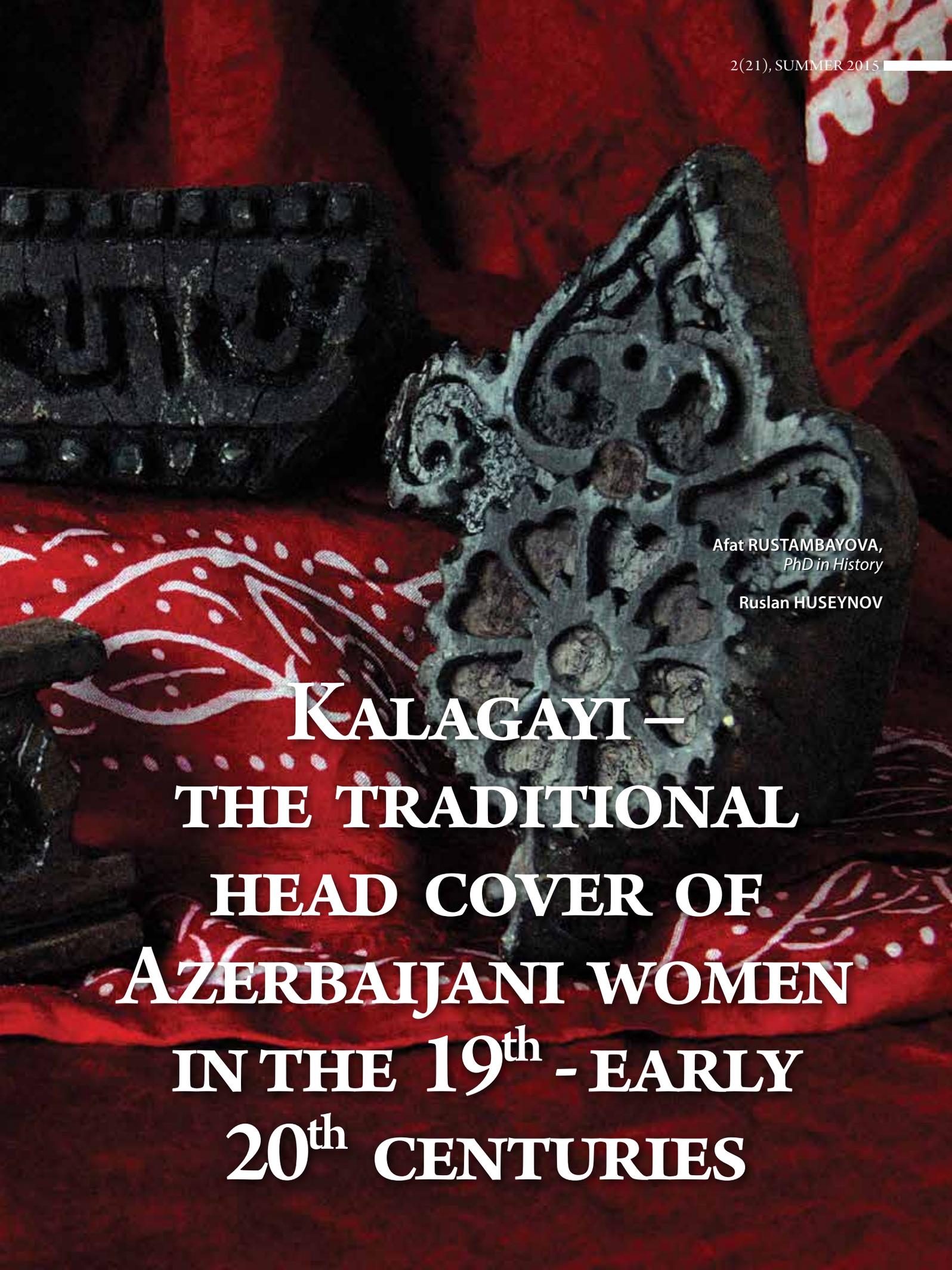


irs Traditional crafts





**KALAGAYI –
THE TRADITIONAL
HEAD COVER OF
AZERBAIJANI WOMEN
IN THE 19th - EARLY
20th CENTURIES**

Afat RUSTAMBAYOVA,
PhD in History

Ruslan HUSEYNOV



In 2014, the Azerbaijani headdress “**kəlağayı**” was included on the UNESCO List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity under the name of “Traditional art of making and wearing the women’s silk headscarf kalagayi and its symbols”. The kalagayi is a recognizable element of the ethnic identity of the Azerbaijani people.

In the modern conditions of the development of a sovereign state, the interest of the Azerbaijani people in their rich historical and cultural heritage has increased and absorbed all the valuable experience of the past generations. Information carriers of characteristic features of the national heritage of an ethnic group are traditional clothes, which took shape over a long period of history. Reflecting the lifestyle and cultural and spiritual values of the people, clothes were also an indicator of climatic conditions and socioeconomic development of the country.

To display the local features in the use of padded silk head covers in a festive and everyday dress, ceremonial life and social relationships, it is necessary to make a historical digression into the history and development of this type of craft.

Archaeological artifacts and written sources testify that developed textile crafts have existed in Azerbaijan since ancient times. The centuries of experience in

the use of vegetable dyes in Azerbaijan are proved by the archaeological material of the Kultapa settlements where there are stone mortars with pestles of the 4th-3rd millennium BC, on one of which traces of the natural dye madder were found (1). Obvious evidence of the existence of the printed cloth craft “**basma**” among ancient Azerbaijanis is archaeological clay stamps of the 1st millennium BC (2). Written confirmation of the presence of the art of ornamentation of fabrics, i.e. printed clothes, is available in the description of Herodotus: “In the Caucasus there are trees whose leaves have such a property. Grinding and mixing them with water, locals draw images of animals on their clothes with this mixture. These animal images do not wash out and are worn out with fur, as if they had been woven on them from the very beginning.” (3)

With the appearance of silk weaving, the presence of the richest flora in Azerbaijan and the developed craft of printed clothes contributed to the fact that the method of decorating textiles with colorful patterns has been applied to locally-made silk fabrics.

The appearance and further development of sericulture in Azerbaijan was furthered by its location on caravan routes, where ancient civilizations appeared and disappeared and priceless monuments of culture



were created and borrowed. In these territories, peoples of different cultures develop common values and create a special elite dressed in silk. And with the end of the Chinese monopoly on silk, Azerbaijan is becoming a center of silk production.

Medieval Arabic sources such as the author of the 10th century Al-Muqaddasi describe the city of Barda, where silk fabrics, curtains, handkerchiefs and finished products are produced and sold at the famous market Al-Kurki (4). The beauty of silk shawls of Shamakhi and Barda was noted by the 13th century Italian traveler Marco Polo. The 16th century English traveler Anthony Jenkinson recorded that colorful silk is delivered from Azerbaijan to Astrakhan for sale (4). Describing the Shamakhi market in the early 17th century, Adam Oleary emphasizes colorful fabrics, silk, brocade, etc., which can be bought at a cheap price (5). Turkish traveler Evliya Celebi admired the beauty of Tabriz silks, the grace of the world famous silks of Ganja and incomparable Sheki silks (6).

Therefore, silks occupied a dominant position in the traditional attire of Azerbaijani women in the 19th century. It should be noted that the traditional clothes of each ethnic group, in addition to highlighting its national identity outside the country, had determinants of a separate society, which, in addition to the conventional indicators of social status, had conventions that indicated the marital status, region and age of a person. At the same time, particular aesthetic and ceremonial functions and sacred significance were attached to the organic component of the national costume – the headscarf.

It should be noted that the diversity of head cov-



ers of Azerbaijani women, until the last century, was due primarily to mandatory head covering for women, which had deep pre-Islamic cultural and religious roots. The Koran recommends that women wear head covers in two surahs - 24:31 "The Light" and 33:59 "The Clans". But apart from the religious function, the head cover of the Azerbaijani women, which also complements and emphasizes the suit outside the home, was endowed with a special information value. For example, specific changes in the headdress occurred with marriage as the social status and sometimes the class layer of the woman changed.

Among the variety of colorful head covers of Azerbaijani women, the elegant silk covers "*kəlağayı*" stood out for their democratic nature, but their compositional arrangement - coloring and patterns - were carriers of certain information about the region, marital status and age.

According to our assumption, the etymology of “*kəlağayi*” may consist of the Turkic words “*kəllə*” (head) + “*əgri*”, probably derived from the “*ağmaq*”, which means a rise (7) and means surface in the toponyms of some Turkic languages (8).

Craft workshops making silk head covers appeared precisely at the sericulture centers of Azerbaijan - Ganja, Barda, Shamakhi, Sheki, Shusha, etc. Ganja kalagayis were in great demand among female residents of the North Caucasus (9). The polychromy of kalagayis and the brightness of the palette were associated primarily with the richness of natural dyes while ornamental elements and their compositions varied depending on fashion.

Graceful head covers from non-woven silk threads of the kalagayi were decorated manually, one by one, by means of cold and hot cloth printing. Preserving the ancient and simple technology of design, cloth printing has pronounced features of ornamental interpretation – compositional design, which indicates rich the creative imagination and high skills of Azerbaijani cloth printers.

In 19th century literature there are numerous reports about centers producing patterned silk scarves kalagayi in Sheki, Shamakhi, Ganja, Baskal, etc. But the most reliable sources are artifacts of the 19th-20th centuries presented in variations of ornamental and compositional structure and color.

The ornamental structure of all kinds of kalagayis is based on the principle of closed composition, which is performed by the classical scheme based on symmetry in the form of a square. In coloristic design, the principle of contrast between three or four color ornaments is observed.

It should also be noted that kalagayis received their name for coloring or ornamentation, which had some meanings.

Kalagayi production remained in Azerbaijan in the 20th century, but considerably decreased. Considering the kalagayis available in the 19th and early 20th centuries, we should note the diversity of their compositional structures. But the existence of their richer patterned design is demonstrated by the museum collection of cloth printing stamps (over 120 items).

The decline in the local production of silk fabrics and scarves, in particular in the second half of the 19th century was, of course, affected by considerable importation from Iran, Russia and other countries of factory scarves that competed with local producers.

The silk scarf not only warmed the body in cold weather, but also protected from the heat. Kalagayis



of 160x160cm or 180x180cm in size covered the head over the lower headgear, covering the hair and partially the figure. It should be noted that large covers such as “*çarşab*” or “*çadra*”, which covered the entire body of a woman from head to toe, were widespread in large cit-



ies and suburban villages with developed trade in Azerbaijan. Part of Azerbaijan, especially the western and southern parts of the country, did not know this kind of head covers (10).

The widespread use of the kalagayi made it part of

the ceremonial rituals of Azerbaijanis. So it should be noted that silk head covers were part of wedding gift exchanges. Kalagayis were also used to cover the deceased, but the color of the cover determines the age of the deceased.



Thus, the comprehensive study of Azerbaijani head covers reveals the diversity of their compositional construction and use. After going a long way in the craft of manufacturing and designing ornamental silk head covers, a distinctive artistic and figurative language was achieved.

The originality and expressiveness of the artistic language of the kalagayis makes them a bearer of the stylistic features of the artistic culture, crafts, lifestyle and world outlook of the Azerbaijani people. ❀



References

1. Кулиев М.М. Древнее ремесло Азербайджана и этноботаника /Материалы по истории Азербайджана, Баку, с.73.
2. Нариманов И.Г. Глиняные штампы из Западного Азербайджана. с.125
3. Геродот. История. Москва, 2009, с.99.
4. Vəlixanlı N.M. IX-XII əsr ərəb coğrafiyaşünas-səyahları Azərbaycan haqqında. Bakı, 1974, s.89.
5. Путешественники об Азербайджане. Баку, 1968, с.108.
6. Эвлия Челеби, Книга путешествий, с. 90, 112, 113, 118.
7. Qəhramanov C. Nəsimi divanının leksikası. Bakı, 1970, s.40.
8. Конкобаев К. Топонимия Южной Киргизии. Фрунзе, 1980, с.125.
9. Гаджиева С.Ш. Одежда народов Дагестана. Москва, с. 103.
10. Алекперов А.К. Исследования по археологии и этнографии Азербайджана. Баку, 1960, с. 121.
11. Каракашлы К.Т.Об азербайджанских головных уборах. Материалы по истории Азербайджана. Баку, 1973, с.87.



