

Adaptation of Traditional Carpet Motifs to Modern Textiles

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Abstract

Smooth surface carpets are the most typical for the hand woven carpets in Bulgaria. The nowadays production of traditional woven carpets faces several difficulties, however. Therefore the design of smaller, frequently used items, art works and souvenirs could be a key solution for preservation of the carpet. This study would like to draw the attention to Chiprovtsi carpets, as the tradition of carpet-weaving in this Bulgarian town was recently (2014) inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The preservation of the carpets motifs is of importance for the cultural heritage; and their larger dissemination can give them new, meaningful life in the modern times. The study presents basic motifs in the weaving of Chiprovtsi carpet, which are typical, and can be used for designing of new woven items. The motifs adaptation in textile items of today is shown. The design of an ethno bag with woven motifs from old carpets is demonstrated.

Keywords: carpet motifs, Bulgarian carpets, Chiprovtsi carpets

1. Introduction

The traditionally made woven carpets and rugs in Bulgaria with smooth surface and double faces are distinguished by the captivating wealth of various geometric, human, plant and animal ornaments. Their high artistic and decorative compositions, as well as color harmonies are remarkable (Vakarelski 1974). Woven for centuries, the carpets jealously guard and transmit the tradition of the best aesthetic achievements of the Bulgarian craftsmanship in almost unchanged appearance, and at the same time they continuously develop. Motifs and ornaments in carpets have been preserved to this day, alongside with purely decorative elements and symbols which are marked by ancient religious ideas and worldview of the Bulgarian weaver (MacDermott 1998).

Smooth surface carpets are the most typical for the carpet production in Bulgaria. They have been made in several rural and urban centers, especially in the mountainous regions of the towns of Chiprovtsi and Samokov (Western Bulgaria), and Kotel (Eastern Bulgaria), where centers for production of the two most typical types of Bulgarian carpets has been established (Stankov 1960; Lecaque 1985). Since November 2014 the tradition of carpet-weaving in Chiprovtsi was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The nowadays production of traditional woven carpets faces several difficulties, however. Modern houses have different type of flooring, which does not require the use of carpets or rugs either because of aesthetic reasons or due to civil engineering solutions (i.e. floor heating). The kept traditions for handmade production of the carpets makes them more expensive compared to industrially woven carpets, which narrows the niche of potential buyers. The open market and practically the global competition for production of cheap textile items stifle the local crafts. It is more and more difficult to find out young people, ready to study the traditional carpet weaving and to continue this valuable from cultural traditions point of view handicraft in the future.

The good news is that the smooth texture of the traditionally woven Bulgarian carpets has unlimited possibilities for the production of textiles with different applications. The design of smaller, frequently used items, art works and souvenirs could be a key solution for preservation of the carpet handicraft and for making its motifs and ornaments part of the everyday life of modern people. Therefore this study is dedicated to presentation of basic motifs in the production of Chiprovtsi carpet and their adaptation in textile items of today.

2. Basic motifs of Chiprovtsi carpets

2.1 Geometric motifs

These are the oldest motifs in Chiprovtsi carpets. They date back to the 17th century, when the first period in the development of Chiprovtsi carpets is (Stankov 1960). This is the geometric period, as different geometric figures and their variations were used as ornaments. The most known with some of their variations are:

- *Makaz* (scissors), known also as sandglass: obtained when two triangles touch their picks. Figure 1 shows three variations of the motif.
- *Kanatitsa*, a motif, obtained by joining several triangles. It is used as a symbol of the eternity. Two variations are presented in Fig. 2.
- *Nest*, obtained when the triangles are placed diagonally. It is very important achievement of the Chiprovtsi carpet ornamentation when the geometric shapes are placed so as to resemble an object from the nature or life. Figure 3 demonstrate two variations of the motif, which is usually a base for a figure

of a bird.



Figure 1. "Makaz" motif

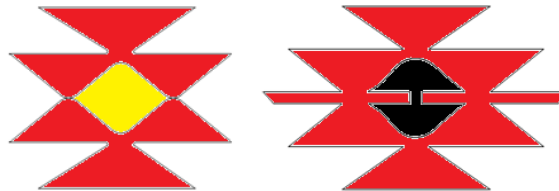


Figure 2. "Kanatitsa" motif

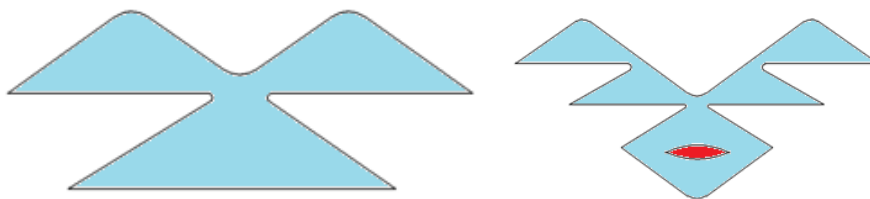


Figure 3. "Nest" motif

- *Kolo* is a motif, which is a mirror image of the "Nest". It symbolizes the Sun – Fig. 4.
- *Kamula* is obtained by distancing the triangles (forming a diamond), which are still joined in the middle, left or right. It is a symbol of immortality and three of its versions are shown in Fig. 5.
- *Bibitsa* is made by joining a triangle and a diamond. It is also an attainment of the carpet design as the motif resembles the figure of a small animal or a child. Two types of this motif are presented in Fig. 6.
- *Karakachka* is one of the most common motifs in Chiprovtsi carpets. Translated from Turkish the name means "black-eyed bride" (Stankov 1960). It is believed that the motif is the symbolic image of the goddess of fertility. It is one of the carpet motifs that resemble a human figure.

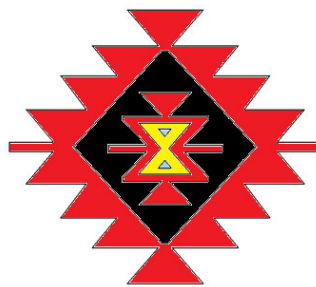


Figure 4. "Kolo" motif

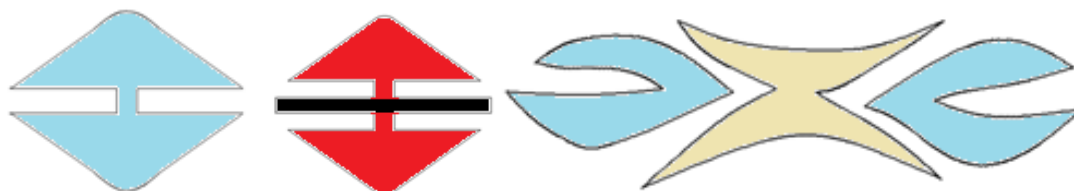


Figure 5. "Kamula" motif

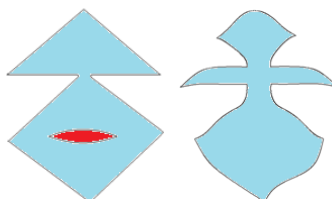


Figure 6. "Bibitsa" motif

2.2 Motifs that resemble elements from nature

The second period in the development of Chiprovtsi carpet, which lasts almost throughout the 19th century (Stankov 1960), is related with the appearance of motifs that resemble elements from nature: buds, flowers, branches, bushes, trees, nests, etc. The period is related with the wide spread of Chiprovtsi carpets in the markets of the Orient, where the appearance of human figures is not allowed by the Koran. There are many motifs, taken from carpets from that period and two of them are *Tree* (Fig. 8) and *Bush* (Fig. 9).

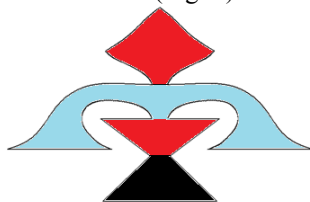


Figure 7. "Karakachka" motif

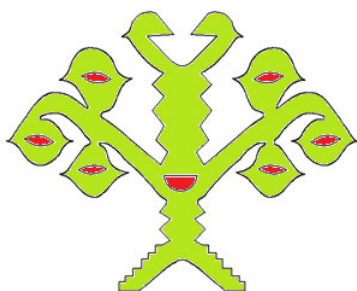


Figure 8. "Tree"

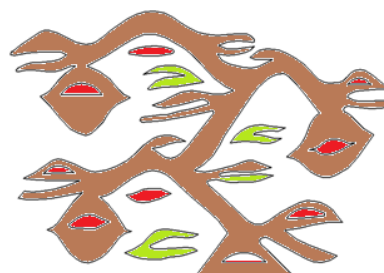


Figure 9. "Bush"

2.3 Motifs that resemble animals

Stylized birds and animals have appeared already at the time of the geometric period, but in the second period of the development of the Chiprovtsi carpet very detailed images have appeared. Figures 10 and 11 present the figures of two birds: hen and goose. A shrimp and a rabbit with long ears are shown in Figures 12 and 13.

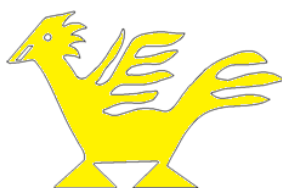


Figure 10. "Hen"

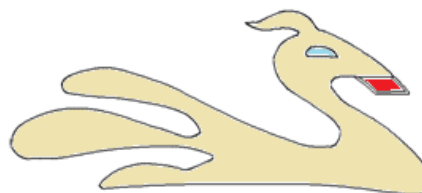


Figure 11. "Goose"



Figure 12. "Shrimp"



Figure 13. "Rabbit"

2.4 Other motifs

There are many other motifs in the ornamentation of Chiprovtsi carpets: human figures, eyes, hands, figures, resembling objects from the household, etc. Some of them appeared during the third period of the development

of Chiprovtsi carpets: since the end of the 19th century up to now (Stankov 1960). Typical for this period is the interaction with new markets and cultures, which has provoked the appearance of new motifs, some of them developed already on a graph paper.

3. Adaptation of the motifs for modern textiles

3.1 Textiles for home decoration

The design of small items, used for decoration of the indoor environment of homes, hotels and even offices is a working solution for preservation of the traditions of hand weaving and especially the motifs, developed down the ages. Small enterprises, usually of family origin, work in this market niche (Tchushkarcheto 2015). Carpets and rugs of bigger size for floors and walls, as well as bad covers are produced together with smaller textile items, which use only one or couple of motifs of Chiprovtsi carpets: panels (Fig. 14), covers for wooden or basket chairs (Fig. 15), pillows (Fig. 16), glass pads (Fig. 17).



Figure 14. Panel with "Makaz" motif (courtesy of Tchushkarcheto 2015)



Figure 15. Chair cover with floral motif, (courtesy of Tchushkarcheto 2015)

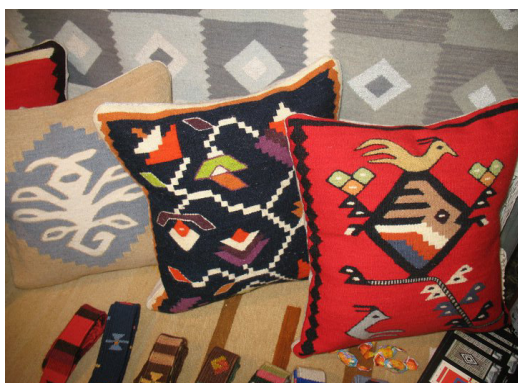


Figure 16. Pillows with various motifs (courtesy of Tchushkarcheto 2015)



Figure 17. Glass pad with "Karakachka" motif (courtesy of Tchushkarcheto 2015)

3.2 Textiles for clothing

Clothing items or decorative element for clothing ornamentation can be also produced. Figure 18 shows entirely woven sleeveless jacket with rich ornamentation, woven directly (no applications).



Figure 18. Female sleeveless jacket, entirely woven (courtesy of Tchushkarcheto 2015)

3.3 Fashion accessories

Bracelets, belts (Fig. 19), bags (Fig. 20), purses (Fig. 21) can also use the rich ornamentation of Chiprovtsi carpets. They can add new ideas for production of souvenirs as well.

There are many other possibilities for revival of the traditional handicrafts, if motifs of handmade carpets:

- are included in crystal or metal jewelry,
- are used as ornaments in embroidery of evening or official dresses, including bridal gowns,
- are used in knitted accessories as hats, scarves, socks and gloves;
- are printed on mugs, pens, pins, etc.

Certainly, these ideas are not related with the woven production itself, but can help the better advertising of the traditional handicraft heritage and recognition of its symbols and ornamentation from larger groups of people.

4. Design of an ethno bag with motifs of Chiprovtsi carpet

We wanted to demonstrate the enormous possibilities for application of traditional ornamentation of Chiprovtsi carpets with the design of a bag in ethno style. A rectangular shape was chosen and pastel shades of the color palette – beige, green, purple, blue and yellow (being natural, earthy colors). The bag had seven pockets – four external and three internal, together with a long and a short side handles.

The motifs, selected for the woven details of the bag, belonged to the geometric motifs that use the primary figure in the ornamentation of the Chiprovtsi carpet – the triangle. The entire length of the long handle was woven with triangles and small tokens in between. “Makaz” and “Kanatitsa” motifs were selected for decoration of the pockets.

Figure 19 shows the design plan and the color palette for weaving of the big front pocket with “Kanatitsa” motif. Figure 20 presents the design plan, motifs and color palette of the woven long handle. Each square in the woven plan corresponded to one warp or weft thread.

The final view of the bag is presented in Fig. 21.

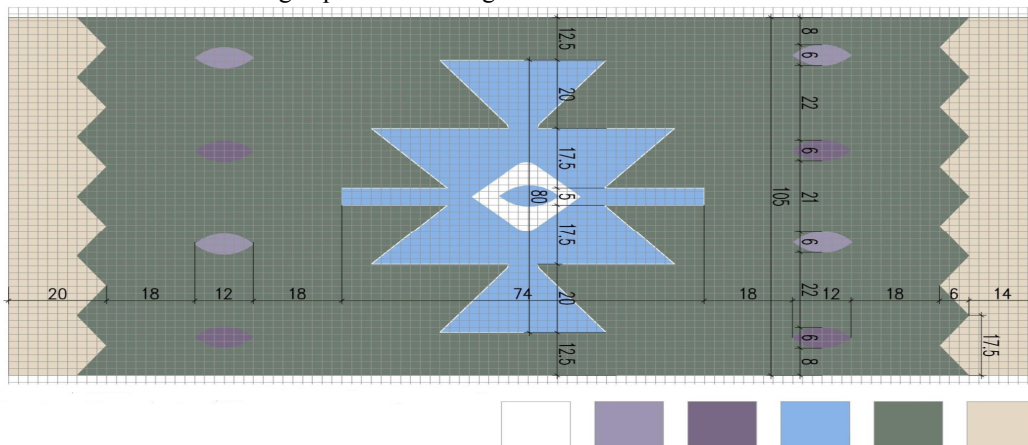


Figure 19. Design plan for weaving of the front bag pocket with “Kanatitsa” motif

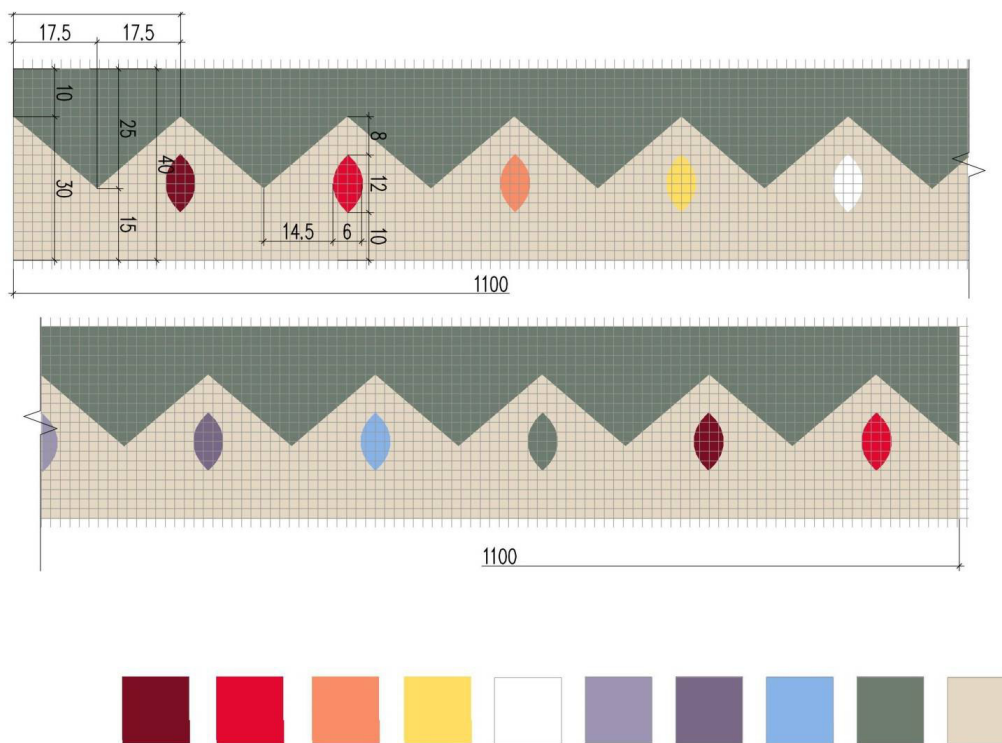


Figure 20. Design plan for weaving of the long handle



Figure 21. The ethno bag with motifs from Chiprovtsi carpet: front and side view

Conclusions

The study has shown the diversity of the motifs of Chiprovtsi carpets – traditionally woven carpets in one of the carpet centers that exist in Bulgaria. The applicability of the traditional motifs in modern items for decoration, clothing and accessories was demonstrated. The results from the design of a bag in ethno style showed that the motifs may be used for production of fashion items, which can open new market niches. Future directions of research will include creation of electronic database of carpet motifs, which can be applied in education, traditional craftsmanship and modern textiles. The traditional carpet motifs can add value to many unified textile items of today, fostering at the same time the world spreading of the traditional Bulgarian crafts.

Acknowledgment

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