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TRADITIONAL HEADSCARVES OF AZERBAIJANI WOMEN:

The Subtleties of a
Rich Heritage





Azerbaijani women have used various types of head coverings since ancient times. Head coverings such as aragchin, chutgu, tesek, shawl, and kalagayi have varied depending on the material, time of year, social status, and the occasion.

To get to know and study such headdresses in more detail, it would be interesting to visit the Ethnographic Fund of the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan. More than a hundred types of headdresses, mainly samples dating back to the 19th-20th centuries, are preserved here.

Historically, the Safavid era can be characterized as a period of flourishing of Azerbaijani culture and craftsmanship. Many craft centers and workshops operated in the territory of the empire, both for local needs and for trade purposes. Examples of these include the silk weaving, weaving, and artistic embroidery arts of the cities of Sheki, Basqal, Shamakhi, Ganja, Tabriz, Baghdad, Herat, and Khorasan. Often, the headgear produced was named after these cities. The Sheki and Basqal kelaghayis still dazzle with their elegance and sophistication today. Our rich heritage, which was transported to Western countries via the ancient Silk Road, today adorns the collections of famous museums around the world.



*Wedding dress of a girl from Ismayilli, veil kalagayi.
Ethnographic drawing from 1926. Azerbaijan Museum of
National History*



Portuguese, Italian, English, and French travelers and diplomats who visited Azerbaijan in the Middle Ages provided interesting information about the customs, clothing, and handicrafts of the local people in their notes. According to the information of the famous geographer H.Z. Shirvani, in the 90s of the 18th century, 1,500 weaving looms operated in Shamakhi. In the "Brief Description of the Handicrafts of the Caucasus" compiled at the beginning of the 19th century, it is written: "The Shirvan Khanate gained fame for its embroidered "daray" and "kelagay" (fabrics with printed patterns), silk covers, jejims (durable fabric material) and other unique beautiful fabrics."

The prominent Azerbaijani educator, playwright and ethnographer Rashid bey Efendiyev, in his "Essay on Sericulture in the Sheki Province of Azerbaijan," called

Nukhan the homeland of sericulture, putting it on a par with China. This is also confirmed by some historical sources. Rashid bey Efendiyev proved that French specialists came to Sheki in the 19th century to learn the experience of keeping silkworms.

Ethnographer, professor Fazail Valiyev, in his historical-ethnographic study "Material Culture of Azerbaijan in the 19th-early 20th Centuries," notes that types of kelagayi such as "gonshuchatladan", "sachagli", "gulvangi", "baghdati", "herati", and "aleb" occupy a prominent place in the daily clothing sets of wealthy women, and in the festive (boghchalig) clothes of the poor.

One of the types of kelagayi, the "Herati" was usually worn over a tsek (arakchi), was tied diagonally, and the ends were tied under the throat and thrown over the back. One such "herati" kelagayi (EF-9321) preserved in the museum dates back to the 19th century, is woven with silk, has a dark black base, and is engraved with red and white buta ornamentation.

One of the kelagayis in the museum's collection was produced in Ganja in the 19th century, made of local black silk and printed with flowers. The dimensions of



Process of stamping kalagayi



this kelagayi, which has a border around it, are 160 x 157 cm. According to tradition, brides wore turbans made of kelagayi on their heads. One of these kelagayis (EF-6319) is painted in purple, yellow, green and raspberry colors.

Art historian S.S. Duniyaliyeva, who discusses the headdresses of the khanates, notes that during this period, three headdresses were worn at the same time: the first was juna (or tela), the second was kelagayi, and the third was lechek (or qasaba, serandaz, zarbaf). The colorful colors of the kelagayi were preferred. It was also common for the lechek to be tied over the kelagayi. In this case, the lechek could also be fringed. The lechek was triangular. For this purpose, a chargat was also used. The length of the quadrangular chargat, which was made of precious fabrics, was equal to the height. A covering made of precious fabrics such as serandaz, zarbaf, and qasaba was placed on top. The serandaz, zarbaf, and qasaba were decorated with gold,

It was made of woven fabric with gold. When covered over the head, the hem of the sarandaz reached

the neck (waist). In cold weather, a shawl was worn over all this clothing. Types of shawls include tirme shawls, cashmere shawls, and wool shawls.

The “dushbare örpäk” (EF-7825), which is kept in the funds and collections of the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan, is made of green and navy blue silk threads, with a net weave, and fringes made of the same threads around it; the “esmeşal örpäk” (EF-7905), which is made of light brown silk fabric with flowers, and has a brown silk fringe around it; the “naz-naz örpäk” (EF-7704), which is made of red, pink checkered fabric, and has a yellow border on top, with red and yellow fringes; the “zaki” or “zakıyya örpäk” (EF-5906), which is made of red silk, with floral patterns made with golden gulab thread, and a red fringed bafta sewn around it; “Yusif-Züleykha örpäk” (EF-7666), made of white silk thread, with a border made of its own thread, embroidered with flowers and leaves in a filling weave, and with fringes, etc. are valuable examples of material culture that confirm the richness and diversity of women's headwear.



A report published in the newspaper "Qafqaz" noted that in the 80s of the 19th century, up to 500 woolen shawls were woven in the Gazakh region. They were used to cover their heads when leaving the house in cold weather. In addition, the head shawl woven from camel wool was also well known to the population living in mountain villages. However, since it was considered expensive, it was not widely distributed. Such a head shawl, which was not produced in Azerbaijan, was worn by wealthy women who had close ties to the markets.

Sometimes, after the headscarf was placed on the head or after the headscarf was covered with a kelayag, a turban was tied over it. Ethnographic materials show that in the 19th century, various types of women's turbans (gashband, qiygaj, chikila, khinaband, pelandi, qiymacha, gadar, burma, gamza, chalma) were used in the regions of Azerbaijan.



Among the women's headgear, the ruband was also important due to its practical importance and protective properties. Ruband was a head-covering garment belonging to noble women living in the city, and is a word of Persian origin. «Ru» - face, «band» - means to close, that is, to close the face. Therefore, the ruband was conceived as a means of clothing (accessory) that protected the face from prying eyes. The vast majority of rubands were made of white fabric, and the net-net part intended for the eyes was woven from white silk threads. One of such rubands (EF-

4715) kept in the museum is made of navy blue fabric, with a floral and buta pattern on the top, and a silver rosette was cut with thread to make it visible. Another example of a ruband (EF-8402) is cut and sewn from white cotton fabric in a rectangular shape, with a geometric pattern embroidered on one side with yellow silk thread and a net woven for the eyelet (108 cm. x 108 cm.).

A robe belonging to the lady in the picture (EF-2494) is made of white cotton fabric, with geometric patterns embroidered with silk thread. The robe is bordered with linen fabric.

Sometimes, urban women belonging to noble society would make their rubands from expensive silk fabrics, decorate them, and even have the net part embroidered with rose petals and make a fringe. There is also such a ruband in the museum (EF-7546). This ruband is embroidered with floral and geometric fringe on a pink-colored cyan fabric. The net part of the ruband is decorated with rose petals and fringe. It has a fringe of rose petals at the hem, and two hooks at the top. Even a red eyebrow is attached to one of the hooks.

The duvag also has its place among the covering headgear. The duvag, as a rule, is considered an important element in the bridal outfit. The fact that the name of this headgear is mentioned in the epic “Kitabi-Dade-Gorgud” confirms the ancient history of its use. One such duvag in the museum (EF-7823) is made of pink-colored muslin fabric, with small and large-sized tassels on it. Another three-part veil (EF-7929) is made of red muslin fabric in a rectangular shape, and its entire surface is decorated with tassels woven from silk threads of various colors.

Some of the covering (wrapping) garments are also made up of shawls and chadors. Ethnographic materials show that, depending on the style of cut and sewing technique, two shapes of shawls are widespread in Azerbaijan - semicircular oval and rectangular.

The semicircular oval chershab, characteristic of the Lankaran-Astara and Nakhchivan regions, was tied with a string passed under the throat after being tied. In the Ordubad region, such a chershab was known as “yapinci



chershab”. In the Sheki-Zagatala, Absheron, Karabakh and Nakhchivan, especially Ordubad ethnographic regions, rectangular chershabs were preferred. Among the people, they were known as “mafrash chershab”, “kutu chershab”, “madam mafrash” and “kechimafrash”.

The National Museum of History of Azerbaijan also keeps numerous and diverse stamp-seals used in embossing on kelaghays - basma pattern-making tools (EF-2756-2769; 2780-2823), which have various decorative ornaments. 60 of these molds or stamp-seals were made by the master from Ganja, Mahammad Molla Abbas oglu Abdullayev. These molds are also valuable as a material and cultural fact that shows the beauty, delicacy, diversity of Azerbaijani folk patterns and the great talent of the masters. These patterns, known as flower border, leaf border, tail border, heart border, corner baklava, almond buta, kobek arqvesi, shah buta, balaca buta, are the distinguishing elements of Azerbaijani kelaghays.

Finally, it is worth noting that in November 2014, the Azerbaijani kelagayi was included in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity under the title «Traditional Culture of Making and Carrying the Women’s Silk Headdress Kelagayi and Its Symbolism», thus making its mark among world craftsmanship. 🌟