

Romanian Traditional Textiles in Brădești – Discovering Some Transnational Links and Influences.

Introduction

When you look at traditional textiles across Europe, there are some common motifs, patterns and characteristics. It's very difficult to say definitely where the original design came from. Also, there is a great difference between 'village' textiles and those that were created for and owned by royalty and the aristocracy. We can call the former 'vernacular textiles' and for sure they are very mixed up and swapped around by village ladies who were experimenting. The aristocratic textiles are quite well documented and the patterns and their origins were usually well understood and the origin is sometimes in the name of the fabric. The EVEHD project gave us the opportunity to bring together Romanians, Turks, ethnic Hungarians, Germans, Slovaks, Icelanders and British volunteers to do some heritage discovery about common textile patterns. The venue was the wonderful municipality of Rímeț in Transylvania, which consists of 13 hamlets in a steep mountainous terrain.

'Marguerites' – everywhere...

The eight-pointed symmetrical star design is found all over Europe and the Near East. It has many names including 'eight-petalled rose', 'star of freedom', 'star of life', 'Nordic star', 'snowflake',



'Muhu mahn', 'Selburose', 'Auseklis', 'Guñjelve', 'octogram' – in EVEHD we adopted the 'marguerite' name because it has more common usage. Our volunteers found this pattern in very many of the village textiles in the hamlet of Brădești ethnographic collection (left).

In EVEHD volunteers in every partner country plus through the internet from many others, such as Cyprus, Jordan, Greece, Estonia, Sweden, all spent some time hunting for the earliest examples of the

marguerite pattern. The earliest was Minoan culture from Crete but it seems to have been the



Romans who first made it to look like a star rather than a flower; they used it a lot in mosaic floors.

The Byzantine period saw the pattern been used more and more and it is said that Viking warriors in the Varangian Guard took it to Scandinavia.

Then the Ottoman Empire took it westwards from Turkey as far as Vienna. Who brought it to

Romania? A good question! It is not impossible that it came directly from the Romans. The Roman mosaics in Constanta and Tomis are of a style similar to Paphos and Andalusia (left), where

marguerites appear and the Roman / Byzantine mosaic at Frumușeni in Alba County has an eight-pointed motif (upper left of the 4 mosaics above).

The marguerite might also have arrived in nowadays Romania with Christianity, the Byzantine Empire and the Orthodox church, where it is a well-known design. The Ottomans and the Arabs almost certainly took it from the Romans but certainly made it bolder with brighter colours. Although Romania was not in the Ottoman Empire, they neighboured it and paid tribute; they were certainly influenced in terms of design, as much of Europe was.

The 'Baclava' pattern

Turkish volunteers Cem Salar and Rukiye Özen Salar had some interesting comparisons to draw (right); they described this pattern as a Turkish 'baclava' design – named because it is in diamond shapes like the well-known sweet pastry. More marguerites – top is Bedouin, middle



Iranian and bottom is in the Brădești ethnographic collection – this blue and purple are generally considered as 'Ottoman colours'. When you compare the Brădești carpet (main picture left) with Turkish kilims (3 smaller images), there is a very striking similarity in design.



With both the marguerite and the 'baclava' pattern, it is safe to say that Romanian vernacular textiles have some oriental influences; this is the case with most of Europe.

We also discussed that vernacular textile patterns might have been

transferred by people traveling along the Carpathian mountain chain. This could certainly explain similarities in Czech, Slovak, Polish, Ukrainian, Moldavian and Romanian patterns. Such travellers might have been shepherds and their families, transferring sheep breeds, wool types and plant dyes.



Tulips and averting the evil eye - Other eastern influences that Cem from Turkey and Peter from Germany spotted included the symbol for 'averting the evil eye'. Also found in much of the Romanian textiles were tulip motifs, which are thought to have arrived in Europe with the Ottoman invaders; Evelin and Szilvia from Slovakia were volunteers involved in the research and they pointed out that it is very common in their country (which was in the Ottoman Empire for more than 400

years).

Volunteers studied the Brădești textiles & noted 'averting the evil eye' motifs and Turkish-style tulips

The German volunteers Peter and Zuzan also saw German influences, which certainly would have arrived in Transylvania with the Austro-Hungarian Empire. They included heavier floral patterns, especially on brocades and damask type textiles, also the use of tree foliage, especially oak leaves on sheepskin waistcoats. Interestingly damask fabric was popular all over Europe and was spread around by Italian traders. The production of damask was considered as one of the five basic weaving techniques—the others being tabby, twill, lampas, and tapestry—of the Byzantine and Islamic weaving centres of the early Middle Ages. Damasks derive their name from the city of Damascus, capital of Syria, on the 'silk road' and very active both in trading and manufacture of textiles. The word "damask" first appeared in records in a Western European language in the mid-14th century French.

Importance for EVEHD

This part of Satul Verde Association's EVEHD actions was important for many reasons:

- The theme of textiles has a wide interest range for volunteers of all ages.
- There is a number of common linkages so the team was able to bond together because of historical commonalities.
- It was a real East meets West opportunity – important because many western Europeans are still timid and uncertain about Turkey and its people.
- We succeeded in doing something that was meaningful and good fun – as a 'reward' we had an impromptu photo-shoot – which went so well an international magazine published it.
- The textiles acted as a catalyst and then the volunteers from 6 countries found that they had many more things in common – such as Turkish-style jewellery (we used in the photoshoot).



- Although the partner organisations are very knowledgeable, we still managed to find new heritage discoveries – led and informed by volunteers.

The discoveries in Rímeş were so important that now we want to work with the municipality and enhance their ethnographic museum with new interpretation material. We will also do exhibitions and features about textile linkages in other villages.