

Plant patterns of silk based needlework, a traditional handcraft in Turkey

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Plant based motifs have been used extensively in Turkish culture for centuries. One of the most intricate and delicate uses can be seen in traditional handicrafts crocheting, shuttle and needlework. Among these crafts, needlework has a special place. Needlework is interesting in many ways. For instance, only silk is used to make these fine patterns. For hundreds of years, needlework has been attached to the corners and sides of covers. The study aims to record and pass the knowledge of the use of plant based motifs in the needlework of Western Anatolia–Turkey. A total of 29 women, especially chosen by age, over 50 yrs old, from the cities Odemis, Beydag, Kiraz, and Tire in the of Izmir Province in Western Anatolia were interviewed. 24 taxa were identified. Among the identified patterns, the flower was the most common. Fruits and leaves were the other motifs identified. The use of different colours on the same pattern is interesting. Four different colours are used in the pattern of the pepper plant; green for the leaves, white for the petals, orange for the reproductive organs, and red for the fruits. In all identified patterns; orange, yellow and white are used for the reproductive organs with orange being the most preferred colour.

Keywords: Needlework, Ethnobotany, Traditional handicrafts, Turkey

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Ethnobotany, a multi–disciplinary science examines the relationship between human populations and cultural values¹⁻⁵. The ethnobotanical knowledge, transmitted orally from generation to generation, is disappearing very fast. Ethnobotanical surveys can be very helpful in rescuing and preserving the precious indigenous knowledge⁶. As people move from their communities and are exposed to other cultures, their culture and associated knowledge, such as their crafts, farming and cattle breeding, culinary, home building and architecture, ethnobotanical usage of plants is lost. Plants always have had a great historical impact on human civilization¹. Plant motifs are used in wraps, quilts, and towels⁷. As in all other cultures, plant based motifs have been used extensively in Turkish culture. They have been traditionally used in carpet, kilim, rug, runner, tapestry, embroidery, needlepoint, textile, ceramic, pottery, decoration, woodcarving, jewelry, ornamentation of metal, mineral or leather articles as well as in architecture. One of the most intricate and delicate uses can be seen in traditional handicrafts of crocheting, shuttle and needlework. Among these crafts, needlework has a special place. Needlework is interesting in many

ways. For instance, only silk is used to make these fine patterns. It is a harmonious unison of needle and silk. It reflects the patience, skill and expertise of Anatolian women. For hundreds of years, they have been attached to the corners and sides of covers such as headscarves, bedspreads, coverlets, pillow covers, table and tripod covers, etc. Because they are made using silk, special care is needed when using and washing. With the study, it was aimed to determine plant based motifs and patterns used in needlework and pass the knowledge to future generations.

Methodology

The study was carried out in the towns of Odemis, Beydag, Kiraz and Tire of the Izmir province in Western Anatolia–Turkey. A total of 29 women, who were especially chosen by age (over 50 yrs old) were interviewed. The interviewees were chosen from different villages and special care was taken to make sure that they had produced needlework some time in their life. Although there are many different patterns used in needlework, plant based patterns were chosen for the study. Scientific names, local names, English names, parts of the plants used, frequency of citation and total quotation (%) identified in needlework were given (Table 1).

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Table 1—Plants and their parts used as patterns for needlework in the study area

Plant name	Local name	English name	Parts used	Frequency of citation	Total quotation (%)
<i>Anthemis</i> sp	<i>Papatya</i>	Daisy	Flower	4	1.04
<i>Capsicum annuum</i> L.	<i>Biber</i>	Pepper	Flower, fruit	29	7.54
<i>Citrus x limon</i> L.	<i>Limon</i>	Lemon	Flower	2	0.52
<i>Colchicum autumnale</i> L.	<i>Cigdem</i>	Autumn crocus	Flower	14	3.64
<i>Dianthus caryophyllus</i> L.	<i>Karanfil</i>	Carnation	Flower	29	7.54
<i>Ficus carica</i> L.	<i>Incir</i>	Fig	Leaf	6	1.56
<i>Fuchsia x hybrida</i> Voss.	<i>Kupeli</i>	Ladies' eardrops	Flower	27	7.02
<i>Hyacinthus orientalis</i> L.	<i>Sumbul</i>	Hyacinth	Flower	18	4.68
<i>Hydrangea</i> sp	<i>Ortanca</i>	Hydrangea	Flower	5	1.30
<i>Jasminum fruticans</i> L.	<i>Yasemin</i>	Jasmine	Flower	7	1.82
<i>Narcissus tazetta</i> L.	<i>Nergis</i>	Cream narcissus	Flower	29	7.54
<i>Nicotiana tabacum</i> L.	<i>Tutun</i>	Tobacco	Flower	21	5.46
<i>Persica vulgaris</i> Miller.	<i>Seftali</i>	Peach	Flower	25	6.50
<i>Petroselinum crispum</i> (Miller) A. W. Hill.	<i>Maydanoz</i>	Parsley	Leaf	16	4.16
<i>Prunus avium</i> L.	<i>Kira</i>	Cherry	Fruit	28	7.28
<i>Prunus x domestica</i> L.	<i>Erik</i>	Plum	Flower	3	0.78
<i>Rosa</i> sp	<i>Gül</i>	Rose	Flower	29	7.54
<i>Solanum tuberosum</i> L.	<i>Patates</i>	Potato	Flower	2	0.52
<i>Styrax officinalis</i> L.	<i>Tespihagaci</i>	Snowdrop bush, storax,	Flower	4	1.04
<i>Tagetes patula</i> L.	<i>Kadife</i>	French marigold	Flower	20	5.20
<i>Tulipa</i> sp	<i>Lale</i>	Tulip	Flower	1	0.26
<i>Viola odorata</i> L. var. <i>odorata</i>	<i>Menekse</i>	Sweet violet	Flower	23	5.98
<i>Viola tricolor</i> L.	<i>Hercai menekşe</i>	Viola, Johnny Jump-up	Flower	27	7.02
<i>Vitis vinifera</i> L.	<i>Uzum</i>	Grape	Fruit	17	4.42
Total:				384	100

Results and discussion

Ethnobotanical uses of plants are often lost easily in modern civilization, due to industrial activity that substitutes traditional handicrafts⁸. The knowledge of generations is in a state of flux, subject to many outside influences. It is difficult to say how much has already been lost, but there is much still to be investigated. Not only plants are endemic, but local knowledge is equally endemic and it may have a much shorter life span than many of the plants⁹. Industrialization greatly reduced the need to produce handmade goods because factories and machines could produce items more quickly, cheaply, and in larger quantities than could be made in the home¹⁰. The livelihood of the rural people is dependent not only on the agricultural and animal products, but also on the forests and other natural resources¹¹⁻¹⁴. In addition to these resources, traditional handicrafts are

important for local economies. In areas where job opportunities are limited, they form one of the main sources of income for individual producers^{10,15-20}. In Turkey, women in both rural and urban areas have skills such as sewing, embroidery and knitting. Only a small number of them use their skills for generating income in the home²¹. Although relatively better when compared to the average income in Turkey, the region of study could not be considered as being rich. The main sources of income for the inhabitants are agriculture and stockbreeding. The reason for this is the Kucuk Menderes Basin, where the locals settled. Like weaving and embroidery needlework used to be one of the main sources of income for the local women other than agriculture^{20, 22}. However, urbanization and an increase of income in general caused women to shy away from this handcraft. In modernization and the rapid acculturation process,

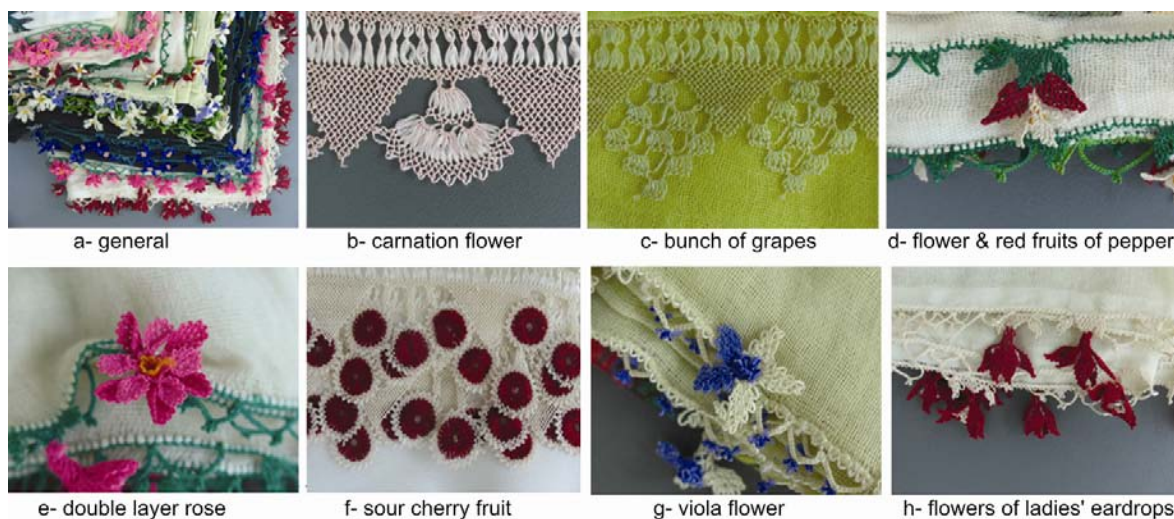


Fig. 1—Some plant patterns of silk based needle works in the study area

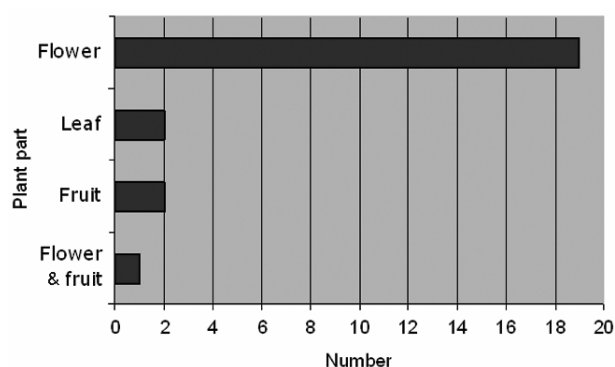


Fig. 2—Plant parts used ranked by frequency

this culturally important heritage of women is at risk and eroding²⁰.

As a result of the study, 24 taxa were identified (Table 1). Different parts of plants were observed to be used as patterns (Fig. 1). Among the identified patterns, the flower was the most common with 19 (Fig. 2). Fruit (2), leaf (2) and flower plus fruit (1) were other motifs identified. Most of the plants used in the patterns were not distributed naturally in the area, but cultivated in pots, fields or gardens. Plants such as sour cherry, fig, peach and plum are tree forms that are widely cultivated in the area and *Styrax officinalis* is a shrub that is distributed naturally in this region. *Nicotiana tabacum* and *Solanum tuberosum* are widely cultivated species and constitute an important source of income for the region. Also *Capsicum annuum*, *Prunus avium*, *Ficus carica*, *Nicotiana tabacum*, *Persica vulgaris*, *Petroselinum crispum*, *Prunus cerasifera*, and *Vitis vinifera* are grown and also one of economic value. *Capsicum*

annuum, *Colchicum autumnale*, *Dianthus caryophyllus*, *Fuchsia hybrida*, *Hyacinthus orientalis*, *Hydrangea* sp, *Nicotiana tabacum*, *Petroselinum crispum*, *Tagetes patula*, *Viola odorata* var. *odorata*, and *Viola tricolor* are herbaceous forms. All plant based patterns, except *Capsicum annuum*, are represented with only one part of the plant. Patterns are flower (*Fuchsia hybrida*), leaf (*Ficus carica*) or fruit (*Vitis vinifera*). However, in pepper (*Capsicum annuum*) both flower and red fruits are identified in needlework. *Rosa* is unique among flower patterns used, as it can be one layer or double layers. It can easily be recognized with its double layers among other patterns.

The use of different colours on the same pattern is interesting. This can be accomplished in one of three ways. In the first group, corolla and reproductive organs are represented in different colours. *Viola odorata* var. *odorata*, *Hyacinthus orientalis* and *Fuchsia hybrida* can be cited among these. In the second group, there are two colours on the same pattern or part of the flower, *Viola tricolor*, *Jasminum fruticans* and *Anthemis* sp are the best examples. For instance, in *Viola tricolor* patterns, blue and white was used on the same flower. Another example is the French marigold; different colours are used on the outer rims of the flower's petals. In the third group, four different colours are used. The best example is *Capsicum annuum*, green for leaves, white for petals, orange for reproductive organs and red for fruits. Another interesting use of the colour can be seen in *Vitis vinifera* and *Dianthus caryophyllus*, where the whole pattern is one colour. For the reproductive

organs; orange, yellow and white is used where orange is the most preferred colour. Despite all the difficulties, traditional handcrafts are still passed from generation to generation. The ethnobotanical knowledge of the Anatolian people is an important part of the world cultural heritage. The study aims to record the knowledge of the use of plant based needlework of Western Anatolia and preserve the traditional art form.

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