



Research Article

CARPET WEAVING CONDITIONS IN NAKHCHIVAN IN THE 18TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

Carpet weaving emerged during the Eneolithic period in Nakhchivan and turned into an independent art field as of the early medieval period. The abundance of workforce and raw materials in Nakhchivan resulted in Nakhchivan being one of the important carpet weaving centers in the Middle Ages. It is no coincidence that Nakhchivan is considered one of the territories where shedde and verni carpet products were first produced. The increase in the demand for carpet products in foreign markets during the early 18th and 20th centuries pushed for the development of this art in Nakhchivan as well. A considerable number of carpet products produced in the district was delivered to the market.

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INTRODUCTION

Carpet weaving is one of the most developed fields of art production in Azerbaijan, and a lot of work has been done in the field of study of carpet weaving as art science. Over the last hundred years, some museum science works [30; 33] and research pieces [31; 32; 34; 35] touching upon artistic and technical features of Azerbaijani carpets were written and published in different foreign countries. In Azerbaijan also, considerable success has been achieved in the scientific and artistic study of carpets that are produced locally. However, gaps still emerge in the research of the history of carpet weaving art in the whole country, as well as separate regions, including Nakhchivan. In this article dedicated to the history of art of carpet weaving in Nakhchivan, we attempted to fill the gap in this field, at least partially. The discovery of the spindle, spinning wheel and basic weaving bench attributed to the New Stone Age and Copper Age, as a result of archeological excavations in an ancient residential settlement called Kultepe, proves that the people living in Nakhchivan were engaged in weaving since late primitive communal systems [6, p.127-8].

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Carpet weaving, which became recognized as a specific activity in the Middle Ages, was one of the main occupations of Azerbaijani women during later periods. It is no coincidence that sources from the 10th-13th century characterize Nakhchivan as one of the major carpet weaving centers, along with several districts of Azerbaijan. Nakhchivan gained a reputation for, in particular, its production and sale of carpets items such as the “zili” and “khali” [17, p.179; 27, p.236-8]. Researcher R. Mammadov claims that carpet products like the “shedde” and “verni” originated in Nakhchivan [8, p.103]. As in other regions of Azerbaijan, carpet weaving in Nakhchivan reached its developmental peak in the 18th-20th century. This was due to an increased demand for carpet products from foreign markets. Continuing a rich heritage and high standards of professionalism, the abundant workforce played an important role in the development of carpet weaving in Nakhchivan. One of the major distinguishing features of carpet weaving from other art fields is its dependence on female labor. Girls in Nakhchivan were taught to weave carpets at a very early age. They began learning the secrets from other female carpet weavers when they were 8-10 years old. During the long, harsh winters, specifically in mountainous districts, village families experienced a pause in agricultural activities and used their time wisely for production, including the production of carpets.



Azerbaijani women would weave complex carpets patterns in the light of oil lamps during long winter nights [15, p.40; 21, p.67; 25, p.24]. The development of carpet weaving in Nakhchivan was closely related to sheep breeding, which initially was the main source of raw material for this field of art. It should be noted that the information provided on sheep breeding in the 18th and early 20th century in Nakhchivan is inadequate. To be precise, although there is quite enough information covering the 19th and early 20th century, this cannot be applied to the 18th century. Despite this, we will try to build a clear picture of the sheep breeding conditions in Nakhchivan over this entire period. It is possible to draw conclusions on the conditions of sheep breeding in Nakhchivan in the first half of the 18th century on the basis of information provided in the “Comprehensive Book of Nakhchivan province.”

While the book holds no statistical information about the number of sheep that were raised, the collection of specific “sheep tax,” “pasture tax,” “wintertime tax,” “summertime tax,” and “grass ushur” tells us how this breeding division was widespread in the province. According to our calculations based on the “Book,” the taxes collected from each residential center indicate that the population in 176 residential quarters of Nakhchivan was engaged in sheep breeding during this period, and paid associated taxes amounting to 100,457 agchas to Turkish tax organisations in 1727 [12]. It is clear from the amount of taxes and the number of residential quarters, that sheep breeding developed mostly in the Azadjiran area. Turkish tax officials collected 2,630 agcha under “sheep tax,” “summertime tax,” and “wintertime tax,” from the district’s Urmus village alone in 1727 [12, p.119]. The first piece of information on the number of sheep and goats raised in Nakhchivan province is contained in the “Statistical narrative of Nakhchivan province. It is clear from this information, which covers the late khanate period and beginning of Russian colonization, that 15,000 sheep and goats were raised in Nakhchivan, 10,000 in Ordubad district, and 13,686 sheep and goats in Sherur district [18, p.93, 100].

The political stability established in connection with Azerbaijan’s inclusion into Russia, and the increased demand for carpet products during the second half of the 19th century, greatly impacted sheep breeding in Nakhchivan. According to information from 1849, the number of sheep and goats was slightly higher than 42,000 [26, p.87]. Even so, Nakhchivan remained far behind other districts of Azerbaijan for its number of sheep and goats during this period. In comparison, the number raised in Yelizavetpol (Ganja) district during this period reached 441,180 [26, p.86]. Still, the rising demand for carpet products during the second half of the 19th century prompted the growth of sheep breeding in Nakhchivan province. In the 1870s, the number of sheep and goats raised here multiplied approximately four times compared to the 1850s, and reached 160,000 [13, p.41].

Mostly the mazikh and balbas breeds were raised in Nakhchivan. The wool of the mazikh sheep is a little rough and golden-brown – local people called it the “golden sheep.” The wool of the balbas sheep is white, and therefore was considered more suitable for weaving. In addition to Nakhchivan, both breeds were widespread in Iravan district and neighboring Iran and Turkey [1, p.21; 14, p.21]. According to information provided by V.Grigoryev, these specific breeds were raised in Nakhchivan during the 1830s. He states that, “all of the sheep and goats have tails, their wool is of medium quality and is mostly used for making rough broadcloth (mahud), carpets, kilim, and horse covers at home” [18, p.93]. I. Chopin wrote that it was possible to obtain 3.8 batman or 4.5 pounds of wool from each sheep raised in the districts of Iravan and Nakhchivan [29, p.794-795]. Considering this, one researcher put forth the idea that the 69,953 sheep and goats raised in Nakhchivan in the 1830-40s yielded 7,772 poods (pood = 16.38 kilograms) of wool [3, p.59]. Before it was ready for weaving, the wool had to go through several stages of treatment: washing, drying, combing, spinning, winding, and dyeing. To wash the wool, it was soaked in cold water for several hours, sometimes with added urine. Urine cleaned the extra oil layer from the wool and sped up the washing process.

In one day, in summer when the weather was good, 32kg of wool could be washed and dried [7, p.96; 20, p.69]. Then, the wool would be torn up and beaten with cornelian, pomegranate, or quince sticks to relax the fibers. Combing was very important and repeated several times. As it was hard and time consuming labor, usually neighboring carpet weavers worked in a group, and could complete the process in one day. Following this, the wool was spun using a hand spindle or manual spinning wheel. It should be reminded that carpet weavers did this work when they had time aside from farming responsibilities; therefore, they finished the process near the end of fall. Further treatment stages depended on the purpose for which the yarn was intended. Four types of yarn – warp, weft, Chinese and brim – were used for weaving various carpet products. Chinese and weft yarns were spun twofold, warp and brim yarns were spun threefold. After this, the yarns were dyed to become skeins [7, p.100; 19, p.29-38].

Once the dyeing was complete, weaving began. This was done on an upright loom, very basic in structure. Usually, “the loom consisted of a couple of wooden arms that were joined transversely by two arrow and heel halves that were underneath and on top [11, p.276].” Multi-toothed heve, scissors, a hooked knife, kirkit (comb shaped hammer used in carpet weaving), and other similar tools made out of iron or wood were used in the weaving process. Heve was used for beating weft, knives were used to make and cut knots, scissors were used for shearing the pile of the woven carpet, and the kirkit was used for removing a wrongly tied knot [9, p.50-60]. Carpet weaving in the province reached a new level in the 18th century. The sharp increase in demand for carpet products from foreign markets resulted in a wider scope of the art field, in the 19th century especially. One source from this period revealed that, in Nakhchivan, “in addition to coarse calico weaving, the production of different kinds of carpets was widespread; Tatar (Azerbaijani – V.M.) women are engaged in making carpets. Particularly in the eastern part of Dereleyez district, the price of a good quality carpet is more than 10 rubles in sterling money [18, p.94].” According to 19th century statistics, a number of pile weave and flat weave carpet products were produced in Nakhchivan province during this period. Statistics from 1845 indicate that here, in one year, 1,050 carpets, 3,000 horse covers, 2,500 felts, 5,000 sacks, 460 mefresh, 10,000 wool socks, and 20,000 arsheen (=28 inches) broadcloth (mahud) were woven [25, p.44]. Interestingly, the amount of different carpet items produced in Nakhchivan in a single year exceeded several times the number of similar products made in Yelizavetpol (Ganja) district, which united Gazakh and Shemseddin districts, and was considered one of the most developed carpet districts of Azerbaijan. Thus, the same year in Yelizavetpol province, 475 carpets, 389 horse covers, 430 felts, 450 sacks, 350 wool socks, 75 mefresh, and 1,550 arsheen broadcloth were produced [25, p.44]. The increased demand for carpet products from both domestic and foreign consumers seriously affected the characteristics of the art. Carpet weaving, a home occupation for a long time, in the 19th century became an art field for mass markets. In the second half of the 19th century, when capitalist production advanced at a greater pace and the majority of artistic fields declined, continued development was observed in carpet production. The reasons for this were clearly reported by K. Khatsov, who studied the carpet weaving industry in the southern Caucasus at the end of the same century.

His writings reveal that carpet and palaz production had a great impact on the economic life of the villages that bred sheep. He records that, “in addition to playing the role of furniture, bedding, and curtains in the daily lives of villagers, carpet products comprise their major income source.” [28, p.284]. Statistics prove that carpet weavers took a considerable number of their products to market: 400 carpets out of 1050, 1500 out of 3000, 2000 sacks out of 5000, and 5000 wool socks out of 10,000, all produced in Nakhchivan in 1845, were sold [25, p.44]. Despite a big improvement in carpet products in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, unlike sericulture that rose to factory plant level, carpet weaving preserved its artistry and small goods status. This was due to unique and specific features of its production. Consequently, unlike some artistic fields that mostly operated in cities, carpet weaving, with weak centralized relations due to the absence of roads and “spread” over a greater number of territories, mostly developed in the villages. As such it did not attract a large trade capital. To be clear, capital owners did not wish to risk investing their resources in a field that had a relatively underdeveloped infrastructure. Instead, they purchased high quality carpet products made in rural areas for an insignificant amount of money, where villagers were not aware of foreign market prices, and sold them on to make a fortune. Local traders who mediated between carpet weavers and traders working for foreign markets played an important role [21, p.67].

A significant number of carpet products woven in Nakhchivan in the 18th and early 20th centuries have survived to this day. In field research we discovered 24 pile weave wool carpets, four prayer rugs, four flat weave wool zili, two salt sacks, two khurjun, one mefresh cover, one shedde, and one kilim woven in Babek, Julfa, Kengerli, Sederek, Ordubad, Shahbuz, and Sherur districts of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, in both public and private collections [10, p.131-149]. It was clear during research that the most ancient pile weave carpet attributed to the Nakhchivan group was held in a private collection, woven in 1800 in Makhta village, Sherur district. Research into the history of pile weave carpets based on samples in private collections allow us to ascertain particular ideas concerning the dynamic progression of carpet weaving in Nakhchivan in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Of 24 pile weave carpets, 15 were woven in 1900. We believe that this is not a coincidence. It shows that, like other districts of Azerbaijan, carpet weaving in Nakhchivan reached its developmental peak during this period. Through our targeted research we found that pile weave carpets were widely produced in Nakhchivan, along with flat weave carpets like shedde, verni and zili. Other examples include two carpet variants woven 565x93cm in 1800, 256x110cm in 1850, and 218x140cm and 477x116cm in 1870 [2, p.27-55]. Many of these carpets are currently displayed at the Carpet Museum in Nakhchivan city. The artistic structure of the “Sinili” (picture. 1) carpet woven in 1850 consists of a richly-patterned middle field and border. Inside the “tray-like” medallions in the middle field, flower and leaf motifs are woven in pale red, brown, brick, pink, pale green, blue, lilac, and navy blue. The background of the medallions is woven in cornelian, cream, pale red, brick, pink, and creamy-lilac colors. The borders contain brown, pale red, pale green, blue, cream, yellow, and pale brown colors. Otherwise vacant areas of the middle field contain four-, six-, and eight-petal flowers, trees, rhombuses, squares, “X” shapes, and other classic elements.

There are stylized deer and birds on the right, left, top, bottom, and central areas of the middle field. The medallions' edges are designed with flowering branches and leaves. Other border elements use pale green, yellow, cream, pale red, navy blue, light and dark brown, pale blue, medium blue, black, henna, and other colors. The main navy blue border of the carpet is decorated with flowers, leaf motifs and branches in carnelian, yellow, pale red, orange, pale green, dark and light brown, blue, and cream. The background of the border is henna-colored in some areas. On both sides, the middle border is surrounded by small red borders decorated with three- and four-petal flowers and spiral-like branches. The small borders on the outside and inside are surrounded with cream-colored chains with wavy lines. The edges of the main border are completed with white elements. The carpet is distinguished by its unique use of color, specific to Nakhchivan carpets. Highly professional in quality, the pile and warp of the carpet are wool, and the weft is cotton [2, p.44].

Carpet products from the various districts of Nakhchivan province were all woven by Azerbaijani women, skilled masters of their profession. The names of some – Ismayilova Ferejdarchingizi and Piriyeva Gumrujafargizi from Jehri village of Nakhchivan district, Mammadova Goncha Heydargizi from kuku village, Asmar Huseynaligizi from Kolani village, and Ramazanova Khanperi Musa gizi from Nusus village of Ordubad – born in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, lived through to modern times [15, p.101]. Distinguished by their high quality, accuracy of design, and vividness of color, the pile weave and flat weave carpet products of Nakhchivan were exhibited in the Russian Empire and a number of foreign countries several times in the latter half of the 19th century. Palaz, pile weave carpets, kilim, jejim, zili, heybe, and khurjun, all produced in Nakhchivan province, were displayed in the Caucasus Agricultural and Industrial products Exhibition in Tbilisi in 1857, 1889, and 1990 [4, p.92-104; 5; 22, p.554; 23, p.7-8, 27-33, 51], in the Universal Exhibition, London in 1862 [24, p.24-5], and the II Russian Amateur Industry Exhibition, Saint-Petersburg in 1913 [16, p.560-3, 578-581, 604-5; 24, p.27].

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Early in the 20th century the oldest weavers and carpet experts called this type of carpets "shadra" or "shatra". The word "shadda" is a distorted form of "shatranj" and "shadvard". The major jejim production centers are Barda, Nakhchivan, Zangilan, Shusha, Shamakha.[4]. Zilli. Some traditional tools of the craft. Beginning with the 18th century "Sumakhs" have been made in the Quba and Gusary districts.[7]"Sumakhs" were created much later than other types of flat-woven carpets. In the early stage of their development they might have had their own individual composition, but the "Sumakhs" of the 18th-20th centuries reproduce the compositions and patterns copied from the pile carpets made in Shirvan, Quba, Karabakh and Ganja.