

## Technical Article: “Trabzon Kazazlik Jewelry” by Umut Demirgüç Thurman SNAG ~ April 2013

*This article offers some insight into an intriguing form of Turkish jewelry that, despite its popularity in Turkey, has very little published information about it. The author (and my wife), Umut Demirgüç Thurman, is a Turkish metalsmith who, along with myself, has been researching and documenting Turkish metalworking techniques. Since much of Turkish metalworking is taught by masters to apprentices and is often somewhat guarded, this research is challenging. The future production of much of this kind of work is also in jeopardy because of increasing competition from cheaper imported work. This article has been a great opportunity to share this work with a larger and appreciative audience.*  
- James Thurman, Technical Articles Editor

### “Trabzon Kazazlik Jewelry” by Umut Demirgüç Thurman



*Kazazlık*, (also known as “Kazaziye” or “Kazaz”), is one of the rare and rapidly disappearing handcrafts of Turkey. Trabzon, a city in the Black Sea region of Turkey, is the only place in Turkey which produces *kazazlık*. The word, “kazaz” means, the person who produces and/or sells silk yarns. *Kazazlık* is a weaving technique that uses 0.08 or 0.09 millimeter (approximately the thickness of a hair) pure gold or pure silver wire wrapped around either silk or nylon threads. This silver or gold wire becomes very strong and flexible so that it can be woven without breaking. Generally, three different thicknesses are used to make jewelry: Thin for making chains, medium thickness for earrings, and thick for pendants and bracelets. The overall thickness of these wrapped wires are between 0.3mm to 0.5mm.



*Kazazlık* technique is not only used in jewelry but also used in prayer beads, clothing decorations and even as buttons. The origin of *kazazlık* is not well-known. There are two theories about its history. One of them suggests that it was inherited from Lydians who lived in Anatolia (today’s Turkey) in twelfth century BC. Lydians were very advanced in jewelry making and metalworking. They invented and started using the first metal coins as money. There are artifacts that belonged to Lydian King Kroisos that shows that they were using some *kazazlık* in their jewelry works.

The second thesis suggests that *kazazlık* came to Trabzon from Circassian groups of Caucasia in the early 1900's. The main support for this idea is that we see *kazazlık* decorations on Caucasian clothing such as hats, riding hoods, whips, caftans, bridal gowns, and buttons. During the Ottoman Empire, emperors were using *kazazlık* on their hats as decorations and empresses were using them as jewelry made of gold or silver sometimes combined with precious stones. In this period, there were a lot of artisans working on *kazazlık* jewelry in Trabzon. However, now there are very few artisans left in Trabzon producing this art.



The main reason is that *kazazlık* is all hand-made and it cannot compete with the machine-made mass produced jewelry in the market. Because of this, the families who used to produce *kazazlık* are no longer doing so. There is an apprenticeship system in Turkey in jewelry and metal art, but since the income from handmade jewelry is not sufficient to make a living, children hesitate to continue their family's traditional handcrafts. As a result, this art is disappearing slowly like many other handcrafts.



The materials used to make *kazazlık* are: Pure silver or pure gold *kazazlık* wire, sewing needle, nylon thread, pliers, beeswax, and a lighter. To begin, we must put beeswax on the end of *kazazlık* wire (to the nylon thread inside the silver wrapping). Since the wire is very thin, a sewing needle is used to make the weavings. With the help of beeswax, it is easy to thread a needle. Then, we will follow the specific instructions to continue to desired knotting motif. There are mainly five types of *kazazlık* works and various numbers of knotting systems.



The most commonly used motifs are *Şems Düğümü* (means “Sun Knot”), *Yeminli Sürgü* (sworn bolt), *Ajur* (hemstitch), ball making, and chain making. “Sun Knots” can be various shapes and sizes and are mostly used as necklaces, pendants, bracelets and earrings. “Sun knots” also called “love knots”. “Sworn bolt” is used to cover the threads at the ends of pendants and earrings. It is called “sworn” because the artisans who make it are never supposed to teach how to make them. The reason for this is that they do not want any competition. There are already numerous sources and instructions for knot-making so they are not duplicated here. *Kazazlık* wire works in a very similar way to thin rope and can be substituted when following any regular knot-making directions.



Hemstitch works like a jump ring to connect the motifs to each other in necklaces. Usually thinner wire used to make them. To make a woven ball, we need to use a plastic or wooden ball underneath. These *kazazlık* balls are used as either a decoration on a chain or as a clasp on a necklace or bracelet. The weaving techniques in all these works are similar to each other and require a sewing needle. When the work is finished, we must bind together the end parts of the *kazazlık* wire tightly with nylon thread and then must stick them together using a lighter. Either a small woven bolt or a sworn bolt can be used to cover the area of nylon

strings.

The knots used in *kazazlık* are very similar to Celtic Knots which had their origin in the artwork of the Roman Empire. We also see similar knots in Asian arts and also in sailing knots from around the world. Obviously, *kazazlık* has a great history that needs to be researched in a more detailed way. It is not possible to give all the details of *kazazlık* in this article because it is such a vast subject. Since the makers of this art mostly keep it a secret, it is very difficult to find information about it. At least I am lucky to have a great teacher, Selver Saraç, who is teaching me this art without keeping any secrets.

## BIO

Umut Demirgüç Thurman has a Bachelor's of Fine Arts degree in Textile and Fashion Design from Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Turkey, and a Master of Fine Arts degree in Metalsmithing and Jewelry from the University of North Texas. Currently, she teaches jewelry design at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University and enameling at The Glass Furnace in Istanbul. She is also co-founder of UJ Design Studios, where she designs and produces jewelry and metalwork in their studios in Istanbul and Texas.