

CAUCASUS, DAGHESTAN, KHAN & KHAN'S RUGS

Caucasus is the name of a great mountain chain like the Alps or Rockies. Caucasus is also the name of the region located between Black Sea and Caspian Sea, half in Europe and half in Asia. Geographically, and more recently politically Caucasus is divided into South- or Trans-Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) and North-Caucasus which is a part of Russian Federation that includes Daghestan Republic.

Daghestan means 'mountain country', somewhat similar to Vermont – 'green mountains'. The highest mountain in Daghestan is almost 4500 m. above sea level, similar to Mount Rainier in Washington. Makhachkala (population about 500,000) is the capital where Khan's Rugs depot is.

Daghestan is also called the Mount of Languages. In the Bible the prosperous people of Babylon were not allowed to build a tower up to heaven because God punished them for their arrogance by stopping them from understanding each other's languages. It is hard to say exactly for what Daghestan people were punished, but on a territory the size of Scotland with 2, 5 million inhabitants there are 32 ethnic groups and languages.

According to local legend, God's messenger was flying over the earth and distributing languages from his bag. His bag was ripped on a mountain peak so many languages dropped out on Daghestan.

Colorful patterned rugs and textiles are made by only a few of the ethnic groups. The largest Avar with about 700,000 make long tapestry-woven davaghins – like Khan's Rugs. The related Andi 8,000 strong breed lustrous long-black-haired sheep to make black "bourka" hairy felt cloaks, Archi 1,500 strong - Khan's people - are the best shepherds. Kumyks (400,000) in the north are descendants of Kipcak Turks and Chengiz Khan, famed for felt mosaic covers called arbabash or cart-cover – also made by Khan's Rugs

South on the Caspian coast in 5000 years old Derbent city live Mountain Jews (30,000), who speak in 'Tat' a Persian language who have given some ornaments to Daghestan carpets - found in Khan's rugs. Further south live Tabassarans (about 100,000) who are weavers and their neighbors about the border with Azerbaijan, the Lezghins (400,000), famous for both pile knotted rugs and soumakhs brocaded flat rugs – like Khan's Rugs.

Since antiquity decorated rugs and textiles have been a leading art form in Daghestan. Herodotus the Ancient Greek father of history (500 BCE) praised the superb wool dyeing and beauty of Caucasian textiles, as did the conquering Arabs who built the Derbent Mosque in the 8th century ACE. Earlier 6th ACE the Sassanian Persian ruler Khosrow's silver dish horseman, who built the walls of Derbent also had a legendary garden carpet.

Thanks to the researches of Prof A Gudriavtsev it is known that the history of Derbent is at least 5000 old making it one of the longest continually inhabited places in the world.

The earliest carpets from Derbent is the famous Garden Carpet of King Khosrows the Persian Sassanian ruler who also participated in construction of

the famous double walls of Derbent remains of which have been recently discovered thanks to Dr. R Khappoullaev to extend in total some 150km. The walls were built to keep the northern nomads out of the rich Persian lands to the south.

The walls also acted as a boundary of textile culture with broadly speaking felt mosaics and dums and davaghin tapestries to the north and soumakhs, knotted pile carpets and kilims to the south. Remains of a narrow stone road from Derbent to Kala Koreish the Kaitag capital was also discovered during the past decade. The beautiful 'Kaitag' silk embroideries were made in this area from the 17th century.

A range of Azerbaijan designs are found in both north and south of the walls. A likely source is the blue-and-white Safavid plates that were given as dowry presents in Koubachi. Also we have found trade records from Derbent customs ledgers from 1700s of Persian imports to Russia which included textiles.

Some examples:

In Davaghins there is the eight pointed star garden design; also sometimes combined with the 'Akstafa' bird design; also the whirling swastika design found on Kazak rugs.

There are Kaitag embroideries with versions of Safavid Azerbaijan hunting embroideries; a tree carpet designs; dragon in combat designs; and central medallion designs based on Koran covers; and one medallion based on a 16th century Tabriz medallion rug.

There is another rare group of 17th-18th century petit point silk embroideries on blue cotton backcloth called "from Derbent" with Tabriz medallion and cartouche designs.

17th/ 18th century Persian silk brocades with repeat 10cm flower and stem designs were found in Daghestan. Silk cloth for Kaitag backgrounds was often bought from Sheki where there is an excellent mural painting in the Khan's Palace to provide designs. There was silk in the Kaitag region for the threads as well.

Some late 18th/ 19th century dragon carpets photographed in Daghestan were also based on so-called Shirvan (the small) dragon rug designs.

There is also the mystery of so-called 17th/ 18th century Koubachi glazed ceramic plates which survive in Daghestan and Baku and were inspired by Azerbaijan portrait figurative miniature paintings.

These are but a few examples of the repeated journeys that Azerbaijan designs made crossing the Sulak River.

Lush green alpine pastures with a good climate for breeding sheep with glowing wool, was complemented by all kinds of plants for natural dyes – such as madder# used today in Khan's rugs. Quiet winters for the agrarian villagers provided time to weave carpets.

There are several questions that even scholars cannot answer: "How is it that in such a tiny territory there are so many different incredibly rich traditional designs in carpets?" "Why are the alluring colors of Daghestan carpets

recognizably different to others?” “Why are there so many unique designs? - Avar “Rukzal” (house) design of Davaghin rugs ; the Sumakh design of Lezghi village “Kabir”; or single-village designs such as Chi-Chi, Mikrakh, Akhti, and Perebedil (all Lezgi villages); or single ethnic designs such as Lezghi Stars, and “Zeykhur” designs - all to be found in Khan’s rugs.

I’d like to put a couple of ideas into the pot. Communists repeated Lenin’s words about the Caucasus staying off the highway of world history. In contrary Caucasus is on a vital crossroad of Eurasian economic and cultural forces. Caucasian civilization is a remarkable fusion of local ancient settled and nomad tribes with Turkic, Iranian, Jewish, Ancient Greek and Roman, and Slavic worlds. The Caucasus benefited from technologies of Europe and Asia, exploiting for example iron, bronze, oil, dyeing and textiles, against a background of Oriental and Western religions.

The second point is the paradox that while being open to cultural influence of the outside world; the Caucasus continues to be one of the most closed parts of the world in term of its traditions and peculiarities in material and spiritual culture.

The reason is not in Geographic isolation which even long ago seemed inaccurate because of the ancient roads discovered by archeologists and the mountains crisscrossed by tracks, but in voluntary social segregation of Mountain village communities. Unlike Americans (and other westerners) who follow the ups and downs of their local baseball teams, mountaineers stubbornly believe that their community, their way of life, their hospitality, their customs and morality, their houses, dresses, food and whatever they produce, be it wooden spoon-boxes, jewelry, wool socks or carpets, are without question the best. They say that “there is no need to change our steel for someone’s cast-iron”. In tiny Kabir village I asked an old Lezgi lady why they do not make soumakhs of tiny Mikrakh village’s designs. She replied: “Because Kabir is Kabir, Mikrakh is Mikrakh”.

Rugs were and are luxury objects and therefore beautiful. To achieve that beauty is a combination of quality of wool and yarn, colors, weaving technique and, of course, design. The best autumn wool of young sheep pastured in high Mountains is selected, washed, dried, combed and spun into yarn. Over washing and chemical washing seen in many other modern rugs looses the natural lanolin that gives rugs sheen. There are three main washes: washing wool, washing yarn before after dyeing, and finally washing a rug.

Rugs are filled with human emotions, memory and fantasy born of the common memory of generations. A rug may be a family heritage, a lover’s gift, a reward or a talisman. There is a lot of little-known customs and folk superstitions around the production of rugs which are in the printed hand-out.

In Daghestan even sitting behind a loom is taboo for men, who may only shear sheep and make and repair looms. In villages men and sit in the village square and discuss things great and small while the women work.

The three “Golden rules” of weaving are:

1). Never allow pregnant women to work behind a loom.

- 2). Never force girls to learn weaving unless they are interested in it.
- 3). Teach girls carpet weaving by “Do as I do”, but never punish mistakes.

When a rug is finished Lezghins let a naked boy walk on it to ensure that the quantity of clan members will grow and the boy’s grandsons will walk on carpets as well. If a family has many girls it means that there will be a lot of carpets in a house and the family will be wealthy. If a dog barks while stringing warps on a loom something will go wrong. As soon as the warps are strung, a branch of thorn or any jewelry or small mirror is fixed on loom, to protect the weaver’s skill and health from the evil eye. It is good manners to invite relatives and neighbors to help in twisting and stringing warps. The weaver gives her women guests tea and small gifts to commemorate the moment; they next come without invitation when a rug is half made, and bring sweets, tea-boxes, or pancakes, and talk about how the carpet is coming along. When the rug is finished, they are invited to a big meal.

If a husband does not find a hair in his food it means that his wife did not weave that day.

There are many songs about carpet weaving, such as:

*“Sister, tell me where you found the design for the carpet?
- A wild goat came down the Mount and left a sign on the carpet.
Sister, tell me where you found colors for the carpets?
I looked at the mountain flowers and their colors are on the carpet”.*

Actually, a weaver is always busy. When she is not behind a loom it means that she is either cooking, or taking care for her children, or looking after livestock or nursing her husband. In every Lezgi and neighboring Tabassaran family, a girl has to weave at least three carpets before she may be married. Otherwise it hard to find volunteers who want to marry a lazy girl (- one lazy man is enough in a family).

Carpets are used both to make the home decorated and warm. Rugs are part of the family treasure. When son was born, his grandfather presented him with a dagger, to grow up brave, and his grandmother – a rug, to become wealthy. In the men’s corner of a Daghestan house there is always a carpet hung on the wall with weapons hung over it. A rug is spread before an honored guest. A wealthy mountaineer who is expecting a special guest will hang a new carpet on the wall, and garnish it with weapons, horns of the wild mountain goat, and musical instruments. When the guest was about to leave, his host gave him that carpet saying: “This is for you. The rest I am leaving with me”. The symbolic meaning of a carpet is “Have a joyful life” in the sense of: “Whenever you are in my house, you will find bread and wine (the horn cups), enjoyment (the musical instrument) and defense (the weapons)”.

Rugs also have a tragic role. Those who have an accident, who are dead or wounded in a war, are carried back to their homes covered by carpet.

When a young girl wove her first carpet, her mother gave her a silver ring and cooked delicious food. Carpets are a valuable part of the dowry of a bride, both as a furnishing and as a ritual. In the wedding party when a bride accompanied by her ceremonial group arrived at the groom's home after dark with music, dancing and torches, she did not cross the threshold of her future house until her future mother-in-law gave her symbols of a sweet, wealthy, and beautiful life: a spoon of honey, a caw and a carpet.

Avars use the narrow and very long (20ft. and more) flat-weave rug called Supra-Dum for collective ceremonial feasts. The Supra (meaning tablecloth) is spread on the long balcony floor and covered with dishes and seat along it.

The following old custom is another example that in traditional Daghestan society carpets represent a part of women's world. There are part true and part-legendary tales about 'blood feud' in Caucasus – a bit like Sicily. When an innocent person was killed, their relatives attacked the house of the murderer, ruined and burnt it, plundered its treasures if there were any and seized the animals. However, it was forbidden to pillage carpets or any textile things, provisions and kitchen implements. According to Customary Law (not Islamic or Russian law) before burning down the enemy's house, these items were taken away and left apart.

By the way, Shamil, who was fighting against the Tsarist Russian conquerors for over 25 years (c1831 to 1859) in his state Imamate, which included the present territories of Daghestan and Chechnya, strongly forbade vendettas and avengers to ruin and burn the house of murder. Shamil said: "The house is not guilty in murder".

The language of signs, symbols, ornamental motifs, and composition in a carpet say what its story is, and from which country it comes.

Often symbols mean signs and vice-versa. Ornaments add beauty to signs. Sign/symbols have been part of human life from the beginning - signs of the sun or moon, signs of space or stars, signs of love or power. Most signs symbolize good wishes and beliefs, but a few do not.

Since ancient time's human beings tried to influence surrounding nature to ask for rain or warm weather, luck in hunting, good harvest, to protect himself and his community from catastrophe and evil. For this he used various magic rituals, connected with dancing and singing, and playing with ornamented ritual subjects. As a part of this 'sympathetic magic', representations of ancient ritual objects and idols could be made to influence human life by drawing them on walls, domestic implements, working tools, amulets, talismans, weapons, and carpets. Proximity to the symbolic world became a tradition, as part of a secure life, in a kind of dialogue between the real and symbolic worlds.

Signs and ornaments of carpets as a rule do not symbolize aggression, at least those made according to folk traditions, not under suppression (such as the Afghan war rugs). Carpet design is made up as personal individual music, as a layered complex composition of a limited range of notes, which form a common alphabet at certain levels.

It is well known that ornaments can be divided into several groups such as geometric, vegetal, zoomorphic, anthropomorphic, cosmogony and so on. Most of Daghestan carpets have geometric designs. Vegetal design is not characteristic for Daghestan, although it appears in a few carpet designs (called “murvar tsuk” – Roses in Lezghin) from Lezghi town/village Akhti and Tabasaran village Khuchni. It is likely to be a late and not enduring influence of Persian design tradition.

Depending on the origin of designs Daghestan carpets are classified and given names of certain villages or ethnic groups: “Akhti”, “Ersi”, “Mikrakh”, “Derbent”, “Rushul”, “Khiv”, “Kasumkent”, “Kabir”, “Tabasaran”, “Rutul”, “Tsakhur”, “Avar” and so on. Most of them have common figures, such a closed composition with an odd numbers of borders and a bordered open central field, but some of them, particularly Avar flat-weave rugs do not.

Some of designs are popular both for their beauty and meaning. For example design “Safar” (means “journey”) symbolizes good luck in traveling. Dragon design has the function of protection of home from evil spirits. Design “Tapancha” (means “Pistol”) It has details looks like of handle old Pistols to symbolize protection of someone who is in military service. Design “Merkher” (“Sledges”) is the symbol for happy youth.

In Avar Davaghins the main strong geometric design is called “Rukzal” (“Homes”) and it symbolizes prosperity and defense of house and home.

As mentioned above the most common ornament of Daghestan carpets is geometric. Vertical and horizontal lines, zigzags, diagonal and inclined lines, and combinations form simple and complicated triangles, cubes, rhomboids, cross, and circle patterns. Direct, short and hooked lines form the repeated elements of the outer borders which symbolize endless water streams, goodness and success. Zigzags are considered as a reflection of natural phenomena such as lightning. Point and circles symbolize grain and sun, signs used as a protection against the evil eye. S-like horizontal and vertical elements are considered as a water symbol (rain) or, as Lezghi weavers think, a snake trying to eating its tail. According to *Encyclopedia of Symbols* by Bower, Dumont and Golovin, “If we cross vertical and horizontal lines we get the simplest pictogram existing in the world. This is an image of four. After Christianity the cross was a symbol of suffering. Before, the cross was a microcosm of our planet with four sides”.

For Sunni Muslims in Daghestan, Prayer rugs have an important ritual role. Of course Muslims can pray on any clean place and without prayer rug. But in the composition of prayer rugs, there is a reflection of some Islamic ideas of praying. The variety of arches on every prayer rug reproduce the “Mihrab” – Niche, located in one of the walls of a mosque that shows the direction to Mecca (called K’ibla) where is the main Holy Place of Muslims – the Kaa’ba, the rock where the angel stopped Abraham sacrificing his son to God. A prayer rug faces the same direction as the Mihrab in the mosque. For a Muslim who is praying outside a mosque, the prayer rug becomes a kind of symbolic micro-mosque where the arch of the prayer rug represents the Mihrab.

On prayer rugs: the arch also symbolizes a gate to Paradise. Ducks symbolize cleanliness and chastity. Cypress trees - tree of life and garden of Paradise. The lamp means enlightenment, wisdom and knowledge.

There are different explanations of what colors symbolize in prayer rugs. A common opinion is that Green is the color of Paradise, Red of Royalty, White of Light and Holiness, Black of Mystery, Blue of Heaven and Water.

Usually a Prayer rug is made for one person's ritual needs. But there are Mosque prayer rugs that consist of more than four complete prayer patterns in one rug or family prayer rugs consist of three or more separate prayer rug designs.

Such prayer rugs may be in use in families for two to four wives as well.

[Khan's Rugs FAQs \[frequently asked questions\]](#)

Knot count is calculated per sq. ft by the number of horizontal knots multiplied by the number of vertical knots.

Khan's Rugs knotted pile carpets density of knots per sq. ft. is: 14,400;

And in Flat Weaves (Soumakhs) density of warps and wefts per sq. ft. is 12,960.

Our weavers

In Daghestan the social position of women was different compared to common stereotypes in other Islamic societies. Women were not housebound, but went out to work. They did not wear the veil. They could converse with anyone as freely as men.

As a result, or vice versa, they possessed self-respect and were respected by society. In 1896 the Tsar's gubernator (governor) of Kutaisi (Georgia) Lieutenant-General Alikhanov-Avarskii rebutted aspersions towards Daghestani women in the pages of the newspaper Kavkaz published in Tbilisi.

“ Any woman of Daghestan... as was confirmed a thousand times, is ready every minute to affirm that if there is any slight encroachment on her rights and dignity, she is the same as a mountaineers, but in women's dress, that she is also flesh of the flesh of her country and is able, when it becomes necessary ... to overcome both others and herself, no less then her husband or her brothers”. (Alikhanov Avarskii.”Kavkaz”, 23 August, 1896, N. 223., Tbilisi).

Self-dignity, sense of independence and healthy competition are the obvious elements of the psychology of our weavers. Everyone is sure that she is the first weaver and the best person.

Madder dye gave many of the reds in Daghestan rugs. Before the 1840s - 1860s when the Russians conquered the plains of the Caucasus where madder flourished, the Russian textile industry imported madder from France and Holland and Indigo from India. These two natural dyes were the main source for red and blue colors. Since the 1840s Russian chemists found that madder grown

in Derbent area of Daghestan contains 3 times more red dyeing pigment than madder roots grown in other countries. That is why Derbent is the only city in the World with madder roots on its coat of arms. Until the 1870s export of madder roots to Russia became an important contributor to the Daghestan economy. But since then, chemical dyes, which were cheap, easy to use, effective, but unnaturally florid and flat, replaced vegetable dyes. After over 130 years, Khan's Rugs has put the madder back into Daghestan rugs.

Who gathers the plants for Khan's Rugs?

Except madder roots, all plants (rhododendron, skin of oak, walnut and onion, other vegetables as milkweed, skin of alder, roots of barberry ext.) we gather ourselves. For gathering madder roots we employ people. In order to get good quality of dyeing, madder roots must be gathered in October. In Daghestan it is a rainy month. It is risky to spoil madder if it is gathered in rainy day. Raw madder roots are cleaned and dried in the shadow and storied in the garret.

It is known that ornamental symbols of rugs are connected with mythology. How it is represented in Dagestan?

Every ornamental detail could be an interesting subject of mythological analyses. For example: swastika which as it known symbolize the Sun. In Daghestan it represents both Sun and snake. In Lezgi Language Swastika sign complicated by labyrinth curve lines is called "Mal'un k'ule" (a house of snake). Mythology about a snake with golden Horns plays a role of home protector which lives only in happy house inside of central column. One can not see it, but if by chance someone seen it he will be happy. In some Avar and Lak villages householders even today put under roof of a piece of bread with butter or small plate with milk for a golden horn snake. There are mythical personages called "Tamirkh'oyas" (in Avar) and "Tushed Ribel" (in Rutul) who patronage carpet weaving. Fantastic stories about these mythical personages say that they somewhere someone found in his house combed wool, carpets and felts made by a house spirits overnight.

Shiite Muslims employ animal's figures. What in Dagestan?

Shiite Muslims traditions allow drawing on paper and carpets miniatures and scenes of hunting, war, love ext. with very realistic figures and images of people and animal. According to Sunni interpretation of Shari'a Law it is forbidden to draw pictures of human being or animal. The explanation is that drawing of living creature to which God gave an ideal form is profane and blasphemous.

Even though on traditional Daghestan designs there are stylized pictures of men, sometimes of shepherd, dancing women's figures, birds, wolves and so on.

What are the different arches mean in Daghestan Prayer rugs?

Arch forms are different (some of them have direct hooked lines, other arches looks like cogwheels). The difference of Daghestan prayer rugs is that the arch is formed by direct lines only, not roundest arches as in Persian or Turkmen or some Turkish prayer rugs.

The other difference more likely connected with Sunni division is that on Daghestan prayer rugs there are no Arabic scripts or notes saying: "This rug belongs to....". The form of Arch of Prayer rugs are compared both with Mihrab and with human body. Every space of Prayer rug is organized very rational. When praying the forehead must touch the center of "a head" of arch, hands - a right and left side of "a head" of arch on the ear level (some prayer rugs have on these points drawings of hands); knees must touch the mid of arch; and the fingers of the feet touch the end of arch. So the body of a praying person should fit to the space of rug occupied by arch and not cross to the bordure of the rug.

What happened to Daghestan rug weaving in Soviet times?

In Daghestan till 1928 carpet production was concentrated in private houses. In 1928 Soviets confiscated private property and in 1936 finished establishing "kolkhozes". There were a lot of communist slogans addressed to local masters such as: "United, poor comrades-masters. Your happiness is in your hands. Daghestan Soviet government will come to help you with all resources and power". There was severe power, but not resources. For several small carpet factories organized in 1930-es looms were confiscated from private houses. In 1940-es partly because of economic reason connected with the World War II most of Soviet carpet factories disappeared. But a remarkable phenomenon was that weavers in they domestic weaving return to natural dyes because they had no enough money to buy chemical dyes. Since 1960-es Soviets started building the two floors carpets factories, like in Derbent city, Khuchni, Lyakhlya, Orta-Stal and other villages. One can imagine a quantity of bureaucrats if a second floor was used completely for offices, as rule former Party bosses or their relatives, who have nothing to do with decorative art. Even though till the collapse of Soviet Union almost 30.000 Daghestan weavers had permanent jobs, some weavers were granted by medals of Lenin and of Hero of Socialist labor, others became deputies of Supreme Soviet of Soviet Union. As many other thing depended on Soviet plan-economy carpet weaving in Daghestan was separated from folk and folk traditions.

Every carpet factory had so called “Khudozhestvennii Soviet” (Artistic Committee). Designs drawn by a members of that Committee had to be confirmed by the same Committee and in Moscow.

Because the main aim of Soviet plan economy was to fulfill a plan the most important thing was to produce a maximum quantity of square meters of carpet production. In order to get the highest achievements even designs were simplified, not saying about using of chemical dyes.

When did you get interested in carpet weaving art?

My grandmother used to weave and I knew from her that in Archi language (spoken in Daghestan by 1500 people) the twisted around loom warps are called “Okh”- means “marriage party”, and the weft is called “Markh” – means “feast”. I can not say that in our family house in Archi village we had a lot of decorative items. But two things I remember forever. My grandfather’s beautiful sugar cutting silver tweezers ornamented by Kubachi master and his very nice prayer rug. After Pray my grandfather put inside the rug his small beautifully embroidered bag with perfume herbs his coral beads and his small comb for his accurate bead.

Later in 1974, when I became a student of S. Petersburg State University there was no doubt about specializing in ethnography and cultural anthropology. In University I met professor of History of Art Tatiana Znamerovskaya who played a key role in provoking my professional interest in fine art. What was my surprise when she took out of her office table a picture of my father show it to me and said: ”I am an expert on West-European Portrait Art. Whenever I discuss with my colleagues about canons of men’s beauty in European portrait art I show your father’s pictures as a canon of man’s beauty”. She told me that in 1959 she had been in our Archi village with ethnographic expedition and my parents had privileges to host her and her friends. She remembered everyone of our family. I was often guest in their modest in terms of space and full of books kvartira in Zanevskii prospect. She and her husband Pavel Chepurnoy, a professor of S. Petersburg Mining (Gorniy) Institute, they represent the most enlightened part of Russian intelligentsia.

They introduced me to the experts in Daghestan Decorative Art at Hermitage Museum Anatoly Ivanov and Tatyana Kilchevskaya. Thanks for them and for my University professors Rudolf Its, Alexander Gadlo and others I learned a lot about the culture which my Daghestan represents.

Erudition of Tatiana Znamerovskaya in Daghestan history and culture was incredible. I believe that the idea of revival of Daghestan Textile tradition in many senses was hers. She told me that Sovietization of decorative art of Daghestan is even worth then its modernization. She used to say that communist consciousness and people’s consciousness are not the same. I always became feared when she repeatedly said to me:” you are studying far away from your homeland for the great aim: to represent your Daghestan people for the whole world”. She was teaching at the same faculty where I studied. She and Pavel

knew about my achievements in education and almost everything about my young and stormy student life. They wanted me not only to wear warm clothes, but to be the best student. It is known that respect of the elders is part of nature of mountaineers, but these great people treated me as their grandchild and I loved them as my grandparents. At them I felt that I have the lovely Daghestan kind Rukzal (home) that I am not 3000 km far from my native Archi village.

After graduating of University in 1979 I was between 12 of 95 who were recommended to continue education in Aspirantura. In 1980-1983 I did my PhD at the Institute of Ethnography of Academy of Sciences of USSR in Moscow under supervision of Academician Julian Bromley. In 1994 I was and adviser of 6 serial BBC TV film "Living Islam", in 1995 - a fellow of John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University (USA). After graduating S. Petersburg University and till 1998 my scientific interests are in contemporary ethnic and cultural issues of Caucasus and, of course, in the Historical of Textile Art of Caucasus and particularly in Daghestan carpet weaving.

I've learned not from academic books that thousand year's folk traditions of Daghestan Textile Art are disappearing. In 1990-es, after collapse of Soviet Union it became obvious that none was interested in doing anything to resolve this problem, but everyone was doing his own: stealing money from Daghestan budget or doing or describing crime and ethnic conflicts. In such a social atmosphere of Eltsin's time when any busyness was control either by criminals or by bureaucrats (which was almost the same) my decision to work on revival of Daghestan Textile Tradition was not easy one. After all I could be completely satisfied by my position between academic colleagues, by giving lectures in Western Universities and enjoying communication with specialist and friends at International conferences.

The decision was made in May 1997 by Josephine Powell, an American Scholar, the world famous expert in Textile Art, living in Cihangir, on the West Bank of Golden Horn in Istanbul. I know her for many years from Robert Chenciner, my old English friend and co-author of several publications including our recent book on "Tattooed Mountain Women and Spoon boxes of Daghestan" (Bennett & Bloom, London, 2006). It was both advice and order when Josephine said: "You, Daghestani, are who have to revival Daghestan Textile traditions. You have to concentrate on two things: natural dyeing and retuning to old Daghestan traditions of Carpet Weaving. In a week, on 9th of May in Denver, Colorado (USA) there will be ACOR conference. Go there, she said, and compare where Daghestan and the rest carpet weaving World are". I did. Luckily I found there R. Chenciner was giving a talk on Daghestan Dum and Davagin carpets. He introduced me to George Jevremovich the chief of "Woven Legend" company. Thanks for his help and first of all thanks for permanent support of two the great American ladies Josephine Powell and Ruth Daniloff Khan's Rugs was created, grown up and given a happy chance to be a messenger and missioner of Daghestan material culture to outside the world.

Why did you decide to revive the old traditions? What's wrong with chemical dyes?

As more I learned about contemporary carpet production of Daghestan as much I became convinced that comparison with old traditions is in favor of old traditions. The quality of wool, dyeing, design solutions, even quantity of knots, everything is in favor of old traditions. Processing wool a machine does not care are a fibrous of wool alive or dead, long or short, shine or withering. Comparison of natural dyed yarn with chemical colored yarn gives the same contrast as if you compare plastic plants with natural flowers. One has to see them not separately, but side by side. Plus chemical dyes do spoil wool quality and as a result quality of carpet. I do not know about special scientific researches on hygienic characteristic of chemical dyed carpets, but what I personally mentioned is that normally a person can concentrate his view on chemical dyed carper no more then 10 minutes, but natural dyed carpets he can contemplate as a Sufi, or as Japanese contemplates a flora.

There is nothing new in what I am saying. Almost every carpet connoisseurs and carpet lovers are saying about it since discovery of chemical dyes, for more then 150 years.

It seems the nature itself is a teacher of natural dyeing. I am always impressed when I see a sheep moving from the pasture and carrying on her wool-back a piece of thorny bush of madder. I feel that it is a sort of sheep's allusion to her owner about requires for her wool the roots of the plant she is carrying...

For thousands years people learn a lot about natural dyes. In Daghestan old women still remember recipes of natural dyes were used by their mothers and grandmothers. I visited many villages and gathered any available information concerned with textile traditions and natural dyeing experience, took notes of receipts.

Descriptions of some designs



“Rukzal”

It seems that the meaning of Latin saying “My house – My Fortress” is both in the name “Rukzal” (“Houses”) and the design of this rug.

Architecture of many floors Daghestan villages, located on naturally protected hills of Mount looks like honeycombs and are often compared with skyscraper. These villages are made up by a separate houses where roofs of downers serve as a yard for the uppers, where are a lot of exits but one or two entrance. Each house and a hole village is private property and sovereign territory of a free villagers united with other villagers into free civil society. Freedom and Defense, Bravery and Hospitality, Opened hand for Friend and closed fist for enemy - these international values have for Avar people particularly important meaning and specific historical context and memory about withstanding for 3 centuries against Arab conquerors (VII- IX cent.), fighting against Chingiz-Khan’s and Tamerlan’s Hoards (XIII c.), “Thunderstorm of Universe” Nadir-Shah of Iran in 1741 defeated in Gunib area of Avar territory, 25 years long fighting for Liberty of Imam of Daghestan and Chechnya Shamil, surrounded by Tsar’s troops in Gunib in 1859.

All experts on Daghestan Textile Art (Josephine Powell, Paul Ramsey, R. Chensiner, Anatoly Ivanov, Elena Tsareva, Patimat Gamzatova and others) agree that “Rukzal” design is unique and can hardly be compared with any known carpets design of any carpet weaving province of the World.

It worth to underline that the elements of bordure of this rug are named as a parts of Eagle: “Tsumil Gozo” (“Eagles beak”), “Tsumil Rutch” (“Eagle’s tale”) ext.



“Tapancha”

Weavers of Daghestan called this design “Tapancha” (“Pistol”) or “Turar” (Swords). In design of this rug one can see a reflection of an unrest history of Daghestan. For centuries Huns and Khazars, Arabs and hordes of Chigiz-Khan, of Nadir-Shah of Iran, of Russian Tsar conquered Daghestan. It is worth to say that on a rug with this particular design Daghestanians like to hang on their weapons, decorated wild Mountain Goat’s Horns, Musical Instruments.

On a white field of this rug there are crest like figures. These handles of pistols have very restrained madder -red color, but look convincingly, as if they repeat Avar saying: “the best place for weapon is sheath”. In the History of Daghestan were periods when people could enjoy their peaceful life and beauty of their Mountain homeland. Flowers spread on the virgin white ground of this carpet looks as an optimistic symbols of life. It is symbolic that nowadays Daghestan Mountaineers when they farewell young man to Army hang on the wall this rug with its attribution and strongly believe that it protects they son or brother from misfortune.



“Syurgi”

On this rug one can find similarities with composition of perfect Lezgi rugs known as “Hassan-Kala” (Fortress of Hassan) and with “ Lezgi Stars”, or with Magical motifs of Tabasaran carpet “Kuvlig” On the same time Tabasarians calls this design “Juhud” (Jewish), Lezgins of Kurakh region “ Karabakh khanch” (“Karabakh crest”), Lezgins of Akhti region “Ermeni” . For interpreters of ornamental motifs the puzzling question arises from this design is complicated figure of these 3 similar and on the same time different medallions. What they represent? Christ, Six angles David Star, 8 or 16 angles Star of unknown origin? If we look carefully at the very center of the first two medallions we can obviously see the images of crests, ornamental solutions of which can be compared with Armenian tradition but what seems very Mountain Jewish is the ornamentation of 6 smaller branches by many tiny rhombic elements which are particularly representative for decorative art of Daghestan Mountain Jews.

Design of this carpet is one the most remarkable example of susceptible nature of Daghestan culture to the artistic traditions of Mountain Jews and Armenians, the only Jewish and Christian peoples living in Daghestan for centuries as neighbors and compatriots, as friends and kunaks (guests). It is symbolic that Inside of central medallion there are two trees of life, common motifs for Daghestan, Mountain Jews and Daghestan ornamental traditions.



“Dragon”

Influence of Chinese Dragon ornamental motifs on the design of this type of rugs is well known and world-wide recognized. But see how looks like our “Dragon” design rug. Except the general form, obvious evidence and trace of ancient Chinese influence, it has nothing “dragonish”. There is no famous Dragon’s terrible face, no frightful mouth, no crooked paws with long aggressive nail.

According to local folklore “Ajdaha” is a monster which looks like something middle in between crocodile and monster- snake. In difference of Russian mythic three head snake-personage “Zmey Gorinich” which lives in a palace and eat every night one young girl, “Ajdakha” has one head, stay in a head of spring, not allow people to use water and attack fighters who try to release people from its tyranny.

During my field ethnographic research in Lezgi and Avar regions of Daghestan and gathering information about meaning and perception of this type of designs I discovered that both Lezgins and Avars never call this design “Dragon” (Azdaho” in all Daghestan languages).

Daghestanians call this design “Eagle” (“Kirgu” (in Avar), Eagle for Daghestanians is sacred bird.

Have a look on our rug. Strain your imagination. Red ground of the rug, harmony of colors give a feeling of relaxes and pleasure, a feeling of fly. Is here a peaceful bird with opened great wing flying on skies and watching what is on earth: floweriest alpine meadow with grazing animals? Is this a holiday for proud bird, for Eagle?

Continuing reference to Russian Mythology let us remind a fantastic Russian “Kover-Samolet” (Self-Fly Carpet). Where is the place of origin of this tale? May it be in Daghestan?



“Yahul”

The very attractive design of this rug is based on ornamental traditions of South of Daghestan and North of Azerbaijan, the cradle of Lezgi people and their textile culture. Extremely complicated composition of many different and small ornamental details of these rugs does not give a feeling that “it is too busy”.

Balanced co-relations of small and big design patterns in the middle of the rug as well as carefully selected proper coloration gives a mystic imagine of Unity and endless of the World. Lezgins call this rug “Yahul” (means a Mountaineer). According to Lezgin tradition a rug of this design was woven for the special gladness cases or to give as a present to authorized guests with an exquisite knowledge of carpets beauty.

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