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## **FELT AS A PART OF MATERIAL AND SPIRITUAL WORLD CULTURE**

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**Abstract:** Analysis of academic literature and of specialized sources showed a serious lack of research studies and publications on the role of felt in Bashkir material culture. A review of available information about felt can set the groundwork for further in-depth research studies in this area. This paper aims to introduce readers to the history of felt, its place in daily life and its reflection in Bashkir spiritual culture. What makes this study relevant in the present context is that it fills the gap in research on felt as being an element of Bashkir material culture and its presence in Bashkir folklore. Based on felt-related folklore and ethnographic materials drawn from the authors' published and non-published field notes, this paper seeks to show the rich history of felt from ancient times to our days and to identify its place in Bashkir spiritual culture. The analytical approach revealed the strong presence of felt in folklore, particularly, in Bashkir fairy tales and customs. The study found that fairy tales usually mention white felt which was widely used in rituals and traditional medicine. Examples drawn from various fairy tales illustrate the authors' observations about the role of felt in Bashkir spiritual culture.

**Keywords:** material culture, felt, folklore, fairy tales, Bashkirs.

## INTRODUCTION

Modern Russian research welcomes interdisciplinary studies, in particular, in the field of folklore and ethnography. Investigating the representation of material culture in folklore is one of major current research topics that needs to be addressed in more detail (see, for instance (Doja, 2015; Jahoda, 2014; Lipphardt, 2015)). The present article examines such a relationship using the example of felt. Felting seems to have had a rich and fascinating history, given that felt and felt products used to be an integral part of the everyday life of many peoples throughout the world. Since a people's daily lifestyle is reflected in their folklore, oral folk-art shows felt to be a major cultural artefact which is worth studying. Analysis of Bashkir folklore sources revealed that felt is mostly mentioned in fairy tales whereas epic poetry makes only passing references to felt. In this connection, this research study draws mostly upon Bashkir fairy tales.

Bashkir ethnographer Z. M. Davletshina wrote several articles on felt (Davletshina, 2012), its revival (Davletshina, 2009) as well as traditions and innovations in Bashkir felt making techniques (Davletshina, 2010). Of special interest to the topic under investigation is her research entitled *Felt in Bashkir rites* (Davletshina, 2011), which overlaps – to some extent – with the present research study. Bashkir cultural studies comprise several articles focusing on the presence of various cultural artefacts in Bashkir oral art and literature. Among them are studies by G. R. Khusainova (Husainova, 2015; Husainova, 2016; Husainova, 2014; Husainova, Sharapova, 2016), A. M. Khakimyanova (2016), G. V. Yuldybaeva (2016), I. R. Sharapova (2011), F. B. Yunusova (2014, 2016), F. S. Fazylova (1999). Cf. a research study by Yakut linguist L. M. Gotovtseva (2016) on the vocabulary for outerwear, its elements and details in Olonkho texts as well as the structure and semantics of words for headwear and its components.

The aim of the study is to investigate the history of felt making, to identify Bashkir fairy tales mentioning felt and to examine its functions in them. Research into the representation of a cultural artefact – felt – in popular culture, notably, in folklore, is of considerable importance for Bashkir folklore studies and ethnography because it proves the existence and active use of felt in the Bashkirs' everyday life.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Bashkir fairy tales and field data collected by present-day folklore specialists and ethnographers served as major primary sources for the present research project. Other sources included information contained in the publications and research studies of pre-revolutionary and present-day researchers. The study adopted a holistic and systemic approach combining the historical, cultural and comparative historical research methods based on a system of universal categories, contrasts, images and symbols.

## RESULTS

Felt (from the Turkic word *ojlyk* “cover”) is a gross, non-woven textile material made from felted wool, having low heat conductivity and breathable. Items made from felt such as felted cloths, clothing, headwear and footwear are also in high demand. In ancient times, felt was an indispensable part of the everyday life of people living in severe climatic conditions and involved in herding activities. Consequently, felt making is a very ancient art. “A great steppe corridor passing through all of Northern Eurasia stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific one. Semi-legendary warrior and

nomadic tribes who knew no other dwelling, but one made from felt used to live here. They slept on felt, wore felt clothes and felt would always accompany marriages, births and deaths, great military campaigns, religious rites and communication with gods. Felt protected people from cold, hardships, evil spirits and enemy arrows, and everything in their tough lives was related to felt” (Po materialam nauchno-poznavatel'nogo fil'ma... 2002). Felt helped people survive, protected them from cold and heat and served them as clothing and building material, therefore, it is hard to imagine the life and culture of nomads and peoples living in severe climatic conditions, such as the Urals, without felt. The history of felt making dates to the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. “Pieces of wool falling from wild sheep and accumulating inside caves were the distant ancestors of felt. With the passage of time, the accumulated wool would thicken, and men used it as flooring” (Po materialam nauchno-poznavatel'nogo fil'ma ... 2002). Felt was invented much later than weaving which had first appeared some 20,000 years ago. This is because felt making could not appear until sheep breeding was fully developed. The wool of wild sheep cannot be felted and has no scales that would tie fibers one to another, hence the need to breed domestic sheep. Furthermore, very large amounts of wool were needed. For instance, a minimum of 100 kilograms of wool is required to cover one yurt, so big flocks of sheep were necessary. Although sheep were domesticated fairly early, they could not be organized into flocks until the domestication of horses, which dates back to approximately 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. This period is generally regarded as the birth of felt making when local manufacturing assumed a wider and life-altering significance. “The very first felt products, identified to have been made by proto-Iranian tribes and dated by archeologists to around 3,000 BC, were found in Asia Minor. Felt making techniques have survived to these days and are still widespread among peoples living in Transcaucasia, Asia Minor, Iran and Central Asia” (Po materialam nauchno-poznavatel'nogo fil'ma... 2002). The Turkmen are one of the major bearers of the Iranian felt making tradition.

Omnipresent pictorial representations of felt on Scythian gold artefacts reveal the existence of numerous felt products among northern nomads. Herodotus describes Scythian felt hats, kaftans and tents, i.e., “even the Scythians were skilled at making” felt (Guljaev, 2005). (The Scythians are known to have appeared in Europe in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC and to have disappeared some 2,300 years ago). Russian researcher V. I. Gulyaev drew upon the materials of archeological research in Ukraine and Russia, including his own excavations, to make the following conclusion: “The dwelling of the Scythian nomad during the archaic period was a nomadic tent, covered with felt or skins and mounted on a cart” (Guljaev, 2005). Given the “sorry state” of the surviving Scythian clothing from the Northern Black Sea Region, he considers it fairly appropriate to turn to similar items from the Altai Mountains “where ice-bound burials dating to the 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries BC have preserved the treasures of the long-gone nomadic culture known as the Pazyryk culture and closely related to the Scythians. The ice which had formed early in the Pazyryk burials preserved, so to say, the organic material made from wood, fur, leather, felt and fabrics” (Guljaev, 2005). Felt covers (Guljaev, 2005) and appliqued felts were discovered in the “frozen” burials of nomadic noblemen, with fish, wolves and goats pictured on them” (Guljaev, 2005). In ancient times, felt was used to keep dwellings warm and to make items of clothing (hats, felt boots with high tops (Guljaev, 2005), high white felt boots (Guljaev, 2005) and fur jackets with felt jacketing) and household items (felt carpets (Guljaev, 2005), a felt pouch for a mirror and/or horn comb (Guljaev, 2005) and many more).

The discovery of the Pazyryk burials in Altai, dated to the 6<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC,

brought about a real revolution in the early nomads' ideas about felt making. Intricately decorated felt items are the best known felts in the world. They are made from 1-to-2-mm thick panels, are decorated with felt-over-felt applications and occasionally feature corneily embroidery, white fringes or details cut out from gold foil. Perfectly preserved, these felt artifacts reveal great techniques, exquisite beauty and special atmosphere of Scythian culture. Felts featuring fine applications have come to be known as the "Pazyryk line", and a giant, over 30-square-meter felt curtain depicting a horseman kneeling before a deity has achieved truly cult status among felt lovers throughout the world. A thick, multi-layered felt canvas covered with fabric, pictures of fighting animals and other mythological subjects, decorations in the form of applications with mandatory stitches and fringes using thick, curling cord are among the typical features of felting and decoration techniques used in felt items uncovered in the Noin-Uly burial site (Xiongnu, 2<sup>nd</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC) in Inner Mongolia. The Xiongnu were a belligerent people devoted to the nomadic lifestyle. There was no place for weaving in their culture. The only textile they used to manufacture were felts, hence their great importance for them. The depiction of Genghis Khan's huge, felt-covered yurt, traditional Mongolian felt items, both ancient and contemporary ones, confirm that the Mongolians are the direct successors of the Xiongnu felt making tradition (Po materialam nauchno-poznavatel'nogo fil'ma ... 2002). Many Central Asian peoples, including the Tibetans, the Tuvinians, the Altai and the Kazakhs, have followed in this tradition. The Xiongnu felt making techniques spread as far as the North Caucasus and every people introduced their national elements into the decoration of felt items, but all steppe people have always perceived felt as a guarantor of their lifestyles. The Xiongnu felt making tradition, born in the territory of modern-day Buryatia, still continues there today (Po materialam nauchno-poznavatel'nogo fil'ma ... 2002).

Since ancient times, felting has been one of the traditional Buryat activities during the short Siberian summer. The first step was sheep shearing. This process took place in late June or early July: shearing was not done later because sheep would not have enough time to grow new wool before winter and could die. The Buryats' initial processing of wool does not differ from that of other peoples specializing in felting. Small-sized felt items used to be felted manually. This job was relatively easy and, consequently, was done by women. As for big cloths to be used as a yurt covering material, they were specially manufactured by men. A roll of would-be felt was sewn into raw cow skin, ropes were tied to the edges of a pole, the loose ends of harness straps were then tied to the stirrups of a saddled horse, and the roll was passed over an even grass field until felt was ready. A distance of 15 to 20 arrow flight paths, which is equivalent to about 1.5-2 km, was thought to be sufficient to obtain high quality felt. Nomadic daily life activities needed large amounts of felt but, no matter how important it was for yurt covering, small-sized pieces of felt used inside yurts were also of great importance. People slept on felt mattresses and ate sitting on felt rugs. Felt was decorated with love: women would meticulously stitch centuries-old patterns with threads made from tendons of horses and wild animals to protect themselves, their families and the entire tribe from evil forces, hoping for the best. Therefore, felt was regarded not only as an intermediary between humans and gods, but also as a good spirit and the guardian of the hearth (Po materialam nauchno-poznavatel'nogo fil'ma ... 2002).

The Slavs have never been involved in nomadic ways of life and have never lived in yurts, yet they had first-hand knowledge about felt and were skilled at producing both felts and half-felts typical of European felting. Old Slavic terms for wool fabrics, known to us from the surviving chronicles, sound unusual and mysterious to us: *водмол* (*vodmol*),

*апона (apona), орниц (ornits), епуза (yeriga) and сукно (sukno)*. The word *sukno* appears in ancient manuscripts starting from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, but it is manifest that its manufacturing method dates to a more remote period. In the territory of old Ladyga, archeologists found fragments of felt for unknown uses and a head scarf dated to the 8<sup>th</sup> century. However, archeologists have not found any felt footwear anywhere yet. Does it mean they did not wear valenki? We know a method the Slavs used to felt *sukno*, or coarse woollen cloth: they put wool on a board and constantly poured a small amount of hot water over it; two strong men sat one against another near the board and moved the fabric with their feet back and forth, thus forming a thin layer like fine felt. In cold weather, Slavic women and men wore long and warm clothes made from *sukno*, called *svity* (from the word *svivat* meaning “wrap”). Felt was also widespread among the Slavs in making horse harness such as draft collar and saddle linings and horsecloths. From Scythian times to this day, felt has been the most suitable horse harness material. In the remote past, the Slavs used to wage wars all the time and felt faithfully served them in military matters: being used as soft inner lining for helmets, felt would cushion blows struck with an axe or a sword. Half-felts were equally widespread for military uses. *Myatel* or coats, which could be used as pieces of military clothing, were made from *sukno*. By wrapping this thick felted material around his arm, the soldier could protect himself as if with a shield, and this kind of coat served as both a blanket and a tent during military campaigns (Po materialam nauchno-poznavatel'nogo fil'ma ... 2002).

Felt made from sheep wool using a special technique was an indispensable material in daily activities of Bashkirs living in the Southern Ural, mostly used to cover yurts (*тирма*) or temporary summer dwellings of Bashkirs and to make clothing, footwear, horse harness and so on. According to Z. M. Davletshina, “the Bashkirs have maintained a respectful attitude towards this universal product that served as an attribute of traditional family and domestic rites and rituals” (Davletshina, 2012). Importantly, there are extensive Bashkir research works on felt and its significance for the Bashkirs (Georgi, 1776; Cheremshanskij, 1859; Rudenko, 2006; Bikbulatov, Shitova, 1962; Janguzin, 2002).

A dictionary compiled by R. N. Karimova provides extensive information on the existing Bashkir types of felt by color: *ак кейез* (white piece of felt), *аласа кейез* (patchy felt with patterns); by composition: *тышлы кейез* (piece of felt with sewn-on palace), *такиамат кейез* (felt made from dyed wool); by thickness: *калын кейез* (thick piece of felt). The Bashkirs must have also had thin felts and felts of medium thickness, which is not mentioned in the dictionary – Kh. G.; by application: *түр кейезе* (narrow, long felt rug) (let us also add *һуке кейезе, изәнгә йәйә торған кейез* (felt rug for plank beds and floor) – Kh. G.), *камьт кейезе* (harness felt), *ыңғырсақ кейезе* (back band felt), *төнлөк кейезе* (piece of felt used to cover the yurt’s chimney throat); *кейез тек / быйма* (felt boots or valenki), *кейез ката* (short valenki) (*кейез олторак* (felt insole), *кейез калпак* (felt hat) can also be added to this list. Interestingly, felt hats also used to be worn by Scythian noblemen: during excavations of a royal kurgan near Kerch, archeologists found, among once luxurious pieces of clothes, a felt hat decorated with gold plaques (Guljaev, 2005), “they (Scythians) wore pointed felt hats on their heads” (Guljaev, 2005), *кейез менән көпләнгән ишек, кейез менән йылытылған күрөп* and so on (felt-coated door; cold-proof felt box made from rods and used on sledges) (Karimova, 2013).

The Bashkirs are known to have washed, in their summer camps, in felt-covered tents (Burakaev, Burakaeva, Julmuhametov, 1996). In 2011, the authors also gathered information regarding felt from Kh. A. Akhmetova (Mutallapova) (b. 1935), a native

resident of the village of Staroye Khalilovo (Gayski District in Orenburg Region): “Бында йәшәгән ир-аттың ат өстөндәге седлоға кейез йәйә торған ғәзәте булған. Шуны тукым тигәндәр” (Men who lived here had a habit of covering saddles with felt. This was called “tukym”), which is indicative of the uses of felt in the local residents’ daily activities. Being of great importance for the Bashkirs, felt is also mentioned in Bashkir folklore. Since no research have been conducted on this topic, this study intends to fill this gap.

Examination of available documents has revealed that the word *кейез* or “felt” is rather rare in Bashkir oral folklore. This can be attributable to the fact that Bashkir folklore was written down at a relatively late period, in the beginning of the 20th century, i.e. during Soviet times when people were massively involved in collective farming, folk arts and crafts having been relegated to the background. In the 1960s, there was a severe shortage of felt in villages. People were unable to find felt even for insoles (back then, they didn’t sell insoles and people used to make their own felt insoles), let alone felts for plank beds and floors, which was indispensable for those whose homes remained cold). If an item is no longer actively used, it is gradually forgotten and rarely mentioned. Nonetheless, the word *кейез* appears in rites and specific genres such as fairy tales and epic poetry, fulfilling specific functions. For instance, according to F. G. Khisamitdinova, “*кейез* is a mythologized object that has positive semantic connotations, <...> attracts good luck, happiness and fertility” (Khisamitdinova, 2010). That is why, during the welcoming of the *килен* (“bride”) in the house of the groom, they would spread out *white felt* under her feet (Bashkirkoe narodnoe tvorcestvo. Obrjadovyj fol’klor, 1995); a white piece of felt would be thrown on the horse of the hero who won a horse race (Bikbulatov, Jusupov, Shitova, 2002); a piece of white felt had to be thrown in front of a white snake for the latter to leave its horn on it; historical writings also mention the habit of lifting the khan up on a piece of white felt: “башкорттар үзәренең шул кан кәрзәше Темәсйәнде ак кейеззә йһангир Сыңғыз-хан итеп күтәрәләр” (Jyhat Soltanov, n.d.). White felt was regarded as a symbol of purity and prosperity; it also served as an amulet and “continuation of a family line” (Davletshina, 2012). This may be why white felt was often used as one of the wedding ceremony attributes. According to the respondent G. M. Bulyakova, born in 1957 in the village of Abdulmambet of Burzyanski District, felt was an integral part of the bride’s trousseau. The following tradition was common among the Bashkirs living in Chelyabinsk Region: the girl spends the night preceding the matchmaking ceremony in the house of a girlfriend of hers; in the morning, the girl’s female friends and sisters-in-law bring her home on a piece of felt; interestingly, the girlfriends pull the felt towards themselves and the sisters-in-law towards themselves. In our view, this episode illustrates the girl’s transition from one status to another (Fol’klor cheljabinskih Bashkir... 2012). Presumably, the color of the mentioned piece of felt was white. According to the respondent, felt was also used for medical purposes. For instance, if a woman had difficulty in giving birth, she was wrapped into a piece of felt and rolled back and forth on the floor (also see Khisamitdinova, 2010). In case of an intoxication, the sick person would be given milk and then treated similarly. A person suffering from a severe cold would be washed in a steam bath and then wrapped into the skin of a previously slaughtered sheep or goat or into a piece of felt. Z. I. Minibaeva, an ethnographer and researcher on Bashkir popular medicine, heard, when in Khaybullinski District, that the sick suffering from allergies are laid on pieces of felt, lifted and shaken, following which allergies are said to disappear. According to folklore specialist R. A. Sultangareyeva, felt was also used for fumigation.

Numerous fairy tales also frequently mention felt, thus supporting the allegation made about the presence of felt in Bashkir folklore. Felt assumes a specific role in Bashkir fairy tales. Let us examine those fairy tales where the word *кейез* appears. First, there is a fairy tale entitled *Кейезбай менән батша кыззлары* (*Kiizbay and the Tsar's Daughters*) in which the name of the protagonist is directly related to the word "felt". In *Үгәй кыз* (*The Stepdaughter*), "Шул вақыт һыйыр, телгә килеп, кызға: «Минең алдыма *ак кейез* сығарып йәй зә ике мөгөзөмдө бәрәп һындыр. Бер мөгөзөмдән бер көтөү турғай, икенсе мөгөзөмдән бер көтөү сыпсык осоп сығып, тары менән бойзайзы айырырзар», – ти" (Then the cow said: "Put a piece of *white felt* in front of me and knock my horns out: sparrows will fly out of one horn, and bullfinches from another; they will sort millet from wheat") (Bashkirskoe narodnoe tvorchestvo, 1976a). In *Кара көсөк* (*The Black Puppy*), the protagonist also asks for white felt: "Миңә *ак кейез*, дүрт мөгөзгә һөт һауып бир... Көсөк *ак кейез*, дүрт мөгөз һөт алып сығып китә. Тиззән йылға буйына барып, *ак кейеззе* йәйеп, дүрт мөгөззә дүрт мөйөшкә ултыртып, үзе ситтән йәшенеп кенә карап ята башлай. Салт төш вақыты еткәс, һуҙан ялтырап, алтын башлы, ынйы тешле, көмөш сәсле ике малай килеп сықты ла яр буйындағы комда аунай башланылар, ти. Уйнай торғас, *кейез* өстөнә килеп менәләр, қояш йылыһында *йомшак кейеззә* йоклап киттеләр, ти... Малайзар йоклап киткәс, кара көсөк *кейеззең* дүрт мөйөшөнән тешләп алды ла сабып қайтып китте, ти. Килеп, *кейеззе* йәйеп ебәрһә, қатын аптырауынан қойолоп төшә. *Кейеззә* уның ике улы ята." ("Give me a piece of white felt and four horns full of milk... Having taken the piece of white felt and four horns full of milk, the puppy goes away. Soon he comes to the bank of a river where he spreads the piece of white felt, puts four horns full of milk in four corners, hides and starts watching what will happen. At noon, two shining boys came out of the river. They had gold heads, pearly teeth and silver hair. The boys started playing in the sand on the riverbank. While playing, they sat on the piece of felt and fell asleep on soft felt under the warm sun... When they fell asleep, the black puppy took the four corners of the piece of felt in his mouth and ran home. At home, he unfolded the piece of felt, and the woman was taken aback: her two sons were lying on the felt" (Bashkirskoe narodnoe tvorchestvo, 1976a).

In *Тук-тук тукмағым* (*Self-Beating Stick*), the protagonist has a piece of felt spread in front of a donkey: "'Әбей, *ак кейезеңде* йәй', – тигән бабай. Әбей *ак кейеззе* йәйгән. 'Алтын қоҫ! Алтын қоҫ!' – тип икәүләп ишәккә ялына башлағандар. Ишәк *ак кейезгә* бер нәмә лә һалмаған" ("Old woman, spread this white felt!" shouted the old man. The old woman did so. "Give us gold! Give us gold!" they started asking the donkey. The donkey, however, put nothing on the felt) (Bashkirskoe narodnoe tvorchestvo, 1976b); "Зур *ак кейез* йәйгәндәр, ишәкте бақтырғандар за: «Алтын қоҫ! Алтын қоҫ!» – тигәндәр. *Ак кейез* алтын менән тулып киткән" ("They spread the white felt and put the donkey before it, saying: 'Give us gold Give us gold!' And the white felt filled with gold") (Bashkirskoe narodnoe tvorchestvo, 1976a).

In the above-mentioned fairy tales, the white felt is spread in front of the protagonist's magical helpers: in the first tale, it was used to put the wheat and millet that the stepdaughter had to sort, and in the other two tales, the protagonist needed it to obtain the missing gold and his disappeared sons. The objects mentioned here – wheat, millet and gold – were, in people's consciousness, very expensive and even sacred to a certain degree, just like the sons from the other fairy tale and, as such, deserved to be put upon the white felt, which the Turkic peoples, including the Bashkirs, regarded as particularly important. As mentioned above, white felts used to be spread on special occasions, as it is the case with a nameless fairy tale written down by L. K. Salmanova in

Samara Region in 2005, which says: “Убыр әбей мейестәр эсенә ут яға ла, бер тирән ям, ямдың өштөнә *ап-ак кейезен* яба ла, был әбей белән бабайзы сакырырға килә: ‘Әбей, бабай, безгә кунакка барығыз, әйзә’, – ти” (“The old ogress makes a fire in a deep pit, covers it with felt and invites the old man and women over”) (Duhovnye sokrovishha bashkir Samarskoj...2008). This excerpt reveals that, despite the ogress’s bad intentions (she is going to roast her guests in the pit), she still observes the practice of spreading white felt when getting ready for guests. It is no coincidence that yurts prepared for newly-weds, guests or festivities also used to be covered with white felt. Also is worth mentioning another tale about a stepmother and a stepdaughter, which the authors recorded in Kurgan Region in 2010. In this tale, the dog welcoming the old man’s daughter starts barking as follows:

Аж капканы асығыз,	Open the white gate,
Аж кейеззе йәйегез.	Spread the white felt.
Апайым килә хунарзан.	My sister is returning from the hunt.

By analogy, when meeting the old woman’s daughter, the dog barks this way:

Кара капканы асығыз,	Open the black gate,
Кара кейез йәйегез.	Spread the black felt.
Байығырға киткән апайым	The sister, who left to become rich,
Байығып килә-ләү.	Is returning very ‘rich’.

This was a real boon for the ethnographic expedition. Despite hundreds of published or archived adaptations of the popular Bashkir story about the stepmother and the stepdaughter, researchers had had no texts with such an inserted song. In our view, this is the best and the oldest sample so far, and the ethnic and genetic popular memory has preserved it to this day. Firstly, national specificity is manifest here because the Bashkirs used to do this only in special circumstances: they would spread white felts in their dwellings on festive occasions such as weddings, and black felts – of more practical use - on ordinary days. The return of the old man’s daughter with a lot of money is a special, solemn occasion whereas that of the old woman’s daughter is not. Secondly, the location and color symbolism are important too. White felt is reserved for the positive character (the stepdaughter), and black felt for the negative one (the old woman’s daughter).

In the fairy tale *Таш һын (Stone Sculpture)*, the tsar makes the protagonist find “донъяла булмаған ике метр кейез» (“non-existent two-meter piece of felt”); “егет ил карты менән ил карсығының өйөн эзләп таба. Егет донъяла булмаған кейезең бында икәнән ишетеп килеүен әйткәс, карттар аптырап калалар. ‘Бындағы кейеззе тик коштар ғына белә’, – тизәр. Егеттең кош телен аңлауына хайран калып, улар ике метр кейеззәрен биреп ебәрәләр. Егет тиз генә кейеззе ала халып, батша кызын алам тип килгән пароход эйәһенә бирә. Кейеззе ул батшаға индерә. Батша, кейеззе күргәс, аптырап кала” (The young man finds the house of the world’s old man and of the world’s old woman. When the young man said that he was searching for the non-existent two-meter piece of felt, the old people were very surprised. ‘Only birds know about this felt’, they said. The old people were astonished to see the young man knew the language of the birds and gave him their felt. The young man took the felt and handed it over to a steamship owner who intended to marry the tsar’s daughter.



The man brought the felt to the tsar, and the latter was very surprised to see the felt" (Bashkirskoe narodnoe tvorchestvo, 1976a). The fact that the story revolves around a felt (*кейез*) seems to point to its national specificity, and the fact that the tsar needs this "*кейез*" highlights its value and significance. Unfortunately, the tale does not make it clear why the tsar needed that felt. The role of the felt remains obscure. In all likelihood, it is a sort of a magic felt carpet similar to those from fairy tales such as *Осар кейез* (*A Flying Piece of Felt*): "Егет осар кейезгә ултырған да оскан" ("The young man sat on the flying piece of felt and fled away") (Bashkirskoe narodnoe tvorchestvo, 1976b), and *Таззың төшө* (*Taz's Dream*): "ултырған кешене осортоп йөрөтә торған бер кейез" ("a piece of felt on which one can seat and fly") (Bashkirskoe narodnoe tvorchestvo, 1976b). In both cases, the flying piece of felt made it to the hands of the protagonists from the children of a shaitan/devil who fought for the magic objects, including the flying piece of felt, which had belonged to their father.

In fairy tales, as in real life, felt is used in popular medicine. For instance, in *Акъял батыр*, Urman-batyr cut a strip of felt off, set it on fire and cauterized his wound. The fairy tale *Акхан улы менән Карахан кызы* (*The White Khan's Son and the Black Khan's Daughter*) mentions *кейез* only in passing: "ақтыңа йәйергә кейезебез юк" ("we have no felt to make a bed for you") (Bashkirskoe narodnoe tvorchestvo, 1976a). The same goes for the fairytale *Габдрахман*: "*кейез-юрғандарын ишек алдына сизәмгә түшәй*" ("he spreads the piece of felt, the blanket, on the courtyard's grass") (Bashkirskoe narodnoe tvorchestvo, 1976b). In the fairy tale *Йылан Йәркәй* (*Yarkay the Serpent*), told by Nuria Utyabayeva (b. 1927) and recorded by the authors in the village of Buranbayevo (Baymaksky District) in 2012, the serpent says to the young girl: "Тәзрәләрге кейез менән қор" ("Close the windows with felt"), which is indicative of the Bashkirs' uses of felt as mattresses and curtains. In the tale, however, the serpent transforms into a handsome young man, i.e. felt also plays a magic role.

## CONCLUSION

Analysis has revealed that felt is frequently seen in Bashkir fairy tales, especially white felt which had a special place in Bashkir culture and in the cultures of other felt-producing peoples. Felt is mentioned as an ordinary household item in just a few tales. White felt is present even in the modern record of two Bashkir tales, which points to the specific uses of felt in material and spiritual folk culture, in particular, in fairy tales. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, felt had almost fallen into disuse in daily life, but felting revived in the Republic of Bashkortostan in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and has flourished since then. Today, felt is produced in several Bashkir districts: for example, it has become an everyday product in Abzelilovsky District. This material is warm and water-resistant due to particles of animal fat preserved in it. Felt has remained widespread among rural dwellers to this day and felt making is some sort of a celebration or a ritual for them. There now appears to be a revival of interest in this ancient folk craft in educational institutions. As an example, for over two decades, students enrolled in the Art and Graphic Design Department of the M. Akmulla Bashkir State Pedagogical University (Dean: T. Kh. Masalimov, Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences) have been choosing felt as a topic for their diploma work.

In the Republic of Bashkortostan there are many artisans specialized in felting. Some make valenki and slippers while others produce creative canvasses that can be rightly called works of art. Felt has long become a favorite among those who enjoy doing arts and crafts. Present-day craftswomen create miniature toys and decorations made

from felt (Ishtvana Vidak... n.d.; Savostickij, Amirova, 2011). Today, there is a growing interest in felt, and more and more people want to produce various felt items such as car and stroller seat covers. Artist N. Bayburin must be right in saying that “another Bashkir brand product, namely, Bashkir felt has to come on the Russian and, later, international markets, in addition to other Bashkir products such as honey, koumiss and petroleum” (Bashkir brand – felt, n.d.). Present-day felting builds on an experience accumulated in many centuries and actively uses the best creative practices of preceding generations. A bright and unique cultural phenomenon, felt is a universal material in terms of manufacturing, but it has a deeply-rooted national identity in terms of processing and uses. As a result, felt is a steady, high-potential investment in the development of new technologies and applications.

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