

THE SYMBOLISM OF SAMARKAND IN ARABIC NOVELS

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Abstract: This article examines the symbolic representations of the city of Samarkand in Arabic novels, focusing on how it is reflected in spiritual, cultural, and aesthetic layers. For Arabic authors, Samarkand is not only a geographical place, but also a symbol of spiritual purity, historical consciousness, and cultural elevation. The article analyzes this symbol using the example of three modern Arabic novels (Amin Maalouf's *Samarkand*, Muhammad Mansi Qandil's *Qamar Samarkand uzra*, and Jamal al-Ghitani's *Oira Qaynaki Khat*). The study, based on the methods of symbolic analysis and cultural criticism, reveals how the image of Samarkand has become a powerful symbol associated with holiness, lost history, and revival.

Keywords: *Samarkand, symbol, Arabic novel, spirituality, cultural thought*

Introduction: In literature, the city is not only a plot backdrop, but also an aesthetic and ideological system. Samarkand occupies a special place in this respect - it is a symbol of lost greatness, symbolized holiness and spiritual quest in Arab literary thought. The symbol of the city in this novel is not accidental; it is strengthened by historical and cultural layers and lives at the level of the inner consciousness. Many authors describe Samarkand as an "ideal space", that is, a spiritual landscape that does not have to be real, but lives in the mind.

This article reveals three main symbolic aspects of Samarkand in the modern Arab novel:

1. As a spiritual and sacred symbol;
2. As a symbol of historical consciousness and cultural awakening;
3. As an architectural and artistic symbol.

Samarkand is a symbol of spiritual awakening in Arab novels, especially in works with a mystical tone. This is primarily due to the religious and mystical centers of the city's history - mosques, mausoleums and places of pilgrimage. In Jamal al-Ghitani's novel *The Source of the Letter*, the city is presented as a spiritually revived entity. There, "the walls tremble as if chanting", which elevates Samarkand from an ordinary place to a higher level.

In the city, time loses its place, the spirit of existence reigns. Ghitani's hero connects with the past with every step he takes in Samarkand, each mausoleum visited is a spiritual mirror. "Every time I lost myself, Samarkand brought me back to its heart," he writes, making the city a means of personal salvation.

In this way, Samarkand becomes not a religious symbol, but a sacred space of experience. For example, the Naqshband mausoleum is mentioned in the novel as a "center of silent wisdom." These images connect the city with mystical rituals and states of the soul.

Main part: In Muhammad Mansi Qandil's novel Qamar round Samarkand, Samarkand is also a source of spiritual awakening. In the work, the hero Misri perceives the journey to Samarkand not as an official assignment, but as an "inner call." He says: "I came here not to see the mausoleums, but to follow the mysterious call of my heart". This phrase turns Samarkand into a gateway to spiritual exploration.

At night in Samarkand, mosques become "lights of salvation", cemeteries are filled with "voices in silence". These images depict the city as a being full of holiness. Time in the work is also not linear - on Ramadan nights, time "stops", "the city floats in a divine light".

In these novels, Samarkand becomes a symbol of approaching Allah, mystical awakening, inner salvation and spiritual purity. The city is a path, but not a geographical one, but a spiritual journey.

Samarkand - a symbol of historical consciousness and awakening

In Amin Maalouf's novel Samarkand, the city is presented as the brightest embodiment of historical consciousness. Here, Samarkand is not only associated with historical figures such as Omar Khayyam, Hassan Sabbah and Nizam al-Mulk, but it is also represented as a gateway to the "golden age" of Islamic civilization. The author restores past events not as mere historical detail, but as a symbolic event that is burned into the mind. At the beginning of the novel, it is said about the book Samarkand: "This book is lost, but it lives in my heart", which shows history not only as a sequence of external events, but as a state embedded in the inner consciousness.

Samarkand is depicted here as a center of cultural awakening. It has been a center of science, philosophy, poetry and interpretation for centuries. In Maalouf's language, this city has become "a caravan of knowledge under the sun". This image symbolically transforms the city into a "cultural caravanserai."

In his novel, Amin Maalouf brings historical time closer to symbols than to reality. Each historical figure represents an idea, a philosophical approach. Omar Khayyam is the embodiment of thought and doubt, Hassan Sabbah is the embodiment of power and radicalism, and Nizam al-Mulk is the embodiment of system and wisdom. They collide against the backdrop of Samarkand, and this collision shows the inner drama of historical awakening.

Throughout the novel, the historical scenes that represent Samarkand are not only a reflection of the past, but also of the present. Maalouf, foreseeing the political disintegration of the Arab world today, places the image of Samarkand as a symbol of lost unity and cultural inventiveness. For this reason, the past in the novel is not just history, but also a desired future. Maalouf describes this as "understanding the future through the past".

Samarkand – Islamic Architecture and Symbol of Art (beginning)

Samarkand is often symbolized in Arabic novels through architectural symbols. Domes, minarets, mosques and cemeteries appear in the novel as symbols filled with inner meaning. Jamal al-Ghitani's novel is very expressive in this regard: "As I walk among the gardens, each dome sounds like a dhikr, each wall brings me back to myself".

The architecture of Samarkand is described in these works as a "silent language" – it does not speak, but it means. The mosque's facade is not a window opened to God here, but a "mirror of the soul". Misri (the protagonist of the novel Qandil) says in one scene: "I found nothing but silence in front of this architectural art, as if these stones were watching me." This phrase is built on the spiritual connection between the city and the reader.

The Islamic ornaments of Samarkand - arabesques, brick patterns, carved ornaments - are depicted in the novels as a spiritual expression of art. In this sense, art here is not an ornament, but a spiritual symbol. A divine hint is hidden in each pattern. Gitani's novel here explores the spiritual language of visual art - it describes, but also feels.

In addition, the novels present the city's architecture as a force that transcends time. For example, in one scene it is said: "This minaret looked at the sky in this way 700 years ago, and I see myself in its eyes today" (Abd al-Jalil, 2008, p. 212). It is a symbol of historical continuity and spiritual stability.

Part 3: Samarkand - a symbol of architecture and Islamic art (final), and conclusion. Samarkand - the transformation of architectural symbols into spiritual elevation. The architecture of Samarkand in Arabic novels is not just external beauty, but also an expression of spiritual elevation, spiritual awakening and symbolic language. Domes and minarets are especially described as "silence extended to God." Ghitani writes: "I heard a moving dhikr in each adjacent stone of the minaret, as if time had lost itself in silence". In this image, time stops through architecture, and the reader is immersed in a divine experience.

The novel also embodies the forms of decorative art. Arabesque patterns are graphic symbols here that represent infinity. They are not simple ornaments, but signs of cosmic order and spiritual harmony. For example, in the novel Qamar over Samarkand, Misri says: "I observed every movement in the patterns of the roof, they moved like silent dhikrs." This turns art into a "silent commentary."

The cemeteries in Samarkand are also symbolically important. They are presented as a space for "dialogue between the past and the living." Maalouf's novel states: "Poems still rise from the soil where Omar Khayyam lay," which makes the city a source that has swallowed time but has not lost it.

Also, the contrast of light and shadow in the images of the city in the novel has a strong aesthetic aspect. Light is a divine revelation, and shadows are symbols of truths hidden in the heart. These images serve to translate Islamic aesthetics into modern artistic language.

Thus, Samarkand actively participates in these novels not as an aesthetic object, but as a subject of cultural and spiritual language. The city speaks in the novels, but not with words - through architectural form, the expression of time, and spiritual harmony

Conclusion:

Samarkand has found its place in Arabic novels through its imagery, not only as a historical or religious place, but also as a symbol of inner understanding, spiritual journey, and cultural identity. Although the three novels analyzed in this article (Maalouf, Qandil, and al-Ghitani) each interpret Samarkand in their own unique way, they all share a common principle: this city transcends time, remains alive in the human mind, and becomes an active "writing force" in the literary text.

Samarkand is not just a backdrop in these novels. It appears as the driving spirit of the plot, the symbolic core, and the aesthetic field. In contact with it, the characters understand themselves, their past, and their connection to the divine. In this respect, Samarkand stands out as one of the most powerful cultural fields for symbolic interpretation in the Arabic novel.

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