



## Ethnic and Local Characteristics of Men's Traditional Clothing in the Khorezm Oasis

Bahtiyor Norov

Urgench State University, Uzbekistan

[Bahtiyor.orov@gmail.com](mailto:Bahtiyor.orov@gmail.com)

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17969476>

---

### **Abstract**

This article provides a detailed ethnographic analysis of men's traditional clothing in the Khorezm oasis, emphasizing its ethnic, social, and environmental dimensions. Particular attention is paid to headwear and outer garments as key indicators of local identity, age hierarchy, and social respect. The study combines a critical analysis of classical ethnographic and historical literature with the author's long-term field research conducted in various districts of Khorezm between 1995 and 2017. The findings demonstrate that despite significant socio-economic changes during the twentieth century, many traditional elements of men's clothing have been preserved in ceremonial contexts and continue to function as symbols of cultural continuity.

**Keywords:** *Traditional Clothing; Khorezm; Men's Costume; Skullcap; Chogirma; Chapan; Ethnography*

### **Introduction**

Traditional clothing represents a complex cultural system through which societies express values related to identity, morality, social hierarchy, and worldview. Garments function not merely as protection from environmental conditions but also as visual markers that communicate information about a person's age, gender, marital status, profession, and belonging to a particular community. In many traditional societies, clothing serves as a non-verbal language that regulates social interaction and reinforces collective norms.

Ethnographic scholarship has long emphasized that traditional costumes should be studied within their historical, economic, and ecological contexts. Researchers typically classify clothing by gender, age group, seasonal use, social function, and the specific parts of the body they cover, such as headwear, outer

garments, undergarments, and footwear (Ismailov, 1978; Shaniyazov & Ismailov, 1981). Such classifications allow scholars to trace both continuity and transformation in material culture over time.

In the Khorezm oasis, men's traditional clothing evolved under the influence of harsh climatic conditions, irrigated agriculture, livestock breeding, and long-standing trade connections. The oasis's geographic isolation, combined with its role as a historical crossroads, contributed to the formation of distinctive local styles. Men's attire in Khorezm consists of a complex set of elements, including headwear, shirts, trousers, outer robes, belts, and footwear, each of which carries functional as well as symbolic significance.

This article aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of men's traditional clothing in the Khorezm oasis from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. The study is based on a synthesis of written ethnographic sources and extensive field materials collected by the author in various districts of Khorezm between 1995 and 2017. By combining historical evidence with oral testimonies, the article seeks to reveal how traditional clothing reflects social relations, economic status, and cultural identity in the oasis.

### ***Headwear and Its Cultural Significance***

Headwear held a central position in the traditional male costume of the Khorezm oasis. It was widely regarded as a symbol of dignity, honor, and moral integrity. Oral testimonies collected during fieldwork emphasize that appearing in public without headwear was considered socially inappropriate, particularly for elderly men and respected members of the community (Field records, Khiva, 2004). In many households, men continued to wear light caps even during rest or sleep, reflecting deeply rooted cultural norms.

Among the various forms of headwear, skullcaps occupied a special place. They varied in shape, size, and decorative patterns depending on age and social status. Younger men preferred lighter and more simply decorated skullcaps, while older men tended to wear darker and more conservative designs. Such distinctions reinforced age hierarchy and social order within the community (Ismailov, 1978).

The most distinctive type of headwear in Khorezm is the chogirma, a fur hat that clearly reflects regional specificity. Ethnographic sources describe several types of chogirma, differentiated by the type of fur, height, and method of preparation (Zadyhina & Sazonova, 1979). Field data indicate that certain forms of chogirma were associated with wealth and prestige, while simpler versions were worn for everyday use. Environmental conditions, particularly cold winters and strong winds, contributed to the long-term preservation of fur headwear in the oasis (Muravev, 1822).

### ***Shirts and Lightweight Garments***

Men's shirts constituted the basic layer of traditional clothing and were worn by all age groups. In the Khorezm oasis, shirts differed in cut, collar shape, and fabric quality. Two main types were widespread: shirts with straight shoulder collars and those with front-cut collars. Locally produced cotton fabrics, often with striped patterns, were commonly used, reflecting the region's developed textile traditions (Ismailov, 1978).

Lightweight garments such as the yaktak were especially important during the hot summer months. The loose cut and wide sleeves of these garments provided comfort and ventilation. Field records show that the yaktak remained popular well into the twentieth century, even after the introduction of factory-

made clothing (Field records, Yangiarik, 2000). The persistence of such garments demonstrates the adaptability of traditional clothing to environmental conditions.

### ***Outerwear and Seasonal Clothing***

Outer garments played a crucial role in protecting the body from climatic extremes and also served as markers of social status. Men's outerwear in Khorezm included garments such as don, chapan, chakman, and postin. These items were typically loose-fitting, open-fronted, and designed for layered wear. Materials and decorative elements varied depending on season, age, and economic standing.

Historical sources indicate that Khorezmian outer garments were widely known beyond the oasis due to active textile production and trade networks. Robes produced in Khiva were valued for their durability and aesthetic qualities and were exported to neighboring regions (Ivanov, 1940). The chakman, often made from camel wool, was particularly common among pastoral communities and reflects the close connection between clothing and economic activity. Archaeological findings from Koykirilgankala suggest that similar garments existed in the region as early as the fourth century BCE (Tolstov, 1967).

### ***Postin and Ritual Functions***

The postin, a fur coat made primarily from sheepskin, occupied a special place in Khorezmian material culture. Beyond its practical function as winter clothing, it played an important role in ritual contexts. Ethnographic and archival sources indicate that postins were often included in wedding ceremonies and gift exchanges, symbolizing prosperity and respect (Ivanov, 1940). Decorated postins were sometimes presented to honored guests and local authorities, highlighting their ceremonial significance.

### ***Belts and Symbolic Meaning***

Belts were an essential component of men's traditional clothing and carried symbolic meanings related to masculinity and social responsibility. In Khorezm, silk and woven belts of varying width were worn over shirts and outer garments. Some scholars trace the symbolic importance of belts to ancient religious traditions, including Zoroastrian practices described in the Avesta (Mahkam, 2001). The act of girding oneself with a belt was associated with maturity and readiness to fulfill social duties.

### ***Footwear Traditions***

Traditional footwear in the Khorezm oasis included mahsi, kavush, choriq, and leather boots such as oq adik. Footwear varied according to season, occupation, and social status. Camel-leather boots were particularly valued for their durability and resistance to harsh conditions. Over time, footwear styles changed, but many traditional forms continued to be worn in rural areas well into the twentieth century (Zakharova & Khojaeva, 1963).

### ***Children's Clothing***

Children's clothing differed from adult attire in both form and symbolic meaning. Garments were designed to be softer and more practical, allowing freedom of movement. Special items such as chilla

jubba were associated with early childhood and protective rituals. As children grew older, their clothing gradually adopted elements of adult dress, reflecting their integration into the social structure (Field records, Koshkopir, 2009).

### ***Socio-Economic Change and Modernization***

The early twentieth century marked a period of significant transformation in clothing practices due to socio-economic change, industrialization, and increased contact with Russian and European culture. European-style garments gradually entered everyday use, particularly in urban centers. Nevertheless, traditional clothing did not disappear entirely. Instead, it acquired new functions as festive, ceremonial, and symbolic attire, preserving cultural memory and continuity (Shaniyazov & Ismailov, 1981).

### ***Conclusion***

Men's traditional clothing of the Khorezm oasis reflects a complex interaction between environmental adaptation, economic activity, and cultural tradition. While sharing common features with neighboring Central Asian peoples, Khorezmian attire demonstrates distinct local characteristics, particularly in headwear and outer garments. Despite profound social and economic changes during the twentieth century, these traditional forms continue to play an important role in expressing ethnic identity and cultural heritage.

### ***References***

- Ismailov, H. (1978). *Traditional Uzbek costumes (late 19th–early 20th centuries)*. Tashkent, Uzbekistan: Fan.
- Ivanov, P. P. (1940). *Archive of the Khivan khans of the 19th century*. Leningrad, USSR.
- Muravev, N. (1822). *Travel to Turkmenia and Khiva in 1819 and 1820 (Vols. 1–2)*. Moscow, Russia.
- Shaniyazov, K. Sh., & Ismailov, Kh. I. (1981). *Ethnographic sketches of the material culture of Uzbeks*. Tashkent, Uzbekistan: Fan.
- Zadyhina, K. L., & Sazonova, M. V. (1979). Men's clothing of the Uzbeks of Khorezm. In *Costumes of Central Asian nations* (pp. 153–165). Moscow, USSR: Nauka.
- Field records. (1995–2017). Khorezm oasis, Uzbekistan. Unpublished materials.

### ***Copyrights***

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.