



Article

Carpet Weaving in the Kashkadarya Oasis and its Distinctive Features

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Abstract: This article examines the historical development, ethno-cultural foundations, technical features, and contemporary significance of carpet weaving in the Kashkadarya oasis of Uzbekistan. Particular attention is paid to carpet traditions associated with Uzbek, Arab, Turkmen, Qongirat, Lakay, Barlas, and other communities, as well as to regionally distinctive forms such as julkhir, arabi or taqir kilims, qiz-gilam, oy-gilam, and gajari. Using a qualitative historical-ethnographic and comparative approach, the study synthesizes written, archaeological, museum, and cultural-heritage sources to identify the relationship between weaving technique, ornament, raw material, natural dyeing, and social function. The results show that Kashkadarya carpet weaving developed through long-term interaction among sedentary and pastoral traditions and became a material expression of household practice, ritual meaning, ethnic identity, interregional exchange, and artistic continuity. The article also highlights the decline of some hand-weaving practices during industrialization and the current importance of safeguarding traditional knowledge through documentation, artisan support, exhibitions, tourism, and heritage-based economic development.

Keywords: Kashkadarya, Carpet Weaving, Julkhir, Gajari, Arabi Kilim, Qiz-Gilam, Oy-Gilam, Natural Dyes, Ethno-Culture, Traditional Craftsmanship

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1. Introduction

Traditional carpet weaving is one of the most significant branches of applied art and household craftsmanship in Central Asia. In Uzbekistan, carpet making developed within both settled and pastoral environments and became closely connected with wool production, domestic life, ritual practice, aesthetic expression, and interregional exchange. National heritage documentation identifies gilamdozlik (carpet weaving) as a form of traditional craftsmanship whose historical basis reflects the interaction of Turkic, Iranian, and other cultural traditions [1].

The Kashkadarya oasis occupies a particularly important place in this history because it lies at the intersection of ancient cultural zones and migration routes. Archaeological and historical research on southern Uzbekistan indicates that textile production and decorative arts were already well developed in antiquity, including during the Kushan period [2]. Later ethnographic studies recorded a complex carpet culture shaped by Uzbek, Arab, Turkmen, Qongirat, Lakay, Barlas, and other communities. Gul's synthesis of Uzbek carpet traditions emphasizes that regional carpets should be understood not only as utilitarian objects but also as carriers of aesthetic systems and symbolic meanings [3].

Ethnic interaction is especially visible in the carpet traditions of Kashkadarya Arabs and Qongirat groups. Historical descriptions of Central Asian carpets link the

Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya traditions and identify 'Karshi carpets' as a recognizable regional group [4]. The Arab communities of Kashkadarya became particularly associated with pileless arabi or taqir carpets, while Qongirat and Lakay weaving retained distinctive household and dowry functions. Museum evidence from nineteenth-century Arab Uzbek kilims confirms that Kashkadarya was an important carpet-producing area and that weaving could also serve as a household source of income [5].

Despite the cultural importance of these traditions, modernization, factory production, synthetic materials, and changing household practices have reduced the continuity of some hand-weaving techniques. At the same time, renewed attention to intangible cultural heritage has created opportunities for safeguarding craft knowledge and strengthening the economic role of artisans. Uzbekistan's broader heritage policy recognizes traditional craftsmanship as an important component of living heritage and cultural transmission [6]. Therefore, the present study aims to systematize the distinctive forms, technologies, symbolic features, and socio-economic meanings of carpet weaving in the Kashkadarya oasis and to explain their place within the wider textile culture of Central Asia.

2. Materials and Methods

This study used a qualitative historical-ethnographic research design. The principal analytical material consisted of published studies on Uzbek and Central Asian carpet weaving, archaeological interpretations of southern Uzbekistan, museum and cultural-heritage documentation, and descriptions of traditional weaving practices contained in the source manuscript. Particular attention was given to evidence concerning Kashkadarya, Karshi, Shahrisabz, Dehkanabad, and related communities in the southern regions.

The analysis was conducted in four stages. First, historical sources were reviewed to identify the chronology and cultural background of textile and carpet production. Second, the major carpet types mentioned in the sources were classified according to construction, pile structure, weaving technique, raw material, ornament, and social use. Third, the study compared the practices of different ethnic communities in order to identify shared and distinctive features. Fourth, the findings were interpreted in relation to cultural continuity, symbolic meaning, heritage safeguarding, and contemporary economic potential. Davlatova's study of Uzbek traditional craftsmanship was used to contextualize craft practices within historical change [7], while research on pileless Uzbek carpets supported the technical comparison of flat-woven forms [8].

The study is interpretive rather than experimental. It does not claim statistical generalizability and does not attempt to quantify the current number of artisans or production volume. Instead, it reconstructs the distinctive characteristics of the Kashkadarya carpet tradition from converging documentary and ethnographic evidence. The analytical emphasis is on cultural form, technique, function, and transmission.

3. Result

The findings indicate that Kashkadarya carpet weaving is best understood as a regional school formed through the interaction of ancient textile traditions and the practices of multiple ethnic communities. Historical evidence places textile craftsmanship in southern Uzbekistan within a long cultural continuum, while later ethnographic materials show how local traditions absorbed and reinterpreted motifs, structures, and techniques brought by mobile and settled populations. This helps explain why Kashkadarya carpets display both strong regional coherence and substantial internal diversity. Muxiddinova's research on the history of craftsmanship in Kashkadarya likewise emphasizes the depth of the region's craft traditions [9].

One of the most distinctive forms is the julkhir, a long-pile carpet traditionally associated with pastoral life. Its thick wool structure provided thermal insulation, while its long pile and comparatively ancient construction gave it a visually powerful and tactile character. Recent research on julkhirs describes the technique as an important stage in the

historical development from plain weaving toward pile weaving and emphasizes its connection with traditional beliefs and nomadic material culture [10]. In Kashkadarya, the julkhir was woven primarily from sheep, goat, or camel wool. The decline of household production during the twentieth century, however, made this technique increasingly rare and strengthened the need for documentation and revival.

A second major group consists of pileless carpets associated with Arab and Uzbek communities. The arabi or taqir carpet is woven as a flat kilim, and the slit-weave method creates clear boundaries between color fields and geometric motifs. These characteristics are consistent with museum examples of Arab Uzbek kilims from Kashkadarya, which use wool warp and weft, saturated colors, and bold geometric compositions [11]. Such carpets had practical domestic functions but also reflected cultural identity, household economy, and interregional connections.

The qiz-gilam, or maiden's carpet, demonstrates the relationship between weaving and life-cycle ritual. Traditionally associated with Qongirat and Lakay communities, it formed part of a bride's dowry and therefore combined material value with social and symbolic meaning. Its bright red field, octagonal motifs, crosses, and horn-like ornaments reveal interaction with wider Turkmen and Central Asian design systems. The oy-gilam, by contrast, is notable for its white wool ground and celestial motifs representing the moon and stars. The repeated transmission of these designs from one generation to another transformed the carpet into a repository of family memory and cosmological symbolism.

The gajari technique adds another layer of technical complexity. Gajari carpets are flat-woven from finely spun wool and are characterized by striped patterns and floating or free warp threads on the reverse. Similar techniques are known in Iran, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, and Turkey, suggesting that Kashkadarya weaving was connected to wider West and Central Asian textile networks. Cultural-heritage documentation on Qongirat weaving in Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya confirms the coexistence of gajari, takir, julkhir, and other woven products and notes the use of both horizontal and narrow-beam looms [12].

4. Discussion

Technical quality also depended on knotting, yarn preparation, and dyeing. Asymmetric or Persian knots could support high density and detailed ornament, while locally available sheep and camel wool provided durable raw material. Natural dyes, especially madder and plant-based colorants, contributed to the characteristic red, brown, yellow, and related tones of traditional carpets. Historical accounts show that natural dye systems were gradually supplemented or replaced by synthetic dyes during the twentieth century, altering both production practice and visual character [13].

From a broader historical perspective, the Kashkadarya tradition belongs to the larger family of Central Asian carpet cultures. Comparative scholarship emphasizes that Central Asian carpets include a wide range of knotted, flat-woven, and felted traditions produced by Uzbek, Turkmen, Tajik, Kyrgyz, Kazakh, Karakalpak, and other communities, and that their history is difficult to separate from patterns of migration, pastoralism, trade, and cultural exchange [14]. This wider framework helps explain the stylistic correspondences between Kashkadarya carpets and neighboring textile traditions without reducing their local identity.

The contemporary significance of Kashkadarya carpet weaving lies in both cultural preservation and sustainable local development. Traditional craftsmanship can contribute to artisan livelihoods, cultural tourism, museum interpretation, creative industries, and the transmission of practical knowledge to younger generations. The recognition of carpet weaving within Uzbekistan's national intangible cultural heritage framework provides an institutional basis for such safeguarding [15]. Effective preservation should therefore combine documentation of techniques and terminology, apprenticeship and community-based training, access to quality natural materials, exhibitions and digital catalogues, and market development that does not detach the products from their cultural meanings.

5. Conclusion

Carpet weaving in the Kashkadarya oasis represents a distinctive regional tradition formed through the long-term interaction of ancient southern Uzbek textile culture and the practices of Uzbek, Arab, Turkmen, Qongirat, Lakay, and other communities. Julkhir, arabi or taqir kilims, qiz-gilam, oy-gilam, and gajari demonstrate different combinations of pile structure, flat weaving, knotting, ornament, raw materials, and social function. Their significance extends beyond household utility because the carpets preserve collective memory, ritual meanings, ethnic identity, artistic knowledge, and evidence of interregional cultural exchange. The study also shows that industrialization and changing lifestyles have weakened some forms of hand production, making safeguarding increasingly important. Sustainable preservation should connect scholarly documentation with artisan training, museum and digital interpretation, heritage tourism, exhibitions, and responsible market support. In this way, Kashkadarya carpet weaving can remain a living cultural practice while also contributing to contemporary cultural and economic development.

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