

# I . Introduction

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In light of field survey conducted within the last few years, traditional culture of Uzbekistan and that of the Central Asia in general, appears to embody significant cultural phenomenon. Its distinctive features are originality of art, vivid expression of artistic values, sustainability and endurance of principles as mirrored by succession of modes and forms, breadth of interconnections with leading artistic schools and directions of the Middle East and Far East.

Historically and geographically Central Asia has always been a hub, in which, during different times and epochs, major Asian cultures intersected. In fact, one of the most important sections of the Great Silk Road, uniting China with Rome, run through Central Asia. This so called “Trans-Asian artery” played significant role in interaction of cultures of the both East and West. Of similar importance were the routes going through Central Asia from south to north. These were the routes which boosted communication of ancient peoples of India and Iran with those of the steppe and beyond, i.e. the peoples of the Upper Volga, Siberia and Far East.

Central Asia (in the past it was named as “Middle Asia”; since 1993 the region bears the name of “Central Asia”) is the region of the highest mountain chains, large river valleys and vast steppes. The written sources, which came down to us, mention about its major historical and geographic regions. Thus, Amudarya basin in its upper and middle reaches was named “Bactria”, later – “Tokharistan”; interfluvium of Kashkadarya and Zarafshan was named as “Sogdiana” or “Sogd”; south of Aral Sea basin was named as “Khwarezmia” (“Khoresm”); the area of present-day Murghab river was named as “Margiana”, “Mouru”, “Margu” or “Merv”; along Kopet Dag mountain range there was “Parthia”; the valley and mountains of Ferghana were named as “Parkana”; behind Sirdarya river there was land of the Scythians and Saka people. In the epic stories, i.e. doston, of the early Middle Ages the whole territory to the north of Amudarya was named as “Turan” and it was set against (or distinguished from) the whole Iran. The Arabs, starting from the VII – VIII centuries, began naming the lands located to the northeast of Amudarya as “Mawarannahr” (literally, “The other side of the River”; it is the territory which represents the most part of present-day Uzbekistan),

those to the southwest – as “Khorasan” and those to the northwest – as “Khwaresm” (“Khoresm”; this ancient name has been preserved to our days).

Names and terms of these areas, to some extent, reflected ethnic formations, which existed there, and which were the founders as well as bearers of local cultures in ancient and medieval times.

In 2011 the publishing house “Nauka”, located in Moscow (Russian Federation), published a monograph called “Uzbeki” (“The Uzbeks”) within the framework of series of books under common title of “Narody i kultury” (“Peoples and Cultures”), which had been prepared jointly by the Institute of History of Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan and Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Academy of Sciences of Russian Federation. The monograph introduces vast information on ethnic and political history, economic activity, family and social life, material and spiritual culture of Uzbek people. The book, which was written by leading scholars of Uzbekistan and Russian Federation, and which is based on new factual as well as rich illustrative material, fills the gaps in learning and studying the history and culture of Uzbeks. In addition to that, the book pays significant attention to the explanation of ethno-cultural processes taking place in present-day Uzbekistan. In general, the book is dedicated to historical and ethnographical description of Uzbeks, who are considered to be the largest ethnicity in Central Asia. This scholarly edition is a result of many-years studies carried out by the collective of authors, who, by analyzing and summarizing extensive sources, ethnographical materials and ethno-sociological surveys, try to: describe ethnic appearance and character of Uzbek people; unveil their history of formation; demonstrate their rich experience of conducting economic activity, which has been accumulated for centuries; inform about their traditional crafts, labor skills in agriculture, stockbreeding and handicrafts; reveal material and spiritual culture, social and family life as well as unique features of folk festivities, games and entertainment, peculiarities of traditional rites and customs, characteristics of lifestyle.

In fact, mutual cultural relations of the peoples of Central Asia with ancient Iran, India, China and other countries of Central, Near and South-West Asia have ancient roots. Peoples, who have been living in the region since antiquity, have many similarities in economic way of life, in their languages, cultural and confessional habits.

Traditional culture and arts of Central Asia have very ancient roots as well – they go as deep as to the times of ancient Eastern civilizations. Studies conducted within the last few years uncovered many formerly unknown things, including,

the level which was achieved by rural and urban civilization. And in this context, the role of Central Asia as the hearth and home of antique culture and arts (which existed during Pre-Achaemenid era and later, throughout the Middle Ages), became evident. However, the peak in growth of local cultures of ancient Central Asia corresponds to the High Medieval Period, when all directions and fields of traditional culture and arts flourished. This, in turn, allows concluding that artistic importance and significance of arts and traditional culture of Central Asia, including of Uzbekistan, is inseparable from its historical and cultural past. Indeed, it is exactly that period that enriched arts with diversity of ideas, images, modes, motifs and forms (which occurred thanks to the uniqueness of the epoch and place).

In the history of art and traditional culture of the peoples of Central Asia there were peculiar stages of development. Each stage was accompanied by own circle of art and culture related issues, which were closely linked to the emergence and formation of statehood:

- 1000 BC - IV century AD – It is the period when antique arts formed and flourished. In this period it is possible to observe existence of traditional culture and arts in early state formations and in ancient town centers, which were predominantly based on local traditions and were significantly influenced by eastern Hellenism.
- IV – VIII centuries AD – This is the period when the new rise of traditional culture and arts occurred as a result of the influence of the Turkic element on all aspects of life. Other characteristic features of these centuries are: the impact of Arabic and Islamic elements on local culture; emergence and formation of heroic epics as well as oral-professional creativity.
- IX – XIII centuries AD – This period is associated with emergence and development of new type of art (so called “Muslim art”) in the system of centralized states, where the ideas of former pagan beliefs got integrated into Islam and local antique traditions got revived based on Arab-Muslim culture. As a result new local artistic directions emerge, i.e. classic oriental poetry, miniature, maqom and doston arts, artistic crafts with prevalence of folklore motifs, applied arts with geometric and vegetative arabesques (patterns). This period basically laid the foundation for further development of traditional culture and arts.
- XIV – XVI centuries AD – Arts and culture during the High Medieval Period, i.e. during the reign of the Temurids Empire, reach virtually universal

importance. Architecture, decorative and applied arts, calligraphy and miniature merge with poetry and music, which results in emergence of new styles. In the history of statehood High Middle Ages is considered as the period of oriental Renaissance. In other words, it was the time, when local antique traditions were revived, new local artistic directions and schools emerged, famous enlighteners, scholars, poets, musicians and painters conducted their creative activities (and whose achievements in science, poetry and arts became invaluable contribution to the world civilization).

- XVII – XIX centuries AD – This period (i.e. Late Middle Ages) represents the last grand stage in the development of arts and crafts. All fields of traditional culture develop in towns and settlements and get enriched with new phenomena such as “Shashmaqom”, applied and non-applied genres of folklore. It is also the period when the process of localization of Central Asian traditions (including Uzbek culture) took place on the background of interaction and mutual enrichment of traditional cultures of different nations.
- Since the second half of the XIX century new hearths of cultural life emerge as a result of joining the region to tsarist Russia. During this time subsequent integration of new artistic values occurs and new artistic and aesthetic ideals get developed.
- Social and cultural environment of the XX century represents considerably diverse picture though. In fact, this is the century when different cultural epochs manifest themselves consequently and simultaneously. It only conditionally allows to outline the vast areas of contemporary art, which incorporates, as its own, deeply relevant material associated with individual creativity (composer’s art, visual arts, theatre art, cinema art, etc.), created during the last century and rich spiritual and creative experience, accumulated during the past epochs (i.e. samples of traditional culture - rituals and festivals, traditional music, folk entertainment performances, folk dancing, arts and crafts, etc.). The twentieth century truly changes the artistic view of the world, where traditional societies, closed in the system of their own aesthetic coordinates, open themselves towards others and begin their contacts with universal spiritual wealth.

Historically the territory of Uzbekistan was the most important section of the Great Silk Road: it was here that its historical crossroads was located. Caravans, with a variety of goods, travelled along the Great Silk Road. It was also the road

through which cultural ideas and traditions spread from East to West and vice versa. Acceptance and adaptation of traditional Iran-Achaemenid, Greco-Hellenistic, Indo-Buddhistic, Chinese, Iran-Sasanian and Arab-Islamic culture, and later – of Russian and European cultural models, largely determined the transcontinental nature of traditional culture. At the same time, arts and culture of the region have been exceptionally original in terms of artistic nature and style at all stages of their historical development.

Since ancient times, Uzbekistan has been a zone of interaction between nomadic and settled-agricultural culture with a tendency for urbanization. Developed urban culture is the most important attribute of the statehood, which distinguishes it from predominantly nomadic cultures of some of neighbors, such as Kazakhs, Kyrgyzs, Karakalpaks, Turkmens, and others. The role of the nomadic factor in the process of historical and cultural symbiosis in Uzbekistan was significant indeed. However, by the XX century its role completely faded away. (Though, its role was dominant in such countries as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan). Notably, already in medieval period urban culture became prevalent in present-day territory of Uzbekistan. Beginning from IX-XI centuries, intensive development of urban planning, crafts and maqom art led to a new and pronounced urban phase in the evolution of statehood. Bukhara, Samarkand, Termez, Khiva, Ferghana, Shakhrisabz, and Andijan became major centers of economy, trade, culture and science of the medieval East and laid foundations for a new stage in the evolution of statehood and civilization.

Significant socio-political and economic transformation processes, which began in 1991, opened a new page in the history of art and culture of Uzbekistan. Thanks to Independence in quite a short period of time new political foundations of the state and society were created. The country adopted new Constitution in order to document and ensure that people's desire for building democratic and civil society is fulfilled. At the same time, the leadership of the country identified priority areas in political, socio-economic and spiritual development. Indeed, Independence and state sovereignty have become important reforming factors in the new social system, ideology of the nation, its culture and art. Symbiosis of national and universal values was proclaimed to be the core value orientation of the new cultural policy. And these two major components have largely predetermined the direction and peculiarity of the contemporary art of Uzbekistan.

Development of cultural and artistic processes in the early 1990s was determined by a number of socio-political and economic factors as well. Active foreign policy of the country (i.e. becoming a member of international

organizations and establishing diplomatic relations with many countries of the world and becoming an equal member of the international society) allowed opening up so called "Iron Curtain" in the sphere of arts and culture. This allowed artists and intellectuals of the country not only to get acquainted with the achievements of contemporary artistic processes taking place in the world, but also to present the achievements of the national culture and arts to the rest of the world. Membership in the United Nations Organization, UNESCO and other international organizations led to implementation of a number of significant projects in the fields of education, culture and arts. Thus, it is possible to tell that Independence gave an impetus to the revival and development of the spiritual culture of the nation.

And the development of basic industries allowed the country to take full responsibility for the fate of the spiritual culture, allowed it to declare itself as the chief sponsor of transformations in the domain of art.

An important factor in the development of art became the ideological component, which was reflected in the idea of National Independence, in an objective understanding and assessment of own historical heritage and in the projection of national culture and arts. Since early days of Independence Uzbekistan's cultural policy has been aimed at formation and development of the spiritual realm, that is studying and promoting historical, moral, religious and cultural values. Fair reassessment of the role of leading religion of the nation, of the Islamic religion, was made: mosques began to be built, conditions were created for the faithful to undertake pilgrimage to the holy Hajj. The life and activity of Amir Temur began to be interpreted from the new angle, based on objective-historical facts. And this whole complex of social and historical factors largely shaped the priorities and vectors of the cultural policy.

At the same time, the growth of national consciousness awoke interest in the own history, poetry, traditional culture; and as consequence - widespread public attention and natural interest to own traditional values and rich artistic heritage emerged. This is an indicator of the fact that the destiny of heritage and destiny of culture are inseparable indeed. In this sense, the question about the role of traditional heritage as an important stimulus to the development of contemporary culture deserves the most careful consideration on the part of state, government, public organizations and foundations.

Importantly, the destiny of culture always depends on certain mechanism of succession. This means that there is a need for matching an intensive gathering of information about traditional heritage (and its learning) with close examination

of new tendencies occurring in the development of artistic creativity. Culture is preserved only if it is alive and changes according to the conditions surrounding it. And bright evidence for this can be seen in sustainable development of the elements of intangible cultural heritage of Uzbekistan, which were included in the Representative List of UNESCO ("Cultural Space of Boysun", "Shashmaqom", "Katta Ashula" and "Navruz"). So far, Uzbekistan has successfully implemented broad and comprehensive programme on safeguarding and inventory-making, development and transfer of traditions, cataloging and documenting, promoting and studying intangible cultural heritage. And the field studies, which were conducted in recent years, were aimed at gathering the necessary information for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. These studies help in: making inventory of intangible cultural heritage of Uzbekistan; creating a database for National and Local Inventory (List); elaboration of nomination files for inclusion in the Representative List of UNESCO; creation of the national website on intangible cultural heritage for awareness raising; conducting research; publishing materials of scientific expeditions in the form of books and papers; production of audio and video discs and training films).

The subject of intangible cultural heritage is very important in Uzbekistan indeed. When we speak about it we usually refer to or discuss about people who are creators of great artistic, musical, poetic, ceremonial, performing and entertainment culture. All types and genres of traditional culture, i.e. epic stories, maqoms, katta ashula, askiya, performances of rope walkers, puppeteers, customs and festivities (Navruz, Mekhrigan), embroidery, carpet weaving, pottery, etc., were included in the artistic treasure-house of Uzbek people.

Being an important one from among many conditions, which determine effectiveness of safeguarding, preservation and transfer of traditions, comprehensive study of all fields of traditional culture, of its live traditions, allows recognizing their specific laws and peculiarities (which were existing in the past and are existing at present). And the artistic process itself becomes dynamic, interesting, emotionally full, and as a result - becomes effective, and promotes increasing of awareness of the population (in particular, of the youth), while instilling in it the feeling of careful attitude to own artistic traditions (to their mastery and transfer), while enriching its spiritual world.

Intangible cultural heritage of the people of Uzbekistan has always reflected the spirit of the times; it has always embodied the tendencies of occurring in different epochs. Today, intangible cultural heritage of Uzbekistan is multidimensional and multi-genre one, which is rich in terms of content and

means of expression. It also rests firmly on the best traditions of the past, and represents true spirit and character of modernity.

Two aspects of historical and cultural process, namely, creation of the common and discovery of the national and inimitable, are the main features of the art in Uzbekistan. Thus, it is possible to speak about specific features and common features. However, strong ties with rich and original cultural heritage, synthesis with historically determined objective laws, vast international linkages and exchanges became incontestable law of development of art; became the factor, speeding up the process of renewal of national styles, of development of skills. And life, artistic practice, integrity of traditions existing – these all assure that the more national culture is linked with other cultures, the more intensive it absorbs the features of spiritual and artistic experience of other nations (who acquired international, intercultural and interspiritual importance), the faster and more effectively it evolves. And by so doing it makes a huge contribution to the enrichment of spiritual life of the own society (and even of the whole humanity).

Intangible cultural heritage is an essential component of artistic performance culture of present time, its specific attribute. And today, having widened its scope of influence, it is now not just an “attachment” to the modern culture of Uzbekistan, but rather its key element.