

THE CARPET COLLECTIONS OF THE STATE MUSEUM OF HISTORY OF UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract

This article examines the history of the formation, composition, and scholarly significance of the carpet collection preserved at the State Museum of History of Uzbekistan. It analyzes the process through which the collection was formed on the basis of ethnographic expeditions, acquisitions, and other sources, while also revealing its geographical scope and its place within the museum holdings. Furthermore, the study evaluates the various types of carpets and carpet-related artifacts included in the collection, their regional attribution, and their scholarly value for the study of the traditional carpet-weaving culture of the peoples of Central Asia. The findings demonstrate that this collection constitutes an important source for research in the fields of museum studies, ethnography, and art history. Moreover, it occupies a significant place in the preservation of cultural heritage, scholarly documentation, cataloguing, and the public dissemination of museum collections.

Keywords

State Museum of History of Uzbekistan; carpet collection; Central Asian carpets; ethnographic heritage; carpet weaving; scholarly research.

Introduction. The carpet collections of the State Museum of History of Uzbekistan constitute an important component of the museum's holdings, preserving unique museum objects that reflect the carpet-weaving traditions, artistic aesthetics, and historical and cultural heritage of Uzbekistan and the peoples of Central Asia as a whole. The collection was gradually formed through ethnographic expeditions, acquisitions, donations, and objects transferred to the museum by state institutions. The carpets preserved in the collection represent not only examples of decorative and applied arts but also valuable scholarly sources for studying the ethnocultural, historical, and social development of the region. Since the independence of Uzbekistan, particular attention has been devoted to the

restoration, preservation, and promotion of cultural heritage. The country's expanding economic, social, and cultural cooperation within the international community has created new opportunities for preserving traditional arts and promoting them as an integral part of world cultural heritage. In this regard, traditional carpet weaving occupies a significant place among the nation's artistic and cultural achievements. The importance of preserving and promoting cultural heritage has also been reinforced at the state level. In particular, Objective 42 of the "Uzbekistan-2030" Strategy, approved by Presidential Decree No. PF-158 of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated 11 September 2023, "On the Uzbekistan-2030 Strategy," identifies the further improvement of activities related to the protection, scholarly study, and popularization of cultural heritage as one of the country's strategic priorities [2]. The principal measures envisaged under this objective include:

- Digitization of archival materials. More than 3,000 historical and cultural materials preserved in the archives of the Institute of Art Studies and the Institute of Uzbek Language, Literature and Folklore will be converted into digital formats. This initiative aims not only to ensure their long-term preservation but also to improve public accessibility and facilitate scholarly research.

- International promotion of intangible cultural heritage. Uzbekistan plans to nominate at least three elements of its unique intangible cultural heritage for inscription on UNESCO's international lists, thereby enhancing their international recognition and safeguarding. In addition, more than thirty elements of intangible cultural heritage are scheduled for comprehensive scholarly investigation to reveal their historical and cultural significance.

- Preservation of cultural heritage sites. The strategy provides for the conservation of 158 cultural heritage sites of archaeological, architectural, and historical importance, ensuring their protection, restoration, and transmission to future generations.

- Development of museum activities and increasing public access. By 2030, the annual number of museum visitors in Uzbekistan is expected to reach five million. At the same time, more than 2.5 million museum objects are planned to be digitized, improving their preservation, documentation, accessibility, and presentation through digital platforms.

The implementation of these measures is intended not only to ensure the preservation of Uzbekistan's cultural heritage but also to strengthen its international promotion. Furthermore, comprehensive scholarly research, documentation, and public dissemination of cultural heritage will contribute to its wider recognition as an integral part of world cultural heritage. Within this

framework, the carpet collections preserved at the State Museum of History of Uzbekistan represent an important source for the study, preservation, cataloguing, and popularization of the traditional carpet-weaving culture of Central Asia.

Materials and Methods. The present study is based primarily on the carpet collection preserved at the **State Museum of History of Uzbekistan**. The research draws upon museum inventory books, scientific passports (object records), collection documentation, acquisition records, expedition reports, archival sources, and scholarly publications related to carpet weaving and museum collections.

The study was conducted using an integrated methodological approach that combines the principles of museum studies, ethnography, history, and art history. At the initial stage, the carpets in the collection were subjected to inventory analysis and scientific classification. The museum objects were systematically classified according to their geographical provenance, chronological attribution, function, constituent materials, weaving techniques, dimensions, ornamental composition, and state of preservation. This approach made it possible to determine the composition and structure of the collection, as well as to identify its regional characteristics.

During the research, the scientific passports (object records), inventory entries, and collection documentation of the museum objects were thoroughly examined in order to verify their authenticity, provenance, and scholarly attribution. In museum practice, scientific passports constitute the principal source for the preparation of scholarly catalogues, the scientific interpretation of museum collections, and the development of exhibitions based on scientific principles. They also serve as an essential reference for research in ethnography, art history, archaeology, and related disciplines [12, p. 156].

The historical and comparative-historical methods were employed to investigate the formation of the museum's carpet collection. These methods facilitated the identification of the principal stages in the development of the collection and enabled a comparative analysis of museum documentation with previously published scholarly studies and archival sources. In addition, descriptive and typological analyses were applied to identify the characteristic features of individual carpet groups and to assess their historical, cultural, and scholarly significance.

The methodological framework of this study was further enhanced through the analysis of theoretical and practical materials presented during the international seminar-training for Central Asian conservators organized by the **Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures, University of Chicago**, and hosted by the **State Museum of History of Uzbekistan**. The contemporary approaches to the scientific

documentation, description, and study of museum collections introduced during the programme were critically evaluated and adapted to the objectives of the present research.

The combination of these methodological approaches enabled a comprehensive examination of the history of the formation, composition, geographical distribution, and scholarly significance of the carpet collection preserved at the **State Museum of History of Uzbekistan**.

Literature Review. Among the scholars who made a substantial contribution to the scientific study of the carpet collections preserved at the **State Museum of History of Uzbekistan**, **Valentina Georgievna Moshkova** (hereafter **V. G. Moshkova**) occupies a prominent place. V. G. Moshkova (1902–1952) was a distinguished scholar whose research encompassed history, ethnography, and art history. She devoted particular attention to the study of the traditional crafts of Central Asia, especially carpet weaving, making a significant contribution to the development of carpet studies in the region [3, p. 83]. During her work within the handicraft cooperative system, Moshkova conducted extensive research on carpet weaving and compiled a substantial body of documentary material, describing more than 900 examples of carpet products.

Her investigations of museum carpet collections, together with extensive fieldwork in carpet-producing regions and close collaboration with traditional carpet weavers, enabled her to acquire profound and comprehensive knowledge of the carpet-weaving traditions of Central Asia. It is no exaggeration to state that, among carpet scholars of her time, there was no specialist with a deeper understanding of Central Asian carpets.

In 1948, Moshkova began the systematic processing of the materials she had collected and planned to dedicate her doctoral dissertation to the subject "**Carpets of the Peoples of Central Asia**". Unfortunately, due to a serious illness, she was unable to complete this work [4, p. 5].

During her lifetime, only two of her studies were published: "**The Tribal Gul in Turkmen Carpets**" [5] and "**Julkhirs**" [6]. The latter is particularly noteworthy because it examines two ancient Uzbek carpets discovered by the author in a teahouse in Samarkand in 1945. These carpets were subsequently acquired by the **State Museum of History of Uzbekistan** in 1947. Moshkova identified them as **julkhirs (jilkhirs)** – a little-studied and scarcely documented category of pile textiles traditionally woven by semi-nomadic Uzbek communities engaged in pastoralism in the Bukhara and Samarkand regions [7].

Following her death, two studies based on the materials she had collected on Uzbek carpet weaving between 1949 and 1950 were published in the book album **Folk Decorative Art of Soviet Uzbekistan**, in the chapter entitled "**Carpets**" [8; 9]. The first edition contains detailed descriptions of the Samarkand carpets preserved in the **State Museum of History of Uzbekistan** [8, pp. 86–99].

Throughout her scholarly career, Moshkova carried out comprehensive research on traditional handicrafts, particularly carpet weaving. Her publications provide detailed information on weaving techniques, ornamental motifs, colour schemes, and the historical development of carpets across different regions of Central Asia. Owing to the breadth and depth of her research, her works continue to serve as one of the principal scholarly references for the study of Central Asian carpets.

Moshkova's scholarly legacy continued to receive considerable recognition after her death. Following the systematic examination and editorial preparation of her manuscripts and archival materials, her fundamental monograph **Carpets of the Peoples of Central Asia** was published [4]. The preparation of the manuscript for publication, including its scientific editing and organization, was undertaken by **Anna Sergeyevna Morozova**, Candidate of Historical Sciences and researcher at the Institute of Art Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR. Morozova substantially revised the manuscript, adapting it to scholarly publication standards, clarifying individual sections, and supplementing the text with explanatory notes. Consequently, several researchers have argued that, in view of her significant scholarly contribution, **A. S. Morozova** should be regarded as a co-author of the monograph [18, p. 257].

Another scholar who made an exceptional contribution to the study of the ethnographic collections preserved at the **State Museum of History of Uzbekistan** was **N. S. Sadykova**. After serving as Director of the museum from 1960 to 1986, she headed its Department of Ethnography and devoted herself entirely to scholarly research. N. S. Sadykova paid particular attention to enriching the museum collections with objects reflecting the everyday life and traditional crafts of the Uzbek people and organized numerous ethnographic expeditions throughout the republic [10, p. 112]. She personally led several expeditions to the Fergana Valley, through which valuable collections of traditional costumes, headdresses, embroideries, coppersmithing objects, and other ethnographic materials were assembled. In her study devoted to the history and composition of the museum's ethnographic collections [11], she provided comprehensive descriptions of collections illustrating the traditional way of life of the Uzbek people.

Seeking to develop a comprehensive understanding of museum practice in Uzbekistan, N. S. Sadykova also investigated the history of museum development from the establishment of the first museums in Turkestan onward. The results of this research were synthesized in her fundamental monograph **Museum Practice in Uzbekistan** [12], which presents valuable information on the establishment of the museum and the formation of its collections. The publication also includes photographs and brief descriptions of numerous ethnographic objects preserved in the museum.

An important contribution to the study of traditional crafts is the collective monograph **Craftsmanship in the Life of the Peoples of Uzbekistan in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries**, published in 1986 [13]. The volume examines the historical development of handicrafts, the regional characteristics of craft products, their functions in everyday life, production techniques, and the stylistic features of ornamental decoration. The chapter entitled "**Carpets and Carpet Products**" contains descriptions of the carpet collections preserved at the **State Museum of History of Uzbekistan** [13, pp. 56–59]. The publication is richly illustrated with rare archival photographs from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as photographs of unique handicraft objects from the museum's ethnographic collections. In addition, it includes a glossary explaining traditional craft terminology used in Uzbekistan during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

A major milestone in the study of Uzbekistan's cultural heritage was the publication of the multi-volume scholarly series **Cultural Heritage of Uzbekistan** [14]. This large-scale research project investigates the cultural heritage of Uzbekistan on the basis of collections preserved in museums both within the country and abroad. Volume 27 of the series is devoted to the ethnographic collections of the **State Museum of History of Uzbekistan**, presenting information on the formation of these collections, the activities of the scholars who assembled them, and photographic documentation of museum objects. The chapter "**Carpets and Carpet-Weaving Products**" provides a concise history of the museum's carpet collection and reproduces photographs of selected carpets preserved in the museum [14, pp. 218–236].

Overall, the existing scholarly literature demonstrates that the carpet collection of the **State Museum of History of Uzbekistan** has been examined from ethnographic, art historical, and museological perspectives. Nevertheless, despite the significant contributions of previous researchers, comprehensive studies devoted specifically to the formation, development, composition, and present state of the museum's carpet collection remain limited. This article seeks to address this

gap by providing an integrated analysis of the history and scholarly significance of the museum's carpet collection.



V.G. Moshkova [17]



A.S. Morozova [19]

Results. The ethnographic collection of the State Museum of History of Uzbekistan comprises a wide range of museum objects reflecting the traditional customs, national costumes, and everyday life of the peoples of Central Asia. The majority of these objects were acquired through ethnographic field expeditions conducted throughout the region since the establishment of the museum. Most of these expeditions were organized and carried out by the museum's own research staff. In addition, objects exhibited during cultural exhibitions dedicated to the traditions of various ethnic groups were subsequently incorporated into the museum's ethnographic collection.

The study of the culture of the peoples of Central Asia was significantly advanced by prominent ethnographers and Orientalists, including A. A. Divaev, M. S. Andreev, Y. M. Peshchereva, M. F. Gavrilov, V. G. Moshkova, A. S. Morozova, T. Mirgiyozov, M. Bikzhanova, A. K. Borovkov, Sh. Inogomov, and O. A. Sukhareva [14, p. 6]. The collections assembled by these scholars laid the scientific foundation for the systematic development of the museum's ethnographic holdings and substantially contributed to the comprehensive study of the material culture of Uzbekistan and Central Asia as a whole [13, p. 18]. The ethnographic expeditions focused on the historical and ethnographic investigation of the ethnic composition, traditional economic activities, everyday life, and cultural practices of Uzbeks and other peoples residing in the territory of Uzbekistan. Particular attention was devoted to documenting the geographical distribution of traditional crafts, production techniques, and manufacturing practices.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the establishment of the Soviet political system brought profound ideological and methodological changes to historical and ethnographic research. Under these circumstances, increased attention was devoted to the ethnographic collections for several reasons. First, the rapid spread of socialist culture created a risk that many traditional customs and household objects of the indigenous population would disappear. Second, the museum was expected to represent not only the ethnographic heritage of Uzbekistan but also that of all the peoples of Central Asia. Third, the existing ethnographic department required substantial reorganization because its collections lacked scientific systematization. This situation was clearly described by the distinguished ethnographer M. S. Andreev, who was appointed Head of the Department of Ethnography by the Committee for Museums and the Protection of Antiquities, Works of Art, and Nature of the Turkestan Republic (Turkkomstaris). He observed:

"At present, the ethnographic department of the museum consists of a random assortment of a relatively small number of miscellaneous objects that only confuse visitors. Rather than resembling the collection of a scientific institution, its exhibits are more akin to the disorderly stock of a junk shop." [1]

During this period, the museum functioned as the Central Asian Central Museum, a status that directly influenced its acquisition policy. As a consequence, systematic efforts were initiated to collect carpets and carpet-related objects representing the peoples of Central Asia, to classify them scientifically, and to incorporate them into the museum collections.

Expeditionary collecting was planned several years in advance and closely coordinated with the museum's exhibition objectives, research priorities, and collection development strategy. Before each expedition, a detailed acquisition schedule was prepared outlining the categories of objects to be collected. During the acquisition of ethnographic collections, every object was documented and studied within the historical and cultural context of the respective ethnic group. Individual ethnographic themes—including housing, clothing, traditional occupations, and family life—were investigated through historical field research conducted in their original cultural environment [16, p. 158].

One of the earliest acquisitions of carpet collections dates to 1930, when the museum researchers T. Mirgiyozov and I. I. Golovin (a carpet artist) conducted an expedition to Ashgabat. As a result of this expedition, a collection consisting of the decorated fronts of chuvals (storage bags), sacks, prayer rugs, ensi (door rugs used to cover the entrance of yurts), decorative carpets suspended above house entrances, and other ethnographic objects was transferred to the museum collection.

Another significant acquisition originated from an expedition conducted in 1927 by M. I. Sheverdin and I. G. Isakovich among the Tekke Turkmens of Ashgabat and the Yomud Turkmens inhabiting the right bank of the Atrek River. The collected materials included men's and women's traditional clothing, headdresses, footwear, jewellery, household utensils, carpets, and various tools and equipment associated with carpet production.



Symbol of the Central Asian General Museum

Discussion. The ethnographic collections of the **State Museum of History of Uzbekistan** represent a systematically organized body of museum objects reflecting the material and intangible cultural heritage of specific ethnic communities. Owing to many years of scientific research, collection development, and active public participation, the museum has established a substantial ethnographic collection of considerable scholarly value. At present, the museum's ethnographic holdings comprise nearly **18,000 objects** organized into **114 collections**, documenting various aspects of the traditional life and culture not only of Uzbekistan but also of the peoples of Central Asia. A distinctive feature of these collections is their classification according to ethnographic principles rather than by the names of individual ethnic groups, which distinguishes the museum's collection management system from that of many other museums in Uzbekistan.

The carpet collection occupies a prominent place within the museum's ethnographic holdings. Carpet weaving has deep historical roots in Central Asia, and numerous examples dating from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are preserved in museums throughout Uzbekistan, particularly in the **State Museum of History of Uzbekistan**, which houses one of the country's richest carpet collections.

The collection encompasses a wide variety of carpet types and carpet-related textiles, including long-pile carpets, flat-woven rugs (*sholcha*), *arabi* carpets, storage bags (*torva*), saddlebags (*khurjun*), and other woven products. It also includes carpets used as animal coverings, **ensi** (door rugs used to cover the entrance of yurts), small threshold rugs, decorative floor coverings, and prayer rugs (*joynamaz*). As in many other Muslim societies, prayer rugs constitute an important component of the collection and are distinguished by the depiction of a **mihrab** arch in the upper part of the composition. In addition to carpets produced in Central Asia, the collection also preserves examples originating from Iran, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, and Kashgar, illustrating the historical cultural and commercial connections between these regions.

The present composition of the carpet collection is largely the result of systematic ethnographic expeditions conducted by the museum throughout the twentieth century across Uzbekistan and neighbouring republics. These expeditions were led by prominent museum researchers and specialists in the history and culture of Central Asia, including **V. G. Moshkova**, **A. S. Morozova**, **T. Mirgiyozov**, and **K. Tursunaliev**. As a result of these field investigations, a significant number of carpets and carpet-related objects were collected, scientifically documented, and incorporated into the museum's collections. Today, these materials are primarily preserved in **Collections Nos. 9 and 15**, while additional examples are distributed among several mixed ethnographic collections [14, p. 218].

The analysis of the collection demonstrates that carpet weaving in Central Asia developed not merely as a practical household craft associated with pastoral life but also as an important form of artistic expression reflecting the aesthetic values, cultural identity, and historical traditions of the region's peoples. Differences in weaving techniques, ornamental designs, colour palettes, and structural characteristics clearly indicate the existence of distinctive regional carpet-weaving traditions. Consequently, the study of museum carpet collections provides valuable evidence for understanding the historical development of traditional craftsmanship, patterns of cultural interaction, and the evolution of regional artistic schools.

Particular attention should be paid to the structure of the museum's carpet collections. **Collection No. 9** contains objects representing the material culture of the Turkmens, including decorated fronts of **chuvals** (storage bags), sacks, prayer rugs, **ensi** (yurt door rugs), decorative carpets suspended above house entrances, and related ethnographic materials. **Collection No. 15**, entitled "**Carpet Products of the Peoples of Central Asia**," includes carpets, exterior yurt entrance curtains,

small rugs, **garmich** threshold rugs, decorative floral carpets, and prayer rugs. The geographical provenance of these objects covers the principal carpet-weaving centres of **Turkmenistan** (Mary, Tagtabazar, Gökdepe, Kerki, Kyzyl-Arvat, and Dashoguz) and **Uzbekistan** (Khorezm, Kashkadarya, Surkhandarya, Samarkand, and Fergana). In addition, the collection contains examples of Kyrgyz and Persian carpets, further enhancing its regional diversity and scholarly significance.

The diversity, provenance, and historical context of the carpet collection confirm that it constitutes not only an important museum holding but also a valuable primary source for research in **museum studies, ethnography, art history, and the history of traditional craftsmanship**. Furthermore, the collection provides substantial evidence for investigating the evolution of carpet-weaving traditions and the cultural interactions among the peoples of Central Asia, thereby contributing to the preservation and scholarly interpretation of the region's rich cultural heritage.

Conclusion. The carpet collection of the **State Museum of History of Uzbekistan** represents one of the most significant museum collections illustrating the carpet-weaving heritage of Central Asia in a comprehensive manner. The formation of this collection reflects the museum's systematic acquisition policy and includes carpets and carpet-related objects originating not only from Uzbekistan but also from Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, Kashgar, Iran, the Caucasus, and Azerbaijan, demonstrating its extensive geographical coverage. Such regional diversity provides a valuable scholarly foundation for the comparative study of carpet-weaving traditions, artistic schools, technological characteristics, and cultural interactions throughout Central Asia and its neighbouring regions.

The collection represents not only an important component of the material cultural heritage reflecting the historical development of traditional carpet weaving but also a valuable primary source for research in the fields of ethnography, art history, museum studies, and cultural heritage preservation. Its scientific significance extends beyond the documentation of traditional craftsmanship, offering important evidence for investigating the regional diversity, technological evolution, and artistic characteristics of Central Asian carpet production.

Therefore, the carpet collection of the **State Museum of History of Uzbekistan** should be regarded as one of the principal reference collections for the study of the history of carpet weaving in Uzbekistan and Central Asia. Furthermore, it provides an essential basis for identifying regional carpet-weaving schools, advancing the scholarly documentation of museum collections, and promoting future initiatives in the digitization, cataloguing, and wider dissemination of museum collections. In

this respect, the collection possesses considerable scholarly, cultural, and practical significance for the preservation and interpretation of the carpet-weaving heritage of Central Asia.

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