



POWER AND CEREMONY IN THE PALACES OF THE MANGIT EMIRS OF BUKHARA: POLITICAL SYMBOLS OF ARCHITECTURAL SPACE

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Abstract This scientific article analyzes the palace architecture and political symbols expressed in it during the reign of the Mangid dynasty in the Bukhara Emirate (1785-1920). The article studies the architectural structure of the Ark Castle and the Sitorai Mohi Khosa Palace, their spatial organization, and the ceremonies held in these spaces (enthronement, reception of ambassadors, military parades, holiday prayers) from the perspective of how power was expressed. Architectural elements (gates, columns, thrones, ceilings, colors) are interpreted as material expressions of political ideology. The research results show that the Mangid palace architecture had not only aesthetic, but also deep political content, and was a means of promoting the sanctity, power, and inviolability of the emir's power.

Keywords: Bukhara Emirate, Mangids, palace architecture, symbols of power, ritual, Ark Castle, Sitorai Mohi Khosa, political ideology.

Relevance of the problem In the study of the architectural heritage of Central Asia, palace buildings are usually approached from an artistic and aesthetic point of view. However, each palace is not only an architectural monument, but also a material embodiment of the political ideology, philosophy of power and social relations of its time. The walls, gates, the location and decoration of the palace rooms - all this is a "stopped text" showing how a particular political system works, to whom and on what basis power belongs.

The Mangid dynasty ruled the Bukhara Emirate for almost a century and a half. During this period, significant political, social, and cultural changes took place in Central Asia: the invasions of the Russian Empire, colonial policies, the crisis of the traditional Eastern model of statehood, and the introduction of new modern trends. It was in these difficult historical conditions that the Mangid emirs sought to demonstrate the strength, legitimacy, and inviolability of their power through various means, including architectural symbols.

The purpose of this article is to reveal the political symbols expressed in the architectural space of the palaces of the Mangid emirs of Bukhara and their connection with the ceremonies of power.

1. To analyze the architectural structure of the Ark Castle and the Sitorai Mohi Khosa Palace from the point of view of political symbols;
2. To reconstruct the main ceremonies held in the palace space (enthronement, reception of ambassadors, military parades);
3. To determine the semiotic relationship between architectural elements (gates, columns, thrones, colors) and ceremonies;



4. To show the differences and similarities of the Mangid palace architecture with the architecture of previous eras (Temurids, Ashtarkhanids).

The following sources were used in the article:

- Works of contemporary historians (Mirzo Olim Makhdum Haji, Ahmad Donish, Mirza 'Abd al-'Azim Sami);
- Reports of officers and orientalist of the Russian Empire (N.P. Ostroumov, V.V. Bartold, A.L. Kun);
- Results of archaeological and architectural research (M.E. Masson, Ya. Gulyomov, S.B. Bobojonov);
- Preserved architectural elements and photographs of palaces.

Although research on the topic began at the end of the 19th century, there are few works that specifically study the Mangid palaces from the perspective of political symbols. Historians of that time (Ahmad Donish) mainly criticized the activities of the emirs, while Soviet-era research paid more attention to socio-economic relations. In the post-independence period, scholars such as O. Usmanov, Sh. Kurbanov, Sh. Shirinov studied the importance of palaces as cultural heritage.

Until the Mangids came to power in Bukhara, the highest officials of the Ashtar Khani dynasty were the atals. In 1747, Muhammad Rahim biy consolidated his power and received the title of emir. The Mangid dynasty was officially recognized in 1785 during the reign of Emir Shahmurad.

The ideology of the Mangid power was based on three pillars: The first is religious legitimacy. The Mangid emirs declared themselves descendants of "Amir ul-mu'minin" (the leader of the faithful) and "Sayyid". This gave their power a religious-Islamic status. Each emir, upon ascending the throne, swore an oath before the Bukhara qazikol (chief judge) and received the blessing of Khalfa Said (the most influential religious figure in Bukhara). The second is lineage legitimacy. The Mangids sought to associate themselves with the descendants of Amir Temur and even Genghis Khan. Although they were not from the Genghis Khanate, they interpreted the title of "emir" and the right to rule as a historical heritage. The third is military-political power. The Mangids waged successful wars against the Khanates of Kokand and Khiva, which strengthened their power with real power. The material expression of this ideology was reflected precisely in the architecture of the palace.

The Ark fortress is the most ancient part of Bukhara, its history dates back to the 5th-4th centuries BC. By the time of the Mangids, the Ark had formed not only the residence of the emir, but also the center of power of the entire Bukhara emirate. The location of the Ark in itself is a symbol of power: it is located at the highest point of the city, on the eastern side of Registan Square. The high (up to 11 meters) and thick (up to 4 meters) walls of the fortress separate it from the outside world. The Ark was accessible only through two gates - the western (main) and eastern (auxiliary). The main gate of the Ark - the Registan Gate - is of particular symbolic importance. In front of the gate was the place of judgment and execution. The heads of criminals were placed in front of the gate. This situation indicates the dual content of the border of power: outside the gate awaits punishment (the punitive power of the emir's power), and inside - protection and privileges (the protection of the emir). Passing through the gate itself was a ceremonial act. An ordinary person, even a high-ranking official, could not enter the Arch on horseback - only on foot. This was a material expression of the peculiar "stalk" or "prostration" act of coming to the emir. During the reception of ambassadors, a special solemn



ceremony was held in front of the gate. Ambassadors were met at the gate, their weapons were handed over, and then they were led through a special corridor to the reception room. The narrow and labyrinthine structure of this corridor was supposed to create in the ambassadors an idea of the impenetrability of the fortress and the greatness of the power.

The hierarchy of power was deeply reflected in the internal structure of the Arch: the division into these three zones gave a clear idea of the sanctity of the emir's power and the difficulty of approaching it. The possibility of moving from the outer courtyard to the inner courtyard depended on the personal permission of the emir, and this permission itself was considered a sign of privilege and respect. One of the most important rooms in the Arch was the throne room. It was located in the inner courtyard, closest to the emir's chambers. The ceiling of the room was very high, and its net side (towards the qibla) was decorated with coral. The throne was placed on the northern or eastern side of the room, higher than the persons being received. This indicated the emir's physical superiority (sitting higher), and thereby his spiritual and political superiority. The patterns and inscriptions on the walls of the throne room had a special symbolic meaning. In addition to verses from the Quran, there were genealogies of the emirs of Mang'it, inscriptions about their victories. These inscriptions conveyed the following message to the person entering: "In this place where you are standing, a generation that has had the right to power for centuries will rule."

The enthronement ceremony (Julus) The enthronement ceremony (julus) of the Mangid emirs lasted several days, and at each stage different parts of the palace space were used. Stage 1 (Religious Oath): It took place in the Ark Mosque, with the participation of the Qaziqaloni and Halfa Said. This stage emphasized the religious legitimacy of the power. The sanctity of the mosque and the divine power of the oath taken here indicated that the new emir was not only a political, but also a religious leader. Stage 2 (Military Oath): It took place in the outer courtyard of the Ark, in front of military units and soldiers (the emir's personal guard). The military "prostrated" before the emir (kneeling and touching their heads to the ground). This ceremony demonstrated the reliance of the power on military power and the emir's status as the supreme commander. Stage 3 (Civil Oath): It took place in Registan Square, in front of the Ark Gate. This stage was attended by representatives of the population, merchants, artisans. Their oath reflected the recognition of power by the entire society. At each of the three stages, the new emir was led from the room where he sat on the throne to other rooms - to the mosque, to the part where the military units were located, to the reception hall - along special ceremonial paths. These paths showed the connection of the emir, as the center of power, with all parts of the palace.

The reception of ambassadors was an important part of the diplomatic activity of the Mangid Palace. This ceremony was not only a formalization of relations between the two states, but also a means of demonstrating the power and independence of the Bukhara Emirate. The ceremony took place in approximately the following sequence:

Reception: The ambassadors were met by special officials at the Arch Gate. Their weapons were handed over - although this was a standard diplomatic protocol, the prohibition of the emir from entering his residence with weapons showed that the authorities retained complete security and control in their own hands.

Waiting: Ambassadors waited for several hours (sometimes several days) before being admitted to the reception. This mandatory waiting was done to emphasize the emir's busyness, importance, and the fact that ambassadors were of relatively lower status.



Presenting gifts: When ambassadors entered the reception room, they were first presented with gifts (mostly expensive fabrics, jewelry, rare animals). These gifts can be interpreted as a symbol of submission and respect for the emir.

Prostration: Ambassadors approached the throne and "prostrated" themselves. Although this action was controversial in later times (especially by ambassadors of the Russian Empire), for centuries it was considered mandatory etiquette in the presence of the emir of Bukhara.

Conversation: The conversation with the emir was conducted through a special interpreter, in a short and formal manner. The emir spoke little and listened more. This expressed the silence and firmness of power.

Banquet: The reception ended with a banquet. At the banquet, the ambassadors were seated separately from other officials, closer to the emir. This indicated their superior status to other guests, but still emphasized their inferiority to the emir.

Military parades were mainly held in the outer courtyard of the Arch and on Registan Square. They usually took place on two occasions: when a new emir ascended the throne or before an important military campaign. The parades had the following symbolic meaning:

- The soldiers (the emir's personal guard) were in the forefront of the parade. Their uniforms (red - the color of power, gold embroidery) and weapons (firearms and swords) indicated that the emir was the most loyal and well-armed force.
- The emir watched the parade from a specially built podium on the western wall of the Arch. His position was above the entire square and the army. Height is another expression of the physical superiority of power.
- During the parade, the name of the emir was repeated, prayers were read to him. This was a collective form of oath of loyalty to the emir by each soldier.

Sitorai Mohi Khosa (Persian - Like the moon and stars) is the summer palace of the Mang'it emirs of Bukhara outside the city. Initially, its construction began during the reign of Emir Nasrullah Khan (1826-1860), it was expanded during the reign of Emir Abdulahad Khan (1885-1910), luxurious gardens and buildings were built, and a new palace was completed during the reign of Emir Alim Khan (1910-1920). Sitorai Mohi Khosa reflects important changes in the ideology of the Mang'it government. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Emirate of Bukhara became a protectorate of the Russian Empire. This political situation also affected the way the government presented itself. Amir Abdulahad Khan (educated in Russia) and his son Alim Khan (who knew Russian) sought to demonstrate the "modernity" of their power by incorporating European elements into the traditional oriental style. The most important feature of Sitorai Mohi Khosa is its combination of Eastern and Western architectural traditions: This synthesis has a double symbolic meaning: Firstly, the use of European elements was an attempt by Abdulahad Khan and Alim Khan to present themselves as "enlightened", "modern" rulers. At the end of the 19th century, European technologies and culture were considered the most advanced in the world. Therefore, the introduction of European elements into the palace showed that the emir was not aloof from this development, but rather took its example. Secondly, the basic style was preserved on the basis of Eastern (Khwarizmi and Bukhara) traditions. The gilded carvings, the mosaics, the wooden columns – all this was a continuation of the local architectural language. Therefore, the palace is not a "Westernized" but an example of the "modernized East".

The name of the palace – "Like the Moon and Stars" – is a cosmological symbol. In Islamic tradition, the moon and stars are not only a symbol of beauty, but also of progress, light and



constancy. By naming the palace in this way, the emir linked his power with the laws of the universe – just as the moon and stars are in constant motion, in constant order, so his power is constant and unchanging. The ceilings of the palace are decorated with patterns of the moon and stars, and in some rooms there are real images of the sky (with stars). Anyone who enters this space feels like they are under the sky, and the emir is the ruler of the “sky on earth”.

There are two types of reception rooms in Sitorai Mohi Khosa:

1. "Eastern" reception room (Large room): Here, receptions were held in the traditional way - sitting on the floor, on expensive carpets and rugs. The ceilings are high, the walls are decorated with ganch carvings. This room was intended mainly for local officials, religious scholars and traditional oriental ceremonies.

2. "Western" reception room (White hall): Here, receptions were held in the European way - with chairs, tables and a special throne (Western throne). The ceiling of the hall is decorated with plaster cartouches and rosettes, the windows are high, and the floor is parquet. This room was intended mainly for European ambassadors and guests. Both reception rooms were built in the same palace, very close to each other. This shows the emir's ability to operate in two different cultures - the traditional East and the modern West - at the same time. This is also an expression of political pragmatism: if necessary, the emir could appear as a "traditional eastern ruler", if necessary, as a "modern European monarch".

The red color occupied a special place in the palaces of the Mangids:

- The uniform of the soldiers was red;
- The emir's flag was red in color;
- The arch gate was painted red;
- The walls of the throne room were red in color, with gold patterns.

The red color has long been considered a symbol of power, might, victory and blood (sacrifice and battle). The Mangids, through the use of this color, demonstrated their military power and the sacredness of power (associated with sacrifice).

The gold color (gold-embroidered patterns, embroidery) was used mainly in the throne rooms and mosques. Gold is a symbol of holiness (gold is used in religious objects), wealth (economic power) and light (enlightenment, wisdom).

White and blue colors predominate in the Sitorai Mohi Khosa. White is a symbol of purity (the justice of the emir), blue is a symbol of the sky (divine power) and infinity (the unlimited power of the emir).

When comparing the palace architecture of the Mangids with that of the previous eras (Temurids, Ashtarkhanids), the following similarities and differences can be seen: The most important feature of the Mangids is the emphasis on the closed and solidity of power. If in the palaces of the Timurids and Ashtarkhanids the power was "open" and "centered" (the throne was in the center, the courtyard was open on all four sides), in the Mangids the power was "on the periphery" and "above" (the throne was on the periphery and high), protected and requiring protection. These differences are explained by the political and economic situation. The Timurids and Ashtarkhanids ruled in relatively stable and strong states, while the Mangids were forced to maintain power in the face of colonial pressure, internal uprisings and economic crises. Therefore, their palaces were not open and spacious, but closed, protected and solid.

Conclusion Based on this study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Architectural space - the material text of the ideology of power



Each architectural element of the Mangid palaces - gate, wall, room, throne, color - has a clear political content. The system formed by these elements together constantly "speaks" about the legitimacy (religious, genealogical, military), power and inviolability of power. In this sense, the palace is not only a place of residence and management, but also a kind of "propaganda text".

2. Ark - the embodiment of the traditional oriental model of power

The three-zone structure of the Ark fortress, its narrow gates, high walls and the high location of the throne on the outskirts indicated that power was sacred, inviolable and difficult to approach. Ark ceremonies (enthronement, reception of ambassadors, military parades) were the "revival" of this space, demonstrating power in a lively and dynamic way.

3. Sitorai Mohi Khosa – a reflection of a changing model of power

The transformation of the Bukhara Emirate into a Russian protectorate in the late 19th and early 20th centuries affected the style of self-presentation of power. The Sitorai Mohi Khosa Palace is an architectural expression of this change. It combines traditional Eastern elements with European elements, and two different models of perception (East and West) coexist. This reflects the emir's desire to appear as the ruler of the "modernized East".

4. Ceremony and space are interconnected

Without ceremonies, the palace space is "lifeless". Ceremonies "animate" the palace space and renew its symbolic meaning in real time. On the contrary, ceremonies without the palace space lose their power, since they are tied to a specific place, history, and tradition. The Mangits understood this well and every ritual