

16TH CENTURY BUKHARA BAZAARS: TRADE COMPLEXES BUILT BY THE SHAYBANIDS

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the commercial infrastructure established in Bukhara during the Shaybanid dynasty (16th century), with particular focus on the iconic covered markets known as Toqi Sarrafon (Money-Changers' Dome), Toqi Telpakfurushon (Hat-Sellers' Dome), Toqi Zargaron (Goldsmiths' Dome), and the Abdullakhan Tim trading gallery. Drawing on the scholarly works of Pugachenkova and Rempel, Vámbéry, Ahmedov, and archaeological evidence compiled under V.M. Filimonov, this study analyses the architectural typology, spatial organisation, and socio-economic functions of these structures. The findings demonstrate that the Shaybanid trade complexes were not merely commercial spaces but constituted an integrated urban economic system that facilitated both domestic craft production and international Silk Road commerce. These monuments continue to hold significant cultural and touristic value in contemporary Bukhara.

Keywords: Shaybanid dynasty; Bukhara trade architecture; covered markets; Toqi Zargaron; Toqi Sarrafon; Toqi Telpakfurushon; Abdullakhan Tim; caravanserais; Silk Road; Central Asian urban history

INTRODUCTION

The city of Bukhara has long been recognised as one of the preeminent socio-economic and cultural centres of the medieval Islamic world. Situated along the Great Silk Road, it served for centuries as a crucial node of international trade linking the Mediterranean, Persia, India, and China. Over successive dynasties, the city's urban fabric evolved substantially, acquiring new layers of architectural and commercial significance.

The accession of the Shaybanid dynasty to power in Mawarannahr and Khurasan from the early 16th century initiated a new phase of socio-economic consolidation and cultural florescence. Under the Shaybanids—particularly during the reign of Abdullah Khan II (r. 1583–1598)—Bukhara was elevated to the status of imperial capital, prompting an ambitious programme of urban construction. Among the structures erected during this period, commercial buildings such as the taq (domed market pavilion), tim (covered trading arcade), and caravanserai occupy a place of special importance in the history of Central Asian urban planning.

Despite their historical and architectural significance, the Shaybanid commercial complexes of Bukhara remain insufficiently examined in English-language scholarship. The present article seeks to address this gap by providing a systematic analysis of four principal surviving trade monuments—Toqi Zargaron, Toqi Telpakfurushon, Toqi Sarrafon, and the Abdullakhan Tim—in terms of their architectural typology, economic functions, and contemporary heritage value.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The architectural heritage of Bukhara has attracted scholarly attention since the 19th century. Among the foundational works in this field, the monumental study by Pugachenkova and Rempel (1965) remains indispensable for any examination of Uzbek art and architectural history.



Their detailed descriptions of the surviving domed structures of Bukhara—the taqs and tims—established the primary typological framework adopted in subsequent scholarship. The authors situate these buildings within the broader tradition of covered market construction that flourished in Timurid-era Khorasan and Mawarannahr, noting that the Shaybanid period represented both a continuation and a refinement of Timurid building practice.

The 19th-century travel accounts of the Hungarian Orientalist Ármín Vámbéry (1832–1913) provide valuable first-hand observations on the commercial life of Bukhara, including specific references to the Abdullakhan Tim and its trade specialisations. While Vámbéry's accounts must be approached with appropriate critical caution regarding their ethnographic accuracy, they offer rare contemporary perspectives on the functioning of these markets.

Archaeological investigations led by V.M. Filimonov yielded significant findings regarding the stratigraphic history of the Toqi Sarrafon site, revealing occupation layers dating to the Samanid period (9th century) and evidence of destruction during the Mongol invasions of the 13th century. Ahmedov (1995) provides a useful synthesis of Central Asian architectural history from the perspective of building typology and construction technology. More recent Uzbek-language scholarship, including works associated with Nizami University, has continued to examine these monuments within the framework of national heritage studies.

The present study builds upon these contributions while adopting a more integrated analytical approach that addresses architectural form, economic function, and heritage significance within a single framework.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative historical-analytical methodology combining primary source analysis, historiographic review, and architectural description. The primary sources consulted include waqf (Islamic endowment) documents pertaining to the construction and administration of the Toqi Telpakfurushon, as referenced in extant secondary literature, and the archaeological reports generated by the Filimonov excavations at the Toqi Sarrafon site.

Secondary sources encompassing Russian-language art historical monographs, Uzbek-language regional studies, and 19th-century European travel literature were systematically reviewed and critically evaluated. The architectural descriptions presented in this article are based on published measured drawings and photographic documentation, supplemented by on-site observations.

The analytical framework applied in this study draws on the typological categories established by Pugachenkova and Rempel (1965), adapted to incorporate more recent developments in Central Asian urban history scholarship. Trade monument typology is examined with reference to three primary variables: structural form, commercial specialisation, and spatial integration within the urban fabric.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Architectural Typology of Shaybanid Commercial Structures

According to Pugachenkova's research, the tradition of constructing enclosed market pavilions (chorsus) at the intersection of major trade routes was well established in Central Asian cities by the 15th century. Multi-domed structures built of fired brick covered entire commercial streets—sometimes only partially, sometimes along their full length. This building tradition,



which had been the dominant form of Timurid commercial architecture, was carried forward and further elaborated under the Shaybanids. Of the continuous covered structures that formerly lined Bukhara's principal market streets, three major domed pavilions and one arcade survive to the present day.

Toqi Zargaron (Goldsmiths' Dome)

Toqi Zargaron is situated at the ancient intersection of the historic shahriston district. Its name—meaning 'Goldsmiths' Dome'—directly reflects the craft specialisation of the merchants who traded within it. The building has a square ground plan, with four iwans (vaulted entrance porticoes) oriented towards the four converging streets.

The central section of the structure is dominated by an imposing dome raised on a polygonal drum by means of eight intersecting arches. The drum of the dome contains sixteen perforated panels that admit natural light into the trading hall below. Shield-shaped squinches (shtitobraz parusy) connect the polygonal drum to the octagonal transition zone. The peripheral ambulatory is covered by eight smaller arches, while the interior walls of the ambulatory carry sixteen additional arched niches. The two flanking arches of each iwan bring the total number of shop units to 36, each designed to accommodate a merchant's shop or craft workshop.

Adjacent to the southern iwan of Toqi Zargaron stood the Hind (Indian) Caravanserai, which was demolished in the 20th century. Today, Toqi Zargaron functions both as a protected architectural monument and as an active centre of traditional handicrafts, making it one of Bukhara's most visited heritage sites.

Toqi Telpakfurushon (Hat-Sellers' Dome)

Toqi Telpakfurushon was constructed in 1570–1571 during the reign of Abdullah Khan II, as attested by waqf documentation. The building was designed to accommodate the production and sale of headwear and was erected at the intersection of five converging streets—an exceptionally complex urban configuration. Historical sources record that the structure was also known by the names Chaxarso'ki Axanin, Toqi Kitobfurushon, and Toqi Khoja Muhammad Parron.

Architecturally, the primary dome rests on a hexagonal drum, while the entrance passages from the converging streets are covered by smaller subsidiary domes. The main dome has a diameter of 38 metres; the trading hall reaches a ceiling height of 10 metres, and the preserved section of the covered commercial street measures 28 metres in length and 14 metres in width. In the pre-modern period, the spaces beneath the dome housed merchants selling headwear, books, and bookbinding materials. The XII-century Magoki Attori mosque is located immediately to the north of Toqi Telpakfurushon, and the structure connects southward to Toqi Sarrafon.

Toqi Sarrafon (Money-Changers' Dome)

Toqi Sarrafon—the 'Money-Changers' Market'—was constructed over the ancient Shahrud irrigation channel. It is the smallest of the three surviving domed market structures. The structural basis of the building is a relatively steep dome mounted on a circular drum supported by four large intersecting arches constructed using the 'linga zarba' technique. Eight smaller pilasters at the apex of the dome support an additional small cupola. A timber staircase in the north-western corner of the building originally provided access to the Shahrud channel below, beside which a small pool has been identified archaeologically.

By the time of its archaeological investigation, Toqi Sarrafon had been buried under approximately two metres of accumulated soil over a period exceeding 400 years. Excavations



directed by V.M. Filimonov revealed the building's distinctive planning and structural solutions. The stratigraphic sequence demonstrated continuous occupation of the site from the 9th century (Samanid period), with a destruction horizon in the first half of the 13th century—attributed by researchers to the Mongol conquest under Genghis Khan—followed by reconstruction in fired brick during the 14th–15th centuries. As a specialised currency exchange facility located on a major Silk Road artery, Toqi Sarrafon was a critical node of Bukhara's international financial infrastructure.

The Abdullakhan Tim (Trading Arcade)

The Abdullakhan Tim represents the most specialised of the four structures examined here. According to Vámbéry, the arcade was constructed in 1582, following Abdullah Khan II's return from Mashhad, and was built in the Persian architectural style. The Tim was designed as a passaj—a covered trading gallery—specialising in the sale of silk textiles and fabrics.

The building has a square plan and is distinguished not by decorative elaboration but by the complex cascade of small domes clustering around the central large dome. The Tim housed approximately 30 specialist trading units (rastas), each dedicated to a specific category of goods or craft:

- Rastayi Suzangaron — needlework implements and sewing accessories;
- Rastayi Sarrafon — currency exchange and book trade;
- Rastayi Zargaron (Sergaron) — goldsmiths and jewellers;
- Rastayi Chilangeron — ironworkers and locksmiths;
- Rastayi Attoriy — spices and aromatic goods;
- Rastayi Kannodiy — confectionery and sugar products;
- Rastayi Choyforushiy — tea merchants;
- Rastayi Chitforushiy / Bazori Latta — textiles and fabrics;
- Timcha-i Darayforushiy — grocery and provisions.

In addition to the shops within the Tim itself, approximately 30 smaller caravanserais operated in the surrounding area, serving simultaneously as warehouses for goods in transit and as lodging facilities for visiting merchants.

DISCUSSION

The four commercial monuments examined in this study collectively demonstrate that the Shaybanid rulers—and Abdullah Khan II in particular—pursued a coherent and ambitious policy of urban commercial development in Bukhara. The spatial clustering of the taqs and the Tim in the historic core of the city was not accidental: it reflected a deliberate strategy of concentrating trade, craft production, and financial services at the convergence points of the city's principal arterial routes.

The functional specialisation of individual market units—goldsmiths in Toqi Zargaron, currency exchangers in Toqi Sarrafon, hatmakers and booksellers in Toqi Telpakfurushon, and a differentiated range of commodity traders in the Abdullakhan Tim—suggests a highly organised guild-based commercial system. This degree of specialisation would have enhanced quality control, simplified taxation and market regulation, and facilitated price formation through direct



competition among practitioners of the same craft.

The monetary exchange function of Toqi Sarrafon was of particular importance to the international trade networks traversing Bukhara. Merchants arriving from Persia, India, Russia, and China required reliable facilities for converting their currencies; the sarrafs (money-changers) who operated in this structure provided a financial service analogous in some respects to that of modern commercial banks. The survival of archaeological evidence attesting to the long pre-Shaybanid history of this site—extending back to the Samanid period—underscores its enduring centrality to Bukharan commercial life.

The construction of these monuments in the Persian architectural idiom, as noted with respect to the Abdullakhan Tim, reflects the cultural cosmopolitanism of the Shaybanid court, which drew on the broader repertoire of Persianate Islamic building traditions while adapting them to local Transoxanian conditions. This synthesis is characteristic of the broader cultural orientation of the Shaybanid period, which, despite its originally nomadic Uzbek tribal identity, rapidly assimilated the refined urban culture of the sedentary Timurid tradition.

From the perspective of heritage studies, all four monuments retain significant value in the present day. Toqi Zargaron and Toqi Telpakfurushon in particular continue to function as active sites of traditional handicraft production and trade, embodying a form of living heritage that extends beyond static architectural preservation. Their role as major tourist destinations contributes substantially to the cultural economy of Bukhara and supports the broader national heritage policy of Uzbekistan.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the Shaybanid commercial architecture of Bukhara—exemplified by Toqi Zargaron, Toqi Telpakfurushon, Toqi Sarrafon, and the Abdullakhan Tim—constitutes a coherent and historically significant urban commercial system. These structures were not simply individual buildings but elements of an integrated network designed to serve the full range of commercial, financial, and logistical functions required by a major Silk Road entrepôt.

Architecturally, the Shaybanid domed market pavilions represent a sophisticated development of the covered market typology inherited from the Timurid period, combining Persian formal principles with local structural traditions. Economically, they facilitated specialised craft production, retail trade, international currency exchange, and the accommodation of long-distance merchants—functions that collectively sustained Bukhara's role as one of the foremost commercial cities of the early modern Islamic world.

The survival of these monuments into the present day, and their continued use as sites of traditional craft production and cultural tourism, attests to their enduring significance. Future research would benefit from more systematic engagement with primary archival sources—particularly waqf documents and court chronicles—and from the application of archaeological remote sensing techniques to unexcavated areas of the historic city centre.

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