



The Historiography of the Study of Bukhara Costumes in the 19th and 20th Centuries

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ABSTRACT

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the traditional clothing of the Uzbeks in the Bukhara oasis—one of the unique historical-ethnographic regions of our Republic—developed into a distinct form. The costume complex preserved characteristics specific to various ethnic groups, reflecting the diverse aspects of the sartorial culture across the region's ethnicities. Naturally, such features necessitate a comprehensive analysis of the traditional attire worn by the oasis population during this period. This article focuses on the study of traditional men's clothing in the Bukhara oasis, examining the types of fabrics, ornaments, and colors utilized, as well as the symbolic meanings they conveyed. Apparel serves as a significant indicator of an individual's gender, social background, societal status, and prestige

Keywords:

Alacha, arshin, cashmere, turban, sleeved wrap (*yopingchiq*), *chapan*, *doppa* (skullcap), *mahsi*, waist-belt, inner tunic, gold embroidery (*zardozi*), ornamentation.

The role of apparel in social life, as well as the extent to which it reflects social structures and values, warrants particular academic attention. The unique characteristics of Uzbek national costumes—including their specific ceremonial uses, their roles in traditional festivals, weddings, and other events—must be studied in conjunction with shifts in the socio-cultural environment. Initial records concerning the attire of Central Asian peoples were compiled by European authors as early as the Middle Ages, coinciding with the first European expeditions to the region. The journals of visiting ambassadors provide invaluable data regarding the clothing worn by the populace and the fabrics utilized during those periods.

In particular, the Hungarian scholar A. Vambery, who visited Bukhara in the second half of the 19th century, provided extensive observations [1]. His documentation of Bukharan textiles illuminates not only the advancement of the weaving industry but also the profound richness of Bukharan culture. Vambery detailed the varieties of imported

fabrics found in major commercial centers, the numerous workshops of local *chitfurush* (calico-cloth) masters, and the diversity of locally manufactured textiles. His accounts range from cotton fabrics known as *alacha* and silk textiles as delicate as spiderwebs to heavy wool and leather materials. Notably, he recorded that two types of *alacha* existed, with the premium silk-blended variety produced in limited quantities exclusively by the artisans of Bukhara city.

The textile industry stood as one of the largest craft sectors within the Emirate. A significant portion of the woven goods consisted of *alacha*, characterized by its thin texture and two-toned striped patterns. Following the Russian Empire's conquest of Central Asia, a series of scientific expeditions were organized across the territory to systematically study the region for imperial administrative and economic purposes.

Ushbu matnning akademik va ilmiy tildagi inglizcha tarjimasi quyidagicha:

By the first half of the 19th century, preliminary data regarding the region began to

surface in the chronicles of numerous travelers, diplomats, and military personnel visiting Central Asia, as well as in the travelogues of participants in expeditions organized for various strategic purposes. Consequently, several scholarly societies active during that period published a series of scientific works dedicated to the history of Turkestan and the material and spiritual culture of its indigenous population. Generally, the works of these authors provide foundational information concerning the attire, sartorial culture, and costume-related aspects of material culture of Central Asian peoples during the Middle Ages and on the eve of Russian colonization; thus, they serve as a primary source for studying the history of traditional Uzbek clothing.

However, these early observers primarily focused on the anthropological descriptions and physical appearances of the local inhabitants, offering only sporadic details regarding their specific garments. For instance, G. Meyendorff noted that Bukharan women wore voluminous clothing that completely concealed the contours of the body. His records provide some of the earliest systematic descriptions of the Emirate of Bukhara in the early 19th century. During the second half of the 19th century, the rivalry between Russia and Great Britain for influence over the Turkestan khanates intensified. This geopolitical competition is evidenced by the frequent dispatch of diplomatic missions and the influx of commodities from both empires into local markets. Much of the data regarding the economy of the period, the social conditions of the population, and the factors influencing them can be meticulously analyzed through the memoirs and diaries of these ambassadors and travelers.

For instance, the American researcher, diplomat, and traveler Eugene Schuyler, in his work *Turkistan: Notes of a Journey in Russian Turkistan, Khokand, Bukhara, and Kuldja* (1873), provided significant insights into the role of apparel within social and economic relations. The Russian administration frequently organized large-scale fairs to establish a market for their commodities, which proved pivotal for commercial development. Furthermore, the

traveler participated in meetings with state officials in Bukhara and remarked upon the opulence of their attire. Schuyler noted that following each reception and formal meeting, he was presented with *kimkhob* (brocade) robes, textiles, and various other valuable gifts. This underscores the high value of clothing as a diplomatic instrument for strengthening interstate relations through the tradition of gift-giving.

The American researcher also observed that while exploring the bazaars of Bukhara, he encountered few English goods other than fine muslin for turbans; instead, he noted a predominance of Russian factory textiles and cotton products over locally manufactured goods. This reflects the ascending economic dominance of Russia in the Bukharan markets. The traveler characterized the Bukhara bazaar as the primary commercial hub of Central Asia, noting that while English goods reached the city via Afghanistan—becoming famous under the name *kobuli*—they were sold in significantly smaller quantities compared to Russian merchandise.

The Danish military officer and researcher Ole Olufsen traveled to the Emirate of Bukhara in the 1890s. During his expeditions, he assembled an extensive collection of textile samples, which are currently preserved in the National Museum of Denmark [1]. The Olufsen collection within this museum includes a diverse array of artifacts, such as ceremonial robes worn by high-ranking officials (*to'n*), men's quilted winter coats (*qavima to'n*), trousers belonging to the Emir, silk skullcaps (*do'ppi*), belts with silver buckles, intricately patterned velvet and silk fabrics, dagger sheaths, and traditional footwear.

Olufsen particularly esteemed the unique aesthetic beauty of *abr* (ikat) fabrics. His scholarly work also encompasses detailed observations on medicine, domestic architecture, household management, customs, traditions, and national cuisine. Specifically, Chapter XIV of his book, titled "Clothing" (pages 467–485), is dedicated to apparel and is supplemented with illustrative photographs. The author emphasizes that one of the most significant elements of Bukharan attire is the

turban (*salla*), which was crafted from exceptionally fine fabric. He notes that this headgear was notably wide, drawing a structural comparison to the broad-brimmed hats worn by English women of that era.

The English traveler, Orientalist, and British Indian official F.G. Skrine compiled extensive records during his journey through Asia. Specifically, during his time in the Emirate of Bukhara, he documented fascinating details regarding the urban populace, their social conditions, and commercial activities. Skrine noted that the diversity in the ethnic composition of Bukhara's population was scarcely reflected in their attire. While the aristocracy wore gold-embroidered (*zardozi*) garments and robes crafted from cashmere, the common people typically wore clothing made from striped fabrics. A distinctive feature common to all men was the large turban fashioned from white muslin, the size of which served as a testament to the wearer's social status—at times requiring up to twenty yards of fabric. Regarding women's apparel, his observations were limited to their long-sleeved wraps and the black burqa (*chachvon*) woven from horsehair.

The variety of goods sold in the local bazaars vividly illustrated the struggle for market dominance between European and Asian powers. Although European goods were available, they often entered through Russian borders under Russian labeling; these products were frequently of inferior quality and low cost. Prior to the advent of the railway, primary commodities were imported via Afghanistan. However, the Trans-Caspian Railway enabled the Russians to establish a firm foothold for their goods in Central Asia, effectively creating a barrier against the influx and distribution of British merchandise.

Internal conflicts between the khanates, political instability, and intensifying external influences exerted a significant impact on the social life of the people. Changes in clothing styles and craftsmanship mirrored these shifts in the social fabric. Historical sources indicate that the garment industry held a leading position among other sectors in Central Asia during the early 19th century. Through the

primary accounts of ambassadors and travelers, we learn of the numerous specialized workshops (producing and selling cotton, silk, and wool textiles), shops, and commercial centers, as well as the specific nomenclature of fabrics and finished products manufactured in the Emirate.

The veterinary surgeon William Moorcroft arrived in India in 1807 to manage horse breeding for the East India Company. Between 1811 and 1812, he traveled to the northwest, and in July 1812, he crossed the Himalayas into Tibet, becoming one of the first Europeans to enter the region. By this time, his interests had expanded toward projecting British influence beyond Northwestern India to open trade routes between Central Asia and Britain, aiming to counter the growing Russian presence in the region. In May 1819, Moorcroft received permission from the East India Company to travel to Bukhara. His posthumously edited and published journals, covering his travels from 1819 to 1825, provide a narrative of his journey through the Himalayan provinces of India and Punjab, as well as his expeditions to Kashmir, Kabul, and Bukhara.

The book also contains a detailed map of Central Asia drafted by the London-based cartographer J. Arrowsmith. In the first volume, the correspondence reveals that the inhabitants of Hoshiarpur were employed as weavers by Muslims, and the cotton fabrics, muslin, and coarse cotton textiles produced there were exported to Herat, Balkh, Bukhara, and Yarkand.

In 1833, P.I. Demezov, and in 1836, I.V. Vitkevich visited the Emirate of Bukhara. I.V. Vitkevich, the first envoy sent to Kabul by the Russian government, specialized in the study of diplomatic relations with Central Asia. He was tasked with gathering political intelligence regarding the internal state of Bukhara, the diplomatic dynamics between the Khanates of Kokand and Khiva and the Emirate of Bukhara, the perspectives of regional rulers concerning Russia, and the geopolitical ambitions of the British in Central Asia. During his mission, he discussed a wide range of issues with Bukharan officials, including the repatriation of Russian prisoners of war held in captivity, as well as the

prospects for Russian-Bukharan trade and diplomatic engagement.

His correspondence further notes that British commodities—such as yellow *kundal*, *muslin-shodoka*, cotton textiles, and *chintz* (chit)—were imported into the Emirate of Bukhara via India. Additionally, it is recorded that the British utilized Iranian trade routes to transport their merchandise into the region.

The Russian philologist, researcher, and traveler P.I. Demezou conducted extensive scholarly inquiries during his visit to the Emirate of Bukhara, leaving behind invaluable records in his correspondence. Demezou personally observed that the most recent caravan from Iran contained three batches of British textiles (patterned calico, chintz, etc.), highlighting British efforts to capture Central Asian markets. He also noted the presence of two major commercial domes (*tim*) in Bukhara alongside the traditional *toqs* (domed bazaars). Specifically, the first dome, *Tim-i Adras* (the Trading Dome of Abdullah Khan), was dedicated to the sale of locally produced Bukharan silk fabrics, raw silk, and silk scarves. The second, *Tim-i Safed* (White Trading Dome—located behind the current Magok-i Attori Mosque), dealt exclusively in Russian and British textiles.

Sericulture was a prominent occupation among the population of the Bukhara Emirate. Raw silk was valued at 13–14 *tilla* per *puđ* (approximately 16.3 kg) and was exported from Bukhara to Kabul. From there, the British acquired the raw materials to manufacture fabrics, which were subsequently brought back to be sold in the Bukharan markets. In this economic landscape, fabrics woven by local artisans competed directly with these imported goods. The Bukharan aristocracy showed a high demand for Russian satin, favoring it for its superior quality, aesthetic floral patterns, and durability. Simultaneously, textiles woven by Bukharan craftsmen were transported to Russian markets for sale. Russian merchants frequently purchased *karbos* (calico) woven in Bukhara, which was produced in three varieties: thick, fine, and *malla* (a yellowish, colorfast cotton fabric).

In a letter written in 1834, Demezou provided a comprehensive list of British

products brought from India to Bukhara via Afghanistan (Kabul). These included: **Kimkhob:** A fabric embroidered with silver and gold threads, measuring one *arshin* in width. A single garment required 8–9 *arshins* of *kimkhob*, costing between 8 and 10 *tilla*. **Doka:** British muslin, which was narrower than Russian muslin but more affordable.

This fabric is famously known as *Haydar Shokhi*, as its production was originally commissioned by Emir Haydar. Over time, however, only the name of this textile has survived in Bukhara. Other notable imports and local products mentioned in historical records include:

- **Chintz (Chit):** British cotton fabrics of varying quality.
- **British Shawl Fabric:** Fine, durably woven textiles available in various colors.
- **Chiti Nasirkhoni:** A cotton fabric manufactured in India, woven at a width of one *arshin*. A 12-*arshin* piece was valued at 6–7 *tanga*.
- **Chakan:** A white cotton headscarf intricately embroidered with silk floral patterns. While imported, these were also produced in Bukhara, where embroidery was a favored pursuit among aristocratic women.

Between 1831 and 1833, Lieutenant Alexander Burnes of the East India Company traveled from India to Afghanistan and subsequently to Bukhara. Based on the data gathered during this expedition, he authored a comprehensive three-volume work. In his journals, Burnes notes that master weavers who had migrated from the city of Merv produced *adras* fabrics in vibrant red, white, green, and yellow hues for the domestic markets using Bukharan raw silk. He characterized the population of Bukhara as modest and sincere, noting their tendency to speak freely on subjects ranging from high politics to the internal dynamics of the marketplace.

In summary, nearly all travelers who visited the region—whether on official missions or private expeditions—engaged in studying trade patterns, domestic demand, and market supply. They frequently purchased local textiles

and apparel both as objects of personal interest and for potential export, providing a rich ethnographic record of the period.

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