

On the Issue of the Attribution of Gazakh Carpets of the Ganja-Gazakh Type

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The art of carpet weaving is the most habitual form of traditional art in Azerbaijan, it reflects a rich inner world and occupies a special place in the history of a national culture's development. The Azerbaijani carpet has always stood out for its plots, ornaments, compositions, and high quality and the Azerbaijani people, faithful to their spiritual values, have protected and developed it throughout the centuries. In this article, several Ganja-Gazakh-type carpets from the Azerbaijan National Carpet Museum collection and their artistic and technical characteristics are discussed. Specimens of material, sacred language, and ornamentation are considered. The deepest meaning is embodied in *tamga* in particular. *Tamga* is a unique phenomenon serving as an amulet, lineage sign, and self-identification of Turkic peoples. The Gazakh carpets of the Ganja-Gazakh type cover the Gazakh region of Azerbaijan, the Borchali region of Georgia, and the Goycha Lake region of Armenia. Karapapakhs Azerbaijani Turks have inhabited these areas since ancient times. Tarakama (nomads) are often equated with the name Karapapakhs (black hat). One of the densely populated regions of Tarakama is Gazakh. Gazakh, Garagoyunlu, Salahli, Shikhli, Kamarli, Damirchilar, Gaymagli, Goycali, Daghkasan, Oysuzlu, Gachagan, and pile carpets with different compositions are woven in the Gazakh carpet weaving center. Large, simple in form, step-shaped or hook-like medallions, horn-shaped patterns, animal images, and stamps with symbols of ancient Turkic tribes characterize the Gazakh carpet weaving group.

Keywords: Azerbaijan, carpet weaving art, Gazakh carpets, museum, collection, Karapapakhs, *terekeme*, *tamga*

Introduction

The art of carpet weaving is the most established form of traditional art in Azerbaijan. The carpet is closely connected with the life and household of the people; at all times it retains the role of representative art, reflecting the tastes and aesthetic ideas of each era. For centuries, Azerbaijani carpets have had worldwide fame by virtue of many qualities, from the originality of the artistry to the high quality of production and wear resistance. Among these, Gazakh carpets are especially famous. Their large size with a clear geometric ornament, the brightness of colors of a very limited spectrum, high pile, and relatively low density, which is associated with the quality of wool and wear resistance, in which they do not lose their brightness, structure, and pile over the centuries attract viewers. Several Western researchers, collectors, and dealers have also turned to the study of Gazakh carpets: Herbert Coxon, Kurt Erdmann, Joseph W. McMullan, Ulrich Schurmann, Raoul Tchebull, Michael Franses, and others. Thus, Ulrich Schurmann in 1967 in his classic work *Caucasian Carpets* described the characteristics of the Gazakh carpet *Starry* with the words “barbarian beauty” and called it one of the few perfectly preserved Gazakh carpets that can be confidently attributed to the 18th century (Voigt 2021, 85).

This research takes the position that the Western approach to the study of the carpet and its attribution, in many respects, fundamentally does not coincide with the knowledge that is stored in the form of a living, growing layer of traditions in the countries that produce carpets, and there are many objective reasons for this. Hence, it is necessary to deepen the knowledge about the ethnic groups that inhabited these lands, their sacred and ideological world, the characteristics of local raw materials and dyes, the characteristic features of weaving technology, and visual-verbal connections that unite ethnic groups settled over vast territories while maintaining a single language of spiritual culture, by which the carpet speaks to us. Thus, this article will consider several samples of carpets of the Ganja-Gazakh type from the collection of the Azerbaijan National Carpet Museum, on the example of which we will try to answer the numerous questions that arise in the process of attributing carpets of this type in the ethno-geographic aspect, such as identifying technological and artistic qualities, material and structure, and weaving area, thereby shedding light on the genesis of forms and deciphering the language of ornaments.

Artistic and Technical Features of Gazakh Carpets: Bozakh Sheep Breed and Natural Dyes

Pile carpets with various compositions are made in the Gazakh carpet weaving center. Those are *Gazakh*, *Salabli*, *Shikbli*, *Kamarli*, *Damirchilar*, *Gaymagli*, *Goychali*, *Dagkesaman*, *Oysuzlu*, *Gachagan*, *Borchali*, *Garayazi*, *Garagoyunlu*, and *Garachop*. The carpets of the Gazakh carpet weaving group are characterized by large, simple in shape, mostly stepped medallions or are

decorated with hook-shaped ornament along the edge as well as ornaments in the form of horns, images of animals, and *tamgas* (tribal stamps) of the ancient Turkic tribes. The Gazakh region is replete with both raw materials (wool) and natural dyes as well as skilled labor for carpet weaving so, traditionally, there was a loom in almost every house—both in the city itself and in the most isolated villages. People here wove carpets not only for themselves but for sale.

Gazakh carpets are distinguished by high pile and relatively low density (30x35 or 30x40 knots per 10 cm) so they are thick and soft. It should be noted that Azerbaijani carpets are divided into two main groups depending on the weaving technique—pile and flat-woven. Knots of pile carpets, including Gazakh carpets, are woven using the *duyunlama* method, also known as *dolama ilme* or *gullabi ilme* (Karimov 1961). This symmetrical knot is also known as *turkbaf*. For the weft, warp, and pile of Gazakh carpets, threads from a relatively coarse but shiny woolen fiber, twisted according to the Z2S or Z3S scheme, were used. The Z2S scheme is a combination of two Z-twisted fibers, which are then S-twisted together, and the Z3S scheme, respectively, uses three fibers for this. Only a few Gazakh carpets made in the 1930s-1940s had a cotton warp or cotton weft. The fringe of Gazakh carpets either is knotted or mesh.

Gazakh carpets are especially beautiful due to their shine, inherent in high-quality wool. Agronomist K. Kalantar divides South Caucasian wool into three groups and in Ganja and Gazakh, the wool of Bozakh sheep, belonging to the second group, was used—in local markets, it was called *Shikbli*, *Ganja*, and *Terekeme* (Isaev 1925, 140). The Bozakh sheep, widespread in the west of Azerbaijan, partly in the east of Georgia, and in some regions of Armenia, is one of the ancient breeds. The wool of these sheep is mostly grey, less often it is white or coffee-colored (Aliyev and Aliyev 2014, 128). In Azerbaijani, the word *bozakh* means *grey* and, most likely, this name comes from the color of sheep's wool. Ethnographic studies show that compared to other breeds, Bozakh sheep produce less wool but the quality of this wool is much higher than that of other breeds (Havilov 1993, 20).

The western part of Azerbaijan is a mountainous and wooded area abounding in plants used for dyeing. Likewise, the Ganja-Gazakh region is known for its traditions of dyeing craft—dyes are obtained from different parts of plants (Muradov and Gasimov 2017, 36). The locals of these lavishly endowed, vegetated areas dyed the threads in a variety of vibrant colors using natural plant dyes. A skilfully woven carpet with a harmonious color ornament attracts attention immediately. Gazakh carpet weavers used only naturally dyed threads of white, light green, red, red-brown, blue, green, dark blue, black, and other colors. According to Azerbaijani scientists Mais Gasimov and Vidadi Muradov (2017), the plants used for dyeing in these areas include: juniper, onion, iris, willow, walnut, Georgian oak, nettle, sorrel, poppy, mignonette, quince, hawthorn, wild rose, almonds, gorse, white and meadow clover, pea-like astragalus, licorice, sweet pea, forest geranium, wild rue, litmus grass, Pallas's joster, grapes, heart-shaped linden, mallow, marshmallow, datisca, pomegranate, privet, ankhuz, oregano, plantain, madder, and marigolds. Shades of the same color could be given by different plants. For example, raw materials such as onion peel, wild apple bark, and yellowed mulberry

leaves yielded various shades of yellow during processing while black was obtained from pomegranate peel, walnut bark, and oak.

Regions of Production of Gazakh Carpets: Turks-Karapapakhs and Terekeme

The production of carpets of the Gazakh group, belonging to the Ganja-Gazakh type, covers such regions as Gazakh in Azerbaijan, Borchali in Georgia, and the vicinity of Lake Goycha in Armenia. Since ancient times, these lands have been inhabited by Azerbaijani Turks—Karapapakhs. They are the most famous ethnic group of Azerbaijani Turks (Azerbaydzhantsi 1969, 278) and live compactly on the territory of four states—Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Iran (Hajiyev 2005, 248). Until the middle of the 19th century, the Karapapakhs lived north of Lake Sevan (Goycha). Currently, this territory is divided between Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan (Karapapakhs). Goycha is a historical region located around the lake of the same name in the territory of western Azerbaijan, one of those places where Azerbaijanis lived compactly until 1988. In 1747-1828, it was part of the Irevan Khanate. In 1911, Professor Evgeny Sergeevich Markov, a member of the Russian Geographical Society, published in St. Petersburg the book *Lake Gokcha: Geographical Description of the Lake*, which provides the most accurate and important information about the hydrography of this lake, its climate, temperature, boundaries, and other indicators. One of the most important points in this book is that the vast majority of geographical names are of Turkic origin (Markov 193). The Karapapakhs lived in 28 villages of the Derechichek Mahal on the territory of the Irevan Khanate (Yeganyan 1958, 71). In Georgia, the Karapapakhs live compactly in the southeast of the country. They make up the majority of the population in Marneuli (before 1947—Borchali), Bolnisi (before 1943—Luxembourg), Dmanisi (before 1947—Bashkechid), and Gardabani (before 1947—Garayazi) (Hajiyev 2005, 4).

There are a number of opinions about the origin of the Karapapakhs and their settlement in the Borchali-Gazakh region, where they make up the majority. Thus, the Turkish historian M.F. Kirzioglu, in his work *The Kipchaks of the Upper Kura and the Choruk Tribes*, states that the Borchali and Gazakhli, two brave Kipchak (Kuman-Khazar) nomadic clans, who are considered the ancestors of modern Karapapakhs, made four major migrations from the North Caucasus to the Kura and Araks rivers in period from the end of the 2nd to the beginning of the 4th century. Their last migration led to settlement in the vicinity of the Borchali (Debed) and Gazakh rivers, a tributary of the Araks, which originates in the Pembek mountains and is located on the territory of present-day Armenia. Kirzioglu (1992, 43-46) believes that the names of these rivers come from the clans mentioned above. Also, the Azerbaijani historian Giyassaddin Geybullayev (1991, 141) in his work *On the Ethnogenesis of Azerbaijanis* concludes that the Gazakhs settled in the territory of Azerbaijan before the 7th century. Moreover, the Russian ethnographer and historian Ivan Chopin, in his book

New Notes on the Ancient History of the Caucasus and Its Inhabitants, calls the Gazakhs one of the branches of the Kipchaks among the tribes of Turkic and Aranian origin and gives various explanations for the origin of the word *Gazakh*: above Zikhia lies a country called Papagia, above the country of Papagia is a country called Kasakhia, above Kasakhia are the Caucasus Mountains, and above these mountains is the country of Alania. At the same time, the Karapapakhs are a Turkic tribe that carries and develops the material and spiritual values of the Kipchaks and Oghuzs (Hajiyev 2005, 24).

The term *Terekeme* is often combined with the name *Karapapakhs*, which is also associated with the ethnonym Turkmen. This term was widely used in the past as the name of an ethnic tribe. In Azerbaijan in the 19th-20th centuries, it denoted pastoralists and had the meaning of *nomads* (Gadzhieva 1990, 216). Historian A.D. Yeritsev (A.D. Yeritsyan) reports that the word *terekeme* did not mean nationality or the name of a tribe among the local population—*all nomadic Tatars were called Terekeme*. When studying the Gazakh district of the Elizavetpol province, Yeritsev concluded that the local Tatars (Azerbaijanis), who made up the majority of the population of the district, were known as *Terekemes*. Thus, the Gazakh region of Azerbaijan is one of the territories where a large number of *terekemes* live. Here the art of carpet weaving was developed and improved, which for centuries played an important role in their lives. Many *terekeme* tribes also lived in Ayrimli, Bayati, Gadirli, Garagoyunlu, Garakhanli, Kangarli, Salahli, Sofulu, Tatli, and other *mahals* (Volkova 1996, 26-27). On the territory of Armenia, the *terekemes* (karapapakhs) inhabited the villages of Garaysa, Evli, Ilmazli, Soyugbulag, Sariyar, Damirchilar, Garagala, and Gizildash of the Kalinin region (Baskakov 1987, 7). In the scientific literature, the tribes of *Karapapakhs*, *Padars*, and *Shahsevans* are often united under the common name *Terekeme*, given the commonality of their cattle breeding as the main direction of agriculture (Mamedli and Solovyova 2017, 708).

Carpet *Garagoyunlu*: To the History of the Garagoyunlu Tribes

Carpets *Garagoyunlu* are among the best varieties of pile carpets in Azerbaijan. Their name comes from the tribal union, which made a significant contribution to the formation of the Azerbaijani people. Garagoyunlu tribes inhabited the eastern and northern shores of Lake Sevan (Goycha), 10 km from the north-western border of modern Azerbaijan. They were engaged in cattle breeding and agriculture and the art of carpet weaving was traditional for them for centuries. *Goycha*—this is how the locals called the territory inhabited by the Garagoyunlu tribes and famous for its carpet weaving, especially the villages of Polad, Chaykend, Golkend, Agbulag, Tala, Karavansaray (Ijevan), Uzuntala, and others on the northern and eastern coast of Lake Sevan (Goycha). In the ornaments of carpets produced in this area, one can trace the ancient traditions of Central Asian carpet weavers (Karimov 1983, 149).

The artistic structure of the carpet *Garagoyunlu* (Figure 1), kept in the Azerbaijan National Carpet Museum, is based on a background-less principle of the arrangement of

ornamental elements. Stylized classical elements of *khatai* form stripes reflecting the dragon motif (1), known as the *Khatai* composition, a style in Azerbaijani carpet weaving. Khata, or Khatai, is one of the tribes that stood at the origins of the Azerbaijani nation. The ornaments inherent in this tribe have the same name—*khatai* (Azerbaijan National Carpet Museum 2022, 124). These elements (2), symmetrically featured along the vertical axis in the central field, form curls resembling ram's horns, which is one of the traditional symbols of the ancient Garagoyunlu tribes. Their surface is decorated with small elements called *goz* (eye) (3). The horns are connected to each other in a mirror image, forming a rhythmic undulating shape resembling a snake. The artistic design of this ornament is such that the unfilled sections of the central field also form the horns of a ram, called *okb-jay* (arrow and bow), *tug* (bunchuk), or *eli belinde* (hands on the sides) (4)—they symbolize courage and strength. The main border, decorated with the *ulduzlu* (starry) pattern (5), and the small stripes of the border of the *dilikli* (toothed) variety (6), consisting of the *tumar* (triangle) *tamga*, give a special artistic richness to the semantics of the *Garagoyunlu* carpets.

It should be noted that the Garagoyunlu tribes played a significant role in the political history of Azerbaijan in the 15th century. They successfully created an influential state in the region. However, there is no exact information about which of the 24 Oguz or Turkmen tribes they belonged to. According to Abubakr Tehrani's book *Kitab-i Diyarbakria*, which is reported by Yagub Makhmudov (2005, 18) the Ak-Koyunlu and Garagoyunlu tribes are among the oldest inhabitants not only of Azerbaijan but also of the entire South Caucasus and Western Asia. The 15th-century Ottoman historian Mevlana Shukrulla connects the origin of the Garagoyunlu tribes with Deniz Khan, the son of Oghuz Khan (Najafli 2000, 14). Professor T. Gulensoy (1989, 68) in his work *Turkic Tamgas from Orkhon to Anatolia* reports that the element depicted on the flag of the Garagoyunlu corresponds to the element depicted on the coins of the Garagoyunlu. Since the *tamgas* on the coins of the Garagoyunlu are largely similar to the *tamgas* of the Iwe—more than the Oguz *tamgas*—V.F. Minorsky (1954, 155) suggests that the Garagoyunlu belong to the Iwe tribe.

Incidentally, according to the Azerbaijani historian Rizvan Huseynov (2019), the word *goyun* among the Oghuz, Uighurs, and Gara-Khitai (Khitai, Katai) Turkic tribes means *big* and *respected*, and not *ram* or *sheep*, as it is sometimes translated. Therefore, the names of the states Garagoyunlu (also known as Ivaya or Baharli) and Ak-Goyunlu (also known as Dovlat-i Bayanduriya) are translated not as *black* or *big* ram but as *big* and *supreme* (leader). The Turkic title *goyun* indicated the high aristocratic status of the state and its leader.

Carpet *Gazakh*: Turkic *Tamgas* in Carpet Ornaments

Another interesting specimen from the exhibits of the Azerbaijan National Carpet Museum is the *Gazakh* carpet of the Gazakh group of the 19th century (Figure 2), purchased from the famous Italian collector Alberto Boralevi in 2012. In Western literature, these carpets are often referred to as *Swastika Kazak* or *Peenwill* (Cattai 2016, 8). However, this is not a swastika,

but an image of *jutbuynuz* (paired horns). According to the classification by Latif Karimov (1961), these carpets are produced in several versions. The carpet we are considering belongs to the first version, sometimes popularly referred to as *Dord Buynuz* (Four Horns) because the main elements with three or four curls (1), depicted in its central field, resemble horns. Some carpet weavers also call it *Damghali* (with *tamgas*), which is justified by its artistic structure. The structure of the elements of its ornament, both in the central field and in the border, goes back to tribal *tamgas*. From an artistic point of view, the cosmological significance of the elements of its central field, the capacious content of their stylized forms, is also of interest. The element called *dordbuynuz* here acts as a symbol of the four elements, *bulud* (cloud) or *ajdaha* (dragon) (2). The ornaments of the central border stripe of this carpet are popularly called *changal* (fork), *goshabuynuz* (double horns), *jutbuynuz* (paired horns), *toggabaghi* (belt buckle) (3), *goz* (eye), and *gadim nahish* (ancient pattern) (4). The small border stripes on both sides contain triangular elements (5) characterizing the carpet-weaving region of Gazakh, called *tumar* (amulet) or *dua* (prayer), the structure of which is based on *tamgas*.

The element *dordbuynuz*, a sacred Turkic symbol, is known in carpet weaving in Azerbaijan and Anadolu as *goch* (ram), *goch bashi* (ram's head), *eli belinde* (hands on hips), and *barakat* (abundance), in Central Asia—as *kochmuyuz* (ram's horn), in the North Caucasus—as *gochkar*, and in the Crimea—as *okuz gozu* (bull's eye). Its oldest images can be seen on the stele on the grave of Kul-Tegin and in the rock paintings of Western Azerbaijan (Gurbanov 2013, 28).

According to the studies of the Turkologist M. Aji (1998), the ancient Turks considered the ram (sheep) a symbol of abundance, wealth, and prosperity. Even the lion, symbolizing power and strength, occupied a lower position than the ram in the thinking of the ancient Turks (Aji 1998, 109). For the ancient Turkic peoples, the ram was a zoomorphic *ongon* (a type of spirit in the shamanistic belief system) of fertility, abundance, and growth, bestowed by the progenitor Oghuz-Kagan to his sons so that they would be fruitful and prosperous. For example, the Khakass, a Turkic people predominantly residing in the Republic of Khakassia (Butanayev 1995, 5), have from ancient times seen in the *guze-menhir* (a statue of a ram) an *ongon* that helps the fertilization and birth of sheep and promotes growth and productivity in general. Therefore, the Khakass have celebrated the harvest festival (the end of the harvest) next to the *guze-menhir*, slaughtered a sacrificial animal in his honor, and left him a share of this sacrifice (Seyidov 1989, 140-142).

It is precisely because *tamgas* are depicted on such carpets called *tamgali* that *tamgas* can be considered one of the sources for the formation of Azerbaijani ornaments, where, in addition to serving as a pattern, they also speak about the tribe in which the carpet was woven. *Tamga*-shaped signs appear in the ornament not only of carpets but also of other monuments of art. The life and practical positions of people in the Turkic world, their well-established ideas about the world, and their emotional characteristics formed the cultural codes of mentality, of which the *tamga* is the most important of these codes. Its special significance in the study of the historical, material, and spiritual heritage of the Azerbaijani people is undeniable. Abstract, stylized forms of *tamga* and totemic images are part of carpet ornaments, which should be perceived as a pictorial language, reflecting the ethnic uniqueness of Azerbaijanis

rather than mere signs.

The famous Azerbaijani scientists J. Jafarov and A. Husseyini discovered ancient Turkic *tamgas* among the images in Gamigaya and Gobustan. Most of them belong to 24 Oghuz tribes. “Like many other peoples, *tamgas* and signs are significant examples of the writing of tribes and tribal unions that influenced the ethnogenesis of the Azerbaijani Turks and other Turkic peoples” (Ahmadova 2017, 115). Among the Turks, *tamgas* were used not only for branding livestock—they are found on tombstones, products of arts and crafts, in the form of tattoos on the body, on flags and *bunchuks* as state symbols, and on coins. In addition to playing the role of a property and family sign as well as decor in monuments of art, these symbolic signs also play their role in the psychological aspects of consciousness and subconsciousness. From all this, we can conclude that in the ornamentation of carpets, *tamgas* were apotropaic and denoted the ruling family.

This analysis shows those ancient *tamgas*, which sometimes seem insignificant and are perceived by the consciousness of an ordinary consumer as ordinary “beauty” patterns are, in fact, the elements that are most resistant to attempts to distort and appropriate the national cultural heritage. Thus, certain forces can claim to declare an old Azerbaijani carpet as their own and promote it as a “sample of their national culture.” However, it is simply impossible to master the codified sacred images available on the *tamgas*, the common Turkic *tamga* signs, which are distinguished by a strong ethnic “immunity.” These signs, in addition to being a unique tool for restoring the original historical and ethnocultural landscape of specific territories—for example, the historical lands of Azerbaijan, Turkey, Central and Western Asia, Crimea, and Eastern Europe are also an objective source of information about the ancestral home, migration processes, religious beliefs, mythology, customs and traditions, military art, and military-political confederations of the Turkic peoples (Gurbanov 2013, 10).

Carpet *Shikhli*: Geometric Stars and Paradise Trees

Another interesting example is the carpet of the Gazakh group *Shikhli*. Its name is associated with the villages of Birinji Shikhli (former Padshahli), Ikinji Shikhli (former Dallar), and Uchunju Shikhli (former Sarivelli), located 30-40 km from Gazakh. In these densely populated, prosperous villages, located in favorable natural conditions along the Kura River—in places where the Karapapakh tribe was once settled—the traditions of the art of carpet weaving that has survived to this day have been preserved for centuries. Several types of carpets created by them have gained worldwide fame under the name *Shikhli*. Despite the fact that such carpets are sometimes produced in other villages and carpet weaving centers of Gazakh, local carpet weavers call them *Shikhli*. Academician Rasim Efendiyev in his work, *The Gazakh School of Carpet Weaving in Azerbaijan*, notes that it is customary to distinguish three variants of *Shikhli* carpets. The most famous is the elongated version, popularly called *Aghajli* (with a tree) or *Chinar* (Efendi and Efendi 2006, 19). However, with reference to the testimonies of old carpet weavers, in the villages bearing the name *Shikhli*, carpets *Gadim Shikhli* (ancient

Shikbli), *Okh bashi* (arrowhead), *Dik Butali* (with a vertical buta), *Ajdabali* (dragon), and others were also produced (Karimov 1961, 111).

The first version of *Shikbli* carpets in the world's specialized literature mostly appears under the name *Star* or *Star Kasak* (starry Gazakh)—due to the fact that the element that forms the artistic structure of their central field is a geometrized star. This element is popularly called *ildiç* (star). It is, no doubt, associated with cosmological beliefs. Such carpets are highly valued among foreign audiences and included in the database of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (inv. No. 22.100.17) and Nickle Gallery of the University of Calgary (inv. No. NG.2014.213.000). One of these carpets was recently sold for \$39,605 at Henry's Auktionshaus Mutterstadt on October 10, 2020 (HALI 2021, 126). The first version of the *Shikbli* (Star Kasak) carpets was carefully studied by Western scientists Michael Franses and Robert Pinner. They subdivide these carpets into four types depending on the compositional structure (Franses and Pinner 1980, 17-26). In the compositional structure of the *Shikbli* carpets of the first version (Figure 3), star-shaped elements are interconnected using the *Bandi-Rumi* composition, or the *shebeke* (grid). Large images of these stars, made in the form of a *khoncha* medallion, are complemented by hook-shaped elements resembling sheep horns, typical for Gazakh carpets. The antiquity of the traditions is indicated by the Turkic tribal *tamgas* and related signs placed inside the stars and *khoncha* medallions (1).

Cube-like geometric patterns located diagonally in the central field are featured only on the *Shikbli* carpets of the first version (according to the classification by Karimov (1961, plate 115). This ornament is popularly called *mafrash* (2) and there are reasons for this. The inhabitants of the Shikhli villages, who led a semi-nomadic lifestyle, moving between summer pastures—*yaylags* and winter dwellings—*gishlags*, weaved into the ornaments of carpets signs denoting home, native land, and happiness, thereby preserving the traditions passed down from generation to generation. This statement is confirmed by the symbolic meaning of the diamond-shaped element *ulduzlu ojad* (starry fire) depicted inside the *mafrash*, *ildiç* ornaments, and *khoncha* medallions in the composition of the central field. The borders of the *Shikbli* carpets of the first version also amaze the viewer with their complexity. Old carpet weavers used security signs in them, referring to the traditional elements of the ornament popularly called *ajdaba* (dragon), *goç* (eye), *duyma* (button). It is interesting that a large *ojag* element, filled with the image of stars, can also be found in the second version of the *Shikbli* carpets. At the same time, in the intermediary field there is an amulet (3), decorated with scales, called *keise* (pouch) by the elder carpet weavers, while in fact it is called *ajdaba* (dragon) (Karimov 1961, table 111).

The third version of *Shikbli* carpets, also called *Aghaj* or *Chinar* in virtue of its artistic and technical features, is one of the most famous types of carpets not only in Azerbaijan but worldwide. Its originality is made up of many qualities, which we will consider when examining the meanings of the elements that form the artistic structure of the third version of the *Shikbli* carpets by referring to a beautiful item from the Azerbaijan National Carpet Museum's collection (Figure 4). An elongated, large, complex medallion (1) in the middle field along the vertical axis has various symbolic meanings. Its top and bottom are crowned

with an element *bashlig* (2) in the form of *okhbashi* (arrowhead), symbolizing the path to the earth (sacred world) and heaven (paradise). The stylized flowers and leaves in the medallion, representing the gifts of nature, have the same meaning. Large images of trees (3), filling the middle field from four sides, also have a deep, rich meaning—they are called *chinar* (sycamore) or *sarv* (cypress). These four trees in the form of a *dik-buta* element (pointed buta) with a jagged edge (4) go back to the ancient Turkic cult of trees and reflect the fundamental principles of nature and the universe. The central field is saturated with filling elements—such as stars symbolizing celestial bodies and elements depicting an *aftafa* jug (5) full of water. The element *aftafa* is closely connected with the ritual of *abdest* (ablution in the Islamic religion) and the sacred world. The border stripes that frame the carpet on all sides perfectly complement its artistic design. Patterns *yonja gulu* (clover) (6) and *chichak* (flower) (7) in the main border designate rebirth and life.

Another original version of *Shikbli* carpet (Figure 5) has a typical for Gazakh carpets, *Karvansaray* artistic structure consisting of geometric patterns and *tamgas*. The four corners of the middle field are highlighted with *lachaks* (petals) (1) and, in its center, three large cypress trees (2) are depicted symmetrically. These images symbolize heights and go back to the ancient Turkic ideas about the world tree. Birds of prey on their tops (3) personify the sky and protection and symbolize the ancient Turkic *ongon*. Such images are located in each *lachak*, against the background of a floral pattern, known as a teapot (4). The branches against the background of a tree and a central field, reminiscent of a floral ornament, are interesting from the point of view of interpreting them as tribal symbols. These branches, symbolizing tribal unions, have not yet been studied and, so far, remain a mystery. They are decorated with elements of *okhbashi* (arrowhead) (5) and *tamga baltavar* (6). The stripes of the main border also reflect the principle mentioned above. For example, the stylized decorative image of the *tamga okb-yay* (bow and arrow) (7) also occupies a significant place in the middle field. The elements, which are popularly called *mollabashi* (mullah's head) and *okhbashi* (arrowhead) (8), bordering the central field, give the carpet a special beauty.

Carpet *Borchali*: Mound Steles and the “Winged Turtle”

Borchali carpets belong to the *Borchali* region of Georgia, located northwest of the Gazakh region of Azerbaijan. The large villages of this region—such as Gurdlar, Akhurlu, Gachagan, Sadakhli, Dashtapa, and Lembeli—were the leading centers for the manufacture of such carpets. The population of these villages as well as of other villages in the *Borchali* region, consists mainly of Azerbaijanis. According to the classification system by Latif Karimov, *Borchali* carpets are woven in five versions, depending on the composition. The specimen under study (Figure 6) is an example of the third variant. Its compositional structure contains a large medallion elongated in the form of a cross in the central field. Inside and along the edges of the medallion there are various *tamgas* and other ornamental elements. Depending on the point where they are woven, such carpets are called *Borchali* (third version) or *Goycha*

and, among the people, also *Ziyyatnishan* or *Zeyryanishan*. A carpet with such a name is woven in this area in different versions. European art historians erroneously call them *Sevan Kazak* (Art Institute of Chicago, inv. No. 2014. 1173), *Kreutzschield Kazak* (Stone 2007, 157), and *Sevan* (Cattai 2016, 66) and compare their main element with the Maltese cross. Sometimes this element is classified as a “keyhole” or “tower.” Mammadhuseyn Huseynov points to the Oguz *tamgas tanri-achasi* (cross of God), *agrab* (scorpion), *nazarlik* (amulet), *darag* (comb), and *ala-yontlu* in the central field (1) and *tamgas okbbashi* (arrowhead) (3) forming the main border (Huseynov 2016, 229, 231).

Although we perceive the elongated medallion of the *Borchali* carpets of the third version as a cross or *ganadli бага* (winged turtle) from the point of view of its cosmological features, it can also be considered as a stylized image dating back to the ancient *balbals*—barrow stelae. *Balbals* in the monuments of the Orkhon-Yenisei literature and the history of art are called vertical stones in the form of human figures found near burial places—their meaning has not yet been disclosed. These monuments, erected near the mounds, are recognized as stone sculptures of the deceased in ancient Turkic societies. Throughout the history of its development, the ancient art has been an integral part of many ceremonies and rituals. Such monuments, which are part of the Turkic culture, were erected on hills, mounds, and holy places as a sign of respect for the ancestors. Some written sources say that they were erected in honor of enemy soldiers (Ibrahimov 2013, 21). All such are characterized by symbolic generalization, schematization, conventionality, and deification of the character. This assumption is confirmed by a *ketebe* (cartouche) with a *tamga garmagli* (4), depicted in the middle of the medallion, and images symbolizing the tree of generations (5) on both sides. Notable are the *tamgas eltabar* (commander) (6) and *darag* (comb) (2) surrounding the medallion. For centuries, these *tamgas* belonged to the ancestors of Azerbaijanis and expressed their worldview and sacred beliefs. Various names of the carpet—such as *Ganadli бага* (winged turtle), *Ziyyatnishan*, or *Zeyryanishan* as well as border stripes containing elements of *okbbashi* (arrowhead) and *dolama* (winding), testify that this carpet has a variety of symbolic interpretations.

Another carpet, *Borchali* (Figure 7), belongs to the fourth variant. In foreign literature, this carpet is called *Lori-Pambak* or *Kazak*. Its central field is occupied by a large cruciform medallion, typical for *tek-gol* (single medallion) compositions. This shape of medallion, often found on *Borchali* carpets, is decorated with *tamga* or indeterminate elements of unknown origin. According to old carpet weavers, this medallion is a totem that personifies ancient beliefs. The decoration of the intermediary field of the carpet contains two full medallions and one incomplete medallion (in the middle), each with a horizontally located *garmagli* (hook-shaped) *tamga* (1) inside, giving an additional shade to the artistic significance of these medallions. The structure of the medallion in *Borchali* as a whole is notable for its symbolic features. On its four sides, there are protrusions representing totem elements called *gurd bashi* (wolf’s head), *gartal bashi* (eagle’s head), or *tamga* (2) (Huseynov 2016, 259). The border of the carpet complements its overall artistic content. Its main stripe consists of the elements *garmagli* (hook-shaped) or *gushbashli* (bird’s head) (3), one of the smaller stripes includes the

tamga giynag (claw) (4) and the other one the stripe *dilikeli* (toothed) (5).

Carpet *Damirchilar*: Tiled Medallions and the *Cross of Tanri*

One of the types of pile carpets of the Gazakh group got its name from the village of Damirchilar, located 9 km west of the city of Gazakh. Some weavers call such carpets *Damirchi Hasan* (Blacksmith Hasan) since the village was founded by hereditary blacksmiths. The Damirchilar clan, which was part of the Gizilbash tribes of the 16th century, turned into one of the most powerful clans of the Gazakh tribal union (Azərbaycan Toponimlərinin Ensiklopedik Lugati 2007, 159). *Damirchilar* carpets are also produced in the villages of Dash Salahli, Kosalar, and Urkmazli of the Gazakh region. There are several variations of the *Damirchilar* carpets but their artistic content and semantic origin go back to the same root and the same tribe. The composition of the considered carpet *Damirchilar* (Figure 8) is based on the compositional construction *tek-gol*. Its central field is decorated with three large octagonal medallions *kashi* (tile). From the point of view of symbolism, the square patterns of each medallion with *tamgas jutbuynuz* (double horns) (1) have cosmological significance but as decorative elements they symbolize the land, homeland, and tribe. We see this trend in the elements of the medallion—*tamgas jutbuynuz* (double horns) and *garmag* (hook) (2), located closer to the center while the small rhombuses against the dark background of the middle field emphasize the connection between these medallions and cosmological symbols. In artistic terms, such images in the middle field of the carpet traditionally corresponded to images of the sky and celestial bodies. The ancestors of the Azerbaijanis widely used this style and created dozens of similar carpet compositions. *Ulduz* (star) (3) patterns decorating the main border reinforce this idea. In addition, this detail is emphasized by the narrow stripes, *su*, along the main border, which have the meaning of a talisman and are decorated with patterns *ajdabali* (dragon) or *dolamagiynag* (twisted) (4).

Another variant of the *Damirchilar* carpet (Figure 9), with the composition *tek-gol* in the middle field, has three geometric medallions, resembling cartouches, called *kotab* (locally *ketebe*) (Karimov 1961, pl. 102). The element *kotab* (1) is decorated with twisted ram's horns images depicted in the center and alongside the edges. These images are associated with *tamgas*, which are common to the ancient Oguz Turks. The semantics of this carpet is also amazing and reflects several meanings. Old carpet weavers called this element *tamga*, *dordbuynuz* (four horns), *gunesh* (sun), or *gochbuynuz* (ram's horn) (Huseynov 2016, 231). This element (1), which hides a deep meaning, is a symbol of the tribal unions of the Oguzes as well as the Kipchaks. It also symbolizes the *Tanri Khan Achasi* (God's cross) and the Oguz *tamga*. This ornament has been preserved since ancient times, as it was traditionally depicted on felt and carpets. The stylization of the element goes back to *okh-yay* (bow and arrow). Various names of the element (2)—such as *Tanri Achasi* (God's cross), *Oguz damgasi* (Oguz tamga), *nazarlik* (amulet), and *dordbuynuz* (four horns)—show that it has a wide meaning (Huseynov 2016, 261). The *gochbuynuzlu* (ram's horn) element in carpet compositions mainly symbolizes the strength and

heat of fire and is located in the *ketebe* (cartouche) in the central field (Huseynov 2012, 95). The edges of the central field and the border are decorated with old traditional patterns. The main stripe of the border is ornamented with elements *mashal* (torch) or *shamdan* (candlestick) (3), symbolizing light, the goddess Umai, the protecting dragon, and representing the *tamgas* of the Kayi tribe. Small borders are decorated with cruciform elements *chichak* (flower) (4) (Huseynov 2022, 120).

Carpet *Goycha*: Oguz Tamga and a Mysterious Key

Gazakh carpet weaving influenced many regions of carpet weaving. One of them is the Goycha district, famous for its carpets. The Goycha carpet weaving center covers the settlements of Pambak, Lembeli, Ijevan, and Garagoyunlu as well as the surroundings of Lake Goycha (presently Sevan). The population of the region around Lake Goycha had close cultural and economic ties with Karabakh (Muradov 2011, 49). This area, historically inhabited by Azerbaijanis, became part of Armenia after the territorial and political reforms under Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union. In terms of composition, Goycha carpets woven by Azerbaijanis are similar to Gazakh, Karabakh, and Ganja carpets.

Large medallions and elements of abstract geometric ornament are typical for *Goycha* carpets. The carpet with these characteristics, popularly called *Goycha* (Figure 10), was built on the composition *tek-gol*. The basis of the composition is a large diamond-shaped medallion in the center with large *ketebe* (cartouches) both at the top and bottom. These elements of the central field are decorated with long ledges in the shape of a *tamga garmag* (hook) (1). In the middle of the central medallion, there is an ancient, hooked element *jinjilim* (star grass) or *ortuk* (lid) (2)—on its red background there are stylized images of a man (3) and an animal (4). Similar centers, reminiscent of the image of a hunter, are found mainly in Gazakh carpet weaving centres. The middle field of such carpets contains large geometric *ketebe* (cartouches) (5), borrowed from the Gazakh carpets *Chayli* or *Chiragli*. Hooked ornamental elements placed inside them are considered amulets and are known among the people under such names as *givrim* (curl), *agrab* (scorpion), and *ajdaba* (dragon). The element *ay-ulduz* (moon and star) (6), located in the gaps on its central field, goes back to the cosmogonic beliefs of the locals. This element also has historical significance as a sign of tribal alliances. The structure of the border stripes and their constituent elements is also interesting. The central stripe of the border includes *tamga* elements, popularly referred to as *kobne nakhish* (old pattern) or *jutdarag* (paired comb) (7). The small border contains elements called *alma* (apple) (8), symbolizing mystery, while the remaining borders are made up of the elements *dolama* (winding) and *dilikli* (serrated) (9).

This carpet is also of interest in virtue of its composition, which has a clearly defined vertical structure with a clearly marked direction, unlike most mirror-symmetrical carpets, which suggests that this carpet most likely hung on the wall. Another distinguishing feature of this carpet is the image of a key in the center of the small upper border, which is hardly

found in carpets. It is difficult to say what this key symbolizes—the entrance to the sacred world, the transition from one world to another, whether it has a connection with the image of a man with a horse—questions that cannot be answered unambiguously. However, such carpets once again prove that they should be perceived not only from the point of view of an established tradition and generally accepted concepts and classifications. The carpet is a much broader and more complex concept and in the case of ethnic carpets, it is very often purely individual, which is a completely unique and original phenomenon.

Another variant of the *Goycha* carpet (Figure 11) was built on the basis of the *tek-gol* composition with three large octagonal medallions. The edges of the medallions are jagged and the middle of each one is decorated with a large cross-shaped ornament *shanagul* (1), which goes back to the primary form of the ancient Oguz *tamgas* and is similar to the element of the same name in the ornament of the ancient Pazyryk carpet found in Altai. This ornament symbolizes the four elements of nature and the division of the Oghuz Turks into 24 main tribes. In the center, there is a rhombus divided into four parts—a symbol of home, motherland, and mother. Free areas both inside the medallions and around them are occupied by filling elements of the ornament, dating back in origin to *tamgas*. This element (2), commonly known as *damga* (tamga), *givrim* (curl), *changal* (fork), *goshabuynuz* (paired horns), *agrab* (scorpion), and under many other names, is widespread in the carpet weaving of Gazakh and Goycha. In the ornament of the border of this carpet, elements of the ancient traditional ornament of kilims (3) are used: one of them—*damga* (tamga) or *bitik* (book)—adorn the main border and the other, called *goz* (eye) (4), both small borders.

Carpet *Garachop*: Dragon Protector and the “Mirror” of Space

One of the Gazakh group carpets of the Ganja-Gazakh type is the *Garachop* pile carpet. Its name comes from a toponym denoting an area located 20 km northwest of Gazakh, on the territory of modern Georgia. The word *Garachop*, in the aggregate, referred to the villages of Muganli, Lembeli, Tullar, Gambali, and Duzagram in the former Muganli region, inhabited by ethnic Azerbaijanis (Karimov 1983, 153). *Garachop* carpets are among the most famous and valuable Azerbaijani carpets. Carpets with such an ornament were woven in the Gazakh, Borchali, and Irevan regions. If the Irevan and Borchali carpet weavers made extremely thick carpets, with a pile height sometimes reaching up to 2 cm, for Gazakh carpets, the pile height was usually 1 cm. The dimensions, color scheme, and perfect workmanship allow us to call these carpets masterpieces.

The ornament of the *Garachop* carpet (Figure 12), woven in this area, consists of geometric patterns and tribal signs. Unlike the central field, the borders of this carpet include elements called *gerdekbashi* (1). We assume that these elements go back to the Gazakh carpets *Oysuzlu*. The elder carpet weavers used the *gerdekbashi* ornament in the borders of many types of carpets, using half of the ancient element *garmagli* (hook-shaped), *givrim* (curl), or *pitrag* (burdock) for this. Obeying the design of the border, the elements of the *gerdekbashi*,

connecting with each other in a ribbon-like manner, form the figure *ajdaba* (dragon) (2), symbolizing protection. This conclusion is confirmed by the meander ornament located on both sides of the central stripe of the border. The square central medallion and various ornamental elements of the central field echo the artistic structure of the border. It consists of elements that are complex in symbolic meaning. It symbolizes the earth, homeland, garden, or “mirror” of the space, reflecting the system of elements in nature and the world (3). In its artistic structure, the *tamga garmag* (hook) is frequently used. Carpets of the Oguz and Kipchak tribes abound with similar ornaments from ancient times. Hooked ornaments *topa ulduz* (star cluster) (4) and *chirag* (torch) (5) at the top and bottom of the central medallion streamline the composition and clarify the symbolic meaning of the carpet.

Conclusion

The history of carpet weaving has been studied since the end of the 19th century but still leaves more questions than answers and precise, proven doctrines that will be accepted by researchers from two opposite blocs—the Western world and the Eastern (the countries in which carpets were historically produced). In this context, it is essential to unite the efforts of different research areas—the Western and Eastern scientific environments that can contribute to a more objective attribution, designation of the place of production, living environment, ownership of carpets, and their classification according to technical features. Why is it important to name carpets as they are called in the place of their production? Without understanding the place of their production and belonging to certain nationalities, it is difficult to understand the genesis of compositions, the semantics of ornaments, their historical conditioning, and penetration into the context of the ethnocultural heritage of the people to give the key to deciphering the ornamental-compositional form, which, in fact, is fundamental in the study of the history of carpet weaving, notwithstanding that the Western scientific school has done a lot to analyze the technical characteristics of carpets and their classification. In this article, extensive research material has been gathered and analyzed from the most famous carpets of the Gazakh group in the world, which are of exceptional interest for penetrating the depths of the ethnocultural codes of a bygone era. Thus, deciphering the hallmarks that make up the originality of the ornamental components of these carpets reveals the significance of carpet art in the cultural system of the Turkic world.



Figure 1. Garagoyunlu Carpet. Gazakh, Azerbaijan. Early 20th century. Warp, weft, pile—wool. Symmetrical knot (turkbaf). 115x151 cm. Inv. No. 3754. Azerbaijan Carpet Museum.



Figure 2. Gazakh Carpet. Gazakh, Azerbaijan. 19th century. Warp, weft, pile—wool. Symmetrical knot (turkbaf). 152x240 cm. Inv. No. 9391. Azerbaijan Carpet Museum.



Figure 3. Shikhli Carpet (first version). Gazakh, Azerbaijan. Mid-19th century. 235x150 cm. Private collection of Mirco Cattai, Milan, Italy.



Figure 4. Shikhli Carpet (third version). Gazakh, Azerbaijan. 1223 (1808) AH. Warp, weft, pile—wool. Symmetrical knot (turkbaf). 147x194 cm, Inv. No. 1821. Azerbaijan Carpet Museum.



Figure 5. Shikhli Carpet. Gazakh, Azerbaijan. Early 20th century. Warp, pile—wool, weft—cotton. Symmetrical knot (turkbaf). 125x273 cm. Inv. No. 1605. Azerbaijan Carpet Museum.



Figure 6. Borchali Carpet. Gazakh, Azerbaijan. Early 20th century. Warp, weft, pile—wool. Symmetrical knot (turkbaf). 155x202 cm. Inv. No. 6565. Azerbaijan Carpet Museum.



Figure 7. Borchali Carpet. Gazakh, Azerbaijan. Early 20th century. Warp, weft, pile—wool. Symmetrical knot (turkbaf). 136x194 cm. Inv. No 7871. Azerbaijan Carpet Museum.



Figure 8. Damirchilar Carpet. Gazakh, Azerbaijan. Late 19th – early 20th century. Warp, weft, pile—wool. Symmetric knot (turkbaf). 135x221 cm. Inv. No. 4683. Azerbaijan Carpet Museum.



Figure 9. Damirchilar Carpet. Gazakh, Azerbaijan. Early 20th century. Warp, weft, pile—wool. Symmetrical knot (turkbaf). 129x179 cm. Inv. No. 7997. Azerbaijan Carpet Museum.



Figure 10. Goycha Carpet. Gazakh, Azerbaijan. Early 20th century. Warp, weft, pile—wool. Symmetrical knot (turkbaf). 145x248 cm. Inv. No. 5963. Azerbaijan Carpet Museum.



Figure 11. Goycha Carpet. Gazakh, Azerbaijan. Early 20th century. Warp, weft, pile—wool. Symmetrical knot (turkbaf). 127x211 cm. Inv. No. 5770. Azerbaijan Carpet Museum.



Figure 12. Garachop Carpet. Gazakh, Azerbaijan. Early 20th century. Warp, weft, pile—wool. Symmetrical knot (turkbaf). 135x212 cm. Inv. No. 8615. Azerbaijan Carpet Museum.

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