FLASHBACK FRIDAY: THE GOLDEN MADRASA

The Golden Madrasa or College of Tilla-Kori was built by Samarkand ruler Yalangtush Bakhadur in the 1650s to house and teach the best and brightest students of his realm. It stands at the center of the wondrous Registan public square complex of the Silk Road oasis city of Samarkand, known to the ancient Greeks as Marakanda.

It was centuries old when Alexander conquered it in 329 BC. For a thousand years as Central Asia's great entrepot on the Silk Road between China and the Mediterranean, it was a cosmopolitan center for Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Nestorian Christianity. Incorporated into the Islamic world in the 700s, sacked by Genghiz Khan in 1220, rebuilt by the time Marco Polo in 1272 described it as "a large and splendid city," Tamerlane made it his capital in 1370.

I was first in Samarkand to stand astonished at the Registan in 1963. Seeing it now, far more impressively preserved than in the Soviet days, made me gasp – especially how Tilla-Kori is once again lavishly decorated with gold. You'll gasp too should you ever be fortunate enough to come here. (*Glimpses of Our Breathtaking World #223* photo ©Jack Wheeler)