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Traditional Kazakh textile fabrics: artistic-technological and ethno-cultural aspects of weaving and felting

Abstract. The article analyzes textile products made from felt and woven fabrics as one of the significant directions of Kazakh decorative and applied art, which was formed based on centuries-old traditions and has received new development in the modern artistic space. The historical path of the formation of felting and weaving skills, their deep roots in the nomadic culture of the Kazakhs, as well as the influence of traditional technologies on the formation of a unique national school of textile art, are traced. Special attention is paid to the relationship between felt products and flat-woven fabrics with Kazakh weaving practices, ornamental canons, and the peculiarities of symbolic language. Modern trends in artistic synthesis are considered, within which masters combine ancient techniques - felting, mosaic technique, applique, woven interlacing - with innovative materials, author's compositions, and current design solutions.

Keywords: traditional culture, folk applied arts, continuity, design, carpets, knots.

The research topic is determined by the analysis of interaction between traditions and innovations in Kazakh decorative and applied arts, fitting into the context of state programs and resonating with their goals aimed at spiritual unity and cultural revival, which highlights the high significance of the chosen research direction.

Objective of the study: investigation of techniques and development of felt products as well as woven fabrics within the framework of Kazakh decorative and applied art, tracing their evolution from traditional forms to contemporary artistic solutions.

Research objectives:

- analyze the formation process of decorative and applied arts using examples of Kazakh tapestries and felt products, identifying its historical and cultural features;
- study the variety of forms and types of textile panels, their artistic characteristics;

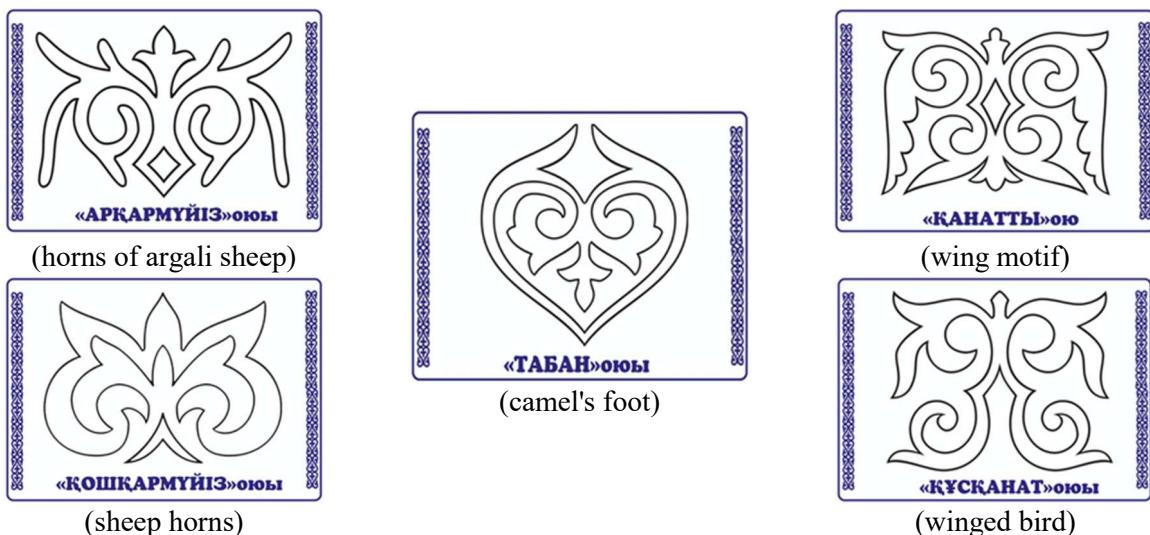
- conduct a comparative analysis of tapestry execution techniques and traditional Kazakh woven carpets, revealing common and specific traits of artistic implementation.

Kazakhstan is renowned for the richness and diversity of its national decorative and applied arts. Over centuries, it has served not only utilitarian purposes but also expressed aesthetic ideals of the people, their worldview, attitude towards nature and traditions. Each item created by craftsmen represents a living part of culture that was carefully passed down through generations. The Kazakh people continue to honor these traditions: Kazakh carpets, felt products, jewelry, woodcarving and leatherwork remain integral parts of their national identity.

It should be noted that recently in Astana – the capital city of Republic of Kazakhstan – an exhibition took place where sculptures, tapestries and various felt works were presented.

Particular attention was drawn to tapestries, one of the most expressive forms of artistic textiles. Although historically their origin is attributed to European tradition, in Kazakh art, tapestry largely resembles weaving techniques and artistic objectives found in traditional Kazakh rugs such as *tykti kilem* and *takyr kilem*. There exists technological kinship between them: both are produced on looms, requiring complex work with color, texture, and pattern rhythm. Authors employ similar principles of thread interlacing, achieving durability, ornamentation, and expressiveness of the fabric.

Tykti kilem – a pile carpet is one of the most labor-intensive types of rug-making. Its distinctive feature lies in each tuft being hand-knotted individually. Artisans stretch a dense foundation made of wool or cotton threads, then use dyed wool yarn to tie thousands of knots onto the warp threads, creating intricate patterns: *muyiz oyu* (*animal horn designs*), *taban* (*animal hoof motifs*), *kanat* (*bird wing patterns*) and many others (Figures 1-5⁶¹).



Figs. 1-5. Types of national ornaments on pile carpets

⁶¹ Figs. 1-5. Telegram: View @tarbiesiler. – URL: <https://t.me/tarbiesiler/174700?single> (Date accessed: October 11, 2025).

Creating such a carpet takes weeks, sometimes even months. The colors used are selected meticulously, often those with symbolic meanings: red signifies life and fire, blue represents the sky, white stands for purity. A *tykti kilem* was considered a sign of prosperity and an essential part of a bride's dowry, serving simultaneously as decoration for the yurt and a symbol of family wealth [1].



Fig. 6. *Takyr kilem*

Takyr kilem – this is a flat textile product executed in the technique of smooth, dense interweaving. Unlike *tykti kilem*, where the ornament is formed using loops fixed by knotting, in *takyr kilem* the interweave consists solely of multicolored warp and weft threads. (Fig. 6⁶²). The name “*takyr*” directly indicates the characteristic of this type of carpet: *takyr* means “smooth, even, without pile”.

Despite their similarities, differences between carpets and tapestries manifest primarily in their artistic distinctiveness and practicality. Carpets traditionally fulfilled functional roles in everyday life, providing insulation and decoration for living spaces, whereas tapestries focus more on visual representation and storytelling. They have come to be regarded as independent works of art, reflecting the author's worldview, individual style and creative stance [2].



Fig. 7. *Tekemet*

Additionally, there is a difference in compositional structure: tapestries tend toward narrative expression, symbolic imagery and integration of ornamentation with artistic intent, while traditional carpets typically adhere to strict ornamental systems based on centuries-old canons [3]. Nevertheless, both forms of textile demonstrate close ties to ethnic culture, nature and spiritual beliefs of the Kazakh people.

Tekemet is one of the oldest types of Kazakh felt carpets. It was made from sheep's wool, which was washed, cleaned, combed and laid out evenly. Then, the wool was moistened with hot water, rolled up and tightly wrapped. During the

⁶² Fig. 6. Kazakh pile and non-pile carpet weaving // Craftsmen database of Kazakhstan: [website]. – URL: <https://artandcrafts.cultural.kz/ru/poster/kovrotkachestvo> (Date accessed: October 29, 2025).

friction process, the fibers interlocked, forming a dense and durable felt material. (Fig. 7⁶³).

What gave tekemets their unique beauty were mosaic-like ornaments. Different-colored wool was arranged over the base layer, creating patterns that symbolized harmony, protection and prosperity. After felting, these ornaments became an integrated part of the carpet, like stories woven into it. Tekemets weren't just decorative items; they protected homes from cold weather and could serve as floor coverings. They came in different sizes and color schemes depending on their intended purpose [4].

In modern times, despite rapid technological advancements and new design trends, Kazakhs still cherish their traditional craftsmanship. Folk artists create carpets and souvenirs inspired by ancient forms yet reinterpreted in contemporary ways. Traditional national ornaments find application in architecture, fashion, interior design, constantly reminding us about the deep layers of cultural heritage.

Long before factories producing yarns and synthetic dyes existed, ancestors created everything manually: spinning wool themselves, dyeing it with natural pigments derived from plants, roots and tree bark, weaving cloth and producing felt items. Every stage required patience, skill and profound knowledge of materials – from selecting wool to precise matching of colors and patterns. This effort transformed every piece into a unique work of art filled with warmth and transmitted folklore across generations [5].

Today, many talented Kazakh masters work in the techniques of tapestry and feltmaking, including Kurasbek Tynybekov, Batima Zaurbekova, Saule and Alibay Bapanovs, Raushan Bazarbayeva, among others.

Modern unique artworks are now created using ready-made materials, retaining their expressiveness, aesthetic value and cultural meaning. Bright Turkic motifs can be seen in the works of Gul'shat Dzhurayeva (pseudonym – Dzhur), a famous Kazakh artist. Her creations, especially her tapestries, stand out due to diverse themes and stylistic approaches. She explores varied subjects and artistic methods, ensuring uniqueness in each artwork. However, critics note that she hasn't fully developed a consistent personal style. Despite this, the range of topics and experiments with form reflect her search for self-expression within Kazakh textile art.

The work titled "Sunset" evokes Mark Rothko's artistry in terms of expressiveness; expansive fields of color, subtle transitions of hues and intense chromatic atmosphere generate a profound emotional impact (Fig. 14⁶⁴).

⁶³ Fig. 7. Felt processing art (felt making) // Craftsmen database of Kazakhstan: [website]. – URL: <https://artandcrafts.cultural.kz/ru/poster/yuvelirnoe-iskusstvo-i-metalloplastika> (Date accessed: October 29, 2025).

⁶⁴ Figs. 14-19. Photos of tapestries by artist Gul'shat Dzhur.

In the tapestries "Bayterek" (Fig. 15), "Winds of steppes" and "Awakening of Spring" (Fig. 17), the following types of weaves can be observed: plain weave (Fig. 8⁶⁵), braid stitch "kosichka" (Fig. 9⁶⁶), twill weave (Fig. 10⁶⁷), «cut pile» (Fig. 11⁶⁸), «Egyptian weave» (Fig. 12⁶⁹), «sumac weave» (Fig. 13⁷⁰).

Types of knots and interlaces in pile carpets

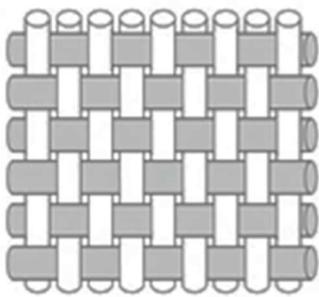


Fig. 8. Plain weave

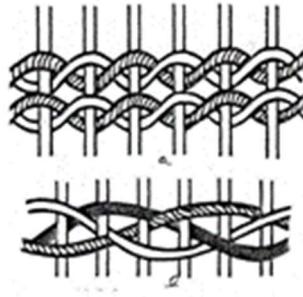


Fig. 9. Braid stitch "kosichka"

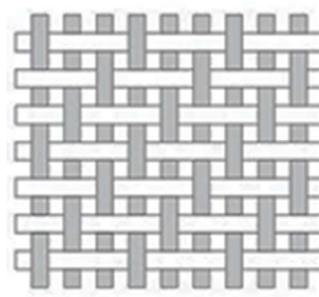


Fig. 10. Twill weave

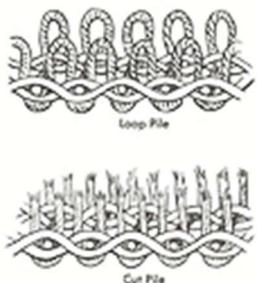


Fig. 11. «Cut pile»

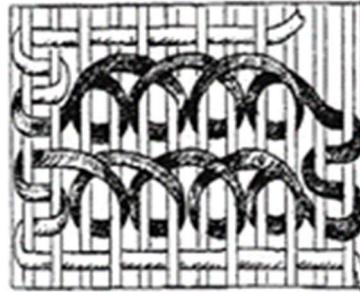


Fig. 12. «Egyptian weave»

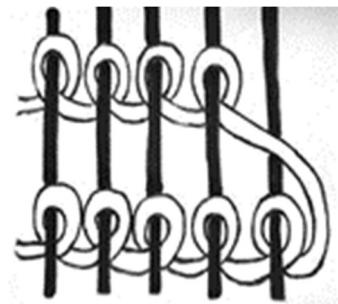


Fig. 13. «Sumac weave»

⁶⁵ Fig. 8. 7 Weave Patterns to Know - Twill, Basketweave, Satin, and More. – URL: <https://i.pinimg.com/1200x/b4/0e/b6/b40eb63f277ccba87ea4867a76d83939.jpg> (Date accessed: October 20, 2025).

⁶⁶ Fig. 9. URL: <https://i.pinimg.com/736x/16/ef/fd/16effd53ff1913e526b0277fbc5f7169.jpg> (Date accessed: October 20, 2025).

⁶⁷ Fig. 10. URL: <https://i.pinimg.com/736x/d7/7b/fd/d77bfd40749458b2286d899a2611b45b.jpg> (Date accessed: October 20, 2025).

⁶⁸ Fig. 11. Marie-Thérèse Wischnewski. Woven pile fabrics: sixty-eighth post from the series "Art resources." – URL: <https://i.pinimg.com/1200x/b9/92/c6/b992c6b9bb6f0a0943f5910f5a739bac.jpg> (Date accessed: October 20, 2025)

⁶⁹ Fig. 12. – Designer handmade carpets in interior design // Instylewood : website. – URL: <https://telarian.ru/?r=carpet-weaving&id=31>

jpg (Date accessed: October 20, 2025).

⁷⁰ Fig. 13. – URL: <https://adya65.livejournal.com/82873.html> (Date accessed: October 20, 2025).



Fig. 14. Gul'shat Dzhur.
Tapestry "Sunset". 2010



Fig. 15. Gul'shat Dzhur.
Tapestry "Bayterek". 2008



Fig. 16. Gul'shat Dzhur.
Tapestry "The floating caravan". 2008



Fig. 17. Gul'shat Dzhur. Tapestry
"Awakening of spring". 2004 г.

Gulshat Dzhur's felt works are distinguished by extraordinary delicacy and exquisite craftsmanship. In her creations, she uses combined materials – fine muslin, lightweight fabric layers, natural wool mixed with viscose (Fig. 18). This combination gives the canvases a multi-layered effect, plasticity and lively texture. Additionally, the artist actively employs three-dimensional inserts, creating relief elements that enrich the composition, enhance visual depth and transform each work into a unique textile object (Fig. 19).

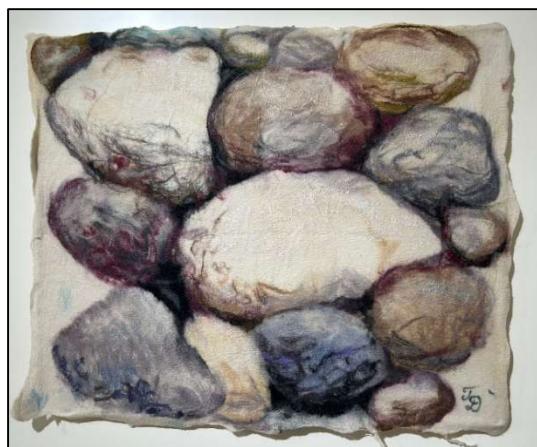


Fig. 18. Gul'shat Dzhur. Panel "Stones".
2023. Wool, felt



Fig. 19. Gul'shat Dzhur.
Tapestry "Birth". 2016.
Wool, felt

Studying the historical development of this type of traditional applied art allows us to speak about continuity in artistic forms and traditional technologies, considering felting and weaving as the basis for shaping the national school of textile art.

Contemporary masters, including new-generation artists, creatively reinterpret the legacy of their ancestors, combining classical materials and techniques with modern artistic approaches. This enables Kazakh textile art to evolve, expand its visual boundaries and acquire new forms of expression.

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