

# TRADITIONS OF FABRIC AND METAL WORKING IN VALLEY CRAFTS

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## **Abstract**

This article covers the intangible cultural heritage of the Fergana Valley, types of folk crafts and the knowledge, skills and qualifications associated with them, as well as information about crafts. The history of the development of crafts in the valley and their widespread spread among the people is covered extensively and in detail.

**Keywords:** Pottery, carpentry, blacksmithing, coppersmithing, construction, sewing, weaving, jewelry, embroidery, goldsmithing, painting, "atlas", "jibaarqoq", silk (kanaus).

## **INTRODUCTION**

In various scientific centers around the world, research and international projects are being conducted on the cultural, social, and economic significance of handicrafts. In particular, the knowledge and skills associated with craftsmanship, as well as customs and rituals, master-apprentice traditions—all constitute intangible cultural heritage. These elements play a crucial role in demonstrating the historical, national, and cultural diversity of a given region.

In recent years, Uzbekistan has placed significant emphasis—at the state policy level—on the development of national handicrafts. The tasks of “reviving centuries - old traditions of national handicrafts, supporting them, and strengthening their promotion within the global community” have become urgent issues on the national agenda. Handicrafts are not only a form of cultural heritage but are also rich in diverse elements as intangible cultural assets.

In studying objects of intangible cultural heritage, ethnologists differ from historians, archaeologists, art historians, economists, and tourism experts in that they conduct field ethnographic research and oral history studies. They focus on restoring the original essence of customs and rituals through historical and ethnographic materials. This ethnological approach helps to effectively reconstruct, develop, and preserve intangible cultural heritage in its authentic form and meaning.

A number of resolutions and decrees have been issued by the President and the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan with the goal of restoring handicraft traditions and further developing them as national values and tourism assets. As a result, attention has been given to handicrafts and even to some of their forgotten types, leading to the revival of related knowledge, rituals, and customs.

Within Uzbekistan’s cultural heritage system, the handicraft traditions of the Fergana Valley and the knowledge and skills associated with them hold particular importance.

Throughout various socio-historical periods, handicrafts have evolved and diversified into different specializations, such as pottery, carpentry, blacksmithing, copper-smithing, construction, stonemasonry, wood carving, embroidery, leatherworking, tailoring, weaving, jewelry-making, dyeing, boat-building, and tinsmithing, among others. The development of these crafts has often depended on the availability of natural resources—for example, in regions with cotton and silk, textile production developed; in areas with high-quality raw materials (such as Rishtan), pottery flourished; and where wool and leather were abundant, weaving and leatherworking became dominant.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY**

The craft production in the Fergana Valley is based on a distinct regional specialization. For instance, according to S.T. Davlatova, who conducted research on the history and traditions of handicrafts, different areas within the valley developed specific crafts: Margilan and Kokand specialized in silk production; Beshariq in textile finishing; Namangan in leather goods; Rishtan in pottery; the villages of Oyim (Jalaquduq) and Dardak (Qo'rg'ontepa) in striped fabric (polos); Margilan in abr silk fabrics; and Chust in knife-making. This specialization is supported by statistical data. In 1896, there were nearly 600 silk weaving workshops in the districts of Margilan, Namangan, and Kokand, employing around 3,165 craftsmen. By 1910, there were 1,387 silk shops in the Fergana region, employing 3,065 workers [2]. These regions, therefore, served as distinctive textile centers within Turkestan, particularly known for silk, weaving, atlas, and adras fabric production. The development of intangible cultural heritage elements is closely linked to these specialized crafts.

In studying the knowledge, skills, customs, and rituals associated with handicrafts as elements of intangible cultural heritage, the following classification criteria were used:

1. Working with fibers and fabrics
2. Metalwork
3. Woodwork
4. Clay work

This article will provide information on working with fibers and fabrics and metalwork.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Working with Fibers and Fabrics Kokand and Margilan have historically served as unique textile centers in the Fergana Valley. The numerous products created by weavers from Margilan were highly demanded not only within the city itself but also in neighboring villages, other cities, countries, and among nomadic populations. Among these products, cotton fabrics held a particularly important place. One of the most sought-after items among various social classes was *karbas* (coarse cotton cloth).

Textile production in the Fergana Valley dates back to ancient times, with cotton, silk fibers, and wool being the main raw materials [3]. In nearly every semi-subsistence farming household, cotton was cultivated, seeds were separated from cotton, yarn was spun, clothing

was sewn, and garments were embroidered by women [4], while weaving was generally done by men.

According to the 16th-century historian Fazlullah ibn Ruzbikhan, the nomadic people of the steppe had great need for "clothing and shrouds," and most of these were made from *karbas*, which were delivered from cities in Central Asia. Among silk fabrics, *chit* (printed cotton) held a special place. Craftsmen involved in producing this type of fabric were called *chitgars*. They printed multicolored floral patterns on a single-colored *bo'z* (*karbas*) fabric. Printing designs onto fabric using wooden stamps was a complex process requiring a high level of craftsmanship [5].

**"One such city is Margilan,** where, according to F. Nazarov at the beginning of the 19th century, textile production was highly developed. "The city hosts various factories that produce Persian brocades, velvets, and a variety of Asian fabrics," notes F. Nazarov [6].

Weaver-artisans of Margilan also produced a type of silk fabric known as *shoyi* or *kanaus*. In Margilan, this fabric was famous under the names *atlas* or *jibaarqoq* [7]. "These fabrics include *shoyi* (*kanaus*), *adras*, and *bekasam*. The latter two are semi-silk," wrote A. Khoroshkhin [8].

The weavers also produced fine fabrics used for turbans and belts, such as *futa*—a silk cloth with small blue rectangular patterns—and *xosa*, a type of white cloth used for turbans. They also wove *doka*, a thin fabric similar to *xosa*. According to a 19th-century author, "The difference between *xosa* and *doka* was in the fabric's width; *doka* was softer than *xosa*" [9].

In the cities of the Kokand Khanate, particularly in Margilan, crafts specializing in clothing production were also well-developed. Numerous artisans produced goods that met the needs of the city, nearby villages, other urban areas, nomadic populations, and, in some cases, foreign markets. Such artisans included hat-makers (*doppi* tailors), shoemakers (*kafshdoz*), and boot-makers (*etikdoz*). Among the large volumes of clothing made by artisan tailors were robes (*ton*), scarves, sashes, and handkerchiefs sewn from various fabrics. These textile products—made of silk and cotton—were often elaborately finished. Special attention was paid to embroidering scarves, sashes, handkerchiefs, and caps (*doppi*), a task typically performed by women [10].

Researcher Z. Esonov classified handicrafts in the Fergana Valley as either commodity-based in large villages or as home-based crafts mainly for domestic use [11]. In cities and villages such as Namangan, Andijan, Kokand, and Margilan, the production of coarse cloth (*bo'z*) was so extensive that valley artisans would even send cloth to Tashkent *chitgar* (fabric printers) for block printing.

In farming households, textile processing was done on simple looms. Cotton fibers were separated from seeds using a hand crank (*chigir*). Highland Tajiks in the valley fluffed the cotton with a wooden beater (*savag'ich*) before processing, similar to the treatment of wool. The combed cotton was spun into thread using a spindle (*charx*). The *charx* in the valley had different forms [12]: in foothill villages, the spinning wheel had 8 spokes, while in Kaptarkhona (southern part of the valley), it had 2 or 4; in Beshariq, it was made with 6 wooden slats.

The next stage in thread preparation was dyeing. At the beginning of the 20th century, in the Chodak and Uyg'ur villages of the Fergana Valley, Uzbeks and Tajiks dyed thread in blue,

navy, and black, while Uygurs used brown, blue, and gray. The dyed yarns were woven in household looms (*do'kon*) located in the villages of Sang, Chodak, Chortoq, G'urumsaroy, Yangiqo'rg'on, and Bekobod.

Village artisans wove a variety of fabrics in the *do'kon*, including *bo'z*, *olacha*, *qalami*, *karbas*, *sosi*, *xosa*, and *alak*. Specialized textile neighborhoods emerged in the villages of Beshariq, Chortoq, and Sang. In these home workshops, valley weavers skillfully produced fabrics such as *atlas*, *daroi*, and *shoxi*.

The silk fabric production centers in the Fergana Valley specialized in raw material preparation, weaving, loom construction, fabric types, colors, and ornamentation. For instance, villages in the Margilan district were known for their silk fabrics such as *atlas*, *shoyi*, *qalghay*, *bekasam*, and *abr*.

Regional characteristics in rural sericulture were reflected in the local traits of the fabrics. For example, the Uzbeks of Margilan and Namangan districts were known for producing semi-silk *bekasam* fabrics with green-blue striped patterns or wide green and purple striped designs. Chortoq village was distinguished by its wide-striped *bekasam*, while Chodak stood out with its *bekasam* and *poshshoyi* fabrics. Among the silk fabrics, *atlas* was considered the most valuable, and in Kosonsoy and Chortoq, *shokhi* and *khonatlas* weaving had especially developed.

Metalworking has a long history in Central Asia, particularly in the Fergana Valley, as confirmed by archaeological findings and medieval sources[13]. From ancient times, ore deposits in Tentaksoy, Kampirravot, Supatepa, and Tuyamuyin were known in the valley, and starting from the 20th century, industrial-scale production began at these sites.

Raw materials for valley metalworkers were sourced from mines located in the Yorkent, Chimgan, and Ghovasoy valleys in the Chotkal and Qurama mountain ranges. Metal was processed in numerous blacksmith workshops located in villages such as Gurumsaroy, Asht, Qo'shtegirmon, Shahrixon, Kosonsoy, Chodak, and Qorasuv[14].

By the early 20th century, there were 19 different branches of metalworking in the Fergana Valley. These workshops produced household items, agricultural tools, and construction equipment, all of which were in high demand. Additionally, locksmiths, precision tool makers (locally known as *rixtagar*), and metal casters (*degrez*) played a key role in producing work tools for carpenters, potters, bookbinders, cartwrights, watchmakers, millers, and others. The metal engraving techniques of Fergana craftsmen were distinguished from those of other regions by their surface-level and precise designs. For example, the duck-shaped *oftoba* (ewer) made by artisans in Margilan is not found in other provinces[15].

Artisans in the Fergana Valley were the first to begin depicting architectural monuments on metal objects. By the late 19th century, they had started illustrating palaces, human figures, and mythical creatures. The most popular decorative motif in Margilan was the almond shape, locally referred to as the "qalampir" (pepper) design. Craftsmen applied this motif on both sides of objects and often added dragon-like figures inspired by Chinese folk art.

Valley metal engravers commonly produced items such as copper bowls, trays, teapots, ewers, water pitchers, samovars, large trays (*barkash*), small chests, plates, serving dishes, ladles, pails, washbasins, and spittoons.

Almost every city in the Fergana Valley gained fame for its jewelry. Popular items included gold *bargak* (small pendants), bracelets, rings, earrings—especially the *qashqar baldoq* and *bulok* for the nose. Women's chest ornaments included *zebigardon* (neck adornments), amulets for the neck and underarms; necklaces such as *marjon* and *nozik*; headpieces like *bodo-moy* and *taxiyadozi*; belts with *kalitboi* and *kamarband*; and hair ornaments like *tuf* and *chochpopuk*. To craft these items, jewelers used both precious and semi-precious stones such as turquoise, coral, pearl, emerald, shell, carnelian (*aqiq*), and ruby. They used various techniques such as casting, hammering, gilding (applying gold or silver layers), stamping, and engraving to decorate the jewelry.

Blacksmiths in remote rural areas typically did not produce goods for sale but instead crafted items based on the orders of fellow villagers. In such cases, the customer would provide the blacksmith with the necessary raw materials. If the blacksmith used his own materials, he was compensated in grain. For example, blacksmiths in the northern village of Sang would receive a special portion of the autumn grain harvest, known as *haqala*.

In the blacksmith shop, the master worked alongside family members and apprentices. The blacksmiths of Asht village were especially well-known for their craftsmanship. For instance, in the Beshariq market in the western valley, iron goods made by Asht masters were highly popular. During this time, blacksmithing also flourished in the villages of Margilan district, where in 1883, 13 blacksmith shops were in operation[16].

Specialization of certain blacksmithing centers has occurred, as exemplified by the blacksmithing centers of Kosonsoy in the north of the valley, Chimyon in the south, Qoshtegirmon in the west, and Shahrixon in the east. For instance, the blacksmiths of Qoshtegirmon were known throughout the valley as skilled ketman (hoe) makers. The local characteristics of these centers were reflected in the appearance of the products they made. The formation of these local aspects was influenced by the geographical conditions and agricultural traditions of the region.

Blacksmiths in the valley placed various-shaped stamps on their products, such as almond-shaped, star-shaped, Arabic script letters, and quail tracks. These stamps reflected the unique way of life of the ethnic groups, in particular, their economic and cultural traditions.

During this period, the knife-making industry also developed in the valley, with archaeological finds confirming that the industry had been thriving in the valley since ancient times. Later, on its basis, this industry was improved in the cities of the valley and in villages such as Shahrixon and Qorasuv. In some villages in the valley, traditions of making special types of knives also emerged.

The local characteristics of the knife-making centers in the valley were reflected in the unique structure of the equipment, the shape of the products, the manufacturing method, and the decorations. The craftsmen of Qorasuv created a special type of tool called "chilmixa parma" for making knives. Knives of various types, such as curved, straight, *tolbargi* (willow leaf),

Kazakh, and Kashgar, were common in the valley. The knife-making centers in the valley were distinguished throughout Central Asia for their high-quality products.

Knife makers in the valley made edged tools like craftsmen from other regions. The knife-making traditions of the valley developed on the basis of knife-making by the ancient settled peoples of the southern part of the valley and the pastoralist ethnic groups of the desert region in the northeast. However, at the same time, some ethno-territorial aspects related to improving the quality of local knives also emerged. For example, the formation of the traditions of Shahrixon and Qorasuv knife makers was influenced by the type of raw materials specific to each center, centuries-old traditions, and ethno-cultural relations with other centers.

Valley craftsmen used high-quality steel grades such as black steel, qurch, bayza, Isfahan, and javdari to make knives. Although several types of knives were made in the valley, the most popular model was the curved-blade knife. Moreover, such knives were made in a unique style in each center in the Fergana Valley.

When preparing the knife blade, the valley craftsmen used a special "dilikaptar" or "kaptarbo'yin" (dove neck) method to preserve the quality of the steel. In this method, the steel was watered little by little several times, and then the cutting part was quenched. This was the most important process in knife-making. Each craftsman had his own method in this regard, through which the craftsman ensured the quality of the knife. For example, Shahrixon craftsmen quenched the knife once, while Qorasuv craftsmen quenched it several times to achieve the desired result. Then, a "soykoma" (groove) was opened on the blade with a file. In Shahrixon, the "koma" was opened on one side of the blade, while in Qorasuv it was opened on both sides, and the "koma" acted as an eyebrow, increasing the flexibility of the knife.

During this period, the craft of foundry work also developed in the cities of the valley, along with large villages. They cast products such as plowshares, cast iron cauldrons, and lamps in simple workshops. In 1883, there were three cast iron foundries in the villages of Chust uyezds belonging to Mir Hoji Sharipov, Holiq Muhammad Boboyev, and Mir Bobo Sharipov.

Copper craftsmanship was also developed in the villages of the Fergana Valley. Research at the Chust and Kairakkum monuments confirms that the industry originated based on the ancient Gavaso, Novkat, and Kara Mozor deposits. Village coppersmiths produced items such as teapots, kettles, platters, trays, jugs, small pitchers, snuffboxes, pipes, inkwells, trumpets, flutes, and sometimes horse harnesses. Copper craftsmanship flourished in the villages of Kosonsoy, Chodak, Sang in the north of the valley, Karasu in the east, and Bekabad in the west, which was influenced by various factors.

Craftsmen from the villages of Besharik in the west of the valley, Chodak and Sang in the north, and Shahrikhan and Asaka in the east produced such decorations. They used tools such as small anvils, small furnaces, bellows, mold-templates, pliers, gilbo'ta (a type of hammer), juptak (a type of pliers), and mangqol (brazier). Among the rural population of Kokand and Namangan uyezds (districts), silver rings with colored stones instead of turquoise and earrings made of thin silver wire were in vogue [18].

In the early 19th and 20th centuries, Tashkent, Kokand, Fergana, Andijan, Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva were considered tanning centers. Even now in Tashkent, Fergana, and

Kokand, leather goods such as shoes, headgear, sheepskin coats, saddles and harnesses, and horse equipment, as well as water-carrying mesh bags, various bags, sacks, chests, other household items, salt shakers, and book covers are produced.

## **Conclusion**

**In conclusion**, studying the knowledge and skills related to craftsmanship, as well as the customs and rituals of the people of the Fergana Valley, plays a crucial role in reviving and developing traditional practices that, to varying degrees, have been preserved to this day as forms of intangible cultural heritage.

The development of craftsmanship in our country has introduced Uzbek culture to the world. The state support for the further advancement of folk arts and crafts, as reinforced by a Presidential Decree, has opened up broad prospects for the future of national art. The names of folk artisans have been honored and celebrated.

Furthermore, the Presidential Decree No. PD 405 on “Additional Measures for the Protection, Scientific Study, and Promotion of Intangible Cultural Heritage” includes provisions to develop examples of intangible cultural heritage based on a continuous system of “production – teaching – restoration – preservation – popularization.” It proposes to test this system on an experimental basis at the Rishtan International Ceramics Center and the craft center in the city of Margilan, in cooperation with the Fergana Regional Government, the Ministry of Culture, and the “Hunarmand” (Craftsmen) Association.

Given the importance of preserving and further developing all schools of craftsmanship, and preventing their disappearance, continuing the traditions of these schools through the "master-apprentice" method has become one of the most urgent tasks in safeguarding our national culture.

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