

Titel: Samarkand: The History and Legacy of One of Asia's Oldest Cities

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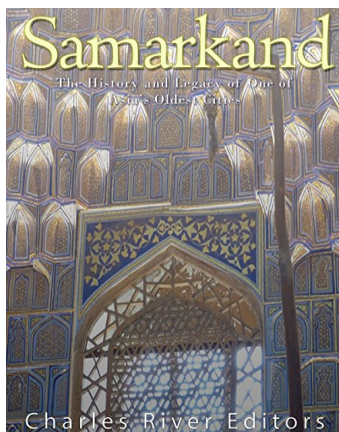
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Samarkand is one of the oldest cities of Central Asia, founded nearly 3,000 years ago. The legendary city was the capital of the Sogdians, a trading people who facilitated the spread of commodities, religions, technologies, and ideas across the Silk Road between China and the rest of Eurasia. Samarkand was a key site along the ancient Silk Road, a place where a number of world cultures from the East and the West met and assimilated. As well as being a commercial center, it was a key religious site for the Zoroastrian, Buddhist, Christian, and Islamic faiths. The growth of Samarkand occurred at the same time as other major urban centers based on oases along the Silk Road, such as Khwarezm, Balkh (Bactria), and Bukhara. The city was conquered by Alexander the Great in 329 BCE and served as a base for his campaigns through Transoxiana. From the early Islamic period to the seventh century, the city prospered until it was completely destroyed by Genghis Khan in 1220. It was not until the 14th century that the city was rebuilt about one kilometer southwest of the ancient tell site.

Although well-known for its trade, another part of Samarkand that makes its history so interesting is its association with the Timurid dynasty and its legendary founder, Tamerlane. Known by the Sogdians as Timur (meaning "iron"), he was one of the most extraordinary individuals to have ever existed. From his origins as a member of the tribal aristocracy, through political and military activity - and almost supernatural power - he came to dominate Transoxania and much of Iran. A lot of his behavior as an emperor was developed on the model of the Mongol empire that had existed before him, as he embarked on a mission to create the largest Turkic Muslim Empire of Eurasia.

Tamerlane chose Samarkand as the capital of this empire. He loved this city above all others, and after each of his military expeditions he would bring back local artisans and craftsmen to live and work there. Beautiful buildings rose one after another through their efforts, and a gloriously cosmopolitan culture blossomed, with monuments unique to this part of the world being constructed in its diverse districts. Tamerlane's successors - though not as ambitious in their conquests - contributed much to the heritage of this city, and at the height of its prosperity it was said to be the very center of the world.