
PRESENTING THE COLLECTION

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A VIEW FROM THE OUTSIDE: *URDA*, *JALAB*, *BACHCHA* (BY THE MAE RAS PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTIONS OF 1870—1920)

A view from the outside is selective. It registers the unusual, peculiar, that which will be interesting to talk about upon returning home. In which way were the women of Central Asia seen by the first photographers who worked here in the end of the 19th—the beginning of the 20th century? What passed in from of their lens? How “distorted” does the photo mirror become which we look into it after 100 years?

The collections of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of the Russian Academy of Sciences have a considerable number of images, historic photos, and ethnographic pictures related to female figures of the, above all, settled people of Central Asia. Thematically they can be broken down into several groups. Prevailing among them are single and group portraits of women, in which they are shown mostly in moments of rest, posing during tea-drinking in the female part of the house, dancing etc., women with children, snapshots of little girls. Separate images show women from harems (*urda*) and inhabitants of local brothels (*jalab*). Special place is taken by photographs of *bachcha* — boys dressed in women's clothes.

It was impossible for a strange man to see a woman with an open face. As one of the Russian authors touring Bukhāra acknowledged, in order to view the home apparel of local women, he had to carefully look into “internal gateways through crevices of the gates or the wall bottoms” [1].

V. V. Krestovskii, who had also been to Bukhāra a bit earlier, underlines the difference between the conduct of women in the capital of the emirate and in the so-called Russian Turkestan. As an example of an extremely free conduct of Tāshkent women he gave the following occurrence:

“They string all flat roofs of their houses and crowd doorways and even streets, and a prettier one would go and remove, as if in a trance, the *chīmmat* from her face and draw the tails of her *paranja* — ‘hey, *kafir*, feast your eyes!’” [2].

The photographs of the drawings by painter V. V. Vereschagin [3] were the earliest images of the Museum's collections in which the female representative of the settled people could be seen. They were included in the album “Turkestan. Sketches from Life by V. V. Vereschagin Issued by Order and Under Sponsorship of the Turkestan Governor-General. 26 Folios with 106 Drawings. St. Petersburg. 1874”. V. V. Vereschagin executed the paintings in 1867 when he was in Turkestan. These are black and white half-length images of young women. They show only headdresses, part of coiffures and necklaces of all adornments. The painter tried to convey in the first place the anthropological type of local females. In the spring of 1869 the Turkestan exhibition of V. V. Vereschagin, then a little known painter, took place in St. Petersburg. It included the sketches and several paintings of the Turkestan cycle. To all appearances, these pictures were also exhibited and acquainted the viewers with the population and everyday life of the new lands adjoined to Russia.

The first photos of the Museum depicting women of the settled peoples of Central Asia were included in the famous “Turkestan Album”, more known as Kaufmann's album which was acquired by the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography in 1874 [4]. The “Turkestan Album” was issued with the purpose of a comprehensive acquaintance of the academic community with the life of the people of the region. Therefore, an entire series of photos was devoted to showing typical men and women. These are half-length portraits, by which only a partial idea of local costumes could be formed. Occasionally headdresses, neck decorations, and earrings were demonstrated (figs. 1—2).

Of women's headdresses these photos show: a scarf tied with the ends backward [5], a headband ornamented with metal pendants, worn above the scarf. R. Ia. Rassudova suggested that one of the photos of the “Turkestan Album” shows a rare specimen of an elegant party *mirsak*, an ancient outer garment sewn out of expensive fabric (fig. 3). It was matched with a dress of corresponding colours and tones. Sleeves of *mirsaks* in Ferghāna were usually made short (above the elbow) and