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TRADITIONAL DANCE AND MUSIC IN AZERBAIJAN
A Field Research on Azerbaijani Folk Dances, Music,
Musical Instruments and Costumes

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BRIEF HISTORY OF AZERBAIJAN:

Azerbaijan is bordered on the north by the Dagestan regions; on the west by Georgia and Armenia; to the east lies the Caspian Sea and to the south, Iran. Until 1991, Azerbaijan was one of the former Soviet republics, but after the Soviet break-up, Azerbaijan gained its full independence along with many other republics.

There are several different resources and speculations about the word "Azerbaijan". Some of these related the name "Azerbaijan" to the civilizations ruled the area in time, and some related the name to the geographic features of the land. *"The area, known today as Azerbaijan, was known to the ancients as "Atropat" Atar and Patar. "Atar" means fire and "Patar" means nation in the ancient Pars (Farsi) language. When the words are joined, they mean the "Nation of Fire". This name was given to the region, according to the well known Arab historian, Tabari, because of the great fire that was fed by natural gas coming out of the earth. Therefore, in remote antiquity, Azerbaijan was the holy land of the worshippers of the eternal fire, and the rich coast near Baku (the capital city) was the place of pilgrimage for many believers (1).*

The other resources claimed that the name "Azerbaijan" was driven from commander Atropates who ruled the area around 328. B.C.E. *"By the 4th century B.C.E. two states had emerged to whose history Azerbaijani Turks attach special importance-Caucasian Albania, on the territory of present-day Soviet or northern Azerbaijan, and Aturpatkan or Atropaten in southern, now Iranian, Azerbaijan. The word Azerbaijan may have been formed from Atropaten, named for Atropat, a strap of Alexander of Macedonia in 328 B.C.E. His state lasted until circa 150 B.C.E."* (2). The name "Azerbaijan" might also be driven from the word "azer" meaning flame and "baygan" meaning soldier. When these two words unite, they get the meaning of "flame soldier." On the other hand, "Azerbaijan" ethimologically might be related to Kazar Turks who also lived in this area for a long time (3). This region has been inhabited since ancient times (4th and 5th century, B.C.). Until the present boundaries for Azerbaijan were established in 1920, the borders varied considerably during its long history; these borders may still change, because the present problem with Azerbaijan and Armenia, over a disputed land called Nagorno Karabakh, has not been solved yet.

The origin of Azerbaijani Turks is still controversial among historians. It is known that during 395-396 A.D some of the Khan Turks migrated through Balkans to Trakiya; and, some migrated through Caucasus to inner Anatolia and then traveled back to northern regions using Azerbaijan-Baku rout. So, we know that this area has met with Turks since these times. However, according to historians, the Turks might have come to Azerbaijan, before Christ, in the era of "Saka" and "Iskit" (4). Thus, some historians related Azerbaijanis to Caucasian Albanians who shared the same land in ancient times, and some related them to Persians. No matter how controversial the origin is, among all the Turkish (Turkic) tribes in Central Asia, as well as in Caucasia (Kafkasia), Azerbaijanis are the closest Turkish speaking tribe to the Anatolian Turks. Infect, neither their written nor spoken language differ from the Turkish language spoken in Anatolia today. All the other Turkic languages, such as Uzbek, Kazakh, Tatar etc. differ greatly despite of sharing the same Turkic origin which traces back to "Altaic" language family (5).

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Map of Azerbaijan

Photo: Courtesy of National Geography.

Since Azerbaijan was located at the crossroads of the trade routes between the East and West, this territory was invaded and ruled by different peoples and influenced by a number of great civilizations, each passing on some of its legacy to posterity: In the sixth century B.C. by the Persian king, Cyrus, by Alexander of Macedonia two centuries later, and by Roman legions under Pompey three centuries after that; around the eighth century by the Arabs, then by Seljuk Turks from ninth to eleventh centuries; eleventh to thirteenth by the Timurid empire, from the thirteenth to the fifteenth by Karakoyunlu and Akkoyunlu; the sixteenth to mid-eighteenth by Iran, then by Ottomans and Russians during the early eighteenth century. All of these great civilizations diversified the culture in Azerbaijan. Because of the domination of Turks and Iranians in the area, Azerbaijan has remained Muslim since the seventh century. During the Russian invasion and by the Treaties of Gulistan in 1813 and Turkmenchai in 1827 Azerbaijan was split in two, and south Azerbaijan was taken by Iran. Today more that 20 million Azerbaijani live in Iran (6).

FOLK ART IN AZERBAIJAN:

Art in Azerbaijan has always been an important part of everyday life, especially in the mountain villages. Carpet and jewelry making are a unique phenomenon of Caucasian and Trans-Caucasian cultures, and one of the best known areas for this is Azerbaijan. Azerbaijanis reflect their life styles through their visual arts as much as they reflect through their performing arts. They depict their legends, thoughts and words in their carpets in order to make them eternal for themselves.

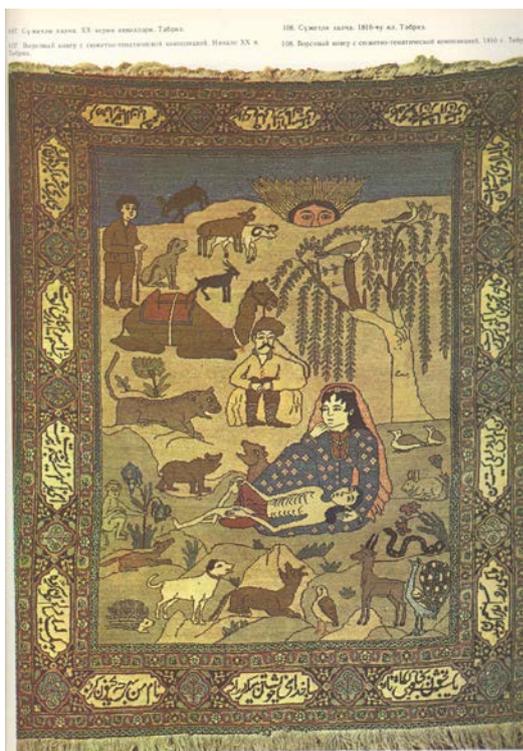


Azerbaijan History Museum Publishing-5, Jewelry, Baku, fig.34



Azerbaijan History Museum Publishing-5, Jewelry, Baku, fig.1

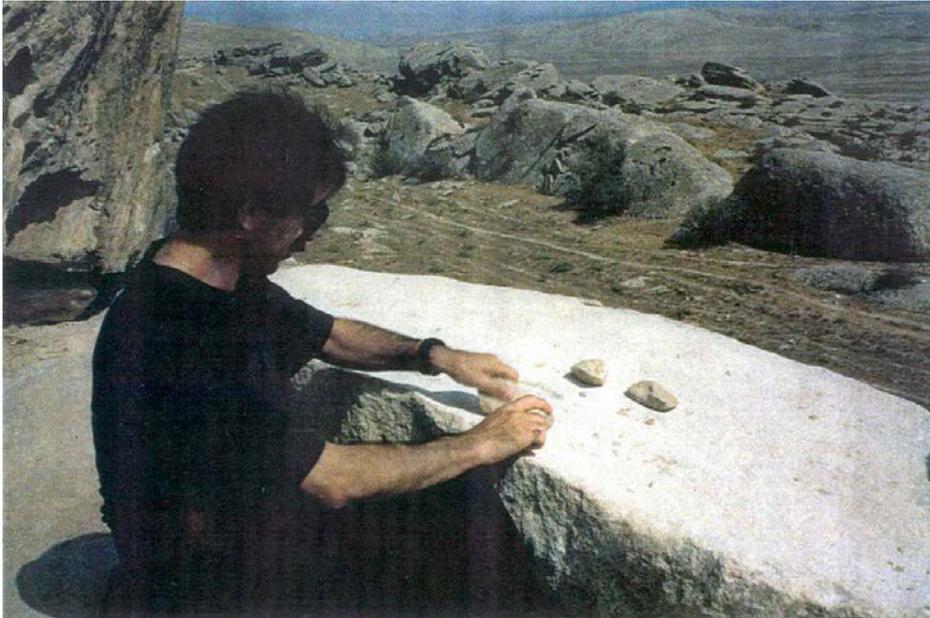
Pottery-making, painting, carving and sculpture are some of the other art forms that are well developed in Azerbaijani society. One other highly valued form of art in Azerbaijan is the poetry. Azerbaijanis love speaking in a poetic way and express themselves through poems. Thus, even in a casual conversation, it is very common for someone to hear a couplet of a poem read by an ordinary Azerbaijani. However, because Azerbaijanis are very music and dance oriented society, when the subject of art is mentioned, performing art forms, such as traditional music and dance, are highly valued.



Hand made carpet depicting a legendary story

Photo: Courtesy of Folk Art of Azerbaijan, p.108

Azerbaijani music and dance trace back as far as the fourth century B.C. Archaeological excavations uncovered rock paintings and carvings of images of people dancing hand in hand in the area called Gobustan. There is a huge rock that is called “Gaval-Dash” (Gaval=drum, Dash=rock) is still being played, trough beating with small pieces of rocks, by visitors to hear the sound of a drum.



Gurbuz Aktas playing Gavaldash

Photo: Courtesy of Nancy Rose Aktas

Forms of Azerbaijan Music:

In ancient times, music and rhythm were played by the early ancestors for social and religious reasons; it was played by shamans for good hunting games and crops, to cure the sick and to worship; it was played to set a certain speed for the workers at a factory like place that was called “Zorkhana” in which big drums were played at a certain speed and the workers were made to follow the set tempo. It was an accompaniment for wrestling, sports, dancing and various other ceremonies and entertainments. However, in this century Azerbaijani music has lost most of its functional value due to cultural changes, mixes of Middle-Eastern and the western influences of the Russians and Europeans. Today, like many of the other cultures, the music functions as more of an entertaining art form. On the other hand, Azerbaijani music has gained a beautiful structure due to this unique, cultural mix. Therefore, it is not unusual to hear Persian, Turkish, Arabic, Central Asian as well as Caucasian influences when listening to Azerbaijani music (7).

Other than Western music which is well developed in Azerbaijan, the traditional music of Azerbaijan can be separated in three different forms: 1-Folk music, which is mainly played by Ashugs the people who are considered to be the lover of nature and life, 2-Classical Azerbaijani music, “Mugam” which is structured and taught by the music conservatories and schools, 3-Folk music, which is mainly anonymous songs sang by the villagers, and also the songs composed in folk style.

In Azerbaijan, the “Ashugs” who tell epic stories and also express themselves through music are regarded as the creators of traditional folk music and poetry. According to the Ashug traditions, one has to memorize the stories, songs, and the poems as well as teach others, but orally only, not in written form. So the person who chooses to become an Ashug has to spend years being trained by a master teacher. The “ozan” of Central Asian Turkistan was the predecessor of the Ashug. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the poetry of the Ashug was recorded; compositions by Gurban, Felek and others still survive. Seadet Abdullayeva traces ashug tradition back in to time of Dede Gorgut saying that “*The foundation of Ashug tradition goes as far back as Dede Gorgut, Dede Ugutkhan, Dede Choban, Dede Yedyar, Ashug Cunun, Miskin Abdal. Their rich creation of ashug tradition affected many of the newer ones*

dating from XVI to XXth century (8). Abdullayeva, also mentions about Bozalgali of Tovuz region in Azerbaijan as the center of Ashug tradition where its popularly kept alive the most.

In the twentieth century, many Ashugs became prominent, among them Alesker, Assad Razaev, Mirza Bayram and Ismail Yussifov. Today many of the others follow their steps and keep this tradition alive. Ashug Ulduz of Baku, Ashug Şerbet of Shamakhi, Ashug Sadik Avdioğlu of Gazakh regions and many of the others from other regions determent to keep the Ashug tradition alive today as well as to carry it to the future.

Legends and epics called “Destan” have taken an important place in poetry and music. They are sung as solo narratives in prose. The dialogue is in verse and music. Over 60 classical melody types are used for the Destan and sung by the Ashug who is renowned for his improvisational skill, which is one of the forms of singing in Ashug tradition.

Another very popular Ashug form is called “Deyishme” (poetic and musical riddle). Two competing Ashugs attempt to outdo one another in improvised questions and answers while playing a long-necked plucked instrument called a SAZ among ashugs. For example, one Ashug will begin with a particular subject and melodic style of his own creation. The other must continue with a reply in the same subject and style. This process continues until one or the other becomes stumped. One unique feature of the competition is the humor, often satirical. In some cases these competitions have been known to last for days to compete with each other. Throughout the duration, the Ashug who displays superior wit and technique is designated the winner by the audience's clapping, cheering and general enthusiasm. The Ashugs are so skillful that the audience's attention is never lost. Sometimes the competition is made more difficult when both Ashugs insert a straight pin vertically between the bottom lip and upper lip called “Dilbatti” (stung tongue) or “Lebdegmez” (notching lips). They are thus further bound to avoid words that would require the lips to touch or close together.

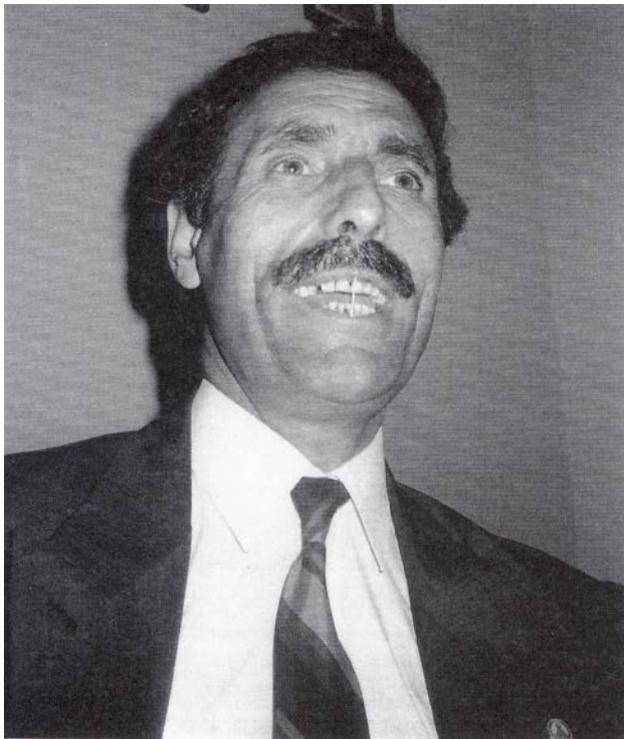


Photo: Courtesy of Viltis

Lebdegmez (Dilbatti) performing Ashug from Kars, Turkey

Poetic forms employed in the Deyishme are the “Gazal Murabba” (four verses), “Mukhammas” (five verses) and “Divani” (cross-rhyme). The musical melodies are diatonic with sporadic chromatic shifts and the meter is 6/8 (9).

The second type of Azerbaijani music “Mugam” is also a type of folk music. This type of folk music is characterized by rich and complicated modalities, distinctive and varied rhythmic patterns. Even during improvisational singing or playing, the performer is compelled to adhere to the rules and limitations of the mode and the traditional metrical structure. Melodies generally possess a descending outline and a short ascent.

The word “Mugam” (plural mugamat) which is pronounced “Maqam” in Arabic and “Makam” in the Turkish defines mode or melody pattern. A mugam is a large vocal and instrumental cyclic composition with contrasting parts of an improvisatory character containing “Tesnif” (couplet songs) and “Reng” (dance music). The “Mugam” came to popularity with the urban culture in the Middle Ages. Text for the “Mugamat” is drawn from classical poetry and performed by a “Khanande” (singer). A “Mugam” is not only a row of specific musical intervals but is also subject to limitations of range, direction of melodic movement, melodic and rhythmic motives and tempo, all inherent in the structure of the particular “Mugam”. Each “Mugam” has a name exemplifying its character; for example, “Ushak” for passion, “Bayat” for cozy, “Hayati”, “Shikeste”, “Agu” (four verses) for dirges etc.(10). *“In the early 20th century, Azerbaijani composer Uzeyir Hajibeyov identified seven main mughams (rast, shur-sahnaz, seyghah, bayati-shiraz, humayun, heyrati and chahargah) plus five secondary mughams. Each mugham is said to be connected with a certain feeling or emotion; for example, “seyghah” represents grief and “shur-shahnaz” stands for tenderness”*(11).

The third type of folk music is mainly anonymous songs sang by the villagers; there are songs that are sung by shepherds or farmers which are usually free-form. The songs of the milker and thresher are very metrically strict, denoting the rhythmic quality of the action involved. Wedding songs are full of metaphors and games. There are cradle songs, children's songs, laments performed by wailing women (improvisational) and heroic songs which tell life style of legendary characters such as “Koroglu” and “Bagbek”. There are also humorous songs, joking or satirical, which are dialogues between a man and a woman, usually in 3/4 or 6/8 meter. Folk songs traditionally are performed solo and the dominant meters are the combinations of 2/4, 3/4, 3/8, 6/8 and 12/8.

Musical Instruments:

The musical instruments used in Azerbaijani music are common throughout Caucasia, and some of them are also used in the Middle East. They are Gaval: frame drum (also called Daff or Doira); Nagara: double headed drum played by hand and named differently by other tribes of the Caucasus; Tar: a long-necked, fretted lute with a large string holder. The resonator is made up of two hollowed-out wooden sections covered with fish skin, Kemanche: the ancient spike-fiddle that has a small 3 or 4 strings and a spherical wooden body; Balaban: a cylindrical reed instrument resembling the flute; Tutek: a small flute; Zurna: a conical reed instrument; Saz: a long-necked, fretted instrument; Gosha Nagara: double drum; Garmon: an accordion.

A typical classical music (mugam) ensemble consists of a singer, Tar, Gaval and a Kemanche player. Often times the singer is a Gaval player (12).



GARMON



SAZ



KAMANCHA



TAR



ZURNA,



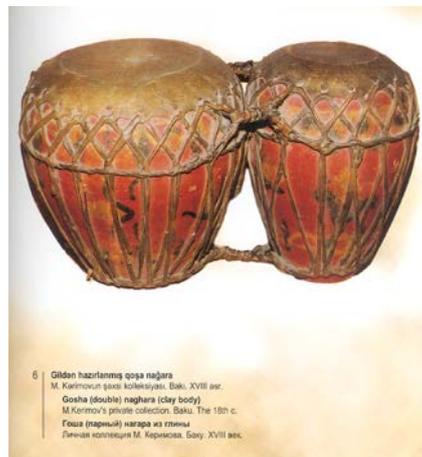
BALABAN,



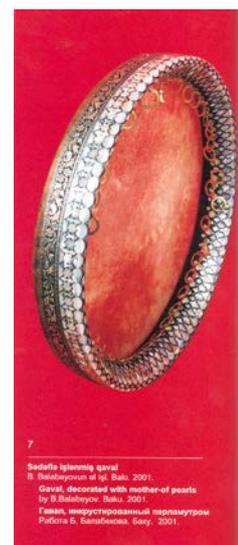
TÜTEK,



NAGARA



GOSHA NAGARA

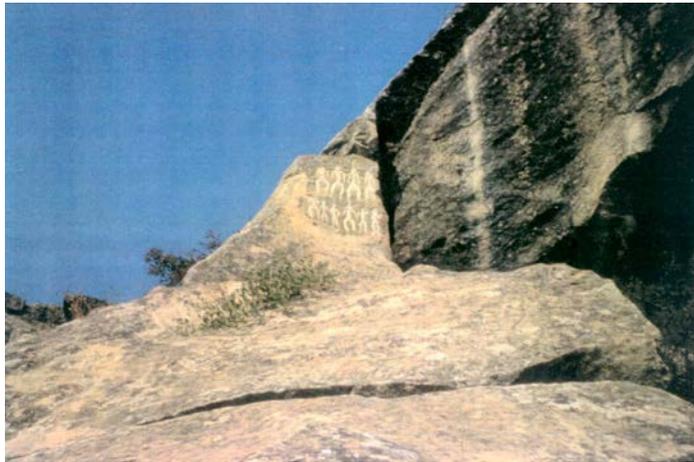


GAVAL

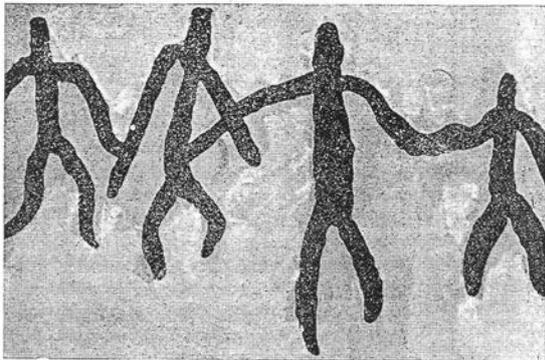
Photos: Courtesy of Meenun Kerimov,

DANCES OF AZERBAIJAN:

The other highly regarded performing art in Azerbaijan is dance. Just as with its music, the roots of Azerbaijani dance can be traced far back into antiquity. Cave paintings and carvings from the fourth and fifth millennia B.C., discovered in the Gobustan area in lines and in circular formations in Azerbaijan, depicted what is believed to be ritual dancers, hand in hand, in lines and in circular formations. Today in almost every region of Azerbaijan a line dance called “Yalli” is performed in the same formation, as I have observed during my field research.



The entrance of Gobustan caves



Rock carvings of Gobustan caves where the Yalli dance was inspired of (IVth Millennium B.C)

Photo: Courtesy of G. Aktaş, October, 1990

As stated in the historical outline of Azerbaijan, this area of the Trans Caucasus was invaded by innumerable peoples, tribes and empires throughout its long history. No invader or conqueror left the area without leaving some traces behind; therefore, in Azerbaijan, many dances can be found with origins that can be attributed to other peoples, such as Turks, Central Asians, Persians, as well as other nations of the Caucasus.

As in Azerbaijani music, in the recent centuries the Azerbaijani dance also has changes in its functional value. In ancient times, Azerbaijanis danced for hunting, harvesting, fire worshipping, as well as for social interaction. Today, however, dance functions primarily as a social interaction and a form of entertainment. In this century, Azerbaijani dance has developed further technically and has diversified due to increasing cultural contacts with countries of the Middle East and Europe. Traditional movements have been refined and made more theatrical to be performed on stage. Almost every city in Azerbaijan has established dance and music schools for the study of both traditional and Western style dance, music and theatrical art forms.

Like in many other cultures, Azerbaijani dances also differ from region to region. One can easily separate and name their areas or regions by their music, costume, characteristic features and by the way they are performed. Dances from Sheki, Karabagh, Shamakhi, Nahchivan, Baku and other regions are all slightly different than each other. Also, according to Hasanov, the same dance may be done in different speed in different regions. For example, “Terekeme” dance is done faster (celd) in Nahchivan while it is danced much slower (aram) in Baku. However, today, due to the development of state ensembles, the same dances are done in every region with slightly different staging. So, one might see the same dances in almost in every region (13).

The traditional Azerbaijani dances can basically be divided into three forms: 1) Dances performed in groups or in a duet form together by men and women, 2) Dances done by men only, 3) Dances done by women only.

1) Dances Performed in Groups by Men and Women:

One of the most popular group dances done by men and women together is called “Yalli”. “Yalli” is done by small as well as big groups; the number of people may vary from two to a hundred or more. This dance is performed throughout Azerbaijan and regarded as a national dance of Azerbaijan “Yalli” was originally done in a circular form by hunters and gatherers and is considered by Azerbaijani historians to be one of their first primitive dances in that region, and one that carried a religious significance, as done under the direction of a shaman. Two of the numerous prehistoric cave carvings in the Gobustan area are revealing: one depicts many people holding hands in a flat line behind an animal (a bison) as if preparing to surround it in the hunt; the other shows the people holding hands in a circle. In fact, this is where the dance gets its name: “yal” means a chain, referring to the chain of people holding hands.

The first documented choreography of “Yalli” in modern times was photographed in Nahchivan in southwestern Azerbaijan. This is why when speaking about “Yalli dance”, the first area to come to mind is Nahchivan and its two main regions Ordubad and Sherur. In fact, a village named “Cherchibogan” of Sherur region is very well-known regarding “Yalli” dance because this village has the famed men’s “Yalli” group whose members are over 70 years old. This dance today is performed by the native people at almost every social event and it has been staged by state folk ensemble as well as by independent semi-professional ensembles.

The music for “Yalli” dance is not very intricate. The tune is relatively simple, set in either a 6/8 or 12/8 time frame or both; slow, fast, and combined; it starts slowly and builds to a fast section and utilizes both 6/8 and 12/8 meters.



Yalli dance, Nahcivan, 1939

Photo: Courtesy of Kamal Hesenov

The costumes of “Yalli dance” is the traditional village costume: for women, this consists of a simple head scarf, a hip-long jacket worn over a knee-length, full skirted dress, and large pants worn over patterned wool socks and leather shoes, which are called “charik”. Generally, the women also wear earrings, necklaces and other jewelry made of silver. For men, the traditional wear is a lambskin hat, a long overcoat called “chukha” or “caftan”, large, full pants and knee-high, form-fitting leather boots. In olden times, the men used to wear the same type of leather shoes (charik) as the women; but, today the costumes have been modified due to outside cultural influences, technological advances and convenience for professional dancers, thus leg wear and footwear especially tend to vary from the original (such as soft leather boots worn by male dancers throughout modern Caucasia). Men as a rule do not use jewelry, although simple rings such as wedding bands may be worn (14).

Another group dance done by men and women is usually in duet formation. One of the well known duet dance done by men and women called “Naz Eyleme” which translates as “don't be coy”. This is a very old traditional dance mostly performed at special occasions that are held mostly by young people. The dance is structured around the Azerbaijani tradition that girls are a little bit shy to get up and dance readily with a man; the man usually invites the girl to dance and the girl shows her hesitancy due to her shyness, especially if there is an attraction between them. When the dance starts, the male dancer comes out first and then he brings the female partner. They dance together, and there is different part for each one of them where they show characteristic features of men's and women's styling. Finally, they join and finish the dance together. As in most of other Azerbaijani dances, the music begins slowly (aram) and ends with a fast (celd) section. The music is not very complicated and the phrasing is evenly composed in a 6/8 time signature.

The woman's costume of “Naz Eyleme” is typical of urban styles popular in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, consisting of a small hat embellished with coins and beads, covered with a long veil; and embroidered velvet or brocade jacket worn over a full-length, gathered skirted dress with many layers of skirts and trousers underneath. The men wears the knee-length overcoat called “chukha”, a satin high-necked shirt (koynek), trousers (shalvar) and leather knee-high boots (chekme or chiveki), and on his head, a dark-colored lambskin hat (kalpak or Papakh) (14).

2) Dances Done by Men Only:

Men's dances of Azerbaijan are usually rhythmic and consist of heroic movements. For example, the dance "Lezginka", which is known through all Caucasia and done by almost all of the Caucasian and Trans-Caucasian nations, is performed as the "İgitler Reksi", meaning the dance of the heroes. It is done very fast and has very intricate movements performed on the toes and knees. It is a competition dance for the men. They try to prove superiority over each other through their difficult and challenging movements. In addition, "Gazagi", "Shalakho", "Khan Chobani", "Cengi" and "Sheki" dances are some of the well-known men's social dances done in groups and as solos. Also some of the old dances are the wrestling and the comic dances. These dances carry theatrical aspects and therefore they are done in theatrical forms. The dancers dance as if they were opponents in a wrestling match. This could be done by many people in two groups. In the comic dance which is usually done at men's gatherings; the dancer is usually dressed as a woman and performs movements that invite laughter. There is also a heroic dance which is a solo showing the life of legendary characters such as the earlier mentioned "Koroglu" and "Bagbek", who were revered by the people (16).

3) Dances Done by Women Only:

Compared to the men's dances, the women's dances are consists of softer bodily movements, and are intended to show the delicate and feminine beauty of women. Because the Muslim religion forbade dancing for women, Azerbaijani women's dancing did not develop until this century; women simply were not allowed on stage until the beginning of the nineteenth century. So women could only do their dancing at women's gatherings. After the Russians took over in eighteenth century, a lot of things changed rapidly; first of all, many nationalities, including Russians, Armenians, Georgians and Europeans, as well as other peoples of the Caucasus and Central Asia moved in large numbers to the main cities of Azerbaijan, particularly Baku, due to increasing industrialization. These peoples started to interact with each other in cultural, social and economic level creating a unique society for Azerbaijan in which the Muslim fundamentalist ideas lost their appeal. It was during this time Azerbaijani women began to dance freely as their self expression, which were admired and danced by many other nations in the former Soviet Union. Today woman's dances of Azerbaijan shows very intricate and feminine movements. They use many different arm and hand movements while depicting an oriental style in the body. Although most of the women's dances are done in a slow rhythmic tone, there are dances that women do as fast as men. For example, the Yalli dance is done in both slow and fast rhythm by men and women together. Also, some of the fast man's dances done by women at social events such as wedding and special gathering.

Well-known, old, traditional women's dances are: "Uzundere", "Terekeme" (done by the bride at the wedding ceremonies), Bahar Reksi (Spring dance), done by women to depict the arrival of Spring, and the drum dance "İnnabi", "Gülgez", "Gelin Havasi", "Vağzali", "Mirzeyi", "Halabaci", "Gitgilida", "Gavalli Reks", inspired by a lady drummer at a women's gathering (17).

THE TRADITIONAL COSTUMES:

The history of Azerbaijani costume goes as far back as the history of dance. A well known Azerbaijani researcher Sabire Sefigızı Dünyamalıyeva, divides the history of Azerbaijani costume in five different era, starting from the stone age ending in the 20th century. Being on the cross roads between East and West, apart from the ancient cultures, through out its history many different cultures such as Caucasians, Turks, Arabs, Persians, Ottomans, Indians, Albanians past through Azerbaijan; all affected and added Azerbaijani

tradition some of their own. Therefore, as in the dance, the traditional dance costumes of Azerbaijan also differ in style and kind from region to region; not only according to the dance form but also to the tradition as well. Dün Yamalyeva states that “*Analyzing of the 19th century costume samples show that today’s costumes are the continuation of the Khans era*” (18). Thus, the examples of men’s and women’s costumes showing below, not only represents the different regions but also the style of the era of the Khans dynasties.

However, today in Azerbaijan, like the standardization of the dances, the costumes are also standardized and used in every ensemble in every region. More over, due to the staging matters, they have been altered greatly through the years. For this reason, today’s dance costumes do not represent the old traditional features despite of being similar in style.

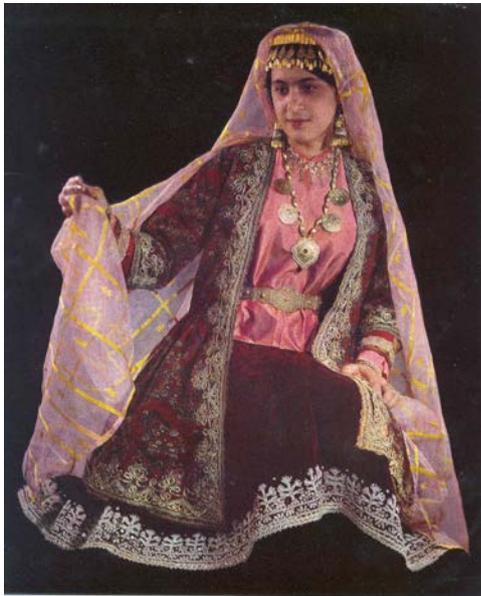
Women’s Costumes:

The traditional costume of Azerbaijani women differs from region to region, as it was stated above. However, the women in general are known for wearing shirts (blouse) under the full floor-length fitted bodices dress (tuman). The blouse or dress has no collar and the sleeves are full or fitted, as desired. The coat, with full 3/4-length sleeves, is usually made of a heavy woolen material. This coat, depending on the region, can be knee-length of waist-length, with a silver belt worn over it. The coat is decorated with gold or silver trim and ornately embellished with traditional symbolic designs, such as leaves, flame shapes (butan), birds and spiral figures. Azerbaijani women usually wear a small hat (arakhchin) with a veil (Duvak=large scarf) or sometimes just a veil (orpek=small scarf) to cover their hair. However, they let their long braids that hang to their waists and are sometimes decorated by small beads or pearls to show.) Women are also known to decorate themselves with beautifully handmade silver and gold jewelry.

Dün Yamalyeva explains the names of some of the traditional women’s costume pieces such as: Chepken (hip-long coat), Arkhalig (small or ¾ length jacket), Bahari (sleeveless hip long jacket), Koynek (shirt-blouse), Tuman (long dress), Kulece (three quarter coat with short sleeves), Kurdu (waist long jacket), Orpek (a rektangler scarf), Bashmag (shoes), Mest (leather boots with no heels), Chakhchur (baggy pants), Chorab (wollen socks). The photographs below shows some of the original costumes, from different regions, that carries all of the pieces mentioned above.



Karabag, Shusha-XIX century



Nahchivan XIX century



Girl's Costume, Baku-XIX century

Photos: Courtesy of "Azerbaycan Milli Keyimleri"

Men's Costumes

Compare to the wide range pieces of women's costumes, men's costume pieces aren't very many an elaborate at all. However, like women's costumes, men's costumes also differ in style according to their region and usage. Moreover, the traditional man's costumes have also altered greatly through the years. Not until to long ago (XVIII-XIX century), Azerbaijani

men wore baggy pants (shalvar), cow-hide shoes (charik), long coats, (chukha or caftan), a shirt with no collar (Koynek) and a lambskin fur hat (papakh), and carried a dagger or a sword at the waist. Today when they dance, we see shorter coats, long and soft knee-high boots, a more fitted pants and sometimes no hat is used at all. The below photographs are some samples of the men's traditional costumes.



Karabag, Shusha-XIX century
Photos: Courtesy of "Azerbaycan Milli Keyimleri"



Boy's Costume, Sheki-XX century
Photos: Courtesy of "Azerbaycan Milli Keyimleri"

CONCLUSION:

As it was mentioned above, art, especially dance and music, has always been important for Azerbaijani people. For them, as for many other indigenous societies, expressing themselves through their performing as well as visual art is traditionally

significant. The field research done on the remote areas showed that, Azerbaijani culture is still unspoiled in regarding to the old traditions. However, especially in the rural areas, there is a noticeable shift and lose of traditional values since their independence, in 1991. For example, to day many of the young generation preferred to learn and perform new age music instead of their traditional music. Therefore, today, especially “Ashug” and “Mugam” music is continually loosing their popularity. Similarly, the traditional dances also lose their popularity. Fortunately, there are state sported music and dance ensembles in almost every region and considered people who are strongly attached to their tradition and love their culture. Noticing this strong cultural orientation made me feel like Azerbaijan’s cultural values will be protected, retained and transferred to the new generation in spite of its fast shift towards the new and popular life style.

The information that is given here has intentionally been prepared to give an overview of the geography, history and arts of the indigenous people of Azerbaijan. In preparation and compilation of this project, a personal observation in the field and the other related works in this topic were used. However, limitations of the resource materials were unfortunate because there were only a couple of old publications and they were written in Cyrillic (Russian alphabet). I hope that this brief cultural preview will be useful to the interested reader.

FOOTNOTES:

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- 7-Aktaş, Gürbüz Dance and Music in Azerbaijan, Master Theses (field research project), San Francisco State University, 1994, p.5
- 8-Seadet Abdullayeva, Azərbaycan Xalk ÇalğAletleri, Adiloğlu Neşriyatı, Bakı, 2002, p.274
- 9-Musical Encyclopedia: Azerbaijan, Moscow, 1973, p. 228.
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