

## VI. Reference Materials

---

### Reference material concerning Kurak

The Kyrgyz People, representing one of the ancient nomadic nations of Central Asia, started using felt for making carpets, covers for yurts, clothes, and other household items a long time ago.

The severe climate of the highlands where the Kyrgyz have always lived introduced and favoured further development of simple Kiyiz (*pressed wool carpet*) into different variations such as Ala Kiyiz and Shyrdak.

The most popular and prevalent type of felt carpet is the shyrdak, made in a mosaic technique. This type of carpet is very labor-intensive and with more a complicated design; however, shyrdaks are considered to be more durable than Ala Kiyiz. For example the average period of use of Ala Kiyiz is up to 20 years, while Shyrdaks can last twice as long – and even up to 100 years depending on the maintenance. To make one medium sized shyrdak from the very beginning will take one woman about 2 months – if she will work only on that shyrdak. Usually, however, women work in a group to make them, thus one woman can invite her female relatives to work together.

Shyrdaks have always been one of the most valuable items in the household. Every Kyrgyz woman in the village considers her duty to leave at least one shyrdak made by her for every son. As for daughters, a shyrdak is an important part of their dowry that they receive when they get married.

The process of making shyrdak is very labor-intensive. There are 2 types of felt needed for making a shyrdak; first a thin layer of felt for the upper side, which is made up from several pieces of different colors sewn together, and second – for the underside of the shyrdak, a thick felt which is usually black or brown.

The pieces of colored felt are put together, and stitched. The ornament is drawn with a piece of chalk and cut out with a sharp knife. The peculiarity of the shyrdak ornament is that background and pattern have identical areas, thus both layers come together in harmony providing wasteless manufacture.

The word "shyrdak" comes from the word "shyryk" which means quilting – one of the main processes in making shyrdak, which makes it very firm and solid. The quilting repeats the ornament design thus making a pattern inside the pattern. In order to evaluate a shyrdak, experts turn the shyrdak on the other side to see the quality of quilting work since the quilting is done throughout all layers.

The most remarkable fact about shyrdaks is the multiplicity and richness of designs and ornaments. Nowadays, we can see influence of modern progress in designs and colours, thus artisans started using geometrical shapes and chemical dyes. However, a shyrdak with traditional, classical ornament includes a border usually with two colors black and white, that represent mountains and the central part may contain different ornaments. The size of the classical shyrdak is usually about 1.5 x 3 meters, which is the perfect size to keep, use, and transport. There are 2 different contrasting colors in a traditional shyrdak; it can be, for example, blue and red, or green and red.

The design of felt carpets usually contains the figures and shapes of some animals, or a part of their bodies such as deer horns, ibex horns, eagle, raven clutch, dog tails ... and so on. There always has been an element of esoteric "knowledge passing" through the ornament that was kind of encoded message for a person for whom a carpet was made.

**Ala kiyiz.** Ala Kiyiz are felt carpets with patterns rolled into them. Patterns are very unique and vary from one part of Kyrgyzstan to another. There are some traditional patterns such as "bugu muiuz" (deer's horn), "kiyal" (dream) which are present in almost every Ala Kiyiz. Ala Kiyiz were made almost by every woman both as a decoration for their dwellings and as a gift for their relatives – mainly as a wedding gift. Women used to keep new carpets folded on their decorated wood trunks (the "sundyk") until there was a wedding, anniversary of some other appropriate event.

It is most likely that Ala Kiyiz appeared from a plain kiyiz that is used as a cover for the yurts. Plain kiyiz do not contain any pattern; and are usually white, grey or black depending on the natural color of the sheep's wool.

Ala Kiyiz are easier to make and less attractive than Shyrdaks, thus they are used as a practical item rather decoration. Ala Kiyiz are still given to a bride as a part of dowry.

Ala Kiyiz are very popular carpets in many rural houses due to the easiness and speed of manufacture. One of the disadvantages of Ala Kiyiz is their short life, compared to Shyrdaks, or other felt carpets.