

A CASE STUDY ON PESHKIRS IN THE EGE UNIVERSITY ETHNOGRAPHY MUSEUM

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Abstract. A “Peshkir” is a special type of Anatolian cloth used as a hand towel, cover, or napkin in daily life in the Ottoman era of Turkey. The most beautiful examples of Turkish embroidery and of unique motifs are seen on peshkirs from the 16th –17th Centuries. The change caused by westernization in the early 19th century reflected on the field of arts and showed its effect especially on embroidery and design motifs. Western-influenced flower motifs came to be applied in traditional Turkish arts, for example as vase- flowerpot-plate, fruit motifs on plate-basket, ribbon, and flower bouquets. Today, traditional peshkirs are included in the collections of national and foreign museums. One of these museums is *Ege University Ethnography Museum* in İzmir, Turkey, which hosts many domestic textiles and cultural objects, including embroidered peshkir examples in different designs. The place of peshkirs and their importance in daily life is a subject worthy of research in terms of the sustenance of cultural heritage. In this context, six embroidered peshkirs with a composition of flowers from the 19th century are studied and evaluated in terms of their design composition, type, techniques, and motifs.

Keywords: *Ethnographic textiles, peshkir, turkish embroidery, surface design.*

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Received: 12 March 2020;

Accepted: 15 May 2020;

Published: 30 June 2020.

1. Introduction

Peshkir is one of the Turkish domestic textiles with cultural and historical values (Ölmez & Özkoca, 2019: 35). It was an indispensable element of daily life in the Ottoman Period (Atasoy, 2000:17). *Peshkir*, in its dictionary meaning, is a rectangular cloth which is made up of linen or cotton fabric decorated with motifs (Eren, 1998:1796). “The most beautiful examples of Turkish embroidery art are seen on peshkirs, made to be woven in court ateliers of the Ottoman Empire in the 16-17th centuries” (Önder, 1995: 158). “During this prevailing period on three continents, the Turks took their culture everywhere they went and were also influenced from the arts of the people out there, so that they have made the embroidery art very common” (Can, 2015: 297). Embroidery is a work requiring quite a lot of effort, attention, and patience. “The art of embroidery became a nonverbal language in which the society expressed their feelings and thoughts or a part of their lives with motifs” (Oberling & Smith, 2001: 82).

Commonly used flower motifs which are *hatai*, *penç*, *carnation*, *roses*, *violet*, *hyacinth* that appeared in the works of Kara Memi (1520-1560) one of the Court Muralists (*Müzebib in Turkish*) in the 16th century Era of Suleyman the Magnificent, were interpreted again with the influence of artists brought from Europe to the court and they gained a new style (Çağman, 1998:11). That the flower motifs in this era were designed by keeping the characteristic properties of flowers attract attention. In the

second half of 18th century, the influences of French Rococo came to be seen in Turkish embroidery (İrez, 1990:22). In the 18th century the naturalist flower style of Rococo and Baroque became mature and enriched; yet, it was used in our art of embroidery depending on Turkish traditions. The change caused by the Westernization Movement (*Garplılaşma in Turkish*) in the 19th and early 20th centuries reflected on the field of arts and showed its effect especially on motifs (Duran, 2018:179).

Peshkirs had been woven in certain cities of İstanbul, Bursa, İzmir, Kocaeli, Maraş, Konya, Gaziantep etc. In cities like İzmir where there is rich historical and cultural depth, it is highly possible to see the effects of the Ottomans. Peshkirs are still used today in several regions of Anatolia. “The cloths which villagers used to make from fabric they wove on hand looms have now been replaced by readymade cloths. Traditional textiles have survived in some villages or can be seen in museum displays. Developments in technology coupled to rapid changes in people’s tastes gradually reduced the use of these cloths” (Koç & Koca, 2012: 164). *Ege University Ethnography Museum* hosts various art objects and ethnographic textile works. The primary aims of this study are to introduce the historical Turkish peshkirs conserved at *Ege University Ethnography Museum* by bringing them to light. The present study analyzes the technical, type, motif, composition and design properties of six embroidered peshkirs.

2. Method

This research is based on the case study method. Case study is a qualitative approach (Creswell *et al.*, 2007) in which the chosen case should be specific and complex in order for it to be unique (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Shuang & Lee, 2020:83). In respect of being a general typology, six peshkirs with flower embroidery were chosen among ornamental peshkirs with objects registered to the inventory of Ege University Ethnography Museum. Museum inventories were analyzed as well as literature scanning; interviews were made with museum employees and theoretical background was formed for the study. With the approval taken from the museum, the museum was visited between 20.01.2020 and 30.01.2020 determining the embroidery techniques, utilized materials, flower motifs and composition characteristics of peshkirs. The obtained data were supported with photograph taking. Six peshkirs samples examined in accordance with their inventory numbers, and interpreted their design composition by the author.

3. Embroidered Peshkirs at Ege University Ethnography Museum

The museum building where the ethnographic works were displayed is composed of two separate interlaced halls where traditional cloths accessories and ethnographic works are displayed. In the hall of ethnographic works, 2500 clothes 3040 ethnographic textile objects are displayed which reflect the traditions and customs of Turkish people and which are used in their daily lives, are displayed. Among these works 52 peshkirs belonging to the 19th and early 20th centuries are preserved in the storehouse and some of them are displayed in wardrobe. Considering the meaning of the word *Peshkir / Pişgir*, it is formed of the combination of two words meaning *Piş*-front and *gir*-grabbed. The word introduced into Turkish from Farsi means grabbed to the front (Anonymous, 1970:933). Especially in the Ottoman Era, it was used as peshkirs after washing hands or performing ablution, or cover underlaid of a table, or as single napkins (Sözen &

Tanyeli, 2012:139). Peshkirs have some types called *destimal* (napkin), and *makrama-mahrama* (napkin or embroidered hand towel) (Eren, 1998:1976).

The embroideries of pre-13th century, 13th and 14th centuries, Great Seljuk Empire and Beyliks Period, early Ottoman Period, and 15th century, and those of the first half of 16th and first half of 17th centuries are quite attractive. The periods in which traditional textile art reached its peak are 16th and 17th centuries (Gümüser, 2012:220). The ornament of this period is called “Classical Period”. The embroidery of 18th and 19th centuries is of the period in which the technique *Türk Rokosu* (Turkish Rokoko) was used (Akar & Keskiner, 1978:12). With the addition of *Ampir style* into Baroque and Turkish Rokoko, flower bouquets in naturalist style giving light, shadow, volume and depth placed on symmetric or asymmetric vases, flowerpots, baskets and tea tables were used in motifs (Dalbaş, 2017: 247). Peshkirs with fringy and skip-stitched types were embroidered on stretchers or tambours with silver threads, flat threads, and colored threads (Köklü, 2004:58). While court peshkirs were more attractive, house peshkirs seem to be plainer. In some of the peshkirs with the composition of flowers examined in Ege University Ethnography Museum, there are some fade-outs depending on time and climate conditions.

The common feature of embroideries is that they were made in *Hesap işi* (counting work) and *Türk İşi iğne* (Turkish needle embroidery) technique with black, yellow or silver color thread. Among the generally selected motifs, there are botanical decorations such as *pomegranate flower*, carnation, *violet*, *hyacinth*, brier rose, rose and rosebud, tree of life, *palm trees*, grape, *zerrin (dahlia)*, *tulipa (tulip)*, *artichoke leaf*, sycamore leaf, pinecone. There are figured decorations such as bird, dragon, lamb, peacock; geometrical decorations such as *Rumi*, *Penç*, *Çintemani* (three spots), star, moon, hexagon, medal, interlaced knitting, arrow; written decorations such as *cufic*, and *nesih* (naskh); and architectural objected decorations such as vase, plate, flowerpot, basket, ship-boat (Barışta, 1995:22,23). On the other hand, the use of animal figures were avoided in the Ottoman Era, botanical and geometrical decorations were paid attention. Berry (1938:344), state that the topic;

Koranic prohibitions, denying the reproduction of living things in material of design decidedly curtailed the use of sculpting and painting as a means of decoration. But where these forms of decoration suffered in popularity the use of needlework gained in popular favor. This gain was due in part to the fact that the people of the Near East have a highly developed appreciation for colors and designs, as well as the ability to imagine and execute lovely things in all branches of decorative arts, and particularly in the field of textile arts.

According to Ögel, “within this overall Turkish style are variations to be found reflecting the details of different social groups, between urban life, court life, and the way of life of the countryside” (1985:4). In peşkirs, side by side and overlapping motifs were generally applied. There are edging embroideries named *su* or *kenar suyu* (bordure) under the completed composition (Yetim & Kayabaş 2007:737). *Gözemes* (Darnings) were rarely embroidered in plain lines; the colors used in composition were used in these *gözemes*. Thus, harmony of cross stitches or *gözemes* were ensured with composition. After a space of a few cm was given under *su motif* (bordure) or *gözeme* edge cleaning of fringe was made with *çırpma (hemming stitch)* technique (Yetim & Kayabaş, 2007:742). The used cloths were local cotton-linen woven fabric of the weaves belonging to İzmir province in the Aegean region of Turkey. Embroideries are

separated into two according to their techniques: one and two sided embroideries. Two sided embroideries are commonly called *Hesap İşi* (counting work). The others are called single-sided works. Embroideries are made on white or colorful backgrounds with colorful silk or threads. These techniques classified in two groups.

1- Hesap İşi (Counting Works): Embroideries are grouped according to embroidery techniques and kinds of needles; single sided or two sided. These are applied according to the usage of the objects in the houses. Because of this, two-sided embroideries are used for households (Çelik, 2010:15,17,55). The main counting work embroidery techniques are; straight needle, *susma* (wrapping work), *pesent*, Turkish embroidery, *Mürver* (sambucus), colorful wrapping, wrapped counting, *Muşabbak* (Treillage), *Bartın work* (wire cutting) (Gönül, 1969: 50).

2- Manuscripts embroidery: The pattern is drawn with pencil frequently on thickly weaved fabric and then it is filled. If the fabric is weaved loosely, inside of the pattern is filled with one of the counting techniques (Çelik, 2010: 65). The main manuscript embroidery techniques are; *Tambour* and *Suzeni* (an embroidery made on stretched fabric with an awl), Chinese needle, *zerduz*, overpassing, wrapping, *dival embroidery* (Gönül, 1969:65). In old Turkish embroidery stitch techniques are straight needle, verve (diagonal needle), simple and zig-zag counted stitches, *Turkish needle stitch*, *pesent*, *counted satin stitch*, *susma*, *kesme*, *musabak* (Treillage), *civankaşı*, *overpassing work*, *tepebaşı*, *Bartın work* (wire cutting) and *mürver* (sambucus) stitches (Gönül, 1969:50). On some of them the pattern was transformed and embroidered on the fabric by using coal dust or parchment paper.

4. Findings

Turkish peshkirs have an aesthetic aspect in terms of their material quality, embroidery techniques, color, motifs and composition. Flower and leaves motifs frequently confronted us as an ornament in Ottoman period in 19th century and the first quarter of the 20th century (Çetinaslan & Yeni, 2014: 433). Ege University Ethnography Museum, which hosts some of these peşkirs has a rich collection through purchases and donations made. In inventory records, only recorded time of peshkirs, their size, craft origin and short information about them were found. In the embroidered peshkirs included in the study, it was observed that Hesap İşi (Counting work) and Turkish needlework, çırpma stitch techniques were used. Following are the findings obtained from six peshkirs samples examined in accordance with their inventory numbers, and interpreted their design composition by the author.

Inventory No: 01-1050 (26-2b)

Dating of the pieces: Purchased in 21.12.2004

Craft origin: Ottoman Period 19th century

Size: 1.90 x 44 cm

Materials and tools: Linen cloth, *kasnak* (tambour), strecher, needle, *iğnedan* (needle-box), gold wire

Techniques: *Hesap işi* (Counting work), çırpma (Hemming stitch)

Colors: Red, blue, dark blue, orange, burgundy, green, gold (metallic)

Motifs: Floral, leaves, zigzag



Figure 1. Peshkir. 19th century. Courtesy of Ege University Ethnography Museum

Design composition: In the middle center, there are alongside three flower motifs with bud flowers. The zig zag motif was used as the *kenar suyü* (bordure) which made up form, color and lines. The newly-sprouted buds from two sides of the flower attract the attention. On the fabric there are partly yellowing's depending on usage and keeping conditions. On border cleaning, instead of fringe or border folding, 4 cm thread was spinned and 4 cm fabric was again left aside.



Figure 2. Peshkir 19th century. Courtesy of Ege University Ethnography Museum

Inventory No: 08-1055 (83-4A)

Dating of the pieces: Purchased in 03.12.2004

Craft origin: Ottoman Period 19th century

Size: 100 x 44 cm

Materials and tools: Cotton cloth, *kasnak* (tambour), strecher, needle, *iğnedan* (needle-box), cotton thread, thin gold wire

Techniques: *Hesap işi* (counting work), chain stitch, *Sürfile* (overcast stitching)

Colors: Blue, dark blue, yellow, purple, green tons

Motifs: Carnation, dots, zigzag, vertical lines

Design composition: It was embroidered with cotton thread with counting work technique (*Hesap işi*) on two extreme sides of cloth. There are two pink and three dark blue stylized carnation motifs. Dots which are made up of gold thread are used around the carnation motifs. The red color chain stitch was used as cloths border. The zig zag motif and little bud flowers were used as the *kenar suyu* (bordure) composition being completed. *Sürfile* technique (overcast stitching) was used in two extreme sides of border cleaning, and made to prevent raveling. There are stains on the fabric because of the fading out of embroidered threads.



Figure 3. Peshkir. 19th century. Courtesy of Ege University Ethnography Museum

Inventory No: 01-717 (26-2c).

Dating of the pieces: Purchased in 21.12.2004

Craft origin: Ottoman Period 19th century

Size: 108 x 44 cm

Materials and tools: Cotton cloth, *kasnak* (tambour), strecher, needle, *iğnedan* (needle-box), silver wire

Techniques: *Türk işi iğne* (Turkish needle embroidery), *çırpma* (Hemming stitch)

Colors: Green, orange, yellow, pink, silver (metallic)

Motifs: *Zerrin* (dahlia), horizontal lines, leaves

Design composition: There is a composition of stylized alongside three *zerrin* (dahlia) motifs. The composition was enriched with leaves and bud flowers (it represents heaven and modesty in Turks) as well as dahlias. *Zerrin* is long lasting flower and represents life, abundance, elegance, and a strong character (Anonymous, 2009: 264). I think that the flowers with their heads looking down to soil on the motifs maybe thought to represent melancholy as well as happiness and peace. If we are to evaluate this way of representation on peshkirs it is possible to interpret this, on the embroideries, as the happiness of building a new home and acidity of leaving the family, from the dowries of young ladies to be brides. Fringe torsade was used in border cleaning. The cloth was

deformed in embroidered and up-ending parts, and stains are observed depending on usage and keeping.



Figure 4. Peshkir 19th century. Courtesy of Ege University Ethnography Museum

Inventory No: 07-723 (83-1b)

Dating of the pieces: Purchased in 10.08.2008

Craft origin: Ottoman Period 19th century

Size: 1.80 x 51 cm

Material and tools: Linen-cotton fabric, *kasnak* (tambour), strecher, needle, *iğnedan* (needle-box), silk thread, silver and gold wire

Techniques: *Türk işi iğne* (Turkish needle embroidery), *saçak* (Fringe torsade)

Colors: Brown, oil green, light blue

Motifs: *Penç*, leaves, bud flowers

Design composition: On a local linen fabric, there are two *penç* motifs with bud flowers a branch and leaves in this sample. From two embroidered side by side *penç* motif is derived from natural plant forms. It looks like drawing of the bird's eye view of the flower (Birol and Derman, 1995). On the opposite, there are bud of branches blossoms and leaves on the offshoot in the *su motif / kenar suyu* (bordure). Silver and gold wire were used in the *border* and around the *penç* motifs. *Fringe torsade (saçak)* was used in border cleaning. There are stains, worn outs, torn parts on fabric's surface and embroideries.



Figure 5. Peshkir 19th century. Courtesy of Ege University Ethnography Museum

Inventory No: 05-696 (204-14).

Dating of the pieces: Purchased in 02.11.2007

Craft origin: Ottoman Period 19th century

Size: 1.76 x 19 cm

Material and tools: Cotton cloth, *kasnak* (tambour), strecher, needle, *iğnedan* (needle-box), silk threads, gold tinsel, silver wire, yellow wire.

Techniques: *Hesap işi* (counting work), *Çırpma* (Hemming stitch)

Colors: Pink, violet, green, black, gold wire

Motifs: Carnation, bud flowers, leaves

Design composition: On local linen woven beige cloth, there are 12 carnation motifs composed in a group of three which are side by side and the rest of which are just below them, which are placed in surface. The composition was completed with buds added to cross stitch motif. In border cleaning, *Çırpma stitch* was used. There are some yellowing and stains on the fabric because of wrong usage and conservation.



Figure 6. Peshkir 19th century. Courtesy of Ege University Ethnography Museum

Inventory No: 25-716 (279-32).

Dating of the pieces: Purchased in 17.10.2008

Craft origin: Ottoman Period 19th century

Size: 110 x 58 cm

Material and tools: Linen cloth, *kasnak* (tambour), strecher, needle, *iğnedan* (needle-box), gold wire

Techniques: *Türk İşi* (Turkish needlework), *Çırpma* (Hemming stitch)

Colors: Lilac, burgundy, gold (metallic)

Motifs: Hyacinth, horizontal lines

Design composition: On local cotton-linen woven beige fabric, there are six hyacinth motifs with gold wire branch in the center and on the two sides of the compositions. *Hyacinth*, like many flowers in nature are reinterpreted as semi-stylized flower motif in the Turkish art (Duran, 2018:178). *Çırpma* (Hemming stitch) was applied in border cleaning. There are chest stains and those caused by wrong usage on the fabric.

5. Conclusion

Turkish culture which is fed by strong sources such as Nomadic, Islamic and ancient Anatolian sources and that has been developed with the East-West relations for centuries; has a special and important place among the world cultures (Ergün, 2004:10-16). Turkish embroideries have been indispensable means of peshkirs with their motifs, pattern and technical properties. Thanks to their embroidery design and techniques, it can be determined to which region (for example İzmir) and which civilization the

peshkirs belong. The rich variety seen on the examined peshkirs are the effects that the artists coming from the West at the Eras of Mehmet the Conqueror and Suleyman the Magnificent had on miniaturists. The reflections of the Imperial, still life works of miniaturists and artists inspired by Western artists in Baroque and Rokoko styles have been seen in fountains, *hazire*, in architecture, hand –carved fields, ceramic, handicrafts, rugs, home textiles etc.

All of the six embroidered peshkirs examined within the context of research are local fabrics woven in plain weave technique in a natural color with linen – cotton combination. Clothes are thought to have been woven by local women for daily life and dowry in hand loom. The dowry is closely associated with the socioeconomic structure of the community (Glazer, 1979:373). Scarce noted that;

In villages and in smaller and more conservative towns girls still learn the arts of fine needle work from their mothers and devote much effort to preparing their dowries. In large cities, well stocked drapers establishments commission pieces from embroideresses who work forth them at home (1983:1-12).

In the embroideries on peshkirs, silk thread and silver and yellow wire were used. Silk threads used in embroideries were obtained from the silk worms grown by local women and they are likely to be natural-dyed threads. On the peshkirs, *hesap işi* (counting work) and *Türk işi iğne* techniques (Turkish needle embroidery) were used among traditional Turkish embroidery techniques. The motifs were applied using straight needle, *verev iğne* (bias needle), *hesap işi* (counting work) (Gönül, 1969:46). Cleaning the short sides of peshkirs was made with *saçak* (fringe torsade) and *çırpma stitch* (hemming). The ground of the examined peshkirs are naturel crème color and the cotton or linen fabrics were not dyed anyhow. On the embroideries, pink, red, yellow, green tons, purple, blue tons, burgundy, brown and black were preferred with a polychromatic application. While a natural-like style is seen in coloration, stylized motifs approach was preferred in some samples. Flat silver wire used as a helping tool in embroideries were used as a complement to give brightness in motifs with *sarma* (wrapping) techniques in offshoot parts of motifs. Among the plant motifs widely used, there are natural and stylized flowers such as hyacinths, blossoms of flowers, carnation, leaves, trefoil, *zerrin* (dahlia) and trees.

On all of the peshkirs there are embroideries on the opposite two short sides. On the sides, the composition motifs formed with proper enlisted repetition of more than one motif embroidered in parallel were observed to have been applied twice or more. Under the main motifs, there are motifs formed of cross stitches or borders. There are, on these motifs, compositions embroidered with linked repetitions. It is observed that zigzag or curved offshoots linked to one another in cross stitches and borders, and small plant blossom motifs placed on these offshoots were embroidered. Old Turkish embroideries are the products of a very strong culture but the lack of researches on this subject is remarkable. Embroidery that is a part of daily life and lovingly made for centuries, has lost its vitality in Turkish folk culture now.

Nowadays, the embroideries of peshkirs have been sustained and preserved as a dowry by young women especially in mountainous regions, rural areas and public training centers in İzmir rarely. Even though peshkirs are used in houses today, their traditional usage has decreased and they found a place in museums because technology has progressed and society's lifestyle and wishes have changed. The study has also revealed that there is a need for a catalog to be formed regarding the fabrics with the

traces of a civilization and for a detailed examination to be carried out. In future studies, may be these original peshkirs produced for souvenir sector and fashion world which designing modern style.

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