

# Lazgi In Khorezm Ethnography And Its Function As An Ethnic Code

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**Received:** 19 November 2025; **Accepted:** 09 December 2025; **Published:** 14 January 2026

**Abstract:** This article examines the function of the Lazgi dance as an ethnic code within the ethnography of Khorezm. Lazgi is interpreted not only as an artistic expression but also as a cultural phenomenon that encapsulates the historical memory, social values, aesthetic worldview, and spiritual identity of the Khorezm people. The study explores the ancient origins of Lazgi, its transformation across different historical periods, the characteristics of male and female forms of the dance, ritual and stage interpretations, as well as its nationwide recognition during the years of independence. Special attention is given to the inclusion of “Khorezm dance – Lazgi” in UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The research is based on historical, ethnographic, comparative, and empirical methods.

**Keywords:** Lazgi, Khorezm, ethnography, ethnic code, dance art, cultural heritage, folklore, national identity, independence period, UNESCO.

**Introduction:** The Khorezm oasis is one of the regions in Central Asia with rich ethnographic and cultural heritage. The uniqueness of this region is manifested in the social, ethnic, and artistic layers formed in different historical periods. One of the elements that constitute the ethnographic profile of Khorezm is the Lazgi. The Lazgi dance is considered not only a source of aesthetic pleasure, but also a medium that expresses the ethnic codes, social values, and historical memory of the Khorezm people.

## LITERATURE ANALYSIS

Research on the role of the Lazgi dance in Khorezm ethnography and its function as an ethnic code includes various sources. In the scientific works of Uzbek and foreign scholars, Lazgi is analyzed as a cultural phenomenon formed from ancient ceremonial traditions and connected with folk oral creativity and historical-educational processes. G. Matyaqubova and Sh. Eshjonova conducted research on the history of Khorezm Lazgi and its significance as part of our intangible heritage [1; 2; 3]. Researcher M. Djumabaeva studied the issues of the formation and development of Khorezm Lazgi in modern history [4, 175–177].

O. Matyaqubov analyzed information on the origins

and development stages of Khorezm Lazgi [5, 870–877]. M. Khudaybergenova and M. Kholmominov examined the issues from the emergence of Lazgi to its importance in modern times [587–591].

## METHOD

In this article, several scientific methods were applied to analyze the function of Lazgi dance as an ethnic code in Khorezm ethnography. During the research process, the historical-methodological approach was used to study the origins, development, and modern interpretations of Lazgi in the Khorezm region on the basis of historical sources, legends, and oral folk traditions. In addition, by employing comparative analysis, similarities and differences between Khorezm Lazgi and other Central Asian dances were examined, which made it possible to determine the unique features of Lazgi as an ethnic code. Ethnographic observations, performances of folk ensembles, practical manifestations of Lazgi in weddings and ceremonies, as well as archival materials and published scientific studies, served as empirical data sources. The historical-analytical method was also applied in the article, examining the ancient roots of Lazgi, its musical motifs, the uniqueness of movement plasticity, and the system of cultural codes.

## DISCUSSION

Lazgi is a dance model formed in ancient times, and many researchers associate it with pre-Islamic religious and ceremonial traditions. According to ancient mythological concepts, Lazgi represents the processes of rebirth, the soul entering the body, the empowerment of the human being, and spiritual elevation. This indicates that Lazgi in its earliest stages was connected with cosmogonic ritual elements.

G. Matyaqubova, People's Artist of Uzbekistan, studied the etymology of the word "Lazgi" and analyzed its historical roots. According to her, in ancient Khorezmian the word denotes meanings such as to tremble, to shiver, and in Persian as yalez meaning to jump, to move rapidly, to shudder; as noted, in other languages the word also carries meanings such as to tremble, to shiver, to dance [1, 5–6].

Researchers note that in the "Avesta", considered the sacred scripture of Zoroastrianism, there are singular references to the origin of the Lazgi dance. Among the people of Khorezm, however, various mythical stories about the creation of Lazgi are widespread. According to some legends, this dance depicted the process of the soul merging with the body; in another interpretation, it emerged from the movements of people warming themselves around fire in cold climatic conditions. Among the people, the following legend about ancient Lazgi is popular: at first, the human body was made of clay, formed of separate limbs. When the soul was commanded to enter the body, it became frightened and retreated. Even when the order "enter the body again" was given, the soul did not stop expressing fear. Then a melody possessing magical power descended from the heavens, enchanting the soul. Under the influence of that sound, the soul entered the body without realizing it. First it entered the fingers, then the palms and wrists, the shoulders, and finally the entire body came to life. According to the legend, this divine melody was the first echo of "Lazgi" [2, 12].

Academician S. P. Tolstov, studying the dwellings of the Khorezm Kaltaminor culture population, discovered that they had areas designed for performing rituals [7, 59–61]. According to Greek historians, the Massagetae danced around fire [8, 75]. G. Matyoqubova interprets this space as a platform designated for dancing and associates the exclamations found in the modern Khorezm Lazgi with fire-worship traditions [1, 12].

In the book "Lazgi" written by People's Artist of Uzbekistan Gavhar Matyoqubova and member of the Journalists' Creative Union Sharqiya Eshjonova, nine types of this dance are identified. According to the classification provided by the authors, types such as "Masxaraboz lazgi", "Qayroq lazgi", "Dutor lazgi",

"Surnay lazgi", "Saroy lazgi", "Changak lazgi", "Xiva lazgi" and "Garmon lazgi" constitute the main forms of this artistic tradition [3, 55].

Honored Artist of Uzbekistan R. Qurbanov linked the origin of the Caucasian peoples' national dance "Lezginka" with the Khorezm Lazgi. The creator associates this with the legend that Khwarazmshah Sultan Jalaluddin marched to the Caucasus and trained his soldiers using Lazgi dance movements [9].

Previously, Lazgi consisted mainly of instrumental melodies, to which no lyrics were added. However, by the 1930s of the 20th century, Lazgi melodies began to merge with folk songs and started being sung [4, 175–177].

The diverse forms of Lazgi reflect the social status, lifestyle, and psychological state of men and women in society. In each type, the performer's skill, inner emotional state, and the rhythm of movements play a significant role. Khorezm Lazgi is generally categorized into men's Lazgi, women's Lazgi, couple dances, and ceremonial Lazgi forms. Men's Lazgi is distinguished by its display of strength, courage, and agility. In this form, the performer expresses power through sharp movements, rapid turns, and firm steps. Its rhythm and dynamics are intense, with each element based on precise and vigorous actions. This type of Lazgi demonstrates men's internal power, endurance, and physical strength. Women's Lazgi, on the other hand, is characterized by its grace, delicate plasticity, and charming movements [10].

O. Matyoqubov considers Khorezmian melodies such as "Ganji Qorabog", "Orazibon" (originally Orazvor), "Kurdiy", "Yelpazalandi", "Lazgi", "Usmoniya I-II-III", as well as instruments like tor, soz (garmon), santur, bulamon, bell, daf, and certain place names as results of long-standing historical and culturally close ties between the peoples of Khorezm, Uzbekistan, the Caucasus, and Turkic regions [5, 870–877].

According to Manghit storyteller Tursun baxshi, Otaq the daf player would perform the "Legend of Lazgi" during weddings and festivities, and then recite the "Jon tana gir" qasida. Until the 1950s, Khoja Otajonov — known as Khoja the Blind — played the garmon and added words to it. Later, the Lazgi variant sung in Komil Khorezmi's style "Kimni sevursen?" became popular throughout Central Asia [4, 175–177].

One of the first artists to compose lyrics for Lazgi melodies was Komiljon Otaniyozov, whose contribution is invaluable. In the new style he created, the famous Lazgi known under the name "Komil Khorezmi" emerged. Otaniyozov added lines such as "so'yla manga ey sanam, kimni sevar yorisan, ey qora ko'z gal bari, ey qora ko'z bo'y-bo'y" as a refrain,

creating an entirely new approach within the Lazgi genre. Moreover, the “Lazgi” song and dance ensemble named after Komiljon Otaniyozov was established in 1957 under the Uzbek State Philharmonic (today’s Uzbekistan State Philharmonic), playing an important role in the popularization of Lazgi art [11, 211].

On 13 December 2019, under the name “Khorezm Dance – Lazgi”, it was inscribed on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, and the increasing attention it receives today brings great joy to artists and admirers, not only in Uzbekistan but around the world [6, 587–591].

The proposal by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan for the Ministry of Culture, the Academy of Sciences, and the Khorezm regional administration to hold the “Lazgi” International Dance Festival and, within its framework, an international scientific-practical conference every two years from 25 to 30 April in Khiva, was approved [12].

Lazgi is one of the brightest and most ancient cultural phenomena of the Khorezm oasis, elevated not only as a form of dance art but also as an ethnic code that embodies the people’s historical worldview, lifestyle, spirituality, and aesthetic values. The enthusiasm, courage, life-affirming energy, and freedom of movement characteristic of the mentality of the Khorezm people find their purest and most natural expression in Lazgi rhythms. Lazgi is one of the brightest cultural markers distinguishing Khorezm from other regions — a tool of ethnic identification.

## RESULTS

As an ethnic code of the Khorezm people, Lazgi performs a multi-layered cultural function. Within it, ancient religious-ritual layers, elements of historical memory, and modern artistic expression form a unified whole. Although Lazgi has evolved and developed from ancient times to the present day, traces of ancestral traditions remain in its rhythmic structure, sacred meaning, and movement plasticity. This dance is one of the brightest symbols determining the uniqueness of the Khorezm people and serves as an important means of ethnic identification. Through its movements, joy, excitement, spiritual elevation, dramatic intensity, and internal energy are expressed; therefore, Lazgi is not only an artistic-aesthetic phenomenon but also a mechanism of expressing the people’s spiritual state. Through its oral and practical transmission across generations, values, customs, and symbols are continuously preserved, enhancing the communicative significance of Lazgi. The delicacy of movements, vibrant rhythms, and unique plasticity shape the aesthetic standards of the Khorezm art school, distinguishing it from other regional dance heritages.

Thus, Lazgi is a unique cultural phenomenon with ancient roots, serving as an ethnic code that expresses the spiritual world, artistic taste, and cultural identity of the people.

## CONCLUSION

During the years of independence, Lazgi transcended the borders of the oasis and became the intangible treasure of all Uzbekistan. It became an integral part of stage arts, folklore ensembles, festivals, and celebrations, and was recognized as a separate school within Uzbek national dance art. Due to state support, Lazgi has not only been preserved but also developed, reaching a new stage through academic research and practical performance. In particular, the Khorezm Lazgi was enriched in new staged interpretations by folk masters, singers, and dancers, included in educational programs, and regarded as an art form to be taught to the younger generation.

The international recognition of Lazgi has become a separate historical process. With its inscription on UNESCO’s List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, Khorezm Lazgi was acknowledged not only in Uzbek art but also in the global cultural sphere. This confirmed its universality as a cultural value and its significance in presenting the people’s spirit and cultural heritage to the world. Thus, Lazgi has risen from being solely the ethnic code of the Khorezm oasis to becoming a nationwide, national, and global cultural heritage.

Lazgi is an integral part of Khorezm ethnography, and its formation is closely connected with the ancient rituals, customs, psychology, and historical development of the people. It continues to live not only as a dance but also as an ethnic code — the spiritual and cultural identity of the people. Lazgi is the most effective cultural expression of Khorezm’s uniqueness and the understanding of national identity.

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