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### **THE ARAN-KARABAKH CARPET SCHOOL (the Karabakh School of carpet weaving)**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The earliest remains of a carpet discovered in the Pazryk mounds have distinctive features that are more similar to the world-famous Karabakh carpets. These carpets in science belong to a separate Karabakh school of carpet weaving, which goes back to the period of antiquity. Art historians highlight individual elements of ornamentation on these carpets. Karabakh carpet makers have created real works of art. In this article, the authors attempt to classify these carpets in different directions. Some names of villages in Karabakh are also taken as a basis for the classification.

**Index Terms:** archaeological artifacts, Karabakh carpet weaving, carpet schools, carpets in literature.

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Pazirliq qo‘rg‘onlarida topilgan eng qadimgi gilam qoldiqlari dunyoga mashhur Qorabog‘ gilamlariga ko‘proq o‘xshagan o‘ziga xos xususiyatlarga ega. Qorabog‘ gilamchilari haqiqiy san‘at

asarlarini yaratgan. Maqolada mualliflar ushbu gilamlarni turli yoʻnalishlarda tasniflashga harakat qilganlar.

**Kalit soʻzlar:** arxeologik ashyolar, Qorabogʻ gilamdoʻzligi, gilam maktablari, adabiyotdagi gilamlar.

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## АННОТАЦИЯ

Самые ранние остатки ковра, обнаруженная в Пазырыкских курганах имеет отличительные особенности, которые больше аналогичны с всемирно известными Карабахскими коврами. Эти ковры в науке относятся к отдельной Карабахской школе ковроткачества, уходящее корнями в период античности. Ученые искусствоведы выделяют отдельные элементы орнаментации на этих коврах. Мастера по изготовлению ковров Карабаха создали настоящие произведения искусства. В статье авторами приняты попытки классификации этих ковров по разным направлениям. При классификации за основы взята также некоторые названия селений в Карабахе.

**Ключевые слова:** археологические артефакты, ковроткачество Карабаха, школы ковра, ковры в литературе.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In 2020, Azerbaijan liberated its historical lands occupied by Armenians after 30 years. Karabakh, which had been part of modern Azerbaijan since ancient times, was almost wiped off the face of the earth. After the victory, our people have to not only restore cities, villages, infrastructure, but also return to the world the cultural monuments created by the autochthonous population over thousands of years. Among the cultural monuments, a special place is given to the carpets of Karabakh. Bit by bit, we have to recreate this unique type of craft. First in books, articles, and then in houses, newly built museums there will be interesting information about such carpets.

## 2. METHODS AND LEVEL OF STUDY

In studying the materials involved in the study, comparative analysis methods were used. In addition, description methods were used. The study of Karabakh carpets has been carried out since the second half of the 20th century by such scientists as L.Karimov, K.Aliyeva and others, who particularly highlighted this type of art and folk art (2;3). But we are the first to involve ourselves in the study of some special types of these carpets, which means that the historical approach occupies a special place.

## 3. RESULTS

Carpet weaving, one of the most interesting productions of Azerbaijan's decorative-applied art, has a special place in the history of our national culture - a very long history: archaeological finds and written sources prove that our ancestors practised this art even BCE.

The emergence of cities and urban culture in the first millennium BCE provided a great impetus to artistic development, and carpet weaving reached a high stage of development in the lands of what is now Azerbaijan. The archaeologist Sergei Rudenko studied samples of carpets found in the Pazryk burial mounds in the Altai Mountains and concluded that they were the work of weavers from Iran and Atropatena [1, p.5-19].

We know now that, even from those ancient times, Azerbaijani carpets spread far and wide. Xenophon (5th-4th centuries BCE) wrote that the Persians who lived a luxurious Median lifestyle also used those carpets [4, p.403-405].

### DISCUSSION

Not a single village, city or settlement in Azerbaijan is unpractised in carpet weaving.

From the distant past to the present day, it has been and developed as an integral contributor to folk art. Essentially practical, carpets satisfy both household and aesthetic needs. They have protected from heat, cold, sun, rain, dust and wind. Our ancestors opened their eyes to the world on a carpet, and were sent on their last journey on one.

The custom lives on. The emergence and development of this practice in Azerbaijan is primarily due to the land's lying on east-west routes. The caravans passing through, and the numerous economic ties and exchanges of goods here indicate that from the 13th-15th centuries, the carpet was high on the list of goods exported from Azerbaijan to European countries.

They have enriched the collections of well-known museums in the West, and they are also especially prized in private collections.

There are 6 carpet-weaving schools in Azerbaijan: Baku-Shirvan, Guba, Karabakh, Ganja, Gazakh, Tabriz, with colour and pattern distinguishing one from another [5].

Karabakh carpet weaving is particularly rich in its diversity, originality and number of compositions. In fact you can find 33 different compositions on Karabakh carpets, known for their vitality and bright colouring. They come in four categories: with medallions, without medallions, prayer carpets and carpets with a theme. Incidentally, they have developed in both the mountainous and lowland regions of Karabakh.

Certain medieval written sources offer interesting information about these carpets and their artistic features. They are praised in *Borders of the World*, by an unknown 10th century author; in the 12th century epic *The Book of Dede Gorgud* and in the writings of our classical poets Nizami and Khagani [6, 7-8].

Examples of Azerbaijani carpets also appear in the works and miniatures of European artists, including the 15<sup>th</sup> century Dutch artists Hans Memling and Van Eyck, and the German Hans Holbein [7, p.4]. We should note here that Karabakh carpets have a high, dense, but soft pile - due to the characteristics of the local sheep's wool. These carpets were produced in Malibeyli, Muradkhanli, Dashbulag, Jabrayil, Horadiz and many other settlements. Shusha city and the Dashbulag, Dovshanli, Girov, Teniviz, Chanakhchi, Tugh, Old Tughlar, Hadrut, Muradkhanli, Gasimushaghi, Gubadli, Gozagh, Mirseyid, Baghirbeyli, Khanlig and Dagh Tumas villages were key to carpet production in mountainous Karabakh in the 19th century.

Jabrayil, Aghdam, Barda and Fuzuli regions, better supplied with raw materials than the mountainous region, were, however, to the fore in carpet production. Each of these regions featured a large number of villages in which most people regularly wove carpets for sale. Carpets woven in Zengezur and Nakhchivan are also included in the Karabakh carpet school for their artistic structure, technology and colours [8].

The many forms of composition included: the Aran carpet, the Baghchada-gullar, Balig, Buynuz, Barda, Bahmanli, Karabakh, Goja, Gasimushaghi, Lemberan, Mughan, Talysh, Lamp, Malibeyli, Khan-gervend, Khanlig, Khantirma, Chelebi and the Shabalid-buta carpet, among others. This huge variety in composition is a classical feature of the Karabakh School [7, p.8-10]

The name of the Aran-Karabakh carpet-weaving school describes the broad area between the Araz and the Kura rivers - the Aran region. From the 9th-10th centuries in this historical area, medieval Barda, the capital of Arran, alongside its history as a city with a major role in medieval trade, was a centre of carpet weaving. The Arab historian al-Maqqdisi wrote: ... Barda is the main city, it is big... It is the Baghdad of this region... [9; 10, s.166].

The carpets, leather goods, silk scarves, cloths and dyes made in Barda have no equal. The main carpet-weaving settlements of Barda were the villages of Garayusifli, Chelebilar, Alpaut, Khanarab, Sharafli, Gazakhtar, Otuzikiler, Kurdlar, Ovsunchular, Khoruzen, Janavarli, Mehdikhanli, Amirli, Lemberan and Garkhun (Yevlakh).

In the 18th century, the leading practitioners of the Karabakh School of carpet weaving were to be found in Shusha. As well as their classical carpets, they wove novel compositions using patterns taken from trays, caskets, scented soaps, cotton textiles and various other household items brought from Russia and Europe: Baghchadaguller (Flowers in the Garden), Sakhsidaguller (Flowers in a Pot), Bulud (Cloud) were among the patterns woven. The centre ground of Azerbaijani carpets has traditionally featured the colour red. In the Middle Ages, dyes were derived from a variety of plants, as well as from insects. The most commonly-used source of red was cochineal. In local parlance this was the red beetle, the red wolf, or oak beetle.

Let us give some more detailed information about the classic forms of the Karabakh School of carpet weaving.

The motifs on Karabakh carpets are unique in their artistic value and originality of interpretation. They are structured on the principle of horizontal symmetry. In early times, as well as the images of beauty on Chelebi carpets, hunting was a popular theme. Later, however, interest in this subject declined. Finally, in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it disappeared completely as a theme, giving way to animal images woven for compositional effect. Now to explain the effect of Shadda carpets on pile carpets.

The ancient, pileless Shadda carpets were based on a principle of primitive, horizontal symmetry in their composition; their artistic principle was a smooth repetition of similar human and animal figures in parallel. For example: by the end of the 19th century, among others, the pile carpets Atli-itli (Horse-dog), tli-pisikli (Dog-cat), Marallijeyranli (Deer-gazelle) were woven. The compositional form consisted of horizontal bands of animal images. The themed Karabakh carpets dedicated to the protagonist Rustam in the great Ferdowsi's poem Shahnameh are especially notable. The series of carpets based on the epic Rustam and Sohrab is distinguished by the interpretation of the compositional principles of Azerbaijani miniature painting. These are unique pearls of the national art of carpet weaving.

Carpets once called Horadiz, but later and more commonly known as Buynuz (horn) were produced in various carpet weaving centres of Nagorno-Karabakh. In Central Asia and the Middle East, as well as in Azerbaijan, horned animals: sheep, oxen and goats, were held sacred. The bull, a symbol of strength and courage, also represented celestial forces, the god of water and agriculture. The central area of the carpet consists of stylized horn images. The elements of similar shape that form this area are arranged horizontally, one after another, according to the traditional laws of art. While the asymmetrical structure of the 'horns' enlivened the carpets, it also allowed variety in carpet size. Other variously-shaped details around the horns act as filler elements in the composition.

The Balig (Fish) carpet is one of the most widespread forms in Karabakh.

It is known as Balig in the north of the country, and Mokhi in Iranian Azerbaijan.

Although this carpet was woven in all of Karabakh's carpet weaving centres, Barda was its main production centre. But only from the second half of the 18th century, the Balig was also produced in Shusha. From the second half of the 19th century, about 35% of the carpets and rugs woven in Shusha were of this type. The popular Erag, Bichag (Knife) Mustofi and other carpets were generally woven on similar principles to those of the Balig, which follows the general principles, and features tight, repeated spiral patterns.

The bent leaves at the end of the spirals are sometimes elongated, echoing a fish shape, hence the weavers' conventional name for the composition.

Karabakh carpets have been produced in all Azerbaijani carpet weaving centres and this is still the case. They are named differently in different places of production but craftworkers still recognise them as Karabakh carpets. In the 19th century, carpets produced in Shusha for sale to Istanbul's markets were given various names: eg. Khan or Khan Karabakh, but those woven in Guba to the same design were Africa carpets. There are several versions of carpets known as Karabakh.

- On carpets with several medallions, their central field is reminiscent of artistic fabrics from Iran and India, especially ornamental printed curtains. These medallions, decorated with floral elements, can be found on covers of the Holy Qur'an and literary works designed by Tabriz artists

of the 15th-17th centuries. The caps on the top and bottom of the medallions fill the gaps between the medallions and the central field.

- There are also Karabakh carpets called Chini-cheshni by carpet weavers. They are composed from a row of octagonal medallions.

- The Khanlig (Khanate) is a particularly prized Karabakh carpet. Khanlig is the best-known carpet weaving centre in Azerbaijan. The carpets produced here have always been beautiful works of art. Distinguished by their high quality and produced in the 19th century in Jabrayil, especially in the villages of Mirzajanli, Efendilar, Dashkesen and Suleymanli, they were considered more beautiful than the carpets exported to the world's markets. A Khanlig carpet depicts a large flower at its centre. There is a dome at the top and bottom, with symmetrical petals at the four corners of the central field. Typically, the borders are in stripes. Original examples of these carpets are woven to special order in complex compositions. As an example, the 19th century Khanlig carpet, popularly known as Khan gizi (Khan's Daughter) was inspired by the poems of Khurshidbanu Natavan [daughter of the last Khan of Karabakh].

- The Gasimushaghi (Gasim's Child) pile carpet of the Jabrayil group of the Karabakh School is also very interesting for its composition and colour palette. The name Gasimushaghi relates to names of people of the Shamkend, Arikli, Kurdhaji, Chorman and Shalva villages in the north of the present Lachin region. High quality carpets were produced in these villages until recently. Gasim Haji Sham oghlu was a respected personality who lived there. The composition of the central field of the Gasimushaghi is original in its artistry and is various in its detail and motif. A large bordered medallion stands at the centre of the carpet. In its centre, there is a further square medallion (khoncha). Twisted branches emerge from the lake to the four sides. In the upper and lower part of the central field there are several large branches that protrude from the central medallion.

There is a dome between these branches in the upper and lower part of the large lake), a unique feature of these carpets, that harmonizes the larger dome pattern.

These Gasimushaghi carpets are an aspect of the development of designs known as 'dragon' compositions. These 18th century carpets have stylized and geometric elements reminiscent of both ribbons and dragons.

All these elements took on a more geometric character on 19th century carpets.

At this point, the medallions became more prominent, pushing the ribbons and dragons into the background.

And on 20th century carpets, the medallions increased in size, they are repeated throughout the vertical space, completely filling it, and displacing the other elements altogether.

- The name of the Bahmanli carpet derives from that of Boyuk Bahmanli village, in what is now Fuzuli region. Its central composition consists of originally-shaped figures arranged successively. One or two figures in the central area form a particularly interesting composition. According to old and experienced weavers, these figures are based on a sculpture, a barbecue grill or jang [a traditional harp-like instrument] while others depict a tortoise.

It may be that the figures associated with the image of a tortoise represent the totem of a particular tribe.

- Malibeyli carpets, from the Shusha group of Karabakh carpets took their name from Malibeyli village, some 15 km north of Shusha city. The village is famous for its carpet weaving: sacks, saddlebags, rugs, saddle covers etc. which were in wide household and agriculture use. Until recently, patterned felt was woven in Malibeyli, its patterns similar to those of the decorative art of medieval Central Asia. This is a further indication of Azerbaijan's trade and political relations with many countries in the medieval Middle and Far East.

The composition of the central area of a Malibeyli carpet consists of vertical lakes. These lakes have an original artistic feature: they have the same shape, regardless of their place and number in the central area. In the centre of each lake is a square-shaped element that suggests the image of a pool, on which two ducks face in opposite directions. The ducks are surrounded by pentagonal patterns that symbolize water, one of the most important elements of life. The squares

themselves are surrounded by snake-like patterns that suggest clouds. Depictions of clouds and other decorative elements of Uighur-Chinese art, especially in miniatures and on pottery, have been part of Azerbaijani folk art since the 9th century. The reason Azerbaijani art accepts these elements so easily is due to local social conditions, religious beliefs and people's lifestyle. In the Middle East, as in Azerbaijan, water was embodied in the form parts thereof.

- The development of 'dragon' carpets led to the gradual disappearance of the dragons and other animals, as well as various small elements. The compositions contain only intertwined ribbons, which are characteristic of palmettes and 'dragon' carpets. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, classical 'dragon' carpets with a dragon theme were stylized and acquired a repetitive tectonic character.

The slotted ribbons on 'dragon' carpets, which border the palmettes and cover the entire width of the carpet, became slotted rhombuses.

Another distinctive element 'dragon' carpet is a complex palmette numerous curls, called flame palmettes the experts; they resemble tongues of flame. These palmettes were gradually increased in size on 19th century carpets, and they become a prominent medallion.

- The main motif of a Cloud carpet is a medallion-shaped element, an interpretation of the gobelin motif in the central area of the carpet.

- The central area of Chelebi carpets consists of one large lake or several lakes in a row. From the 20th century onwards, a rhomboid flame palmette with a cross-shaped ornament displaces all other elements at the centre of Chelebi carpets.

- The central area of Daryanur carpets is formed by lakes lined along the vertical axis. The interior of the lakes consists of eight arabesque ornaments arranged symmetrically. The vertical and horizontal heads on the four sides of the lakes are characteristic elements of this carpet.

- The central area is surrounded on the left and right by a large slit area on a dark blue background. Its patterns repeat those of the central area of the carpet.

- The Kurd carpet was produced in Jabrayil, Lachin, Kalbajar and Kurdlar village (Aghdam). The medallion's narrow border covers the central area and includes two large and three small rectangles. The small rectangles are decorated with symmetrical, 'hook' elements. The patterns of the two large rectangles that form the base of the central field are arranged asymmetrically. There are polygonal lakes in the centre of the dark red rectangles located in the lower part of the intermediate area.

In the centre of the red rectangle at the top of the central area is a large element called a seal, with two 'beard combs' at the top, which is typical of prayer rugs.

The seal is surrounded on three sides by a square suzani pattern. The central area is bordered by the three stripes associated with Karabakh carpets.

- Garagoyunlu carpets are known for their special composition. There is a large lake with slit lines in the middle of the central area. There is an element of 'old pattern, which is a regular feature of Mughan carpets.

A thin medallion border round the central area of the upper part forms a symbolic arch (mihrab), common on Prayer carpets. Large Garagoyunlu carpets with the same composition, but without the mihrab are also found. The border round the central area consists of two medallions called hemankomenchi and a border on a white background called chakhmag, characteristic of Baku carpets.

The composition of the central areas of Gubadli carpets is formed mainly by rhomboid lakes arranged along the vertical axis. In the upper part of the central area there is the mihrab associated with prayer carpets. The border frame has stylized floral ornamentation - an eight-petal flower.

They are woven in Jabrayil and the carpet-weaving centres of Karabakh.

- The Lemberan Karabakh carpet is produced in two versions. The first comprises floral patterns with dotted lines. The central field is based on the bandi-rumi composition interpreted within the traditions of the Karabakh School: the rhomboid network on the central field is presented in the form of a chain of medallions along the central vertical axis. Although the rules pertaining to

classical ornamental structure have been slightly changed on these carpets, the decorative petals in the corners of the central field are an artistic enrichment of the composition.

The second version of the Lemberan carpet includes a monochrome background.

A further option is the Lembeli. The large diamond-shaped lakes in the central area, as well as the central border are close to those on Gazakh carpets.

- Lampa are the most complex carpets of the Karabakh School. Their compositions are entirely original. A large octagonal medallion (lake) is typically woven into the middle of the central field. There is also a large, elongated book shape on the upper and lower parts of the lake. The lakes and book shapes are repeated consecutively to the end of the central field.

These lakes and book shapes, usually in a vertical row, end with a dome (hood), which Shusha weavers call a barrel. In the open space of the central field, near the lakes, there are images of parrots.

Hook-shaped elements are a main feature of the Mughan composition; they are also seen on carpets from Central Asia and Turkey. There are also 12 hooks around these elements, and 3 placed diagonally. The image at the centre of the element is usually an octagonal star or, according to the carpet weavers, a four-horned motif. On another version, called Flowery Mughan, the central area is decorated with bouquets in addition to the traditional composition.

- On Nelbekigul or Minakhani carpets the central field consists of both small and large circular botanical and floral elements. Despite their usually symmetrical but, in some cases, asymmetrical arrangements, these elements have the smoothness and concision characteristic of Karabakh carpets.

In these compositions, the eight-petal, round flowers attract most attention.

The frame around the central area is a characteristic border strip of this carpet. The proportion of the border and central area, their harmony, as well as the harmony of the bright, cheerful flowers, add to the carpet's artistic value.

- The central area of the Chestnut-buta carpets is covered by images of butas repeated along the horizontal axis.

Butas that open to the different sides of each row give a dynamic to the composition, raising the artistic impact. Sometimes Chestnut-buta carpets are filled with pompomed butas.

The central field of the Talysh carpet may be plain or complex in structure. A broad border with a simple pattern on a white background is a characteristic feature of these carpets.

The central area of a complex composition consists of rhomboid medallions framed by a buta-motif border strip. The background of the medallions and the central field is in the same colour.

Carpets with complex compositions also include elongated carpets called baklava (diamond-shaped) patterns. These motifs, lined up one by one, in the same shape but different colours, present a dynamic artistic composition.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The roots of this unique artistic style of carpet weaving, free of the representation of Western European painting, established artistic principles of organization in decorative-applied art that arose from local psychology back in the depths of time. A conscious rejection of interpretation of the motifs in multi-figure compositions, but rather a strengthening of graphic interpretation of symbols and life events were characteristic features of carpets from northern Azerbaijan, especially Karabakh.

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