

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36719/2663-4619/114/18-34>

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## Comparison of Azerbaijani Carpets and Embroideries According to Composition and Patterns

### Abstract

This study aims to identify the similarities between Azerbaijani embroideries and carpets, thereby confirming their partner cultural roots. The central hypothesis consists of that if these art forms exhibit numerous common features, it becomes indisputable that they originate from the same historical and cultural background. This research is particularly significant due to the frequent misrepresentation of Azerbaijani carpets in foreign scientific literature or art circles, where they are often referred to by incorrect names that obscure or deny their true provenance. Consequently, a number of Azerbaijani carpets are inaccurately presented as part of the cultural heritage of other communities. Over time, the repetition of these errors—whether intentional or unintentional—is contributed to their acceptance as factual. For substantiating the hypothesis, a comparative analysis was conducted on various examples of Azerbaijani embroideries and carpets, focusing on both general design and individual details. The findings indicate a profound interrelation between the two artistic traditions, demonstrating that their ornaments and compositions have evolved in tandem over centuries. In numerous cases, the available factual data does not allow for a definitive determination of whether a particular design or design element first emerged in embroidery or carpet weaving. Nevertheless, the abundance of shared characteristics reinforces the argument for their common origin and underscores the necessity of recognizing these carpets as integral components of Azerbaijan's cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** *Azerbaijani embroideries, Azerbaijani carpets, composition, ornament, origin*

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## Azərbaycan xalça və tikmələrinin kompozisiya və naxışlara görə müqayisəsi

### Xülasə

Bu tədqiqatın məqsədi Azərbaycan tikmə və xalçaları arasındakı oxşarlıqları müəyyən etməklə onların ortaq mənşəyini təsdiqləməkdir. Əsas hipotez ondan ibarətdir ki, əgər bu sənət nümunələri çoxsaylı ümumi xüsusiyyətlərə malikdirsə, onların eyni köklərdən inkişaf etdiyi şübhəsizdir. Bu araşdırma, xarici elmi ədəbiyyatda və sənət çevrələrində Azərbaycan xalçalarının çox vaxt fərqli adlarla təqdim edilməsi və bu yolla onların həqiqi mənşəyinin təhrif edilməsi baxımından əhəmiyyətlidir. Nəticədə, bir sıra Azərbaycan xalçaları digər xalqların mədəni irs nümunələri kimi təqdim olunur. Bu yanlışların qəsdən və ya bilməyərək təkrarlanması zamanla onların doğru kimi qəbul olunmasına gətirib çıxarır. Qeyd edilən hipotezi əsaslandırmaq üçün Azərbaycan tikmə və xalça nümunələri həm ümumi kompozisiya, həm də bir sıra kompozisiya elementləri baxımından müqayisə edilmişdir. Nəticələr göstərir ki, bu iki sənət ənənəsi arasında dərin əlaqə mövcuddur və onların ornament və kompozisiyaları əsrlər boyu paralel şəkildə inkişaf etmişdir. Bir çox hallarda mövcud faktiki material müəyyən bir kompozisiya və ya elementin ilk dəfə tikmədə, yoxsa xalçada

meydana çıxdığını müəyyən etməyə imkan vermir. Bununla belə, mövcud oxşarlıqların çoxluğu onların ortağ mənşəyini təsdiqləyir və bu xalçaların Azərbaycanın mədəni irsinin ayrılmaz hissəsi olduğunu sübut edir.

*Açar sözlər: Azərbaycan tikmələri, Azərbaycan xalçaları, kompozisiya, ornament, mənşə*

### Introduction

An antiquity of the textile art in Azerbaijan is proved by archaeological excavations (Abibullaev, 1982, pp. 44-45, 223; Aslanov, Vaidov, Ione, 1959, pp. 32-33, 152, etc.). Embroidery represents one of the most ancient and cherished forms of textile art in Azerbaijan. Surviving examples of embroidery suggest that this technique was widely employed to embellish tents, garments, coverlets, curtains, blanket covers, pillowcases, personal accessory cases, weapon sheaths, as well as covers for horses and camels. Like other artifacts of applied arts, Azerbaijani embroideries not only exhibit the general aesthetic and technical characteristics of their respective eras but also serve as reflections of the lifestyles, tastes, worldviews, religious beliefs, traditions, and artistic sensibilities of the people who created them. From this perspective, it is unsurprising that similarities are seen in the ornaments of applied art products of any society irrespective of the way of manufacturing these products.

The forms and applications of embroidered products in Azerbaijan are highly diverse. The designs and ornamental elements used in these products are carefully selected according to their specific shapes. Many extant Azerbaijani embroideries, such as various coverlets, pillowcases, and curtains, exhibit a quadrangular shape similar to that of carpets, and their design as a whole resembles carpet compositions. Typically, the composition of these embroideries consists of a central field framed by a border. In most cases, the border appears as a narrow, single strip surrounding the central field. However, in rare instances, wide border strips can also be observed. In some examples, the wide border consists of a single strip, whereas in others, it is composed of multiple sections—often featuring a broad central band flanked by two narrower side strips.

### Research

The similarities between such kind of Azerbaijani embroideries and carpets have been noted in several studies; however, there is no unanimous consensus on this subject. For instance, J. T. Wertime and R. E. Wright (1995: 27) acknowledge that a group of silk embroideries exhibit design affinities with both dragon and floral carpets, as well as certain Garabagh village rugs. Nevertheless, they do not attribute the origin of these dragon and floral carpets to Garabagh or Guba. Despite identifying Tabriz—a major center of Azerbaijan carpet weaving—as the place of production for these renowned carpets, they argue that the presence of an Armenian weaver's inscription on one of the approximately 150 surviving pieces suggests that these carpets were woven by Armenians. However, they fail to mention that another dragon carpet from the same period bears an inscription by a Turkic weaver (Pope, 1925, p. 150). A distinguished scholar of Oriental art, particularly in the field of Oriental carpets, A. U. Pope (1925), provided a well-reasoned rebuttal to proponents of the theory attributing these carpets to Armenian origins. Later, Ch. G. Ellis (1976), after conducting a closely analysis of approximately 150 authentic dragon carpets, also addressed this issue. He wrote: "This structure of suppositions should have been utterly demolished by Heinrich Jacoby and Arthur Upham Pope, who underlined their fallacies and pointed out that the construction, design elements, color schemes and even small details, such as borders, can be followed down into semi-antique and recent Karabagh, Kazak and Shirvan rugs. The carpets of the Armenians, on the other hand, except for occasional pieces of typically Caucasian weaves which bear Armenian inscriptions, remain a terra incognita until the recently developed production around Erivan under the Soviets."

Islamic art historian C. Bier (1990: 169) argues that Caucasian textiles and carpets share not only visual similarities but also common aesthetic principles that extend across the entire textile tradition of the region. Furthermore, she asserts that these principles are evident in architectural ornamentation and decorative arts—an observation that is certainly valid. However, by relying

solely on material evidence, C. Bier restricts the history of carpet weaving in the Caucasus to a span of just three hundred years. This approach overlooks written records that attest to a much older tradition of carpet production in the region. For instance, the *History of Albania*, authored by a local historian in the 7th century, mentions colorful carpets alongside silk fabrics in the residence of a noble prince (Kagankatvatsi, 1861, p. 181). This reference pertains to the ancient state of Caucasian Albania, which was located in the territory of present-day Azerbaijan, with Gabala as its capital and later Barda from the mid-5th century onward. Additionally, Arabic sources of 10th - 13th centuries provide evidence of production various textile products in Arran (a part of the present-day Azerbaijan Republic) and in Azerbaijan (present-day Iranian Azerbaijan). Though infrequent, these sources do mention pile rugs too. For example, Al-Muqaddasi (946/47–1000) writes that “the carpets and covers of Barda, trouser cords, a dye known as gyrgyz (insect-based red dye) ... are unparalleled” (Vəlixanlı, 1974, p. 129). The anonymous 10th-century geographical work *Hudud al-Alam* (The Regions of the World) refers to zilu and prayer carpets from Vartan (possibly Varsan, a city located 36 miles from Beylaqan), as well as horse rugs (jul) from Baylaqan, etc. (1982: 142, 144). Furthermore, F. Rashid-ad-din (1250–1318) notes that during the reign of the Hulakids, messengers sent to villages would stay in local homes, later plundering these residences and seizing household items, including carpets (Rashid-ad-din, 1946, v. 3: 313). These accounts indicate that, alongside other textiles, carpets were widely produced. Additional historical evidence can be found in European art. The painting *Flowers in a Vase* (1485) by Hans Memling depicts a Mughan rug, a design that continues to be produced in Azerbaijan to this day. The presence of such a carpet in 15th-century Europe strongly suggests that commercial carpet production was already established in Azerbaijan by that time.

C. Bier argues that if bold patterns and bright colors appear in commercially produced rugs, they were likely copied from embroideries and flatweaves (1993: 107). In her opinion (1989), “The close relationship between structure and design in these textile arts suggests that pile carpets from the Caucasus, woven in the commercial environment of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, are for the most part derivative, based upon indigenous design traditions that evolved for embroidery, soumak (weft-wrapping), and kilim (slit tapestry) techniques.”

However, it is difficult to agree with this assertion, as the carpets produced in the late 19th and early 20th centuries have predecessors that had been woven for centuries. Over time, of course, certain modifications and distortions have occurred in carpet designs, yet these changes can often be traced.

C. Bier is not alone in her view regarding the primacy of embroidery and other textiles in influencing carpet designs. For instance, C. Klose, in her attempt to trace the origins of the Pirebedil carpet (of Devechi-Kuba origin), concluded that its design derives from certain late 17th- or early 18th-century silk embroideries from the same region (1991: 111-113). Further, she follows the evolution and transformation of the Pirebedil carpet’s design up to the modern era. The author’s statement is not unfounded and is justified by the materials cited.

Discussing field designs of Zeikhur rugs (Zeikhur-Guba origin) R. Tschbull as a source for one type of design indicates the old Azerbaijani slit tapestry- kilim and for another one - the silk embroidery of Guba origin (1992).

However, the question remains whether the primacy of textiles as a source for carpet designs is always valid. There is no definitive consensus on this issue—whether the motifs and patterns of textiles (embroidery and flatweaves) influenced carpets or vice versa. For instance, R. Pinner and M. Franses, in their research on Shield carpets, cite an example of a kilim that they consider a distant relative of Shield carpets (1978: 17). They argue that the border of this kilim is a simplified descendant of the border found in Wher’s Shield carpet.

J. Wearden (Wearden, 1991, p. 106), referencing C. Bier and C. Klose, highlights that while it was traditionally assumed that embroidery designs were derived from carpets, the aforementioned scholars suggest an alternative perspective: that Caucasian carpets may have been inspired by the designs of more traditional textile crafts of the region, such as flatweaves and embroidery. J. Wearden herself posits only a stylistic connection between Azerbaijani embroideries and floral

carpets of the Caucasus or Armenia (according to her opinion). In our opinion, numerous similarities in the designs and ornaments of different products are possible in case, if these products belong to the same people or peoples with common roots.

As demonstrated by this brief review of the relevant literature, there is a general consensus regarding the similarities between the designs of Azerbaijani embroideries and certain carpets. However, this issue has not been the subject of a dedicated study; rather, in the course of other studies certain embroideries were also involved to the study, or scholars have noted general observations on the topic. Moreover, while many researchers argue that embroidery and flatweave designs served as a source for carpet patterns, others propose the opposite perspective.

In this study by systematically comparing a selection of embroideries and carpets in terms of their designs and motifs, we have tried to answer some questions: 1. Do the designs and motifs of Azerbaijani embroideries and carpets exhibit significant similarities? If so, their shared features would provide strong evidence that both art forms originate from the same cultural tradition and belong to the same people; 2. Are these relationships observed exclusively between embroideries and floral carpets, or do they also extend to non-floral carpet designs? 3. Were the patterns used in embroideries later incorporated into pile carpets, or did the influence move in the opposite direction? Another critical aspect of our investigation is the origin of carpets that exhibit similarities with embroidery. We argue that the existence of numerous parallels in both design and ornamental details serves as compelling evidence of a common origin.

To identify these similarities, we examined a group of embroideries, regardless of the specific techniques used in their execution. These were primarily compared with Azerbaijani carpets from the Garabagh, Shirvan, Guba, Gazakh, and Tabriz regions. Our findings reveal similarities, not only in general design but also in ornamental details. At the same time, we have attempted to address other questions central to this discussion.

### **Comparison of Azerbaijani Embroideries and Carpets**

Discussing the similarities between embroideries and carpets, it is important to note that it is almost impossible to find two completely identical examples. Although some samples may feature very similar designs, but they often differ in color. For instance, a comparison between the embroidery shown in fig. 1 and Surahani carpet, a fragment of which represented in fig. 2, reveals such similarities. The design of these samples was very frequently used in Azerbaijani embroideries and represents recurrence of the technical repeat unit consisting of two primary motifs, with diagonal cartouches surrounding them. More ancient variants of this design can be seen in the tiles of the Blue Mosque in Tabriz (1465) (Aslanapa, 1987, p. 117, fig. 35) and in the carpet depicted in Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533) (Aslanapa, 1987, p. 86, pl. 66a). The main motifs of this pattern take various forms in different samples, such as an eight-pointed star, a square, a hexagon, an octagon, etc. According to R. Tschbull (Tschbull, 1992, p. 89), this design "drew its basic inspiration from a common Islamic unglazed tile pattern."



Fig. 1. Embroidery. Azerbaijan, 17th c. 0.84 x 0.81 m (Van Ham rugs/carpets and tapestries auction 236, Köln, 03.11.2004, lot 37)

Fig. 2. Surahani Carpet (fragm.). Baku area, early 19th c. 2.05 x 3.03 m. Private collection (Gantzhorn, 1998, ill. 537)

The examples shown in fig. 1 and fig. 2, despite having an identical design, differ not only in their color schemes but also in the way individual details are colored. In the embroidery, one of the recurring main motifs—positioned in alternating horizontal rows—features a background of varying colors, whereas in the rug, the background remains uniform. Additionally, the rug employs bright and contrasting colors, while the embroidery uses pastel and closely related shades. As a result, at first glance, these pieces may appear somewhat different; however, upon closer examination, the absolute identity of their designs becomes evident.

The design of these pieces bears a strong resemblance to that of another rug—the Alpan rug, named after the Alpan village in the Guba region (fig. 3). Despite certain differences in motifs, their overall arrangement is identical to that of the previously mentioned examples. In another embroidery with the same design (fig. 4), even the motifs closely resemble those of the Alpan rug. Similar to the aforementioned rugs, this embroidery features a dark background with motifs in bright, contrast color. Its color scheme is also close to that of a rug from the Baku region. The sinuous elements extending from the corners of the cartouches in this embroidery, positioned in the spaces between the primary design elements, also appear in the Alpan rug. However, due to weaving technique and certain evolutionary distortions, they manifest in a modified form and have become a characteristic feature of the Alpan rug. Furthermore, the connection between the two main motifs in the embroidery is also present in the rug, albeit in a slightly different form. This demonstrates that all design elements of the embroidery have undergone some degree of modification in the rug over time.



Fig. 3. Alpan Rug. Guba region, 1312 H (1895 M). 0.71 x 1.19 m. R. Boswell, Wiesbaden, CPR, t. 54 (*Hali*, 100: 139)

Fig. 4. Embroidery. Azerbaijan, 17th c. 1.09 x 1.12 m. James D. Burns Collection, Seattle, Washington (Klose, 1991: 112)

The same arrangement of the design elements is observed in the embroidery (fig. 5) and the Alpan rug (fig. 6) of very similar design. Despite some differences in design of these pieces the motifs, including the border motif, are identical. In the embroidery, only a single unit of the repeated pattern is visible, whereas the rug displays one and a half units. As with fig. 1 and 2, the primary distinction between these items lies in their color schemes. The rug employs bright colors, contrasting with the embroidery's more subdued palette. Notably, the motifs and overall design of

these pieces bear resemblances to those in fig. 3 and 4, suggesting a common artistic and cultural origin.

A significant number of embroideries (Wearden, 1991, figs. 11, pp. 16-18; Klose, 1991, figs. 1, 3; Franses, 1996, fig. 7; *Hali*, 108: 126; *Hali*, 135: 93, etc.) and several carpets (Klose, 1991, fig. 7; Bier, 1990, fig. 3) featuring this design have been preserved. In some of these examples, the cartouches—both in shape and inner ornamentation—closely resemble those found in 18th-century Azerbaijani cartouche rug (*Hali*, 105: 155).



Fig. 5. Embroidery. Azerbaijan, 18th c. R. Boswell Spring 2003 sale, Wiesbaden, 17.05.2003, lot 45 (Azerbaijan Rugs, Lot 45)

Fig. 6. Alpan Rug, 19th c. 1.57 x 2.26 m. TIEM, Istanbul, inv. no. 141 (Şahin vd., 2019: 137)

It is generally believed that the majority of the aforementioned items originate from the Guba-Shirvan region. However, the same design is also found in the Old Shikhli rug of Gazakh origin (*Hali*, 59: 70), known in foreign literature as the Star Kazakh. Despite the fact that all design elements of this carpet exhibit characteristics typical of the Gazakh group, its general design closely resembles the embroideries and rugs under discussion. Another Gazakh rug, the Tamgali (Pinwheel) (*Hali*, 56: 42), have the same arrangement of design elements.

A variation of the design under discussion, characterized by a modified arrangement of its elements, was also widespread and frequently used in embroidery (See: *Hali*, 86: 59; Tschbull, 1992, fig. 15; Franses, 1996, figs. 2, 5; Wearden, 1991, fig. 9; *Hali*, 67: 131, etc.). This variation retains two offset main motifs—appearing in different forms across various samples—surrounded by vertically and horizontally arranged cartouches. In each vertical or horizontal row, one primary motif is repeated, with cartouches placed in between. A part of embroideries featuring this design share some similarities with the previously discussed examples. Fig. 7 presents one such embroidery, while fig. 8 shows a fragment of a South Azerbaijani carpet that features the same design. Although the primary motifs in these two pieces are entirely different, their cartouches—both in form and inner ornamentation—are remarkably similar. Their resemblance to the cartouches in the embroidery shown in fig. 4 is particularly striking. Notably, a similar ornamentation pattern can be found on horse equipment from the Pazyryk burial mounds in the Altai Mountains (Diyarbekirli, 1972, fig 52).



Fig. 7. Embroidery. Azerbaijan, 18th c. 0.92x1.09 m. Victoria & Albert Museum, London, inv. no. T.41-1940 (Wearden, 1991, fig. 13)

Fig. 8. Carpet (fragm.). South Azerbaijan, end of 18th c. 2.15 x 2.60 m. Il Mercante d'Oriente, Verona, Italia (*Hali*, 64: 67)

Certain design elements commonly found in both Azerbaijani embroideries and carpets warrant special attention. One such element is the cross positioned at the center of medallions of various shapes (see figs. 1–7). The cross may take on a simple or highly decorative form and often contains a small geometric figure at its center. In many instances, crosses in embroideries and carpets resemble ancient Turkic *tamgas* (fig. 9).

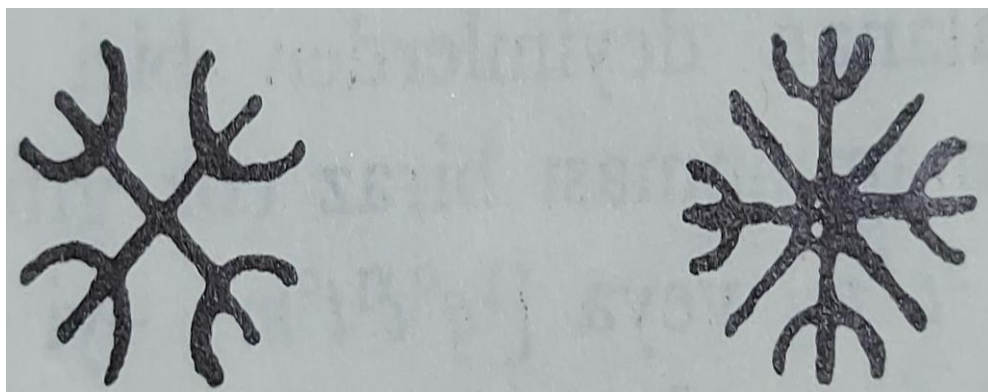


Fig. 9. Iron *tamgas* from Bol'shoe Mikushkino and Keszthely-Csakbereny (Harmatta, 1988, fig. 10)

According to J. Harmatta, one of these symbols represents the concept of the four cardinal directions (*dört bulung* in Old Turkic), while another symbolizes the Universe, encompassing also four parties of the sky (1988: 39). This motif is widely present in Azerbaijani embroideries and carpets. Frequently, the ends of the cross are highly stylized, assuming different decorative forms (figs. 10 a, b, c).

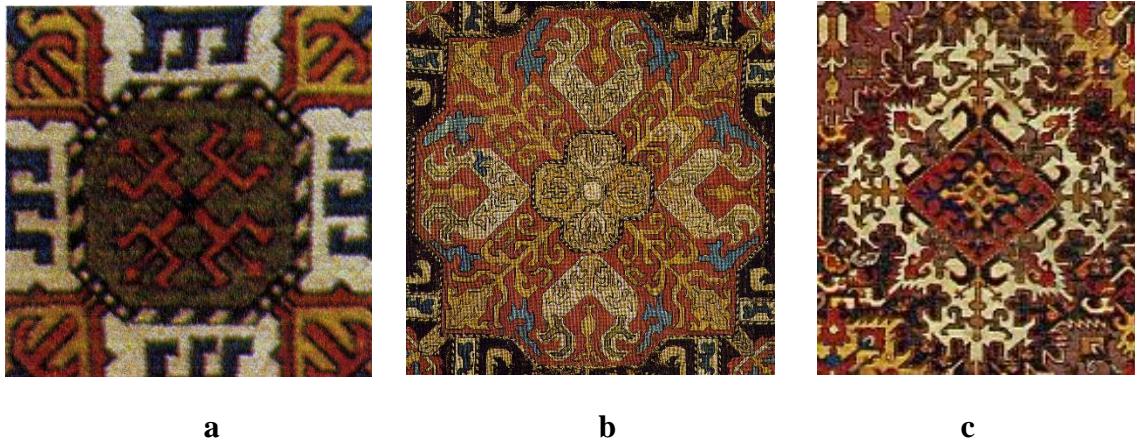


Fig. 10, a. Embroidery (fragm.). Azerbaijan, ca. 1700. 0.69x1.20 m (*Hali*, 88: 150)  
Fig. 10, b. Embroidery (fr.). Azerbaijan, late 17th c. 0.64x0.69 m (Wearden, 1991, fig. 3)  
Fig. 10, c. Chelebi Carpet (fr.). Azerbaijan, Garabagh area, late 18th c. 2.37x5.65 m.  
TMW no. R 36.2.3 (Ellis, 1976, pl. 16)

Fig. 11 illustrates a variation of a Barda rug of Garabagh origin, attributed to the 18th century. This rug of geometric medallion design with pendants, includes a medallion of the type described above. A 17th-century Garabagh embroidery (fig. 12) bears a striking resemblance to this variation of the Barda rug, particularly in the medallion's design. It is possible that they belong to the same period. A similar medallion appears in another embroidery (Sotheby's, Lot 1), though in combination with additional design elements such as cartouches. Notably, another example of this rug (Paşayeva, 2018, fig. 3)—in our opinion the older one—also features cartouches accompanying central medallion.

In both the Barda rug (in all its known examples) and the aforementioned embroideries, four elements shaped like small serrated medallions with inner decoration closely resembling the tamga shown on the right in fig. 9, extend outward from the central figure. In the rug, the same serrated diamond elements are also present in the main field surrounding the central medallion.



Fig. 11. Barda Rug. Azerbaijan, Garabagh region, 18th c. 1.5x1.7 m. TIEM, Istanbul, inv. no. 751 (1411) (Paşayeva, 2018, şək. 6)  
Fig. 12. Embroidery. Azerb., 17th c. 0.65 x 1.16 m. J. Eskenazi, Oriental Art, London (*Hali*, 87: 63)

However, the paired elements located at the top and bottom of the embroidery in fig. 12 do not appear in the rug. It is believed that in earlier versions, these were decorated lanceolate leaves, which, over time, underwent significant transformation, evolving into the forms seen in the embroidery. Identical elements appear in the Gasimushagi rug of Garabagh origin (*Hali*, 76: 21, fig. 3), where they frame the pendants at the top and bottom, mirroring their placement in the embroidery in fig. 12. A similar configuration is also present in one type of Zeikhur rug (Azerbaijan rugs, Antique Guba Rug), where these elements surround the medallion(s). These so-called "arms" are also found in several 17th- and 18th-century embroideries (see *Hali*, 88: 150; *Hali*, 100: 65; *Hali*, 56: 96, etc.).

The stylized leaves surrounding the octagonal medallions in the 18th-century Garabagh rug (fig. 13) bear a strong resemblance to the leaves in the embroidery shown in fig. 12. This rug presents an intriguing combination of elements characteristic of various variations of Barda rugs, as well as motifs found in some embroideries, including those in fig. 12 and fig. 14. The central field of the rug is occupied by design elements typical of Chelebi rugs (also known as Sunburst rugs, a variation of Barda rugs) (see Ellis, 1976, pl. 15; *Hali*, 127: 99). This central motif is also found in several embroideries (Boralevi, Carey, Eiland III, Franses, Koshoridze, Krody, Morehouse, Oakley, Samadova, Wearden, 2018, p. 3; *Azerbaijan Rugs, Garabagh Embroidery*<sup>1</sup>), which appear to replicate one of the most significant and widely recognized design features of Chelebi rugs after their stylistic evolution. Additionally, other key design elements of Chelebi rugs also are encountered in embroideries (see Pinterest, *Garabagh Embroidery*).



Fig. 13. Garabagh Rug. Azerbaijan, 18th c. 2.45 x 4.75 m. TIEM, Istanbul, inv. no. 726 (4019) (*Şahin vd.*, 2019: 81)

Fig. 14. Embroidery. Azerbaijan, 18th c. 0.61x0.71 m (Klose, 1991, fig. 3)

The octagonal medallions and cartouches in the rug depicted in fig. 13 closely resemble the central medallion and surrounding cartouches of the embroidery in fig. 14. The same medallion also appears in another embroidery (Sotheby's, Lot 11). In our opinion, the medallion and cartouches in both the rug and the additional embroidery were likely derived from the embroidery in fig. 14 or an even older source.

Fig. 15 presents an early 18th-century embroidery with a design similar to that of the piece shown in fig. 12. However, unlike fig. 12, the medallion in this embroidery incorporates tulip-like elements. Certain examples of Barda rugs—such as those illustrated in fig. 11 and the piece from the Orient Stars Collection (Kirchheim, Franses, Spuhler, Muse, Rageth, Herrmann, 1993, pl. 83) – may provide insight into the origins of this tulip-like motif, which is a defining feature of the

Lembeli-type Borchali rug (also known as Lori-Pambak) of Gazakh origin (fig. 16). The same medallion, adorned with tulip-like motifs, can be observed in some embroideries of period (see *Hali*, 87: 59; Azerbaijan Rugs, Garabagh Embroidery<sup>2</sup>) and an 1828 Garabagh rug (*Hali*, 130: 132). The evident similarities among these embroideries and rugs suggest that the 1828 Garabagh rug and embroideries of this type may have served as transitional forms between Barda and Lembeli rugs.



Fig. 15. Embroidery. Azerbaijan, ca. 1700. 0.7x1.29 m (*Hali*, 100: 65)

Fig. 16. Lembeli Rug. Borchali district, early 19th c. 1.73x2.18 m. Private collection  
(Boralevi & oth., 2018, fig. 10.23)

In an article published in *Hali Magazine*, R. Tschbull highlighted the resemblance between an embroidery featuring a central medallion and a Zeikhur rug of Guba origin (fig. 17) (1992, figs. 1,2), which shares an identical medallion. This Zeikhur rug exhibits bars with a light background and interior ornamentation radiating from the top and bottom of the medallion—an element characteristic of these rugs (see *Hali*, 59: 170), but absent in the embroidery. In our opinion, there is a closely relation between this type of Zeikhur rugs, embroidery in fig. 12 and Gasimushagi rugs of Garabagh origin (see *Hali*, 76: 21, fig. 3; Sabahi, 2007, p. 357, etc.). The distinctive bars of Zeikhur rugs likely evolved from stylized leaves present in these and other related textiles. Similar bars, adorned with interior ornamentation, can also be found in various embroideries (fig. 18) (see also Wikimedia Commons, Embroidery Gasimushagi) and rugs (see Yetkin, 1978, v. 1, pl. 38; Tagiyeva, 1999, ill. 227, 228).



Fig. 17. Zeikhur Rug. Guba region, 19th c. 0.96x1.65 m. Lefevre & Partners, London, 21 October 1983, lot 2 (Tschebull, 1992, fig. 1)

Fig. 18. Embroidery. Azerbaijan, 18th c. 1.27x1.55 m (*Hali*, 127: 37)

Stylized lanceolate leaves with inner decoration are a prominent feature in many Azerbaijani embroideries (see Wearden, 1991, figs. 1, 2, 5; *Hali*, 50: 96; Franses, 1996, fig. 6; *Hali*, 56: 96; *Hali*, 88: 150; *Hali*, 89: 28, etc.) and carpets (see Wearden, 1991, fig. 4; Yetkin, 1978, v. 1, pl. 40; Ellis, 1976, pls. 17, 24, 26, 36, etc.). In embroidery, these leaves often extend outward from the medallion in various forms: resembling horns—typically in two pairs but sometimes more—or arranged in a swastika-like pattern, emerging from the top, bottom, sides, or corners of the medallion, and occasionally encircling it. The size of these leaves varies, with some appearing elongated while others remain compact.

Such decorated leaves are also characteristic of Garabagh or Shirvan carpets a specific pattern (the Leaf and Cypress pattern carpet or the Nakhchivan carpet, as classified by L. Kerimov). In these floral carpets, four curving lancet leaves grow out from multiple medallions (see Yetkin, 1978, v. 2, pl. 172; Ellis, 1976, pl. 24; Ellis, 1988, fig. 45a; Tagiyeva, 1999, ill. 25). Along the central axis of the carpet, positioned between the medallions—and in some instances along the side axes—are cypress trees, often arranged in reverse orientation. These cypress motifs bear a strong resemblance to those found in the embroidery depicted in fig. 18. This motif is not exclusive to these particular items but can also be observed in various other carpets (see Jakoby, 1923, pl. 14; Yetkin, 1978, v. 1, pls. 40, 103, etc.) and embroideries (see fig. 18; Wearden, 1991, figs. 7, 20, etc.) of the same period. Given that the cypress tree held sacred significance in both Zoroastrianism and Islamic traditions, its presence in these textiles is unsurprising. Although rare, similar cypress motifs can also be identified in some early Azerbaijani dragon carpets (see Ellis, 1976, pl. 3; Sabahi, 2007, p. 78; Christie's Sale 6815, Oriental Rugs and Carpets, Lot 127, 16 October 2003, London, etc.).

Determining whether this motif first appeared in carpets or embroideries remains a challenge. However, a considerable number of embroideries feature the cypress motif, many of which belong to a figurative embroidery tradition influenced by Safavid carpet and textile art. M. Franses has examined these pieces extensively in “Stars of the Caucasus” (Boralevi, Carey, Eiland III, Franses, Koshoridze, Krody, Morehouse, Oakley, Samadova, Wearden, 2018, pp. 48-105).

Another motif - the palmettes in upper and lower parts of the embroidery in fig. 18 also are well-known elements found in early Azerbaijani dragon (see Gans-Ruedin, 1986, pp. 43-44; Ellis, 1976, pl. 10, etc.) and floral carpets (see Sabahi, 2007, pp. 80-81; Ellis, 1976, fig. 19; Hali 68: 100, etc.). In many of these carpets, "flaming" palmettes (see Ellis, 1976, pl. 30; Gans-Ruedin, 1986, pp. 43; Jakoby, 1923, pl. 10; Yetkin, 1978, v. 1, pl. 93, etc.) are a recurrent design feature, also appearing in embroideries (see Wearden, 1991, fig. 6; Burns, 1987, p. 15; *Hali*, 50: 96, etc.) from the same historical period. This stylistic continuity suggests a shared artistic vocabulary between Azerbaijani carpet weaving and embroidery traditions, reinforcing the notion of a common cultural and aesthetic heritage.

The highly curved and elaborately decorated leaves were also utilized in the late 17th or early 18th-century embroidery shown in fig. 19. While the execution of floral motifs in this embroidery resembles those found in dragon rugs and Goja carpets (see: Tagiyeva, 1999, ill. 126) of Garabagh origin (Blossom or Palmette carpets), its design in general bears close similarity to a Shirvan-origin rug depicted in fig. 20. This rug, which belongs to the small group of Shield carpets, discussed by R. Pinner and M. Franses (1978: 9), unlike the embroidery, exhibits a more geometric style, with a continuous pattern extending throughout the rug. The embroidery captures only a section of the design enclosed between the curled leaves. Despite notable differences in motifs and border compositions of these pieces, there is a similarity in general scheme of pattern and in our opinion, the embroidery may have served as the design source. The primary variant of the Shield carpet pattern also shares many similarities with figurative embroideries and Safavid textiles (Pinner, Franses, 1978, p. 14). At least two other 17th-century embroideries feature the same medallion and its attendants (Hali, 89: 28; Boralevi, Carey, Eiland III, Franses, Koshoridze, Krody, Morehouse, Oakley, Samadova, Wearden, 2018, p. 133).

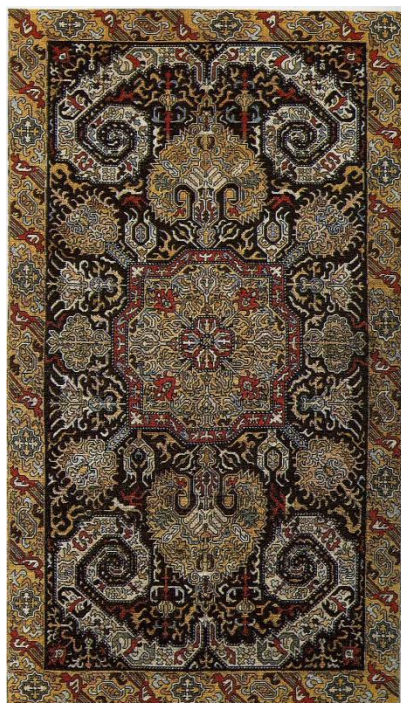


Fig. 19. Embroidery. Azerbaijan, 17th - 18th c. 1.27x1.55 m (Wearden, 1991, fig. 2)

Fig. 20. Shield Carpet. Azerbaijan, Shirvan region, 18th c. 1.04x1.68 m. (*Hali*, 89: 70)

Among rugs that incorporate stylized lanceolate leaves, at least a dozen known examples or fragments exhibit similar pattern (rugs with medallion and sickle leaves or multiple medallion rugs)

and are housed in various collections worldwide. In these Garabagh-origin rugs (fig. 21), two pairs of highly curved lancet leaves—resembling horns—emerge from the medallions. There is an embroidery featuring a similar design, which includes a single complete horned medallion (fig. 22). However, the visible segments of medallions indicate that horned medallions are repeated in alternating rows, like those in rugs.



Fig. 21. Multiple Medallion Rug. Shirvan or Garabagh origin, late 17th or early 18th c. 2.29x5.69 m. The Art Institute, Chicago, inv. no. 26.1616 (*Hali*, 76: 109)

Fig. 22. Embroidery. Azerbaijan, late 17th c. 0.70x1.05 m. The Textile Museum, Washington DC, inv. no 2.18 (Wearden, 1991, fig. 5)

Both in the rugs and the embroidery, ragged tree palmettes serve as finials for the medallions, and between horizontally arranged medallions are positioned hexagonal plaques. Most of these rugs feature a red ground, while only two – of blue, like this embroidery. All examples of the rug have any differences between themselves and the embroidery is not an exception. In some of examples of these rugs, animal combat scenes appear between the tree palmettes (see fig. 21; Liveauctioneers, Caucasian Animal Rug). In other versions, these combat scenes were replaced with plant motifs (Wearden, 1991, fig. 4; Yetkin, 1978, v. 1, pl. 41, etc.) or elongated shapes containing inner floral decorations (*Hali*, 91: 87; Ellis, 1976, pl. 26.), while in the embroidery, they evolved into ragged leaves (fig. 22). The interior decoration of medallions in rugs featuring combat scenes, which we consider the earlier examples, differs slightly from other variations. Notably, the embroidery's medallion decoration is the same of majority. These observations strongly suggest that, in this instance, the rug design predates the embroidery. However, it remains unclear whether an earlier version of the embroidery exists.

At this point, it is important to note that the embroidery shown in fig. 22 is not the only example that appears to be derived from earlier rugs. For instance, the design of the embroidery shown in fig. 23, most likely originates from a classical carpet design that has been used for centuries in the carpets of Central Asia, Azerbaijan, and Anatolia. A 15th-century carpet featuring this pattern is preserved in the Mevlana Museum in Konya (Yetkin, 1974, lev. 48). Additionally, the Flemish painter Hans Memling depicted a rug with this pattern in his painting *Flowers in a Vase*. In Azerbaijan carpet art, this design—characterized by octagons with jagged hooks within squares—is present in the Mughan rug of Garabagh origin (fig. 24), which continues to be produced in

Azerbaijan today. Several examples of embroidery feature the same design (Landreau & Pickering, 1969, pl. 82; *Hali*, 85: 138).



Fig. 23. Embroidery. Azerbaijan, 18th c. 0.64x1.19 m. (Sotheby's, Lot 8)

Fig. 24: Mughan Rug. Garabagh origin, 19th c. Private collection (Tagiyeva, 1999, ill. 131)

In some embroideries, four curving lanceolate leaves extend from the medallion in a swastika-like formation (*Hali*, 88: 150; *Hali*, 94: 128; Wearden, 1991, fig. 12, etc.). The swastika, an ancient symbol present in many cultures, is a frequently used motif in Azerbaijan decorative-applied arts, including embroidery (Wearden, 1991, figs. 7, 9, 12, 16, 18; Klose, 1991, figs. 1, 3; *Hali*, 55: 176; *Hali*, 56: 96; *Hali*, 68: 67; *Hali*, 86: 59; *Hali*, 100: 65; Franses, 1996, fig. 7, etc.). This motif is also commonly found in Azerbaijani carpets (Tagiyeva, 1999, tab. XXXIX; *Hali*, 50: 184; *Hali*, 72: 139).

Furthermore, both embroideries (Azerbaijan Rugs, Garabagh Embroidery<sup>3</sup>; Boralevi, Carey, Eiland III, Franses, Koshoridze, Krody, Morehouse, Oakley, Samadova, Wearden, 2018, pls. 29, 31) and rugs (*Hali*, 127: 40; *Hali*, 150: 31, fig. 2; Tagiyeva, 1999, ill. 240; Boralevi, Carey, Eiland III, Franses, Koshoridze, Krody, Morehouse, Oakley, Samadova, Wearden, 2018, fig. 1.4) of overall design exist in which the main repeated motif is the pinwheel. Particularly noteworthy is the similarity between an embroidery sold at Lefevre (Azerbaijan Rugs, Garabagh Embroidery<sup>3</sup>) and a rug sold at a Rippon Boswell auction (*Hali*, 127: 40). In our opinion, the latter may be the predecessor of the embroidery and the Tamgaly rug (Pinwheel) of Gazakh origin.

Due to space constraints, it is difficult to comprehensively cover all the compositions and motifs shared between embroideries and carpets within a single article. Therefore, we have selected compositions that are both well-known and widely represented in various collections.

### Conclusion

Through a comparative study of Azerbaijani embroideries and carpets, we have confirmed that a significant number of these items share similarities in design and motifs, supporting our hypothesis regarding their common origins. The color schemes of both art forms also exhibit notable parallels. However, during our research, we did not encounter completely identical embroideries and carpets. While some examples display highly similar designs, they often differ at least in color.

In many instances, we observed a close resemblance in both overall composition and individual design elements of embroideries and carpets. In other cases, the similarity is evident only in the arrangement of elements, while the motifs themselves differ. This is particularly common when comparing embroideries and carpets from different regions of Azerbaijan, each representing distinct artistic schools. Most often in these cases, carpets are non-floral. But there is also a sufficient number of similar non-floral embroideries and carpets that demonstrating the breadth of mutual influence between these two traditions.

As a result of this comparison, we assume that any design or design element after appearing in a carpet or embroidery, repeatedly passed from one product to another, undergoing modifications in the process. Some motifs retained their original form while acquiring new stylistic features, whereas others evolved significantly. This continuous exchange of artistic influences underscores the centuries-old historical development of Azerbaijani carpet and embroidery arts as interconnected traditions. Some researchers assert unequivocally that the motifs and compositions found in carpets originated from embroidery. While this may be true for certain designs, we believe the reverse is also possible. Some patterns likely first emerged in carpets before being adapted into embroidery. Over time, many motifs transitioned between the two crafts repeatedly, gradually evolving into their final forms.

The results of this study allow us to address a key question regarding the origins of carpets that exhibit similarities with Azerbaijani embroideries. Given the extensive commonalities revealed in our research and have been noted by other scholars it is undeniable that these artistic traditions share a common root. These works, whether in the form of carpets or embroideries, constitute an integral part of Azerbaijan artistic identity.

The enigmatic beauty of Azerbaijani embroideries continues to captivate admirers today, just as it did in the past. As a testament to this enduring appeal, contemporary carpets incorporating embroidery-inspired designs and motifs have emerged, further reinforcing the dynamic relationship between these two art forms.

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Received: 20.12.2024

Accepted: 17.03.2025