

Carpet Weaving on the Territory of Kazakhstan as a Reflection of the Traditional Worldview of Nomads

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The article deals with issues related to the tradition of carpet production on the territory of Kazakhstan where, for the most part, tribes engaged in nomadic livestock raising lived. Analyzing the technological component of this traditional craft, the author focuses on the main factor that influenced carpet weaving along with arts and crafts—the nomadic method of production of the Kazakhs. The study of the ideological component that accompanies the process of making various types of carpets allows us to conclude that it has a sacred meaning and subordination to myth, rite, and ritual. At the mythmaking level, the process of making carpets, like any other activity among nomads, personified the process of creating the world, the marriage of Kok-Tengri (Heaven) and Zher-Su (Earth), and the creation of the Cosmos from Chaos. The process of carpet weaving, as well as the process of making felt, symbolized the act of creation, the marriage of Heaven and Earth, and male and female principles. The study of various types of ornaments that Kazakhs and their ancestors used to decorate carpets allows us to conclude that the ornament applied to carpet products was the bearer of the most valuable information about the mythological worldview of the people. Carpets in their structure reproduced the structure of the Universe, which has a binary, ternary, and quaternary system. The ornament has turned into a kind of coded text, reflecting ideas about the cosmogonic structure of the Universe and an awareness of the harmony of the world. The location of Kazakhstan on the northern routes of the Sogdian Road (Great Silk Road) allowed the spread of various ideas, due to which carpet weaving was influenced by other peoples in technical and stylistic design.

Keywords: Kazakh traditional carpets, felt, Kazakh national ornament, nomadic culture, the Great Silk Road

Introduction

Carpet weaving, as a kind of arts and crafts, is an expression of the spiritual culture of any people, including nomadic tribes living in Kazakhstan since ancient times. Along the Great Silk Road, the northern routes of which passed through Kazakhstan, not only goods were transferred, but also religious, scientific, architectural, and musical ideas. The mutual influence and interaction of cultures were reflected both in the manufacturing techniques and in the ornamental designs of carpets. Echoes of this influence can still be seen today. For example, the traditional carpets of East Kazakhstan differ in many ways from the carpets of South Kazakhstan. This can be explained by a number of factors that have been traced since antiquity, such as natural and climatic conditions, the prevailing type of management, and the influence of neighboring settled agricultural cultures. So, in the composition of the carpets of the Mangystau region (western part of Kazakhstan), Turkmen motifs are traced and in the carpets of South Kazakhstan, Sogdian ones.

At the same time, each nation formed its own stable traditions of the ornamental design of carpet products as a result of the aesthetic development of the material world. It seems that the formation of these traditions among the Kazakhs was significantly influenced by the nomadic mode of production as a mechanism for adaptation to the environment. Today, the traditional ornament in arts and crafts is a form of artistic self-expression of the Kazakhs as well as a part of the ethnic, cultural, and civilizational identity of the people.

Literature Review

At present, significant archaeological and ethnographic material has been accumulated, illustrating the spread of technologies in the manufacture of carpet products. This material demonstrates the mutual influence and degree of distribution of ornaments used in arts and crafts along the Great Silk Road. The origins of the arts and crafts of the Turkic tribes on the territory of Kazakhstan date back to ancient times, as evidenced by archaeological excavations dating back to the Neolithic era (Zajbert 2011). Huge material for study is contained in the finds of the Saka (Akishev 1978; Samashev 2018), Usun (Akishev and Kushaev 1963), and Old Turkic (Arslanova 1969; Zuev 2002) periods. A detailed analysis of the oldest surviving pile carpet dating back to the 5th century BCE, discovered in the Pazyryk burial mound in Altai, with versions of its origin are given in the works of S.I. Rudenko (1961), N.N. Semenovich (1956), and N.V. Polos'mak and L.L. Barkova (2005). The study of M.P. Grjaznov (1958) is devoted to the analysis of carpet patterns, their style, semantics, yarn, and performance technique, which confirms the cultural ties of the peoples of Altai,

Persia, the Near East, and the Mediterranean along with the issue of borrowing mythological plots in ornament.

These archaeological finds can serve as an illustration of the idea of a “double wave” of trade and migration flows that affected the socio-cultural processes of ancient society. The first wave is the movement of the Indo-European Tocharo-Yuezhi tribes (Saks) during the 2nd-1st millennia BCE from west to east from Western Asia. The second wave went from east to west from the 2nd century BCE, when part of the Tocharo-Yuezhi tribes, having been defeated by the Xiongnu, began to move from the Sayano-Altai Highlands in East Turkestan and Semirechye to Central Asia and conquered ancient Bactria (Dasya). The population of Eastern Turkestan, Altai, and Semirechye was one of the centers of the Tocharo-Yuezhi and then the Turkic-Sogdian culture, where the Sogdians played a decisive role in the formation of the Great Silk Road, which, in many written sources, is called the Sogdian road.

The settlement of the Yuezhi nomadic tribes spread not only on the territory of Altai but also on the territory of East Turkestan and Semirechye, where a rich ornamental culture was recorded in the early Middle Ages. This is evidenced by numerous archaeological finds of fragments of carpet products in the oases of East Turkestan in the Lop Nor region, such as in the Turfan, Khotan, and Khami oases (Vostochnyj Turkestan 1995, 51-54). The found material provides valuable information on the history of textile production and carpet weaving, the products of which were used, in particular, in funeral rites. The found fragments date back to different periods, namely from the 4th-8th centuries CE. Also, the description of carpet products and decoration of yurts is contained in the notes of medieval travelers Fazlallakh ibn Ruzbikhan and Wilhelm Rubruk (Puteshestvija 1993).

Moreover, ethnographic analysis, classification, description, and semantics of objects of decorative and applied art are contained in the works of art historians and ethnographers of the 19th-20th centuries (ethnographic works of A. Levshin (1832), I. Altynsarin (1970), R. Karutz (1911), G. Potanin (Kazakh folklore 1972) Additional scientific research by A.H. Margulan (1986), M.S. Mukanov (1979), Sh. Zh. Tokhtabayeva (2005, 2008, 2017) is devoted to various aspects of the decorative and applied art of the Kazakhs of the 18th-20th centuries. Finally, a huge layer of research is connected with the analysis of Turkic writing, reflecting the worldview of the nomads of Eurasia during the existence of the Turkic Khaganates. These include academic papers by V.V. Radlov (1892-1899), S.E. Malov (1959), S.G. Klyashtorny (1964, 1977), I. V. Stebleva (1965), A. Amanzholov (2003), A. Shcherbak (1970), and Y. Zuev (2002).

Undoubtedly, the development of a strategy for studying the traditional material culture of the Kazakhs is impossible without studying the essence and patterns of the functioning of the nomadic civilization on the territory of Kazakhstan. Definitely, Kazakhs were one of the largest nomadic peoples on the territory of Eurasia and, to the greatest extent, preserved a nomadic way of life until the 1920s. This was written in the first half of the 20th century by V. Sokolovsky, a member of the expedition that explored the essence of the Kazakh *aul* or village (Sokolovsky 1926, 4). According to N. Masanov, the largest specialist in nomadism, who made a significant contribution to the study of the nomadic civilization of the Kazakhs,

the analysis of the cultural and everyday realities of the nomadic Kazakhs is the key to the study of the “society-nature” system (Masanov 1995, 5).

For the first time, various aspects of the economic and everyday life of the Kazakhs are described in Russian historiography of the 18th-19th centuries (scientific notes by A. Vamberi (2003), P. Pallas (1773), and A. Levshin (1832)). Since the middle of the 19th century, with the beginning of the activities of the Russian Geographical Society, such works by researchers of the Kazakh steppe as Ch. Valikhanov (1984-1985) and G. Potanin (1867) have been actively published. The study of nomadic cattle breeding from the point of view of natural and climatic conditions can be traced to the scientific research of N. Krasovsky (1868) and M. Chormanov (1871). While in the 20th century, the range of nomadic researchers from the point of view of possibilism and geographical determinism has expanded significantly. Among the huge number of studies, one can distinguish the works of Arnold J. Toynbee (2001), K. Akishev (1972), S. Vainshtein (1973), A. Khazanov (1975), N. Masanov (1995), and Zh. Abylkhozhin (1991).

Valuable studies of the religious beliefs of nomads on the territory of Kazakhstan in the Middle Ages and the Modern Age are the works of Ch. Valikhanov (1985), L. Potapov (1991), and E.L. Lvova, I.V. Oktyabrskaya, A.M. Sagalaev, and M.S. Usmanova (1988). Also, the philosophy of the nomad's dwelling, the yurt, as a reflection of the cosmic structure in the view of ancient people and the semantic meaning of this or that ornament used in arts and crafts are studied in the works of E.L. Lvova, I.V. Oktyabrskaya, A.M. Sagalaev, and M.S. Usmanova (1988), M. Mukanov (1981), and Zh.K. Karakuzova and M.Sh. Hasanov (1993). Among them, Valikhanov (1985) in his work characterizes shamanism as "worship of nature." Islam, having come to Kazakhstan, gradually supplanted earlier beliefs, such as shamanism and Tengrism, the echoes of which were shamanic rituals and worship of Tengri. It should be noted that even in the 20th century, rituals dating back to shamanism, Zoroastrianism, and Mazdaism have been preserved in the traditional culture of the Kazakhs. Furthermore, analyzing extensive ethnographic material, Potapov (1991, 307) explores the phenomenon of shamanism among the peoples of Altai as “formed in a natural, historical way on an unwritten basis, within the framework of an ancient dualistic worldview based on the veneration of nature and its elemental, cosmic forces.”

Lastly, an important source of studying the material culture of the Kazakhs, in particular carpet weaving on the territory of Kazakhstan, are museum funds that have collected collections of decorative and applied art. Significant work on the collection, systematization, and classification of carpets on the territory of Kazakhstan in the period from the 18th century to the 1970s was done by the Central State Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which released, in 2012, a scientific catalog containing information on 265 units of Kazakh traditional carpets (Kazakhskie kovry 2012). Collections of traditional carpets are stored in such museums of Kazakhstan as the East Kazakhstan Regional Museum of Ethnography, the State Museum of Arts named after Kasteev, the Atyrau Museum of Decorative and Applied Arts, and the Museum of Local History in Astana among others.

Research Methods

This paper uses a philosophical, cultural, and semiotic approach in the analysis of the traditional worldview of the nomads of Kazakhstan through the prism of making various types of carpets. The study is conducted using archaeological, historical, and ethnological material at the interdisciplinary level. The methodological basis for the study includes several principles:

First. The civilizational approach to the study of a nomadic society allows us to talk about the interaction of environmental and socio-economic factors when the geographical landscape, ecological environment, and natural and climatic conditions affect the main parameters of the life of society and the material production system affects the environment and changes it (Masanov 1995, 3). From this point of view, nomadism, as a cultural and historical phenomenon, is a specific form of human adaptation to specific environmental conditions (Masanov 1995, 4). In this regard, the study of the worldview foundations of material and spiritual culture, including arts and crafts, seems possible through the prism of the interaction of a nomad with the environment and the system of material production and the geographical environment. In other words, a specific form of material production, determined by natural and climatic conditions, forms a specific lifestyle and value system.

Second. An important feature of the nomadic culture was that the main life support channel was a diachronic way of transferring information and property. The experience of ecological adaptation and the values of material and spiritual culture were passed from one generation to another, from father to son, from son to grandson, etc. There is a priority of genealogical links in the sphere of public consciousness (Masanov 1995, 238-239). This allows us to conclude that the same cultural values have been reproduced over the centuries. This applies to both ritual practice and the canons of arts and crafts. This process of reproduction of the culture of the Kazakhs was interrupted in the 1920-30s when during the years of collectivization, nomadic cattle breeding as a mode of production was completely destroyed. As a result of the actions of the command-administrative system, about 40% of the Kazakh population died from famine. Since that time, the process of transferring information from father to son or from mother to daughter has practically ceased, and, accordingly, the original meaning of traditional values in both material and spiritual culture has been gradually lost.

Third. Before talking about the traditional worldview of nomads, it is necessary to define the term “worldview.” As a rule, a worldview is understood as a system of views on the world, nature, and society, that is, on the surrounding world as a whole. This is quite a broad understanding of what a worldview is. Exploring traditional societies, it is necessary to focus on understanding the worldview as the spiritual mastery of the universe from the point of view of the relationship between nature and man. That is, a worldview is a system of images and ideas focused on the relationship between the natural world and the human world, between macrocosm and microcosm (Chanyshv 1982, 38). The initial, or lower level of such spiritual assimilation of the world is the figurative-representational-associative-emotional level (39). At this level, the worldview can be expressed both in non-verbal (arts and crafts,

painting, music, etc.) and in abstract and verbal forms (folklore, ritual songs, myths). That is, art, mythology, folklore, and religious beliefs, as well as collective ideas and attitudes, are related to the worldview.

Important components of the world model of the ancient Turks are space-time representations. Undoubtedly, the attempt to reconstruct the spatiotemporal structure of the world has a certain danger of oversimplification and schematization in comparison with what probably took place in reality. At the same time, such schematization allows us to visualize the worldview of our ancestors. The complexity of the study lies in the lack of written sources illustrating the worldview attitudes of the ancient nomads. Nonetheless, the ancient Turkic runic manuscripts are of great value in the study of this issue, allowing us to reconstruct the mythological representations of the early Turks. At the same time, it must be taken into account that the nomadic culture was largely “oral” in nature. Therefore, folklore is the main source for the study of nomadic Turkic peoples. Such sources include epic tales, shamanic songs, legends and traditions, proverbs, sayings, riddles, and ritual songs (Lvova et al. 1988, 14).

Fourth. Material culture (“the world of things”), minimalistic in its content due to the high level of mobility of nomads, is also a valuable source for studying the worldview of the nomadic Turkic peoples. Dwellings, clothing, tools, household items, weapons, carpets—everything is filled with a certain meaning, which is revealed in semiotic analysis. Traditional etiquette that regulates the location of family members in the yurt determines the relationship between relatives according to the hierarchical system of kinship, regulates meeting and seeing off guests, and other ritual behavior—all this is a kind of “text” that allows you to study the worldview attitudes of people (Lvova et al. 1988, 15).

Fifth. Another important aspect of the study of worldview is that the kinship of the language, origin, culture, and type of economic activity of the Turkic-speaking peoples on the territory of Central Asia, Kazakhstan, and South Siberia allows us to project the conclusions drawn from the results of an ethnographic study of one ethnic group onto the culture of a related ethnic group.

Discussion of Results

Before turning to the study of the semantics of the design of nomadic carpet products, it should be noted that the study of this type of arts and crafts would be impossible without understanding the philosophy of the material world in a nomadic environment, the center of which was a yurt (*bakan*, *kerege*, or *kara shanyrak*), as well as tribal sanctuaries and territory (mountains, rivers), the hierarchy of clans, and archetypal attitudes within the clan and the animal world. From a rational point of view, the yurt was the oldest dwelling of nomads adapted to the nomadic way of life. This type of dwelling was completely subordinated to the life rhythm of the nomad. The yurt, together with all the decoration, could be quickly assembled and just as quickly disassembled, provided that it was necessary to constantly

move during the entire annual cycle of nomads.

At the same time, it is necessary to understand that the material world of the nomadic Turks was realized through cosmological ideas or the space-time model of the world. These ideas were based on such religious beliefs as shamanism and Tengrism. Even Islam, actively supported by Russian politics, has not been able to supplant these beliefs. A. Vamberi (2003, 235), describing his journey through Central Asia in 1863, noted that "Islam among the nomads of Central Asia changed only the outward form of the old religion. What the sun, fire, and other phenomena of nature used to be, now Allah and Muhammad have become, but in the depths the nomad is still the same as 2000 years ago, and his character can only change when he replaces his light yurt with a strong house, built by hard work, that is, when he ceases to be a nomad."

S. Klyashtorny (1977) in the ancient Turkic texts identifies six mythological plots, correlated with three myth-making cycles, among which the myth of the creation and structure of the world is of interest to us, first of all. This myth is set forth in the opening lines of the inscriptions in honor of Kül-tegin and Bilge-Kagan (8th century): "When the blue sky was created above and the brown earth below, the sons of men were created between both of them" (120). The sky as part of the cosmos is referred to in runic texts as "Kok Tengri" - "Blue Sky." The middle world, opposed to the "Blue Sky," is represented by the deity "Zher-Su" - "Earth -Water." An obligatory attribute of the Middle World is a vertically sacralized mountain peak inside which there is an ancestral cave ("Holy Ötüken Mountains") (122). The lower world is represented by its lord Erilig (Erklig), mentioned, in particular, in "Yrk bitig" - "The Book of Divination" (9th century) (Klyashtorny 1981).

The vertical structure of the world, which implies the presence of a top, middle, bottom, is most fully realized in the image of the worldfamily tree - the Tree of Life (World Mountain). The upper world is the crown of the tree, the sky, the stars, the top of the mountain, the source of the river, and the bird. The lower/night world is personified by the roots of the tree, the Milky Way, water, animals that live in holes/caves, and horned animals. The middle world is a tree trunk, a valley, a person, and animals "with warm breath" (Lvova et al. 1988, 22).

This structure is also reproduced in images associated with Altaic shamanism. Thus, images on shaman drums included drawings that symbolized ideas about the three-term division of the Universe. As L. Potapov (1991, 193-194) writes, "the celestial sphere with its luminaries, rainbow, clouds, the Milky Way has always been depicted in the upper part of the tambourine. On the left side was placed the sun, called the mother, on the right - the moon, called the father. Usually, under the celestial sphere there was a transverse strip - the earth, with a broken line in the middle, symbolizing the mountains. Under the image of the earth, the field of the tambourine was assigned to depict the characters of the underworld. Earthly spirits in the form of animals and birds were drawn above the strip of earth, but below the heavenly bodies."

In addition to the vertical structure of spaces, in the Turkic tradition, there is a horizontal division of the world. The creators of the ancient Turkic runic manuscripts imagined the

earth as a square space, inhabited along the edges by peoples hostile to the Turks. The center of the world was the “sacred Ötüken Mountains,” inhabited by the Turks, it was the residence of the Turkic Kagans from where they went on campaigns “forward,” “backward,” “right,” and “left” to conquer the “four corners of the world” (Klyashtorny 1977, 122). The cardinal directions are indicated by the oppositions “right-left” and “front-back.” In the center of the horizontal structure is the World Tree (Lvova et al. 1988, 24). This structure is reproduced both in the worldview and in material culture.

Furthermore, the life rhythm of the nomad was associated with a yearly nomadic cycle, starting in early spring and ending in late autumn. Vamberi (2003) wrote in his diaries: “The picture of the life of a nomad opened up to me in its entirety, and when I started talking about this restless wandering life with one woman, she said to me, laughing: ‘We can’t be as lazy as you and sit in one place all day! The person must move. Look, the sun, the moon, the stars, the water, the animals, the birds, the fish, everything is moving. Only the dead and the earth immovable.’” That is, the nomad represented themselves as an organic part of the natural world of things, an element of the natural movement.

Another aspect that must be taken into account in the study of material culture is the system of rituals as the organizing principle of the life of the team. Any creative activity (hunting, harvesting, the beginning and end of the nomadic cycle, baking bread, meat harvesting, etc.) was sanctioned not only by the real needs of society but also by ritual. Ritualization also extended to the sphere of domestic crafts. So, among the Southern Altaians, felt rolling was accompanied by a ritual appeal to felt: “Be strong, like the forehead of a three-year-old bull! Be strong like the rump of a wild three-year-old horse!” (Lvova et al. 1988, 113).

At present, in the Kazakh ethnographic literature, there are such typologically significant features in the classification of carpet products as the material used, manufacturing technique, and practical purpose. Based on these features, the following types of carpets are distinguished: pile carpets (*qaly kilem*), lint-free carpets (*taqyr kilem*), sewn-woven carpets (*alasha*), wall carpets (*tuskilem*), and small-form carpet products (Kazakhskie kovry 2012, 22). Depending on the manufacturing technique, Kazakh carpets are usually divided into lint-free (*taqyr kilem* - literally translated as “bald carpet”) and nap carpets (*qaly kilem* or *tükti kilem*). In addition, there are carpets woven (by hand or on a loom) and non-woven, made from dried sheep’s wool (Mukanov 1979, 48). For example, the nomads of Eurasia were the first to master the unique technique of making felt from sheep’s wool, as evidenced by archaeological materials from the Pazyryk burial mounds of the Altai Mountains, where, due to the phenomenon of permafrost, the remains of woven fabric, felt, and pile carpets of nomadic tribes were preserved (Rudenko 1961, 10-30). The carpets found in Pazyryk belong to a nomadic culture that also shaped the cultures of Kazakhstan and East Turkestan.

Felt turned out to be a unique material—light, soft, breathable, retaining heat, and impervious to moisture and became widely used in everyday life in the manufacture of clothes, covers, and bags as well as decorating the floor, walls, and the outside of the yurt. Among the felt products, there were floor carpets - *tekemet* and *syrmak*, which were in almost

every house, wall carpets - *tuskiiž*, canvases for covering the outside of the lattice walls of the yurt - *tuyrlyk*, for the dome of the yurt - *uzik*, for the dome hole - *tundyk*, and stripes for decorating the yurt outside - *dodege*, along with a felt canopy - *esykezhapkysb* (Tokhtabayeva 2008, 36). In Kazakhstan, the practice of making felt carpets was widespread throughout the entire territory. Practically in every house they used floor carpets - *tekemet*, which were made from sheep's wool of autumn shearing, since such wool was well compacted. The wool was then cleaned, dyed with natural dyes, and dried.



Figure 1. *Tekemet*, felt floor carpet, mid-20th century, exposition of the East Kazakhstan Ethnographic Museum (Photograph by the author).

Women whipped wool with rods, after which the wool was laid out on a mat in an even layer. A colored pattern of felt of a different color was applied to the surface of the felt carpet. Then this blank was wetted with boiling water and rolled up. This roll was rolled on the ground then tamped down with feet, hands, and elbows. After that, the procedure of throwing the felt into the air and compacting it with the hands of the craftsmen took place. The entire felt-making cycle was accompanied by ritual songs, a feast, magical rituals, and precautionary measures. For example, it was believed that unfinished work should not be shown to children or young people (men) so that the product would not turn out to be

defective. An interesting fact is that if the *tekemet* carpet was made for a daughter who was about to get married, then this carpet would be left unfinished. It was believed that it would be completed in the husband's house after the wedding. Also, the *tekemet* was often given as a housewarming gift, likewise, a felt carpet was spread under the cradle after the birth of a child. Also, when the bride entered her husband's house for the first time after the wedding, she was seated on white felt so that the couple's life would be prosperous (Tokhtabayeva 2008, 38-39).

On the mythological level, the technological process of making felt was associated with acts of fertilization and birth. For example, among the Altaians, the old felt, on which the wool intended for felting was laid out, was called "mother-felt," and the new felt was called "child-felt" (Lvova et al. 1988, 118). In the Kazakh yurt, felt figures were placed on the *kara-shanyrak*, which symbolized the ancestors - the patron spirits (*aruaqtar*). As we can see, felt and products made from it had a sacred meaning and the entire manufacturing process had a ritualized character.

As a rule, *tekemets* are made of a large size with a large symmetrical ornament, as they symbolize the endless steppe or the Universe. According to the ornamental design, *tekemets* are divided into two groups - with a border and without a border, with a pronounced center, or without an emphasis on the center. In accordance with the peculiarities of the felting technique, the contours of the patterns are indistinct or slightly "blurred." The central field is most often filled with rhombuses, squares, or rectangles, in which there are horn-shaped, tree-like, spiral motifs, arranged in a cruciform pattern. This structure reflects the idea of fertility as the interaction of the feminine and masculine principles, which leads to the birth of a clan/tribe.

Felt technique in the manufacture of carpets is spread over a vast territory among the peoples of Central Asia (Kyrgyzskij uzor 1986, 10-12), the Caucasus (Mehdi 2006, 190-221), Siberia, and Altai. There is a similarity between the *tekemet* carpets of Western Kazakhstan with ornaments in the form of solar symbols found on Turkmen, Uzbek, and North Caucasian carpets (Kuznetsova 1982, 120-124). There is also a great similarity between the carpets of Central and Eastern Kazakhstan with carpets from Kyrgyzstan.

Another kind of felt carpet is *yrmak*. For the manufacture of such carpets, sheep's wool was used from autumn shearing. A mosaic technique was used—inserting the felt of one color into the felt of another color. The technique of appliqué and stitches was also used. The method of the mosaic technique is that the pattern should be flush with the surface of the background. This method protects the carpet from premature wear. A well-made *yrmak* can last up to 50 years. The *yrmak* ornament is based on patterns in the form of horn-shaped curls, which end in the form of a trefoil. This pattern is very archaic and is found on items discovered by archaeologists in ancient burial mounds. The horn motifs differ depending on the region. For example, in East Kazakhstan, the motif of the horns of a ram, maral, elk, or deer was used. Most *yrmak* have a wide border with inscribed horn-like patterns. The borders between the ornamental rosettes and the border field are drawn with a cord. All patterns along the contour are outlined with a colored cord "zhiiek."



Figure 2. *Syrmak*, felt floor carpet, mosaic technique, mid-20th century, exposition of the East Kazakhstan Ethnographic Museum (Photograph by the author).

In the compositional construction of the *syrmak* ornament, several types can be distinguished: one with a distinguished center and a border, another dividing the canvas into two mirror-reflecting parts, and a third without any emphasis on the central part of the carpet. Ornamental modules usually consist of rhombuses, squares, or rectangles filled with various motifs in the form of horns, spirals, or trees. The design is dominated by zoomorphic and tree-like motifs and their combinations. Only occasionally are plant motifs found in their pure form. This is due to the peculiarity of the economic and cultural type of the nomadic society where the main value was cattle.

Another interesting variety of felt carpets are *tuskilem* wall carpets, usually hung over the bed. They differ from floor carpets in their U-shaped composition while the central field and the lower part are not filled since they were covered with pillows in everyday life. A further type of wall carpet - *tuskiiiz* are made of leather, velvet, suede, or cloth. The use of such materials as velvet and silk from Bukhara, Samarkand, or China for the manufacture of wall carpets along with coral, mother-of-pearl, or turquoise for decoration is evidence of an active exchange of goods with neighboring countries.



Figure 3. *Tusküz*, wall carpet, mid-20th century, exposition of the East Kazakhstan Ethnographic Museum (Photograph by the author).

Kazakh woven carpets are divided according to the manufacturing technique into nap and lint-free. Lint-free carpets were distributed throughout Kazakhstan. Pile carpets or *qaly kilem* had their own distribution area—the southern and western regions of Kazakhstan. Pile carpets were highly valued and one large carpet (3.5 by 5 meters) cost four to five good horses (Kazakhskie kovry 2012, 23). A high-quality carpet was included in the list of five items that were not only of special material value for the Kazakhs, but also of sacral and ritual significance. This list included: a black camel, a horse, a carpet, an expensive fur coat, and expensive weapons.



Figure 4. *Qaly kilem*, pile carpet, mid-20th century, exposition of the East Kazakhstan Ethnographic Museum (Photograph by the author).

Carpets were woven on horizontal and vertical looms. In carpet weaving, the soft wool of spring shearing was used with the addition of a small amount of autumn wool. Sheep and camel wool were used but camel wool was not used in the manufacture of floor carpets. This was due to the fact that the camel was considered a sacred animal, whose fur could not be stepped on (Tokhtabayeva 2008, 49). The wool was cleaned, washed, and wrung out by hand. After that, the wool was dyed in various colors and dried. Then the wool was combed with the help of a plate with iron teeth and made into yarn. The production of pile carpets required high-quality wool, weighing up to thirty kilograms, and such production required more physical costs, time, and creative energy.

The process of carpet weaving, as well as the process of making felt, was ritualized and, at the ideological level, symbolized the act of creation, the marriage of Heaven and Earth, along with male and female principles. Relatives, neighbors, and friends organized help during carpet making. The weaving process was suspended if someone in the house fell ill. In this case, the canvas with the machine was covered with a cloth until the family member fully recovered. Otherwise, the disease may drag on and become long, like the weaving process itself. In the event of the death of a relative, work was stopped for forty days (Tokhtabayeva 2008, 50).

The components of pile carpets are the central field, the border, the dividing strip or the border between the background and patterns, and the ornamental border. Rhombuses with horn-shaped processes, hexagons, octagons, squares, crosses, stylized stars, or oval medallions can be placed in the central field. These figures were filled with motifs of ram's horns, stars, rhombuses, trees, triangles, and, quite rarely, flowers. The border ornament is made up of triangles, horns, and rhombuses. The number of modules of the central field in South Kazakhstan is from three to ten units, in North Kazakhstan, up to fourteen units, and in Western Kazakhstan, there are many of them (Tokhtabayeva 2008, 57). There are also carpets where there are one or more borders and dividing strips. A similar compositional structure is also inherent in lint-free carpet weaving in the southern and southwestern regions of Kazakhstan (Kazakhskie kovry 2012, 25). According to the location of the motifs on the central field, it is possible to determine whether the carpet belongs to a particular region. Also, the comparison of iconography with the carpets of neighboring regions can demonstrate the influence of styles in decoration. For example, *kaly kilem* from the Mangystau region differ significantly in compositional features from the carpets of other regions of Kazakhstan. This is due to the mutual influence of the Kazakh and Turkmen traditions of carpet weaving.

The most popular type of woven product common in Kazakhstan is *alasha*. This product is characterized by its rapid and economical production. *Alasha* is sewn together from several narrow strips woven on looms. *Alasha* is woven from multi-colored threads that form white, yellow, red, dark red, brown, blue, and green alternating longitudinal stripes. The threads are made from spring-cut wool. According to the design, several types of *alasha* are distinguished: striped, ornamented, and according to the material - woolen or cotton.

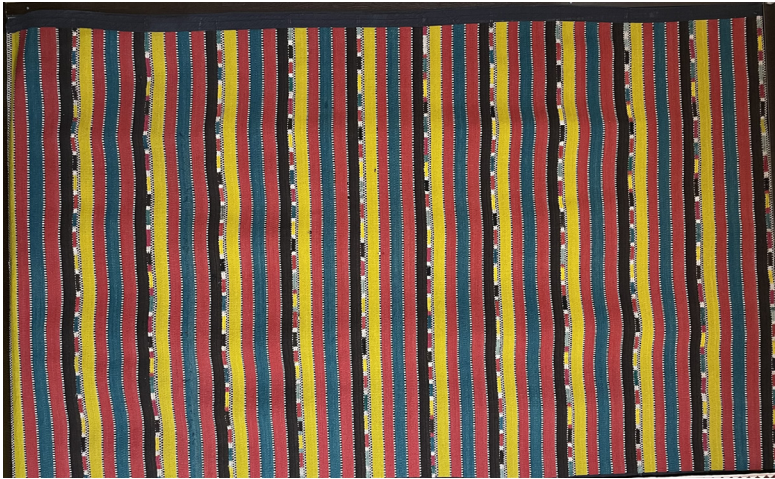


Figure 5. *Alasha*, the second half of the 20th century, exposition of the East Kazakhstan Ethnographic Museum (Photograph by the author).

The ornament applied to carpets was the bearer of the most valuable information about the mythological worldview of the people. The Kazakh traditional carpet ornament uses geometric, cosmogonic, zoomorphic, and plant motifs. Over time, the carpet ornament turned into a kind of coded text, reflecting ideas about the cosmogonic structure of the Universe and awareness of the harmony of the world. Each such “text” carries the wishes of well-being and prosperity to the owner of the carpet. The structure and semantics of geometric ornament go back to the sacred meaning of numbers in traditional culture. The number could describe the diversity of the Universe, with the help of the number the world acquired a measure and rhythm and became available for counting, measuring, and, ultimately, for cognition. Perhaps, the system of binary oppositions can be attributed to the earliest measurements.

For the model of the world of the South Siberian Turks, the following set of binary representations is revealed: top-bottom, right-left, south-north, day-night, fertilization-birth, sun-moon, red-white, summer-winter, sky-earth, and positive-negative (Lvova et al. 1988, 100). Further, a number of “transitional” characteristics are distinguished: front-back, east-west, birth-dying, and spring-autumn. When combining the two schemes, we get a four-sided structure of the world (north-south-west-east). The number “three” characterizes the vertical structure of the world: the upper world, the middle world, and the lower world. In general, as we can see, the numbers two, three, and four carry important cosmogonic information, which is also reflected in the traditional ornament, including carpet ornament. These numbers form geometric shapes on the carpet field: a triangle, a square, a rectangle, a rhombus, a cross, and a binary combination of colors: a black pattern (brown) on white, white on black, and a division of the product into two parts. Since ancient times, the numbers three, seven, and nine have been sacred among nomads. For example, the number seven symbolizes the model

of the Universe, where the ternary and quaternary structures of the world are connected. This number is a reflection of the seven phases of the moon, which is reflected in ideas about the natural cycles of birth, growth, and death.

The carpet ornament also depicts such sacred cosmogonic symbols as the World Tree (World Mountain), the solar circle, the cross, and the square. For example, the *orken* ornament, which literally translates as “stem,” goes back in its symbolism to the ancient idea of the World Tree. The ornament in carpets is found in the form of a diamond-shaped medallion in the center (usually three to four medallions with branches in the form of a tree with a crown) (Kazakhskie kovry 2012, 353).



Figure 6. *Orken*, a sample of a carpet ornament (Kazakhskie kovry 2012, 353)

The semantics of the pattern lies in the wish for growth and multiplication of offspring in the family. The center is a symbol of the hearth while the shoots of the stem symbolize descendants. Young families were given such carpets with the wishes of children and wealth. From the image of the World Tree in the traditional worldview, the Tree of Life is formed, and then the Generic Tree is formed. A large, strong, flowering tree is associated with a large, strong family. The tree, in the traditional worldview, is the sacred center of the earth. The tree, like the Mountain, is the embodiment of the idea of a vertical axis that links together the three worlds—the upper world, the middle, and the lower. Both the World Tree and the World Mountain are closely connected with the life of the clan. In the folklore of all the Turkic-speaking peoples of Siberia, a tree feeds (gives birth) children, it is a symbol of life, and a guarantee of the well-being of members of the genus. Uprooting a tree means dooming to death people connected with them by kinship. The cradles of future children

hang on the branches of the tree. In real life, the deceased baby was buried in the hollow of a tree, literally returning it to the womb that “gave birth” to it (Lvova et al. 1988, 32). As we can see, the symbol of the Tree is multi-valued and, in ancient times, played a huge role in the life of the family and clan.

The solar symbolism among the Turks was associated with the cult of the Sun, the onset of the New Year on the day of the spring equinox (Nauryz). The swastika was the simplest symbolic reflection of the cult of the Sun, which personified life and fertility. The circle also symbolized the Sun and this symbol was recorded in the rock carvings of sun-headed deities from the Bronze Age (Maksimova 1985, 98). It should be noted that the symbol of the Sun is present in almost all types of arts and crafts, not only in carpet weaving. This is explained by the fact that in traditional society, solar energy was perceived as cleansing, protecting, and spreading good energy. Therefore, solar symbols are present in carpets, traditional costumes, jewelry, belts, and various household items (Tokhtabayeva 2005, 236). Ancient people believed in the magical power of the Sun and wore various amulets with its symbols.



Figure 7. Solar symbolism in carpet ornament (Tokhtabayeva 2008, 12)

The image of the cross in the Turkic-Sogdian tradition in the Middle Ages goes back to the religious traditions of Manichaeism and Nestorianism, reflecting the eternal struggle between Light and Darkness. The migration of the Sogdians and the development of the Silk Road led to the spread not only of religions but also visual canons. The heyday of Manichaean culture falls on Semirechie in the 8th century CE, where the city of Talas was the Manichaean religious center during the Kara-Türgesh period. A notable feature of Manichaean art was painting on matter, as well as wall painting, which influenced the local canons of the decorative and applied arts of the ancient Turks and Türgesh. The image of the cross was preserved on tombstones of the Middle Ages. The religious syncretism of Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and Nestorianism is traced, which is expressed in the development of ornamental art.

Among the proto-Turks, the cross was often perceived as a magical amulet, at the same

time it was associated with the idea of fertility. Later, the sun began to be depicted with the help of a cross framed by a circle. Subsequently, the sun began to be denoted by a circle with six or eight radii, resembling a wheel. Another variant of the designation of the sun, a circle with a dot in the center, is often present in silver jewelry. An S-shaped sign in a circle is also used, conveying the effect of the circular motion of the Sun (Tokhtabayeva 2005, 239).



Figure 8. Cross in a carpet ornament (Tokhtabayeva 2008, 14a)

Floral ornament is also presented in the ornamental design of carpets. For example, the image of a flower (*gul* - a flower, *gulkumbeshty* - a flower dome, *gulkauryzy* - an open flower, *zhuldyzgul* - a flower in the shape of a star), which is technically rather complicated in execution, personifies growth, eternal renewal, ideas of fertility, and rebirth of life. (Kazakhskie kovry 2012, 346-347).

One of the most common carpet ornaments is *koshkar muiz* - ram's horns. It represents a stylized upper part of a ram's head with horns bent inward. Such a wide distribution of the ornament is explained by the fact that the livestock of the nomads were of the highest material value and the ram's horns were, firstly, a link between Heaven and Earth, and, secondly, a symbol of wealth and prosperity (the idea of happiness - *kut* in Turko-Iranian tradition).



Figure 9. Carpet ornament, *Koshkar muiz* - ram's horns (Kazakhskie kovry 2012, 265)

In general, in the ornament of Kazakh carpet zoomorphic motifs are very widely represented, often parts of different animals are combined into one product—domestic animals, birds, wild animals, insects, and fish. Each animal had a certain meaning, going back to the ancient forms of religion such as totemism, shamanism, animism, and fetishism. For example, Ch. Valikhanov, who studied Kazakh shamanism in the 19th century, noted that Kazakhs used various parts of the body of animals or birds, as well as animal bones, as talismans. Animal bones were believed to have supernatural powers. So, the ulnar bone, according to pre-Muslim beliefs, could replace the shepherd for the livestock, and protect the cattle from wolves and thieves (Valikhanov 1985, 22).

In Kazakh fine arts, the image of the bird motif is popular. The bird in the proto-Turkic tradition was the personification of the upper world, a connection with the world of the gods, and a symbol of supreme power. Birds were considered the souls of dead people, going to the *aruaqtar* - the spirits of their ancestors. The totem bird among the Turkic peoples was perceived as the patroness of the family, birds of prey were taken for hunting, and eagle owl feathers served as talismans for children. Ch. Valikhanov, in particular, wrote about this: “The owl’s head, legs and feathers keep evil spirits away; for this they are tied to the yurt and the cradles of children” (1985, 22). In the design of carpets, there are separate “bird” motifs. For example, *karga* - “crow’s foot” is a cruciform figure resembling a bird’s footprint. *Kuskanats* or “a bird’s wing” resembles a bird spreading its wings. Lastly, the *kaz moyin* - “gooseneck” pattern resembles a curved S-shaped line resembling the neck of a goose (Kazakhskie kovry 2012, 344-357).

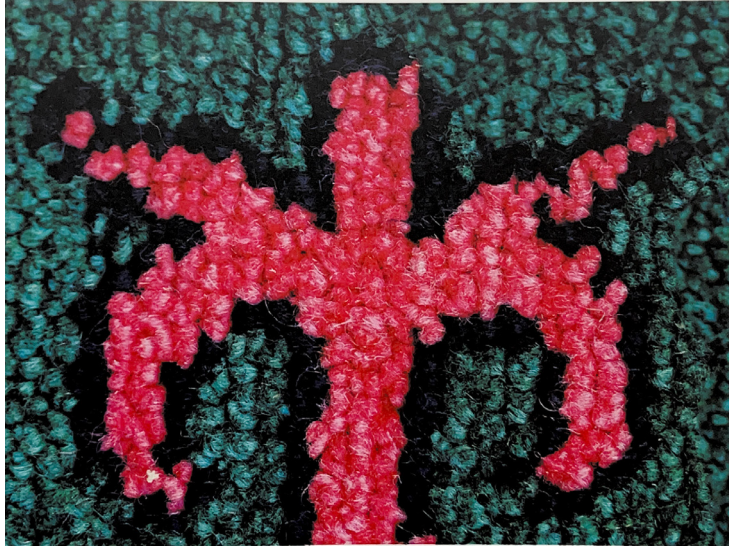


Figure 10. Carpet ornament, *kus kanaty* - bird's wing (Kazakhskie kovry 2012, 352)

There are a number of motives associated with cattle breeding. So, in the ornament of carpets, there are such patterns as “ribs” - *kabyrga*. This pattern consists of parallel inclined stripes that resemble the ribs of an animal. *Kanka* - “skeleton,” is a straight line with stripes extending from it. *Omyrtka* - “spine,” is a triangle (vertebrae) interconnected. *Synarmuyiz* - “one horn,” is an image of one horn, often used as an additional element in the main pattern. *Tys* - “tooth,” one of the oldest ornaments, is found on the borders of the carpet. *Attaban* - “horse hoof print,” is an octagonal medallion divided into 4 sectors. Periodically, in carpet products, there is a motif associated with the image of a camel. For example, the *botakož* pattern - “the eye of a camel,” is a rhombus inside of which there is a circle in the form of a pupil. Finally, there is *botamoyin* - “camel's neck,” which resembles a lying camel with its neck turned (Kazakhskie kovry 2012, 344-357). Masters, performing such an ornament, believed that even a part of the body or skeleton of an animal that has a sacred meaning can endow a person with the strength and energy of this animal.

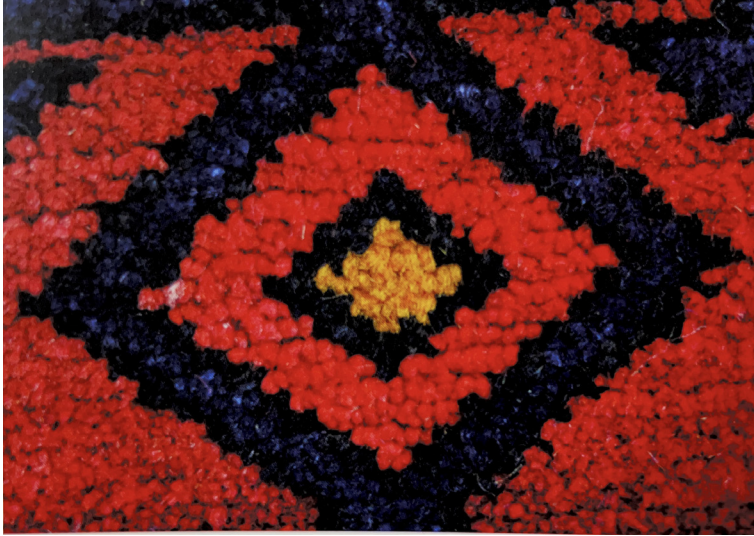


Figure 11. Carpet ornament, “botakoz” - the eye of a baby camel
(Kazakhskie kovry 2012, 345)

In general, zoomorphic ornamentation prevailed in decorative and applied art, however, plant elements can also be found on carpets, the presence of which indicates the influence of agricultural cultures. The use of velvet and silk from Bukhara, Samarkand, and China for the manufacture of wall carpets is evidence of the active exchange of goods on the Great Silk Road. The color scheme of carpet production played a special role since each color carried a certain symbol associated with ancient mythological ideas about the structure of the world.

Conclusion

An analysis of the traditional carpet manufacturing system in Kazakhstan allows us to draw the following conclusions. Carpet weaving was an integral part of the life of the Kazakhs and their ancestors. In the conditions of the nomadic method of production, carpets were not only a decoration of the home but also an urgent need, and the methods of carpet production, shapes, sizes, raw materials, and ornaments—all this was associated with nomadic life and obeyed the rhythm of the annual nomadic cycle. At the same time, it should be noted that the material world of the nomadic Turks was realized through cosmological ideas and the space-time model of the world thus material culture was a reflection of these ideas in everyday life.

Carpet weaving as a creative activity was ritualized and was always accompanied by sacred words, actions, and prohibitions. At the mythological level, the process of making carpets personified the process of the creation of the world, the marriage between Heaven and Earth, and the creation of the Cosmos from Chaos. The ornament applied to carpets

was the bearer of the most valuable information about the mythological worldview of the people. Carpets in their structure reproduced the structure of the Universe, which has a binary, ternary, and quaternary system. The ornament has turned into a kind of coded text, reflecting ideas about the cosmogonic structure of the Universe and an awareness of the harmony of the world. At the same time, the author of the carpet, as the creator, could lay down any information about the future owner of the carpet and his authorship. As a rule, such information carried the wishes of well-being and prosperity.

For many centuries, the techniques of carpet weaving, paints, and visual canons have changed, experiencing the stylistic, ideological, and religious influence of ideas that spread along the Silk Road. The ornamental art of carpet design carries information about early release beliefs and cults that existed on the territory of Eurasia. Carpet weaving, as a kind of arts and crafts, is a reflection of the traditional worldview of the Kazakhs, which absorbed pre-Muslim beliefs, including shamanism, Mazdaism, Tengrism, Manichaeism, and Nestorianism and, overall, reflected the worldview of nomadic tribes.

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