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(SECOND HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY – EARLY 20TH CENTURY)

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It is well known that the visual art of the peoples of Central Asia, after Islam spread to the region, lost its earlier, intrinsic freedom in choice of subjects and became predominantly ornamental. Diverse patterns adorned the walls of houses, wooden and metal objects of everyday use, and fabrics. Embroidery was a highly developed art form and there were a number of major schools of embroidery.

Research into Central Asian ornament has shown that the stylized plants (shoots, flowers, leaves) and geometric figures which make up its basic elements had different associations in the popular consciousness, particularly in the minds of the artisans creating them. This was first shown by M. S. Andreyev in 1928, who established that ornamental geometric and plant motifs are derived from objects in the physical world, and that the patterns reflect particular conceptions about the natural environment.[1] The study of Central Asian ornament has advanced greatly since then. The work of ethnographers, whose profession puts them in direct contact with creators of folk art as informants, has revealed a wide range of symbolic meanings latent in traditional plant (and sometimes geometric) shapes.

G. L. Chepelevetskaya's richly illustrated volume on the large decorative embroideries (*suzanis*) of Uzbekistan includes a wealth of material about embroidery designs.[2] V. G. Moshkova's study of Central Asian carpet ornaments[3] is very valuable, since she gathered her information directly from carpet-weavers. The work of A. S. Morozova, published posthumously and only complete in parts, contains tables of ornamental motifs, many of which are listed together with their names. Moshkova succeeded in deciphering a number of ancient motifs, but most of them still await their interpreter. Altogether, the symbolic meanings of ornamental motifs have been poorly studied. However, thanks to the work of ethnographers over many years, a significant mass of material has been collected, making a deeper understanding of ornamental

1 M. S. Andreyev, *The Ornament of the Mountain Tajiks of the Upper Reaches of the Amu Darya and the Kyrgyz of the Pamirs* (Tashkent: 1928).

2 G. L. Chepelevetskaya, *Suzanis of Uzbekistan* (Tashkent: UzSSR State Art Literature Publishing House, 1961).

3 V. G. Moshkova, *Carpets of the People of Central Asia of the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries* (Tashkent: Fan, 1970).

art possible. Most of the names of ornamental motifs have been recorded, especially older ones now falling into disuse and basically being forgotten. Their names often communicate concepts that were once associated with these motifs.

Variegated ornamental motifs featured primarily, it must be said, in those branches of folk art that were in the hands of women. In handicrafts executed by male artisans, especially the decoration of buildings, the main role was played by abstract geometric *gireh* patterns.[4] Representative images accompanied such designs only rarely, or were dispensed with altogether. Since female artisans did not receive a formal apprentice's education, which rejected certain techniques and a wide assortment of decorative forms, they were freer in their art. They had a wider range to express their individuality, invent new patterns inspired by their direct experiences of nature, and create shapes evoked by religious beliefs or folklore. Folk art was always profoundly traditional, however, and any theme had to be expressed through forms that were familiar and customary, thereby obscuring the meanings of the motifs, although those were frequently revealed by the motifs' names.

In Central Asia's sedentary areas between the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers, tradition dictated that embroidery patterns should have a floral look. Flower and leaf elements usually stood out sharply in the designs by virtue of their colors and shapes. This was characteristic particularly of major embroideries – embroideries on white fabric which played an important part in everyday life. These embroideries may be regarded as examples of the highest achievements of embroidery art. Any object used as an ornament needed to assume a vegetal form to fit in with the overall style of vegetal compositions. Only in a few embroideries (principally from Nurata and Bukhara, and sometimes from Samarkand) do we find relatively realistic depictions of little pitchers, birds, occasional human figures, and, in one case, horses.[5] Usually these figures are not part of the main composition, however, but are put in places with too much empty space. Only in one very old *suzani*, apparently from Nurata, a pair of peacocks are situated in the center of the composition surrounding its largest design element.[6]

Both the forms and interpretation of the ornamental motifs used by embroideresses from different regions provide insight into the history of this visual art. In embroideries we can discover, alongside designs created by our contemporaries, motifs dating back to antiquity, as evidenced by surviving objects from centuries past. Some ancient motifs have been preserved practically unchanged (for example, depictions

4 L. I. Rempel', *Architectural Ornament of Uzbekistan* (Tashkent: UzSSR Gospolitizdat, 1961).
5 Chepelevetskaya, p. 84, plate XIV; p. 101, illus. 7.
6 Ibid., p. 103, plate 9.

of pomegranates); others have been reinterpreted. Thus, one ornament found on old pieces, shaped like a chain of tendrils pointing in different directions, came to be called *otash-aroba* "train," although its sole association with a train is the conjunction of identical repeating elements. In some cases, it is possible to see different motifs merged in a single design, losing their individual features in the process of transformation. One example, examined by the archeologist G. V. Grigor'ev, is a bird motif found extensively in Central Asian decoration. During the process of stylization, the bird lost its head and tail and merged with a design that can be traced back to a picture of a pepper pod or an almond.[7]

The author of the present article spent many years studying decorative embroidery,[8] starting in 1934, working at the State Museum of the History of the Culture and Art of the Uzbek SSR (in Samarkand) where, alongside examining, analyzing and dating museum pieces, it was possible to be in continuous contact with embroideresses and, crucially, the draftswomen who drew the designs. The latter proved to be the true creators of this art, both past and present, experts on ornaments and guardians of tradition. Many of them came to maturity and began pattern drawing in the second half of the 19th century when the old motifs and embroidery styles still held sway. Some elderly draftswomen drew from memory whole embroidery sets from their own dowries, and the dowries of their relatives.[9] By studying complete sets dating to different decades of the 19th and early 20th centuries it was possible to trace the evolution of embroidery during this period, uncover key points about changes in style and decoration, and shed at least some light on what the designs signified. In those years the meanings of the motifs were known not only to the draftswomen: many women were well versed in embroideries, as they were used constantly in the daily life of every family. Women took part in making them, and received them as dowries when they got married; some women learned the art from childhood.

Decorative embroidery turned out to be an extremely convenient art form to research ornament. It was most highly developed in Samarkand. Not even Nurata and Bukhara produced such a huge number of decorative embroideries as Samarkand in the late 19th – early 20th centuries. It was home to many professional draftswomen, including some who were very elderly but had lost none of their mastery and knowledge of the ornaments and compositions they had employed (sometimes adapted, sometimes created afresh) in the course of their long lives.

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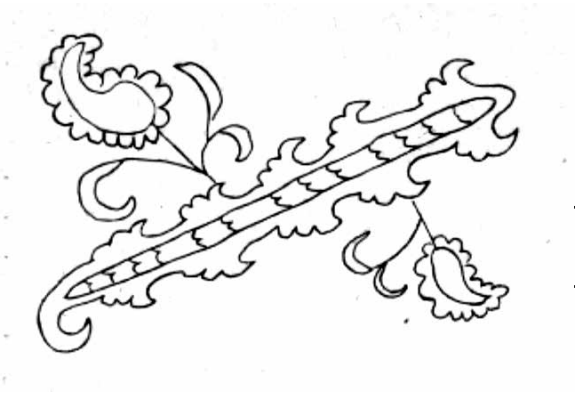
7 G. V. Grigor'ev, "Tus-Tupi: The History of a Folk Design of the East," *Art*, 1957 No. 1.

8 O. A. Sukhareva, "On the History of the Development of Samarkand Decorative Embroidery" in *Literature and Art of Uzbekistan*, Volume 6 (Tashkent, 1937).

9 These drawings are held in the A. Ikramov State Museum of the History of the Culture and Art of the Uzbek SSR in Samarkand.

A comparison of Samarkand embroideries from the second half of the 19th century with later examples reveals that in every one of the earlier embroideries certain motifs were mandatory; they are missing in the later pieces. Admittedly, there are favorite motifs which appear frequently in later embroideries, but that was only because they became fashionable. In Samarkand, for instance, starting in the early 20th century it became modish to employ the *palak* design, depicting the trailing vine of the watermelon plant, for the leafy parts of patterns on embroideries sewn on white fabric (not to be confused with the Tashkent term *palak*, meaning a *suzani* on white fabric completely covered in embroidery). One design from Samarkand with supple watermelon plant vines twining around rosettes grew so popular that it continues to be used today.



Illus. 1. *Kordi osh* ("kitchen knife") motif

Among the many different motifs that appeared in the early 20th century we see countless flowering bushes, various fruits depicted in conventional vegetal forms, and objects such as samovars, women's jewelry, etc. All these designs were intended to show abundance and richness. The formulation of motifs on 19th-century embroideries was different: in practically every example of embroidery on a white background, motifs of a cultic character, depicting objects regarded as amulets, occupied an important place in the composition. It is appropriate, therefore, to study embroidery designs also in the context of the survival of old beliefs peacefully coexisting with Islam in the daily life of the peoples of Central Asia.[10] Pre-Islamic religious ideas defined many aspects of their understanding of the world and its phenomena, even at the beginning of the 20th century. Illnesses, bad luck, and infertility were commonly linked in the popular consciousness with the influence of spirits or the magical power of an enemy. A whole system was established to battle such adversities with special

10 *Pre-Islamic Beliefs and Rites in Central Asia* (Moscow: Nauka, 1975).

devices to protect people, their descendants, their houses and property. To this end, complex magical defenses were developed in ancient times, in which amulets played an important part. People wore them, kept them in their homes or displayed them on their doors and farmstead fences.

The most important events in the lives of individuals and all their family members – the birth of a child, circumcision, marriage – were considered crucial and dangerous. During a forty-day period – the first forty days of life (*chilla*, from Tajik *chil*, "forty") – people were believed to be particularly defenseless and exposed to attack by evil spirits and harm from magic. Therefore, efforts were made to protect them through different rites, prayers and spells,[11] as well as a variety of specially appointed magical objects. Many everyday items were also employed for this purpose. For instance, fire, knives and other sharp objects were believed to have strong protective powers. Jewelry worn by a bride was supposed to neutralize the "evil eye" and divert it from the newlywed. Cornelian and turquoise were credited with having apotropaic qualities.

Many facts indicate that embroideries also had protective powers, including large decorative embroideries, the *suzanis* which adorned the nuptial chamber. In some regions, embroideries were hung on the walls of the newlyweds' room and not taken down for a long time. That was the custom in Samarkand, Khodjent and Tashkent. In other places embroideries had a lesser role in decorating the newlyweds' room: as coverings for bedclothes during the day. But whatever use embroideries were put to, their primary function everywhere was to beautify the nuptial bed: an embroidered sheet (*ruyidzho* or *dzhoypush*) was spread on the bed, on top of the blankets and mattresses; a special embroidered covering (*bolinpush, takiyapūsh, yastykpush*) was thrown over the pillows; and in winter, on top of a quilted blanket, the young people covered themselves with an embroidered counterpane which in fact was also called a *suzani*.

Three types of decorative embroidery came into being to answer their purpose – *suzani*, *ruyidzho* and *bolinpush* – to which was added, under the influence of Islam, an embroidered carpet to pray on (*dzhoynamaz*). These items constituted a complete embroidery set in Samarkand.

During a wedding, embroideries were used not only for the nuptial bed. In Samarkand, a *suzani* was draped over the bride when she was transported, usually on a horse, to the groom's house. In Tashkent, Uratyube and Khodjent, a *suzani* was held over the bride's head like a canopy as she was led from the gates of the house to

11 See O. A. Sukhareva, "The Mother and Child Among the Tajiks," *Iran*, vol. III (Leningrad, 1929).

the nuptial chamber. The way embroideries were used in these instances is clear evidence that they were credited with protective power. In some places this was acknowledged consciously; in others (like Samarkand) the belief had been forgotten and people simplyconsidered embroideries to have “good properties” (*khosiyat doran*).

Illus. 2. *Kordi osh* knife for chopping meat (sketch)

Ornamental motifs could have protective functions, for which the prototypes were the knife and the lamp. These motifs were inserted between large rosettes spread symmetrically over the entire field of the embroidery, and consequently they occupied an important place in the composition, which depended on the alternation of rosettes with these motifs.

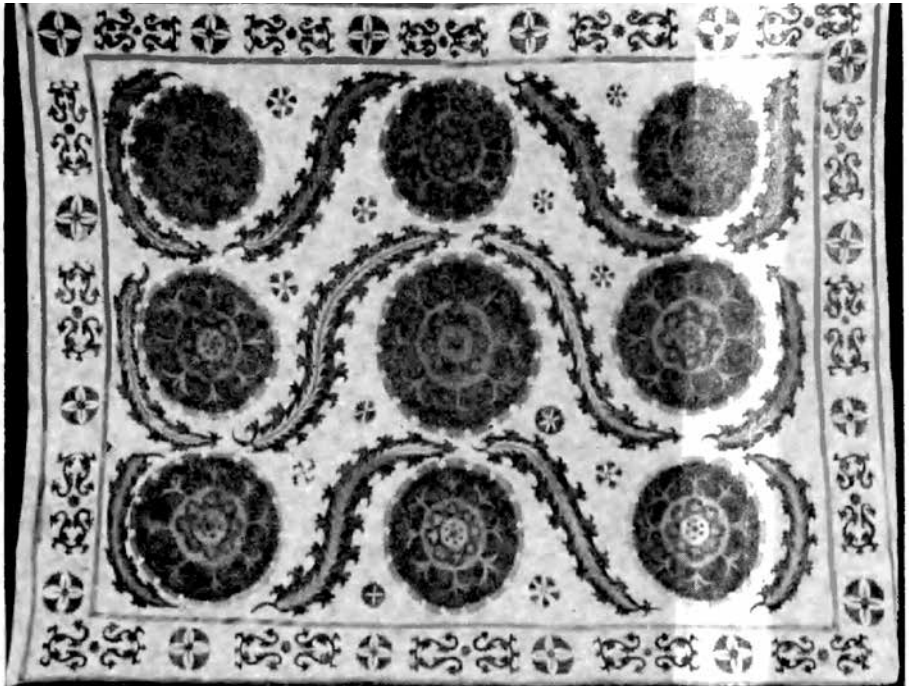
***Kordi osh* (“kitchen knife”) design.** *Kordi osh*, a knife found in every home, was depicted on embroideries. Like all Central Asian knives, it has a distinctive shape: its upper tip is slightly curled upwards, while its lower tip is turned down in the opposite direction. Although it is easy to make out the distinguishing features of the original in the “kitchen knife” motif, the “knife” has been given a shape close to a plant, as tradition required for embroidery ornaments. The knife is pictured like an oblong figure with its ends turned up and down; it is bordered by a leafy frame whose importance is emphasized by the green color used (on old embroideries) for this part of the pattern. Wavy lines divide the “knife” into transverse stripes of different colors – a very common device in Central Asia.

Besides the “kitchen knife” motif on old Samarkand embroideries, we frequently see another, semantically similar motif, called *teg* or *tegcha* (“sharp point,” “blade,” “knife”). The motif’s name matched its shape: it was a lanceolate figure with a pointed end. It often featured in compositions of large rosettes on embroideries on white fabric. The “sharp parts” pointed in all directions away from the center of the rosette, as if repulsing an enemy, no matter where the threat came from.

A physical knife, too, not only served an ordinary utilitarian function but, as described above, simultaneously had protective power. Wicked spirits could not harm someone carrying a knife. A knife in a sheath, hung on the belt, was a part of a man's costume, so spirits rarely harmed men. For women, it was the kitchen knife that warded off evil. Simply mentioning it was enough to chase away malicious forces. Once when I was a young woman, I was leaving a Tajik friend's home in the evening, and the female head of the household, worried I might be inadvertently harmed by evil spirits, advised me to repeat while I walked, "kordi osh, kordi osh, kordi osh." Without doubt, it was precisely this property of the knife which made its stylized image indispensable on old embroideries.

***Chorchirog* ("lamp") design.** The image of a lamp, another very common motif found on old embroideries, evidently had a protective function as well. The apotropaic role of fire, well-known among all nations on earth, is a widely-held belief in Central Asia too. Going in a circle around a fire, or stepping through it, were parts of the ritual to expel disease and of many other rituals, particularly those performed at weddings. A burning lamp was passed around the heads of a bride and groom; the fire was not put out in a room where a mother lay with her newborn baby; it was also left to burn in the room of newlyweds. At some point the same importance was attached, no doubt, to the depictions of lamps on wedding embroideries. Its prototype was an oil lamp with four wicks facing in different directions. Lamps of this kind are known from archeological sites. They were used in daily life up to the end of the 19th century, and even later in some places. The ornamental motif of a four-wick lamp appeared as four ovals arranged in a (slanted) cross shape within a leafy frame. Since the design had to be rendered in a vegetal form, the lamps themselves were treated as floral elements. Each oval consisted of three concentric parts; the outermost one was crimson like the large rosettes, the next was red, and the center was a warm-toned yellow or green. The ovals "perched" on stems.[12] The physical original, a four-font lamp made of clay or cast iron, can be distinguished clearly in this motif (cf. illus. 6 and 7).

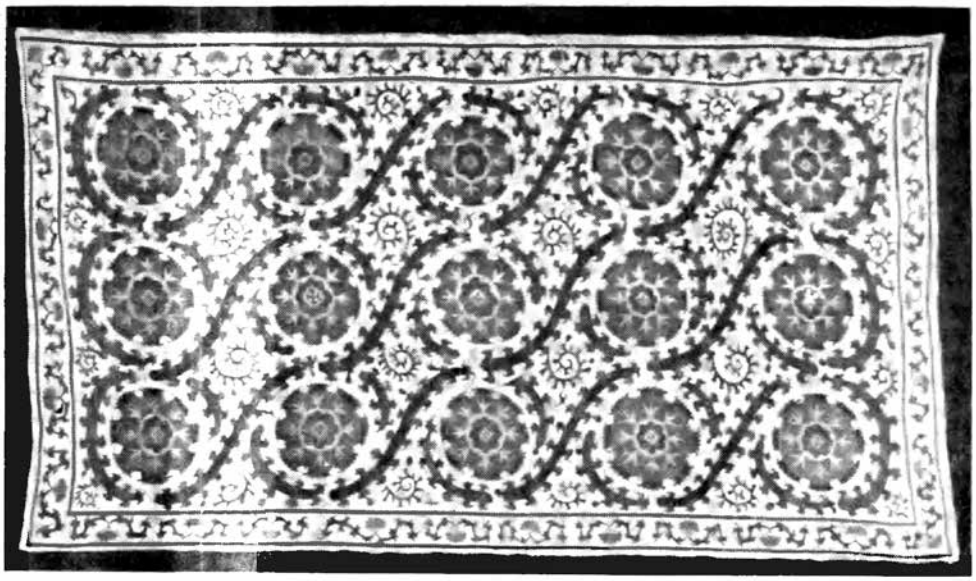
12 For detail of a Samarkand *bolinpush* with *chorchirog* design, see Chepelevetskaya, plate V.



Illus. 3. *Suzani* from the 1800s with *kordi osh* design

***Kalamfur* ("pepper") and *bodom* ("almond") designs, and the "bird" motif.** The red pepper was thought to have protective power, and we see its image in the widespread design called kalamfur, "pepper." Peppers were popularly believed to scare off malevolent forces. For this reason, a pepper pod was hung on a string in the doorway of a room where a mother and her newborn baby lay. For a long time I could not understand the significance of the almond motif commonly found on old embroideries. Almonds are favorite snacks; it seemed impossible to interpret this motif as a protection against evil. The puzzle was solved when, in the Tajik town of Urgut (Samarkand Province), I happened to see perforated nuts of the wild mountain almond tree dangling on a child's bracelet together with "beads against the evil eye," and it was explained to me that the almonds were used to ward off evil spirits from the child. Mountain almonds are very bitter, which would seem to be why they have been cast in the role of protective charms. However, the "almond" design with its protective function could also have arisen in an environment where cultivated almonds abounded, since it is well-known that almond nuts can be not just bitter, but poisonous. These facts taken together suggest that the "pepper" and "almond" designs possessed apotropaic properties, and it was for that reason they assumed a place in the ornamentation of embroideries.

The only differences between the “red pepper” and “almond” motifs are that the former is more stretched out, and the latter has a less pointed tip. That said, these differences were frequently ignored: the shape of figure could be more or less extended depending on the requirements of the composition or the figure’s position in it. A similar motif was called *kalamfur* in some regions (Samarkand) and *bodom* in others (Khodjent, now renamed Leninabad).



Illus. 4. *Suzani* from the late 1890s with *kordi osh* design

Overlapping with these two motifs, which are close to one another in form and meaning, is the “bird” motif analyzed by G. V. Grigor’ev. He revealed its deep cultic roots, and in particular its protective properties. Such powers were attributed not only to birds (to the rooster, probably, in accordance with the Zoroastrian outlook, since it heralded the dawn with its crowing) but also to the plant called “the cockscomb” (Tajik *toji khurus*) which people planted around their houses to ward off evil (as noted by Grigor’ev). The *toji khurus* design depicting the cockscomb flower on Jizzakh embroideries probably possessed apotropaic properties as well. Noting the similarities between the stylized bird motif and the pepper and almond motifs, Grigor’ev thought the vegetal guise of the pepper and almond was a later development that resulted when the bird motif became distorted and the religious ideas associated with it grew obsolete. However, this interpretation cannot be accepted. All three motifs could have originated independently from their own prototypes. In some instances the motif is called pepper or almond; in others it is called bird, even when its form is the

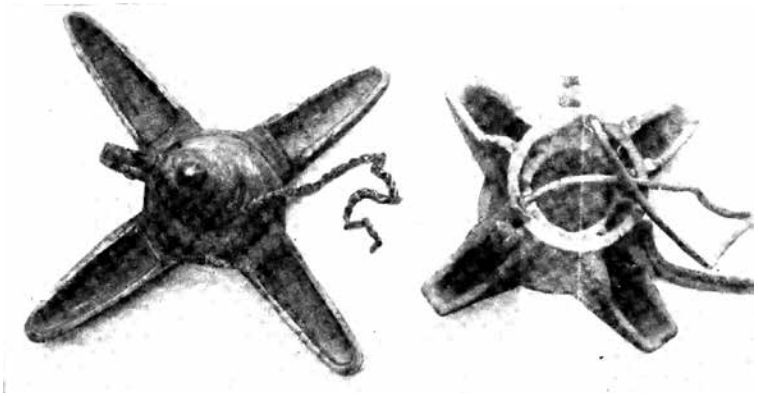
same. In the latter case the name tells us clearly what the ornament was modeled on. Thus, one of the almond-shaped designs of skullcaps in Urgut was called *musicha* "turtle dove," while the same motif used to adorn skullcaps in Chelek (also a town in Samarkand Province, inhabited by Uzbeks, whereas the population of Urgut is Tajik) was called *urdak muyini* "duck's neck." Similarly, a type of Samarkand jewelry – a necklace made up of almond-like elements – is called *murgak* "bird." Evidently, when decorative elements of the type under discussion are called "pepper" or "almond," there is no reason to trace them back to a single prototype "bird." All three motifs arose from magical and animistic ideas dating to antiquity.

Decorative images of birds did not have only protective powers, apparently, but could serve as talismans, making something wished-for come true (magic "by affinity"). It is possible that the male and female peacocks facing one another on the Nurata *suzani* mentioned above had this function. Perhaps the motif was supposed to help the newlyweds establish a good relationship and have children. This motif on *suzanis* has an exact parallel in a design characteristic of Central Asian Arabs found on "girls' carpets" (*kyz gilem*). According to Moshkova, this extremely stylized ornament was called *murgon* (Tajik "birds") and was interpreted as a picture of a female (*urgachi-murgon*) and a male (*erkak-murgon*).[13] It is significant that such embroideries and carpets were produced for weddings; this fact underlines once again the magical nature of the designs.

Illus. 5. Variations of the *tegcha* ("blades") motif, placed inside a rosette

There is a realistic depiction of a bird holding a branch in its beak on an embroidery from an Uzbek village in Bukhara Province (held in the Samarkand Museum); it seems to have signified good wishes. Grigor'ev gave the same interpretation to a picture of a bird with a necklace in its beak on a silver plate from the Sassanid era.

13 Moshkova, p. 114.



Illus. 6. Four-wick lamps

***Anor* ("pomegranate") motif.** A number of motifs modeled on plants undoubtedly played the role of talismans. Most important was the pomegranate, which archeologists rightly consider a symbol of fertility and attribute of the goddess Anahita: she is shown most often on ancient terracotta with a pomegranate. Real pomegranates were believed to ensure fertility: for example, pomegranates were poured over the bride's lap during the wedding rite in Bukhara. The pomegranate motif was quite widespread as a design element both on decorative embroideries like *suzanis* and embroidered clothing, skullcaps in particular. It was common to emphasize the very feature which made pomegranates a symbol of fertility – the abundance of seeds in each fruit. The fruit was depicted as if opened, so that its inside was visible. However, the fruit was often pictured whole as well, in which cases it was shown with the distinguishing features of an actual pomegranate, its round shape and crown (with three points).[14] The opium poppy was regarded as a means to ensure fertility. The design showing the poppy (*kuknor*) is reminiscent of the pomegranate design (*anor*), save that the fruit's triple-pointed crown is larger and the fruit itself is somewhat stretched out.

Illus. 7. *Chorchirog* ("four-wick lamp") motif

14 Chepelevetskaya, p. 75, illus. 44; p. 84, plate XIV.

"Sheep" and "camel" motifs. Cultic significance was attached to motifs whose prototypes were the sheep and the camel, animals that were held in high esteem. The sanctity of the sheep is underscored by the Tajik name for it: *gusfand*, *guspand* from the word *gou*, *gau* "livestock" (cow, bull). Grigor'ev's theory (well-founded, in my opinion) is that the etymology of the second half of the word, *sipand*, derives from the Indo-European root for "light" (from which Tajik *safed* "white"). The word *sipand* is given in dictionaries as the name for the *ruta* plant whose smoke was used in Central Asia to fumigate sickrooms in an attempt to chase away disease, or, more precisely, the spirits that caused it. The term *sipand* also makes up part of certain words associated with the cult of the sun: *sipandor* – "position of the sun in the constellation Pisces," candle; *sipandormuz* – "12th month of the Persian year" (February).[15]

In the conception of many peoples, including the Tajiks, the sheep was regarded truly as *rahmoni* ("divine"), while the goat was *shaytoni* ("devilish"). The ram (*kuchkor*) played a magical protective role: in families in which male children had died, the newborn was given the name Kuchkor to scare away malevolent spirits. Uzbeks in Khorezm usually kept a sheep in the courtyard of the house to secure themselves against the evil eye: they believed the evil eye would fall on the sheep's horns and lose its force.[16] The ram with its tightly curled horns was considered the best animal for sacrifices, and its horns could often be seen in cemeteries. There were especially many of them in a cemetery in Bukhara with the noteworthy name of Kuchkor-ota. Only one of the ram's features figured in embroidery ornamentation, its horns. This design, widespread among sedentary populations, and even more so among nomadic peoples, was called *kuchkorak* by Tajiks in Samarkand and Uzbeks in Samarkand Province, *kaykalak* by Kyrgyz in the Ferghana Valley, *muyiz* by the Uzbek-Turkmen in Nurata, and *gochok* or *gochbuyniz* by the Turkmen.[17] It looked like two spiral volutes oriented in different directions, and could be used either as a smaller, minor design element or arranged along the border. Occasionally very large volutes were placed right in the center of the composition; they were assigned special importance as a result.

The second animal represented in embroidery designs was the camel. On old Samarkand embroideries the leafy frame around a rosette was often a closed circle, adorned with palmettes sitting on a stem bent sharply downwards. This motif was

15 I. D. Yagello, *Complete Persian-Arabic-Russian Dictionary* (Tashkent:1910).

16 G. P. Snesarev, *Survivals of Pre-Islamic Beliefs and Rituals Among the Uzbeks of Khorezm* (Moscow: Nauka, 1969), p. 316.

17 For details, see V. N. Basilov, "On the Vestiges of Totemism Among the Turkmen," *Reports of the Institute of History, Archeology and Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the Turkmen SSR*, vol. VII (Ashgabat: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of the Turkmen SSR, 1963), pp. 141–146.

called *gardani shutur*, "camel's neck." A similar motif *tuya muyon* is also found among the ornamentation of carpets by Kyrgyz in the Ferghana Valley.[18] One of the main designs of old Khodjent embroidery – a rhythmic arrangement of rosettes over the entire field of the embroidery – was called *paypoki shutur*, "camel's track (stocking)." Thus, one representative feature of the animal in question appeared on embroideries. The Samarkand design showed the camel's long, stretched neck, while the Khodjent design showed its wide, soft foot. (Animal or bird tracks are some of the most common subjects used in ornamentation.) Perhaps it was merely the look of a sharply bent meander that caused it to be associated with a camel's neck. Yet it can hardly be a coincidence that the camel caught the imagination of the female artist who first (and probably long ago) created this motif. Camels were honored by many Central Asia peoples. In Samarkand they believed that, if you dreamed of a camel, it meant a holy man (*buzurgvor*) had visited you in your sleep, and custom demanded you make a sacrifice at the nearest cemetery. At the same time, the camel was imputed to have special sexual powers, which may explain why a schematic representation of a camel became a design on embroideries made for weddings. Among the Tajiks of Shahristan (northern Tajikistan), when the bride was transported to the groom's house and invited to sit down, they would recite (after a long time trying to persuade her and offering promises) the following couplet which had become a sacramental formula: *Shuturi nora dodem, tashnavi tara dodem* – "We give a male camel and a damp gutter for water," alluding to the groom and the customary Muslim ritual of ablution.[19]

Illus. 8. *Musicha* ("turtle dove") motif. Drawn by Ovida-oy (Urgut, Samarkand Province)

18 Moshkova, plate XXIV, illus. 7.

19 O. A. Sukhareva, "Certain Aspects of the Weddings and Marriage Rituals of the Tajiks of Shahristan Village," *Digest of the Research Group of the Oriental Faculty of Central Asian State University* (Tashkent, 1928), p. 87.

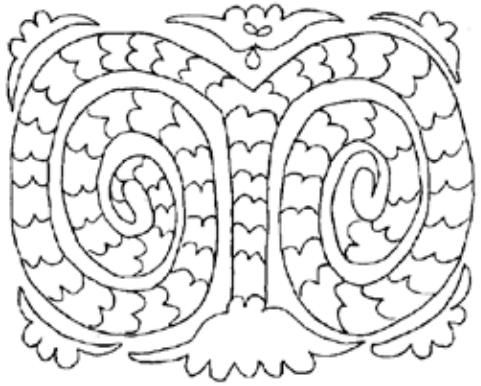
Illus. 9. *Urdak-muyini* (“duck’s neck”) motif. Drawn by a woman from Katta-turk, Samarkand Province

Astral motifs on embroidery. A number of astral motifs that appear on embroideries should be mentioned. Their cultic significance has been almost forgotten, but it can be assumed that that was the reason why such motifs were introduced into the decorative scheme of embroideries functioning as amulets. The first point to note is that in Tashkent, and probably a number of other places, the large rosettes on which the whole composition basically depends are called *oy* “moon.” Complementing the moon are *yulduz* “stars,”[20] and the *suzanis* themselves, on white fabric entirely filled in with patterns, are called *palak*. This term evidenly comes from the Arabic *falak* (“sky”), altered in Turkic pronuncation.

Another interpretation we heard in Uzbek villages in Bukahra Province was that the rosettes were images of the sun. One of the women there who drew designs for *suzanis* gave the name “sun” (*oftob-nuska*) to a small rosette in a clearly floral composition consisting of shrubs or branches. In Samarkand rosettes in embroidery patterns are called *lola* “tulip.” However, in another branch of decorative art in Samarkand, carving in wet clay to decorate the walls of wealthy farmsteads on the edge of town, rosettes are often understood to be solar symbols,[21] an interpretation confirmed by the observations of Grigor’ev. When he asked about a wet-clay carving of a circle above the door of a butter churning establishment, it was explained to him that it was a sun which would protect the work from the evil eye (so the volume of butter produced would not diminish). According to G. P. Snesarev, rosettes with swirls (a solar symbol) adorned the houses of Uzbeks in Khorezm as a protective measure.

20 Tashkent embroidery was studied by M. A. Bikzhanova. Unfortunately, her materials were never published.

21 A. K. Pisharchik, *National Architecture of Samarkand* (Dushanbe: Donish, 1975), illus. 146-147.



Illus. 10. *Kuchkorak* (“ram,” “ram’s horns”) motif

Illus. 11. Motifs used to decorate the central parts of leafy ornamentation: (a) *abri bakhor* “spring cloud”; (b) *tiri kamon* “lightning.”

The name *lola* “tulip” used in Samarkand is hard to explain; it is unclear what significance the tulip image once had. The tulip festival in Isfara[22] comes to mind, though, and the widespread existence of the toponym *lolazor* “tulip field,” applied at times to places where it is unlikely that tulips ever grew (such as the name of one of the nearest suburbs outside Samarkand, which had come within the city limits by the early 20th century). It should be noted in this context that in many places *lolazor* meant a women’s outdoor party, doubtless a hold-over from some ancient ritual that probably took place in spring. Little is known about such parties. I had the chance to witness

22 E. M. Peshchereva, “The Tulip (Lola) Festival in the Town of Isfara, Kokand District,” in the volume *For V. V. Bartol’d* (Tashkent, 1927); id., “Addenda to a Description of the Tulip Festival in the Ferghana Valley,” *Iranian Digest. On the Seventieth Birthday of Professor I. I. Zarubin* (Moscow: Oriental Literature Publishing House, 1963), pp. 214-218.

a *lolazor* in the village of Shahristan in 1926 during the Feast of the Sacrifice (that year it took place in July). These parties had nothing to do with the Muslim Feast of the Sacrifice, of course. In the town of Brichmulla (Tashkent Province) I heard about springtime parties for girls, which were also called *lolazor*.

The color schemes used for certain ornamental elements on old Samarkand embroideries were also probably connected with astral concepts. Motifs were divided by wavy lines into differently colored transverse stripes. In Samarkand this color scheme was called *abri bakhor* "spring cloud," and judging by the name it could harken back to the depiction of a rainbow. This color scheme was also common in embroideries from other regions (Tashkent, Jizzakh, Khodjent). It gave birth to the well-known term *abr* textiles – textiles with variegated, iridescent patterns. In Samarkand and Tashkent, the centers of leafy ornaments were frequently decorated with transverse, *abri bakhor* stripes, as were small design elements like "peppers" and "almonds." A second approach to adding color to leafy circles (dark green on early embroideries) was called *tiru kamon*. In this case, the middle of the leafy circle was traced out with a thin red line, on either side of which ran strips with serrated or broken edges, colored a warm green.[23] The words *tiru kamon* – literally, "arrow and bow" – meant lightning or (in Samarkand) a rainbow. The Uzbeks used the term *uk-yoy*, which has the same etymology, to mean a rainbow. In Tajik literary language a rainbow was called *kamoni Rustam* "the bow of Rustam."[24] The motif's serrated or zigzag shape suggests it is less likely it was associated with an image of a rainbow than with a bolt of lightning, which could be represented in the design by its jagged or broken line. By the 1930s, however, even the most elderly draftswomen retained no memory of this connection: the reasons for the name of the design had also been forgotten.

The idea that embroideries and their designs were magical had already began to wane in Samarkand apparently by the middle of the 19th century, i.e. long before great changes took place in the art of embroidery brought on by the social upheavals following Central Asia's annexation to Russia. Of course, changes were occurring in embroidery before that. Without doubt, it took many centuries to develop its style and ornamentation and achieve a stylistic unity among all the various components which go into the composition of an embroidered panel. The elaborate, beautifully finished embroideries from the mid-19th century did not appear overnight. However, as far as we can judge by the very ancient decorative features that survived into the second half of the 19th century, they experienced an evolution of form rather than undergoing any fundamental changes. Until the end of the 19th century they were linked in essence with ancient beliefs. The archaic concepts underlying embroidery started

23 Chepelevetskaya, plate V.

24 *Farkhangi zaboni tojiki*, I (Moscow: Soviet Encyclopedia, 1969), p. 534.

to become obsolete only at the end off the 19th century, when they slowly made way for a new style, and new subjects and motifs in decorative compositions.

In Samarkand, changes in the style and ornamentation of embroideries, and partially in the technology of their production, began in the 1880s, and a little later or earlier in other regions whose embroideries have not been studied yet from a historical perspective. For instance, a very bright color palette was developed in Tashkent, whereas in Samarkand, where embroidery hues had always been darker, the range of colors used in compositions was gradually narrowed. Ornamentation came close to becoming completely monochromatic as a result: patterns started to be sewn wholly in white on a backing of colored fabric (usually of dark shades like purple, dark green and dark red). In embroideries on white fabric the number of colors was reduced until all that remained was a contrast in the pattern between the crimson rosettes and their leafy frames. The dark green of the frames was replaced by black, but originally – until the 1900s – the center of the "leaves" was rendered in the old style: a thin red line ran through their middle, with jagged green "teeth" on either side of it. Then the colorful central strip disappeared and the entire leafy design was embroidered only in black. Accordingly, there occurred a significant evolution of worldview: the superstitious fear of black (the color of mourning) was overcome. Elderly women have described how in their youth they had to battle quite hard with their grandmothers to make embroideries for dowries in the new (fashionable) style. The move to coloring the leafy decorations black – and, in other regions, to sewing embroideries on black fabric – seemingly such a small detail, in fact represented an important step forward in making the old artistic traditions obsolete and eliminating superstitious beliefs. Superstition could not hold out against the onslaught of the new, which was invading all aspects of people's lives.

Decoration changed too, together with the changes in color. The "lamp" motif disappeared by the end of the 19th century. But the "kitchen knife" supplanted all other forms of vegetal frames for rosettes. The "knives" got much larger until they looked like curved sabers; they were made to arch over sharply so they could go around the rosettes. The "kitchen knife" motif was still being used at the start of the 1900s, but only for small embroideries such as *dzhoynamaz*. It was transformed into a simple shrub with a bent stem, off of which a great many tendrils extended on either side. All that remained of the earlier motif was the bent ends (one turned up, the other turned down) and the old name.

As a result of all these changes from the earlier archaic, semantically magical ornamentation of embroideries, only a few small designs remained (such as "pepper" and "almond"). Pomegranates and poppy heads continued to be pictured for a while

longer, but soon they also disappeared. Once embroidery decoration lost its magical, cultic function and the traditional designs ceased to be mandatory, new horizons opened to widen the scope of available subjects. Designs appeared that reflected the changes in everyday life – “samovar,” “train,” “dower chest,” rendered in stylized, vegetal forms. Fresh impetus was given particularly to designs showing different fruits which evidently symbolized abundance. The various magical designs became things of the past. It is true that the superstitions that gave rise to them held their place in family life for a long time afterwards, but embroidery lost its connection with them. Only in the consciousness of elderly women there remained a vague memory of the protective role that embroideries had played in the past.