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Tashkent Embroidery 19th – 20th Centuries

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Introduction

The embroidery produced by Uzbekistan’s city-dwellers is one of the most popular kinds of folk art. It is famous for its artistry and highly regarded by local people themselves. Although embroidery has existed from ancient times, very old examples, because of the structure of cloth, have not been preserved... The oldest embroideries surviving today were made not more than 100–150 years ago. Such embroideries can be found in the central museums (Moscow, Leningrad) and in Uzbekistan in museums in Tashkent, Samarkand and Bukhara. Among the population it is rare to find embroideries older than 70–80 years; the great majority of embroideries in people’s possession are quite recent, dating to the end of the 19th century, or modern productions. Although embroidery was common and well-known throughout Central Asia, no one researched or studied it seriously before the revolution. It was only after the Great October Revolution that this branch of applied folk art became an object of scholarly study. The pioneer was the Uzbek State History Museum in Samarkand. The museum’s senior research associate O. A. Sukhareva gathered rich material about Samarkand embroidery which she used to write a large and important scholarly work.¹ Following the Samarkand museum’s example, the Tashkent Museum of Art sent an expedition to Nur-ata, one of the most interesting embroidery centers. The result of the survey was “Nur-ata Embroidery” written by A. K. Pisarchik, a research associate at the museum and member of the expedition.²

Besides the two locations mentioned above, Samarkand and Nur-Ata, Sukareva began to research the embroidery of Jizzak, Bukhara and Shahrissabz. Our Academic Research Institute of Art History included a study of “Tashkent Embroidery” in its work plan for 1947, and this is the subject of my present work. In this way the most important embroidery centers will have been studied. The Fergana Valley is still poorly studied, while Surhandarya Province and Khiva remain completely unknown. In the opinion of some researchers, since embroidery is not found in Khiva

1 O. A. Sukhareva manuscript: “Decorative Embroidery of Samarkand,” acquired by the Tashkent Museum of Art and held in its library.

2 A. K. Pisarchik’s manuscript is held in the Uzbek State Museum of Art in Tashkent.

at the present time, there never was embroidery there. But the subject has been too little studied for us to make this claim. Based on the material we do have, we can conclude that, up to the revolution, decorative embroidery was found predominantly among the Uzbeks and lowland Tajiks, and that every region had its own, very separate distinguishing features. Even non-specialists can tell them apart easily by the patterns and color schemes characteristic of each region.

Embroidery was an area of folk art that was almost completely and exclusively concentrated in the hands of women. Those drawing the patterns (*chizmakash*) and doing the embroidery (*chokchi*, *chevar*) were almost always women. With the arrival of machine-made embroidery in the 1890s, when embroideries started taking on a commercial character – produced for the market and sold as goods – men got involved to some extent. But that statement needs to be qualified: as a rule, men did not embroider by hand and did not draw their own designs. *Chizmakashlik*, the art of pattern drawing by hand, was always the province of women.³

The method of applying patterns to skullcaps using a stamp (*kalyb*), which has become widespread in recent decades, is men's work.

Tashkent Embroidery in the 19th Century

Decorative embroidery had a very important place in people's daily lives in Tashkent. Little can be said about embroideries before the Russian conquest of the area, i.e., the pre-colonial period, due to the paucity of embroideries dating to that time and a lack of relevant information. The observation made above, that embroideries from before the beginning of the 19th century have not survived, applies equally to Tashkent. Most of the materials and information I have gathered concern the colonial period. Unfortunately, there are no embroideries in any of the state museums in Tashkent dating to earlier than the middle of the 19th century. Regrettably, we do not possess sufficient information pertaining to Tashkent that characterizes, clearly and distinctly, the early part of the second half of the 19th century. There is practically no one left who could provide information about embroideries from that time. We can infer from the information gathered from older people that before the Russians conquered the region, and in the early days after the conquest, large decorative em-

3 According E. M. Peshcherova, there was a famous man in the city of Kitab who hand-embroidered beautifully and was reputed to be an excellent draftsman (*chizmakash*).

broideries were not in common everyday use among the population of Tashkent. In their opinion, this was because of the economic condition of the masses – people’s lack of means. You can’t compare great-grandmothers’ times with today, they say: our great-grandmothers wore rough cotton cloth and didn’t even dream of silk... The *palak* and *gulkurpa* were rarities in those days, only for the rich. Their grandmothers used to tell them how they had heard from their mothers, if news got around that a bride (*kelin*) had moved into a house bringing a *palak*, people “would cross thrice nine lands” – come from afar – to the *kelin hayiti* (bride ceremony)⁴ to see the *palak*. That shows for certain how rare *palaks* were in those days.

Four types of decorative embroidery were widespread in the 19th century: *palak*, *gulkurpa*, *choyshab* and *joynamaz*. By the end of the century the number of types had risen. *Zardevor*, *dorpech*, *kirpech* and *yakandoz palak*⁵ appeared in the 1880s. The same period saw an increase in the quantity of embroideries being produced, connected with the rapid growth of a prosperous local commercial bourgeoisie, many of whose members had become very rich by the 1890s. Newly risen bourgeois strove to flaunt their wealth, trying to shine in front of one another; they wanted to outdo the rest and show off. All precolonial embroideries were executed on cotton fabric made by local artisans. In the first quarter of the second half of the 19th century, following the conquest of Tashkent by the Russians (1865), there also appeared factory-made fabrics imported from Russian, the majority of which were red and yellow calico (*alvon*). Imports of Russian factory-made goods, including textiles, sharply increased at the end of the 1880s. The production of embroideries on local cotton cloth made by artisans ceased completely, replaced by embroideries on expensive fabrics made either in factories or locally: *shoi* (silk), *tovar* (atlas with an embossed woven pattern), *bakhmal* (velvet) etc. If previously the bride was given a *palak*, a *gulkurpa*, two *choyshabs* and a *joynamaz* for her dowry, in the 1880s other

4 It is customary in Tashkent to organize a type of “viewing” of the dowry, and of the bride herself, either during the Ramazan or Kurban [Feast of the Sacrifice] holidays. (Both are religious Muslim holidays, *hayit*.) On the first *hayit* after getting married, the bride’s room is adorned with decorative embroideries, clothes, jewelry and different kinds of dishes – ceramic, copper, etc. – and the complete dowry is exhibited for all to see... Dressed up, the bride stands in the corner of the decorated room, bowing low to all those who have come for the viewing (*kelin kurar*). Anyone is welcome to come, even girls and young women who are complete strangers.

5 *Yakandoz palak* was not as widespread as the other embroideries mentioned here. It was produced only for the dowries of the daughters of very wealthy families.

kinds of decorative embroidery were added as well: *kirpech*, *dorpech*, and *zardevor*. In the effort to demonstrate their prosperity through luxury and splendor, wealthy families started putting together a number of sets of embroideries of different sorts for the dowry, intending to decorate not only the room designated for the newlyweds but also the ayvan (terrace) and one other room. The sharp increase in size that occurred with embroideries from Samarkand⁶ was not observed in Tashkent in the colonial period.

Inevitably, the growing number of embroideries required for a wedding had an adverse effect on embroidery technique. Old pieces from the 19th century, up to the 1880s, stood out for their excellent, regular, tiny stitchwork. Such delicate, expert sewing carried out over whole large decorative embroideries could be achieved only at the cost of much time and labor. In those days, an Uzbek woman, shut away within the four walls of her house, had no life beyond her narrow domestic interests. Cut off from the outside world, the sole purpose of her life was her family. All her sewing art and all her love for her daughter were poured into producing embroideries for her daughter's dowry, to beautify her future home! There were no specialized professionals making embroideries to order, nor were embroideries sold in the bazaars, until the 1880s. Every family provided and produced the embroideries they needed themselves: a large decorative piece like a *palak*, more labor-intensive and complicated than other textiles, needed several years of work (3 to 8). It should be understood this includes the whole preparatory process: the preparation of silk, from hatching and feeding the worms to spinning the threads (*pishi-tish*). Only the coloring of the threads was usually handled by specialist dyers.

In that situation, it is not surprising that one family on its own (one or two women, usually mother and grandmother) was not capable of producing more than three or four large embroideries for a daughter's dowry. Before the girl had even grown up, when she was 4–5 years old, they would start to get her dowry ready! If they foresaw they could not finish the dowry in time for the wedding,⁷ they resorted to the ancient custom of the *hashar* (social mutual assistance).⁸ Embroideries still needing

6 O. A. Sukhareva, "Decorative Embroideries in Samarkand." Manuscript.

7 It is well known that, according to Sharia law, a girl is considered to have reached adulthood at 9 years old. On this basis, girls are often given in marriage at the ages of 11–13.

8 A custom practiced very widely throughout Uzbekistan. Relatives and friends come together to help gather in the harvest, waterproof the roof, build a mud-brick fence (*duval*), etc. In return for their labor, the beneficiary feeds them for the whole

work were finished collectively. Naturally this lowered the quality of the embroidery, due to the haste of the work and the unevenness of the sewing being done by different hands.

In light of the foregoing, we may conclude that the art of embroidery was a genuine folk art which people made exclusively for themselves until the 1880s. A big change is detectable starting in the 1880s, when this branch of art was commercialized and began to turn into a kind of trade.⁹ As mentioned above, the growing material prosperity of the newly formed local bourgeoisie allowed them to show off – outwardly to adorn their personal lives. Together with other excesses in their way of life (family ceremonies, *toi*, lasting weeks or months), dowries grew gigantically, and so did embroideries. No family was in a position to meet the growing requirements by itself and produce the necessary quantity of embroideries. Help from relatives (*hashar*) – gratis, one-time-only – would not save the situation. But now it was not needed anyway. By getting rich fast and easily, the bourgeoisie could buy anything for money, including labor... Women’s hands could now be purchased cheaply for money. The appearance of professional embroideresses dates to this time. In Tashkent they were known by the general term *chokchi* (from the word *chok* “stitch,” hence *chokchi* “a person working with stitches”) or *chevar* “female artisan.”¹⁰ Working from home, and combining the work with their own domestic, family duties, they fulfilled orders for a fee and embroidered. Their job was really just mechanical execution, as everything was done per the directions and taste of the customer, using his materials (silk, threads, fabric, etc.). Usually the embroideress was given a fabric with a design already drawn on it by a *chizmakash* (draftswoman). It often happened that both professions were united in one individual (the *chizmakash* was also a *chokchi*). There were even narrowly specialized embroideresses called *ilmakash* (those making buttonholes, i.e., who sewed using the buttonhole stitch).¹¹ As a rule, all Uzbek

working day. People did not usually refuse to join in this kind of social assistance. Participants in a *hashar* could be sure that, when they needed help, they could rely on those whom they had helped in their turn.

9 Despite this, it was not destined to become a trade in the full sense of the word. This branch of applied art survives to this day among the people, at least partially, as a folk art.

10 L. Budagov’s *Comparative Dictionary of Turkish-Tatar Dialects* gives several definitions for this word, including “beautiful,” “skillful.” It is used in contemporary Uzbek language in the latter sense, which perfectly matches the word’s meaning here – “artisan, expert.”

11 *Ilmakash* is a compound word from Turkish *ilma* “buttonhole” and Persian

women knew how to sew, a skill they learned in childhood... Sewing by hand with a needle is an ancient art in Tashkent, but embroidery using a *bigiz* (hook) on a tambour frame is a later innovation. Old Tashkent pieces completely lack “contouring” – an outline around the design sewn in buttonhole stitch. However, it is found on later pieces (final quarter of the 19th century). This is precisely when *ilmakash* make their appearance, women who made textiles (for money) exclusively on special tambour frames (*gardish*). In the 1900s after the arrival of the sewing machine – Uzbeks called it *mashina popoy*, and machine-made embroidery simply *popoy* – all the work of the *ilmakash* was performed by machine. Hardly anyone requested contouring by hand, which was more expensive and took longer.

During these years the quality of embroideries declined significantly, due not only to poorer (slipshod, uneven) stitchwork – the result of hurrying to finish pieces on time – but also the introduction of aniline dyes (although small quantities of anilines were imported to Central Asia from Russia even before the Russian conquest of the area). When embroideries made of silk were colored with aniline dyes, the colors initially looked sharp and bright but quickly degraded: they ran, paled and faded. Until the 1880s silk embroidery threads were colored with resilient vegetable dyes (madder, pomegranate rinds, indigo, etc.), which did not fade over time but, on the contrary, grew richer, acquiring softer, warmer tones and increased brilliance from the silk. All vegetable dyes were very rapidly supplanted and replaced by aniline dyes which worked quickly and were easy to use. Aniline dyes were widely available and popular because they came in a very large number of colors and different shades. If, before the arrival of aniline dyes, there had been only one kind of green – very close to dark blue, achieved by applying blue dye (indigo) to yellow silk – now in its place there appeared pretty well dozens of different shades of green (*bargi, karam, kuk, sigir, buk, tut*, etc.). New colors of silk appeared, previously unknown: purple, lilac, rose, crimson, and others! Many of these colors became popular favorites, such as crimson, pink (*pushti*) and purple (*gunafsha*). Other colors, meanwhile, practically disappeared from large embroideries, such as dark blue, light blue, bright red, and the vermilion shades used on wool threads (*puta*) which were employed in small numbers on *palaks*. The growth in demand for embroideries in the 1900s meant that they took on a commercial character. At first, they were produced to be sold at market to unknown buyers. Various merchants in Tashkent started selling embroideries in their shops (*dukon*), some of which they had bought from people randomly, others of which had been specially ordered for purchase. Entrepreneurial dealers placed orders with expert seamstresses (*chevar*) working from home to

kash from the verb *kashidan* (كشيدن) “produce, make.”

make various kinds of embroideries from material that they (the dealers) provided. The quality of embroideries made for the bazaar was not high, first because most of them were sewn from silk leftovers (*kazna*) and plain cotton thread, and second because low-paid seamstresses strove not for quality but a high volume of completed orders.

On the subject of professional embroideresses we should add a few words about embroideresses altogether, and the word *chevar* in particular. Professional embroideresses first appeared not long ago (at the end of the 19th century), but the word *chevar* had existed for much longer. This term, meaning “female expert, skilled artisan, woman who is good at embroidering, sewing, and any kind of needlework,” had been used to characterize a woman of any age who had gained the respect of those around her. Embroidery in Uzbekistan was women’s work. The only thing that girls were taught was embroidery. In the pre-revolutionary period it was considered unnecessary to teach girls to read and write. From cradle to grave, women spent their whole lives in seclusion within the four walls of her father’s house and, after marriage, her husband’s. Women’s interests were extremely limited. As preparation for marriage, efforts were made to turn girls into good housekeepers and skilled artisans. Girls were taught to embroider from childhood – usually starting with skullcaps or other small items like the trimming on women’s trousers (*kiikcha rumal*). Usually their mothers were their teachers, and every mother earnestly wanted her daughter to become a *chevar*. In Tashkent before the revolution they practiced customs to train a girl to be an artisan. One of the commonest and best known, found also among other nations in Central Asia such as the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz, was as follows. Domestic animals including sheep have a peculiar membrane on the palate in their mouth. To Uzbek women its shape is suggestive: it seems to be composed of tiny folds, made very skillfully. In Tashkent this membrane is called *chevari* or *chevar*. When they divide up a boiled animal head, the mother or grandmother strips off this membrane and presents it on her palm to the girl they want to become an artisan. At the same time, they repeat the words “*chevar bul*” (“be a skilled artisan”). The girl must be nimble-fingered and manage to hold the *chevari*-membrane in her hand. If she can’t grasp the membrane the first time, it is given to her a second time, up to three times... This custom is a survival from the distant past, of course, when belief in magic was strong. The intricately formed *chevari* is supposed to work magically and make the girl a *chevar*. Another custom, less common but undoubtedly ancient, goes essentially as follows: a girl’s first work, a skullcap embroidered on some old material, is brought to the house of a famous *chevar* and thrown into the burning hearth... An unskillfully embroidered skullcap burns up in the fire, and the

girl's unskillfulness burns away with it. From that moment she becomes a *chevar*, like the one in whose hearth her work burned up... Some people do not throw a girl's first work into the hearth of a *chevar* but on the roof (*tam*) of the kitchen (*oshkhona*) into the *tunuk*, an opening that serves as a smoke flue. A custom evidently of more recent provenance, and practiced until recently, was to sell a girl's first work at the bazaar and take the money to prepare a *khudoi* ("godly") – to cook food with the good intention of propitiating God.

We cannot talk about embroideresses without discussing draftswomen, *chizmakash*.

While almost all Uzbek women in the cities knew how to embroider following a design, far from all were actually able to draw the design and render the ornaments, especially for large embroideries. To do that required talent and inclination; and most importantly, it was a specialty passed down in families. The profession was passed down the female line from mother to daughter, or via a close relative. In Tashkent before the revolution every section of the city (*dakha*) had a number of draftswomen, some of whom were famed, such as Pulat-*chizmakash* in the Sibzar area and Mokhi-*chizmakash* in Shaykhantaur. The art of drawing designs for embroideries was performed solely by women. Men have been drawing designs for skullcaps for only a few decades, not by hand but with stamps (*kalyb*). Master draftswomen (*chizmakash*) consider the saint Bahauddin Nakshbendi, buried near Bukhara, to be their protector and patron (*pir*). Architecture painters (*nakkosh*) also regard Nakshbendi as their *pir*. They were united in a workshop and, like other workshops, had their own statutes (*risolya*) and their own *aksakal* ["white beard" elder]. However, if there ever was a workshop that united women/ *chizmakash*, there is no trace of it in Tashkent.

It is interesting to note that in both Tashkent and Kokand, *chizmakashlik* – the profession of draftswoman – for some reason is considered unlucky. Whoever practices the profession risks falling out of favor with God. She can become *khasiyatsiz*,¹² unlucky in life, afflicted by every sort of misfortune: she may get sick, or be barren, and even if she does have children they will not survive or will be born with physical or mental defects (*iskastlikh* "impaired"). One *chizmakash* in Tashkent had epilepsy. She attributed it to her profession and gave it up. There was a famous *chizmakash* in Kokand at the court of Khudoyar Khan who served the whole female quarter, the

12 *Khosiyat* is used in the sense of a "good quality" that one may possess. A fortunate individual, they say, is *khosiyat bor kishi*, *khosiyatli* ["a person with *khosiyat*"], whereas an unfortunate one is *khosiyatsiz*.

harem of the khan. She bore children but they all died. The root of the evil was perceived to be her profession. Her relatives successfully begged the khan to release her from her work in the *urda* (palace) and forbade her to draw any more designs. Our lack of information and material makes it hard to say, for now, when this notion about the profession of *chizmakash* arose, whether before the arrival of Islam in Central Asia or following its spread. The responses given by people themselves are not adequate for us to decide the issue. Despite our questioning we could not determine why the profession was considered unlucky. Sukhareva does not discuss it in her work “The Development of Decorative Embroidery in Samarkand,” but does mention at one point that a draftsman (*kalamkash* in Samarkand dialect) abandoned her profession because her children died, supposedly because she had drawn a pattern in black, which brought misfortune on her person.¹³

It is conceivable that the use of black could be a problem for draftswomen in their profession, but not the root of evil. Evidently it was categorized as one of the “inauspicious” professions following the arrival of Islam on the territory of present-day Uzbekistan... In the 19th – 20th centuries a *chizmakash* drew on cloth whatever the religion permitted: vegetal designs (branches, flowers), inanimate objects (jugs, jewelry), objects in nature (the moon, stars) etc.; long ago, doubtless, they depicted animate creatures as well, including human beings.¹⁴ The attitude of orthodox clergy in Central Asia towards miniature painters who depicted humans was implacably hostile. There must have been the same attitude towards *chizmakash*, all of whom fell into the category of great sinners. Adherents of Islam pointed to Koranic commentaries that said, “Woe to whoever depicts living creatures! On the day of the Last Judgment, the people painted by an artist will step out of the pictures and go to him to demand their souls back. Then that person, unable to give souls to his creations, will burn in eternal fire!”

Nowadays the *chizmakash* Salamat Yunusova is very popular in Sibzar neighborhood (Sa’ban). She is a relative of the famous *chizmakash* Pulat who died in 1940 at the ripe old age of 80. Salamat Yunusova is about 70 years old and has been a professional draftsman for over 45 years. In 1944–45 she even practiced her specialty in the embroidery workshop of the Art-Training Center in Tashkent where

13 Manuscript, held in the academic archive of the Museum of Art in Tashkent.

14 It is written in one of the commentaries on the Koran, “God sent me to destroy three kinds of people: those who are arrogant, polytheists, and artists. Refrain from depicting God and man, and paint only trees, flowers and inanimate objects.” Denike, *Painting of Iran*, p. 8.

she drew embroidery designs for the students of the center. Her biography is particularly interesting. She is living proof of how the old ways and traditions have lost their grounding, lost their force and meaning. As noted above, until recently the profession of draftswoman was passed down in families from mother to daughter. There was a special initiation... two people in the same family (mother and daughter, or a close relative) could not practice the profession of designer at the same time... *Chizmakash* Salamat was not initiated by anyone, did not inherit her profession, and worked at the same time as her aunt Pulat the *chizmakash*. She began to practice the profession by accident. She had daughters, and according to custom she had to start preparing dowries for them. Material for the embroideries for the eldest daughter was purchased. She asked her aunt to draw the design. Days passed. Pulat the *chizmakash* kept procrastinating. Eventually Salamat got angry and decided to stop asking her aunt and try drawing herself... Since her childhood she had loved watching her aunt confidently draw beautiful flowers, ornate circles and meandering lines on a wide piece of fabric. But she had never held a *kalam-chub* in her hand before – the thin reed used to draw with. Unsure of herself, she decided not to make her first attempt on a new piece. She tried on rags. It did not look bad... and she has been drawing since then. She drew the patterns herself on the embroideries for all five of her daughters, then started accepting commissions from strangers. All this happened without ceremony – and already nobody thought there was anything odd about it. No one reproached her or warned her of future misfortunes, neither *chizmakash* Pulat herself, who had undergone initiation and inherited the profession, *chizmakashlik*, from her mother, nor her other relatives. All this clearly illustrates how the traditions associated with the profession of draftswoman, which once had existed in Tashkent, had withered away.

Until the end of the 19th century, all embroideries were made by hand with a needle. Embroideries were sewn using different sorts of stitches. Each kind of piece had its own characteristic stitches. For instance, large decorative embroideries were mostly executed in *basma* stitch (specific to Central Asia – we do not know it in Russia). For women's headscarves (*rumol*) and men's sash belts (*kyekcha*), *duruya* (double-sided stitch) and *yurma* (equivalent to a satin stitch) were used. For the braid on women's trousers, dresses and skullcaps, *iroki* (half cross stitch) was used, etc. The *bigiz* (hook) was not employed much in Tashkent. The tambour stitch *ilma* (buttonhole stitch) done with a *bigiz* on a tambour frame appears in old embroideries but is not found nowadays. In any case, Tashkent embroideries were never sewn completely in tambour stitch, as happened in Bukhara region (Bukhara, Nur-Ata. Shahrissabz, Karshi). *Ilma* played a supporting role in large Tashkent embroider-

ies, accessory to the primary technique. Its basic function was to form a contour around ornaments executed in a different stitch. In older embroideries this outline was usually the same color as the ornament it surrounded. In later pieces it was very frequently a different, sharply contrasting color, as if aimed at emphasizing the ornament. It would seem that the *bigiz* appeared in Tashkent relatively recently, in view of the fact that it was used comparatively rarely and not very skillfully. In Tashkent the tambour stitch was done with a needle. However, with the appearance of professional specialists (*ilmakash*) at the end of the 19th century, it became rare for anyone to use a needle to sew an outline herself, especially since the stitch quality using a *bigiz* on a tambour frame was incomparably better. Sewing machines started to be imported to Central Asia from Russia at the end of the 19th century. Embroidering on a sewing machine became prevalent among the Uzbek population in the 1900s. Soon afterwards, tambour work with a *bigiz* was replaced by sewing machines. Some *ilmakash* moved over to machine embroidery, but the rest were left without work. Sewing machines were used not only for the outlines on handmade embroidery, but to produce complete embroideries. Machine embroidery spread widely very quickly and became extremely popular. Embroidery became a commercial commodity during these years. It began to be produced for sale at the market. Men started making embroideries on sewing machines in addition to women.¹⁵ The name for all of them was *popopchi*, from the term “*popop* machine,” used to mean a sewing machine (most likely a distortion of Popov, a brand of sewing machine). Enterprising merchants placed orders with *popopchis* (embroideresses) to make different kinds of embroideries out of material which they provided, which they sold at the bazaar in their shops (*dukan*). There were cases of merchants ordering machine-made embroideries from Moscow.

Sewing machines were used to produce almost all types of decorative embroideries: *zardevor*, *dorpech*, *kirpech*, *gulkurpa*, *choyshab*, *joynamaz*. *Palaks*, however, were always produced only by hand. Handmade embroideries continued to exist, but fewer and fewer of them, as they were replaced by machine-made items. The number of handmade embroideries fell sharply especially during the years of revolution. The revolution liberated Uzbek women. Their equal rights were recognized. They were involved in building socialism from the very first years of the revolution. Doing work that advanced the public good freed them from narrow domestic interests. Girls and young women no longer wanted to spend years sitting at home making large embroideries. Education, professions, and public work absorbed women’s en-

15 In Tashkent at first it was only men who used sewing machines; in other cities, women never used them, only men.

ergies. Only elderly women, whose age kept them at home, continued out of love of the art to sew large embroideries as gifts for their daughters and grand-daughters.

After the revolution, a number of artels were organized in Tashkent producing decorative embroideries, mainly with sewing machines, but including a very small number of handmade pieces as well. Currently there are three embroidery artels functioning under the aegis of Uzkhudozhpromsoyuz [Uzbekistan Art Industrial Union]: Shark Guli [Eastern Flower], Udarnik [Shock Worker], and the Stalin Artel. There is also an embroidery workshop under Uchkominat [Training Complex]. These artels make *zardevors* and the decorative embroideries called *suzanis*. There is private sector production as well. There are artisans accepting commissions from customers who provide the material.

The functions of the embroideries considered in this study changed over time. They had multiple uses. Long ago, embroideries acted as protective amulets, as shown by Sukhareva in a work which I have referred to a number of times already.¹⁶ There are still traces left in Tashkent of the fact that embroideries really were amulets. It can be seen in the way that a large *palak* embroidery is held like a canopy above the bride when she enters the groom's house; and afterwards, after the groom "abducts" the bride beneath a curtain (*gushanga*), the *palak* is hung over the curtain. Some families practiced the old traditions until recently, preserving customs like the wedding ritual just described. It is undoubtedly a relic of the past, which many people are no longer aware of. Besides wedding ceremonies, in which embroideries clearly have maintained their protective function, on all other occasions embroideries are treated as works of art serving to decorate the house – they beautiful walls, niches (*takhmon*), rooms, and sometimes terraces (*ayvan*).

These were the roles embroidery played in the 19th century until today, i.e. in the period under consideration in this study. A number of embroidery types were common in the 19th century: *gulkurpa*, *choyshab*, *palak*, and *joynamaz*.

We will examine each kind of embroidery separately. We begin with the *gulkurpa*, believed to be the oldest of the four kinds. The *gulkurpa* is a big embroidery (220 x 238 cm, 260 x 270 cm), usually square (2 square meters in size, or a little over two square meters). Its purpose is strictly decorative, to adorn the wall. In the past, no doubt, it had a different, more utilitarian function and probably served as a bedcover or blanket. This suggestion is supported by the name of the embroidery itself as well as other factors.

16 *The Development of Decorative Embroidery in Samarkand*, p.

Gulkurpa means “flowery blanket.”¹⁷ The word *kurpa* has no other meaning than “blanket”; moreover, in the village of Pskent in Tashkent region there is an embroidery called *shokhkurpa*, which corresponds in size and ornamental composition to the Tashkent *gulkurpa*, whose purpose until recently was to serve as a blanket or bedspread over the blanket for newlyweds. All the oldest surviving *gulkurpas* in Tashkent are made on white homespun cotton cloth (*boz*). The ornaments on the embroidery are basically vegetal. In the center of the embroidery (on old *gulkurpas*) is a large, unique kind of eight-pointed star whose outlines are made of strips usually used for edging. Inside the star are eight leaves that compose a circle framing a circular rosette. Four (much smaller) identical stars are arranged at a small distance around the central star. In the gaps between these four stars is a smaller design – separate, stylized branches (two in each gap). All these five stars are contained within a square and between two embroidered stripes set quite far apart from one another (about half a meter). Running along the inside of the frame created by these lines, on all four sides, is a single row of stylized flowering branches with gaps between them (5-6 branches along each side).

After factory-made products started to appear en masse in Central Asia, and particularly after Tsarist Russia conquered the region, *gulkurpas* were made of imported fabrics, usually red or yellow *alvon* (calico). *Gulkurpas* made of colored satin appeared at the end of the 19th century; later, they were also made of silk, produced either by local artisans or factories. In the 1900s velvet *gulkurpas*, predominantly black velvet, became fashionable. The pattern on later *gulkurpas* did not deviate from earlier pieces in any substantial way. The pattern remained as described above: a wide border-frame created by two stripes; a square formed by this frame; in the center of the square, a large design consisting of a decorated, serrated circle or star; around it, four smaller, identical circles or stars set in the four corners of the square, or occasionally something like bouquets of flowers.

Choyshab is another, equally well-known type of decorative embroidery in Tashkent. It is a mandatory item in every bride’s dowry, common in the pre-colonial period and no less popular today. This kind of embroidery is found in the different areas of Uzbekistan where the art is practiced, but under various names. It is called *ruyi-duso* in Fergana, Samarkand and Bukhara; *takhmon pech* in Pskent. The name used in Pskent means “niche covering,” which closely corresponds with its function, as it

17 To my mind, a more correct translation would be “embroidered blanket.” In Uzbek, “to embroider” is *gul tikomok* (“sew flowers, pattern”). “Embroidered” is *gul tikkon*, *gul tikilgon*.

serves as a curtain hung over a *takhmon*. In Fergana, Bukhara and Samarkand this type of embroidery is used also as a sheet on the newlyweds' bed. It is possible that it served the same purpose in the past in Tashkent. Supporting this conjecture is the Tashkent tradition, on the wedding night, of covering the young couple's bed, and particularly the bedhead, with a *choyshab*. According to some linguists the name *choyshab* itself can be translated as "sheet," allegedly a corruption of *joy-shab* (*joy* "place," *shab* "night"). Others reckon it is a distorted version of the Tatar word *charshav* "curtain" (from Persian *chadr-shab*). In all Uzbek houses built before the Russian Revolution, there are two deep recesses in the so-called wall of honor (*tur*). These recesses, which go as high as the wall, are niches called *takhmon* where chests are placed, on which all the bedding material (blankets, cotton mattresses, pillows) are stored during the day.

Contemporary Uzbeks use the ordinary cotton sheets that we all know on their beds, without embroidery. In Tashkent they also are called *choyshabs*, evidently by analogy with the embroidered *choyshabs* which, in all probability, served as newlyweds' bedsheets in the past, and still do today in the Fergana Valley (Kokand, Margilan, Andijan). The *choyshabs* embroidered in Tashkent, used to screen niches, are not large: on average 135–140 cm x 90–95 cm. The narrower side stretches across the *takhmon*, the long side hangs down, usually to the top of the chest in order to cover the bedclothes folded on it. We can infer that embroidered *choyshabs* were used as bedsheets from other facts as well. The side of the *choyshab* hung on the upper part of a *takhmon* is called *ayok ta'mon* ("lower end," in fact, but literally "feet end"), the same as on the Fergana *ruyi-duso*. *Choyshabs* from Tashkent – and from the other areas mentioned earlier – usually are all patterned in identical fashion. Only three sides are embroidered, while the fourth side is left plain and free of embroidery: in Tashkent it is called *bosh tomon* ("upper end," i.e., the end where the head is). The embroidery on the three decorated sides forms a wide border running along the edges, looking like the Russian letter П. The border, similar to the border on a *gulkurpa*, is created by two ornamented stripes set quite far apart from one another. The most common designs between these two stripes are bouquets of flowers, particular kinds of bushes, or decorated circles.

It is interesting to note that on *choyshabs* made in places other than Tashkent, the central field surrounded by the border is left free of embroidery (presumably to make it more comfortable to lie on it). In Tashkent, however, where *choyshabs* stopped being used as sheets, and served primarily as curtains over a *takhmon* and as decorations for the house, the central field was almost always covered with embroidery.

The patterns at the center of the pieces were almost always exactly the same: three large, completely free-standing ornaments, separately placed one above another in a vertical line. Usually in the middle is a decorated, circular rosette (with rounded “teeth” around its edge); above and below are identical stylized bouquets, shrubs, or the same round rosettes as the one in the middle, but smaller.

The ornaments on *choyshabs*, like *gulkurpas*, are basically vegetal. Sukhareva suggests in her article “On the History of the Development of Samarkand Decorative Embroidery” that plant shapes on embroideries symbolically reflect the productive activity of female embroiderers in an era of matriarchy, which included gathering edible plants and (later) their cultivation.¹⁸ In Tashkent, the ornamental depiction of plants clearly reflects magical conceptions about them. On the wedding night the young couple’s bedhead is covered with an embroidered *choyshab*, while the following words are repeated: *gulga gul kushimin* (“may flower be joined to flower”).¹⁹ This custom and a series of other wedding ceremonies are performed in order to make the newlyweds happy and have many children. Flowers and plants are fertile and fruitful and can transmit these potential characteristics. The belief in their magical power derives from this. Among many other marriage customs, the *yuz kurar* (“viewing of the face”) ceremony, performed on the second day of the wedding, is a particularly clear example of such magical conceptions. In the morning, the bride is led out in a *paranja*, her face covered by several white veils (*doki*), and introduced to her new family. The boy reveals her face with a branch (*navda*) which must come from a fruit-bearing tree, never a sterile tree. The attributes of the fruit-bearing tree are transmitted to the young girl through the tree branch, and she becomes fertile.

In the 1900s *choyshab palaks* appeared in Tashkent, pieces similar to the decorative embroideries known as *palaks*. The characteristic feature of a *choyshab palak* is that it is completely embroidered in silk, so that none of the backing fabric is visible. The ornamentation of a *choyshab* is very close to that of a *palak*, which will be discussed below. Similar to the way that a *choyshab palak* formed a kind of set with a *palak*, earlier *choyshabs* from the 19th century formed a set with a *gulkurpa* (two identical *choyshabs* with one *gulkurpa*).²⁰ Their designs were the same, executed

18 *Literature and Art of Uzbekistan* (journal), vol. 6, p. 138.

19 The custom of covering the bedhead with an embroidery is also seen during the *ogul toy* circumcision ceremony.

20 *Choyshabs* were usually produced in pairs since each room in every house had two *takhmons*. Odd numbers of them were made specially when there was a *takhmon* in the *ayvan*.

on white homespun cotton cloth (*boz*). Later, starting in the 1880s, this rule was relaxed. *Choyshabs* developed in their own way, independent of the fabrics, colors and decorations used for *gulkurpas*.

Together with these two kinds of embroideries (*gulkurpa* and *choyshab*) a third type was commonly found in everyday use, called a *palak*. The word literally means “dome of heaven,” “sky” (from the Arabic word *falak* – the letter “f” is pronounced “p” very often in spoken Uzbek). The basic use of a *palak* embroidery is as a wall decoration, hung in the most visible spot. A *palak* functions not only as a work of art to beautify the home, but is the sole embroidery to have preserved from olden times its significance as a protective amulet in the wedding ritual. The *palak* protected the bride from the wiles of malevolent spirits (*ij-jinns*) and people giving her the evil eye (*koz*). The bride was led into the groom’s house under a *palak* and remained that way (beside a burning fire during the performance of the *tartyshmachak* “abduction” ceremony) until the groom stole away his “plunder,” the bride, under a curtain (*gushanga*). Afterwards the *palak* was hung over the *gushanga* as a protection for both the young people. No other embroidery was ever used for the marriage ritual except a *palak*. Even in cases when the bride’s dowry did not include a *palak*, nothing could substitute for it and one would usually be borrowed from relatives or friends. The answer to the question why it had a protective function is most likely to be found in the embroidery’s name itself. The translation of *palak* is “dome of heaven,” “sky.”²¹ The ornamental motifs on *palaks* really did correspond to the name of the embroidery, since they always depicted heavy bodies such as the full, round moon (*oy*), stars (*yulduz*), etc. An embroidery symbolizing the sky itself was supposed to protect the young girl from evil spirits and evil people during the most dangerous period of her life – *chilla* (“the forty days”).²² In the past, *palaks* were most likely used as blankets for newlyweds, the same as *gulkurpas* were in their time. Evidence for this suggestion is provided again by an analogy from Pskent.

The *palaks* found in Pskent are very similar to the Tashkent variety in their shape and choice of fabric, technical execution and decorative design, but are never called simply *palak* as they are in Tashkent and Fergana, but always *palak kurpa* (*palak-blanket*) to distinguish them from another type of embroidery known in Tashkent as *gulkurpa*, but here called *shokhkurpa*.

21 *Palak* is from the Arabic word *falak*. The letter “f” is pronounced “p” in spoken Uzbek.

22 The name given to periods lasting forty days and considered dangerous for a person. There were a number of such periods: after giving birth (threatening for the newborn and mother), circumcision, wedding and death.

There is a further weighty argument supporting the idea that *palaks* were blankets. There was another type of embroidery in use in Tashkent in the 19th and early 20th centuries, possessed by rich families and very similar in character to a *palak*, called a *yakandoz*. Its purpose was exclusively ornamental – to decorate a wall, hung in a line with a *palak* and a *gulkurpa*. But its name points to something else. Translated from Tajik, *yakandoz* means “blanket for one” (*yak*). Thus, a *palak* was a blanket for a double-bed, and a *yakandoz* was for a single bed. And the *palak* did not remain unchanged as far as its decorations were concerned. In the hundred years of its existence (older examples have not survived till today), its form radically changed a number of times. In the 19th century, during the pre-colonial period, it (like other embroideries) was sewn on white cotton homespun cloth (*boz*) but its background was densely filled with decoration so that the *boz* could hardly be seen. The commonest ornamental motifs on *palaks* were the decorative circles called *oy* “moon.” They were always embroidered in a single red hue, using silk colored with red vegetable dye (*ruyan* “madder”), making them very pleasant to look at, soft, rich and lustrous. These circles were very often surrounded by a decorated ring sewn in two colors, dark cherry (*napraman*) with a blackish shade and yellow, or other color combinations such as sky-blue (*nil* “indigo”) and yellow. The ring appeared like a striped band in the design, its two colors alternating with one another in zigzags. A similar circle-and-ring design is found on Samarkand embroideries, where it is called *obri-bakhar* “spring cloud.”

The number of *oy* motifs on Tashkent *palaks* differed greatly. The older the embroidery, the more of them there are. The maximum number of *oys* that I have seen on surviving *palaks* in Tashkent is 20. However, according to very elderly people there existed a *kyrk oylik palak* with 40 *oys*.

The embroidery collections of the State Museum of Art in Tashkent and the Museum of Revolution of the Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR include *palaks* with 16 *oys* and 12 *oys* (three rows of four circles each). Many people living in Tashkent still possess *palaks* with six huge *oys* or, more commonly, with four even larger circles. These so-called *olt oylik* and *turt oylik palaks* were widespread in the 1880s–1890. Old people, 75 to 90 years old, say that in their youth they received similar *palaks* in their dowries from their parents.

At the very end of the 19th century, there appeared a new type of *palak* which retained its popularity until recently called *bir oylik palak*, with a single *oy*, also called the *kyz palak* “girl’s *palak*” or *togara palak* (a *togara* is a big basin). It had a huge or-

nate circle in the center together with a big patterned star and large, stylized “plump” leeches arranged around the center.

It is a characteristic feature of this type of *palak* that it is embroidered all over – absolutely none of the backing cloth is visible. The embroidery is usually done on white *boz* rather than plain cotton *mata* cloth. Women who were particularly careful would sometimes sew on red fabric to make sure no white accidentally showed through. The basic colors of silk used for sewing are dark maroon, black, yellow, and pink (with a crimson hue). Sometime a little purple is introduced, a color which is completely absent in old pieces. The prevailing colors are maroon, which serves as the embroidery ground, then black and pinky crimson. The whole embroidery is executed only using pure twisted silk, in *basma* stitch – a specific stitch used predominantly in Uzbekistan.

It takes more than five kilograms (13–14 old Russian pounds) of silk to make one *palak*. A *palak*'s value grows even higher when the time and labor spent making it are taken into consideration.

New *palaks* are produced extremely rarely nowadays, only in families where there is a grandmother who is a *chevar* (expert artisan) with enough time on her hands and good eyesight. The artels have refused to produce *palaks* since they are very time-consuming to make. At one time the “Twenty Years of October” artel was producing them, but the results achieved were poor, due to the fact that several individuals worked on one *palak* – one person embroidered more loosely, another more tightly, and the upshot was uneven sewing.

As for size, a *palak* in rare instances could measure more than three meters. Its usual shape was 270 x 300 cm, maybe a little more or less, but without major deviations from the norm.

There is no difference between a *yakandoz* and a *palak* as far as technical execution is concerned. All that distinguishes these two types of embroidery pieces is their size. A *yakandoz* is narrower than a *palak*. Both are almost completely filled in with embroidery, leaving very few, insignificant gaps where the backing fabric may be visible. They are sewn in *basma* stitch, a characteristic Central Asian stitch. People stopped making *yakandoz* in the 20th century, when our era began. A relatively small number of *yakandoz* from the 19th century are still in the possession of ordinary people. Like *palaks*, *yakandoz* from that time were embroidered in a few principal

colors, predominantly dark red (madder red, *ruyan*) and very dark green with a dark blue/black tint, achieved by dyeing silk yellow (using the yellow larkspur plant, called *isparak*) and then re-dyeing in indigo (*nil*). The same ornamentation found on *palaks* was used for *yakadoz*, but smaller: *oy* “moon” round rosettes, embroidered in red. Sometimes in the center of the *oy* there was a star-shaped motif of the same color but lighter shade (see illustration No. ____ in the volume *Tashkent Embroidery of the Colonial Period*.) The *oy* was surrounded with stylized leaf ornaments embroidered in dark-green silk. *Yakadoz* found in ordinary homes usually have six *oys* (*olti oylik*).

[Written in the left margin: JOYNAMAZ]

The prayer carpet *joynamaz* is also a form of embroidery. Its purpose is given by its name: *joy* “place,” *namaz* “prayer,” hence place for prayer. *Joynamaz* found in mosques are usually bigger for general use, made of plain yellow cotton (*mallya boz*). Every Muslim Uzbek had his own prayer rug at home, also very commonly made of yellow homespun cotton, although some were made of expensive fabrics like half-silk and embroidered silk. According to old traditions, when a girl got married her dowry included two or three embroidered *joynamaz*, one of which was earmarked for the *supa* of the local *mahalla* (caretaker of the neighborhood mosque). Embroidered *joynamaz* were used sometimes to decorate a bride’s room. This happened when she had few other embroideries to decorate the room with. Girls and young women did not pray five times a day even in old times during the colonial period, so one *joynamaz* was intended as a gift from the bride to the groom’s parents. Usually a *joynamaz* was embroidered on only three sides, the fourth side and center area where the person praying positioned himself being left empty. This composition was reminiscent of a mihrab,²³ a pointed arch. A narrow, embroidered border strip ran around three of the edges; a second such strip, set inside the first with some space between them, was shaped like a mihrab. Stylized plant and flower ornaments were placed between these two narrow strips; the individual motifs were separated some distance from one another. Sometimes the whole embroidered portion of a *joynamaz* was one wide border consisting of connected and intertwined stylized leaves and flowers.

Decorative embroideries, especially *palaks* and *gulkurpas*, are passed down generations from mother to daughter, and are preserved long and well, insofar as they are little used: they decorate a new couple’s room merely for the first two years,

23 A pointed niche on the front wall of a mosque pointing in the direction of the Kaaba, the sacred stone in Mecca.

sometimes even less. *Joynamaz*, by contrast, rarely survive long. They remain in whatever house they are brought to, and help “bless it.” For this reason, very old *joynamaz* have not been preserved among the population. At the start of the 20th century *joynamaz* were embroidered on broadcloth. This style seems to have been borrowed from the Tatars. Large black broadcloth *joynamaz*, embroidered in tam-bour chain-stitch or cross-stitch, were very popular among the Volga Tatars.

In the 19th century *joy-namaz* were hand-embroidered in *basma* stitch, but with the appearance of sewing machines (*mashina popop*) machine-embroidered *joynamaz* became extremely widespread.

The end of the 19th century saw the rapid rise of the bourgeois class. As their prosperity increased, so did their striving to show off their wealth and luxury. The “price” put on a daughter shot up enormously. The *kalyn* (*kalym*) – money sent by the groom’s side during the wedding “to pay for the bride” – reached unheard-of sums in the colonial period... In exchange for the money received, the “purchased product” (the girl) set out with her goods for the groom’s house. Sometimes it took a whole caravan of camels to fetch the dowry, loaded down with household items. Embroideries had an important place amidst this abundance of possessions, both old pieces like the *palak*, *gulkurpa*, *choyshab* and *joynamaz*, and recent innovations like the *kirpech*, *dorpech* and *zardevor*... In Uzbek homes there were always two large niches (*takhmon*) set into the front wall of any room where a chest was usually placed, on which blankets, pillows and bedding taken up from the floor were stored during the day. Both *takhmons* were screened off by embroidered curtains called *choyshabs* (for description, see p. ...). Between the two *takhmons* is a mid-section of the wall with two deep niches about a meter from the floor, one above another, functioning as shelves (*tokhcha*). Clean linens (*toza ker*) are stored usually in the lower *tokhcha* which is why such niches are called *ker tokhchas* (“niches for linens”). In the bride’s room this whole wall mid-section is screened off from top to bottom by a special embroidery called a *kirpech* (meaning “covering cloth”). In the 1880s these were embroidered in white, yellow, pink, and in some places black silk on factory-made, red cotton textiles (*alvon*). Later they were produced on more expensive fabrics – silk and velvet. Usually, they were embroidered on machines.

At the beginning of the 20th century *kirpech palaks* became fashionable. In terms of technique, they were executed like *palaks* in *basma* stitch, completely covered in embroidery. Like *palaks*, the basic colors of *kirpech palaks* were maroon, black,

yellow, pink, occasionally purple, and others. The patterns on *kirpech palaks* (and *kirpech* altogether) were ornamental circles (*oy*), usually three arranged vertically one above the other. A variety of additional, small secondary motifs were frequently introduced into the major design, like birds or little jugs. *Kirpech* were also embroidered in the Soviet period; one, seen in 1974, had the Soviet hammer-and-sickle emblem sewn on it. On one modern *kirpech* embroidery, the primary pattern consists of three large birds (pheasants), with plant ornaments filling out the rest; this is the opposite to older pieces where the birds were secondary in importance, quite small and not particularly noticeable.

[Written in the left margin: DORPECH]

The *dorpech* (literally “covering” *dor* “rod”) is a kind of decorative embroidery that was widespread especially in the 19th century. Previously two *dor* “rods” hung in the room of every Uzbek house. One of them, on the front wall, was fixed a short distance from the ceiling to the second ceiling beam, while the other one, on the back wall, was fixed to the last-but-one beam. Clothes, dresses, robes, *paranjas* and similar items were hung on these rods. They functioned in the past as a sort of wardrobe. There were special embroideries which hung from the ceiling and extended to the rod (*dor*). A *dorpech* was not supposed to be longer than the width of the room. It usually stretched across the ceiling from one wall to the others. One *dorpech* hung by the front wall and another by the back wall. Thus, they did not exceed 3–3.5 meters in length. They were about 1 meter wide.

Recently the *dorpech* has lost its place of old. People in Tashkent stopped hanging *dor* “rods” before the revolution, and nailed the embroideries instead to the front and back walls. The patterning of the *dorpech* is very similar to that of the *zardevor*. In discussing the latter we will devote a few words to its decorative composition. The *zardevor* and *dorpech* are essentially the same, only differing in length.

A *zardevor* is a wide band or runner, whose purpose is clear from its name: *zor* meaning “gold,” *devor* meaning “wall.” Its function is to decorate the wall. In Tashkent the *zardevor* is usually hung on the upper part of the wall. If there were two *dorpech* adorning two opposite walls, front and back, then *zardevors* adorned the other two facing walls on the left and right. The *zardevor* was hung just below the ceiling. In Bukhara and Samarkand *za-devors* were used to decorate the lower parts of walls, but this happened only very rarely in Tashkent. The walls in Tashkent house were not so high that their lower sections would not be covered by other em-

broideries. When they first appeared *zorpech* and *zardevors* were made of cotton cloth on red, more rarely yellow, calico (*alvon*). It was very common to sew a fringe of twisted silk onto *zardevors* – the same as with many other embroideries, though not *palaks* or *gulkurpas*. That style became popular at the very end of the 19th century. Silk *zardevors* and *choyshabs* came into fashion at the same time, particularly green ones. The sewn-on fringe was frequently chosen not to match but to contrast with the color of the background; thus, a fringe on green silk might be yellow or even white. A white fringe of twisted silk was added if there was a lot of white in the embroidery itself. Before the appearance of machine embroidery, *zardevors* and *dorpech* were embroidered by hand using a hook (*bigiz*) in *basma* stitch and buttonhole stitch (*yurma*). All outlining was done using a *bigiz*. The designs on *dorpech* and *zardevors* are the same and consist of single units rhythmically repeated many times. It is very common to find a series of little mihrabs running the length of the embroidery band, one connected to the next, with a plant motif inside each one; all the plant motifs are identical, differing only in color, but create a rhythm by alternating with one another in color series that repeat. A pattern that featured for a while on a small number of pieces was a whole row of connected squares filled in with plant ornaments. Since the start of the present period the most widespread decorative motifs on *zardevors* have been distinctive flower bouquets, linked together with a kind of chain; embroidered beneath each one is a shape like a tooth. *Zardevors* continue to be used today. Many artels in Uzbekistan produce them by the meter. Anyone can go to a shop and buy as many meters of textile as they need, depending on the size of the room, and whether they want to decorate all four walls or only some of them.

Zardevors ceased to be embroidered by hand long before the revolution. They are embroidered exclusively by machine. In the 1900s, they were made on sewing machines using the “lamb” technique – in whorls – which makes the ornaments stand out in relief. The relief texture is achieved particularly well when the embroidery is done not with silk, but worsted wool.

Another type of embroidery that existed in the colonial period was the *kazyklungi*, whose primary function was also as a room decoration. *Lungi* means “towel” in Uzbek, while *kazyk* is a wooden peg about 20 cm long, fixed into the wall of a room (on the part of the wall between the *tokhcha* niches). There were up to 16 such pegs in one room. In the 19th century the bride’s room was decorated with cloths hung on these pegs. This is why these cloths, to distinguish them from everyday utilitarian towels, are called *kazyklungi*. They were very long compared with ordinary towels,

about 3 meters long. Both ends were embroidered. There was no special embroidery technique employed to make *kazyklungi*, although the following were used: double-sided satin-stitch (*duruya*), *sanama* (counted-thread embroidery), counted satin stitch (for which they sometimes resorted to pulling weft threads out of the textile to keep the count equal), tambour stitch (with a *bigiz*) and cross stitch. Interestingly, they embroidered in cross stitch on Russian factory-made canvas and, odd as it may seem, it was common not to pull out any threads from the canvas but leave the canvas backing to show through as decorative stripes. *Kazyklungi* were most usually made on smooth, monotone silk fabrics (*shon-kanaus*). Sometimes a frill made of the same fabric, or factory-made white lace, was added to both sides of the *kazyklungi* as a finishing. The decorations on *kazyklungi* were usually vegetal motifs, supplemented by various kinds of borders, zigzags (*kungara*), simple lines (*suv* “water”) and a very widespread ornament called *zuluk* (“leech”) *nuska*. The width of the embroidery did not exceed 50 cm, and could be less. Since the purpose of *kazyklungi* was decorative, some people, to economize on material, started making them half as long with embroidery only on one end, but hanging them to their full length with the embroidery on the bottom. Items other than *kazyklungi* were also regularly hung on pegs or nails, such as men’s embroidered sash-belts (*kyekcha* or *churt belbag*) and embroidered skull-caps, and all of these screened and curtained off the unfinished top parts of the textiles.

Almost no new *kazyklungi* have been embroidered since the revolution. Whenever a bride receives her own embroideries during the wedding from her mother as part of her dowry, they are still used and hung. They have not totally disappeared from use like the *kashtalik rumol*, an embroidered headscarf that once served as a room decoration.

The *kashtalik rumol* was very widespread in the 19th century. A bride would receive several dozens of these embroidered scarves in her dowry, sometimes 40. They were made of thin white muslin. In the mid-19th century this was either locally produced *khosa* or imported Anglo-Indian *doka*. In the second half of the 19th century, especially after the annexation of Central Asia to Russia, Russian muslin took the leading place among other varieties and squeezed them out. White muslin scarves were embroidered on both sides, such that, when one was folded slantwise to make a triangle, the corner was embroidered. The embroidered border was about 15 cm wide. Moreover, in the corner, above the place where the two borders met, an additional, completely independent motif was sewn which sometimes looked like a flower bouquet, a shrub or a branch (*shokhchi*).

Scarves in the 19th century were embroidered most frequently in double-sided satin stitch *duruya*. The stitch is considered very difficult, but is very beautiful. Pieces sewn in this stitch are totally identical from both sides, left and right.

Scarves were embroidered in silk of various colors – dark blue, black, and yellow. Or black and red. Scarves with the former color combination of dark blue and yellow looked particularly attractive. The number of colors rose markedly in the 20th century with the introduction of bright pink (aniline) – *pushti*, a favorite color in recent times – and several shades of green: *tut rang*, bright green; *bargi karam* “cabbage color”; and darkish or very dark green called *mosh rang* (the color of the local green pea). All these dyes were aniline, and the colors ran, which is why canvas strips were sewn onto the scarves: these were embroidered in cross stitch with plant motifs – roses and other flowers – and birds. The embroidered strips would come off when they were washed. At the end of the 19th century little circles (6-8 cm in diameter) of different colors were sewn onto white muslin scarves; the circles were embroidered using a special buttonhole stitch. The circles were called *pat* “feather,” perhaps because the several rows of buttonhole stitches forming a circle looked like feathers lengthwise. *Pats* of different colors (yellow, red, pink, and other colors) were sewn on both sides of a scarf, placed at intervals in a line. There was a time when these *pats* were even sewn on large decorative pieces such as *choyshabs*: several rows of alternating yellow and red circles on red velvet. In terms of artistic value there is nothing special about these pieces. An ordinary patterned textile could be prettier than this kind of “embroidery.” These types of embroidered items can serve as a strong argument and evidence of the bourgeois’ decline in taste and their parsimony. They were made in this way with the sole intention of re-using the material in the future for clothes or something more utilitarian than an embroidery that was hung on the wall for a year, maximum two. When the embroidery was not needed any more, and the time came to take down “the whole silly exhibit,” the sewn-on *pats* could easily be unpicked and removed without damaging the velvet.

Embroidered scarves were utilitarian as well, worn by young women. After marriage or having a number of children they exchanged embroidered scarves for smooth white ones. In other words, most of the embroidered scarves they had could never get worn out.

Obviously, then, embroidered scarves had the additional function of adorning a bride’s room. Considering how few large decorative embroideries there were in the middle of the 19th century, scarves were a visible part of a room’s decoration. Thirty or forty embroidered scarves were hung together on *saba-chub* (rods).

As new types of embroideries appeared (*kirpech, dorpech, zardevor*) and large decorative embroideries got bigger (*choyshab, gulkurpa, palak*), the use of embroidered scarves as decorations got rarer and rarer, until (1920) the custom ended altogether, as well as the habit of wearing embroidered scarves.