



TASHKENT ARCHITECTURE OF THE SHAYBANID ERA: THE CASE OF THE KUKALDOSH MADRASA

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Article history:	Abstract:
Received: 11 th March 2026 Accepted: 8 th April, 2026	This article examines the historical significance, architectural structure, and past and present scholarly, educational, and touristic activities of the Kukaldosh Madrasa — one of the most outstanding examples of Shaybanid-era architecture, built in the city of Tashkent
Keywords: scholarly, educational, and touristic activities	

INTRODUCTION

In the history of every state, periods of war and conflict coexist alongside eras of prosperity, construction, and urban development. During the reign of the Shaybanid dynasty, which ruled over Mawarannahr, such constructive endeavors were likewise carried out: the dynasty's representatives sought not only to centralize the state politically, but also to elevate fields such as science, art, and architecture. Rulers including Shaybanykhan, Ubaydullakhan, and Abdullakhan II, alongside the officials and governors who played important roles in the political life of that era, took an active part in these building efforts. On their initiative, numerous madrasas, mosques, and khanqahs were erected throughout the country. One such structure is the Kukaldosh Madrasa, which rose in Tashkent in the sixteenth century and holds a distinctive place by virtue of its grandeur, architectural design, and location.

METHOD

The study employs a comparative-historical analysis method. Through this approach, the personality and social standing of the madrasa's founder, Qulbobo Kukaldosh, were examined using Hafiz Tanish Bukhari's sixteenth-century work *Abdullaname*. To determine the madrasa's construction, its rooms, and its economic condition, the accounts of nineteenth-century authors D. I. Evarnitsky and Muhammad Salihkhoja were compared with one another. Furthermore, the scholarly conclusions of researchers such as G. A. Pugachenkova, V. Bulatova, and S. Davletov were drawn upon to analyze how the building changed over time as a result of earthquakes and restorations. This approach served to clearly trace the building's history from its original conception through to its current architectural and economic condition.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Over many centuries, cultural life and architecture have been inseparable components of the state structure. The unique architectural monuments erected during the period of the Bukhara Khanate — remarkable for their engineering solutions and socio-economic significance — have attracted the attention of numerous local and foreign scholars across the centuries. The foundational starting point for studying these monuments is the sixteenth-century source *Abdullaname* by Hafiz Tanish al-Bukhari. Although this work does not provide a direct technical description of the building, it serves as a fundamental source for illuminating the political influence and administrative role of the object's founder, Qulbobo Kukaldosh. Muhammad Salihkhoja's *Tarihi Jadidai Tashkand* is of particular importance for documenting the monument's condition in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The scholarly value and reliability of this work have been thoroughly studied by contemporary researcher U. Sultonov, who systematized Salihkhoja's notes concerning madrasa life, its waqf properties, and damage sustained after earthquakes. The investigations of D. I. Evarnitsky likewise occupy an important place in illuminating the monument's archaeological and historical condition from the perspective of that era. Scientific analyses of the monument's architectural structure and artistic decoration are reflected in the fundamental works of scholars such as G. A. Pugachenkova and V. Bulatova, who established the building's place within the Central Asian school of architecture and substantiated its structural characteristics.

ANALYSIS

Although Hafiz Tanish al-Bukhari's *Abdullaname* — one of the principal sources of the sixteenth century — does not provide a direct architectural description of the madrasa, it offers detailed accounts of its founder Qulbobo Kukaldosh, his role in state policy, and his close relationship with Abdullakhan II. (Kukaldosh means "milk-brother.")

This indirectly aids in understanding the madrasa's prestige and the state attention devoted to its construction. (Abdullaname, 2000)

Notably, however, while examining Muhammad Salihkhoja's manuscripts, U. Sultonov connects the construction of the Kukaldosh Madrasa with Darveshkhon, the son of Baraqkhon. Sultonov also cites the views of other researchers — in particular A. N. Dobrosmislov — in his work. According to these accounts, the madrasa was located in the Beshyog'och district of the city and originally comprised three stories and thirty-eight cells. Over subsequent periods, however — especially following powerful earthquakes and restorations — only a single story of the madrasa survived. Muhammad Salihkhoja himself confirms these details, recording that the madrasa suffered severe damage in the earthquakes of 1868 and 1886. Sultonov further notes the madrasa's economic condition, indicating that by 1884 it possessed 230 shops, the income from which was directed toward the madrasa's expenses and the salaries of its teachers. (Muhammad Salihkhoja va uning «Tarixi jadidayi Toshkand» asari, 2009: 145)

The notes of researcher D. I. Evarnitsky, who conducted fieldwork in the late nineteenth century, are also of particular significance. In his work *A Guide to Central Asia (Putevoditel po Sredney Azii)*, he addresses the madrasa's condition at that time. Evarnitsky corroborates Sultonov's findings, noting that the madrasa then consisted of thirty-eight cells. Although he links the madrasa's construction to the name of Darvishkhon, he based this information not on precise archival documents but primarily on local oral tradition. He also draws attention to changes in the monument's architectural appearance, noting that the madrasa complex had been rebuilt and repaired on numerous occasions, and that this continuous reconstruction caused the building to lose all of its original ornamental decorations and the ancient inscriptions on its walls — making it considerably more difficult to study the monument's original appearance. Another intriguing detail appears in Evarnitsky's research. The madrasa at that time served not only as an educational institution but also as a place for the execution of religious legal judgments. From the height of the dome built atop its third floor, women convicted of adultery were reportedly sewn into sacks and thrown down onto the bazaar street running alongside the madrasa. This punishment, however, was not applied regularly — it was carried out once every six years as a public example. ("Putevoditel po Sredney Azii: ot Baku do Tashkenta v arkhologicheskoy i istoricheskoy otnosheniya", 1893: 194–195)

While the above information concerning the madrasa's history is undoubtedly noteworthy, the deep scholarly investigations of G. A. Pugachenkova and V. A. Bulatova serve as the primary sources for studying the building's distinctive architectural structure, construction framework, and engineering solutions. Pugachenkova's conclusions are of special importance for a deeper understanding of the madrasa. According to her findings, the madrasa was a rectangular structure with a spacious courtyard whose corners were cut at a forty-five-degree angle. Unlike other researchers, Pugachenkova places the number of cells at sixty. A lecture hall was situated in the northeast corner of the madrasa, and a small mosque in the southwest corner. On either side of the portal were two-story arcaded galleries (loggias), whose corners were adorned with tall and elegant minarets — though these minarets were demolished by the early nineteenth century. (Vydayushchiesya pamyatniki arkhitektury Uzbekistana, 1958: 150–151)

V. A. Bulatova and L. Mankovskaya, in their work *Architectural Monuments of Tashkent*, also devote particular attention to the madrasa's construction technique and the damage it sustained over time. Unlike other researchers, Bulatova links the madrasa's construction to a vizier of the Tashkent Khan, known by the name "Kukaldosh." According to the testimony of Tashkent merchant Nur-Muhammad, recorded by the Orenburg expedition in 1795, the madrasa was used as a caravanserai in the late eighteenth century. The blue domes that had stood above the mosque and lecture hall until 1800, along with the second story of the cells, were dismantled for bricks in 1830–1831 by the Tashkent ruler Beklarbegi, who used these bricks to construct a madrasa in his own name near Registon Square. The madrasa was subsequently repaired. During restoration, the following inscriptions were applied to the tiles above the entrance door:

"This magnificent building was restored in Hijri year 1246 (CE 1830/31) by the hands of master Avaz-Muhammad, son of Azima Veli." "This building was skillfully reworked by Shodmonbek, son of Jahongirbek, chief commander of the palace." "Death is inevitable for man, but the works he leaves behind are eternal. Tile master Alimjon, son of master Salim."

The use of the madrasa for punishments is confirmed by Bulatova and Mankovskaya as well. During the powerful Tashkent earthquakes of 1868 and 1886, the upper section of the entrance portal was destroyed down to the fifth arch. Following this destruction, the main facade, the courtyard cells, borders, and tympanums were repaired using "Russian brick." The most extensive restoration work was carried out between 1902 and 1910: the remaining portal pylons were completed, a cornice was finished, lanterns were installed atop the pylons, and the walls and roof underwent capital repair — all without regard for the sixteenth-century original forms. Major research and restoration work was subsequently carried out by Soviet restorers during the 1930s through 1960s.

The Kukaldosh Madrasa is one of the largest surviving sixteenth-century madrasas in Central Asia. The building's overall form is bilaterally symmetrical along its central axis. Upon entering through the gate, the courtyard is not immediately visible; one must pass through turning corridors that lead out into the courtyard's southern arcade. The four corners of the courtyard are not simple right angles but are cut on the diagonal, with special passageways at these corners providing access to the student cells. The cells are built on two stories, with nine elegantly arched doorways arranged along the long sides of the courtyard.

The madrasa's most important rooms — the mosque and the lecture hall — feature exceptionally complex roof construction. These rooms were originally covered by double superimposed domes, a distinctive hallmark of Tashkent's

fifteenth- and sixteenth-century architecture. Today, only the inner shell and the base of the outer dome survive. Viewed from above, the interior of the mosque and lecture hall takes on an "X" shape, with double superimposed domes covering them — one of the most defining features of the Tashkent school of architecture. The cells' roofs are likewise not flat but domed. The building was constructed of fired brick (27×27 cm) laid in clay mortar. The walls are of three-layer construction, with brick fragments and clay fill in the middle. This technique, however, proved insufficiently resistant in seismically active zones, and over time the lower portions of the walls gradually bowed outward. Only the front facade of the madrasa was lavishly decorated. The portal is adorned with hexagonal patterned tiles (majolica) and intricately carved stonework, lending the structure a distinctive majesty. The windows are fitted with ornamental grilles of blue, white, and turquoise ceramic, whose harmonious colors impart a sense of elegance and lightness to the monument. Architectural beauty continued into the courtyard as well: the interior walls of the portal facing the courtyard were fully covered with majolica tiles, representing a supreme example of the tile-making art of that era. (Pamyatniki zodchestva Tashkenta, 1983: 70–72)

DISCUSSION

The research reveals that the date of the madrasa's construction and the identity of its founder remain unresolved. Some scholars link it to the name of Qulbobob Kukaldosh, while others associate it with Darvishkhan, a cousin of Abdullakhan. Despite this ambiguity, the structure stands as proof that Shaybanid architecture reached a remarkably high level of development, as attested by its scale and grandeur.

As noted above, the building served not only as a place of learning but also as a venue for the execution of legal sentences. Although such punishments were applied infrequently, their deterrent effect served to uphold public morality. The choice of the Kukaldosh Madrasa for this purpose can be explained by its location directly adjacent to the bazaar — and, as history consistently shows, bazaars were always the most crowded and central gathering places in any city.

The madrasa suffered severe damage in the earthquakes of 1868 and 1886, with the result that its original architectural style and appearance have not been preserved. The cause of this damage lay in the construction method employed: the three-layer walls with rubble-and-clay fill proved insufficiently strong for a seismically active region, and over time the lower sections of the walls gradually bulged outward.

Another noteworthy aspect is that each successive restoration caused the building to deviate further from its original appearance. During the most extensive restoration of 1902–1910 in particular, portal pylons were completed, a cornice was added, lanterns were placed atop the pylons, and the walls and roof were overhauled — all without any reference to the sixteenth-century forms. This creates significant difficulties today in reconstructing the madrasa's original appearance.

Despite all of this, the Kukaldosh Madrasa continues to fulfill its historical function to this day. It remains an active center of learning, providing religious education to young students — a testament to the fact that this monument has not merely become a museum piece or architectural relic, but continues to be preserved as living cultural heritage. Furthermore, the madrasa has become one of Tashkent's most significant tourist attractions. Its location next to the Chorsu Bazaar and its position in the historical center of the city make it especially accessible to visitors, and many local and foreign tourists come to this site to acquaint themselves firsthand with the rich architectural heritage of Central Asia.

CONCLUSION

Over the course of this research, it became clear that the Kukaldosh Madrasa is not merely an architectural monument, but a living reflection of the society that produced it. An examination of the sources reveals that scholars have yet to reach consensus on when the madrasa was built and by whom: some attribute it to Qulbobob Kukaldosh, others to Darvishkhan. This uncertainty leads to an important observation — that history sometimes resides not in documents but in oral tradition, and that proving such traditions scientifically is often impossible.

The madrasa itself was far more than a place of study over the centuries. It simultaneously served as a site for the execution of punishments, as a caravanserai, and as a center of social life — illustrating how multifaceted and vital such structures were within the fabric of the medieval city. The earthquakes and successive waves of restoration have meant that the building's original appearance has not survived intact to the present day. Each restoration was carried out with the intention of preserving the structure, yet each one, in practice, moved it further from its original form — a reminder that the preservation of cultural heritage demands not hasty decisions, but careful and rigorous scholarly methodology. Even so, the Kukaldosh Madrasa lives on. It serves at once as a house of learning for young students and as an open book for travelers seeking to experience the rich history of Central Asia. It is precisely this dual function — maintained simultaneously — that, in my view, represents the monument's greatest value and enduring strength.

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