

## Section 4. Theory and history of art

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### CENTERS OF SAMARKAND EMBROIDERY: GENERAL ASPECTS, DIFFERENCES, ARTISTIC FEATURES

*Maxkamova Gulnora Abilkasimovna*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kamoliddin Behzod National Institute of Fine Arts and Design, Uzbekistan

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#### Abstract

**Research Objective:** The objective of this study is to investigate the embroidery of Samarkand from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, re-evaluate certain aspects, and introduce previously unexplored information into academic discourse.

**Research Methods:** The primary research method involved examining documents and resolutions issued by the Government of Uzbekistan and the Cabinet of Ministers, which focus on artistic education and handicrafts. Comparative-analytical, historical-reconstruction, induction, and systematization methods were also applied.

**Research Results:** Gaps in the literature concerning Samarkand embroidery were substantiated through archival documents and sources from the Samarkand State Museum-Reserve (SDMQ). Proposals were made for the study of O. A. Sukhareva's work. The SDMQ embroidery collection, archival information, and scholarly documents were reviewed, and recommendations for systematizing them by schools and centers were provided. The study also shed light on the activities of several embroiderers who worked in Samarkand during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

**Practical Applications:** The findings are valuable for the staff of the Samarkand State Museum-Reserve in systematizing and organizing the collection of Samarkand embroidery, as well as for revising scientific passports. The research is also crucial for current Samarkand embroiderers to maintain traditions while deciding on the creative directions they should pursue. It holds significant importance for art historians, field specialists, and for preparing lectures, educational materials, television programs, and media content on Samarkand embroidery.

**Keywords:** *Tanbur, suzani, bolinpush, skullcap, jiyak, tasma, kokma, "joynamaz", "suzana", "ruyjo", "takhmonpech", tulip, moon, sky, branch, bush, silk, velvet, transformation*

#### Introduction

XX century – Samarkand embroidery developed in a unique way. In the embroidery

centers such as Samarkand city, Urgut, Nurata, Payariq, Bulung'ur, Kattako'rg'on, various types of embroidered items were created.

Although large embroidery pieces were similar in content, small embroideries showed diversity. In large embroideries, a floral rosette was considered the main design, but its appearance varied across different regions.

The embroidery of Samarkand city is considered the main center. This is because, in the city during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, machine-made embroidery became popular alongside handmade embroidery, and as a result, many new types of popup embroidery were produced in the “Trud Zhenshchin” (Women’s Labor) artel. Embroiderers taught this craft to women in their homes, with the youngest students being seven years old. The first item embroidered by an apprentice was stored in a chest, and as their skills improved over the years, they would compare their early works with their later, more advanced creations.

The embroideries were sewn in various neighborhoods of the city, such as So’zangaron, Motrid, Bog’ishamol, Xayrabod, Xo’ja Zulmurod, and Kaftarxona. Mainly prayer mats (“joynamoz”), wall hangings (“so’zana”), pillow covers (“ro’yjo”), bedspreads (“bolinpo’sh”), and shelf covers (“taxmonpech”) were embroidered. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the base fabric was often red, yellow, dark red, crimson, or brown, while in the second half of the century, off-white, beige, calico, and satin fabrics were commonly used. Dark red, black, and crimson silk and cotton threads were used for chain stitching, with techniques like “kanda khayol,” “chinda khayol,” and “yurma” (mainly for borders) being employed.

The main pattern in these embroideries was large rosettes featuring tulips, moons, palmettes, branches, and repeated motifs arranged in rows. The rosettes were surrounded by thick leafy circles and curled leaves. The outer edge had a flat ribbon-like appearance. This stitch is known as “ilmoq du tarafi,” a double-sided loop stitch.

In the embroidery technique, Samarkand embroiderers used the “chinda khayol” and “kanda khayol” stitches during the sewing process. These stitches create a relief layer on the fabric surface, giving the item a thick and solid appearance, which adds grandeur when displayed on a wall. The contrast of black and red threads enhances the festive atmosphere. The embroiderers connected the threads so precisely that no knots are visible on the

reverse side of the item. They would slightly unspool the threads and re-twist them together, achieving a seamless connection without knots. This style persisted until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, maintaining the philosophical themes of the sun, moon, goodness, and the continuity of life.

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, alongside handmade embroidery, machine embroidery products began to be produced in Samarkand, and this continued until the end of the century. Many items were sewn in the popup technique at the “Trud Zhenshchin” (Women’s Labor) factory. “In the 1920s, a process of transformation took place, where master craftsmen were united into production artels based on a new economic idea, changing the previous workshop principles under a new social and economic concept.”

### Materials and methods

In 1932, the factory was established under the name “Artistic Carpet Factory” in Samarkand, and in 1960 it became the “Artistic Goods Factory.” Later that year, it was renamed the “Carpet-Artistic Goods Factory.” In 1961, the artistic-perfumery factory merged with the former “Culture” factory No. 1 to form the “Samarkand Artistic Carpet Factory.” Later, other perfumery artels in Samarkand and Qarshi were also merged into the factory. In 1960, the artel was converted into a factory. Initially, the artel started with only five workers, but over the years, more than 300 workers were employed in the embroidery workshop alone. At its inception, it focused on producing embroidery products. The sewing machines used were popup machines No. 22, No. 27, and No. 97, with Kyiv machines and thread sizes of No. 40 and No. 50.

For example, in 1960, the factory had divisions for embroidery, stitching, machine embroidery, and the production of headwear. Among the workers were girls as young as 15 years old. The average salary ranged from 50 to 70 rubles. This artel employed skilled draftsmen and seamstresses, including sisters Radjabova, artist Z. M. Kovalevskaya, Sh. Shukurova, I. Jamilova, and the renowned seamstress Dodar Mavlonova. Abdulaziz Ikromov, who had moved from Margilan to Samarkand, also worked there. Embroideries were created not only by machine but also

by hand. For instance, portraits embroidered by Fazilat Saydaliyeva were crafted using the printing technique on silk fabric, showcasing a high level of skill with various shades of mulina threads. The sketches prepared for hats by artist Zinayida Kovalevskaya were also noted for their rich imagery and vibrant colors.

Large embroideries featured black, red, and blue silk, as well as fabrics from the Duchaba factory, with medium-sized and tiny rosettes, while items made in the popup technique utilized yellow, light blue, white, and light purple threads, giving them a unique appearance. In short, the combination of hand embroidery and Nurata embroidery traditions is reflected in the artel's works.

We can observe this contrast in the embroidery of Samarkand and Tashkent, as well as in the Russian ceramics of world applied arts. The "Trud Zhenshchin" artel in Samarkand began its activities in the first half of the 20th century, and since Uzbekistan was part of the Soviet Union during that time, the style of Uzbek embroidery with a dark background resembles Russian ceramics. Here, the embroiderers' skills and the stylized depictions of flowers and leaves reflect national characteristics. This phenomenon can be described as the influence of folk art across different nations. One of the founders of famous Russian national shawls, Labzik, initially depicted Asian patterns in his shawls.

Today, the artel operates under the name "Aziza." It produces various mattresses, bed linens, special garments, and knitted products for Uzbekistan and abroad. Saida Jo'rayeva, the factory manager who recalls her youth, emphasizes that Samarkand's popup embroideries stand out for their colors and delicacy, as well as for the harmonious structure of their patterns and colors.

In the center of Samarkand, until the 1950s, items like money bags and hats were common, after which decorative tablecloths and belts became more prominent. The products of the "Trud Zhenshchin" artel included decorative embroidery for women's and men's clothing, tablecloths, square-shaped pillows, and belts. We saw various poetic inscriptions and wishes embroidered on hand-stitched wall hangings and hats. Machine-made popup embroidery primarily featured slogans and congratulatory messages intended for

celebrations and anniversaries, which we can consider reflections of the ideological views of their time.

One notable factory product was a belt made in 1970, measuring 98 × 98 cm, embroidered on brown silk. The item's edge featured a geometric design, and in one corner, the phrase "Самарқанд 2500" ("Samarkand 2500") was stitched in yellow thread using the Cyrillic alphabet. Below the inscription, a pattern of green leaves was embroidered, and above the text, a depiction of an archway with architectural elements was illustrated in blue thread.

From the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to today, decorative national headdresses in the beadwork style for brides, veils (bride's shawls), and bridal ensembles (dresses, wraps, coats) demonstrate that computer embroidery and beadwork were maximally utilized in popup-style items. This development significantly advanced Samarkand's clothing and small embroidery styles by the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. By the 1980s, the composition of bridal items began to include gold embroidery elements. These included circular hats, long gowns with bell-shaped skirts, bell-shaped wraps, and gold-embroidered shoes. Craftspeople taught this art to young girls in their homes.

To achieve the most developed form of hand embroidery, the "qoqma" (a type of embroidery) became fashionable among women in everyday clothing and festive dresses. By the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, sizes 10, 14, 16, 18, and 21 emerged (these are explained by the corresponding sizes). The qoqmas made from black cotton thread, with 10, 14, 16, and up to 25 rows of thickness, became popular. They often featured rose patterns, flowers, and inscriptions like "BAKHT" (Happiness) and "BAKHTLI BO'LING" (Be Happy), crafted in various colored threads using the zar and iroqi techniques.

In both local Tajik and Uzbek cultures, it became essential for women's clothing to include qoqma embroidery. Women whose husbands had passed away were expected to wear items without qoqma. For this reason, it was considered a must-have for everyone from seven-year-old girls to elderly women, which created an economic benefit for the embroiderers. This trend continued until 2017–2018, after which machine-made em-

broideries – imported from factories in China and Iran – began to replace them. These were cheaper, offered a variety of designs and colors, and were convenient (they wouldn't bleed when washed).

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, embroiderers in the districts of Bulungur, Jomboy, and Qo'shrobood worked from their homes, often gathering in one household to embroider together. In this environment, they compared their work, analyzed it, and exchanged ideas about thread color selection. Small embroideries were primarily made for large and small pillows and square cushions. These items were produced in the local embroiderers' homes and then sold at district or Urgut markets.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the embroiderers transported raw materials from the city center. They brought satin (las) fabric from the area near Registan Square in Samarkand. The threads they used came in various colors from factories. Pillow makers sold a pair of large and small pillows for 5 rubles, purchasing satin for 1 ruble and 10 kopecks per meter, taking orders for up to 100 pairs of cushions. While ancient patterns were gradually replaced by flowers and doves, the "qo'ch-qorak" (ram) pattern still persisted. The base fabric was colorful, and even shiny disco fabric was embroidered. However, the production of these large cushions is slowly declining, primarily due to a lack of demand in rural and district life. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the price for a pair of these pillows reached 80,000 to 120,000 soums, while the smaller ones were priced between 6,000 and 10,000 soums for drawing.

The term "sozana" in popular language has become synonymous with "kashta" (embroidery). When people say "kashta," they primarily refer to large items meant to be hung on walls. The item "zardevol" is understood by the term "manglayqosh." However, the embroidery of lace with white thread and the attachment of pistons and various glass beads to them hold particular significance. In sozanas embroidered on red fabric, large rosettes now take the shape of flowers. The symbolic patterns have transformed into representations of real flowers. Bright colors are used in them, and symbolic concepts in folk art have turned into realistic images.

A distinctive center differing from Samarkand embroidery is Kattakurgan. Mostly, embroiderers from the town of Payshamba created many embroidered items. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Kattakurgan's large embroideries, such as sozanas and prayer rugs, were sewn on shiny satin fabric, taffeta, blue satin, and silk. These were notable for their small patterns in chain stitch embroidery. The tiny white flowers on the blue fabric could be compared to the sky and stars. The rosette pattern often had the appearance of a flower, with the flower consisting of three or four layers of colors. The thread colors were bright and varied, made from silk and synthetic fibers. The border section's patterns were the same size as those in the center, and the clarity and uniformity of the patterns demonstrated the skill of the designers. The edges of the items were always finished with a ribbon, which the embroiderers themselves would weave. The ribbon, 2 cm wide, was woven from black cotton thread by the embroiderers and then embroidered with a pattern using silk thread in the Iroqi technique. Some featured ancient "S"-shaped patterns, and at times, the ends of these were finished with arrow-like shapes.

In dishes such as plates, cups, and vases, one can observe motifs from the art of Afrosiyob pottery – patterns formed by the interconnection of "S"-shaped elements, generalized depictions of the sun, horns resembling the curled shapes of mountain goats, and the animal kingdom alongside the shapes and volumes of the vessels, reminiscent of ancient art. However, these are now used more for fashion and have lost their primary decorative function. Kattakurgan patterns are less dense on the fabric surface compared to Samarkand embroidery. Though the flowers are sparser, the stitching and pattern details are more precise.

### **Result and discussion**

Nurata has long been recognized for its garden-like embroidered designs, which are notable not only in Uzbekistan but also in the global decorative arts. Nurata embroiderers maintained ancient patterns and techniques in their creations. "By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a distinctive style of embroidery had emerged in Nurata. Nurata embroideries had specific



features and were adorned with bouquets of flowers. However, these bouquets did not densely cover the white background of the fabric. Nurata embroidery held a leading position in Uzbekistan's artistic embroidery in terms of the richness and variety of floral motifs. Often, Islamic-style patterns were enlivened with images of birds. Sometimes, in less noticeable areas, stylized depictions of animals and humans served as decorative elements. A closed composition, with an eight-pointed star at the center and four large bouquets in the corners of the central field, was the most common design. This type of composition was called 'chor shox-yak moh,' meaning 'four branches – one moon.' The remaining patterns were placed in the spaces between the main flowers. Another type of pattern was the diamond-shaped net-like design, which was formed from toothed leaves (known as 'Toba doni,' a lattice pattern). The ends of this pattern were filled with images of branches, flowers, clusters of flowers, birds, and animals."

Takyapo'sh is an embroidered headscarf made from tricot (a knitted fabric) in a close white shade. The lining is a red fabric with yellow and black stripes. The main fabric features patterns of tanobaki, tulips, and a lattice design. The tulips, which stand upright, are outlined in green with white borders, and we see lattice flowers as well as rosettes in the shape of tulips. The central area contains an "albasti bodom" design, with the tip of the almond depicted in an open green hue and outlined in black thread. These designs are positioned in each corner of the takyapo'sh. In the center, there is a large green rosette surrounded by green leaves, with small rosettes filling the empty spaces. Three eye-like patterns in green are encircled by a wavy shape. The delicate border is outlined in black and dark red threads, with white and yellow patterns interspersed. The embroidery is done using a printing technique, with the edges sewn with an overlock stitch. The threads used are made of both natural and synthetic silk. Notably, the embroiderers from Nurata do not use a filler in the edges of their large embroideries.

In Nurata's fine embroidery, we find embroidered headscarves, wedding dresses for brides, nimchas, rectangular pillows, belts, and shawls. Today, they also create various

modern items such as bags, women's wallets, and cases for items. Nurata's fine embroidery has retained its ancient motifs, including qalmpir, almonds, eye patterns, and flower depictions, up to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and these designs now look very rich.

Nurata embroidery has its own style, characterized by a method where the fabric is stretched tightly on a loom. Colorful threads are then embroidered over drawn designs, and once the item is finished, the fabric is released from tension, causing the embroidered flowers and images to pop out. This enhances the artistic quality of the item. In Nurata, every woman, girl, and bride is expected to know how to embroider, which contributes to their livelihood. The embroidery process, with 1 cm requiring 50 or 100 stitches, demands great patience and endurance from the embroiderers. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the patterns depicted on women's bags changed, yet the stitching methods remained rooted in ancient traditions.

Modern rectangular bags feature contemporary artistic representations, including images of women with hats and cats. In contrast, older designs depict stylized representations of peacocks, doves, and deer, which have now expanded to include more realistic and decorative elements.

In the Payariq district, embroiderers have their own distinctive creativity. They produce large embroideries, including prayer rugs, sozanalar, tablecloths, and zardevors (decorative wall hangings). The main materials used are red, yellow, and green satin fabrics. The patterns from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century are preserved in zardevors and sozanalar. For example, the use of black leaf-like designs and rosettes is characteristic. The edges of these items are reinforced with a 5 cm thick black satin band, with a fine "janona" stitch applied over the top. This method was present in Samarkand embroidery at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Hooks made from black satin are attached to the corners for hanging on walls, indicating that these items are designed specifically as interior decorations and not for other practical uses.

Urgut artisans have been continuously embroidering large textiles such as prayer rugs, sozanalar (wall hangings), bolinposh (ceremonial cloths), and ro'yjolar (decora-

tive panels). The ancient “teapot” motif is still preserved in their works. The patterns on the fabric are designed by other artisans known as chizmakashlar (designers). In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Urgut’s embroidery showcased motifs similar to those of Samarkand, featuring white and yellow backgrounds with black outlines, a central brown rosette, and bright tulip designs. However, the black circles surrounding the rosettes in Urgut’s older examples are not as thick as those found in Samarkand. The embroidery techniques are highly skilled, with intricate leaf patterns included. The reverse side of the items is completely clean and free of any loose threads. The edges of the items are finished with a border. In Urgut, the borders are crafted separately by a specialized artisan known as a “tasmachi hunarmand.”

### Conclusion

Overall, the embroiderers in Urgut create items that closely resemble the style of Samarkand, likely influenced by the proximity of Urgut to this city. Urgut embroiderers have passed their craft down to local women and girls, teaching them the trade within their households. Chizmakashlar are considered separate artisans who solely focus on drawing patterns. Notable chizmakashlar like Toshkandiy (whose real name is unknown), Obidaoy Nurmammedova, and Turdi-oy

primarily created designs for doppi (traditional caps).

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, small embroideries included tea bags, headscarves, doppi, and takyapo’shs (embroidered headscarves). By the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this type of fine embroidery remained a part of Urgut’s cultural traditions. The appearance of the patterns continues to reflect the ancient styles. For wedding ceremonies, bolinposh, sozanalar, and prayer rugs are essential components of the bride and groom’s dowry.

In general, the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the development of Samarkand embroidery based on ancient traditions and the demands of modern times. The art of embroidery thrived in Samarkand and other regions such as Nurota, Urgut, Payariq, Kattaqo’rg’on, Jomboy, and Bulung’ur. During the 1970s, numerous embroidered pieces with written motifs began to appear. The large embroideries in Nurota, Urgut, and Samarkand preserved and enriched ancient traditions. Although the patterns and items varied, they maintained a unity that ensured the continuity of the art of embroidery. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the production was largely driven by the demands of foreign tourists and local residents. Fine embroidery experienced significant growth during this time. The types of items and patterns began to promote modern meanings rather than just traditional customs.

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Contact: maxkamovagulnora83@gmail.com