

Qori-khona Architecture of the 18th Century as the Naqshbandiya Museum : Arsitektur Qori-khona pada Abad ke-18 sebagai Museum Naqshbandiya

Odina Olimova

Silk Road International Research Institute under the Silk Road International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage, Uzbekistan

Azamat Rajabboyev

Silk Road International Research Institute under the Silk Road International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage, Uzbekistan

This study examines the architectural and cultural significance of the 18th-century Qori-khona in Kagan, currently functioning as the Naqshbandiya Museum, within the framework of Islamic educational architecture and Sufi traditions in Central Asia. The research addresses a critical gap in existing scholarship, which has predominantly focused on monumental madrasas and earlier historical periods while overlooking smaller-scale religious-educational structures and their contextual integration within the Naqshbandiya spiritual tradition. The investigation employed a qualitative methodology combining architectural analysis, field documentation, spatial surveys, and critical examination of historical and visual sources to evaluate the building's design principles, spatial organization, and adaptive reuse as a museum facility. Findings reveal that the Qori-khona exemplifies the Bukhara architectural school through its modest peshtaq, inward-oriented courtyard layout, minimalist ornamentation, and compact hujra configuration, all reflecting Naqshbandiya values of spiritual discipline, modesty, and contemplative concentration. The architectural composition demonstrates deliberate restraint in decoration and proportional harmony aligned with Sufi educational practices rather than syncretic or symbolic interpretations previously suggested in literature. The novelty of this research lies in establishing the Qori-khona as a coherent Islamic educational space rooted specifically in 18th-century Sufi architectural conventions, challenging generalized or chronologically imprecise characterizations. These findings contribute theoretical understanding of later-period Sufi architecture in Central Asia and provide practical implications for heritage conservation, demonstrating how adaptive reuse can maintain architectural integrity while extending the educational mission of religious monuments through contemporary museological frameworks.

Keywords : Qori-khona architecture, Naqshbandiya Sufism, Bukhara architectural school, Islamic educational buildings, Central Asian heritage preservation, 18th-century religious monuments

Highlight:

- The Qori-khona demonstrates coherent 18th-century Islamic educational architecture aligned with Naqshbandiya Sufi principles.
- Architectural features reflect intentional design emphasizing modesty, discipline, and inward spiritual focus through spatial organization.
- Museum adaptation successfully maintains architectural integrity while continuing the building's original educational purpose effectively.

Introduction

The architectural traditions of Central Asia tell of the interconnection between the practice of religion and education and the culture of the city in the societies developed according to Islamic traditions. One of the monuments of this type, the religious-educational buildings of the Bukhara oasis, are situated in a special place as they are characterized by the restrained architectural language and close relations to the sufi traditions. The Qori-khona in Kagan is an Islamic building dating to the 18th century which is now the Naqshbandiya[1] Museum[2]. Being a historical structure, related to educational activities of Quran and subsequent cultural transmission, it provides a good opportunity to investigate the architectural expression of sufi values in the context of the Bukhara school of architecture[3].

Earlier literature has dealt with madrasas, khanqahs and memorial complexes of Islamic architecture as a building type in Central Asia, with a tendency to discuss monumental buildings of earlier times. Studies of the Qori-khona have most often tagged its architectural appearance and ornamentation, and its museum reconstruction, but others have not given close chronological context or even assimilated the monument to regional history. It has resulted in a lack of focus on its peculiar Islamic history of the 18th century and its immediate linkage with the Naqshbandiya order[4]. Consequently, the connection between the sufi ideology, sufi architecture, and the modern museum role has been under-researched.

This study has a conceptual framework anchored on the theories of Islamic architectural modesty, spatial inwardness and sufi ideas of disciplining and inner concentration. Spiritual restraint and silent remembrance are not formally represented in monumental terms in the Naqshbandiya school[5], but by proportions of the eye, by restrained decoration, and inward directed spatial arrangement[6]. This interpretation of the Qori-khona enables one to examine the building as an architectural environment with a purpose and focus which was influenced by religious practice as opposed to a syncretic or symbolic building which is out of touch with its historical role.

The methodology of the study is based on the architectural and spatial analysis, which is accompanied by the study of historical sources, visual aids, and past literature[7]. Shear focus is made on the plan arrangement, material application, facade arrangement and interior arrangement[8]. The work also explores the way the building is transformed into the Naqshbandiya Museum and evaluates the way the curatorial practices co-exist with the historic building material[9], [10]. This method allows reading the monument contextually based on the initial purpose of its use and its current application.

The discussion should shed light on the architectural identity of the Qori-khona as being a coherent Islamic and sufi space based on the Bukhara architectural tradition[11]. The results indicate that the originality of the building in its adaptation to the museum does not mean the loss of its original purpose but rather its further expansion as an educational establishment. The findings also add to a more correct understanding of sufi architecture in the 18th century, and also have implications to the study of heritage, especially when it comes to the adaptive re-use of religious monuments as cultural facilities[12], [13].

Methodology

The proposed work advocates a qualitative research design that will involve architectural analysis, field work research, and the analysis of written and visual data critically. The main research was made up of a field trip (ekspeditsiya na mestakh) to the Qori-khona in Kagan now used as the Naqshbandiya Museum. On-site observations, spatial survey, photographic and graphic description of the exterior of the building, of its interior spaces, the construction materials, decorations, and existing museum displays formed part of the fieldwork. Special focus was put on the plan configuration, peshtaq, courtyard system, wall thickness, lighting conditions, and the interaction of the architectural form and functional use. These data were complemented by informal research in the local experts and museum personnel to explain the historical use of the building and its modern functioning.

Secondary data involved published academic sources, archival sources, architectural drawings, maps, and past studies involving the Bukhara architectural school, sufi institutions and the Naqshbandiya order. The comparative analysis was used to contextualize the Qori-khona into the wider scope of the Islamic learning architecture of the 18th century, without being disrespectful to

the chronological and religious accuracy. The analysis paradigm was based on determining architectural features in relation to sufi values of modesty, inward-looking and spatial discipline. Adaptation of the structure into a museum was considered in terms of heritage conservation, which entailed continuity between the original purpose and the current one. The combination of the field expedition data with the documentary analysis made it possible to interpret the Qori-khona in terms of a consistent Islamic and sufi architectural space in context

Result and Discussion

The discussion substantiates the fact that the Qori-khona in Kagan is a logical instance of the Islamic educational architecture of the 18 th century that belongs to the Naqshbandiya school of thought. The outward look of the structure, where some fieldwork was carried out, indicates the sober architectural expression of the Bukhara school, which consisted of baked brick constructions, meager treatment of decoration, and modesty of peshtaq (Fig. 1). These elements show a conscious architectural decision of simplicity and utility as opposed to monumentality, which was in terms with the moral codes of sufi discipline and modesty.



Fig.1. The front facade of the Museum Naqshbandiya (photo by authors)

The space structure of the Qori-khona also allows viewing it as a purpose-oriented educational and spiritual setting. The small one-storey building with inside-oriented space and distinctly defined flow of circulation places an accent of isolation with the outside environment and focus on the learning process (Fig. 2). The hujras that run along the internal axis are small, closed, and similar in size, which means that they were used during individual Qur'anic reading, writing, and contemplation. The inside views indicate that small and high window openings result in soft and diffused light and make the study conditions conducive with visual distraction being minimized (Fig. 3). Such spatial reticence is consistent with the ideals of Naqshbandiya of retaliatory spiritual practice and discipline of everyday routine.

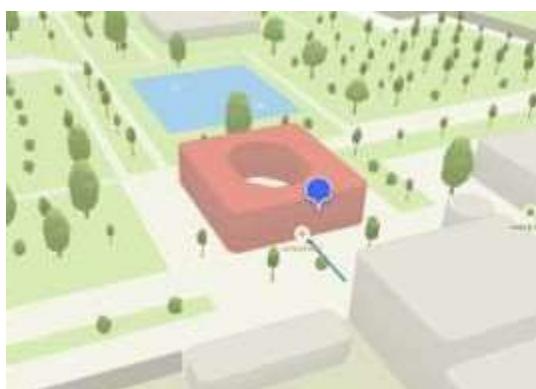


Fig. 2. by authors (GIS2)



Fig.3. Google Maps(situation plan)

The field documentation also made it visible that there is a centralized internal area that works as an integrating factor in the general layout. The fact that this central volume is proportionate to the surrounding hujras strengthens the spatial balance and order which can be taken to reflect on as a practical solution to the circulation as well as a symbolic resemblance of harmony and order within Islamic educational settings. The architectural coherence that is witnessed implies that the form and the functionality were in tandem during the initial design of the building.

The transformation of the Qori-khona to the Naqshbandiya Museum shows a continuity between the historical role and the modern one. In the museum exhibition, the museum is skillfully incorporated into the existing architectural structure without presenting structural interventions (Fig. 5). Thematically, manuscripts, ritual items, craft tools, and educational resources are displayed in correspondence to the teachings of Khoja Bahauddin Naqshband and the Naqshbandiya silsila, in general. The principle of Dil ba yor, dast ba kor, the relationship between spiritual practice and daily labor and education is supported by the curatorial approach, but the logic of space remains the same as that of the early building.

Theoretically, the findings help fill a significant knowledge gap in the research of the later Islamic educational architecture in Central Asia. The main period of study of previous literature has been monumental madrasas or even earlier historical eras, with the small-scale monuments (which might be the Qori-khona) or even the manner of their interpretation entirely overlooked. This paper proves that the Qori-khona needs to be interpreted as a harmonious Islamic and sufi learning environment, and not a syncretic or transitional one.

In practice, the results point to the importance of field-based records in the interpretation of architectural heritage. The connection between the Qori-khona and the surrounding Naqshbandiya memorial landscape also reinforces the fact that it exists in a larger spiritual and cultural context (Fig. 4). Further studies are required to provide elaborated architectural surveys, digital records, and comparative analysis with other institutions of the same period in the 18th century in order to enrich theoretical knowledge and be able to offer sustainable conservation measures. The findings of the analysis are summarized in Table 1, which introduces the Qori-khona as a self-contained 18th century architectural item, where historical role, layout, building materials, and museum reinterpretation are analyzed as a system, as described in the previous section.



Fig. 4. Some exhibits of the Naqshbandiya Museum(photo by authors)

Table 1. Architectural and Functional Characteristics of the Qori-khona (18th Century), Kagan

Aspect	Description
Historical period	18th century
Original function	Islamic educational building for Qur'anic reading and individual study
Current function	Naqshbandiya Museum
Architectural school	Bukhara architectural school
Building type	One-storey religious-educational structure (Qori-khona)
Construction material	Baked brick typical of the Bukhara oasis
Plan structure	Compact linear layout with ten hujras and a centrally organized internal space
Spatial orientation	Inward-oriented, enclosed composition emphasizing concentration and seclusion
Entrance element	Modest peshtaq with a lightly pointed arch
Interior spaces	Small-scale hujras with simple finishes and restrained proportions
Lighting system	Narrow and high window openings providing soft, diffused natural light
Decorative approach	Functional minimalism with absence of excessive ornamentation
Sufi conceptual association	Modesty, discipline, inward concentration (Naqshbandiya tradition)
Museum adaptation	Exhibition integrated into original architectural fabric without structural alteration
Exhibited materials	Manuscripts, ritual objects, craft tools, educational and historical artefacts
Relationship to landscape	Integrated within the Naqshbandiya memorial complex

Conclusion

This paper has shown that the Qori-khona of Kagan is a consistent representation of Islamic architectural education in the 18th century which is based on the Bukhara school of architecture and largely aligned to the Naqshbandiya Sufi region. The study supports the claim that the reserved nature of the exterior, small plan, inward-facing hujras, limited use of lighting and minimalism of the building complex were all designed in line with sufi values of modesty, discipline, internal spiritual focus. The results also indicate that the modern restoration of the building as the Naqshbandiya Museum does maintain its architectural integrity besides serving its original didactic purpose by a well-organized exhibition show focused on the life, teachings, and spiritual legacy of Khoja Bahauddin Naqshband. However, instead of being a syncretic or symbolic monument, the Qori-khona is an ongoing Islamic cultural and spiritual space where the architectural structure, religious activity and museological definition are conceptually coherent. The research has two implications: on the theoretical level, it can help to understand more accurately the architecture of sufi later periods in Central Asia, which is a less represented category in academic literature; on the practical level, the results of the study can serve as a model of the adaptive reuse of religious heritage buildings in a manner that does not disregard the functionality and spatial logic. Additional steps are suggested as more inclusive architectural surveys, comparisons with other 18th-century learning edifices, and computerized reports to learn more about the methods of building construction, spatial functions, and long-term preservation plans of sufi architectural heritage.

References

- [1.] A.F. Buehler, "The Naqshbandiyya in Timurid India: The Central Asian Legacy," *Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 208-228, Jul. 1996, doi: 10.1093/jis/7.2.208.
- [2.] S. Bobojonov, "Bahauddin Naqshband is the Pilgrimage Threshold of the Oasis of Bukhara," *Central Asian Journal of Social Sciences and History*, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 45-58, 2023.
- [3.] M. Yusupova, "Islamic Architecture of Uzbekistan: Development and Features," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 51-63, Fall 2012.
- [4.] F. Piraino, "Between Real and Virtual Communities: Sufism in Western Societies and the Naqshbandi Haqqani Case," *Social Compass*, vol. 63, no. 1, pp. 93-108, Mar. 2016, doi: 10.1177/0037768615622405.
- [5.] D. DeWeese, "The 'Masha'ikh-i Turk' and the 'Khojagan': Rethinking the Links Between the Yasavi and Naqshbandi Sufi Traditions," *Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 180-207, Jul. 1996, doi: 10.1093/jis/7.2.180.
- [6.] G. Asanova and M. Dow, "The Sarrafan Baths in Bukhara," *Iran*, vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 187-205, 2001, doi: 10.2307/4299931.
- [7.] R. Poulton and M. Poulton, "A Recent Visit to Bukhara and Samarkand: A View of Uzbek Society," *Asian Affairs*, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 299-311, 1976, doi: 10.1080/03068377608729816.
- [8.] S. Ebaid, "Two Foundation Inscriptions for 'Abd-Allah Khan in Buildings of Bukhara," *Iran*, vol. 54, no. 2, pp. 135-142, Jul. 2016, doi: 10.1080/05786967.2016.1234277.
- [9.] M. Yusupova, "Islamic Architecture of Uzbekistan: Development and Features," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 51-63, Fall 2012.
- [10.] M. Yusupova, "Evolution of Architecture of the Sufi Complexes in Bukhara," in *Bukhara: The Myth and the Architecture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1999, pp. 122-135.
- [11.] M. A. Abbasova-Yusupova, "Znachenie i Mesto Khanaka-Mabzoleia Khodja Akhmade Iassavi v Evoliutsii Arkhitektury Sufiiskikh Obitelei Tsentral'noi Azii Epokhi Amira Temura," *Architecture and Civil Engineering*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 1-7, 2025.
- [12.] N. V. Drobchenko and O. Olimova, "Revealing the Diverse Evolution of Ornamental Safeguards Across Societies," *Sustainable Infrastructure and Construction Engineering Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 1-90, 2025.
- [13.] N. V. Drobchenko and O. Olimova, "Revealing the Diverse Evolution of Ornamental Safeguards Across Societies," *Sustainable Infrastructure and Construction Engineering Journal*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 1-90, 2025.