



irs

Following tradition

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FIGURED MATS OF AZERBAIJAN

The plaiting of various products from cane, including those for household purposes, appeared in ancient times. It is known that this type of handicraft preceded weaving; the manufacture of mats required neither a machine tool nor complex material processing. It was enough to select a material, cut it into pieces of a certain length and join them together (7, 123).

The manufacture of mats as a type of craft has been widespread in Azerbaijan since ancient times, as evidenced by the archaeological finds of mats in an Eneolithic era burial in the settlement of Kultepe (7-5th millennia BC) (1, 35).

The ethnographic collection of the National Museum of the History of Azerbaijan contains up to 10 mats of various sizes and plaiting patterns – monochromatic and ornamental. A thicker mat, called “buriyye” (2, 43-44), was made of twisted fiber of wild growing reeds. This kind of oversized non-decorated mat was used to cover tents on the outside and to cover the earthen floor for carpets, thus protecting woven fabrics from dampness and wear.

Patterned mats were designed for interior decoration, spreading along the entire perimeter along the walls (2, 42). Dense wicker was widely used in the decoration of both temporary and permanent dwellings in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and was used as a bedding on the earthen floor, beds and for sitting. The patterned texture of the mats testifies to their decorative purpose – it was used to decorate the walls. In addition, they were used as partitions in the room. On the sides, portable dwellings were fenced with a special side mat 1 meter high and 5-6 meters long.

Young reeds, sedge stalks, birch and willow twigs were used to make mats in Azerbaijan. A monochromatic variety





of mats measuring 570x87cm was made by running horizontal stems through the base with a certain rhythmic sequence. Thus, rows of simple geometric patterns were obtained, consisting of wavy lines, triangles and rhombuses. It should be noted that the



rhombus is one of the most ancient and widespread ornaments on mats. As an early agricultural cult, it symbolized fertility (3, 14-27). The nomads covered the walls of their temporary dwellings with similar mats and made "nemi" in them – special niches for storing food (2, 19; 4, 45). If the mat was not ornamented, it was covered with a lint-free woven blanket called "nemi-ortuyu". Poor nomads often placed livestock and equipment for making dairy products together behind a reed partition in their huts (6, 34).

Mats were also used in the "chovustan" reed huts, where the space between the pillars was covered with a wicker made of a special type of reed called "givir". Such dwellings were called "tapanli-chovustan". As contemporaries noted, "rarely did anyone have large cabins or Turkish tents with compartments which would be covered with a large number of carpets, rugs, and mats" (5, 134).

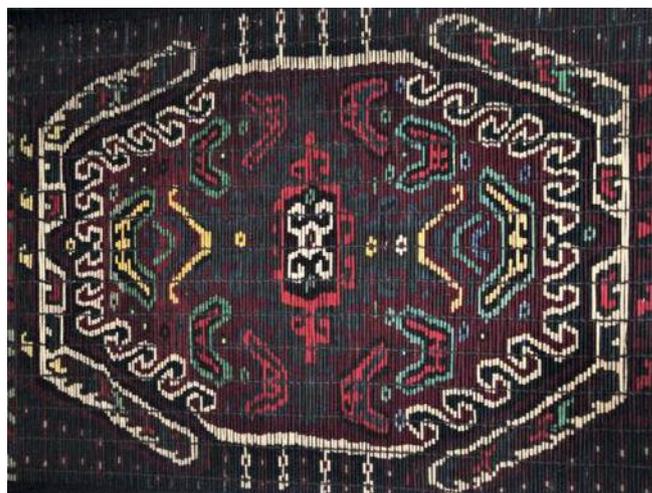
The patterned mat occupied a special place among the numerous and varied interior items of the rich yurt. The manufacture of patterned mats was very laborious and required a certain level of professionalism. Such mats were woven from thin and durable marsh grass – sedges and sandpiper stalks, which were carefully selected. The technique for making such a product was quite special in that at the very beginning of the work, the craftswoman marked the contours of the planned patterns on the stems and then wrapped the stems separately with woolen threads of different colors.

It should be noted that the NMIA has a single copy of a patterned mat (inventory number 5218) made in Gazakh in the 19th century (2, 43). The mat measuring 1.18x8.60 cm was made by winding the stems vertically with woolen threads with small additions of silk threads. It has complex elements in a rich composition. The entire mat is horizontally filled with three large, rhythmically repeating medallions, which alternate with smaller diamond-shaped ornaments. The main medallions are accentuated and distinguished by a two-tone outline with horn-like curls. The middle area on both sides of the small medallions is crossed by half-shaped rhombuses with branches bent in the opposite direction. In the center of the large medallions there is a cross-shaped pattern with curls with a white ornament in the middle, reminiscent of a schematic representation of an insect. All the free space between the complex diamond-shaped ornaments is filled with small geometric patterns. What makes the compositional construction of this patterned mat different from carpets is the absence of borders.

The colors and patterns of the patterned mat are completed in the traditions of Azerbaijani carpets of the Gazakh and Karabakh schools. In addition to the prevailing dark red and dark blue colors, there are glimmers of white, yellow and orange. The appearance of these bright flashes against a dark blue-red background imparts it a livelier and more colorful flavor. The medallions framed with black and green stripes gives the patterns a sharper outline. There is a certain consistency in the multicolor pattern of the patterned mat. Against the background of five large medallions, the central rhombus is highlighted in bright red. Apparently, in the living quarters it was positioned so that the central medallion fell on the headboard where the head of the family was seated. The picturesque ornament of the patterned mat does not exactly repeat any of the numerous carpet compositions of



Azerbaijan. Only the central medallion of a complex design resembles a stylized figure of a turtle from the Karabakh carpet composition “bahmanli” (after the name of a village). Rhombic patterns with branches in



the form of curls are found in many variations in the carpet composition “Talysh” of the Karabakh carpet-making school, “Shahnazarli” of the Guba school and “Erjuman” of the Shirvan schools. Intricate designs of rhombic figures with asymmetric combinations of curls of various sizes create whimsical patterns reminiscent of the “kilimgulu” (flower) ornament of Shirvan and Gazakh lint-free carpets. Note that ornamental motifs in the form of paired horn-like curls with branches are characteristic of carpet compositions of many Turkic peoples, which is evidence of the commonality of their cultures and traditions.

The interior walls of traditional tents-yurts were decorated with patterned mats, and it is possible that they were also used as a screen. Along with this, mats also insulated the home. This type of mats, in addition to decorative and artistic qualities, is very functional – it could be easily rolled up and was convenient for transportation.

The existence of such varieties of ornamental mats in Azerbaijan is reported by some written sources of the 19th century (10, 407; 9, 117). The perfection and complexity of the composition of the patterned mat and its elements even in the absence of traditional carpet ornamental construction enables us to conclude that patterned mats are a creative reworking of ornaments borrowed from carpet weaving.

Besides Azerbaijan, patterned carpet mats were widespread in the Caucasus among the Avars (11), among the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs, in Western Asia, as well as among the Iranian-speaking nomadic peoples of the Firuskuhi and northern Taimats in Afghanistan (8, 47). ❖



