

TURKISH HANDICRAFTS HAND-KNITTED SOCKS AND STOCKINGS

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The subject of Turkish plastic arts, which is remarkable for its rich repertoire, is also very important for its traditional and popular ethnological treasures. A cultural heritage evolves over thousands of years involving practical creativity and creations which are not solely expression from the soul of the artisans. It appears as fine arts, artistic handicrafts, crafts at regional, national, and international levels. However, this physical cultural heritage reflecting the non-physical heritage and modern folk art that has not so far or, until recently, seemed to merit priority has not clearly been given adequate definition. It should be studied with an interdisciplinary approach using scientific methods following a chronological sequence, so that this heritage which is dying out and which is concerned with Turkish culture from the point of view of aesthetics, folklore and technology, is inventoried, collected, conserved and integrated into modern life. A comprehensive documentation with multifunctional observation cards is necessary in this field in order to ensure mutual sympathy and appreciation as well as the training of artisans and ethnologists and to enable cultural development with dissemination, since mankind is to draw lessons from the available experience in many fields with a view to improving technology. On the other hand contemporary traditional treasures should be recorded following standard criteria. In this connection the links between the past and the present could be strengthened in such a manner as to integrate the functional and aesthetic situation and improve the regional cultural characteristics suitable to offer them to the public and so have a wider impact on the national and international community.

Here, my aim is to impart knowledge about Turkish hand-knitted socks and stockings with their motifs, styles, colours, patterns,

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material and techniques which are not known by the governmental and non-governmental institutions but have been traditionally used by artisans and are still in use today.

Written sources reveal that this branch and type of artistic handicraft has not been given the unique place it deserves in crafts and art. However, steps taken by writers, researchers, and enthusiasts working in this field have begun to reflect the efforts deployed. In this field good progress was achieved, e. g., during 1935-1945 by Tefrik Eşberk's 'Türkiye'de Köylü Elsanatlarının Mahiyeti ve Ehemmiyeti' and Kenan Özbel's 'Türk Köylü Çorapları'.

I would like to draw attention to the presentation of socks and stockings in variety of displays in the museums and collections such as: The Kiosk of Alaybey connected to Topkapı Palace Museum, the Ankara Ethnographical Museum and İş Bank Collections, which were collected by Kenan Özbel (see plate I) and mark that the oldest Turkish hand-knitted stocking so far to be found is dated as far back as the 19th century.

In regard to the finds from tombs of the Huns it is feasible to follow the early samples done before the Turks migrated to Anatolia: Kaşgarlı's Divânü Lugâti't Türk (a dictionary) can be shown as a witness for the terminology in this field involving more than 25 words. It is interesting to see miniatures, ceramics depicting figures wearing stockings, felt boots (see plate 2, 3, 4) proffering information about the Selçuk and Emirate Period. Diaries and memoranda from travelers are valuable documents from the Ottoman Empire Period, such as Evliya Çelebi, Moryson, and Baron W. Wratislaw besides Ehli Hiref note-books (notebooks on commercial relations covering fees and prices). A note-book which has come down to us from the 17th century gives information about the types and prices of stockings and felt boots. Apart from these the manuscripts illustrated with miniatures dealing with festivals (see plate 5), historical events and costumes are remarkable reflections from the rich historical background of Turkey.

Hand-knitted socks and stockings scattered over several museums and collections as mentioned before, supply us with information about Turkish socks and stockings from the 19th-20th centuries. These stockings were made from hand spun natural wool coloured by natural dyes in general. These were knitted on 5 needles pointed

at both ends. Recently the material and equipment employed in this craft has changed with the modern technology and what was used formerly has gained ethnographical value. (See illustrations 1-7) Apart from the natural wool yarns used, cotton yarns attract attention from among the old samples as well as the coloured beads which were also used, as in Balkan samples. (See plate 6)

The subject matter chosen for the stockings can be divided into 5 main groups. Phytomorphic motifs such as: flowers, trees, fruits, vegetables; anthropomorphic motifs appearing as a whole; or part of a human-being or animals such as: snakes, fishes, the trace of a dog, ram's horn, the moustache of youth, rosy cheeks; objective motifs such as: bridal head dresses, bracelet, buttons, fringes of a fez, the shoulder basket of the Turkmens; calligraphical motifs such as: Elif (the initial letter of the Arabic script and as special monogram). In general, floral, motifs were used in symbolic forms. There are also motifs symbols of narratives. (See plate 8, 8) A parallel can be drawn with the Balkan samples reflecting the same subject matters. (See illustrations 8-19 for Turkish motifs)

In forming the motifs and antinaturalistic style was vastly used. Among the samples left from the 19th and 20 the centuries there are also pieces decorated with naturalistic floral motifs. While in the former, polychrome colouring was used with big spots in vivid colours without tones such as red violet, pink and green besides blue; in the latter a linear system with grades of pink to bordeaux and green to dark green is visible. On the pieces where geometrical motifs are chosen sharp contrasts attract the attention. Motivation is obvious on most of the pieces. Emphasis on motivation is even underlined on the monochrome coloured stockings gained by puffing out or eyelet and fargot stitch motifs such as: variations of mouse teeth. (See plates 9-12)

A sock or stocking is formed of: the sole, toe, heel, sides of leg and the top rib. The setting of the pattern may be divided into 3 main groups. (See illustrations 20 and 21)

- 1 — Stockings decorated with scattered motifs.
- 2 — Stockings decorated with horizontal, vertical or diagonal motif borders.
- 3 — Stockings decorated in both ways at the same time.

Most of the socks and stockings have decorations on the front, back centre of the leg neglecting toes, heel and sole. Sometimes the motifs form an all over pattern. In general narrow linear decoration with diagonal, vertical or horizontal borders are popular which differentiate Turkish stockings from their Balkanic relatives. Attracting attention are those pieces with scattered motifs on heels and around the ankles in the front. On the pieces where mixed decoration have been worked with both types, rectangular framed areas filled with scattered motifs are observed.

Turkish knitting has variable stitches gained from knit or front, purl or back of fabric worked with cross over stitches, slip stitches and stitches which are lengthened by adding an extra throw of the yarn as well as faggot stitches gained by an over and a decrease. Apart from stocking stitch (see illustration 22) applied in succeeding rounds knitted with different motifs by using several colours of wool; knittings which have the effect of lace (see illustration 22, 23, plate 11) and embroidery such as variations of Tunisian stitch (which I named regarding their resemblance of Gobelein, stem, chain and satin stitches (see illustrations 25-36) focus attention. These knitting stitches are worked in colours on a white or black background. (See plate 11)

In conclusion, serious interdisciplinay studies concerning the history of art, archeology and ethnology is of paramount importance. Constructive work which aims at playing a significant role in the scope of mankind's cultural heritage in this field should be supported and encouraged via governmental and non-governmental institutions sothat cultural material regarding the traditions, customs, innovations and dissemination between cultures from the angle of geographical and historical background should be researched thoroughly and creations should be recorded in cooperation with other diciplins and arts leading to objective synthesis.