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Azerbaijani national costumes



The Azerbaijani national costumes are one of the valuable sources to learn our culture. Playing an important role in identifying ethnogeny, cultural and historical relations, mutual influence between nations, clothes are also

influenced by economic and geographical conditions.

Historical, ethnographic and artistic features of folk art are reflected in

clothes. It may be apparent on clothing and accessories, as well as on embroidery and weaving art.

During archaeological excavations in Azerbaijan, bronze needles and awls dated to the early Bronze Age (3rd millennium BC) were discovered. These findings prove that the ancient population of Azerbaijan could sew clothes for themselves. Small clay statues (2nd millennium BC) found in Kultepe and seals and fingerwares (5th century BC) discovered in Mingechevir give a certain idea of garments of



Hair pin. Gold and bronze. 1st century BC – 1st century AD; found during archeological excavations in Shamakhi)

those periods. Remains of clothes made of silk fabrics were found in Mingechevir catacomb graves (5-6th centuries AD). Gold accessories and clay shoe-shape dishes dated back to 3-4th centuries also prove that the Azerbaijanis had high material culture since ancient times.



Lavalier. Gold and crystal (7-5th century BC; found during archeological excavations in Mingechevir)





Veil covering head.



Window curtain. XIX century

portant textile centers. An important silk textile center, Ganja should especially be mentioned. Evliya Çelebi (12th century) wrote that the Ganja silk was very popular.

Skillful weavers of Nakhchivan manufactured inexpensive, but beautiful cotton fabrics of high quality, which were widely demanded.

Undoubtedly, fabric is one of elements reflecting national culture.

In the 18th century women clothes were made more beautifully and elegantly. The traveler Marshall von Biberstein, who was in Azerbaijan in the late 18th century, admired local women and their clothes.

Paintings by Russian artists Vereschagin and Gagarin, who in 19th century traveled to Baku, Shamakhi, Sheki, Ganja, Kazakh and other cit-



Women clothing set for summer. Shusha.

During restoration works in a mausoleum next to the Shirvanshah Palace (15th century) in Baku, remnants of valuable moire and silk fabrics were found.

Abundant raw materials in Azerbaijan created favorable conditions for manufacturing silk and woolen clothes here in the Middle Ages.

In the 17th century, Azerbaijan was an important sericulture region of the Near East, while Shirvan the main sericulture province of Azerbaijan. Shamakhi Shabran, Arash, Gabala, Javad, Agdash and other cities were Azerbaijan's main textile centers. The famous traveler Adam Olearius wrote: "They (Shirvan people) are mostly engaged in yarn, silk and wool weaving, embroidery." Textiles manufactured in Shamakhi became well-known since there was a constant demand for elegant headcovers and other weaving products.

Azerbaijani cities, such as Ganja, Sheki, Nakhchivan, Maragha, Marand, Arash, and Ordubad were im-

Patterns and colors of fabrics distinguished one nation from another, also different classes and groups within the same nation. Women costumes were made mostly of silk and velvet.

The 16th and 17th centuries were rich in development for Azerbaijani clothes.

Researches show that a real school of national clothing was created at that time. A person's age, occupation and social status could be identified by his or her costume.

Upper clothes of 16-17th centuries were quite diverse and colorful in Azerbaijan. At that time, top clothes developed as continuation of mostly ancient clothing traditions. However, their decoration was gradually enriched and sophisticated. The main changes evolved in details, patterns and decorations. Emergence of independent khanates, such as Baku, Guba, Shamakhi, Karabakh, Nakhchivan, Ganja, Lankaran, Sheki made an impact on costume, too. Different political and economic situation in

ies also expressed admiration by the Azerbaijani national costume.

The territory of Azerbaijan can be divided into several historical and ethnographic regions: Guba-Khachmaz, Absheron, Lankaran-Astara, Shamakhi, Karabakh, Nakhchi-

*"A woman from Shamakhi".
By Gagarin.*



van-Ordubad, Gabala-Oghuz, Sheki-Zagatala, Ganja and Shamkir-Kazakh. The same clothes worn by the Azerbaijanis in the above-mentioned ethnographic regions prove that they historically belong to the same ethnic group. Slight differences in costume reflected only local patterns of the common national clothing.

The costume reflected local peculiarities of Azerbaijan's various historical and ethnographic regions, clothes, indicated age, marital and social status of its owner. Clothes of a young girl and a married woman were visibly different. Young women wore richer and more beautifully



Women clothes.

Women clothes for summer.

decorated garments. Clothes of girls and older women were less decorated.

Unlike daily and working clothes, wedding and special-occasion costumes usually were made of precious fabrics and decorated with golden and silver jewelry.



Children clothing. Shamakhi.



Azerbaijani women costumes consisting of upper and lower pieces dated 19th and early 20th century could be divided into two groups.

The upper garments comprised upper shirt, chapkan, arkhalig, labbada, kulaja, kurdu, eshmak and bahari.

Chapkan was one beautifully cut women top clothes. Having linen, it was tight. On sides, it has bulging parts named chapig, which showed the body nicer and more attractive.

Arkhalig was one most popular costume among women in Azerbaijan. Like chapkan, arkhalig also contained linen and was tight. The most beautiful women arkhaligs were made in Shusha, Sheki, Nakhchivan and Shamakhi.

Labbada (labbada) - was banded and lined. With open collar, it was tied at waist. Slightly lower than waist, its sides were bulging. The sleeves were short, up to the elbow. The armpit was open. Mostly made of velvet and various gilded fabrics, labbada had its collar, sleeves and edge decorated with elegant galloons.

Eshmak was type of upper clothing, usually made

1. Chapkan. Decorative women clothes for spring-autumn.

2. Arkhalig. Women top clothes for autumn.

3. Labbada (Lavada). Women top clothes for autumn.

4. Labbada 3. Women top clothes for autumn.

5. Eshmak. Women clothing for winter.

6. Kurdu. Warm women clothing for winter.

7. Sample of kulaja.





Beads. Carved gold.
(Shamakhi, 1870s)



of tirma and velvet. Inside, collar, sleeves and edge of eshmak were covered with fur. In addition, its sleeves, edge, and collar were decorated with different galloons and chains.

Kurdu was one of the most richly decorated upper clothing for women. Made of tirma and velvet, kurdu was banded and sleeveless. As winter clothing, it had neck, collar and edge made of fur. One of the popular clothing was Khorasan kurdu. Imported

and tirma. Its collar, waist cut, lap and sleeves were usually decorated with gulabatin.

The length of the skirt worn by Azerbaijani woman extended down to fetlock, except for that in the Nakhchivan-Ordubad region. In Nakhchivan-Ordubad, women wore shorter skirts. Skirt was made of a variety of fabrics, including patterned silk, wool, chintz, tirma. In some cities, women wore chakhchur when going outside. Chakhchur was made of silk.

Buttons made of gold or silver were sewn along the collar of women clothes. Sometimes golden coins were added to the edge of shirt. Gold threads, beads and other kinds of embroidery were also very common.

Women usually wore a golden or gilded silver belt over arkhalig or chapkan. Moreover, leather belts with silver coins and silver buckle were also widely used.

Kalaghayi, various kerchiefs, naz-naz and gaz-gaz silk veils were the most popular women veils. Kalaghayi was manufactured in special shops of famous sericulture centers, such as Sheki, Ganja and Shamakhi. Colorful kinds of kalaghayi were preferred. In cold weather, a shawl (tirma shawl,

kashmiri shawl, handwoven woolen shawl) was worn over kalaghayi.

Aragchin was one of the most popular women headgears in the 16-17th centuries. There were mainly two types of aragchin: for women and for maids.

Headgears were worn by women at home, in the yard, and at guests' houses. When going outside they would usually wear a white charshab.

"A woman from Baku". By Gagarin.



Aragchins. (headgear) 19th century

from Khorasan, that kind of kurdu was made of dark-yellow leather and had patterns sewn with the same-colored silk thread on surface.

Kulaja was an overcoat with straight back and frilled edge. An open-collar kulaja extended till the lap, while its sleeve was longer than elbow. It was usually made of velvet





Women shoes. Decorative embroidery.

Traditionally, little girls and old women were allowed to not wear charshab outside.

Charshab was typical for women of some towns and suburban villages. When leaving house, women put on charshab. It was made of colored satin, checked felt fabric and various kinds of silk fabrics. Women covered in charshab sometimes wore also ruband.

In the 18th century and later a headgear covering forehead was also popular among the Azerbaijani women.

Women jackboots.



Such headgears were made by jewelers, not by tailors.

That kind of headgears was spread mostly in Karabakh, Ganja, Kazakh, Tovuz, and Borchali.

Although women shoes looked like men shoes in the 18th century, they were more elegant and abundantly decorated. Shoes of noble women had outer embroidery and a silver piece with ornaments inside from heel to paw (examples of such women shoes can be found in a number of museums in our country).

Azerbaijani women wore decorated shoes or jackboots.

Various accessories complete clothes and enriched their national

character. Accessories were made of gold and silver. Precious stones like diamond, emerald, ruby, pearl, turquoise, agate were also used in decorations. Azerbaijan's jewelry centers were Baku, Ganja, Shamakhi, Sheki, Nakhchivan, and Shusha. Local jewelers could make all kinds of jewelry people needed. Silver belts made by Kubachi jewelers in Dagestan for men and women were also popular in Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijani women were very fond of decorations, and used them skillfully. They include a variety of head and chest decorations, rings, earrings, belts, bracelets and bangles.



Buckle. Silver. Stampfiligree.

*Belt. Silver.
Blackened engraved design.*



To future with traditions



Clothing is closely related to the history of the nation. People's ethnicity, history, folk art, artistic decorations, ornaments are all reflected in national garments.

The Baku National Costume House, opened in January 2010, produces and promotes Azerbaijani national clothes, which are considered to be treasures of the national heritage. We are presenting you our interview with Konul Valibayli, head of the Baku National Costume House.

- Ms. Valibayli, you have taken over a great responsibility by creating this fashion house.

- It is true that our national costumes are known for its rich colors, cut style, elaborate design and its variety. Of course, each region of Azerbaijan has its local patterns, details; however, there are common features in traditional costumes. Naturally, as a modern producer we apply some innovations in our work. We combine designs of different regions to create new looks. Thanks to efforts of young fashion designers of our center, we design very interesting national costumes. Let me emphasize that we try to preserve cut style and local particularities in our costume designs.

- To what extent can you achieve your objectives?

- So far the Baku National Costume House has designed hundreds of national garments. The costumes designed by our house have been used in various events, exhibitions and celebration both in Azerbaijan and abroad (Days of the Azerbaijani Culture in China, the Silk Road Festival in the United States, Days of the Azerbaijani Culture in Turkey, etc.). A new project of our center intends to further promote the Azerbaijani national costumes. They will be exhibited in cultural and public organizations and institutions of different profiles. More specifically, it is planned to include some national attributes and patterns in garments of employees of cultural and public organizations.

It should be emphasized that producing national costumes requires some time due to importing fabrics of high quality from abroad and due manufacturing. Therefore, the Baku National Costume House has set an objective to expand the scope of producing national garments for their wider promotion. In general, expansion of this manufacturing is important for our national culture and values. Thus, our goal is to expand our activities in this sphere and increase production considering demand. It is also very important to support collaborators of the Baku National Costume House. Good examples of such support are the national fashion shows "From tradition to future" held in the Baku Museum Center and a national costume exhibition held in Park Bulvar shopping center.





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