

DECORATIVE AND HOUSEHOLD FUNCTIONS OF EMBROIDERY IN AZERBAIJANI HOME INTERIOR IN 19TH-EARLY 20TH CENTURIES



Embroidery in Azerbaijan carries the high artistic merits and traditions of the material and spiritual culture of the people.

Samples of embroidery available at the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan are mostly works of high art and skill of the 18th-early 19th centuries. Most

women mastered the art of embroidery and decorated their homes themselves. It was equally important that embroidery required simple devices, on which small funds were spent. Artisanal traditional embroidery was a reflection of the customs and ideology accumulated over centuries. There was also professional embroidery which originated in private workshops and palaces of the rulers. Here, the main creators of composite structures and ornamental motifs were professional artists-decorators.

Archaeological finds of bone awls and sewing needles of the Neolithic (8th-6th millennia BC) and Chalcolithic (6th-4th millennia BC) in Gazakh (Azerbaijan) suggest that with the first steps of civilization in this region, sewing was already known.

The archaeological fund of the museum keeps medieval archaeological embroidery in satin stitch, silk and silver-plated threads of the 9th-13th centuries from the village of Kharaba - Gilan in Ordubad District and the village of Kish in Sheki District. Italian traveler Marco Polo (13th century), noting the beauty of Azerbaijani silk products, recorded: "There is a lot of silk here in Barda, they make silk and gold fabrics, and you cannot see such beautiful fabrics anywhere"; English traveler Anthony Jenkinson (16th century), describing the luxury of the Khan's palace and his garments, writes that "the king sat in a rich tent embroidered with silk and gold, and his clothes were embroidered with pearls and precious stones". (1, p. 33, 34, 109) According to the description of the historian Ibrahim Rahimzadeh in the work "Gəncineyi fəth-e Gəncə" (Collection of information about the capture of Ganja), in connection with the end of the 12-year war, the signing of the Istanbul agreement and the ascent of Ottoman Sultan Murat III to the throne, Safavid Shah Abbas I also sent gold embroidered items among his embassy gifts: four carpets, nine top shoulder garments "əba", one blanket, and even four skeins of gold threads (2, p. 82-83). In the 15th century, eastern silks embroidered with gold and velvets that had the highest technical and artistic properties were worn by the whole elite of Europe and Russia.

Embroidered items continued to play an important role in the interior design of the traditional Azerbaijani dwellings in the 19th-20th centuries too. Bright towels hanging on the mirrors, embroidered bedspreads and tablecloths, cases for books and small household items and wall panels with Koranic inscriptions and scenes created a special aesthetic atmosphere. Household items embroidered with gold and silk threads were an indispensable attribute of the Azerbaijani wedding



ceremony and dowry. Embroidered items were donated or handed down from generation to generation. Embroidery was used to decorate not only items for celebrations, but also everyday household items. The material for silk embroidery was silk - "qanauz", "daray", "atlas", velvet "məxmər", flax "kətan" and cloth "mahud". Among imported fabrics, cashmere wool "tirmə" was also a favorite material for gold and bead embroidery, but





because of the high cost it was available to few.

One of the most ancient and widespread was the form of embroidery in satin stitch "örtmə" or "doldurma" due to the simplicity of its technique in the decoration of the Azerbaijani home. This seam was embroidered with



silk, wool and gold threads on the front side of the fabric based on a drawing made in advance. (3, p.115-117) Embroidery in satin stitch in Azerbaijan was carried out by craftswomen with bright silk threads on wall hangings, cushions, curtains and covers for small quadrangular pillows "nazbalınc" and elongated pillows "mütəkkə".

Sequin embroidery "pərək" was made with small decorative silver and gold plates with holes, stringing them on a thread, and the ornament was covered entirely or around the contour of the drawing. The X-ray analysis we carried out showed that silver sequins contained both copper and silver.

Embroiderers used several ways of beaded embroidery - embroidery by the piece, or stringing several beads depending on the pattern. Small beads "toz muncuğu" or pearls "mirvari" were used to decorate items of furniture in the form of small wall hangings, capes and tassels for curtains. Ornamentation had several varieties - solid patterned filling of the entire space of the product; contour embroidery when a linear pattern was formed; embroidery of drawings with beads to get an embossed pattern on a solid background. Beads of solid filling also decorated solid items like beaded tassels "qotaz", wedding curtains "gərdək pərdəsi" and 18th century hookah pipes. The chain stitch is one of the oldest in the East and has spread among many Turkic peoples. The material for the chain stitch was the cloth "mahud", often black, red, green, and blue, and later - sleek black satin. The production center of the "təkəlduz" chain stitch in Azerbaijan in the 19th century was many large cities. (3, p.93-101) Complex, intertwined, and polygamous patterns, filled with bright silk threads on a red, black, dark blue and green background, were sewn with a metal crochet hook inserted into a wooden handle, and therefore, in some areas of Azerbaijan this embroidery is called "qarmaq" (hook).

Of all the varieties of embroidery art, gold embroidery "güləbatın" was considered the most expensive and complex since the technique required special training and the material was expensive. Gilded or silvered thread was made in Iran, Turkey, Bukhara and India. The metallic yarn intended for sewing has two varieties - flat thread in the form of foil and tight spiral spun from metallic threads on a silk or linen base. The features of the texture of threads also dictated a special sewing technique. When sewing, the flat gold embroidery threads lay in tight parallel vertical rows with short stitches on the fabric – they were pinned, i.e. sewed with auxiliary threads. (3, p.101-107)

Metal threads twisted in a tight spiral were often used as inking for the outlines of a pattern. Twisted gold embroidery threads were often used for making fringe. Gold embroidery was used to decorate items of decorative furniture, curtains for small niches in the wall "raf", bedspreads, wall hangings and various cases (4). These items, as well as cases for combs, antimony, prayer stamps and various cosmetic accessories were included in the bride's dowry in wealthy families. X-ray studies with a spectroscopic method showed that some of the analyzed threads were made from a 97-per-cent concentration of silver.

Samples of Azerbaijani gold embroidery, unusual in their artistic design, technique of embroidery and expressiveness of forms, not only became widespread in the everyday life of the Azerbaijani people, but also enjoyed great popularity and love beyond the country.

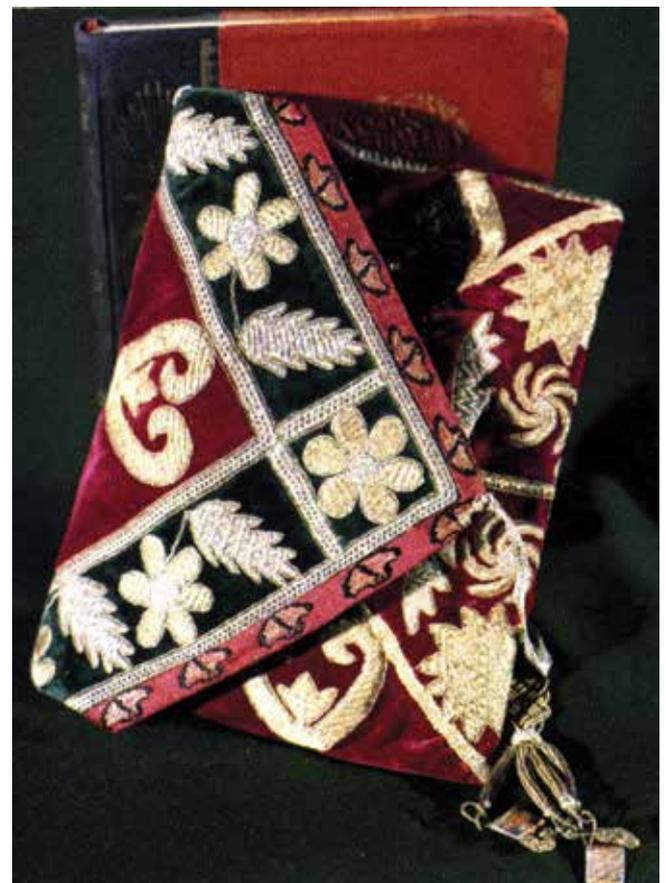
Embroidered items in furniture. Mirrors and their design in the decoration of the Azerbaijani home are a single whole, and therefore, special attention was paid to its design. The roots of the ideological content of the image of the "mirror" go back to the mythological consciousness of many peoples, and many rituals from ancient times in Azerbaijan are linked to it too (5). It is indisputable that the mirror had ritual significance on the wedding day, which is observed in Azerbaijan to this day. Azerbaijanis have a wedding ritual: the bride and groom need to look at the mirror sent by the groom, which is lit by candles on both sides. The family should keep "baxt güzgüsü" (Mirror of Fate) throughout the marriage, and if it breaks, it is considered a harbinger of misfortune in the family. Towels for mirrors, "ayna pərdəsi" or "sallamanc", like a mirror, are the most important attribute for decorating the room of the bride during the wedding ceremony. Traditional embroidery motifs for these items were rosewater vessels "gülabdan", and in this case, the Islamic symbolism of purification served as a kind of talisman.

Wall decorations "divar bəzəyi" are one of the most expressive decor items of the Azerbaijani home, embodying the spirit of the time and differing with fine work and rich ornamentation. The main theme of large wall embroidery decorated with sequins and chain stitch is the "tree of life" located in the center and surrounded by plant ornaments and peacocks. The compositional structure is organized vertically, often on the basis of tripartite framing with a motif of contrasting colors that form a kind of arch.

On one of the wall hangings, along with the chain stitch, a motif from a combination of red, blue and



black cloths is used. The central field with a bright red background decorates the tree of life, while the blue figure arch frames the central composition from above. The composition of the embroidered panel represents a symbolic picture of a flower garden, which is not inferior to the carpet "Ağacılı" (with a tree) by the beauty and elegance of its composite construction. On the





decoration in the cartouche there is an embroidered inscription in Arabic script: "Usta Əli Kəriminin işi, sakin Hacı Tərimxan" (Work of craftsman Ali Karimi, a resident of Haji Terimkhan) and "1213" of Hijrah, which corresponds to 1835.

At first glance, embroidered tablecloths, with various types of multicolored almond-shaped ornaments "buta" placed on a smooth background around the central medallion, are no different from the expensive cashmere wool "tirmə". Tablecloths are made of white cloth and are totally covered with a linear plant pattern of red, black, green, cream colors and elements of the blue color.

The museum collection has varieties of special small cases with eyelets, which were meant not only for keeping small household items, but also for decorating the walls. They were embroidered with gilt thread, decorated with the chain stitch, satin stitch and silk thread, while the ornaments were filled with sequins and beads.

The interior of the home, the places covered with

carpets, where the owners themselves sat or their guests were seated, were decorated with embroidered pillows. In Azerbaijan, the sizes and shapes of pillows were determined by their names: small and square - "nazbaliş", rectangular and large - "baliş" or "yastıq" and elongated - "mütəkkə". Most of the pillows are embroidered with satin stitch. Sequins were sometimes combined with embroidery from silk thread in satin stitch. With the invention of the sewing machine, satin stitch became less time-consuming, and cooperatives of embroiderers began to appear, for example in Sheki. Items created by cooperatives retain the characteristic features of folk embroidery: their brilliance, and combination of various and traditional patterns and materials.

A large number of capes and napkins were supposed to create a special festive atmosphere and comfort in the interior design of the Azerbaijani home. Round capes vary in size and are created using a variety of materials and techniques. Large capes, up to 1 meter in diameter, and small ones with a diameter of 30 cm for samovars and small square covers with a floral ornament and embroidered with sequins were an integral part of the traditional Azerbaijani home. A model of total filling is the round velvet red cape, where beads fill the pictures



and form a convex floral ornament in the center of the free background and along the border. The use of silver-plated twisted threads created especially rich texture for patterns embroidered on items.

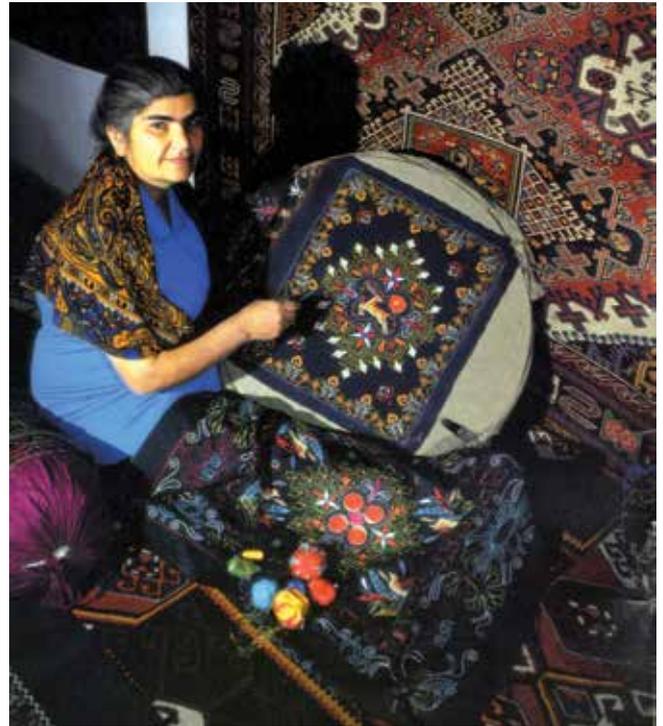
As you know, in the Muslim East wall hangings with Koranic verses embroidered with gilt threads are widespread in the interior of the home. Undoubtedly, the prohibition to depict a human in Islam and the beauty of the Arabic alphabet led to the rapid development of calligraphic art. This technique made it possible to sew inscriptions in Arabic on products, and mostly, these were verses from the Koran. The belief in the magic of the Arabic script and the Koranic verses is reflected in embroidery, often gold embroidery.

Some of the wall hangings with religious themes are also made with chain stitch. All stories are similar to the composition embroidered with colorful silk threads, wall hangings of black velvet, where a mosque is depicted in the center with the sun going down behind its dome. The image of the sun is endowed with human traits, and the most characteristic ornamental motif is on embroidery, copper products and shields.

Among items of decorative furniture, rectangular curtains for small niches in the wall "raf", most of which are ornamented with artisan gold embroidery, were widespread. Curtains also stand out for their great diversity and artistic properties. Often, the primary motive here is the same type of flower pattern that uniformly fills the entire surface of the product.

Embroidery in the interior of the traditional Azerbaijani dwelling differed with the richness and diversity of ornamental motifs and performance technique. Craftswomen largely borrowed their inspiration and creativity from nature: looking closely at it, women stylized natural motifs and elements into symbols, adding new content each time. Patterns depicted on various household items were consistent with their form and primary purpose. The favorite floral motifs of Azerbaijani embroideries are rose, narcissus, carnation, poppy, lily and flowers of fruit trees, as well as the ears and leaves of different shapes.

By embroidery in gold, silver and silk threads, as well as plaques, beads, sequins, pearls and so on, one can argue that the crisis of craft production in connection with the manufactory boom had no effect on this version of the craft. In the 19th century, sewing machines began to spread everywhere in Azerbaijan, both in the cities and in provincial areas, which facilitated the hard work of embroiderers. The sewing machine itself, which had



an original and elegant design that combined different styles, also became a part of interior design until the middle of the 20th century. Thus, the objective conditions of the overall progress caused by time, material and technical innovations and new ornamental motifs did not change the manner and character of motifs and principles of the composite construction of Azerbaijani embroidery. ◆

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