

An evaluation of architectural monuments in Afghanistan as in the capital city, Kabul

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Abstract

Afghanistan as a multi-cultural country witnesses a diversity of architectural styles influenced by many civilizations. Architecture in the Kabul city, the capital of Afghanistan, encompasses styles before emerging Islamic and after emerging Islamic religion. Considering the civilization influences, architecture styles in Afghanistan may be divided into three parts: Central Asia, Persian, and Indian. Kabul city is the meeting place of all these three styles. After the establishment of current Afghanistan in 1747, for the first time the evolution of architectural style in Kabul city as the capital occurred in 1880 which has been influenced by western architecture styles, and it has become the most famous style in the city. Basically, the architecture styles in Kabul city in relation to the civilization influences are characterized by Central Asian, Persian, Indian, and Western styles which have been reflected in most of the architectural monuments in the country. In this paper it is aimed to study the architectural evolution of the Kabul city by considering the civilization impacts through history, particularly before emerging Islam and after emerging Islam religion. The associated architectural monuments of each historical period in the city were studied based on its architectural style and related civilization. Furthermore, these impacts on shaping the current architectural style of the Kabul city have also been reviewed. This study is carried out mostly by reviewing the literature to highlight the architectural styles developed over the periods in Kabul city and the impact of cultural influences on them. As a case from each historical period, the monuments according to their historical importance, architecture style, and construction method are evaluated. As a mapping technique, Arc GIS 10.5 is used to visualize the distribution of architectural monuments within Kabul city.

Keywords: Kabul city, monuments, architectural style, Islamic architecture, evolution, western architecture.

1. Introduction

Afghanistan with capital of Kabul is located in Central Asia. Based on ethnic mosaics, cultural variations, and influences, it is believed that the history of Afghanistan is showing the alternating periods of fission and fusion (Dupree, 2002). To clarify the terminology of "fission and fusion", one has to decipher the dominant stylistic approaches in defining the decomposition and transformation processes of any architectural style in determining the identity of the culture that represents itself in architectural production. Afghanistan is located on trade routes between Central

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Asia and India thus it inevitably represents the most important and little known area in the history of oriental art and architecture of the Muslim world (Frye, 1946; Najimi, 2016), (Figure 1).



Figure 1 Location of Afghanistan within the extent of Silk Road (Berry, 2020).

With consideration of long historical periods in Afghanistan, many architectural monuments belonging to various historical periods such as Ai-Khanoum, Qala-e-Ikhtiaruddin, Minar-e-jam, Idol Buddha, Ghazni minarets, Lashkari Bazar etc. are found in the country together with unmentioned and destroyed monuments. Unfortunately, the ancient architectural history of Afghanistan has not been investigated well yet, however, the archaeological studies in various parts of the country indicate that diverse historical monuments will be discovered if detailed investigations are carried out in the future (Frye, 1946). The traditional architecture of Afghanistan is the product of many centuries' long developments, which reflects "regional identity" and "traditional sense of place"(Kazimee & Najimi, 2017). The traditional urbanism and architecture in Afghanistan usually encompass Kalas, or square forts and caravanserais providing adequate protection for local inhabitants against the enemy (Frye, 1946; Issa, 2006; Najimi, 2016). The history of Kala in Kabul city is merely linked to the cultural, environment, religious and historical background of the country which has an inward-looking design and surrounded by strong walls and defense towers as a self-protecting family society (Barfield, 2012; Dupree, 1973; Szabo & Barfield, 1991). There is a strong link between the heterogeneous linguistic, ethnic, and religious culture of Afghanistan that architecture of all has been influenced by this cultural and environmental aspects (Issa, 2006). In addition to traditional architecture, the architecture is characterized by the influences of Persia, India and Central Asia Islamic architecture (Issa, 2006). In parallel, the provinces of Kabul, Balkh, Ghazni, Kandahar and Herat have been the designated centers of Afghanistan at different periods of history and inevitably they are representing the major monumental architecture of country largely influenced by Persian, Indian and Central Asian civilizations (Bechhoefer, 1977; Frye, 1946), which contemporary Afghanistan also was a part of these civilizations.

Kabul as the capital of Afghanistan has its own historical, social and political features (Issa & Kohistani, 2007). Also the architectural style of Kabul city particularly reflects the culture and architectural style of the whole country (Issa, 2006; Najimi, 2016).

Kabul, as the historical city of Afghanistan, introduces various cultural repositories with its architecture and urban forms resulted by the developments of various generations (Kazimee & Najimi, 2017). Based on a prominent study as in (Sharifzai, Kitagawa, Halimee, Habib, & Sakaguchi, 2016), Contemporary Afghanistan residential architecture and lifestyle governing in Kabul city have been converged with modern and foreign architecture that transformed new urbanism and dwelling into a unfavorable form clashing with Afghanistan traditional culture and environment. There are some conducted studies on Afghanistan's traditional architectural style and history.¹

The studies on architectural styles of Kabul city were conducted mostly by local and foreign researchers who focused on the traditional architectural styles, and there is not enough specific study on how the civilizations affected the architectural styles in Kabul city. Based on the inadequacy of scientific studies on architecture styles in Kabul city, there is not any comprehensive study regarding the architectural monuments to show the specification of architecture style and history of those monuments, therefore, some architects believe that most of these monuments have been designed by Islamic and western architectural style, however, it is necessary to differentiate the Islamic style borrowing different Islamic civilizations and western architectural style in different time periods. Moreover, Kabul city reflects several types of architectural styles, most of which were destroyed due to unsuitable conditions, and according to limited related studies, these styles e.g., Buddhist, Greek, and some ancient Islamic are not paid attention in during the designing of new buildings in Kabul city. In 2002, the Afghanistan Government by the cooperation of UNESCO and Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) undertook a range of historical buildings conservation and restoration efforts in Kabul city e.g. Bagh – e – Babur, Timur Shah Mausoleum, Id Gah Mosque, Chilsotoon palace, etc. (AKDN, 2012). Considering the limited study on architecture of Afghanistan, architects and students of architectural education are not fully familiarized with pattern and styles of architecture in Afghanistan, therefore these are not well reflected in contemporary designs and urban planning as stated by scholars (Najimi, 2012, 2016).

The main aims of this study are to review the evolution of architectural styles in Afghanistan specifically in Kabul city during different historical periods by considering the social, environmental, and political conditions. And, by this means it is aimed to evaluate the impact of civilizations on the architectural designs in Afghanistan. It is expected that the findings of this study would contribute to the understanding of various architectural styles existed in Kabul city, and trace their reflections on architectural monuments of this city.

2. Methodology

This study is carried out mostly by reviewing the previous literature to highlight the architectural styles developed over the periods in Kabul city and the impact of cultural influences on them. As a case from each historical period, the monuments according to their historical importance, architecture style, and construction method are evaluated. As a mapping technique, Arc GIS 10.5 is used to visualize the distribution of architectural monuments within Kabul city. The working procedure is shown in a flow chart (Figure 2).

¹ Afghanistan's traditional architecture (Bechhoefer, 1989; Dupree, 1973; Hallet & Samizay, 1980), Herati traditional housing (Samizay, 1974), Traditional housing complex in Kabul Old city (Bechhoefer, 1975), Traditional Afghan settlements (Watts, 1981), Indigenous architecture of Afghanistan (Szabo & Barfield, 1991), Residential prototypes in Kabul city and urban growth (Samizay, 1974), Urban and rural dwelling environments in Kabul city (Kazimee, 1977), Vernacular architecture in Afghanistan (Najimi, 2016), European and Afghanistan Architecture Adaptations (Dupree, 1977), Cultural heritage and architecture of Afghanistan (Dupree, 2002), Historical overview of the Islamic heritage in Afghanistan (Aalund, 2003), National identity of Afghanistan architecture (Issa, 2006), Architectural heritage conservation in Afghanistan (Najimi, 2011), Architectural heritage saving in Kabul (Kazimee & Najimi, 2017).

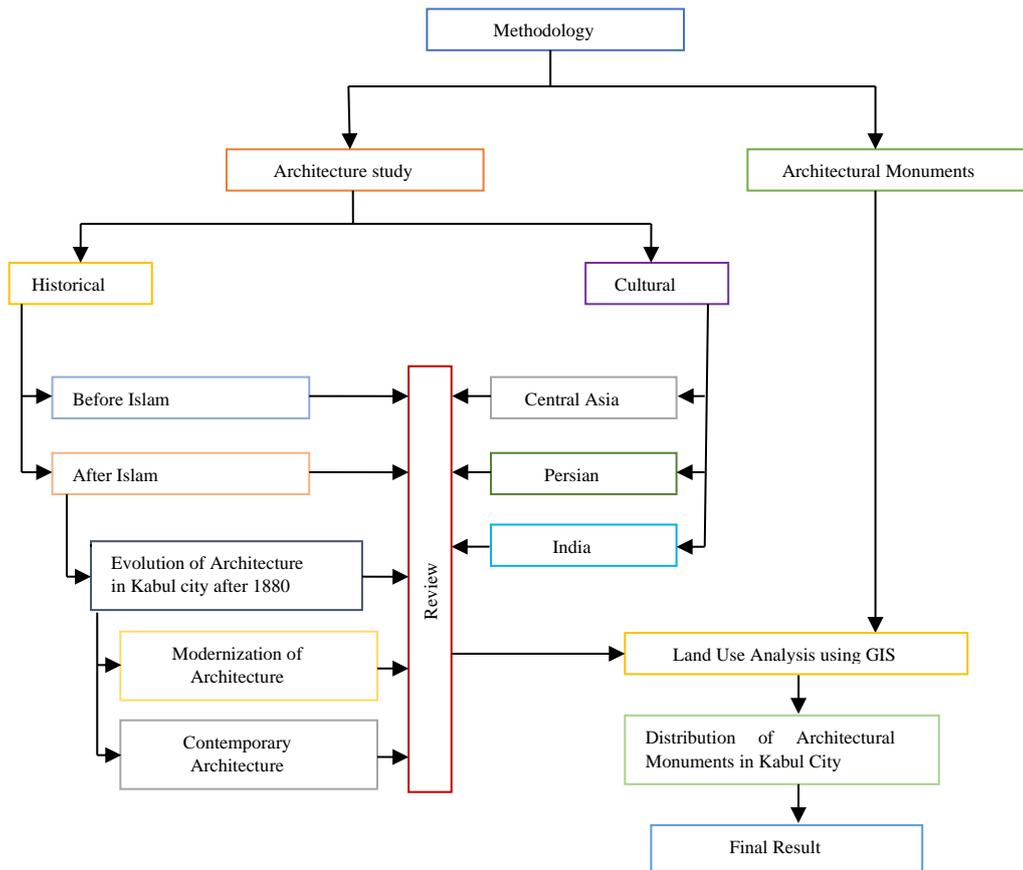


Figure 2 Methodology flow chart

3. Architectural history of Kabul city

The history of Kabul city is related to ancient times. In the sacred book of Hindus’ Rig-Veda, 1500 BC, Kabuha is stated as representing current Kabul River (Anwar, 2017). Moreover, Kabul, during the 675 AD had been an important strategic commercial and visiting center (Kazimee & Najimi, 2017). Ptolemy in the middle of the second century has mentioned the Kabul city by the name of 'Kabura' and its residence as 'Kabulitae' (Issa & Kohistani, 2007; Kohzad, 1968). Therefore, Kabul city as the capital of Afghanistan has its own identity and history. As the location of Kabul city on ancient trade routes connecting India and China to the Persian trade routes and beyond to the West proves the opportunity of developing and represents many historical aspects which are considered as inherently important factors to its development (Kazimee & Najimi, 2017). The buildings in Kabul city are mostly designed following the traditional architecture representing the various needs of social and cultural requirements and the housing prototype is introverted courtyard house that perfectly matches with cultural requirements of Afghanistan lifestyle (Kazimee, 2006; Kazimee & Najimi, 2017). In addition to traditional architecture of Kabul city, the architectural style in Kabul city can be divided into two sections based on civilizations’ influences: before and after emerging Islamic religion. It is worth mentioning that the contemporary Afghanistan was also part of these civilizations and represented important role in development of these civilizations.

3.1. Before Islam

Before Islam, Kabul city was situated in the southeast of present town as it has been mentioned in the itinerary of Chinese traveler, Hsuan Tsang. Architectural monuments belonging to that time are two columns (manars) and a “stupa” that are thought to be dated to the epoch of the Kushan

empire (first to third centuries A.D.), although it has been suggested that they were built in the time of Asoka (Frye, 1946). Kabul city, during the reign of Hephthalites in 5th century, became a stronghold in the history of Afghanistan, and as an administrative capital in a part of Hephthalids kingdom, it was the most prestigious economic and religious center (Paiman, 2015).

According to archaeological excavations, original location of Kabul city is in Chakari Hill located in the southeast of the present city, where Buddhist temples, monasteries and irrigation canals are found (Kazimee & Najimi, 2017). Based on the mountains around Kabul city, which are providing excellent defensive barriers and climate for the city, it has been an urban site since the time of Alexander the Great (Bechhoefer, 1989). Unfortunately, during the several wars and non-stable conditions in Afghanistan, many architectural monuments belonging to ancient times were destroyed or have not been discovered yet. As stated, ancient architectural history of Afghanistan has not been familiarized certainly, that by the future archeological excavations, these uncovered monuments will be revealed (Frye, 1946). Considering the historical importance and remains of civilizations in this territory, some of the architectural monuments characterized by pre-Islamic civilizations between the 1st to 6th centuries are described as bellow:

Chakari Minarets

Minar-i Chakari, as stated by many scholars the most historical monuments of Buddhist remain, is located about 16km southeast of Kabul city with the history belonging to the 1st century and symbolized 700 years of Hinayana Buddhism in this region. It is believed that the masonry in the diaper style (in which thin and flat stones are placed between large stone blocks) is suggesting that monument was built in the Kushan Age. Minaret is composed of three major parts: the rectangular pedestal, the cylindrical column with base, shaft and capital, and an uppermost crowning of unknown shape. Total height, measured at the central axis, showed slightly more than 27 meters which can be fixed the total height at 28.6m. Also, the column base of the Minars was related to Attic (classical Greek) order, very familiar to the Graeco-Bactrian (ancestors of the Indo-Greek Kingdom) and Gandharan art and architecture (a style of Buddhist visual art developed in Pakistan and Afghanistan between 1st and 7th century), as also can be seen in Ai Khanum and Surkh Kotal. The building material was hewn stones or, to be more precise, quartz and green schist. The pillar was heavily damaged during the Afghanistan Civil Wars and almost destroyed (Dorn'eich, 1999). During the several decades of civil war in the country and no required attention from conservation perspective, the minaret was completely destroyed, only some marks on the site remain (Figure 3).

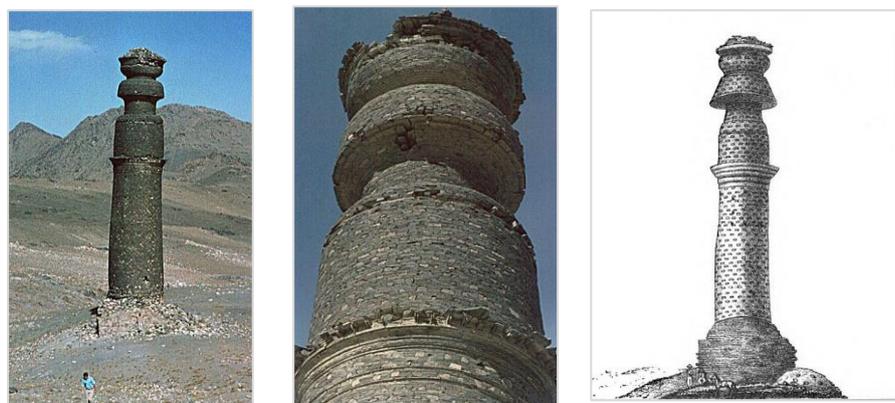


Figure 3 Minaret of Chakari (Buddhist pillar) in Kabul city (Dorn'eich, 1999).

Bala Hissar

Bala Hissar (known as “High Fort”) was the seat of rulers and played an essential role in states development in Afghanistan for many centuries. It is both palatial and military type. Bala Hissar is located in the south of the old city of Kabul and its history is estimated around the 5th century AD in Hephthalites times. Common materials used in construction of Bala Hissar are stone, mud walls, ornamental tiles, and wood. Bala Hissar was designed in two distinct facilities; the lower fort contained stables, barracks and three royal palaces; the upper fort was housing the armory and the dungeon of Kabul or jail by ancient Buddhist architecture style (Woodburn, 2009). However, the Afghanistan ancient traditional architecture as been represented in the type of kalas include such familiar elements as inward-looking layouts, massive mud walls, single entry doors, watchtowers, carved and pressed stucco, decorative brick masonry. Bala Hissar was used as state development center for many kingdoms in Afghanistan, however the fort was destroyed during the Afghan – British war. Consequently, current presidential palace (Arg) in the center of Kabul city has been substituted. Currently it is used for military purposes that its architectural monuments were completely destroyed, however, the destroyed marks of surrounding walls are still remained (Figure 4). The restoration work of ancient fortress Bala Hissar has started by Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) which is implementing the project and plans to complete it by 2022 (AKDN, 2020).



Figure 4 photograph showing Bala Hissar fort view in kabul city (Woodburn, 2009).

Tepe Narenj

According to the data published by the Worlds Monuments Fund, “Tepe Narenj is a Buddhist monastery that was founded in the fifth or sixth centuries over the Zanburak Mountains south of Kabul city”. In the excavations by the Afghanistan Institute of Archeology under the direction of Zafar Paiman since 2004, a series of artificial terraces including the stupas were brought to attention of the archeological evidence of Buddhist religious concepts and rituals. As stated by the Worlds Monuments Fund, the site is composed of one large and five small stupas, cells for individual meditation, and five chapels adorned with miniature stupas, statues of the Buddha, and standing Boddhisatva figures (WMF, 2008). It is thought, the iconography of these statues attests the practice of Tantric Buddhism in the area, based on a relevant report, it was destroyed in the ninth century by Muslim armies (WMF, 2008). The site provides valuable evidence for the expansion of Buddhism in the region and preserves several examples of sculpture made in the unusual method of clay overlaid with fabric and covered with stucco (Figure 5).

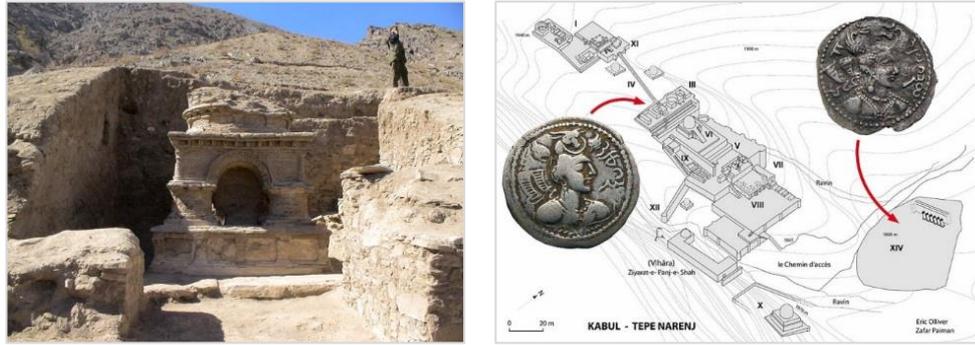


Figure 5 Illustrations showing Buddhist architectural monuments (WMF, 2008).

3.2. After Islam

Kabul was invaded several times by Arabs which took several decades to capture Kabul, therefore Kabul city experienced destruction due to war and finally accepted Islam as their new religion in 698 A.D. Afterwards, Islam introduced new socio-cultural values and administration techniques (Kazimee & Najimi, 2017). The conquest of Kabul city, completely was realized in 870 A.D by Yakub bin Layth and Islam culture dominated afterwards (Anwar, 2017; Frye, 1946).

Kabul due to its geographical location and connectivity between India, Central Asia, and China has an important statue for regional civilizations. Therefore, since ancient times it has been a site of attraction to settle (Frye, 1946). Islamic architectural history in Afghanistan represents several architecture styles related to Islamic civilizations such as dynasties of the Samanids (9th c. AD), Ghaznavids (10-12th), Timurids (15th), Moghuls (16-17th) and etc. (Dupree, 1977). In the 16th century, Zahiruddin Mohammad Babur, the king of Mughal empire who was very much attracted to Kabul city decided to make it the capital, (Bechhoefer, 1989) and also Babur embellished Kabul with seven big gardens as Bagh-e Shahr-ara, Char Bagh, Bagh-e Jelaw-Khana, Orta Bagh, Bagh-e Soorat-Khana, Bagh-e Mahtab and Bagh-e AhooKhana, and three more small gardens around (Issa & Kohistani, 2007; Kazimee & Najimi, 2017; Kohzad, 2005). Some of these famous monuments of Islamic civilization in the city are described below:

Bagh – e – Babur (Babur’s Garden)

Bagh-e Babur was founded by Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur, founder of Mughal dynasty in Kabul city in the early sixteenth century on the hillside of Sher Darwaza mountains, southwest of the old city of Kabul. The garden is 11.5 ha large and arranged in 15 terraces along a central axis in east west direction. It is related to Islamic gardens category which follows particular principles in layout and design, function and meaning (Jodidio, 2017). The layout of the garden includes running water, flowers and fruit trees and architectural monuments such as Caravanserai complex, Swimming pool, Garden pavilion, Shah Jahan Mosque, Babur’s tomb, Perimeter wall, Queen’s Palace which are representing central Asia and Mughal Islamic architecture style (UNESCO, 2009). Also, the intricate wooden carving, carved and pressed stucco, decorative brick or stone masonry and surrounded massive mud walls of complex are reflections of the Afghanistan traditional architecture. Most parts of the garden and associated architectural monuments had been destroyed during the civil wars in the country, after the establishment of new government in 2001, it was restored. Currently it is used as a recreational area for public visitors (Figure 6).



Figure 6 Baghe Babur garden and Babur tomb views (Jodidio, 2017).

Timur Shah Mausoleum

Timur Shah was the first Afghanistan king to make Kabul the capital of a unified kingdom. He died in 1793s, but his mausoleum was built 23 years before his death in central Kabul. Timur Shah's Mausoleum is composed of an octagonal structure with two intersecting cross-axes organized on six levels. Above a crypt in which the grave stands is a square central space surrounded by an octagonal structure, with four double-height iwans on the main elevations. There are sixteen brick-vaulted spaces of varied size on the first floor, encircling the central space, with a flat roof above, surrounding the sixteen-sided drum under the domes. Its features generally follow the central Asian tradition with decorative brick masonries and colorless appearance which could be identified with the local traditional architectural forms. The Mausoleum has an outer dome constructed on a high drum above a ribbed inner dome (Jodidio, 2011).

The current view illustrated in Figure 7 is the restored form which had been damaged during the Afghanistan civil wars for the last several decades. The tomb itself is situated within a garden in the center of Kabul city which is open for public visitors.



Figure 7 Timur Shah Mausoleum exterior and interior views (Jodidio, 2011).

Eid Gah Mosque

Eid Gah is an open ground place where Muslims gather on the two Muslim festivals, such as Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha to offer prayers in the form of congregation. This mosque is considered to be the second largest mosque in Kabul where more than one million people could be conveniently accommodated for the Eid congregations at any one time. Mosque was built sometimes in the 16th century, but the exact year of construction is not known, but when the Mughal empire Babar invaded India and ordered that mosque to be built to propagate Islam in this part of the region

(AKTC, 2016). Babar ordered his men to bring valuable stones from Punjab, Sindh and the adjoining areas and then called the Persian designers to draw plans to build a beautiful place where people would love to offer prayers on the occasion of the two Muslim festivals (Masnonahmed, 2014). In the general sense, decorative brick and stone masonry, multi-functional open space and continuous porch in front of the mosque hall, are in line with the Afghanistan traditional architectural forms.

Some parts of the mosque had been destroyed during the civil wars; it was reconstructed in its preliminary form. In 2018, it was completely reconstructed based on its real form (Figure 8).



Figure 8 Current views of Id Gag Mosque after restoration (shafaqna, 2019).

After Babur's death, Kabul lost its value as a capital. In 1737, Nader Shah Afshar, the Iranian king invaded Kabul and this resulted with destructions of lots of buildings and gardens. (Kazimee & Najimi, 2017). After then in 1747, the Afghanistan king Ahmad Shah Durrani established current Afghanistan and ruled Kabul as a major city but selected Kandahar city as his capital to easily administrate Khurasan. After his death in 1773, his son Timur-Shah relocated the capital from Kandahar to Kabul (Farhang, 1993; Kazimee & Najimi, 2017). Since then Kabul has been preserving its position as the capital and strategic city of Afghanistan (Issa & Kohistani, 2007). With the establishment of current Afghanistan by Ahmad Shah Durrani according to political unrest and an innate dislike of architectural designs, large-scale monumental buildings and projects were ceased in Afghanistan, therefore both public and domestic architecture exhibited the same forms for rich and poor peoples (Dupree, 1977). Massive unadorned mud-plastered walls pierced by single doorways presented blank faces to the outsider, in the countryside and in the cities. It is stated that this architecture reflected an inward-looking, self-protecting, family/tribal society (Dupree, 1977). Existing architectural condition continued up to 1880s, King Amir Abdurrahman Khan was the first person to restart construction activities in its modern form and introduced the foreign western architectural styles in Afghanistan (Issa & Kohistani, 2007). Also, during 1839–1842, due to the invasion of British army, Kabul suffered a great deal of devastation that much of its fine architecture and urban fabric were destroyed. (Kazimee & Najimi, 2017).

4. Evolution of architecture in Kabul city after 1880

Another chapter in the evolution of architecture in Kabul city opens up with Amir Abdurrahman Khan, who took the power in 1880 and his kingdom lasted between 1880 and 1901. During his kingship, he built his own palace – Bagh-e-Bala Palace (Upper Garden Palace) – in Mughal and European styles of architecture to represent his reign. Afterwards, he built another palace the so called 'Arg' with Indian British architecture style in the middle of the city, where he moved his state (Dupree, 1977; Issa, 2006; Issa & Kohistani, 2007). This was the first significant deviation from the Afghanistan traditional and Islamic architecture to western architectural style. With the beginning of Amir Abdur Rahman Khan kingship, design strategy on building new architecture was changed

and architectural design was considered as an aesthetic endeavor both in the palaces stood behind high-walls in the park-like landscaped gardens. The modernization efforts also included the search in durability and a new practice of protection urged for baked-brick and stone-cutting. This also implied a shift from using sun-dried brick in one-façade articulations of Afghanistan traditional architecture (Dupree, 1977). The king Amir Abdur Rahman Khan was interested to design all his palaces with Central Asian Islamic architecture. The most consistently employed plan was a square, free-standing, one-story structure on a plinth, consisting of a central, high-domed octagonal hall with square rooms on each corner connected by colonnaded verandahs (Dupree, 1977). The size of the city in the 19th century was the same and the physical structure of the city introduced most of the elements of a traditional Islamic city such as the fortification walls with controlled gates and commercial bazaars and series (Kazimee & Najimi, 2017). During Amir Abdur Rahman Khan Kingship, the new city of Kabul expanded, and the king built opulent palaces for himself as Arg (the citadel), Baghi-Bala and Chilsotoon palaces, as well as the Arg Bazaar, and several other lavish buildings. (Kazimee & Najimi, 2017). Amir Abdur Rahman Khan was influenced by Central Asian architectural style, and consequently he had ornate palaces built inside spacious gardens, with elaborate architectural and landscape schemes to proclaim his royal position.

King Habibullah Khan (1901-1919) following his father's architectural patronage, also built several palaces and public buildings and implemented electricity and piped water supply to the city. He ordered the Dilkusha palace designed by English architect, expanded the Eidgah mosque and the Habibia College and expanded the palace of Arg (Dupree, 1977; Kazimee & Najimi, 2017). Some of well-known architectural monuments built after 1880s is described below:

Chilsotoon palace

Chilsotoon Palace is located on the foothills of the Sher Darwaza Mountain. Based on the historic documents, this area is believed to be an outpost of Mughal troops as early as the sixteenth century (Jodidio, 2017). During Zaman Shah Kingship in 1796, the original building was destroyed and was rebuilt during the reign of king Abdur Rahman Khan (1880-1901), (N. H. Dupree, 1977; KM, 2020). The palace is also known as the Jahan Nama and Hendaky palaces. Habibullah Khan and then Zahir Khan, the kings of Afghanistan, expanded the palace and built it in four floors (Jodidio, 2017). Chilsotoon (Forty Pillars) Palace is composed of two indoor and outdoor gardens of which outdoor garden area reaches 30 hectares. Early twentieth-century photographs of the pavilion reveal an elongated rectilinear building (with one circular end) surrounded by a deep arched veranda with forty columns that are called chihil-sitooon built above a series of terraced platforms with views onto the Chardeh plain. With newly built royal residences (Arg) at the center of the city, the pavilion remained unoccupied and occasionally served as a state guesthouse. The palace exposed variety of materials such as marble, clay, cement and iron. Most of Kabul city, especially Darulaman Palace as the important architectural monument is viewed from the terrace of this palace, (Figure 9). During several wars in Afghanistan, the garden was destroyed many times and now completely has been restored by Aga Khan Trust for Culture program in 2015, and the rehabilitated Chihilsitooon Garden provides users with high-quality landscapes and building spaces capable of containing and promoting the rich and diverse forms of social, cultural and economic expression manifested in Afghanistan (KM, 2020). In architecture of this palace the separated indoor and outdoor gardens, continuous veranda around the building and elongated rectilinear plane are mere illustrations of the Afghanistan tradition (Kala) architectural style.



Figure 9 Different views of Chihilsitoun Garden and Palace (Jodidio, 2017).

Bagh-e-Bala Palace

The palace has been built on the top of a hill over the north of Kabul city during Amir Abdul Rahman Khan Kingdom (1880–1901) with Mughal and Europe style of architecture (Issa & Kohistani, 2007). Bagh-e-Bala Palace, because of its dazzling view and location, could be seen from far away, surrounded by vineyard and tall pine trees. Also, the terrace provides a spectacular view of the Kabul Valley (Qayomi, 2015). The stucco and mirror-studded decoration inside the palace, decorative elements of the roof edges and towers like “kala watchtower” represent the uniqueness of the Afghanistan traditions in palace. Currently, it has become the most attractive restaurant in Kabul city (Issa, 2006), (Figure 10).



Figure 10 Bagh e Bala Palace and surrounded natural views (Mudl, 2019a).

4.1. Modernization of Architecture

The first steps of architectural modernization in Afghanistan started in the early 20th century (Issa & Kohistani, 2007). Respectively, the modernization of Kabul city belongs to Habibullah's son King Amanullah Khan between 1919 and 1929. Based on King Amanullah's ideas on modernity, a comprehensive plan was developed by French and German architects for the new city of Kabul (Kazimee & Najimi, 2017). Amanullah Khan was influenced by European architectural style especially from Berlin and Paris during his visits to Europe. Thus, as soon as he returned to Kabul, he developed the idea to have a capital as modern as European cities. Therefore, he built Darulaman Palace and surrounding areas in European architectural style designed by European architects and craftsmen (Issa & Kohistani, 2007). Famous modern architecture monuments of Kabul city are reflecting the admixture of Islamic and western culture. Modernity for Amanullah Khan meant importing architectural styles from foreign countries, especially western oriented styles (Issa, 2006). Therefore, for the first time, significant impacts of western architectural style on

Afghanistan architecture was in the reign of King Amanullah Khan in 1920s, even, his father also had introduced some western architectural forms (Bechhoefer, 1977).

Shah-Do Shamshira Mosque

The Shah-Do Shamshira mosque taken from Persian language means "Mosque of the King of Two Swords", is located in downtown Kabul along the edge of the Kabul River (Knobloch, 2002). It was built in the 1920s by King Amanullah Khan, who attempted to introduce several modern reforms to Afghanistan. This mosque was designed in western style of baroque, in an unusual way for a designing mosque. The design features of this mosque are mostly expressed in its multiple levels and facades introducing the Italian baroque style in Kabul city, as if it looks like it would be more at home in Versailles or Vienna (AHA, 2011). The intricate wooden carving represents the Afghanistan tradition inside the mosque, (Figure 11).



Figure 11 Shah-Do Shamshira Mosque views in Kabul city (AHA, 2011).

Darul Aman Palace

Darul Aman Palace is located at six kilometers away from the city center on a hill. King Amanullah Khan imagined himself ruling his nation from Darulaman Palace and had assigned European engineers, French architects and craftsmen to build and design a palace to reflect western architectural style in the Kabul city (Issa, 2006). It is also known as the dwelling-place of peace. The site was chosen on a hill enabled the King to survey his citizens and a small railway was designed to connect to the city. The palace has been designed in three storeys with 150 small and large rooms, a library and 32 toilets. Its walls and foundations are made of clay, cement, bricks and iron, with old and ancient style (Faisal, 2014; Issa & Kohistani, 2007; KM, 2020), (Figure 12). It is actually designed to house the first parliament of Afghanistan; however it could not be realized since the reform and modernization ideals of the King met with strong resistance from the traditional powers and he had to exile to Italy (Issa, 2006).



Figure 12 Photograph illustrating the front view of Darul Aman Palace (Issa, 2006).

Since 1930s, the western architecture has become a common approach of designing domestic architecture in Kabul city (N. H. Dupree, 2002). But unfortunately, the modernization ideal in the late of the 19th century resulted to marginalization of the historical urban form and local architecture styles in the country (Kazimee & Najimi, 2017).

During the reign of King Nadir Shah (1929-33) and then his son King Zahir Shah (1933-73), the planned development of the capital Kabul continued up to the Soviet occupation (Issa, 2006). In 1962s, based on national economic development, a team of the Soviet Union planners were invited for town construction and preparation of a new 25-year master plan for the city (Kazimee & Najimi, 2017). In 1963s, Kabul city attracted the interest of the Western and the Eastern countries, and they started intensive investment in Afghanistan. Kabul city as a capital was the focal point of this activity in that time. Kabul was expanded in terms of its urban areas like Kart-e Seh, Kart-e Char, Kart-e Naw, Kart-e Mamoorin, Karte Parwan, etc. kart is a French word meaning "quarter, neighborhood".

Significant numbers of Afghanistan students were sent to USSR for education in 1950s and 1970s. When they returned, modern architecture style became a favorite housing style for them (Issa & Kohistani, 2007). All of the aforementioned aspects were the steps of architectural transformation to modernization which has represented new culture in Kabul city.

4.2. The reconstruction of the capital

25 years of war that firstly imposed by Soviet Union in 1978s and then civil wars till 2001 resulted in utter destabilization of the country and destroyed lots of buildings and cities (Kazimee & Najimi, 2017). After the fall of Taliban in 2001 and establishment of the new government, the reconstruction of the capital drew the attention of both the government and international donors (Issa & Kohistani, 2007). In 2002, rehabilitation and conservation program were formulated which encompassed the resettlement process of residents and reconstructed/ or repaired the war damaged properties. Most of these processes were handled by the US, Canadian, UK governments and the World Bank through the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) foundation and its Historic Cities Program (HCP). Since 2002 in close collaboration with community leaders, municipal representatives and the Ministry of Urban Development played an important role in the urban recovery of the Old City of Kabul as well as providing support for the conservation and restoration of historic properties across the country (Kazimee & Najimi, 2017).

Almost four decades of war in the country have effected on the inter-professional relationship in research, teaching and application of traditional architectural concepts, especially in current architectural designs for newer developments (Najimi, 2016). Currently, based on materialistic culture, the method of vernacular architecture has been destroyed and ignored deliberately by builders, investors, and architects (Zare & Kazemian, 2014). Contemporary diversity of architectural style in Kabul city which is a contrast between old and new styles, define the regional identities of Afghanistan and at the same time seeking to catch up and preserving modernity and Afghanistan traditional life (Issa & Kohistani, 2007). Modern Kabul city with a variety of urban identities is reflecting different social and political aspects of development that its architecture style is mostly characterized by the Islamic and the Western styles (Dupree, 2002). In current Kabul city, the use of glass facades in construction of commercial and private buildings' elevation represent a new modernity (Issa & Kohistani, 2007). Commercial and private buildings are designed as glass palaces representing a new modernity which are completely different from the past. The city seems to be an open gate for the new influences due to modern ideas and developments. Some examples of commercial buildings in modern Western style are Kabul City Centre, Majid Mall, Park Mall,

Gulbahar Center representing a typical western style of the mall with several floors (Figure 13). In the underground, a "food court" is established which is similar to many malls in Europe.



Figure 13 Contemporary designed commercial buildings in Kabul city, a) City center, b) Majid Mall in Kabul city

Also, recently most government buildings were designed with mixed western and Islamic architectural style in Kabul city. The most important buildings are: New parliament building, Ministry of National Defense, Darulaman Administrative Complex (not completed), etc. that are described below:

New Parliament Building

The parliament building has the elements of Mughal modern Islamic architecture having the Asia's largest dome with copper as its key feature, and marble work. The building has two session halls; one for the Wolesi Jirga, the House of the Representatives of the People, with a capacity for 294 seats and with the other containing 190 seats for the House of the elders, Meshrano Jirga (AAN, 2020). Space for the eventuality of an increase in the houses' membership is considered in the both session halls. Additionally, the building comprises five halls for parliamentary commission sessions, conference, press, computer and dining rooms, a library and a mosque able to accommodate 400 worshippers at the same time (AAN, 2020), (Figure 14). The garden has a pool element and rectangle parcels with terraced organization as a reflection of the Islamic garden history starting with Babur's gardens. It is not a coincident that the Indian architecture has its effects in the exterior articulation because Indian government has built the parliament building as part of its contribution in rebuilding of Afghanistan. The wooden and stucco carving, watchtowers and a large porch in front of the building represent the local traditional architectural forms.

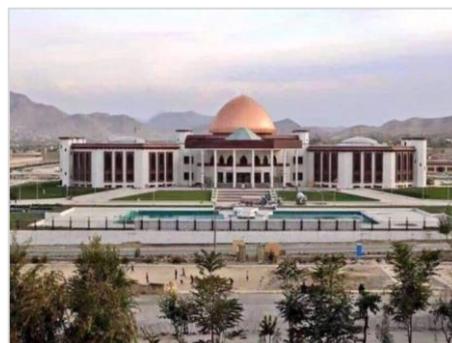


Figure 14 New parliament building designed with mixed western and Islamic architectural styles in Kabul city (AAN, 2020).

Ministry of National Defense

The building was designed by the architecture students of Kabul Polytechnic University and Kabul University based on a competition held amongst them. The architectural style of the building was inspired by the Pentagon building and Islamic architecture style (Scheuer, 2015). Furthermore, the massive design and elements in the corners like kala watchtowers and decorative wall carves are following the Afghanistan traditional architectural elements. The headquarter itself has five above-ground floors and a two-story basement, providing workspace for about 2,200 personnel (SIGAR, 2016), (Figure 15).



Figure 15 Photograph illustrating the front view Ministry of national defense designed with mixed western and Islamic architectural styles in Kabul city (Scheuer, 2015).

The construction work of Darulaman Administrative Complex started in 2018 and will be completed and inaugurated within the three years. The complex in a total area of 100 hectares with 31 administrative buildings, 18 ministries, 10 independent offices and 3 state-owned banks are being built in a fundamental and modern way (MUDL, 2019b), (Figure 16). Darulaman Administrative Complex is inspired by the Afghanistan modern or new Islamic architectural patterns as well as classical inspiration sources found during the reign of Timurid, Ghaznavid, Ghurid and Khurasani dynasties (Tolo, 2019).



Figure 16 Photos illustrate some 3d models of Darulaman Administrative Complex (Tolo, 2019)

5. Distribution of Architectural Monuments in Kabul City

Throughout the history of the human life, architecture as a mother of all arts, has provided shrines for religion, homes for the living, and monuments for the dead and heritage of civilizations, architecture is concerned with finding the pattern of building and communications which make the community function, and, at the same time, give it meaning (Hanson, 2001).

In Kabul city, each period of time from ancient times of Buddhist to Islamic or contemporary age show that every civilization made emphasis on their own culture in the country, and every new

occupying power tried to remove the heritage of its predecessors (Issa, 2006; Knobloch, 2002). Therefore, in Kabul city, several types of architectural monuments can be found which belong to different periods of history and identified a specific civilization’s architectural style. As illustrated in (Figure 17), most of architecture monuments are distributed in Central parts of Kabul city such as Kabul old city in north of the Kabul river. The reason behind this configuration is its proximity to Kabul River and old city. From environmental concerns, this area has a pleasant climate and comparatively flat area for development. From socio-political concerns it is the social center of the city and the presence of presidential palace (Arg) after the destruction of Bala Hissar adds to its determination as the seat of the power. After the destruction of Bala Hissar, the Arg palace became the center of development of the Kabul city and most monuments and urban areas were developed around (Figure 17).

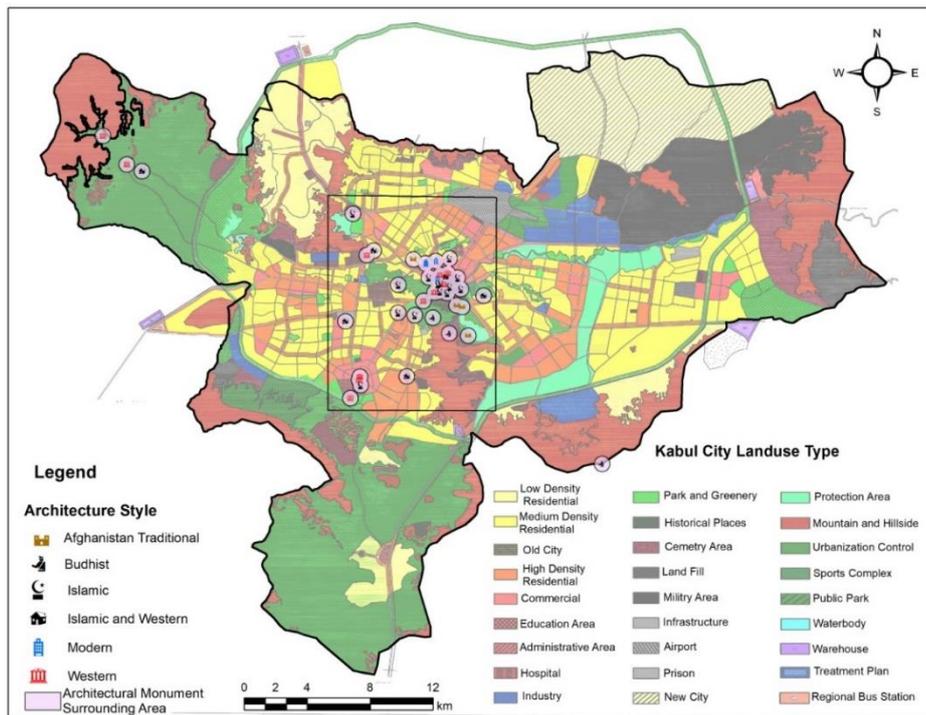


Figure 17 Distribution of historical monuments in Kabul city Modified from (KM, 2020).

The large numbers of architectural monuments in central parts of Kabul city is associated with government buildings and presidential palaces for having close relations between them, such as Dilkusha Palace, Kuti Baghcha, Arg palace, National Archive and etc. The accessibility to these monuments is restricted to public visitors. The rest of the historical monuments in Kabul city including mosques, tombs, gardens, and some non-governmental palaces are located around the presidential areas which are open to public visitors. The reasons behind the buildings located outside the central parts are mainly environmental aspects. Presently, most of the commercial buildings have been built in the center of Kabul city and surrounding areas are coined with western architectural style. According to the evaluation of architectural monuments, it is found out that most of the monuments in the Kabul city are followed by Afghanistan traditional, Islamic, western architecture and mix of these styles shown in (Figure 18).

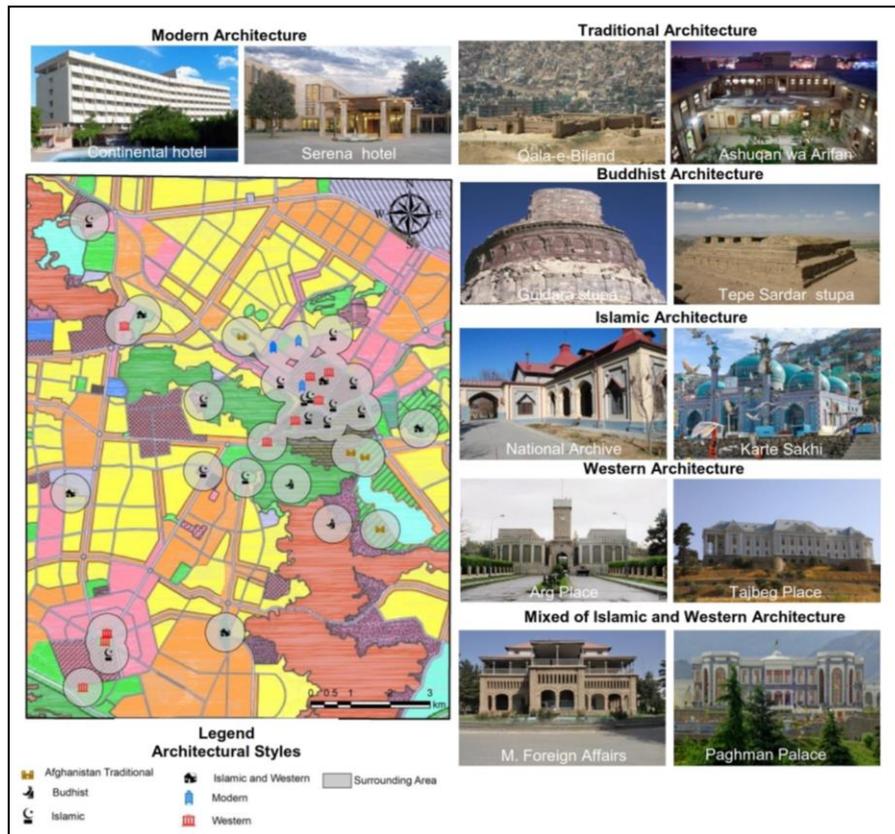


Figure 18 Spatial distribution of architectural monuments and surroundings areas in central part of Kabul city modified (KM, 2020).

6. Discussion

Kabul city as a capital and historic city in the country reflects the architectural styles of different civilizations in this territory. The mostly known types of architectural styles in Kabul city date after the emergence of Islamic period which encompass several other types of Islamic and western architectural styles also. In addition to traditional architecture, Islamic architectural style in the city characterized by Central Asian, Persian, Indian that each of them is also subdivided into other styles (Samanids, Ghaznavids, Timurids, Moghuls, Ghurid, Khurasani and etc.), while western architectural style in Kabul city has Indian–British and European influences. Most of these architectural reflections can be seen in palaces, tombs, mosques, and governmental buildings design. Traditional architectural elements or forms (Kala) basically have not been used/ or partially used as mixed with other styles for palaces and big projects designs, whereas it is often used in typical and residential housing designs. Kala as a type of buildings complex was developed during the Iron Age and (also alternative term for village) has a common place for family living, worship or mosque, sheltering strangers, and stocking etc. (Najimi, 2016; Szabo & Barfield, 1991). During the several decades of war and non-stable conditions in country the ancient traditional type of housing in Kabul city as Kala have been mostly diminished. However it can be stated that inward-looking layout, self-protection as in family design, and division between private and public spaces in Kala are still represented in Afghanistan and Islamic culture (Issa, 2006). Considering the general concept of Kala in Afghanistan, most architectural forms of Kala contain rectangular shape surrounded by massive mud walls with a single entrance door and has several watchtowers in corner and mid parts to protect habitants from outside attacks. The watchtowers are also used as storage for farm products. Basically, interior space of Kala is subdivided by thinner mud walls to seclude public and private spaces; public space includes praying space, shared guestrooms, and some other public areas while

private spaces encompass several multi-single interior courtyards. Each courtyard house is a representation of Afghanistan traditional culture and living style. Houses in each courtyard are composed of two or three floors containing living rooms, kitchens, toilet, storage room, stable, and guestroom. Usually two or three families can live within a courtyard (Kazimee, 1977; Szabo & Barfield, 1991), (Figure 19). Furthermore, fundamental types of courtyard houses in Kabul city may be termed as Kala so that some scientists believe courtyard houses are the upgraded version of Kala courtyards in single form.

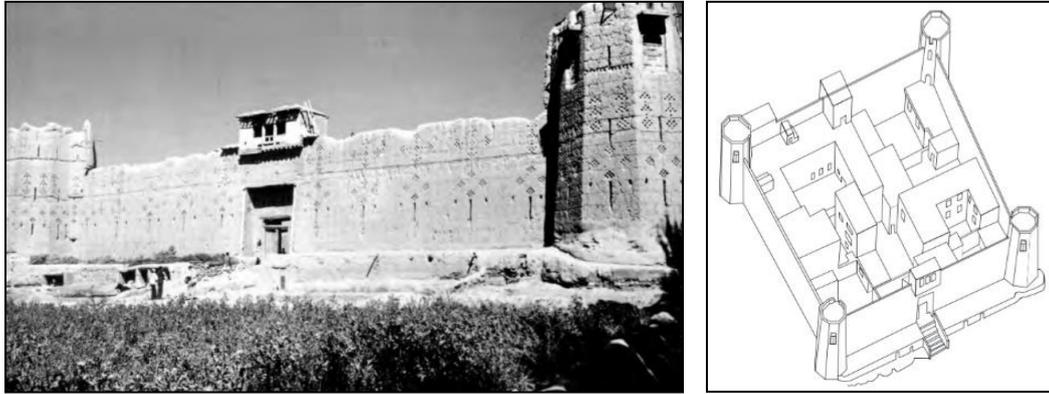


Figure 19 Photograph showing the traditional rural house or Kala view taken from (Szabo & Barfield, 1991).

As a reflection of kalas architecture in public buildings or monuments, Bala Hissar fully follows the Afghanistan traditional architectural form and elements such as inward-looking, surrounded massive mud walls, single entry door, watchtowers, carved and pressed stucco, decorative brick masonry. It may be stated that there is not any architectural monument in Kabul city which completely identifies with Afghanistan traditional architecture more than Bala Hissar. Most of the monuments get into dialogue with traditional forms in an eclectic manner of expressing Islamic or western style architecture elements at the same time. However, in all of mentioned monuments in this study, the intricate wooden carving, carved and pressed stucco, decorative brick and stone masonry, separated indoor and outdoor spaces, veranda, elongated rectilinear building plan, decorative towers, watchtowers, massive elements and design forms, decorative carved, pressed massive walls may well be defined as the vocabulary of the traditional architecture of Afghanistan, (Table 1).

Table 1 Summary of the evaluated architectural monuments in Kabul city

Name	Building Type	Construction date	Architecture Style	Components	Material
Chakari Minarets	Monument	1st century	Buddhist style	Rectangular pedestal, cylindrical column with base, shaft and capital, an uppermost crowning of, unknown shape.	Rock, quartz and green schist
Bala Hissar / Kala and Places	Governmental	5th century	Hepthalites style	Stables, barracks, three royal palaces, armory and dungeon	stone, mud walls, ornamental tiles, and wood
Tepe Narenj / Stupa	Religious	5th or 6th centuries	Buddhist style	One large stupa, five small stupas, cells for individual meditation, five chapels, statues of the Buddha, and standing Boddhisatva figures	unusual method of clay overlaid with fabric and covered with stucco
Babur's Garden	Governmental	16th century	Islamic style	Running water, flowers and fruit trees, caravanserai complex, swimming pool, garden pavilion, shah jahan mosque, babur's tomb, perimeter wall and queen's palace.	Stone, marble and brick masonry
Timur Shah Mausoleum	Tomb	1770	Islamic style	Octagonal structure, four double-height iwans on the main elevations. sixteen brick-vaulted spaces of varied size.	Brick masonry and wood
Id Gah Mosque	Religious	16th century & 1893	Islamic style	Four minarets at the front, long building and narrow in width, 18 dark archways either side along its length, courtyard area	Stones, local quarries and materials

				with vast and capable of holding massive populations	
Chilsotoon palace	Governmental	1796&1880	Islamic & Western style	Four floors, two indoor and outdoor gardens, an elongated rectilinear building surrounded by a deep arched veranda with forty columns, located on a rocky hill seen from inside of the palace.	marble, clay, cement, and iron
Bagh-e-Bala Palace	Governmental	1893	Islamic architecture style	Palace building with hall and rooms, a large pool, surrounded by pine trees, stucco and mirror-studded decoration inside the palace	Brick masonry, Cement, Plaster and wood
Shah-Do Shamshira Mosque	Religious	1920	Islamic & Western style	Praying hall, stucco detailing, Wooden decorations and tiny minarets.	Brick masonry, Cement, Plaster and wood
Darul Aman Palace	Governmental	1920	western style	Three stores, 150 small and large rooms, a library and 32 toilets	clay, cement, bricks and iron
City Center mall	Commercial	2005	Western & Modern style	100 stores, a food court, equipped with see-through elevators and escalators, a 4-star hotel and basement car parking.	Glass, Brick masonry, Cement, Plaster, Iron and wood
Majid Mall	Commercial	2011	Western & Modern style	Stores, basement car parking, restaurant, sport salon	Glass, Brick masonry, Cement, Plaster, Iron and wood
New Parliament Building	Governmental	2012	Mughal and modern style	Two session halls, five halls for parliamentary commission sessions, conference, press, computer and dining rooms, a library and a mosque	Brick masonry, Cement, Plaster, iron and wood
Ministry of National Defense	Governmental	2015	Islamic and western style	Five above-ground floors and a two-story basement, providing workspace for about 2,200 personnel	Brick masonry, Cement, Plaster, iron and wood
Darulaman Administrative Complex	Governmental	2018 Continuing	Islamic and modern style	Administrative Offices	Brick masonry, Cement, Plaster, iron and wood

The architectural styles of Samanids, Ghaznavids, and Timurids are originated in Central Asia, even the Moghuls were from Central Asia, although they developed their eclectic style in India (Dupree, 1977). The Samanid Empire was centered in Khorasan, and its territory was included the contemporary Afghanistan also, in last quarter of the tenth century, Ghaznavids empire was established in the eastern and southern part of contemporary Afghanistan (Bosworth, 1968). The Timurid descendants reigned in western Turkistan, Iran and Afghanistan which the three and a half decades of Sultan Husayn Bayqara's rule in Herat of Afghanistan are often referred to as the Timurid renaissance (Dale, 1998). Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, Afghanistan was fought over by the Mughal Empire and the Safavid Dynasty of Persia (now Iran), with the Safavids mostly controlling Herat and western Afghanistan, and the Mughals controlling Kabul and the east (Katzman, 2010), even Babur Shah, the Mughal emperor, established Kabul as his capital. Therefore, contemporary Afghanistan as a part of the mentioned civilizations can have a significant place in Persian, Central Asia and Indian Islamic architecture styles and can simply adapt with Afghanistan traditional architecture, culture, environment, and political issues. In the architectural representations of most of the governmental and public buildings in the Kabul city, it is observed that a blend of Afghanistan traditional and Islamic architecture style is chosen as the language of building new with modern context such as in the Darulaman Administrative Complex. However, over the time, elements of the Western architecture were merged with the local culture, traditional and existing Islamic architectural styles in Kabul city and widely has been used in governmental building during King Amanullah Khan e.g. Darul Aman palaces, Shah-e-Do Shamshira mosque, Tajbeg Palace etc. In contemporary days, Western architectural elements have been used in the design of government buildings only with combination of Afghanistan traditional and Islamic architecture such as the Ministry of Defense.

7. Conclusion

This study attempted to highlight the architectural evolution in Kabul city based on some of the architectural monuments knowing that it does not include all of the architectural heritage, which were not discovered yet or destroyed, since the first century. Considering the literature and the study's findings, the architectural evolution in Kabul city points to a significant turning point in history as "before Islam" and "after Islam" religion, which included several types of architectural styles. The architectural monuments associated with before Islam were generally related to two (Buddhist and Hephthalites) civilizations in the Kabul city. The important representations of before Islamic civilization in the Kabul city are Chakari Minarets, Bala Hissar Fort, and many stupas in Tepe Narenj, however, these monuments have been almost destroyed.

Architectural styles associated to after Islam in Kabul city are mostly representing Samanids, Ghaznavids, Timurids, Moghuls, Ghurid and Khurasani empires in Afghanistan that some of their historical monuments are Bagh-e-Babur, Timur Shah Mausoleum, Eid Gah Mosque designed by Afghanistan traditional and Islamic architecture styles. These architectural styles continued till the establishment of Afghanistan in 1747. Afterwards, based on the unsuitable condition of country, the architectural evolution process in Kabul city staggered for a while. After 1880, as large-scale construction activities in the Kabul city started again, and based on Western influences, new architectural styles (as ideas of modernity) were introduced. Since then, architectural styles in Kabul city in addition to Afghanistan traditional architecture include Western, Islamic, and mixture of them. Some significant examples of western influences on architecture styles are Chilsotoon, Bagh-e-Bala, Darul Aman palaces, and Shah-e-Do Shamshira mosque. After establishment of the new government in 2001, most of the designed buildings in Kabul city started to represent western, Islamic architecture and a mixture of them. However, it can be stated that the combination of Islamic and traditional architectural elements in its modern form constitutes the contemporary Afghanistan architecture style. This can be a signifier of a new style that needs further investigation. For further studies it would be also relevant to scrutinize if the western architectural style, which was imposed to Kabul city "as a signifier of modernization" via foreign architects as commissioned by the rulers and "as a signifier of forced development" due to foreign interventions, "was" or "is" suitable with environmental and socio-cultural issues of Afghan people. As it can be understood from the discussions on the stylistic investigations on architectural monuments, a comparative analysis between the residential and monumental architecture is not well yet prepared. In the search for a new identity of Afghanistan via architectural production, supposing it will be quite relevant in the future because of its uniqueness, and how its complex context be defined sustaining the diversity of the broad spectrum of cultures, the field is open to new studies.

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Resume

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