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The role of Mountain Jews in the development of jewelry art of Azerbaijan

Abstract

Azerbaijan is a country with the rich cultural and spiritual heritage and traditions of tolerance. Azerbaijan, located at the crossroads of various civilizations for many centuries has become famous as a country where the atmosphere of national cultural diversity was formed. We know that even nowadays people live in hardly which belong to the same language, religion, ethnicity and culture. But today, more than 30 ethnic groups and national minorities, including Azerbaijan Turks are living in the territory of Azerbaijan. Some of these ethnic groups live here from ancient periods. In the same time ethnic map of Azerbaijan had been changed by the coming of foreigners from all over the world. The population of Azerbaijan, including Baku, increased as a result of the development of the oil industry in the 19th century. In this regard, it paved the way for the increase in different kinds of art in Azerbaijan cities. One of the types of art was jewellery. There were members of Mountain Jews among the jewellers of Azerbaijan. In the following period, they became famous not only in Azerbaijan but also in all South Caucasus. Mountain Jews from their settlement in Azerbaijan territory began to actively take part in the socio-political life of Azerbaijan. That is why, in this article we tried to look through the works of jewelry masters of the Mountain Jews.

And at the end we can say that there have been no ethnic and religious conflict between Azerbaijanis and Jewish people from ancient periods till today. They also consider themselves as a part of Azerbaijan. The Mountain Jews in Azerbaijan do not have any problems in maintaining their national and religious traditions and ethnicity in general.

Keywords: Mountain Jews, jewelry, Red Sloboda, ethnics, cultural diversity

Introduction. Azerbaijan has historically been a multi-religious and multiethnic country, based on the spirit traditional tolerance and coexistence of various ethnic groups and religious communities. Different ethnic groups and minorities lived in Azerbaijan in various periods. One of these ethnic groups is Mountain Jews. Currently Mountain Jews compactly live in the

Red Sloboda in Guba region of Azerbaijan, as well as in Oghuz, Ismaili and Baku and partially in Gabala. However, Mountain Jews live not only in Azerbaijan but also in different parts of the Caucasus, especially in Derbent and Dagestan.

Main part: There are different opinions about how the Mountain Jews came to Azerbaijan. However, it is clear that the Jews who lived in Azerbaijan territory were called “mountain Jews” by Russian researchers in the 19th century. But, Mountain Jews call themselves "juhud" or "juhur" (Cavadov, 2000, p. 72). More than two centuries have been spent on the history of mountain Jews, which occupies a special place in the history of the world. There are historians who consider them as a part “tat” ethnic group, but others thought that Mountain Jews is a special group of Jews. It is absolutely different research to find and that’s why we do not have to focus on it.

However, research shows that, despite different views, these nations have historically been active participants in all socio-economic and political events that have ever existed in Azerbaijan. Mountain Jews have been working in various arts since their settlement in these lands. The Jews were mainly engaged in painting, carpet weaving and trade, as well as jewelry. The development of the oil industry in the nineteenth century led to the rise of Baku and the growth of the urban population. The growth of urban life has contributed to the development of various arts fields. Baku, the main center of the South Caucasus, has always been in the spotlight of foreigners. Therefore, the fashion of the period was particularly pursued in Baku. One of the public figure of Jews Frida Yusifova wrote that the 19th century Baku played the role of Paris for France in the Caucasus. Mountain Jews, who have closely followed all the socio-economic changes, have also engaged in many arts and jewelry.

Therefore, it would be interesting to mention the craftsmen-jewelers who played a major role in the development of jewelry art in the 19th and 20th centuries. The manufacture of jewelry, especially gold and silver ornaments, required great skills. In this regard, talented masters emerged from the various cities of Azerbaijan in the 19th and 20th centuries as a result of the development of jewelry. There were skilled craftsmen from Baku, Sheki, Lankaran, Guba and other regions whose works were known not only in Azerbaijan, but also beyond its borders. Such talented masters were existed among the Mountain Jews living in the Red Sloboda in Guba. We have already acquired some information about Azerbaijani jewelers. The researches show that Mountain Jews are also encountered among them. In the early of 19th and early of 20th centuries some of these jewelers were working in the palaces of wealthy people of that time, some in their own workshops of their own houses. However, customers came not only from Guba, but also from other regions of Azerbaijan.

As the Azerbaijani jeweler makers Mountain Jewish masters also used the harmonious combination of various materials, such as metal, gold or silver, and different precious stones (agate, ruby, turquoise, pearl, diamond, etc.). All of these masters were well-informed.

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Geometric, floral, zoomorphic, and astral motifs were used for the design of different types of jewelry.

In this regard, I would note some information about masters mentioned above. One of them, Samuel the son of Abrami, a member Mountain Jews of Guba region, was known as a master of gold and silver (Аствацатурян, 1978, p. 114). He was so famous for his work in this field that he had received a Master's Certificate for his ability in various years – 1848-1866, 1848-1851, 1852-1853, 1855-1858, 1860-1863, 1866.

Ilhani the son of Shallum, is also a member of Mountain Jews from the Red Sloboda. He was a master of silver. He has worked not only on local raw materials but also on products from foreign countries. So, he was a well-known specialist in silver and silver production from Warsaw. Ilhani the son of Shallum had a workshop in the Red Sloboda in the place called Yakubov's palace (Аствацатурян, 1978).

Another jewelry master, Nasim, is specialized in gold production. He was also from the Red Sloboda. In 1848, 1853, 1855-1861, he was awarded a "Certificate of Competence".

Agarun the son of Nisim, was a silver craftsman and appears in the 1904-1912 collection. He mainly worked within Red Sloboda of Guba. The workshop was located in his house. The son of the Shabatay Khan's another master of silver workshop also had his own house. His name is found in the data of 1907-1912 (Аствацатурян, 1978, p. 118).

Research showed that various precious stones were used in the production of women jewelry. Some of these gems were imported from the East with caravan trade. Because of this long-lasting process, the women who were not wealthy used less expensive stones, ordinary glasses, copper, bronze and other tools (Azərbaycan etnoqrafiyası, 2007, s. 178).

The Mountain Jewish women are also part of the Caucasus and Azerbaijan, so let's look at some of the gold and silver jewelry they used. As you know, decorative items are divided into several groups, including head, neck, arm, chest, back and foot. Earrings have a major place in the head decoration. Mountain Jews women usually used gold and silver earrings (Fig.2). Research cleared up that basket-shaped earrings are more common among Jewish women.

At the end 19th and earlier of 20th century different types of necklaces were used by Jews women. Some of the necklaces were made of gold beads, and were threaded. In later times, the Mountain Jews women were used small circles and necklaces, including gold and round ones. One of the most common necklaces among Mountain Jews women are the barley-shaped necklaces. Barley-shaped necklaces are widespread among Azerbaijanis and "tat" ethnic group. The history of the using of "barley-shaped necklaces", which is typical for most ethnographic regions of Azerbaijan, is also quite ancient. It was proved by archeological excavations in the territory of Azerbaijan. This kind of "barley" bead was found from Mingachevir region is completely similar with the same beads that are now being made (Azərbaycan etnoqrafiyası, 2007, s. 185). According to the scientists, such beads have existed in Azerbaijan about two

thousand years ago and have been passed from one generation to another. The barley-shaped necklaces were sometimes simply stacked on top of each other, and sometimes added to the middle of the circle, decorated with beautiful patterns. One of these barley-shaped necklaces used by Jews women also attracts our attention. Thus, we can see some Russian coins of that time between the beads of the necklace. Some medallions were used for decoration of necklaces (Fig. 1; 3). On the surface of the medallions was engraved hexagonal (six-pointed) star and Hebrew inscription (Mountain Jews: Customs and daily life in the Caucasus, 2002., s. 142). Sometimes the names of the saints were mentioned on the surface of medallions. At the same time such medallions were used as amulet and they believed that in this way they could protect themselves from evil eyes and evil forces.

Belt decorations also play a special role among adornments. Leather, fabric, silver, gold and other metal belts, which included women's or men's clothing elements, were considered to be the main decorative elements that complete the clothing complex (Fig.4;7). There were also such belts among the Mountain Jews women. As other women of the region, Jews women also wore different shaped and patterned adornments, including silver and gold. In general, the belts were made of both gold and silver. In addition, the main part of the belts was made from leather and some of them were from metal. Sometimes precious stones on them were added as well. In the center of the belt there were silver and other precious stones surrounded with silver. One sample of these belts is preserved at the Haifa Ethnology Museum in Israel (Mountain Jews: Customs and daily life in the Caucasus, 2002., s. 143). The major part of the belt was made of leather, and the belt buckle was made of silver. The leather part of the belt was decorated with silver coins of the Tsarist Russia (Fig.7). The inscription which was written on the buckle showed that the belt was made in 1913 (Mountain Jews: Customs and daily life in the Caucasus, 2002., s. 146). There is another Hebrew inscription on the silver buckle of the belt. The inscription indicates the name of the person who ordered this belt. Although, the belt is currently kept in the Haifa Ethnology Museum of Israel, it was used by the Mountain Jews family in Guba region of Azerbaijan (Fig. 8). Compared to the belt patterns in the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan, we can see the similar features on the belts used by Azerbaijani women.

Conclusion. Finally, all of these things confirmed that Mountain Jews masters were so well-known in the region. But it is also indisputable that they lived and worked in the Caucasus and within the borders of Azerbaijan. Therefore, the products were similar to those made by Azerbaijani craftsmen. They just tried to enrich it by adding some elements as we mentioned above.

Thus, all these facts showed that the Mountain Jews had also any experience and skills in jewelry art. The masters talked about above had worked at different times and in various parts of Guba including Red Sloboda and other cities of Azerbaijan. In general, it is interesting that

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Mountain Jews are talented in many fields of art. All of these similar ornaments confirm mutual relations between these two nations.



Figure 1 Barley-shaped necklace with coins



Figure 2 Basket-shaped earring



Figure 3 Different type necklaces;



Figure 4 Man belts with silver and lather medallion with Hebrew inscription and six pointed star.



Figure 5. Silver belt buckle



Figure 6. Gold belt for woman



Figure 7. Belt for woman with silver buckle and russian coins



Figure 8. Belt buckle with the Hebrew inscription.

Note: Figures were taken from the book of Mountain Jews: Customs and daily life in the Caucasus.

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