

COLORFUL UNIVERSE: NATIONAL TRADITIONS AND CRAFTS





Introduction

Dear friends and colleagues,

You are holding a book about Space! Space in the widest sense, meaning all of us and everything around us, the Universe that humanity is trying to explore and exploit effectively. However, we can never make a step forward without the rich artistic and cultural heritage left by our predecessors.

As children, we curiously watch how adults draw, craft, or create something. In our wish to excel them, we create our world and search for our way, struggling to choose what we can sacrifice for the sake of a step into the unknown in art, science, or business.

Human spaceflight and space exploration triggered a new trend in philosophy and art known as cosmism. This philosophy is formulated in the works of the founder of cosmonautics, Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, as the awareness of the unity of a human being and space, and the search for the relationship between cosmic and earthly processes, as well as the need to align human activity with the principles of world integrity. Cosmists believe that creativity, even intuitive, is aimed at revealing various aspects of Space – in human forms, in landscapes, in the display of abstract images of the inner world. The belief of the early 20th century cosmists in the expansion of humanity into outer space, space exploration, the construction of cities on the Moon, Mars, and Venus or other planets suitable for human life does not seem to be a utopian idea today.

Starting this book, we relied on our more than half-century experience in the field of space communications via various communications and broadcasting satellites launched for the people inhabiting our vast planet. We saw our task as making our readers aware of the beauty of national crafts and the directions of creative thought of artisans from the countries that are members of our Organisation.

This is our contribution to the modern understanding of cosmism. We believe that cultural ties, sustained traditions, and the beauty of masterpieces created by peoples inhabiting the different continents of the Earth will be the foundation for the cities of the future on distant planets.

Director General of Intersputnik
Ksenia Drozdova

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Content

Republic of Azerbaijan	7
Islamic Republic of Afghanistan	13
Republic of Belarus	19
Republic of Bulgaria	25
Hungary	31
Socialist Republic of Vietnam	37
Georgia	43
Republic of India	49
Republic of Yemen	55
Republic of Kazakhstan	61
Kyrgyz Republic	67
Democratic People’s Republic of Korea	73
Republic of Cuba	79
Lao People’s Democratic Republic	85
Mongolia	91
Republic of Nicaragua	97
Republic of Poland	103
Russian Federation	109
Romania	115
Syrian Arab Republic	121
Federal Republic of Somalia	127
Republic of Tajikistan	133
Turkmenistan	139
Ukraine	145
Czech Republic	151



Republic of Azerbaijan

The history of carpet art in Azerbaijan began a long time ago, back in the Bronze Age. It was during this era that the carpet became an integral household item for the ancient inhabitants of this land. The carpet embodied the aesthetics of harmony, ideas, artistic invention, free imagination, clarity of representation, and the entire color scheme of the surrounding nature.

Back in the 5th century BC, the Ancient Greek philosopher Xenophon pointed out that the Iranians borrowed the custom of making and using carpets from the Medes, distant ancestors of the Azerbaijanis. The ancient historian Herodotus mentioned about how plant dyes of great durability and beautiful shades used in carpet weaving were produced in the Caucasus.

Starting from the 6th century AD, historical and literary writings provide extensive and valuable information about the Azerbaijani carpet. Enthusiastic statements about the greatest diversity, the art of weaving, and the rare beauty of medieval Azerbaijani carpets can often be found in the works of the Albanian historian Moses of Kagankatvatsi (7th c.), Arab geographers and historians al-Masudi, al-Tabari, al-Muqaddasi, Ibn Haukal, al-Istakhri (9th–10th cc.). They highlighted the making of fine high-quality flat-woven carpets and rugs of Azerbaijan.

In the 8th–15th centuries, Azerbaijani carpets became one of the main goods exported from the Caucasus to the West. As a symbol of luxury and involvement in high culture, they are depicted in many paintings by great European artists. For example, the “Zeiva” carpet is drawn in the “The Madonna with Canon van der Paele” painting by the Dutch painter Jan van Eyck (15th c.); the “Ganja” carpet of the Kazakh zone is depicted in “Scenes from the Life of Aeneas” by the Italian Renaissance painter Pinturicchio; the 15th century Dutch artist Hans Memling painted Azerbaijani carpets in several of his works, including the famous triptych dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

The Azerbaijani carpet culminated its Golden Age in the Safavid state of the 16th century, when Shah Ismail Khatai ascended the throne. The poet, historian, philosopher, Shah Ismail patronized music, poetry, architecture, and various types of folk arts and crafts, including carpet weaving, that reached their peak development during his reign. Manuscript illuminators and calligraphers of that time played a huge role in the formation of the school of Azerbaijani ornamental art, which later had a huge influence on the East and created an unique “Tabriz style”.

Since the mid-19th century, Azerbaijani carpets were admired by thousands of visitors to various exhibitions held all over the world. At the first international exhibitions in Tiflis in 1850 and 1857, unique products of Azerbaijani craftsmen were awarded prizes. In the history of the Azerbaijani carpet, the Moscow Polytechnic Exhibition of 1872 and the All-Russian Exhibition of Industry and Art of 1882 played an important role, at the latter of which, in particular, carpets and embroideries created by the famous Azerbaijani poetess Khurshud Baku Natavan were exhibited. Those as well as following exhibitions brought world recognition, fame and awards to Azerbaijani carpets.

Today Azerbaijani carpets have stored and displayed at the world’s greatest museums and private collections...

Artistic traditions

Similar to any type of art that has its own technological features and artistic types, Azerbaijani carpets are also divided into two general groups – flat-woven and pile carpets.

Flat-woven carpets are also called “household carpets” used by people in the everyday life and activities. These are palas, kilim, jajim, shadda, verneh, zileh, soumak that represent the initial stage of the development of carpet weaving. These textiles are woven by the interlacing and wrapping of warp and weft threads. Pile carpets are the most complex ones in weaving technique: they are created by knotting pile yarns around warp threads to make symmetric “turkbuff” knots. This method opens up a wide field of activity for creating various geometrical and plant patterns, color combinations, and motifs. It is the pile carpets which have absorbed all the beauty of the surrounding world, the skill and inspiration of the weaver. Today they are woven in different sizes: small ones – khalcha, ghaba, namazlik, takht-ustu, doshanak; and the large ones – dast-khaly-ghaba. At the same time, the aesthetic principle of the Azerbaijani carpet is embedded in the two-dimensional solution of design, the rhythm of the design, the traditional division into a central field and border, the laconic geometry of the elements, and all this – in all the variety of forms, motifs, and artistic ideas.



Carpet Afuja Guba. 1883
© Azerbaijan National Carpet Museum



Carpet Khila Afshan. 18th century
© Azerbaijan National Carpet Museum

There have always been local carpet weaving schools in Azerbaijan, and these schools have always mutually influenced and enriched each other. Nowadays, there are seven recognized carpet schools of Azerbaijan: Baku, Kuba, Shirvan, Ganja, Kazakh, Karabakh, and Tabriz. The Kuba “Pirabedil”, “Gimyl”, “Syrt-chichi” carpets amaze with the fineness of workmanship and fine plant patterns, with a clean range of bright colors; the Shirvan “Mugan”, “Tabistan”, “Shilyan” carpets are closer to the most ancient designs, with a strict the idea of rhythm and calm, monumental coloring. The Karabagh “Khanlyg”, “Malybeyli”, “Lempe” carpets incorporate the mastery of composition, inventiveness of imagination, colorful shades; and the Baku “Khila-buta”, “Novkhani”, “Fatmai” carpets attract with their delicate patterns and complex patterns. In the coarse carpets of Ganja and Kazakh “Fakhraly”, “Shikhly” and “Borchaly”, there are large stylized and simplified geometric structures; in Tabriz “Sarabi”, “Afshan”, “Lechek-Turunj” carpets, arabesques of ornaments, circular and spiral arrangements creating an image of eternal harmony of the world.



Carpet Shirvan. 13th century
© Turkic and Islamic Arts Museum

The pictorial (figurative) carpets of Azerbaijan have a more ancient history than ornamental designs, the themes of which were drawn from life itself, inspired by beautiful nature, and were closely related to the very way of life, traditions, and socio-historical processes. The content of the carpets is as diverse as motifs of the Oriental literature created over the centuries. The most ancient in origin of motifs and images are “Ovchulug” Hunting carpets that remain popular in the decorative art of Azerbaijan. Today, highly praised are carpets with traditional motifs of the Oriental classical literature that borrow the favorite motifs from the works by the great Azerbaijani poet and thinker Nizami Ganjavi.



Carpet Sheykh Safi Tabriz. 1539
© Los Angeles Arts Museum



Carpet Ajdahaly (Dragon) Karabakh. 17th century
© Azerbaijan National Carpet Museum

Carpet Museum

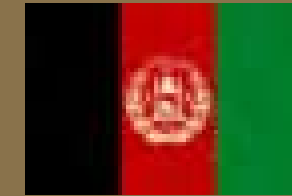
Since the early Middle Ages, Azerbaijani carpets were exported to world markets and purchased by museums and private collectors. In 1967, the State Museum of Azerbaijani Carpet and Folk Applied Arts (now, Azerbaijan National Carpet Museum) was established by the Ministry of Culture of Azerbaijan to preserve the rich local heritage. Invaluable assistance in preparing the museum's exhibitions was provided by Latif Kerimov, country's national artist and world-famous carpet weaving expert.

Regular expeditions of the museum staff to the regions made it possible to significantly replenish the museum's collections, to study in detail the technology of carpet weaving, processing of wool, making dyes, production techniques, construction of weaving looms and the weaver's tools. Today the museum is not only a temple of art with unique carpets in the storage, but also a major scientific center of the country, from which domestic and foreign specialists draw knowledge.

The Azerbaijan National Carpet Museum has the world's largest collection of carpets, which made it possible to hold two representative symposiums on the art of oriental carpets in Baku under the auspices of UNESCO. The museum also received international recognition as a center for the study and promotion of oriental art. The most ancient exhibits of the museum are a khurjin saddle bag signed by the weaver (1827) with perfectly preserved colors and color harmony, the Hunting carpet (17th c.) of the Tabriz school, a carpet “Khila Afshan” (18th c.) of the Baku school, flat-woven carpets – kilim, zileh (18th c.), famous carpets of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Azerbaijani carpet art has long and firmly taken its place in the development of the world's carpet weaving, which demonstrates how much the Azerbaijani people have contributed to the treasury of the world culture. Many assessments of this have been given in recent years, one of them is the admission of the museum in 1986 to the most prestigious international museum organization ICOM (International Council of Museums of UNESCO). In 2010, “Traditional art of Azerbaijani carpet weaving in the Republic of Azerbaijan” was inscribed onto the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

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Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Afghan women are very fond of silver jewellery adorned with carnelians and lapis lazuli. They wear beads and necklaces made of coins, as well as earrings, rings, bracelets and decorative headpieces. Jewellery used to be passed down in families from generation to generation. One of the popular types of ornament was torcs, produced in a variety of forms from silver and melchior and decorated with pendants or inlays of semi-precious stones. There are two main types of torcs. The spiral-shaped items have their roots in Turkmen traditions. In pre-Islamic Kafirstan they were sported by high-ranking officials and their wives and daughters. The takeover of this mountainous region of eastern Afghanistan in 1896 and the conversion of its population to Islam practically put an end to the production of this type of jewellery. Men would wear two- or three-piece pectorals (*yamni geul*), but few such items survive. Torcs consisting of one spiral (*geul*) were for women. Another type of Afghan torcs are items consisting of several neck rings featuring pendants made of coins and lapis lazuli set in metal. In the Pashto language, such torcs are called *ogay*.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries Afghani jewellers, along with their Turkmen counterparts, produced their wares from recast Russian, Persian, Chinese and Indian coins. The finished pieces were about 80–90% silver. Coins were also used as pendants. These coins highlighted the owner's status and could be re-purposed for their original use as a means of payment in times of hardship. By the mid-20th century, however, jewellers were using silver less frequently, and when they did it was only for expensive jewellery. Otherwise, adornments were made of *chamkali* (an alloy of silver and copper) and, later, of various alloys of copper and nickel. Brass, gilded and plain, was often used to imitate gold in the 20th century. Brass decorations were very popular among Uzbeks and Hazaras. The Kuchi nomads of Afghanistan and Pakistan very often used alpaca silver – an alloy of nickel, zinc, copper and tin in different proportions, with or without the addition of silver. The colour of the alloy varied from silvery-white to yellow, depending on the composition. Coins made of an alloy of nickel and copper – the traditional staples of artisanal jewellery – were widely used. On some occasions, aluminium alloys were used for solid bracelets. Coins made of non-ferrous alloys, which were no longer in circulation because of inflation, became popular elements of decorations worn by nomads in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. Coins in such jewellery had a purely symbolic and aesthetic significance (because they could no longer be used as a means of payment).

Metal decorations for the middle class and nomads in the 19th – early 20th centuries featured inlays made of available natural precious and semi-precious stones, with lapis lazuli, carnelian and turquoise being the most popular among them. From the early 20th century, natural stones in the inlays began to be substituted with coloured glass produced in Asia or Europe. And later, plastic, as the cheapest option, became a popular inlay material as well.

Pendant-amulet. 20th century
Metal, carnelian, decorative ironwork, engraving,
repoussé decoration, filigree
© The State Museum of Oriental Art

According to traditional beliefs, jewellery had magic, protective powers, and tassel and fringe are a very old type of Near Eastern amulets. The classic type of tassels, large and small, secured singly or in clusters, in one or several rows, are featured on headpieces worn by women all through their life. The jewellery of the nomadic peoples of Afghanistan, as well as the settled Pashtuns and Balochs, comprises a large and richly varied group of amulets worn by men and women alike. The most intricately shaped and technically complex amulets are the *ta'wiz* and *tumar* in the form of small rectangular boxes or hollow tubes. Usually these amulets were depositories for texts of surahs of the Quran, names of God, etc. It should be mentioned that even today, popular beliefs featuring amulets are very widespread in Afghanistan. These charms supposedly protect against the evil eye and grant good fortune and the fulfilment of wishes. The amulets believed to be especially strong are those brought from *ziarats* – sites where martyrs and local saints are buried. Some local, perhaps pre-Islamic, traditions involved the use of amulets with inlays of natural materials: horn, stones, and seeds, as well as ceramic and glass elements. One of the most ancient types of amulets in Afghanistan is the blue ceramic bead with concentric holes, round or star-shaped. These amulets are believed to have originated from ancient Egypt and from the time of antiquity they have been used in many countries all the way from North Africa to the Caucasus.



Torc with pendants (*ogay*). Second half of the 19th century
White metal, lapis lazuli, textile, cast metal, stamping, repoussé decoration
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Ogay torc. 20th century
Metal, coloured glass, cast metal, stamping, soldering, engraving
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Hazara bracelet. 20th century
Metal, coloured glass, weaving, cast metal
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Pendant. 19th century
Metal, glass, seed beads, paint, cast metal, soldering
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Medallion. End of the 19th century
Metal, lapis lazuli, twisted wire, soldering
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Pectoral pendant. Mid-20th century
Metal, coloured glass, cutwork, emboss in relief, engraving, stamping, background gilding
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Necklace. 20th century
Brass, coins imitation, seed beads, coloured glass, gilding, filigree
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Republic of Belarus

Straw plaiting is one of the oldest handicrafts. Researchers have discovered traces of objects made of straw on fragments of pottery from ancient Egypt. In Belarus, straw plaiting has been practiced for centuries. Straw was used for roofing, for the cattle's bedding and fodder, for footwear, and for clothing. It served as a bed and, in years of poor harvest, it was added to bread. It was used in the making of houseware, headdresses, toys, and decorations.

This handicraft has existed for more than a millennium. Its roots lie in the ancient rites related to the cult of bread and straw. Our ancestors believed in the divine powers of straw and grain, which presumably preserved the life-bearing power of nature and generously bestowed it not only on the stems and stalks of a new crop but to everything and everyone who, in one way or another, came into contact with them. Therefore, the last sheaf of straw removed from the field was an object of special veneration, kept in the house until new crops would appear. Peasants, believing their future was encrypted in straw, used it as a fortune-teller in numerous Koliada (Slavic Christmas-related) divination rituals. The bride and groom at their wedding had handfuls of grain thrown at them, while the bride would be seated on straw to make sure that the power of the plants would be passed on to the young family and their future children.

There are countless popular beliefs and rites related to straw and bread. In an ever-changing world, they have come down with us through the ages from the distant times of paganism and continue to live side by side with us in the form of objects crafted by artisans.

Belarusian craftsmen have long been familiar with straw, as they used it in the making of a variety of items: mats, bags, carpets, and toys.

Dry straw is delicate and brittle but treated with steam, it becomes soft, pliable and fit for bending at any angle – when it dries, it keeps its given form well. These characteristics, combined with its natural decorative qualities – its glossy surface and the natural beauty of its colour – enable artisans to produce masterpieces.

The amazing and seemingly incompatible qualities of straw – the dry stalks are inflexible and resistant to any attempts at changing their form, while objects plaited from straw and straw ribbons are incredibly pliable – opened up, for artisans who mastered the secrets of plaiting, avenues for creative work that defy imagination. They developed techniques and ornamentation patterns previously unknown to straw plaiters.

Belarusian straw is a symbol of Belarus's folk art. The diversity and pliability of the natural raw material allows artisans to create inimitable original objects of various shapes and for different uses: souvenirs and gifts, objects for practical use, furniture and furnishings, etc. Straw “spiders”, horses, birds, and dolls: these are all not just objects, each is related to the person who created it and is bound to it by invisible threads made of the hopes and aspirations they imbued it with.

Various of the figures made of straw are not simply toys, they are symbols of deities and protectors. Featured prominently in many folk beliefs and fairy tales, the horse always accompanied man and was his friend, adviser and protector. The she-goat was a symbol of harvest and fertility. The doll was the Foremother, protectress of women. Birds, meanwhile, were ancestors' souls that protected and helped people living on the Earth. The oldest and most widespread tradition was preserving and decorating the first “start-of-the-harvest-season” and the last “end-of-the-harvest-season” sheaves. In most of the world's cultures, the belief in the Spirit of the Harvest, whose abode is in the grain, destroyed by people as they reap, was very strong.

Straw Royal Gates. 18th century
National Art Museum of the Republic of Belarus



Woven straw items – dolls, birds, and baskets – displayed at a village fair

Objects made from straw in many countries, such as cages and wreaths, were supposed to serve as a temporary shelter for the now homeless Spirit of the Field. In Belarus, this role was performed by “the beard” or “God’s beard” – unharvested stalks that were decorated and left in the field at the end of every harvesting season.

Straw plaiters use mostly rye stalks as their length and strength have no match among cereal plants. Wheat stalks are fit for plaiting too, although they are shorter, coarser and thicker than rye stalks. The preferred material for plaiting small items and decorative elements is oat straw, which has a pleasant yellow hue although its stems are not sufficiently long. The best kind of straw for plaiting is straw prepared manually and, furthermore, at different times of the year, to make sure the plaiter has straw of different colours, from green to bright yellow. The straw is dried, cleaned and soaked in hot water. This makes it pliable and elastic. Folk artists often used straw coloured with natural colourants: it was boiled in water with onion husk to enhance yellow hues, and with alder catkins or oak birch to brown up.

There are four main plaiting techniques: spiral, straight, flat and three-dimensional. Spiral plaiting was the most widely used one. This technique was used in the making of boxes and containers for foodstuffs, clothes, grain and flour, as well as beehives and furniture. Straight and flat techniques were used in the making of preforms for straw hats, baskets, chests, and jewellery boxes. Three-dimensional plaiting was mostly used for decorative objects. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries this technique was used for the interior décor of churches. In a modest interior of rural churches, the royal doors produced from the commonplace, widely available material looked as good as gilded ones.

The earliest objects inlaid with straw date to the 18th century. Straw was used for decorating jewellery boxes, snuff boxes, and Easter eggs. Rye straw is the material of choice for marquetry. Dry rye stalks are cut into small squares, rhombuses or strips and then affixed to the surface. To play up the contrast between the straw pattern and the dark background, the surface is often varnished.



Traditional Belarusian straw dolls



Craftswoman at work



Belarusian straw doll – woman with flowers



Handmade straw doll charms – a talisman of happiness, health, and vitality

The most enigmatic straw items are the “spider” dangles, made in anticipation of the winter solstice. For our ancestors, the spider and his cobweb symbolised the Creator and his creation, the Universe. The spider’s creative energy was presumably expected to be carried over to the next year’s harvest: it was no accident that only the best of the reaped stalks were used in the making of these objects. Most of the “spiders” have a pyramidal shape. They say that under the shadow cast by the little straw pyramids one can experience an extraordinary sense of peace. The ball-shaped “spiders” symbolised the sun and featured various decorations made of straw, paper, seeds, and feathers. The “spider” dangle would be hung in the most important place of the house – in its “red” (beautiful) corner, over the dining table. The “spider” would slowly rotate in the warm puffs emanating from the food and cast shadows. The “spiders” supposedly absorbed all negative energy. On the day of the March equinox, the “spider”, after his winter-long service, was always committed to the flames.

The traditions of straw plaiting are still alive in Belarus. Decorations made of straw are on sale at fairs, exhibitions, gift shops and large department stores in the country. Belarus’s largest libraries keep collections of straw artwork.

To keep the public interested in this type of decorative art, Belarusians regularly hold shows, organize master classes, and run clubs teaching the basics of straw plaiting.

Belarusian straw objects have no match in the entire world. The Republic of Belarus’s national treasure and one of the nation’s most remarkable artistic traditions, Belarusian straw plaiting is listed in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Lists.



Decorative straw horse



Republic of Bulgaria

Balkan temperament, a culture based around community, and a fierce love for the native land binds Bulgarians together tightly. When times are bad, the nation unites and remembers that family, a central pillar, will be an endless source of support. When times are good, Bulgarians throw on the neatly pressed folk dress known as *nosiya*, join hands in the wonderfully dynamic line dance that is *horo*, and celebrate in a lavish display of togetherness, often accompanied by copious amounts of cheese, sausage, brandy, and music.

Bulgarians pride themselves on being from a nation that has withstood slavery, bloody wars, hunger, and economic hardship, and as such, they have an immense reverence for their culture and always wear their *nosiya* with a great sense of pride. The folk dress serves as the key to one's personal history. Its intricate sleeve patterns show whether a woman is married or available, and the shoes of a man's *nosiya* are a tell-tale sign of whether he is a farmer or a warrior.

While the *nosiya* is no longer daily attire, Bulgarians have come up with dozens of annual festivals where they can throw one on, such as the first day of spring, the fall harvest, or New Year's Day.

Whenever a celebration involves folk dress, you can fully expect a bagpipe orchestra to gather for a live performance of *Byala Roza* and *Boryano*, *Boryanke*. What follows is a long line of dancers, hands firmly joined, performing a *horo* that sometimes winds around an entire block. Anyone is welcome to join, regardless of age, and the steps are often easy to follow as long as you pay attention to your neighbours on either side. Luckily, the leather shoes that go with each *nosiya* are comfortable and allow you to dance the night away pain-free.

Bulgaria's folk dress patterns vary by region and are closely tied to nature. Although it is a small country that can be crossed in fewer than five hours, Bulgaria has seven distinct folklore districts. Northern Bulgaria, *Trakia*, *Shopluk*, *Dobrudhza*, *Macedonia*, *Strandzha*, and the *Rhodope* have their own traditional song and dance, and corresponding folk dress. Each article of folk dress consists of a few main components. For women, that is a head accessory decorated either with roses or gold coins and a dress (*nosiya*) that most often goes below the knee. The female *nosiya* has two embroidered aprons – one in the back and one in the front, symbolizing the woman's role as the homemaker and a hard worker who runs the entire household. The aprons are fastened by a belt that is made of silver, bronze, or fabric such as silk and linen.

The male folk dress consists of a tall hat made of fur, a white shirt to convey decency of character, sturdy pants called *poturi*, an embroidered vest, and a wide red belt. The belt is reminiscent of the Bulgarian freedom fighters of the 18th century when it was used to carry weapons such as daggers and knives.

Both the male and female folk dress have distinct shoes. Women wear leather slippers named *tsarvuli*, which are suitable for muddy, uneven terrain. Sometimes, men can be seen wearing *tsarvili*, too as the shoes are genderless and versatile, but they also wear tall boots that can endure long days of pilgrimage, trekking, or even a battle. The boots symbolize a man's role as a protector and a soldier while the leather *tsarvuli* signify that he does agricultural work close to home. Festivities aside, if you visit an agricultural region of the country today, such as the northern part closest to the Danube river, you'll see locals sport *tsarvuli* as everyday footwear as they tend to their livestock.

People in traditional authentic folklore costume a meadow near Vratsa

You can always tell where a Bulgarian is from based on their nosiya. Residents of Trakiya put a big emphasis on the embroidery of the women's frontal apron and shirt sleeves. If a woman is from the Danube region, her belt would be tied around her waist multiple times and the emphasis of pattern would be on the back apron. In the south and southwestern regions of Bulgaria, the female nosiya's front apron is single-color – either red or black. In the Rhodope region, women have only one apron instead of two. Rhodope women tend to opt for pale colors, such as a yellow-orange hue or grass green to demonstrate their connection to nature.

Not only that, but you can always tell a woman's marital status by her dress. If the woven pattern is simple and in the shape of squares, then she is single. Triangles on a lady's apron convey that she's engaged. If the woman is married, her nosiya will display a pattern of four triangles. The main difference is that a single woman would have a simple dress with fewer patterns and often wear a flower behind her ear that she would gift to her beloved. A married woman would be much more lavishly adorned symbolizing her higher status in society.

For men, there are only two types of folk dress – a white and a black variety. When it comes to the male nosiya, the difference in style and color is not really based on geography; this ensemble has two stages of evolution so it rather reflects a time period. The white variety of male nosiya came first. It includes long, tight pants, a white linen shirt, and a wide red belt. Later on, during the second half of the period known as the “Bulgarian rebirth”, in the 18th century, a new style of male folk dress came along – the black variety. The pants here have a lower, looser crotch seam signifying that their owner is wealthy.



Bulgarian folk dancers prepare to perform at an annual International Folk Festival



Dancers dressed in authentic, traditional folk costumes at the “Ledenika” National Folklore Festival



Dancers dressed in traditional costumes perform a Bulgarian horo in a meadow near the village of Varvara



Authentic folk costumes with details



Dancers dressed in authentic Bulgarian folk costumes perform a Bulgarian horo in Gara Bov



Young, beautiful and happy Bulgarian girls dressed in ethnic Bulgarian costumes. They are members of the famous Traika folklore ensemble from the city of Plovdiv



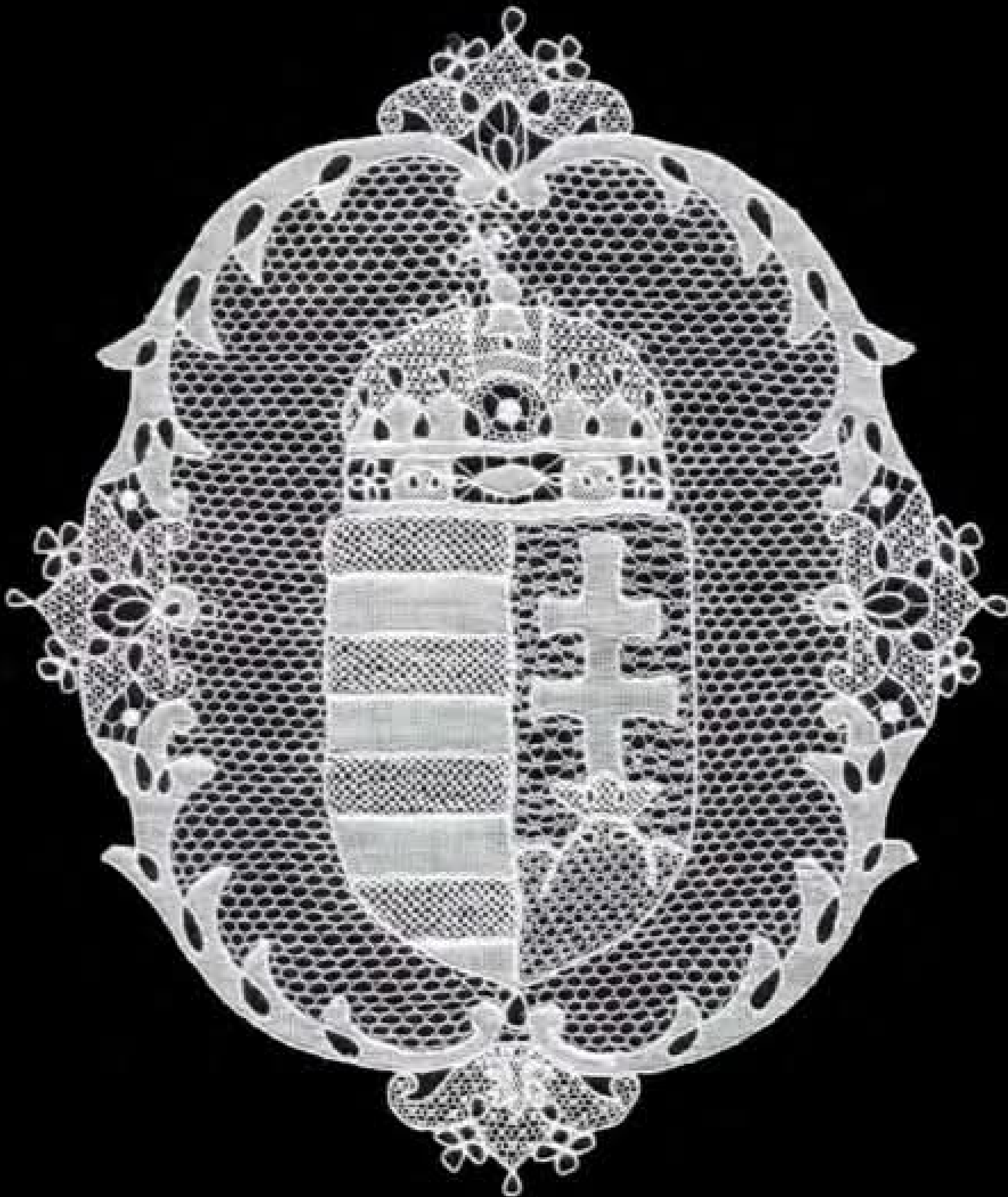
Dancers dressed in authentic, traditional folk costumes in a meadow near Vratsa

Bulgarians used to believe that their folk dress had magical powers.

In the 1800s, folklore dress was thought to be an item that held magical powers. The nosiya was the connection between human and nature, which was of immense importance in this agricultural society. Bulgarians truly believed that the better you cared for your nosiya and the more adorned it was, the more powerful and fortunate you would be. Some even believed that one's folk dress was the window to their soul, and you could tell what kind of character they possessed by the embroidery on their apron or vest.

In the last two centuries, each folk dress was handmade and the timing of the sewing was not at all random. It was considered auspicious to sew together a nosiya on Mondays and Thursdays before sunrise. When a white shirt was made for a newborn, the mother had to use a single thread and never let it break, otherwise her lack of patience would symbolize the child's death. Knowing this fact, some of us are no longer surprised when our grandmothers ask us to go run an errand for them reminding how they labored over our nosiya for days on end without letting the thread break and how we owe them to go pick up some kashkaval from the store for supper.

Even though Bulgaria is a modern European country that has embraced the widespread international fashion trends today, traditional folk dress continues to carry great sentimental and cultural values. Nosiya can be seen at the Rose Festival in Karlovo, on the first day of spring celebration in Kyustendil during which a dozen young women compete for the title of "Miss Spring", as well as on March 3 – Bulgaria's Independence Day. An ensemble made with love according to tradition, our folk dress continues to stand the test of time and unite us.



Coat of arms of Hungary



Hungary

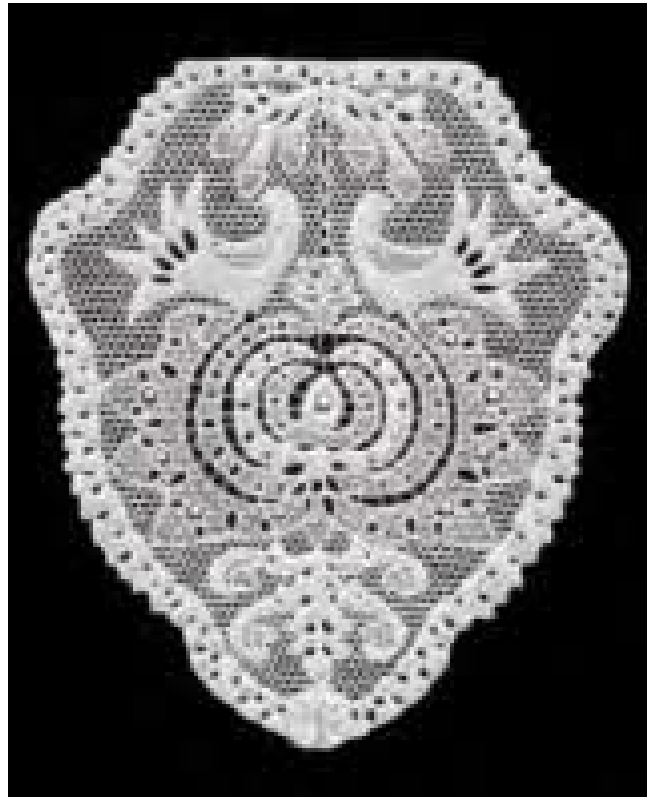
Halas lace goes back to the end of the 19th century, to a city called Kiskunhalas in the south of Hungary. There was a 25-year-old art teacher in the local “gymnázium” (high school), called Árpád Dékányi. Besides teaching, he actively contributed to the life of the city: he edited the local newspaper, acted in the theater, wrote, and helped to found the city’s fire department and sports club. He was a well-rounded person with energy for all this, but he had a particular interest in folk art. His collective work very soon became known throughout Hungary.

By a stroke of luck, Árpád Dékányi met Mária Markovics in 1902, and they had the idea to create a Hungarian national lacemaking technique. But to do this, they needed designs, drawings, and much more. They were at Dékányi’s home when he offered Markovics to see the lacemaking designs he had been working on for several years. Markovics selected only two in total and started creating designs of her own.

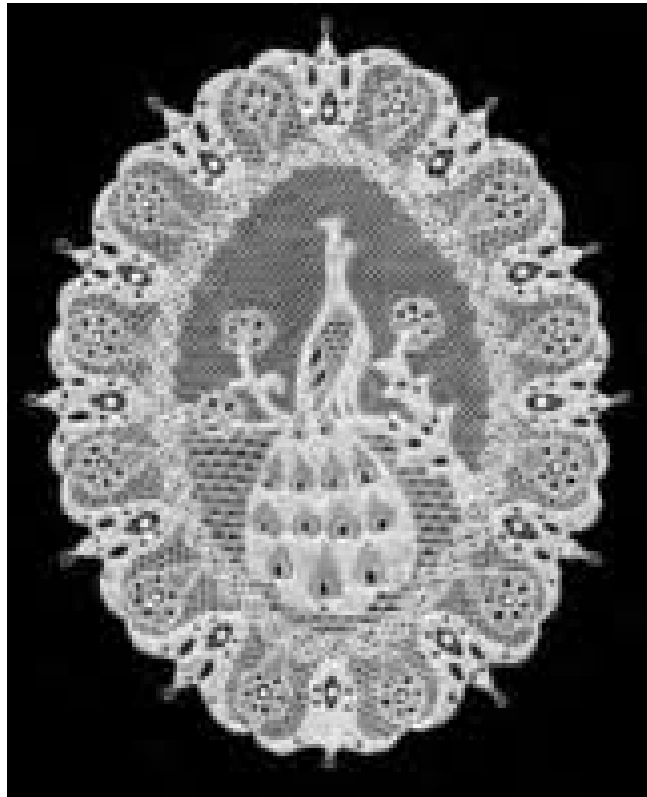
Dékányi’s designs had only the outlines of motifs and thus differed greatly from any lacework that Markovics knew. Nevertheless, she took on the work. She was a great artist and an alumna of the Royal School; she had to come up with something. But alas, having exhausted her arsenal of stitches, which included 12 techniques for Venetian lace, Markovics realised that she was drawing a blank. It became all too apparent that she needed a new technique. As a result of her talent, dedication, and perseverance, she came up with a new kind of needlepoint lace – Halas lace – in 1903.

In the same year, Dékányi organised a workshop, in which Mária Markovics taught her new technique to her first students. At first, she had six students, and then twelve, and then around 100 by 1938. Over her lifetime, Markovics created 50 new stitches. There is a total of 60 different stitches used in Halas lace.

It was not long after the workshop that Halas lace came to be well known. Already in 1904, it won the Grand Prize at the St. Louis World’s Fair and earned its next Grand Prize two years later in Milan. Unfortunately, happiness from this accolade did not last long; a fire in the Hungarian pavilion destroyed much of the exposition. Despite this, Dékányi continued to promote Halas lace. With the support of the Hungarian Ministry of Religion and Public Education, he organised lacemaking classes across the country. However, Halas lace never became popular on a large scale. The only place where this lacework still continued to thrive was Markovics’ workshop in Kiskunhalas.



Two pigeons



Peacock



Doily with floral pattern

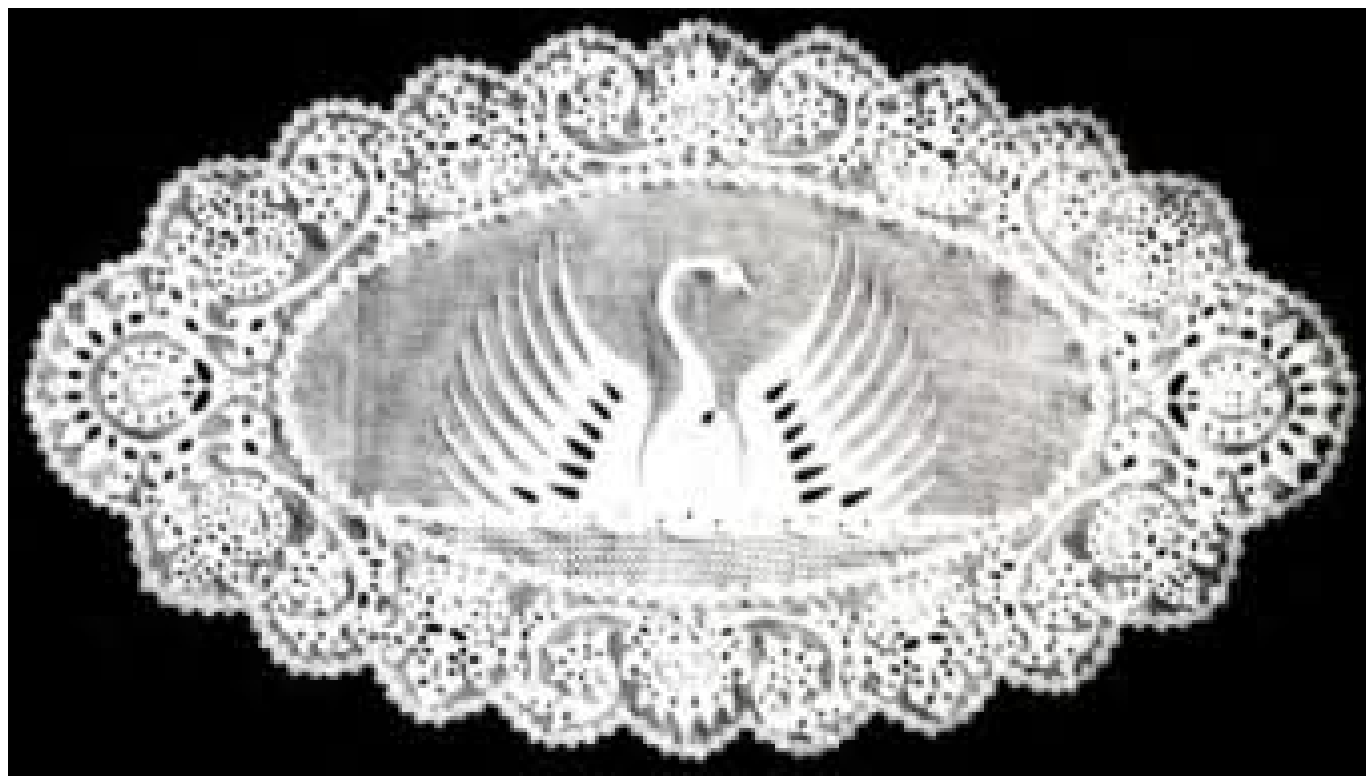


Peasant couple

After the First World War, the workshop would have ceased operations if it were not for the mayor of the city of Kiskunhalas, Imre Fekete. He obtained funds from the government for the upkeep of the workshop, and in 1935 converted it to the Lace House. A movie was made about it, and a series of postcards was printed with examples of the lacework. These postcards today hold intrinsic value, as they depict missing lace designs.

The Lace House drew a great number of tourists to Kiskunhalas; in 1936 alone, there were around 6,000 visitors – a huge number for a small city. The workshop received orders from Paris, Rome and Berlin, as well as from the United States and even India!

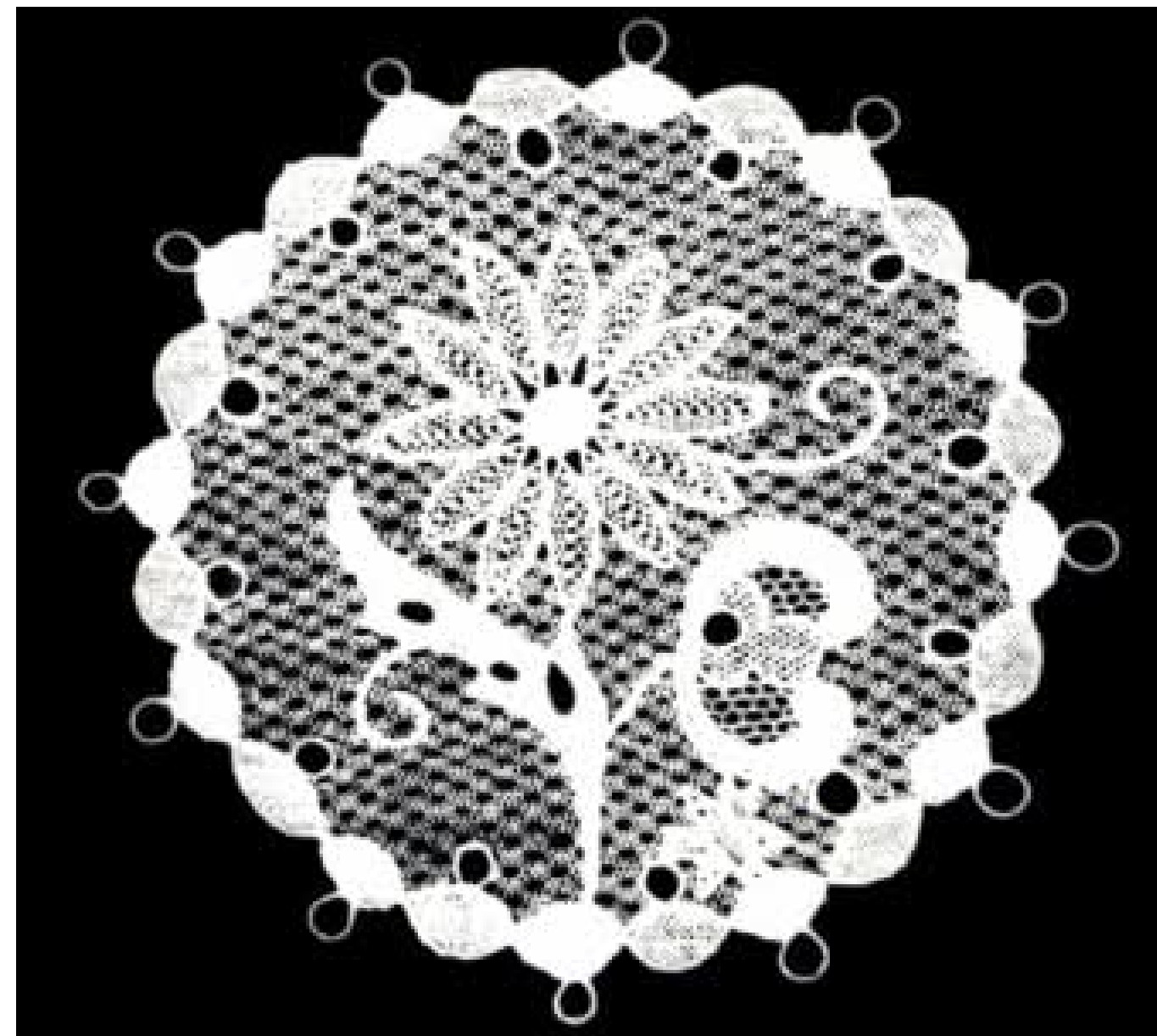
Demand for lace fell ahead of the Second World War. The workshop began to take small orders: tablecloths, napkins, and coats of arms. The Lace House ceased operations during the war years. The designs, drawings, and even the register of lacework were lost, but Markovics continued to sew at home. By the end of 1944, not much remained of the equipment and collection of lace designs and samples. But a little over a year later, the government of the post-war Hungary once again remembered Halas lace: orders were made to Markovics' workshop. The support of the government substantially helped the Lace House resume its work but unfortunately, Markovics did not live to see the revival. She died in October 1954, aged 81.



Swan



Craftswoman at work



Flower

Halas lace continued to develop. Today, this type of lacework is on the list of official state gifts of Hungary and has so-called “Hungarikum” status, marking it as a genuine Hungarian product. In addition, Halas lace is valued and acknowledged by all European centres of lacemaking.

Even close-up, it is hard to believe when looking at Halas lace that it is entirely needlework. In some designs, seams from the finest fabric can be seen. But not here. Everything is sewn exclusively with needle and thread – it is artistry and beauty of the highest order. In one of the Budapest newspapers at the beginning of last century, the following was written about the work of the Halas lacemakers: “Stitching this lace requires enormous discipline, meticulous effort, mastery, and total artistic immersion in one’s work.” Halas lace is called a “hymn to patience”, and that is very apt!

It is made entirely by hand with fine, snow-white thread and almost invisible needlework. The secret of its production is known only to dedicated Halas lacemakers. This unique lacemaking technique has passed from one generation to the next for over 120 years. Each year, the lacework is enriched with new motifs, in which tradition is combined with contemporary values.



Socialist Republic of Vietnam

The tradition of lacquerware began in Vietnam in the early Middle Ages. For centuries, local artists made lacquer from the resin of lacquer trees (cây sơn). With its excellent decorative properties, the resin acted as a protective layer, preventing domestic wood and wicker baskets from becoming damaged in the humid conditions of the tropical climate. Objects were traditionally covered with black, brown, or red lacquer and, to enhance the artistic effect, were gilded or encrusted with mother-of-pearl. Mother-of-pearl is a material with an astonishing array of colours. The shells are known for their distinctive beauty and are found on the shores of the South China Sea, while freshwater mother-of-pearls is known for its pink or lavender tones. In the first quarter of the 20th century, new decorative technologies became widespread: eggshell encrusting, engraving, and, of course, painting, which made it possible to create exquisite graphic compositions in lacquer.

Common motifs included mythological scenes, such as one favoured by Vietnamese artists: Lake of the Returned Sword. The legend's hero, Le Loi, who founded the Le Dynasty, was given a magic sword by a golden turtle, which was capable of freeing the country of its enemies. A curved footbridge arcs across the lake, connecting the Temple of the Jade Mountain on one small island in the lake to Turtle Tower on another.

Landscape designs are also common, such as bodies of water, woods, and temples, as well as zoomorphic images. Images are widely used that are popular in Vietnamese print: roosters, hens with their chicks, pigs, tigers, and warriors with horses. These images contain various encrypted symbols of benevolence: from prosperity and longevity to honour and numerous progenies. For example, the pig represents abundance, and the hen with her chicks represents many sons. Designs with one of the four holy animals (Tứ Linh) are widespread: the turtle, the dragon, the phoenix, and the unicorn.

Lacquerware objects are an important feature of interior decor. They include for household trinket boxes, vases, cups, table lamps, and large furniture carved from the wood of tropical trees and decorated with lacquer, such as tables and cabinets. Amongst the most commonly encrusted objects are screens, decorative panels, vases, betel nut boxes (for chewing mixtures), dishes, platters, candy boxes, and more.

In the 20th century, Vietnamese lacquerware developed in another direction too – lacquer painting. In 1925, the Indochina School of Fine Arts was founded in Hanoi, where artists were introduced to Western techniques. Influenced by the Western culture of art, Vietnamese artists developed a new style of graphic art: lacquer painting, which skilfully combined traditional and innovative styles. Since the 1930, Vietnamese artists have actively developed new themes to improve techniques. Nowadays, paintings and other lacquer objects have become a hallmark of Hanoi – one of the main centres of lacquerware art in Vietnam and around the world.

A vase with a picture of bamboo by the river. 1950s – early 1960s
Wood, lacquer, painting
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



A dish with the image of the lake of the Returned Sword. Mid-20th century
Wood, lacquer, painting
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



The lid of the trinket box. 1950s
Wood, lacquer, painting, eggshell inlay
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



A trinket box with a removable lid. Mid-20th century
Wood, lacquer, painting
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



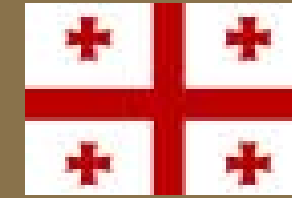
Vase. 1980
Wood, lacquer, painting
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



A vase with a picture of red flowers. Late 1970s – early 1980s
Wood, lacquer, painting
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Nguyen Xuan Kyong
Thach Sanh Killing an Eagle. 1987
Wood, lacquer, lacquer painting technique, eggshell and mother-of-pearl inlay
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Georgia

Georgians believe that their country has the world's oldest wine-making traditions. In Georgia, every feast, every religious ritual, and every rite of hospitality features wine. The vine is celebrated in Georgian epic poems, songs and legends. According to one of these texts, St. Nino, who baptised Georgia, was the first to place a grapevine cross, now the symbol of the Georgian church. In Christian culture, the imagery of the vine shoot and wine is imbued with multiple meanings. When Georgia became a part of Christendom, it not only preserved and enriched the old traditions of wine making but also infused them with elevated symbolism.

Every region of Georgia had its own traditions of wine making and drinking. Resembling a ritual, the extraordinary ambiance of the Georgian banquet was for everyone to enjoy. Craftsmen produced a variety of wine vessels serving different purposes.

There were communal and individual wine vessels. The earthenware wine vessels for table use included *doki*, *sura*, and *gozauri*, which were distinguished by their graceful forms and decoration. The shapes of these vessels were refined over the centuries.

For instance, the *gozauri* – a clay vessel that adorned the banquet table – often had an anthropomorphic shape. This tradition has a long history – in the legends and holy texts of different peoples, clay is the material from which God created human beings. Sets of twin vessels shaped as a man and a woman, which symbolised the bride and the groom, had a special function: they were intended for wedding feasts.

As for the other fancifully shaped traditional wine vessels, of special note is the *marani* – an intricately sculpted vessel consisting of several small containers. The *marani* was used for toasting guests' health. Each of these containers is connected via a tube to the round base, which has a drinking orifice shaped as a ram's or stag's head. Drinkers drank wine from this orifice, passing the vessel to any person who wanted to make a toast. The *marani* ceremony gave the feast a special intimate feel. Old-time *marani* vessels usually consisted of eleven small containers shaped as a *kvevri* – the vessel for storing wine. In the 20th century, however, Georgian potters took this tradition in a new direction, and in modern *marani* vessels the number of containers and their shapes can vary. Feasters in Georgia drink undiluted wine and are never in a hurry. The measured pace of the repast is defined by the ceremony of delivering long solemn toasts, which proceeds under the stewardship of the toast master, who directs the course of the banquet. Since the tradition of directing a banquet for a long time existed only in Georgia, the word *tamada* (toast master) was adopted into other languages as well. Toasting is a special genre, which is conceptually impossible without wine. The toaster is a person who elegantly, wittily and poetically expresses ideas important for the code of Georgian ethics.

These feasting rites began to form in Georgia in ancient times. The assignment of certain roles to the old and the young enabled the young to learn their manners and the sequence of ceremonial activities.

Different forms of drinking vessels, meanwhile, were adapted to particular stages of the banquet. For instance, at the start of a Georgian feast, feasters would use small individual jugs called *chinchila*. The *chinchila* is a small vessel, the name of which is believed to resemble the peal of a small bell, evoked by the clinking that accompanies the pouring of wine into cups. At the high point of the feast, the toaster would empty a *khanstis* (drinking horn) full of wine. The biggest horn could have a capacity of several litres. Custom required the drinker to consume the entire contents, demonstrating his endurance.



I. Khurtsidze
Vessel, marani. 1970s
Clay, glaze, painting
© The State Museum of Oriental Art

Wine vessels occupied a special place in Georgian culture, so their decoration was a matter of great importance.

Metalwork in silver and other metals was one of the techniques most often used for decorating wine vessels in Georgia. The decorations featured various narratives, as well as floral and zoomorphic ornaments. Despite being utilitarian objects, wine vessels in Georgia reflect the nation's artistic traditions and demonstrate high levels of technical skill, as well as Georgians' special attitude to wine. Wine is not just a drink, but also an intrinsic part of Georgia's culture.



Wine horn. 1960s
Horn, white metal, engraving
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



M.D. Chikhladze
Double vessel for drinking wine, chinchila. 1963
Clay, smoked, polishing, painting
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Wine jug, sura. 1870s
Clay, glaze, stamped pattern, pasted pattern
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



T. Menurilishvili
Wine storage jug, docki. 1974
Clay, circle-formed, angob decoration
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



N.I. Azeladze
Lid of a wine vessel in the form of a male figure. 1961
Clay, coloured glaze, circle-formed, modelled, stamping, painting
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Decorative vessel in the form of a "marani" (wedding vessel for wine). 1963
Terracotta, glaze, polishing, painting, engraving
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Republic of India

Indian ceramics have a long history and their own national characteristics. For a long time glazed ceramic dishes were not widely used in India; those of modest means most commonly used metallic crockery or dishes made out of unfired clay for carrying or storing liquids. It is characteristic of traditional Hindu culture that pottery is destroyed after use. This is connected with the idea of ceremonial cleaning and the system of forbidden foods. Of course, nowadays, as well as ceramics, glass and metal dishes are used; however, these traditions live on, especially in villages. A prime example of this is the lasting practice of destroying all household utensils at home celebrations, such as upon the birth of a child.

Indian ceramic artists conventionally divide themselves into two groups. The self-name of the first group is Kumbhars. Mostly, they are village potters who make everyday domestic utensils, which are often unfired. Artists who make a higher grade of pottery, Kashigars, produce refined pots (kagashi), which are glazed. Archaeological findings by researchers of the Indus Valley Civilization (4000–2000 B.C.E.) suggest that ceramic glazing was developed during this era. These findings are the earliest known fragments of glazed ceramics found in South Asia. They were discovered in Mohenjo-daro and pre-date findings from contemporary Mesopotamian, Nubian, and Egyptian civilizations.

The tradition of glazed ceramic-making resumed in India several centuries later, with the emergence of Muslim artists. It is worth noting that a significant proportion of glazed ceramics in India in the Middle Ages were made in shades of blue and white. It is believed that this style of pottery was brought to India by artists who arrived with Timur and settled in the area of Multan. The common name for this style is Timurid ceramics, and it came about at the end of the 14th and in the 15th centuries. Its origins remain unclear, but most researchers would agree that it stemmed from Chinese porcelain painted with cobalt blue during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). According to data from archaeological digs at Indus Valley Civilization sites, in the period of the Sultanate in the Delhi region, two types of glazed ceramics were widespread: polychrome painted on a green and brown base and with green and blue pigments on a white base.

Under Shah Abbas I of Persia (1571–1629), glazed ceramics were imported to India mainly from Iran, and later from China. Indeed, it is known that some local emir rulers, to avoid unnecessary costs, sought to make their own glazed ceramics. Therefore, as well as pottery in the areas of Sindh and Multan, the production of glazed ceramic tiles was established, and the tiles were widely used as architectural decor. The brick buildings at the Thatta necropolis are a prime example of this kind of monument. As with other necropolis buildings, they were decorated with tiles painted with white, cobalt-blue, and turquoise underglaze. For ceramic products, base colour was greatly significant. Those wanting to achieve a white base went on to discover fritting – a so-called soft-paste porcelain. A white ceramic body was made by using kaolin clay. Lacking this primary material, ceramicists came up with a little trick: they took red clay and covered it with what they had available, applying, for example, a white engobe over the surface. Pottery with a white-coloured base started to be produced in India in the 1860s, when the kaolin mining pits were discovered in the Rajmahal Hills of Jharkhand. In the second half of the 19th century, the white ceramic body became a signature of Multani ceramics, while the colour range of the patterns changed significantly: dark blue and brown gradually superseded white and cobalt blue.

Vase, "martaban", 19th century
Clay, glaze, circle-formed, modelled, fired, underglaze
© The State Museum of Oriental Art

There were several styles central to ceramic art in the 19th and 20th centuries. Delhi white-and-blue ceramics refers to pottery from Khurja, Delhi, and Agra. In terms of form and decoration, it is practically impossible to differentiate ceramics made by these artisans from the work of artists from Sindh and Multan. However, a more delicate, lighter red ceramic body was typical of theirs, as well as the way in which the inside of the pottery was a different colour to the outside.

When the universal interest in producing porcelain reached India in the 19th century, another important style was founded: Jaipur. This included pottery in blue hues and glazed ceramic tiles with a white base. It had its own particular ovens, and the glazing was extremely sensitive.

Another famous ceramic style came from the Bombay School of Art. In its early form, it was very similar to the Sindh hues (white and blue patterns on a red base) but went on to differ from them dramatically with its fanciful shapes. Bombay School pottery flourished in the 1870–1890s, when artists began to employ floral motifs and colour paintings inspired by Ajanta scenes.



Pot. 19th century
Clay, glaze, circle-formed, fired, underglaze
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Pot. 19th century
Clay, glaze, circle-formed, modelled, fired, underglaze
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Vase. 1950s
Clay, circle-formed, fired, painting
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Vase. 1950s
Clay, circle-formed, fired, painting
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Vase. 1950s
Clay, circle-formed, fired, painting
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Vase. 1950s
Clay, glaze, circle-formed, fired, copper-red underglaze, cobalt-blue underglaze
© The State Museum of Oriental Art

Dal Gate ceramics feature lead glaze, which gives them an intense sheen and holds perfectly on any ceramic body. Being colourless and transparent, it is stained with different metal oxides. Various shades of green are mostly used, as well as deep, dark blues and browns. Nizamabad products are patterned using a technique inspired by the metal handicraft of Bidar. Black-glazed ceramics were produced in India from antiquity; they include the so-called engraved silver ceramics and the black shiny ceramics of the north.

Artists of Bengal painted pottery, depicted below, drew on inspiration from the work of Jamini Roy, known for reshaping approaches to the artistic language of Bengali folk art: Kalighat painting, Santhal paintings, etc. Sketches of village life, images of the gods, mythological animals and birds became characteristic of pottery designs.



Vase with two handles. 1950s
Clay, glaze, circle-formed, modelled, fired, etched
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Republic of Yemen

For many cultures and societies across the globe, arms and armour played an important role off the battlefield, particularly as markers of social status, military rank, courage, and wealth. In Yemen, this tradition continues to prevail with a dagger known as the jambiya or janbiyyah which is derived from the Arabic word for ‘side’. The weapon embodies centuries of tribalism and honour; , it represents manhood, social prestige, and family identity. So impactful is the jambiya on Yemeni culture that its presence echoed throughout regions of the Islamic world, from Morocco to India, inspiring regional versions of the weapon.

Generally, the jambiya is characterized by a short, broad, double-edged, curved blade that gradually tapers to the tip, with a raised midrib that runs down the length. The hilt is typically baluster-, I-, or T-shaped. The earliest representation of the weapon seems to be on a statue of a Sabaean king that dates to about 500 and is currently in the National Museum of Yemen in Sana’a. It is shown with an I-shaped hilt and is tucked into the ruler’s waist sash.

The Yemeni jambiya was an ideal weapon for its semi-nomadic and rural population, who primarily used it in defence. The short, curved blade provided several advantages for the wielder. First, when worn at the waist, it allowed for mobility and comfort while travelling – or even fighting – on horse or camel. Second, like most curved knives and daggers, the blade bends towards the opponent, eliminating the need to angle the wrist, thus providing more ease and stability as a stabbing weapon than a straight-edged blade. Third, it allowed for more agile movements, including cutting and twisting upwards. It should be mentioned that the blade’s heaviness was also significant for combat; it made it possible to inflict deeper wounds than a standard knife, as it could cut through muscle and bone.

However, the advent of firearms in the early to mid-16th century changed not only combat for Yemen and the rest of the Arabian peninsula but also the jambiya’s role within it. It slowly transitioned from an instrument of war and defence to a symbol of honour, identity, status, power, and masculinity. Men who were affiliated with a tribe or had tribal origins would wear it to represent their right to bear arms through centuries-ingrained codes of honour that required one to defend one’s tribe, heritage, and family name. Boys are presented with their first jambiya to mark their passage into manhood. In some parts of Yemen, they are given one after their circumcision ceremony. Young boys are sometimes given diminutive versions to participate in ceremonies and celebrations. The jambiya is stored in a J-shaped sheath that is made from wood and covered with cloth, leather, or metal. It is worth noting that the shape has a practical purpose: the hook would catch in one’s belt so that it was not pulled along with a suddenly drawn weapon. The jambiya is tucked into a belt or waist sash of a robe or placed within the top of a ma’awaz, a wrap-around skirt. While some men wear their jambiya at all times, it is commonly worn for weddings, celebrations, Muslim holidays like Eid, and dances (bara’a). The weapon is also used as a means of arbitration during individual and tribal disputes, dispensing justice (adl) and working through reconciliation (alfara’a). As it is still considered a functional weapon, there are both societal and religious protocols one must follow.

Dagger (*jambiya*) with sheath
Double-edged, slightly curved steel blade, gilded copper, semi-precious stones, silver, rhinoceros horn

The most important aspects of the Yemeni jambiya are the materials and the decoration, which collectively denote the status and wealth of the owner and his family. Those who could afford it would have blades forged from strong, high-quality steel. Blades were traditionally forged from iron mined locally from the Sa'da and Hadhramaut regions.

While blades are not typically embellished, the sheaths and the hilts can be heavily decorated. Sheaths that are covered in silver, gold, or copper alloy (a relatively inexpensive substitute for gold) can feature highly intricate metalwork designs that include piercing, chiseling, etching, and granulation. Often semi-precious stones are also inlaid into the sheath, enhancing the beauty of the weapon and the status of the owner. It is important to note that, in Islam, it is forbidden for men to wear gold jewellery. However, as the jambiya is a weapon, it is an exception to this rule.

The most important part of the jambiya is the hilt; it reveals the owner's status since it is what an observer would immediately notice. Thus, much care goes into its creation and decoration. Standard hilts are often made from the horns and bones of cows, goats, or water buffalos; the hooves or bones of camels; metal; or wood. Men of distinction opt for more exotic and precious materials, including agate, jasper, red and yellow amber, silver, and elephant or walrus ivory. However, the most coveted material was, and still is, rhinoceros horn. It is considered a prestigious material for a variety of reasons, in addition to its aesthetic qualities: it comes from an exotic creature, it takes notable time and resources to procure, and it is durable.

As a weapon, it provided protection for the wielder, his family, his tribe, and his livelihood, and it fostered independence, courage, and manliness. The jambiya continues to represent these sentiments as it has transitioned into a symbol that is worn proudly by Yemeni men. For them, it serves not only as a marker of status but also as a reminder of their family, their heritage, and the codes of honour they uphold within their society. What makes the Yemeni jambiya so captivating is that its status is so powerful and impactful, that it inspired versions in different regions of the Islamic world, and that – despite the great influx, movement, and circulation of trade and people throughout the centuries, and despite modernization and contemporary challenges – it carries on as an anchor and living evidence of Yemen's cultural and societal pride.



Dagger (*jambiya*) with sheath
Double-edged, slightly curved steel blade, gilded copper, semi-precious stones, silver, textile



Daggers (*jambiya*) with sheaths
Double-edged, slightly curved steel blade, gilded copper, semi-precious stones, silver, textile

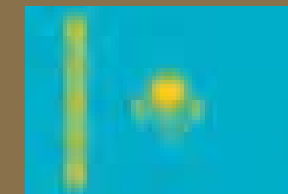


Daggers (*jambiya*) with sheaths
Double-edged, slightly curved steel blade, gilded copper, semi-precious stones, silver



Dagger (*jambiya*) with sheath and belt
Double-edged, slightly curved steel blade, silver, rubies, leather





Republic of Kazakhstan

Most Kazakh decorations are made of silver. The dominant material in nomadic culture, silver was believed to possess purifying and protective powers. Like artisans in the regions reviewed above, Kazakh jewellers often used coins in their jewellery. Inlays of natural stones were likewise often featured: red stones – rubies, carnelians, and corals – were the favourites.

The sets of men's decorations include festive and hunting belts, signet rings, and varieties of bladed weapons highlighting the status of the heroic mighty warrior. Women were accustomed from their earliest years to wearing multiple pieces of jewellery at once. The absence of jewels signalled that the woman was mourning. The traditional set of female ornaments in Kazakhstan symbolised fertility. Popular decorations included hairpieces, such as the *nakosnik* (tip-of-the-braid decorations), which, according to folk beliefs, protected women who wore them and enhanced their fertility.

Highlighting the social status of those who wore them, jewellery was an important element of attire. In Kazakhstan, girls had their ears pierced at the age of three, and this was a significant event on a par with circumcision for male babies. Earrings were believed not only to protect children from the evil eye but also their ears from foul language. Going out without earrings and finger rings was considered bad manners. Earrings were the wedding gift of choice for a bride, and there were many sets of jewellery that women began to wear only after their wedding.

As was the custom among other Central Asian peoples, Kazakh women had to wear a silver ring or a ring with a stone at all times, even when cooking. Meals prepared by a woman without a ring on her finger were regarded as impure. There were several traditional varieties of rings. The ring with a setting in the form of a bird's beak, very popular in Kazakhstan, was considered a powerful charm. The *otau ju'zik* ring with a stone in a cone-shaped setting was described as the family ring – it was believed to promote family happiness, so it was usually gifted to brides. Especially noteworthy is the massive ring with a stone called *qudag'i ju'zik* ("the ring of matchmakers"), which is worn on two fingers at once, symbolising the union of two elements and two families. The bride's parents would present such a ring to the future mother-in-law, to make sure she treated their daughter well.

The Kazakhs used amulets as well, believing that they could protect a person from birth onwards. As in Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan, in Kazakhstan one of the most typical amulets is the *tumar*. The *tumar* is a triangular, rectangular or tubular container used to hold a charm. The *tumar* was an indispensable part of wedding jewellery.

Paired pendants. Late 19th – early 20th centuries
White metal, carnelian, glass, filigree, inlay
© The State Museum of Oriental Art

Jewellery pieces from western Kazakhstan, which form a separate stylistic group, are distinguished by sparseness of form and a sense of proportion. They are original both in terms of techniques of ornamentation and workmanship. Each detail in western Kazakh jewellery is crafted with great love and care, so consummate craftsmanship is turned into inspired art. Originality is a distinctive characteristic of the multi-tiered pectoral decorations, such as the *onirzhiiek* – three rectangular plates vertically interconnected with chainlets featuring rhombuses and jingle bells. Other commonly used jewellery pieces include heavy bracelets, earrings and huge rings with a stone that covers two fingers at once – the so-called “matchmakers’ rings”. These are massive rings with a round bezel. In the past, custom required that the bride’s mother would present such a ring to the matchmaker after the wedding. The rings were visually striking thanks to the contrast between gold granulation arranged in a flat geometric pattern and large, tall inserts of carnelian or glass, also partially covered with granulation. The play of light and dark and the refined combination of three colours (gold, silver, and brown-red stone) enhanced the visual effect. This ancient aesthetic evokes the polychrome style of jewellery of the first Turkic tribes that arrived in Kazakhstan in the 4th–5th centuries AD. Jewellery from northern, central and eastern Kazakhstan is distinguished by stone and glass inserts and an abundance of pendants. In southern Kazakhstan, jewellery is often remarkable for its wholeness of form, featuring enamel and rich colours.



Pectoral decoration “onirzhiiek”. End of the 19th century
Silver, base metal, mastic resin, glass, embossing
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Pectoral pendant connected by a chain with an earring. End of the 19th century
Silver, base metal, mastic resin, glass, embossing, gilding
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



A bracelet. Mid-20th century
White metal, embossing, colouring
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Ring. End of the 19th century
Silver, glass, melchior, stamping
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Detail of the pectoral decoration. End of the 19th century
Silver, base metal, mastic resin, glass, embossing, stamping
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Detail of the pectoral pendant, "onirzhiak". Late 19th – early 20th century
Silver, glass, stamping, weaving, soldering
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Ring. Early 20th century
White metal, glass, paste, cast metal, stamping
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Kyrgyz Republic

According to some scholars, Kyrgyz ethnogenesis was completed quite late, in the 16th century. Kyrgyz culture is an heir and successor to the cultural traditions of the peoples inhabiting the vast span of land from the Tian Shan to Central Asia and southern Siberia. As something separate from the art of other Central Asian nomads, Kyrgyz folk art became the focus of serious scholarly research only in the 1920s and 1930s, when scholars began to undertake annual archaeological and ethnographic expeditions to the region, and the main collections of Kyrgyz folk art started to form.

Textile art is a remarkable strand of Kyrgyz culture. Kyrgyz textile art boasts a great variety of patterns. Most objects accompanying the Kyrgyz from the cradle to the grave are decorated with patterns. These patterns can be called a reflection of the Kyrgyz people's way of thinking, their poetic view of nature, the expression of their temperament and the richness of their soul. Kyrgyz ornaments are distinguished by their simplicity, economy and austerity of form, their monumentality, and their decorative colour combinations.

Every pattern has a specific meaning, identically understood by all weavers. The most distinctive and widely used elements of these patterns are the ram's horns and head. Images of the wild mountain sheep and its horns are the oldest motif in nomads' art. This imagery was already featured in Scythian art, with the ram represented as the patron of a clan. And even today, the ram's horns are a symbol of big, bountiful herds. An equally ancient element is the swirly rosette – a symbol of the sun and the life-giving powers of nature. Like the circle, this motif perhaps originates from the most ancient rites of sun worship. Equally old are the simplest geometrical shapes such as the rhombus, square, and cross. They are typical for nearly all kinds of decorative art: ornamented felts, objects made of wood, high-pile carpets, and embroidery. Stylised floral ornaments – all sorts of rosettes, palmettes, and stylised images of a plant such as the “tree of life” – are quite common too.

In Kyrgyz families, most of the handicraft work was done by women, who produced felt mats (*koshma*), wove rugs and cloth, embroidered clothes, and plaited chiy (grass mats). Women were not only keepers of all the family's and the clan's traditions of embroidering household items but also interpreters of the patterns that they wove and embroidered.

Felts are the products of folk art most often used in daily activities. Ornamented felts are made of light-coloured fleece sheared in autumn. The wool was dyed with natural dyes, which gave it a rich velvety tone. The patterns embroidered on these felts were mostly simple – combinations of circles, squares and spirals.

Embroidery is the Kyrgyz people's oldest, most beloved and most widely employed handicraft. The *tush kyiz* – embroidered wall hangings – was one of the main types of embroidered item used for decorating yurts. These original embroidered textiles for walls were usually the yurt's main decoration.

The design of patterns was normally the responsibility of the most talented and experienced craftswomen, who often improvised without a prior plan.

M. Alimbekova
Tableware bag, “ayak kap”, 1930s
Cotton velvet, cotton fabric, silk threads,
cotton threads, fringe, embroidery, weaving
Fragment
© The State Museum of Oriental Art

The most common materials used as the base for embroidery were velvet, red broadcloth, silk, sateen. Most of the patterns and decorations employed in the Kyrgyz tradition are floral: all kinds of round rosettes filled with petals, twin vignettes, and *badam* (almond-shaped forms). Especially popular are a wide variety of swirly rosettes. Elements evoking body parts of different birds and animals are a fixture of Kyrgyz needlepoint ornaments. Along with these symbolic representations of various animals and birds, however, Kyrgyz embroidery also quite often features fully developed figures of animals and birds, and even genre scenes with human figures. The figures of animals and birds are usually stylised – weavers leave out all details that they consider redundant or insignificant. Nonetheless, the animals are easily recognizable, as their characteristic gestures, contours, and poses are always rendered delicately and accurately. Embroidery was used not only for large wall hangings but also for decorating all sorts of bags intended for crockery, clothes, and other accoutrements – *ayak kap*, *kuzgu kap*, *chaine kap*, and *kishik kap*. Because these bags had to be especially resistant to wear and tear, the fabrics for embroidery included broadcloth, felt and even leather and chamois.



S. Tuigunova
Hanging bag, "bashtyk". 1930s
Cotton fabric, silk threads, braid, fringe, tassels, hand embroidery
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Baysanova
Skirt, "beldemchi". Early 20th century
Velvet, flannel fabric (lining), cotton fabric, silk threads, cotton threads, hand embroidery, tambour seam
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Woman's cap, "chach kep". 1920s
Silk, cotton threads, braid, metal, mother of pearl, pendants, embroidery
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



An embroidery fragment. End of 19th century
Velvet, cotton fabric, silk threads, cotton threads, hand embroidery, tambour seam
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Tableware bag, "ayak kap". End of 19th century
Velvet, felt, silk threads, fringe, tassels, glass (beads), hand embroidery, tambour seam, weaving
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Tableware bag, "ayak kap". Late of 19th – early 20th century
Felt, velvet, cotton fabric, silk threads, braid, hand embroidery, tambour seam
© The State Museum of Oriental Art

Embroidery was featured prominently in women's dresses. Breastpieces on dresses were decorated with needlework, and ornate needlework was also featured on *beldemchi* – warm wrap skirts. Very elegant needlepoint ornaments figured on *chach kep* – small helmet-shaped hats worn by married women. Despite the small size of the embroidered areas (cheek flaps and tip-of-the-braid decorations), the ornaments on the *chach kep* are monumental and decorative, and also easily recognizable.

In the old days, the materials used by the Kyrgyz in the making of embroidered wall hangings, various bags and *torba* (carpet bags), pillows and accoutrements for horses included felt, leather and wools. Later, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, these materials were substituted with factory-made textiles – velvet, silks and cotton cloths. The art of embroidery absorbed many principles of the nomads' decorative handicrafts. The creators of the embroidered pieces – women who passed on from mother to daughter the traditions of abstract ornamentation – learned to achieve the best artistic results using sometimes the scarcest available resources.



The detail of the patchwork quilt, the "kurok". 1970s
Cotton fabric, silk fabric, velvet, tassels, cotton threads, patchwork technique, machine stitching
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Ceramics has nearly always been one of Korea's most noteworthy applied arts. As a craft where the creative potential of ordinary folks is prominently displayed, ceramics has always occupied a special place in the history of Korean culture. It was not by chance that the aspect of Korean artistic heritage to first receive recognition outside the country was Korean pottery, first of all celadons coated with bluish-green glaze. Pottery became a reflection of Korean artistic style in general.

The Korean pottery that won worldwide fame was porcelain-like stoneware produced during the reign of the Goryeo dynasty – the items were coated with light-green, greenish-grey or olive-green glaze, which later came to be known in Europe as “celadon”. Korean celadon objects (cheongja) catch the eye with their expressive forms, perfect proportions, the serene smoothness of their silhouettes, and the elegant hues of their glaze. The glaze with the subtlest shades of bluish-green, called in the Goryeo kingdom “kingfisher colour”, was considered especially valuable. The production of celadon and white porcelain (baekja) is the greatest accomplishment of Goryeo potters.

Researchers believe that the production of celadon pottery on the Korean Peninsula began in the 9th and early 10th centuries. These objects were broadly modelled on pottery from China – in particular, Yaozhou celadons from Zhejiang, China's south-eastern province. This is a region with which the Korean Peninsula had long-standing ties through trade by sea. The Koreans' consummate skills and rich traditions of producing high-temperature pottery enabled the craftsmen not only to quickly master the other artisans' skills, but also to come up with their own forms and shapes, enriching the array of celadon decorating techniques and achieving unique shades of glaze.

Goryeo potters' fondness of natural motifs was reflected both in the decoration and the shapes of the vessels. Lotus-shaped bowls on high bases enjoyed great popularity. Surviving Korean painted celadon objects include quite a lot of maebyeong vessels (derived from the Chinese meiping – literally “vases for plum branches”). Some of these vessels were discovered with lids. This suggests that the vessels may have been used by Koreans for wine storage.

The deep changes in the cultural life of Korean society during the Joseon dynasty's reign were occasioned first of all by the establishment of neo-Confucianism as the country's official ideology. Some of the most common ceramic items of the Joseon era were white porcelain objects called baekja – they became what might be called a symbol of the Confucian underpinnings of the society in the Joseon era.

Beginning from the 1750s, buyers of the porcelain became more numerous. Many newly rich people who, having risen from humble beginnings, were keen on copying the elite's lifestyle, spent abundantly in pursuit of this goal. Sure enough, the new consumers' tastes had an effect on the assortment of articles produced. The pottery became more diverse, with a pronounced trend toward embellishment. Other impactful factors causing the changes in the perceptions of beauty were a growing interest in the culture of China under the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) and the decline of the influence of orthodox Confucianism in the early 19th century. The art of porcelain painting blossomed during the Joseon era. Korean craftsmen preferred monochrome designs and painted the underglaze with cobalt-blue, or with dark-brown iron oxide paints, or with copper-red.

Vessel with lid. 1957
Porcelain, celadon glaze
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Rim Taekwang
Vase. 1980s
Porcelain, glaze, cobalt-blue and copper-red underglaze
© The State Museum of Oriental Art

Some North Korean vessels feature characteristic floral ornaments and forms. For instance, Jang Do Won shaped a vase as a calabash and painted calabash blossoms on it. Another vessel, created by Cheong Hyeong Jeong, features luffa leaves and fruits. Other images are featured as well. A wide celadon vase is adorned with a picture of flying storks, while a cylindrical container is crowned with a unicorn-shaped lid. North Koreans carried on the traditions of Korean pottery in the 20th century and continue to do so to this day, creating new artistic forms.



Jang Do Won
Vase. 1980s
Porcelain, glaze, iron underglaze
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Pak Gir Bam, Park Hyun-jung
Vase. 1980s
Porcelain, glaze, relief, engraving, copper-red underglaze
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Jeong Hyun Jung
Vase. 1980s
Porcelain, glaze, engraving
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Bowl. 1957
Porcelain, celadon glaze
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Vase. 1957
Porcelain, celadon glaze
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Kim Yong Song
Vase. 1980s
Porcelain, glaze, cobalt-blue and copper-red underglaze
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Republic of Cuba

The Cuban national costume is a colourful and elegant representation of the culture and heritage of this enchanting island. It reflects the richness and diversity of Cuban culture, which combines elements of Spanish, African, and Caribbean traditions.

One of the defining features of Cuban clothing is the use of bright and vivid colours. Red, yellow, green, and orange inspire energy and joy, and create a festive atmosphere.

Patterns such as geometric shapes, zigzags, and eye-catching prints are also a common element of Cuban dress. These bright colours and patterns reflect the cultural diversity and expressiveness of Cubans. Cuban clothing is often characterised by flowing fabrics and loose silhouettes that allow for freedom of movement. Women usually wear long flowing skirts or dresses made of lightweight materials, while men opt for loose shirts and pants. These convenient, easy-fitting garments do not restrict movement and also have an air of elegance and grace.

Headbands and turbans are important elements of Cuban dress, especially for women. They represent cultural symbols, fashion statements, as well as express personal style preferences. Headbands and turbans are often made of colourful fabrics, displaying intricate patterns and tying techniques. They add a touch of royalty and an ancestral connection, paying tribute to the African roots of Cuban culture.

Jewellery and accessories play an important role in Cuban dress, reinforcing the overall aesthetic and cultural significance. Women often wear beaded necklaces, bracelets, and earrings of bright colours with symbolic patterns. These accessories are not just mere decorations but items of spiritual and cultural significance that link their wearers to their historical heritage.

Embroidery and handmade details are common in Cuban clothing, reflecting the skill and creativity of local artisans. One can often see intricate embroidery on shirts, blouses, and dresses, showcasing traditional patterns and designs. Handmade details, such as appliques and beads, make the garments more stylish and visually interesting. These exquisite elements emphasize the craftsmanship and draw attention to the details that are characteristic of Cuban dress.

The guayabera, a stylish embroidered shirt, is one of the most popular traditional Cuban garments. These shirts usually have two or four front pockets, as well as two rows of pleats on the chest and three on the back, and buttons. Made from lightweight cotton fabrics, the shirts usually have long sleeves and a straight hem. However, there are also guayaberas with short sleeves. All are worn loose, which makes them ideal wear for Cuba's hot climate. The embroidery on the guayabera's chest and back comprises beautiful geometric patterns or floral motifs.

Another important element of Cuban men's national dress are pantaloons, loose pants worn high on the waist. These pants are usually made of lightweight and durable fabrics, such as cotton or linen, to ensure convenience and ease of movement. The colour of pantaloons may range from the classic white to bright rich hues.

To complete the image, accessories are often worn with the Cuban male dress, such as a scarf or a cord around the neck known as a paolet. Stylish hats are also popular, among them the Havana hat, which that adds a special charm and authenticity to the costume.

Dancers in costumes for dancing *son jarocho la bamba*



Costumista or “flower girls” – Cuban women in traditional dress carrying baskets of flowers

Cubans’ love of guayabera shirts may be seen in the modern female equivalent of this item, the guayabera dress. It is a simple buttoned summer dress decorated with the same pleats as men’s shirts. It is the perfect garment for everyday life in the hot and humid Cuban climate. The dress is light and unpretentious, without frills, attractive but not flashy. Unlike the guayabera shirts that are usually white, the guayabera dresses may be of any colour.

However, the most famous Cuban female folk dress is the Bata Cubana – gorgeous, colourful, and theatrical. This multicoloured dress with ruffles, long wide skirts, and fascinating shoulder cutouts fits closely to the body. The style was borrowed from the Spanish flamenco dress in the 19th century. However, the Cuban outfits are not entirely Spanish. They are a mixture of Spanish and African trends. Bata Cubana dresses are, for the most part, associated with rumba singers and dancers. For Bata Cubana, they use fabric with floral motifs, stripes, plaid prints or even with a combination of all these patterns. Lace and ribbons are used for decoration.

Cuban national dress is an essential part of Cuba’s cultural heritage. Its vivid colours, embroidery, and style create a unique atmosphere that reflects the beauty and diversity of this amazing country. These costumes, whether for festivities or for everyday life, reflect the spirit of the Cuban people and provide an excellent means to express both their distinctive personality and their cultural heritage.



Guayabera, straw fedora and cigars



Man wearing one of the folk costumes of Cuba



Female street performers smoking cigars in traditional Cuban dress



Dancers in colourul costumes celebrate Havana Day with a parade along Paseo de Marti in the historic La Habana Vieja neighbourhood



Dancers performing at the Tropicana Club in Havana



Performers at the Tropicana Club in Havana



Dancer performing at the Tropicana Club in Havana



Three Cuban women in traditional dresses in Havana



Lao People's Democratic Republic

For millennia, decorative art has been, and still is, critical to understanding the surrounding world through art in Southeast Asia and, more specifically, in Laos. To begin with, designs were associated with mythology and religious beliefs. This included depictions of people's beliefs around the creation and existence of the universe, our earliest ancestors and gods, and the forces controlling fertility and the bounties of the earth.

Decorations served as magic protection from the forces of nature, adversities, disease, demons, and evil spirits; they were believed to have the power to ward off evil spells, charm loved ones, and bring good luck and prosperity. Patterns reflected the social status of the wearer, their material and family situation, age, sex, and ethnicity. Designs involved a vast range of geometric, zoomorphic, and anthropomorphic motifs. The most ancient designs were geometric (stars, diamonds, triangles, swastikas, spirals, etc.), which were often perceived as hieroglyphs.

Motifs (plants, animals, ritual objects, human figures) gave the designs a certain theme – most often a religious or mythological one. The decorative culture of Laos is reflected in the various kinds of decorative and applied arts, and, in particular, textile designs. Textiles were used for different purposes, from tailoring traditional dress to creating decorative elements for home furnishings (murals, screens, etc.) or dolls' clothes. Fabrics also differ in how they are produced, namely in terms of dyeing techniques. But there are some similarities in all these kinds of Lao textiles, which remain unchanged, and that is the clear distinctiveness of the designs.

Common motifs include the tree of life, ears of rice, and guardian spirits originating in ancient animism and ancestor worship. Representations of plants, buffalo, horses, birds, and other animals are associated with fertility and prosperity. The figure of a sacred white elephant is commonly used in designs, as a symbol of the god Indra, the birth of Buddha, power, and prosperity. Flora and fauna are used to embellish scenes of fantasy creatures. Southeast Asia, including Laos, has its own version of a dragon that is depicted in art and folklore: Naga, the sacred serpent. In eastern cultures, dragons are commonly made up of the body parts of various animals. The Naga resembles no other ordinary snake: it is much larger, more majestic, with a head like a dragon, and other features vary according to the region. In Laos, the Naga is depicted with a splendid, flaming mane on its head, legs, and small wings. Lao patterns can depict fantasy birds with the head of elephants, mythical lions, and creatures that are half woman, half bird.

Woven into silk fabrics in the southern provinces of Laos are often small, thickset people with stalks of rice in raised hands. These images refer to agricultural ceremonies of sacrifice to the guardian spirits of the rice fields. Another anthropomorphic motif used is a semi-abstract figure of a woman wearing a diadem – she is the personification of the goddess (spirit) of rice.

Apron for women's costume
of the Hmong people (Meo Lai), Late 1970s
Cotton, silk, synthetic threads, weaving, sewing, embroidery, appliqué
© The State Museum of Oriental Art

Amongst smaller groups of Indochinese people living primarily in the mountain regions, appliqué and embroidery are techniques typically used in textile-making. The dress traditionally worn by Meo Lai (Hmong) women is decorated with intricate, multi-coloured geometric designs, cross-stitched on colourful strips of fabric. These patterns are often – and strikingly – placed on a black background. Specific characteristics of national dress and textiles are depicted not just in “real” clothes, but also in dolls’ clothes, which are made from traditional fabrics.

Laotians use gold and silver metallic thread in the making of ceremonial fabrics, as well as woven patterns on individual parts often overlaid with multi-coloured silk thread. Lao ornamental fabric is often bright and decorative, depicting a broad range of themes and images that are significant in Lao culture.



A border for a woman's skirt. First half of the 1970s
Cotton, silk, hand weaving
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Women's shawl phatum. 1950s
Cotton, silk, hand-patterned weaving
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Doll in national female costume of the Tai Deng people
First half of the 1970s
Papier-mache, fabric, wood, metal, seed beads, bamboo, sewing, weaving, painting
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Doll in national female costume of the Hmong people (Meo Lai)
First half of the 1970s
Papier-mache, fabric, wood, metal, sewing, embroidery, painting
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



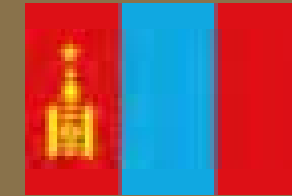
Fabric for women's skirts. Late 1970s
Silk, matmi technique (ikat), hand weaving
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Women's skirt or "sinh". First half of the 1970s
Cotton, silk, hand weaving, matmi technique (ikat)
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Screen. First half of the 1980s
Cotton, synthetic threads, hand weaving
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Mongolia

Mongolian national dress has a rich history and many centuries of artistic traditions. It is closely linked to the way of life of Mongolian people, the particular features of their economic system, and the country's natural conditions. Their clothing needs to be fitting for all kinds of everyday situations, whether someone rides across the steppes on horseback, sits at home in a yurt, or dances at traditional festivities. The distinct climate has also influenced the way of dress, resulting in clothing designed for different times of year.

In summer, Mongolians wear a light robe, or “törlök”, in spring and autumn either a cotton robe, “khovontei dööl”, or one made of lambskin called a “khurgan dotortoi dööl”, and in winter a sheepskin robe, “tsagaan nökhii dööl”, resembling a fur coat. Clothing also reflects the age of the person wearing it. As a rule, clothing worn by older generations is modest and muted in colour, while young people tend to wear more colourful, stylish attire. Women's clothing differs between girls and married women, with that of married women being more ornate with richer adornments.

Mongols have long worn robes with an oblique border, the “tashuu öngertei dööl”, and one reminiscent of a waistcoat with a straight border, the “sadgai öngertei dööl”. This can be seen in the clothes worn during the Hun dynasty, which were discovered during excavations of the Noin-Ula burial mounds. Garment design, colour combination, and decorative detail all testify to the ancient culture of the Mongol people. The materials used in making Mongol clothing tie in with Mongolian culture and the culture of neighbouring countries in the East. As well as this, Mongolian national identity has had a very clear influence on the art of clothing design and the distinctive national character of Mongolian dress. Rectangular borders later became very popular: “durbölzhin öngertei dööl”.

Under changing socio-economic conditions, the national dress underwent further evolution, with ancient traditions preserved in new ways. To this day, Mongols continue to wear robes with oblique borders (tashuu öngertei dööl) and rectangular borders (durbölzhin öngertei dööl). The materials used to make clothing, such as leather, wool, and fur, were produced by the Mongols themselves or were imported. It is unclear when they started manufacturing textiles in Mongolia; however, we know that clothes have a long history of being made from silk, cotton, wool, and brocade. Some fabrics, particularly during the reign of the Hun dynasty, were introduced from other countries in the East. Of course, clothing was made from different materials according to the season. Wadding for winter clothing was made from sheepskin, goatskin, wolf skin, or the pelts of corsac foxes, lynxes, wolverines, raccoons, foxes, or sables. Winter coats might be made from just sheepskin, or sometimes the outer part was made from cotton, tussore, silk, brocade, or satin. White sheepskin was often dyed yellow or green and adorned. Summer clothes were made from cotton, tussore, silk, brocade, satin, cloth, or velvet. Thin fabric was used for the lining. Generally, clothes were richly adorned. Traditional craftspeople were skilled artisans who made adornments from gold, silver, coral, pearls, and other precious stones.

Newly married couple in traditional outfits
near old temple in Ulaanbaatar



Mongolian people in traditional dress walking on frozen Lake Khuvsgul

Looking at Mongolian national dress, you can see the history of its people and its culture embodied in it. Making clothes has always been considered an art form. There has been a long list of real artists famous for their handicraft. Tailors had to have a wide range of skills and knowledge; they were both artists and embroiderers, who needed to know how to glue and quilt, and understand the symbolism behind clothing decorations, colours, and colour combinations. There is a longstanding tradition of adorning clothes with ornaments. Each piece of clothing has a unique type of ornament with a symbolism of its own.

The colour range used in Mongolian dress is fascinating. Traditional clothing was mostly brown or dark blue. As we know, Mongolians are a diverse population, made up of the Khalkha, Buryat, Dörbet, Torghut, Barga, Dariganga, Uzemchin, Bayad, Uriankhai, Khoton, Mingat, Zakhchin, Darkhad, Ölot, and Kazakh people. Of course, national differences are inevitably apparent in clothing. Variations in dress between groups of people can be seen in the pattern, colours, cut, and fit. For example, there are differences in the border of robes, the style of waistcoats worn over the robes, the edging around the borders, the adornments and ornaments. Khalkha people tend to wear dark blue and brown, while Buryats wear dark blue, and Khotons dark colours. Almost all peoples use black velvet for trimming, and even put a thin strip of black velvet on the very edge of the border. However, the style of trimming differs, sometimes having a square cut, and other times not. Women's waistcoats, "uuj" are generally similar, but there can be certain differences in patterns. Like the Khalkha, Mingat women wear clothing with large pleats on the sleeves; however, the seams on Khalkha pleats run horizontally, whereas Mingats have vertical seams. Some men wear robes with slashes, just like women. Women's national dress also differs by the adornments.



Mongolian national headdresses



Mongolian cavalry colour guard begins Nadaam festival of national games



Mongolian couple in traditional outfits near old temple in Ulaanbaatar

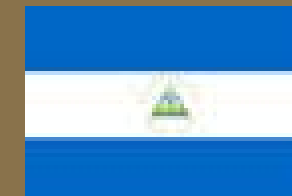
The unique Mongolian headdresses are truly distinctive. Nearly all peoples have their own style, form, and colour scheme for the headdresses and adornments, and so there are many types of Mongolian hats. In the western part of Mongolia, “toortsog”, “yuden”, and “jarantai” hats are worn, which are distinct from the headdresses of the Khalkha and Buryat people.

There are also several types of footwear worn by Mongols: “naamal ultai gutal”, boots with glued-on soles, “sholkhoitoi gutal”, and “khanchin gutal”. There are differences too in the footwear worn by different national groups. While Torghtu people wear “tookhuu gutal”-style boots, Buryats wear “ulsan gutal”.

Studying the history of Mongolian dress helps understanding the course of the cultural evolution, and in particular the evolution of folk art, and is a valuable part of ethnographic research. Drawing on the rich traditions of Mongolian dress, contemporary artisans and folk artists are making use of everything that has survived through the centuries and are creating new specimens of national clothing.

Traditional Mongolian dress at sunset, Ulaanbaatar ►





Republic of Nicaragua

Nicaragua is a nation with beautiful and rich diversity of handicrafts. Nicaraguan pottery is absolutely beautiful and very popular. Pottery making has been a part of the culture since pre-Columbian times here and hence the pieces are inspired by traditional pre-Columbian designs. All the pottery collection that you see here are entirely handmade. All of the Nicaraguan handmade pottery is made using a manual “kick” wheel to throw the desired shape. The potters of Nicaragua use mineral oxides to colour the vases. They then fire them at low temperatures in brick kilns. Most of the potteries of Nicaragua come from San Juan de Oriente, a small village near Nicaragua’s capital, Managua. Among the various styles, individual pieces may be painted in the traditional fashion, using natural mineral oxides for the different colours, or they may be accented by scoring or etching the outer layer of soft clay or even pecking to remove a portion of the outer-most layer to produce a 3-dimensional effect.

Finishing the pot requires baking it in kilns made out of adobe bricks and other local materials to create a basic, wood-burning oven in the traditional bee hive configuration. The process of “firing” the pots begins with low heat, followed by hours of gradual increasing temperature. Once the maximum temperature is reached, it is maintained for several more hours. After the kiln has cooled – usually a whole day later – the pots are removed and shined with a soft cloth.

The ceramics of old were made by coil, decorated with colours of mineral oxides and then fired in pits in the ground. Today most is done on a foot powered potters wheel. Many of the pots are in the style known as “inciso”, or incised, a traditional technique dating back more than 2500 years. Many are still decorated with traditional Pre-Columbian designs. Some of the potters of today are utilizing the techniques of old keeping the ancient traditions and styles alive.

There is also a long tradition of pottery manufacture for export. Nicaraguan ceramics have been found at burial sites throughout Honduras and Costa Rica. There are numerous studios in town producing pottery that will be sold through out the county.

Paul Henry Devoti
Sea Sky Sequence
Clay, glaze, fine etching with acrylic colours



Paul Henry Devoti
Tortugas
Clay, glaze, fine etching with acrylic colors



Paul Henry Devoti
Electric Symbols & Sea
Clay, glaze, fine etching with acrylic colours



Ceramic handcrafts along the main road of San Juan Oriente in the highlands between Granada and Masaya



Colourful vases at a local market in Granada



Types of colourful ceramic pots and vases



Small group of traditional pots



Ceramic handcrafts along the main road of San Juan Oriente in the highlands between Granada and Masaya



Paul Henry Devoti
 Maya Garden
 Clay, glaze, fine etching with acrylic colours



Republic of Poland

In a small city in southwest Poland, some of the world's most beautiful pottery is produced for sale around the world. The stoneware known as Bolesławiec pottery – named after the medieval city of Bolesławiec – is popular among collectors and bakers alike. The classic organic designs in cobalt, green, and red paint complement the natural cream of the local clay. Today, modern designs build upon the traditional as the craft is an important element of Polish culture and folk art. To fully appreciate contemporary examples of this eye-catching craft, one would have to take a look back at the history of Bolesławiec wares.

The town of Bolesławiec – in present-day Poland – has a long history of producing quality pottery which was coveted across Europe. Nestled into a region known as Silesia, evidence of active potters' workshops in the city dates from the 15th century. By 1511, a guild of potters had been established to regulate access to the craft, as was customary in late-medieval Europe. The early pottery products of these workshops were stoneware vessels fired from the fine local clay. The jugs and tankards were decorated with raised patterns and covered in a brown slip glaze. Tin, silver, or pewter tops could be added.

The 18th century brought innovation in styles and materials. Bolesławiec became a part of the Kingdom of Prussia in 1742. This new unity with Germanic lands brought an influx of potters to the region. The Prussian rulers took an interest in Bolesławiec pottery (Bunzlauer in German) and encouraged its growth by facilitating the exchange of ideas between local potters and renowned professors of art. To meet new consumer needs, potters produced new items such as coffee and tea pots. New techniques of molded reliefs glazed in white were added on top if the classic brown background of vessels. Potters also experimented with "cold-painted" overlays of heraldry and religious iconography.

During the 19th century, Bolesławiec pottery developed the classic look seen today. The most influential figure in this development was Johann Gottlieb Altmann. In addition to refining the purity of the clay used, Altmann developed a feldspar-based clear glaze to replace the more expensive, brown glaze (which contained lead, a recently discovered hazard). He also began to cast vessels rather than using traditional wheel techniques. Inspired by classical designs, Altmann's work won international recognition and inspired much interest in Bolesławiec pieces.

By the 1880s and 1890s, Bolesławiec pottery was in high demand, with over 20 shops operating within the city. A royal pottery school was established in the city to further the craft. It was during this period that – utilizing the clear feldspar glaze – the cobalt blue and white patterns were introduced. Potters hand-cut sponges into designs, then slowly stamped their wares (hence spongeware). The fine natural clay of the region was light enough to allow for such embellishment. The potters quickly incorporated popular organic motifs typical of the Jugendstil period in Germany – known to Americans as Art Nouveau. By the early 20th century, the most iconic pattern – known as Pfauenauge, or peacock's eyes – had become popular. Art Deco designs were also produced.

Classic handmade pottery produced in Bolesławiec



Handmade pottery with blue pattern produced in Boleslawiec

Production of the pottery encountered difficulties in the 20th century. The inter-war period in Germany was marked by a cratering economy. Although production was increasingly industrialized and airbrush and stencil techniques made hand-finishing pieces easier, potters had to band their workshops together to survive economically. World War II proved a radical shift in the history of both the region and Bolesławiec pottery. A defeated Germany forfeited Silesia to Poland, and the German residents of Bolesławiec were expelled. Many continued their craft in East or West German towns, but Bolesławiec was left mostly bereft of artisans.

A strong Polish government effort began in 1946 to rescue the traditional folk art. Factories were rebuilt and ceramic artists recruited from elsewhere in Poland. Now under communist rule, pottery became a cooperative much like other production. The CPLiA Cooperative was founded in 1950, and its training programs produced countless new artisans to carry on the craft. A post-communism version of the cooperative is still active in producing traditional pottery today.

Bolesławiec pottery is still produced today. Often referred to internationally as Polish pottery, it is a popular collectable in the United States and internationally. Each piece is hand-crafted, building on the long-established traditions of the region. The pottery is still made from local white clay fired to extreme temperatures. Each piece is hand-stamped with free-hand details and coated in a lead-free glaze. The pottery may be very beautiful, but it is also extremely useful in the kitchen. As stoneware, these lovely dishes can resist the heat of microwaves and ovens while also remaining crack-free in the freezer.

Modern producers of Bolesławiec pottery are constantly developing new designs which incorporate popular historic motifs. Some classic patterns commonly found today include the Old Poland, the Floral Peacock (a variation on the classic peacock eye motif), the Crimson Bells, and the Emerald Mosaic. Whatever your taste – traditional, modern, or bohemian – artisans have created patterns that broad audiences are sure to find appealing.



Classic jug with blue pattern produced in Boleslawiec



Colourful handmade pottery produced in Boleslawiec



Classic handmade pottery produced in Boleslawiec

These patterns can be found on virtually any ceramic form imaginable. Spoon rests, platters, teapots, mugs, and bowls are just some of the many forms taken by Polish pottery. While they are durable, proper care will preserve these stunning pieces for generations to come.

Each piece is unique due to hand-painting, but some are true one-of-a-kind creations by the most esteemed and experienced artisans. After many years of work, an artisan reaches a point when they are able to produce their own pieces from start to finish. These pieces are identified as *unikat*, or unique. They are often more expensive but make excellent additions to any collection. Through works such as this, as well as pattern development, the art of Bolesławiec pottery continues to develop.



Russian Federation

Goldwork, an age-old handicraft practiced for centuries by various ethnic groups living in Russia, is a technique of embroidery by hand using metal threads that are gold or silver in colour. In the 5th century, the technique was employed by Byzantine and Persian craftsmen to decorate clothes and household objects. Goldwork embroidery is also known to have been used in the decoration of religious objects, such as Quran covers, Aër veils (the outer covers of sacred vessels in the Eastern Orthodox church), elements of Orthodox liturgical vestments, and Torah mantles.

Later, this craft was adopted in Western Europe, where it was used mostly in the making of priestly attire. In old Russia, goldwork arrived together with Christianity from Byzantium in the 11th century. Goldwork workshops, established at monasteries and royal and princely courts, began to thrive.

Initially, this embroidery technique did use threads made of real gold and was called “zolotnaya”. Later gold threads were replaced with gilded metal. When the technique was at its height, goldwork skills were highly valued, since the craft requires great assiduity, patience, and accuracy. Goldwork is one of the most labour-intensive types of handicraft.

The workshops used very strong fabrics that could withstand thousands of piercings. Velvet, leather, broadcloth, and sometimes silk were the materials of choice.

Goldwork was used to adorn the Epitaphios icons of Christ’s dead body, religious banners, the Aër covers of church vessels, and liturgical garments. In the 15th and 16th centuries, when ecclesiastical goldwork had its heyday, it spawned several regional traditions, the most famous among them being the Novgorod, Suzdal-Vladimir and Moscow schools of goldwork. The trade in goldwork embroidery reached its peak in the 17th–19th centuries. The most famous producers were workshops operating in St. Petersburg, Moscow and Torzhok, as well as in the Novodevichy and Ivanovsky Convents in Moscow.

Goldwork was also practiced in other regions of the Russian Empire. In the Russian north, distinctive items were produced by craftswomen living in Sol’vychegodsk and the villages of the Olonetsk and Vologda governorates. In Russia’s heartland and the south, the centres of goldwork were the rural and urban areas of the Nizhny Novgorod, Kostroma, Kaluga, Tambov, Voronezh, and Belgorod regions, among others. In the 19th century, goldwork became a popular decoration for the festive dresses not only of rich urban dwellers but of wealthy peasants as well. The embroidery techniques in use were diverse. In the old days, double-sided satin stitch was popular: silk and gilded threads were split in half to produce identical patterns on both sides.

In the 18th–19th centuries, among the most widely used techniques were couching stitch, cardboard embroidery, and v lom stitch.

Couching stitch is used for filling large spaces with decoration. Long threads are secured on the base fabric with one or several short cross stitches.

Cardboard embroidery: embroidery on a piece of thick paper folded several times, or on a thick cloth, or on a piece of birch bark.

V lom stitch is the technique of tightly spaced stitches completely filling the surface within the outlines of a decoration on a fabric. It often involved “splitting”, when the working thread was brought out and back using the same entry and exit hole, drawing the metal thread to the reverse side.

“Russian” court dress. Second half of the 19th century
Moire, silk, velvet, silver-gilt thread, gauze
© Moscow Kremlin Museums



Decorated caftan of Tsar Peter I. 1689
Brocade, brocaded satin, taffeta, silver-gilt lace
© Moscow Kremlin Museums

The chain stitch technique – a series of interconnected looped stitches forming a chain – was used less often. On some occasions, embroiderers applied the “samite stitch” (aksamitnyi in Russian) technique to imitate the texture of fleecy fabrics: a knitting pin was stitched with a metal thread to the base fabric and then removed, resulting in a raised pattern.

Tatar embroiderers in the Volga region had used gilded and silvery threads to decorate clothes, household objects and sacred objects from time immemorial. Krymchaks, Karaites and Crimean Tatars had, since the dawn of time, decorated clothes and other items with goldwork. Crimean Tatars in the 16th–19th centuries were familiar with a variety of goldwork embroidery techniques. In addition to one-sided satin stitch, which filled only the outside of the fabric with pattern, popular types of embroidery also included double-sided satin stitch and Hardanger embroidery. Hardanger involves the drawing of threads in a particular order, forming small holes that produce an openwork motif. Hardanger was used on loosely woven, mostly thin textiles: batiste, marquissette, voile, and other sheer fabrics. The technique was applied to embellish young women’s headscarves, as well as decorative and church towels.



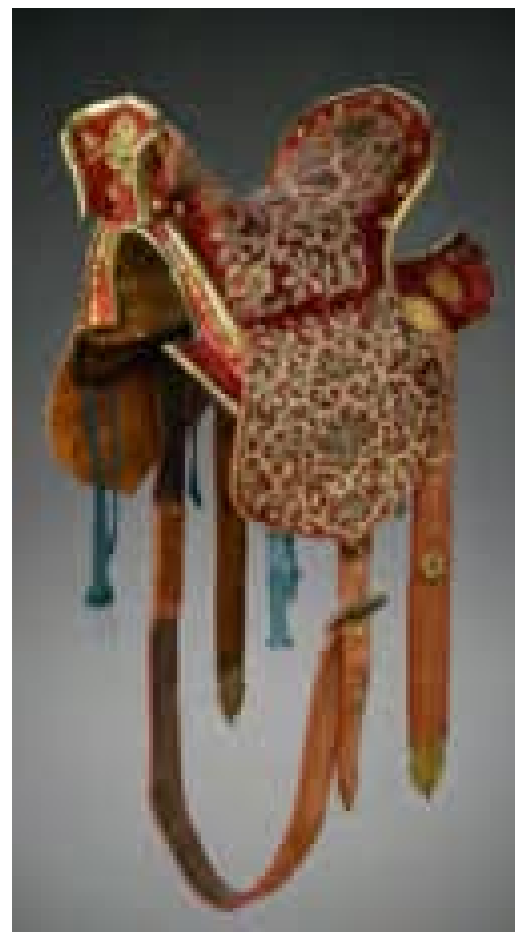
Sakkos (dalmatic) “Kolomensky”. Belonged to Patriarch Nikon. 1653
Silver-gilt satin, taffeta, velvet, pearls, silver-gilt threads, silk threads, gold, silver, precious stones
© Moscow Kremlin Museums



Barmy (regalia collar). Belonged to Tsar Fyodor Ivanovich. 1584–1598
Brocaded damask, silver-gilt thread, silk thread, cotton thread, satin
© Moscow Kremlin Museums



Yuri Frobos
Diamond Cap of Tsar Ivan Alexeevich. 1687
Gold, silver, diamonds, spinel, gold-woven fabric, fur
© Moscow Kremlin Museums



Saddle. Belonged to Tsar Ivan IV the Terrible
The 16th century
Gold, wood, leather, velvet, precious stones, silver-gilt threads
© Moscow Kremlin Museums

Goldwork was often featured on the festive clothing of women living in the Caucasus region. For the Kalmyk residents of Astrakhan and Stavropol governorates, Terskaya oblast and the Don Cossack oblast, patterns embroidered with golden and silvery threads were one of the main decorative elements of both men's and women's clothes. These decorations featured padded satin stitch combined with golden or silver galloon trims and passementerie. Padded satin stitch lent volume to embroidered items. Padded embroidery consisted of two layers of stitchwork: a padding below and needlework above.

In Siberia, only Yakuts practiced goldwork. They used golden or silvery threads to embroider the broadcloth tops of women's festive headpieces made of wolverine fur. Raised satin stitch also adorned women's purses and tobacco pouches. Raised satin stitch is accomplished with artificial silk on a monochrome cloth. This type of work requires a special, Z-twisted thread – a thread twisted counterclockwise, unlike other types of yarn.

Elegant chain-stitch goldwork embellished church vessels, women's and men's headwear, wedding towels, headscarves, festive shirts made of delicate linen cloth and courtiers' intricately designed and skilfully crafted ceremonial outfits.

Admirals, generals and senior officials took pride in their uniforms decorated with embroidery accomplished by Russian craftswomen. Foreigners at the royal court were stunned by the abundance of silvery lace, ornate goldwork embroidery decorations, and dazzling gems sported by ladies of the court.

Goldwork became an important handicraft industry in medieval Russia. Practitioners of the craft made a great contribution to its progression and the formation of its various ethnic traditions, which continued to develop in the context of folk art in the following centuries. Russian needlewomen became so good at goldwork that church items featuring their work were brought from Russia to other countries. Today the town of Torzhok in Tver oblast remains the main centre of this handicraft in Russia.



Caftan of the masquerade costume.
Belonged to Emperor Nicholas II. 1903
Silver-gilt velvet, silk, satin, gold, precious stones, pearls, braid
© Moscow Kremlin Museums



Romania

Pottery in Romania goes back to antiquity. It was an important part of culture as early as the Neolithic period.

Peasants from many regions of Romania, rich with clay, make ceramics. Nowadays, potters work in artisan workshops or producers' cooperative workshops. As a rule, pottery is made on a throwing wheel. Thrown pots are decorated with various patterns and glazed, and then fired in special kilns. Everyday earthenware often is not glazed.

The tools used for ceramic art are very simple: cones, brushes, combs, and paintbrushes. Ceramics are painted as they spin on the throwing wheel, or freehand.

One of the more distinctive and curious features of Romanian ceramics is the contrast between the simplicity of the techniques and the level of artistry; despite employing extremely simple techniques, potters have great artistic skill.

Earthenware is patterned using different techniques: painting, sgraffito, and bas-relief. The most widespread technique is painting, which can be done in different ways depending on how the product will be used. Everyday ceramics (such as water pitchers or milk jugs) are not glazed and the paint is applied to brown and red clay using an engobe.

Despite being simple and modest, these patterns incorporate circles, spirals, undulating lines, etc., that go so elegantly and harmoniously with the shape of the pot. In addition to coloured patterns, ceramics can be decorated using various colours of glazing, which can cover the whole pot or just certain parts of it. Various metal oxides can be used as the raw materials for ceramic colourants: lead sulphide (yellow), copper oxide (green), iron oxide (red), cobalt oxide (blue). The glaze that artists use in traditional ceramics is always transparent.

Unglazed black ceramics are a particularly interesting style of pottery. With its prehistoric traditions, black ceramics have survived in some areas of Romania (Suceava, Iași Counties, and the territories known before as the Hungarian Autonomous Region of the Romanian People's Republic). Black ceramics are decorated by rubbing the raw clay with flint and then, after firing, the polished strokes create a matte background for the pot.

Romanian ceramics come in different varieties, closely associated with their intended use. Pottery can be separated into two main categories: ordinary, everyday objects and decorative items. The most common kind of everyday ceramics are pitchers used for storing and carrying liquids; pots for cooking and presenting food; large pitchers with handles; storage jars; and, finally, plates and bowls. Plates, bowls, cups, and decanters serve as interior decorations – especially in Transylvania. Such items are beautifully decorated.



Traditional pottery in the form of plates, decorated for specific purposes, Corund area, Transylvania



Traditional ceramic plates, Horezu area

One of the most interesting categories of traditional ceramics is zoomorphic and anthropomorphic pieces (jugs, pipes, toys). These objects come from an ancient tradition and are notable for the true artistry involved. Made in the style of primitive realism, they are full of humour and expression. The most famous centres for this style are the village of Oboga near Craiova, as well as Bucharest and Ploiești Counties.

Glazed tile stoves are widespread amongst the local population of Transylvania. The oldest ceramic tiles date back to the 15th and 16th centuries and are unglazed. Glazed tiles began to appear in the 18th century and were decorated with relief designs. They are common in households in Suceava County and are beautifully decorated in a style known as “de Kutý”.

Potters use a rich and varied range of motifs for decorating these ceramics. Evolving from old and well-established tradition, folk ceramics have always developed to have decorations that are greatly varied and enriched with elements.

Geometric patterns are most common: spirals, circles, and zigzags have a long tradition associated with throwing wheel techniques. Floral patterns are widespread, particularly in Transylvania, while figures, although rarer, feature all over the country.

As with other areas of folk art, each county in Romania had its own decorative style according to the historical developments that took place under the feudal system.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the main centre for pottery in Oltenia was Horezu. It is known for having its own specific technique: a horn is used to apply the patterns, then the patterns are “scratched” with a brush made of pig hair, creating the impression of little scales. These most valuable ceramics in the country came in specific colours: brown, red, and green.

The other oldest and largest centre for pottery production in Oltenia is Oboga. Ceramics in this village are known for their beautiful and elegant shapes.



Ceramic works which display old handicrafts, Romanian culture and tradition. Vases with Lady's bedstraw or yellow bedstraw flowers. (“Cucuteni” National Fair, Copou Park)



Romanian ceramic jug with traditional painted patterns



Traditional Romanian handmade ceramics from Sibiu at the potters' fair



Traditional handcrafted pottery mugs and pottery jugs

In the Muntenia region, the oldest and most significant ceramics centre was Curtea de Argeş. Here, large jugs with relief patterns are made, now just as in times past. In modern times, the main centres of ceramic production, both in terms of production and number of potters, are found in the lower Danube regions: Pisc and Pucheni. The most significant places in Transylvania for Romanian ceramics can be found in Bihor, Maramureş, and Țara Oașului.

Bihor ceramics are crude and plain, but their patterns are distinct for their clean lines. Patterns are applied using brown, white, and red clay against the natural brick-red ceramic and covered by a thin layer of glazing reminiscent of Greek pottery.

Vama is the main centre for ceramics in Țara Oașului County, but Maramureş is known for Iza River Valley pottery. Very ornate sgraffito ceramics are produced in these two counties. In Maramureş, they are more delicate, while in Țara Oașului County, crude; geometric patterns are skilfully and artistically combined with floral patterns and figures.

Ceramics are one of the main types of traditional applied arts in Romania. Over the years, artisan potters have demonstrated clear intent to preserve local traditions, adapting them to modern-day themes.



Hearth in the Music Room and Library, Dracula's Castle, Bran, Transylvania



Syrian Arab Republic

The walls and ceilings of Syria's ancient houses have preserved the magnificent, colourful Ajami artwork to this day. Known in Arabic as “Hashabiyat Mazuwna” this exquisite painted wood panelling is a historic interior decoration technique and one of Syria's most renowned crafts.

Ajami panels and ceilings were essential elements in the elaborate interior decoration of private homes in Syrian cities from the 16th to the 19th centuries. They interact delicately with beautiful stone mosaics, softly coloured paste work, gilded and painted masonry, magnificent tiles, and exquisite textiles. Over time, decorative techniques evolved along with the motifs. Patterns, floral vases, and small landscapes show influences from India to France and from Iran to Turkey. The decorations reflect the specific taste of each owner-builder and the exceptional craftsmanship of artisan workshops. The materials for the painted wood panelling were usually sourced locally, while rare pigments and dyes were imported from distant locations. Artisans had to balance the ambitious task of creating spectacular, vibrant surface decorations using expensive materials while making them affordable for their clients. Modern analytical techniques and microscopic examinations now enable scientists to uncover some of the lost secrets, including the special effects and extraordinarily brilliant colours the artisans achieved. Among the rediscovered painting materials are ground cobalt glass (known as smalt), carmine (a dark red dye made from insects), and aloe (a colourant for orange lacquer).

In 18th-century Damascus, there were no stores selling ready-made paints. All the materials for Ajami panels were handmade in workshops. The paints were prepared by grinding minerals, processing vegetable dyes, or using toxic materials. One of the most fascinating materials was a sparkling orange-yellow pigment, widely used for its intense golden colour and the double refraction of light in its crystal structure. Although fascinating for the artisans, this pigment was also dangerous due to its highly toxic nature – it was pure arsenic. The bright blue paint, sometimes visible under layers of brown varnish, was created by tinting glass with expensive cobalt oxide during the heating process, and then grinding the glass into powder.

The old masters also knew which liquid worked best when mixed with pigments to produce vivid colours. For example, blue glass powder appears black when mixed with oil or resin but turns bright blue when mixed with egg white or glue. The bright red colour was achieved by first applying a bright orange base coat, which was then covered with a thin layer of expensive vermilion. The thin red layer by itself would have been quite pale.

The special effect of Ajami reliefs was created using a thick paste made from unburnt gypsum and glue. This mixture had to be quickly applied to the wood, as it needed to be heated to about 60 °C to remain liquid enough to create the raised pattern. At lower temperatures, the paste would harden too quickly, preventing the artisan from completing the motifs. Artisans had to be experienced and skilled, with a quick and steady hand, and they needed to know the motifs by heart to create intricate ornaments with this challenging material.

Aleppo Room. 1600–1603

Cedar wood, walnut wood, boxwood, cut, carved, drilled, painted and gilded

Panel fragment

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Photo: Georg Niedermeiser

Artisans didn't just use various paints and tinted varnishes; they were also masters at applying metal leaf and foil. They used special brushes and tools to lay out razor-thin gold leaf, as well as thicker copper leaf and tin foil. These metals were applied to raised ornaments, creating a unique reflection of light. Some metals were polished to a shine, while others were applied to a rough surface for a matte effect, similar to modern metallic paint. All of these efforts were made to create special surface textures and contrasts between polished gold leaf and matte shimmering azure blue, silver-coloured tin foil and glossy dark red lacquer, satin pink and light blue, glossy copper leaf and silky orange paint, and matte violet and green lacquer. The elaborate composition of surface decoration, with its layers of shimmering patterns and colours, produced the uniquely magnificent atmosphere of Damascene residences.

The patterns and colours of painted wood decor are similar to those found in stone mosaics. Motifs in ceiling patterns can be repeated on the flooring as well. The finely honed black marble that forms the background of many mosaic panels blends perfectly with the bright black lines of the painted pattern on the Ajami panels. Silver and gold threads in silk fabrics and embroideries reflect the metal-leafed elements on the walls and ceilings, while colourful rugs and ornamental cushions harmonise with the painted wood panels. Mother-of-pearl inlays and mirrors shimmer with silver light, creating a sparkling effect that echoes the dazzling water of the fountain spouts. The play of light throughout the day is one of the most exciting discoveries in these rooms, as it suggests the decoration was designed to continually delight the owners and guests during long stays in the house, gradually changing the atmosphere and expression. The well-balanced combination of vibrant colours, ornaments, and architectural elements is a testament to the high quality of craftsmanship and leaves a lasting impression on visitors.



Aleppo Room. 1600–1603
Cedar wood, walnut wood, boxwood, cut, carved, drilled, painted and gilded
© Museum für Islamische Kunst der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Photo: Georg Niedermeiser



Aleppo Room. 1600–1603
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Photo: Georg Niedermeiser

Knowledge of materials, painting techniques, and motifs was handed down in family workshops from generation to generation. However, with the decline in the use of Ajami decorations after the 1850s, many of these secrets were lost. There were two main reasons for this: firstly, the dramatic changes in people's economic status after the Ottoman Empire opened access to cheap goods from industrial Europe; and secondly, the change in people's tastes and the style of home décor. Over time, most of the secrets of Ajami art were lost forever, with only a few of them detectable today through scientific analysis and research.



Aleppo Room. 1600–1603
Cedar wood, walnut wood, boxwood, cut, carved, drilled, painted and gilded
Panel fragment
© Museum für Islamische Kunst der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Photo: Georg Niedermeiser



Federal Republic of Somalia

Somali art is the artistic culture of the Somali people, both historic and contemporary. This includes artistic traditions in pottery, music, architecture, woodcarving and other crafts. Somali art is characterised by its aniconism, partly as a result of the vestigial influence of the pre-Islamic mythology of the Somalis, coupled with their ubiquitous Muslim beliefs. However, there have been cases in the past of artistic depictions representing living creatures such as the golden birds on Mogadishan canopies, ancient rock paintings, and plant decorations on religious tombs in Somalia, but these are considered rare. Instead, intricate patterns and geometric designs, bold colours, and monumental architecture were the norm.

The oldest evidence of art in the Somali peninsula are pre-historic rock paintings. The rock art of Laas Geel is thought to be some of the best preserved in Africa, representing cows with ceremonial decorations accompanied by humans. The necks of the cows are ornamented with a kind of apron, and some of the cows are depicted as wearing decorative robes. The paintings not only show cows, but also domesticated dogs and a giraffe.

Aspects of ancient Somali styles of architecture and art can be seen in the various Somali civilisations that flourished under Islam, particularly during the Mogadishan Golden Age and the Empire of Ajuran period (especially in the domain of architecture). In the early modern and contemporary era, poetry and theatrical performance shaped much of contemporary Somali artistic culture.

Carving, known in Somali as qoris, is a highly respected profession in Somalia both in historic and modern times. Many wealthy urbanites in the medieval period regularly employed the finest wood and marble carvers in Somalia to work on their interiors and houses. The carvings on the mihrabs and pillars of ancient Somali mosques are some of the oldest on the continent. Artistic carving was considered the province of men, just as the Somali textile industry was mainly women's business. Among the nomads, carving, especially woodwork, was widespread and could be found on the most basic objects such as spoons, combs and bowls, but also on more complex structures such as the portable nomadic house, the aqal. In the last several decades, traditional carving of windows, doors and furniture has taken a backseat to the introduction of workshops employing electrical machinery, which deliver the same results in a far shorter time.

The textile culture of Somalia is an ancient one, and the Somali textile industry in Mogadishu was, from at least the 13th century to the late 19th century, considered to be one of the main textile hubs in the Indian Ocean. It competed with those of the Indians and later the Americans in domestic and foreign markets such as Egypt and Syria.

The goldsmiths and blacksmiths of the cities, though often shunned by the dominant nomadic culture for their occupation, fashioned the city-dwellers' traditional displays of wealth and power through ornaments such as jewellery in the case of women or the intricately designed Somali dagger (toraay) in the case of men.



Carved spoons
Wood
© Manchester Museum



Ear-ring, 1928
Silver
© The British Museum



Headrest
Wood
© Minneapolis Institute of Art



Bottle with stopper. First half of 20th century
Wood, leather, plant fibers
© Minneapolis Institute of Art



Mat. 1875–1923
Straw, cowrie shells, glass
© The British Museum



Woven mat. 1875–1923
Grass, cotton, glass, cowrie shells
© The British Museum



Quiver with arrows. 1901–1926
Skin, wood, cotton, iron, sinew (?), feather, fibres (?)
© The British Museum



Republic of Tajikistan

Central Asian ceramics of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and Tajik ceramics in particular, is a distinctive artistic phenomenon which has yet to be fully appreciated and which was incorporated into daily routines in Tajik homes during the period indicated, just as it used to be in the past. And, while in rich homes wealth was now showcased through a display of imported Russian porcelain, which served not only as tableware but also as a decoration – it was placed in wall niches for all guests of a *mekhmonkhana* (*mehmonxona*) or guesthouse to see – locally produced pottery remained popular among common people, and not only because it was cheaper compared to the imports but also because, according to local folk beliefs, it had special qualities.

It was believed that a meal prepared in a clay vessel tasted better than a meal prepared in an iron pot. Some rituals required the use of only ritualistically clean vessels made of fired clay – a clean and godly material for, according to the Quran, the first human was made of clay similar to potter's clay. During the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, the faithful preferred eating and drinking from ceramic plates and bowls, which were bought specially for the purpose before the fast began. Ceramic dishes were also considered charms against the evil eye, which explains why in homes and teahouses (*chaikhana*) painted ceramic plates were hung across the room from the door.

Central Asia is rich in potter's clay, so its artisans procured the material for their craft themselves. The quality of ceramic items strongly depended on the composition of the clay used in their making. Potters passed on from one generation to the next the secrets of working with different clays and improving their formulas. For instance, seeking the needed quality of the raw material, artisans mixed different clays as well as adding wool, manure, and cattail, depending on the final product – a thin-walled *kosa* bowl, a *khum* (a massive grain storage container), or a tandoor oven for baking bread. After a round of careful preparation of the raw material, which had not only to be thoroughly kneaded but also to be given rest afterwards, the artisan would proceed to prepare lumps of clay to mould the item on the potter's wheel. The finished items were placed on racks for drying, after which they were ground smooth on a grinder. Then the artisan would again go over the item with a wet rag, again let it dry, and only after that he would start painting the surface. Painting required some preliminary steps, such as coating the vessel with engobe, a clay slurry with a special formula. Engobe made painted images under the glaze shine and sparkle, and reduced the vessel's porosity.

Plate, "nim tavok". 1907
Clay, white engobe, transparent glaze,
circle-formed, fired, engraving, underglaze
© The State Museum of Oriental Art

The main types of colourants used by ceramists for underglaze painting were various white and coloured potter's clays and compounds with iron oxides. They had to be very meltable, so as not to dissolve into the glaze during the firing. Deep violet and deep brown colours were achieved by using manganese; reddish brown, ferruginous clays; yellow from rock rich in antimony; and green from rock rich in copper oxide. All of the above could be extracted locally, and only blue colourants required imported lapis lazuli, mined in Badakhshan or brought from Iran. Applying glaze over the painting, artisans had to keep in mind how a particular colourant would react to a particular glaze. For instance, a copper compound would become bright green under a lead glaze, and bright turquoise blue under an alkaline glaze. Artisans achieved a variety of hues using different additives in different proportions and carefully guarded their formulas from their competitors.

One of the important Tajik pottery centres was the town of Khujand (Khodjent). Other locales famous for their glazed pottery included the village of Chorku by the river Isfara and the towns of Karatag and Uroteppa. In the past, there were two groups of potters: *kuzagars*, who produced unglazed vessels, and *tabakchi*, who created glazed items. The latter group had a subgroup of very high-skilled artisans, *nakkoshi*, who painted ceramic items.



D. Kakhorov
Bowl, "Kosai panjarador". 1950s
Clay, angob, circle-formed, painting, glaze
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Plate, "miyona tavok". Beginning of the 20th century
Clay, white angob, transparent glaze, circle-formed, fired, engraving, underglaze
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



S. Sahibov
Plate, "Lyagan". 1970
Clay, painting, glaze
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Vase, "Guldon". Beginning of the 20th century
Clay, circle-formed, angob, underglaze, engraving, modelled, glaze
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



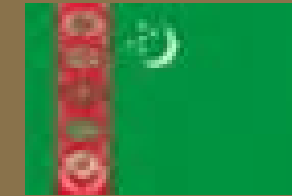
Plate, "Lyagan". Beginning of the 20th century
 Clay, white angob, transparent bluish glaze, circle-formed, underglaze
 © The State Museum of Oriental Art



Plate, "Lyagan". Beginning of the 20th century
 Clay, white angob, transparent glaze, underglaze
 © The State Museum of Oriental Art



Mir Ghafur
Vase, "Guldun". Second half of the 19th century
 Clay, white angob, transparent glaze, circle-formed, fired, underglaze
 © The State Museum of Oriental Art



Turkmenistan

High-pile and low-pile rugs and carpets were produced all across Central Asia, but the finest of them all were Turkmen high-pile carpets. As far back as the 13th century, famous Venetian explorer Marco Polo characterised them as “the finest and most beautiful in the world”. Because of the region’s strong trade ties with Europe, the popularity of Turkmen carpets grew over the centuries. These carpets were valued for their good quality and resistance to wear and tear, for their softness and high density, their lightness and silkiness, for the elegance of their colour scheme and the classic clarity of their patterns. As they grow old, these rugs and carpets become softer. Far from fading, their colours acquire a noble silvery or golden sheen. Nearly all Turkmen women, young and old, were engaged in carpet weaving. In the old days, carpets were woven on the simplest horizontal looms, using the best spring fleece, sometimes with the addition of camel’s hair, coloured silk and white cotton. The fibres were dyed using natural dyes by the weavers themselves. Refined over the centuries, the technical skills and creative methods were passed on from one generation to another. That was how the traditions survived. The main events in Turkmen life and their daily needs were all “wrapped up” in carpets. As toddlers, they rested in hanging bassinets made of carpets. Turkmen ate, slept, prayed, performed wedding rituals and died on rugs and carpets. Due to their nomadic existence, Turkmen had a wide variety of types and forms of textile coverings. Different regions and tribes produced carpets with different ornaments. Carpets woven by different Turkmen tribes – Salur, Saryk, Teke, Yomut and Ersari – featured different varieties of ornamentation and colour. The main motif of nearly all Turkmen rugs and carpets – the geometrised polygonal rosette – varies in design, detail and colour scheme. The semantics of the rosette seem to be related to the symbols of the tribe.

The big Teke floor carpets called haly are a classic variety of Turkmen carpets. Like the other carpets, the haly has a central part, called the field, and the fringe (tassels). The design of the field is biaxially symmetric.

The mainstay of Turkmen art from time immemorial, saturated red – the colour of blood, sunset, springtime poppies and tulips – has a lot of symbolism. Bright red gives the original five-cornered rug, the *asmalyk*, a solemn and festive look. Like duffel bags (*mafrash* and *chuval*), the *asmalyk* was an indispensable accessory for wedding ceremonies and included in the bride’s dowry. A couple of twin *asmalyk* bags, woven by the bride, usually decorated the camel on whose back she travelled to the groom’s house. Nomads’ favourite animal, the camel can be described as a symbol of their world, which is forever in flux. So decoration of a camel was always a matter of great importance, especially at wedding rituals. Geometric ornaments, typical for Turkmen art, in this case are replaced with an abstract design. Both zoomorphic and floral motifs here are benign symbols of the continuity of life and procreation. Despite the flatness of its ornamental forms, the dynamically diagonal composition creates the illusion of an intricate, multidimensional and fluid space, enriching the *asmalyk’s* imagery. The inertia of tradition weighed less heavily in the production of small rugs, allowing their weavers to attempt creative experimentation and self-expression. More often than in the case of other textile coverings, the *asmalyk* rugs feature a unique artistic vision distinguished by inimitable lyrical motifs evoking the warm comfort of domesticity.

A. Aglieva, O. Taganmuridova
Carpet “Turkmenistan”, 1961
Wool, cotton (base), pile weaving
© The State Museum of Oriental Art

The *kapunuk*, a magnificent U-shaped rug hung at the entrance to the yurt, is a valuable artefact. In addition to being of great artistic value, this object is also ethnographically important as an item with all the embellishments typical for such hangings surviving in good shape and condition. Its lower edges feature a long fringe consisting of braids with tassels and beads intertwined with coloured threads.

Turkmen rugs and carpets serve both functional and decorative purposes: they shape the way a home looks while also being a fixture of daily life. Carpet weaving was connected with nomadic herding. The production of rugs and carpets was closely linked with the fixings of portable dwelling units such as the yurt, and also with an itinerant way of life. Numerous sacks and bags were hung on the walls of the yurt during stationary periods, then hung on animals' flanks during migration.



"Namazlik", Ersari carpet. Early 20th century
Wool, pile weaving
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Yomud, "osmoldyk", decoration on camel's flanks. 19th century
Wool, pile weaving
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



"Kapunuk" decoration at the entrance to a yurt. 1920s
Wool, pile weaving, tassel weaving
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



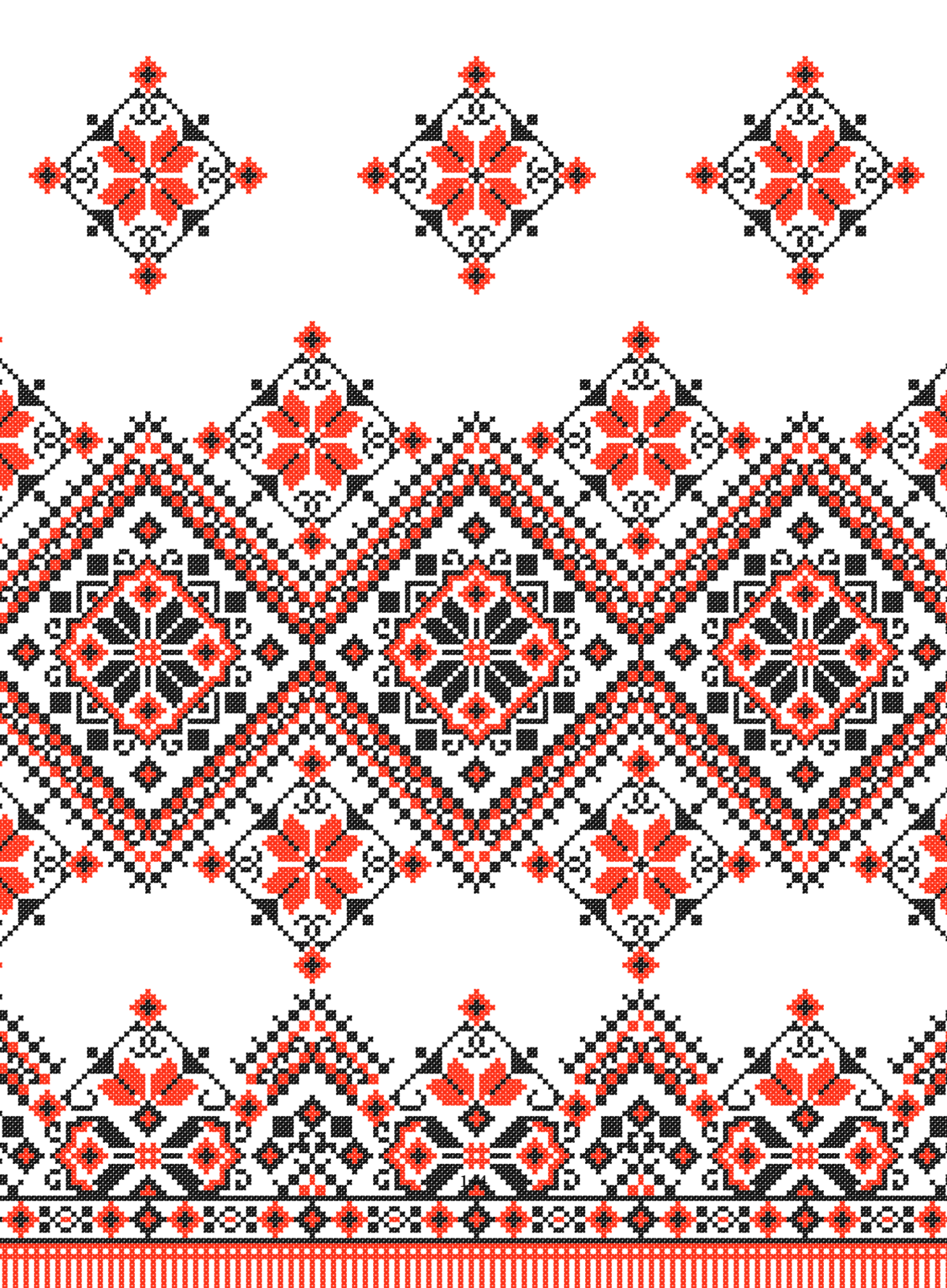
"Khurjin" bag 1960s
Wool, high-pile and low-pile weaving
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



"Chuval" bag. Mid-20th century
Wool, pile weaving
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



"Than-cha" bag. Mid-20th century
Wool, pile weaving
© The State Museum of Oriental Art



Ukraine

The traditional Ukrainian *rushnyk* or *rushnik* (plural *rushnyky*) is a rectangular hemp or flax cloth, the ends of which feature embroidered or woven decorations. These decorations reflect the customs and worldview of past generations and convey ideas of well-being, goodness and health. The *rushnyk* is often compared to a song embroidered on cloth.

Embroidering Ukrainian *rushnyky* is an old Ukrainian tradition that is still alive today. Originally, the embroidered *rushnyk* was intended for guests. It would be prominently displayed in the house. The mistress of the house, as a token of respect to the guest, would bring water in an ewer and solicitously offer the guest to wash their hands.

Created in accordance with tradition, the Ukrainian *rushnyk* is full of symbolism and has multiple meanings. It is not just a household object, it is a symbolic link to forefathers, clan, and the Universe. The embroidered decorations on *rushnyky* tell an encrypted story about nature, the creation of the world, nations, people and animals.

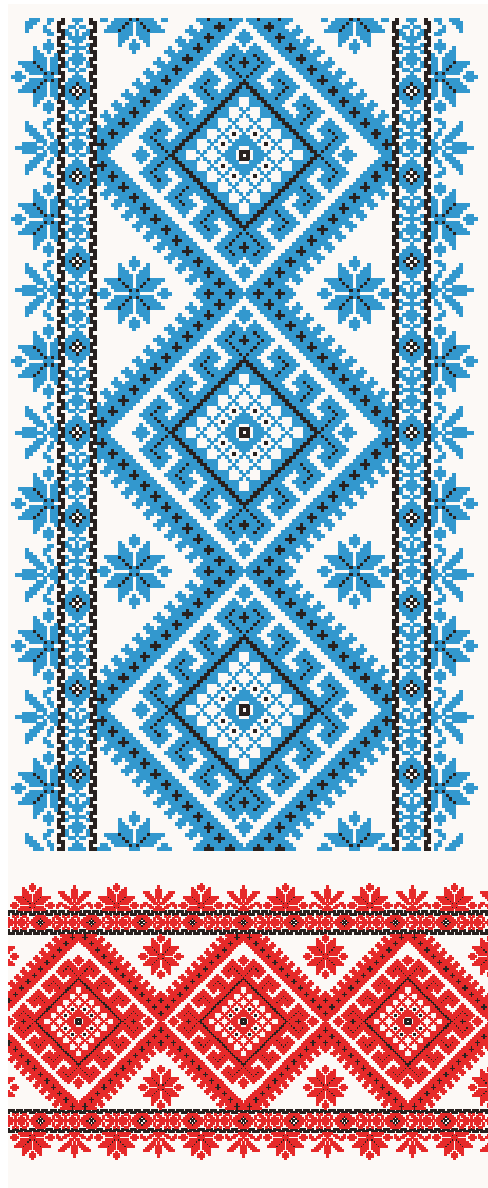
Ukrainian *rushnyky* were utilised at every stage of a person's life, in situations both joyful and sad. The *rushnyk* was not only used in utilitarian fashion as a towel, but also served as a protective charm, an element of interior décor in peasants' homes, an accessory to be worn, and a ritualistic object. *Rushnyky* were utilised to decorate doors, corners, windows, icons. No matter how poor a Ukrainian peasant's home might look, it cannot be imagined without embroidered *rushnyky*. The mistress of the house showed off her cleanliness and industry through the neatness of her home, with a clean *rushnyk* always at the ready. *Rushnyky* are used to wipe hands, milk the cow, and cook meals.

As for its use as an item of dress, in the centre of the Dnieper region, for instance, until the late 19th century, *rushnyky* skilfully and richly ornamented with protective signs were employed as festive or ritualistic sashes. The sash itself, for that matter, was not just a decorative accessory but also an indicator of moral fibre. A self-respecting man would never leave his homestead without a *rushnyk* sash. Furthermore, an embroidered *rushnyk* used as a waistband had magic powers and served as a kind of charm. This magic waistband was often featured in ritualistic costumes, especially when one wanted to ensure that a person would live a life of good fortune.

The Ukrainian *rushnyk* was an important attribute in all family rituals and customs. It was featured at every wedding, every birth, every betrothal, every funeral. Different types of *rushnyky* had special names fitting the specific purpose: *stirok* (for tableware), *utirach* (for the face and the hands), *pokutnik* (for icons), *plechevoi* (for the head of the village), the gift *rushnyk*, the wedding *rushnyk*.

Rushnyky helped to protect Berehynia, the "hearth mother" representing people's homes and all their belongings, all that was passed on to them by their ancestors, all of the family's riches: children, harmony, health, and well-being.

Ukrainian *rushnyk* with ornament



Ukrainian *rushnyk* with ornament.
Blue and Red version over white background



Traditional Ukrainian *rushnyk* flat with red and black threads



Ukrainian folk embroidery, handmade

Rushnyky featured elements of nature, as well as symbols of the elements and humanity. *Rushnyky* were thus intermediaries in people's communication with divine powers. People believed that a *rushnyk* embroidered with a particular ornament and composition had a magic power and could help in different spheres of life. In the old days, *rushnyky* were there not just to please the eye – their ritualistic and functional roles were of the greatest importance. The design of their compositions and ornaments were defined by the specific purpose of that particular *rushnyk*, and the execution of the ornamentation had to proceed according to certain rules as well.

The “Golden Age” of Ukrainian *rushnyk* was in the 19th and 20th centuries. Still powerful, they were utilised in different situations. It was at that period that the “ordinary *rushnyk*” became widely used. This type of *rushnyk* was special because the entire process of weaving and embroidering had to be completed overnight, starting at dusk and ending at dawn. Such *rushnyky* would be used most often by families in trouble: when someone was sick, and herbs and other remedies did not help. All women of the village would participate in the production of such a *rushnyk* when their husbands or sons were fighting a war or when a pandemic was raging among humans or animals. The weaving and embroidering of the *rushnyk* would take place in a single rural home, where all women of the village would congregate. The weavers were not to utter a single word over the course of the night, they had to dedicate all their energies to the making of the *rushnyk* and programming it to effect a positive settlement of the problem. Such a *rushnyk* would become a potent power-generating symbol thanks to the strength and energy of all its weavers and embroiderers.

Only women, as the symbols of procreation and preservation of national customs and traditions, were allowed to participate in the making of a *rushnyk*. They used only threads of specific colours, because colours too had a profound sacred meaning. Scholars and historians noticed long ago that old *rushnyky* never had a single redundant element, each detail responsible for a specific aspect and fulfilling a certain function. *Rushnyky* accompanied people in prosperity and adversity. Inside the house, *rushnyky* decorated the wall in the place where the entire family usually gathered for meals.



The young craftswoman



Wedding loaf with a beautiful *rushnyk*. Wedding bread. National Ukrainian style

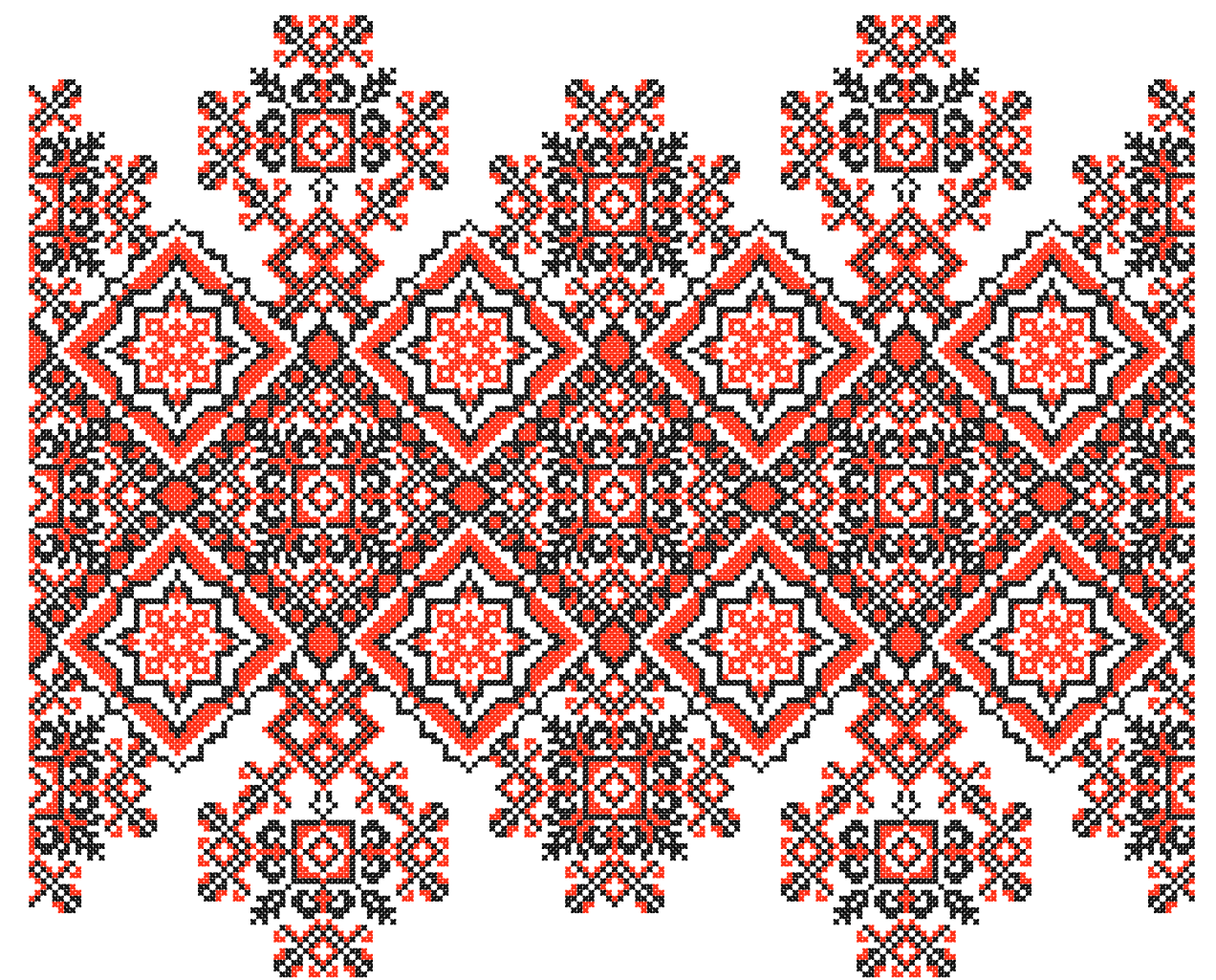


Rushnyk – Ukrainian embroidered ritual cloth

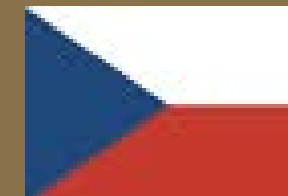
As time went by, *rushnyky* began to lose their magic powers and became more of a decorative element, although even today some rites involve the use of Ukrainian embroidered *rushnyky*. As the culture developed, changes in traditions brought about changes in the patterns and decorations of the *rushnyky*. Becoming increasingly valued only as ornaments, they gradually shed their ritualistic legacy. Today it is difficult to find another object of decorative art that can hold and combine so many diverse symbolic meanings as the *rushnyk* did. The Ukrainian *rushnyk* is justly regarded as a unique phenomenon in the history of Ukrainian culture and the Ukrainian nation, its self-understanding and development. Returning to their roots, a lot of people today are reinstating the *rushnyk's* role and importance in ordinary life, increasingly using the way their ancestors did.

The *rushnyk* was a constant attribute of peasant life at every stage. It was featured, in one way or another, at every major event. Every home had a large number of embroidered *rushnyky* for a variety of uses. The most well-known and widely practiced ceremonies involving the use of *rushnyky* were:

- Baptism: The child to be baptised was carried to the church on an embroidered *rushnyk*. Importantly, such *rushnyky* featured only attractive, bright and cheerful colours, with no black. The child thus was set on a path to a good and long life. After the baptism, the infant again was covered with the *rushnyk* and its godparents placed a kryzhmo – a silver or gold coin – on it. These items were not to be given to anybody, else the child's path in life would be ruptured. In the age of atheism, the *rushnyk* and kryzhmo were replaced with a white cloth.
- Nuptials: *Rushnyky* played a part in every marriage ceremony, as they do to this day. During the wedding ceremony, the newlyweds would step on a *rushnyk* embroidered by the bride to ensure that their life together was good. Their hands would be tied with the same *rushnyk* to ensure that husband and wife would never part. Such *rushnyky* often featured doves as a symbol of fidelity, love and honesty.
- Construction: During the construction of a house, the final element to add was brought inside on *rushnyky*, which were later presented to the builders as a token of gratitude and respect. When the construction was over, the roof of the house was decorated with a *rushnyk* and oak leaves.
- Travel *rushnyky*: Mothers would gift embroidered *rushnyky* to their sons so that they would have happy and trouble-free travels, and also remember the way home.
- Hospitality: Guests were always welcomed with bread and salt on a *rushnyk*. This tradition is still alive.



Old handmade cross-stitch ethnic Ukraine pattern



Czech Republic

Glassware manufacture is a traditional Czech industry, and if there is one type of glass that has gained the small Central European country fame around the world, it is, without doubt, Czech crystal. According to archaeological findings, glass first appeared in the Czech lands around the 3rd century BC. It is believed to have been traded and brought by the Celts from the Middle East. The first written records of glass processing in the Czech lands date back to the 12th century, with rapid development in the craft from the second half of the 13th century. In the Czech lands, glassware manufacture mainly developed in mountain areas – in the Ore, Šumava, Krkonoše, and Jizera mountain ranges, and in the region of Vysočina. These areas were rich in the basic materials needed for glass manufacturing – beech, quartz, limestone, and water. The first glassware made in the Czech lands was strongly influenced by Italian Renaissance pieces. Back then, Venetian glass was among the most famous. Until the 17th century, Czech glass was considered average in terms of quality and methods of manufacture. It was not until the reign of Emperor Rudolf II that this changed, and the glass industry experienced a boom. At the turn of the 17th century, Rudolf II invited many prominent artists and scholars to Prague. In those days, attempts were made to engrave glass, and this had a substantial influence on later Czech Baroque production. Czech crystal dazzled the whole world. In the 1670s, a major breakthrough occurred. A type of glass, later named Czech crystal, was invented in Müller's Glassworks in the Šumava. This was perfectly clear potash-lime crystal glass, ideal for engraving and grinding. In addition to ornamental or figurative engravings, the crystal glass was often decorated with pictures. Back then, this type of glass knew no equal. Its fame therefore quickly spread beyond the Czech borders, in part due to active traders. Czech crystal glass achieved peak popularity between the 1720s and 1740s. During that period, Czech products were unrivalled in the luxury drinking glassware market. In addition to glasses, chandeliers and mirrors were particularly popular.

From the second half of the 18th century, the importance of Czech crystal began to wane. This was partially caused by numerous wars, military blockades and the increasing costs of materials, but also by a change in taste among the industry's main customers. Neither the Rococo nor Empire styles were favourable times for Czech crystal glass. As a result, many glassworks started merely to imitate current trends or ceased production completely.

Crystal chandelier



Original Bohemian art glass figures and glassware on display



A Czech glass cutter working on an intricately decorated lead crystal vase at a Bohemian glass manufactory



Original Bohemian glass products

The fame Czech glassworks enjoyed in the past partially returned with Biedermeier and Art Nouveau. After that period of recovery, the industry was hit by the First and especially the Second World Wars. Despite all these historical events and the turbulent changes they instigated, the glass industry has managed to survive in the Czech Republic, with many producers gaining recognition in Europe and worldwide.

This was mainly due to the exceptional success Czech glass enjoyed at the EXPO 58 World Fair in Brussels. As a result, the export of crystal glass became an important source of income for the state.

What was so unique about it and what was behind its success? The reasons include use of the highest quality materials, skill in decorative grinding and engraving. In addition to its unquestionable technological properties, Czech crystal glass is perfect for decorative purposes as well. Its long-lasting artistic value is underlined by the way light plays off it. Czech crystal's characteristic properties are ensured mainly by the presence of lead, which adds weight to the glass. Lead crystal glass contains more than 24% of lead oxides. The lead softens the material, making it easier to grind and engrave, and gives Czech crystal glass its characteristic light refraction and high gloss. It is these very characteristics that mean Czech crystal is still highly valued today.



Vintage crystal chandelier



Lavish chandelier made of Bohemian crystal



Counter display of Bohemian glass products

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