



Following tradition

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VARIETY OF KELAGAYI TYPES



Kelagayi is a recognizable element of the Azerbaijani people's ethnic identity.

In addition to the distinctive features of its ethnic affiliation outside the home country, there were separate deciding societal factors that influenced the traditional clothes of each ethnic group. Besides the generally accepted indicators of the social status, formalities that indicated the marital status, the region and age of a person came into play. At the same time, the headdress, a harmonious component of the national attire, possessed special aesthetic and ceremonial functions and sacred significance.

It is worth mentioning that the diversity of Azerbaijani women's headdress types was mainly due to the obligatory head coverings that existed till the last century and had profound pre-Islamic cultural and religious roots. The head cover of Azerbaijani women, which complemented and favorably highlighted the clothing, had special informative value as well. Thus, marriage led to special headdress changes due to the alteration of the social status and sometimes the social class of a woman.

"Kelagayi", graceful silk-made covers, stood out among a host of colorful Azerbaijani head covers for their democratic nature, but their compositional design, i.e. the color palette and patterns, carried certain information about the region, marital status and age of the woman.

Each of the delicate head covers made of untwisted silk threads was ornamented separately by hand with the use of cold and hot padding. Having retained the ancient and simple design technology, the kelagayi pad has distinguished features of ornamental and compositional interpretation, which points to the abundant creative imagination and high skills of Azerbaijani craftsmen.

Artefacts dating back to the 19th-20th centuries distinguished by a variety of ornamental and compositional design and coloration are the most reliable source of

information to determine the types of kelagayi. From the viewpoint of compositional design, kelagayi could be loosely grouped into types depending on the number and location of ornaments.

Bordered kelagayi is the simplified option with a composition featuring a single-tint medial field and one thin stripe of patterns applied along portioned margins upon boundaries. The number of the bordering colors



was usually no more than three contrasting shades. The ornamental-compositional solution of this type of kelagayi was comprised of a loose uniform pattern applied along the medial field as colors or as almond-shaped "buta" ornaments. Rarely, bird images and one thin ornamental bordered stripe were used. This option allows applying patterns called "shah" in the corners of the single-tint medial field (1).

The complex type of ornamental compositions included various kinds of a complete fill-up of the product's surface with different drawings.



The ornamental structure of all types of kelagayi stems from the concept of an enclosed composition created on the basis of a classical arrangement. The latter is square-shaped and based on symmetry. As for the color palette, the principle of a contrast of three to four-colored ornaments was observed. It is also worthy of note that kelagayi were granted their titles mostly based on their shades or ornamentation, which possessed a certain semantic value.

Let's look at some of the preserved kelagayi samples based on an ethnographical collection of the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan National Sciences Academy, as well as Ruslan Huseynov's privately owned collection of national Azerbaijani clothing.

Two types of kelagayi were named based on the "soghani" color palette, i.e. the onion peel shades, as well as "surmayi", i.e. dark blue colored items. Such kelagayi were distinguished by the simplest type of a single-tint medial field and patterned boundaries that usually had two colors.

The "sachaqli" kelagayi (those with a fringe) is a rare type of a silk headscarf attributed to Azerbaijani regions, given that such items were made in Guba.

"Sonen ulduz" ("a fading star") was named based on a composition comprised of a small scattering of red stars against the background of a dark cherry colored medial field framed by a single bordering of patterns. They say headscarves of this type were worn by young widows.

The "Ayli geje" ("lunar night") title was granted to kelagayi based on the ornamental content featuring a host of white crescents against a dark blue background and a single shimmering white edging. It was worn by elderly women.

Kelagayi of the "nokhudu" (pea color) type were also called on the basis of their compositional design. This type consists of uniform little circles and light-colored bordering lined up in a single row. The ornaments and shades used are also likely to be favored by the elderly.

The kelagayi called "Naz" was distinguished by its rectangular shape sized 250x120 cm, as well as a compositional structure consisting of a line-up of rhombi. These features are encountered in the carpet ornamentation of Guba, "Shahnazarli", the ornamentation of Shirvan, "Arjiman", and that of Karabakh, "Ajma-yumma".

The "Herati" composition is the most complicated type of ornamental and compositional structures.



A round-shaped medallion called “macmayi gul” (“dish-shaped flower”) composed of interwoven floral ornaments is located in the middle of the medial field. The medallion edges are usually framed by a criss-cross line or cogs symbolizing sunrays. There are large jagged almond-shaped “buta” ornaments personifying flame tongues around the central medallion, which has a diameter of 25-30 cm. The ornaments are complemented by images of “heyat aghaji” (“the tree of life”).

The next row in the centric circle is filled with floral patterns with birds drawn in the corners. The square-shaped medial field is completed by quarters of the central “lecek” (“petal”) medallion. This compositional solution is seen on the Azerbaijani carpet compositions “Gymyl” and “Lechekturunj”. The border is made up of multi-row strips that combine complex vegetational ornaments.

All varieties of the researched “Herati” kelagayi have an identical compositional structure, but differ in separate elements and the density of patterns. The enlargement of the scale of drawings in this composition, the use of two or three colors against a dark background, such as white with the ocher color or red, enhances the

decorative content of the composition. The drawings foster a host of decorative solutions in different variations and compositional structures.

Ornamentation of the “Gulbandi” (“floral weaving”) kelagayi has features similar to those of the “Herati” composition. It consists of a central round medallion and two bordering strips of patterns, while the empty space in between is filled with almond-shaped “buta” ornaments. The coloristic solution includes red ornaments applied in a dark background. “Herati” and “Gulbandi” are festive types of headscarves earmarked for young people.

A kelagayi sample with a composition comprised of scattered vegetational images, including Surahs of the Quran in cartouches, is particularly remarkable. As is known, Islam introduced a new set of values, asserting Arabic as a sacred language throughout the Muslim world. Therefore, relevant graphics was considered to have magical power. Objects assumed sacred significance due to inscriptions. It is possible that such headscarves were worn as a protective amulet on special occasions.

The available kelagayi of the 19th-early 20th centuries point to a diversity of their compositional structures.



The existence of a more abundant design of patterns is proven by a museum collection of padding stamps (comprised of more than 120 stored items).

It is worth mentioning that such big shawls as “charshab” and “chadra” that covered a woman’s entire body from head to toes were widespread in large Azerbaijani cities and settlements located in city suburbs with developed commerce. People in a part of Azerbaijan, in particular, the country’s western and southern regions, were unaware of this type of head covers (2).

There were many ways of tying kelagayi and headscarves of the most popular types were decorated by drawings.

The most widespread practice was covering the head with a kerchief, putting one of its tips over the right shoulder behind the back. Another way of wear-

ing a headscarf was making sure that both tips hang on the back and tying another small kerchief folded as a ribbon from the forehead to the back of the head, making a turban (3).

Thus, comprehensive research of Azerbaijani headscarves revealed diversity of their compositional design. Having covered a long path of development in the art of making and decorating ornamental silk-made headscarves, craftsmen succeeded in creating a peculiar artistic-figurative language.

The structures of applying kelagayi patterns differ based on the types of depicted images and the extent of intricacy, ranging from the simplest to the most complicated samples. Over 30 researched samples of kelagayi predominantly included those with a simple structure, namely, items with bordering, as well as “He-



ration”, i.e. samples with complex ornamental design. The edging of these kelağayi samples particularly stood out amid a wide variety of the types of kelağayi decoration.

Vegetational and solar elements prevail in the patterns, while ornithological and geometric figures are encountered more rarely.

Semantic content of the images is one of the informational components of the kelağayi patterns. The peculiarity and expressiveness of the artistic language turn kelağayi into a guideline for the stylistic features of the artistic culture, crafts, domestic life and world view of the Azerbaijani people. ✨

The photographs shown in the article are stored in the collection of the National Museum of the History of Azerbaijan

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