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THE EMBROIDERY OF THE CRIMEAN TATARS: TRADITIONS AND THE PRESENT

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КРИМСЬКОТАТАРСЬКЕ ОРНАМЕНТАЛЬНЕ ШИТВО: ТРАДИЦІЇ ТА СУЧАСНІСТЬ

В статті подається інформація про особливості кримськотатарського декоративного шитва. Розглядаються осовні орнаментальні композиції, техніки вишивки та застосування вишитих тканин у побуті. Стаття формує комплексне уявлення про традиції кримськотатарського мистецтва вишивки, процес його відродження на сучасному етапі.

One of the main assignments of the independent Ukrainian state is to restitute the lost cultural values, traditions, and monuments and to restore the historical justice concerning peoples which were exposed to the repressions, ideological, political and national pressures. It refers not only to the Ukrainians but also to all peoples and ethnic groups leaving in the territory of Ukraine. The Crimean Tatars is the native people of the Crimean peninsula with ancient history and unique culture that absorbed various traditions of the Mediterranean cultural area and Muslim world.

In the age of Stalinism and repressions the Crimean Tatars were greatly oppressed. They went through a tragedy of deportation which had a destructive influence on their traditional culture. It was a lot to be lost forever, but some spheres of the folk art are being gradually regenerated. That's why the study of the traditional culture of the Crimean Tatars, in particular of the folk art, becomes very important nowadays.

The production of the patterned clothes and embroideries was the main and the most widespread kind of handicraft of the Crimean Tatars. The end of the 19th century was marked by the growth of the interest to the Crimean Tatars' culture. Just in this period the process of gathering and collecting the items of the Crimean Tatars' art began. The abovementioned subject was widely examined in 20's – 30's years of the 20th century. The first research dedicated to the Crimean Tatars' embroidery by P. Chepurina¹ and E. Spasskaya² were published in this time. After 1994 a new long-term period of harboring began, during which not only publications were completely excluded but also the study of the Crimean Tatars' art was forbidden³. In the time of deportation the valuable items of the folk decorative art were lost; the source base was seriously damaged. That's why today the single textbooks on embroidery are ancient goods, collected in the museums. The great contribution to the rebirth of the traditions and the development of the modern embroidery art was made by the Crimean Tatars professional artist, craftsman of carpet-making Mamut Churlu. On the basis of studying the Crimean Tatars' patterns the artist has published the manual for children "... (The decorative painting and overlay on Crimean Tatars' patterns) (1995))⁴. Nowadays the articles and works of other researchers dedicated to the Crimean Tatars' decorative art and embroidery continue to be published⁵.

The originality of the culture of the Crimean peoples is caused by the process of mixing different ethnic groups for centuries in the comparatively small territory.

The presence of the Turkic element in the culture of the Crimean peoples is connected with the migrations of the Turkic peoples in the beginning of the first millennium AD. In early Middle Ages, with the growth of Byzantine power, the Crimean peninsula falls into the sphere of influence of the Christian European Culture. Since then the antic meander appears in the Crimean embroidery.

In the XIII century this region becomes a part of the Turkic Muslim world; the Crimea becomes a province of the Golden Horde. Since then the influence of the traditions of the patterned embroidery of Syria, Iran, Palestine can be seen in the Crimean arts and crafts⁶.

During the times of the Crimean Khanate, namely in the 15th – 17th centuries, the Crimean Tatars' art achieves particular prosperity. This period is marked by the forming of guilds at the Khan court. The part of the produced goods was exported to the countries of the Mediterranean area, as well as to the Asia Minor and Russia⁷. The Khan period embroidery was characterized by the high level of craftsmanship. In the 17th century an influence of Christian culture patterns can already be seen. Some researchers mark also Ukrainian and Bulgarian impacts⁸.

After Crimean annexation by the Russian Empire in the end of the 18th century the local culture entered into the phase of the deaf self-isolation. The conservation of the cannons of the traditional art leading to the depression took place⁹. The gradual penetration of the west European culture to the Crimean peninsula changed the way of life of the Crimean Tatars. With the advent of the factory color patterned materials the traditional embroidery stepped back on the background. The quality of the embroidered and weaved goods changed. The pattern became more crude and simplified. Till the beginning of the 20th century only patterned weaving and sewing was preserved in more or less clear form, especially in remote regions of Crimea.

The famous Crimean ethnographer A.N. Samoylovych insisted on hastening the studying process of folk handicraft, because of the gradual decline of the craft production¹⁰.

After establishment of Soviet power in the territory of the Crimea the traditional crafts fell in the sphere of general policy of regulation of national economy. In different Crimean towns were created various artistic and cultural institutions, museums, study-groups, where the collections and the exhibitions of items of the national Crimean Tatars' art were created. The World War II and 1944 deportation became the turning point in the history of the Crimean Tatars' art; the production of embroidered goods completely stopped¹¹. Nowadays the study of the local peculiarities of the Crimean Tatars' embroidery has become almost impossible, as during the deportation the hundreds and thousands people were alienated from the native land and after return the Crimean Tatars didn't manage to come back in their native villages.

The patterned art of the Crimean Tatars is characterized by the variety of forms and, first of all, it concerns the embroidered desings. Firstly, it refers to decorating with the embroidery of different articles and elements of clothing (dresses, jackets, head-veils, glands, chemises, men's belts, etc.)¹². Secondly, the embroidery played an important role in the decoration of the interior of the dwellings and sometimes it even replaced the painting. The Crimean Tatars houses were filled with various materials, woven and embroidered things which were of utilitarian function and played the role of decorative adornments: table-clothes, different towels, napkins and handkerchiefs, embroidered pillow covers, window curtains¹³. The towels and napkins were hanged along the walls so that the two sides of embroidery could be seen. That was a demonstration of the skilled double-sided embroidery. The patterned embroidery was of a great importance in the wedding ceremony. The room of the bride was decorated with all the embroidered things made on her own. That was the presents for the bridegroom and the guests.

The compositional structure of the desings of the Crimean Tatars' embroidery is incredibly diverse. The patterns may be linked and separated, mobile (curved in diagonal, horizontal, chemical) and fixed (symmetrical)¹⁴. The patterns on the delicate home-made materials used for belts, handkerchiefs and scarves, were always complicated and various. In the same time, the patterns on jackets, dresses, head-dresses and footwear were simpler¹⁵.

In the color gamut of the embroidery the light shades of soft colors prevail: pinky-green, bluish-yellow. More deep colors can also be seen, but they are always softened. In the design of the Crimean Tatars the local specificity can clearly be traced. The steppe region was characterized by

the pattern built across horizontal and by comparatively simple forms as well as by depicting the concentric circles resembling the sun. As concerns patterns located vertically, they are typical for the mountainous territories. One can also note that the most difficult patterned

compositions with the significant influence of other nations were common for coastal regions of the peninsula (the figures of fish, sheep, the wavy lines); the eastern coast was characterized by depicting various flowers thickly covering the cloth¹⁶.

The symbolism and motives of the Tatar embroidery were also very diverse. The most widespread motives are the vegetable ones, sometimes also geometrical and zoomorphic patterns.

With the geometrical patterns (usually woven) the things of the home usage were embellished: different towels, napkins, table clothes. While making the clothes the vegetable patterns were used. The roses, pomegranates, tulips, carnations separately and in bouquets covered the ancient Tatar embroidery goods. The delicate flower motive rendered the things special gracefulness and smoothness.

Among the traditional motives the pictures of vegetables as well as of zoomorphic silhouettes can also be found ("fish", "snail", "centipede", "crab" etc.). However, they are very similar to the plant patterns.

In the Crimean Tatars' embroidery the astral and solar motives are also frequently used (the stars, the sun, more seldom half-moon). Very typical were also pictures of traditional crockery (plates, jugs).

The patterns are often connected with the ritual symbolism. One of the most widespread motives of the Crimean Tatars' embroidery is the tree of life. Like within other peoples it symbolizes continuation of the kin, prosperity, happiness of the family. That's why this figure can frequently be seen on the things in wedding ceremony – almost on all elements of clothes of bride and bridegroom. The conventionalized depiction of the tree of life was the basis of the embroidered picture on all things destined for the dowry (pillow covers, tobacco pouches)¹⁷. Sometimes on the top of the tree a small trefoil was embroidered. This made it similar to the

Persian and Assyrian interpretations of the figure of the tree of life: the prophetic bird in the form of trefoil was perched on the tree (in the Arabian culture such a bird is called *Ruhh*)¹⁸. One of the variations of symbolic life in Crimean Tatars' embroidery is the figure of pomegranate which symbolizes the strength of life, continuation of the kin and eternity. Usually, the pomegranate is depicted in the form of the big flower with tendrils. The large core of the fruit is designed as the net with many cells signifying unaccountable grains. On both sides of the old fruit two or more young sprouts are depicted.

The widespread element of the patterns in the embroidery is rhombus ("kobek"), which bears the symbolism of naval-core, core, the center of the Earth and therefore is connected with the symbolical interpretation of the conception of the Earth, fertility, as well as with the embodiment of order and truth.

Traditional for the Crimean Tatars is also the use of the landscape motives. The embroidery makers knew how to turn the common elements of clothing into real masterpieces by depicting mosques, houses, various trees, ships, the moon and sometimes even real places (e.g., the Bakhchysaray palace, the tomb of Mahomet etc.)¹⁹.

The epigraphic pattern is also often met on the Crimean Tatars' embroideries. Usually it's the quotations from the Koran, poetic lines, short wishes, which hardly can be read sometimes²⁰.

Now we should stop on the embroidery technique. The embroidery was made both on the homemade cotton materials by "atma" technique and on the mainly imported ready-made textiles (cloth, velvet, satin, muslin, silk). The silk and wool threads were commonly used for embroidery. Sometimes metal (silvery, golden, coppery) threads and manufactured golden laces were utilized²¹.

For dyeing the yarn and clothes till the beginning of the 19th century natural dyes were used. From the beginning of the 20th century aniline dyes were widely applied, though they greatly yielded to the natural ones from the aspect of art²².

During the process of embroidery special tambour stitches were used. They could be of various sizes depending on the item and material.

The study of embroidery was held as a rule on the crude materials, on which it was easier to count the weaves of the basic threads. Embroidery is a delicate work that demands a lot of attention:

letting pass one thread or losing counting may spoil the whole pattern. Therefore, only after mastering all techniques on the hoarse material the master was allowed to embroider on more delicate clothes.

The patterns were composed by the local artists. They cut out of the hard cardboard general form of the picture, placed it on the surface of the material and outlined the contours²³. Though the stencils were used, one can not find two identical patterns. On the question where the embroideresses take the subjects for their compositions, the director of “Marama” corporation Ayshe Osmanova answered that they never make the exact copies: “The ornamented embroidery is the same thing that the pictorial art. On imagining some idea the artist fixes it on the paper. The embroidery is the same. If a person embroiders the same pattern the works will be still different even in that case”²⁴.

The modern Crimean Tatars’ artist M. Churlu considers that the embroidery of the Crimean Tatars has three main features: the use of double-sided stitches (when the right and the wrong sides can not be distinguished); the great variety of the stitches (approximately 60); the use of metal threads and plates along with silk and wool threads. The abovementioned features aren’t referred to the embroidery in satin-stitch in gold and silver thread over a thread base²⁵. The using of a number of silver and golden threads can be explained by the belief in the magic force of the metal²⁶.

The art of the Crimean Tatars numbers 10 kinds of the patterned embroidery, six whereof are considered to be principal, four – additional²⁷.

1) “Tatar ishleme” is the Tatar double-sided satin-stitch without the prior laying. The simplest technique of the double-sided satin-stitch is conventional “sarma”. It is used as a rule in the case of necessity to embroider the detail of the middle size, the contours of the pattern being evenly embroidered.

For the larger detail more complicated methods are used. For example, the “yol-yp-shashyrma” can be of three different types. The peculiarities of this technique consist in that the large detail is broken into equal pieces, horizontal or diagonal according to the kind of technique. For the large details of the pattern “tarleme” technique is also used: the detail of the picture is broken into small tetragons. As a result, the contour similar to the brickwork comes out. The methods, used while embroidering the pattern in the “gyvan kash” technique look like those in “yol-yp-shashyrma”, but the relief is zigzag. The same methods are used also in the “yades” technique the final result whereof is the relief with the contours of fir-tree.

For the embroidery of the small details special methods are used. They include “taukot” (the stitches are laid down in a circle in order to embroider small round elements); “yuzymchyk” or the raisin (only one side remains round while another one is a little bit elongated); “yilan-bau” or the snake stitch (stitches are laid down in such a way that the element in the form of leaf is formed); “sychan tysh” or the mouse tooth (for depicting of the small branches).

The researchers have fixed a number of other stitches in double-sided embroidery. The names themselves may prove their variety: “arpachyk” (a barley ear), “tutash” (the tongues of flame), “gogerdgyn tobuhy” (pigeon legs), “shaker pare” (sugar pattern), “tuyumchyk” (small knots) and a lot of others.

2) Another widespread technique was the transparent double-sided sewing “esab ishleme” (the Turkish embroidery). In contrast to the first kind of sewing, it numbers only seven stitches. At the same time, it takes the first place by the elegance of forms.

3) The third form of the patterned sewing is “telli”, made with thin silver or golden plate²⁸.

4) Except double-sided satin stitch embroidery and sewing with metal plates the sewing by metal threads (gold or gilded copper) on velvet over a thread base was also widespread – “mklama” (from the Tatar language ‘nail’, ‘to fasten’). In ancient times, mainly men embroidered in gold as it was considered to be a hard work.

5) The fifth stitch is called “bukme” (lace, thread). In order to make a picture in “bukme” technique the golden thread was intertwined several times till the required thickness. Firstly, the contours were outlined on the picture; then the lace was spread out on it and was carefully sewed down with the thin dark threads. As a result, it seemed that the lace was simply lying on the cloth.

6) In the golden sewing the “suzane”, “kasnak” technique was also used. This technique was widely spread in the whole Eastern region (Iran, Syria, the Caucasus).

The four additional kinds of sewing include: overlay sewing (borrowed from other Eastern nations), sewing in sparkles (“pull”), sewing in beads and pearls, sewing in jewel²⁹.

The combination of different techniques of the embroidery made the pattern more open-work and relief. The refined and various color spectrum was supplemented with numerous stitches, which made the pattern more diverse. So, the main feature of the Crimean Tatars’ pattern is the use of diverse plant motives. The Crimean Tatars’ compositions are remarkable for their lightness of form and graceful interweaving of lines.

Unfortunately, nowadays, the great part of the traditional art has been lost. The secrets of masters perished frequently along with their owners in foreign lands; and to master the art of embroidery of one’s own is not easy at all.

Today, the revival of the arts and crafts in the Crimea takes place mostly due to the enthusiasm of separate people, devoted to their work. The excellent examples of the modern embroidery in gold and double-sided satin-stitch are the works by Elvira Osmanova (born in 1961) and Elvira Muratova (born in 1970).

Nowadays, the creative society “Marama” headed by Ayshe Osmanova operates in Bakhchysaray. It consists of about seven masters. Their main task is to recreate the lost forms of the ready-made garments, the traditional patterns and the technique of embroidery, to make the embroidered goods not only the national souvenir, but also a part of the modern way of life³⁰.

The traditional Crimean Tatars’ embroidery impresses not only by its beauty, but also by the variety of forms in the patterns as well as in technique. The embroidery of the Crimean Tatars is an outstanding phenomenon of the Crimean folk arts and crafts. It has common features in technique and patterns with other Oriental peoples. However, it preserves its unique ethnic character and style.

Today, certain qualitative changes in the arts and crafts of the Crimean Tatars, in particular, in the embroidery, can be traced. One of the factors influencing the development of the national art in the Crimea is the orientation toward market. Another positive feature is that the traditional arts and crafts’ goods are becoming more available to the society; they can be bought as the souvenirs or as the elements of clothing. However, such goods may have lesser art value.

In art of the Crimean Tatars new technique and patterns are widely used in the traditional decorative needlework. Besides, patterns from other Turkic peoples, first of all from the Central Asian cultural region, enrich the traditional art of the CrimeanTatars.

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⁷ Чурлу М. Вышивка и ткачество в крымскотатарском народном декоративно-прикладном искусстве. – С. 4–5.

⁸ Рославцева Л.И. Одежда крымских татар конца 18 – 20 вв. – М., 2000. – С. 75.

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