

## Attribution of the Kazakh Traditional Dress in the Collections of the Russian Ethnographic Museum

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### ABSTRACT

The paper analyzes the collections of the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (MAE RAS) and the Russian Ethnographic Museum (REM) (St. Petersburg, Russian Federation). Their study is of great importance both in the scientific-theoretical and practical aspects. In theory, their study is of particular interest, since at the turn of XXth century customs of the Kazakhs underwent dramatic changes, many traditions, which remained intact for centuries, were perceived as archaisms. The museum collections became the material and information basis, which could be used to reliably reconstruct the traditional way of life of the Kazakhs. The main objective of this paper is to study the collections of traditional Kazakh clothing (19th century), describing specific features of its national ornaments, comparison of modern and traditional ornamentation (19th century). Relevance of the problem being under study is amplified in the context of universal cultural globalization. Against this background, the uniqueness and originality of the Kazakh ethnic culture are threatened with extinction. This study reveals key tendencies related to the cultural impact of globalization on the ethnic and cultural identity of the modern Kazakh society by the example of studying national ornaments on traditional clothing. The authors conclude that some of the decorative motifs, presented in modern renovated clothes are applied incorrectly. The paper provides analysis of the factors that caused this phenomenon and recommendations to improve cultural background of the population.

### KEYWORDS

National ornament, material culture, the peoples of Central Asia, social anthropology, cultural globalization

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### Introduction

Starting from the first half of the 18th century, Kazakhstan was part of the Russian Empire (Yerofeeva, 1998). Dynamic development of the Russian ethnographic science has led to a number of scientific expeditions to the steppes of Kazakhstan (Prishchepova, 2000). This provided formation of unique museum collections related to the traditional Kazakh culture, the exhibits of which are still preserved in the largest museums of St. Petersburg. Transformation of political power and government, which occurred in the early twentieth century, radically changed the life of the Kazakh people and broke the century-long continuity as regards the traditional economy and way of life. Consequently, museum ethnographic collections became the most reliable

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source of the Kazakh pre-industrial material culture (Cvetkovski & Hofmeister, 2014).

Presently, the Russian Ethnographic Museum has the largest and unique collection of cultural monuments belonging to the traditional Kazakh society in the Russian Federation. Its reserve collections include 6450 units; these are authentic items, which were widely used in everyday life of the Kazakhs as well as during their national holidays in the past (Fedoseyenko, 2001). Speaking about the total museum fund, about 400 items make up the collection of clothing and shoes from different regions of Kazakhstan. Items dating back to the late XIX – early XX centuries are of particular interest for this research. Full territorial coverage of items stored in the Russian Museum of Ethnography, provides full reconstruction of the past historical picture. The collection includes complexes located in the southern, western (including the Aral Sea area and Mangyshlak), and in the central regions of Kazakhstan. The northern and the northeastern territories of Kazakhstan became the most studied by ethnographers and therefore were later presented in the museum (Fedoseyenko, 2001).

The wide chronological and thematic range of the collection defines the multidimensional nature of the problem being under study. Therefore, the history of Kazakh traditional clothing and description of the main elements of its ornaments present one of the topical issues of the modern ethnographic Kazakh studies. Clothing is an integral part of the traditional material culture in the Kazakh lifestyle. In the nomadic culture, applied arts were reflected in everything around: in the objects of everyday life, in the design of housing, clothing. The ornamentation of clothes had a special meaning (Lymer, 2014).

### ***Background Paper***

The attribution of the Kazakh traditional clothing has not been a subject of individual research in the museum collections of St. Petersburg. However, there are a number of studies devoted to the history of the Kazakh ethnographic collections, the semantics of clothes and headwear of the Kazakhs etc. In this regard, one can note research works by I.V. Stasevich (2011), V.A. Prishchepova (2011), E.W. Said (2003).

In order to understand the logic of museum collection acquisition, one should turn to the historical realities of the 18th – 19th centuries. February 19, 1731 is considered as the beginning of the process that culminated in entering of the Kazakh steppes in the Russian Empire. On this very day, the Empress Anna Ivanovna signed a decree on the adoption of the Younger zhuz ("zhuz" is one of the three administrative-territorial units of the Kazakh state based on ancestral traditions) of the Kazakh Khanate into the Russian Empire. Following the Younger Zhuz, the Middle zhuz Kazakhs also appeared under the protectorate of the Russian Empire (1732-1740). By the middle of the 19th century, Russian citizenship was extended to the entire territory of the Kazakh Khanate (Tapper, 2013; Hosking, 2014).

In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Khan's power was eliminated, the descendants of the ruling elite, "tore" (Dynasties of the Kazakh Khanate) could hold key positions of separate volosts (districts, provinces) being part of the Russian Empire. Many Kazakhs took the official service of the Tsarist Russia, got a secular education (Thompson, 2012).

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Russian ethnography developed dynamically, numerous scientific expeditions were carried out,.

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Russian scientists participated in ethnographic expeditions including the expeditions to the Kazakh steppes. Since that time, museum collections in St. Petersburg were formed. In addition, private donors made a significant contribution to MAE (Dmitriyev, 2012; Popova, 2008, Dmitriyev & Popova, 2012).

The first large-scale ethnographic exhibition was organized in 1867 in Moscow. The main objective of this exhibition was to display the entire ethnic diversity of the peoples in the Russian Empire, the representation of different ethnic groups and cultures in their traditional manifestation. The exhibition was opened after a long work on gathering the necessary material. The Kazakh materials included yurt and the complex of nomadic household items as well as clothing items (Popova, 2008).

The subsequent future of this collection is indistinct. Perhaps the exhibition materials were stored in Moscow, and then were transferred to the collections of the Central Museum of Ethnology (Moscow). Later, the Museum of the USSR Peoples was founded in Moscow, closed during the Second World War. It is known that in 1948 the collection of the Museum of the USSR Peoples was added to the collection of the Ethnographic Department of the Russian Museum (which was later renamed as REM). Currently, many items that appear on the exhibition in 1867 in Moscow are represented in the permanent exhibition of the Russian Ethnographic Museum in St. Petersburg (Rohwer, Drovetski & Wood, 2001).

In 2008, the catalog "Kazakh traditional culture in the Kunstkamera collections" was published. This catalog presented a rich collection of illustrative photo materials on the Kazakhs, as well as a number of short scientific essays (Stasevich, 2008). Significant contribution to the study of illustrative photo collections of MAE RAS on the traditional culture of Kazakhs was made by V.A. Vishnevetskaya (1989).

L.F. Popova (2002), Head of Ethnography Department of the Peoples of the Caucasus, Central Asia and Kazakhstan of the Russian Ethnographic Museum also specializes in the Kazakh ethnography.

The acquisition history of REM as regards the Kazakh ethnography is reflected in the paper by S.V. Dmitriyev (2012), "The Ethnographic Department Fund of the Russian Museum of Foreign East Culture: History and Fate (1901-1930)". All this suggests that attribution of the traditional Kazakh clothes in museum collections of St. Petersburg require a special study.

### ***Research purpose***

This paper aims at studying collections of traditional Kazakh clothing (XIX century), describing characteristic features of its national ornaments, and making comparison of modern and traditional ornamentation (XIX century) of the Kazakh clothing.

### ***Research question***

What are the characteristic features of the Kazakh national clothing?

How did the traditional Kazakh clothing change?



## Methods

This study is based on the museological concepts and approaches. The axiological approach is one of the main methodological principles in this paper; it provides the value-based consideration of ethnic and cultural heritage. When working with the museum ethnographic objects, the authors used the following methods: visual identification and the scientific description method. All these approaches are associated with the exhibit attribution. The clothing ornamentation contains a lot of information. Therefore, the authors of this study also applied semiotic research methods.

Research problem was studied in several stages.

The first stage of the study implied collecting information related to the Kazakh ethnographic collections in the museums of St. Petersburg. The authors carried out research work related to the collections and exhibitions of the Russian Ethnographic Museum and the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography. The authors first summarized the fragmented ethnographic material, used inaccessible scientific journals and unpublished archival materials.

The second stage of this study implied the analysis of ornamental motifs and techniques used in the manufacture of these products.

Results of the second stage gave the possibility to conclude that carpet ornamentation was used in the current reconstruction of the Kazakh clothing samples. In order to determine the factors that caused the above situation, the authors analyzed the academic literature devoted to the Kazakh applied art.

## Data, Analysis, and Results

Currently, MAE has a rich collection of photo-illustrative materials on the peoples of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (middle 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> century). The unique photographs and drawings (created during ethnographic expeditions) are of great value; they could be the basis of authentic reconstruction of the traditional Kazakh clothes, shoes and headwear.

The photo collections provided by S.M. Dudin have a special status in the photo-illustrative collections MAE and REM. In 1899, an expedition led by S.M. Dudin was sent to the Semipalatinsk region. According to V.A. Prishchepova (2000) *"the 1899 expedition led by S.M. Dudin can be called complex, he brought the Kazakh antique household items, photographs and drawings"*. Due to his visit, the museum received the collection of photographs (about 500) from the life of the nomadic pastoralists. *"For its time, the Kazakh photo collection provided by S.M. Dudin in 1899 was the most comprehensive"*. He bought some items at fairs: *"During his trip in 1899, S.M. Dudin photographed the Kuyandinskaya (or Botovskaya) fair, which was the most important for the Steppe"* (Prishchepova, 2000).

In 1934, the Ethnographic Department of the Russian Museum has been transformed into an independent cultural and scientific center – REM. As V.A. Dmitriyev (2012) noted, "At the end of the 1930s the REM ethnographic museology began to take shape, which development during the Soviet period became a reality due to prominent museum workers, such as T.A. Kryukova, A.S. Morozova, E.N. Studenetskaya".

The development of Orientalism, as a separate direction of the Russian historical development, had an enormous impact on the acquisition of collections related to the Kazakh material culture. Development of Orientalism in Russia was determined by the necessity to study the peoples of the Asian part of the empire, who were the bearers of strange and unfamiliar culture of the Russians. Orientalism, as a complex and multi-level system of the East representation from the Western viewpoint determined the acquisition specifics of museum collections being under consideration (Said, 2003).

The collections of the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography include several clothing sets. Men's clothing items included coats, gowns, trousers, jackets, belts and items worn on the belt, summer and winter hats. Women's clothing sets included shirts, dressing gowns, sleeveless blouses, hats for women of different age groups (Vishnevetskaya, 1989).

Women's bridal headdress ("saukele") occupies a special place in the MAE collection. It dates back to the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Prishchepova, 2011). "Saukele" was the most expensive and luxurious part of the bride's decoration, symbolizing the start of family life. At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was a mandatory part of bride's dowry and prepared long before the girls reached the marriage age.

"Saukele" was the most expensive and luxurious part of a bride's attire. It symbolized the beginning of family life. There were different options for the size and décor of "saukele." Typically, this high headdress (about 70 cm) was cone-shaped and consisted of two parts: the "sau" (base) and "kele" (top). A thick white felt served as its frame, covered with silk velvet, satin and red velure. The base of the "saukele" was decorated with mink, sable or fox fur. The headgear top could be decorated with fluffy owl feathers. The long charms ("zhaktau") served as a compulsory supplement to saukele; they had to be attached to it from the sides, reaching the waist or even below it. Charms could be made of coral, turquoise, silver and gold-plated plates (in some cases, coins), pearls, silk tassels. In addition to the charms, side decorations were added; these were made of silver – "shekelik." The surface of the "saukele" was covered with silk or velvet shawl that could fall down on the girl's back.

The "saukele" collection of the Russian Museum of Ethnography is represented by eight copies, two of which date from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Based on the analysis of this collection, L.F. Popova (2002) offered her vision related to local classification of "saukele".

In addition, the "Turkestan Album" contains rich material on the Kazakh clothing (Stasevich, 2008).

The MAE photo-illustration collections have very personable content. As I.V. Stasevich (2008) in this respect rightly observes that "... *The main pragmatic function of the clothing is to protect the body from the environmental impacts. But apart from that, traditional costume played a crucial "acquisition" function: with regard to clothing, one could determine not only the person's age and gender, but also his/her social status, ancestral affiliation ... In the 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, both men's and women's clothing was very stable and uniform over the entire territory of Kazakhstan. The clothing composition and its style principles remained almost unchanged ...*" Obviously, the Kazakhs widely used imported fabrics, in particular, the Chinese silk with a large floral print.



Styles of dresses remained relatively unchanged; the embroidery cloth was negligible, mainly in the breast and neck (Stasevich, 2008).

As regards the entire collection of traditional Kazakh clothes stored in the Russian Museum of Ethnography, several ensembles of the ethnically marked clothing are of particular interest (Popova, 2008):

**Sultan costume.** Mid-nineteenth century.

The ensemble includes: *shalbar* (leather pants), *dressing gown*, *kise* (a belt made of leather), *kalpak* (upper headwear), *etik* (brown leather boots). The sides of a dressing gown and the surface of pants are covered with richly embroidery, tamboured with silk threads of red, blue, white, yellow and black colors. The ornament is dominated by green motifs. The surface is decorated with gold thread embroidery couched by stitch technique.

**Men's winter suit.** Mid-nineteenth century. The ensemble includes: *zhigde* (a shirt made of cotton and silk fabric), *kesteli shalbar* (pants), *shapan* (gown), *kise* (a belt made of leather), *zhargak* (a coat made of fur, sheepskin and silk fabric), *kalpak* (upper headwear), *etik* (brown leather boots). The gown is not ornamented. The shirt collar and pants are decorated with satin stitch embroidery; the ornament is medium-sized, green.

**Costume of a wealthy man.** Mid-nineteenth century. The ensemble includes: *koylek* (denim shirt of motley colors), *shalbar* (pants made of cloth), gown, *shekpen* (bottom gown), *beldik* (belt), *kalpak* (upper headwear), *kebis* (black leather shoes). All costume elements are not ornamented.

**Girl's costume.** Mid-nineteenth century. The ensemble includes: *koylek* (dress made of half-silk fabric of motley colors), *dambal* (pants), *Bottom gown* (made of silk and velvet), *topcoat* (made of red cloth and cotton fabric), *borik* (a cone-shaped hat, about 40 cm. in height, made of red velvet), brown leather boots, decorated with inlaid cord. The edges of the sleeves, sides and bottom of the robe are trimmed with embroidery, chain stitch with silk threads. The ornament is green. The base of headdress is trimmed with fur. The surface is decorated with narrow braid stripes, small metal plates of cruciform shape, and owl feathers on the side.

**Bride's costume.** Mid-nineteenth century. The ensemble includes: *koylek* (dress), *omrausha* – bib made of red velvet and cotton fabric, decorated with lace, *kushak* (denim blue belt), *waistcoat* (gown, made of red velvet and cotton fabric), *saukele* (ceremonial headdress of the bride), *etik* (brown leather boots). The edges of the sleeves, sides and the bottom of waistcoat are decorated with lace. The rest of the surface is not ornamented. *Saukele* presents a cone-shaped cap about 70 centimeters in height, which consists of two parts: the *sau* (the main part) and *kele* (top). The frame is sheathed in red velvet. The surface is decorated with metal plates inlaid with carnelian.

**Costume of a young woman.** Mid-nineteenth century. The ensemble includes: *kurte* (silk coat in lilac colors), *dambal* (pants made of cotton fabric), *gown* (made of brocade and red silk), *saukele* (ceremonial headdress of the bride), *kebis* (black leather shoes). The collar of the coat is made of velvet lilac. The chest is decorated with chain stitch embroidery, silk threads of blue, yellow and white colors. The ornament is floral, medium size. The collar is sealed with metal clasp. The edges of the sleeves, sides and bottom of the gown are trimmed with wide bands of velvet.

The surface of *saukele* is decorated with metal plates inlaid with carnelian; the lower part of the headdress is trimmed with braid and coral. The base is trimmed with fur. The *zhaktau* (long charms made of coral beads) is attached along the sides. The headdress includes also a long cape-white handkerchief, put under the *saukele*. This cape is richly decorated with embroidery – predominantly red, to a lesser extent – black threads. The ornament is floral, medium-sized.

Thus, the ornamentation of the traditional ritual and everyday Kazakh costumes is dominated by the plant and floral designs, having small dimensions, made by a chain or satin stitch technique.

The analysis of museum collections containing samples of traditional clothing and textiles, as well as various kinds of tapestries provides the possibility to discern their ornamentation and semiotics quite clearly (Reference book, 2003). In the traditional Kazakh society, felt production occupies a special place. Felt was used in tapestries manufacture including: *tuskiiz* – decorative wall carpet with applique, *syrmak* – floor carpet manufactured by using mosaic technique, *tekemet* – decorative floor carpet and others. The main motive in the felt carpet ornamentation is the paired spiral, resembling sheep horns "*koshkar muyiz*" and the cross "*tort kulak*" orbbed into a diamond. Decorative elements of carpets present relatively large silhouettes. The specific features of Kazakh ornament include equal area of the ornament and the background pattern, the symmetry of ornament on the vertical axis.

Currently, traditional methods and felt production ornamentation preserved both on the territory of Kazakhstan and in the Kazakhs of Mongolia, as well as in the steppes of Western Siberia (Prishchepova, 2011).

Kazakhstan, notwithstanding the dramatic changes of the twentieth century, preserved the traditional ideas and the knowledge of felt production and ornamentation. However, at the same time, the knowledge related to the specifics of traditional clothing design was lost.

In early XX<sup>th</sup> century, clothing preferences of the Kazakhs underwent significant changes due to cultural globalization. The continuity of traditions associated with the clothing manufacture was broken, which resulted in distortion of its artistic image. As a result, modern attempts related to make the traditional costume "look ethnic" are still made, however the false ornamentation is used. To date, knowledge of what is appropriate and what is not for the traditional costume is partially lost. It is difficult to determine exactly when the first mistake was made in relation to the ornamentation of clothing; perhaps, it happened when Kazakhstan was part of the Soviet Union. At that time, the cultural heritage of the Kazakhs was universalized. For example, the Kazakh national folklore and music survived, but transformed into opera and ballet theatrical production, thus becoming available for a wider audience. The traditional costume was considered an archaism already in the second half of the twentieth century, and its reconstruction attempts were haphazard and, mainly, creative, which led to the wrongful application of ornamental motifs that prevail today.

The present situation related to the interpretation of the traditional ornamentation and traditional costume has much in common with the situation in the contemporary art of Kazakhstan. Based on the results of archaeological and ethnographic research, artists, without going deep into the semantics of the



sign systems of different eras, actively use the symbolism in their paintings. Indeed, the works of contemporary artists of Kazakhstan are characterized by the elements of historical reconstruction, generic tamga signs, vivid examples of polychrome style of the early Iron Age, Bronze Age petroglyphs. The work by K. Zhapalova "Golden Age" presents a vivid example of how the signs and elements of art from different eras could be combined in a single picture. The Bronze Age is presented by sun-head anthropomorphic creatures displayed with Tamga petroglyphs; the early Iron Age is presented by the famous images, created in Saka animal style; medieval and early modern period – by the generic tamga and elements of the traditional Kazakh ornaments (Nikolenko, 2013).

Therefore, the use of false ornamentation in the design of the Kazakh clothes occurs in the same way. The authors believe that the establishment of reliable historical reconstructions of traditional Kazakh clothing is still relevant.

### Discussion and Conclusions

Currently, there are only a few cases related to the creation of authentic clothing reconstructions reflecting the realities of the 19<sup>th</sup> – the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Aizhan Abdubait is one of the specialists working in this direction. She works as an art restorer, the author of the successful reconstruction of ceremonial chapans of the Kazakh rulers, traditional Kazakh hats and dresses, the entire collection of items for museum exhibitions (Kabdieva & Yarmukhamedova, 2002). Her work is based on a profound study of the ethnographic museum artefacts and the written sources. One of the most famous works performed by Aizhan Abdubait is reconstruction of the dress, which belonged to Hanshi Fatima – the wife of Zhangir Khan – the last ruler of the Bukeyev Khanate (late 19<sup>th</sup> century) (Figure 4). In order to promote artistic canons of clothing, Aizhan Abdubait created series of contemporary costumes in ethnic style, including wedding gowns, for the citizens of Kazakhstan.

In this respect, several assumptions could be made. Perhaps this is because the carpet ornamentation was largely present in the everyday life of the Kazakhs, since carpets are the products of prolonged usage, as compared with daily or even dress clothes. Quite often, syrmaks, tekemets, tuskiizes and other tapestry were transferred by succession and were made specifically as a bride's dowry. Felting is a time consuming process, which requires the participation of a group of women. Therefore, felting skills are easily transferred and continue to be transferred from elders to youth. In addition, zoomorphic ornamentation is distinguished by its beauty and elegance, which provides its special popularity.

The study and preservation of the ethnic and cultural heritage is of particular relevance at the present stage of the Kazakh social development, in a world of cultural globalization. The Republic of Kazakhstan is a relatively young, dynamically developing country searching for its national identity, including indirect search, realized through material culture. In this regard, the creation of reliable, scientifically grounded reconstructions based on a thorough analysis of primary sources, acquires specific significance. Obviously, the traditional clothing and its ornamentation form the nonverbal sign system that could be read today.

Modern Kazakh society almost lost the understanding of the appropriateness regarding the use of the sign system of traditional

ornamentation. This situation is determined by partial marginalization of the Kazakh society, which occurred in the twentieth century. In less than a century, people who still kept their statehood and national identity, lost knowledge of their traditional costume specifics. In the context of cultural globalization and the market economy, where demand creates supply, there is a mass replication of "pseudo-national" items like chapans, waistcoats and hats decorated with "koshkar muyiz" ornament. Authentic historical reconstructions of clothing could be implemented only in the museum environment.

### Implications and Recommendations

Considering national and cultural identity of the Kazakh clothing, one can distinguish their unique style. The traditional style of clothing and its ornamentation create a non-verbal sign system, underlining their originality and historical heritage.

Globalization is the main problem that threatens national culture. Therefore, one needs to provide detailed study of the national Kazakh traditions and traditional decoration. Obviously, without popularization of authentic traditional costume, the mass consciousness of the modern Kazakh society will have the deliberately false picture of a traditional costume.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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