

Turkistan: The Archeological Treasure

Turkistan – a sacred place, a place of worship and pilgrimage for Muslims, one of the oldest cities in the world. It has a population of 85,600 and is situated 160 km (100 miles) north–west of Shymkent on the Trans–Aral Railway between Kyzylorda to the north and Tashkent to the south.



The site of ancient settlement Turkistan is an important archeological monument of the urban culture of South Kazakhstan. The major role this town played in the Late Middle Ages in Kazakhstan is widely known. It was the center of the economic and political development of various states, a trade and cultural centre on the junction of vast steppes and ancient agricultural areas, the place of preaching activities of the Turkic Sufi Khodja Akhmed Yasawi, the political centre of the Kazakh Statehood and the "second Mecca" of the Moslem East. Medieval Turkistan experienced a stormy history with periods of flourishing and decline. This town absorbed cultural traditions of various origins. In 2000, Turkistan celebrated its 1500th anniversary.

A huge amount of ancient monuments, more than 800, remained there. Turkistan used to be one of the most significant trade and political centers of the whole Central Asian region for many centuries. Until the 18th century, Turkistan, or Yasi, as it used to be called, was the capital of the Kazakh Khanate formed in the 15th century. Many ancient monuments are retained in the city; striking architecture of the city surprisingly passed through a millennium with practically unchanged appearance.

The ancient buildings of Yasi suggest the lifestyle of people of the city. Turkistan as a city set on a trade route, certainly had a big advantage over other cities in the sense that it naturally attracted labor, funds, advanced technology, famous scientists and philosophers. Turkistan was also a center of education: there were large libraries in the city.



The humanist and preacher Ahmed Yassauï founded a theological school there. When the famous Sufi

Hoja Ahmed Yassaui read a sermon in the city Turkistan became quite well known. In his honor a temple was built here – a masterpiece of medieval architecture, mausoleum, consisting of a complex of palaces and temples. Fine furnishings and interior decorations of walls, roofs and ceilings will impress anyone.

Even by modern standards, the building of the mausoleum is considered very large (40 meters in height); it has several domes. The central dome of the mausoleum, Kazanlak, unifies more than 35 different rooms. The cauldron was a symbol of unity and hospitality for the Turks. Therefore, special significance was attached to its size and appearance.



Among historical places, Ordabasy natural boundary is particularly interesting. It was recently awarded the status of a Historic Reserve. It is here where formerly scattered Kazakh tribes united, transcending all differences, to confront the powerful and dangerous invader, Dzungaria. Among other famous places around Turkistan are Hanaka, the tomb of the Kazakh khans Esimhana, Ablai Khan Abulhairhana, the burial place of Kazybek, one of the founders of the first set of Kazakh laws "Zhety Zhargy".

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