

EMBROIDERY IN THE INTERIOR OF THE AZERBAIJANI HOME IN THE 19TH - EARLY 20TH CENTURIES

The artistic embroidery of Azerbaijan carries high artistic merits and traditions of the material and spiritual culture of the people.

Most women wielded the art of embroidery and were engaged in decorating their homes themselves. Equally important was the fact that embroidery required simple devices, on the purchase of which little money was spent. Artisanal traditional embroidery was a reflection of the customs and ideology accumulated over the centuries. There was professional artistic embroidery born in private workshops and palaces of the rulers. Here, the creators of the main compositional structures and ornamental motifs were professional ornamental artists.

Archaeological finds of bone awls and sewing needles of the Neolithic (8th-6th millennium BC) and Eneolithic (6th-4th millennium BC) in Gazakh (Azerbaijan) indicate that sewing was already known in the region with the first steps of civilization.

The Archaeological Fund of the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan keeps medieval archaeological embroideries with silk and silver-plated stitches of the 9th-13th centuries from the village of Kharaba - Gilan in Ordubad District and the village of Kish in Sheki District. Italian traveller Marco Polo (13th century), not-

ing the beauty of silk products of Azerbaijan, recorded: "There is a lot of silk here in Barda, they make silk and gold fabrics, and you will not see such beautiful ones elsewhere"; English traveller Anthony Jenkinson (16th century), describing the luxury of the Khan's palace and his clothes, writes that "the king sat in a rich tent sewn with silk and gold, his clothes were embroidered with pearls and precious stones" (1, p. 33, 34, 109). According to the description of historian Ibrahim Rahimzadeh in the work "Gəncine-yi fəth-e Gəncə" (Collection of Reports on the Capture of Ganja) in connection with the end of the 12-year war, the signing of the Istanbul Treaty and the accession of Ottoman Sultan Murad III to the throne, Safavid Shah Abbas I, among ambassadorial gifts, also sent gold-embroidered items: four rugs, nine upper shoulder clothes "əba», one bedspread and even four skeins of gold-embroidered threads (2, p. 82-83). Already in the 15th century the whole elite of Europe and Russia wore gold-embroidered oriental silk and velvet, which possessed, undoubtedly, the highest technical and artistic merits.

Embroidered products continued to play a great role in the interior decoration of the traditional home of Azerbaijan in the 19th-20th centuries. Bright towels hung on mirrors, and embroidered bedspreads and

Door curtain. Sheki, 19th century, National Museum of History of Azerbaijan, NMHA







for small niches in the wall “rəf”, bedspreads, wall decorations and various cases were decorated with gold embroidery (4). These items, as well as cases for combs, hair dye, prayer stamps and various cosmetic accessories were included in the bride’s dowry in wealthy families. Spectroscopic X-ray studies showed that some of the analyzed threads were made with 97-per-cent silver.

Samples of Azerbaijani gold embroidery products, unusual in their artistic design, embroidery techniques and expressiveness of forms, were not only widely used in the everyday life of the Azerbaijani people, but enjoyed great popularity and love outside its borders.

Embroidered items in the interior. The mirror and its 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 worldview content of the image of the “mirror” go into the mythological consciousness of many peoples, and many rituals from the most ancient times are associated with it in Azerbaijan as well (5). The ritual significance of the mirror on the wedding day, which is observed in Azerbaijan to this day, is indisputable. Azerbaijanis have a wedding ritual: the bride and the groom should look in the mirror sent by the groom, illuminated by candles on both sides. The family must

Cover for a large pillow, 19th century, NMHA



keep the “bəxt güzgüsü” (mirror of fate) throughout their entire married life, and its breakage 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 bride’s room during a wedding ceremony.** Traditional motifs for embroidery on these products were vessels for pink water “gülabdan”, and in this case, Islamic symbols 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 times and distinguished by their delicate work and rich ornamentation. The main theme of large wall embroideries decorated with sequins and tambour seams is the “tree of life”, located in the centre and surrounded by floral ornaments and peacocks. Compositional construction is organized vertically, more often, according to the principle of triangular framing with an applique of contrasting colours that form a kind of arch.

On one of the wall decorations, along with tambour embroidery, an applique made of a combination of red, blue and black cloth was also used. The central field with a bright red background adorns the tree of life, and a blue curved arch frames the central composition from above. The composition of the embroidered panel represents a symbolic picture of a blossoming garden,



Cover for a small table, 19th century, NMHA

which is not inferior in its beauty and grace to the composition of the carpet “Ağaclı» (with a tree). The decoration in cartouche is embroidered with an inscription in Arabic script: “Usta əli Kəriminin işi, sakin Hacı Tərimxan. (The work of the master Ali Karim, a resident of Haji Terimkhan) 1213” Hijra, which corresponds to 1835.

Cover for a small table, 19th century, NMHA



Handbag, 19th century, NMHA

At first glance, embroidered tablecloths with varieties of multi-colour almond-shaped buta ornaments placed on a smooth background around the central medallion are no different from the expensive Kashmiri woolen fabric “tirmə”. Tablecloths are made of white cloth completely filled with a linear plant pattern of red, black, green, cream and elements of blue colour.

The museum collection also has varieties of small special cases with eyelets, which were intended not only for storing small household items, but also for decorating walls. They were embroidered with gilt threads and decorated with a tambour seam and stitched silk threads, and ornaments were filled with spangles and beads.

In the interior of the dwelling, places covered with carpets, where the owners themselves sat, or seated their guests, were furnished with pillows decorated with embroideries. In Azerbaijan, the size and shape of the pillows determined their names: small and square – “nazbalış”, rectangular and large – “balış” or “yastıq”,



elongated – “mütəkkə”. Most of the pillows are embroidered with tambour embroidery. Spangles were sometimes combined with embroidery with silk thread stitch. With the invention of the sewing machine, tambour embroidery became less laborious, and embroiderers’ artels began to appear, for example, in Sheki. The products created by artels retain the characteristic features of folk embroideries: colourfulness, combination of diverse and traditional patterns among themselves and materials.

A large number of wraps and napkins were to create a special atmosphere and coziness in the arrangement of the interior of the Azerbaijani home. More and more round-shaped wraps of varied sizes were created using various materials and techniques. Large wraps with a diameter of up to 1 metre, small ones with a diameter of up to 30 cm for samovars and small square bedspreads with floral patterns embroidered with sequins were an integral part of the traditional Azerbaijani home. A sample of complete filling is a round red velvet wrap, where drawings are filled with beads, forming a convex floral ornament in the centre of the free background and on the edge. The use of twisted silver-plated threads created a particularly rich texture for embroidered patterns on products.

As you know, in the countries of the Muslim East, wall decorations with sayings from the Koran embroidered from gilded threads were widely used in the interior of the dwelling. Undoubtedly, the ban to

Embroidery, Baku, early 20th century, NMHA

portray a person 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 these were mainly sayings from the Koran. Belief in the magic of Arabic writing and sayings from the Koran is reflected in embroidery, more often gold embroidery.

Some wall decorations with a religious theme are also made with tambour stitches. All plots are similar to the composition of a wall decoration made of black velvet embroidered with multi-coloured silk threads, where a mosque, behind the dome of which the sun sets, is depicted in the centre. The image of the sun is endowed with human features, the most characteristic ornamental motif on embroideries, copper products and shields.

Among items of decorative design, curtains of rectangular shapes for small niches in the wall “rəf”, most of which are ornamented with gold embroidery, were widespread. Curtains also have a great variety and artistic merits. Here, often the main motif is the same type of floral ornament that uniformly fills the entire surface of the product.

Embroidered products in the interior of the traditional Azerbaijani home stood out for the richness and diversity of ornamental motifs and techniques. In many ways, the craftswomen took their inspiration and creativity from nature: looking at it, women stylized natural motifs and elements into symbols, each time adding new content. Patterns depicted on various household items corresponded to their shape and, above all, their purpose. The favourite plant motifs of Azerbaijani embroidery are rose, daffodil, carnation, poppy, lily and flowers of fruit trees, as well as ears and leaves of various shapes.

Judging by embroideries with gold, silver and silk threads, as well as sequins, beads, spangles, pearls, etc., it can be argued that the crisis of handicraft production in connection with the manufacturing boom did not affect this kind of craft. In the 19th century, machines began to spread throughout Azerbaijan, both in cities and in provincial regions, which facilitated the laborious work of embroiderers. The sewing machine itself, having an original and noble design and combining different styles, also became part of the interior design until the middle of the 20th century. So, the objective conditions of general progress due to time, material-technical innovations and the emergence of new ornamental



motifs did not change the manner and nature of motifs and principles of the compositional construction of Azerbaijani embroidery. ✨

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