



THE AZERBAIJANI CARPETS



From the ancient times, favorable natural conditions in Azerbaijan contributed to the development of local carpet weaving. Archaeological findings and written sources demonstrate that as early as in the 2nd Millennium B.C. various fine items of carpet fabric were produced on the territory of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan was the centre of carpet weaving in the Caucasus. As much as 90 percent of patterns used in the Caucasian carpets were invented by Azerbaijani weavers. Azerbaijan carpets were popular not only in the East, but also in the West. Examples of such carpets were depicted on the Oriental miniatures of the 14th -15th centuries and on masterpieces of the Renaissance painters. Patterns of these carpets fascinated many Italian, Dutch and Flemish painters of the Mediaeval Ages, among which were Hans Memling, Carlo Crivelli, Thomas de Keyser, etc. During centuries, Azerbaijan weavers developed 8 carpet weaving schools: Guba, Baku, Shirvan, Ganja, Gazakh, Garabagh, Nakhchivan and Tabriz. The most striking examples of carpets are stored at the State Museum of Azerbaijan Carpet and Applied Art. The present catalogue demonstrates carpets from the Museum's collection.

The Traditional Art of Azerbaijani Carpet Weaving was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity on November 16, 2010.



“Syrt-Chichi” carpet. Guba, Azerbaijan. Late XIX century.

GUBA

The Guba region is the largest carpet weaving centre of Azerbaijan. It is situated in the northeast part of the country and consists of 3 areas – mountains, foothills and lowland. The Guba carpet weaving localities are Syrt-Chichi, Dara-Chichi, Pirabadil, Alpan, Afurja, Mollakamalli, Shahnazarli, Garagashli, etc. Carpets woven in Derbend (Dagestan, Russia) are also included into this group. The Guba Carpet Weaving School represents over 30 various designs and color schemes. The Guba carpets are distinguished with a variety of designs, complicated geometric patterns, and color harmony. Bordures in the Guba carpets demonstrate complicated patterns, and frequently occupy the largest part of the field. Carpets of the group are various in size. The Guba designs, such as “Alpan”, “Gonagkend”, “Alchagul-chichi”, “Khirdagul-chichi”, “Gimil”, “Pirabadil”, “Greatpirabadil”, “Zeiva”, “Biliji”, “Ugakh”, “Afurja”, “Orduj”, “Jimi”, “Gadim Minara”, “Sirtchichi”, etc., are famous for their perfect knotting, fine texture, intricate patterns, delicate outlines and harmonic color combinations. The “Sirtchichi” carpet presented in the catalogue belongs to the Guba-Shirvan group and was woven in the village of Sirtchichi of the Guba carpet weaving region. In the palette of the carpet, dark blue, blue, white and red shades are dominated. Besides pile carpets, Guba also produced pile-less rugs (sumakh and palas) and carpet items.



“Arjiman” carpet. Shirvan, Azerbaijan. Late XIX century.

SHIRVAN

The Shirvan Carpet Weaving School situated in the north-east part of Azerbaijan includes Shamakhy, Maraza, Aghsu, Kurdamir, Hajigabul, Goychay and the surrounding villages. Rich in designs and complicated in patterns, the Shirvan carpets were popular from the Middle Ages. German and English travelers and ambassadors of the 16th – 18th centuries wrote about the artistic merits of such carpets. Today, the Shirvan carpets of the 12th -15th centuries are stored in leading museums of the world. European painters of the 14th - 15th centuries represented these carpets in their own works. The Shirvan carpets were woven in large formats and high density of knots, sometimes in sets of several rugs (dast-khali).

The “Arjiman”, “Jamjamli”, “Gobustan”, “Maraza”, and “Kurdamir” designs are the most famous pile carpets of the Shirvan group. The “Arjiman” carpet from the catalogue was woven in the village of Arjiman. Shirvan was also famous for its pile-less weavings, palas and kilim. Pile-less carpets produced in the villages of Pashali and Udulu were well-known in the world. In Shirvan, various carpet items, such as sack (chuval), saddlebag (khurjun), trunk (mafrash), horse-cloth (chul) etc, were also woven.



“Khila Buta” carpet.
Baku, Azerbaijan. Early XX century.

“Khila Afshan” carpet.
Baku, Azerbaijan. XIX century.

BAKU

The Baku Carpet Weaving School includes villages of the Absheron Peninsula – Novkhani, Nardaran, Bulbula, Fatmayi, Mardakan, Gala, Khila and others, as well as the Khyzy area with Gedi, Hil, Kesh, Findigan and other carpet producing centers outside of Absheron. Most of these carpets were called after villages where they were woven in: “Khila-butа”, “Khila-Afshan”, “Novkhani”, “Surakhani”, “Gala”, “Baku”, “Goradil”, “Fatmayi”, “Findigan”, “Gaadi”, etc. Generally similar to the Guba and Shirvan carpets by technical qualities, the carpets produced in Baku were distinguished with own artistic characteristics. The field of the carpets is mainly dark blue and rarely red and yellow. These carpets stand out with their softness, bright colors, originality of decorative elements and fineness of patterns. Geometric medallions and curvilinear plant motives dominate in patterns of the carpets. For example, repeated patterns in the “Khila-Afshan” carpet demonstrated in the catalogue form spiral branches on which a number of elements are placed. These elements are used as filling, additional, or principal motives. The meaning of the word “Afshan” is “to spread”, “scatter”, “motley”. The “Afshan” design is used not only in the Baku, Guba, and Shirvan carpets, but also in the Tabriz ones. The catalogue demonstrates an example of the “Khila-butа” carpets. The name comes from the village of Khila in the eastern part of Baku (now, Amirjan) where they were woven. The carpet shows “butа”, the most popular and rich almond-shaped motive in Azerbaijani ornamental art. In the past, the motive bore a symbolic meaning and was used by the fire-worshippers as a decorative element. In the Baku region, pile-less carpets (palas, kilim, and zili) and carpet items (kheiba, chanta, khurjun) were also woven.



"Fakhrali" carpet.
Ganja, Azerbaijan.
Early XX century.



"Gadim Ganja" carpet.
Ganja, Azerbaijan.
Early XX century.

GANJA

The Ganja Carpet Weaving School situated in the north-west part of Azerbaijan includes Ganja and the surrounding villages, as well as Gedabey, Goranboy, Shamkir, and Samukh. The main carpet producing centre was Ganja. Since the 10th -11th centuries, Ganja was famous for its silk and woolen textiles and carpets of high quality which were produced in many local carpet workshops. The Ganja School influenced other weaving localities in the vicinity of Ganja.

The Ganja carpets are distinguished from other Azerbaijan carpets with their patterns, variety of designs, ways of patterning, and finesse of outlines. The best examples of the Ganja carpets are “Gadim Ganja” and “Fakhrali”. The “Gadim Ganja” is also called “Ganja-shahar”, “Ganja-butа”, or “Butali Ganja” by experts. The field design of the “Gadim Ganja” carpet from the catalogue consists of a number of the main buta-motives set out in lines which are different from the similar elements used in other schools by their simplicity and color palette. The “Fakhrali” carpets were usually woven in small formats and mainly used as prayer rugs while praying (namazlig). But today, they are used as decorative or utilitarian items.



“Borchali” carpet. Gazakh, Azerbaijan.
Early XX century.



“Gaimagli” carpet. Gazakh, Azerbaijan.
XX century.

GAZAKH

The Gazakh Carpet Weaving School includes localities of the Gazakh region situated in the northwest part of Azerbaijan, as well as Azerbaijan villages in Georgia (Borchali, Karayazi, Karachop, and Gachagan) and in Armenia (Goycha, Bambak, Lambali, Ijevan, Garagoyunlu, and the surroundings of Lake Goycha). The most famous designs of the group are “Borchali”, “Shikhli”, “Gaimagli”, “Gachagan”, “Salakhli”, “Garayazi,” etc.

Patterns of the Gazakh carpets drew attention of the European painters beginning from the Middle Ages. One of these carpets was portrayed on the Carlo Crivelli’s 15th century painting “The Annunciation.” Striking pieces of the Gazakh School of the 14th – 19th centuries are stored in many museums of the world, including the Museum of Victoria and Albert (London), the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), the Museum of Turkic and Islamic Art (Istanbul), as well as in private collections.



"Mughan" carpet. Garabagh, Azerbaijan. XIX century.

GARABAGH

Located in the south-west part of Azerbaijan, the Garabagh Carpet Weaving School includes mountainous and lowland areas. From the 10th century, Arabian historians Al-Mugaddasi, Masudi and others wrote that the region was cotton and wool producing hub. The famous Dutch artist Hans Memling (15th century) portrayed a Mughan-styled carpet originating from Garabagh School on his “Madonna Enthroned” painting.

From the 18th century, Shusha was the carpet weaving centre of Garabagh. In 1750, the Ruler of the Garabagh khanate Panahali-khan founded the town of Shusha called at first Panahabad. The Garabagh carpets are distinguished with their large dimensions and consist of 5 pieces, the set called “dastkhali-gaba”. The reason for such size was the spacious interior design of local residential premises with large and slightly oblong rooms and halls.

Owing to the specific quality of local wool, the Garabagh carpets are renowned by a very high, thick and fluffy pile which is as colorful and picturesque as the nature of Garabagh itself. Apart from pile carpets, the Garabagh Carpet Weaving School was famous for pileless carpets, such as kilim, zili, verni, etc.



“Goja” carpet. Garabagh, Azerbaijan. XIX century.



“Malybeili” carpet. Garabagh, Azerbaijan. Early XX century.



Carpet. Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan. Early XX century.

NAKHCHIVAN

Since times immemorial, Nakhchivan was among Azerbaijan's established artistic, commercial and cultural hubs, famous for its decorative and applied arts.

Carpet weaving was among the leading artisan trade in the region. Places like Nakhchivan, Shahbuz, Ordubad and Julfa were the centers of piled and pileless carpet weaving for centuries, using both wool and silk for their production.

As it was the case in Garabagh, "Dast-Khaly-Gebe" carpet sets were very popular here as well, with an overall area of coverage reaching 20-30 square meters. In the meantime, typical of Nakhchivan were long, narrow and striped carpets with geometric, vegetal and zoomorphic ornaments. The "Dragon" carpets from Nakhchivan (17-18th centuries) notable for their rich and versatile compositions, are nowadays found in Istanbul.



“Agajli” carpet. Tabriz, Azerbaijan. Late XIX century.

TABRIZ

One of the oldest carpet weaving schools of Azerbaijan is the Tabriz School, which includes Tabriz, Ardabil, Maraga, Marand, Khoy, Urmiya, Zanjan, Gereche, Heriz, Sarab, Ahmadabad, Mirish, Ahar, Salmas, Goravan, Senne, Garadagh and other carpet weaving locations in present North-Western Iran.

The Tabriz School has greatly influenced the development of the Iranian carpet weaving art at times. The Tabriz classic miniature school of the 16th century has informed the development of the Tabriz and Oriental carpet art as a whole. Just that is why this period is called the Golden Age of the Tabriz and Oriental carpet art. Approximately three thousand masterpieces of that period are stored at many museums of the world. Of the classic Tabriz carpets, it is worth to mention the 16th century “Sheikh Safi” carpet in the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the 16th century “Ovchulug” (Hunting) carpet in the Poldi Pezzoli Museum in Milan.



