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Tobelik, the Ancient Headdress of the Karakalpak Women

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Abstract: A headdress was the brightest element of traditional costume, which made it possible to refer a person to this or that nation. Like costume, a headdress has gone through a long evolution, in the course of which various ethnic contacts took place to form its appearance.

This article attempts to reveal some common features in the Karkalpak women's headdresses and those of ancient Altai people and contemporary Turkmen, Chuvash, Bashkir and Mari, using the traditional headdress tobelik as an example. Further examination of ancient headdresses will help solve some important problems in the Karakalpaks' historical and cultural contacts with other peoples and will become a valuable source of information on the unstudied areas in the people's history.

Keywords: Material culture, Headdress, Traditional costume, Headdress's function, Headdresses typology, Ethnocultural, Ethnogenetic, Ritual.

A woman's headdress indicates its wearer's social status. At the same time, it still bears archaic features, as some of its elements have magic functions. This is because the head is the most sacral part of the human body. It has always been the bearer of the most valuable and important things, such as a crown, helmet or bridal veil.

The headdresses of Karakalpak women are diverse, differing in form, material and semantics. There are several types of the traditional headdress: *saukele*, *tobelik*, *kiymeshek*, *turme* and *taqyya*.

Karakalpk *saukele* is a soft round deep felt hat covered with red cloth *tumaq*. *Saukele* was decorated with embroidery and jewellery in the form of scaly or filigree silver pendants with cornelian and coral eyes. The back of the headdress had the form of a strip of cloth going down onto the neck, from under which a thin embroidered strip of *alakka* fabric dropped below the waist and sometimes to the knees. Narrow black strips ran against the red background. A cross on the upper part of a *tumaq* accentuated by a contrasting combination of red and black is a characteristic feature of Karakalpak *saukele*, which is confirmed by T. A. Zhdanko (1952).

Kiymeshek is one of the brightest elements of the traditional clothes of Karakalpak women. *Kiymeshek* is an original headdress with an aperture for the face. It consists of two parts-back and facial. The facial part, *aldy*, is trapezoid, goes down to the breast, has an aperture for the face and is made of red cloth. This part used to be richly adorned with embroidery. In the centre of the breast portion there is a horizontal red cloth patch named *orta qara*, which has branches going out of its lateral sides and is covered all over with various embroidered ornamental patterns. The back part is made of a large square piece of silk or semi-silk cloth, usually *padshai* with an amber pattern or red velvet, one corner of which is sometimes placed on the head and has the name of *kuyryksha* (tail). A strip of cloth-a small headdress-used to be sewn to the ends of the breast part over the head (*Lobacheva*, 2000).

The traditional turban composed of kerchiefs or a long piece of cloth *turme* wound around a skullcap was an everyday headdress for Karakalpak women. When the cloth of a turban was calico *aydynly*, the turban was called *aydynly oramal*. Apart from *aydynly*, red silk homemade kerchiefs of *turme* and *madeli* were used.

Skullcap *taqyya* has been a part of the national woman's clothes since long ago. The most common form was a dome-shaped skullcap, the top of which was composed of four parts, which were usually quilted together. The skullcap was reinforced with cotton lining. A tape of silk thread *jiyek* went around the cap band.

This headdress served as a base and auxiliary for the turban of a young woman. *Taqyya* was the main element in the costume of little and adolescent girls.

Taqyya had different names, depending on its adornment: *marjan taqyya* (decorated with corals), *tybelek taqyya* (with a column on the top) and *tozeu taqyya* (with various jewels) (Zhdanko & Kamalov, 1980).

Tobelik is the most important for us among the woman's headdresses we have listed above. This is a headdress from the complex traditional costume of Karakalpak women, which has an unusual form and is a rare element of the costume. As of today, we know of two whole specimens of this headdress, one of which is kept at the Russian Ethnographic Museum in St Petersburg, and the other-at the Savitsky State Museum of Arts in the Republic of Karakalpakstan.

There is little information on this element of the traditional Karakalpak woman's costume, which is found in a few works (Materials…, 1935; Zhdanko, 1952; Zhdanko, 1958; 1962; Karakalpaki, 1962; Zhdanko & Kamalov, 1980). This is because even in the mid-20th century there were very few local people who remembered it. Based on the materials of field research gathered in the mid-20th century, T. A. Zhdanko made a supposition that *tobelik* was an element of another headdress, *saukele*, and covered its upper soft portion *tumaq* (1958).

Tobelik is a unique example of the high skill demonstrated by Karakalpak jewellers. Judging by the well-known items, *tobelik* was made of thin silver plates and was usually richly decorated with turquoise, corals and other semi-precious stones.

In particular, the *tobelik* from the Savitsky Museum is made of several silver plates covered with gold coating: the front, back and top parts (Fig 1). These plates are connected with one another to form a kind of metal hat. The top of the *tobelik* is slanting forward slightly. It consists of two elements interconnected with a piece of wire. The top is decorated with conic projections with turquoise inserts. The space between the cones is decorated with chased plant and geometric ornamental patterns and small holding nests with coral inserts. The front part features the same conic projections. The space between the cones is also covered with a number of small eyes with coral beads. The lower plate on the front part is not gilded, but is covered with a barely noticeable engraved geometric ornament. Long pendants consisting of alternating chains, spirals, corals and beads hang from the front part and end in tiny petal-shaped plates.

Fig. 1. *Tobelik* from collection of Savitsky Museum of Arts

The back plate is decorated with an engraved pattern. Attached to it is a chain of stamped pendants and three rows of coral beads.

The on-plait element *alaka* is attached to the back part of the *tobelik*. It consists of five narrow interconnected strips of cloth. The ends of the bands bifurcate and have dome-shaped adornments suspending from them and having small insertions of coloured stones.

A. Allamuratov gave a description of the *tobelik* from the Russian Ethnographic Museum. This item (Karlybayev & Kurbanova, 2014: fig. 23) is slightly different in appearance from the one from Nukus described above. The front-temple part consists of two plates interconnected with a filigree rope-shaped wire. The upper plate is taller than the lower one. It is decorated with two rows of large dome-shaped pendants with insertions of coloured stones. The insertions of alternating turquoises and corals are arranged in a chessboard pattern. The plate is gilded and decorated with a geometric pattern.

The lower plate of the front part is made of silver and is decorated with a pattern in the form of parallel vertical lines and semi-circles. The front part ends in a many-tier row of coral beads, with gilded rectangular pendants with insertions in the intervals. These rectangular pendants with insertions of turquoises and corals are attached to each other with the help of silver hooks, thus forming a decorative chain.

The top of this *tobelik* also consists of two flat parts, slants forward slightly and has a crosswise figurative opening in the form of the '*kos muyiz'* ornament. These parts are interconnected with the help of a twisted wire. The work is done so skillfully that the seam looks like a filigree pattern. The front plate is slightly larger and has two dome-shaped pendants, while the back part has only five pendants of this type. All the pendants are decorated with insertions of large corals and turquoises and are arranged centrically.

Nine small ‘domes,’ three large ones in the middle and three smaller domes on both sides of them, form a semi-circle on the front plate. The largest dome is fixed to the centre of the *tobelik* top, with two smaller ones at its sides. The back plate has five large ‘domes’ forming a semi-circle. The four largest of them have a number of small insertions.

The gilded surface of the *tobelik* top has been preserved well. It is covered with an engraved and chased low-relief pattern.

The *alaqa* of this exhibit consists of various bands differing in length, width and colour. A large number of coloured glass beads are sewn to the ends of two of them. All the bands have silk pom-poms on their ends (Aliyeva, 2004).

In the early 20th century *tobelik* was still common for the Karakalpak people. By the mid-20th century it had stopped being included in the traditional costume of the Karakalpak women. This was caused by the Europeanisation of the traditional clothes, which resulted in the change of the traditional forms.

However, this headdress still occurs often in the Karakalpaks’ folklore, in particular, in their minor poetic genres, such as *suymish*. So, the *suymish* recorded in Khojeyli District, Karakalpakstan, in the early 21st century have the following lines:

Apaq qi’zi’ jasi’nda,	My one year old sweet girl
To’betay basi’nda,	On her head skullcap
Aq otawda apasi’,	In the white yurt is her sister
To’beligi qasi’nda,	On her head *tobelik*
Alla-ya o’zi qarasqay,	God willing
Toyi’m toyg’a ulasqay!	Let there be wedding after wedding!

1. Field Records of S. Amirlan: Baymurat Tagay Uly

Tobelik is also present in one of the versions of the well-known children's folklore game '*Ҳәкке қайда?*' *(Hakke kayda), 'Where is the magpie?'*:

Ha'kke қayda?	Where is a magpie?
Uyasi'nda.	In the nest.
Neg'i'p ati'r?	What it doing?
Kesten tigip ati'r	It is embroidering.
Kestesi qanday	What is the size of the embroidery?
Alaqanday	Like the palm of a hand .
Kimlerge eken	For whom is this gift?
Ag'asi', apasi'na eken	For father and mother
Ag'asi' nesin beredi	What will father give in return
Alti'n belligin beredi	Golden belt
Apasi' nesin beredi	What will mother give in return
Alti'n to'beligin beredi	Golden *tobelik*

2. Field Records of S. Amirlan: Nazhimova.

This means that it was quite a popular headdress once. It is difficult to trace the chronological history of this headdress. According to 18th-century literary sources, a similar headdress called *khasava* was common among the Karakalpaks. Gladyshev and Muravin have the following description: 'Their wives wear the same thing as the wives of the Kyrgyz do; however, their *khasava* are made of copper coated with silver, while some of them wear silver *khasava*; they have small knobs on the top, and these knobs have simple stones, mostly marjoram, inserted in them; also, *shevkali* are sewn to the canvas that is worn under the *khasava*; the space between the abovementioned knobs is covered with white coarse calico and *uramal*; the women tie them under the chin

and let them hang at the back, like the Kyrgyz *kasyney*; they plait their hair in the same way' (Materials…,1935: 210).

Other peoples also feature headdresses resembling *tobelik*. The Karakalpak *tobelik* has some common features with the Chuvash *khushpu*, Mari *shurka* and Bashkir *kalapush*. They are similar not only in appearance, but also in function and, in some cases, in terminology.

We suppose that the headdress of the ancient Altai people is similar in appearance to *tobelik*. S. I. Rudenko describes it as a wooden headdress cut from a whole piece of cedar-'quite a mysterious construction accurately corresponding with the size and form of a woman's head' (1953: 123). The hat has a flat top provided with several apertures. The latter served to let locks of hair through. A thick twisted bunch of horse's hairs 20 cm high was attached vertically to the hat's top. Two plaits interwoven with woolen laces and drawn through two of the apertures were attached to the bunch, and all this was wound by a strip of felt. (Rudenko, 1953: 123).

Tobelik also features a flat, slightly sloping top; however, it has several conic projections with coloured insertions instead of the apertures.

Some scholars suppose that this headdress was based on helmet. The thesis that helmet-like headdresses are related to the battle helmets worn by the soldiers of the Saka-Massagetae (Khorezm) and Sarmatian-Alanian tribes, who are known to have had strong matriarchal traditions and who often had women as their leaders, was made long ago (Morozova 1954; Zhdanko, 1952; Zhdanko, 1971).

Now let us address to the functional analogy. *Tobelik* formed a part of bride's costume; it was the headdress of a young married woman. *Khushpu*, *khasava*, *shurka* and *kalyapush* had the same functions.

The Chuvash *khushpu*, which served as a kind of crown in the costume of a married woman, was made of leather and had the form of a low truncated cone with an open top and a strip on the back. It was

decorated with glass beads and coins. The 'tail' was relatively simple in structure-a strip of canvas or leather covered with small *nukhrat* and thin European badges with drawings enigmatic for the Chuvash (Nikolayev et al. 2002, fig.107, 110).

The Turkmen *khasava* is a tall and wide headdress in the form of an upturned truncated cone, flattened from the front and back; *khasava*'s rigid frame covered with kerchiefs was decorated with several rows of silver pendants and coins from the front; over the forehead there was an adornment similar to the Ersari *sinsile* but having a different name (in some places-*khasava*, in others-*gyzylgoturga*); silver figures decorated with an ornamental pattern and cornelian, with numerous pendants suspending from them on long chains, were attached to both sides of the head, at the temples (Vasilyeva, 1979).

G. P. Vasilyeva relates the term 'khasava' to Kipchak peoples. However, she considers that *khasava*'s decorative elements are similar to those of the Alanian headdresses and that some elements of its structure indicate the Turkmens' relations with the Sarmatian and Scythian tribes (1979). A. S. Morozova relates the appearance of *khasava* to the Western Asia, on the one hand, and to the Scythian and Sarmatian cultures, on the other hand (1963). N. P. Lobacheva believes that *khasava* took part in the ethnogenesis of the Iranian-speaking agriculture-oriented Turkmens and the gods of the agrarian cult typical of such cultures (1991).

The Mari woman's headdress *shurka* is a tall cone made of bast and sewn in cloth, which is decorated with embroidery and shells, coins and badges. It is worn on the top of the head in such a way that the woman's hair above the forehead and on the temples remains uncovered. A long strip of canvas is attached to the back of the headdress; it runs along the back down to the waist and is decorated with coins and shells in the same way as the 'tail' of the Chuvash *khushpu* is. The 'tail' of a headdress is an on-plait element, which replaced the bast cases for plaits found in the Volga archaeological sites, where they were quite common.

The description of the ancient headdress of Bashkir women that had gone in the late 19th century is very important for our research. According to P. S. Pallas's description and drawing, Bashkir women wore a hat (*chashbau*) covered with silver coins and a conic headdress (*tyubya*) with a broad blade going down almost to the edge of the clothes, over it (1786). I. I. Lepekhin describes the ancient headdress in the following way: 'Bashkir women used to wear "*chashpau*" with a blade "covered with silver kopeks" together with a conic headdress, while the Bashkir women along the Siberian road added to this complex the broad blade "*amyan*", "covered with silver kopeks and glass beads" (1802: 150-152). I. G. Georgi distinguishes between the hat worn by girls and having '… a sharpened back one span long, which, like the rest of the hat, is covered with coins and reguli', and that worn by married women, 'which was provided with a similar element covered in the same way and put on the forehead' (1799:103).

Rudenko notes that in former times *kashmau* was worn together with another headdress covering the aperture on the top. Rudenko refers to V. M. Cheremshansky and calls this headdress *kelepush* or *talyapush* and describes it as a helmet-like scaly hat with a long broad tail, the headdress proper covered all over with silver coins and the tail-with shells and glass beads (1799). S. I. Rudenko considered that the headdress named *tube* that had been included in the collection of the former Rumyantsev Museum was actually Cheremshansky's 'helmet-like hat'. 'Tube' was the name for the conic hat proper covering the aperture in the top of the headdress, while the headdress as a whole was called *kelepush* (2006, fig. 160).

Though being different, these ancient Bashkir headdresses have some common features: the conic shape, the way of putting one headdress over the other and the rich decoration with coins. The women's headdresses *tobelik*, *khushpu*, *shurka*, *khasava* and *kelepush* have specific forms and are made of specific material (metal Karakalpak

hats, bast Mari headdresses and leather Chuvash head coverings), but have a number of common elements. All these headdresses are provided with a long on-plait element consisting of several strips of cloth (bands) and decorated with embroidery. Besides, all of them are bride's headdresses and young women's holiday headdress. Gagen Thorn notes that tall hats were ritual wedding headdresses and that they are more ancient and connected with the cult associated with the goddess of fertility, life and maternity (1960).

There is a commonality between the names of the Bashkir and Karakalpak headdresses. The Karakalpak term 'tobelik' originates from the root 'tobe', which translates as 'top.' The conic hat from the Bashkir *kelepush* is named 'tube'. 'Tube' also means 'top' in Bashkir. The term 'tobe' ('tube') can be interpreted in two ways: the top of a headdress and 'tall' or 'supreme', that is, the headdress of noble people.

Tobelik's decoration bears traces of the polychrome style characterized by the insertion of semi-precious atones and pieces of coloured glass into certain elements of images and compositions. The top and front part of *tobelik* have coloured stones inserted in special nests, granulated patterns and decorative elements of silver and gold. This tradition originates from the Sarmatian ethnic culture.

In the first half of the 1960s Karakalpak archaeologists found pieces of applied art performed in the so called 'Sarmatian polychrome style' in the course of archaeological excavation at the Mizdakhkan complex (Yagodin & Khojayov, 1970 coloured insert 2).

The latest archaeological research also confirms the connection between the tribes of the southern Aral Sea area and the southern regions of the Volga and Ural Rivers. V. N. Yagodin notes that a part of the southern Ural population was nomadic and migrated throughout the year. The migration routes went along the meridians and reached in the south the boundaries of the ancient urban and settled agricultural civilizations of Khoresm and the south of Turkmenistan (Yagodin, 1991).

L. T. Yablonsky provides craniological data, according to which the nomads of the southern Ural might settle at the borders with Khorezm (1999). This version is supported by Tairov: 'The migration of the nomadic people from the steppes of southern Ural to the Ustyurt Plateau led to a considerable increase in the number of the nomadic people living permanently between the Caspian and Aral Seas in the late 6th century and early 5th century BC' (2005:56).

A number of scholars, such as S. P. Tolstov, A. Yu. Yakubovsky and A. P. Roslyakov, have written many times about ethnic relations between the Scythian, Sarmatian and Alanian tribes of the northern Caucasus, Volga River area and Central Asia. L. S. Tolstova agrees with them and notes that, like the Alanians, the Saka and Massagetae tribes were involved in the formation of the Uzbek and Turkmen people of the Khorezm oasis. Since around the 1st millennium BC the principal lines of the ethnocultural relations stretched from the Aral Sea area primarily to the north-west, covering the Ural and Volga (the lower and middle course) regions and the northern Caucasus (1984).

Some researchers note similarities in the material culture of the Khorezm Turkmen and the peoples living in Khorezm since the early medieval period. This succession can be found in the house building (Vaynberg, 1959; Nerazik, 1959), spiritual culture and other areas. The wedding ritual of the Khorezmian Yomut is recorded to have preserved a number of magic rites connecting these people with the ancient Iranian-speaking population inhabiting these areas (Vasilyeva, 1968). Some of the mentioned features inherent in the culture of the Khorezmian Turkmens have already allowed scholars to conclude that the ancestors of contemporary Turkmens had close historical relations with ancient Khorezmians (Andrianov & Vasilyeva 1958).

T. A. Trofimova gave an idea that the relations between the Central Asian and Altai peoples 'were not episodic but had deep roots. The Mongoloid elements, probably, of the Altai origin, start to penetrate

into the local Caucasian and, apparently, Iranian-speaking medium of the south-eastern Aral Sea area and the lower course of the Syrdarya River in the last centuries BC' (1963: 235).

Although the areas were separated by a vast territory and had no direct ethnic relations, they had ethnographic parallels, one of which lied in the material area of clothes. These facts testify to the important role the Scythian and Sarmatian tribes played in the ethnogenesis of the Karakalpaks, Turkmens and Chuvash and allow us to affirm that the similarity between the headdresses of these peoples was not a coincidence but confirmed the ethnocultral relations between these peoples. This similarity was conditioned by both ethnocultural and ethnogenetic relations between these peoples' ancestors.

Thus, the semantics of the Karakalpak headdress *tobelik* is multi-layered. This is confirmed by its functional similarity with the headdresses of the Volga peoples. The earlier layers of the ethnic history reflect *tobelik*'s visual similarity with the headdresses of the ancient Altai people. This enables us to carry out deeper research into the ancient layers in the ethnogenesis of these peoples. The polychrome technique present in the traditional Karakalpak jewellery presupposes the existence of a common ethnic component in their ethnogenesis.

The study of ethnocultural parallels and characteristic features in the material culture, beliefs and rituals of the ethnoses discussed above gave a lot of valuable material necessary for a deeper understanding of their ethnic history and the solution of the questions of intercultural and interethnic relations.

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