

Saida M. Garunova,
Junior Researcher,
The G. Tsadasa Institute of Language, Literature and Art of the
Daghestan Scientific Centre of RAS, Makhachkala, Russia
saida-mag@yandex.ru

Robert Chenciner,
Honorary Researcher, Prof.,
St. Antony's College,
University of Oxford, United Kingdom
chenciner@clara.net

Magomedhan M. Magomedhanov,
D.Sc. (in History), Prof., Head of Dept. of Ethnography,
The Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography of the
Daghestan Scientific Centre of RAS, Makhachkala, Russia
mkhan@yandex.ru

**COLOUR AND SYMBOLISM
IN DAGHESTAN FOLKLORE LITERATURE AND CARPETS
– A FRESH LOOK¹**

Abstract. In the present article, we study more issues of color semantics and symbols. Our research is based on the analysis of mainly Daghestani folklore and ethnographic materials and colour characteristics of traditional textiles, including carpets.

We examined two methods of gathering evidence about associations of colours in the minds of people. The first is to use some kind of psychological tests. The second is to use ideas incorporated in folklore and folk literature, as handed down through generations of narrators and listeners. During this process, successive narrators have unconsciously filtered the material to ensure its relevance to their audience. This is clearly an indirect method: nobody actually answers the questions from today's experimenter, so any colour associations must be inferred from the context.

Colours in oral tradition were considered, not in isolation, but rather in contrasting pairs or in sequences. It was found that a specific colour could have different associations in different conditions, and that generally the associations were more abstract than concrete. In surviving woolen rugs and felts and silk embroideries, colours appear to be linked with availability of dyes or decorative preferences rather than symbolism.

Keywords: colour symbolism; colour associations; folklore; Daghestan; Caucasus; Daghestan textile; Daghestan carpet.

¹ This article attempts to add to David Hunt and Robert Chenciner's 2006 article "Colour symbolism in the folk literature and textile tradition of the Caucasus" [1]

**ЦВЕТ И СИМВОЛЫ
В ДАГЕСТАНСКОЙ ФОЛЬКЛОРНОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЕ И КОВРАХ:
НОВЫЙ ВЗГЛЯД**

Гарунова Саида Магомедхановна,
младший научный сотрудник,
Институт языка, литературы и искусства им. Г. Цадасы
Дагестанского научного центра РАН, Махачкала, Россия
saida-mag@yandex.ru

Роберт Ченсинер,
Почетный научный сотрудник, проф.,
Колледж Св. Антония,
Оксфордский университет, Великобритания
chenciner@clara.net

Магомедханов Магомедхан Магомедович,
д.и.н., зав. отделом этнографии,
Институт истории, археологии и этнографии
Дагестанского научного центра РАН, Махачкала, Россия
mkhan@yandex.ru

Аннотация. Статья написана на основе анализа преимущественно дагестанских фольклорных и этнографических материалов, в которых нашли отражение различные аспекты восприятия цветов и цветовой символики у народов Дагестана.

Одним из широко используемых методов сбора данных о цветовых ассоциациях, психологических, эмоциональных реакциях людей на те или иные цвета является применение различных психологических тестов. Другой метод заключается в выявлении сохранившихся в памяти фольклора, традиционной материальной и духовной культуры, сведений о восприятии цветов, цветовых значениях и символах. Принципиальные различия между этими методами видятся в том, что первый из них имеет «прямое» (исследователь/испытуемый) применение, тогда как второй, этнографический или структурно-антропологический, метод подразумевает и прямое (опрос информаторов, полевые наблюдения), и опосредованное (изучение фольклора, обрядов, традиционной материальной культуры) извлечение искомой информации.

В своем исследовании мы исходили из понимания того, что для выявления символического или мистического в восприятии цветов в тех или иных культурах важно знать не только теорию и методологию вопроса, не только предмет, но и объект исследования.

Цветовые ассоциации рассматривались как по отдельным (красный, синий и т.д.) цветам, так и по контрастирующим цветовым парам (белый/черный и т.д.). Результаты исследования подтверждают, что один и тот же цвет может иметь разные символические значения, что цветовые ассоциации не поддаются рассмотрению в строгих критериях абстрактности или конкретности, что специфика цветовой палитры шерстяных ковров, войлоков, шелковых вышивок связана не столько с символикой, сколько с доступностью, наличием тех или иных красителей.

Ключевые слова: цветовая символика; цветовые ассоциации; фольклор; Дагестан; Кавказ; дагестанский текстиль; дагестанские ковры.

Introduction

The interest of ethnographers in the study of color symbolism as one of the expressive forms of peoples and religions is natural. It is explicable by the fact that both the formation and function of symbolism occurs in particular natural, geographical and socio-ethnic environments. Subject matter includes semiotics and symbolism of colors that occurs inter alia in art criticism, psychology, folklore, ethnography, and structural anthropology [2–12].

In spite of all the disciplinary nuances in the theory and methodology of cognition, the analysis of traditional material culture, folk art, fairy tales, myths, and legends often lead to similar conclusions.

At the same time, ethnography/anthropology, like each of the above-mentioned branches of knowledge, has its own differences and advantages. These can be defined as the illumination

and description of the symbolism of colors, color associations that most follow ethno-cultural realities and contexts of the survey. It is popularly believed that different temporal, spatial, life situations and circumstances cause different color associations. These can be detected by psychological tests and presented in quantitative and qualitative indicators by ethnicities. However, this and other highly general, axiomatic statements may carry cultural biases of the ethnographers i.e. the idea that the differences in color reflections and associations depend not only on individual features, but also on ethnic group. Such a thesis of ethnic correlation in Daghestan, to explain the uniqueness of color symbolism does not hold, as illustrated by the following two examples:

Examples

Example 1

The image of a young man in the red shirt is usually associated with Russians; and in Daghestan - with the Avars, the largest of 31 indigenous peoples. However, these are stereotypes; that red shirts are traditional not only for Avars and Russians; that it's not so much about the color of the shirt, but the shades of color and fabric type, sewing, cut; ways of wearing the shirt whether iconic, use in ritual function and so on.

"The question of red shirts is exactly in their colour", stated a historian of local lore of Derbent, that the entire textile industry of the Russian Empire since the time of Tsar Peter The First to the invention in 1868 of synthetic dyes, depended on Derbent madder; the red shirts, under discussion, were dyed with Derbent madder; there is no other city, except Derbent which has on its historical coat of arms a bush of madder; even in the French city of Avignon, a centre of madder there is a monument in the honor of the Derbent citizen Kerbalai Huseynov inscribed "The man who managed to grow seeds of wild madder".

Example 2

Azure-dark blue color (hex code # 002147), commonly known as Oxford Blue was used from 1829 to distinguish the crews of the Varsity Boat Race with coloured stripes of fabrics dyed with indigo from India. In Daghestan the same color of the same indigo is seen in Avar and Kumyk tapestry-woven carpets called "davaghins", "dums" and "supradums" the earliest of which date back to the 18th century.

As Baron Peter von Uslar wrote: "[What] we call sea blue, it seems to the [Daghestan] mountain people it is green: it's impossible to argue about colors" [13]. In Daghestani languages, a gray horse and blue eyes are also described by one adjective (for example, цИхИлабчу, цИхИлалберал/ ts'ih'ilab chu, ts'ih'ilal beral, Avar). The explanation for this lies, of course, not in the physiology of the recognition of flowers, but in indigenous ethno-linguistic traditions.

Folklore's colours

Folklorists have drawn attention to the fact that in Caucasus folk literature the colours of white, black and red are also absolutely dominant. We see in folklore texts that the colours are mentioned in:

- a) combinations - black or golden colours in braids; black eyes, white face, red cheeks in a beautiful woman;
- b) comparisons - white, gray, bay, black, in horses against sky blue;
- c) contrasts - dressed in black clothes, sat on a black horse; he ran in half an hour the distance his white horse ran for an hour; three girls with white, yellow and black hair;
- d) separately - red cow, white woman, white snake, white maidens.

There are also differences in the symbolism of different objects and mythical creatures of the same color. For instance, a white shawl, a white turban, a white shroud are different, causing different associations. However, in most cases white color is usually associated with purity.

A horse, no matter what sort, symbolizes the embodiment of beauty, grace, aspiration for success, strength, and stunning speed, like a luxury sports car.

In the Kumyk fairy tale "A cunning traveler" a snow-white horse "in one day rounded the Earth seven times ... when he jumps, the earth and sky shake, between his ears can fit seven camels, and if the horse stands on its hind legs, its head rests against the clouds!" [14: 424]

The Avar tale "Sea horse" describes the marvelous speed and strength of the snow-white Sea-horse, which runs out from the sea behind the Sunrise and in a moment circles around the Earth three times and hides back under the Sea [15: 155].

In Daghestani fairy tales a horse- usually white, white sheep, white deer, eagle, comb, spindle, salt, needles, sabre, dagger, lamp, rings, necklaces, carpets, white and red kerchiefs, etc., perform a significant role in achieving fairy-tale goals of strength, bravery, difficulty often in far off lands, often to find a beautiful personage.

The white horse also symbolizes wisdom, as in the Avar saying: "K'ahab chol cholo zamanalda k'ay"/ Bridle the White Horse firmly in advance. Here it means: if from an early age he has neither the will nor the patience to be intelligent, if he did not "curb" himself, then the white horse (wisdom) will throw him off.

In addition, the white horse symbolizes happiness, leadership, or victory. A bride goes on a white horse and in a white costume in her wedding procession to the groom's house.

The white snake symbolizes well-being, prosperity. So, in the ethnic-Rutul tale "The White Snake", it dwells in the pantry of the house. "This snake was revered in the house of my grandmother; in the pantry always put a saucer with milk to feed her... No one touched or disturbed this snake from home and for such an attitude to her there was always plenty in the house [16:134].

In Daghestan mythology, the snake is often endowed with useful magical qualities, unlike the serpent in the Adam and Eve story. Frequently snakes are pretty creatures with golden horns, protectors of the house and household. They live only in a happy house, at the base, directly opposite the central pillar of a large room. It is impossible to see them, but if someone succeeds this - the household will be happy [16:20].

Black

The colour black is generally associated with something impure, bad, or dark. David Hunt illustrated these associations in legends from Karachai folklore (about the villain Ogre, holding a black sword in a black chest [1:460; 17: 378].

Balkarians (about the daughter of the Sun and Moon of Satan, for whom the abduction of the God of the Sea became "the eclipse of the Moon and the Sun", grief from which her face became black [17: 306], the Adygs (about the villain Totaresh, who is moving the "mighty black army" across the Volga River in a "powerful black boat" [1: 460].

Red

The colour red appears to have the connotation of potency, and sometimes of poison [1: 460].

For instance, the Balkarian primordial blacksmith used red water for the tempering of steel. When the Balkarian epic heroine was a child she used to like playing with her "little red stones" (coral beads) [17: 597].

There is a tradition about a siren who sits on a "Red Crag" in the mountains of Georgia, "letting down her red hair and combing it with a large comb"; she calls to travelers, "Come to me", but if they do so they are likely to be eaten by the cannibal ogres. [18: 72].

There is an Avar tale in which a sorceress summons a herd of magic red cows, whose milk she used to rejuvenate some centenarians (but not the wicked king, who was drowned in it) [19: 106; 15: 159].

In some cases, poison is concocted from red creatures. The strong hero Narchkheu was courting a maiden whose brothers opposed the match and they decided to get rid of the hero by poison. For this they laced the wine with a red snake and a red frog, chopped into small pieces. Narchkheu persuaded the eldest brother to drink first, with dire results; but then he himself "strained the wine through his steel moustache", and so escaped its effects [20:75].

In the Daghestan Mountain-Jews' tale "Homol and his daughters", Shende, father of three daughters Nevoi ("Do not want"), Vesi ("Enough"), Besti ("No more"), was homol (had no son). In order to invoke God's mercy to give him a son, he followed the custom of his forefathers,

and began wearing a red "belt of childlessness" and a talisman from the rabbi "for a big cockerel, a jug of wine and money." When a year passed and the son did not appear, Shende began to reproach the rabbi. In his turn, he replied: "After giving such names to daughters, what did you want from God! If God does not give you children, what can I do?!" [14: 479-480].

There are various literary mentions of characters with red hair. There is some suggestion that this is associated with northern foreigners with red hair and blue eyes, possibly Russians or Scythians [1:460]. In the north-Caucasian Nart-literature there are legends involving a character called "Red-Haired Fuk", a kind of semi-deity who demanded sacrifices from the people, and if they hesitated he sent down a drought to punish them. He lived in a palace in the sky, but eventually the hero either flew there, was fired from a cannon or ascended in a balloon, and killed him.

The significance of the colour red can be summarized as neither good nor bad, but potent. This conclusion will be amplified in consideration of colour contrasts, below [1:461].

Some examples of colour contrasts.

White/black contrasting pairs. The most important associations with the white/black contrasting pair are good/bad or day/night.

An example of the first pair is the Georgian tale of the hero who was obliged to visit the world of the dead, and on his way he saw various strange sights, including a woman, bending over a hot oven (traditional Georgian bread ovens are cylindrical with their axis vertical). She was putting in white dough and the bread coming out was black: this was a punishment for her miserliness during her life, for refusing to give bread to beggars or hungry travelers [21:32].

An example of the second contrasting pair is the tale of a couple escaping from an ogre, using two horses, one black and the other white: "during the day nobody can outstrip the white one, nor at night the black one". [20:208].

An example of a mixture of the two pairs is the common motif of a hero being stranded in an underground world, after descending a well or the equivalent. He is warned that he will encounter two sheep: one black and one white. If he grabs the white one it will transport him to the upper "sunny world", whereas the black one will transport him to a lower world [21:25]. Of course, he unintentionally grabs the black one. [22:36, 128].

In other tales, there are three levels of other worlds, and again it is the white animal that would lift the hero to the sunny world.

Red/white contrasting pairs

For this pair, the individual colours tend to retain the associations that they have on their own, described above. In other words, the red option is potent or active; the white option is good, passive or possibly neutral with respect to the red.

Some examples are in an Adyge 'Nart' legend in which there is an amazing tree producing apples that are red on one side and white on the other side. It was said of the apple: If a barren woman tastes of the white side, then to her will be born a daughter. With hair silken white. If a barren woman tastes of the red side, then to her will be born a Nart son. A great son, a white son. With hair silken white [23: 12].

The idea of red for a boy and white for a girl fits in with the Adyge concept of a boy being active and a girl being passive. The white hair and the white son have the connotation of good, so that this one legend contains two different associations for the colour white.

In a Georgian folk tale, the hero discovers a crop of grapes, some red and some white. He discovered that by eating a few of the red grapes one was transformed to a donkey, while the white grapes transformed the donkey back to a human form. He uses these to take his revenge on a cheating princess, putting a halter on her and making her carry bricks [21: 80].

In another Georgian tale, two brothers are going hunting in the mountains. The elder brother persuades the younger one to hunt on "the white mountain; that is a good place and the animals are small. I will go on to the red mountain; there the animals are big and the place is dangerous" [21: 177]. .

Red/black contrasting pairs

Again, the colours tend to retain their connotations of potency for red, evil for black.

An example is a Georgian tale of an orphan boy who sees two snakes fighting, one red and the other black. The black one is stronger and chases the red snake in order to kill it. The orphan

hides the red snake and dismisses the black one; as a reward the red snake gives the boy one of its scales, with which the boy can make wishes that come true [21: 76].

White/red/black sequences.

With these sequences, the red generally takes an intermediate position between the white/black pair. This parallels the day/dusk/night sequence mentioned above.

For example, a Georgian legend describes the appearance in a mountain settlement of some evil spirits bringing diseases. "They arrived as a trio on three donkeys: black, red and white. The black donkey was loaded with arrows with black feathers on their ends, the red one with arrows with red feathers, and the white one with white feathers. The black-feathered arrow killed a man on the spot, the red one half-killed him, but the white one left him alive" [18: 114].

A Georgian folk tale describes the hero's duels with three ogres; in succession, a white one on a white horse, a red one on a red horse and a black one on a black horse [21: 143]. Here again there is a gradation of danger, with the black one being the most dangerous.

Another Georgian folk tale involves an evil ogre who can only be killed by locating and killing his external soul. [21: 22]. This is in three parts, residing in three little birds: the red bird contains his strength, the white bird his reason, and the black bird his actual soul. The symbolism here is not clear, except that the ogre was very strong but stupid, so that his most potent attribute was his strength contained in the red bird, which had to be killed first. His evil soul was contained in the black bird [1: 462].

An interesting costume example of this trio of colours is the colour of clothing traditionally worn by women among the Cherkess, Abkhaz and Chechens, according to Byhan [24: 140], white was worn by young girls, red by wives and blue for widows. It is tempting to interpret this as white for purity, lack of blemish, a 'blank page'; red for the potency of a woman in her child-bearing capacity; and blue for a woman with neither of the two potentials.

Other colours and their associations - gold.

There are some other colours that are significant in Caucasus folk literature.

The most common of these is probably gold. This is a complex symbol, since gold is also associated with wealth and value. Its more abstract associations are generally good and/or potent.

An example of the first abstract association is the epithet of the Karachay-Balkar culture hero and the primordial blacksmith: 'Debet the Golden'. Their epic heroine also had golden hair, and another of their main heroes carries a golden spear and wears a golden helmet [17: 375].

An example of the potency of gold items is contained in a Georgian legend about the hunting goddess who has golden hair [21: 134]. The goddess lives in a cave and starts a love affair with a hunter. While they are asleep his jealous wife comes and uses the goddess's golden scissors to cut off her golden hair, which she takes away; the result being that the goddess dies, but the fetus that she was carrying develops into the Georgian 'Prometheus'.

In another example of the potency of gold-coloured items, the hero is sent on a quest by his sick father to obtain, as medicine, a golden fish living in a golden trough and owned by a sorceress with long golden hair [17: 383].

Multi-colours

Another interesting 'colour' is specified as 'multi-coloured', without further detail. The importance of this may have been its association with the jewel-encrusted objects found in churches, particularly in Georgia, and therefore possibly having a religious or magic connotation.

Multi-colours are usually associated with potency or magic. In the traditional tale of the magician and his pupil, the magician, who is also named as the devil, has multi-coloured eyes [21: 109].

The Abkhaz hunting god-brothers, the Aergi, have a palace in the mountains that changes colour according to the weather; grey on a cloudy day and blue on a bright day [20: 65].

The icon of St. George and the dragon shown in Fig. 1 illustrates the multi-coloured depiction of the dragon, although it must not be considered as supporting evidence, since it may be considered as religious art rather than folk art.

Horse colours

The colours of horses fit into a special category, since there are many specialized names for the colours of horses; and moreover the wild Caucasus mountain landscape, with its few roads,

lends itself to a horse culture. However, the really exceptional legendary horses are generally either red or multi-coloured.

The first is often described by a phrase such as “red stallion, like a snow leopard” [25: 381].

The second may be ‘dappled’, such as the legendary horse Durdura [26:204] or a “horse with apples”, who was “the best horse of all” [23: 288] ; or the “chestnut stallion with a mouse-coloured back standing in an iron shed and eating iron, and his dung is of iron” [17: 559].

Symbols and symbolic value of colours in carpets and textiles

The following describes interpretations of the symbolism of the designs and motifs but not of the colours used. Often symbolic and/or mystical meaning is found not so much in the motifs themselves, as in their interpretation by the weavers. For example, in Lezgi carpet-sumakhs each element of the pattern is circled in black, and "hooks" or "running goose heads" on the curb of the carpet with yellow or white threads. It is difficult to say what is more significant here - the symbolism or aspirations of the carpet-weaver to highlight every component and/or the carpet as a whole.

Cosmic symbols

Introduction

Since ancient times, people have tried to represent the Cosmos, to explain the place of humans in it, to know the mysteries of the surrounding world, with its grace and danger. Humans had reasons to see Nature as stronger and more powerful, possessing an inexhaustible array of frightening forces. They sought to engage with that Cosmos in a variety of ways.

Today, we use electron microscopes and space probes, but the principles are the same – we seek to understand and influence the Universe to our advantage. This is a process central to human consciousness, whether we are discussing Paleolithic hunters living in caves or teams of researchers living in science cities. Whether we design computers or carpets, we enrich the global fabric of our existence. We would therefore argue that we need to encourage such expressions of tradition, for, in this process, local and global expressions enter into a dialogue with each other, one that enriches all. Another side of this argument is that Big History should also encourage and seek popular expressions of its insights, for, without such widespread and basic cultural understanding, it will not gain the wide support that the world so needs [27]. (Big history covers from the Big Bang to the present. Big History resists specialization, and searches for universal patterns or trends.)

Indigenous traditions may indicate not only topographical knowledge but also expansive views of the Cosmos. Microanalysis is required to discover an expression of social complexity that often mirrors the complexity of the larger Universe. In the Caucasus, as one of the important gateways between Europe and Asia, there are rich archeological sites, artifacts, cave paintings, spiritual beliefs, and folklore.

There are such components of material culture that can be classified according to evolutionary-stage and other criteria, but which, regardless of when, where and by what people they were produced, are as if outside the formation, time and ethnic boundaries. An example of this is carpets, on the basis of an analysis of the ornamental specifics of which researchers are trying to discover the uniqueness of the artistic consciousness of past epochs and the social environments in which they were created.

Carpets weaving appears to us as a kind of synthesis, the unity of the traditions of economic life, material and spiritual culture, folk art. It is suggested, that subconscious remembered heritage influences much more recent designs—in contrast, pre-factory weavers were not archeologists and did not have ancient models available.

Caucasian cosmos

According to the beliefs of the ancient peoples of Daghestan, the spatial structure of the Universe was a three-part system that consisted of an upper world (sky and heavenly bodies), a middle world (land and sea surfaces), and a lower world (underground or sea abyss). These worlds were the eternal or temporary abodes of gods, angels, demons, dragons, people, birds, animals, fish, and other fantastic or mundane creatures.

Within this Cosmos, people searched for answers to questions of their existence, for “an ideal reflection of themselves and their society” [28:42]. Most analysis is speculation, though pa-

ganism was described more convincingly as "...a chaotic collection of various beliefs [and] cults, but not a teaching...different rites...a heap of objects of religious veneration". Nonetheless, there was a clear division of pagan characters and objects on the basis of good and evil, as well as of rites aimed at teaching good and preventing evil, in order to protect the individual and the community from the influence of evil spirits [29:249].

Ancient Daghestani cosmogony gave important place to the sun, moon, sky, stars, rivers, sea, mountains, and atmospheric phenomena. Of the many folk stories, describing such concepts is the tale –

About a Girl Herding Sheep in the Sky

A poor man had three daughters. Once, he had a dream. An angel descended from the heavens and said to him that he must send one of the daughters to the sky to work as a shepherd, to feed the sheep. The owner of the sheep had a huge house with lots of rooms... In the first room she saw huge clay jugs. In one of the jars was the moon, in the other – the sun, in the third – the rain, in the fourth – the wind. When she opened the lid of one of the jugs and looked in, she saw a warm sunny day and her mother and father, who worked on the threshing floor. When the girl saw them she lowered her head into the pitcher.

While she flew to the ground, she turned into the sun's rays. They say that the sun's rays come from this girl. [15: 234-237].

It is arguable that ancient ideas are preserved in the traditional material and spiritual culture of people following the principle that nothing comes from nowhere. In Daghestan, such ancient motifs were gradually transformed in public consciousness under the influence of Islam, as well as Judaism and Christianity.

The harmony of solar and water elements – male (Sun) and female (Water).

This harmony can be seen in the image of rainbows. The combination of red and yellow in these rainbows reflect Daghestani folk sayings: "If a rainbow has a red color, expect a rich harvest" or "if the rainbow has a yellow color, there will be an abundant harvest of barley." [30: 56]. The Dargins say that "at the bottom of the rainbow there are golden scissors or a golden mortar and pestle, and one who takes possession of them will become rich and happy". The Tabasarans say: "if the ends of the rainbow are facing south, then this year will be fruitful. And if a person can go under the rainbow, then after death will fall into paradise. If a woman has been childless for a long time, and she managed to pass under the rainbow, then in nine months she will have a child, and this will be a son" [16:53]. They believed that passing under rainbow "provides a transition to a different state", that the rainbow was also perceived as the boundary between the worlds [31:9].

The red color of the rainbow (the symbol of the sun color, which was endowed with magical power) was especially prominent. According to the views of the Avars and Kumyks, red, orange colors - to rain, an abundance of wheat, i.e. to the harvest.

The Chechens say the Sun "rises from the sea and, in the evening, is again submerged. When it rises on the horizon [in the morning], it separates out of something black – that is, the people say, the sea merges with the sun [at night]. This [separation] continues until it [the Sun] rises up 300 fathoms [half a kilometer] over the sea, gradually heating-up and flashing. At this time, one can view it because, having bathed in the cold sea, it does not have time to overheat." [32: 161–162].

Astronomical bodies

In world mythologies, symbols of the sun and moon are diverse and multifaceted [33; 34].

A residual memory of the respect in which ancient peoples held astronomical bodies is preserved by the Abkhazians. It is popular among girls have their names associated with the name of the Sun and the Moon: "Amra" (Sun) or "Amza" (Moon). [35: 48].

Solar symbols, in Daghestan, as noted above, are often used in cave drawings and on carpets, felt items, jewelry, female tattoos, wooden spoon-boxes and other wooden items found in home interiors, bearing pillars, stone facades of houses and defensive structures, and tombstones [36-53].

The sacredness of the Sun was typical for the North Caucasus peoples. This was reflected in the norms of society. For example, the old rules of Chechen etiquette made a person walking from the

solar side more important in communication, so it was necessary to first welcome a man by moving from the sun-rising side [54:36].

The Daghestani preserve such expressions today: “I swear by the Sun” or “I swear by the Sun’s glare”.

North Ossetian archaeologist Evgeniya Pchelina wrote: “Even in the beginning of the XX century, in the most remote parts of Ossetia, a round flat bread was carried ahead of the borne stretcher of a dead man; with a diameter of up to half a meter, it was called ‘Soti,’ which symbolized ‘the Sun of the dead’ [55:148].

Water

There are also fantastical stories about heroes that are related to the element of water, those who overcome rivers and seas, mountains and forests, fly on the wings of birds, ascend to heaven, go down into the underworld, to the bottom of the sea, drink a lake or sea, fight with monsters, dragons, and giants with supernatural powers. Water is one of the fundamental elements of the universe. In various mythologies water is the primary source, the initial state of all things, the equivalent of a primitive chaos...water is the symbol of the great Mother, and is associated with birth, the female sex, the womb of the universe...the waters of fertility and freshness, the source of life. Water dissolves, destroys, cleans, “washes away” and restores. Water returns to life and gives new life. [56: 39].

In spite of the fact that water-motifs are related to birth and fertility, water is also perceived as a symbol of danger and a metaphor for death [57: 240].

Among the mythological characters associated with water is the Mother of Water. She was called the Su-anasy by the Kumyks, Dedey-ol by the Mountain Jews, and Azhdaha (water-defending dragons) by other Daghestani peoples.

According to the ancient beliefs of the Laki people, in the mountains of Daghestan, the sea is home of “Misidu” – a young woman of incredible beauty, with long green hair, who lures men with her diabolical beauty and charming voice into the water and kills them. [58:79-80].

The Kumyk spirit, Suvanasi (Mother of Water), had the image of a woman of great stature and great physical strength. She lived in the rivers and guarded the water, but people would have to deal with her only at night. In the darkness, she could stun anyone who carelessly walked to the water and drown them. It was believed that Suvanasi could even come out of water and fight with people [59: 162].

There are echoes of such pagan water beliefs among the Chechen and Ingush peoples: “In the murmuring of mountain creeks dwells Chi-Nana...a water spirit [who] sympathizes with people and warns them of calamities that await them. Being part of society and grasping their misery, she weeps bitterly and miserably sings songs that are similar to the wail over the dead.” [32: 86–87].

Among the Adyghe of the northwestern Caucasus, there was belief in the spirit, Psiho-Guashe (Mistress of the River). She was seen as a beautiful woman, on the bank of a river or the sea, in the heat of the day, combing her hair. Psiho-Guashe was capable of loving a mortal, joining with him in marriage, and being a faithful and loving wife, capable of bringing him happiness and joy [32: 170].

The Mother of Water also circulated among the Mountain Jews of Daghestan. Serovi (The Head of Water) or, as she is otherwise called, Dedeyol (Mother of the Water). “[She] has the image of the air – a virgin, as white as snow. In the moonlight she sits over a spring and protects the water from people throwing in their uncleanness. Sometimes Serovi attracts young people and drowns them in the water, but does not touch old people. According to the belief of the people, Serovi is terribly afraid of steel and runs away at the sight of it. Therefore, when coming at night for water, take anything of steel, all the time waving it in the air and over the spring. In view of this, the majority of men and women wear bulat-steel rings on the big toe. In the dark night, Serovi transforms and floats out over the water in the form of a black mist” [60: 58–59].

Symbols on carpets, as well as on other objects of material culture are not just stylized and naturalistic images of animals, birds, many-legged creatures, swastikas, flowers, circles, crosses, diamonds, etc.

Carpets can be viewed as a carrier of information, as a reflection of the memory of the skill of the creators of certain objects, evidence of skill, knowledge, consciousness, understanding of the universe, perception of the departed (and now living) generations, the universe, habitats, specific eco-

logical niches. It is locally widely known, for example, that swastikas and spinning wheels symbolize the Sun. The names of types of Daghestan carpets (rukzal/ houses (Avar.), Azhdaha/ dragon (for all Daghestani languages) and ornamental elements (katilbet'er / cat head, (gozo / beak (Avar.), (gyulyagdin kval / snake house (Lezgin.)), directly indicate what they symbolize.

Colour symbolism

The traditional approach to the analysis of colour symbolism is to look for associations between a colour and a meaningful symbol. Thus, for example, red might be associated with blood, blue with sadness, and so on. Whilst this approach can yield useful results, a more fruitful approach is often that of structural anthropology, in which colour combinations or colour contrasts are studied.

While in folklore there appears to be significance attached to various colours, this is likely to be because the narrator has a free and authentic choice in his directed imagination, whereas most weavers are governed by the availability of dyes.

Social organization of production of Carpets and textiles of the Caucasus

Carpets and textiles in silk and wool and cotton have been inter alia grouped by their means of production. Designed Court carpets with the most sophisticated colour ranges are related to Court miniature painters. Town production frequently consists of crude copies of Court rugs. Village and nomadic production are related to folk and tribal memory, and from what survives, they are generally more or less derivative. Any colour symbolism is accordingly likely to be present in Court production, which is virtually unknown in the Caucasus as opposed to the more powerful and dominant Ottoman or Persian or Egyptian Courts. There is also a difference between rugs and textiles made for home and family use and the more mechanical designs of export wares. Regrettably, one has to make the negative comment that, after 30 years of study of these surviving rugs and textiles, there does not appear to be any discernable symbolic content in the use of colours.

Brief survey of surviving rugs and textiles from the Caucasus

The legendary huge garden carpet of the Sassanian Persian King Khosrows, who built the double walls of Derbent during the sixth century AD, only exists in textual reference. The earliest surviving rugs and textiles are likely to date from the 16th century. There are so-called 'dragon carpets' and 'palmette carpets' of large dimensions, which now appear to have been made nearer to Heriz in Persia for technical reasons in the weaving. However there are later 18th century examples of the design in smaller rugs with cotton and red-wool wefts, which are called Shirvan (see Fig. 2). This group has been named 'pastiche rugs' because the same technical group—all about the same size, have individuated copies of Classical Persian Court rug designs [53]. There are also groups of silk embroideries called West Caspian, with versions of these designs in both satin-stitch and cross-stitch.

In the 1930's the anti-Kulak purges and state control of designs virtually stopped independent village production, in favour of a Sovietized product imported by Kelaty&Co in north London. The main final export of old rugs from the Caucasus was by Stalin during World War Two: he was desperate for funds and sold rugs by the train truck-load to Mr. Ganz-Ruedin, a Swiss dealer.

During the late 1980s and early 1990's three further discoveries were documented.

Firstly, Kaitag silk embroideries (Fig. 3) (for protecting a baby in a cradle from the evil eye, wrapping bridal dowry jewellery, and covering the face of the dead and as cushion covers in other mourning rituals) from Daghestan, the earliest dated to the 16th–17th centuries because they are accurate copies of Ottoman silk velvets and brocades [61].

Secondly, 5m long Davaghins and Dums (Fig. 4), long tapestry-woven woollen rugs hung horizontally by leather loops on mountain-side home walls. Their typical palette is an indigo blue ground with red designs outlined in yellow white and or brown, with small use of other colours. Dums and davaghins are known by both names and were woven by Avars and Kumyks in central Daghestan. Davaghins and Dums usually have blue backgrounds dyed with imported indigo from India via Central Asia, from the east beyond the Caspian, i.e., they were dyers' or exotic rugs [47].

Thirdly, there is a range of felts from the north Caucasus. Most striking are the appliqué or painted masks used in popular 'magic' events-cum-theatre that can represent several characters such as the 'cruel khan'. Burkhas, hairy felt capes are usually black from natural lanoline-saturated Andi sheep wool, and there are festival burkhas in white wool. However, a woman's corpse being taken to her burial in Archi village in Daghestan was covered in a black burka; in the mountains of

Georgia, Khevsurs photographed by G. Nioradze in the 1920s [62] carried a corpse wrapped in a broad-striped kilim (slit tapestry weave); and another corpse was laid wearing his papakha hat on a rug during the funeral horse races. There are felt mosaic arbabashes, cart covers, with curling vegetal designs; and similar horn designs on Chechen yistangs, felt mosaic rugs for the wall of the main room of a stair-less Chechen blood-feud siege tower.

Local madder dye

The Caucasus was subdued by Tsarist Russia from ca. 1800 to 1865, with the mountaineers holding out longest. From about 1807, madder (whose roots produce a vibrant red, or with different mordants a range from brown to orange to pink to purple, and even a finishing dye for blacks), which still grows wild, was grown industrially especially on the plains near Derbent and this increased from the 1830s, hand-in-hand with an increase in the Russian and local weaving industries, for export from the Baku and Derbent and Elizabetpol (Ganje) regions to Russia and the British Empire—typical examples are small Daghestan prayer rugs and ‘soumakhs’, weft-float brocade rugs. For example, Lanercost Priory in Cumbria still has two Derbent soumakhs from the late 19th century in front of the altar. Only one of these export rugs has ever been recorded as found in a local house—a ‘star-burst Kazak’ from Azerbaijan in a Laki house in a Daghestan mountain village. The dominant color in Daghestan carpets was red with its various shades. The strongest dye for this color is the roots of local madder. The madder industry—a five-year root harvest—was so profitable that the price of bread shot up, as there resulted a relative shortage of wheat [63]. The introduction of chemical dyes during the 1870s led to the collapse of the madder industry, because after some initial difficulties, synthetic alizarin cost a tenth of the price of madder and was more convenient to use. In turn, this led to a greater urbanization of production for export by foreign-owned firms such as OCM.

Other local dyes

Combinations of some plants or walnut and oak bark with iron sulfate gave a black color. Brown tones were obtained from the use of leaves and bark of a nut, bark of an oak tree. White color was usually a matching natural wool color. For dyeing yarns in blue and green colors, indigo was used. The green color was obtained by immersing the previously yarn-dyed yarn in an indigo infusion.

To obtain different tones of red color, cochineal (dried small insect bodies that occur on Mount Ararat, Poland and best known in Mexico and Central America) was less commonly used as the dye.

Colour frequency

An approximation of the frequency of appearance of colours can be estimated from the largest areas of a rug or textile—the background—as opposed to the designs; meaning the background of the central field as opposed to the borders. About 80% are various reds and pinks (local madder), over 10% blue (imported indigo) and less than 10% are white (undyed), yellow (local weld or alpine rhododendron), brown (natural or local madder) and black (walnut skins or Chechen willow), and rarely green (yellow over-dyed with blue) or purple (a madder), which are more complicated dyes. There are hundreds of other plant dyes, but they are found in small quantities.

There are a few obvious symbols, such as green for paradise or Islam, which was not very pervasive in Daghestan until the 19th century. However, green is rarely found. Red was long considered a sumptuary colour in Europe and it was fortuitous that it was also the most readily available colour in the Caucasus. European Renaissance paintings of the Virgin and Child often feature an Ottoman Turkish imported red rug at the feet of her throne. While there were Turkish and Persian rug imports and export orders to Britain from late 16th century, there were no Caucasian rugs imported until 19th century. There are many theories of the symbolic meaning of red (madder) but in the Caucasus the use of red must rather be considered in terms of availability of local dyestuff. Also, similar designs are found with a variety of background colours and design colour schemes. The visual reason is that rugs and textiles were locally seen purely as luxurious decor, and there was no particular significance attached to colour or design.

In addition none of the felt colours have particular significance, except for the white festival burka, which may well have been a Soviet introduction. For example, local villagers in ca. 1990 threw out old family rugs with excellent designs and colours because they were worn. In one village a rare ‘zilu’ compound weave rug was used to keep the rain off a hay stack, and in another village a Da-

vaghin with a 16th–17th century Turkish village overall palmette design was used under the milking pail.

Of the few hundred Kaitag embroideries known, a white cotton ground is common, with blue and more rarely other colours. Also an irregular patchwork of different coloured oblongs was popular. This is not because of shortages, as one example has a patchwork on the front with an entire green lining on the back. It is both the range of palette and the juxta-positioning of colours that are often considered the signature of a craftsman or district.

While this is evident to the experienced eye, no computerized analysis of this complex phenomenon has been attempted. It would appear that, if there had been a symbolic significance in the colours of Caucasian rugs and textiles, it has been lost for several hundred years.

Conclusions.

The symbolism of colour can be a rather confusing subject, partly because some colours have different associations in different contexts. An attempt has been made in this paper to analyze colours in pairs or sequences, in order to bring some order to this confusion. It is clear from the analyses that the associations of colours are relatively abstract, such as ‘active’ or ‘passive’, and that simplifications into simple concrete associations are unlikely to be found, except in some specific cases. An advantage of using oral folk literature examples is that during their oral transmission the motifs have developed over centuries or even millennia, thereby developing colour symbolism according to popular intuition.



Fig. 1. 15th century icon of St. George. Cloisonné enamelwork (reproduced by permission of the Georgian State Museum of Art)

Рис. 1. Икона Св. Георгия. XV в. перегородчатая эмаль (воспроизведено с разрешения Государственного музея искусств Грузии)



Fig. 2. Late 18th century Shirvan dragon rug—pastiche style
(Acknowledgement, Friedrich Spuhler, Museum of Islamic Arts, Berlin)

Рис. 2. Конец XVIII в. Ширванский ковер с драконами в стиле пастич
(Благодарность Фридриху Шпулеру, Музей исламского искусства, Берлин)



Fig. 3. 18th century Kaitag silk embroidery on a patchwork cotton ground-mirror design of microcosmic mounds, heaven and lightning, or rain, and a cosmic axis

Рис.3. Кайтагская шелковая вышивка XVIII в. на хлопковой тканой основе с зеркальным изображением мелких небесных тел, молнии и дождя, мировой оси



Fig. 4. 19th century Davaghin – tapestry-woven Avar rug with a Yistang Chechen appliquer felt ram's-horned motif

Рис. 4. «Давагин» – аварский гладкотканый ковер с рисунком на мотив «бараньи рога» чеченского войлочного ковра «Истанги»

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