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## TURKISH EMBROIDERIES FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE MUSEUM OF MACEDONIA

The embroidery decoration is very common on garments and other textiles in Macedonia. Contrary to the polychromatic embroidery with woolen threads and predominantly geometric stylization of the motives of the Macedonian rural textiles, the urban textiles are decorated with embroidery that, according to the materials and applied techniques, suggest another kind of aesthetics and associates to other influences.

The Museum of Macedonia has a collection of 73 embroidered cloths, pertaining to the urban costume and textile furniture. They were acquired for the Museum after 1945, most of them in the 50' and the 60' of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But, the data in the museum register do not reveal the exact period of their production and use, and for some of them even the place of their origin is not given. Most of them are registered as "cloths", and their specific function is not given. There are only few registered as *uchkur*, *chevre*, *bofcha*, and *peshkir*. According to the registered names of the sellers, we may assume that they were used both by the Muslim and Christian population.

There are many open questions concerning the materials, techniques, ornaments and their origin and interpretation, as well the function of those embroidered cloths, as there are no relevant information for their origin, nor any living informers who had made and used them. We shall try to answer those questions by a formal analysis of the materials, embroidery techniques, and motives and by analogies to the embroideries in the neighboring Balkan countries and Turkey.

The Macedonian, and generally the Balkan cities, as craft and commercial centers, were constantly exposed to external influences. The history of the Balkan cities, after the conquering of the Turks, reveals that they became a part of the Levantine civilization, and that they had a similar development as the Near East cities.<sup>1</sup> Having a cosmopolitan character, they developed a culture that was an expression of the syncretism of particular cultural traditions, languages, customs and habits of the various peoples populating them. The material remains of this unique culture show us that there almost no differences in the interior equipment of the houses and the costumes among the different ethnic and religious groups who used to live together, and were exposed to the same influences and fashion novelties.

The Balkan urban women are the creators of the embroideries from the collection. Living in conservative patriarchal families, they were isolated from the public life. Having no school and education they expressed their artistic skills by their handiwork. By her embroidery the woman expressed her feelings, sense of beauty, style and skills. The

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<sup>1</sup> Samard`i}, R., O gradskoj civilizaciji na Balkanu XV-XIX veka, Gradska kultura na Balkanu XV-XIX veka, Zbornik radova 1-2, SANU Balkanolo{ki institut, posebna izdanja, Beograd, 1988, 1

abundance of embroidery in the Turkish period is due also to the way of life and interior decoration. The simple interior with minimum furniture was enriched with a lot of embroidered textiles, decorating the doors, mirrors, caskets, bathrooms, and tables. Also, the women's costumes for special occasions had embroidered chemises, and the most precious gift given by a young girl was her embroidery.<sup>2</sup>

The majority of the museum items we discuss here, are registered under the name *krpa* - "cloth". In fact it is a piece of rectangular or square cloth decorated with embroidery. In Serbia they call it *peshkir*. It is a Turkish word that replaced the Slavic word *ubrus*, meaning towel. The Bulgarians and the Romanians also use the word *peshkir*, the Croats *ruchnik*,<sup>3</sup> while in Macedonia the local term *ubrus*, *riza*, *maramche*, *maramitza* are used.

I think that the appropriate word in the Turkish would be *jagluk*. According to [kalji], *jagluk* denotes a long cloth of fine cotton linen, *bez*, embroidered with gold threads at one end,<sup>4</sup> i.e. a small or larger piece of textile with embroidery, for various uses. According to the travel books of Evliya Chelebi, the *yagluks* were mainly embroidered with silk threads, so we may suppose that the *yagluk* was multifunctional, mainly for practical use, and thus often washed, while the textiles decorated with silver threads were more difficult to maintain. The *yagluks* were used for decorating the interiors, but they were also given as presents in various rituals and customs.<sup>5</sup> Some of the cloths in the collection have Turkish names as *uchkur*, *chevre*, *peshkir*, and according to their size, decoration and function they are adequate to the Turkish ones, as described in the literature, and therefore I consider them correct.

The cloths are made of cotton, both the weft and the warp. They are woven in a technique of plain weave, out of a thin unbleached yarn. Most often they do not have any patterns. Some pieces have silk threads in the warp, distributed along the rims lengthwise. The cloths with silk threads in the weft have stripes, organized in groups, or are distributed on equal distances widthwise. Some pieces have cotton threads in the weft, but those are usually thicker. Two items, besides the stripes of thick cotton weft, also have woven geometric patterns. Rectangular forms, combined in rhombuses are woven in two horizontal belts. This weaving technique is also used in Bosnia and Herzegovina with a local name *pirlitanje*.<sup>6</sup> The cloths are rimmed with a sewing needle, while the ready-made organdie and linen are rimmed on a sewing machine. The *peshkirs* have the most

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<sup>2</sup> Z. Janjic, @enski rucni radovi u starom Sarajevu, Muzej grada Sarajeva, katalog izlo`be, Sarajevo, 1964, 6

<sup>3</sup> Fileki, I., Zdravo Svanuli, Pe{kir u tradicionalnom `ivotu Srbije, Etnografski muzej Srbije, katalog izlo`be, Beograd, 2002, 1, 9-10

<sup>4</sup> [kalji], A., Turcizmi u srpskohrvatskom jeziku, Sarajevo, 1979, 358

<sup>5</sup> Han, V., Putopisne bele{ke Evlije ^elebije, O gradskoj civilizaciji na Balkanu XV-XIX veka, Gradska kultura na Balkanu XV-XIX veka, Zbornik radova 1-2, SANU, Balkanolo{ki institut, posebna izdanja, Beograd, 1988, 93

<sup>6</sup> Janji}, Z., op.cit., 5

beautiful fringes. They are long and knitted in a net. Eight of the cloths have *oya* laces decorating the rims.

The cloth is fixed on a rectangular embroiderer's frame, and then embroidered with twisted silk threads of various thicknesses, adapted to a particular technique of embroidery. Subtle, pastel nuances of pink, purple, blue to indigo, green, yellow, brown, gray, light to dark red are most often used colors. (Fig. 1, 8, 10) Gold and silver threads, cut metallic threads and sequins are also used. The *chevres* are embroidered only with cut metallic threads and gold and silver-gilded threads. The palette of pastel colors is characteristic not only for Macedonia, but also for the embroideries from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the most of the ones from Serbia, while the embroideries from Kosovo have more intensive colors and large surfaces covered only with cut metallic threads.<sup>7</sup> Some of the samples from Tetovo, where the influences from Kosovo are more intensive, are of the same type. In Turkey, according to Prof. Bariřta,<sup>8</sup> the most common colors for the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century embroideries are yellow, silver, white, pink, blue, pistachio green, orange. Those colors appear also on our samples.

The number and variety of techniques of the Turkish embroidery are considered as one of its most specific characteristics. The first thing to notice is that the both faces of the embroidery are alike. The silk embroidery was made with the counted thread stitchery, following the structure of the texture. On the contrary, the embroidery with gold threads was made according the drawings on the cloth, due to the firmness of the metal threads, which are not adequate for complicated patterns and stitches.<sup>9</sup> This embroidery is considered of a later type. Although its shiny looks suggests preciousness, for the expert's eye it has never reached the value of the technically more elaborate counted stitches. The gold thread embroidery was also worked on the rectangular frame, with both faces alike. Thin cloths with transparent structure, as the organdie, were more appropriate for it.<sup>10</sup> The embroiderer has to have high level of technical skills in order to master and adapt to the materials and the motives.<sup>11</sup> All these qualities could be seen on the samples from the Museum of Macedonia, but unfortunately, except few local terms for the techniques, other data are not available. As in the museum register books there are no such data, I was only to try to recognize the embroidery techniques from our collection, in the books of Prof. Örcün Bariřta.<sup>12</sup> According to her precise instructions, I tried to do some of the stitches. It may be concluded that the techniques applied on the Macedonian samples are all present in the Turkish embroidery, which, on the other hand, has much more techniques that are not present in our collection. The most common is the satin stitch. It is used for filling the motives such as branches, leaves and buds. (Fig. 2, 6) The counted

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<sup>7</sup> Janji}, Z., *Stara vezena ornamentika u Sarajevu*, Prilozi za prou~avanje istorije Sarajeva, Sarajevo, 1966, 191

<sup>8</sup> Bariřta, Ö., *Osmanli Imperatorluk Dönemi Türk İslemelerinden Örnekler*, XIX ve XX yuzyil renk dokum tablosu, Ankara, 1981

<sup>9</sup> Petrovi}, \., *Gradski vez*, Narodno stvarala{tvo - folklor, god. XXVI, sv. 1-4, 1987, 8

<sup>10</sup> Jani}, Z., *@enski ru~ni...*, 10

<sup>11</sup> Janji}, Z., *Stara vezena...*, 193

<sup>12</sup> Bariřta, Ö., *Techniques in Turkish Embroidery*, Ankara, 1978; Bariřta, Ö., *Techniques from Turkish Embroidery*, Ankara, 1997

thread satin stitch appears in square, rectangular and triangular forms. The last ones are used most often for the borders, made in several colors, in order to check the harmony of the colors used for the motives. (Fig. 3, 8, 14) The variation of the satin stitch, called basket filling, is present at four samples. (Fig. 4, 5) The satin stitch in triangular form, having an effect of a woven pattern, also known as Byzantine stitch, in six of our samples appears in the borders. (Fig. 4, 5)

The double running stitch is present in the majority of our samples, as filling a stitch, and often in combination with other stitches. It appears both in straight and diagonal style. (Fig. 5,6,9, 10, 14 )

Holbein stitch is most often used in combination with the double running stitch, as a filling stitch. It is a variation of counted stitch with both faces alike. It appears both in horizontal and diagonal style. (Fig. 7, 11, 12)

Fishbone stitch is a variation of the satin stitch and it is used for filling small forms as, petals, leaves and flower buds, with the other filling stitches. (Fig. 8, 13)

Turkish openwork embroidery or *mushebak*, as is also called in Macedonia, is used alone or in combination with the satin, Holbein, fishbone and other stitches, for filling the entire motive or only some of its parts. It appears on 18 of our samples, on the two of them the main motive executed in this stitch. (Fig.9, 12)

The following stitches appear more rarely, always in combination with the other ones: the backstitch, the running stitch, the star stitch in squares, the herring bone stitch and sequin stitchery.

The cut thread stitchery that could be used for the borders, on our samples is used for decorating the materials. Knotted stitch with cut metallic threads appears in the museum samples for decorations around the motives.

Drawn-thread embroidery is applied on one way of withdrawn threads. We have only one sample with this stitch, for stressing the rimming.

The goblin stitch, also known as the half cross-stitch, consists of small diagonal stitches. It appears only on one sample for filling a detail of the motive.

The floral decoration dominates on the majority of the cloths from Macedonia. It consists of flowers, buds, leaves and branches. The ornaments are most often built on the curved branch. Sometimes, two or three branches are interlaced in spirals. The leaves have idealized forms and follow the curves of the branches. Often, they have a form of a bow. Sometimes, a single flower makes the entire ornament. By combining and repeating the flowers, branches and leaves, various compositions are obtained. The motives are stylized and idealized, and sometimes so far from the real forms, that it is difficult to recognize the very flower, fruit or plant. In our collection, tulips, carnations, lilacs, could be recognized, while the rose is so stylized that it is very possible to make a mistake in identifying it. But the resemblance to the model is obviously not the main intention of the decoration, but, first of all, the harmony of forms and colors, and the beauty of the composition.

The comparison to the similar items from the Balkans shows a clear resemblance among the motives. For example, a frequent motive in Macedonia (Fig. 1, 10, ), a large flower, under the bow of a curved branch with tiny flowers appears in almost identical form on

the samples from Bosnia,<sup>13</sup> and Turkey.<sup>14</sup> The tree is very often used in a stylized form. The trees, with their vertical forms are used to separate two subjects of the composition or as borders. (Fig. 11). The cypress and the palm trees are most often used, as they have a symbolic and religious meaning. They are always combined with flowers, or motives of mosques or other structures. Similar combinations are found on the Turkish embroideries.<sup>15</sup> Although Z. Janjić writes that the poppy motive is characteristic for the Macedonian embroideries,<sup>16</sup> and generally the fruit motives are characteristic for the Turkish embroideries, I did not recognize such motives on our samples, most probably because of the stylized forms of the motives which are hardly recognizable.

Besides the numerous embroideries with vegetal motives, the animal motives are quite rare, as a matter of fact, there are only two pieces in the collection, although the images of birds, fishes and insects are common in this type of embroidery.<sup>17</sup> The two samples from our Museum have almost identical motives of two confronted lions with a motive of a flower in a pot in the middle. (Fig. 12) The animals are almost identical on both of the samples; even the embroidery techniques are the same. There are differences in the flower motive, the border, the colors and the size. This motive is called *arslania*, and is considered to be typical for the Macedonian embroideries.<sup>18</sup> Similar composition is found in Turkey.<sup>19</sup> Another sample distinguishes with an unusual motive. At first sight, it looks as an Arabic letter, but it also may be a curved branch with flowers. (Fig. 13) Knowing that embroideries with Arabic inscriptions are found in some other places on the Balkans<sup>20</sup> we looked for analogies in the Turkish samples called *Mashallah*,<sup>21</sup> which look very alike the Macedonian one, taking into consideration its very simplified form.

The compositions of the motives vary according to the function and type of the cloth. The *yagluks* and the *uchkurs* are decorated only on the two narrower ends. Most often, the motives are positioned vertically in horizontal rows. Sometimes the motives are rotated and placed horizontally, thus contributing to the more fantastic look of the composition. (Fig. 6) As the *uchkurs* are narrower than the other textiles, the motives could be lined in two or three rows. (Fig. 7) They often have a composition with a central flower in a pot, and thickly interwoven branches with many leaves and tiny flowers around it. (Fig. 5, 9.) The *bofchas* are decorated on all the four sides, with developed types of borders and with large floral motives in the corners. The *chevres* are decorated with the same motive on each four angles, connected with their function in the customs and religious rituals.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Janjić, Z., *Stara...*, 197

<sup>14</sup> Barišta, Ö., *Osmanli ... Örnek: 275, 271, 269.* etc.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, Örnek: 255, 390

<sup>16</sup> Janjić, Z., *Stara...*, 198

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*. 198

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*. 202

<sup>19</sup> Barišta, Ö., *Osmanli...*, Örnek: 360

<sup>20</sup> Janjić, Z., *Stara...*, 199

<sup>21</sup> Barišta, Ö., *Osmanli...*, Örnek: 289, 290

<sup>22</sup> Mikov, L., *Chevreto vuv kulturata na mjušlumanite ot severoiztochna Bulgaria, Problemi na izkustvoto*, 2, Institut za izkustvoznane pri BAN, Sofija, 1995, 53

At first sight, the impression is that the materials, techniques, colors, compositions and the choice of motives are very similar in the entire collection. It is due, first of all, to the fact that the embroideries are made by the women living and creating isolated from the outside world. This conservatism is conveyed to their embroideries, with no changes in the forms and the style, often leading to a simple reproduction. Z. Janjić who has studied the urban embroideries from the entire Balkans says that besides small local differences in the choice of motives, they are almost the same. Not only that the same motive is embroidered in the same form, but also the composition and the techniques are also the same. The embroiderer only dared to change some tiny detail or color, and to give a name to the motive whose ideographic meaning and symbolism is forgotten long time ago.<sup>23</sup>

The presented collection is almost identical to its Oriental models. The analysis presents evidence for the identical function of the observed cloths, the materials they are made of and the applied embroidery technique. The motives and the compositions shows similarities and analogies to the samples from all the larger Balkan cities and the Turkish embroideries from the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Museum of Macedonia in its ethnographic collection has not many items older than the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As the textiles could not be preserved in good condition for a longer period of time, I suppose that our samples originate from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Only one sample in the collection has an embroidered year on it. (Fig. 14)

I hope, that the presented data on Turkish embroideries from Macedonia will help to create more precise picture on the Turkish embroidery in general, and particularly on its Balkan variants.

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<sup>23</sup> Janjić, Z., Stara..., 191