

**TURKMENISTAN -  
UNESCO: APPRAISAL OF THE HISTORICAL-  
CULTURAL VALUES AND DETERMINATION  
OF THE WAYS ON THE PROTECTION  
OF THE WORLD HERITAGE PROPERTIES**

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**EXPANSION OF ARCHITECTURAL TRADITIONS  
OF KUNYA-URGENCH TO PAKISTAN AND BEYOND**

Kunya-Urgench represents a very important architectural ensemble in the evolution of Islamic architecture in Central Asia during the 12th to 15th centuries which is intimately linked with the contemporary centers in the same region and beyond. Its cultural, artistic and architectural significance is further emphasized by its location on an ancient international route connecting East Asia with the western world. A distinctive architectural style and decorative art emerged in this region that profoundly influenced the building art in the adjoining regions of Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey. Kunya-Urgench continues to be an integral part of the groups of monuments at Samarkand, Khiva and Bukhara.

Thanks to the team of experienced conservators and architects of Turkmenistan that restoration work at the monuments has been carried out

with due regard for maintaining originality of structural plan and design. The monuments so far preserved, still stand on their original foundations, though decorative details are missing. The religious structures in particular have undergone extensive repairs and restoration during the last century because they are "living" monuments and continue to function as such even today. The procedure for restoring monuments is almost standardized in Turkmenistan and elsewhere in Central Asia, which is inherited in part from the Russian conservators. The restored monuments at Kunya-Urgench reflect those traditional conservation and restoration concepts that allow restoration without changing the basic plan and style. As such, the remains of ancient city and monuments at Kunya-Urgench are an authentic record of the past providing credible information in terms of NARA Document of Authenticity.

As a consequence of fast political changes that took place in Central Asia during the 11th and 12th centuries, the neighbouring regions to its south in Afghanistan and Pakistan were profoundly affected which ultimately, led to various changes in the cultural configurations and expressions in art forms and architecture. There have always been very close commercial, cultural and even spiritual contacts among the populations of these regions. These bonds always remained very strong because the Muslim rulers of South Asia came from Afghanistan and Central Asia and sought inspiration from their homeland. Displacement of population in Central Asia caused by military conflicts caused inter-regional migrations to Pakistan and northern India. Men of letters, artists and artisans, architects, master craftsmen and calligraphers, Sufi and saints, from Central Asia migrated to Pakistan and India, bringing with them valuable knowledge and expertise to use under their new royal patronage. It is therefore no surprise that the Islamic art of Pakistan during the early Medieval times bears strong similarities with the Central Asian technique of construction in design and decorative art for surface ornamentation.

There are quite a number of monuments in Pakistan, which clearly reflect direct inspiration from the buildings of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in terms of structural design, decorative elements and their style. The most common form of mausoleum was the square base changing to an octagonal form with squinches at the corners to support a high drum and dome above. The cut-brick decorations are other elements that characterize the 12th century and later architecture of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Pakistan being an integral part of the Central Asian history and cultural traditions represents an extension of architectural forms, decorations and traditions in the mausoleum, mosques and secular buildings of the 12th century and later periods. The surviving tombs of the 12th century in Pakistan clearly reflect several architectural features that originally characterized the Seljuk

buildings such as the tomb of Sultan Sanjar and contemporary buildings in other parts of Central Asia. Some significant architectural features that are comparable between the two regions are:

- (i) square ground plan of tombs with slightly tapering outer walls,
- (ii) use of wooden tie-beams and fired bricks,
- (iii) elaborate cut-brick decorations of geometric and floral designs,
- (iv) combination of glazed and moulded brick designs and
- (v) stucco decorations.

In Pakistan, the earliest surviving tomb of Khalid Walid, built in 1175 ACE, is a clear reflection of Seljuk architecture. It is built on a square plan with a single dome above, which is supported, on corner squinches. It has a brick 'mihrab' (niche marking direction of Qibla). Profusely decorated with cut-brick inscriptions in floriated 'Kufic' style combined with other decorative motifs. Although not many complete examples of the second half of the 12th century have survived in Pakistan but their popularity and religious sanctity is demonstrated by the continuity of architectural traditions during the succeeding 13th century and even later.

One of the best examples is the mausoleum of Bahad-ud-din Zakriya (d. 1262 ACE) at Multan in central Punjab in the same region where the tomb of Khalid Walid is located. Baha-ud-din Zakriya was a highly respected saint. Who like other spritual leaders of Pakistan had travelled to Central Asian cities of learning in search of spritual guidance, knowledge and training. His tomb is marked by simplicity of design with plain brick external walls crowned with an imposing single dome that stands on sqinches springing from the square base. There is yet another tomb in the same region built at Pakpattan over the saint Ala-ud-din Mauj Dray that is built on square base and crowned with a single dome. The surface treatment with glazed tiles and plain brickwork recalls the style of monument of Kunya-Urgench and Samarkand. The most visible and emphatic example of central Asian architectural traditions in Pakistan is the monuments in central Punjab at Muzaffargarh and Uch. These tombs still retain original brilliancy of blue glazed brick tiles blending harmoniously with white glaze and naked brickwork.

There are three other contemporary tombs in central and southern Pakistan built of brick on square base and supporting a dome above. Yet other important groups of tombs are located in Balochistan near Iranian border and northern part of Pakistan that border Afghanistan. All represent a plain and cut brick construction, use of wood and further elaboration of decorated designs that have their origin in Central Asia. These traditions persisted well into the 14th century and beyond in modified form to suit local conditions. Such monuments stand out as the finest examples of early Central Asian architectural traditions as documents of common cultural and artistic traditions in both the regions.

The monuments at Kunya-Urgench and elsewhere in Turkmenistan constitute one of centres of these traditions.

The paper will highlight the significance of architecture of Kunya-Urgench and at other places in Central Asia and their striking similarities with buildings in Afghanistan and especially Pakistan, in order to demonstrate common cultural source and tradition of these regions during the 12th and 16th centuries. The emphasis will be on elaborate cut brick decoration of geometric and floral designs and combinations of glazed and moulded brick work with stucco decorations on the monuments of 12th century as a clear reflection of strong Central Asian influences in architecture and decorative designs.