

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF THE PARANJA: FROM ANCIENT FARAJI TO CENTRAL ASIAN VEIL TRADITIONS

*O'zbekiston amaliy san'at va hunarmandchilik
tarixi davlat muzeyi, Amaliy san'at va
etnografiya ilmiy bo'limi ilmiy xodimi*

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Annotation: This article examines the historical development of the paranja, a traditional women's garment of Central Asia. Based on archaeological and historical evidence, it traces its origin from the ancient faraji to later Islamic and Soviet forms. The study highlights the paranja as both a cultural and social symbol, reflecting changes in religion, aesthetics, and women's status throughout Central Asian history.

Аннотация: В данной статье рассматривается историческое развитие *паранжи* — традиционной женской одежды Центральной Азии. На основе археологических и исторических данных прослеживается её происхождение от древнего *фараджи* до более поздних исламских и советских форм. Исследование подчеркивает, что *паранжа* являлась не только элементом одежды, но и культурным и социальным символом, отражающим изменения в религии, эстетике и положении женщин на протяжении истории Центральной Азии.

Key words: Paranja, faraji, Central Asia, traditional Dress, archaeology — women's Costume, culture, history.

Ключевые слова: Паранжа, фараджи, Центральная Азия, традиционная одежда, Археология, женский костюм, культура, история.

The general literary terms used for items that meet human clothing needs are “clothing” and “clothes,” while in colloquial usage expressions such as “light,” “light-weight,” “clothes-head,” and “dress” may also appear. Traditional attire developed over a long historical period, shaped by the geographical environment of a nation, its economy, social structure, cultural practices, ethnic composition, and other factors. The culture of clothing and dress has followed a lengthy path of evolution and refinement. As a result, national and traditional styles emerged that reflected people's lifestyles and production methods. A nation's cultural level can often be recognized through its clothing habits, since dress reveals taste, material and spiritual values, and even occupation. From the moment concepts such as modesty, dignity, and self-respect arose, humans began the practice of dressing. Women were the first to adopt clothing, which is why adornment and dress hold a central place in female life. Clothing culture is linked to sex, age, season, nationality, customs, profession, time, and historical

development. Dress styles vary across generations, reflecting differences in content and form. Beyond appearance, clothing serves practical functions: it provides warmth or coolness as needed, positively influences both body and mind, and helps maintain health. In his work “*There Is No Future Without Historical Memory*”, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, emphasizes: “Every nation, while developing its national values in line with its own goals and aspirations and on the basis of the achievements of universal progress, strives to elevate its spiritual world. In this process, the issue of historical memory acquires special importance. That is to say, history becomes genuine only when the sense of historical memory is fully restored, and the path traversed by the people—with all its successes and victories, losses and sacrifices, joys and sorrows—is studied impartially and truthfully.”

In the modern states of Central Asia, formerly part of the USSR, there was also the custom of women concealing their face and figure. For this purpose, special cloaks existed. The most well-known was the *paranja* — a Muslim woman’s veil for wearing outdoors. It was spread primarily among the urban Uzbek and Tajik populations. In the 19th century and up to the 1920s, the *paranja* was obligatory for women of all ages — from girls of marriageable age to old women. Girls wore *paranj*as made of red fabric or red-and-white stripes, and instead of the *chachvan* used white muslin. Among village women (except those from wealthy families), the *paranja* was replaced by light summer robes with various names depending on the locality, which were worn over the head but without a net. This could be any robe, often even a child’s one. The name of this garment is also of interest. There was no single name for it, nor were its forms identical among different Muslim peoples. What is meant are garments covering a woman from head to toe, combined with face veils. In Egypt these were the *khagara* and *milaya*, made from one or two pieces of fabric, with a *burqu’* (veil) for the face; among the Turks — the *feredje* in the form of a robe with a *yashmak* for the face, or a sleeveless cloak *çarşaf* with *peçe*; among the Persians — the *chador*, resembling a double skirt, the outer part of which was thrown over the head, with a *ruband* of white muslin or a black mesh *peçe* for the face, together with trousers and socks — *chakhchur*; among the Afghans — the *chatri*, made of wide, densely pleated pieces of fabric attached to a cap in the form of a cloak with an opening for the eyes covered with muslin, and with trousers and socks, etc. Urban women used such clothing daily, while in rural areas it was usually worn in well-off families and used for long trips, visits to the bazaar, and so on. According to O. A. Sukhareva, the Uzbek word *paranji* and the Tajik *faranchi* are distorted forms of the word *faraji*, meaning “robe.” Among the Pamir peoples, in Khuf and Shughnan, this term has preserved its original form — *faraji* — but it refers not to a type of clothing, but to the way of wearing men’s garments draped over the shoulders. The orientalist R. P. Dozy, in his dictionary of Arabic

clothing terms, reports that the first mention of the *faraji* as a long outer garment reaching the heels, made of colored cloth, silk, or linen, with wide and long sleeves often decorated with embroidery and precious stones, appears in 9th-century sources. He associates its origin with Egypt, from where, according to Ibn Battuta (14th c.), the *faraji* spread to distant lands. The commonality of clothing cuts in Central Asia and Khorasan during the Timurid period (15th century); certain differences in clothing design in the states of the Shaybanids and the Safavids (16th century).

In the 14th century, as miniatures show, a type of men's clothing was developed called *joma*: a long robe usually fastened with ties at the side, under the right armpit, with short (sometimes long) sleeves, often embroidered on the chest and shoulders. It was worn over a shirt and trousers, but more often over another long robe, the *penšaz*, of the same form but with long sleeves and a front closure. Women's *joma* was almost identical and differed only in having a slit down the front, which was often left unfastened, slightly revealing the fabric of the underdress. Under the early Timurids, this fashion remained unchanged. By the end of the 14th century, both men's and women's costume saw the development of a special type of bright cloak or fur coat lined with light-colored fur, thrown over the shoulders so that the very long sleeves, almost to the middle of the calves, hung freely down. We note such garments in the miniatures of the manuscript of Khodja Kermani, kept in the British Museum, illustrated by the famous master Junaid Sultani in 1396; in miniatures of the Shiraz school from the *Anthology* of 1410 (Gulbenkian Collection) and the *Anthology* of 1420 (Berlin, State Museum). In the early 15th century, this fashion also existed in Herat, as shown by miniatures of the so-called Herat school: the *Khamsa* of Nizami (State Hermitage), painted in 1430/31; the *Mi'raj-Nama* of 1436; the *Shah-Nama* of 1440, and others.

Essentially, this was already the fully developed type and cut of the *faraji*, the use of which we note both among men and women. Meanwhile, in women's Central Asian clothing, the *faraji* had its own ancient prototype. A rich mantle with long hanging sleeves, thrown over the shoulders above a dress, is a common feature of terracotta figurines found in the ancient settlements of Samarkand and its surroundings. These figurines depict the goddess Anahita, patroness of waters and the fertile forces of nature. According to the *Avesta*, whose earliest layers were formed in Central Asia, Anahita was portrayed as a richly dressed maiden. Undoubtedly, her costume reflected the local cut and style of clothing—and in this sense, the terracotta figurines of Anahita contain valuable evidence of the existence of a rich upper women's mantle, which in the feudal era was transformed, modified in accordance with new tastes, yet always retained its ancient local foundation.

In the mid-15th century, as shown by miniatures of the *Shah-Nama* from the Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences (inv. no. B-822), in both men's and women's costume a wide upper robe-cloak with extremely long sleeves became widespread. It was worn sometimes with the arms through the sleeves, sometimes simply thrown over the shoulders. This persisted up until the end of the 15th–early 16th century, as evidenced by miniatures of the *Khamisa* of Nizami of 1479/80 (State Public Library named after Saltykov-Shchedrin in Leningrad, inv. no. 337) and another *Khamisa* of 1502/3 (inv. no. 339). Judging by the memoirs of Vassifi, the *faraji* was usually worn as a mantle: "...he was dressed in a brocade *kaba*, and a *faraji* was thrown obliquely across his shoulders." In Iran, by the 1520s–1530s, the *faraji* underwent a certain evolution. Its long sleeves were cut diagonally about at the elbows, so that the lower part fell freely down. This type of cut is seen in the costumes in the miniatures of Nizami of 1525 (Metropolitan Museum), in the garments of the Prophet in the miniatures of the *History of the Twelve Imams* (State Public Library named after Saltykov-Shchedrin, inv. no. 312), partly executed, as was recently established by M. M. Dyakonov, by the famous artist Qasim-Ali during the reign of Shah Tahmasp (1524–1570). This particular form of the *faraji* came widely into use at the Indian court during the reign of Humayun (1526–1586). In Safavid miniature painting, it also appears in the 16th century.

As for Central Asia, men's and women's costume the use of the traditional *faraji* — with long, but uncut sleeves, sometimes worn simply as a mantle. Examples can be found in the miniatures of the *Shah-Nama* of 1556/57 (Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR, inv. no. 1811), executed by the Samarkand artist Muhammad-Murad for the Khiva ruler Ish-Muhammad-Sultan. It also appears in Central Asian miniatures later—even in the 17th century. Thus, the "paranja" of Central Asian women has as its ancient prototype the *faraji* — a ceremonial women's outer cloak, worn primarily as a mantle. This circumstance led already in the 16th century to the gradual transformation of the long, inconvenient sleeves into a purely decorative element. From the 18th century, in the era of late feudalism, when the *faraji* began to be worn over the head, the sleeves finally lost their practical function and degenerated into long strips, sewn, however, like real sleeves and fastened together at the back. The conservative character of late Central Asian feudalism had the harshest effect on the position of women. By this time the *faraji* had turned into street clothing that erased all individuality, hiding the woman from outside eyes. The evolution of the *chachvan* (a distortion of *chashm-band* — "band for the eyes") originally proceeded independently of the *faraji*. The custom of covering the face, extremely widespread in the East, is noted in works of visual art at least from the 15th century. However, this

tradition is even older, going back to Mongol customs. Let us recall the description of the attire of Mongol women by William of Rubruck: “Under their eyes they tie a piece of white cloth; these pieces hang down upon the chest.” One may suppose that the faces of Mongol queens were depicted in 14th-century miniatures uncovered mainly because of the artist’s desire to create a group portrait (cf. Rashid al-Din’s *Chronicles* of 1311, Paris National Library; Institute of Oriental Studies of the Uzbek SSR, inv. no. 1620, etc.), for which it was not considered improper to include the individual likenesses of noble ladies. As for various heroines of literary works — Firdawsi, Bidpai, Amir Khusraw, and others — in 14th-century miniatures they are shown with uncovered faces. The same is observed in miniatures of the first half of the 15th century. Meanwhile, in Clavijo’s descriptions of the festive dress of Timur’s harem queens it is stated that their faces were covered with transparent white fabric. Very interesting information is given about the women of Tabriz, who “go about entirely wrapped in white veils, with nets of black horsehair in front of their eyes; thus wrapped they walk, so that they cannot be recognized.” Thus, the horsehair net *chashm-band* existed in western Iran already at the very beginning of the 15th century (and therefore for some time before that). A costume with a black *chashm-band*, leaving only the eyes open, of the type described, can be noted in miniatures of the *Shah-Nama* of the mid-15th century (Institute of Oriental Studies, inv. no. C-822), judging by the style, belonging specifically to the western Iranian artistic circle.

Meanwhile, in the regions of Afghanistan and Central Asia, it seems, light white veils predominated, as in the attire of the Samarkand queens. In any case, in the reports of Chinese missions of the first half of the 15th century it is said that “the wives of the ruler of Samarkand wrap their heads with white silk cloth” and that Herat women “cover their heads with white cloth and leave only an opening for the eyes.” Undoubtedly, the Chinese would not have overlooked such a detail as a black horsehair *chashm-band*, had the women of Herat and Samarkand been using it. In some miniatures of the second half of the 15th–early 16th centuries, women indeed wear a transparent veil thrown over the head and falling down onto the shoulders (State Public Library named after Saltykov-Shchedrin, Nizami 1481/82, inv. no. 337; and 1502/3, inv. no. 339). Apparently, it was worn primarily when going outdoors, which is why in the verses of Navoi we read: “Oh, if only this slender cypress would appear in the street, oh, if only she would cast aside the veil from the world-adorning face...” An exceptionally interesting fact can be drawn from Babur’s *Memoirs*. Speaking of Princess Khanzada Begim, he writes: “[At that time] her face was still covered. According to Turkic custom, I was compelled to unveil her face.” Apparently, the practice of covering the face with a veil was a custom that took shape during the Timurid period, specifically under the conditions of refined urban culture, which

differed from the less strict requirements of the semi-nomadic Turkic way of life. O. A. Sukhareva regards this episode as one of the elements of the wedding ceremony. Miniatures show that in the 16th and 17th centuries the black horsehair net had not yet entered Central Asian daily life. Meanwhile, in the notes of F. Efremov (1784), it was already recorded that the women of Bukhara covered their faces with a net woven from horsehair and wore the *faradji*, “a woman’s robe, extending from head to heel, with narrow sleeves sewn together and thrown back, reaching below the calves.” It is noteworthy that in the 19th–20th centuries, as O. A. Sukhareva established, the production of horsehair *chachvans* was not carried out by Uzbek or Tajik artisans, but by wandering Gypsies (*Lyuli*). This serves as clear evidence of the foreign, introduced nature of this craft.

The wearing of the *chachvan* and *paranja* in the 18th century is undoubtedly linked to the major social upheavals caused by the crisis of that century. The conservative isolation of everyday life and the harsh feudal enslavement of women led to the creation of a costume that leveled individuality, one that was only superficially connected in its cut to the traditions of ancient local clothing. Thus, during the period of late Central Asian feudalism, the festive attire—its cut and style developed in the brilliant era of Ulugh Beg and Navoi—degenerates into its opposite. The bright ceremonial cloak-robe (*faradji*), once worn proudly over the shoulders, is transformed into a dull gray shapeless covering enveloping the figure from head to toe, while the light transparent veil, which hardly concealed the features of the face, was replaced by the grotesque, impenetrably black chashm-band.

Dozy notes that in Constantinople (Istanbul) during the period of the Ottoman Turks, women also wore the *faraji* — which was not the case at that time in Egypt or the Maghreb. He does not mention the Persian and Central Asian *faraji* at all. However, the term appears in Central Asian writings of the 15th–17th centuries. For instance, in Rashahat. In the work of the 19th-century English orientalist and Arabist E. W. Lane Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians, we also find the term *faragiyah* (in Egyptian dialect the fifth letter of the Arabic alphabet is pronounced as “g” instead of “j”) referring to outer garments made of linen in men’s dress in Egypt. Its distinctive feature was the absence of slits in the long sleeves, which extended below the wrists, unlike the upper garment called kaftan. It was worn mainly by men of scholarly professions. These data are also confirmed by T. P. Hughes, the author of the Dictionary of Islam, in which the term *farageeyeh* refers to a very long men’s garment worn in Egypt by people of certain professions.

By the 20th century, paranjas began to be made from fabrics of different quality and even of various colors. The outer part is made of kimhob, banaras, olacha and other fabrics, the border is embroidered and decorated with embroidered stitches, the lining is made of sateen, and the edges are made of blue, pink or sidirga silk. Two 25-cmlong vertical lines are woven together on both sides of the veil (pockets). From the ends of the branches, small bells are attached. Young women's paranjas were made of colored plush, velvet, and silk, decorated with embroidery and white braid. They were not treated with particular care (the situation changed somewhat when they began to be made from expensive fabrics). According to Sukhareva's observations, upon returning home, women would throw the paranja into a corner or hang it over a beam. Possibly, this reflected a superstitious attitude toward it as something that could bring misfortune. In Tashkent and Fergana, veils were popular and distinguished by their silk embroidery. Their style is similar to that of Samarkand, but the width of the collars is quite different. The Samarkand veil was similar to shape of the men's cloak of Kashkadarya. Half of the collar of the Bukhara burqa is sewn in a short form. In Bukhara and Samarkand, the burqa was made of black and floral fabrics without embroidery, only the edges and hems were decorated with stripes, red and white colors predominated. In Kashkadarya, women also wore jelak. Jelaks are sewn from cotton yarn without a lining. Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya women wore white and colorful jelaks in the summer season. In Khorezm, the composition of the paranji incorporates the "chit"(a type of fabric) chakmon model of the northern regions. The skirts are rectangular, the longest reaching to the skirts. Another aspect of the Khorezm veil that is different from others is its length (170- 180 cm) and unembroidered stitching.

According to O. A. Sukhareva, in earlier times women wore identical paranjas made of blue cotton alacha — a striped fabric — without replacing them for 30–40 years. Unlike other elements of costume, the paranja was not made at home. The production of this garment was handled by specialist women who worked both on commission for traders and for private customers. The black horsehair net (*chachvan*) was also not made at home — it was produced by Gypsies. In Bukhara and Samarkand, paranjas were sewn from a fabric called **benares**, in a narrow black-gray stripe, and decorated with black braid, sometimes with patterns along the hem, lapels, near the false pockets, at the collar, and at the ends of the "sleeves." Certain unwritten rules were observed in handling the paranja. When leaving the house, it was carried out of the room and only thrown over the head in the courtyard. The *chachvan* was carried in the hands and only put on at the gate — due to the superstitious fear that wearing the black net inside the home could bring misfortune to its inhabitants. A guest, upon entering a courtyard, immediately threw back the *chachvan*, while the hostess or members of the household would remove the *paranja* from her head — this was

considered a duty of politeness. Likewise, when the guest departed, someone from the household would put the *paranja* back onto her head.

“Paranji” is worn outside the house. The front side of the veil is covered with a mesh chachvan (chimmat, Tajik, kashmbandkoztosar). Researcher M. Asomiddinova noted that the word “veil” is derived from the Arabic *forajiya*, *farojatso*, and the term is the outer garment of religious people, scholars, and sultans made of expensive fabric. The scientist tries to connect the term veil to the Turkmen verb *pýrenchek*//*býrýnchak* – to cover up, and as evidence he cites the verb *büryndi* – put on, covered up, mentioned in the work “Devonilug'otitturk”. The same researcher quotes the following based on the opinions of ethnographer N.P. Lobacheva: “The Turkmen *ponzhak*, which was used as an outer garment in ancient times, later ceased to function as a garment and became a simple cover, its hems became thinner and a simple decoration. Its neck (the most important, the most accessible engraving) was sewn on the body, and the clasp in the armpit was preserved, and from this form the *paranchi* came from. The word *Paranji* refers to the mature stage of a woman in relation to her age. A woman in the married stage is indicated as [waduh] in Sugdian sources. This indicates that the word has a Sugdian, not Arabic, origin. That is, “*paranji*” means women's outerwear. There are examples of women in burqa-like clothing in historical, and in particular, archaeological sources. For example, in the murals of Bolaliktepa (Surkhondarya Oasis) monument of the Hephthalites (V-VI centuries), the cloth made of the finest woven cloth covered over the shoulders of the women participating in the banquet scene is the veil. Europe has been familiar with burqa-shaped outerwear since the time of Alexander the Great. Until then, there was no cover clothing in Europe. This kind of clothing was alien to the barbarians who destroyed Rome. From the time of the ancient caravan routes, later the Great Silk Road, in Europe, a silk over-the-shoulder garment that covered the horse's sari while riding a horse appeared in Europe.

Therefore, the explanations given in the Uzbek explanatory dictionary and various other dictionaries to the word “*paranji*”, which still exists in the Tajik and Uzbek languages, do not justify themselves etymologically because this word has a Sugdian origin. The function of the burqa as a women's street outerwear changed within the framework of Islamic culture in Central Asia. This was caused by the separation of women from men's society. The ethno-pedagogical aspect of the veil is that it was raised from the shoulder to the head under the condition that the woman did not show her open face, and began to serve to cover the woman's face from the view of the “non-mahram”. For this reason, “*paranji*” is understood as the garment covering the head. Even now, in some regions of Uzbekistan, veils are covered during ceremonies. But since women do not wear it in today's society, the burqa remained only in museums as

a historical-ethnographic relic (lat. relictum - remnant). According to other sources, paranji (Arabic faranji - a wide dress) is a Muslim women's cover, which together with chachvan formed an ensemble. According to the researchers, the burqa was originated in Egypt and later spread to other Eastern countries. The woman's face was covered by a black, thick, rectangular chachvan - chimmit, woven from horsehair. Chachvan, or chimmit, actually originated from the custom of covering the face, which is widespread in Eastern countries. Faraji, the predecessor of paranji, was considered men's clothing. The terracotta figurines found in the town of Afrosiyob in Samarkand can prove this. Buranji, which has an ancient basis, changed over the period time and became a women's dress. In the districts of Uzbekistan, burqas have their own distinctive features.

Wearing the *paranja* belonged to those prescriptions of Islam that ceased to be followed in the Soviet period. This was facilitated by the state's deliberate policy, which aimed at emancipating women, granting them equal rights with men (including in education), combating female seclusion (widespread and especially strictly observed in centers of orthodox Islam such as Bukhara, Samarkand, Khiva, and other cities). The *paranja* attracted the attention of such prominent scholars as G. A. Pugachenkova, O. A. Sukhareva, and others. Descriptions of it appear in the works of S. P. Rusyaykina, G. P. Vasilieva, and Z. A. Shirokova, as well as in sections on the clothing of Uzbeks and Tajiks in the volumes *The Peoples of Central Asia and Kazakhstan* from the series *Peoples of the World*. The present author also touched upon this subject in discussing robe-like head coverings of a number of peoples of the region. Despite the differences in appearance, one can note that the head and shoulder clothing — richly decorated along the edges — of fertility goddesses was diverse, but among them, there are very similar examples to the Turkmen *khasava* and *borik*, as well as to the cloaks worn by sedentary Uzbeks and Tajiks. The closest similarity with *khasava* is found in the female headdress of statuettes from the Marghianian temple complex of the 1st millennium BC and in statuettes of the Kushan period (the site of Aphrasiab). The ancient female headwear depicted on terracotta figurines from Nisa (3rd–2nd centuries BC) also resembles the forms of Central Asian fertility goddesses' head attire. The garments of goddesses apparently had sleeves. The manner of wearing cloaks over the shoulders, both by men and women, was reflected in many artistic images of different peoples. Among them is the golden statue of a Sogdian nobleman of the early centuries; frescoes of Panjikent and Varakhsha; wall paintings from Iranian traditions; as well as scenes of Greek art from Central Asia. From medieval Turkmenistan, ethnographic material preserved in Persian miniatures of the 15th–16th centuries is known. This image of the wedding *khalat* (robe) thrown over the bride's head and body has deep roots and

parallels with the practice of wearing ceremonial cloaks, veils, and robes in Central Asia.

In conclusion: The author of this article does not intend to discuss the issue of whether the custom of covering the face and figure of women should be preserved or, on the contrary, rejected as degrading to women's dignity and harmful to their health — that is a topic for separate discussion. The task of the article is to examine the origin of this custom and the history of the *paranja* in the Central Asian region as the embodiment of an Islamic prescription.

FOYDALANILGAN ADABIYOTLAR RO'YXATI

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