

ISSN:1306-3111
e-Journal of New World Sciences Academy
2009, Volume: 4, Number: 4, Article Number: 2C0014

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Received: January 2009
Accepted: September 2009
Series : 2C
ISSN : 1308-7355
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CREATING MODERN DESIGNS WITH POMAK WEAVING

ABSTRACT

Hand-weaving has a tradition so old that it has no known starting point. In Pomak villages in the Balkans and later after the migration in various parts of the Anatolia this traditional skill and craftsmanship of hand-weaving had been passed down through families from one generation to the next. The main aim lies in our study is to contribute to the transfer of this tradition and to keep this traditional method vital through fashion designs by making a document on this subject. Our study should also be evaluated as a stimulus for modernizing the traditional. For this research, many Pomak villages in the mountainous parts of Biga county of Çanakkale, such as Elmalı, Işıkeli, Kaynarca, Ilıcabaşı, Yolindi, Arabaalan and Camialan were visited. A questionnaire of 20 questions and an observation form were administered to the villagers in order to document the hand weaving tradition of Pomaks and modern outfits were designed using the results of the research.

Keywords: Pomaks, Handicrafts, Woman, Traditional Weaving, Modernization, Fashion Design

POMAK DOKUMALARIYLA MODERN TASARIMLAR

ÖZET

El dokumacılığı, tarih boyunca tüm toplumlarda köklü bir yer edinen önemli el sanatlarından biridir. Pomak kültüründe de bu gelenek Balkanlarda ve göçten sonra Anadolu'nun çeşitli bölgelerinde aile içerisinde yaşatılmış, bir nesilden diğerine aktarılmıştır. Araştırmannın temel amacı, Pomak el dokumaları alanında bir belge yaratmak suretiyle, bu geleneğin aktarılmasına ve yeni tasarımlar aracılığıyla geleneksel metotların canlı tutulmasına katkıda bulunmaktır. Araştırma, geleneksel olanın orijinal özellikleri ile korunması yanında, modernize edilerek günümüzde kullanımının sağlanabilmesi açısından önem taşımaktadır. Araştırma kapsamına, günümüzde geleneksel kültürlerini hala yaşatmakta olan Çanakkale ilinin Biga ilçesine bağlı Elmalı, Işıkeli, Kaynarca, Ilıcabaşı, Yolindi, Arabaalan ve Camialan gibi Pomak dağ köyleri alınmıştır. Araştırmannın içeriğini, görüşme ve anket yoluyla belgelenen orijinal örnekler ve günümüz moda anlayışına uygun hazırlanan tasarımlar oluşturmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Pomaklar, El Sanatları, Kadın, Geleneksel Dokuma, Modernizasyon, Moda Tasarımı



1. INTRODUCTION (GİRİŞ)

Each community's local traditions, languages, and life styles contribute its own particular sub-culture to the nation as a whole. The diversity of sub-cultures within a community reflects each member's perception of his or her own identity, as exemplified by minority cultures, regional identities, and migrant communities. In Turkey, migrant communities with various ethnic roots have preserved their unique cultures throughout the long process of historical development, and, at the same time, have created extremely varied folkways or customs. This has resulted in different life styles and modes of production, as displayed in dress, handicrafts, adornments, diet, residences, and traditions concerning, for example, marriage and funerals.

The arts and handicrafts of ethnic people have a splendid legacy, among which hand weaving has survived as a way of life. This article focuses on the modernization of the traditional fabric and hand-weaving process of one of these ethnic cultures – the Pomaks – who migrated from the Balkans to Turkey years ago. This article may be considered the story of a modern-day dress made of traditional hand-woven Pomak fabric, a tradition that is passed along from mother to daughter and father to son. Importantly, this article makes the ethnographic argument that modernization of traditional, social, and cultural mechanisms will revitalize almost forgotten cultural arts such as traditional textiles and clothes.

2. RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE (ÇALIŞMANIN ÖNEMİ)

During long years of deprivation in Communist countries, Pomaks lived in isolated villages in the Balkans. During this enclave period in Thrace, cultural change proceeded at a slower pace for the Pomaks who lived in the restricted zone (Laber, 1986; Whitman, 1990; Dimitras, 1991:139-154). Thus, their cultural heritage remained nearly unchanged and ancient handicrafts, such as hand weaving, survived there without being diffused or changed. In 1989, international attention turned to the injustices perpetrated on Bulgaria's Muslim minority, and Turkey opened its borders with an offer of asylum. Reports from the Turkish government state that, from May to August of 1989 alone, some 300,000 ethnic Turks crossed into Turkey. Unable to support the unexpected influx of people, however, Turkey eventually closed its borders in order to maintain the stability of its own infrastructure. This migration was not the only one, for after the 1877-78 Ottoman-Russian war and after 1950, many Pomaks left their homeland in Thrace and migrated to Turkey. Of the Turks who came to Turkey from Bulgaria after 1950, 23,000 were Pomaks. They settled in a number of cities in Turkey such as Çanakkale, Edirne, Eskişehir, Bursa and Balıkesir (De Jong, 1980:96; Seyppel, 1989:41-49; Sarides, 1987; Hidiroglu, 1990:89; Memişoğlu, 1991:8). With their common history, common geography, common traditions, and common culture, Pomaks in Turkey, together with many other ethnic cultures, complemented the Turkish society's uniqueness and plurality.

Traditional Pomak Fabric as an Intangible Cultural Heritage

Hand weaving has a tradition so old that it has no known starting point. In Pomak villages in the Balkans, the traditional skill and craftsmanship of hand weaving was passed down through



families, from one generation to the next. Since ancient times, the Pomak people have been weaving blankets and garments for their own use. These include women's shawls, dresses, wedding dresses, skirts and other decorative household goods. Although women's clothing was often richly embroidered after woven, clothes worn at home were simple and unadorned. These fabrics include woven geometric shapes, such as squares or rectangles, and range in size of 50-100 cm owing to the size of the looms (Fig. 1). Although it is not known where the first weaving techniques came from, the Pomaks developed their horizontal loom, very much like those in use today, and spun thread, and wove fabrics of cotton and wool. The Pomaks became excellent weavers and by the mid 1800s their fabrics were valued as trade items with neighboring villagers. These early fabrics were made of hand-spun wool in either its natural color or dyed with the plants and minerals of the region.



Figure 1. Pomak loom
(Resim 1. Pomak el dokuma tezgahı)

In earlier times, hand weaving was a part of rural life along with farming, thatching, and animal husbandry. As the trade in hand-woven products began to die out, the craft of hand weaving became a secondary occupation. However, the poor soil and severe climate made it a challenge for families to survive on their smallholdings by animal husbandry and agriculture alone. As there were no major industrial developments in the area, the formerly secondary occupation of hand weaving fabric became the main livelihood for hundreds of families (De Jong, 1980:98; Seyppel, 1989:41-49; Sarides, 1987; Hidiroglu, 1990:89; Memişoğlu, 1991:13).

This handicraft survived without much diffusion due to the isolation of Pomak villages in southeastern Thrace (Laber, 1986; Whitman, 1990; Dimitras, 1991:139-154). Indeed, the skill and craft of the weavers, as well as the stubbornness and persistence of Pomak villagers who refuse to let this craft die, contributed much to this preservation. The process for producing Pomak hand-woven fabric changed very little in the mountain villages with their traditional handlooms. Producing this hand-woven fabric was a lengthy process; it took an average of one month to dye, card and spin, and then weave and



finish a length of cloth. It was so difficult to weave that one could only weave one-to-three meters per day. The looms were entirely manually operated. It is a tribute to the original designers that old looms differ very little from the ones of today.

As they lived under rough weather conditions in the high regions of Bulgaria, Pomakian women wove thick fabric and made heavy clothes from these fabrics. They used wool and hair for many of their floor mats and rugs, and wool and cotton for their clothes (Ergenekon & Basaran, 1998:5; Başaran, 1999:50). This tradition continued when the Pomaks of Bulgaria migrated to Anatolia and settled in villages there.

Today, even though Pomak fabric does not have the worldwide fame of "Buldan Fabric" of Buldan province in Denizli, and no one can find hand-woven Pomak fabrics tailored into stylish garments in exclusive and expensive shops, this hereditary craft and weaving tradition is still alive in many Pomak homes in modern Turkey. The heritage of their characteristic design continues to be transmitted from the past into the present.



Figure 2. Pomak fabric
(Resim 2. Pomak el dokuma örneği)

Pomaks use both dark and bright colors in their home decorations and clothes to take full advantage of the sun and to express their dynamic nature. Many different geometric patterns are woven into their cloth (Fig. 2). In Pomak villages, color repetitions make vertical and horizontal lined fabrics, and some different -checked patterns are woven in plain weave. Traditional hand-woven garments are made and worn by older people and women as everyday wear and on ceremonial occasions.

The Pomaks spin their wool yarn with spindles called "furka", "öreke," or "çıkırık" - a slender stick with a disk, or whorl, about two-thirds of the way down the stick. Methods vary from one group of Pomak people to another. Traditionally, hand-spun yarn made from wool and inexpensive fibers such as rough sheep's wool or coarse animal hair was used in these woven fabrics. Today, with many developments in the fiber industry, some colorful synthetic yarns are also used. The art of dyeing fabric with plant and mineral extracts is a magical craft, as old as civilization itself. Traditional dyes were made from plants such as rabbit brush, larkspur, sumac and dock. However, indigo and aniline dyes bought from the shops are now used.



The Pomak handloom, where 50-100 cm-wide fabrics can be woven, is called a "stan". Handlooms have changed little over the years, since these looms are passed along from one generation to the next. The loom is horizontal and has treadles below that are used for moving the harnesses. The weft thread is passed through the warps by a shuttle that is called an "atkaçe". The weaver uses a special comb to beat down the weft. Some Pomakian weavers push the weft thread through with their fingers and do not use a shuttle.

3. EXPERIMENTAL METHOD (DENEYSSEL YÖNTEM)

For this project, the following seven Pomak villages in the mountainous regions of Biga county of Çanakkale in Turkey were visited: Elmalı, Işıkeli, Kaynarca, Ilıcabaşı, Yolindi, Arabaalan and Camialan. A 20-question questionnaire with an observation form was administered to 120 village women in order to document the hand weaving tradition of Pomaks. Using the results of this research, outfits to appeal to a modern audience were designed.

Although adult Pomak women typically wear casual outfits, young girls wear highly ornamented traditional outfits during their wedding ceremonies and on other special occasions (Fig. 3).

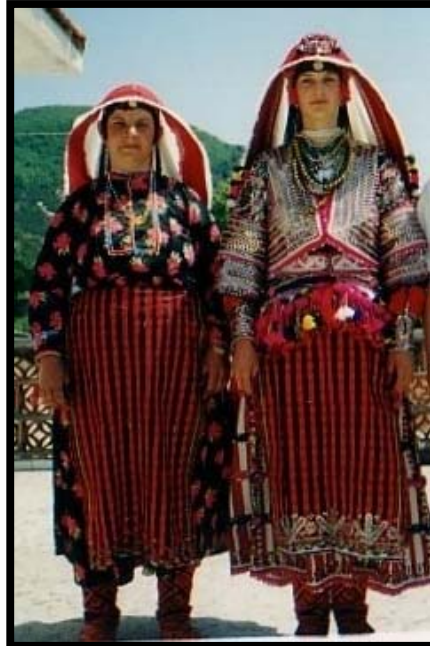


Figure 3. Pomak woman in casual outfit and Pomak girl in ceremonial outfit (Basaran & Gurcum, 2007)
(Resim 3. Günlük giysileri ile Pomak kadını ve Pomak genç kız kıyafeti)

This research project addresses traditional clothing and ornamentation styles, as well as traditional hand-woven fabric. Specifically, its aim is to adapt bygone ceremonial clothing preparation and traditional fabric production to modern life using contemporary methods. Our starting point was to modernize original Pomak fabrics into modern-day outfits and to introduce different



materials to reinterpret accessories and traditional embellishment styles according to the fashion of today. In this study, two blouses, one *cepken* (waist-length short jacket), one skirt, and one vest were designed.

4. THE APPLICATION (UYGULAMA)

- **The collection:** In this study, 5 garments; 1 sleeveless shirt, 1 *cepken* (Jacket), 1 skirt, 1 blouse, 1 vest are designed (Fig. 4, Fig.5, Fig.6, Fig.7, Fig.8 and Fig.9).

The inner shirt worn under traditional Pomak outfits is made of cotton (Fig.10). We turned this inner shirt using the plain fabric of the dress into a sleeveless modern blouse (Fig. 12). The same fabric, which is woven in the same traditional weaving loom, is used in our design. The original garment may be used either as a dress (Fig.10) or as a shirt and skirt combination (see Fig.11).



Figure 4. Design no 1-Sleeveless Shirt
(Resim 4. Tasarım 1-Kolsuz bluz)



Figure 5. Design no:2- Cepken
(Resim 5. Tasarım 2-Cepken)



Figure 6. Design no: 3-Skirt
(Resim 6. Tasarım 3-Etek)



Figure 7. Design no: 4-Blouse
(Resim 7. Tasarım 4-Bluz)



Figure 8. Design no: 5-Vest (back) Figure 9. Design no: 5-Vest (front)
(Resim 8. Tasarım 5- Yelek (arka) (Resim 9. Tasarım 5-Yelek ön
görünüm)



Figure 10. Traditional Pomak inner dress Figure 11. Traditional skirt
(Resim 10. Geleneksel Pomak iç entarisi) (Resim 11. Geleneksel etek)

The collar is ornamented with embroidery as it would have been in the original outfit, and it fastens with a button and knitted buttonhole.

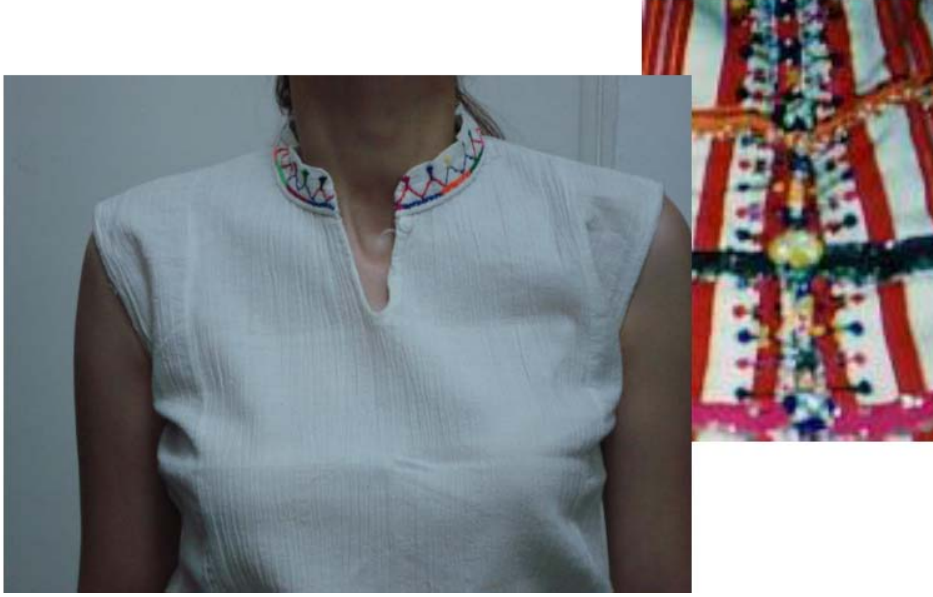


Figure 12. Sleeveless blouse with ornamented collar and detail from the ornament of the traditional skirt
(Resim 12. Yakası geleneksel etek kenarlarındaki süslemelere uygun hazırlanmış kolsuz bluz)

This blouse can be combined with other hand-woven pieces or with jeans. In this study, the blouse is coupled with a skirt and a *cepken* made of striped fabric of the traditional Pomak clothes (Fig.13).



Figure 13. Three-piece outfit – blouse, skirt, and cepken
(Resim 13. Üç parçadan oluşan giysi -bluz, etek, cepken)

The smocked midi skirt is trimmed at the hem with metal sequins, giving a shimmer as the wearer walks (Fig. 14).



Figure 14. Skirt trimmed at hem with metal sequins
(Resim 14. Metal pullarla oylanmış etek kenarı)

This striped traditional fabric is also used in the bell-sleeved *cepken* (Fig. 15). The lined *cepken* sleeves are ornamented with traditional handmade embroidery (see Fig. 16) lengthwise and at the wrist. The sleeveless blouse with ornamented collar, along with the *cepken* and skirt that are made from the same fabric, would make a good combination. The outfit is completed with a special belt (Fig. 17).



Figure 15. *Cepken*
(Resim 15. *Cepken*)



Figure 16. Cepken sleeve (detail)
(Resim 16. Cepken kol detayı)



Figure 17. Belt (detail)
(Resim 17. Kemer detayı)

The final item, women's headgear, is a very large kerchief, the *Karpa* in Pomak (Figure 18). The *Karpa* is both a casual and a ceremonial garment indispensable to Pomak women (Basaran & Gurcum, 2007:218-220).



Figure 18. Karpa worn in traditional Pomak outfit (front) and (back)
(Resim 18. Karpanın geleneksel kıyafette kullanımı-ön ve arka görünüm)



Figure 19. Casual karpa worn by a weaver woman



Figure 20. Ornamented karpa

(Resim 19. Dokuyucu kadında günlük karpa) (Resim 20. Karpa Süslemeleri)

The difference between the ceremonial Karpa (Fig.18 and 20) and one for casual wear (Fig. 19) is the corner embroideries and added accessories. The white Karpa is woven on a handloom in two sections with red borders on three sides. The two pieces are then sewn together, and at each corner different motifs are added, using metal sequins, beads, braids and colorful yarns. Many tassels are also attached to the corners as ornaments. These elaborate corner ornaments are used only on the Karpas worn by unmarried Pomak girls (Basaran & Gurcum, 2007:218-222).



Figure 21. Side seam of blouse (Resim 21. Bluz kenarı)
Figure 22. Neckline and sleeve of blouse (Resim 22. Bluzun yaka ve kol görünümü)

The blouse designed with this fabric has a rounded neckline and wide sleeves. The original side seam is conserved and used in the new design (Fig. 21). The neckline is trimmed with crochet, using the hook technique, and ornamented with beads (Fig.22). The colored borders that are the same as on the original *Karpa* are used in the hems and the ends of the sleeves (Fig. 19).

Felt is used in the vest based on traditional Pomak clothes and decoration styles. After sewing the vest, profuse hand-made decorations are applied to the shoulder and back panel (Fig. 9). In the traditional costume, many plaits (called *peliks*) hang from the back of the headgear down to the waist. Pomak women usually have black hair, and for this reason the *peliks* are made from strands of thin, black, synthetic yarn to give the impression of real, long, black hair. Adornments chosen by the girl, such as tassels, beads, and sequins, are attached to these plaits (Fig. 23) (Basaran & Gurcum, 2007:223-225).



Figure 23. Three samples of headgear from Kaynarca, Elmalı and Işıkeli villages

(Resim 23. Kaynarca, Elmalı ve Işıkeli köylerinden baş süslemelerine ait üç örnek)

As part of the design process, the vest is decorated with the most unique feature of Pomak headgear, the *pelik* ornaments. First, many stands of black synthetic yarn are braided. These braids are put together to form a triangular design and then, using the *firkete oya* (bodkin needle work) technique, joined with strands of colored yarn (Fig. 23 and Fig. 26). Metal sequins are added to the crochet work in order to give a shimmer to the decoration. The end of each braid is decorated with colored beads and yarn tassels.



Figure 24. Wearing the vest with the modern garments
(Resim 24. Yelek tasarımının arka görünümü)

In traditional dress, the *Karpa* is placed over a *fez*, and carefully attached to it with a large pin. The pin goes through the *fez* and *Karpa* (Basaran & Gurcum, 2007:218-225). The center of the decorated forehead area of the *fez* remains in full view. On top of the *Karpa*, unmarried girls and brides pin a small accessory called a *kıpılka* (Fig. 25). This ornament, which is made of little pompoms of colorful yarn, beads, sequins, and small bells, is a symbol of virginity. The *kıpılka* is placed on the *Karpa* before the wedding ceremony and is never used by married women.

The vest features this traditional Pomak accessory, the *kıpılka*, applied over the decoration made by the braids of black synthetic yarn (Fig. 24). This accessory is made of silver coins, sequins, and colorful yarn (Figs. 23 and 26).



Figure 25. Kıpılka on the *karpa*
(Resim 25. Karpa üzerinde kıpılka)



Figure 26. Kıpılka detail on the back
of the vest
(Resim 26. Yelek arkasında kıpılka
detay)



The shoulders of the front of the vest are also decorated with braids and beaded ornaments in order to provide unity to both the front and back. The vest is fastened with button and buttonhole (Fig. 27).



Figure 27. Front view of vest
(Resim 21. Yeleğin önden görünümü)

5. CONCLUSION (SONUÇ)

As the social structure has gradually changed and the past few decades have brought various ethnic groups into intimate contact with the modern world, many of the old ways have changed and local arts have declined in modern living. This leads to many problems of modernization that can be addressed via cultural preservation either passively or more actively. The more passive approach to intellectual preservation of cultural heritage is the concern of scholars and academicians, who conduct research and document culture for study and appreciation by future generations. In contrast, there is also a more active approach to preservation.

The goal of our research is both passive and active cultural preservation. We believe that keeping the objects, the details, and the information about a living culture by continuing actual traditions and customs is much more precious than writing about a forgotten custom. Some academicians preserve culture by documenting the fruits of their research in books, articles, and television documentaries, but folklorists have a chance to revitalize a tradition before it dies out. The traditional weaving technique observed and explained in this article would most likely be passed along to the next generation. However, the main aim of our study is to help ensure this transfer of traditions as they are now, by documenting this subject and, most importantly, by channeling these traditional methods into modern fashion designs. This will help keep traditional Pomak hand weaving alive in our modern world.

Today's fashion designer, appreciating the inherited roots and values of his or her nation, can provide value-added products to global markets. This global marketplace moves quickly, continuously demanding new high-value products, and constantly going through significant economic changes. Knowing that unique and rare ethnic



products that are tailored with customers in mind are valued in the global markets, our study should be considered as a stimulus for today's fashion designers.

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