendable. As a direct outcome of this high societal standing, Bibikhonim assumed a pivotal role in advancing education, culture, construction, urban development, and numerous other domains. The construction of mosques and madrasas clearly reflects the superior refinement of her taste and organizational prowess.

In synthesis, Bibikhonim can be characterized not only as a compassionate mother and an elegant wife but also as an erudite, perceptive, and enterprising queen, who consistently demonstrated the capabilities of a skilled architectural patron. Embodying an extraordinary blend of sophisticated aesthetic taste and profound intellect, Bibikhonim possesses enduring qualities that serve as an exemplary model for contemporary women. During the Timurid era, the role of women in urban planning was not limited to just providing financial support. They directly interacted with architects, engineers, and master craftsmen, acting as the chief designers and patrons of their time regarding the building designs, tilework ornamentation, and overall magnificence. The role of women in the architecture of that era was unparalleled. This tradition, initiated by Bibi Khanum, was later continued by other Timurid queens, such as Shahrukh Mirza's wife, Gawhar Shad Begum, who sponsored the construction of major architectural ensembles in Herat and Mashhad. With her refined taste, immense wealth, and passion for urban development, Saraymulk Khanum remains one of the brightest figures who worthily contributed to turning Samarkand into a capital of world culture.

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