

Traditional wall-carpet craftsmanship in Romania - excerpt -



I. Domain: traditional craftsmanship

II. The element of intangible cultural heritage:
Traditional wall-carpet craftsmanship in Romania.

Standard name of the element: Wall-carpet craftsmanship

Other local / regional names of the element: “păretar” (woven wall hanging), “lăicer” (narrow ornamental wool rug covering backless benches), “velință” (wool carpet), “chilim” (kilim), “lădar”(carpet lying on chests-of-drawers), “ungherar” (carpet lying on house-corner chests), “cergă” (wool blanket meant for wrapping, or used as bedcloth), “război” (loom).

Area of manifestation:

The element is widely spread throughout the entire Romanian territory, as performed both within the peasant household, in specialized workshops from orthodox nunneries and in distinct family associations. The weaving craft according to the traditional techniques of scoarțe / carpets is very well represented in Maramureș county, the northern and central parts of the historical province of Moldavia (counties: Botoșani, Neamț, Bacău), in Prahova and Buzău, as well as in Oltenia (counties: Olt, Vâlcea, Dolj, Gorj).

Along with individual weavers renowned for carpet production, the craft represents a current activity in the monasteries of Agapia and Văratec – Neamț county, Hurezi – Vâlcea county, Tismana – Gorj county, and in associations such as Australis Prod



SRL from Bechet, in Dolj county and Nemțeanca from Târgu Neamț, in Neamț county. The following locations are estimated as representative centres for the weaving of carpets through traditional techniques: Botiza and Bârsana (Maramureș county), Tudora (Botoșani county), Târgu Neamț and Agapia (Neamț county), Buzău, Bechet (Dolj county), Ho-



rezu (Vâlcea county).

Brief description:

A reference point in Romanian folk craftsmanship, carpets are utilitarian and decorative wool weavings, meant to protect and improve the quality of life in households. In Romania, carpet weaving dates from times immemorial.

Of Latin origin, the term reminds of

the primary function of weavings – not at all different from the tree plank used in the past, which was to provide thermal isolation to log-made houses.

The originality, unity and artistic value of Romanian carpets is provided by the technological competence of many generations of working women, by their creative integration of motifs and symbols circulating in Europe and elsewhere. Carpets were made on horizontal or vertical looms by intertwining wool threads. The preparatory steps for weaving were the selection and manual processing of textile fibers, followed by warping and woofing, the basis of the subsequent woven fabric. Between 1850 and 1950, hemp was used as warp, later to be replaced by carded cotton (with carded yarn). The chromatic quality was first provided by vegetal pigments; after 1900, chemical dyes replaced the natural ones, determining a diversification in the chromatic range of decorative motives. In the weaving process

on horizontal looms, both hands were used to place the woof, whilst the legs stepped on the paddles that separated the warp groups, thus allowing one to let in the shuttle with the woofing threads. With vertical looms, the wool threads are placed by hand amidst the yarns of the warp, “beaten” with “combs,” or “forks.” Essential for the Romanian traditional ornamenting systems (18th – 19th centuries) are the techniques of motif picking. The decorative motifs are frequently picked “by fingers” and they come out in the weaving process, differentiating between colours and modelling the composition. The so-called “alesul cu speteaza” / crossbeam picking technique was found in the Olt country and Southern Wallachia; Moldavia would rather have “alesul în chilim” / kilim technique; Banat and Dobrudja



seemed to prefer “alesul printre fire” picking through the threads and “alesul peste fire” / picking over the threads with rods.

The group work on the processing of weaving threads (corvee) and the carpet craftsmanship as such are community-binding activities, gradually defining the experiential exchange in the production of traditional motifs and the emergence

of new artistic patterns. The fact that carpets actually made girls’ dowry motivated the weavers in choosing the best techniques for designing ornamental motifs, so as to be admired by the community during the wedding. Through a slow process



of refinement and creative combination of motifs, the compositions of carpets have gradually changed, so as to meet the cultural and taste requirements of each generation. In temporal terms, the geometric motifs are the oldest.

According to their age, they were connected with water, earth, clouds, stars. Irrespective of the picking technique – tight picking, karamani

(in “holes,” with “cuts”) – these motifs harness the repertory of geometrical figures: combinations of simple, broken, curved lines, associated with triangles, squares, rectangles, and diamonds. The motifs are ordered in either open or framed compositions, thus resulting a symmetrical, repetitive effect and chromatic rhythm. Vegetal-floral motifs, stylized in accordance with regional techniques, illustrate the special universe of the Romanian village. Under different names, field and forest flowers, also such garden plants and flowers as clover, basil, rose, peony, lily-of-the-valley, tulip, daffodil, and the like come harmoniously, often in clusters, in the overall design. There is an





extremely varied regional range of stylization methods and techniques used in rendering symbolical motifs – the tree of life and the fir tree. Among the very stylized zoomorphic motifs, the horse, always with the rider, was one of the most frequent carpet motifs in Maramureș, Moldavia and the Olt country in the 19–th century. Birds conveniently complete the ornamental repertory of Romanian carpets, as they are integrated, in their symbolical value, into complex compositions. The human silhouettes, feminine or masculine, or simply their physiognomy, are stylized down to abstractions, emphasizing the

artistic canons of the Paleolithic and the Neolithic periods. The carpets and the woven wall hangings from Moldavia, Muntenia, Transylvania, and Oltenia provide the most expressive anthropomorphic representations.

An important role in the perpetuation and the development of ornamental repertoires of carpets was held by monastery workshops (Agapia, Văratec, Hurezi, Vorona) and manufacturing city workshops (Târgu Jiu, Craiova – specialized in educating kiliman women weavers, Câmpulung Muscel, Argeș county and Pietroșița, Dâmbovița county). In early 20th century, the Royal House of Romania founded royal carpet workshops, which promoted the traditional wall-carpets as representative weavings, not only in rural areas. The most valuable items made in these workshops were promoted as symbols of national identity in world exhibitions in Europe and America.



Practitioners:

The craft of carpet weaving has been practised to the present days in peasants' households as a domestic activity running in the family, from one generation to another. In times past, girls used to "take over the loom" early, starting with simple weavings, having their mothers or grandmothers by their side. Each girl had to weave her own scoarțe / carpets, as part of her dowry. Weaving had the value of initiation, and those girls who did not acquire the skill had little chance to get married.

From the second half of the 19th century to 1980, in certain villages, specialized women weavers started rounding up their incomes by selling carpets in fairs. Today, in villages such as Botiza and Bârsana (Maramureș), Tudora (Botoșani), Pipirig (Neamț), Ostroveni (Dolj), most of the women perform by hand, in their households, all the operations required for weaving, from the selection and processing of wool fibers, to their dyeing with natural pigments.

Particularly gifted people, suppliers of the knowledge and experience accumulated throughout many generations, are distinguished carriers, such being the remarkable



cases of: Adela Petre, nothing less than a living human treasure from Buzău, Antoneta Nadu from Bechet (Dolj), Varvara and Maria Todici (Nemțeanca Handicraftsmen Association, Târgu Neamț – Neamț), Floarea and Mihai Maxim from Tudora (Botoșani), Maria and Ioana Hodor, Maria Știopei, Iuliana Frânc from Bârsana (Maramureș), Parasca and Anghelina Sidău, Ana and Maria Tri-

foi from Botiza (Maramureș).

Besides this category of craftsmen, carpet weaving is also performed in craft centres and family associations, as well as in specialized workshops near orthodox nunneries.

Age range:

The learning of simple operations begins at a tender age (9 to 10 years old), but the weavers acquire a certain reputation throughout adulthood (25 to 90 years old).

Gender:

Weaving, as well as the preliminary operations, address particularly women, as one of the domestic activities emphasizing woman's role within the traditional family. Women are also predominant in workshops.

Socio-professional category: housewives, specialized weavers, craftswomen, teachers, professionals.

Nationality: Romanian

Current state of the element:

Although carpet weaving was a domestic craft transmitted in the family environment, with the development of the educational system, the process of professional learning was no longer confined to the family, but it developed through school and nonformal/vocational education. One could find villages specialized in the weaving of certain kinds of carpets, and also extremely gifted people, traditional craftsmen involved in transmitting traditional techniques. Besides the traditional forms of mutual help, there are now family associations and NGOs concerned with the transmission of the craft, also contributing to the long-term development of settlements through professional reconversion. In recent years, in many of the rural communities there have been founded collections and museum-houses which, besides collecting representative regional items, perform demonstrative activities and acts of initiation in the craftsmanship.



Legislation: Law no. 410/2005 concerning the acceptance of the Convention for safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage; the Order of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage no. 2491/2009 for the approval of the Regulation granting the title of Living Human Treasure; Law no. 1/2005 regarding the cooperative's organization and functioning;

Safeguarding/protective measures:**1. Legal framework:**

The Romanian Ministry of Culture will follow the application of heritage and institutional applicable legisla-

tion: the Craft Act of 2007; Order no. 545/2014 concerning the modification of the Procedure of implementing the multiannual Programme for the support of arts and crafts, approved through the Order of the Minister authorized for small and medium-sized enterprises, business environment and tourism no. 169/2013, as well as the Sectoral Strategy in the field of culture and national heritage 2014 – 2020.

2. Institutional contribution:

In recent decades, cultural heritage institutions – ethnographic museums from Bucharest, Craiova, Sibiu, Iasi, Baia Mare and cultural centres – have organized activities with the purpose of promoting the craft of carpet weaving and especially their support and, where needed, their revitalization. Through such manifestations from local up to national, foundations are laid, on a permanent basis, for weaving workshops for children with the participation of craftsmen



from well-established regions.

Researchers and curators have permanently been concerned with updating the documentary-ethnographic information regarding weaving, and with capitalizing the museum heritage. Their results took shape in the publication of studies in annals and specialized journals, in syntheses and catalogues much to the interest of specialists, and the people willing to actually become involved in the perpetuation of the craft (craftsmen, trainers, teachers from the vocational education system).

In the two universities that have BA and MA programs in ethnology – the University of Bucharest and the North University of Baia Mare – the university curriculum contains courses in traditional arts and crafts, also other traditional activities. At the National Arts University of Bucharest, the Faculty of Decorative Arts and Design (Textile Arts and Design departments), students get advice in the acquisition of traditional weaving techniques; they can also get acquainted with the graphical-decorative characteristics of ornamental compositions. By way of practice, students participate in field research oriented towards a direct knowledge of traditional methods, as well as in events organized by choice museums, where they get to meet the most gifted carpet craftswomen, so as to watch closely their techniques and specific style.

3. Contributions of nongovernmental organizations:

Besides the traditional forms of carpet making, there are now family associations

and NGOs concerned with transmitting the craft. They contribute to the development of alternative sources of income through the capitalization of women's local skills in the art of weaving.

Examples of good practices as far as cultural heritage preservation and management are concerned are: Australis Prod SRL directed by Antoneta Nadu from Bechet (Dolj) – <http://www.artalasar.ro/> and Nemteanca Handicraftsmen Association from Târgu Neamț, directed by Tincuța Ciubotariu – <http://www.nemteanca.com/index.php/en/>.

4. Contribution of communities and individuals:

In present day Romania heritage carrier communities have launched initiatives concerning the revitalization of carpet weaving, and have participated in the completion of nomination list. In carpet weaving centres there is a systematic interest in recovering the motifs and old techniques of the craftsmanship, so as to be made use of in the new weavings.



At a community level, carpet craftsmanship is promoted by many representatives specialized in various activities: shepherds, wire processors in technical installations, dyers, weavers, teachers, cultural managers and agrotouristic networks. Women weavers assimilate and transmit traditional artistic patterns to beneficiaries at home and abroad through participations in exhibitions and national or international fairs, through the organization of public workshops, also by catering for public and private beneficiaries.

Safeguarding/protective measures include:

- the continuation of technique inventory activities and data collection under various forms (archive, documentary);
- the control of the craft's preservation and transmission through: research in old centres (active and semiactive), selection and declaration of living human treasures;
- offering scientific consulting for the promotion of weaving techniques;
- the development, in specialized museums, of certain cultural projects meant to support the process of transmission and capitalization (exhibitions with a theme, fairs and demonstrative activities);
- a more intense contribution of research institutions to sustaining the element's

viability by: reconsidering, re-evaluating and promoting craft centres and creators, giving them every assistance to participate in promotional activities, and get involved in organizing cultural – from local up to national and international – events;

- the production of informational materials, in printed and digital formats;
- the creation of a webpage focusing on carpet weaving;
- the support provided to the network of village museum collections through a dynamic owners/creators/specialists dialogue;
- the production of leaflets promoting the weavers and the centres, serving as reference points for the current application.

Data collection, community involvement and consent:

In preparing the nomination, there were brought together specialists and experts from Dimitrie Gusti National Village Museum (Bucharest), the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant (Bucharest), the Museum of Ethnography (Botoșani), the Museum of Oltenia, Casa Băniei Department of Ethnography (Craiova), the North University Centre (Baia Mare), the University of Bucharest, the Metropolitan Church of Moldavia and Bukovina (Iași), the Romanian Ministry of Culture. Teams of specialists were involved in capitalizing on the field research and in recording audio-visual and photographic materials from craftsmen, with a view to detailing traditional techniques and emphasizing compositional-ornamental, as well as chromatic, regional characteristics.

In making the documentary attached to the UNESCO file, Constantin Brăiloiu Institute of Ethnography and Folklore has provided audio documents from its own archives, while the actual DVD production was performed by the Video Art Studio, subordinated to the Ministry of Culture.

The National Heritage Institute/Department for the Preservation and Promotion of Traditional Culture has posted on its site the page representing the inventory of traditional carpet weaving techniques.

Community representatives and individual value carriers have supported the nomination, allowing for the recording, and the field research of the element. They have provided the experts with materials and auxiliary documents, necessary for preparing the nomination (photographs, video recordings, weaving collections). Public authorities and creators approved of the nomination of the element, and official agreements were signed for the traditional techniques of carpet production.

Observations:

Carpet weaving has been one of the most expressive artistic crafts practised in a traditional manner; given their practical, aesthetic, and symbolical value, they have

played an important role in social communication, in the affirmation and promotion of cultural identity. Their inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity will contribute to the preservation, transmission and acknowledgement, on a national and international scale, of one of the oldest Romanian artistic crafts. The communities will be encouraged to ensure the continuity of the element, reconsidering their status as identity mark through the transmission of knowledge and skills from generation to generation.

The traditional wall-carpet craftsmanship in Romania and the Republic of Moldova applies for the inscription on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity for November 2016, in a transfrontier file: Romania – the Republic of Moldova.

Completed by:

Dr. Narcisa Alexandra Știucă, Associate Professor, Department of Cultural Studies, Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest.

Dr. Doina Ișfănoni, ethnologist, Dimitrie Gusti National Village Museum, Bucharest.

English translation:

Prof. dr. Sorin Pîrву, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University

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