A GROUP OF PLAİN WEAVES FOUND İN MURATLI (MARADİT) MOSQUE, ARTVİN, BORÇKA[1]

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Abstract. Since prehistoric times, people have made continuous progress and aesthetically arranged the spaces they inhabit, alongside their essential needs such as shelter and sustenance. Exploring its surroundings and now ruling over them, humankind initially spun plant fibers to obtain yarn, then learned to weave, and covered the spaces they lived in with woven fabrics both to make them look beautiful and to keep themselves warm. Woven fabrics that could not have been preserved for long periods of time, due to their raw material and intended use, have been found, albeit in small quantities. For instance, samples from one of the oldest remains were discovered in the Dzudzuana Cave, located in the foothills of the Caucasus Mountains in Georgia. Linen fabric remains, made out of plant-based fibers, were discovered in the Upper Paleolithic layers of the cave. It has also been found that some yarns were colored, two-plied and knotted. Whereas in Anatolia, the oldest woven fabric remains were found in the excavations of Çatalhöyük. These artifacts are dated between 9th-7th millennia BCE and it is determined that weaving was known in Anatolia from these earliest periods. It has been indicated in various written sources that the successor civilisations who ruled over Anatolia, such as Hittites and Urartians, also knew about weaving and natural dyeing, and even used it for commercial purposes; however, the peak era of this craft in Anatolia came with the Turkic migrations to the region. In fact, as inferred from the travelers' notes (İbn Battuta; Marco Polo; Evliya Çelebi), in and after the Middle Ages, weaving production occurred in various centers and the products were also exported outside of Anatolia. In this paper, a group of plain weaves housed in the Muratlı (Maradit) Village Mosque in Artvin/Borçka, is examined. The artifacts found in this mosque, which was built in 1846, are evaluated according to certain characteristics, such as weaving technique, color palette, composition, and motifs. This study attempts to demonstrate the place and significance of the plain weaves found in this region of Anatolia, which borders Georgia, within the art of weaving.

Keywords: Weaving, Kilim, Flat Weave, Plain Weave, Muratlı, Artvin.

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1. Introduction. Situated in the northeastern end of Turkey, Artvin is notable for its history, culture and geography. Located in the Black Sea Region, Artvin is one of Turkey's border provinces, sharing its northern boundary with Georgia. It is surrounded by Ardahan to the east, Rize to the west and Erzurum to the south (Doganay and Orhan, 2014: 31). The province of Artvin covers an area of 7367 km^2 and consists of the districts of Ardanuç, Arhavi, Borçka, Hopa, Kemalpaşa, Murgul, Şavşat and Yusufeli (doka.org.tr/bolgemiz_Artvin-TR.html Reach: 22.09.2025).

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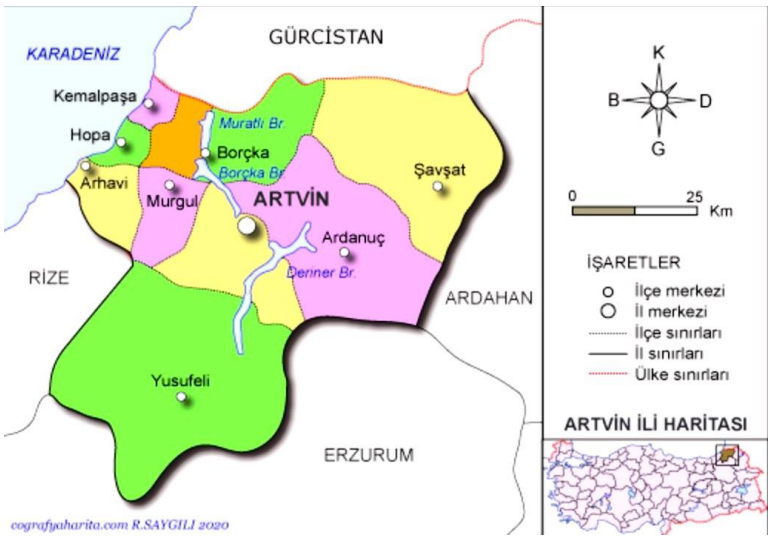

Map 1: Political Map of Artvin Province, Source: cofrafyaharita.com/Artvin (E.T. 28.08.2025)

Excavations and field surveys aimed at understanding the prehistoric (Stone Age) period of Artvin province have recently begun. As a result, the region's prehistoric data are quite limited; moreover, it is not possible to go beyond making assumptions based on the findings from the surrounding provinces. Accordingly, the basalt axes found in Erzurum and Kars suggest human activity in northern Anatolia during the Paleolithic period. Various stone tools believed to date to the Neolithic period were recovered on Akçakale Island, Ardahan. The fact that Artvin and its region served as a bridge for the migrations from Caucasus to Anatolia enhances its importance in the prehistoric period (Alkan, 2019: 35).

Strabo, author of writings dating back to ancient times, referred to the region as "gold-rich" due to its mineral wealth. Bronze axes recovered from the Yusufeli District and from Zazakale Cave in Balıklı Village, Arhavi District further indicate that there were quarries as well as workshops in the region (Kucukyildiz, 2022: 187).

The name Kolkhis (also spelled Kolhis) appears in historical sources as Artvin's earlier name. The name was first mentioned by Eumelus of Corinth in the 8th century BCE. Apart from this the Romans called the region *Lazika*, while Georgians used the terms *İmereti*, *Egrisi* and *Apkhazeti*. The region also came under the rule of the Urartians, Cimmerians and Scythians between the 9th and 7th centuries BCE (Yildirim, 2018: 2023). After these civilisations, various kingdoms were formed in the area. Among those, Tao (Erzurum, Oltu) and Klarjeti (Yusufeli) rose to prominence, and the area became known as Tao-Klarjeti. The region encountered Islam with the Arab incursions in the late 7th century. The fall of the Empire of Trebizond in 1461 and Sultan Selim I's conquest of part of present-day Georgia around 1510 and in the following years put pressure on the Christians in the region. Finally, through the efforts of Kara Ahmet Pasha, vizier to Sultan Suleiman I, and İskender Pasha's capture of the Castle of Ardanuç in 1551, the Ottomans ensured absolute rule over the region (Aytekin, 1996: 10-14). Although there had been a 42-year period of Russian rule over the region, it was eventually incorporated into the Republic of Turkey in 1921 (Atalay, 2020: 312).

Weaving, simply put, is the process in which two sets of yarns are interlaced at right angles (Britannica Online Ansiclopedia, britannica.com/technology/weaving Reach: 22.09.2025). Indeed, it is rather difficult to determine, in general, when and where weaving began. Some of the reasons why it is difficult to date the woven fabrics are that the materials used to make them were fragile and that the woven fabrics were continuously used, which made them prone to degradation. However, certain scientific research indicate that human activities in both weaving and aesthetics date back to very early periods.

Since prehistoric times, humankind has always sought a safe environment to inhabit, while also striving to beautify its surroundings. Similar to most other inventions, the invention of weaving must have been due to this desire. Humankind benefited from the way woven fabric both protected the human body from external factors and enhanced the aesthetic quality of its surroundings. Plant-based fiber remains from the Upper Paleolithic period, recovered in caves of the Caucasus and the Near East, serve as evidence of this (Kvavadze and the others, 2009: 1359). Analysis of the woven textile fragment recovered farther east, at the Tianluoshan Site in China, revealed that the artifact was made from plant-based fibers and dates to 8000-7000 BCE (Zhang and the others, 2016: 6).

While more examples can be cited from various centers across the globe, past studies have revealed that weaving was also practiced in Anatolia for thousands of years before the Common Era. As revealed by excavations on Konya, Çatalhöyük, weaving was practiced at the site as early as the 8th millennia BCE. Moreover, weaving techniques have developed and been practiced continuously (Jørgensen and the others, 2023: 224).

The duration of how long weaving has been practiced in Artvin region is unknown. It can, however, be inferred from the published literature and data collected that the woven artifacts in the Artvin region show parallels with the ones woven in Anatolia (Turan, 2012: 34).

2. Muratlı (Maradit) Mosque, Borçka, Artvin and its Exhibited Artifacts

2.1. Muratlı (Maradit) Mosque, Borçka, Artvin

The mosque is located in Muratlı (Maradit), a village in the Borçka district of Artvin Province, on the bank of the Çoruh River, near the border where the river flows from Turkey into Georgia. It can be inferred from the inscriptions of the mosque that it was built by Ahmet Usta, son of Reşit, in 1846. It was built on top of a stone basement. With a nearly-square plan, the mosque has its center part covered by a dome and the remaining sections, by a flat roof. The two main entrances to the mosque, along with the mahfil (upper gallery), mihrab, and minbar, are original and among the most prominent examples of the Islamic wooden ornamentation in the region. (Aytekin, 1999: 173).

On the eastern, western and northern walls in the mahfil (upper gallery) of the mosque are 15 flat-woven artifacts, woven with different techniques and compositions, displayed at regular intervals. The displayed pieces are mounted vertically, with their fringes wrapped around wooden rods and secured to the walls by nails. Nine of the exhibited textiles were included in this study.

2.2. Exhibited Artifacts from Muratlı Mosque, Borçka, Artvin

Artifact 1

Location: Muratlı Mosque

Date of Weaving: 1940-1960

Date of Examination: 08.17.2025

Material: Goat Hair-Sheep's Wool

Technique: Plain Weave

Dimensions: 300 cm./146 cm.

Motifs: Lozenge

Composition: The artifact was woven with plain weave technique (interlocking weave), as a single-panel textile, blending goat hair and sheep's wool. The warp yarns were sourced from goat hair. The white yarns that constituted the motifs, meanwhile, were obtained from sheep's wool and they were stitched using a packing needle. The motifs were formed by the weft yarns, and the artifact was designed as a weft-faced weave.

The motifs in the artifact were placed vertically, and lozenge (equilateral triangle) was preferred as the main motif. A total of 18 lozenges were used, arranged vertically in three adjacent rows, in the visible and concealed parts. In proportion to this, three half-lozenges, each one defined by a line underneath, were positioned horizontally under each lozenge.

Illustration 1: Motif Detail of Artifact 1

Artifact 2

Location: Muratlı Mosque

Date of Weaving: 1940-1960

Date of Examination: 08.17.2025

Material: Sheep's Wool

Technique: Plain Weave

Dimensions: 200 cm./70 cm.

Motifs: -

Composition: The artifact was woven with plain weave technique, as a single-panel textile, using yarns spun from sheep's wool. The yarns were dyed with both natural and aniline-based coloring agents. No motifs were featured in the artifact; instead, the visual dynamism of the field was achieved through horizontal, irregularly repeating borders. Black yarns were stitched in a loop using a packing needle, to further accentuate the white-grounded borders.

Illustration 2: Motif Detail of Artifact 2

Artifact 3

Location: Muratlı Mosque

Date of Weaving: 1950-1960

Date of Examination: 08.17.2025

Material: Sheep's Wool

Technique: Kilim (Flat Weave)-Plain Weave

Dimensions: 200 cm./70 cm.

Motifs: Star, Finger, Water Channel

Composition: The artifact was woven with both kilim and plain weave techniques. The yarns were spun from sheep's wool, and dyed with natural dyes. This single-panel textile was originally woven to be a double-panel textile, but the other panel could not be found. The motifs were woven from the weft yarns and the artifact was designed as a weft-faced textile.

The field was divided into segments with bands and borders of varying widths. Although each border features a different ground color, it was observed that the colors (black, red, orange, white and navy blue) have a repeating pattern, when the artifact was examined overall. The motifs were woven into borders that narrow from bottom to top. The narrowest border features stylized water channel motifs, while star motifs were displayed as the main motif in remaining borders. Finger motifs were featured along the edges of the largest border.

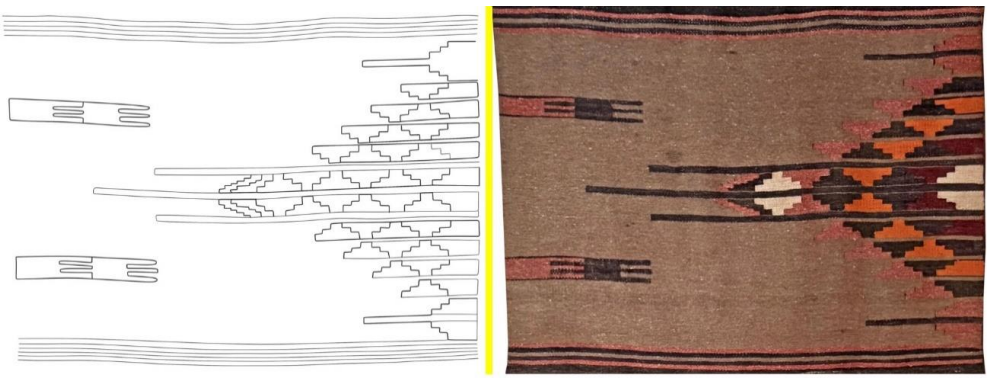

Illustration 3: Artifact 3, Detailed View of The Star and Finger Motifs.

Artifact 4

Location: Muratlı Mosque

Date of Weaving: 1940-1960

Date of Examination: 08.17.2025

Material: Sheep's Wool

Technique: Plain Weave

Dimensions: 240 cm./136 cm.

Motifs: -

Composition: The artifact was woven with plain weave technique, using yarns spun from sheep's wool. It was designed as a double-panel textile, and the yarns were dyed with both natural and aniline-based coloring agents. No motifs were featured in the artifact; instead, the visual dynamism of the field was achieved through horizontal bands and borders with varying widths. The color and width of the borders and bands were arranged sequentially.

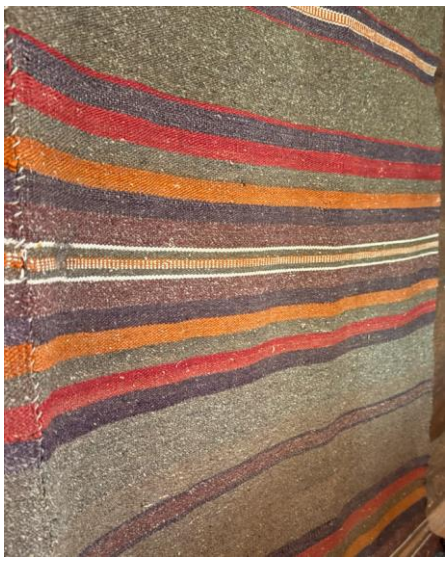

Illustration 4: Motif Detail of Artifact 4

Artifact 5

Location: Muratlı Mosque

Date of Weaving: 1940-1960

Date of Examination: 08.17.2025

Material: Sheep's Wool

Technique: Plain Weave

Dimensions: 240 cm./136 cm.

Motifs: Lozenge, Star Motif

Composition: The artifact was woven with plain weave technique, as a double-panel textile. The yarns were spun from sheep's wool, and dyed with both natural and aniline dyes. The motifs were woven from the weft yarns and the artifact was designed as a weft-faced textile.

The field of the artifact was divided into segments using bands and borders. The visual dynamism of the segments was achieved with a repeated sequence of empty and motif-filled segments. From bottom to top, the first wide border features a star motif in an idiosyncratic manner, while a lozenge motif is woven within the other one. The larger lozenge motif that is placed at the center of the artifact was designated as the main motif.

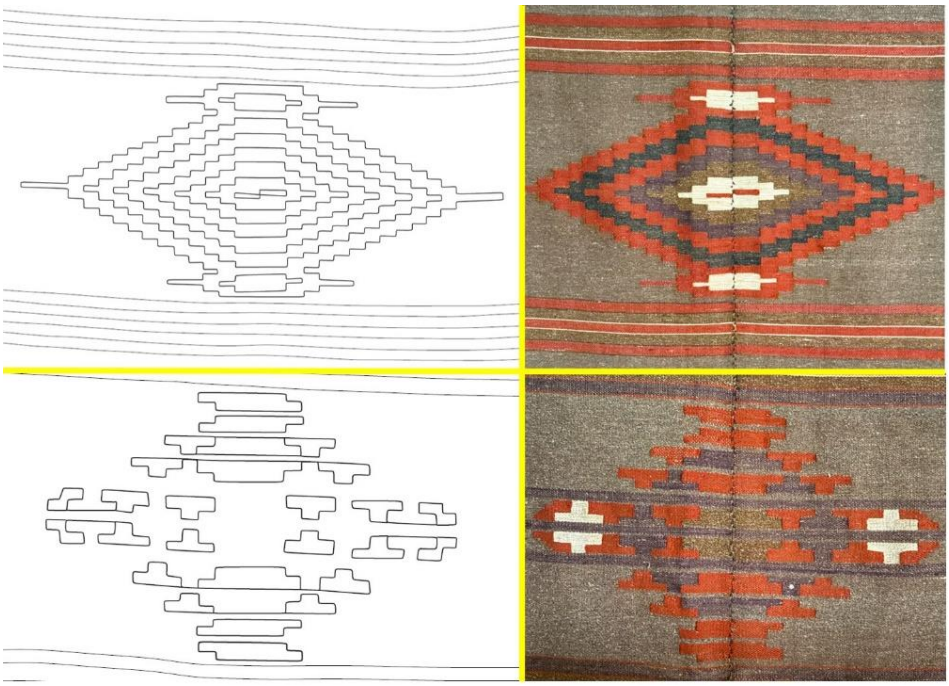

Illustration 5: Detailed View of The Lozenge and Star Motifs in Artifact 5

Artifact 6

Location: Muratlı Mosque

Date of Weaving: 1950-1960

Date of Examination: 08.17.2025

Material: Sheep's Wool

Technique: Plain Weave

Dimensions: 235 cm./140 cm.

Motifs: Water Channel, Star Motif

Composition: The artifact was woven with plain weave technique, as a single-panel textile. The yarns were spun from sheep's wool, and dyed with both natural and aniline dyes. The motifs were woven from the weft yarns and the artifact was designed as a weft-faced textile.

The field integrity was not maintained in the artifact; rather, the visual dynamism was achieved through a border sequence, with a pattern of three narrow borders and a wide one. The central narrow borders, which have a white ground, feature water channel and four-pointed star (cruciform) motifs, employed sequentially. In addition, the border segments were dyed in sequential, repeating order as dark brown, blue, white, red, and yellow.

Illustration 6: Artifact 6, Detailed View of The Four-Pointed Star (Cruciform) and Water Channel Motifs

Artifact 7

Location: Muratlı Mosque

Date of Weaving: 1940-1960

Date of Examination: 08.17.2025

Material: Sheep's Wool

Technique: Plain Weave

Dimensions: 263 cm./165 cm.

Motifs: Star, Finger

Composition: The artifact was woven with the plain weave technique, as a double-panel textile. The yarns were spun from sheep's wool, and dyed with both natural and aniline dyes. The motifs were woven from the weft yarns and the artifact was designed as a weft-faced textile.

The field was divided into bands and borders of varying widths. The fifth border upward includes a star motif on each panel. These motifs were on the outermost edges and half-woven. The ninth border upward from the fifth displays a water channel motif, which is woven in a different style. Another nine borders upwards from this point is the largest segment in the artifact. This segment features half-star motifs on the outermost edges, and two finger motifs at the center, one above the other. The composition was concluded with a series of borders above this wide segment, and a final border that features a water channel motif, with the same style as the previous one.

Illustration 7: Artifact 7, Detailed View of The Four-Pointed Star (Cruciform) and Water Channel Motifs

Artifact 8

Location: Muratlı Mosque

Date of Weaving: 1950-1960

Date of Examination: 08.17.2025

Material: Sheep's Wool

Technique: Kilim-Plain Weave

Dimensions: 345 cm./173 cm.

Motifs: Star, Water Channel, Wolf's Mouth

Composition: The artifact was woven with both kilim and plain weave techniques, as a double-panel textile. The yarns were spun from sheep's wool, and dyed with both natural and aniline dyes. The motifs were woven from the weft yarns and the artifact was designed as a weft-faced textile.

The field was divided into nine wide borders that are almost equal in width, from bottom to top, in an alternating sequence: one plain (unadorned), followed by one that features geometric motifs woven in a different style. The plain borders were all woven with the same-colored (black) yarns to highlight the motifs. The first two borders that include motifs are designed in the same style, featuring water channel motifs. The motifs featured there are curvilinear geometric shapes, whose edges are aligned. The third border that includes a motif, on the other hand, has a more advanced form of the curvilinear geometric shape. The shapes used in this motif resemble arrowheads, positioned one above the other. The border immediately below the main motif features wolf's mouth motifs with varying colors, which follow one another in horizontal order. The main motif, namely the star motif, was featured in a larger segment and lozenge motifs were incorporated in its centers. Four borders with varying colors, followed by another large segment featuring the main motif, was added immediately above the first main motif. The fringe of the artifact was kept short, and the ends of the threads were left loose.

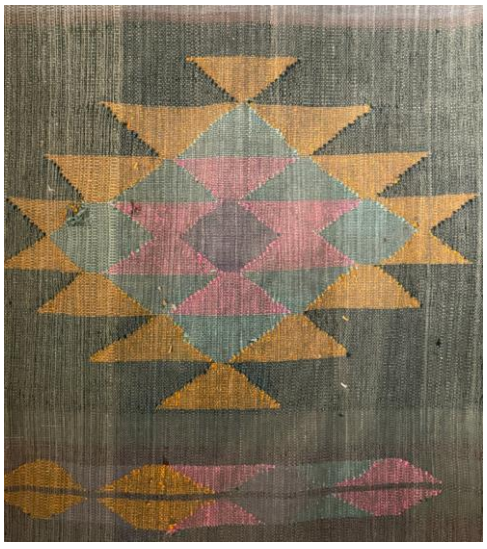

Illustration 8: Artifact 8, Detailed View of The Star and Wolf's Mouth Motifs

Artifact 9

Location: Muratlı Mosque

Date of Weaving: 1950-1960

Date of Examination: 08.17.2025

Material: Sheep's Wool-Goat Hair

Technique: Plain Weave

Dimensions: 340 cm./143 cm.

Motifs: -

Composition: The artifact was woven with plain weave technique, as a three-panel textile. The warp yarns were spun from goat hair, while the weft yarns were spun from sheep's wool. The yarns were dyed with natural dyes. Each panel was woven to a width of approximately 47 cm, and was seamed together, making the final textile 143 cm wide. The artifact does not feature any motif; instead, the field was divided into vertical borders with white yarns. The artifact was woven as a warp-faced textile by looping white weft yarns through the warps.

Illustration 9: Motif Detail of Artifact 9

3. Review and Conclusion

The entire collection of artifacts were gathered in 2010 from Muratlı village, Borçka district, for the purpose of the Adult Education Center (Halk Eğitim Merkezi). Interviews conducted with the collection team revealed that the pieces were woven by the village's weavers between the 1940s and 1960s, and preserved until the year of 2010. In an initiative launched by the Adult Education Center (AEC) to revitalize this vanishing art form, the samples were acquired from the weavers, their techniques and motifs were documented, and a weaving program was initiated. After this program, in the same year, the imam …… …… collected the pieces from the AEC and affixed them on the eastern, western and northern walls of the Muratlı Mosque's upper gallery with wooden battens and nails. The instrument(s) used for yarn spinning, and the methods and techniques used for dyeing them, could not be determined, as the provenances of the pieces could not be identified. Moreover, because the replications of the original pieces could not be located, comparisons could not be made.

Nevertheless, when the techniques and motifs used in the pieces were examined, similarities were found to those used in Anatolian pieces; consequently, the production methods of these works could be illustrated with representative visuals.

Illustration 10: Plain Weave Pieces from Muratlı (Maradit) Mosque, Artvin, Borçka

In order to spin the fibers obtained from sheep's wool, goat hair or cotton into yarn, they are scoured of animal and vegetable oils through washing processes, and subsequently cleaned of any plant and animal residues by being picked by hand. Once air-dried in the shade and carded, the fibers are ready to be spun into yarn. Then the wool is spun into yarn using a spindle or a spinning wheel. The spun yarn is prepared for dyeing. In the past, yarns were dyed using natural dyeing methods in Anatolia and in the Artvin region. The invention and proliferation of chemical dyes following the Industrial Revolution also spread to Anatolia. Aniline dyes became widespread in the production of colors difficult to extract. These were oftentimes used with natural dyes to enhance the vibrancy of the yarn.

Weaving techniques used in various places of Anatolia are also observed in the Artvin region. In the Anatolian lands where it is evident that a shared weaving culture was established, a considerable similarity is observed in aspects ranging from yarn spinning to natural dyeing and weaving techniques. As such a comprehensive production center could not be identified in the Artvin region, in this part of the study, the production of yarns, natural dyeing and weaving techniques are illustrated with representative visuals.

Before dyeing, the yarn is conditioned in warm water, which improves its affinity for the mordant[1] and dyes. It is then put in the pre-proportioned water-mordant mix and simmered in it. Dye-bearing yarns are added to the mix afterwards and let to simmer until the desired vibrancy is achieved. The yarns are frequently dipped in and withdrawn from the dye vat for colorfastness. After that, the yarn is rinsed in cold water (without agitation) and air-dried in the shade.

Illustration 12: Stages of Dyeing the Yarn

All of the artifacts consist of wool. However, goat hair was also used alongside wool in artifacts 1 and 9. Similarly, cotton fibers were used alongside wool in artifacts 2 and 4. The remaining artifacts (3, 5, 6, 7, 8), meanwhile, consist solely of wool.

[1] Mordant: A mordant is an organic or inorganic substance used to bind dyes on fabric by forming a coordination complex with it (britannica.com/science/mordant?utm_source).

Illustration 13: Yarns Used in Artifacts 1, 2, 4 and 9

The techniques used in the artifacts are identified as plain weaving and kilim weaving technique (flat weave). In some literature, the plain weave is also referred to as interlocked tapestry or interlocking weave, and the kilim weaving technique is also referred to as slit tapestry or slit weave.

In the plain weave (or interlocking weave), the warp and weft threads are interwoven equally. This technique is mainly used for the making of tablecloths, curtains, pouches and tents (Acar, 1982: 43). Meanwhile in kilim weave, the pattern-colored weft yarn is interlaced alternately over and under the warps, from one motif to the edge of the next, and then returned. A tool named kirkit (beater)[2] is also used to compact the wefts and thus strengthen the weave (Acar, 1982: 45). Plain weave technique was used in all the artifacts presented in this study. Furthermore, the kilim weaving technique was utilized alongside the plain weave technique in Artifacts 3 and 8. All pieces, except Artifact 9, were woven with the weft-faced weaving technique. In Artifact 9, meanwhile, the white threads were used as the warp and the textile was designed as a warp-faced weave.

Illustration 14: Plain Weave and Kilim (Flat-Weave) Technique

The artifacts feature motifs that are evidently derived from geometric forms, such as the lozenge motif, as well as other motifs that were used throughout Anatolia across centuries, such as the star, water channel and finger motifs. The star motif represents the sky and eternity. The water channel motif, like water, represents purity, cleansing and continuity. The finger motif, meanwhile, is often used alongside the hand motif and represents its protectiveness and its sense of ownership. (Erbek, 2002: 88). In Artifacts 2, 4 and 9, which do not feature any motif, the vibrancy and dynamism is achieved through the use of borders. In Artifact 9, unlike the others, the borders are positioned vertically rather than horizontally. In terms of composition, the main motifs are placed at the center of the artifacts, and the remaining motifs and borders are used as complementary elements.

[2] Kirkit (beater): Also called "weaving comb," kirkit is a tool that has tines on its tip and a handle. It is made of wood, metal or bone, and used in the making of all kinds of ground cloth, to beat down and compact the wefts and knots that are inserted horizontally between the warps.

Illustration 15: From left to right: Artifact 1: Lozenge; Artifact 3: Star Motif; Artifact 5: Star Motif; Artifact 6: Four-Pointed Star (Cruciform) Motif; Artifact 7: Finger Motif; Artifact 2, 4 and 9: Field Composition

The compositions of the presented artifacts vary. Although some of the artifacts do not feature any motif, a sense of dynamism that could be interpreted as composition is still present. Accordingly, the lozenge motifs are positioned vertically. Horizontal or vertical borders constitute the defining features of the compositions in the remainder of the artifacts. Their visual dynamism is achieved by placing the main and complementary motifs within borders with different widths. In Artifacts 3, 5, 7 and 8, the distance between the borders that feature the main motif field is wide. This approach is not observed in Artifact 6; instead, all motifs are arranged in sequential order within the narrower borders. Meanwhile, there are no motifs in Artifacts 2, 4 and 9.

Illustration 16: 1- Hakkâri Region Mezerk (Plain Weave), 2- Hakkâri Gülgever Kilim, 3- Erzurum Region (Kılıç, 2019: 101-212).

Illustration 17: 1- Artvin-Yusufeli, Ehram, Plain Weave (Turan, 2012: 272). 2- Artvin-Şavşat, Kilim Weave (Selçuk ve Yurttaş, 2021: 304). 3- Kars Region Kilim (Turan, 2012: 272).

To conclude. It is determined that plain weave technique, also known as interlocked tapestry technique, has been widely preferred in the area. Apart from that, local people refer to both plain weaving and kilim weaving as cecim (flat-woven textile). Yet, it is well known that the cecim weaving technique is distinct from these two in its method of production.

The more angular trend in the motifs suggests a tendency among weavers toward geometric forms. It is observed in the samples recovered from Muratlı (Maradit) Mosque that the main motifs were positioned centrally and woven independently. Compared to the kilim examples found in nearby centers and areas, the more extensive use of empty spaces in the field may indicate that these pieces were woven in more recent periods. Because it is evident that when approaching the present day, the material, the color, and the composition weakens, and this craft is now on the verge of extinction.

It has been determined that the woven fabrics in the Muratlı Mosque, which are among the most remarkable examples of wooden architecture and decorative arts in the region, are preserved mainly for exhibition rather than daily use. This may be interpreted as a way to show respect to this craft that these woven fabrics, once decorated the floors and walls of civil and religious buildings, are now exhibited on the mahfil (upper gallery) of the Muratlı Mosque.

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