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Unique Suzane Embroideries from the State Museum of Arts of Uzbekistan Collection

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On the face of it, the collection appears to be well known to researchers, since the most interesting suzane embroideries were published many times, having become a kind of textbook examples. However, some of the embroideries kept in the Uzbekistan State Art Museum remained inaccessible to a wider research community until present. In this regard, the initiative of the USAM Administration to publish the Uzbekistan Applied Arts Catalogue has become an important step towards a comprehensive presentation of the Museum's unique specimens. The present author started preparing the Catalogue in 2013.

The Catalogue publication introduced to scholarly domain the previously unpublished specimens of traditional Uzbekistan embroidery, thus allowing an adjustment of the former approaches to the study of its development specificities. Publication of the suzane embroideries from the USAM collection with detailed description and

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specimen dating is also important to clarify information on a large number of embroidery items kept in museums overseas, on which data are incomplete. For instance, two museums in Berlin – Ethnography, and Islamic Art – keep some Nurata items attributed to the East Turkistan. However, the comparison with their analogues from the USAM allowed identifying them as belonging to Nurata (1). These examples are many. Besides, the publication of data contained in the USAM inventory cards allows making corrections as they sometimes contain either inaccurate or incomplete information.

One of the important matters for the item description is their dating. Unlike chased products, embroideries rarely feature manufacturing date, so it is mainly determined by the information from the source that donated or sold an embroidery piece. Foreign researchers identified three Uzbek suzane with manufacturing date. Two of them pre-date the museum ones: one dates to 1146 year of Hijra (1733-1734 AD, i.e. the 18th century), and the other – a suzane from Bukhara kept in the Ethnography Museum in Berlin – dates to 1224 year of Hijra, that is 1809 AD (2, p. 274; p. 275, ll. 555).

G. Chepelevetskaya and O. Sukhareva believed that Uzbekistan museums had no large-size suzane embroideries pre-dating the early XIX century, and in the late 1940s M. **Bikjanova** claimed that "...State Museums in Tashkent, unfortunately, have no embroideries pre-dating the middle of the last century" (3). **Bikjanova** might not have complete information on embroideries kept in the USAM, otherwise it is hard to explain why she had not mentioned the Nurata embroideries that, according to the USAM inventory cards, date mostly to the early and mid nineteenth century.

As for the presence of earlier embroideries in museum collections, quite important is a suzane found in the USAM, which is made of light-brown cotton fabric: based on an entry in its inventory card (КП 12302, Inv. № 746) it was manufactured in Bukhara in the XV-XVI centuries (Fig. 1). Among embroidery items in the Uzbekistan museums this suzane can be considered the earliest. It has never been published and is virtually unknown to experts. The suzane is unusual in its ornamental composition as well as in the fact that masters used not only silk yarn, but also golden thread. In the centre of the vertical composition there is a white vase standing on a wide bowl. The design style, composition and shape of the vase and its bowl-stand suggest that the suzane goes back to the so-called Iranian garden carpets of the Safavid time and has analogies in interior paintings found in the XVII-XVIII cc.

Bukhara buildings. Based on these preliminary observations, the suzane, in our view, can be dated to the late XVII or early XVIII century. The use of gold thread speaks in favour of its Bukhara origin. Thus, the Bukhara suzane is the earliest embroidery specimen among those kept in the local museums. Nevertheless, in terms of its composition style and ornamental motifs, the suzane stands somewhat apart in a typological rank of the Bukhara and, more generally, traditional Uzbek suzane embroideries of the early nineteenth century.

The issues of dating are also interesting to consider looking at the attribution of Nurata large-size embroideries, most of which date to the early XIX century. Moreover, of the 34 Nurata suzane included in the Catalogue 24 have descriptions showing the manufacturing year. No justification for the dating is given, however; yet in our opinion, it

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did exist. For instance, most of the Nurata embroideries were purchased by the USAM field work staff directly in Nurata in 1937-1939, and, presumably, the embroidery owners who the items were purchased from did mention the names of woman-masters who created them. They also remembered years when embroideries were made, since the items were often crafted by their close relatives – mothers or grandmothers.

In the USAM collection the most ancient item wrought in line with the already sustainable ornamental and technological Uzbek embroidery traditions is one Nurata suzane dating to years 1827-1832; it was frequently cited in different studies and albums on Uzbek embroidery (КП 7193, Inv. № 477) (Fig. 2). The description does not specify how the date is sourced: most probably, the information was received from the seller. By the way, this dating is also supported by somewhat archaic and unusual motifs in the design. The central rectangular field of the suzane is covered with alternating diamond shapes with floral rosettes inside. The design that some women-masters call *tobodoni* (grid-like) and others – *zanjila* (chain) is often found in the ornamentation of both Nurata and Bukhara embroideries of the XIX century and belongs to the group of “mesh” compositions. The uniqueness of this suzane comes from the motif of a horse covered with a horsecloth of multi-coloured rhombs. It is placed inside a cut triangle of the rhomb at the bottom of the suzane. Such horsecloths appeared in the XV-XVI cc. Herat miniatures where in the same triangle on the left they pictured a stylized bird resembling a peacock. Its body is also embroidered as light-blue, yellow and pinkish rhombs (Fig. 4). We have never seen similar images in suzane embroideries of later dates. If the date in the suzane description is correct, we are dealing with one of the early embroideries in museum collections in Uzbekistan, the ornamentation of which defines the peculiar style of Nurata embroideries. Early XIX century is also the dating of a *nim-suzane* embroidered on a deep-blue calico (КП 25770, Inv. № 1456) (Fig. 3), which differs from the 1827 suzane in both the textile colour, and more liberal style of its centrepiece, employing the traditional Nurata pattern known as *chor shohu, yak moh* (four branches, one moon). At the same time, not quite archaic style of the images and the specificities of their motifs suggest that the item is likely to be of the more recent origin: perhaps the second half of the XIX century.

With regard to the dating, it is interesting to consider a *takiya-push* embroidery dated by the USAM experts to the year 1867 (КП 7190, Inv. №197) (Fig. 4). This date is more likely to be valid, as the presence of archaic objective and zoomorphic images suggests. In its borderline pattern the *takiya-push* is similar to the 1827 suzane, while its centrepiece makes it more akin to the deep-blue calico suzane. The study of embroideries kept in the USAM enables a different treatment of the colour properties of the Nurata embroidery textiles. Apart from classical suzane embroidered on light-yellow fabrics and those of a later date on red, deep-blue or light-brown cotton cloth, the Catalogue includes two *takiya-push* suzane embroideries from Nurata with unusual deep-blue design on a white background (yy.1852-1857, КП 7494, Inv. № 211) (Fig. 5). These are the so-called indigo suzane that change our perception of the Nurata embroidery. Due to absence of data about the existence of such suzane in a monograph titled “Applied Arts of Uzbekistan: Traditions and Innovations”, we criticized the attempt of contemporary women-masters to embroider blue designs on a white background as a trend uncharacteristic of the

Nurata embroidery (4, p. 42). The introduction to the USAM assets and the discovery of these two specimens made it clear that this colour spectrum indeed was once typical for the Nurata embroidery, representing one of its development trends, eventually interrupted, however. Perhaps the reason for the disappearance of this embroidery type is the same as in the case of blue-black printed cloth that ceased to be manufactured with the termination of indigo pigment supply from India in the early XX century.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the primary material used for embroidery was cotton fabrics, home- or factory-made, yet often women-masters in Ferghana and Bukhara embroidered on handmade silks. Quite unique is the previously unpublished suzane from the Ferghana Valley embroidered on yellow silk (КП 31321, Inv. № 1704) (Fig. 6). The ornamental composition of its centrepiece follows the “one moon, four branches” pattern. The moon here is represented by a large conventional rosette composed of ten small crimson rosettes and one exactly the same in the centre. The four branches appear as bodomgul (almond blossom) design. The singularity of this Ferghana embroidery comes from its wide edging with ten embroidered cartouches containing lyrical verses in Farsi. The verses were translated by B. Babajanov, Doctor of History – an effort sincerely appreciated by the authors. The inscription is embroidered with dark-coloured yarn in individual cartouche shapes along the cloth perimeter (one beyt in each cartouche). Nastaz'lik script has a bit rough outlines. The verses are shown below:

نوسم من بآن دور یگانه // نوسم من بآن شاه زمانه
 بیاد آن دو چشم آهوانه // که میدیدی بآن دور یگانه
 عجایب رویمالی دلبرانه // گلی سرخیش (!) در میانه
 بصد خون جگر من رویمالی // بدوزم بر گلش چنده خیالی
 تهن زرد (؟) مصفا چون گل نار // بددرش هر طرفش (؟) شکفته گلزار
 کنم ابرشیم از زلف خوبان // به زیب زینت آرم چون گلستان
 دعا گوی تو هستم از دل جان // خدا یار باشد هم رسولان
 الهی بخت دولت با [تو] باشد // جمیع دشمنان خار باشد
 به [عجایب رویمالی مینوسم // بصد فکر خیالی مینوسم]
 بآن یوسف جمال مینوسم // بآن ماننده ماه مینوسم

Here is the translation:

I wrote (these verses) for the unique one of the era,

I wrote (these verses) to the Shah of the era.

Remember these two shameless eyes,

That saw that unique one of the era

An amazing and adorable scarf,

Pomegranates flowers (embroidered) in the middle

Hundreds blood drops (I shed) from my liver
On the flowers, which I embroidered in meditations
The basis of the flowers is clean like pomegranate,
And each side is embroidered as a flower bed.
I have woven a silk from lock of beauties
Decorated them like a flower bed.
Waiting sincerely for your prayers,
May the God and all messengers be thy companions
With the God's will, may the power and wealth be with you,
And let all your enemies perish.
At amazing scarf I wrote it,
With hundreds of thoughts and wishes I wrote it
To the person, who like a wonderful Yusuf, I wrote,
To the person, who look like the Moon, I wrote.

Although women-masters often used different kinds of well-wishing inscriptions or Koranic verses in their embroideries, in the USAM we found only one suzane with inscription.

By and large, the USAM embroidery collection offers valuable factual material that helps to clarify and further our knowledge about the traditional embroidery of Uzbekistan and its characteristic ornamental features over the past 150-200 years. Working on the USAM Catalogue requires a more systematic and statistically extensive study, as well as the publication of applied art items kept in museum collections.

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