

THE RICH HISTORY AND UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS OF UZBEKISTAN'S TRADITIONAL POTTERY AND CERAMICS INDUSTRY

Abdusalom Anvarovich Mamurov

Teacher at Fergana State University

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Abstract. *The article provides a detailed overview of the history and development of Uzbekistan's traditional pottery and ceramics industry. It discusses the archaeological evidence of this industry dating back to the IV-III millennium BC in Central Asia, and the documentation of its importance by Russian military and European travelers in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The article also highlights the role of pottery and ceramics in the development of ancient cities such as Afrosiyob and Varaxsha.*

Keywords: *Uzbekistan, pottery, ceramics, Zarafshon, Yangob, Urgut, Shahrisabz, Afrosiyob, Varaxsha, colors, motifs, traditional, industry, development, archaeological evidence, European travelers, ancient cities, cultural.*

It is known that embroidery is a type of craftsmanship and is an ancient and highly developed form of folk art in Uzbekistan. The origins of this art can be traced back thousands of years to the IV-III millennia BC, as evidenced by archaeological and scientific findings. Researchers of the Eneolithic period in Central Asia have discovered numerous archaeological artifacts that demonstrate the existence of embroidery workshops and the production of embroidered fabrics and colorful textiles during that time.

To shed light on the history of embroidery in our country, important information has been obtained from the accounts of Russian military expeditions and European travelers who visited Central Asian states in the second half of the 19th century and early 20th century. Scholars such as N. Khanikov, A. Vambery, M. Bichurin, A. Khoroshkhin, N. Maev, V.V. Krestovsky, S.A. Artyunov, N.A. Aristov, and others have partially touched upon the subject of embroidery within the broader scope of various handicrafts of that period. Between 1917 and 1991, valuable scholarly works on the history of Central Asia were created, and some of these works included information on the history of embroidery. Prominent scholars like A.A. Semyonov, S. Ayniy, V.L. Vyatkin, P.P. Ivanov, B.I. Iskandarov, V.V. Bartold, E.M. Masson, O.A. Sukharev, G.A. Pugachenkova, P.A. and others have contributed to our knowledge of the history of embroidery through their valuable works. It is possible to mention scholars such as Goncharova, H. Ziyoyev, M.K. Rakhimov, D.K. Mirzaahmedov, and others. For example, G. Agzamova has contributed to the study of the history of Central Asia by analyzing the role of trade and craftsmanship in the socio-economic history. E.M. Pesheroeva, in her research, focused on studying the history of pottery in Central Asia and evaluated the history of pottery works in ancient and medieval times. N.A. Dimitrieva and L.I. Akimova analyzed the role of art in ancient world history and also appreciated the significance of ancient embroidery. M.S. Hamidova, in her research on the history of craftsmanship in the Kashkadarya region in the early 18th to 20th centuries, analyzed various sources and scholarly literature that highlight the historical aspects of the craft.

The archaeological research expedition of ancient Khorezm, led by the archaeologist S. Tolstov, discovered the sites of "Kaltaminor civilization," including "Tozabog'yob," "Suvyorg'on," and "Amirobod," which date back to the III millennium BC, providing evidence of the existence of both undyed and dyed embroidery workshops among them.

S. Tolstov's further research during the ancient Khorezm exploration revealed that embroidery materials were utilized in ancient Khorezm as early as the 1st millennium BC. The shape of golden-threaded and lacquered embroidered pieces found in the region indicates that the form of these artifacts has remained relatively unchanged for thousands of years or has undergone minimal changes. This suggests a remarkable continuity and preservation of the traditional embroidery techniques and designs in ancient Khorezm. Regarding the ancient Uzbek embroidery, the excavations of archaeological sites such as "Jonbosqal'a," "Qiy qirilgan qal'a," "Ayoqzal'a," "Tuproqqal'a," "Teshikqal'a," and "Jettisor" in the "Konguy civilization" of ancient Khorezm reveal that embroidery art flourished at a high level in this region. Similarly, the discovery of embroidered artifacts from archaeological sites such as "Bolalik tepa," "Fayoz tepa," "Ayritom," "Sopolli tepa," "Jarquton," and "Mirshodi" in ancient Surkhandarya, dating back to thousands of years ago, demonstrates the high development of embroidery art in Uzbekistan. Archaeologists such as A. Okladnikov and A. Askarov have found silk textiles, Buddha sculptures, and ceramic artifacts from this region, expanding the geographical scope of ancient Uzbek embroidery history.

Although the Fergana region has not been extensively studied from an archaeological perspective, some discoveries have provided historical archaeological information related to the art and culture of this region. These findings contribute to the study of the history of Uzbek embroidery through valuable scholarly sources.

In the years of independence, archaeological research has shed light on the history, art, and culture of ancient Fergana, uncovering a series of historical revelations. These research efforts have focused on the history, art, and development of cities such as Aksikent, Chust, Koson, Kubo, Bob, and Shakhrisayab, providing insights into their historical significance and artistic achievements.

According to the results of archaeological research in the Fergana region, embroidered artifacts found in sites such as "Buonamozor," "Dalvarzin," "Ashqoltepa," "Bo'ztepa," "Mug'tepa," "Balandtepa," and "Sopollitepa" indicate that embroidery art was highly valued in this region even thousands of years ago, and it was practiced with great dedication.

Reports and published works of archaeologists demonstrate that these embroidered artifacts were initially made with undyed thread, later dyed in natural colors, and eventually adorned with simple designs. This progression is documented in the reports and publications of archaeologists.

The cities and settlements of the Zarafshan Valley, including Fergana, show significant development in embroidery, as confirmed by the information gathered by archaeologists. In the archaeological study of ancient cities like Bukhara, Samarkand, Varakhsha, and Afrasiyab, embroidery art is highlighted as having played an important role in the advancement of these cities. Information is available about the production of intricate and elegant embroidered pieces, including delicate textiles, patterned and woven fabrics, lamps, and decorated textiles, during the 9th to 13th centuries in Afrasiyab. These embroidered works featured designs of figures, birds and animals, landscapes, and verses, poems, and prayers written in Arabic script, calling people to knowledge, goodness, bravery, and generosity.

Varakhsha, which is another city of Uzbekistan, was the focus of archaeological investigations led by archaeologist V. Shishkin. He established that Varakhsha was a flourishing city of artisans, particularly during the 1st and 2nd centuries.

By the 6th century, Varakhsha became the capital of the "Bukhara Khudats" (local rulers). Through archaeological excavations, it has been observed that practical arts thrived in the city during the Middle Ages, and it had a significant positive influence on the development of craftsmanship. The presence of beautiful buildings, evidence of practical arts such as embroidery and ceramic artifacts, glass vessels, and stamped coins from the 1st and 2nd centuries, indicates the utilization of enamel, ceramics, and glass in the production of various goods. Archaeologists draw conclusions about the use of clay and ceramics from the artifacts found in the form of pottery and ceramic fragments.

Bukhara is the oldest city of the Zarafshan region, and its art and craftsmanship have a long history. Archaeologists such as A. Yakubovskiy, V. Shishkin, and Ya. Gulomov have made significant contributions to the study of the establishment of Bukhara city and the history of its art and culture. Furthermore, they have discovered new materials regarding folk applied art and its field of embroidery. They have found evidence that Bukhara embroidery flourished during the 15th and 16th centuries, during which embroidery pieces were adorned with vibrant colors such as red, yellow, white, and brown. However, in the late 16th century and early 18th century, there was a decline in the production of Bukhara embroidery, and the use of gold thread significantly decreased during this period.²

XIX-XX centuries witnessed a revival and embellishment of Bukhara embroidery. Embroidery was done using threads of various colors, creating a dazzling effect. The quality of craftsmanship and the techniques of embroidery also evolved and improved.

Similarly, in cities and towns of the Zarafshan region such as Khisor, Yangob, Urgut, and Shakhrisabz, embroidery experienced significant development. Zarafshan artisans employed new technologies in the production of embroidery and ceramic artifacts, resulting in exquisite and intricate designs that showcased their skillfulness.

In subsequent periods, embroidery traditions and styles were preserved in Samarqand, Bukhara, and Shakhrisabz. The art of embroidery continued to evolve and maintain its distinctive features.

In the Tashkent region as well, evidence of ancient folk embroidery has been found, indicating the development of embroidery craftsmanship in the area. Archaeologists such as I. Veselovsky, M. Mason, Ya. Gulomov, A. Askarov, U. Islamov, R. Sulaymonov, and V. Bulatova have discovered more than 700 archaeological sites in Tashkent and its surrounding villages, with many of them containing embroidery artifacts. Embroidery in Tashkent and its environs has flourished and evolved over the centuries.

Archaeological investigations have revealed the presence of ancient embroidery artifacts from more than 2,000 years ago in various cities and towns of Uzbekistan. The cities of Tashkent, Shosh, Iloq, Binkot, Tunqat, Kharashket, Shuturkent, Nujkat, Khudaykent, Srinozkent, and Isfitob are known to have produced embroidery pieces that met the demands of their respective eras. These cities experienced a significant development of embroidery during the Middle Ages.

Tashkent region has also yielded embroidery artifacts related to the V-VIII centuries, which were used for water vessels. An example of a sopol pottery vessel from the 9th century was found in Binkat.

During the 10th century, embroidery workshops flourished in cities such as Samarqand, Shosh (Binkat), and Fergana (Aksikat). Embroidery pieces adorned with patterns, flowers, birds, and animal motifs were produced.

Surkhandarya region, considered the oldest and densely populated region of Uzbekistan, has been extensively researched by archaeologists such as B. Denike, M. Masson, A. Askarov, V. Masson, L. Al'boum, G. Pugachenkova, U. Islamov, and G. Parfenov. They have identified several archaeological sites such as "Teshiktosh," "Mochay," "Ayritom," "Kholchayon," "Dalvarzin," "Bolaliktepa," "Fayoztepa," "Qoratepa," and "Termez." These sites have provided a wealth of artistic materials related to various forms of representational art.

Many sopol pottery artifacts have been discovered among these findings. The Surkhandarya region's archaeological site, "Sopollitepa," revealed the remains of more than 20 pottery kilns used for sopol production. The majority of these kilns were two-tiered, with flat plates and long-necked vessels being fired.

These sopol artifacts found in Uzbekistan represent different periods and display diverse shapes and techniques. They serve as evidence of the continuous creativity and production of sopol pottery by the Surkhandarya artisans, who crafted them by hand, on potter's wheels, and foot-powered wheels.

Through archaeological investigations in the Surkhandarya region, the Termez Palace of Termezshokhlar was discovered. It featured a water basin measuring 8.5 by 8.5 meters, primarily constructed with sopol ceramics and sopol tiles. All these findings provide evidence of the development and continuous evolution of embroidery and pottery craftsmanship in the Surkhandarya region from ancient times to subsequent centuries.

Gijduvon embroidery school showcases its distinctive features that distinguish it from the embroidery schools of Bukhara, Samarqand, Shahrisabz, Urgench, and Denov. While Gijduvon and Shahrisabz artisans primarily work in the mo'yqalam (pen) style, the artisans from Urgench and Denov create their embroidery in the "chizma" (patchwork) style, featuring stitched patterns.

Gijduvon embroideries heavily utilize intricate and detailed patterns. These compositions often incorporate various floral motifs, including roses, pomegranates, apricots, and almond fruits. Gijduvon embroideries also pay special attention to color harmony.

Shahrisabz embroidery, influenced by the traditions of Zarafshan embroidery, creates its distinct charm through its technical construction, shape design, and specific decorative elements. Shahrisabz embroidery also incorporates bezels closely resembling iloniz (chain) motifs, zanjira (chain) motifs, and qushmarak (bird-eye) motifs.

The embroidery schools of Khorezm and Khiva exhibit unique requirements and characteristics in terms of their shapes, structures, and technological conditions. Khorezm embroidery, for example, places particular emphasis on the use of deep bowls, likops (plates), and shallow plates, which demand specific techniques. In the process of embroidery creation, Khorezm artisans skillfully utilize both grix (satin) and islimi (silk) techniques, as well as various mixed styles. Geometric shapes, plant patterns, and even depictions of birds and animals are often present in their embroidery designs.

In modern times, Khorezm embroidery is mainly carried out by the "Modar" and "Kattabog" embroidery centers, which have achieved significant success in their artistic endeavors.

Khiva embroidery has evolved by incorporating the traditions of Khorezm embroidery. During the Middle Ages, the city of Khiva experienced remarkable development. The construction of Ichanqala in the 17th to 19th centuries relied heavily on embroidery and ceramics as the main decorative elements. Additionally, the use of sopol quvurlar (tile panels), flat plates, niches, and carved wooden decorations played a significant role in the city's architecture and ornamentation.

Khiva artisans create various types of dishes, bowls, leather products, and ceramic vessels, incorporating different forms and adapting them into their embroidery. Their designs often consist of vertical lines, straight lines, diagonal lines, and other geometrical shapes, with floral patterns, leaves, and tendrils occasionally incorporated. Overall, the embroidery schools of Gijduvon, Shahrisabz, Khorezm, and Khiva each have their distinct characteristics and contribute to the rich heritage of Uzbek embroidery art. Xorazm embroidery, known as the Kaltaminor civilization, dates back to the ancient period, starting from approximately the 4th to 3rd millennium BCE, making it the oldest embroidery style in Central Asia. This ancient embroidery art has developed and evolved over time and is reflected in the embroidery traditions of present-day Xorazm, Surxon, Zarafshan, and Farg'ona.

Uzbek embroidery has continued to develop, incorporating new techniques and materials such as ceramics, faience, and chinaware. It has become an essential part of the cultural heritage, contributing to various aspects of people's lives, including crafts, construction, industry, and folk economy, by producing necessary items in the most affordable and sophisticated manner.

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