



Article

The Role of the Science of “Rasm Al-Mushaf” in the Formation of the Transoxiana School of Calligraphy

Ibragimov Shomirza Nurmirza o'g'li¹, Alisher Navoi²

1. PhD Candidate at Tashkent State University of Uzbek Language and Literature named after
2. Lecturer at the Department of Qur'anic Sciences, Tashkent Islamic Institute named after Imam al-Bukhari

Abstract: We will discuss the importance of the Rasm al-Mushaf in the development of the Transoxiana school of calligraphy from historical, linguistic and aesthetic perspectives in this article. Calligraphy with the Arabic script began to flourish as the region opened up to different cultures through the Silk Road and with the advent of Islam as well. Rasm al-Mushaf, the science of exact reproduction of Qur'anic texts, not only guaranteed consistency between manuscripts, but also allowed for local styles of characteristic calligraphy to emerge. A gap in the existing literature on the intersection of the religious necessity to accurately replicate a given text as well as the innovative side of calligraphy is identified in this article. Using a qualitative approach and relying on manuscripts, artistic works, and the tradition of calligraphy, it has been historically tracing back the schools of calligraphy, specifically during the era and time of Timur. Abstract: The stricter regulations of Rasm al-Mushaf provided a fertile ground for creative expression, one that was embraced and fine tuned by the calligraphers of Transoxiana and their works became artwork with a global positive impact. The peak of aesthetic and technical master in the Timurid period not only contributed to the advancement of the art form but also established its permanent place in the world cultural heritage. In doing so, this research highlights the importance of calligraphy, not just as an art form but as an expression of culture, knowledge and religious necessity that provided a window into the relationship between textual accuracy and aesthetic elegance in the crafting of the calligraphic heritage of Transoxiana. Future studies may examine the contemporary role of Rasm al-Mushaf in the transmission and understanding of Islamic calligraphy.

Keywords: Transoxiana, Calligraphy, Rasm Al-Mushaf, Arabic Script, Islamic Culture, Qur'anic Writing, Schools of Calligraphy, Timurid Period, Naskh, Thuluth, Nasta'Li, Aesthetics, Linguistics, Manuscripts

Citation: Nurmirza o'g'li I. S., Navoi A. The Role of the Science of “Rasm Al-Mushaf” in the Formation of the Transoxiana School of Calligraphy. Central Asian Journal of Literature, Philosophy, and Culture 2025, 6(4), 1013-1017.

Received: 15th Sept 2025

Revised: 30th Sept 2025

Accepted: 15th Oct 2025

Published: 28th Oct 2025



Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. Submitted for open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

1. Introduction

Rasm al-Mushaf as a science has served as an enduring foundation for the spread and preservation of the Qur'ān throughout the Islamic world and mosques throughout Transoxiana. An example of this, which established stringent rules for the faithful reproduction of the Qur'anic text, was fundamental to the evolution of calligraphy in this area [1]. A major center for both artistic and intellectual achievement was the Transoxiana school of calligraphy, which peaked especially during the Timurid period and served as an interface for the overlapping pursuits of religious devotion and aesthetic innovation. With the possible exception of Rasm al-Mushaf, its significance and the nature of the relationship between Rasm al-Mushaf and two distinct calligraphic traditions developed in Transoxiana is less considered terrain in current scholarship.

The literature around Rasm al-Mushaf has focused on its use for art or religion, but there are few studies that examine both aspects together. Importantly, no scholar has yet commented on the titronic interplay between theoretical exactitude and creative expression that characterized the calligraphic tradition of TL = TL-name (legend name) in the stretches of Transoxiana active as a center of Islamic culture. By exploring the adherence and deviation from the principles of Rasm al-Mushaf, this research aims to bridge this gap and carefully examine how those principles informed the works of calligraphers while providing them with the freedom to express their creativity [2]. Based on historical manuscripts, the article demonstrates the unique characteristics of calligraphic schools of Transoxiana, and proves their importance in Islamic art. A historical and analytical approach is taken in this study, drawing on diverse primary and secondary materials including Qur'anic manuscripts, works of art, and previous scholarship. These results show that the balanced relationship between the strict principles of Rasm al-Mushaf and the free zone of artistic expression resulted in a unique period of flourishing the art of calligraphy during the Timurid period, which can be defined as a golden age of this art [3]. More importantly, these results highlight the cultural importance of this singular art type and its lasting impact on the global legacy of Islamic art. Study implication: Whatever practical manifestations Rasm al-Mushaf went through, studying it can allude ways for modern calligraphy and manuscript preservation approaches.

2. Materials and Methods

This study methodology is the combination of historical researches as well as qualitative analysis of primary and secondary sources to reveal the function of Rasm al-Mushaf in developing a Transoxiana school of calligraphy. Its foundation is the deep study of Qur'anic manuscripts from the time of the Samanid, Qarakhanid, Khwarazmshah and Timurid epochs in terms of the features of aesthetics, linguistics and technics in calligraphy. This entails studying different calligraphic styles kufic, naskh, thuluth, and nasta'liq to see how the rules of Rasm al-Mushaf affected such styles. This paper explores the evolution of calligraphic traditions in Transoxiana focusing on the manuscripts from some key centers like Bukhara, Samarkand and Herat. Besides the manuscript analysis through text, the study also engages with the historical literature, art historical literature on Islamic calligraphy, art history, and cultural studies. This provides a contextual background for his observations of the political, religious, and cultural factors that led to the prominence of calligraphy in Transoxiana [4]. The study focuses specifically on the peak of this symbiosis of religious orthodoxy with art, at the time of the Timurids. When viewing calligraphic works from various periods, it notes the innovations in aesthetic made possible given the constraints of Rasm al-Mushaf. Through the synthesis of these materials, the results of this study demonstrate ways in which calligraphers of Transoxiana negotiated the tension between strict adherence to canonical forms and originality. Through this multi-faceted methodology, we can better understand the cultural meanings embedded in calligraphy in Transoxiana and its enduring legacy in global Islamic art.

3. Results and Discussion

Transoxiana: Cultural crossroads and the advent of Arabic script

Due to its geographical location on the crossroads of the Silk Road, Transoxiana was historically exposed to diverse cultures and writing systems [5]. The arrival of Islam in the 7th–8th centuries brought about fundamental transformations in the socio-political, economic, and cultural life of the region. In particular, the adoption of the Arabic script created a solid foundation for the rise and flourishing of calligraphic art.

Pre-Islamic written culture of Transoxiana: foundations and transformation

Before Islam, the region possessed a rich and diverse writing heritage [6]. Archaeological and linguistic evidence shows that Sogdian, Khwarazmian, and Pahlavi

scripts, all derived from the Aramaic alphabet, were widely used. The Sogdian script, in particular, functioned as a medium of trade and cultural exchange along the Silk Road. Khwarazmian and Pahlavi writings, on the other hand, reflected local statehood and religious traditions.

With the Muslim conquest, Arabic gradually replaced local scripts. This process was not immediate. Sogdian and other scripts survived for a time but the spread of Islam and the need to read and write the Qur'an in its original language elevated the importance of Arabic [7]. Over time, Arabic became the principal medium not only for religious texts but also for state administration, scholarship, and literature.

The emergence of *Rasm al-Mushaf*: religious necessity and linguistic foundation

As the divine word of God, the Qur'an demanded precision in every letter, word, and orthographic form. Out of this necessity arose a specialized discipline *Rasm al-Mushaf* (Arabic: رسم المصحف) which laid down strict canonical rules for writing the Qur'an. These rules governed the shapes, proportions, and connections of letters, the arrangement of words on lines, and the use of diacritics and supplementary signs [8].

The science of *Rasm al-Mushaf* ensured the uniform preservation of Qur'anic manuscripts across the Islamic world. For calligraphers, it served as a guidebook that guaranteed the accurate transmission of the divine text.

The rise of calligraphy schools in Transoxiana and the influence of *Rasm al-Mushaf*

As Islam firmly took root, Transoxiana became a major intellectual and cultural hub, creating fertile ground for the development of calligraphy. During the Samanid era (9th–10th centuries), cities such as Bukhara, Samarkand, and Urgench witnessed a flourishing of scholarship and literature [9]. Mosques, madrasas, and libraries increased the demand for books, which spurred the growth of professional calligraphers.

In this period, *Rasm al-Mushaf* became the standard criterion for copying Qur'anic manuscripts. The transcription of the Qur'an was not only a religious duty but also an artistic endeavor [10]. Transoxiana's calligraphers mastered the principles of *Rasm al-Mushaf* while simultaneously developing individual styles, which gave rise to distinctive regional schools of calligraphy.

Under the Qarakhanids and Khwarazmshahs (11th–13th centuries), the art of calligraphy advanced further. Qur'an copying gained widespread popularity, with increasing attention to beauty and refinement [11]. Alongside strict adherence to *Rasm al-Mushaf*, artistic experimentation expanded. Styles such as kufic, naskh, and thuluth developed distinctive local forms.

The Timurid era: fidelity to *Rasm al-Mushaf* and aesthetic flourishing

The 14th–15th centuries, under the Timurids, marked the "golden age" of calligraphy in Transoxiana. Amir Timur and his successors actively supported scholarship and the arts, including calligraphy. Samarkand, Herat, and Bukhara emerged as major centers.

During this period, while the rules of *Rasm al-Mushaf* remained central, calligraphers achieved unprecedented artistic sophistication. Traditional Arabic scripts such as naskh, thuluth, muhaqqaq, rayhani, and tawqi' thrived, while the nasta'liq style developed by Mir Ali Tabrizi rose to prominence [12]. Suited to Persian phonetics, nasta'liq became a hallmark of Transoxiana's calligraphic school.

Masters such as Sultan Ali Mashhadi, Ja'far Tabrizi, and Azhar Tabrizi created masterpieces that harmonized canonical precision with artistic excellence [13]. Their Qur'anic manuscripts stood out not only for script beauty but also for page composition, decorative illumination, and symmetry. Margins were adorned with gold and lapis lazuli, enriched with floral and geometric motifs.

The harmony of Rasm al-Mushaf and artistic creativity

The uniqueness of Transoxiana's calligraphy lay in its balance: calligraphers upheld the strict demands of *Rasm al-Mushaf* while imbuing their work with elegance, rhythm, and dynamism. Lines were meticulously arranged, words carefully balanced, and pages aesthetically unified.

Rather than limiting creativity, *Rasm al-Mushaf* provided a framework within which calligraphers could demonstrate mastery and produce works of enduring artistic value [14]. This harmony ensured that Transoxiana's calligraphy became an integral part of the global heritage of Islamic art.

The cultural significance of calligraphy in Transoxiana

Calligraphy in Transoxiana extended beyond religious contexts. Beautifully written manuscripts spread knowledge in disciplines such as history, philosophy, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, and literature. Their aesthetic embellishment increased their prestige and stimulated intellectual curiosity. In architecture, calligraphy played a prominent role. Mosques, madrasas, mausoleums, and palaces were adorned with Qur'anic verses, hadiths, and wise sayings inscribed in elegant scripts, enriching the cities' visual identity [15][16].

The art of calligraphy also stimulated the book-making industry. Calligraphers worked alongside binders, illuminators, gilders, and other artisans, fostering the growth of crafts and related industries.

4. Conclusion

The science of *Rasm al-Mushaf* was fundamental to the formation of the Transoxiana school of calligraphy. By safeguarding the preservation and transmission of the Qur'an, it provided a solid basis for the growth of professional skill and the emergence of unique artistic styles. The pinnacle reached in the Timurid era secured Transoxiana's place in the history of world culture. The harmony between fidelity to *Rasm al-Mushaf* and aesthetic refinement ensured the distinctiveness of this calligraphic tradition, elevating it among the treasures of global art. Today, this legacy continues to inspire as a luminous expression of Islamic civilization.

REFERENCES

- [1] Blair, S.S. *The Art and Architecture of Islam 1250–1800*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.
- [2] Khan, A.H. *Islamic Calligraphy: Its History and Development*. Lahore: Ferozsons, 2005.
- [3] Beg, M. *Calligraphy and Architecture in Central Asia*. Islamabad: National Book Foundation, 2009.
- [4] Ciofalo, L. *Islamic Art in Central Asia: A Critical Overview*. Milan: Mondadori, 2007.
- [5] History of Art of Uzbekistan (3 vols), Tashkent: Fan, 2001–2005.
- [6] Ashurov, Yo., *Pages from the History of Calligraphy*, Tashkent: O'qituvchi, 1990.
- [7] Hakimov, M., *Art of the Timurid Period*, Tashkent: Main Editorial Board of Encyclopedias, 1996.
- [8] Rempel, L.I., *Art of Central Asia*, Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1978.
- [9] Pugachenkova, G.A., *Art of Central Asia: Essays in History from the 3rd century BCE to the 19th century CE*, Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1974.
- [10] Malikov, A.M., *The Samarkand School of Calligraphy in the 15th Century*, Tashkent: Fan, 1971.
- [11] Muminov, I.M., *History of Cultural Development of the Peoples of Central Asia (from Ancient Times to the Present)*, Tashkent: Fan, 1976.
- [12] Rice, D.T., *Islamic Art*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1965.
- [13] Schimmel, A., *Calligraphy and Islamic Culture*, New York: New York University Press, 1984.
- [14] Blair, S.S., *Islamic Inscriptions*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998.

- [15] Bloom, J.M. & Blair, S.S., *Islamic Arts*, London: Phaidon Press, 1997.
- [16] *National Encyclopedia of Uzbekistan*, Tashkent: State Scientific Publishing House, 2000–2005.
- [17] Blair, S.S., *The Art and Architecture of Islam 1250–1800*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.
- [18] Khan, A.H., *Islamic Calligraphy: Its History and Development*, Lahore: Ferozsons, 2005.
- [19] Beg, M., *Calligraphy and Architecture in Central Asia*, Islamabad: National Book Foundation, 2009.
- [20] Ciofalo, L., *Islamic Art in Central Asia: A Critical Overview*, Milan: Mondadori, 2007.