

Taking and Denying

Challenging Canons in Arts and Philosophy

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Medieval Islamic Stucco Décor vs. Soviet Architecture of Uzbekistan

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Abstract This is a review of what is termed ‘twentieth-century Central Asian national style’. It aims to answer the question of how the 20th century treated the heritage of early Islamic ornamental art. My research uses the example of carved stucco architectural décor in Uzbekistan. This technique was traditional in both the early Islamic period and the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Uzbekistan was chosen because it possesses the most representative examples of architecture, illustrating common processes for all of Central Asia. I raise the questions of adoptions and rejections in stylisation, review the stages of reinterpretation and reconsideration, and finally propose my own periodisation.

Keywords Central Asian architectural décor. Girikh. Gunch. Islamic architectural ornament. Islimi. National style. Soviet architectural décor. Stucco.

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1 Introduction

Any discussion of twentieth-century art of Central Asia will inevitably touch upon what is termed ‘national style’ and how it follows, re-defines, or renounces its centuries-long canons. Art reviews of that period raised rhetorical questions that remained unanswered. Should the experience of Muslim artistic culture gained in the Middle Ages be discarded? Should Central Asian art really be severed from its traditional foundations?

These questions keep arising until now, for the decorative art of Central Asia is based on the achievements of mediaeval Muslim ornamentation.¹ That is especially true of architectural décor: decorative mural painting in residential premises and carving on wood and wet stucco or plaster. The latter technique is well known from the architecture of the Middle East and especially Iran as stucco carving and in Central Asia, as *ганч gunch*, ‘carving’.

Stucco, or *gunch*, is produced by firing limestone rock. The soft material, hard upon drying, is highly expressive upon carving. It was, therefore, the most favoured and widespread technique of decorating both interiors and façades since pre-Islamic times. It flourished in the pre-Mongolian ninth-twelfth centuries.² Most of the Central Asian monuments of that period are located in the territories of present-day Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

Among the above-listed countries, it is probably Uzbek architecture that is the most representative, offering the most vivid examples of how that mediaeval technique, developed in line with the layout of religious buildings and private houses and palaces of the Middle Ages, is now being adapted to modern construction projects.

The objectives of my study are to:

1. briefly review the use of stucco carving in twentieth-century architecture as exemplified by Uzbekistan;
2. answer the question of how the twentieth century treated the immense heritage of the preceding centuries’ Islamic art.

To this end, a number of tasks shall be solved:

1. identify, among all pre-Mongolian (and some post-Mongolian) carved stucco monuments, those whose ornamentation has inspired twentieth-century art;
2. delineate the set of the twentieth-century monuments that use stucco carving;

1 As regards both its set of ornamental motifs and execution technique.

2 It was used both as masonry mortar and decorative moulding and carving base: a wall of fired bricks would be covered with wet *gunch* that was then turned into ornament before it dried. Sometimes the wall would be covered with clay and then *gunch*.

3. analyse their style to classify them into groups;
4. suggest a periodisation.

1.1 Methodology

We identified the most iconic ninth-twelfth and fourteenth-century monuments with carved stucco that have become national patrimony and inspire contemporary carvers. Most are concentrated in the territory of present-day Uzbekistan.³

Twentieth-century architectural works (residential houses, theatres, concert halls, hotels, and exhibition spaces) were also identified (data collection).⁴

The study employs the following architectural and archaeological methods: photographic recording (intended to document the décor's condition) and descriptive recording (termed working hypotheses).

The study examines the décor's composition, style, and execution techniques and classifies the monuments by these criteria and by date (evaluation and classification of data). The materials have been collated and reconciled with historical information and with pre-existing studies (synthesis). These methods allow the most comprehensive data coverage and evaluation.

1.2 Review of Literature

Most of the research literature on the topic deals with the pre-Mongolian period. Most studies were made by Soviet archaeologists, re-

3 In Uzbekistan: the 9th-10th century halls of the Samanid palace in Samarkand and its 10th-century domed hall, the 10th 'Arab' Ata mausoleum in the village of Tim, the 11th-12th century Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi mausoleum in Termez, and the 12th-century Tirmidh rulers' palace. In Tajikistan: the 11th-century palace in Hulbuk. In Kyrgyzstan: the 11th-12th century Northern, Middle and Southern mausoleums in Uzgent. In Turkmenistan: the Shir Kabir mosque in Mashad, 12th-century Sultan Sanjar Mausoleum in Merv, 14th-century Ahmed Yasavi mausoleum and the caravanserai portal of the same time in the city of Urgench.

4 The 1929 Hamza Drama Theatre in Tashkent, 1939 State Variety Theatre in Tashkent, 1939 pavilion of Uzbekistan at the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition in Moscow, 1947 Navoi Opera and Ballet Theatre in Tashkent, 1974 Tashkent Hotel, 1964 Vatan Cinema, 1973 the lobby of the State Arts Museum of Uzbekistan in Tashkent, the lobby of the State History Museum of Uzbekistan (1970s) in Tashkent, lobby at the 1974 Central Exhibition Hall of the Academy of Arts of Uzbekistan in Tashkent, 1933 Institute of Art Studies of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan in Tashkent, 1981 Istiklol Concert Hall (formerly known as the Palace of Friendship of Peoples) in Tashkent, 1993 Turkiston Concert Hall in Tashkent, the entrance hall of the publishing house of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Uzbekistan in Tashkent and the Minzifa Hotel (2000s) and 2007 Komil Hotel in Bukhara.

storers, and historians of art and architecture⁵ and, to a lesser extent, by European researchers, because they had limited access to the territory of Soviet Central Asia.

Oddly enough, even fewer studies, most in Russian, are dedicated to the nineteenth-twentieth centuries, considered a period of decline of that technique. This period's architectural décor is examined in terms of ethnography, decorative and applied art, techniques and technology, or only local schools are reviewed.⁶

That is why this study attempts to review the history of the national tradition being redefined over the whole twentieth century and suggests a periodisation.

2 Brief History of the Development of Carved Stucco Technique in the Nineth-Twelfth Centuries

After the Arabs invaded Central Asia in the first half of the eighth century, a new religion, Islam, came to those lands. The conquered territories were soon included in the Caliphate and fell into the orbit of Islamic art for twelve centuries.

The new religion was not indifferent to the artistic expression of its victories and superiority. That is how the exuberant ornamental style of architecture emerged to become the victors' resonant proclamation of faith. The decoration of the new architecture (mosques, mausoleums, palaces, mansions, and caravanserais) hinged on the carved stucco technique that had had deep Pre-Islamic traditions.

The technique flourished in the ninth-eleventh centuries. It was by the twelfth century that the traditions of using stucco to decorate interiors finally take shape as we know them now, dominated by ornamental style, with geometric and vegetal ornaments turning into complete systems in the form of geometric weaving and lattices developed to perfection.

Those colossal achievements were grounded in the fact that Islam, being a religion of pronounced monotheism, discouraged portraying the deity. As a consequence, it worked out a special form of describing its essence. Unlike the art of the Christian world, Islamic art need-

⁵ Some well-known names include Lazar Rempel, Galina Pugachenkova, Sergey Khmelnitsky, Vasily Shishkin, Boris Zasyppkin, and Vladimir Nilsen.

⁶ In the decorative and applied art perspective, this issue was examined by Atamuratova (2013, 42-4); Bairamova (2016, 85-97); Morozova (1968) and Avedova, Makhkamova, Morozova (1979). The local Tashkent school was reviewed by Pritsa (1960, 5-16). The Samarkand local school was reviewed by Pisarchik (1974, 17-129) and by Zakhidov (1965). The technique and ornaments were reviewed by Rempel' (1962, 5-47) and Gerasimova, Markina (2015, 120-3). Hmelnitskiy (1963, 23-5) and Rempel' (1961, 436-561) wrote about national style.

ed to symbolically convey the abstract truth of the single God's existence rather than retell sacred history. The inherently abstract ornament was a perfect language for the abstract narrative. It became a method for expressing the Islamic perception of the world through artistic means. That caused all kinds of ornaments to prosper, and the methods for building these became science-based.⁷

However, the advent of new types of decorative facings (more resistant to the environmental impact than stucco), the Mongolian invasion in the thirteenth century and the ensuing decline of construction combined to displace stucco.

In the post-Mongolian period, it occurs rather as an exception in the décor of the main structural parts of public buildings. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it is mainly used in private house interiors, but the quality of execution is very low.

Stucco ornamentation was in crisis all that time and used the instruments developed by the twelfth century. The masters enriched that heritage only partially with new techniques and patterns. These include:

1. decorative stucco stalactites and shell-shaped arched *nichettes* widespread in Khwarizm in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century.
2. polychromic stucco with vivid examples from the fourteenth century, when it combined with pinkish-yellow terracotta and other polychromic facings (the pattern forms become finer and more complicated).⁸
3. decorate stellate vaults, developed to perfection in sixteenth century Bukhara.
4. a new кърма *kyrma*, 'coloured plaster', a technique widely used in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
5. a combination of carved stucco, coloured plasters and mural painting typical of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century architecture of Bukhara.⁹

⁷ As geometry develops in the Islamic country, not only is *girikh*, 'geometric ornament' created with ruler and compass but also vegetal ornament gets a new, geometric basis for its own evolution. *Islimi*, 'vegetal ornament', drawn by hand without using geometrician's instruments, follows the forms of the spiral, circle, and sinusoid. Ornament on flat surfaces and stalactites displace the pre-Islamic sculptural plastics.

⁸ The 14th-century Ahmed Yasavi mausoleum and the caravanserai portal of the same time in the city of Urgench.

⁹ The coloured *gunch* technique had been used back in the 10th century but reached its full flowering in Bukhara and Samarkand in the 16th century. It means carving on two-coloured or multicoloured plaster (usually resulting in white *gunch* undercoloured with cold blue or warm orange one). The undercolouring makes it possible to imitate carved terracotta. It is now made manually or by mechanised casting. With some improvements, *kyrma* was used in housing construction in Soviet-era Tashkent.

3 Stages of Development of Carved Stucco Technique in the Twentieth Century

3.1 The Pre-Soviet Period: Late Nineteenth and First Quarter of the Twentieth Century

In the nineteenth century, European influences became felt in these Oriental lands: in the second half of the century, Central Asia became part of the Russian Empire and in 1918, part of the USSR.

This resulted in European-style private houses, differently planned, appearing in major cities of Central Asia. However, their commissioners overlooked the fact that the traditional décor programme was not intended for such layout and jarred.

This is well illustrated by the best-known monuments of architecture: the *Sitorai Mohi-Hosa*, a countryside residence of the Bukhara emir built by local masters after a study visit to Europe (late nineteenth-early twentieth century and 1912-18), and dwelling houses in Tashkent (for example, the House of diplomat A. Polovtsev and Bykhovsky's House).¹⁰

Nevertheless, private orders were growing in numbers. That resulted in the formation of local private stucco schools in Uzbek territory (Khiva, Bukhara, Tashkent, Samarkand and Fergana) by the turn of the twentieth century. These trained *усто* *usto*, 'masters', who passed their experience on to Soviet era *ганчкоры* *ganchkors*, 'stucco carvers'. It was those masters that ultimately adapted their knowledge of Muslim ornamentation to the needs of Soviet architecture.

So interior decorative art of the first quarter of the twentieth century was actually decaying, separated as it was from the new house type and layout. The ornamental motifs declined into a mechanical repetition of something already learnt:

1. the old traditions of monumental architecture are used, especially in a vault and niche decoration.
2. there occur scaled-down *шарафа* *sharafa*, 'stalactite cornices', and *хазак* *hauzak*, 'vaults' and 'decorated ceilings'.
3. the wall panels feature motifs developed in the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries in Bukhara and Samarkand.
4. in the decoration of deep interior niches, decorative mesh and stalactite vaults are found that originate from the architecture of the second half of the fifteenth century.¹¹

¹⁰ In Tashkent, master T. Arslankulov.

¹¹ Stalactite cornices that conceal the junction between a wall and the ceiling or round dome.

The vogue for 'European' style caused the interior decoration art to adopt motifs from Russian moulded ornament – first in private houses (R. Vadyayev's House in Kokand) and then in public buildings (1929 Hamza Drama Theatre in Tashkent).¹² The latter's doorway marge patterns feature both traditional motifs and twigs with flowers, characteristic of Russian moulded ornament.

3.2 The Soviet Period. Second Quarter to Late Twentieth Century

After Central Asia came into the Soviet Union's orbit, great changes began in its traditional decorative and applied arts. The State declared traditional art backward and set the goal of creating a new, realistic art, easy for workers and peasants to understand. All the arts were now expected to visibly discard the old traditions. That process was widespread enough to encompass even the jewellery art. Its canonical ornamentation that had been taking shape for centuries came to include modern images of teapots and clocks on traditional women's jewellery.

In the 1930s, signs of the new time of the 'State of workers and peasants' (in the epoch's parlance) enter the toolkit of the traditional stucco motifs, too.

Thus, musical instruments appear on the façade of the 1939 State Variety Theatre in Tashkent.¹³ Images of cotton appear on the façades of the pavilions of Uzbekistan at the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition in 1939 (rebuilt in 1954). Architect S.N. Polupanov forcefully inserts the cotton motif, in the form of a stylised trefoil with a ball, into all the compositions (cornices, capitals, panels, and chandeliers) to the point of producing an eye-straining sight.¹⁴ The architect probably conceived cotton to symbolise, for residents of the European part of the country, the peasants' toil in the distant Oriental provinces that were growing cotton on an industrial scale for the whole country. However, the traditional ornamentation excludes any cotton motifs. I suppose they were alien to the Muslim population of Central Asia, educated in a different visual tradition.

Moreover, the architect repeats the motifs of the huge flat circles of Tashkent *сюзане* *suzaneh* (big and colourful traditional embroideries) that used to adorn private houses' walls in the nineteenth century, on his façades. That attempt at importing embroidered or printed patterns on cloth into architectural décor was somewhat artificial and, luckily, it did not take hold – although in stucco's hey-

¹² Master T. Arslankulov.

¹³ Master T. Arslankulov.

¹⁴ Masters A. Umarov, Sh. Muradov, K. Yuldashev, Ya. Raufov, and Sh. Gafurov.

day, the first centuries of Islam, decorative and applied art had actually become a natural source of inspiration for the masters who borrowed a lot of motifs from it.¹⁵

At the same time, in the 1940s, the opposite trend emerged: a meticulous imitation of traditional specimens of carving. However, the result was the same and resembled a show of traditional folk art.

For example, the 1947 Navoi State Opera and Ballet Theatre (by architect A.V. Shchusev) embodied the idea of decorating halls to produce a sort of gallery of 'folk' art (at that time's parlance). Masters were invited to decorate six halls that flanked the auditorium on three floors. They were asked to reflect the specific features of the decorative art of different regions of Uzbekistan that had produced paragons of that décor in the past.¹⁶

The Termez Hall¹⁷ was to demonstrate the vegetal and geometric motifs of the twelfth-century Tirmidh countryside palace, but the concept was not quite a success. In the Tashkent hall, the painting techniques of Tashkent, typically used to decorate wooden cornices, arches and borders, were transposed into high relief.¹⁸

As a general rule, the masters would employ the traditional ornamental motifs and carving technique, and divide the walls and ceilings into separate panels, friezes and ribbons which was typical of the previous centuries' residential architecture. Novelty is only felt in some transformations of old motifs that were adapted to non-traditional window rhythm and size and beamed ceilings. The combination of stucco with marble and monumental painting makes a fresh impression, but otherwise the halls look like an exhibition of pieces of traditional stucco carving.

In the post-war years when cities were to be rebuilt as soon as possible, construction had to be quick and cheap. Although the devastating war had spared Central Asia, a quest towards reserved laconicism began there, which was, again, alien to that artistic tradition.

The links to traditional carving are now quite nominal, as casting, as a simpler and cheaper method, displaces carved stucco from everywhere. The patterns are also modified to adapt them to casting. A mixed technique is sometimes used, with castings chiselled manu-

15 For example, the 10th-century carved wood of the upper reaches of the Zeravshan in Tajikistan, 10th-century wooden *mihrab* from Iskodar, 11th-12th-century carved columns of the Friday Mosque in Khiva, and metal and fabric arts.

16 The Khiva and Samarkand halls were designed by architect S.N. Polupanov; the Tashkent hall, by R. Abdurasulev; the Termez Hall, by A. Zainutdinov, and the Fergana hall, by B. Zasyplin. The main spaces of the foyer and auditorium (everything, from the cornices and ceilings to the chandeliers and doorknobs) are made to hardboards by A.V. Shchusev.

17 Master Sh. Muradov.

18 Master T. Arslankulov.

ally. The very structure of a modern building rules out cumbersome cornices and consoles, and the façades no longer carry huge rosettes in stucco. The interiors are dominated by new techniques of décor that purport to be more reserved.

In the 1960s and 1970s, stucco is thus relegated to a modest role of cast cornices, ceiling rosettes and, rarely, separate panels (lounges of the 1973 State Art Museum of Uzbekistan in Tashkent, and the History Museum of Uzbekistan built in the 1970s, and the 1974 Central Exhibition Hall of the Academy of Arts of Uzbekistan).

3.3 The Post-Soviet Period: 1990s and into the 21st Century

The turn of the century eliminated all copying of old patterns and prioritised the creation of a modern, functional and comfortable building and free interpretation of both ancient and modern motifs (1993 Turkiston and 1981 Istiklol Concert Halls in Tashkent, designed by Ye. Rozanov, V. Shestopalov, Ye. Sukhanova, Ye. Bukhina, and Ye. Shumov). For example, a building is made remotely similar in shape to pre-Islamic monuments: the Bukhara rulers' palace at Varakhsha (40 km away from Bukhara) and *Kampir-Kala*.

By now, stucco has returned to architecture, mainly in the tourist areas as a local brand. So, it is mainly used to decorate restaurants and hotels. One trend is to use the traditional coloured stucco techniques but in a new colour scheme or to accurately repeat the stylistics of the local monuments of the nineteenth century (2007 Komil Hotel and Minzifa Hotel, 2000s, in Bukhara). Such techniques are now used as through-carved stucco on a mirror surface, ceiling cornices, the *sharafa* technique originating from the fifteenth century, and the patterns of панджара *panjara*, through-carved window lattices.¹⁹

¹⁹ Through-carved decorative lattices that used to serve as additional sources of light and ventilation are now used to give a national colour to the interior.

3.4 The Ornaments Types, Techniques, and Interaction in a Design

The current technique is based on a high percentage of gypsum, which accelerates the setting. The material passes multi-stage treatment by firing, removal of impurities, and mixing the stucco powder with vegetable glue added. Work quality depends on the stucco's properties. The masters control setting speed by adding glue and by wetting the product with water.

Close texture, high strength and pure white colour largely determine the carving technique. This consists in chiselling wet stucco plaster, first to outline the ornament and then to sink the background and decorate the relief.

The resultant relief is not higher than a few millimetres. Unlike stone or wood, stucco is more plastic and easier to process, making it simpler for the master to express his personal style. On the other hand, it is super-hard after drying and has a velvety texture and soft white colour.

The technique of carving on a flat surface stays arguably the same over time: while in early Islamic monuments the dominant technique is carving without a background, the latest centuries' works feature exuberant ornamentation that stands out against a smooth background.

At present, the most common types of stucco work, mainly using the quicker and cheaper technique of casting, include *panjara*, *hauzak*, *sharafa*, and *занджир* *zanjira* (narrow borders decorated with an ornament).

The *ganchkor's* arsenal includes a dozen or so of tools that enable him to create even the most complicated ornaments. The so-called *пардозы* *pardoz*, 'ornament templates', are the *ganchkor's* main treasure that used to be handed down from father to son. In a *pardoz*, vegetable and geometric ornaments heighten each other.

The master's task is not only to build a geometric scheme but also to give it an emotional colouring. The forms of a vegetal ornament follow geometry and are based on two building methods: a combination of arc and curve and *мадохиль* *madokhil*, a system of figures that include and form one another.

There is also a group of stylised ornaments (figure lockets and festoon arches) and vegetal ornaments that follow no geometric structure. These are primarily floral compositions consisting of stylised flowers in fancy vases and other motifs inspired by poetic allusions (the weeping willow from the mediaeval tale of Layla and Majnun). These techniques are equally common to stucco and carved wood, majolica and mosaic. However, not all the works feature high artistic quality and style of their own.

How do these types of ornament interact in a single décor programme? What meanings do they carry?

To answer these questions, I proceed from the fact that any sacral art essentially projects certain theological aspects into visual imagery.

Thus, the repetition of certain images forms the basis of an ornament. All the types of Muslim ornament are perceived by the viewer as an endless narration that lasts forever. It performs two functions. On the one hand, being flexible and varied, it conveys the idea of infinity that constitutes an important element of a Muslim's perception of a non-portrayable and incomprehensible God. On the other hand, it is a means of glorifying and admiring the world. The Quran repeatedly cites plant and animal life as proof of God's benevolence towards the man who uses its riches. And Islam's plastic art reflects, in a sense, the word of the Quran, whose language is omnipresent in the world of Islam.

Virtually every vegetal ornament includes geometric elements. These impart a certain structure to the triumph of flexible vegetal forms. The above-mentioned *sharafa* stalactite cornices are brilliant examples of it. Their elements hanging down one after the other create an illusion of endless deepening of space and serve to hide the junction between a wall and the flat ceiling or dome. Like the dome, these have become a symbol of Heaven. In connecting the dome to its four-cornered foundation, they reflect the motion of the celestial spheres in agreement with that of the Earth. Moreover, they perform the function of absorbing light and diffusing it in the form of the finest gradations to express the idea of divine light. The Muslim artist strives to turn even the material with which he works into the vibration of colour and to transform light-transmitting surfaces. Hence the much-favoured technique of *panjara*, stucco lattices that diffuse bright sunshine, so that it becomes non-blinding and brings out all objects, as though awakening them into existence.

All that corresponded to the Muslim's heartfelt understanding of the essence of his religion. Of course, now we can not state that masters of this day realise and try to embody these principles of sacral art. Rather, they unconsciously copy the specimens and achievements of what has once been a super-rich tradition.

4 Conclusions

By the twelfth century canons of ornamental forms based on *islimi* and *girikh* were elaborated, to be somewhat redefined in the following centuries. As a result, twentieth-century masters inherited a very rich arsenal of vegetal and geometric ornamental patterns executed in flat carving technique.

In conclusion, we should answer the two questions formulated in Section 1.

Firstly, how did the twentieth century manage this rich heritage of Islamic art (as regards the region under review)?

It embarked on stylisation.

Back at the turn of the twentieth century, Russian architecture of the eclectic period, rich in Oriental-like stylisations, found its way into major cities in the Muslim provinces of the Russian empire.

Such stylisations were only multiplying in the Soviet period, for the traditions of Muslim religious architecture could no longer develop naturally. Against this backdrop, stylisation was the only way to keep the Muslim tradition alive in the big and modern city. In the research literature, it was termed 'search for national style'. However, the fruitfulness of those experiments and the aesthetic value of such architecture that mimicked the Muslim East remain doubtful.

By inertia, this penchant for stylisation is still prevalent in the architects' work. Even now that the principles of Muslim architecture no longer need not be smuggled in any longer and religious structures can be freely built, they still over-emphasise the decorative elements. And this is done without sufficient knowledge about the laws of articulation and organisation on which the construction of such buildings is based.

The above is true of the twentieth (and 21st) century, although the development of this type of décor has been undulating in different decades.

Secondly, above I gave a brief overview of the use of traditional stucco carving in the twentieth-century architecture of Uzbekistan, and I suggest the following periodisation.

By the turn of the twentieth century, stucco was mainly being used in interiors in its obsolete stereotyped forms. So when the new home layout appeared with which the former décor jarred, adapted as it was to the framework-based design of the traditional house, it was rather quick to succumb to the influences of the moulded ornament of the neighbouring Russian regions (different in both technique and ornamentation).

By the second quarter of the twentieth century, private orders for interiors with carved stucco disappears as a factor of development. So, in the following decades stucco was being employed for representative purposes in the architecture of public buildings (libraries, theatres, exhibition pavilions, etc.)

In the 1930s, Central Asia came fully into the orbit of the Soviet Union that proclaimed not only the construction of a new society but also the creation of a new and realistic Soviet art, which entailed colossal shifts in traditional decorative and applied art. Signs of the new time (such as musical instruments and cotton) are artificially introduced into the stucco ornamentation. In the pre-war years, the invited Russian architects with marginal knowledge of Muslim ornamentation were apparently struggling with a difficult task. They

were trying to enrich the traditional ornamentation arsenal by turning not only to signs of the new era but also to the accustomed motifs of other decorative and applied arts (such as embroidery). However, they were unsuccessful, as were the attempts to accurately follow the traditional ornamentation models and reproduce the achievements of the local schools, that had once been the best ones, in the interiors of one public building. The same trend has been observed in the last fifteen years, mainly in the architecture of the tourist areas.

In the 1960s and 1970s, in line with the worldwide trends of laconism, stucco is relegated to the modest role of decorating structural elements (cornices, ceiling rosettes, and, rarely, panels.) The links to traditional carved stucco become more and more distant and nominal, as carving is replaced everywhere with template casting. The result features neither a high mastership nor newly found patterns.

The copying of old models ceases altogether in the 1980s and 1990s, a period that prioritised the creation of a modern, functional and comfortable building and free interpretation of both ancient (pre-Islamic) and modern motifs.

While after the twelfth-century stucco was rarely used mainly in interiors as it would quickly succumb to the elements, in the Soviet period it was also used to decorate outer walls. But that did not change matters much, for the new century failed to enrich the former arsenal with any innovative ornamentation approaches. Although the twentieth century was introducing new means of expression, most masters were repeating the old techniques. Thus, in-wall panels, less than perfectly executed, we can still see the favoured motifs of Bukhara and Samarkand, developed in monumental architecture back in the fifteenth-seventeenth centuries. In the stalactites and arch *nichettes*, the Khwarizmi models of the late twelfth-thirteenth centuries. In the decorative stellate vaults, we see Bukhara examples of the sixteenth century and re-coloured polychromic stucco that was traditionally combined with pinkish-yellow terracotta in the fourteenth century.

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