



Classification, Functions, And Symbolic Meanings Of Traditional Khorezm Clothing In The Collections Of The Ichan Kala Museum-Reserve

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ABSTRACT

This article presents an ethnographic analysis of traditional Khorezm clothing preserved in the collections of the Ichan-Qal'a State Museum-Reserve. The study examines the structural features of clothing, its social and functional roles, and symbolic meanings. The analysis reveals how clothing reflects age, gender, social status, and ceremonial practices in Khorezm society. The relevance of the study lies in the importance of preserving traditional cultural heritage and the scientific analysis of museum collections. The findings have both scientific and practical significance for Khorezm ethnography, museology, and the study of the history of national costume.

В данной статье проведен этнографический анализ традиционной одежды Хорезма, хранящейся в фондах Ичонқалъа государственный музей-заповедник. Исследование охватывает конструктивные особенности одежды, её социально-функциональные роли и символическое значение. Анализ показывает, как одежда отражает возраст, пол, социальный статус и ритуальные особенности хорезмского общества. Актуальность темы объясняется значением сохранения традиционного культурного наследия и научного изучения музейных фондов. Результаты исследования имеют научную и практическую ценность для этнографии Хорезма, музейного дела и изучения истории национального костюма.

Keywords:

classification, function, symbolic meaning, national costume, ceremonial clothing, structural features, cultural heritage
классификация, функция, символическое значение, национальный костюм, ритуальная одежда, конструктивные особенности, культурное наследие

Introduction. Traditional clothing occupies a special place in the material and spiritual culture of the peoples of Central Asia. In particular, the national attire of the population of the Khorezm oasis serves not only as a means of meeting everyday needs, but also as an important expression of social relations, aesthetic views, and symbolic thinking. Through traditional clothing, aspects such as age, gender, social status, ethnic identity, and ceremonial contexts are reflected, making them a valuable source for ethnological research.

Today, museums play a significant role in preserving and studying national heritage. In this regard, ethnographic collections housed in the funds of the Ichan Kala State Museum-Reserve are of particular importance. The traditional clothing of Khorezm preserved in this museum collection stands out for its diversity, decorative styles, materials, and socio-functional roles. This, in turn, makes their scientific classification, the identification of their functions, and the analysis of their symbolic meanings an actual and important research task.

Research Method. The study employs an integrated комплекс of ethnographic, museological, and historical-analytical methods. Through collection analysis, the traditional clothing artifacts preserved in the фондлар of the Ichan Kala Museum-Reserve were systematically examined. The structural features of the garments, their fabrics, decorations, and production techniques were carefully documented.

Classification and systematization made it possible to group the clothing according to their functions, social status, ceremonial significance, and symbolic characteristics. A multi-criteria classification table was developed to create a visual basis for analysis. Ethnographic and historical analysis facilitated the study of the history of Khorezm clothing, its role within the social context, and its cultural significance.

The research is based on archival materials, scholarly literature, and museum catalogs. Semiotic analysis was applied to consistently interpret the symbolic meanings embedded in clothing through colors, patterns, and decorative elements, revealing their social and cultural significance.

This methodology makes it possible to scientifically classify traditional clothing, determine their functional roles, and analyze their symbolic meanings. At the same time, the use of museum фонд materials provides a comprehensive understanding of Khorezm ethnography and the history of national dress..

Literature Review. Numerous scholarly studies have been conducted based on the фонд materials of the Ichan Kala Museum-Reserve in Khiva. In particular, the works of M. Jumaniyozova [1], N. Sodikova [2], D. Rahmatullayeva [3], G. K. Xasanbayeva [4], Sh. Nurullaeva [5], and Yu. Rakhmonova and M. A. Asqarova [6] address the classification of clothing and their ethnographic aspects.

Main Materials. In almost all ethnographic studies devoted to traditional clothing, jewelry, and household items, primary attention is given to the classification of their types, the periodization of their development, methods of production, material composition, quality, color, dimensions, and cut. The works of O. A. Sukhareva, K. L. Zadykhina, and M. V. Sazonova [7] serve as representative examples of this approach. Their studies mainly cover the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In these works, clothing is analyzed according to gender (women’s and men’s garments), age (adults, children, bridegrooms’ and brides’ attire), seasons (summer, autumn, winter, and spring clothing), social function (festive, wedding, and mourning garments), and functional position on the human body (headwear, body garments, and footwear).

In the studies of N. A. Lobacheva [8], the history of ancient clothing traditions of the peoples of Central Asia is examined on the basis of mural paintings preserved in early and medieval architectural monuments. The research of G. A. Pugachenkova [9] is based on the analysis of miniature paintings. Later studies, including those by T. A. Abdullaev, S. A. Khasanova, M. A. Bikzhanova [10], and N. Sodikova, also continue this established tradition in the study of clothing.

We believe that in scientifically classifying traditional Khorezm clothing, it is more appropriate not to limit the approach to a single direction, but to apply a comprehensive classification (multi-criteria classification). This method is particularly effective when working with the фонд materials of the Ichan Kala State Museum-Reserve. In the course of studying the фонд materials, we consider it possible to classify them as follows.

	classification criterion	Category	Description	Examples
1	Constructive (Cut/Design)	Upper garments	For the upper part of the body	Chapan (robe), kamzul
		Inner garments	Worn directly on the body	Koylak (dress)

		Lower garments	For below the waist	Ishton (trousers)
		Headwear	For the head	Doppi, turban
		Footwear	For the feet	Mahsi, kavush
2	Functional	Everyday	Simple, minimally decorated	Plain dress, trousers
		Ceremonial	For weddings, circumcision, funerals	Bridal attire
		Festive	Formal, richly decorated	Gold-embroidered chapan
		Workwear	Practical and durable	Thick-fabric clothing
3	Gender-Age	Men	Male-specific clothing	Chapan, turban
		Women	Female-specific clothing	Dress, kamzul
		Children	For children	Small-sized garments
		Age group	Differentiated by age	Girls'/brides' attire
4	Social Status	Оддий аҳоли	Кам безакли	Пахта мато
		Бой қатлам	Қиммат мато, безакли	Атлас, ипак
		Амалдорлар	Нуфузли кўриниш	Зардўз либос
		Диний табақа	Содда, рамзий	Оқ либослар
5	Material	Cotton	Most widely used	Everyday fabric
		Silk	Expensive and decorative	Atlas, adras
		Wool	For warmth	Thick clothing
		Leather	Used in footwear	Mahsi
6	Decoration and Symbolism	Patterned	Decorative	Embroidery, gold embroidery
		Plain	Simple	Undecorated fabric
		Color symbolism	Meaning of colors	Red – life, white – purity

Regional	Urban style	Refined, elegant	Decorative garments Less decorated clothing
	Rural style	Simpler	

This table is based on a multi-criteria classification, which enables the analysis of traditional Khorezm clothing simultaneously from constructive, functional, and semiotic perspectives. This approach is considered effective for the in-depth study of museum collection materials and their integration into scholarly discourse.

Attention is drawn to the traditional women’s garments of Khorezm preserved in the museum-reserve collection under inventory numbers ГХМЗ КП 39 (first inventory) and ГХМЗ КП73. ИНВ.2. These artifacts date back to the early twentieth century and were made using hand-sewing techniques. The main fabric is coarse cotton (boz), while the sleeves and front part are made of silk. The dress is long, with wide sleeves and a tunic-like shape, designed to allow free movement. The neckline has a vertical slit; in some examples it is decorated with a trim ribbon, while in others it remains undecorated.

The dress consists of several types of fabric: the main part is made of factory-produced chintz, decorated with white and blue patterns on a red background; the sleeves and front part are made of silk, featuring abr patterns—cloud-like, wavy designs with indistinct borders executed in white, red, yellow, and green colors. These patterns resemble flowing colors on fabric, creating smooth transitions that appear cloud-like. Such designs are widely found in the traditional clothing of Central Asia, especially in fabrics such as adras and atlas. These decorative elements reflect national aesthetic traditions, as well as social status and ceremonial functions.

The artifacts preserved in the museum-reserve collection represent an important source for understanding the traditional dress culture, aesthetic views, and social life of women in the Khorezm oasis. In particular, the dress samples stored under inventory numbers ГХМЗ КП 39 ба ГХМЗ КП 73 clearly demonstrate local

weaving traditions, color selection, and decorative styles. Their hand-sewn construction, use of natural materials, and enrichment with silk elements indicate the high level of development of traditional craftsmanship.

The abr (abr-like) patterns used in the dresses serve not only a decorative function but also carry distinctive symbolic meanings. The harmony of cloud-like, smoothly transitioning colors expresses ideas associated with nature, as well as continuity of life and dynamism. At the same time, the combination of red, white, and green colors can be interpreted in the worldview of the local population as symbols of life, purity, and prosperity.

Although the condition of the artifact shows several defects—such as torn and damaged areas at the collar and in some parts, as well as fading and small holes on the back—it remains of significant importance. Through its structural and decorative features, this garment reveals the everyday and ceremonial practices of Khorezm women, as well as their cultural and symbolic representations. The dress also carries symbolic meaning: red and white colors may represent life and purity, while abr patterns reflect a distinctive local decorative tradition. This artifact serves as an important source for the scholarly study of Khorezm women’s clothing styles, the history of national dress, and cultural heritage.

The fabrics of the clothing preserved in the collection are quite diverse. Among them are atlas, silk, parcha, velvet, chintz, silk, semi-silk (“partovus”), alacha, and velveteen fabrics. However, the majority of the garments are made of silk.

Traditional women’s garments of the Khorezm oasis, particularly the types known as yelak and koylak, hold special significance. These items serve as important sources for studying local craft traditions, material selection, and

decorative styles of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The yelak preserved under inventory number ГХМЗ КП 4524 (Inv. 137) is an outer garment for women, typically made by machine quilting with a layer of cotton padding. In the first example, the outer surface of the yelak is made of lilac-colored velvet with white stripes, while the inner lining consists of chintz with yellow floral patterns on a red background. The garment has vertical slits on the sides at the hem, and its edges are finished with red trim. Some areas show signs of tearing. This yelak belonged to the wife of the jeweler Master Matkarimov. It dates back to the early twentieth century in the Khorezm region and is made from velvet and chintz fabrics. Its total length is 120 cm, and the sleeve length is 55 cm..

The second yelak sample, ГХМЗ КП 4648 (Inv. 154), measuring 132 × 49 cm, is also made using a machine quilting technique with a cotton padding layer. Its outer surface is made of raspberry-colored brocade, decorated with brown horn-like patterns. The lining is made of chintz with small floral motifs on a red background. The edges of the garment are finished with burgundy trim. This yelak belonged to the wife of Musa Tura (Tura Rahim) and originates from the Khorezm region. The artifact shows slight fading of colors due to the effects of time. The materials used are brocade and chintz. Its length is 119 cm, and the sleeve length is 58 cm.

The dress registered under ГХМЗ КП 1466 (Inv. 65) is one of the traditional garments worn by women during wedding ceremonies. It has a tunic-like cut and is distinguished by its long and wide sleeves. This example is made of pink-colored stoff fabric. The neckline features a vertical slit, and the sleeves are decorated with hand embroidery executed using white, yellow, purple, green, and blue threads in wave-like patterns. Wide trim and tassels are attached to the sleeve edges. The garment is well preserved, originates from the city of Khiva, and dates back to the early twentieth century. Its total length is 129 cm, with a sleeve length of 65 cm.

These garment samples serve as important ethnographic sources for revealing the material

selection, decorative styles, and social functions of women's clothing in the Khorezm oasis.

The yelak samples in the collection reveal the practical and social significance of women's outer garments. Their quilting with a cotton layer demonstrates adaptation to climatic conditions, while the use of valuable fabrics such as velvet and brocade on the outer surface indicates the social status of the wearer. The colors, patterns, and decorative elements in these garments served not only aesthetic purposes but also, to a certain extent, an identifying function.

Furthermore, the wear, color fading, and damage at the seams observed in these artifacts confirm that they were not merely museum objects but cultural items actively used in real life. This, in turn, enhances their significance in ethnographic research as "living artifacts."

Conclusion. The clothing samples analyzed above provide important information about the traditional costume culture, craft traditions, and aesthetic taste of women in the Khorezm oasis. The materials, patterns, and sewing techniques used in these garments reveal not only the practical function of clothing but also its social, ceremonial, and symbolic significance. In this regard, these exhibits serve as important ethnographic sources of great value for the study, preservation, and scholarly analysis of national cultural heritage.

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