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Integration of traditional artistic embroidery of Russia into the traditional costumes of the Maya civilization

Abstract. The article describes the experience of creating a clothing collection at the Russian university of traditional art crafts, based on the art of the Maya civilization. The process of developing clothing models, selecting materials and choosing ornaments in accordance with historical data is highlighted. A step-by-step process of decorating one of the collection's models with types of artistic embroidery from the Ivanovo region – specifically Richelieu and colored satin stitch – is presented. Special attention is paid to the collaborative work of instructors and students, their involvement in research and practical activities, as well as the development of their professional qualities.

Keywords: higher education in artistic embroidery, clothing collection, Maya civilization, composition, materials, artistic embroidery, network interaction.

Since the beginning of 2025, O.N. Platonova, a teacher of clothing modeling and construction at the Institute of traditional applied arts – the Moscow branch of the Russian university of traditional art crafts – has created a collection of eight garments. This collection is focused on the synthesis of traditional Maya costume forms and traditional Russian artistic embroidery.

Since samples of Maya clothing have not survived (only images on frescoes, ceramics, sculptural monuments and manuscripts are known), the cut and silhouettes of the collection's items were developed based on the study of garments depicted in sculptural compositions. The exoticism and sophistication of the artistic style, the structural details used in the creation of Maya clothing and jewelry, as well as a modern approach to clothing modeling and construction, allowed for the creation of a unique collection with a variable model range.

After the final approval of the collections clothing mock-ups by the Art Council of the Russian university of traditional art crafts, it was decided to decorate the items using traditional types of artistic embroidery and artistic lace-making. In accordance with the assigned task, all models were distributed among the university's branches.

In this article, we will examine the stylistic techniques used to decorate an item from this collection using the artistic and technological methods of artistic

embroidery from the Ivanovo region. We will also consider the collaborative process between specialists in artistic embroidery from the Russian university of traditional art crafts and the Kholuy Institute of lacquer miniature painting named after N.N. Kharlamov.

At the first stage of the project work, which took place at the Russian university of traditional art crafts, a search was conducted for the main ornamental motif, as well as compositional and technological solutions that would allow for the decoration of works based on the art of an ancient civilization using traditional Russian artistic embroidery.

An extensive historical analysis was conducted, encompassing archaeological research, ethnographic data, museum collections and scientific publications on the history and culture of the Maya. Particular attention was paid to the stylistic and artistic expressive techniques in Maya art, which, as it turned out, served not so much for decoration as for narration – it was a complex sign system reflecting the worldview, the power of rulers and the passage of time.

The dynamism and naturalism of the sculptural and ornamental imagery are particularly interesting. Maya artists sought to convey movement, depicting rulers and gods in complex poses full of life and energy, which was uncharacteristic of other Mesoamerican cultures. Symbolism occupied an important place: almost every work was saturated with cosmological and mythological symbols. Colors, attributes, gestures and postures – everything had a deep meaning [4], and it would not be entirely correct to disregard this in our work.

It was found that the Maya used materials such as cotton fabrics, animal skins and bird feathers for clothing production. Moreover, they possessed the secrets of dyeing fabrics, which led to the conclusion that the use of colored threads is possible in the decoration of our model. Furthermore, as researchers of this culture assert, the Maya were the first to begin using the stitch, which gave them the opportunity to create complex and beautiful patterns on clothing [5]. This allowed us to deepen our research: while studying sources depicting everyday scenes, we found confirmation that the Maya decorated their clothing with embroidery and decorative seams.

This very process is depicted in the pages of the Dresden Codex – one of the four Maya manuscript books that have survived to the present day [3]. The wives of the gods hold oval-shaped wooden frames and large-eyed needles, into which twisted threads are threaded. Accompanying captions state that the goddesses are “sewing” (chu’y). Judging by the ratio to body size, these needles were 25–30 cm long, which is quite unusual, but they were indeed not small, as confirmed by archaeological finds: the length of whole needles was 15–25 cm, the thickness was 3–6 mm and near the eye 1–1.5 cm. This allows us to conclude that the embroidery was not as delicate as researchers of Maya culture describe it. Most likely, these were primitive decorative stitches from which a geometricized pattern was possibly formed. At the same time, the fact that the work was performed in hoops in the form of oval frames, rather than freehand, is of particular interest.

Regarding textile materials, it was found that the ancient Maya cultivated two types of cotton: white – an annual variety sown yearly – and light brown, called cuyuscate – a perennial variety of tree cotton (*Gossypium herbaceum*), which bore

fruit for 5–6 years. The second variety of cotton is quite rare and is currently found mainly in South Africa; its fiber is stiff and short, so it is used only for coarse cotton wool [2]. The fibers of these cotton types were usually dyed.

For dyeing fabrics, the Maya used both organic and mineral dyes; the most popular among them were green, purple, blue, black and red. The most in-demand was indigo dye, which allowed for obtaining blue and light blue shades. Red dye was obtained from cochineal (cactus lice) and the achiote plant, green – from avocado, and black – from iron oxides [5].

The use of certain colors and patterns indicated the social status of a tribe member. For example, blue was often associated with the elite due to its rarity and high cost [8]. The fabric from which traditional clothing was made was produced on hand looms, so the cloth was quite dense and not very wide.

Based on the information obtained, the main characteristics that the future dress model should possess have been identified:

- since the Maya used coarser cotton fabrics in clothing production due to the peculiarities of the cotton variety and primitive manufacturing methods (weaving), it is permissible to use materials similar in properties and density, such as linen and cotton fabrics;
- the use of colored fabrics and threads is possible;
- the ornamental solution of the artistic embroidery should feature a more naturalistic depiction and carry a specific semantic meaning.

The creative process of creating an artwork and composing its parts into a whole is complex and multifaceted [1]. Traditionally, when developing the ornamental solution for artistic embroidery in Russia, plant motifs from the surrounding nature are most often used, which determined the choice of the decorative motif for the Maya dress in the collection.

It is well known that among the main sacred plants of the Maya were maize (corn), ceiba (cotton tree), catalpa (macaroni tree), morning glory, chili pepper, as well as cocoa. Maize and ceiba were excluded from the list, as they had already been used in the decoration of other items in the collection. Cocoa proved to be the most suitable plant for developing the composition of artistic embroidery of the Ivanovo region – specifically Richelieu and colored satin stitch. This evergreen tree, with its decorative, graceful flower shape, large graphic fruits and elongated leaves, provides immense opportunities for the creative imagination of an artist in traditional applied arts. However, despite all the plant's expressive features, it is important to understand what symbolic meaning cocoa had for the Maya and how appropriate its use is in clothing decoration.

Mesoamericans have been cultivating cocoa since 2000 BC, initially using it to make a mildly alcoholic beverage, and later – a foamy drink similar to hot chocolate, which was used for offerings to the gods [7]. By the 8th century, cocoa beans were already being used not only for making chocolate but also as a monetary equivalent for trade and tax payments. Chocolate was loved so much that a deity was created specifically for cocoa, to whom regular worship was offered. Ek Chuah is

the deity of the ancient Maya, who was revered as the patron of trade and cocoa (Fig. 3¹⁰).

As can be seen in Figure 1, the deity is wearing a necklace made of cocoa branches and pods, and the headdress is adorned with cocoa beans – all rendered in a sufficiently naturalistic manner, down to the depiction of veins on the leaves and pods. Figure 2¹¹ – depicts a deity whose entire body is adorned with cocoa pods.

Therefore, the depiction of cocoa as a decorative motif is permissible, especially since the future dress model will largely be a work of traditional applied art.



Fig. 1. Ek Chuah. Patron Deity of trade of the Ancient Maya



Fig. 2. Ceramic statuette of Ek Chuah

Since the development of the compositional solution for the artistic embroidery was planned to take place at the university in St. Petersburg, while its material realization was to be carried out at the Kholuy Institute of lacquer miniature painting named after N.N. Kharlamov (Ivanovo region), responsible executors were appointed for the artistic-graphic and technological development of the ornament and the material realization of the artistic embroidery. Forms of interaction and control were also defined, which included online consultations and monthly visits to the branch with an analysis of the ongoing work.

Based on the results of the historical research and the determination of the material composition for the artistic embroidery, it was decided to use linen fabric. Having studied the surfaces of the product mock-up most suitable for decoration and taking into account the selected illustrative material, E.V. Saifulina, a teacher of the

¹⁰ Fig. 1. Maya vessel in the effigy of Ek Chuah. Toniná Museum. – URL: https://digitalmapsoftheancientworld.com/mythology/maya-mythology/maya-gods/ek-chuah/?utm_medium=organic&utm_source=yandexsmartcamera (Accessed: 03.09.2025).

¹¹ Cocoa god. Maya statuette from the late classic period from the Popol Vuh museum, Guatemala. – URL: https://arzamas.academy/materials/097?utm_medium=organic&utm_source=yandexsmartcamera (Accessed: 03.09.2025).

artistic embroidery workshop, developed a linear-graphic design for the embroidery of the dress hem, the half-width of which was 110 cm (Fig. 3¹²).

This part of the project development was assigned to the instructor, as the complexity, volume and deadlines of the work did not correspond to the proficiency level of the students at the main university. The design was prepared for machine-assisted types of artistic embroidery, which are studied only at the Kholuy Institute of lacquer miniature painting named after N.N. Kharlamov.

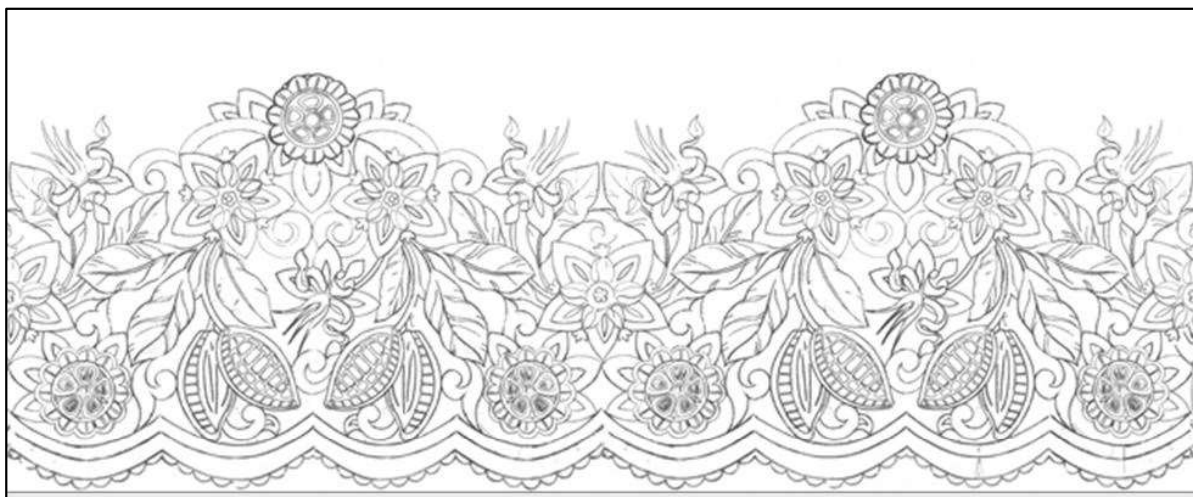


Fig. 3. Linear-graphic design for artistic embroidery with a cocoa plant motif

Subsequently, a fragment of the artistic embroidery ornamental solution in color was executed. This work was conducted at two sites. The sketches were completed at the Kholuy Institute of lacquer miniature painting named after N.N. Kharlamov; in these, the primary emphasis was placed on the use of the chocolate image and a color sketch for the brown fabric of the dress was also selected. Students were involved in this process of developing the artistic embroidery in color. For instance, under the guidance of E.V. Saifulina, student O. Zhinzhirova from the Moscow Institute of traditional applied arts refined the proposed variants on a graphics tablet. She replaced the golden color of the ornamental forms with bright red and the fabric color with purple. This color scheme was not chosen by chance: red is the favorite color of Mayan women, while purple is a sign of high social status.

The development of the artistic embroidery composition, along with its ornamental and coloristic solution, preceded the most complex stage of the project development: the translation into the technique of this specific type of traditional art craft. Therefore, the technological detailing of the embroidery pattern was carried out by the instructor of the Kholuy branch, I.A. Komissarova, who has extensive practical experience in the artistic embroidery types of the Ivanovo region, including “white satin stitch”, “Ivanovo hemstitching”, machine “Richelieu”, “colored satin stitch” and “satin stitch with tonal blending”. During the discussion on the choice of artistic embroidery type, whose techniques could convey the graphic quality and the uniqueness of the coloristic solution, an innovative approach was chosen: the

¹² Figs. 3-4. Photo by the author of the article.

combination of three types of machine embroidery. This required additional technological development, as such a combination was being implemented for the first time.

In the course of research work on artistic embroidery, including experimental project work, the teaching staff of the department strives to involve students in this process to develop their professional qualities in creative, innovative and scientific activities. Thus, the technological refinement of the artistic embroidery in material was carried out by student S. Ovcharenko under the guidance of I.A. Komissarova. The main difficulty lay in joining the brides (the connecting threads in embroidery that join separate parts of the pattern) and the satin-stitch forms, as they “broke” the contour of the artistic embroidery. In connection with this, it was decided to execute the brides first, and only then the contour of the artistic embroidery, which, albeit slightly, complicated the embroidery process.



Fig. 4. Refinement of artistic embroidery elements on fabric

With the same level of meticulousness, each element was refined, the technology for combining the types of artistic embroidery was developed and the amount of time required for the full realization of the item was calculated. After this, the work was distributed between the instructor and the student (Fig. 4).

The creation of a clothing collection dedicated to the ancient Maya civilization became a large-scale and multifaceted project, which united historical analysis, artistic modeling and innovative approaches in the field of traditional applied arts.

The project made it possible not only to recreate elements of the Maya style and artistic aesthetics but also to integrate them with the traditions of Russian artistic embroidery. This was made possible through a thorough study of historical materials and the application of modern technologies for clothing modeling and decoration.

Of particular value is the experience of organizing the collaborative work of the teaching staff and students. Involving learners in research and practical activities contributed to the development of their professional skills, as well as their creative and innovative thinking. The project demonstrated how collaborative work can stimulate the scientific and creative potential of students, preparing them to solve complex professional tasks in the future.

Thus, traditional Russian artistic embroidery, as a unique form of traditional applied art, while fully preserving regional and historical artistic-technological traditions, is capable of embellishing the works of any culture. This was proven by the example of creating a collection dedicated to the Maya civilization.

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