Traditions of Armenian Rug Weaving Culture in Northeastern Transcaucuses

The study of the Armenian rug weaving culture clearly reveals that features of technological and ornamentation principles, present in surrounding rug weaving centres, are to some extent characteristic of the traditions established in the Armenian rug weaving centres. The said refers to several rug weaving centres of Shirvan, Derbent, Gharadagh, Basin of Lake Urmia and Asia Minor. What historico-cultural relations might cause this situation and which niche the Armenian rug weaving traditions occupy in these processes. To our opinion, among other factors, ethnic shifts and consequent historico-cultural processes are of prime importance for unravelling such matters. We consider this conjuncture to be the major factor in the case of the issue of concern, given the fact that since the first millennium the Armenian community had obviously mastered the rug weaving technologies. Moreover, according to the sources of VII-XIV centuries, Armenia was considered to be a renowned centre of rug weaving culture and export; the Armenian rug: a criterion of perfection.

This report is a brief presentation of the ethnic shifts and their significance in the formation of cultural sets of the rug weaving centres of the above mentioned areas. Primary sources provide opportunity to track these issues since the Sassanid period. It is known that the Armenian community has had a considerable role in the ethnic portrait of the region since Early Middle Ages. The number of Armenians in the area was so considerable and influential, that an Armenian kingdom was formed there in XI-XIII centuries. Lithographic monuments proving this fact, in his time found and described by Bishop Makar Barkhutareants, were preserved in the vicinity of Derbent and Khachen until the middle of XX century. At the end of XIX century in two old cemeteries, located in the vicinity of Khachmas, he unearthed and cleaned many tombstones with the help of villagers. The tombstone inscriptions bore evidence that Armenians continually lived here at least from 573 to 1890. Archbishop Sargis Jalaliants saw the tombstone.

3 Barkhudarian, S. id., pp. 125-147.
4 Archbishop Sargis Jalaleants, A Journey to Armenia Major 2, Tpghis, 1858, p. 420 (hereinafter Archbishop Sargis Jalaleants).
of Sevada’s son Senekerim, the last king of Aghvank, in the thorn-covered graveyard in the same cemetery in the 1840s but when Makar Barkhutareants was there in the 1890s, the tombstone had already disappeared. Materials, gathered by Makar Barkhutareants, certify that many legends and toponyms, pointing out the Armenian presence in the Derbent-Makhachkala regions survived until the end of XIX century, which also bear witness to a great number of Armenian settlements in that area.

Despite regularly repeated abrupt changes in military-political situation of the area, in the northeastern parts of Transcaucuses survived Armenian semi-independent Principalities, particularly the Principality of Kutkashen. Artem Araratian, among others, gives information about many densely populated settlements of Armenians in this area. Being a participant of Valerian Zubov campaign, he eye witnesses about tenths of flourishing Armenian villages, located in the Mushkyur valley at the end of XIX century. Unfortunately, inhabitants of some villages entirely moved to Northern Caucasus because of the failure of the campaign.

In XVIII and at the end of XIX century, studies based on documents and memoirs related to the newest historical events, give an insight of Armenians of that area, also number of emigrated Armenians and those who adopted Islam. Yesai Hassan Jalalian’s observations show that only in the first quarter of XVIII century, as an aftermath of Turkish-Persian wars, consequent incursions of Lezgies and famine which followed, more than 10 000 Armenians adopted Islam in Shaki-Shirvan area. There are numerous documents verifying foreign incursions in the first quarter of XVIII century and the coming decades. In a letter of 5 February 1725, addressed to the Georgian king Vaxtang VI, it is said that Armenian inhabited villages of Shaki, Shamakhi, Gharasu (Kutkashen), Mushkyur and adjacent areas have been plundered and converted to Islam after the incursions of Lezgies. Concerning these events, it is recorded that: “…from the above mentioned regions captives, garments, rice, wheat were taken to Dagestan”. Artsakh was also not exempt of these calamities. The said refers to the campaign of Lezgies of 1711-1712, which caused vast destructions in the area, among them were areas from Bargushat to Jraberid and Gandzak. Such events were incessant in XVIII century with an aftermath of emigration and conversion processes in the densely populated Armenian regions of northeastern Transcaucuses. Only in the 1750s in Shaki area about 15 000 Armenian families were forcefully

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6 Yesai Hassan Jalalian, History or Memoirs of Certain Events of Land of Aghvank, Shushi, 1839, p. 29 (hereinafter Yesai Hassan Jalalian), also Leviatov, V. N. id., p. 92.
converted and as a result, 29 Armenian villages became Muslim\textsuperscript{10}. These processes continued well into the 1918-20s. Due to massacres and deportations, a part of Armenians living in 42 out of 52 villages of Shamakhi, Shaki, Gyolcha, still remaining populated by Armenians, had to adopt Islam. Only ten villages were partially saved from these calamities: Mirzabeklu, Khoshkashen, Nizh, Tjalet, Tosik, Vardashen, Mets Sogutlu, Pokr Sogutlu, Girk, Chorlu\textsuperscript{11}.

However, gradual loss of the mother tongue, parallel to conversion, does not imply any changes in the economic and cultural system. Anyway, whatever traditions the converted community has, automatically becomes the cultural property of the alien community. Taking into consideration the fact that waves of forceful conversion have begun since XIV-XV centuries, it must be assumed that already in XVI-XVII centuries the generations of converted Armenians were regarded as Muslim tribes: Lezgies, Tatars, Persians, etc. who, to some extent, continued to preserve and develop occupations and customs, characteristic of their ancestors.\textsuperscript{12}

Parallel to conversion processes, new waves of deportation, especially those of Armenians of Artsax followed; only in the 1790s about 12 000 Armenian families resettled there from Artsakh\textsuperscript{13}. Many settlements, being on the verge of deportation of Armenians or already empty, were again inhabited by Armenians due to such regular migrations. Catholicos Yesai wrote about Shirvan in the first quarter of XVIII century: “... the land was fertile, rich and densely populated by Armenians, having long ago migrated from Karabakh, who were more in number than the locals or other nationalities of this land...”\textsuperscript{14}. In the first quarter of XIX century traveller of Shushi Father Baghdassar Gasparian recorded the same portrayal. At the end of the XIX century, according to his data Makar Barkhutareants wrote: “The dominant Armenian dialect of Darband, Ghuba, Bagu, Shamakhi, Shaki, Tjar and all other counties (except Kapaghak) is the everyday language of Artsakh, for as we know, the majority of the present population has emigrated from Artsakh”\textsuperscript{15}. In this regard he also mentioned that: “Emigrants from Isfahan, Khoy and Tehran have also preserved their local Armenian dialects”\textsuperscript{16}. Makar Barkhutareants points out narratives, legends and toponyms, bearing witness to the former presence of Armenians in Shaki and counties located north of it, in particular, Tjar.\textsuperscript{17} According to these data, emigrants from

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Priest Ghazar Yovsepian} Priest Ghazar Yovsepian, Sketches on Uti and Muslim Armenians, Tiflis, 1904, pp. 64-65.
\bibitem{Yesai Hassan Jalalian} Yesai Hassan Jalalian, pp. 32-33.
\bibitem{Bishop Makar Barkhutareants} Bishop Makar Barkhutareants, id., p. 144.
\bibitem{Ibid.} Ibid., pp. 134-140.
\end{thebibliography}
Agulis settled in Zakatala or Tjar\textsuperscript{18}. The same refers to Armenians who emigrated to northeastern Transcaucasus from other areas, particularly from Peria county adjacent to Nor Djugha, Isfahan, Tehran and especially Khoy-Salmast, Nahkridjevan, county of Goghtan\textsuperscript{19}. In terms of presence of Artsakh traditions in rug weaving centres of Shirvan, Aresh village of Yelisavetapol county is also of great importance. The villages of this county: Kandak, Havarik, Mamatava, Khanavad, Mazurghu, Khaldan and Aresh were entirely inhabited by Armenians until the beginning of XX century and were known as rug weaving centres. Aresh was also known as "Ermani bazar" (Armenian market)\textsuperscript{20}. There are quite many data concerning occupations of Armenians in the above mentioned regions of Transcaucus. Thus, apart from farming, cattle breeding and gardening, they were also engaged in crafts as well as in occupations connected with processing raw material. In this regard there is also much evidence, e.g. Makar Barkhutareants, writing about spheres of activity of population of Shamakhi and adjacent counties, among them also Armenians, mentioned textile and its products: rugs and carpets, bed bags and saddlebags, wool and yarn, dyes, etc. which were exported to the market of Aghdash\textsuperscript{21}. Taking into consideration the origin of the Armenian population of Transcaucus or southeastern parts of Caucasus, it may be definitely stated that rugs and other textiles woven by them should mainly present the rug weaving traditions of Artsax-Syunik rug weaving centres. Tjartar village of rug weaving prominent centre of Varanda county of Artsakh may be a typical example for understanding the role and significance of Armenians of Artsakh in these regions. We have found out from the data provided by Makar Barkhutareants that Armenians who emigrated from Tjartar in XVII-XVIII centuries, settled the villages Arpaut, Ghara-Karkanj, Kurtjevan, Gandzak, Keshkhurd, Kyalband, Vankashen and Talish, located in the vicinity of Shamakhi\textsuperscript{22}. All these are obvious factors of cultural impact. Certainly, the role of Armenians, having adopted Islam and deprived of mother tongue is especially relevant for Artsax rug weaving traditions and their further development in terms of types of rugs and carpets, their design, criteria of technique and technology, embedded in the rug weaving centres of above mentioned areas.

Actually, among Armenians, settled in northeastern Transcaucus in the second half of XIX and the beginning of XX centuries, especially prominent were Armenians who emigrated from the eastern counties of Vaspurakan: Aghbak, Salmast, Berkri and Khoy. Since the second half of XIX century, industrial rise and manpower demand caused new demographic processes: massive emigration of Armenians to industrial centres, in particular, to Baku. In 1909 the rug weaving characteristics of several counties of Vaspurakan, mentioned above, and its

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., pp. 112-123, 140.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., pp. 91-94, 117, 120-121, 150.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 141-143. Lusents, A. The Dialect of Aresh, Yerevan, 1982, pp. 5-7.
\textsuperscript{21} Bishop Makar Barkhutareants, id., p. 144.
\textsuperscript{22} Id., pp. 97, 104, 107. For the issues of concern see also Kajberuni, Multimillion Heritage, Documents 2 (Compiled by A. Ghaziyan, A. Kalantaryan), Yerevan, 2001, p. 76.
development were highlighted in some presentations made at the Congress of Home Crafts in Tiflis. It was notably stated that: “…already in the 1860s Salmast was a factory Balakhani with its rug weaving (this means that it was as developed as oil industry in the neighbourhood of Baku with the same name – A. P.). The same refers to Tabriz. Anyway, today only remnants are left; rug weaving does not exist in Salmast and there is only one factory in Tabriz”. The reporter considered this situation to be a consequence of “extensive emigration in Salmast in the recent years”, the reason of which was decline of home crafts and particularly rug weaving23. In the opinion of Yu. Aristakesian, an artisan of a weaving workshop opened in Baku in 1908, who had lived in Persia and was aware of the situation in Salmast, the contagious movement of emigration caused the decline of home craft occupations and agriculture in this region24. Certainly, regardless of the extent and reasons of decline of rug weaving culture, what is important for us is the statement of rug weaving being developed in these two regions and also the fact of Armenians having an essential role, otherwise the emigration could not have such a crucial impact on its further evolvement. In this regard it is worth mentioning that even in the 1880s 11,700 Armenians lived in Salmast region25. On the other hand, it is natural for the immigrants to bring traditions of their rug weaving culture to northeastern Transcaucasia.

Evidently, this kind of historico-cultural processes, not only make research on rug origin complicated but also facilitate purposeful appropriation of cultural heritage, created by other ethnic communities. Fortunately, bulletins and studies on economics of the 1920-30s provide concrete data concerning Armenian rug weaving culture of these regions. In particular, M. Isaev, the famous specialist of Caucasian rug weaving culture, also stated that until the early 1920s the Armenian villages of Karamarian subregion: Kirk, Rushan, Ushtal, Soltankend were centres of intensive rug weaving. Another fact is of great importance to us, namely that rugs woven in these villages, were the same as Artsakh rugs in terms of quality, technique and technologies26. Several other researchers have also pointed out the similarities of design, technique and technologies of rugs woven in these regions. Simply they have neither addressed the causes of this phenomenon nor have studied them. In particular, Azerbaijanian researcher A. Babaev stating in one of his reports that: “…in ancient times rugs typical of Karabakh were woven in Shaki and neighbouring rug weaving centres” gives neither explanations nor mentions any sources27.

23 Home Craft Congress, Tiflis, 1909, p. 256:
24 Id., p. 258:
25 M. A., Armenians of Turkey and their Neighbours, Marseilles, 1890, p. 38.
26 Isaev, M. Rug Production of Transcaucasus, Tiflis, 1932, p. 121.
As for Derbent and Ghuba rug weaving centres, the said first of all refers to rugs and carpets ornamented by the variety of “Jraberd” motif (Figs. 1, 2): rugs of “Vorotan”, “Amaras” and “Getashen” types. In the rug weaving centres of Shirvan and Shaki, apart from the mentioned rugs, also widespread were “Tjartar”, “Haghpat”, “Tavush” (Fig. 3), “Utik”, “Voskanapat” (Fig. 4), “Banants”, “Pyunik”, “Sisakan”, “Gandzak” and several other types of rugs. Materials published during the recent years bear evidence to the said, notably the rug images printed by Anthony Hazeldine in “Hali” Magazine: “Tavush” (Fig. 5), “Vahan”, “Vorotan” (Fig. 6) which were taken during the trip to Zakatala in 1994. Moreover, Hazeldine published also the photograph of the Armenian church situated in the centre of the town28. Another evidence of presence of Artsax traditions in this area is the well-known rug “Jraberd” with a dated Armenian inscription, woven in 1850 (Fig. 7). Our inquiry shows that it was woven in the village of Karkanj where, as mentioned above, settled also Armenian inhabitants of Tjartar (Fig. 8). The inscription is of prime importance for identifying the provenance of this rug. The thing is that the family, by a rare surname Sharbekov, mentioned in the inscription, lived in Karkanj during the same years. This family was famous for its benefactions and, as a matter of fact, the given rug was presented to one of the family members by a grateful villager29.

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Among Shirvan group of rugs, those attributed to Karamarian subregion are completely different. According to M. Isaev’s observations, their technologies bear the impact of Karabakh as well as rug weaving centres adjacent to Baku. Noteworthy details provided by Isaev suggest that these rugs were of almost square shape and were rarely for export. Still, they were highly esteemed, were in high demand among traders and were named “Ermeni khila” (Armenian rug). Isaev also wrote that the production of rugs ceased after the First World War\(^30\). It was natural, for the majority of the Armenian population was deported from here. Thus, it may be concluded that sources of a substantial number of rug types, considered traditional in the aforementioned rug weaving centres of Transcaucasus, must be mainly sought in the rug weaving centres of Artsakh and Syunik. In the areas of concern considerable is also the influence of the rug weaving centres of the eastern counties of Vaspurakan: Salmast, Aghbak and Basin of Lake Urmia as well. In particular, it refers to the chequered rugs of “Aghbak” type (known by the

\(^30\) Isaev, M. Rug Production of transcaucasus, Tiflis, 1932, p. 121.
name of “Avshan” in professional literature), characteristic of the traditions of the rug weaving centres of Basin of Lake Urmia and eastern counties of Vaspurakan. Research shows that at the end of XIX century this type of rugs and their varieties were woven also in the southern rug weaving centres of historical Armenia, particularly in Tigranakert (Diarbekir) and surrounding settlements. The said also refers to “Mina Khanum” type of rugs, the design principles of which are close to “Aghbak” type and are characteristic to the rug weaving centres of Eastern Armenia and the name is most probably related to Mina Khanum: the benefactor spouse of Orbelian Tarsayitj Prince of Syunik, daughter of Artsax Prince Hassan Jalal.

Certainly, other ethnic communities of the area, to some extent engaged in rug weaving, also played a particular role in the formation of the Transcaucasian rug weaving traditions. Rugs attributed to Lezgies are known to have distinctive technological features. Lezgies were especially skillful in weaving carpets of “Sumakh” type\. In the rug weaving centres of Transcaucasus, particularly in the districts of Ghuba, Khachmas and Dyavachi as well as in the Absheron Peninsula Tats were distinguished in terms of weaving high quality rugs. The production of “Chichi”, “Pirebedyl”, “Ghonaghkend”, “Surakhani” and several other types of high market value rugs, launched since 1880s are attributed to them. At this time, on the initiative of Caucasian Home Craft Committee and expecting extensive production of commodity rugs, manufactories were created in these centres and diagrams of rugs were distributed to home-based craftsmen.\(^32\)

Summarizing this report, it may be stated that, apart from other rug weaving centres of historical Armenia, also Armenians having resettled in these areas from Artsax and Syunik for centuries as well as native peoples, notably Lezgies and Tats have an essential role in the formation of the traditions of rug weaving centres of Transcaucasus.


http://www.miacum.am/docs/taty/#g01