

# WOMEN'S JEWELRY OF AZERBAIJAN



*“Piala-Zang” earrings*

The traditional women's costume of Azerbaijan in the 19<sup>th</sup> - early 20<sup>th</sup> century was supplemented with a variety of jewels. Basically, jewels had a decorative purpose. But at the same time, by jewels one could determine to which social class a woman belonged, her status, the historical and ethnographic zone the owner of the jewels came from, as well as her age and marital status.

Jewelry stood out for its high technology of manufacture and richness of ornament. In the jewelry craft of Azerbaijan, one can see the continuity of traditions for thousands of years as evidenced by numerous jewels found during archaeological excavations. **The gold and silver jewelry of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC resembles jewels of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century by their form and sometimes technique of manufacture:** crescent earrings; earrings in the form of a hoop with soldered triangles of large grains; earrings made from a large stone surrounded

*“Gul Golbag” bracelet*



*“Koran Gabi” breast jewel. Fragment*

with an openwork rim and many others; a diadem from small double stamped plates arranged in several rows. The neck jewel chachik, which was widespread among women from wealthy families in the Nakhchivan zone in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, is very similar to this diadem by its form and technique of manufacture. Belts, bracelets, pendants and various buttons (1, p. 11-12, 2, p. 80; 3) were richly represented in archaeological materials. Over time, the jewelry craft was perfected and jewels became more refined by their technique of manufacture and artistic design. Ancient jewelers of Azerbaijan were aware of various methods of metal processing - casting, granulation, engraving and filigree.

In Azerbaijan, jewelers from Baku, Shamakhi, Ganja, Sheki, Nakhchivan and Shusha were especially famous for their works (4, p.26; 2, p.80). Jewelry with the enamel of Baku masters was highly valued. Engraving and niello were widely used in the manufacture of silver belts. A small floral ornament was placed on plates, belt buckles and buttons using engraving and niello. The best masters in the manufacture of products covered with niello were jewelers from Baku and Sheki. The role of masters from Dagestan, who visited Azerbaijan and worked in workshops here, was also significant. Basically, they worked with silver and mastered the art of applying ornament by niello. The work of Nakhchivan jewelers was characterized by graceful stamping.

Fine gold jewelry was created by craftsmen mainly for representatives of the propertied strata. Most women wore silver jewelry. In the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women still continued to wear traditional jewelry. On photos from the 1920s and 1930s, we often see rural women in silver belts and necklaces with various beads



that served as a talisman. In the pictures we rarely see women with head jewels. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a number of traditional jewels were no longer worn and were replaced by more modern jewels.

*“Chutku Gabagi” diadem*



*“Badam” earrings*



For its purpose, the traditional women’s jewelry of the 19<sup>th</sup> - early 20<sup>th</sup> century can be divided into

**head, neck and breast, wrist and waist jewels.** In turn, each group of jewelry is divided into types and kinds of jewelry with a different function and form.

*“Sirga” earrings*



**Head jewels** in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century stood out for their great diversity. Although they fixed scarves on their heads, they still had a decorative nature to a greater degree. The category of head jewels includes forehead, temporal and ear jewels. Forehead jewels were widespread and stood out for their considerable variety. Among them are three types. The first type includes “garmag” jewels (i.e., hook) - they fixed scarves on women’s head tied in different ways. Hooks were often soldered to coins. The second type of “garmag” was widespread in the Sheki and Zagatala zones of Azerbaijan. It was a massive medallion, from which 5-6 rows of double braided chains with a length of about 10-12 cm extended in three directions. These chains were attached to massive hooks. One hook was attached to the crown and the other two to the sides of the head (5, p.91). The third type includes jewels that were fixed over the forehead, had only a decorative value and were

*“Piala-Zang” earrings*

called “alinlig” (6, p.79). Gold complex “alinligs” in Baku and Shamakhi were more known under the term “silsila”. This kind of forehead jewel was worn mostly by city women from wealthy families. Therefore, “silsila” was not very common - it was mostly worn in Baku, Shamakhi, Nakhchivan and Gazakh.

In Balakan and Zagatala districts, a forehead jewel which resembled a helmet was widespread; the jewel is known under the name “Taj” (i.e., “crown”, or “keken” in Avar) (5, p.89). “Taj” consists of a centrally located (above the forehead) cone-shaped plate, from which three rows of chains extend with pendants in the form of the buta. The chains end with hooks that are attached to the head. A round badge is attached to the top of the central plate with chain links and a vertical tube is soldered in its center. Apparently, feathers are inserted into the tube. “Taj” was worn by young married women.

One type of head jewels was jewels on a textile basis. Gold or silver pendants of various shapes were sewn on a narrow strip of often red velvet, silk or satin. In the Shirvan and Guba-Khachmaz zones, this strip was often sewn on the “chutka” (headdress) and sometimes tied to the forehead. For this reason, this jewel was called “chutka gabagi”. This jewel was characteristic for the north-eastern regions of Azerbaijan, but was rare in Karabakh and in the Gazakh area, where it was known as



“gizil papag” or “gabaglig” (7, p.91).

In the Middle Ages, temporal jewels were common in a vast area, although in the late 19<sup>th</sup> - early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, they were used much less. In the past, this type of jewel was more widespread in the Nakhchivan zone where it has survived to this day and is known as “chanaband”. The jewel usually consists of small medallions of various

*“Kamar” belt*



shapes connected with rings. The last medallions end with hooks. The “chanaband” passes under the chin to the temples and is fastened on the headscarf. There are several species of “chanabands”, which have different parts and pendants. Women from wealthy families wore gold “chanabands”. Usually, gold “chanabands” were worn along with forehead jewels as evidenced by pictures of women from wealthy families of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. (2, p.85)

In Absheron and Gazakh, “bogazalti” jewels were common.

In the Zagatala zone, a temporal jewel known under the name “mamasan” was common and was an integral part of the lower cap “duymacha”.

Headdress jewels reflected the economic and social position of women. **The wearing of headdress jewels was associated with transition from girlhood to**

**the position of a married woman.** Richer and more complex jewels were worn by younger women.

**Among head jewels, earrings were more widespread in Azerbaijan in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.**

But it should be noted that in addition to these, there were areas where earrings were rare. These include Zagatala, Sheki and Guba-Khachmaz zones for which earrings in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were not characteristic (5, p.91). Probably this was due to the special headdress, when ears remained closed even at home. Earrings were characteristic for the Absheron, Nakhchivan, Talish and Karabakh zones (9, p. 45). It was more customary to wear earrings in cities.

Earrings had extraordinary variety. They had various shapes, designs and manufacturing techniques. The diversity of earrings hinders their precise classification. It is customary to divide them into two groups by the

*“Piala-Zang” earrings*



*“Togga” belt*

form of manufacture: ring and hook earrings. Both of these types have been known since antiquity.

Among ring earrings, earrings called “girkh duyma” (forty buttons), “heydari”, “uch duyma” and “besh duyma” were common (8, p.97). Ring earrings also include crescent earrings (silver and gold), which were rare at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Among hook earrings, filigree earrings, which consisted of several rows of pendants, were common. Depending on the shape of the components of these earrings, they were called “Armudu” (pear), “Gul” (flower) and “Piyala-Zang (bowl-bell). These earrings were mainly made of gold and were available to women from the wealthy strata of the population.

Earrings with one stone – turquoise, ruby and sometimes glass - were quite common both in cities and villages. Of precious stones they also used diamond for earrings in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We should also note “Piyala-Zang” and “Finegi” earrings covered with painted enamel. “Piyala-Zang” consisted of two hemispheres that resembled a bowl placed one above the other (10, p.107). “Finegi” are earrings with pendants from a ball covered with painted enamel. “Finegi” and “Piyala-Zang” earrings were rare since they were available only to very

*“Koran Gabi” breast jewel*



*“Goza Duyma” breast pendants*



rich families due to their high cost.

Earrings as a kind of jewelry became even more common in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is because they are not associated with any item of clothing that disappeared, as well as due to the fact that women do not cover their heads as they did in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Neck and breast jewels of Azerbaijani women in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century stood out for**

*“Chechik” breast jewel*

**their variety.** Necklaces of beads were widespread. They were worn on a daily basis, while silver or gold jewels were worn on ceremonial occasions. Beads of carnelian in combination with various amulets were common. Black beads with white specks against the evil eye - “goz munjugu” – were particularly widespread. Beads found during archaeological excavations allow us to assume that in ancient times people believed in



the magical power of beads of carnelian, chalcedony, jade, etc. They also wore necklaces of coral and small pearls. Coral beads were not common. It was customary to wear pearls in five to eight threads. Relatively large pearls were worn in combination with gold beads or stamped pendants both in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Stamped gold beads in the form of barley or cardamom were also widespread. Because of their shape, they were respectively called "arpa" and "hil". In the 1830- 50s, gold round beads called "Nargila" became widespread. Basically, "Nargila" was worn in small towns and rural areas. Necklaces of gold beads were rare and were available only to women from wealthy families. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, in the Nakhchivan zone, specific necklaces called "garabattag" and "chachik" were worn along with those mentioned. "Garabattag" consists of alternating lozenges of black beads and gold, and this jewel was tightly tied around the neck and buttoned in the back. In the Nakhchivan zone, the necklace "chachik" was common (2, p.85).

In the northern and northeastern regions of Azerbaijan, silver breast jewels were widespread. They were massive and sizeable, covering almost all the woman's breast. These jewels were especially characteristic of the Zagatala zone. There were three types of breast jewels: 1. "boyunbagi"; 2. "gazayagi"; 3. "ilgak" (5, p.91). All breast jewels were made of silver. With an everyday elegant apron, they wore the jewel "gazayagi" (goose foot) – the jewel resembles the contour of a goose's foot. In Absheron, in the Lankaran zone, Shamakhi and Ganja, gold filigree necklaces were widespread. They consisted of various figures: stars, fish, flowers and crescents. Usually these figures were arranged in two or three rows.

**Wrist jewels complemented the smart costume of Azerbaijani women.** Hand jewels of Azerbaijani women consisted of rings and bracelets. It should be noted that wearing bracelets was common only in some regions of Azerbaijan. Different regions of Azerbaijan had their local types of bracelets.

Bracelets of beads "golbag" were ubiquitous in Azerbaijan in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. These bracelets were made of small and large beads. Silver bracelets were more typical for the northern part of Azerbaijan – the Zagatala and Guba-Khachmaz zones. Here they wore bracelets shaped as hoops with diverging ends. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> - early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, bracelets with diverging ends and soldered filigree medallions became widespread in the same areas. "Boyunbagi" represented

a triangular plate with pendants of coins arranged in several rows. On plates there is usually an inset made of carnelian (5, p.91). Occasionally, in areas neighboring on Dagestan, there were bracelets with diverging ends in the form of a snake from a thick silver rod. In other areas, mainly in cities, silver and gold bracelets consisting of individual elements - filigree medallions – became somewhat common in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Another kind of filigree bracelets are bracelets consisting of two halves fastened with a clasp or pin. In the Talish zone and surrounding areas, bracelets consisting of stamped twinned pendants were somewhat common.

**Hand jewelry includes rings, the wearing of which is an ancient tradition in Azerbaijan.** The wearing of rings was quite common. Sometimes silver rings were decorated with ornaments applied by niello. The most characteristic stone for inserts was turquoise, and after it, carnelian and ruby. Women from wealthy families wore gold rings with precious stones.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> - early 20<sup>th</sup> century, rings with a diamond or almond-shaped stone ("baklava uzuk"), in which small diamonds were inserted, were common in cities. Rings with a stone in the form of a flower "gul" from diamonds were common too. It should be noted that many stones were worn as amulets. In the past, it was not customary to wear wedding rings. Until the 1920s, they were worn mostly by members of the upper social strata and intelligentsia. From the 1930s, the wearing of a wedding ring becomes widespread. From the late 1950s, giving a bride a wedding ring during the "nishan" (i.e., engagement ceremony) becomes common.

**In the women's costume in most of the ethnographic zones of Azerbaijan in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the belt was a mandatory element.** Belts were worn during holidays and festive events. Young brides put on belts every day and when leaving the house. Belts with metal parts were widespread in the northern part of Azerbaijan - Guba-Khachmaz, Shirvan, Sheki, Zagatala, Ganja- Gadabay, Gazakh and Karabakh zones (5, p.91). For the Nakhchivan and Talish zones, the wearing of a belt was not typical.

Leather belts, on which silver coins were sewn in rows ("pullu kamar"), were common. Belt buckles were usually decorated with floral ornaments through engraving and niello. Images of bird heads are quite common. Belts from leather and sometimes fabric with silver pieces sewn on them are common too. Pieces sewn on the leather belt were in the form of squares, diamonds, six or eight-petal flowers and semi-circular





buttons. Usually, they were made convex and had a loop from inside, to which they sewed the belt. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> - early 20<sup>th</sup> century, belts consisting entirely of metal and silver pieces became common. In all belts of this type there is a hallmark. This belt consists of rectangular silver plates on which rectangular filigree granulated medallions are fixed. In the cities - Baku, Shamakhi and Ganja, rich women wore belts of gold plates with fine filigree medallions attached to them (11, p.182). A

*“Kamar” belt*



peculiar waist jewel called “belbagi” was common in the Zagatala zone (5, p.91). The “belbagi” was worn with an apron, which replaced the string tied around the waist. Depending on the financial situation, the “belbagi” could consist of coins or a special semi-belt of metal, usually silver. The “belbagi” was a silver plate with filigree attached thereto.

Despite the spread of European-style jewelry in Azerbaijan in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, modern Azerbaijani jewelers continue to make traditional jewels. ✦

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