



RABOTI MALIK – A UNIQUE EXAMPLE OF MEDIEVAL CARAVAN SARAJE ARCHITECTURE

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Abstract: This article discusses the architectural structure of Rabati Malik, a legacy from the Middle Ages and one of the unique monuments of the Karakhanid state. The article describes the size and shape of Rabati Malik, types of decoration, historical significance, and functions it performed. The place of the monument in Central Asia is also discussed.

Keywords: Great Silk Road, Karakhanids, Eastern Renaissance, Yettisuv, Navoi, King's Castle, Apadana, Firuzabad, Jarkurgan, Leman.

Great trade routes have long passed through the lands of Uzbekistan, which played an important role in the development of cultural, economic and political ties connecting the East and West, North and South. In particular, caravanserais built along the Great Silk Road were not only convenient places for merchants, but also high examples of the architecture of that time. One of such unique structures is the Rabati Malik caravanserai. Rabati Malik is one of the oldest and most famous caravanserais in Central Asia, attracting the attention of historians, archaeologists and architects due to its architectural appearance, function as an architectural structure and political and economic significance of its time. This structure was built in the 11th century during the reign of the Karakhanid dynasty and reflects the developed infrastructure of that time. This monument occupies a special place in the cultural heritage of Uzbekistan not only for its architectural beauty, but also for its historical essence. Raboti Malik, with its solid foundation, magnificent gate and elegant brickwork, has preserved the most important features of medieval Eastern architecture. In-depth study of such monuments is an important tool in introducing the younger generation to our national history. Therefore, this article will analyze in detail the historical origin, architectural features and current significance of the Raboti Malik caravanserai.

The 9th-12th centuries are one of the highest stages for the countries of the East, and this period is distinguished by unprecedented development in many areas of science, culture and art. This period is called the “Eastern Renaissance” or “Eastern Renaissance” in historiography, especially in science, philosophy, literature, architecture and many other areas. During this period, several dynasties changed in Central Asia. Each of them had a significant impact on the political, social and cultural life of its time. In particular, this process directly affected the ethnic formation, language, religion and culture of the Turkic peoples. During the period of the change of dynasties, a unique political and cultural image of the Turks began to take shape. One of the dynasties that ruled during this period was the Karakhanid dynasty. They entered the political arena in the late 9th and early 10th centuries and established their power in the Transoxiana and Seven Seas regions. The Karakhanids, in addition to being the first Turkic dynasty to adopt Islam as an official religion, made a significant contribution to the development of science and culture during their time. The rulers of the dynasty left their mark in history as scholars and patrons of architecture. [1] In particular, significant developments were observed in the field of architecture. Mosques, madrasahs, mausoleums and other public buildings created the first examples of Turkic Islamic architecture. Architectural monuments built during the Karakhanid era became centers of not only religious but also social life. Thus, the 9th–12th centuries occupy an important place in history with their political and cultural diversity, achievements in science and

art. The Karakhanid dynasty was one of the important participants in this revival process, leaving an unforgettable mark on the history of Central Asia.

There is information that the Rabati Malik caravanserai was built in the second half of the 11th century, approximately in 1078–1079, by Shams ul-Mulk, a representative of the Karakhanid dynasty. However, some researchers emphasize that the customer and initiator of this architectural structure is not clear. The caravanserai was built of raw brick, and the exterior was finished with baked bricks measuring 24x28x4 cm. To date, only the roof of the structure has been preserved, through which one can get an idea of the general structure of the building. The layout of the building was square, measuring 86x86 meters. The fact that its walls were 12 meters high indicates that it was two-story - that is, with attics[2].

The caravanserai consisted of two main parts. When entering through the main entrance porch, one encounters a courtyard surrounded by rooms on all four sides. This courtyard served as a central open space and provided convenience for the accommodation, recreation, and keeping of pack animals of the caravanserai guests. The Raboti Malik caravanserai is one of the most important examples of large caravanserai of the 11th century in Central Asia. Its architectural significance, decoration, and construction indicate the development of trade routes in its time. The fact that the porch has survived to this day indicates the solidity of this structure. Raboti Malik is not only a historical monument, but also one of the highest examples of medieval Eastern architecture.

Located 23 kilometers south of Navoi, at the crossroads of ancient caravan routes, the Raboti Malik caravanserai is one of the unique examples of medieval Eastern architecture. Its name means “King’s Fortress”, and the monument was built in the 11th century during the rule of the Karakhanid dynasty in Transoxiana. According to historical sources, the Rabati Malik caravanserai was a fortified desert residence of the Turkic rulers of the Karakhanid dynasty in the 11th-12th centuries. This monument served not only as a defense, but also as an important strategic point for trade and travel. The preserved bastions are known among the local population as the “Gates of Bukhara”, and are still valued today as a witness to the past. Even after the Mongol invasion in the 13th century, Rabati Malik continued its activity, serving as an important stopping place for trade caravans until the beginning of the 18th century. The territory of the palace included living rooms typical of a caravanserai, a kitchen, a bathhouse, a mosque, and stables. In particular, the cistern, located not far from the gate, was of great importance as a source of water supply. The location of Rabati Malik is also historically important: one of the important branches of the Great Silk Road passed through it. This circumstance creates the basis for valuing this structure as a monument of importance not only architecturally, but also economically and politically.[3] We can see that the fact that the monument is located on ancient caravan routes, was built in the 11th-12th centuries during the Karakhanid era, and served as an important place on the trade route for a long time increases its historical significance. In particular, the fact that it does not consist of just a simple building - that is, it had living rooms, a bathhouse, a mosque, stables and a cistern, indicates that this place was an important center in its time.

The Raboti Malik caravanserai played an important role in its time not only as a stopping place for trade caravans, but also as a fortification and fortress. In the center of the Raboti is a large courtyard measuring 22.5x22.5 meters, surrounded by two-story rooms and chambers. Water was supplied to these rooms through clay pipes, which in itself indicates that the building had a developed infrastructure. In front of the magnificent palace, located in the middle of the central part, a 7.5x13 meter porch was built, with 20 brick columns on both wings. The palace was entered through a gate with a roof on the south side. The entire structure is surrounded by thick walls: the southern and northern walls are 2.35 meters high, the western and eastern parts are 1.5 meters high, and the front wall is about 12 meters high.

The huge roof (18 meters high, 12 meters wide) located on the south side facing the square is one of the oldest architectural elements in Central Asia. Eight-pointed stars and various geometric patterns are carved on its surface. On both sides of the roof are constellations, which are connected to each other by a high wall. In the middle of the wall there is a row of turrets, connected by narrowing arcades at their tops. The turrets are relatively low, cylindrical or multi-faceted towers placed at certain intervals along the walls of the camp, which served to strengthen the defense system. The upper part of the wall is framed with Kufic inscriptions made of brick. A pavilion with an arcade was built on top of each turret, which served as an observation point. Under the pavilion there are two rows of large stucco moldings and rings with Kufic inscriptions. The decoration of the structure is mainly made of brick, and in some places carved stucco patterns are also encountered.[4]

Rabati Malik occupies a special place in the history of medieval Eastern architecture with its architectural solution and artistic treatment. In particular, its facade, decorated with cylindrical columns mounted on the walls of the main entrance, is of particular interest. These large brick half-columns are interconnected by arches located above, a style first observed in ancient Persian monuments, in particular the Apadana Palace in Persepolis (5th century BC) and the Parthian and Sasanian buildings of Firuzabad[5]. Such architectural decoration is very rare among monuments of the Islamic period. Therefore, this facade decoration is a unique phenomenon for the architecture of the Islamic period. In particular, this artistic solution in Rabati Malik is comparable to the Jarkurgan Tower located in the Surkhandarya region in southern Uzbekistan. Both structures feature unique examples of the combination of brick half-columns and arcaded decorations. Unfortunately, a large part of Raboti Malik was completely destroyed by a powerful earthquake in 1968. Only the main entrance porch has been partially preserved, and today it is a reminder of its past glory.

The first information about the Rabati Malik monument dates back to the middle of the 19th century. During the Russian scientific and diplomatic mission to Bukhara in 1841–1842, the naturalist A. Leman (at the age of 27) drew the first sketches of the inner courtyard and architectural elements of the monument, which were still preserved at that time. These images played an important role in the scientific restoration of parts that were not preserved until the 19th century. Although the theory was put forward during the initial studies that Rabati Malik was a caravanserai, subsequent archaeological research revealed the true nature of this monument. As a result of excavations, it became known that Rabati Malik was originally built as a summer residence of the rulers of the Karakhanid dynasty. It is known that the Karakhanids led a nomadic lifestyle, leaving their winter palaces for the summer months and temporarily residing in palaces and camps located in the steppe regions. Rabati Malik was one of such seasonal settlements.[6] For many years, the Rabati Malik monument has been mentioned in the scientific literature only as a caravanserai. Indeed, its strategic location, water supply (cistern), and the presence of living and service rooms confirm this idea to some extent. However, archaeological research analysis also shows that the function of Rabati Malik was much broader and more complex than this. In particular, given the semi-nomadic lifestyle of the Karakhanid dynasty, which constantly moved between summer and winter settlements, we can conclude that Rabati Malik was not only a seasonal settlement for trade, but also a place for the rulers to live, relax, and conduct political activities. In conclusion, the Rabati Malik monument was of great importance in medieval Transoxiana not only as a caravanserai, but also as a political and cultural center. The fact that this structure built by the Karakhanid dynasty is considered, especially as the construction of a “King’s Fortress” in the steppe indicates its importance. This monument was a summer residence for the Karakhanids, who, in accordance with their nomadic lifestyle, moved from their winter palaces to this fortified and spacious courtyard palace in the steppe. The architectural and defensive features of Raboti Malik, its internal living quarters, water supply system, as well as its location on one of the routes of the Great Silk Road, confirm that it was used not only for trade and travel, but also for political and military purposes. Therefore, it would be a mistake to limit it to just a simple caravanserai. Today, the study of

Raboti Malik as a unique monument of medieval culture and politics helps to further understand its historical significance and is an invaluable part of the historical heritage of Uzbekistan.

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