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THE EARLY CENTERS OF SCULPTURE ART DEVELOPMENT IN THE TERRITORY OF UZBEKISTAN

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Annotation: This paper outlines the historical development of sculpture in Uzbekistan, starting from Bronze Age artifacts to the flourishing of easel sculpture in the 1970s–1980s. Emphasis is placed on stylistic fusion, thematic diversity, and the transition from traditional to contemporary artistic directions, all of which contributed to forming a unique national sculptural identity.

Key words: sculpture, classical realism, thematic sculpture, satirical genre, artistic identity, cultural continuity, visual art heritage, national art, stylistic diversity.

Introduction:

By the Bronze Age of the primitive communal system (the 2nd millennium BC), ancient urban-type settlements began to form in the southern regions of Uzbekistan—particularly around the Sherobod River basin, Qizilsuv, and Bandikhon streams in Surkhandarya. These ancient cultural centers include cities such as Sopolli-tepa and Jarkoton. In Sopolli-tepa, residential, economic, and artisanal buildings were constructed. Pottery workshops in particular were well developed, producing various household and economic items, some of which feature elements of sculpture.

Animal images were used as decorative elements on objects, and handles resembling human figures were applied to jugs. Among the findings at Sopolli-tepa, there is a clearly depicted image of an animal. Although the image is somewhat stylized, it possesses a realistic external form. Such examples of sculpture indicate that during the Bronze Age, people not only aimed to make household items practical but also paid attention to their decorative qualities. The integration of sculptural elements into objects ultimately led to the development of creative skills in this art form. This process later laid the foundation for sculpture to emerge as an independent branch of visual art.

Literature analysis and methodology:

Ancient Uzbek sculpture has been studied since 1960 by the “Art Studies Expedition” of the Institute of Art Studies. As a result of the expeditions led by art historian and academician G.A. Pugachenkova, many rare monuments consisting of sculptural works reflecting the development of our cultural heritage have been discovered. These very findings serve as the main source for studying ancient Uzbek sculpture. These artifacts represent the socio-political and spiritual-cultural lifestyle spanning from the final ruling period of the Achaemenid Empire in the 4th century BC to the 3rd–4th centuries AD.

It is known that in the 6th century BC, ancient states in the territory of Uzbekistan—formed by the Bactrians, Sogdians, Khorezmians, Parthians, Kangju, and Saka tribes—were colonized by the

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Achaemenid Empire of Iran. In the art of that period, one can observe a fusion of Iranian artistic traditions with local schools. Based on this synthesis, sculpture, like other branches of visual art, developed significantly. Alongside small-scale plastic sculptures, many works of art were created as architectural decorations. In this regard, the sculptural examples found in the palace of Kallalikir in Khorezm are of particular importance. The griffins with eagle heads on the capital part of the palace columns are priceless examples of sculpture from that era. The discoveries from the "Oxus Treasure," dating from the 6th to 4th centuries BC, provide valuable information about Achaemenid-era sculpture. Monuments created according to the traditions of commissioned sculpture were also found in the ruins of the city of Dingilja (Khorezm), which was under the influence of Achaemenid art and culture.

Artistic works of ancient Uzbekistan's sculpture from the 6th to 4th centuries BC have reached us through the architectural remains of Kallalikir in Khorezm. The use of sculpture in this architecture is evident in the capitals depicting griffins with eagle heads. Artworks from this period are also clearly reflected in various decorative items—including sculptural examples—found in the upper reaches of the Amu Darya. "Among these artifacts, now preserved in the British Museum in London, are gold statues, various jugs, bracelets, rings, seals, coins, a miniature gold chariot, and weapons, all of which are particularly noteworthy." Monumental sculpture was well developed in ancient Khorezm. During archaeological research conducted in Topraqqala, more than 30 large statues, both clothed and unclothed, were discovered in nine rooms. Additionally, embossed images on coins and small-scale sculptures dating back to before 305 BC were found.

Results:

The 1970s and 1980s marked an important stage in the creative development of sculpture. In particular, easel sculpture emerged as an active branch of visual art, alongside painting and graphics. This was closely linked to the social and cultural changes of the time. For instance, "in the 1970s, the range of tasks facing Uzbek sculpture expanded in connection with the artistic interpretation of social life. The use of easel sculptures in accordance with social life, and their service to museums and art exhibitions, grew within cultural circles." As a result, holding special exhibitions with the participation of numerous artists took on serious significance. The deep integration of sculpture into cultural life increased the demand for easel sculptures, ultimately accelerating the pace of creative growth.

The republican sculpture exhibitions held in the mid-1970s show a noticeable intensification in the creative assimilation of the realistic style. "The First Regional Sculpture Exhibition of the Central Asian and Kazakh Republics, held in March 1983, became a significant event, where 365 easel sculptures by 118 artists were displayed." A special conference was organized to discuss the exhibits, with sculptors and art critics invited from across the former Soviet Union. The exhibition featured works skillfully created in the classical traditions of world realist art. Uzbekistan's sculpture spread beyond the capital and reached remote regions. For instance, activity in the Fergana Valley and Samarkand was observed early on, followed by growing engagement in Bukhara, Khorezm, and Nukus.

Discussion:

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Since the 1980s, the increase in the number of skilled sculptors in Uzbekistan led to new challenges in enhancing the artistic quality of works. This period saw the emergence of a highly competitive creative environment among sculptors with various levels of expertise. Each artist viewed the development of a personal artistic style through innovative plastic interpretation as a primary goal. As a result, there was a move away from dependence on portraiture or other traditional criteria, and expanding the scope of visual subjects became a common creative trend. This, in turn, contributed to the formation of thematic sculpture. The broadening of subject matter in sculpture brought about stylistic diversity.

This development clearly marked a shift from the one-sided artistic progression of the 1960s toward a new and dynamic stage of plastic expression. During this phase, diverse aspects of social life, rural scenes, legendary figures, and modern narratives were actively explored, resulting in consistent development in national, contemporary, and satirical themes. Over time, the emergence of engaging and distinctive forms that retained their artistic value became central themes for sculptors, significantly influencing the national stature of creative development. In the development of Uzbek easel sculpture during the 1970s and 1980s, both traditional and non-traditional directions played a significant role. In the traditional direction—particularly in complete and multi-figure thematic works—classical and realistic stylistic approaches were given great importance. In full-figure sculptures, there was noticeable improvement in anatomical accuracy and plastic harmony. Positive results were observed in portraying the inner essence of images and expressing their emotional states more precisely, especially in portraits and historical works created in realistic or classical styles. Notably, the satirical genre also played an important role in conveying human emotions.

Conclusion:

The historical trajectory of sculpture in Uzbekistan demonstrates a rich continuity from ancient times to the modern era. Beginning with Bronze Age utilitarian objects enhanced by decorative sculptural elements, the art form matured through the influence of Achaemenid culture and local traditions, as seen in the artifacts from Khorezm and the Oxus Treasure. The Soviet period, particularly the 1970s–1980s, marked a significant turning point with the rise of easel sculpture and the incorporation of both classical realism and experimental approaches. Regional expansion, thematic enrichment, and stylistic diversification characterized this era, solidifying sculpture's role in shaping Uzbekistan’s national artistic identity.

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