

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF EPIGRAPHIC INSCRIPTIONS IN THE ARCHITECTURAL MONUMENTS OF UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract: *This study explores the conceptual foundations and historical development of epigraphic inscriptions in the architectural monuments of Uzbekistan. Special attention is given to the evolution of calligraphic traditions, the introduction of Arabic script following the spread of Islam in Central Asia, and the transformation of architectural decoration from figurative imagery to ornamental and epigraphic forms. The article analyzes the classification of architectural inscriptions according to their content, including political, religious, poetic, historical, and commemorative texts. The research highlights the symbolic and semantic significance of epigraphy as an essential component of architectural expression and as a unique source for reconstructing the spiritual, cultural, and political history of the region.*

Keywords: *Architectural epigraphy, Uzbekistan architecture, calligraphy, Arabic script, Islamic art, monumental inscriptions, symbolic ornamentation, cultural heritage, historical development, Central Asia.*

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, the dynasties that ruled the territory of present-day Uzbekistan contributed significantly to shaping its architectural identity. Although many monuments have been lost or reconstructed, surviving structures preserve invaluable epigraphic inscriptions that serve as primary historical sources.

One of the early researchers of Bukhara’s architectural monuments and their unique inscriptions was the reformist scholar Muso Saidjonov, who in 1929 described the inscriptions of Bukhara as “an unread book” containing historical information unavailable in manuscript sources.

In medieval architectural decoration of Uzbekistan, monuments function not only as masterpieces of art but also as remarkable examples of epigraphy—the art of inscribing texts on durable materials such as stone, metal, and ceramics. Epigraphy represents a powerful means of understanding national identity, historical roots, and the spiritual legacy of ancestors.

Historical Development of Script Traditions. Before the introduction of Islam, various writing systems were used in Central Asia, including Sogdian, Orkhon-Yenisei (Turkic runic), and Bactrian scripts. With the Arab conquest in the 7th century, Arabic script entered the region and gradually replaced earlier writing systems.

Islamic teachings discouraged the depiction of living beings in monumental art, which led to the development of geometric (*giri*) and vegetal (*isl*) ornamentation combined with Qur’anic verses and Hadith inscriptions. Architectural decoration shifted from figurative murals to ornamental and calligraphic compositions.

Several major styles of Arabic calligraphy became widespread in the Islamic world and were actively used in Central Asian architecture:

- Kufic script – primarily for decorative monumental inscriptions;
- Thuluth script – widely used on portals and façades;
- Naskh script – mainly for manuscript copying;
- Ta‘liq and Nastaliq – commonly used for Persian and Turkic literary works;
- Riq‘a and Tawqi‘ – for correspondence and signatures.

Central Asian calligraphers and artisans made significant contributions to Islamic epigraphic traditions. Alongside styles associated with Morocco, Cairo, and Cordoba, architectural schools of Samarkand, Bukhara, Herat, Khorezm, Tashkent, and Fergana gained wide recognition.

Symbolism and Conceptual Classification of Architectural Inscriptions

Architectural epigraphy in Uzbekistan can be classified according to content and function:

1. Political inscriptions – expressing state ideology.

For example, on the portal of Ak-Saray Palace built by Amir Temur, the famous inscription reads: “Justice is the foundation of the state and the motto of rulers.”

2. Historical texts – documenting construction dates and events.
3. Poetic inscriptions – literary verses integrated into architecture.
4. Names of calligraphers and architects – acknowledging creators.
5. Sufi wisdom texts – reflecting spiritual philosophy.
6. Religious inscriptions – Qur‘anic verses and Hadiths.
7. Chronograms – encoded dates within poetic formulas.
8. Commemorative inscriptions and tombstones – recording notable personalities.

Symbols embedded within architectural ornamentation carry encoded meanings. However, many symbolic systems remain partially undeciphered due to the loss of interpretative traditions. Modern scholarship seeks to reconstruct this “alphabet of symbols” to better understand architectural decoration.

Researchers such as B.A. Murodov, V.A. Shishkin, L.I. Rempel, M. Bulatov, and others have contributed substantially to the study of architectural symbolism and epigraphy in Central Asia.

Conclusion. Architectural epigraphy in Uzbekistan represents a unique synthesis of art, theology, politics, and cultural memory. The historical development of inscriptions—from pre-Islamic scripts to refined Arabic calligraphy—reflects profound transformations in worldview, religious beliefs, and artistic expression.

As an integral element of architectural composition, inscriptions perform not only decorative but also informational, ideological, and spiritual functions. They serve as durable carriers of historical memory and remain indispensable sources for understanding the intellectual and cultural heritage of Central Asia.

The study of architectural epigraphy contributes to preserving national identity and deepening scholarly knowledge about the conceptual and symbolic foundations of Islamic architectural art.



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