

# GRAPHICS, SYMBOL AND TECHNOLOGIES OF MAKING TRADITIONAL MOLDOVAN CARPETS

Svetlana CANGAS

*Technical University of Moldova, Chisinau, Republic of Moldova  
svetlana.cangas@dtp.utm.md*

**Abstract.** *The cultural traditions of a nation, a people are reflected in the symbol, graphics and technologies of making popular wear products. The linear graphics, the chromatic ornament, framed in structural compositional rigors educated over long periods, denote the cultural cultivation of the people for centuries. Traditional carpet weaving technologies preserved over time reflect spiritual as well as economic development. Adaptation, graphic elements and borrowed weaving technologies led to the development of the popular wear product and the carpet itself. The traditional carpet is a product with a considerable lifespan and at the same time it is the product that transmits, but also preserves over time, the symbolic and graphic elements of the woven motifs. Production technologies reveal to us a rather varied palette of ornamental motifs, broadening the product's destination. Each period of carpet development promotes a basic ornamental motif. The rose motif is predominantly characteristic of the 20th century, the tree of life motif identified as an authentic motif is found in the 19th and 20th century carpet. The use of motifs of the "tree of life", "comb" or "palm", "shepherd's hook" in the ornament of the carpet, characterizes the authenticity of the product. The way of organization, the graphics of the ornament changes over time, taking over foreign cultural influences, in this way the dry carpet. the 19th reflects the stylized graphic of the ornament motif loaded with elements of symbol and legend, the graphic of the sec. the 20th makes attempts at realistic accounts of the ornament.*

**Keywords:** *chromatics, destination, ornament, weaves.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The term carpet appears in the XV- XVI century, including all non-woven and woven textiles. Peasant carpets on the Bessarabian territory in the XVIII century are named "scoarță" and "lăicer", towards the middle of the XX century some large chosen carpets are called "covor" or "război" and sometimes also "chilim".

Thanks to the hereditary traditions practiced in the homesteaders' yards, today the hand-woven carpets are presented in museum exhibitions, and some local specimens can be over 200 years old. The most common type of carpet is the 80-year-old one which also keeps in itself the traditions of passing on as dowry, as gifts or "pomană" rediscovering the social brand of the family from generation to generation. The oldest carpet, which is over 260 years old, was exhibited at one of the carpet celebrations and is from Crișcăuți, Dondușeni, inherited by the craftsman from his great-great-grandmother.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The proposed objectives were studied through the theoretical approach to the problem. Several research methods have been cumulated, including: analytical method - made by analyzing the theoretical aspects starting from the research of the history of the development of weaving technologies, also carpet ornamentation; comparison method - carried out by examining the compositional structures and graphics of carpet ornament in identified development periods; systemic method - personalized argumentation of ethnographic studies proposed in this paper and reasoning of conclusions, coherence of thoughts and interpretations; induction method, which allowed to substantiate the main aspects and conclusions of this scientific article.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Weaving techniques and dyes

Carpet in the folk tradition has always been weaved only by women, men did not participate in the process of carpet weaving. Three categories of techniques were most frequently applied to the weaving of Bessarabia carpets: the tissue in smooth, also called "scorțeresc" or „chilim”; the tissue in „ridicățuri” and the tissue in "mițe", which is also called in "noduri".[1] In the Northern and Southern areas of the Republic of Moldova, the technique of working carpets "pick thread by thread", with short wool threads on the vertical tool called: "război" or "ramă", "căringi", "druci", allowed the creation of carpets with a smooth surface, 2-sided dense. The smooth and dense texture was obtained as a result of the processing technology by which in the process of work they were beaten with a heavy wooden comb or even fork. Due to the increased density of threads the double-sided carpet is distinguished by the quality of not absorbing dust, keeping heat and protecting the house from noise.

In the south of the republic, the carpet was made on horizontal "stands"-“stative” also called “war”-“război” - a technique and utensil used to make the single-sided carpet. The weaving of carpets with the use of stands on which almost all the textiles in the household were worked was imposed by the smaller housing in these localities. It is impressive the technique of the carpet "chosen in bumbi" practiced more in the central districts, a technique that is also an element of old traditional embroidery also used in the old ie product in which the "chosen in bumbi" is made on cloth, in carpet - on warp. It is a carpet for floors or a bedspread with a curative element of foot therapy, the realization of which is currently being revived in Călărași, which is yet another proof of the return of popular technologies in current household products.

Although natural dyes offer a rich range of shades, the chromatic spectrum of a carpet oscillates around seven colors, the aesthetic effect is obtained from the contrasting nuances of chromatic shades. Thanks to the increases value of the national traditions and culture through social networks, and other opportunities offered by digital resources, today a fairly wide audience knows that walnut buds are used to obtain khaki color, green color is obtained from nettle, tan and orange color from onion husk, yellow color from marigold and saffron flowers. For a deep black color, red wine is used, for blue color, “the swallow's dress” is used. To strengthen and fix the color on the woolen thread, the "mortant" is used, which in itself represents a solution prepared from vinegar or sour borscht. Different shades and colors require the use of different "mortant". Dyeing in natural colors is a long-lasting and quite expensive process, although it is necessary to mention that carpet craftsmen note that painting with synthetic dyes is not a simpler one.

#### 3.2. Graphics, symbol and composition

If we were to approach the problem of the aesthetics and the symbol of the carpet ornament, then the source of inspiration of our great-grandmothers, say the carpet craftsmen as well as the book sources, was absolutely everything that surrounded them. Both on the carpet and on the popular product we find the message and the symbol encrypted in vegetal, geometric motifs, motifs with representations of animals and primitive human figures from the point of view of stylization, various inscriptions representing the year the carpet was made, the name of the author, work tools, etc.

The first steps in the art of carpet weaving for beginner craftsmen were made by the work of geometric ornamental motifs "vrîste", rhombuses, squares, teeth, hooks, broken lines, etc. The tree of life - a frequent motif in folk clothing [2, 3], cult products such as towels, and especially in the carpet, it is found in various interpretations [6, 7], but at the same time it proves through the graphic characteristic belonging to the popular culture developed in the space between the Dniester and Prut rivers. The tree of life with the human face resembling a tree on the carpet-type product, the twig-type tree of life (figure 1c) which also appears as a postage stamp, the tree of life on the festive shirt (figure 1d), the tree of life on ritual products from the interwar period (figure 1 e).

The compositional structure of the Moldavian carpet is based on the organization of the background, the central design called the “floarea” or the "ozorul" and the border analogous to the structure of the sleeve, which is also organized into fields: the “altita”, the “incret” and the “raurii”. In the "Album of Moldavian carpet ornaments", edited from 1912 in Chisinau, which is still used today by many folk craftsmen, it is mentioned that the ornament of the authentic, old Moldovan carpet is different, but still quite close to the Italian carpet and totally different from the oriental carpet.



**Figure 1.** a) b) c) Model sketches from the Album of Moldavian carpet ornaments [4] d) Holiday shirts - component of the Romanian folk holiday costume, [5] e) The tree of life, towel embroidery - exhibits of the Museum of History and Ethnography of the Republic of Moldova from Nisporeni city.

The basic characteristic of the old Moldavian carpet [3], is the compositional structure organized on fields of ornament that are totally different. But it is necessary to note that through the ornamental diversity the aesthetic and compositional harmony of the product is achieved, identifying itself as a characteristic of the authenticity of the carpets and popular products shown in the example of shirt “iea” (figure 1d). According to its message, ornament and structure, the Bessarabian carpet of the last century, a century in which we remain to be eyewitnesses, separates into two large groups, namely the authentic carpet, the ornament of which is organized in rows (figure 1) and the carpet with the centered ornament (figure 2) or the ornament which pivots around the central message that developed in the 18th, shaping it already in the 20th century in a popular product.

In the 20th century, around the middle of the 70s., large-sized carpets, called “războaie”, “tave” or “tabloane”, were produced more for commercial purposes [1], although in this period it was currently the Persian industrial carpet produced by local businesses. The type of wall tapestry, hand-woven, dating back to c. 20th, the most common in the central area of the country is considered the “Podnos” model. The “Podnos” is the most popular carpet in this area, due to its rectangular shape reminiscent of a tray and is woven with flowers all around, the carpet artisans say. Or the compositional structure of these carpet models, shown in figure 2, is organized on fields located on the perimeter of the central drawing of the carpet which often by itself represents the shape of a tray or popularly - “podnos”, “tabloane”. The number of fields is imposed by the carpet pattern and can be very varied (figure 2).



**Figure 2.** a) "Podnos" carpet with horseshoe edge, the 20th century [8];  
b) "Podnos" carpet with typical national ornament border, the 20th century [8]

The structural type consists of the model of the traditional old Moldavian carpet (figure 1) and the so-called fluffy Persian carpet "from Tarigrad" which, starting with the century the 18th began to be manufactured industrially in Spain, England and Germany. [1] Arriving in the aristocratic environment, from that period, oriental, Persian carpets were considered luxury items. And already towards the 19th-20th centuries in the popular weaving culture, the influences of the Persian carpet appear, which, as the author of the "Album of Moldavian Carpet Ornaments" P. Gore mentions [4], is characterized by the double border correlated with the basic motif placed in the center of the carpet. This subordination of the edges and the center can be found in the carpet of the "podnos" or "tabloane" type, which mainly following the invasion of the industrial carpet in the 20th century already manufactured by local enterprises such as "Floare-Carpet" remains to emerge as a popular product with special compositional structure characteristics. This allogenic compositional structure is found in many samples of carpets kept in local, regional history and ethnography museums in the country as valuables, produced by folk craftsmen from the 20th century, dated to the interwar period and the mid-1970s.

Both the ornament of the carpet and the ornament of the embroidery on the popular products is subordinated to the vertical and horizontal rhythm of the woven threads, a fact that requires the symbol elements to be organized according to the graphic rhythm characteristic of the woven threads or to acquire mostly the same elements of stylization of the image. The chromatic and iconographic morphogenesis of the ornamentation of popular products is one of the much-discussed issues. Multi-century migrations motivated by non-essential climatic changes with land and people grabs had considerable influences on the development of tribes in prehistory, but also in the historical period they contributed to new invasions, conquests of territory, but already through the assimilation of traditions, reinterpretations of legends that finally they ended up being woven on carpets, sewn on shirts, "bundite", painted on weaving and spinning tools that were considered and remained sacred as an iconostasis of the house.

Rows and repetition of the ornament, the woven row, embroidered in carpets and folk wear products is one of the essential characteristics of the popular culture housed on the banks of the Dniester and Prut, although following many historical events these lands served as a bridge for many ethnicities and peoples, remained to be conserved due to the character offered to the product.

Thanks to the philosophy of continuity, development and preservation of traditions from mother to daughter, from father to son unwavering and educated for millennia. Rows of branches of the tree of life, rows of succeeding generations and rows of ornament, ornamental symbols in rows still today give the meaning of continuity to infinity and close kinship

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion we can mention that:

- In the geographical space of the Republic of Moldova in the 20th century, the popular carpet takes shape in three compositional types:
  - ✓ The carpet called "Podnos", the composition and graphics of the ornament of which derives from the authentic carpet and the Persian carpet.

- ✓ The carpet, which is actually still found today in the houses of grandparents, museums, used by many folk craftsmen outlines the repeated or doubled organization of the floral ornament on the center most frequently with a black background and the center with bouquets of flowers roses, poppies, lilacs, ears of wheat, in quite vivid colors red, purple, gold and border on the outline of the rug.
- ✓ The carpet that retains the authentic composition of ornament in rows on the center and border with the stylized graphics and the encrypted symbol in the styling elements such as the embroidery of the shirts of the popular port.
- The format of the carpet is also diverse, which frequently in authentic proportions is narrowed and in the tradition of the 20th century mainly covers the wall on an area of 2×3 m.
- The graphic and symbolic elements used in the carpets, from the geographical space of the Republic of Moldova dating from the interwar period, intersperse within themselves traces of the Cucuteni culture and influences of the Christian religion, characterized by the use of the symbols of the “tree of life”, “the ear of wheat”, “vrîste”, “rhombuses”, “squares”, “the stream”, etc.

### Acknowledgements

We express our gratitude to the National Agency for Research and Development of the Republic of Moldova, the Technical University of Moldova for the trust and support provided in carrying out the research within the State Program project "Education for the revitalization of the national cultural heritage through the traditional processing technologies used in the Republic of Moldova, in the context of multiculturalism, diversity and European integration" 20.80009.0807.17.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Mardare, Gh.: *Arta covoarelor vechi românești basarabene: Magia mesajului simbolic*, Cartier, ISBN 978-9975-86-095-6, Chișinău, (2016.)
- [2] Buzilă, V.: *Costumul popular din Republica Moldova, ghid practic*, Chișinău (2011)
- [3] Buzilă, V.: *Retorica vestimentară: cămașa cu altiță; Ministerul Culturii al Republicii Moldova*, ISBN 978-9975-163-16-3, muzeul Național de Etnografie și Istorie Naturală-Chișinău: S. N., (2022) (lexon-Prim), 311 p.
- [4] Gore, P.: *Albumului ornamentelor de covoare moldovenești*, ediția 1912.
- [5] Kolbenheyer, E.: *Designs of the home-industry embroideries in Bukovina*, published by the imperial ministry for public works and the Bucovina Diet, (1912), 200 p.
- [6] Cangaș, S.; Florea-Burduja, E.: *Clothing product of the folk costume with a utility and symbol-apron role*, Збірник матеріалів IV Міжнародної науково-практичної конференції «Актуальні проблеми сучасного дизайну», м. Київ, 27 квітня (2022) року: у 2 томах. Київ: КНУТД, 2022. Том 1. 303 с., ISBN 978-617-7506-98-9, pp. 130-133.
- [7] Kangash, S.; Florea, Ye.: *Vosstanovleniye identichnosti i simboliki elementov vyshivki i kruzheva*, Збірник матеріалів III Міжнародної науково-практичної конференції «Актуальні проблеми сучасного дизайну», м. Київ, 22 квітня 2021 року. ISBN 978-617-7506-78-1, Київ: КНУТД, (2021). у 2 томах. Том 1. 321 с., pp. 35-39. [in Russian]
- [8] Postolachi, E.: *Covorul moldovenesc în dificultate*, revista de Etnologie nr.4, (2011), pag.113-119.