

JORABS - TRADITIONAL AZERBAIJANI SOCKS



One of the essential elements of Azerbaijani national clothes is jorabs - knitted socks. The literature of past eras contains almost no information about jorabs, and even in the studies of 20th century ethnographers this topic has not been sufficiently addressed. Meanwhile, jorabs deserve special attention.

When considering traditional shoes it is easy to notice that their sole is thin and does not protect your feet from injury. Therefore there was a need for thick socks that supplemented leather shoes. Jorabs were knitted from wool, cotton and silk threads. The National

History Museum of Azerbaijan has a large collection of jorabs representing different ethnographic regions of the country.

Socks differed in their purpose and reflected the sexual and social identity of the owner. Jorabs are divided into men's and women's ones; everyday and weekend ones. Azerbaijani socks were knitted entirely in hosiery-knitting, i.e. the leg was not knitted with the method of ribbing. The heel was knitted as an extension of the leg and sole, which were joined at right angles. The top of the foot and the heel portion had a pointed shape. The knitting of the heel was different from the knitting of the heels of Russian socks, which had a rounded shape. In order to make sure that socks hold themselves better on the foot, twisted woolen laces, which were tied around the calf or ankle, were fixed on the edge of the leg. A characteristic feature of Azerbaijani jorabs is that often their sole had the same pattern as their foot: the tradition to remove the shoes in the living room and sit on the floor when the sock soles were visible had an impact on the appearance of this specificity.

Men's jorabs usually had a longer leg of 15 - 25 cm. In the countryside men tucked pants into socks in winter. Generally, poor peasants wore charigs over socks. In winter over *shalvars* (pants) tucked into socks, they wrapped their leg with a *dolag* (puttees). They sewed a *gaytan* (laces) on one end of the dolag and fixed the dolag on the leg with its help. This way of wearing jorabs and puttees is shown on the Tilka picture of 1910 depicting a wealthy urban resident of Gazakh District (3). Men's ornamented socks were knitted usually in darker colors. They also knitted smooth long socks in white or dark colors without a pattern.

Women's socks had a short leg and more vivid and bright colors. Some of them, designed for visits and weddings, were knitted from fine wool or silk, sometimes with a *gulabatin* (gold thread).



By ornamental designs one can distinguish three types of socks: jorabs, entirely covered with a pattern without stripes with edging on the leg; jorabs with ornamented stripes on the leg; jorabs with the highlighted end of the foot and highlighted heel covered with the same ornament.

The similarity in the composition of the pattern is that the leg has several narrow stripes with a pattern, and then the entire surface of the foot is covered with one main pattern enclosed in a narrow frame of the edging. The structure of the composition is very similar

to that of a carpet. Carpet art undoubtedly influenced the ornamentation of jorabs. There are patterns such as "achma-yumma", "gulbudag", "agaj", "buta", "tirmasayag" and "gotaz". Edgings such as "sichandishi", "mollabashi", "dolamakiynak", "dolangach" (triangles with zigzag), as well as S-shaped edging, which is considered a symbol of water and ajdah, are used on the leg and around the foot. Most often such edgings as "mollabashi" and "traveling wave" are used in the frame of the foot.

The patterns on jorabs in different regions have specific local features.

The pattern on socks in the Karabakh zone is varied. Some jorabs have the main ornament in the form of a tree with branches and flowers - "gulbudag" (4). It can also be called the tree of life as the image of a tree with branches, which is called the "tree of life", is characteristic for ornamental motifs of Azerbaijan. The next kind of pattern is shaped as an irregular elongated hexagon, in which a twig is depicted. A separate kind is the top of the foot and heel highlighted with a stripe and inside them - another pattern shaped as a flower with twigs. There is

also a pattern of red thread on a white background like the "achma-yumma" carpet design. Flowers are depicted inside the squares. On one of the sock, little dogs are depicted on both sides of the squares.

The collection of Karabakh socks also has socks with the tirma pattern. On the foot of the sock there are red and white stripes, in which small butas are located. These socks differ with their fine wool and elegant knitting. Also, there are socks knitted from coarse wool: one type has crimson roses on the foot, others - cells in which a





stylized buta is depicted. The latter pattern is also found in Shirvan. We should note socks that have simpler patterns and are knitted from coarse black wool. On their surface there are small lilac or red diamonds.

On one type of socks of very good knitting from Gazakh District the background consists of broad burgundy and black stripes and depicts squares edged with stylized horns. Another type of Gazakh socks is white socks, and occasionally they depict a pattern in the form of a triangle with three pendants. This element is found in carpets and considered an image of earrings (sirga) (6). On socks from Tovuz District there is a big "achma-yumma" pattern on the foot and the colors are brown and white.

Socks from Gabala District are knitted from coarse woolen threads. On the leg of socks there is a pattern shaped as a kitab with a buta and in the frame of the foot there is a traveling wave. On the foot, on a black background, a buta is located in rows. Interesting socks from the same district are kept at the Museum of Georgia (7). On the foot there is a pattern in the form of an axis on which diamonds are located and from which twigs radiate out. On the leg there is edging shaped as a kitab with a buta and in the frame of the foot there is a traveling wave. Socks from Shaki have a similar pattern (8).

Socks from Balakan and Zagatala districts have a traditional Azerbaijani shape with a short leg. One type depicts a stylized tree with twigs on a white background. On the sole there are transverse stripes of white and red threads. In the frame on the foot there is the "sichandishi"

edging. The second type is one broad stripe with edging in the form of triangles on the leg, and there is a traveling wave on the edge of the stripe. The foot has a white background, in its middle there is a broad stripe with large edging in the form of a traveling wave. The top of the foot is black. On the sole, there are four black stripes in the middle.

Among the eastern regions of Azerbaijan, Lerik District is represented by the most significant number of kinds of socks. Some socks have a pattern that looks like a striped tirma. Red and white stripes have edging shaped as zigzags and triangles. On the leg there is a pattern - kitab and buta.

Socks from the mountainous part of Astara District have an "achma-yumma" pattern and are without stripes on the leg. The background is mostly red and the pattern consists of white, black and yellow threads. Around the foot one sock has a kitab with a buta and the other - a traveling wave (9).

Socks from the village of Allar in Yardimli District differ with their special patterns, good knitting and consistency of colors. On some of them there are black and white zigzag-shaped thin stripes on a brick background and a traveling wave along the edge of the foot. On others - along the entire length - there are broad transverse stripes of different colors, in which there is an elegant pattern in the form of zigzags, from which a rectangle and





a triangle radiate out. In the frame around the foot there is edging shaped as a traveling wave. Along the entire length of the sock there are transverse pale turquoise and red stripes with an S-shaped white pattern in the form of a traveling wave. The stripes are separated by thin black and white lines.

Jorabs from the Mugan zone are characterized by broad stripes separated by thin lines. An S-shaped pattern, characteristic for kilims of this zone, is frequently found on the stripes. On the sole stripes are knitted into herringbones.

In the Shirvan zone there are jorabs with the “achmalyumma” pattern. The colors on them are mostly red, white and black, and on the foot there is edging shaped as “mollabashi”. These socks are made in Baku. Another pair

of socks is socks acquired in Baku with a tirma pattern. There are small butas in red and white stripes. On jorabs from Khizi District, on a dark or light background that forms some kind of cells there is a small buta or a flower.

In Shamakhi District, a gray background with pink butas has been common since the end of the 19th century. The top of the foot and heels are highlighted by a stripe with a pattern in the form of a traveling wave. On the leg there is edging shaped as X and a traveling wave. On the top of the sock and on the heel, a flower with leaves is knitted; the leg of the sock is very low, and a thin stripe is tied with a lace. On the top of the foot there is an S-shaped pattern. There is an image of a flower on the top of the sock separated with a stripe of edging.

Socks from Guba District have a low leg. The entire

foot is covered with stripes, in which flowers of carpet patterns with four petals are placed. On a different type of jorabs, there is a large buta in the upper part of the foot, and a geometric pattern and other knitting at the bottom. The heel is not knitted, and a hole has been left. On the sole there is small yellow-orange cell. At the State Museum of Georgia, there are two pairs of jorabs from

Guba woven in 1908 (10). On some of them, a large part of the foot is covered with rows of eight-pointed stars, and small butas are knitted at the bottom of the foot, which is separated with a stripe of edging. In the stripe of edging there is a traveling wave and triangles. The second sock has patterns of small butas along the foot and serrated edging in the frame. Guba socks reflect



elements of patterns characteristic of Guba carpets.

On socks from the Nakhchivan zone, there is a yellow background and the same pattern on the stripes of the leg shaped as a kitab with a buta. Another type – on the foot there is a pattern in the form of two diamonds with four branches in the tops. This picture resembles a pattern on carpets known as “shamdan” (candlestick, lamp) (11). In the frame of the foot there is edging from

triangles. The Nakhchivan regional museum has two pairs of jorabs with a pattern identical to those described above. On some of them there is a pattern – a tree with leaves in the form of the buta, and on others - “shamdan”. Also, there is the “achma-yumma” pattern on socks from the Nakhchivan zone. Socks are knitted from blue and pale pink cotton threads. The entire surface of the foot is covered with the “achma-yumma” pattern while there





is the “mollabashi” edging in the frame. There are jorabs knitted from woolen threads with a gulabatin. The background on the foot is crimson, the pattern is white, while the leg has three stripes – the one in the middle has edging from rhombuses and the two extreme ones - edging in the form of a zigzag. There is edging from triangles in the frame of the sole.

As we have already mentioned, fancy silk socks were also worn. All silk socks have a very low leg - 3-5 cm and are knitted in the traditional form for Azerbaijani socks, i.e. the heel is knitted as an extension of the leg and sole. Often, there are 3-4 stripes with edging on the leg. On a number of socks, the stripes of the leg have edging with a kitab and buta. There are socks in which stripes of the leg have elegant floral edging with rounded lines. A characteristic feature of silk socks is that there is the same pattern on the foot and sole, around which there is a frame with “mollabashi” or “dolangach” edging. More complex edging consisting of triangles and rhombuses is also often found in the frame. On silk socks there are also patterns characteristic of tirma fabric. Deep red and white stripes with small butas are found on socks. Sometimes silk socks have a white background on which the buta is located in rows. On many socks there are silk laces for fastening on the legs. Silk socks in museum collections are all little worn or brand new. Apparently, they were put on for solemn occasions; they were part of the dowry, and many kept them in chests.

These types of socks belong to the late 19th - early 20th centuries. Most socks were knitted by artisans for sale as they have very complex and fine patterns and their knitting required special skills.

When studying such a piece of clothing of the

peoples of the Caucasus as socks, an interesting detail comes to the fore: the majority of the peoples of the North Caucasus did not wear knitted socks. Leather socks (or stockings) were typical of them. Wool socks began to be knitted at the beginning of the 20th century, and not by all peoples (12). In Georgia, they wore smooth socks with patterns, but the design of the patterns differs from those in Azerbaijan, and on the sole of the sock the foot pattern was not repeated. Armenians knitted socks with patterns on the leg and at the end of the foot, while a free area was usually left in the middle.

Studies have shown that sock-knitting in Azerbaijan was a developed craft directly linked with the development of carpet-weaving. Analysis of sock ornamentation indicates that all elements were borrowed from Azerbaijani carpets. The structure of the composition of the picture seems to repeat the basic structure of the carpet composition. Ornamentation of socks is extremely rich and some of them can be considered a work of art due to the grace of the composition and pattern. ❀

REFERENCES

1. Измайлова А.А. О народной одежде Нахичеванской зоны в XIX – начале XX века. // Известия АН Азерб. ССР, 1981, №2, с.81.
2. Сборник для описания местностей и племен Кавказа. XI том. Тифлис, 1891, с.288.
3. Открытка из серии «Народы Кавказа в национальных костюмах». Тюрки-Карапапах. Художник М.Тильке. 1910г.
4. Керимов Л. Азербайджанский ковер. Том I. Баку-Ленинград. 1961, табл.108, с.59.
5. Трофимова А.Г. Обзор коллекций одежды народов Азербайджана Государственного Музея Грузии. // Хозяйство и материальная культура народов Кавказа в XIX – XX вв. Москва, 1971, с.187.
6. Керимов Л. Указ. раб., табл.31, рис.2., с.32.
7. Трофимова А.Г. Указ. раб., с.197.
8. Там же, с.164
9. Научный архив Института Истории НАН Азерб. Негативный фонд №569.
10. Трофимова А.Г. Указ. раб., с.193.
11. Керимов Л. Указ. раб., табл.35, рис.5, с.36.
12. Студенецкая Е.Н. Одежда народов Северного Кавказа XVIII-XX вв. Москва. 1989, с.55.