

## **WOODWORKING TRADITIONS IN KHIVA'S ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE**

*Atajanova Dilnoza Amoboyevna*

*Lecturer of History*

*Urgench innovation university*

**Abstract:** This study investigates the enduring woodcraft traditions practiced in Khiva and its environs, tracing their historical evolution and current conservation issues. The research particularly highlights sustainable approaches for preserving and revitalizing this distinctive artistic heritage.

**Keywords:** Khwarezmian woodcarving, Khivan artisans, traditional joinery, ornamental carving, architectural woodcraft, arabesque motifs (islimi), geometric designs (girihi).

**Аннотация:** В статье рассматриваются многовековые традиции художественной обработки древесины, сложившиеся в Хиве и прилегающих территориях, анализируются этапы их формирования и современные проблемы сохранения. Особое внимание уделено перспективам возрождения этого уникального вида декоративно-прикладного искусства.

**Ключевые слова:** Хорезмская школа резьбы по дереву, мастера Хивы, плотницкое ремесло, художественная резьба, архитектурные деревянные конструкции, растительный орнамент (ислими), геометрические узоры (гирих).

**INTRODUCTION:** Today, the Ichan Qala Museum-Reserve in Khiva, which embodies national traditions, is also recognized as a center for the preservation of various traditional crafts such as decorative painting, carpentry, blacksmithing, and pottery. In particular, carpentry and wood carving have been refined and developed over centuries, continuing to enhance the beauty of Khiva's architectural monuments to this day. These architectural landmarks encapsulate the traditions of woodworking and craftsmanship.

**LITERATURE REVIEW:** The issue under consideration is based on a number of important sources. Notes recorded by master artisan A. Boltayev contain essential information about woodworking traditions and the master craftsmen who continue the classical craft heritage in the Ichan Qala Museum-Reserve [5]. Additionally, the scholarly research conducted by D. Bobjonov and M. Abdrasulov presents detailed information on the construction of monuments located within the Ichan Qala area, as well as their subsequent historical development [4]. K. Khudoyberganov, known for his scientific studies on the history and rich heritage of the Ichan Qala Museum-Reserve, also provides valuable and unique insights into Khiva's architectural monuments [10].

**METHOD:** Throughout the research process, a wide range of scientific methods typical of historical studies were employed. The data presented in the sources were subjected to in-depth comparative analysis, identifying similarities and differences across various accounts. Events were examined within their historical context and circumstances, adhering to the principle of historicity. Strict chronological order was observed, with all occurrences organized according to their temporal sequence. The information from sources was critically evaluated to verify its credibility and authenticity. The findings were synthesized and systematically concluded, ensuring the study's academic novelty and practical relevance.

**DISCUSSION:** In the last century, during the colonial era, national traditions faced severe damage and the survival of cultural values was under threat. Despite this, local master artisans managed to preserve the classical handicraft heritage passed down through generations. Master designer A. Boltayev provides information about prominent woodcarvers such as Ota Polvonov, Abdulla Bobojonov, and Safo Bogbekov, who carried forward the traditions of woodcarving schools. He also mentions Vays Usta and Atomas Shaykhov, who worked on restoring the ceilings of the ancient Ark [5, 8–9].

Researchers of Uzbekistan's architectural and decorative art, such as B.N. Zasyupkin and N.M. Bachinskiy, note that Khorezm art is distinguished by its dynamic and expressive spiral patterns, intricately carved with numerous intersecting and entwined lines. The use of spiral motifs in Khorezm folk applied art has very ancient roots. These patterns, found in some historical monuments of ancient Khorezm—such as the 3rd-century rooms of the Topraq Qala palace—have evolved into various combinations in medieval architectural monuments [9, 8].

The master-apprentice tradition holds a special place in the development of craftsmanship. According to the Russian researcher A. Kun, who conducted fieldwork in Khorezm in the mid-19th century, the inheritance of a craft from father to eldest son after the father's death was accompanied by a specific ceremony [7, p. 57]. This traditional ceremony in Khiva followed a strict order: first, mutual consent between master and apprentice was required; second, at the end of the ceremony, the apprentice would ceremonially present a robe (chapan) to the master; third, it was customary to gift a shirt to the head of the workshop [6, p. 302].

The Khorezm school of woodcarving is distinguished by its artistic delicacy, colorful patterns, and unique style. Islamic floral (islīmī) and geometric (giriḥ) motifs dominate in the school's artworks, featuring intricate lattice-line compositions. Many wooden items bear inscriptions of the date of production, the names (or initials) of the masters, verses from the Qur'an, sayings of the Prophet, as well as the wise words of ancestors. Khorezm craftsmen's works stand out from other regional schools for their elegance, richness of ornamentation, and diversity of patterns. Each piece reflects the master's artistic solutions, a harmony of traditional motifs with modern interpretations, and the craftsman's personal style. Notably, the use of Qur'anic texts and wise sayings in woodcarving reveals not only the artistic but also the spiritual dimensions of this art [1, p. 183].

In Khiva's architecture, columns form unique compositions and architectural features. Because of their decorative, structural, and functional significance, columns became intertwined with religious beliefs and gradually evolved into customary practices. Over time, the original meaning of some of these customs faded, eventually becoming part of religious rituals. In the worldview of Eastern peoples, the column held a mythical association with the structure and development of the universe [8, p. 85].

Archaeological research has been conducted on structures dating from the 10th to 14th centuries, and some columns of the Juma Mosque are confirmed to belong to this period [3, p. 71]. However, noticeable transformations in woodcarving techniques and ornamentation are observed. The oldest columns display deep relief triangular patterns resembling plant motifs. In 12th-century columns, although the proportions mirror earlier forms, the carvings are more refined, with Kufic inscriptions intertwined with leaf and floral designs. Later columns expand upward in a goblet-like form, with the middle section adorned in Kufic script and the lower part being quite thick. The upper section, in contrast, is decorated with relatively sparse carvings [2, p. 231].

In 1935, the "Umid" artel was established in Khiva, where various types of craftsmanship, including woodcarving, were developed by skilled artisans. Under the leadership of master Ota Polvonov and master Abdulla Boltaev, this enterprise completed a special order in 1943 commissioned by engineer-builder S.N. Polupanov for the Alisher Navoi Opera and Ballet Theatre in Tashkent [1, p. 185]. During the Soviet era, despite working under specific state commissions, national craft traditions were preserved to some extent. During this time, masters of the Khiva woodcarving school continued its traditions and contributed not only to local but

also to significant republican-level architectural sites with their skills. Their work played an essential role in preserving the rich heritage of national craftsmanship.

In 1975, the Ota Gate (Ota Darvoza) was restored under the supervision of master Samandar Qalandarov, with domes completed by masters Polvon Otajonov and Matyoqub Jumaniyozov. By that time, the original doors of the gate had been lost [10, p. 25]. Although it is reasonable to assume a lack of trained painters and carpenters for such a reconstruction at the time, this condition is more closely tied to the constraints imposed by the government of that era. Additionally, photos taken by X. Devonov provide evidence that this gate—inscribed with Surah Al-Ikhlās and the Islamic declaration of faith (Kalima Shahada)—was originally from the estate built by Muhammad Amin Khan in the mid-19th century in the village of Angarik near Khiva [4, p. 17]. This underscores the fact that traditional craftsmanship in Khiva was not only preserved but further refined and passed down through generations.

Khorezm's woodcarving masters used specialized tools for drawing and measuring patterns. These included rulers, compasses, pencils, erasers, and protractors (for measuring angles), which were essential traditional drafting instruments. Artisans from Khiva developed over 100 different patterns, most of which were composed of intricate girih and islīmī motifs covering the entire surface of objects. Designs such as madahil, apple blossoms, completed knots, and ram horns were widely used in this art form. The majority of these designs consisted of two main parts and were sometimes executed based on pre-drafted templates. In particular, girih motifs were created using precisely calculated geometric ratios, each one based on unique mathematical principles.

**RESULTS:** Khorezm woodcarving stands out for its use of islīmī and girih motifs, Qur'anic inscriptions, wise sayings, and spiral-shaped patterns that have ancient roots. This art is significant not only for its aesthetic value but also for its spiritual and educational importance, serving as a vital source that reflects the worldview, religious beliefs, and lifestyle of the local population.

Based on the above, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Woodcarving is an integral part of Khorezm's architectural-decorative art, reflecting the craftsmanship of local masters and national traditions.
2. The master-apprentice system and related rituals played a crucial role in the intergenerational transmission of this art form.
3. The Khiva school of woodcarving is distinguished from other regional schools by its artistic finesse, vibrant patterns, and unique style.
4. The motifs and inscriptions used in woodcarving works express the historical, cultural, and spiritual values of the region.

**CONCLUSION:** The woodcarving techniques used in Khiva's architectural monuments encapsulate ancient traditions while evolving in accordance with modern needs. Despite adapting to contemporary demands, the craft has retained its unique characteristics and overall identity. These traditions, having endured a long historical journey, have withstood severe trials over the past century. Nevertheless, thanks to the initiative of master artisans, this national heritage has been successfully preserved.

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