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Handwoven Dowries From the Gotse Delchev Region of Bulgaria

by
Miriam Milgram

In the Gotse Delchev area of Bulgaria, girls in many villages still bring handwoven dowry items to their wedding. These items include bread cloths, aprons, baby carriers, horse rugs, floor rugs, and bed covers. The dowry items are prepared by the girl and her mother, beginning as early as the daughter's birth in some cases. Since a girl and her family are judged upon the quality of the work, it is of great importance that the handwoven items demonstrate skill and aesthetic values. The competition to have the best possible dowry items leads to 'stealing' especially fine patterns, which in turn leads to changing fashion in aesthetics. Each village or set of villages has its own style of ornamentation, and even its own traditional way of displaying the dowry. This paper uses several actual dowries to illustrate how the dowry and its display reflect the changing aesthetics and unchanging need for the dowry and its public presentation.

Miriam Milgram is an independent scholar, fiber artist, and folklorist. For over twenty years, she has been working with ethnographic textiles, concentrating on the Balkan region. She has conducted fieldwork in villages in Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Slovakia. She has also worked with immigrant communities in the United States, and with museum collections. Her B.A. in anthropology is from Barnard College (thesis - Ethnographic Textiles) and her M. A. is from University of Oregon (thesis - From Our Mothers: Weaving Aprons in the Western Rodops of Bulgaria). Her current research looks at the meaning that the production and use of textiles hold for villagers in Bulgaria, based on data collected during a Fulbright Research Award.