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## Art Culture of Lezgin People- Carpet Weaving

### Abstract

Lezgins are one of the oldest and most culturally diverse peoples in the Caucasus. They live mainly in the northern regions of Azerbaijan - Gusar, Guba, Khachmaz, Shabran and the Dagestan Republic of the Russian Federation. In the culture of the Lezgins, which has a unique place in Caucasus and Azerbaijan, various fields of art, including carpet weaving, have been passed down from generation to generation for hundreds of years, and are a traditional art form that manifests itself both in everyday life and in art. Although the history of carpet weaving goes back to ancient times, its development dates back to later periods. Carpets, which are considered one of the most important elements of the population's daily life, have always played an important role not only in the interior design of houses, but also in the decoration of the walls and floors of private and public buildings, palaces, mosques, madrasas, caravanserais and houses of worship in the Middle Ages. This art form is closely related to the lifestyle, worldview, religious beliefs and aesthetic taste of the Lezgins. The short history and the features of carpet making of Lezgin people are researched in the paper.

**Keywords:** Carpet-Weaving, Lezgin People, Culture, Ethnic Groups, Weaving

## Lezgin Halkının Sanat Kültürü-Halı Dokumacılığı

### Öz

Lezgiler, Kafkasya'nın en eski ve kültürel açıdan en zengin halklarından biridir. Onlar Azerbaycan'ın kuzey bölgelerinde (Gusar, Guba, Kaçmaz, Şabran ) ve Rusya Federasyonu'nun Dağıstan Cumhuriyeti'nde yaşamaktadırlar. Kafkasya ve Azerbaycan'da benzersiz bir yere sahip olan Lezgilerin kültüründe, halı dokumacılığı da dahil olmak üzere çeşitli sanat alanları, yüzlerce yıldır nesilden nesile



*aktarılmakta olup; bu hem günlük yaşamda hem de sanatta kendini gösteren geleneksel bir sanat formudur. Halı dokumacılığının tarihi eski çağlara kadar uzansa da, gelişimi daha sonraki dönemlere dayanmaktadır. Halkın günlük yaşamının en önemli unsurlarından biri olarak kabul edilen halılar, Orta Çağ'da sadece evlerin iç tasarımında değil, özel ve kamu binalarının, sarayların, camilerin, medreselerin, kervansarayların ve ibadethanelerin duvar ve zeminlerinin dekorasyonunda da her zaman önemli bir rol oynamıştır. Bu sanat formu, Lezginlerin yaşam tarzı, dünya görüşü, dini inançları ve estetik zevkleriyle yakından ilgilidir. Makalede, Lezgin halkının halı dokumacılığının kısa tarihi ve özellikleri araştırılmaktadır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Halı Dokumacılığı, Lezgin Halkı, Kültür, Etnik Gruplar, Dokumacılık

### Introduction

The Lezgi people have a unique place on the ethnic map of the Caucasus and Azerbaijan. The majority of Lezgi nations live in the Dagestan region of Russia and Azerbaijan. Lezgi people of Azerbaijan live in the Gusar, Khachmaz, Goychay, Gabala, Sheki, Oghuz, Ismayilli regions and the city of Baku and as a people call themselves lezgiyar (Cavadov, 2000). The first information about the Lezgins is found in the works of ancient authors. The presence of "legi/legis" among the Albanian tribes is mentioned. According to recent ideas, the modern name Lezgin is also derived from the words "lek" and "lakz". According to research, the ethnic territories of the ancient ancestors of the Lezgins were located on the left bank of the Samur River, in the south of Dagestan. Later, it becomes clear that the Lezgins gradually moved south - towards the foothills of Azerbaijan and the Caspian coast (Narody Kafkaza, 1962). In the ethnographic literature of the 19th century, the name Lezgi was understood as the entire mountainous population of Dagestan. From a modern point of view, the name Lezgi refers to later periods. In Dagestan itself, until the beginning of the 20th century, the Lezgi called themselves "Kurelians". The Lezgi speak their native language, the Lezgi language, which belongs to the Nakh-Dagestan group of the North Caucasian language family. The Lezgi language has three dialects: the Kurin, Akht and Guba groups (Paşayeva, 2018). Although the Azerbaijani Lezgins speak the Guba dialect, they have also mastered the Azerbaijani language. This shows that historically the Azerbaijani language was also widespread among the Lezgins living in Dagestan. For the majority, the native language is Lezgin, and for a relatively small number, Azerbaijani and Russian. According to statistics, currently more than 167 thousand Lezgins live in Azerbaijan (Azərbaycanın demoqrafik göstəriciləri, 2021). The problem of the ethnogenesis of the Lezgins still remains controversial. Nevertheless, the distant ancestors of the peoples of modern Dagestan, including the Lezgins, are considered to be the "Gels", "Leks" and "Lakzi", mentioned by ancient and Arab authors, as well as later Caucasian and Persian

sources. It is believed that the modern ethnonym “Lezgin” was formed from the terms “Lek” and “Lakzi” (not to be confused with Laks S. A.). Recent studies localize the main ethnic territory of the ancestors of the Lezgins on the left bank of the Samur River, in the south of modern Dagestan. However, over the centuries, the Lezgin tribes gradually moved to the southern, mountainous and Caspian regions of Azerbaijan. In this progress, along with the peculiarities of the economic structure of the Lezgins, their inclusion in the Azerbaijani states also played a significant role. Thus, starting from the 11th century, the Lezgins were part of the states of the Shirvanshahs, and then the Safavids. After the fall of the Safavid Empire, in the second half of the 18th century, the Azerbaijani Lezgins were part of various feudal states that emerged here - the Guba and Derbent Khanates. At the beginning of the 19th century, these khanates became part of the Russian Empire. The Azerbaijani Lezgins actively participated in the entire socio-political life of the country. Among the economic fields of the Lezgins, carpet weaving, along with other fields, occupied an important place.

Various literature, field-ethnographic research, and photographic evidence were used in writing the article. Various research methods were used in writing the article, including scientific-theoretical approach, descriptive, historical-comparative analysis, and systematic historical generalization methods.

### **1. Carpet Weaving in the Life of Lezgins and its Features**

The climate of the Caucasus has influenced the lives of the peoples living here, leading to the emergence and development of various art forms among them. One of these ancient areas was carpet weaving. The history of carpet weaving in the lives of the Caucasian peoples, as well as the Lezgins, dates back to very ancient times. Finds discovered during archaeological excavations, ethnographic information and written sources indicate that this art has a millennial past. Like the ancient Turkic and Caucasian peoples, the Lezgins learned to weave carpets at home, and kept this art alive mainly through women. Carpets were an integral part of everyday life, as well as a special place in religious ceremonies, weddings, receiving guests and preserving family traditions. Carpets occupied an important place in the dowry of girls and were considered an indicator of their manual skills.

In Azerbaijani historiography, various aspects of research have been conducted on the history, music, folklore and culture of the Lezgi. The research of Azerbaijani scientists O. Efendiyev, G. Javadov, M. Pashayeva includes research on their history and everyday culture. However, the activities of the Lezgi people in the field of carpet weaving have not been a

separate research topic. True, there are certain studies by Dagestan researchers in this field. Therefore, this article will discuss the services of the Lezgi living in Azerbaijan in the field of carpet weaving and the characteristics of the carpets they weave.

The carpets of the regions where the Lezgi live are included in the Guba carpet weaving school of Azerbaijan due to their characteristics. Currently, 7 carpet weaving schools have been registered in Azerbaijan, one of which is the Guba carpet weaving school. The Guba carpet weaving school covers about 35 carpets with ornamental compositions, including those of the Gonagkend and Deveci regions. The Guba carpet weaving school is one of the most important and distinctive schools of Azerbaijani carpet weaving art. Carpets woven by the Guba carpet weaving school are woven with high-quality wool, are distinguished by their dense weave, rich patterns and vibrant colors. Green is a minority in carpets woven by Lezgins. The main colors are red and blue, and to a lesser extent white and yellow. Of course, later carpets may contain green. Therefore, judging from the point of view of tradition, we can say that green was not used in Lezgin carpets. This may be due to the difficulty of obtaining green dye in the past.

The Guba region of Azerbaijan is a historical region inhabited by many different peoples. Currently, peoples speaking different languages - Azerbaijani, Lezgi, Tat, Khinaliq, Dzhek, Budug, Kyrgyz and others live here. Lezgins also have a unique role in the development of Caucasian and Azerbaijani carpet art. Lezgi carpets have long been famous for their beautiful, colorful patterns, which indicates the great artistic taste of the craftsmen. S. Agashirinova noted that carpet weaving in Azerbaijan and Dagestan is especially developed in the regions inhabited by Lezgins (Aqaşirinova, 1978). Many of the world-famous Caucasian carpets bear the names of Lezgi villages such as Mikrah, Akhty, Kebir, Zeykhur, and Gimil. Lezgins living in Azerbaijan mainly weaved Kusnet and Gimil carpets. G. Javadov wrote about this: Gimil and Kusnet carpets, which are distinguished by their unique features in the art of Azerbaijani carpet weaving, are the product of the creativity of Lezgi girls. (Cavadov, 2000). Since the population of the villages of Gimil and Kusnet is mainly Lezgins, it seems that the author took this as a basis. Gimil carpets, which are part of the Guba group, are produced in the village of Gimil, located in the southwest of Guba. L. Karimov notes that Gimil carpets first appeared in Gabala in the 14th-15th centuries and developed there, but later, from the 18th century, they began to spread in Guba and in separate carpet weaving centers in the Guba region (Kerimov, 1983 ). Sumagi, a type of pileless carpet, is of particular importance. Azerbaijani professor M. Pashayeva noted that “weaving “sumagi” carpets, which are distinguished by their unique characteristics in the art of Azerbaijani carpet weaving, is widespread in Gusar, where Lezgins

live, and in the village of Galajig in the Ismayilli region. (Paşayeva, 2018, s. 96). The rich wool reserves led to the development of the art of carpet weaving among the Lezgi people living in Azerbaijan. Carpets, distinguished by their rich colors and weaving techniques, were woven by Lezgi brides as dowries, were considered valuable household items, and also played an important role in their livelihood. Girls, especially from the age of 14-15, learned the secrets of carpet weaving.

### **1.1. Symbolism of carpets**

One of the main features of traditional Lezgi carpets is that all symbols are mainly composed of geometric figures of regular shape. The carpet often has double symmetry. The most common type of Lezgi carpet pattern is three geometric figures arranged in a row. The main symbols used are the cube, Lezgi cross, Lezgi star, flower and wave.

### **1.2. Patterns and Motifs of Carpets**

The patterns and ornaments found on Lezgi carpets reflect the ancient beliefs, worldview and lifestyle of the people. These motifs have a symbolic meaning and each pattern tells a story. Zoomorphic motifs - animal figures (eagle, goat, deer, etc.) are considered to have protective power. Plant motifs - a symbol of life, fertility and harmony with nature. Geometric ornaments - triangle, rhombus, eight-pointed star, etc. are interpreted as symbols that bring protection and prosperity.

The colors used in Lezgin carpets are obtained with natural dyes obtained locally. The main color of the Lezgin carpet is red, the best and only dye for this color is the roots of marena, which grow wild in abundance in Dagestan. Since the 1930s, due to the great demand for it in the Russian textile industry, this plant has been cultivated on an industrial scale in the vicinity of the city of Derbent and nearby regions (Ramazanova, 2017). Traditional dyeing techniques ensure that carpets have long-lasting and fade-resistant colors. Natural dyes are mainly of plant and mineral origin: oak bark, onion peel, walnut kernels, pomegranate peel, etc.

## **2. Weaving technique and material**

Carpets are piled and non-pile depending on the weaving technique. Lezgi carpets were mainly woven with woolen threads. Since wool is both elastic and durable, high-quality carpets are obtained. In some cases, cotton was also used.

## **3. Social and cultural role of carpet**

For Lezgi people, carpets are not only a household item, but also a carrier of culture. The social status, economic status of the family, and even the girl's literacy and skills are expressed

through carpets. Carpets are presented as a dowry at weddings, preserved as family heirlooms, valued as gifts and exchange items, and used in religious ceremonies (prayer places, grave covers, etc.).

### Conclusion

The carpet weaving art of Lezgi is a rich example of their material and spiritual culture. This art reflects the history, aesthetics, morality, and worldview of the people. Ancient techniques and motifs are preserved today and are valued both as works of art and ethnic heritage in modern times. The art of Lezgin carpet weaving is not only a national treasure, but also carries values that can be supported by UNESCO as part of the human cultural heritage. Education, teaching in art schools, and national exhibitions play a very important role in preserving this art and passing it on to future generations.

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## Appendix

*Qumil* carpets (EF inv. No. 6740, inv. No 6729 National Museum of History of Azerbaijan,  
Ethnography Fund)

