

A cross-cultural perspective on ornamental serpentine patterns along the Great Silk Road

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Prof. Dr. German Kim is a leading expert in history and Korean studies, with a focus on the history of Korean immigration and the cultural heritage of Koreans in Kazakhstan and Central Asia. His academic journey began with studies in history, leading to prestigious positions such as Director of the Institute for Asian Studies at al-Farabi Kazakh National University. His contributions include over 30 monographs and 250 scholarly articles, with a strong emphasis on the socio-cultural development of the Korean diaspora. Prof. Kim's work has been widely recognized, earning him numerous national and international awards for his significant contributions to the field.

Abstract

The Silk Road, one of the most ancient trade routes in history, connected China with the West, traversing Central Asia, India, Persia, and extending into Europe. This network facilitated a rich cultural exchange, as reflected in the art and decorative elements that flourished along its path.

The study of folk patterns along the Silk Road serves multiple purposes, depending on the researcher's focus. Key research objectives include examining the significance of ornamentation within the traditional cultural and artistic expressions of the peoples along this historic route, as well as reconstructing historical narratives and processes through the analysis of these decorative elements.

This paper aims to undertake a cross-cultural study of ornamentation in the Great Steppe along the Silk Road, with particular attention to Kazakh *baskur*—a decorative woven band used to secure the felt covering to the wooden frame of traditional nomadic dwellings. The study explores the key aspects of the centuries-old, unaltered handcrafting techniques of *baskur*, as well as the unity and symbolism embedded within the various types of ornamentation. The utilitarian and decorative functions of *baskur* are characteristic not only of the Kazakhs but also of other nomadic peoples along the Silk Road, underscoring the relevance of cross-cultural research in this area.

Keywords

Silk Road, Kazakh *baskur*, Ornamentation, Nomadic culture, Cross-cultural studies, Symbolism in patterns, Traditional weaving

Introduction

Experts from a wide array of disciplines, including art history, design, ethnology, archaeology, mathematics, and cultural studies, have long engaged in the study of ornamentation. Yet, the fundamental nature and origins of ornament remain a matter of debate. Three principal hypotheses seek to explain its emergence: the magical, the technological, and the aesthetic. Correspondingly, ornamentation is believed to serve three key functions: magical, communicative, and aesthetic. Scholars suggest that ornaments should be approached from three distinct perspectives: as pictorial, applied, and semantic expressions.¹ Since the medieval era, a substantial body of literature on traditional ornament and the patterns of various cultures has been published. Notably among these is *The Grammar of Ornament*, authored by the British architect and designer Owen Jones (1809–1874), first released in 1856. Jones meticulously documented his observations of decorative arts during his extensive travels across Europe, the Middle East, and his native London.²

The study of ornamentation along the Silk Road is of considerable significance for several compelling reasons. Ornaments found along this ancient trade route were far more than mere decoration; they embodied profound meaning and symbolism, reflecting the worldview and cultural values of their time. Research in this field offers invaluable insights into the lives, beliefs, and artistic practices of the ancient civilizations that flourished along the Silk Road.

Ornaments frequently functioned as markers of identity, social status, and cultural affiliation. By examining the types and distribution of these ornaments, scholars can glean important information about the social structures, hierarchies, and intergroup relations within the societies that inhabited this region.

Furthermore, research into Silk Road ornamentation plays a pivotal role in safeguarding cultural heritage, fostering intercultural exchange, and serving as a wellspring of inspiration for contemporary art and design. Historical and cultural analyses of these ornaments provide a richly layered perspective on the interconnectedness of civilizations, the dynamics of trade and commerce, the evolution of artistic expression, and the diffusion of ideas and beliefs across vast geographical expanses.³

¹ TRILLING, J. *The Language of Ornament*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2001.

² JONES, Owen. *The Grammar of Ornament: A Visual Reference of Form and Colour in Architecture and the Decorative Arts*-The complete and unabridged full-color edition. Princeton University Press, 2016.

³ FRANKOPAN, P. *The New Silk Roads. The Present and Future of the World*. London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018

Studies of traditional patterns along the Silk Road reveal a region rich in cultural complexity, offering a unique confluence of multiple academic disciplines. The examination of these patterns yields valuable insights into the cultural, economic, and social dynamics that shaped this historic trade route, drawing on the fields of archaeology, art history, ethnography, and cultural studies. This multidisciplinary approach is crucial for a thorough understanding of the origins, significance, and evolution of these patterns.

Cities along the Silk Road, such as Dunhuang, Chang'an (near present-day Xi'an in China), Constantinople (Byzantium), Damascus (Syria), Samarkand (Uzbekistan), Taraz and Otrar (Kazakhstan), and Merv (Turkmenistan), among others, have uncovered significant artefacts that highlight the diversity and complexity of ornamental traditions.

The Great Steppe, a vast expanse of flat, treeless grassland stretching across Eurasia, holds great historical importance as both a homeland and a transit route for many nomadic cultures, including the Kazakhs. The traditional dwelling of the Kazakh nomads, the yurt—also known as a ger in Mongolia—is a circular structure supported by a wooden frame covered with felt or fabric. This frame consists of a collapsible lattice wall, roof poles, and a crown (shanyrak) that supports the roof and provides ventilation.⁴

The yurt is a traditional, portable dwelling used by the nomads of Central Asia, with origins tracing back to the Late Bronze Age. It served as a home for various ethnic groups, each of whom referred to it by different names: in Kazakh, it is called "kiiz uy," literally translating to "felt mat house"; in Kyrgyz, "boz uy" ("grey house," named for the colour of the felt); in Turkmen, "gara öý" ("black house," owing to the dark hue of the felt); in Khakass, "aras ib" ("wooden house," referring to the use of logs); in Bashkir, "tirmə" (felt dwelling); in Karakalpak, "kara-uy" ("black house"); and in Mongolian and Buryat, "gar" (meaning simply "house"). In Uzbek, the term "uy" is also used to denote a yurt, which translates as "house." Etymological comparisons reveal two key features common to the names of yurts: the primary building material (felt or wood) and its colour (white, grey, or black). Almost universally, the word for yurt across these languages incorporates the term for "house" or "dwelling."

HANSEN V. *The Silk Road. A New History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012

LIU, Xinru. *The Silk Road in World History*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2010

FRANK, Andre Gunder. The Centrality of Central Asia. *Studies in History*, 1992, 8.1: 43-97.

⁴ NAZARBEEKULY, S. *Kazakh yurt*. Astana: Stoloca; 2005.

The yurt's architectural design, using natural materials such as wood and wool, provided the lightness essential for a nomadic lifestyle, ease of assembly and disassembly, and insulation that offered warmth in winter and coolness in summer. The internal space of the yurt was functionally divided, with each section assigned a specific purpose, reflecting not only the daily life of the nomads but also their worldview, deeply imbued with ancient symbols, sociocultural values, and philosophical meaning.



Figure 1.

Examples of **Sogdian traders** and porcelain utensils from the Silk Road period, Han Dynasty. From right to left: **Ancient motifs of two opposing animals on silk brocade** and polychrome material, early 8th century. Also Uighur. **Motif of two oppositely standing birds** on carpets of remote mountain Tajik villages of the Pamir, 18th-19th century. **Round rosette, Kosh (Eyebrows)** and plant painting from the Fergana Valley, 17th-18th century. **Plant ornament in Shokhi Zinda**, plant ornament in wood carving, plant ornament painting from Samarkand, 16th-17th century. A fragment of **Bukhara ceramic mosaic**, details of carved tombstones from Bukhara mausoleums, 17th-18th century. **Persian ornaments**, Sasanian and Safavid culture. Plate with Chinese pattern, **reliefs** with animals, carpets of vegetal character, 16th century. **Complex tribal gyols of the Turkmen tribes** Ersala and Teke. 14th-15th centuries. **Ossetian and Alanian ornaments**. Solar ornaments of North Ossetia and clan circles. No later than the 15th-16th centuries. **Examples of arabesques and vegetal ornaments**. Geometric, cosmogonic symbols. 18th-19th centuries. **Turkish ornaments**, the latest concerning the influence of the Silk Road. **Islimi** patterns can be clearly seen.

Scholars from across Eurasia have extensively studied the origins, historical development, and construction techniques of the yurt, as well as its connection to nature and the economic and cultural life of nomadic societies. By the 18th century, the yurt had garnered the attention of Russian, Kazakh, and foreign geographers, military personnel, and travellers. Its structure and decoration are detailed in the works of notable figures such as O. Peshel, I. Falk, P. Pallas, C. Valikhanov, B. Zalessky, and others.

The Kazakh yurt, in particular, has been the subject of research by Kazakhstani scholars, including archaeologists, ethnographers, cultural historians, and philosophers such as M. Mukanov, A. Toleubaev, N. Shakhanov, M. Karakuzov, Zh. Khasanov, B. Ibraev, R.R. Fatikov, K.H. Amirgazin, K.E. Amirgazin, S. Agigali, S.J. Tokhtabaeva, A. Esmakhanova, S. Nazarbekuly, K. Shaimardanov, among others.

The yurt's structure exemplifies a cylindrical form, rising into a dome with a spherical or conical shape, symbolising the vastness of the sky. This design offers both stability and strength, while the natural materials used in its construction provide the flexibility required for a nomadic lifestyle, without compromising its structural integrity.

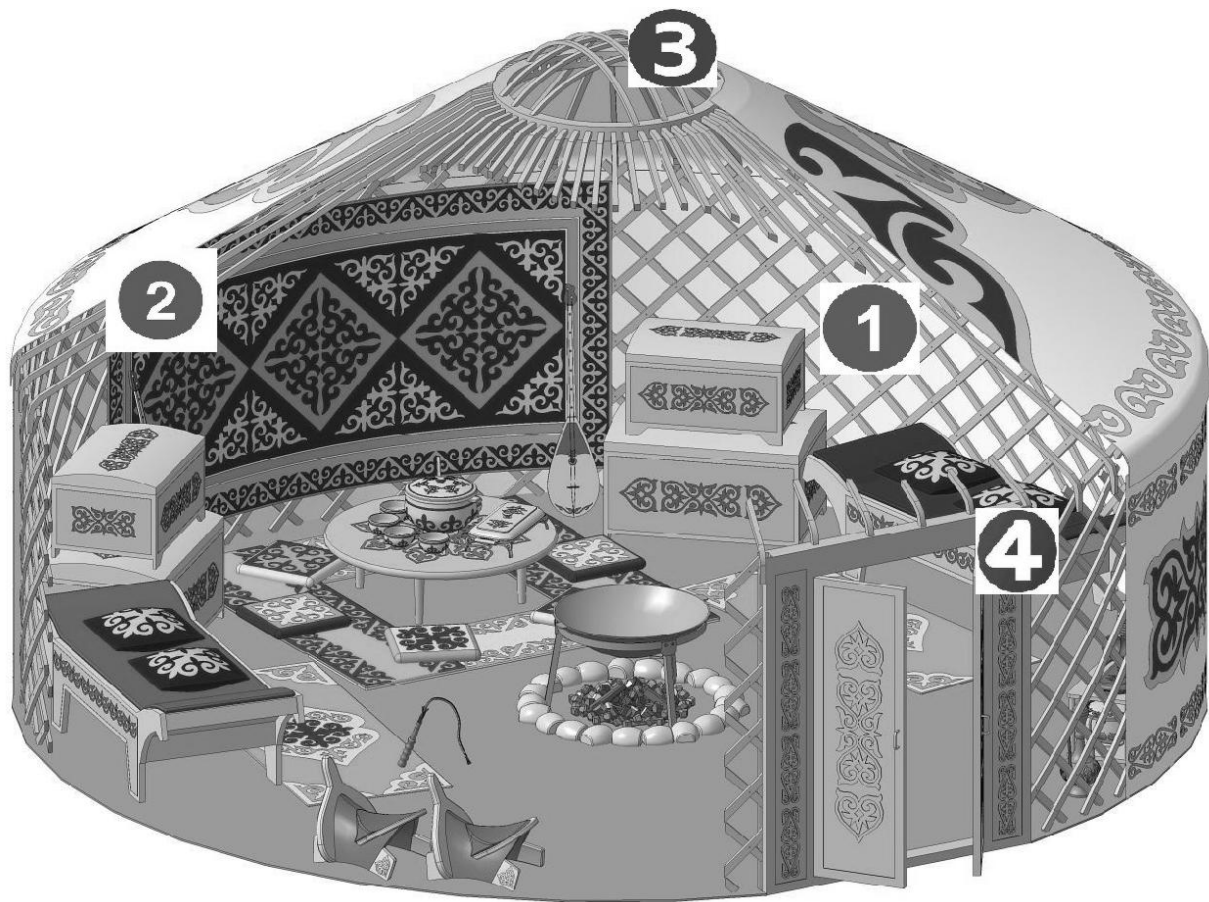


Figure 2. General view of the Kazakh yurt.

The wooden framework of the yurt comprises four main components: (1) *kerege* (the lattice wall structure), (2) *uyk* (poles forming the dome), (3) *shanyrak* (the circular top of the dome), and (4) *esik* (the doors), which include *sykyrlauyk* (double doors), *bosaga* (side posts), *mandaysha* (the upper crossbar), and *tabaldyryk* (the threshold). The yurt is covered with felt,

consisting of several sections, each of which is carefully described in specialist studies devoted to the production and use of felt.⁵

Extensive scholarly research across Eurasia has examined the origins of the yurt, its historical development, construction techniques, and its relationship with the natural environment, as well as the economic and cultural lives of nomadic peoples and their worldviews. During the 18th century, the yurt attracted the attention of Russian, Kazakh, and foreign geographers, military personnel, and travellers alike.

The Kazakh yurt has since become a focal point of study for Kazakhstani scholars, including archaeologists, ethnographers, cultural historians, and philosophers. The decoration and ornamentation of the yurt are meticulously detailed in the works of notable researchers such as M. Mukanov, A. Toleubaev, N. Shakhanov, M. Karakuzov, Zh. Khasanov, B. Ibraev, R.R. Fatikov, and K.H. Amirgazin, among others.

Ornamentation, widely recognised as one of the most enduring elements of nomadic decorative and applied arts, plays a central role in the aesthetic identity of the yurt. Grigory Potanin, a prominent early 20th-century Russian ethnographer and expert on the Kazakh steppe, offered a vivid description of this phenomenon. He noted that Kazakh ornamentation "pervades every aspect of the home environment; in a yurt, not a single piece of felt, leather, or wooden surface remains undecorated. The floors are covered with felt, with black and red cloth symmetrically arranged on its white surface. The back wall is lined with chests, encased in felt, which are similarly adorned with patterns. Even the felts covering the roof of the yurt bear intricate designs. The yurt, in essence, is an art gallery—an exhibition of ornamentation."⁶

The *baskur* is a decorative woven band used to secure the felt covering to the frame of the yurt. Beyond its practical function, a beautifully crafted *baskur* serves as an ornamentation, enhancing both the interior and exterior of the dwelling. A historiographical review of pre-Soviet literature reveals that studies of Kazakh folk weaving from this period were largely general and descriptive. In contrast, works by Kazakh authors from the Soviet era, such as T.K. Basenov, N.A. Orazbaeva, A.Kh. Margulan, U. Dzhaniybekov, M.S.

⁵ ZHAKUPOVA, A.; SUIYERKUL, B.; TASHIMBAY, S.; BERKIMBAYEVA, S.; Kazakh yurt as a unique creation of nomadic civilization architecture. *Innovaciencia* 2022; 10 (1): 1-13.

⁶ POTANIN, G. N. *Puteshestviye G. N. Potanina po Mongolii, Tibetu i Kitayu*. Saint Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo. A. F. Devriyena, 1912.

Mukanov, and others, provided a more comprehensive and detailed analysis of carpet weaving, significantly advancing our understanding of this traditional craft.⁷

The prominent Kazakh anthropologist of the Soviet era, M.S. Mukanov, made a significant contribution to the study of folk applied arts. For over two decades, Mukanov participated in ethnographic expeditions, including those organized by the Institute of History, Archaeology, and Ethnography, founded by Ch. Ch. Valikhanov, whose staff led much of the research on Kazakh folk crafts and ornamentation. Since 1955, the institute has conducted annual expeditions throughout Kazakhstan. Mukanov gathered extensive material and authored key works such as *Carpet Production and Its Ornamentation*, *Some Materials on the Felt-Weaving Production of the Kazakhs of Semirechye*, *Kazakh Household Artistic Crafts*, and *Craft* (included in *Culture and Life of the Kazakh Collective Farm Village*, co-authored with A.Kh. Margulan), as well as *Kazakh Yurt*, among others.

Mukanov was the first to document the types of looms, the tools required for weaving, the varieties of woven products, and the names and classifications of ornaments, along with their ethnic origins. Weaving is briefly discussed in the book-album *Kazakh Yurt*, created by a team of authors, and is more comprehensively covered in Sh.Zh. Tokhtabaeva's monograph *Masterpieces of the Great Steppe*, which explores various types of Kazakh decorative and applied arts in an accessible scholarly format. In the section dedicated to Kazakh weaving, Tokhtabaeva pays particular attention to the rituals and customs associated with the production process.

Following Kazakhstan's independence and a resurgence of ethnic self-awareness, interest in the history and culture of the Kazakhs saw a dramatic rise. This led to the publication of hundreds of articles, books, and photo albums on the applied arts and folk crafts of the Kazakhs, including various types of carpets and woven strips. These works, to varying degrees, address the types of ornaments, their semantics, and the symbolism embedded in Kazakh folk patterns.

N. Bazhenova astutely observed that the existing publications tend to focus primarily on ethnographic and historical aspects. There is, however, a notable absence of comprehensive studies detailing the full technological cycle, including the wide variety of weaving techniques employed by the Kazakh people and the tools used in production. No modern publication, with the exception of a few, has offered an artistic analysis of weaving as

⁷ TOREBAEV, B. P. et al. The production of felt products of the nomads of Eurasia as a phenomenon of world culture. *Technology of the textile industry*. No. 5 (389), 2020, pp. 122-127
ASANOVA, B. E. *Kazakh artistic felt as a phenomenon of nomadic culture*. Almaty: "KazAkparat", 2007.

a form of art. As a result, many questions remain unanswered concerning the technological processes, the development of artistic elements, regional distinctions, and the ongoing significance of weaving traditions in the modern Kazakh artistic landscape.⁸

The interest of foreign scholars—primarily historians, anthropologists, and to a lesser extent, art historians—in Kazakh crafts and carpet-making has not yet yielded significant academic contributions.

This report focuses on Kazakh ornaments as a fundamental element of the Kazakhs' material and spiritual culture, embodied in the *baskur*, which served not only to reinforce the structure of the yurt but also to adorn its interior and provide protection for its inhabitants. The report outlines the techniques involved in the creation of the *baskur* and details its various types. Particular emphasis is placed on the analysis of *baskur* ornaments and the typology of their patterns. The findings presented in this report can serve as valuable data for a cross-cultural comparative typological study of ornamental serpentine patterns along the Silk Road.

Utility of the Baskur

Within the yurt, various parts of the wooden frame were secured using ropes, woven belts, and *baskur* strips. Beneath the dome of the yurt, the *shanyrak*, decorative woven braids or patterned bands were often suspended. In cases of strong winds, these braids were tied to stakes driven into the ground, thus reinforcing the entire structure of the nomadic dwelling.

The length of the *baskur* needed to be sufficient to encircle the yurt completely. Typically, the width of a *baskur* ranged from 20 to 30 cm, although some reached widths of up to 40 or 50 cm. Wealthier Kazakhs adorned their yurts with multiple *baskurs*, rather than just one. For a standard 6-rope yurt, the *baskur* typically measured 15 to 20 meters in length, with the production of one *baskur* taking approximately 10 days.

The interior of the yurt was further enhanced with additional patterned braids: *shashak bau*, decorative ribbons with tassels that hung from the dome poles, and *uyk bau*, which secured the felt coverings to the supporting poles. Another notable type of *baskur* is the wide woven tape known as *keregebas*, used to fasten the lattice walls (*kerege*) to the external supports of the yurt. The yurt was also encircled by *ak-baskurs* (white belts), unwound from a roll and laid over the roof with the front side facing inward. The belt's lower edge was

⁸ BAZHENOVA, N. A. *Kazakhskoye narodnoye tkachestvo. Polotno kul'tura*. Sbornik materialov mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii. Almaty, 2018. <https://roerich.kz/publication/kazahskoe-narodnoe-tkachestvo.htm>

positioned to meet the upper edge of the *kyzyl-baskur*, with precise calculations ensuring that the *kyzyl-baskur*'s width perfectly matched the length of the corresponding yurt section.

Structurally, the *ak-baskur*—meaning "white main belt"—does not fulfill the role of a primary support. Rather, it serves an auxiliary function, though its name reflects the cultural importance attached to it by yurt owners. While the yurt's frame was typically purchased from skilled craftsmen, the decoration, including the *ak-baskur*, was traditionally crafted by the house's mistress, often as part of her preparations for marriage. The *ak-baskur* is one of the most intricate and labour-intensive decorative elements, proudly displayed on the yurt's ceiling, showcasing the craftsmanship and skill of the household's women. Its prominent position made it a source of pride and prestige.

The *ak-baskur* is woven with a pile pattern, dominated by red and brown tones on a white cotton base, creating a striking aesthetic. The length of the *baskur*, like all woven elements of the yurt, depends on the number of ropes used, as it is a structurally significant component of the yurt's architecture.

The production of *baskurs* begins with the processing of wool. Sheep are sheared, and the wool is washed, cleaned, and dyed with natural colours. The wool is then fluffed into a light, cloud-like texture by beating it with sticks, before being twisted into thick threads, wound into balls, and further twisted into finer threads for weaving. These threads are then wound onto a spindle, known in Kazakh as *urshyk*, from which they are ready to be woven.

The weaving process itself typically involves a dense warp of multi-coloured threads and a single-colour weft, with a limited yet vibrant colour palette. Common combinations include deep red and blue, orange and brown, and, less frequently, orange and blue.



Figure 3. Baskur making. Painting in the National Gallery of Karakalpakstan, Nukus.

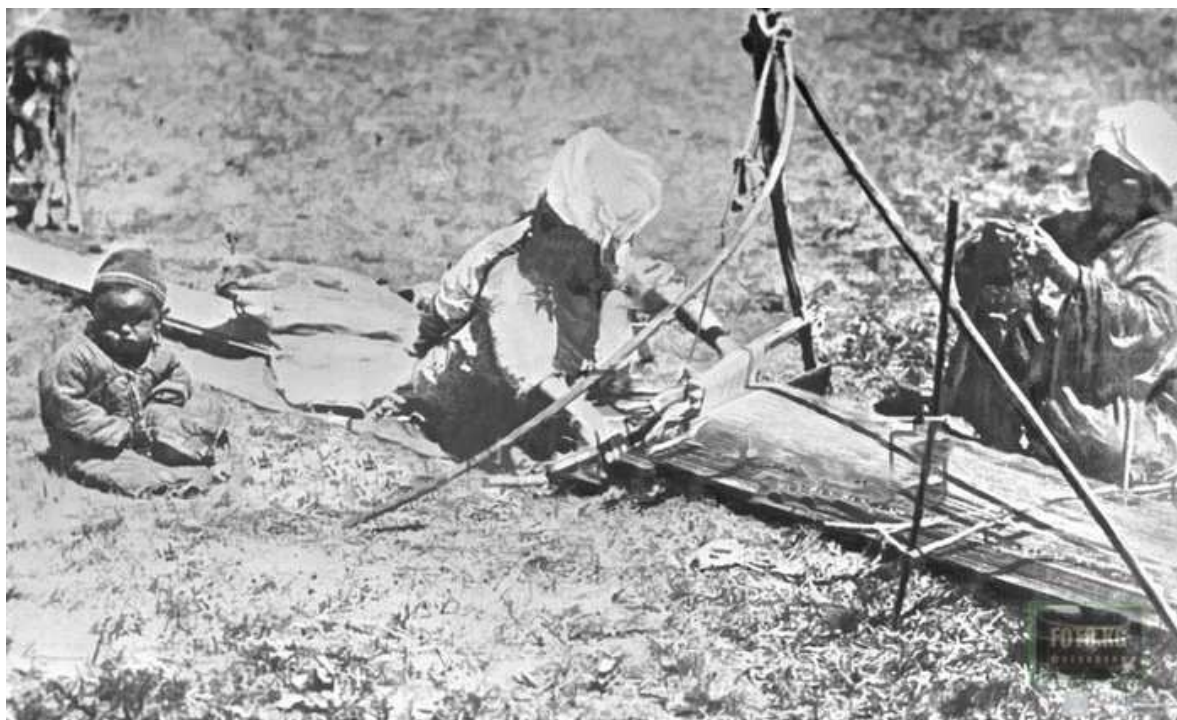


Figure 4. Making baskur in Kyrgyzstan. Photo from 1927.



Figure 5. Single-Wind Loom of the Karakalpaks. National Museum, Nukus.

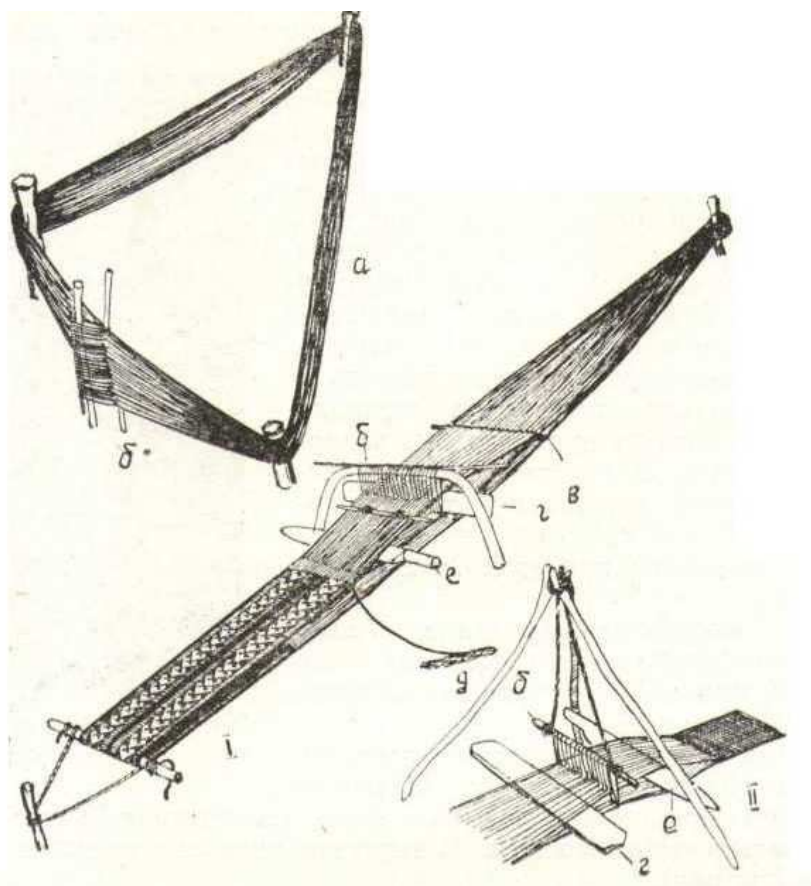


Figure 6. Components of a single-wing loom of the Kirghiz. Early 20th century.

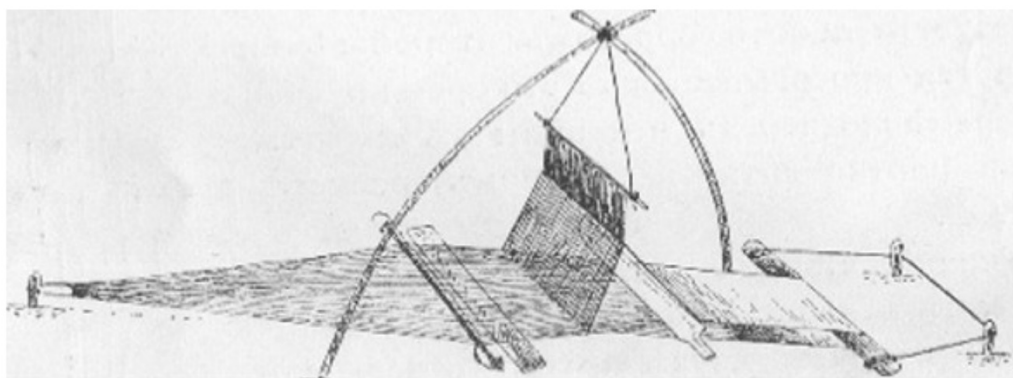


Figure 7. Ormek – one-wing loom of the Kazakhs in the past and present.

The *ormek*, a loom used by the Kazakhs and other neighbouring peoples, is a simple structure composed of wooden elements, traditionally employed for the production of woven carpets. On this loom, artisans primarily crafted woolen fabrics, carpets, carpet bags, *baskurs*, and other types of patterned bands used to adorn the yurt.

Narrow-woven *ormek* looms were utilised for weaving patterned stripes and *alasha* carpets, which were then stitched together from several narrow strips. The wide patterned bands of the *baskur* were used to encircle the yurt's frame, securing it completely. All types of *baskurs*, produced using various weaving techniques, are traditionally crafted with widths ranging from 30 to 50 cm, and their length is determined by the size of the yurt they are intended for, typically spanning between 10 and 15 meters.

Types of Kazakh baskur

The most common type of *baskur* was the lint-free *kyzyl-baskur*, adorned with traditional horn-shaped ornaments (*koshkar muiz*, *sonar muiz*) along the sides of rhombuses. Another widely used variety, the *ala-baskur*, featured multi-coloured patterns borrowed from carpet designs, distinguishing it from the *kyzyl-baskur*.

The half-pile *baskur* (*ak-baskur*) was particularly striking. Its base was woven from smooth white fabric, while the patterns were created using pile weaving, involving the tying of pile knots onto the smooth base. *Baskur* is typically woven on a loom with multi-coloured threads, where the weft is inserted using ornamental weaving and unlined (*arched*) weaving techniques (*kakpa toku*). The fleecy, white *baskur* is made by tying coloured threads to the warp, while a smooth, lint-free *baskur* is woven from multi-coloured threads in a rug-like format. Camel, sheep, and goat wool are commonly used in the production.

Brightly patterned ribbons on a white background were often used to decorate ceremonial yurts. The Kazakh tradition of lavish weddings called for rich interior decorations, which were seen as essential to ensuring the happiness of newlyweds. These patterned ribbons were symbolic, often associated with spatial and human body structures.

Baskurs are categorised by their background colour: white *ak-baskur* and red *kyzyl-baskur*. The *ak-baskur* is crafted using a highly complex combined weaving technique, making it a true decorative highlight of the yurt. This intricate method combines a carpet warp with an ornament woven on the upper row using knot weaving. The production of an *ak-baskur* requires the wool of 3-4 sheep for the base and an additional 1-2 sheep for the pile. The ornamentation on these ribbons typically follows a horizontal axis and includes

zoomorphic, plant, and geometric motifs. Narrower ribbons, such as *akbau* and *zhelbau*, are also traditionally woven using this technique.

Another common method, *orama*, is widely employed in *baskur* production. In this technique, the ornament is formed using an additional coloured weft thread. The resulting ornamental composition features alternating stripes, within which various patterns are fitted, such as broken lines, multi-coloured rhombic grids, triangles, and variations of the "ram's horns pattern."

The symbolism and connotations embedded in baskur

ornaments

Ornaments on *baskurs* are imbued with profound symbolism and connotations, reflecting concepts such as status and wealth, protection and luck, religious and spiritual significance, cultural identity, and connections to nature and personal meaning.

Zoomorphic symbols: Horses, camels, falcons, and rams are vividly represented in these patterns. Over time, specific body parts of these animals, such as wings, heads, horns, and humps, were depicted, each carrying a distinct symbolic meaning.

One of the most prevalent Kazakh ornaments is the *koshkar muiz* (ram's horn). It is ubiquitous in Kazakh decorative arts, seen on felt, woven textiles, and other crafted items. This widespread use can be attributed to two main factors. First, cattle breeding was the primary economic activity of the nomadic tribes, and both the ram and the horse held special significance for the Kazakhs. Second, with the advent of Islam, which prohibited the depiction of human and animal figures, abstract representations of animals became a common artistic expression.

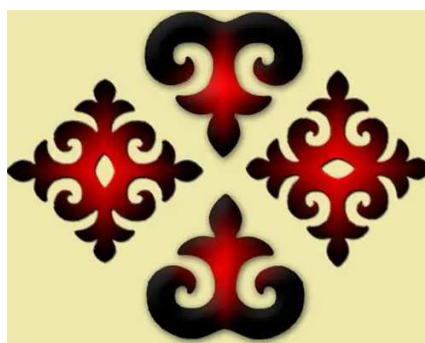


Figure 8. *Koshkar muiz*. NURIYEVA, A. *Znaki i smysly kazakhskikh ornamentov* (Signs and Meanings of Kazakh Ornaments). [online] 2019 [cited 18 September 2024]. Available from: <https://www.caa-network.org/archives/15372>

Patterns depicting heads, horns, hooves of animals, and the wings and claws of birds are central elements in Kazakh ornamentation. From these basic forms, many derivatives have emerged, giving rise to an array of curves, wavy lines, spirals, and curls. Zoomorphic patterns in Kazakh ornamentation are rooted in realistic depictions of totemic animals and birds such as the ram, horse, deer, wolf, bull, and hawk. Some of these, particularly the horn motifs and representations of animal tracks, carried ritual significance. Additionally, Kazakh ornaments feature numerous designs that evoke the silhouettes of birds and the contours of their wings, necks, and legs, further enriching the symbolic depth of these patterns.⁹

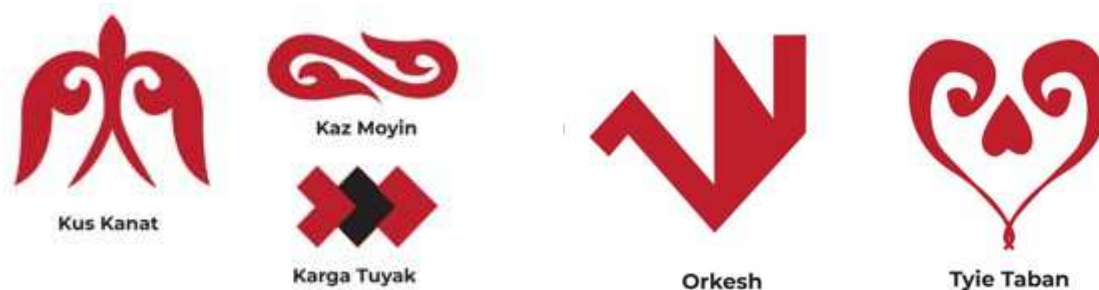


Figure 9. *Koshkar muiz*. NURIYEVA, A. c. d.

Plant Symbols: In the ancient world, plants were vital resources for food, medicine, and livestock, which is why vegetation held such profound significance. Flowers, leaves, inflorescences, and fruits were skillfully incorporated into striking ornamental designs. In Kazakh ornamentation, the intertwining of floral elements symbolizes unity, growth, and interconnection. These motifs also represent fertility, eternal renewal, the revival of life, and abundance. Such designs are frequently featured in embroidery on *tuskiiz*, as well as on clothing and various household items, reflecting their enduring cultural importance.

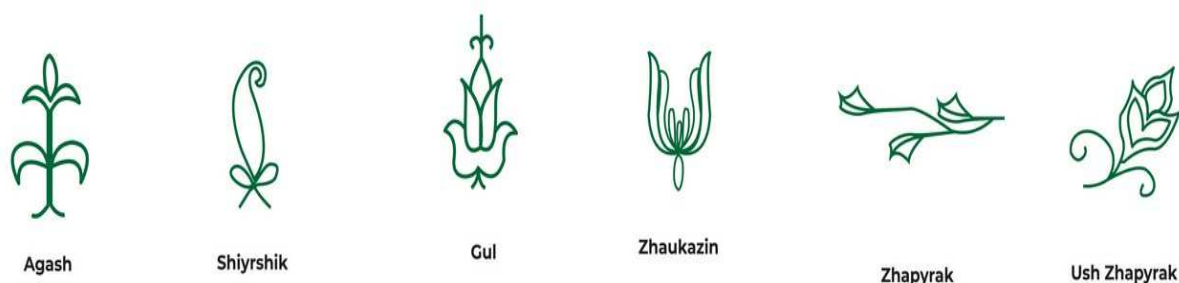


Figure 10. *Koshkar muiz*. NURIYEVA, A. c. d.

⁹ *Vektornaya kolleksiya kazakhskikh ornamentov "Baskur"* (Vector Collection of Kazakh Ornaments "Baskur"). [online] [cited 18 September 2024]. Available from: <https://veta.kz/old/www.veta.kz/articles/323280.html>

Geometrical Symbols: Geometric motifs, such as rhombuses, zigzags, and triangles, feature prominently in Kazakh woven products and are closely tied to the techniques used in their creation. These patterns are characterized by balance and proportional division, with lines that vary from straight to wavy, spiral, chain-like, and cord forms, used to construct intricate ornamental compositions. These geometric designs are commonly applied in architectural decorations, carpets, wood and stone carvings, and leather embossing. The materials and techniques used in their production directly influence the style and patterns of the ornaments.

In many designs, rhombuses are combined with crosses and swastikas. Although the swastika is now associated with the Nazis, who appropriated it from the ancient Aryans of India, its origins stretch back to the Neolithic era. The swastika was a widespread symbol across Asia, the Caucasus, Greece, and even in the Mayan civilization of the Americas. Some believe that the Milky Way resembles a swastika, representing the four cardinal points and the rotational movement around the world axis. When two infinity symbols, representing Tengri, are crossed, they form a clockwise swastika symbolizing life, while a counterclockwise swastika is thought to represent the afterlife.¹⁰

Cosmogonic Symbols: Cosmogonic patterns, symbolizing the sun and the universe—such as *kun kozi* (the sun's eye), *kun saulesi* (sun rays), and *shyqqan kun* (sunrise)—have been effectively incorporated into modern Kazakh symbols and heraldry. A defining feature of Kazakh ornamentation is its strict adherence to the principles of symmetry and rhythmic composition. Folk artisans displayed remarkable skill in arranging complex designs, whether on large or small surfaces. The harmonious use of colour, rhythmic repetition, and the blending of various tones are hallmarks of Kazakh craftsmanship, reflecting a deep understanding of balance and aesthetic unity.¹¹

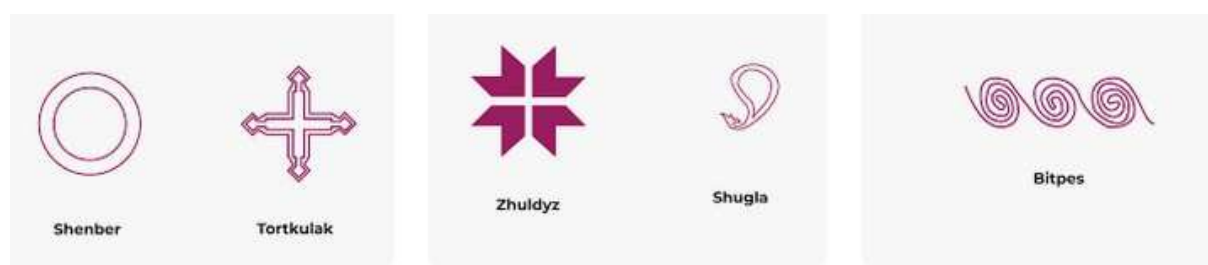


Figure 11. *Koshkar muiz*. NURIYEVA, A. c. d.

¹⁰ NURIYEVA, A. *Znaki i smysly kazakhskikh ornamentov* (Signs and Meanings of Kazakh Ornaments). [online] 2019 [cited 18 September 2024]. Available from: <https://www.caa-network.org/archives/15372>

¹¹ MINUAROV, I. B. The Symbolic Meaning of Kazakh Ornaments. [online] Qazaqstan Tarihy portaly, 2013-2024 [cited 18 September 2024]. Available from: <https://e-history.kz/en/news/show/7648>

The use of colour in Kazakh ornamentation was closely tied to the materials employed and the graphic patterns crafted. The colours used in ornamental clothing held profound meaning, with each shade carrying its own symbolism: blue represented the sky, white signified joy, truth, and happiness, yellow symbolized knowledge and wisdom, red embodied fire and the sun, green stood for youth and spring, while black represented the earth. The combination of white and red was traditionally associated with celebrations, whereas darker, muted tones conveyed sorrow and grief.

The arrangement of colours in ornamentation was of great importance, with a precise order of alternation required to maintain the desired aesthetic. The selection of background colours and patterns dictated the overall composition. In Kazakh tradition, blue always symbolized the sky; red, the sun and fire; yellow, intellect and melancholy; black, the earth; and green, youth and spring. Consequently, the choice and arrangement of colours in these ornaments reflected the historically ingrained perceptions of the natural world, alongside the aesthetic tastes and national characteristics of the Kazakh people.

For example, in the central green belt of Russia, red predominates in local designs, while in the cities of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, where yellow deserts dominate the landscape, a preference for ceramics in shades of blue can be observed. In applied arts, two types of paints were typically used.

Ethnographers have noted in their fieldwork that many *baskur* ribbons seen in yurts today feature the woven names of the craftswomen's children and grandchildren. Informants claim that this practice is a relatively new tradition, beginning around the 1960s and continuing to the present day.

Conclusion

Every aspect of the daily lives and cultural practices of the Kazakhs, as well as other peoples along the Great Silk Road, was permeated with ornamentation, a versatile and profound visual expression of their creative capacity. These patterns, distinguished by their elegant simplicity and universal appeal, served a far greater purpose than mere decoration; they encapsulated the essence of their worldview and embodied the core ideas of their relationship with nature, society, and the divine. Over time, each ornament's symbolic form became a vehicle for spiritual principles and cultural knowledge, evolving into a powerful medium for cross-cultural communication. Within this broader cultural framework, ornamentation transcended

its decorative function, transforming into a universal visual language grounded in a symbolic and archetypal perception of reality.

Experts suggest that the diversity in ornamental designs among the Kazakhs was largely shaped by regional distinctions, rather than broader, more general influences. This indicates that the specific patterns, motifs, and decorative styles vary significantly from one geographic region to another, reflecting local cultural, environmental, and historical factors unique to each area. As a result, these regional characteristics play a more significant role in shaping the aesthetic identity of Kazakh decorative art than overarching or generic elements.

Kazakh ornaments form an integral part of the cultural heritage of Kazakhstan. They are deeply symbolic, often representing ideas connected to nature, life, and spirituality. Kazakh ornaments harmoniously combine abstract, geometric, and natural motifs, each imbued with deep symbolism, closely linked to the nomadic way of life, spirituality, and connection to nature. These ornaments are not merely decorative; they convey cultural and spiritual values passed down through generations. In essence, Kazakh ornaments vividly express the country's history, culture, and artistic heritage, highlighting the unique identity of the Kazakh people.

Kazakh patterns also share a profound connection with the designs of other Central Asian cultures, extending their influence far beyond the region. The tribal culture of Kazakhstan was shaped by significant cultural exchanges with neighbouring regions, particularly the Volga and Siberian areas. These interactions left a lasting imprint on Kazakh art and ornamentation. The distinctive patterns found in Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Karakalpak designs are not confined to their own cultural sphere; they bear striking similarities to motifs discovered in the burial mounds of the Ancient Altai and the Caucasus, suggesting a broader cultural diffusion. This interweaving of styles underscores the extensive reach of Kazakh artistry, which transcends regional boundaries and reflects a shared heritage across vast territories.

This similarity is also evident among various ethnic groups, including Azerbaijanis, Alans, Bashkirs, Bulgarians, Kumyks, Nogais, Tatars, Ukrainians, and others. These commonalities have deep historical roots, stretching back many centuries. The explanation for this is straightforward: in ancient times, the absence of rigid borders allowed for the free movement of people, ideas, and cultural practices across this vast region and beyond. The lack of defined boundaries along the Great Silk Road facilitated a natural exchange, which shaped the shared characteristics observed today.

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