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DRAGON IMAGES IN THE AZERBAIJAN NON-DRAGON CARPETS

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Abstract. The images of dragon are present not only in the Dragon carpets of Karabakh but also in most carpet designs of Azerbaijan. However, unlike the Karabakh carpets, the dragon images in carpets of other regions are less known to experts. Unlike the dragons of carpets woven for palace and trade purposes during the Safavid era, the dragons in the carpets of regional folk art were depicted geometrically and schematically. The dragons of palace carpets tended to be figurative and were depicted as symbols of the power and authority of rulers. In contrast, the dragons in folk art carpets were more influenced by the beliefs and folklore of the people, often symbolizing the dragon in a more conditional manner. The dragon images woven in these carpets were believed to protect the home, hearth, and family from evil forces and the evil eye.

Key words: Azerbaijani carpet, Dragon carpet, Karabakh, Safavid, «Tree of Life».

Introduction. Everyone knows that most of the “dragon carpets” are of Caucasian and Karabakh origin. But not everyone knows that carpets from other regions of Azerbaijan also contain images of dragons in their designs. Numerous variations and artistic interpretations of the dragon motif are found

in ornamental carpets from Azerbaijan's regions such as Shirvan, Quba, Gazakh and elsewhere. The images of dragons in these carpets are sometimes simple, but extremely interesting folklore versions of dragon images. A large number of such carpets are in the collection of the of Azerbaijan National Carpet Museum.

Images of dragons in Azerbaijani carpets have long played the role of a magical talisman, protecting the home, hearth, family from potential evil. Only later they play the role of carpet decoration. Later, in connection with the strengthening of medieval feudal power and the establishment of statehood, a third function was added to these two functions of carpet dragons – the representation of the strength and power of the ruler of the state, through images of dragons on large palace carpets.

The interpretation of the main material. Along with the archaic folk belief in the protective power of the mystical dragon, there was also the conviction that even its image protects and "attracts" luck into the home. This belief in the magical power of the dragon image itself had ancient roots, going deep into the cultural memory of Azerbaijanis and was so strong and universal that its image was traditionally placed in almost all carpets, regardless of design.

This folk tradition, previously manifested exclusively in family, wedding and tribal carpets, continued in the commercial carpets woven in Azerbaijan in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Small images of dragons were quietly and subtly introduced into the official design of the carpet by the weavers, continuing the folk tradition of magical protection of the carpet.

Images of dragons are found in both flat woven and pile carpets woven during the 16th – 19th centuries in all regions of Azerbaijan. All traditional Azerbaijani carpets woven during this period are divided into four typological groups determined by local artistic and technical traditions. The typological differences between these groups are determined by historical and local traditions that were formed in a specific ethno-tribal or geographical area. These typological groups are as follows: "Quba-Shirvan group", "Karabakh group", "Kazakh-Borchaly-Zangezur group", and "Tabriz-Ardabil group" of Iranian Azerbaijan. Although they have local distinctive features, all these groups of carpets nevertheless have common recognizable stylistic features characteristic of carpets woven by Azerbaijanis living in their historical territories. Weavers from ethnic minorities such as Lezgins, Avars, Kurds, Tats, Mountain Jews, Talysh, and others also contributed to the creation of these common stylistic features. Common political geography, history, interethnic

marriages, trade, and cultural ties between neighboring ethnic groups led to the formation of a common national identity and, as a consequence, to the formation of common artistic and technical properties of the craft of carpet weaving in this region.

Western experts divide carpets from the Caucasus and Northwestern Iran into "Caucasian" and "Persian" based on modern political geography. They do not take into account the fact that the Azerbaijani people and the territory of their residence, as a result of two Russo-Persian wars in the 19th century, were divided between the Persian and Russian empires. This division has a political and legal status for everyone, but not for Azerbaijanis. For Azerbaijanis, the modern political border between the Northern and Southern Aerbaijanis conditional, because they are one and the same people with common cultural and historical traditions.

Traditionally, the Caucasian group of Azerbaijani carpets is characterized by schematic and geometric stylization of carpet motifs. Carpets from Iranian Azerbaijan are characterized by a higher level of realism of the depicted plant motifs. There are almost no straight lines or angles in the designs of these rugs.

Dragon motif in Azerbaijani carpets is common in two fundamentally different iconographic styles: in the early Safavid palace carpets of Iranian Azerbaijan, the dragon motif is characterized by figurativeness and a realistic style of depiction. The iconography of this dragon comes from the famous images of dragons in miniature illustrations that adorned the manuscripts of the classics of Eastern poetry (Firdowsi, Nizami Ganjavi, Faridaddin Attar, Jami, Hafiz, etc.). The works of these authors contain plots of a literary hero fighting a dragon. With the participation of palace artists who illuminated these handwritten books, the dragons "migrated" into the technical drawings of palace carpets, which later received the conventional name "Dragon Carpets".

In the classical literary tradition and on the pages of handwritten books, the dragon is described as an evil that a positive literary hero fights against. The negative assessment of the image of the dragon was "transferred" to pictorial carpets woven in the palace workshops of the Safavid era. This negative attitude towards the image of the dragon was mainly widespread among the palace aristocracy, who had access to literary works. Common people, who did not have literacy or access to expensive handwritten books, had their own image of a dragon, which goes back to folk beliefs, myths and fairy tales. In these myths, the initially negative, scary, and evil dragon, turned later, as

a result of the struggle and relationship with the hero, who does good and justice, into his assistant and protector.

Beginning in the mid-16th century, the pictorial tradition of depicting dragons in palace carpets increasingly gave way to stylized, ornamental depictions of dragons. There is a "restyling" of the old pictorial motif of the hero's fight with the dragon into a new, more conventional, and stylized motif – "Dragon and Simurgh". The new motif was freed from the old narrative of literary tradition.

It must be said that among experts in Oriental carpets, there is a misconception that the "Dragon and Simurgh" motif depicts the struggle between these two characters. This misunderstanding arises because the content of the old literary motif of the hero's fight with the dragon was "mechanically" projected onto the content of the carpet motif "Dragon and Simurgh".

However, from the earliest depiction of the Dragon and Simurgh motif on the 15th-century Berlin carpet to the late Safavid carpets, there is not a single one in which the Dragon and Simurgh motif could be clearly and convincingly called a wrestling scene. Are there any clear signs of struggle in this motif? There is no struggle, there is opposition, and balance, which creates harmony. In the discourse of the ornamental motif, "Dragon and Simurg" peacefully coexist, symbolizing the harmony of the male and female principles in space and life. However, literary stereotypes are so strong that there is a "mechanical" transfer of the content of the old motif to a new one, outwardly similar, but fundamentally different.

The content, iconography, and style of the depiction of dragons on Safavid palace carpets changed with the coming to power of a new ruler in 1642 – Shah Abbas Safavi (the Great). Shah Abbas's large-scale reforms in the production of commercial carpets sold to Europe are well known. It is also known that Shah Abbas personally participated in the creation of some carpet designs. According to legend, the famous "Flower of Life" motif, which is guarded by heraldic dragons in Karabakh "dragon carpets", was created personally by Shah Abbas and remained in carpet history under the name of the "Shah Abbasi" flower or motif.

The commercialization project of large Safavid carpets was connectedwith the flourishingof trade with European countries. Commercial reproduction of carpets required the unification of designs and basic motifs. This unification eliminated errors made by weavers during the weaving process, which led to

an increase in the quality and productivity of carpets. Yet weavers, not always very familiar with the motifs, sometimes still introduced their subjective interpretations or distortions into the carpet. But in general, the design of the carpet remained within the general iconographic canon, set by the palace artist in a technical drawing or fragment of a sample carpet ("Örnek" – sample).

The palace purpose of Safavid carpets led to a reinterpretation of the dragon motif discourse. Now, the ancient dragon motif began to symbolize supreme power. Reinterpretation was influenced by expanded political, cultural and economic contacts with European countries. The presence of heraldic images of lions, eagles flanking the royal crown on the coats of arms of European monarchies provoked the creation of a similar Safavid carpet «coat of arms» with heraldic images of dragons on the sides of the «flower of life» (Shah Abbasi flower).

By the way, such symbolism and functionality of the dragon motif have parallels in Chinese culture, where the dragon also personified the supreme imperial power. Apparently, the similarity between the official/palace symbolism of Safavid and Chinese carpets influenced some European experts in oriental carpets to decide that the Safavid dragon motif has "Chinese roots." It is strange that no one pays attention to the fact that these motifs have fundamental differences both in the semantics of the image and in the iconography of its depiction. At the same time, we should not forget that local symbolism and the content of the dragon discourse, completely independent of each other, appeared among almost all peoples of all continents. "There is a very clear distinction between the content and symbolism of the dragon in the cultural and historical environments of the Far East (China) and the Muslim world."

The dragon motif of tribal and family carpets reflects the popular, traditional symbolism of not a literary, but a folkloric dragon, dating back to ancient myths, legends and folk tales. And in these tales, the dragon is usually the guardian of a luxurious magical palace and countless treasures that go to the fairy-tale hero. The dragon in these tales symbolizes the hero's acquisition of the dragon's qualities, including strength, wealth, and eternal life. Thus, the «dragon» motif in traditional beliefs is a magical giver, keeper and protector of good. The ancient motif of paired dragons guarding the tree of life/flower of life has turned into a mystical protective symbol in folk carpets.

In traditional folk carpets, the dragon is usually not figurative, but schematic and stylized in an ornamental style. It is represented in the carpet not as the main motif, but as a small talismanic symbol with a magical subtext,

"woven" into the space between the main motifs of the carpet. An exception is the famous group of Caucasian (Karabakh) flat woven carpets Verni, in which a schematically depicted S-shaped dragon is the main motifrepeated vertically and horizontally.

In folk interpretation, the dragon is a magical protector of the family, driving away evil and bringing good luck, prosperity, and longevity. In these carpets, the image of the dragon is found in two iconographic variants: 1. Images of paired, heraldic dragons protecting the sacred tree/flower of life; 2. Images of dragons in the "Dragon and Phoenix" motif.

An analysis of the iconography of both typological groups indicates that folk carpet weavers were not familiar with the literary tradition of describing the dragon and its palace iconography. The palace canon of the dragonimage was represented only in palace carpets, which simple village weavers did not see and had no right to repeat in their carpets.

The situation changed at the beginning of the 19th century, when after the annexation of the feudal khanates of Northern Azerbaijan to the Russian Empire, and the khanates of Southern Azerbaijan remained part of the Persian Empire. Large-scale commercialization of carpets and the loss of folkloric images of dragons in their design occurred during the period of activity of the Caucasian branch of the "Handicraft Committee" of the Russian Empire (1899-1924), which was engaged in the organization, production and sale of traditional Azerbaijani carpets on the foreign market.

After the collapse of the Russian Empire, the management and organization of the carpet business was carried out by the Transcaucasian State Trade Association – «ZAKGOSTORG» (1924-1927). Following this Creative Production Union "Azerkhalcha" (In 2016 renamed to Open Joint-Stock Company "Azerkhalcha").

In the modern carpets of the Open Joint Stock Company «Azerkhalcha,» those naive folklore dragons are no longer woven, which were traditionally woven by simple folk weavers in all carpets, regardless of the main design.

Conclusion. 1. Images of dragons are found in numerous regional Azerbaijani carpets, the design of which has nothing to do with the Karabakh region or the design of the so-called "dragon carpets". The images of dragons on these carpets have folkloric content and naive iconography.

2. The commercial production of traditional Azerbaijani carpets has led to the fact that small and secondary images of dragons, which were individually and arbitrarily introduced by weavers into the field of the design, have been

excluded from official commercial designs. Individual and subjective images of dragons continued to be woven in wedding rugs and rugs for family use. In these carpets, dragons were woven as talismans to bring good luck to the home.

3. No matter how unrecognizable, fantastic and naive the dragons in these carpets are woven, they can be recognized based on the famous iconography of the motif "dragons are the protectors of the sacred tree/ flower of life." The inclusion of a dragon motif in the carpet design had a dual purpose: On the one hand, it filled the design gaps, thereby increasing the artistic and material value of the carpet. On the other hand, following an ancient tradition, the weaver included in the carpet a mandatory, traditional, family talisman.

In tribal carpets, not only the images of dragons but also the tree of life/ flower of life itself, with dragons depicted on either side, have undergone folkloric stylization. The tree of life and the dragons guarding it have become a conventional, symbolic representation of a talismanic motif, whose semantics encompass both real and mystical facets.

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AZƏRBAYCANIN QEYRİ – "ƏJDAHALI" XALÇALARINDA ƏJDAHA TƏSVİRLƏRİ

Əjdaha təsviri təkcə Qarabağın "Əjdahalı" xalıların da deyil, Azərbaycanın əksər xalça dizaynlarında mövcuddur. Lakin, Qarabağ "Əjdahalı" xalılarından fərqli olaraq digər bölgələrin xalçalarında mövcud olan əjdaha təsvirləri mütəxəssislərə az məlumdur. Səfəvilər dövründə saray və ticarət məqsədi ilə toxunan xalçalardakı əjdahalardan fərqli olaraq, regional xalq yaradıcılığı olan xalçalardakı əjdahalar həndəsiləşməyə məruz qalaraq, sxematik və şərti təsvir olunmuşlar. Saray xalılarındakı əjdahalar fiqurativliyə meyilli olaraq, hökmdarların güc-qüdrət, hakimiyyət rəmzi kimi təsvir olunurdu. Xalq yaradıcılığı olan xalçalarda isə, əjdahalar daha çox xalqın inancları, folklorundan bəhrələnərək, bir çox halda şərti olaraq əjdahanı simvolizə etmişlər. Onların xalçalarda toxuduğu əjdaha təsvirləri evi, ocağı, ailəni bədhax quvvələrdən, bədnəzərdən qorumuşlar.

Açar sözlər: Azərbaycan xalçası, Əjdahalı xalça, Qarabağ, Səfəvi, Həyat ağacı.

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ИЗОБРАЖЕНИЯ ДРАКОНОВ НА «НЕДРАКОНОВЫХ» КОВРАХ АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНА

Изображение дракона присутствует не только в «Драконовых» коврах Карабаха, но и в большинстве ковров различных регионов Азербайджана. Однако, в отличие от карабахских ковров, изображения драконов в коврах других регионов менее известны специалистам. В отличие от драконов на дворцовых и коммерческих коврах, драконы региональных ковров,

стилизованы, изображены схематично и условно. Драконы на больших дворцовых коврах носили репрезентативный характер и изображались как символы власти и могущества правителей. В народных коврах драконы, в основном, выполняли функцию оберега дома, очага, семьи от зла. Такой символизм мифического дракона происходил из древних народный поверий и фольклорных повествований. Сплетенные на коврах изображения драконов должны были принести удачу, процветание и защиту от сглаза.

Ключевые слова: азербайджанский ковер, ковер Дракон, Карабах, Сефевиды, «Древо жизни».

FIGURES