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KHAN-ATLAS AS A MIRROR OF NATURE AND THE FOUNDATION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

Sevara Khodjamatova,
Independent Researcher, State Academy of Choreography of Uzbekistan

Abstract: This article delves into the history, legends, and production secrets of Khan-atlas, a fabric deeply woven into the fabric of Uzbek national culture and intangible heritage. The study offers a comparative look at the traditional "abrband" art, exploring the distinctive decorative patterns and vibrant color palettes of the Samarkand, Bukhara, and Fergana weaving schools that flourished in the 19th century.

Keywords: Khan-atlas, abrband, silk, weaving, silk weaving, Samarkand school of weaving, Bukhara school of weaving, Fergana school of weaving, Margilan silk, national costume, ornament, geometric patterns, floral motifs, "butterfly" pattern, natural dyes, mulberry silkworm, sericulture, cultural heritage, intangible values, Uzbek craftsmanship.

Clothing is the face of every nation and its main distinguishing feature. It is precisely this kind of national symbol of the Uzbek people that khan-atlas represents. To this day, the history of the creation and origin of this exquisite fabric is shrouded in various mysteries and beautiful legends.

According to historical sources, the roots of the Margilan school of crafts date back to the 3rd century BC, and it was from this period that the culture of silk weaving began to take shape in the region. Soon, these exquisite fabrics spread along the Great Silk Road between East and West, conquering the global market. The local silk, and later the unique silk fabrics, were admired not only by Eastern beauties but also by Western women. In particular, the garments sewn from these fabrics for Uzbek women and girls not only lent them a special charm, elegance, and splendor

but also became one of the most vivid national symbols of the Uzbek people in the world.

According to legend, the elderly Khan of Margilan decided to marry for a fifth time. He ordered the most beautiful girls in the city to be gathered in the square so he could choose a bride from among them. The Khan's gaze fell upon the daughter of a poor weaver, who was incomparable in her beauty, upbringing, and disposition. Upon learning of this, the master came to the palace, voiced his objection to the Khan, and asked that his daughter be left in peace. The ruler then promised to release the girl in exchange for fulfilling an impossible condition: in a single night, the master had to weave a unique fabric that would reflect the boundless blue of the sky, the radiance of the sun, and the lush green of the spring hills. Finding himself in a hopeless situation and receiving no help from artists or other craftsmen, the master went to the riverbank in despair. When the rain stopped and a rainbow shimmered on the surface of the water, inspiration suddenly struck the master's heart. He hurried home and worked at his loom all night. At daybreak, the Khan was amazed by the fabric brought to his palace. Spellbound by the marvelous cloth that mirrored the colors of the sky, the sun, and the rainbow, the ruler honored the weaver's craftsmanship and named the fabric "Khan-atlas".

Khan-atlas is not just a fabric, but a living work of art that embodies all the beauty of nature, its multifaceted iridescence, and its mysterious harmony. Each of its patterns and glimmers reflects the magnificence of the universe. And when people, as an integral part of nature, clothe themselves in this fabric, they rediscover their true selves, their national identity, and their natural grace. The vibrant colors of khan-atlas, merging with the human soul's aspiration for beauty, reveal the inseparable bond between nature and humanity.

Today, this unique fabric-an essential cornerstone of our national identity and cultural heritage-is experiencing a vibrant revival, handcrafted with a rich variety of captivating designs. Among the most celebrated patterns are the vivid Margilan

Atlas, the enigmatic Black Atlas, the nature-inspired Bargi Karim, and the Namashamgul, which mirrors the beauty of the twilight sky. Equally adored are the iridescent Peacock Atlas and the poetic My Black Eyes (Qora Kozim). Beyond their exquisite beauty and refinement, these textiles offer remarkable health benefits; genuine atlas is woven from 100% organic silk fibers. In keeping with time-honored traditions, the threads are meticulously hand-dyed using organic, plant-based pigments. The fabric's signature enigmatic luster and intricate motifs are achieved through the renowned abr (ikat) weaving technique, which embodies centuries of artisanal secrets.

The technique for producing atlas fabric is rich with secrets and consists of several complex and fascinating stages. Traditional Uzbek atlas, a craft honed over centuries, is fundamentally derived from the cocoons of the local mulberry silkworm. Today, these textiles are classified into several distinct categories based on their material composition: 100% pure silk fabrics, semi-silk varieties featuring a blend of cotton and silk (akin to adras), and opulent textiles woven with gold or silver threads, originally reserved for royal attire. Prior to the weaving process, the fibers undergo a specialized dyeing method that demands meticulous precision. As mentioned earlier, the famous art of "abrband" involves the systematic dyeing of specific sections of the silk. In this process, the silk threads are pre-divided into bundles according to a sketch of the future pattern, and the areas that should not be dyed are tightly bound. Thanks to this unique method, a rainbow-like harmony of colors and a unique artistic gloss are created on the fabric's surface. Afterward, the dyed threads are mounted onto traditional looms. The weaving process is done entirely by hand with millimeter precision, and as a result of such painstaking and diligent labor, the world-astounding and unique khan-atlas is born.

It can be said that by the 19th century, the traditional art of weaving in the territory of Uzbekistan had reached its zenith; major historical centers for the production of national fabrics were established, and they continue to develop to this

day. The artistic design of silk and semi-silk fabrics exhibits certain local characteristics and differences, shaped by the cultural perspectives, traditions, and natural environment of each oasis and region. The Samarkand, Bukhara, and Fergana schools of weaving are considered the most prominent among them.

Fabrics created by the masters of the Samarkand school of weaving are distinguished by their monumentality and restraint. Along with a sharp contrast of colors in the ornamentation, the geometric shapes of fabrics from this region are also enriched with contradictions. Sometimes, colors of a similar tone are used on the surface of the fabrics; such textiles employ a combination of simplified patterns reminiscent of the plants and historical monuments of the great city.

As the formation and development of the Bukhara school of weaving are associated with the period of the Emirate of Bukhara, fabrics created by the masters of this region feature perfect geometric compositions and simple, yet extremely concise patterns. In particular, the colors of the fabrics are warm and bright, evoking the sun, the contrasts are soft, and the patterns on the atlas have sharp, strict, and clear outlines.

The Fergana school of weaving combines two distinct traditions-those of Margilan and Kokand-which, though similar, have subtle contrasts. Primarily, the atlases created by the artisans of the Fergana Valley expressed a completely different philosophy through their elegant, light, and airy fabrics. The designs applied to the fabric are rendered in delicate, flowing patterns that evoke complex botanical forms; the artisans show a preference for the shapes of flowers and fruits.

Among the abr fabrics, khan-atlas is of particular interest to women due to its exceptional smoothness and lightness. At the same time, the uniqueness of this fabric lies in its fanciful colors; always special, inimitable, and distinctive, it is vibrant and rich, having absorbed all the colors of the rainbow. From ancient times, Margilan and Namangan were celebrated as the true cradle of Khan-atlas. In those early days, only royalty and high-ranking nobles possessed the right to wear dresses made from

this precious cloth, which is exactly how it earned its name, meaning "the Khan's silk". As the fabric became a staple of court fashion, weavers introduced colorful new patterns depicting trees and shrubs, as well as bold ornaments shaped like ram's horns and bouquets in vases. Later on, striped variations also came to life, becoming widely known as bekasam.

In the 19th century, striped fabrics produced on looms continued to become widespread among the population of Central Asia, and weaving developed into the most advanced craft industry. This made it possible not only to create multi-striped ornamental compositions but also to increase the width of the fabric itself.

During the mid-20th century, traditional craft schools kept this ancient art alive, passing master secrets down through generations. In the region's historic cities, particularly within the Fergana Valley, the creation of fabrics with colorful, expressive patterns reached new heights. Then, in the early 1990s, clothing with national motifs witnessed a major revival, becoming a stylish and proud centerpiece of traditional celebrations, family milestones, and holidays.

In the 21st century, the ancient craft of traditional weaving has taken center stage in our modern national art. Today, Khan-atlas is far more than just a local symbol for Margilan, Kokand, Andijan, and Fergana-it has evolved into the quintessential hallmark of Uzbekistan as a whole. This legendary silk does not simply beautify our national celebrations and festivals; it has woven itself into the fabric of everyday life, becoming an indispensable part of our people's daily routine.

The results of the study show that the Uzbek khan-atlas is not merely a fabric, but a high art form that for centuries has reflected the aesthetic views and philosophical worldview of our people. The monumental-geometric, the luxurious with its clear contours, and the elegant-lyrical schools of weaving that formed in the 19th century demonstrate the multifaceted nature of the Uzbek national art of "abrband." The preservation of these traditional patterns and environmentally friendly production technologies, as well as their integration into the modern fashion

industry, indicates that our national heritage possesses not only historical value but also sustainable prospects for development.

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