



Traditions And Historical Development Of Folk Crafts In Uzbekistan (On The Example Of Khorezm)

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ABSTRACT

Folk crafts represent one of the most ancient forms of human economic and cultural activity. They emerged as a result of the production activities of early societies and gradually separated from agriculture and animal husbandry in the process of social development. Over time, crafts developed in close connection with technological progress, natural resources, and the division of labor, forming numerous specialized branches such as pottery, carpentry, blacksmithing, metalworking, jewelry making, embroidery, leatherworking, weaving, and wood carving. This article analyzes the historical development of crafts in Uzbekistan, particularly in the Khorezm oasis, from ancient times to the present day. Special attention is paid to the influence of historical processes, natural conditions, and cultural traditions on the formation of craft practices. The study also examines the role of the Silk Road in the spread of craft products, the impact of political changes and conquests on craft development, and the revival of traditional crafts during the years of Uzbekistan’s independence. The research concludes that folk crafts constitute an important element of national cultural heritage and play a significant role in preserving traditional knowledge, supporting local economies, and promoting cultural tourism.

Keywords:

Folk crafts, Khorezm, traditional crafts, wood carving, cultural heritage, Silk Road, handicraft traditions, Uzbekistan.

Introduction.

Craftsmanship emerged as a result of human productive activity and gradually separated from agriculture and animal husbandry during the development of society. With the advancement of technology and the deepening of the social division of labor, crafts evolved and diversified into numerous specialized fields such as pottery, carpentry, blacksmithing, metalworking, embroidery, weaving, leather processing, jewelry making, and wood carving.

The development of handicrafts has always been closely related to the availability of natural resources in a given region. For example, textile production developed in areas where cotton and silk were available, pottery

flourished in regions rich in high-quality clay such as Rishtan, while leatherworking and wool processing developed in areas with abundant livestock. Similarly, woodworking developed in forested regions, metalworking in mineral-rich areas, and shipbuilding in areas located near rivers or seas.

Depending on the stage of socio-economic development and the degree of market integration, three main forms of handicraft production historically emerged: household crafts, commissioned crafts, and crafts producing goods for the market

Early Development of Crafts in Central Asia.

Archaeological evidence indicates that the earliest forms of crafts in the territory of

modern Uzbekistan appeared during the Neolithic period. Pottery production and textile manufacturing were among the first major branches of handicrafts. Archaeological sites such as the Kaltaminor culture in the Khorezm region and Sopollitepa in Surkhandarya confirm the existence of early craft production in these regions.

From the second century BCE, the Great Silk Road played a crucial role in the trade of craft products. Through this transcontinental trade network, handicraft goods produced in Central Asia, China, India, and the Middle East spread to European markets. Technological innovations such as silk weaving in China and cotton textile production in India contributed to the expansion of craft production across Eurasia.

By the 9th–10th centuries, major craft centers had emerged in Central Asia. Cities such as Urgench, Shash, Bukhara, Merv, and Fergana became important centers for textile production, metalworking, glass production, and weapon manufacturing. However, the Mongol invasion in the 13th century caused significant damage to the craft sector. The establishment of the Timurid state later contributed to the revival and further development of handicrafts in the region.

Structure and Organization of Traditional Crafts.

Until the early twentieth century, various types of handicrafts continued to exist in Central Asia. In cities such as Bukhara, Samarkand, Kokand, Khiva, and Tashkent, handicrafts played a significant role in economic life. For instance, historical records indicate that by the 1860s Khiva had at least twenty-seven types of crafts, with hundreds of craft shops operating in the city's markets.

Craft production was highly specialized. For example, leather processing included professions such as shoemakers, saddle makers, fur coat makers, and belt makers. Textile production included weavers, carpet makers, and felt producers, while metalworking included blacksmiths, farriers, coppersmiths, locksmiths, and jewelers.

The social structure of traditional craft production was based on the master–apprentice system. Craftsmen were organized according to a hierarchical structure consisting of masters (usta), assistants (khalifa), and apprentices (shogird). Professional rules and ethical norms were regulated through special craft manuals known as “Risolah.” Each craft had its spiritual patron (pir), and various rituals accompanied the beginning of work or the training of apprentices.

Crafts in the Khorezm Oasis.

Historical sources indicate that more than one hundred types of crafts existed in Khorezm between the sixteenth and early twentieth centuries. The development of these crafts was closely connected with the region's geographical conditions and lifestyle. In desert regions such as Khorezm, crafts related to clay and wood were more widespread, while metal and stone processing were more common in mountainous areas.

The cultural and historical heritage of Khorezm also includes rich traditions of ornamental art. Islamic artistic principles led to the development of geometric and floral ornamentation, known respectively as girih and islami patterns. These decorative motifs carried symbolic meanings and were widely used in architecture and applied arts.

Among the most prominent representatives of Khorezm ornamental art and wood carving were masters such as Abdulla Boltayeva, Rozmat Masharipov, Matkarim Ne'matullayev, Odamboyoqubov, Odamboyo Bobojonov, Eshmurod Sapayev, Rahimberdi Matchanov, and Ulugbek Masharipov.

Wood Carving Traditions.

Wood carving occupies a special place in the traditional crafts of Uzbekistan. Archaeological findings indicate that relief wood carving techniques existed in Central Asia more than a thousand years ago. Ancient carved wooden elements discovered in archaeological sites demonstrate the high artistic level of this craft.

Historical sources indicate that wood carving developed rapidly until the Arab

conquest. Following the spread of Islamic cultural norms, figurative representations gradually disappeared, while geometric and vegetal ornamentation became dominant. Craftsmen adapted their artistic expression by creating complex decorative patterns based on symbolic meanings.

Different regional schools of wood carving emerged in Uzbekistan, including the Khiva, Samarkand, Kokand, and Tashkent schools. The Khiva school is particularly known for its monumental style, dense ornamental compositions, and preservation of the natural color of wood. Craftsmen commonly used local wood species such as elm, poplar, and plane tree, treating the surfaces with natural oils to maintain their natural appearance

Revival of Crafts During the Independence Period.

After Uzbekistan gained independence, a new stage in the development of traditional crafts began. Government policies aimed at preserving national cultural heritage and supporting artisans significantly contributed to the revival of handicraft traditions.

Several institutional initiatives were implemented, including the establishment of the "Hunarmand" Association of Folk Craftsmen. State programs, exhibitions, and international cooperation projects have also supported the development of craft production and the promotion of craft products in international markets.

In addition to preserving cultural traditions, handicrafts today contribute to the development of tourism, employment opportunities, and local economic development. The revival of traditional techniques such as natural glaze production, plant-based dyes, and traditional decorative methods demonstrates the resilience and adaptability of folk crafts

Conclusion.

The historical analysis shows that handicrafts represent one of the most ancient and important forms of human economic and cultural activity. Originating as a means of satisfying everyday needs, crafts gradually evolved into complex systems closely connected

with social development, natural resources, and cultural traditions.

In Uzbekistan, particularly in the Khorezm oasis, handicrafts developed over centuries and formed a unique cultural heritage characterized by diverse technologies, artistic styles, and professional traditions. Despite historical challenges such as invasions and political transformations, traditional crafts survived through the master-apprentice system and the preservation of cultural values.

Today, the revival and development of folk crafts play an important role in preserving national identity, promoting cultural heritage, and supporting sustainable economic development. Therefore, the study of traditional crafts, their technologies, artistic features, and historical roots remains an important direction of historical and ethnological research

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