

Photo 4.30
Samarkand (Uzbekistan).
The Registan Square



Samarkand and Bukhara – great urban centres in Central Asia

Samarkand is one of the oldest cities in Central Asia. The origin of the city (known as Marcanda in the Ancient times) dates back to the 6th century BC. Then it was an important centre in the Persian Empire of the Achamaenid. Conquered and destroyed (among others by Alexander the Great in 329 BC and Genghis Khan in 1220 CE), the city kept regenerating, taking advantage of its location on the Silk Road and at the crossing with other trade routes connecting India, China, the Near East, and Europe. Arabs conquered Samarkand in 712 CE.

In the history of urban planning and architecture, the constructions dating from the era of the Timurid Dynasty's reign, the beginning of which was the year 1369, when Timur chose Samarkand to be the capital of his state, are of particular importance. The city developed especially rapidly in the first half of the 15th century, when the ruler of Samarkand was Ulugh Beg. At that time the city became a great centre of culture and science. A typical construction of that day was madrasa – a religious school. The madrasa built by Ulugh Beg in the years 1417–1420 gave rise to one of the most outstanding urban complexes, forming the **Registan Square** (Figure 4.10) in Samarkand. Around 200 years later (1619–1636),