

**Araştırma Makalesi/Research Article**

**The Art of Wicker and the Role of Women in its  
Development in Azerbaijan**

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**Abstract**

The territory of Azerbaijan was one of the ancient human settlements. Here, since ancient times, various areas of art began to emerge. A large number of archaeological materials found in the mentioned region suggests that Azerbaijan is one of the ancient weaving regions.

The art of wicker is one of the most ancient craftsmanship not only in Azerbaijan, but all over the world. It should be noted that mat weaving played the role of the basis in the development of weaving art. The women who have made rich contributions to the art of weaving have also created a rich tradition and a wide range of kinds of crafts in the weaving field. As in other fields of craftsmanship, women have created many varieties of weaving.

Storage containers, baskets, janamaz, tablecloths, hangers, and etc., have been created from wicker. The article examines the important and ancient role of this craftsmanship. It should be noted that the reeds growing in the swamp dry up and turn into a beautiful and delightful work of art. .

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### **Azərbaycan'da Hasır Sanatı və Gelişiminde Kadınların Rolü**

#### **Öz**

Azərbaycan toprakları eski insan yerleşimlerinden biridir. Burada ilk çağlardan itibaren çeşitli sanat dalları oluşmaya başlamıştır. Bahsedilen bölgede bulunan çok sayıda arkeolojik malzeme, Azərbaycan'ın eski dokuma alanlarından biri olduğunu düşündürmektedir.

Hasır dokuma sanatı sadece Azərbaycan'da değil, tüm dünyada en eski sanat dallarından biridir. Unutulmamalıdır ki hasır dokumacılığı dokuma sanatının oluşmasında temel teşkil etmektedir. Dokuma sanatına büyük katkılarda bulunan kadınlar hasır dokuma alanında da zengin gelenekler ve çeşitli sanat örnekleri oluşturmuşlardır. Kadınlar sanatın diğer dallarında olduğu gibi hasır dokuma sanatında da zengin örnekler yaratmışlardır.

Hasırlardan saklama kapları, sepetler, seccadeler, masa örtüleri, askılar gibi çeşitli küçük ev eşyaları oluşturulmuştur. Bu bağlamda, makale sanatın önemli ve kadim rolünü incelemektedir. Bataklıkta yetişen bitkilerin kurutulmasıyla güzel ve zevkli bir sanat örneğine dönüştürüldüğü dikkate alınmalıdır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Hasır, Bitki, Dokuma, Kadın, Tezgah.

The art of wicker and weaving from sticks is one of the most ancient crafts not only in Azerbaijan, but throughout the world. The necessity of people, arising from natural need, led to the invention of products of primary demand (clothing, housing, tools, etc.) through objects that they see in the world around them. Historian T. Bunyadov noted that the tribes living in Azerbaijan knew knitting long before they knew wool, fiber and cotton.<sup>1</sup> They wove various items from thin sticks and special types of grass and used them in various areas of the household. Plants were the first raw material that man received from nature. It also provided for their material needs, such as food, shelter, and their first means of heating.

In addition to spinning threads from plant fibers, animal wool or cocoons, primitive people dried plants obtained from nature to make products. This led to the creation of wicker weaving, an ancient type of weaving. The art of weaving from plants has been practiced at all stages of history, whether primitive or civilized, settled or nomadic, and is the

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<sup>1</sup> Bunyadov, Teymur "Qədim Azərbaycanca toxuculuq və keçaçılığın inkişaf tarixinə dair", *Azərbaycan etnoqrafik məcmuəsi*, 1 (1964), s. 81.

first craft that arose out of necessity.<sup>2</sup> In other words, it is more logical that the first people made a finished product from them by methods of weaving and twisting, until they had the potential to invent the spinning of thread from fibers. From the archaeological excavations carried out by scientists, it is known that people observed natural life and, most likely, the nesting methods of birds, discovered and developed weaving methods over time.<sup>3</sup>

However, the question of the period from which the art of making wicker appeared in Azerbaijan still remains open. Each area of art or occupation was created and developed in accordance with the lifestyle of the population, the climate of the area where it lives, and the corresponding raw materials. Since the 19th century, the southern region of Azerbaijan, due to its humid climate, has been a region where the plants needed for wicker products are widespread and where there is a serious demand for the products in question. According to historical sources, we can say that wicker weaving has spread to many other regions of Azerbaijan, and in modern times it has retained its popularity mainly in the southern regions of the country. A. Mustafayev notes that at the sites of "Firuz" in Gobustan (Azerbaijan), 8 pointed bone weaving tools dating back to the late Mesolithic period were found.<sup>4</sup> The existence of weaving habits suggests that the art of wicker making also has an ancient history. In addition, during archaeological excavations carried out in the Jalilabad region of Azerbaijan, the remains of wicker dating back to the 4th millennium BC were discovered. Traces of wicker dating back to the 5th millennium BC were discovered by archaeologist Vali Aliyev during archaeological excavations at the site of II Kultepa in Nakhchivan.<sup>5</sup> It is also known that weaving of wicker is widespread in Agdash, Kura-Araz, Yevlakh regions of Azerbaijan.<sup>6</sup> The tradition of weaving mats in the Aghdash region is presented in one of the paintings by R. Efendiyev (pedagogue, ethnographer), kept in the Ethnography fund of National Museum of History of Azerbaijan (NMHA).

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<sup>2</sup> Akpınarlı, Feriha; Başaran, Fatma Nur, "The importance and place of wicker knitting in traditional turkish arts", *Recent advances in social Sciences*, 25 (2019), s. 373.

<sup>3</sup> Akpınarlı, Başaran, a.g.m., s.373

<sup>4</sup> Mustafayev, Arif, *Azərbaycanın Maddi Mədəniyyət Tarixi*, Bakı: 2009, s.426.

<sup>5</sup> Əliyeva, Kubra, "Xovsuz Xalçalar", *Azərbaycan Xalça Muzeyi*, 2017, s.46.

<sup>6</sup> Əliyeva, Kubra, *Azərbaycanın Xovsuz Xalçaları*, Bakı: 2020, s.76.



**Figure 1.** Painting of R. Efendiyev. NMHA EF, inv. 1108.

As for the etymology of the word "hasir" (wicker), it is of Arabic origin. The Turks of Central Asia called the wicker plant "yyken". The Turks-Egyptians and Turks-Kipchaks, close to the ancient Anatolian culture, directly called wicker "yigen, yigin, yikin".<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that Mahmud Kashkari calls the plant from which the Turks weave wicker "yika"<sup>8</sup> and notes that this plant is thinner and softer than reed.<sup>9</sup> From this we can conclude that the main raw plant in the art of weaving wicker, which has ancient traditions among the Turks, is not only reed. The above name of the wicker is not currently in use. This word is written and pronounced "tsegesen" among the Mongolian tribes, it passed into the Russian language from the Turkic tribes, and the Russians also begin to call wicker "chakan"<sup>10</sup> In modern Russian, the

<sup>7</sup> Türктаş, Zühal, "Beyşehir Gölü Ve Çevresinde Hasır Dokumacılığı", *Kalemîşi*, 4/7 2016, s. 21

<sup>8</sup> Qaşğari, Mahmud, *Divanü Lügat-İt-Türk*, C.1, Bakı: 2006, s.28.

<sup>9</sup> Ögel, Bahaddin, *Türk Kültür Tarihine Giriş*, C.3, Ankara: 1978, s.81.

<sup>10</sup> Ögel, a.g.e., s.84

wicker is called “циновка” (chinovka). Probably, the etymology of this word is connected with the ancient Turkic term.

The main raw materials for the art of making wicker are plants called jil, lig and puza<sup>11</sup>. Some authors report that wicker is also woven from reeds. Also, among Russian authors, the plant "reed" is written as the main raw material for the manufacture of wicker.<sup>12</sup> It can be assumed that researchers who are not familiar with the local names of plants generally call them all - reeds. However, people involved in this art also confirm that wicker products are woven only from the above-mentioned plants. Fences<sup>13</sup>, taraja (shelves for cocoons) for sericulture, roofs of houses, walls for the construction of huts and valleys, for household appliances, etc. were most often made from reeds. We also find among R. Efendiev's paintings about the collection and use of reed. These paintings show examples of tarajas. Chatan (kind of wickerwork), stored in the Ethnography fund of NMHA is one of the unique examples of reed products. Multi-colored woolen and silk threads wrap around chatan sticks belonging to Karabakh (Lachin). The carpet element "Gasymushagy" was created on chatan due to the color symmetry of the threads.

The main starting point of the mat weaving process is the collection of the necessary plants. Fibrous plants growing on humid lands (lig, ziyalyg, jil), flexible wood sticks and shavings, stubble of cereal plants, being the oldest type of raw material for wickerwork, have not lost their practical significance until recently.<sup>14</sup> The mentioned plants mainly grew in damp places. This fact directly increased the demand for mat products among the population living in these areas, along with the development of wicker production in these areas.

It is known that among the Turks of Turkey, a plant called "hasir otu" is mainly harvested by men with a sickle.<sup>15</sup> In the above-mentioned

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<sup>11</sup> local plant names used for wicker weaving

<sup>12</sup> Студенецкая, Евгения Николаевна, “Прикладное искусство народов Карачаево-Черкесии”, *Использование памятников истории и культуры в интернациональном воспитании трудящихся: Материалы краеведческой научно-методической конференции*, 1974, s.76.

<sup>13</sup> Information from Shiriyeva Faiza Ahmad, Azerbaijan, Lankaran district, Girdeni village, date of birth: 1952.

<sup>14</sup> Mustafayev, Arif. *Azərbaycanda Sənətkarlıq*, Bakı: 1999, 262.

<sup>15</sup> Türктаş, a.g.m., s.28.

paintings by R. Efendiyev, we observe the collection of reeds by men. However, the plants used to weave wicker in Azerbaijan were collected by women. This shows that women are very familiar with mat plants. The next step was drying the harvested plants. Women harvest the plants needed for weaving wicker in June-July, and this process continues even until August, after which they are spread on the ground and dried in their own air.<sup>16</sup>

Women select plants were depending on the type of tissue. For example, jill was only used for weaving floor mats because it was coarser and broader in shape.<sup>17</sup> This plant was called “delo” in Talysh. In the Ethnographic fund of NMHA there are samples of wicker from the “delo”, which were clearly used as floor mats. Such mats mainly have the function of protecting against dampness. Puze is a more tender plant. For this reason, women can make patterns on such mats easily. There are a number of patterned mats woven from the puze in the Ethnographic fund. These patterns are mostly in the form of geometric elements. Among the Talysh, a pattern called “zeranegil” was more often used (“zeren” refers to the form of the sweet of the same name, characteristic of the region, and “kil” in Talysh means flower<sup>18</sup>). The design of the wicker indicates that they are used not only for protection from moisture, but also for decorative purposes. It is no coincidence that mats were also prepared as a dowry. Thus, the art of weaving wicker became a field of art that was passed down from generation to generation. Women began to master the secrets of this art from a young age. Just like carpet weaving, providing the household with mat products was one of the important household activities in the regions where the art of mat making was developed.

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<sup>16</sup> Əhmədova, Sara. “Etnik azlıqların sənət mədəniyyəti – həsirçilik (Milli Azərbaycan Tarixi Muzeyinin materialları əsasında)”, *Milli Azərbaycan Tarixi Muzeyi-2018*, 2018, s.56.

<sup>17</sup> Information from Shiriyyeva Faiza Ahmad, Azerbaijan, Lankaran district, Girdeni village, date of birth: 1952.

<sup>18</sup> Information from Shiriyyeva Faiza Ahmad, Azerbaijan, Lankaran district, Girdeni village, date of birth: 1952.



**Figure 2.** Wicker. NMHA EF, inv. 5307

Wicker products are were produced on vertical and horizontal looms, which looks primitive and at the same time cost a lot of labor. The basis of these machines is "jiya", which plays the role of warp. Jiya is obtained by twisting and weaving. The invention of the jiya made it possible to move on to a simple weaving operation. This, in turn, necessitated the creation of tools, especially simple looms, necessary for the weaving process. The simplest example of these was the brushed loom.<sup>19</sup>

Patterned wicker is woven on a horizontal loom. There are wooden poles on both sides of the loom, and ropes are stretched between them. In the southern region of Azerbaijan, it is called "ligarshtan". Ethnographic materials show that, the weaving of ligharishans is mainly done by women.<sup>20</sup> Spinning wrap is not done by young weavers, but by older women who have been mastering this method for years.<sup>21</sup> The string are passed through the holes of the instrument called "paral" ("si", "tumunasi"). The paral, stored in the MATM "Ethnography" fund,

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<sup>19</sup> Mustafayev, a.g.e., 262.

<sup>20</sup> Cavadov, Qəmərşah, *Talışlar (tarixi-etnoqrafik tədqiqat)*, Bakı: 2004, s.414.

<sup>21</sup> Türктаş, a.g.m., s.26

is a wooden board with holes for parallel threading. The number of holes depends on the size of the material. The puza, woven on a horizontal loom, is nailed and secured with a paral by passing it through the layers of wrap in a certain order, on the right and on the left.<sup>22</sup> The parallel wefts are tied at the edges with knots to prevent them from blooming, and at the end, the excess parts are cut off with a sickle. According to the scheme of passing the weft parts, the weaver receives the pattern she conceived. According to the information provided by art critic K. Aliyeva, the weaving method used in weaving wicker differs from other flat woven carpets. Both in fabrics and in the manufacturing process of flat woven carpets, horizontal wefts pass between warp threads arranged in a vertical direction and form an overall weave. In the production of wicker, these processes are carried out in an oblique direction.<sup>23</sup>

There is a photograph of two women weaving on a horizontal loom in the Fund of Photo Negative materials of NMHA. As we see in the photo, women keep a basin of water with them. The weaver sprinkled this water on the wicker during the process. Thus, it wets the wicker and provides a comfortable weave, and at the same time prevents the fibers from weakening during the weaving process.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Mustafayev, a.g.e., 262.

<sup>23</sup> Əliyeva, a.g.e., s. 76

<sup>24</sup> Information from Shiriyeva Faiza Ahmad, Azerbaijan, Lankaran district, Girdeni village, date of birth: 1952.





**Figure 3.** Wicker weaving women. NMHA, PNF, inv.58.

The vertical loom is used to weave wicker without patterns. Since wicker have become a staple household item in people's daily lives, patterned wicker have become more common. For this reason, vertical machines are used less frequently than horizontal ones.

Now we know that moisture-proof wicker have been used for more than just this purpose in the home. Carpets, baskets, various utensils, etc. are woven from wicker. In the past, families who did not have carpets or rugs considered wicker to be an important household item.<sup>25</sup>

Rugs woven from jil, historian G. Javadov divides into such types as floor, grain storage, wagon wicker, grave wicker, lig - wall, window wicker, janamaz (rug for praying), tablecloth.<sup>26</sup> Storage containers of various sizes with lids are also in the Ethnography fund collection if NMHA. In addition, items such as scales, hats, and chests were woven from wicker.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Şiriyev, a.g.m., s. 153.

<sup>26</sup> Cavadov, a.g.e., s.407-408.

<sup>27</sup> Information from Shiriyeva Faiza Ahmad, Azerbaijan, Lankaran district, Girdeni village, date of birth: 1952

Floor wicker used to protect against moisture are mainly placed under the carpet. Even among the ancient Turks, wicker were placed under the carpet that spread in tents. It is clear that such wicker protect the house from moisture and at the same time prevent the carpet from getting wet and rotting. But floor wicker are used not only for this purpose. They are laid directly on the floor as carpets.

It is believed that the first wicker in the history of the world were woven to make baskets. The very concept of "gatherers and hunters" suggests that even the most ancient peoples needed some kind of container for collecting and transporting the edible plants necessary for man. Therefore, among these peoples, great importance was attached to the lightness, strength and regular shape of wicker pots.<sup>28</sup> Of course, these dishes could be woven not only from wicker, but also from sticks of any plant. The practice of weaving sticks had already paved the way for the development of wicker weaving. Women were mainly engaged in weaving carpet wicker on wicker looms. In most cases, men participated in weaving baskets.

The Ethnography fund of NMHA holds large and medium storage containers with and without lids, as well as small containers for needle thread and seals. In one example, we see the use of pieces of fabric on it. At the same time, wicker protected the dwelling from insects and snakes, and this product was also used by women as a door threshold, a kitchen screen, a felt wicker, and a napkin for drying dairy products.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> <http://historic.ru/books/item/f00/s00/z0000146/st006.shtml>

<sup>29</sup> (PDF) Исторический обзор «Чия» которые сохраним и передадим потомкам. ([researchgate.net](http://researchgate.net))



**Figure 4.** Container. NMHA, EF, inv. 8342.

From ancient times, wicker products used in everyday life of people also occupied an important place in funeral customs. According to archaeological materials, during the burial, the dead were wrapped in wicker, and the grave goods were placed in the grave pit.<sup>30</sup> After wicker became decorative, they became widely used in wedding ceremonies in the region where they were used. Wicker, like carpets, were part of the girl's dowry. Mothers and daughters wove and collected rugs, storage containers, etc. for their dowry.

The Ethnographic fund of NMHA also holds khoncha (tray) woven from wicker. The round khoncha is painted with pink and blue paints in the form of a sun. It can be assumed that such trays are used for the bride gifts.

Wicker products were used not only in the production of household items, but also as a building material. For centuries, the roofs of residential houses in Mugan were made of reeds, and the walls and often even the doors of houses were made of reeds.<sup>31</sup> It can be assumed that wicker were used in the construction of houses because they protect against moisture and because they are cheap. In most cases, wicker were used in rural houses with earthen roofs. The roof was first

<sup>30</sup> *Azərbaycan Etnoqrafiyası*, C.3, Bakı, 2007, s.404.

<sup>31</sup> Məmmədov, Habil, *Muğanın Maddi Mədəniyyəti*, Bakı: 2001, s.46.

laid with a ledge, and a wicker was laid on top of it. Then they were buried with a thick layer of earth and kagil (mud mixed with straw).<sup>32</sup>



**Figure 5.** Tray. NMHA, EF, inv.3573.

Thus, the presence of favorable conditions is the main factor in the emergence and development of any direction of art, including wicker weaving. Azerbaijan's rich natural resources, especially women's interest in weaving, have formed rich traditions. It should be noted that for many centuries women were oriented towards housework, as opposed to social work. Each family sewed and wove for their needs (clothes, household items, etc.). For this reason, women in Azerbaijan were actively engaged in weaving wicker, one of the ancient weaving arts. While picking and drying wicker plants requires some physical labor, in Azerbaijan this work is mostly done by women themselves. As a household activity, wicker weaving was traditionally taught to the new generation. However, in modern times, among the younger generation, those who study this art are a minority. This suggests that in the near future the art of weaving wicker, like a number of household activities, will also go down in history. From this point of view, the study of this art is still relevant.

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<sup>32</sup> Əliyeva, a.g.e., s.76.

In addition, as we mentioned earlier, the manufacture of wicker, which existed among a number of other ancient peoples, indicates the presence of common traditions among the peoples of the world. Given the fact that communication between the peoples of the world was limited and rare, it can be said that scientists can put forward the idea that the tradition of making wicker was borrowed from the ways of weaving bird nests.

In addition, the Ethnographic fund of NMHA stores scales made of wicker, containers for seals, containers for needles, storage containers with lids of various sizes. According to the samples of materials we have and information from sources, we see that the art of weaving wicker on the territory of Azerbaijan is quite developed. The wicker product began to be more of a decorative character than a primitive everyday essence, and at the same time, the use of the mentioned product became a tradition.

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