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Livestock Products and Traditional Handicrafts in the Surkhan Oasis in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of livestock products in traditional handicrafts in the Surkhan Oasis during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Using a qualitative historical-ethnographic approach, the paper analyzes how wool, leather, and dairy-related resources supported local craft production, household economies, and cultural identity. The findings show that wool was central to carpet weaving and felt production, while leather was used for durable everyday goods such as footwear, bags, and belts. These practices demonstrate the close relationship between pastoral life, material culture, and community identity. The study highlights livestock-based handicrafts as both economic activities and cultural expressions in the historical development of the Surkhan Oasis.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Historical and cultural research is important because it helps explain how communities organize economic life, preserve local knowledge, and maintain cultural identity through everyday practices. Culture is transmitted through many forms, including language, literature, ritual, education, social values, food traditions, and material objects. Studies on cultural literacy show that songs and local texts can function as media for transmitting cultural knowledge to younger generations [1]. Other studies also show that cultural understanding is necessary in community and educational contexts because social practices are shaped by belief systems, values, and identity [2].

Cultural identity is also preserved through symbolic narratives, religious traditions, and ritual practices. Mythology and literature can represent the values, worldview, and historical imagination of a community [3]. Cultural traditions may also shape social practices and community decision-making, especially when local customs interact with religious and moral principles [4]. Similarly, ritual and spiritual practices can reaffirm collective identity and preserve cultural meaning across generations [5]. These studies indicate that culture is not limited to abstract beliefs but is also expressed through repeated practices, inherited knowledge, and meaningful objects.

Traditional handicrafts can therefore be understood as an important form of material culture. They provide evidence of how historical communities used available resources, organized household labour, and transformed local materials into objects with practical and symbolic value. Studies on traditional food and agricultural heritage show that local production systems may function not only as economic activities but also as expressions of cultural identity and continuity [6]. This perspective is useful for examining the Surkhan Oasis, where pastoral life and craft production were historically interconnected.

The Surkhan Oasis represents an important historical and cultural region where pastoral life, household production, and traditional crafts were closely related. Previous research on cultural heritage sites in the Surkhan Oasis shows that the region has long attracted scholarly attention because of its historical, cultural, and archaeological significance [7]. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, livestock products were not only used for daily subsistence but also served as essential raw materials for various handicrafts. Wool, leather, milk, and other animal-derived materials supported domestic production, local exchange, and the preservation of community-based material culture.

Wool was especially important in textile-related handicrafts. It was used in carpet weaving, felt production, and other forms of household craft. These products supported domestic comfort, economic exchange, and cultural continuity. Leather was also widely used because of its durability and practicality. It was processed into shoes, bags, belts, and other objects needed in daily life. Studies on material-based innovation show that locally available materials can be transformed into useful products through practical knowledge and technical adaptation [8]. This supports the idea that traditional communities did not merely consume local resources but also converted them into objects with economic and cultural value.

The study of livestock-based handicrafts is important because it shows that traditional craft production was not separate from broader social and economic systems. Handicrafts were connected to pastoral activities, family labour, local markets, and cultural traditions. Studies on indigenous and ethnic communities show that heritage is maintained through everyday practices, culinary traditions, language, and intergenerational knowledge [9]. Cultural identity

can weaken when such inherited practices are disrupted, which makes documentation of local traditions important for cultural preservation [10].

Historical-ethnographic analysis is useful for understanding these relationships because it allows material culture to be examined as part of everyday life. This approach helps explain how communities give meaning to objects, resources, and production practices within specific historical and cultural contexts. Previous methodological discussions emphasize the importance of clear research design, interpretive framing, and careful alignment between data, method, and research objectives [11]. In the case of the Surkhan Oasis, this approach helps show how livestock products supported adaptation to the environment, household economy, and cultural continuity.

This paper examines the role of livestock products in traditional handicrafts in the Surkhan Oasis during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It focuses on how wool, leather, and dairy-related resources contributed to household production, local economy, and cultural identity. The paper also discusses the social functions of handicrafts and their significance in preserving the material culture of the region.

2. METHODS

This study used a qualitative historical-ethnographic approach to examine the role of livestock products in traditional handicrafts in the Surkhan Oasis during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Detailed information regarding this method is explained elsewhere [11]. This approach was appropriate because the study focused on interpreting material culture, local production practices, and the relationship between pastoral life and handicraft traditions.

The data were collected from secondary sources, including ethnographic literature, historical descriptions, cultural studies, and relevant academic articles on local heritage, agricultural-based culture, livestock resources, and traditional material practices. The analysis focused on how animal-derived materials, especially wool, leather, and dairy-related resources, were used in household production and craft activities. These materials were examined as part of the broader economic and cultural life of local communities.

The study applied interpretive analysis to understand the cultural meaning of livestock-based handicrafts. Wool was analyzed in relation to carpet weaving, felt production, and domestic textile use. Leather was examined in relation to footwear, bags, belts, and other durable goods. Dairy-related resources were considered in connection with household economy, exchange practices, and everyday subsistence. Through this process, the study identified how livestock products supported both practical needs and cultural identity.

The data were categorized thematically. The main themes included types of livestock products, handicraft uses, cultural significance, economic function, social identity, and preservation of tradition. These themes were then organized into narrative discussion and summary tables in the Results and Discussion section. The use of tables helped present the relationship between livestock products, craft functions, and social meanings more clearly.

Because this research was based on secondary sources and historical-ethnographic interpretation, it did not use quantitative data, field experiments, or statistical measurements. Raw historical data and full ethnographic descriptions were not included in the article. Instead, the study presents a synthesized interpretation of available cultural and

historical evidence. This method allows the paper to explain how livestock products contributed to the development of traditional handicrafts and material culture in the Surkhan Oasis.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis shows that livestock products played an essential role in the handicraft traditions of the Surkhan Oasis during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Wool, leather, and dairy-related resources were not only used for household needs but also supported local production, exchange, and cultural continuity. These materials demonstrate how pastoral life and craft production were closely connected in the everyday economy of the region.

Livestock-based handicrafts were important because they transformed local animal resources into useful and culturally meaningful objects. Wool was processed into carpets, felt items, and other textile products, while leather was used to make shoes, bags, belts, and durable household objects. Dairy-related products also supported the domestic economy and local exchange. Similar studies on agricultural and cultural heritage show that local production practices can function as both economic activities and markers of community identity [6].

The main types of livestock products and their uses in traditional handicrafts are presented in **Table 1**. The main components are wool, leather, and milk products.

Table 1. Types of livestock products and their uses.

LIVESTOCK PRODUCT	HANDICRAFT USE	CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE
Wool	Carpet weaving, felting	Symbol of household wealth
Leather	Shoes, bags, belts	Durability and daily utility
Milk products	Domestic economy support	Nutritional and trade value

Wool was one of the most significant livestock products in the handicraft traditions of the Surkhan Oasis. It was widely used for carpet weaving and felt production, both of which were important for household life and local exchange. Carpets and felt items were not only practical objects but also represented domestic skill, aesthetic taste, and family prosperity. The use of wool in household production shows how animal husbandry supported textile traditions and strengthened the material culture of the community.

Leather also had an important role because of its durability and usefulness in daily life. It was processed into footwear, bags, belts, and other objects that were needed for work, travel, and household activities. The use of leather demonstrates the practical relationship between livestock resources and everyday material needs. Studies on alternative leather-related materials also show that locally available materials can be transformed into useful products through practical knowledge and craft-based innovation [8].

Milk products were not directly connected to handicraft production in the same way as wool and leather, but they supported the domestic economy surrounding craft life. Dairy products contributed to nutrition, household stability, and local exchange. This indicates that livestock resources formed an integrated economic system in which food production, craft production, and trade supported one another. In this sense, handicrafts should be understood as part of a wider pastoral economy rather than as isolated craft activities.

Handicrafts had several social functions in the Surkhan Oasis. They supported household income, preserved traditions, and strengthened community identity. Traditional crafts often carry meanings that go beyond their material function because they connect everyday

practices with inherited knowledge and cultural memory. Research on indigenous heritage and cultural identity similarly emphasizes that local traditions are maintained through everyday practices, community knowledge, and intergenerational transmission [9].

The social functions of handicrafts in the Surkhan Oasis are summarized in **Table 2**. Typically, there are three components: economic, cultural, and social.

Table 2. Social functions of handicrafts.

FUNCTION TYPE	DESCRIPTION
Economic	Trade and household income
Cultural	Preservation of traditions
Social	Community identity and status

The economic function of handicrafts was visible in their contribution to household income and local trade. Products made from wool and leather could be used within the household or exchanged in local markets. This economic function was particularly important in a pastoral environment where families depended on livestock not only for food but also for materials that could be transformed into valuable goods.

The cultural function of handicrafts was reflected in the preservation of inherited skills and traditional forms of production. Carpet weaving, felting, leather processing, and household craft practices were transmitted across generations. These practices helped maintain cultural continuity in the Surkhan Oasis. Studies on indigenous cultural identity show that traditional practices remain important because they preserve collective memory and strengthen a community's sense of belonging [10].

The social function of handicrafts was connected to identity and status. In many traditional communities, handmade objects could represent family skill, social position, and community belonging. A household's ability to produce or own well-made carpets, felt items, or leather goods could reflect economic stability and cultural participation. Thus, livestock-based handicrafts were not only practical objects but also social symbols.

Livestock products were central to the development of traditional handicrafts in the Surkhan Oasis. Wool, leather, and dairy-related resources supported household production, local exchange, and cultural identity. These findings suggest that the handicraft traditions of the region were shaped by the close relationship between pastoral economy, material culture, and social life. The use of livestock products in craft production demonstrates how local communities adapted available resources into meaningful economic and cultural practices.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that livestock products played a central role in the development of traditional handicrafts in the Surkhan Oasis during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Wool, leather, and dairy-related resources supported household production, local exchange, and everyday economic life. Wool was especially important for carpet weaving and felt production, while leather was used for durable goods such as shoes, bags, and belts. Dairy-related products supported the wider domestic economy that surrounded craft production. The findings show that livestock-based handicrafts were not only practical economic activities but also cultural expressions. They reflected local knowledge, inherited

skills, community identity, and adaptation to the pastoral environment. The social functions of these handicrafts included household income, preservation of traditions, and representation of community status. The relationship between pastoral life and handicraft production demonstrates the importance of livestock resources in the material culture of the Surkhan Oasis. Future research may examine specific craft techniques, local oral histories, and comparative handicraft traditions in other Central Asian regions to deepen understanding of livestock-based material culture.

5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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