Khiva Timber Repairs: Original, Replaced, or Reused?

How to read a carved column, door, or beam without giving its visible surface an invented history

A carved wooden column can look much older than the roof it supports. A new door can be made using an established carving vocabulary. A timber removed from one building and installed in another may be older than its present setting. Even an expertly repaired beam might contain a mixture of inherited material and new wood. These possibilities make Khiva's historic timber a fascinating subject—but they also make it easy to write a beautiful, confident, and misleading caption.

Khiva is a city in Uzbekistan's Khorezm Region. Its walled inner town, **Itchan Kala**, was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in **1990**, as property **543** [S1]. The ensemble contains prominent carved wooden architectural components, including columns and doors. UNESCO describes the **Juma (Djuma) Mosque** as a distinctive hall with **212 columns** and records timber and foundations as vulnerable to termites, humidity, and soil salinity [S1]. This gives an excellent starting point for studying timber, but it does **not** give a date, species, maker, movement history, or repair record for every individual column.

The central discipline of this guide is to keep five questions separate: **What is the object? When was its material made or worked? Where has it been used? What repairs did it undergo? Who can actually be credited for it?** Those answers may come from different documents or remain unknown. A source that names a woodcarving tradition is not automatically a maker's signature on a specific door. A building's founding date is not automatically the date of every object inside it.

This is a documentary and educational guide. It contains **no interviews, invented craftsperson quotations, physical inspections, or claims that a named column has been scientifically dated**. The practice records and sample entries below are explicitly fictional learning devices; they are not field reports from Khiva. Visitors should respect site access rules and leave physical testing to qualified custodians.

1. One place can contain timber from many periods

The phrase *old mosque* sounds like a single chronological label. But buildings often evolve. A site can have a long history, a currently visible structure from a later campaign, and components that were moved from an earlier building. Repairs may add more chronological layers. The same logic holds for a house, courtyard portico, gate, or bazaar stall. **A date attached to a building is not proof that every timber visible there shares that date.**

UNESCO's Itchan Kala account gives the Juma Mosque a central place in the architectural ensemble. Its description of a hall with **212 columns** is a site-level architectural fact [S1]. It does not present a numbered scientific inventory in which each column's individual origin, present structural condition, exact wood species, repair history and artisan are established. Popular travel descriptions differ in

their column counts, sometimes presenting **213** [S7]. A careful free article can quote the UNESCO figure, identify its documentary source, and avoid converting another source's different count into a claim that somebody built or removed a column at a particular time. Counts made on different dates or using different inclusion rules may not be directly comparable.

The Uzbekistan intangible-cultural-heritage inventory identifies **wood carving (Yog‘och o‘ymakorligi)** as traditional craftsmanship and notes the architectural importance of columns, doors and decorative elements in Khiva, Bukhara and Kokand [S2]. It describes the **Palvanov** family as prominent in Khiva woodcarving during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This identifies a **craft tradition and documented historical representatives**. It does not mean that every spiral, leaf, or geometric ornament seen in Itchan Kala was carved by a Palvanov family member, or that a modern craft object bearing a familiar motif was made in the nineteenth century.

The historian's three different labels are therefore **site**, **object**, and **maker**. A statement about the site should not be laundered into an object identification, and a statement about the regional tradition should not be laundered into an attribution to an individual. If an official wall label supplies an object inventory number or maker, record that evidence precisely. If it does not, the word **unknown** is a valid and often essential result.

2. What does “original” really mean?

The word **original** is useful only when its reference point is clear. Consider these four meanings:

- **Original to the present building phase:** a timber was installed when the currently studied phase was constructed.
- **Original historic material:** part or all of a timber survives from an earlier period, whether or not this was its first location.
- **Original craftsmanship:** the carving was carried out by the creator being discussed, rather than copied later; establishing this requires attribution evidence.
- **Original design:** an element follows a historical design even though the material might be a later replacement.

These meanings can overlap but need not. A carefully carved replacement made in 2023 can follow a historic design and use comparable joinery while remaining **new material**. An old column moved in 1780 into a rebuilt hall can be materially old but **reused in its current location**. A modern conservation splice may preserve much original wood while adding new wood at one end. A detail photograph alone seldom resolves all these possibilities.

A public caption should choose the narrowest defensible formulation. **“Carved wooden column in the Juma Mosque, Khiva”** can be supported by a reliable location and identification. **“Tenth-century column, originally carved for this mosque”** requires separate evidence for date, original placement and identity. The more specific a claim becomes, the more independent links in its documentary chain it needs.

Do not confuse **visible age** with material age. Dark colour may come from finishing, smoke, dust, oxidation, later coating or photography. Cracking may reflect many conditions, not simply centuries of existence. A bright surface could be recently conserved old wood or newly installed timber. A

repeated motif could be a long-lived regional language of ornament rather than proof that two objects share a maker.

3. A real conservation example: Bogbonli Mosque

A useful dated case exists in the public UNESCO record. **Bogbonli Mosque**, in the southern part of Itchan Kala, is described by UNESCO as a nineteenth-century mosque complex that includes an *ayvan* with **two wooden columns described as dating to the fourteenth century**, together with an originally preserved painted ceiling [S3]. The chronology illustrates why an object's claimed date must be distinguished from the date of the larger building.

UNESCO states that conservation and adaptation work on the mosque, undertaken through a European Union-supported Silk Roads heritage initiative and local partners, **was completed in 2022**, with an official opening in **February 2023** [S3][S4]. The conservation work reinforced and stabilized the building while **preserving existing wooden elements**. It also improved accessibility for people with disabilities. An intended visitors' and training role was discussed, but an intention is not proof that every future service opened as planned.

There are at least three separate date lines in this small example: the period associated with the mosque complex, the earlier date attributed to the two wooden columns, and the **2022 conservation work / 2023 opening**. These dates describe different things. A reader who collapses them into one date might call a fourteenth-century column a nineteenth-century object, or mistake a 2023 conservation photograph for evidence that the timber itself was installed in 2023.

Equally important: the UNESCO articles do **not** provide a piece-by-piece laboratory report that allows this guide to certify the original material in a particular photographed joint. Their phrase “preserving existing wooden elements” identifies a project approach; it does not tell the outside reader how many millimetres of wood were replaced in one named beam. If another editor writes that a specific column was untouched, that stronger claim would require condition reports, photographs linked to a particular member, or a verified custodian explanation.

This example is a reason to be optimistic about **careful conservation records**, not a licence to guess. It shows how documented reinforcement and accessibility adaptation may coexist with retaining valued material; it does not justify saying that every repair in Khiva is performed in the same manner.

4. “Replaced” is not one single action

A damaged element can receive very different interventions. A conservator may stabilize a weak joint, repair a small area of lost wood, introduce a carefully designed new insert, replace an entire structurally failed member, or retain a historic component in secure storage while installing a compatible replica. The appearance of the finished surface may not disclose which operation occurred.

The **ICOMOS 2017 Principles for the Conservation of Wooden Built Heritage** provide an internationally applicable framework for working with old timber [S5]. Their emphasis on diagnosis, historical significance, compatible intervention, recording and monitoring is a guide to the **questions**

a writer should ask, not a substitute for the specific condition report of an Uzbek monument. For example: Was deterioration diagnosed by a qualified professional? Were photographs and measurements taken before work? Is the replacement distinguishable and documented? Were retained parts inventoried? Does a repair leave enough information for future conservation?

These questions should not be turned into a do-it-yourself procedure. Visitors should never scrape finishes, probe a carved surface, tap a timber with tools, remove a splinter, or climb onto historic architecture to test its age or stability. Even a seemingly minor mark may be damaging, and a weak member may be unsafe. An accessible free worksheet can train **documentary interpretation** without instructing readers to perform interventions.

A useful writer's distinction is:

RETAINED: The record shows an element remained in place, possibly with consolidation. **REPAIRED:** The record shows intervention to an existing element, but not its complete replacement. **PARTLY REPLACED:** The record identifies inserted new material in an older member. **FULLY REPLACED:** The record identifies a new component taking the place of a previous one. **REUSED:** The record establishes that an existing element was transferred from a different location or phase. **UNKNOWN:** The current public evidence cannot determine which applies.

These are **evidence flags**, not promises that the wood is safe or inauthentic. “Repaired” is a process; “old” is a relative chronological description; “authentic” is a broader conservation judgment; “reused” is a placement history. A single object may legitimately carry more than one flag, as long as each refers to a clearly described part and the documentation supports it.

5. How termites, moisture and repair can change the story

UNESCO identifies termite infestation of timber, soil salinity and humidity affecting foundations as conservation threats for Itchan Kala [S1]. The **2024 World Heritage Committee decision 46 COM 7B.42** refers to termite-control guidance and better investigation and monitoring of termites in buildings [S6]. Those are documented site-level concerns. They do **not** prove that every dark patch on a column is insect damage, or that a particular failed joint was caused by salt.

The **2026 state-of-conservation record** reports that a 2025 monitoring and documentation campaign and 3D recording of the architectural ensemble included the Juma Mosque. It also describes plans for investigation of termite, moisture and salt damage, ongoing identification of needed repair work, and an Uzbekistan–Germany collaboration for restoration and repair of wooden elements of the Juma Mosque and Tosh Khovli Palace [S8]. Such language must be read carefully: **a project launched or intervention planned is not the same as a completed treatment on a specific object**. A 3D record documents a shape at a time; it does not, without additional study, establish timber age or species.

The 2026 record makes it reasonable to ask for documentary sources connected to a named element. It does not permit this guide to assert that the wood in one photograph received a particular chemical treatment or that a replacement happened in a given year. Any claim about treatments, methods, safety, or conservation results must be tied to a specific professional report and its date.

Moisture and insects can also be connected to the surrounding building. A water problem, faulty drainage, an altered roof and changing ground conditions can affect structural behaviour. But diagnosis requires more than a tourist's eye. The responsible question is **“What do the professional condition records say about this member?”**, not **“Does this crack look like termite damage to me?”**

6. The evidence chain behind an honest attribution

To attribute an object to a period, maker or place of origin, an editor should assemble evidence in stages. First identify the **present location** from an authoritative inventory or sign. Second identify the **specific member** within that location, ideally using a custodian's code or consistent photograph reference. Third find dated records: restoration files, measured drawings, archival images, inscriptions, acquisition notes or scholarship. Fourth distinguish a **reported claim** from a claim verified by another source. Fifth state uncertainty openly.

Evidence has different strengths. An object inscription that can be independently authenticated may be informative but should be interpreted in context. A conservation inventory with photographs, member ID, survey date and treatment history is stronger for documenting **that specific member's** repair than a general tourism brochure. A UNESCO World Heritage description is excellent evidence for the ensemble's significance but generally cannot establish the maker of a particular plank. A modern craftsperson's demonstration illustrates technique but does not retroactively identify a historical carver.

There is also a legal and ethical side. Museum catalogues, photographs, measured drawings and scans can be copyrighted or restricted even where the underlying building is historic. Linking to a scholarly source is not permission to reproduce its photographs. A public-domain historical image still needs its identification and date checked. A newly drawn **general diagram** avoids pretending to reproduce a specific column's measured geometry. For people appearing in craft demonstrations, obtain appropriate consent for identifiable photographs, and do not describe the participant's identity or community affiliation without evidence.

When an attribution cannot be resolved, write the smaller fact that remains true. For instance: “Carved wood is documented as a significant tradition in Khiva [S2], and UNESCO records wooden columns at the Juma Mosque [S1]. The maker of this particular example is not identified by these two sources.” This sentence is not weak. It protects a reader from confusing two true general statements with a false specific conclusion.

7. An object is not a photograph, and a photograph is not an archive

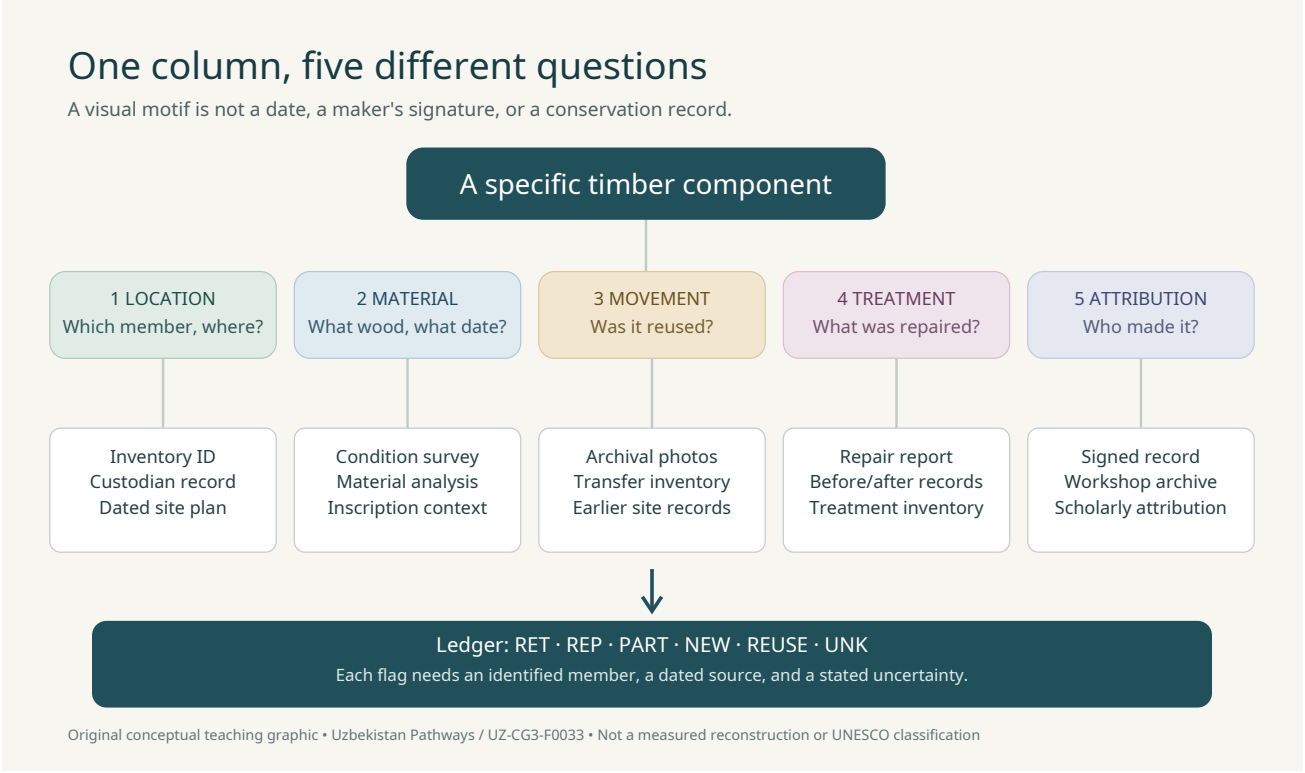
A close-up of a carved door may crop out its setting and make it look like a museum object, even if it is attached to a functioning building. A restored member photographed in 2026 might appear more brightly coloured than in an archival image, but a colour difference can reflect lighting, camera processing, surface cleaning, or replacement. Two photos from different angles are not necessarily comparable. An image caption should identify **who made the image, when it was taken, which object it shows, and whether reproduction is licensed**, if those facts can be established.

A comparative photographic analysis should align the same object, location and feature, with dates for both frames. Look for distinct features such as a documented inscription, joint outline or unique surviving knot; do not infer identity only from a repeating ornament. If the object cannot be matched across photographs, the comparison remains **unconfirmed**. Marking a photo “before restoration” and another “after restoration” without verifiable date and object identity can create a false conservation history.

In Khiva, descriptions of the Juma Mosque often emphasize the column forest. Do not assume that an unlabeled image online of *a* carved column is *the same* column described in an academic article. Similarly, a door displayed for sale in a craft shop is not automatically a door removed from a monument, and a modern carving in historic style is not automatically an antique. If a commercial provenance claim matters, the buyer should seek the seller's lawful documentation and independent expertise rather than rely on a social-media caption.

8. The printable timber-piece provenance ledger

From object to dated evidence: an original study diagram



This ledger is designed for **desk research and education**, not physical examination. Fill one row for each **separately identified** timber element, not one row per whole building. If different materials appear in the same column or beam, use a parent record and a linked sub-record rather than inventing uniformity.

ID / location	Object and part	Claim: date / origin / maker	Strongest dated source	Material status flag	Repair or movement evidence	Confidence and unresolved question
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

ID / location	Object and part	Claim: date / origin / maker	Strongest dated source	Material status flag	Repair or movement evidence	Confidence and unresolved question
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Flag key: RET retained; REP repaired; PART partly replaced; NEW fully replaced; REUSE moved/reused; UNK unknown. Put the **date of evidence** beside each flag. REUSE can coexist with REP if there are separate sources for both. These abbreviations are an original educational scheme, **not an official UNESCO or ICOMOS inventory classification**.

Confidence key: DOC = specific dated document directly identifies the member and intervention; ATTR = published attribution without a member-level conservation record; OBS = public visual observation only; HYP = hypothesis; NO DATA = insufficient information. The labels do not grade conservation professionals. They simply reveal how much an outside reader knows from available evidence.

Worked case A — a documented ensemble, not a dated member. Record ID TRAINING-A; location “Juma Mosque, Itchan Kala”; object “one unspecified carved wooden column”; claim “present in mosque; individual maker and installation date unknown”; sources [S1] and [S2]; material status UNK; confidence NO DATA for exact member age and repair history. This entry is an example of *limiting a claim*, not an actual tagged object inventory.

Worked case B — a real project described at building level. Record ID TRAINING-B; location “Bogbonli Mosque, Itchan Kala”; object “existing wooden elements, unspecified individually”; claim “preservation as part of 2022 conservation/adaptation project”; sources [S3] and [S4]; flag “RET reported at project level”; confidence ATTR for the public project description and NO DATA for the condition of any individually numbered piece. Do not upgrade it to DOC for a named column without an actual member-level report.

Worked case C — invented for practice, not a Khiva fact. Imagine a conservation sheet dated 2020 identifying beam HYP-03: “old member retained, new wood inserted at damaged end.” The ledger may record PART and REP *only because the fictional sheet explicitly states both*. Now imagine a social post calling the beam “untouched since the fourteenth century.” The reader should reject that categorical claim. The exercise shows how a specific repair record can matter more than the apparent antiquity of a photograph.

9. A caption-writing lab: three degrees of certainty

Exercise 1: The attractive but unsupported caption. “This thousand-year-old walnut column was carved by the master whose family built Khiva.” Identify at least four unsupported claims: exact age, wood species, named maker/family, and a claim about who built the city. A photograph of ornament alone cannot support them.

Exercise 2: The overly broad caption. “Uzbek craftsmen always carved their doors this way.” Find the problems: a whole national tradition is described as uniform; time, place and workshop variation

disappear; the reader cannot tell whether the door is a recent craft piece or an old building element.

Exercise 3: The evidence-bounded caption. “Carved wooden architectural elements are a documented part of Khiva's craft heritage [S2]. The Juma Mosque is recorded by UNESCO as containing a hall supported by numerous columns [S1]. This undated illustrative image has not been matched to a numbered historical member.” This is a useful general caption when the image's object identity cannot be independently documented. Add a real image only after the source, licence and actual location have been verified.

For a stronger caption, an editor could obtain a museum inventory identifier, confirm the element's actual identity, quote a dated conservation report in paraphrase, and state what is known about the intervention. For a weaker caption, remove the unverified age and maker. **The correct level of confidence depends on evidence, not on how many adjectives fit under the photograph.**

10. What conservators know—and what a visitor can responsibly do

The ICOMOS conservation principles recognize that timber can deteriorate and that interventions should be documented and considered in relation to a structure's cultural significance [S5]. They are written for skilled conservation practice. This guide is for readers learning to interpret records. It does not prescribe chemical treatments, structural repair, carving methods, or dating procedures. A qualified specialist may use measurements, material identification, archival comparison and diagnostic testing; those are not equivalent to visual guesses made from behind a visitor barrier.

A visitor can still do useful work. Read the site's official description. Check the date of a plaque or guidebook. If allowed to take a photo, photograph the object **without touching it** and record that the image documents only one moment. Ask a responsible custodian whether a public conservation record exists. Do not enter closed spaces, handle fixtures or reproduce restricted documents. If a door leads to someone's home, respect their privacy rather than using the threshold as an uninvited photo studio.

The same restraint helps a buyer considering a “historic” carved object: distinguish a newly made item in a traditional style from a verified historical object, ask for lawful provenance, and be cautious about claims that an architectural fragment came from a protected monument. The existence of a thriving craft tradition is a reason to respect today's makers, not to treat their contemporary work as an inferior substitute for an undocumented antique.

11. A one-page decision test for an editor

Before describing any timber component in Khiva, answer the following in order.

1. **Location:** Khiva city generally, Itchan Kala property, or an identified monument? What document fixes the boundary or building identity? 2. **Member:** Is there a reliable identifier or distinctive documented feature linking the text to one actual column, door, beam or panel? 3. **Date:** Does the date belong to the building, visible carving, timber material, documented relocation, conservation campaign or photograph? 4. **Technique and maker:** Does a source merely discuss Khiva woodcarving generally, or does it identify this specific piece? Is an artisan attribution independently

supported? 5. **Treatment:** Is the status RET, REP, PART, NEW, REUSE, or UNK? What dated evidence supports it? Are there mixed stages? 6. **Risk and diagnosis:** Is the article citing a site-level termite or moisture concern, or a qualified diagnosis for one identified member? 7. **Rights:** Is any image or measured plan actually licensed for republication? Have privacy and monument access restrictions been respected? 8. **Honest uncertainty:** Which part of the story is still unknown, and what record would be needed to narrow it?

A strong answer can be short. “The UNESCO listing establishes that the mosque is an important timber-supported monument, but this source does not date the visible column” is better than a confident guess. “A UNESCO-supported project preserved existing wooden elements at Bogbonli and completed conservation work in 2022” is supported [S3]; “the column was never altered at any time” is not supported by that same announcement.

12. Conclusion: repairs are part of history, not an embarrassment

The history of a wooden building is rarely captured by a single construction year. A surviving older piece, a skillfully made replacement, a reused component and a documented repair may all contribute to an important place. The challenge for a writer is to show those layers without flattening them into “entirely original” or “not authentic.” UNESCO's records show how Khiva's historic carved timber matters, how conservation work has been undertaken, and why continued monitoring is essential. They also show that documentary precision is possible without inventing the voice of a restorer or the provenance of a column.

The best final question is not just **“How old does this wood look?”** Ask **“Which part can we date, what happened to it, and what evidence would allow someone else to check our claim?”** Once a ledger makes that distinction visible, even an undecorated repair joint becomes intellectually interesting. It marks the continuation of a building's story—and invites the care needed to tell that story accurately.

Primary-source and professional framework record

All sources below are cited for **the specific institutional or craft statements** described in the text; none is treated as a complete member-by-member inventory of Khiva's timber. Links were consulted on 4 November 2026. English-language phrasing in this article is original paraphrase rather than a reproduction of the linked sources.

[S1] UNESCO World Heritage Centre, *Itchan Kala*, World Heritage property 543 (inscribed **1990**; criteria iii, iv, v). Describes the town, Juma Mosque's **212 columns**, traditional residential architecture, site-level termite and humidity threats, and use of locally treated building materials in conservation. https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/543/.

[S2] Intangible Cultural Heritage of Uzbekistan, national list, traditional craftsmanship, *Yoghoch Oymakorligi (Wood Carving)* (index 05.08). Describes the craft's architectural applications, Khiva as a notable centre, and the historical Palvanov family tradition; not a provenance certificate for each object. https://www.ich.uz/en/ich-of-uzbekistan/national-list/domain-5/442-yoghoch-oymakorligi.

[S3] UNESCO, *Bogbonli Mosque in Itchan Kala*, **20 July 2023**, updated **26 July 2023**. Dates building complex to the nineteenth century; describes the attached ayvan with two wooden columns dated to the fourteenth century; reports conservation and adaptation work **completed in 2022** and opening in **February 2023**. https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/bogbonli-mosque-itchan-kala.

[S4] UNESCO, *UNESCO supports restoration of the Bogbonli Mosque in Khiva, Uzbekistan*, **1 March 2023**, updated **20 April 2023**. Confirms project reinforcement and stabilization, retention of existing timber, accessibility adaptation, local partners and February 2023 opening; does not supply an individual timber-treatment register. https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-supports-restoration-bogbonli-mosque-khiva-uzbekistan.

[S5] ICOMOS International Wood Committee, *Principles for the Conservation of Wooden Built Heritage*, adopted **15 December 2017**. Professional conservation principles concerning recording, assessment, compatible intervention and monitoring. Applicable as guidance, not proof of a particular monument's repair history. Official archive: https://openarchive.icomos.org/id/eprint/3292/ (French edition); accessible English text: https://www.icomos.org.tr/Dosyalar/ICOMOSTR_en0695848001536913740.pdf.

[S6] UNESCO World Heritage Committee, Decision **46 COM 7B.42**, **2024**, Itchan Kala (Uzbekistan), paragraphs concerning termites, maintenance and infrastructure proposals. Session verified as New Delhi **21–31 July 2024**; not to be confused with the 45th session held in 2023. https://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/8568/.

[S7] Central Asia Guide, *Khiva Juma Mosque with carved wooden columns*, webpage last labelled updated **17 February 2021**. A secondary travel account using **213** columns and discussing reused components. Its count and component histories are **not adopted as independently verified object-level facts** here; this reference is used only to teach caution about differing popular counts. https://central-asia.guide/uzbekistan/destinations-uz/khiva/juma-mosque/.

[S8] UNESCO World Heritage Centre, *State of Conservation of Itchan Kala*, **2026**, French-language record and World Heritage Committee decision **48 COM 7B.23**. Reports the 2025 documentation campaign, 3D database including Juma Mosque, planned diagnostic work, and an Uzbekistan–Germany project on wooden elements at Juma Mosque and Tosh Khovli Palace. https://whc.unesco.org/fr/soc/4914/.

Rights and transparency: No external photograph, third-party plan, resident interview, unpublished workshop record, image generated to impersonate a historic source, or protected craft pattern is copied into this manuscript. An original conceptual educational diagram can accompany the article; it is not a measured plan or reconstruction of an actual column. Any additional site photograph must have a verifiable licence and accurate subject credit before reader-file inclusion. Access information and physical safety must be rechecked locally rather than inferred from the historical records above.