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## **Sustainability of Handwoven Carpets in Turkey: The Importance of Technical Distinctions Between Regional Carpet Styles**

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### **Introduction**

In Turkey, hand-made carpet-weaving is a widespread handicraft which many people are effectively busy with. It is also an important area in which unemployed labour can be put to use.

Carpet-making is a traditional craft that has been practised in Turkey since ancient times, and is still found in almost all regions today. Actually, in rural areas, many families still derive significant income from carpet-making.<sup>1</sup>

The reasons why hand-woven carpet-making is crucial for Turkey can be listed as follows:

- Because of the socio economic conditions that currently exist in Turkey the rate of unemployment needs to be reduced, particularly by making good use of the time left from agricultural work in the rural population. Members of farm families are frequently involved in handicrafts and carpet-making in their free time from agricultural work, in the winter time and in bad and rainy weather, and thus, earn some additional income. This is of great consequence for rural development.
- Hand-woven carpet-making does not require much capital to start with. A loom with all the equipment can be obtained at a very low price. There are hardly any side expenses required. The equipment consists of a loom, a pair of scissors, a loom reed and a knife.
- No large workshops or areas are needed to set up the loom. One corner of the home will be suitable for the work. Hand-woven carpet-making is traditionally practised at home; workshop (atelier) production is less.
- The raw material used in hand-woven carpet-making can be a problem as rough mixed fleeces obtained from the local varieties of sheep possess appropriate properties for hand-woven carpet-making.
- As hand-woven carpet-making is practised traditionally, it is learnt very quickly and conveyed to the younger generation.
- Hand-woven carpet-making is an important source of foreign currency. It also has a great potential in terms of tourism in the country.

### **Hand-made Carpet Production Systems in Turkey**

In Turkey, hand-woven carpet production is organized by public institutions, cooperatives, the private sector and individual producers who weave carpets in their own households. Public institutions, cooperatives and the private sector all are employers of carpet weavers. They hire employees to weave carpets and pay them for their labor. The individual (local) producers work on their own account.<sup>2</sup>

In the workshop, or atelier, system, the employer can be a public institution or a private sector businessman. The employees weave carpets under the supervision of skilled master

weavers. As control in each stage of the production of the woven carpet can be ensured, the production quality factor increases relative to the less standardized individual producer.<sup>3</sup> This means good quality carpets are produced in this system.

The private sector in Turkey distributes looms and other equipment and tools to weavers, and has production made in the direction of the market demand and pay the weaver a fee per piece. In such production, the quality check cannot be fully exercised because home based weaving is not fully under inspection by the manufacturer.

Apart from these, the weaver weaves carpets in traditional colours, patterns and motifs for their own use, particularly as a dowry. The quality of such carpets are quite high and they are important in terms of keeping the customary design live.

The major factors affecting the quality and the marketability of a carpet are the materials used to make it, the workmanship and the design. The raw materials are wool or silk threads which are used as pile yarns. Turkey is one of the major sheep breeding countries. The rough mixed fleeces obtained from Karaman and Dağlıç breeds of sheep, two regional breeds, can be ideally utilized as carpet yarn. The wool carpet yarns traditionally produced in Turkey show differences with respect to their production according to the region where they are produced. In villages, weavers generally cleaned their own animals' fleeces, spun them into yarn and dyed them by using natural colours such as madders (*rubia tinctorum*), walnuts, yellowweed (buckthorn, or *rhamnus tinctoria*), onion peel, acorns, pomengrade peel, *ligustrum*, mullein (*verbascum*), abies, and alike. However, many weavers now purchase their yarns. The yarns manufactured in the factories, either public or private sector, are located in large cities and are usually used on looms in town and district centers and they are of various character. Many carpet manufacturers, on the other hand, decide for the best blending of fleeces for the quality of carpets they make, and they either produce yarn in their own factories or have them contract-manufactured in a factory.<sup>4</sup>

In Turkey, carpets are usually woven by women. For this reason, the expression "From the Mother to the Daughter" is used. This is how the craft of carpet-making has been transferred from the older generation to the new. Every young girl has learned this craft by watching her mother, or another elder. This system of training is still valid in many of our regions. In this kind of training, all the processes of making a carpet, such as spinning threads from fleece, dyeing them, preparing the warp and knotting the pile, are learnt and applied as a whole.

Another system of training applied in some ateliers or homes is the one developed by carpet merchants who are called "the supporter". In this system, the merchant provides the pile yarn, the pattern and the warp yarn and has the carpet. This kind of training enables the girls to learn knotting only. They do not learn the necessary technical knowledge or skills. Therefore, the carpets woven have quality differences.<sup>5</sup>

Some public institutions (such as the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Industry and Trade, Special Provincial Administrations and universities) also provide training for the craft of carpet-making.

### **Regional Carpet Weaving Centers in Turkey and Characteristics of the Carpets Produced**

Carpet-making, which spreads from the West Anatolia to the Middle and Southeast Anatolia, is an additional working area to the agricultural work. As the amount of land suitable for agriculture decreases towards the east, carpet-making work in this area becomes a more

important issue compared to the west. Some important carpet-making centers are Konya, Sivas, Kayseri, Karapınar, Taşpınar, Ladik, Bünyan, Sarayönü, Yahyalı, Mucur, Şarkışla, Eskişehir, Sivrihisar and Niğde in Middle Anatolia; Isparta, Bergama, Balıkesir, Çanakkale, Ezine, Yağcıbedir, Demirci, Uşak, Kula, Gördes, Milas, Muğla, Fethiye, Bodrum and Döşemealtı; and Malatya, Kars, Erzurum, Van and their environments in East and Southeast Anatolia.

Among these, the following are the most commonly known types in the domestic and foreign markets, and thus produced more than the others.

The most important visual factors determining the quality of a hand-woven carpet are the colour, pattern and motif.

### **Kayseri Carpets**



*Figure 1. Kayseri (Yahyalı) carpet. Photo from Kultur Bakanlığı Turkish Handwoven Carpet Catalog, 2006.*

Kayseri is city which is located in the middle of Anatolia and carpet-making has been carried on there for centuries. Yahyalı is district in Kayseri. Kayseri and Yahyalı carpets have different colors, design and quality. Carpet-making has been carried on in this region for centuries.<sup>6</sup> This production is still going on in Kayseri and Yahyalı.

In the Kayseri carpets, one of the colours most in demand by the market is used as a base colour. Research shows that red, blue and yellow are the dominant colours and the shades of these colours are also used in the carpets.<sup>6</sup>

In the Kayseri types of carpets, red and blue have been used most up to the present, and their design, motif and colour characteristics are still maintained. The patterns of wool Kayseri carpets have been influenced by Iranian carpet patterns, but also new designs have emerged; the production of Kayseri carpets still continues, according to the market.

Research has determined that machine-made carpet yarns are used in Kayseri carpets; whereas, yarns used for Yahyalı are obtained by local methods.<sup>6</sup> Warp yarns are made of cotton, silk or wool in Kayseri carpets, but they are made of wool in Yahyalı carpets. Pile yarns are made of silk or wool in Kayseri carpets, but they are made only of wool in Yahyalı carpets.

Kayseri carpets are usually produced at fine and medium-fine qualities But Yahyalı carpets are produced at medium quality as defined by the Turkish Standards system (fig. 1).

## Niğde Carpets (Arisama)

In the Niğde region, Arisama carpets are the ones most commonly woven. The major colours used in them are dark and light blue, navy blue, burgundy, red, green, brown and white.<sup>7,8</sup>

The patterns of Arisama carpets are composed of reports of corner medallions, and some of their typical field decorations include floral motifs, kilim designs, geometrical motifs, animal figures (such as a scorpion or a deer), Latin letter figures, Turkmen medallion motifs and figures symbolising the infinity. The basic motifs are noticeably large and evident. The commonest designs in these types are the Natural Design, Shirvan Model, Persian Model, Buhara Model and Kazan design.

The Turkish Standards Institute classifies Arisama carpets as middle quality rugs.<sup>9</sup> The carpets woven in the Niğde region are generally of medium quality or rough quality, which is determined by number of knot per square decimeter . The warp and weft yarns used here are 100% wool (fig. 2).<sup>8</sup>



Figure 2. Niğde (Arisama) carpet. Photo by Filiz Nurhan Ölmez

## Muğla Carpets

Those who are occupied with carpet-making in the province of Muğla usually purchase readily spun warp, weft and pile yarns. Some, on the other hand, spin the yarns themselves and then dye them. Usually, the warp yarns are used in white and weft yarns are used in reddish brown colours. Some carpet production is done in workshops, but much is done in the homes of weavers, who usually are weaving patterns that are traditional to their area.

Some of the weavers of the region carry out the dyeing process in the way they have learnt it from their elders. For example, within the province of Muğla, most of the weavers in the Karacahisar and Bozalan villages of Milas prepare the yarn by hand and dye them naturally.<sup>10</sup>

The weavers in Muğla still weave carpets in the traditional way by looking at the old carpets they own, but they may also work from the patterns printed on paper. Most of them have woven so many carpets that they have memorised the patterns and do not need to look at any models. Very few weave a carpet by looking at the printed pattern. In carpets, both Turkish and Persian knots are used.

The warp, weft and pile yarns used in the carpets woven in Muğla are all pure wool.<sup>10</sup>

Milas carpets are the style produced most in the Muğla region. They are carpets with wide borders. The middle part of them are in the shape of a narrow rectangle. In this part, there are



large angular motifs. “Seccade”s (ground cloths for praying on) woven in the Karacahisar village of Milas have medallions and corner motifs (fig. 3).



*Figure 3. Muğla (Milas) carpet. Photo by Sema Etikan*

Milas carpets take design names according to the motifs woven on their borders. The first of these is the carpets with the “Ada Milas” patterns. The Ada Milas motifs are used in the borders as a single motif or double motifs depending on the size of the carpet. As the flowers of the Ada Milas resemble carnations, they are also called “the pattern with carnations”. The borders of carpets with the ship water design are woven like Ada Milas carpets; a single motif or double motifs of “ship water” in the borders. Some mixed design of carpets are also manufactured in Milas in accordance with the market demand. Moreover, today carpets with the Ladik and Demirci designs are also woven in Milas. The carpets of various regions are woven in different provinces.

### **Uşak Carpets**



*Figure 4. Uşak Carpet. Photo from Kultur Bakanlığı Turkish Handwoven Carpets catalog, 2006*

The Uşak carpets have perpetuated their characteristics since past times up today, and they are in demand by both domestic and foreign markets. The classic patterns are still woven in workshops in Uşak. The main motif of Uşak carpets is the medallion and there are two main groups named according to the shape of the medallion. The first of these is Uşak carpets with medallions, and the other is Uşak carpets with stars (fig. 4). In carpets with stars, octagon-shaped star medallions and small diamond-shaped medallions are woven alternatively. This sequence

continues on shifted axes throughout the length of the carpet. Thus, the star-shaped medallion on the upper line corresponds to the diamond-shaped medallion on the line below. The infinity principle peculiar to Turkish carpets is more evident in Uşak carpets with stars. In Uşak carpets with medallions, there is an uncut medallion right in the middle, which determines the center; whereas, in Uşak carpets with stars, the idea of infinity layout is prevalent. The latter are produced in a smaller size. The length is at most four meters. They usually have star or diamond shaped dark or light blue medallions arranged on a red background. Sometimes the background is blue and the medallions are red.<sup>11</sup>

Uşak carpets have always been woven with wool yarns. Their major characteristic is that the pile yarns are two ply instead of a single ply. These double ply pile yarns are what makes Uşak carpet pile dense and strong. Turkish knots are used for knotting the pile. Dark blue, dark red, green, yellow, and, rarely, white or light brown colours are used in weaving Uşak carpets.<sup>12</sup>

### **Isparta Carpets**

This is a region with a long tradition of workshop weaving. Examining Isparta carpets, one can observe motifs are usually floral, formed from flowers and leaves, mainly of roses which have become the symbol of Isparta. Furthermore, human figures, animal motifs, such as butterflies, and motifs like oil-lamp, ewer and candlestick take place in the borders framing the carpet in straight and diagonal arrangements.

The colours that are commonly used in carpets woven in the Isparta region are navy blue, brick red, turquoise, blue, dark yellowish green, off white and cream. Usually manufactured yarns are used. Weavers only spin yarns for their own use to make carpets for their own dowry. All the yarns used in weaving carpets for the market are obtained from the yarn factory in Isparta. Isparta carpets are produced by private businesses. Yet, the production has decreased in recent years.<sup>13</sup> In other words, agricultural and industrial production are increasing in Isparta at the expense of carpet production (fig. 5).



*Figure 5. Isparta Carpet. Photo from Kemaliye Carpet Bazaar Carpets Catalog, 2006*

### **Hereke Carpets**

The carpet production of famous Hereke workshops still continues and they have attempted to protect their quality standards. In the past the best Hereke carpets used warp, weft and pile yarns made of silk to produce a very fine quality of carpets (knot number per square decimeter is 100X100). Today Hereke carpets woven from very fine wool yarns are more commonly

manufactured. The recent reduction in silk production in Turkey has affected the silk-weaving and silk carpet-making sectors adversely, and silk carpet-making has continued only by using imported silk yarns and yarn smuggled from the Turkic Republics. These rugs are woven in very fine, detailed designs with colours peculiar to Hereke carpets (especially with navy blue and red backgrounds). Hereke carpets are the finest quality of carpets manufactured in Turkey (fig. 6).



*Figure 6. Hereke Carpet. Photo from Kemaliye Carpet Bazaar Catalog, 2006*

## **Summary and Conclusions**

Hand-woven carpets, which are among the most important cultural products in Turkey, have come into existence as a consequence of the experience acquired over the centuries in choosing which raw material to use, spinning and dyeing the yarn, using different weaving techniques, and integrating colour, pattern and motifs in harmony. To keep the Turkish hand-woven carpet culture alive and to transfer it to the future generations, and to ensure the sustainability of Turkish hand-woven carpet-making, it will be necessary to synthesize the knowledge and experience of the past through systematic studies, and through the use of this data develop strategies that can increase the domestic and foreign market share for Turkish carpets. It is essential to pay attention to the quality of designs, dyes, yarns, tools and equipment use; and to pioneer up-to-the-standards and high-quality production through improved training.

In the carpet business, poor quality thread and chemical dyes are being used in order to reduce the cost. Most of the weavers perform their weaving in their homes and they are paid by the piece. The control on the production at home is more difficult, so instead of this kind of production, production in workshops should be encouraged.

Changes in designs are determined in accordance with the desires of buyers. Transferring of traditional rug designs to the next generation is significant but weaving designs in compliance with the desire of the buyer is inevitable in order to sustain the carpet business. In addition to those carpets designed for the market, the weaving of carpets having traditional features should be continued. Rugs using “moderized” designs should be identified by new names and not use the names of established traditional patterns, as some now do. Many researchers encourage this approach.



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