University of Nebraska - Lincoln
DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings | Textile Society of America

1-1-2010

Trousseaux: From Weaving Handwoven Textiles to Collecting Mass Commodities

Kimberly Hart
kilhart@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf

Part of the Art and Design Commons

Hart, Kimberly, "Trousseaux: From Weaving Handwoven Textiles to Collecting Mass Commodities" (2010). *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings*. Paper 19.
http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/tsaconf/19

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Textile Society of America at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

TROUSSEAUX: FROM WEAVING TEXTILES TO COLLECTING MASS COMMODITIES

KIMBERLY HART
kilhart@gmail.com

Trousseau, or "*çeyiz*" the Turkish for the practice in amassing goods for marriage, has transformed from the early 1940's to the present to reflect fashion, taste, and economic standing. I will briefly outline the transition in village *çeyiz* from the early 1940s to the present in this short essay. As a graduate student of social-cultural anthropology, I began to study the DOBAG (Doğal Boya Araştırma ve Geliştirme Projesi, natural dye research and development project) carpet-weaving cooperative based in Örselli village in western Turkey in 1998. I returned for long-term fieldwork in 2000-1. I then followed up with visits in 2002, 3, and 4. In 2008, 9, and 10, I returned with a different topic, Sunni Islam, but also up-dated my material on the cooperative and *çeyiz*.

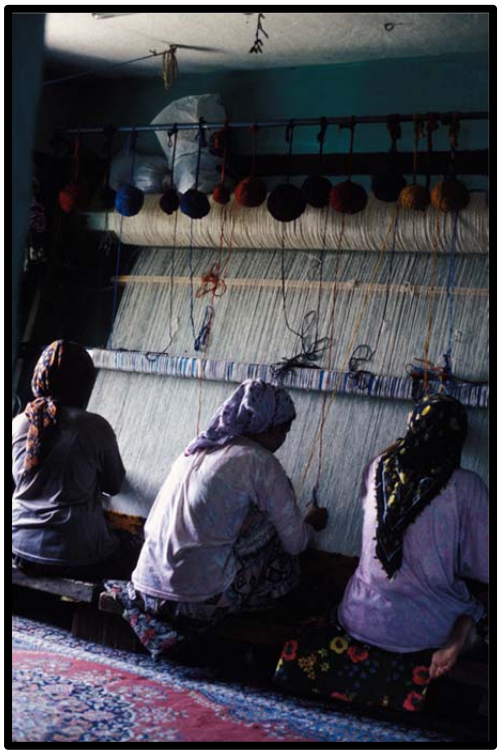

Figure 1. *Daughters and friends weaving for DOBAG, 2000.*

Why trousseau?

What began as a study of a carpet-weaving cooperative expanded to include trousseaux when one day I was interviewing a young woman and her mother weaving carpets. Maybe my questions were uninspiring or perhaps the mother and daughter were bored by the topics of weaving and the cooperative. In either case, their lackluster answers pushed me to search for a new angle. I asked if they ever wove for themselves. I already knew that the practice of weaving for oneself had become taboo among members of the cooperative. The director and managers were anxious that weavers might steal the yarns dyed with plants and use these to weave carpets to sell independently. In addition, taking time to weave with one's own yarns (also a problem, because one would have to process wool, spin and then dye it oneself), would take time away from weaving for the cooperative, which yielded immediate pay assessed by the number of knots. Weavers simply could not afford to make carpets, kilims, sacks and bags, as they once had before the commercialization of weaving. (Fig. 1)

When the mother and daughter answered in the negative to my question about whether they wove for themselves, I was prepared for this answer. The mother added, "but we make other things." The daughter excitedly leapt from the bench and brought in a beaten-up cardboard box. With her mother, she unpacked the embroideries, decorated headscarves, long strips of *oya* or crocheted edging for hand towels, and *patik* or short knit socks.

Figure 2, left. *Photo by Kimberly Hart, video still. An unmarried girl shows items from her trousseau for the camera while her brother watches, 2000.*
Figure 3, right. *An engaged girl shows her gifts of gold, 2001.*

These things did not appeal to me from an aesthetic standpoint, but I reminded myself to pay attention. The obvious enthusiasm showed these goods must be important. Thereafter, I spent months asking young women to show me their *çeyiz*. One enjoyable practice was to videotape as they showed all their pieces. I did not realize at the time, but this was only a fraction of what they would accumulate through the rituals of marriage, as relatives and future in-laws gave them things, and they and their mothers worked diligently in the weeks leading up to marriage to swell the numbers of headscarves to 150, and *patik* and edged towels into the triple digits. (Fig. 2)

Additionally, there would be framed embroideries, hand-crochet lace tablecloths, and tens of doilies for each shelf in the complicated "silver cabinet," and other knick-knacks. The bride's parents buy a china set, typically never used, multiple sets of pots and pans, a refrigerator, stove, washing machine, everyday dishes and many odds and ends for the kitchen, the entire bedroom set, including tens of pillows, handmade quilts, mattresses stuffed with wool, blankets, sheets and so on. They may contribute to the cost of machine made carpets and perhaps some of the furniture. The remainder, all the furniture, a television, a satellite dish, and the machine made carpets, would be bought by the groom's side. The groom's family also built the new home as they accumulated resources to invest in the raw materials.

And they give the bride at least one thousand dollars worth of gold coins. From a financial standpoint, the groom's side gives more to the couple, but trousseau goods for the bride have increased in amount, kind, and substance. The reason for these quantities is that all the dowry goods are taken to the bride's new home a few days before the wedding ritual. The women from the groom's side clean and decorate the new home with these goods to make a beautiful display. (Fig. 3)

Figure 4. *Interior of new house decorated with trousseau, 2001.*

Women visit on the day of the wedding to assess the *çeyiz*. They count the numbers of headscarves, hand towels, and *patik* and they determine the quality, thereby assessing the bride's family's wealth and thereby their generosity or stinginess. After I would videotape a young woman showing all the items in her *çeyiz*, we would watch the tape. Inevitably, they and everyone in the room remarked on the display, as they saw it reflected at them in video. At this point, mothers and grandmothers would remark with almost clocklike regularity, "we never had any of this stuff. We had nothing." (Fig. 4)

Their remarks were packed with multiple tones of expression. A partial critique of the abundance of goods and the obvious materialism of their daughters formed a negative element, but entwined with this was a complaint about what they had lacked in their youths. There was an upbeat thread too, a proud commentary on new wealth. And perhaps not fully realized, but a commentary on the material return daughters earned by offering their weaving labor without membership in the cooperative. Thus, daughters stood in a position of ownership of the trousseau goods, though unrealized until marriage. In fact, daughters who elope are not given their *çeyiz* until they "make peace," usually after the birth of a grandchild. The display thereby underscores the moral foundation of the marriage.

Thus, a pattern emerged in the reaction to the modern *çeyiz* among the middle aged and elderly: an ambivalent and critical note about the dangers of modern life insofar as it increases shallow materialism in the young, a sorrowful reflection on all that they missed and accompanying this sentiment, tales of hardship and extreme poverty from the past. Yet, the positive aspects of capitalism ring through, in that working for money enables young people to enter the market place and buy things they desire.

Figure 5. *Photo by Harald Bohmer, early 1980s. Young girl shows her trousseau goods in nearby village.*

Hearing the complexity in the remark, "we had nothing," I felt a bit skeptical. Surely they had something when they married…and this led me to ask, "what did you have in your *çeyiz* at the time you married?" I answered this question in a survey of 86 women. This group consisted of all the married women in the village. In brief what I learned was that the members of the most elderly generation that of grandmothers and great grandmothers, had handmade textiles and basic household goods. These were used to furnish the home in a style resembling that of a nomadic tent, but they did not have masses of consumer goods which their daughters and granddaughters have. (Fig. 5)

My first example of a *çeyiz* from the past is somewhat atypical for women of that generation because the trousseau contains more than that of her peers. This is because Nahime married a camel driver in 1944 and as her husband reminded me, "we were the truck drivers!"

Nahime's *Çeyiz*
she had...

Figure 6. *Carpet with classic trousseau "deve" (camel) pattern from Örselli village, pre-1970.*

1 *deve halı*, a camel carpet (Fig. 6)

This carpet was the standard carpet in *çeyiz* in Örselli. Each village had its own carpet pattern for *çeyiz*. Interestingly, these patterns are not reproduced in cooperative weavings because they are too nontraditional for foreign buyers.

2 *namazlık* or prayer rugs
3 kilims, actually reverse weave tapestry but the villagers call these "kilim"…these usually included a "Turkmen" kilim but there were also other patterns
2 *heybe* or saddlebags

Figure 7, left. *Typical sack or çuval made of cotton with wool decoration, pre-1970.*
Figure 8, center. *An arkaleş, from 1940s approximately.*
Figure 9, right. *Weaver showing torba (shepherd's bag) woven for author on commission, 2001.*

10 *çuval* or sacks (Fig. 7)
1 *arkaleş* or a backpiece for carrying water (Fig. 8)
8 *torba* or small bags---the image is of a contemporary *torba* and the weaver, this is the *koç boyunuz* pattern, or ram's horns (Fig. 9)
1 *meldin*, textile for wrapping bread and making a cradle
2 *halı yastığı*, carpet pillows---which I photographed from a mosque
She also had basic household goods and some clothing.

The literature often assumes that the bride made her trousseau. Young women at the loom dreaming of their married lives is a romantic trope among carpet dealers, novelists, and even, it would seem, some researchers. Yet, I found that it was the mother-in-law, not the bride, who made the woven goods in a bride's trousseau. In the early decades of the twentieth century, this mass of goods was not regarded as a trousseau, but a dowry given to the groom to furnish his new marital home. The bride received these goods when she married. They were transported by camel train, the bride riding a horse around the village a few times, as part of the wedding ritual, but she only gained ownership when she married.

Thus, when grandmothers and great grandmothers remark, "they had nothing," they are correct in that the things in their marital home, mainly came from the groom's mother's labor. At times they say they "had no *çeyiz,* and at other times they claim the things that their mothers-in-law wove for their husbands to furnish the new home, was the *çeyiz*. This accounts for some of the confusion in asking women what they had in their trousseaux.

Another important detail is that each bride aspired to have the **same** things as every other bride within her peer group. The desire to have the same as everyone else underscores the importance of egalitarianism in the village, but because some brides had more and others less, *çeyiz* was always a source of competitive anxiety. While everyone aspired to have the same things, the actual contents of *çeyiz*, due to slight

differences between collections, changed over time, as new items became fashionable. Thus, by tracing the lists of things, I began to see how patterns in desirable items, many urban, emerged over time.

Figure 10. *Example of embroidery from 1990s.*

Embroideries were the first urban element of the *çeyiz* to enter the village. The cornerstone of urban Ottoman *çeyiz* was embroidery. In this rural region of former nomads, the first embroidered piece was a pillowcase, which was brought by a bride from the neighboring village in 1960. By the 1970s, girls routinely had embroideries in their *çeyiz*, which they made themselves. (Fig. 10)

In a *çeyiz* in 1970, a double bed appears. This was the first piece of furniture, supplanting the use of hand woven goods to furnish the house. After 1960, double beds appear sporadically until 1977, when all *çeyiz* include one. The double bed was meant for the married couple; children would continue to sleep on mats put out in the evening. The introduction of furniture caused villagers to redesign the architecture of their houses in order to create rooms for specific purposes. The mass of the double bed forced villagers to rethink the home from a solid version of a nomadic tent to a segmented series of rooms. Slowly, as a second room was tacked onto the house, a kitchen was often separated, and over the decades, a special sitting room used exclusively for the display of trousseau goods and the preservation of "good furniture" virtually never used, was added. Houses thereby contained a museum of consumption, while they once were functioning spaces reflecting a deep nomadic cultural heritage. In the process, hand woven carpets, bags, sacks, and kilims, were sold or traded for commercial goods, plastic buckets, machine woven carpets and kilims. Itinerant traders sold the hand woven goods to dealers who eventually passed these to collectors and museums, which began to preserve the material remnants of Anatolian's nomadic heritage. Thus, villagers' interest in modern consumer goods transplanted the need and desire for woven goods. These became ossified as "tradition;" as the villagers say, "*müzelik*" or stuff appropriate for dusty and forgotten places.

A Return from Manisa

The next *çeyiz* to transform marriage practices was in 1970, when Fahriye, who had been born in Örselli but whose family migrated to Manisa when she was small, married her first cousin. Although she had a carpet and kilims, Fahriye had no sacks or small bags. Sacks were one of the most practical woven goods, holding grains and flour, or used to transport and store things. *Torba* or shepherd's bag, taken to the pastures and used to protect the body while carrying kindling, were hung in a row on the wall, decorating the home and providing storage. The lack of sacks and bags reflects an urban sensibility and apparent disregard for rural labors. Fahriye announced in her selection of things that she would not participate in this labor, this style, or in the competition among brides over the numbers of *torba* in their *çeyiz*.

The End of Traditional Weaving
From the 1970's to the 2000's, as weaving becomes commercial rather than functional, woven goods in *çeyiz* taper off. Household goods, however, which must be purchased, proliferate. Handiwork does not vanish; embroideries, knitted items and eventually crochet are important.

Figure 11. *Patik or short socks, 2010.*

Knitting and Trousseau in the 1980's
In 1980, Safiye arrived from a neighboring village and brought *patik*, short knitted socks. These socks seem an unglamorous item, but for decades they were a source of competition. (Fig. 11)

Crochet Lace
In 1980, Sevim, from Pinarköy arrived with traditional woven goods, made by her mother-in-law. In addition to three decorative wall embroideries, embroidered door covers, floor cushions and prayer rugs, she was the first to have crochet lace doilies (*dantel*) and decorative towel edgings (*havlu kenarı*). Her *çeyiz* then both pushes the incorporation of new goods, as well as demonstrating a link to former practice.

Contemporary Çeyiz
By 1980, *çeyiz* in Örselli had taken its contemporary shape. Brides rarely had any hand-woven goods. Carpet knotting instead became a job and few young women learned to make kilims. Though some goods appear functional, headscarves, *patik* and towels, they are also decorative because rarely used and instead displayed in the silver cabinet. Rather than woven goods, which were functional and beautiful, demonstrating a deep connection to nomadic heritage and the everyday needs of a household, which continued to live as if in a tent, the trends of fashion in consumption and decoration define the contents of contemporary *çeyiz*.

Daughter's Handiwork: Why Fund It?
I asked women why girls in the past had virtually nothing for their *çeyiz*, but now have a lot. The most common response was that in the past families were poor, there was no money, and for this reason they could not afford to give anything. Because I had collected lists of the goods women of different generations had and because I knew the kin relationship among these individuals, I saw that often the daughter-in-law had a substantial *çeyiz*, but the daughter was given very little. This discrepancy seemed to show that the family could afford to invest in a bride, but they were reluctant to invest in a daughter. I asked if this showed that daughters were not valued, but that daughters-in-law were. One woman seemed a little stunned when I pointed out that the same families which gave daughters little, gave daughters-in-law a lot. She argued that it was the son, not the bride, who was valued. These early *çeyiz* demonstrate that the trousseau was a dowry given to the son to furnish his new home. Yet beginning in the 1980s, daughters began to accumulate masses of things given to them by their parents. Their explanation for why daughters now get a lot was because there is more money, and therefore more to give. The

availability of money, however, does not fully explain why parents should be willing to give it to their daughters. Daughters have become worthy of this investment, but why?

The cooperative has demonstrated the financial value of daughters' labor in weaving. Daughters have become wage earners, though they are unpaid. This is because they are not members of the cooperative. As a "women's cooperative" daughters are girls not women, which only happens after marriage and thus before marriage they do not qualify as members. They earn money via their mothers' membership, which is given to their mothers. Their parents, however, acknowledge their wage-earning capacity and endow them with goods for their *çeyiz*.

The question of who is making the decision to invest in a daughter's *çeyiz* is important. When I visited houses, I most often spoke to mothers and daughters. Fathers were rarely at home, but when they were, mothers and daughters hesitated a bit. Most men, newly married husbands and fathers, made negative comments. Such as: "Why do you need so many headscarves?" "Are you going to really use all these things?" And: "How much did it cost to make these?" Fathers' pointed questions about the cost and function of trousseau goods showed that their wives were investing in their daughters' trousseaux without their full knowledge or understanding. Thus, the expressive strand in mothers' remarks about what they lacked when young was being addressed in their ability to invest in their daughters' trousseaux.

Education and Investments

Since 2001, more young women have begun to attend high school and as a result *çeyiz* practices have radically altered. Education requires financial, social and practical investments by families. Fathers have to believe that their daughters' minds are worth the investment. They need to trust them to live in dormitories in Manisa or stay with relatives in the city. Girls who have been entrusted with their educations and bodies are released from the pressure to produce trousseaux goods. This task falls to their mothers. Due to the very public nature of *çeyiz* at the wedding, the bride's mother is anxious not to shame herself and her daughter, when women who do not acknowledge the value of an education negatively evaluate the lack of *çeyiz* goods among educated brides. *Çeyiz* then solidifies the bride's moral and economic standing in the village during the wedding rituals when other women come to examine her collection of goods. Women often express their assumption that the correct amounts of things demonstrate the parents' love for her daughter. The cache of goods also demonstrates the bride's savvy knowledge of current fashions, rather than show her cultural ties to the past.

These goods have a social role beyond that of the connection between the bride and her parents and her future mother-in-law. Brides give unmarried girls a headscarf from their *çeyiz* after they marry. There is an expectation that the girl receiving the gift will put it in her trousseau and perhaps it will be passed along to another unmarried young woman later. In this way, headscarves form a "Kula Ring" of exchange, passing from the recently married to the unmarried, cementing their common bond. Even those who are educated and did not make their own *çeyiz* and don't wear headscarves any longer because they live in the city and want to appear as "modern, urban women," have these and give them. They may wear them to please their mothers and grandmothers when they return to the village for holidays.

Çeyiz practices, when examined over time, demonstrate an evolution of material cultural practices. By considering how, when, why, and in what forms hand weaving gave way to the collection of mass-produced commodities and handmade goods, this study demonstrates transformations in notions of, as well as concrete desires for cultural heritage. As villagers turn from the functional and beautiful hand woven goods of their collective pasts to the consumption of mass-produced goods, they demonstrate their interest in current fashions in both local and national terms. They thereby materially position themselves in a swiftly transforming, urbanizing, and modernizing national life.

All photos in this paper are by Kimberly Hart, with the exception of Figure 5.