

EMBROIDERED CARPETS OF UZBEKISTAN

Abstract: *The article is devoted to the embroidered carpets of Uzbekistan, which may be in two flat-woven varieties and one felt one. The earliest items of this group, related to the cultural heritage of Uzbekistan – Bactrian ones – were found in burials of Noin-Ula (Mongolia). After a long break in the finds, scientists began documenting the tradition of embroidered carpets anew, based on the finds from the late 19th – early 20th century. These materials are the products of the Uzbek groups belonging to the Dasht-i-Kipchak tribal association – the Kungrat and Lakai; namely, the flat-woven carpets of the enli type (ok-enli gilam, kizil-enli gilam, kara-enli gilam) and kiz gilam, as well as felt carpet products and felt carpets (kigiz). In Uzbekistan, the focus of researchers fell on these items only starting from the early 2000s, after the Complex Expedition was undertaken to Boysun, which UNESCO proclaimed a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Boysun is an area in the Surkhandarya region of Uzbekistan, where the traditions of the Uzbek carpet weaving are preserved in their most authentic form. The technological process of their manufacture, the purpose and semantic content of their decor, and the related evolution have been identified and researched, ever since. In the last quarter of the (20th) century, ok-enli gilams have only survived in the working practice of the Kungrat weavers of Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya. The study of the embroidered carpets in the entire variety of their types and the popularization thereof will help draw the attention of relevant organizations to the goal of reviving this group of traditional textiles manufacture and use.*

Key words: *embroidered carpets, ok-enli gilam (kara-enli, kizil-enli), kiz gilam, kigiz.*

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UZBEKISTAN is a country with extremely rich textile traditions. The diverse landscapes - the combination of fertile oases with the steppes, foothills, deserts and semi-deserts - have all become the reason for the diverse economy and culture groups of population to have coexisted here for centuries. The inhabitants of the cities and oasis-type settlements, while growing cotton and mulberry, were also engaged in embroidery crafts, including gold weaving. They created printed cloth, magnificent cotton and silk fabrics that enthralled and “conquered” the entire world. Cattle breeders, in turn, having enough wool, weaved the carpets and fulfilled the felt. The textile culture of this part of the population of this region is also represented in embroidery (silk, wool, and cotton). These were primarily small-sized products – various kinds of packaging containers, or clothing items, or embroidered carpets, which will be discussed further below. In general, the carpets were predominantly the product of cattle breeding or “pastoral” groups that still preserved traditions of their nomadic past.

The modern-day carpet weaving is being developed in Uzbekistan at a dynamic pace, but has little to do with the classical carpet making legacy of

the land. In this regard, the study and preservation of the local authentic weaving traditions are of particular importance. The purpose of this article is to present to the reader a group of the least studied Uzbek carpets: the embroidered ones, in order to consider the genesis of their typical production techniques, their types, their distribution areas, and the semantics of their motifs.

In the 19th century, when three independent Uzbek states existed on the territory of the modern-day Uzbekistan – the Khiva khanate, Kokand khanate, and the Emirate of Bukhara, the carpet weaving was spread mainly among the part of the population engaged in agisted stock breeding or trans-humane grazing. These are the numerous Uzbek tribal groups of the Dasht-i-Kipchak origin (the largest are the Kungrats and Lakai of the Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya regions), the tribal groups of the Samarkand region, Jizzakh and the Ferghana Valley, having lost their tribal identification, the Karakalpaks and the Kyrgyz of the Ferghana Valley. The grassland farming was also well developed and popular with the Arabs of Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya, with the Turkmens of the middle reaches of the Amu Darya, whose lands were part of the Bukhara Emirate, and

these population groups, in effect, combined the breeding of sheep and camels with agriculture. Each of the above groups produced carpets and carpet-type products, furnishing the finished products not only for their domestic households, but also for the needs of the townspeople. In more modest volumes, though, the carpet weaving was practiced by sedentary farmers, in particular, Tajiks.

The local carpets differed in types, purposes and manufacturing techniques. Based on the technical parameters, they can be classed into piled, smooth-woven (pattern-woven, pile-free), embroidered or felt-type. If we talk about the exclusive Uzbek carpet-making tradition, it includes the following groups of carpets, which stand out in their production processes: long-pile *julhirs*, short-pile (shorn) *gilams*, smooth-woven, felt-type. The smooth-woven carpets group is the most diverse one; it consists of smooth-woven carpets and carpets with embroidery. The latter include two types — *enli gilam* and *kiz gilam*. The embroidered group is also complemented by one of the types of felt carpets.

Embroidered carpets in publications of their researchers. Embroidered carpets have attracted the attention of researchers since the early stages of the study of carpet weaving in Central Asia, which began in the mid of 19th century, when the Russian Empire launched a campaign conquering this region (1854–1880). However, this is rather a fixation or documentation of the materials, which is quite understandable for the first steps towards understanding the carpet weaving of these remote lands, newly discovered for Russian researchers and travelers. So, we can see black and white photos of *ok-enli* carpets in the book “Ancient Carpets of Central Asia” by Armin Baron von Fölkersahm, collector, artist and art critic, curator of the Treasure Gallery at the Imperial Hermitage and, later, director of the Hermitage, who, however, did not have a chance to visit the land of their creation (Fölkersahm 1915: 64–65). The author identifies them as «Uzbek Kungrat embroidered palases» and notes that they are part of the collection of the Russian Museum of Alexander III (the nowadays State Russian Museum in St. Petersburg). With reference to the manufacturers of these carpets, he writes: “They are distinguished by the embroidery of the luxurious palases with patterns of floral motifs, while sheared carpets do not rise above the level of ordinary make of some other Uzbek tribes” (Fölkersahm 1915: 75).

The most large-scale work devoted to the carpets of the region has been the monograph by Valentina Moshkova entitled “The Carpets of the peoples of Central Asia of the late 19th – early 20th century.” It still remains in its status as a reference book for all specialists and enthusiasts of this type of

applied art. However, embroidered carpets, among smooth-woven, or, as the author writes, pile-free (*kokhma*, *terme*, *gajari*, *besht-kashta*, *arabi*¹), have not been mentioned herein (Moshkova 1970: 38–41). However, page 41 demonstrates a single black-and-white fragment of an *ok-enli gilam* carpet, which, judging by the patterns, is one of the copies published by Fölkersahm. The author captioned it as “made according to the *besht-kashta* technique” with an additional note that “*besht-kashta* palases with a relief multi-colored overlaid pattern seem to be embroidered by the rough smooth stitching, and this may sometimes lead to a confusion of definitions” (Moshkova 1970: 40, Fig. 17). Perhaps this situation arose because the preparation of the book for the publication, including its part containing illustrations, was completed after the author passed away. In fact, the photo, undoubtedly, shows an embroidered carpet.

The group of embroidered ones was singled out in her classification of carpets of Central Asia by Elena Tsareva, Russian specialist in archaeological and ethnographic textiles of the peoples of this region. She included photographs of two items of this type in her excellent review article, noting that they have “distinct tribal characteristics” (Tsareva 2003: 228). These are *kiz-gilam* of the early 20th century, woven in the village of Tuda, Baysun district, and a felt carpet, which the author captioned as *kiz-namat*, woven in Chelek, Samarkand region in the 1920s, (both pertain to the collection of the Samarkand Museum of Cultural History).

As for the Uzbek studies of the recent decades, embroidered carpets were first mentioned in the materials of the Baysun complex expedition, which operated in 2003–2005, in connection with the proclamation of Baysun, being a region in southern Uzbekistan, as a “Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity under the program” of UNESCO. Baysun turned out to be a true “reserve” of embroidered carpets, although by the time the field work was carried out in this area, only one of their species, *ok-enli gilam*, had survived. The name itself was introduced into the scientific literature by the author of this article (Gyul 2005: 267–283). Further details on embroidered carpets are given in the monograph of the same author, entitled as “The Carpet weaving of Uzbekistan: history, aesthetics, and semantics”, where both of their types are discussed (Gyul 2019: 134–139). Thanks to the Baysun expedition, it was possible to identify the centers where the manufacture of carpets of this type

¹ *Arabi* is the local name for the kilims, derived from the fact that the main manufacturers of these carpets were Central Asian Arabs; the Uzbek version of the name of a kilim is *takir-gilam*.

was still preserved, to pin the understanding of the semantics of their decor, which was preserved among weaveresses by the early 21st century.

Among the publications of the recent years, the article by Zilola Nasyrova, dedicated to *ok-enli* carpets is also noteworthy. In her work, the author specified the variants of this species - *kizil-enli* and *ok-enli* (Nasyrova 2008: 21). Thus, given the obvious attention to embroidered carpets, none of the publications presented a complete range of this type.

Early examples of carpets and embroidered carpet-like products. Before considering all types of embroidered carpets of the late 19th–20th centuries, let us briefly look at the genesis of woolen curtains and embroidered floor covers. The surviving rarities make it possible to understand that such items have been known at least since Antiquity. The earliest known examples - the Bactrian ones - were found in the Hun (Xiongnu) nobles burial ground, located in the Noin-Ula mountains in northern Mongolia (the burial site dates back to the period of the late 1st century BCE – early 1st century CE). These are cloths sewn together from a series of strips of fabric and decorated with satin embroidery in woolen thread. They were obviously intended to decorate the walls of the front rooms of buildings. On the surviving fragments, we can see portrait images, a group of riders with horses, griffins and other characters (these are kept in the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg).

The first researchers put forward an assumption about the Greek origin of these finds (Boroffka 1925: 78). K. V. Trever, in her turn, attributed them to the products of the Hellenized Bactrian environment, made in the late 2nd century BCE. (Trever 1940: 3, 143). S. I. Rudenko also considered that this was the work of the Bactrian and Parthian masters who were at the Hun (Xiongnu) headquarters (Rudenko 1962: 40). G. A. Pugachenkova confirmed the Yuezhi-Kushan origin of these artifacts. At the same time, she noted that the pictorial, realistically wrought imagery here was no longer the product of the steppe nomadic culture, but of the urban handicraft shops of Bactria (Pugachenkova 1966: 191). L. I. Rempel was more specific here, revealing the commonality of the images – Caucasoid faces with characteristic hairstyles fixed using ribbon-diadems, on the surviving fragments with the portraits of Yuezhi rulers on some early Kushan coins, as compared with the Khalchayan sculpture (Rempel 1989: 122).

The exclusivity and the small number of Noin-Ula artifacts did not allow to draw confident conclusions about the scale of Bactrian carpet weaving, at the time of their discovery. Excavations in mounds No. 20 and 31, carried out by the Novosibirsk and Mongolian scientists in 2006–2009, added new rarities to the Bactrian textiles group. Embroidered fragments, both

the already known and newly found ones, were made in the same place, at the same time – at the turn of the common era (Glushkova, Polosmak 2012: 153–157; Polosmak 2013: 154). The subject imagery of the new Noin-Ula finds are even more diverse. Here is a battle scene (133 × 100 cm), a procession of dismounted warriors and priests (?) moving to the altar with a blazing fire (192 × 100 cm), some characters and a ruler sitting in his armchair and holding a bowl with a hot (sacred?) Obviously, at its time, this curtain-carpet adorned the walls of some worshipping premises. On one of the fragments, we can see a profile image of a man, whose depiction is almost a complete match with the image of the “ruling “Gerai” Sanab Kushan” on a silver tetradrachm discovered in the village of Vakhshinskiy in 1967 (Zeimal 1983: 76). Thus, both on the coin and on the embroidered fragment, we can see the image of Kushan himself, the founder of the Yuezhi dynasty, and the carpet can thus be dated to not earlier than the I century BCE – I century CE. (the exact period of reign of Kushan “Gerai” is questionable). Another convincing factor that testifies in favor of the Bactrian version of the origin of the artifacts is the obvious portrait-like resemblance of its characters to the appearance of the ruler of “Gerai,” known from the Khalchayan sculpture (the palace of the ruling dynasty in Surkhandarya). Clothing and military armor are also identical.

Thereafter there was a long gap, and we can only assume the existence of embroidered carpets. Clavijo the Spanish ambassador wrote about the carpets of the period of Timur’s reign (the last third of 14th – early 15th century), mentioning mainly the red ones, with embroidery using golden threads, as well as with inserts of white and other colors of carpet fabric (Clavijo 1990: 122, 130, 131).

Who produced embroidered carpets in the 19th - early 20th century. The samples that follow in time date back to the late 19th – early 20th century. The embroidered carpets of this period are still the products of cattle-breeding groups, but already different in their ethnic composition – Lakai and Kungrats, which, in particular, were mentioned by A. Fölkersahm. Their decor is different from the antique products discussed above – this decor here was, in effect, dominated by the ornamental principles. However, taking into account a certain cultural commonality of the civilizations of the steppe zone, there is reason to talk about the continuity of the very tradition of embroidered carpets (or the use of embroidery in carpets or felts), which subsequently developed with the various ethnic groups into various forms.

It is believed that Lakai and Kungrats are the descendants of the most ancient Turkic part of the population of the Asian steppes. According to

one version, in the early 16th century, these tribes, together with the other Turkic and Turkic-Mongolian tribes led by Sheibani Khan, migrated from the Dasht-i-Kypchak steppes to the south, conquering the oases and cities of Maverannakhr (*Karmysheva* 1954: 35). We find information about the Kungrats, in particular, in the “Chronicles Collection” by historian Rashid ad-Din, who referred to them as “the Turkic tribes, whose nickname was the Mongols in ancient times.” It is known that the Kungrats have long been one of the largest tribes living in the territories of the present-day Khorezm, Samarkand, Bukhara, Navoi, Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya regions, and are now considered as one of the most important sub-ethnic components of the Uzbek nation.

In the twentieth century, Kungrats were located mainly in the Kamashin, Guzar, Dekhkanabad districts of the Kashkadarya region, and the valleys of the Sherabad and Karatag rivers of the Surkhandarya region (Baisun, Shurchi, Dashnabad, Sherabad). Certain groups of Kungrats can be found in the Jizzakh, Kattakurgan, Samarkand, Bukhara regions. In the 1970s, owing to the development of the Karshi steppe, many families of the Kashkadaryan Kungrats moved to Baysun, forming small mono-ethnic villages there. Nowadays, Baysun is an interesting area, a kind of a reserve, where the culture of this tribal group is compactly represented.

The situation was different for the Lakai. Data about them is rather scarce. In the first half of the 19th century, this ethnic group was part of the Katagan tribe, the majority of which lived in their *yurt* (allotment) of Kunduz; The Lakai occupied the vast pastures of the mountainous valleys of southern Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the areas around Balkh and Kunduz in northern Afghanistan and were still engaged in cattle breeding, founded small villages, combining trans-humane grazing with agriculture, while maintaining political independence and tribal integrity.

With the formation of the Uzbek khanates, the territories inhabited by Lakais and Kungrats became part of the Bukhara Emirate. In 1869, the Emir of Bukhara, enraged by the defiant behavior of the tribe inherently independent by their spirit, which never paid him their tribute, deployed a brutal military offensive against the Lakai, defeating their leaders, capturing their herds and thus forcing them to succumb (*Gibbon, Hale* 2007: 33). By 1889, the Lakai were forced to switch to the semi-nomadic lifestyle, and they also began to engage in agriculture, and established a political and military alliance with Bukhara (*Gibbon, Hale* 2007: 33).

In the first years of the Soviet rule, the Lakai again acted as ardent fighters for independence of their lands, but their resistance was historically doomed.

Some families remained in northern Afghanistan (in the Kunduz region), but most of them were concentrated on the lands of the northern bank of the Amu Darya River, mainly in the mountainous regions of Tajikistan, and is included in the new collective-farming life of the country of the Soviets. Today, the Lakai of Tajikistan continue to maintain their identity as an ethnically Uzbek group of people.

The best examples of the Lakai and Kungrat textiles date mainly to the period of 1875 to 1925, but this does not mean that the women of these tribal groups had not been engaged in the needlework earlier. From the 1930s, the quality of the “steppe” textiles was increasingly deteriorating, which was primarily associated with socio-political transformations. The Sovietization and collectivization led to a change in the everyday life, to a gradual erosion of age-old family ritual traditions and customs, where textiles played a prominent role. The widespread use of the carpet ‘artels’ or workshops which united weavers, and produced standardized products, the coming of factory textiles to the everyday life did not contribute to the preservation of the carpet weaving and embroidery traditions, either. The latest Lakai examples, in particular, the embroidery, date to the 1950s, clearly showing a state of decline. The subsequent oblivion of the “nomadic” embroidery and carpets was associated both with the termination of the tradition of their manufacture starting from the 1950s, and with the mass export of the surviving samples abroad.

As for the Kungrats of Uzbekistan, despite all the vicissitudes of the time, they strived to preserve their sway of life, music, folklore, national clothing, handicraft (felt felting, carpet weaving, embroidery), all bearing distinct imprints of the steppe nomadic tradition. In particular, this is expressed in the concept of *nasl buzilmasin* – “so as not to spoil the family”, which implied the rejection of mixed marriages and strict adherence to traditions. Although the quality of modern home-spun carpets was gradually degrading, with their pattern symbolism revisited and redefined, the handicraft tradition is still alive.

Nowadays, the entire known corpus of the embroidered carpets can be divided into two groups according to the quality of their working. The first one is the products of the late 19th - the first quarter of the 20th century, distinguished by the finesse and delicacy of workmanship, highly elaborated and detailed decor, and the balanced color scheme. The second one is products starting from the 1970s, a good example of which are the carpets studied during the Baysun expedition of 2003–2005. While maintaining the principles of the original manufacturing technology and typical decor motifs, the pattern of these products is larger, the fine details disappear, the



Fig. 1. *Ok-enli gilam*. Uzbeks: Lakais or Kungrats. Surkhandarya, 19th century. Private collection of Akbar Khakimov, Bukhara



Fig. 2. Composite *enli* rug with embroidered stripes in white and red. Uzbeks: Lakais or Kungrats. Surkhandarya, 19th century. Private collection of Akbar Khakimov, Bukhara

quality of workmanship deteriorates.

Despite the fact that the main population of the Baysun region is the Tajiks and Uzbeks, the practice of making embroidered carpets was recorded exclusively in the Uzbek villages – Tuda, Khojabulgan, Dashtigoz, Besh Erkak. In Duobe, which has both Tajik and Uzbek populations, embroidered carpets are also produced by Uzbeks, Kungrat tribal groups, and Tortuvli. Such localization once again serves to emphasize the belonging of the embroidered carpets

to the culture of the Turkic tribes of the ‘steppe circle’.

Enli group carpets. Due to the lack of creditable surviving material, it is difficult to state exactly when stable compositions of embroidered carpets, known to us from the material of the 19th – early 20th centuries, were formed. Their first type is carpets of the *enli group* (lit.: *enli* – wide, i.e., obviously, a carpet with a wide – embroidered – strip). Their originality in comparison with other patterned techniques lies in the fact that embroidery is done on the finished

fabric, while the pattern of such types of products as *sumac* and *besht-kashta*, reminiscent of embroidery, was created in the process of fabric weaving using the additional weft thread (Fig. 1, 2). In everyday life, *enli* carpets performed the same functions as the interior embroideries of the *suzani* among the sedentary population - they were the most important wedding attributes and were most often used as curtains or bedspreads, less often for floor cover. They were woven on a narrow warp loom, in separate *takhtas* (narrow, long panels or strips), which were cut into pieces corresponding to the width of the future carpet, embroidered and, finally, sewn together to form a finished product. When stitching, strips with embroidery in this type of carpets are interspersed with strips woven using other techniques, most often - *gajari* (a technique where floating warp threads are pattern-forming), which is why such products are called composite.

As already noted, the embroidered stripes in *enli* carpets could be white, red or dark brown. Depending on this color, the finished products were called *ok-enli gilam* (a carpet with a white wide strip; they also use a reduced *ok-en, okli*), *kyzyl-enli gilam* (a carpet with a red wide strip) and *kara-enli gilam* (a carpet with a black broad strip, Fig. 3) (Nasyrova 2008: 21). White strips, which are most common, can obviously be considered as a wish of a happy way - *ok yul* - to newlyweds, whose future life path was to be "guarded" by various embroidered star and totem signs (curls of ram horns), as well as flower rosettes and palmettes, personifying fertility.

Sometimes, in one carpet, *gajari* stripes could be combined with both white and brick-red embroidered stripes, as, for example, in a copy of the late 19th century, from the collection of the Textile Museum, Washington (accession No. 1989.9.3, gift of Charles Grant Ellis, Fig. 4).

Red, in this case, can also be associated with a protective meaning - this color, in folk magic, has always signified strength and protection. There are also specimens from the early 20th century, where only white and red stripes were sewn together, without *gajari*, embroidered with cotton. The size of the carpets ranged anywhere within 2.80 x 1.40 m.

The data collected by the Baysun expedition revealed that, by the late 20th century, the production of *ok-enli gilams* had exclusively been preserved; the tradition of *kara-* and *kyzyl-enli* carpets gradually vanished.

Embroidered palases with a white strip from the turn of the 19th-20th centuries in non-domestic collections were attributed as Lakai (northern Afghanistan). Thus, from the late 19th century, this type of carpets was obviously known among both of the tribal groups. The expressive contrast of texture

and color, the richness of the floral decor impart a unique originality to the carpets of the *enli* group. They could also be called *kiz gilam* - a girl's carpet, which emphasized the status of *enli* as a wedding attribute.

Kiz-gilam carpets. As for the second type of embroidered carpets, produced by the Kungrats and Lakais of the Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya Rivers, their naming as *kiz gilam* is conventional, since the original one has not been preserved. Their main characteristic feature is an exclusively red base, upon which rows of same-type of medallions were embroidered (Fig. 5). From the second half of the 20th century the practice of their manufacture began to wane gradually, and therefore, perhaps, these carpets did not fall into the circle of attention of the modern-day researchers. Meanwhile, S. M. Dudin mentioned carpets with "smooth woven stripes of brick-red, brown or ocher-yellow colors, embroidered with woolen or cotton yarn", referring them to the works of the Uzbek carpet weavers from the Bukhara and Samarkand regions (as quoted from: Moshkova 1970: 66). V. G. Moshkova herself noted that she did not encounter embroidered palases in districts of the Samarkand region, and the place of their production remains unknown (as quoted from: Moshkova 1970: 67). We can assume that in this case we are talking about Kungrat and Lakai red embroidered carpets.

At present, most of the red *kiz-gilams* are dispersed among foreign collections, and only a few copies have been preserved in private and museum collections in Uzbekistan (among the exhibitions of the State Art Museum of Uzbekistan - *kiz-gilam* of the late 19th century, Dekhkanabad district of Kashkadarya region; in the exhibitions of the Samarkand State Art Museum - *kiz-gilam* of the late 19th - early 20th century, Surkhandarya region, Tuda, Uzbek-Kungrats of the Tortuvli Clan - the same one which was published in the mentioned publication by E. G. Tsareva).

Like the vast majority of other Uzbek carpets, *kiz-gilam* were sewn from pre-woven and embroidered narrow fabric cloths. Unlike composite *enli-gilams*, made up from strips manufactured using various techniques, *kiz-gilams* were sewn from identical strips, with embroidery (only sometimes a separately sewn-on narrow border could be added using a different technique, more often the kilim-type process). The warp and weft of the base fabric are wool, threads of the uniform, sometimes extreme, fineness; the spinning of threads for this type for carpets was received special attention. As for embroidery, it was the wool, cotton, sometimes in minor details it was the silk. The main elements were embroidered with a *bosma* (smooth) stitch, with the contours and additional details embroidered with the *yurma*



Fig. 3. Kara-enli. Uzbeks-Kungrats. Surkhandarya or Kashkadarya region, second half of the 20th century.
Enterprise "Bukhara silk carpets", Bukhara



Fig. 4. Composite *enli* rug with red and white embroidered strips. Uzbeks: Lakais or Kungrats. Late 19th century
Collection of the Textile Museum, Washington (accession No. 1989.9.3), a gift from Charles Grant Ellis.
Photo from the museum website



Fig. 5. Embroidered carpet *kiz-gilam*. Uzbeks-Kungrats. Surkhandarya region, first half of the 20th century.
Enterprise "Bukhara silk carpets", Bukhara

(chain-like) stitch. The quality of the embroidery can serve as a dating attribute; it is higher on the earlier-dated products.

As was already noted above, a distinctive and immediately recognizable feature of these products is the bright red background color and rows of octagonal medallions, almost close to the shape of a circle, against which placed were equilateral crosses, classic for the “steppe” art, with a rhombus at the base and curls of horns at the ends. The coloring of the medallions is diagonal (white with green, white with blue, red with blue, red with white, etc.), which brings the Lakai and Kungrat *kiz-gilams* closer to the Turkmen *gel* tradition. The rarest specimens had a white background, with red and blue embroidery (Gyul 2019: 138). On one carpet there could be from six to twenty-eight or more medallions, depending on the size.

The best specimens are distinguished by a more detailed decor, the presence of additional motifs, both inside the medallion itself – small checkered motifs or flower rosettes in each of the four sectors formed by the cross, and on the background of the middle field free from medallions – W signs, lattice motifs, eight-pointed stars, equilateral crosses. The medallion itself was framed either with a dotted line (a multi-colored strip), or with tiny triangles with curls of horns (in this motif one can see the pattern of ram’s heads), or with a shamrock, which can be interpreted as a bird’s footprint. On a copy from the collection of the State Art Museum of Uzbekistan, almost imperceptibly, on the edge, a triangle is embroidered with black threads – another classic symbol of protection against an evil eye. The inclusion of such, at first glance, inconspicuous, hidden amulets into the composition was a widespread phenomenon in folk art: these were designed to enhance the already protective functions of the decor.

The exposition of the State Museum of Applied Arts presents a rather late *kiz-gilam* from the 1970s, where the saturated red color gives way to a calmer range of colors, and the composition as a whole resembles a backgroundless mosaic laying of octagons with rhombuses between them (Fig. 6).

Just like *enli*, this type of product had a special status, endowed not only with decorative, but also with magical functions. Usually, a *kiz-gilam* was prepared by the mother for her daughter’s wedding and was used as a wedding curtain or bedspread, which is the reason for our choice of the name to replace the lost one. The presence of a border brought these products closer to the bedding carpets. The border is narrow, 8–15 cm, woven in a separate strip, contrasting in color (black), or the same red. Typical border patterns are eight-pointed stars, vortex rosettes, stepped rhombuses, crosses with curls of

horns and other horn-like motifs, stylized ram heads.

Embroidered felts. Finally, yet another group of embroidered carpets is the felt carpets (*kigiz*). A little over 100 years ago, semi-nomadic peoples living on the territory of Uzbekistan produced three main types of felt carpets: felted (rolled), applique and embroidered. Nowadays, the production of only felted (rolled) felts has been preserved. As for the technique of embroidery on felt, it is also recorded by the ancient time artifacts, in particular, the famous applique felt carpets from the Fifth Pazyryk Barrow with pictorial decor. At a certain period in the culture of the steppe nomadic peoples, figurativeness gives way to the ornamental principle, and at the same time it is rather difficult to state whether this was due to the weakening of ancient traditions and return to the ornamentality inherent to the culture of Central Asia, or to the influence of the Islam ornamental dominant. In any case, in the 19th century the decor of felt carpets is exclusively abstract, non-figurative, and rare pictorial motifs are woven into the overall patterned canvas.

The lost practice of embroidery on felt is unique – firstly, the carpet base itself is sewn together from pre-rolled and cut large felt parts. Once sewn together, these parts, contrasting in color, form the intended composition of the item. Then patterns are embroidered over the felt base, also using multi-colored threads. The result is a decorative, ornate surface that combines felt quilting and embroidery. The patterns of these carpets were typical for the steppe art, and were found ubiquitously: vortex rosettes, meander, stars, horn-shaped and stepped (jagged) motifs.

Just like the smooth-woven *kiz-gilam* carpets, the surviving examples of felt embroidered carpets can only be found in private either national or foreign museum collections (British Museum, UK; Museum named after A. Linden, Germany, and many others.) (Fig. 7).

In addition to the elegant bedding felt carpets, the steppe dwellers practiced embroidery in the manufacture of various kinds of felt containers, for example, *ok-bash* (*uk-bash*, *uk-bash*) – bags to protect the ends of the *uuk* poles forming the dome of the yurt-house, when they are transported in a collapsed / assembled state, on top of the riding animals.

Nowadays, the tradition of embroidery on felt is a thing of the past, along with other striking phenomena of the nomadic culture. In this regard, it is necessary to raise the issue of reviving of the production of embroidered carpets as one of the most interesting phenomena of the traditional Uzbek textiles.

Decor of embroidered carpets and its semantics. Despite certain differences in the techniques, the decor of all embroidered carpets – both smooth-woven



Fig. 6. Embroidered carpet *kiz-gilam*. Uzbeks-Kungrats. Kashkadarya. 1930. Collection of the State Museum of Applied Arts and History of Handicraft of Uzbekistan, Tashkent. KP-7063. Accession No. 90



Fig. 7. Embroidered felt carpet. Uzbeks: Lakais or Kungrats, Surkhandarya, late 19th – early 20th century. Collection of Samarkand Museum-Reserve

and felt - is based on a standard, and at the same time endlessly varying, set of motifs, which once again emphasizes their belonging to one cultural tradition. At the same time, one can distinguish among motifs of strips made using the *Gajari* technique, common to all *Gajari* carpets (rhombuses with horn-shaped curls, signs W and S, a *syrg* motif that played the role of an amulet, a *chess* motif), and embroidered motifs (on white, red or dark brown strips), larger and more diverse in shape.

A wonderful trio of the Uzbek embroidered

carpets from the mid to late 19th century (*kiz-gilam*, *ok-enli-gilam*) and the early 20th century. (*kigiz*) from the collection of the Linden Museum, Stuttgart, presented in the catalog of the exhibition “Heirs of the Silk Road. Uzbekistan,” testifying, on one hand, to the great interest of the West in this part of the Uzbek textiles, and, on the other hand, to the still debatable content of its decor (Heirs/Successors... 1997: 200, 201, fig. 389-391). Not entirely correctly labeled as *kilims*, these products are attributed with certain degree of caution to the Uzbek Lakai of

Northern Afghanistan (two smooth-woven ones) and the weavers of Surkhandarya (felt carpet) that are not ethnically designated. In the same presumptive “vein,” the decor is interpreted, in whose motifs the author of the article J. Kalter recognizes either images of “yurts and camels,” and “non-traditional star motifs,” then “insect-like images” (Heirs/Successors ... 1997: 200). These cautious conjectures once again indicate that understanding the semantics of patterns in our time is already quite difficult. Taking into account the purpose of embroidered carpets as wedding attributes, there is reason to speak in general about the benevolent nature of their decor.

The entire existing range of the ornamental motifs can be divided into several groups:

- medallions in the form of crosses and rhombuses, circles, eight-pointed stars and vortex swastikas (solar symbols), S signs and meanders (water, fertility, uninterrupted life course). This popular group is the backbone of any carpet decor. The motifs are somehow connected with benevolent ideas, they “promise” the protection of the gods, fertility, increase in the family headcount;

- zoomorphic motifs: mainly the image of ram horns – the main totem symbol of the steppes (as an option – combined interwoven pair of horns of kosh kaykalak, designed to express the idea of marriage, the union of a couple, and also served as double protection), geometric elements with “animalistic” names, for example, keklik-tush (keklik chest). Initially associated with totemism, the motifs of this group are intended to convey the animal in the “part for its whole” technique typical of the steppe artistic tradition – pars pro toto. This technique testified to the initially cult-worshipping nature of animals - the totem, which is also the patron of family, had to be depicted indirectly, encrypted, through its characteristic symbols;

- floral motifs, symbols of fertility, are found mainly in the carpets of the *enli* group. These are stylized palmettes of various degrees of complexity, including paired, as if transformed from horn curls, *bodoms* (almonds), naturalistic flowers;

- item-related motifs that have the character of amulets: *tarok* - comb (for protection), *tumor*, *tumorcha* – triangular amulet, minute amulet;

- anthropomorphic motifs: a woman in labor;

- service elements – small geometric shapes that serve to link larger decor motifs, squares, dotted (*si-chan izi* - mouse tooth), wavy strips, broken lines, etc.

A peculiar evolution of the decor of embroidered strips can be traced: the earlier-dated copies are dominated by astral (eight-pointed stars, vortex rosettes) and zoomorphic (rhombuses with curls of horns, like totem signs) signs, stepped rhombuses, triangles in a meander frame, large S signs, the motif

of the so-called double axe (obviously, a relic of Zoroastrian symbolism, the image of Vretragna, the god of war and victory), in the later ones, flower rosettes and palmettes come to the fore. There is a noticeable transition from geometric motifs to vegetable motifs - horn curls along the edges of an equilateral cross are interpreted as flower palmettes (an attempt to turn a solar symbol into a vegetable one). Realistic, quite recognizable forms of flowers are typical for products of the second half of the 20th century. They can be seen as a reflection of the transition to the sedentary way of life and the adaptation of motifs typical of agricultural cultures. Thus, in the *энли* carpets of the Surkhandarya and Kashkadarya regions of the second half of the 20th century the pattern gets bigger, the floral theme tends towards naturalism. There are multicolored large palmettes connected to each other by a shoot of an undulating stem, recognizable roses and tulips, even motifs reminiscent of raspberries of the 20th century. The 20th century – the fantasy of modern craftswomen is no longer restrained by the desire to preserve the olden-day patterns. The later in time the production of a the carpet, the more realistic is the imagery of flowers. Craftswomen call them without species distinction – *lola gul* (tulip or poppy). The content of these patterns is related to the theme of the fertility. Innovations are the inscriptions, and the modern-day symbolism, including state symbols (images of the flag, coat-of-arms). Despite the standardized set of motifs, weavers constantly vary them due to a different interpretation of details, achieving the endless variety of decors.

Of course, the most popular are variations of an equilateral cross with a rhombus at the base and curls of horns at the ends; in *kiz-gilams* this cross dominates. The unprecedented area of the spreading of this motif not only among the Lakai and Kungrats, but among all nomadic peoples in the past since antiquity (early examples are on a white felt carpet from Pazyryk) allows us to speak of its exceptional importance. It can be seen as a kind of “steppe mandala,” a universal model of a harmonious world order in the view of nomads, at the same time – a symbol of the sky god Tengri. The cross incorporated several basic concepts at one time: God the Creator / God the Sun (cross), the union of male (horn) and female (rhombus) principles, the combination of which is very typical for the idea of the dual organization of the world order among the nomadic tribes, the origin and development of life, the developed space, fertility, patronage and protection. Having become widespread, this element has clearly become a common Turkic universal symbol, incorporating life-affirming and protective concepts. In the carpet decor, the Tengrian cosmogram could also act as a strong amulet, good wishes, a symbol of prosperity,

and finally, a marker of belonging to the values of this religion. The repetition of the cross in rows along the central field greatly enhanced the magical significance of the carpet decor.

By the time of large-scale ethnographic research of the 20th century this motif, thanks to the curls of the horns, was interpreted by the craftswomen as *kuchkorak* (from *kuchkor* – a stud-ram). Such an interpretation was clearly associated with the echoes of totemism, the deification of horned animals – a bull, a ram, a goat or a cow, with which the concepts of strength, potency, prosperity, and fertility were associated. The method of depicting sacred animals with the help of horns was very ancient, associated with a special attitude towards these animals; schematism served as a conventional expression of their secret powers and capabilities. However, another version of the name of this motif is no less interesting – *kaykalak*. Perhaps this word comes from *haikal* – an idol, and then it is possible to assume that the motif itself was originally associated with a worshiping image. Another alleged primary source is – *kuy kalla* – the head of a sheep. In this case, we are faced with a horn female image, hinting at the goddess of Umai, who was traditionally represented by the horned crown.

The collection of the State Art Museum of Uzbekistan has an original *ok-enli-gilam*, where cross-*kuchkorak*, embroidered on white stripes is transformed into paired figures of women in labor. This kind of decor once again emphasizes that

these carpets were important wedding attributes, “providing” the fertility function of the bride – the future mother, and protecting her from the evil eye.

In general, the patterns of embroidered carpets were related to folk magic and were associated with the idea of the patronage of Heaven, totem animals, and the fruit-bearing forces of nature. Despite the fact that the creators of these carpets converted to Islam long ago, the figurative basis of their folk art remained true to pre-Islamic cults, symbols and ideals.

Conclusion. Embroidered carpets, which were attributes of wedding celebrations of the nomadic part of the population of Uzbekistan in the past, have become relics, have practically disappeared from the life of the population, along with most of the “steppe” heritage. Nowadays, from the entire species range embroidered large-format carpets and smaller carpet-like products (bags) are preserved only as *ok-enli gilams*, the only producers of which are the Uzbek-Kungrats of Surkhandarya and Kashkadarya regions. The unique Lakai tradition of embroidered carpets has not been preserved. The tradition of making embroidered felts has also gone into oblivion. The study and popularization of Uzbek embroidered carpets, which were so common in the recent past, will help revive one of the most interesting groups of textiles – perhaps not as an attribute of ritual, but as beautiful decorative items which can decorate the modern life.

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