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On Some Peculiarities of Talysh Decorative-Applied Art

Talysh, one of the most interesting ethnic groups, inhabited the Southern part of Azerbaijan. In historical and ethnographic sources about the Talysh people, quite different, sometimes even contradictory opinions exist. Well-known scientist Ahmad Kasrari wrote that in ancient Greek sources, the peoples settled in Iran are listed, but Talyshes are not mentioned among them. Talyshes became known after Arabian scientists' works. It was Ahmad Kasrari's attempt to retrace the transformation of the ethnonym "kadus" or "tallish" (talesh)².

Outstanding Russian scientist and academician V.V. Bartold wrote that Talyshes were not mentioned in early sources. So, V.V. Bartold wrote that "in Iran, in Lankaran district, to the North from Gilan tribes "tallish" tribes live. They are close to Gilan, and the name "tallish" was not known in mid-century period"³.

In Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopedic Dictionary (published at the end of XIX – beginning of XX century), the Talyshes are mentioned as the tribe of Iranian genesis. They settled the territory called Talysh and spoke a special language similar to Persian⁴. According to information published in the *Alphabet list of people living in the Russian Empire* (1886), Talyshes lived in the southern part of the Lankaran district of Baku province, and their population was 50 150⁵. The first all-Russian general population census in 1897 regis-

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² Талышинцы // Энциклопедический словарь Брокгауза и Ефрона: В 86 томах (82 т. и 4 доп.). – СПб., 1890–1907, с. 283–288.

³ „Алфавитный список народов, обитающих в Российской Империи”. «Демоскоп». Архивировано из первоисточника 25 августа, 2011, с. 273.

⁴ Талыши // Народы Кавказа. – М.: Изд-во Академии наук СССР, 1962, с. 237.

⁵ Н.Г. Волкова. Этнонимия в трудах экономического обследования Кавказа 1880-х годов // Имя и этнос: общие вопросы ономастики, этнонимия, антропонимия, теонимия, топонимия: сборник. – М.: Ин-т этнологии и антропологии, 1996, с. 68.

tered 35 291 citizens speaking the Talysh language⁶. According to that census, Talyshes made up 1,9% of Azerbaijan's inhabitants⁷.

According to the information given by N.K. Zeydlitz, Talyshes formed half of the Lankaran district population (43,33% Talyshes and 44,20% Azerbaijanis)⁸. At the end of XIX – and the beginning of the XX century, Talyshes saved the signs of tribal division⁹. D.A. Kistenev studied the demographic situation in the Lankaran district of Azerbaijan and presented the names of five groups of Talyshes: Talyshes, Pornaims, Alars, Oratlins, and Zuvands¹⁰. But, to our mind, it would be more reasonable to present a short review from Wikipedia¹¹. Wikipedia includes very interesting information about ethnogenesis and the history of Talyshes. For example, B.V. Miller thinks “the word “tallish” means the name of one the ancient inhabitants of these places”¹².

In the second half of the XV century, the owners of Talysh khanat supported Sefevids in the war, in which Gizilbashes fought with Shirvanshakhs and sultans of Ag-Goyunlu state. That is why Talyshes were included in the Gizilbash tribes. Talyshes were the only Persian-speaking and non-nomadic people among Gizilbashes and were considered a “special” tribe with specific traditions¹³. So, Gilan province was inhabited by Talyshes and Gizilbashes, and in politics and economics, it was connected with internal Iran very little. The research carried out in the Soviet period of the XX century among the Talyshes proved again that the Talyshes differ from other ethnic groups living in Azerbaijan by their courage and skills. This peculiarity is seen most obviously in Talysh's decorative-applied art.

⁶ Б.В. Миллер. Предварительный отчёт о поездке в Талыш летом 1925 г. (доклад, читанный на заседании Истор.-Этнограф. Секции О-ва 14/1X 1925 г.). – Издание Общества обследования и изучения Азербайджана. – Баку, 1926, с. 91.

⁷ А.В. Севрюгин. Талышинцы. Талыши. Сайт проекта «Фотоколлекция Кунсткамеры». Руководитель проекта – директор Музея Антропологии и этнографии им. Петра Великого РАН, д.и.н. Ю.К.Чистов, с. 9.

⁸ В.В. Бартольд. Сочинения. – Наука, т. 3. 1965, с. 53.

⁹ Измайлова А.А. Социалистические преобразования хозяйства, культуры и быта талышей. Автореферат диссертации на соискание учёной степени кандидата исторических наук. – М.: Изд-во Академии Наук СССР, Институт этнографии им. Н.Н.Миклухо-Маклая, 1964, с. 194.

¹⁰ Талышинцы // Энциклопедический словарь Брокгауза и Ефрона: В 86 томах (82 т. и 4 доп.). – СПб., 1890–1907, с. 27.

¹¹ В.В. Бартольд. Сочинения. – М., Наука, т. 7. 1971, с. 39.

¹² Ibidem, с. 17.

¹³ Н.Г. Волкова. Этнонимия в трудах экономического обследования Кавказа 1880-х годов // Имя и этнос: общие вопросы ономастики, этнонимия, антропонимия, теонимия, топонимия: сборник. – М.: Ин-т этнологии и антропологии, 1996, с. 31.

The high level of development of the culture of the Talysh people is notable for its diversity. That diversity is seen in quite different artefacts, such as household and ritual ceramics, weapons, jewellery, and stamp amulets (stamp amulets from ancient times combined the function of an ornament amulet with a sign of ownership and also had utilitarian value). An analysis of the decoration of ceramic products and motifs used in the compositions of metal amulets and talismans indicates that objects of applied art, except traditional ornaments, also contain a group of geometric, floral, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic motifs, inclusions, pictorial quotes in the form of figures of fantastic and hybrid creatures, animals and plants, non-typical for the region, and others.

In this region, for many centuries, in the décor of applied art objects, the dominant place was occupied by solar and astral symbols. These symbols existed simultaneously with images of totem animals of the local substrate (goat, snake, etc.). Afterwards, these symbols began to be pictured along with pictograms and epigraphy. In this connection, an interesting fact should be pointed out. It is the use of foreign figurative elements combined with regional symbols in compositions created based on the local graphic texture, namely in the décor of applied arts. Graphic symbols characterise these elements without penetrating the “meaning” of borrowed characters. This feature is seen in the décor and ornamentation of ceramic products and carpets.

The Talysh people created a many-sided and comprehended culture in various spheres of handicrafts. Among them, woodworking, carpet weaving, metalworking, pottery, and mat making were highly developed. Materials about different branches of handicraft production prove that the Talysh craftsmen have accumulated rich experience and empirical knowledge in this sphere. For instance, numerous ceramic kilns found by archaeologists in Lankaran and other regions of Talysh suggest that most of the ceramic products found during excavations in the area under consideration are products of local craftsmen. Samples of highly artistic stone carvings have been preserved as tombstones, peculiar for the Qajar period in the region under consideration. Tombstones, animal sculptures, and earlier samples of this art are decorated with geometric and floral ornaments. The epigraphy performed by talented calligraphers and plot images reflected the most important episodes from the life of the buried.

The history of carpet art in the Talysh region was also engendered very early. Talysh carpets are exhibited in many famous public museums and galleries, such as the Hermitage in Saint-Petersburg, the Museum of History, the Museum of the Peoples of the East, The Armory Museum in Moscow, the Metropolitan Museum in New York, in Victoria and Albert Museum in London, in the Louvre in Paris, in Tehran and Isfahan carpet museums, in the

Topkapi Palace Museum in Istanbul and many others. Very interesting samples of Talysh carpets are also kept in private collections. They are also carefully kept in other Moscow, Saint-Petersburg, Kyiv, Tashkent, and Tbilisi museums.

Talysh carpets passed through four stages of development: at first, felt carpets appeared, then pileless carpets (palases), and even later, zili, verni and sumakhs began to be woven. Finally, the last stage of carpet weaving was connected with creating complex ornamental pile carpets. In particular, in the houses of wealthy Talyshes, traditionally, carpet sets (dasts) were used. They consisted of four carpets of three standard sizes. In the set, two “kenare”, one “kelleyi”, and one “khali” was included. Talysh pile carpets have been woven for centuries using two forms of knotting technique – “gullabi” (turkbab) and “dolama” (farsbab). As for carpet composition kinds, their number is unlimited.

In some cases, a rich and complex composition was widespread within the boundaries of one village, city or ethnic group where these carpets were woven. These compositions were traditionally passed down from generation to generation and considered valuable heritage. Carpets containing “quotes” from architectural monuments (both Islamic and Christian) are also widely known. In ornamental motifs of such carpets, many elements of architectural structures – arches and portals, columns and domes, windows and hanging lamps (gandil) are included.

The high density of carpet tie-knots is a distinctive feature of the Talysh pile carpet. In some carpets, the famous architectural monuments of the East and the shrines of the Muslim world are pictured (certainly, they are depicted schematically). In the structure of decorative compositions of small prayer rugs (namazlig), some architectural detail, e.g., a mihrab (a niche of the mosque altar), is included. The prosperity period of Talysh carpets in the Qajar period is illustrated most fully by specimens from the collections of museums in Baku (State Museum of Azerbaijani Carpet and Folk Applied Arts named after Latif Karimov), Zurich (Rietberg museum), Glasgow (The Burrell Collection), Washington (Textile Museum), New York (Metropolitan Museum of Art), Istanbul (Top-Kapi Museum), Moscow (Museum of Oriental Art), Kyiv (Museum of Oriental and Western Art), and many others.

As known, Talyshes were busy with other kinds of weaving in Azerbaijan. So, they wove “jejims” (handmade woollen fabric), and passed its secrets to Azerbaijanis, wove traditional “jorabs” (socks). Besides, Talyshes were busy making floor mats from ancient times and were always skilful masters in this sphere.

It should be pointed out that in the Midcentury period in Azerbaijan, two kinds of floor mats existed. These floor mats differed from each other in their

technique and artistic design. The first type was called “buriya”, and the second was called “hesir”. Buriya was the simplest kind of floor mats. Its ornament consisted of wide diagonal stripes, which resemble a parquet. In the Masalli, Lankaran, and Astara regions of Azerbaijan, in houses with clay floors, buriya and hesir are spread under carpets to protect them from dampness. In the old time, those inexpensive articles were widely used in the everyday life of simple people.

In mid-century Azerbaijani poetry floor-mat, “buriya” is mentioned very often. The floor-mat buriya became a part of the literary character and characterised the type of hypocrite and dissembler who covers up his real matter by buriya – a symbol of poverty.

Talyshes use basses for making different things of everyday life, e.g., big and small baskets – “zanbul” (Tal.), closed baskets, scales (“terezi”-Azerb., “tavzi”-Tal.), hats with wide brims for working under the sun (“lik papag”-Azerb., “piknakolo”-Tal.), table-mats or stands for saucepan (“gazanalti”-Azerb., “sife”-Tal.), mat for handmill (“kirkire”-Azerb., “dasor”-Tal.), square table-cloth for newly baked bread (“sufre”-Azerb., “sife”-Tal.) and many other things.

The “hesir” is also a very interesting handmade article of daily use. Hesir can be simple and figure. Both simple and figure hesirs look similar, but craftsmen created very interesting hesirs. They differed in their compositions and design. Homogeneity of material did not prevent creating quite different patterns. In the works of different masters living in separate villages, one can see very interesting and different versions of hesir compositions. It demonstrates the creative approach of weavers to hesir making.

At the beginning of the XX century and later in the Soviet period, the Talysh region was known for felt, silk fabrics, national clothes and shoes, and silk and gold embroidery. In the Talysh region, the production of glazed ceramics, the production of toreutic, engraved copper utensils, jewellery, wood and stone carving and many other crafts were very popular. The samples of decorative-applied arts of Talysh people in this region, namely the articles dating back to the II half of the XVIII and I half of the XIX centuries, adorn the collections of many museums over the world.

Since the middle of the XIX century, among the Talyshes, the art of embroidery by tambour stitch (“tekelduz”) and golden embroidery (“gulabatin”) had particularly flourished. In contrast to carpet-making, the embroidery craft (like in the North Caucasus and Central Asia) was the prerogative of the region’s male population. The clothes, skullcaps, shoes, rugs and all kinds of small household items, e.g., cases for the Koran, combs and watches, tobacco pouches, etc., were decorated with gold embroidery. For gold embroidery, as

a rule, smooth velvet of burgundy, purple, and green was used as the main material. Sometimes embroideries were made on satin or other fabrics with factory-made gold threads. In the décor, traditional symbols were used, and they were combined with local peculiarities. Outdoor clothes were also decorated with embroidery, fur, golden lace, gold and silver jewellery or silver coins. The golden and silver beads and buttons, stylised as large grains of barley, threading coins, lace pendants, chains, etc., were especially popular in this region. European and Russian travellers repeatedly mentioned the beautiful clothes of Talysh women in their descriptions of this region¹⁴.

Talysh jewellery pieces were distinguished by their diversity and were made mainly of gold. As for everyday belts or buckles for leather belts and other things, they were made mainly from silver. Golden products had always been in great demand; therefore, the jewellery workshops consisted of rows of famous bazaars. The jewellers decorated weapons and armour too. The daggers were an obligatory attribute of a man's suit.

The production of highly artistic chased (casting is less common) copper, and brass utensils were sharply reduced by the middle of the XIX century. This process most likely occurred due to increased competition with imported Russian-made industrial goods and the historically inevitable change in the population's lifestyle. The surviving samples of copper (tin-plated) dishes of the late XVIII and early XIX centuries impress with the elegance of form and the refinement of the decorative finishing. Sometimes, epigraphy containing quotations from the Koran, the most popular prayers, verses of Persian poets, and well-wishing maxims were used as decoration. In particular cases, in the carpet, the name of the carpet-weaver and the date of manufacture, less often – the name of the customer was fixed.

It should be noted that such utensils have entered the everyday life of the peoples of the region under consideration both as a substitute for expensive silver utensils and as its more democratic alternative. At the same time, it should be noted that the availability and cheapness of these products were achieved by replacing expensive metals with cheaper metal alloys, but by no means by reducing aesthetic indicators. Talysh craftsmen sometimes repeated in metal the forms and decor of expensive Oriental, European and Russian dishes made of porcelain, faience and ceramics in circulation in the market. Among them are buckets, "satil" dishes, ritual jugs with basins and jugs for

¹⁴ А.В. Севрюгин. Талышинцы. Талыши. Сайт проекта «Фотоколлекция Кунсткамеры». Руководитель проекта – директор Музея Антропологии и этнографии им. Петра Великого РАН, д.и.н. Ю.К. Чистов, с. 57.

transferring and storing water (“gyum”, “syakhang”), a vessel for rose oil (“gulbadan”), and other vessels should be noted particularly.

The production of daggers was stimulated due to their demand for their direct appointment and as a necessary addition to men’s clothes. A rich collection of arms is kept in the Museum of the History of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Among Talysh craftsmen’s products – swords and daggers with expensive blades and highly artistic scabbards, guns and pistols inlaid with gold and mother-of-pearl – are of particular interest. Among collectors, the weapons of the Qajar period of the early XIX century, made by craftsmen of different ethnic groups of the Caspian region, including Talyshes, are especially highly valued¹⁵.

The representatives of all estates turned to craftsmen of artistic wood-working because the vast majority of a wide range of household items (such as small boxes for storing Koran, carved spoons for pouring sherbet, combs, window shutters, shebeke, carved doors, etc.) was accessible for most inhabitants. The proficient, who produced musical instruments and trunks, formed a separate large group of craftsmen. Samples of this type of Talysh confirm the high artistic level of the Talysh wood carvers’ applied art, kept both in museums and private collections.

The beginning of systematic and programmatic accumulation and study of materials on the ethnography and culture of the Talysh ethnos and the initial information about the applied art of the Talysh is connected with the activity of archaeological excavations, and ethnographic investigations carried out in the late XIX–early XX centuries undertaken by the tsarist government in order to collect information about the composition of the inhabitant in Southern territories of the Russian state¹⁶. Later, in the Soviet period, those studies were continued.

As seen, the objective necessity for further study and systematisation of all components of the Talysh cultural space is quite evident, and the research in this sphere should be continued and developed.

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¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 73.

¹⁶ Н.К. Зейдлиц. Этнографический очерк Бакинской губернии // Кавказский календарь на 1871 г. Отделение Второе. – Тифлис, 1870, с. 49.

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On Some Peculiarities of Talysh Decorative-Applied Art

Summary

The article discusses the Talysh national culture and its decorative-applied art. The author dwells on issues connected with the Talysh people's history and the Talysh language's peculiarities, on the history of the study of Talysh culture and decorative-applied art. It is pointed out that the decorative-applied art of the Talysh people is rich, original, and quite imitative. The author enumerates the world museums where samples of Talysh decorative-applied art are exhibited. The author also pointed out the spheres of handicrafts in which Talysh craftsmen stood out. So, Talysh craftsmen were brilliantly proficient in carpet weaving (including pile and pileless carpets, hesirs and buriya), decorating swords and daggers, embroidery, wood-carving, stone-carving, and many others. Besides, the Talysh traditions in other spheres of art are also mentioned. For instance, everyday dishes, articles made from clay, various items, utensils of everyday and ritual purpose, and artistic ceramics are also mentioned in the article. The author points out that all items made by Talysh craftsmen were always in great demand, but large-scale production did not mean degrading their quality. Talyshes were jewellers of the highest level and created very interesting products, real masterpieces. It is not occasional that samples of Talysh decorative-applied art are considered a very interesting cultural phenomenon. So, the materials discovered during archaeological excavations and their comparison with modern products prove that rich traditions of Talysh decorative-applied art are saved, are continued nowadays and are enriched by new achievements.

Keywords: Talysh, decorative-applied art, carpet-making, ornament, zoomorphic and anthropomorphic motifs, household and ritual ceramics

О некоторых особенностях талышского декоративно-прикладного искусства

Резюме

В статье говорится об истории талышского народа, особенностях языка, характерных особенностях талышского декоративно-прикладного искусства. Талышские мастера, ремесленники во все времена славились своим искусством, это подтверждается многочисленными интересными находками, обнаруженными в результате археологических раскопок. Мастера – талыши проявляли свое искусство в самых разных сферах декоративно-прикладного искусства – в ковроткачестве, вышивке, ювелирном искусстве, декорировании одежды, украшении оружия, художественной керамике, производстве посуды, и самых различных предметов быта. В статье также подчеркивается, что даже повседневная утварь, созданная талышскими мастерами, отличалась высоким

художественным уровнем и отражала особенности быта талышского народа. В связи с ковроткачеством в статье приводятся виды ворсовых и безворсовых ковров, которые талышские мастера ткали веками, а также упоминаются другие изделия – циновки, хесиры, бурия, раскрываются особенности их изготовления, их утилитарное назначение. В статье автор особенно подробно останавливается на других видах декоративно-прикладного искусства, таких как резьба по камню, резьба по дереву, ювелирное искусство. В статье подчеркивается, что талышские мастера с большим умением сочетали в производимых предметах художественные достоинства с удобством их бытового использования. Талышские мастера во все времена славились своими изделиями из золота и драгоценных камней и ювелирное искусство талышей, созданные ими украшения-кольца, серьги, подвески, браслеты всегда ценились очень высоко. Кроме того, талышские мастера прославились своим умением украшать оружие, что также считалось высоким искусством. В целом, талышские мастера создали множество интереснейших образцов декоративно-прикладного искусства и созданные ими различные предметы – ковры, оружие, ювелирные украшения – хранятся в настоящее время во многих знаменитых музеях мира. В настоящее время талышский продолжает свои национальные культурные традиции, обогащает их.

Ключевые слова: Талыш, декоративно-прикладное искусство, ковроткачество, орнамент, зооморфные и антропоморфные мотивы, бытовая и ритуальная керамика