

TRADITIONAL CRAFTS AND TRADITIONAL PRODUCTION OF HOME-MADE OBJECTS OR PRODUCTS

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Traditional crafts and traditional domestic production use most often local raw and other materials for the making of objects related mainly to the housing, the food, the clothing and the infrastructure of the settlement. The resultant product has a relatively long life and is often used by several generations in turn. Thus in a way the created object, although indirectly, “transmits” in time the inherited knowledge of the ancestors who have made it and, which is more important, directly and actively participates in life (of the family, of the kinship, and of the definite group) by means of the aesthetic and artistic specifics of its form and decoration. In that way certain aesthetic and artistic views and conceptions embedded in the separate object “live” for a long time, in the meanwhile taking part in the establishment of the aesthetic criteria of many generations. Last but not least, having found their place at home, the objects made by traditional crafts and home production activities take part in the long-term acquisition of skills and knowledge about the place and the role of the aesthetic in life by constructing a wholesome “micro universe”, which in itself is the material world of the predecessors.

Initially created by almost all the inhabitants of the village or the separate community in order to satisfy the everyday human needs, the products of the domestic activities are gradually replaced by the products born under the hands of craftsmen. The Bulgarian National Revival period (18th-19th century) is strongly marked by the significant rise of crafts. It is precisely from that time that we today have some specimens preserved, especially interesting and important if tradition is concerned. Brought to life in a time of expanding markets and of flourishing commercial fairs, where the handi-

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craft products have a broad realization, their boom and their produce in this period are marked also by at least one more essential specificity. It is precisely during the time of the Revival that in the Bulgarian conditions are established the structures of the craft guilds, rather powerful for their time, which gradually become more and more specialized in separate manufactures. It is no coincidence that the Bulgarian National Revival is also the period marked by the growth and the development of the Revival artistic schools, and of the craft centers (the village of Busintsi or the town of Troyan in the field of pottery-making, the towns of Chiprovtsi or Kotel in the field of carpet-making, etc.). In this process of skill specialization in the field of virtuosic handling with the physical material and of sculpturing it within the limits it allows in order to achieve an ever-perfecting form, often subjected to additional embellishment, a certain number of discoveries are “born”, perceived by the contemporaries as “secrets” of the craft and transmitted to the followers – from father to son, from master to apprentice. In contrast to the products-objects, which the crafts usually manufacture, and which, being material, live for a long time, these “secret” skills, most often bordering on virtuosity, are rather fragile. As a rule they exist by being directly transmitted from person to person, and the technical and technological norms associated with them, also as a rule, are not recorded. Today with the dying out of the crafts, as well as with the gradual loss of the people who practice them, we face the risk to lose also the knowledge and the know-how characterizing these skills. The “*Living Human Treasures*” program supposes a special interest towards them, a special care for their preservation, as well as the necessity to provide the conditions for their transmitting to the following generations.

The boom and the following gradual dying out of the crafts in Bulgaria during the 20th century as a consequence of the historical changes and of the ever growing mechanized production, is accompanied by the permanent presence of practicing knowledge and skills in the sphere of the domestic activities in Bulgarian citizens’ lives. In spite of the establishment of new technologies in the field of weaving, for example, in spite of the broad distribution of the industrial production of textiles, the home loom and the rugs, carpets or fine materials with selvage, manufactured on it mainly by women

in the family circle, continues to be a living practice even today. Of course, what is to be taken into account is that this is valid much more for the village rather than the town milieu where, in spite of certain exceptions, traditional skills are “forgotten” much earlier. Another fact that is also to be taken into account is that no matter how conservative and changing at a slow pace, traditional skills are still not preserved entirely unchanged. A good example in this respect is women’s hand-knitting of lace, well preserved and existing as a home production activity in modern times as well. Although making laces has not achieved the status of a craft, as it has happened in the conditions of some Western European cultural traditions – for example point-lace (also known in Bulgaria as “Brussels lace” or “Kalofer lace”) – it became widely spread during the National Revival, settled firmly and permanently in the Bulgarian lands, and still continues to be a living practice. Knitting lace as a home activity today is one of the most vital skills with traditional roots.

Apart from the traditional conceptions of beauty, the products of traditional crafts and home activities also materialize the predecessors’ notion of benefit. According to the traditional concept, beautiful is what is also most useful and vice versa – what is useful is beautiful as well. Made by means of old, predominantly manual technologies, these material products are often additionally decorated by coloring (crimsoning) and ornamentation. In fact, precisely the manner of structuring the individual form, as well as the manner of its decoration are transmitted from generation to generation and are conceived as traditional Bulgarian cultural heritage by a large audience.



In the Bulgarian lands many and various crafts and domestic activities are widespread, related to the people’s lifestyle through the centuries. Each of these has its own specificity. Also various are their names. There are cases in which the same craft or home activity has different designations in the different regions.

To make things easier, in the questionnaire card have been enumerated in a table over thirty of the most common crafts

and domestic activities, mainly grouped according to the material they use. In the cases of more than one known name of a craft or activity, preference has been given to the most frequently used ones. An opportunity has also been provided in the questionnaire card that some other previously unmentioned crafts and domestic activities are added to the given list.

For every home activity or craft practiced in the particular village or town, the collection of additional data has been planned as well (the data being related to the time of emergence of the activity or craft in the town or village and to the number, sex, ethnic and religious characteristics of the people professing or practising it). A number of questions have been aimed at revealing where the skill was mastered, why it is practiced, what objects it produces. It has been of special interest whether knowledge and experience are transmitted to younger people.

The collection and systematization of the data has offered an opportunity to draw an almost complete picture of the state of traditional crafts and home production activities on the territory of Bulgaria today. Special attention has been paid, of course, to the domestic activities and the crafts, the products of which are of an artistic nature, as well as to those having ritual functions. Stress has also been laid on the samples made by means of rare old technologies, though in some cases with more modern instruments, on the reproduction of traditional samples characterized by a specific regional or local form, decoration, etc.

The generalization of the data from the questionnaire cards shows that in most of the administrative regions of the country and on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria as a whole, are preserved traditional knowledge and skills for processing clay, metal, wood, leather, fur and some other vegetable and animal materials. Also manufactured are products combining raw and other materials: wood, metal, horn, leather, glass, textile, etc. The final framing and arranging of the national and the regional lists follows mainly the principle of grouping and enumerating the crafts and the activities according to the material processed.

The analysis shows that most stable and hardly pliable to change to the very present day are the domestic activities. Therefore, in both the national and the regional lists they are allotted a due place.

A characteristic feature of the domestic activities, which originated in most ancient times, is their regional and local distinctiveness. Traditionally some of them (weaving, embroidery, making hand-knitted lace, making most of the ritual objects – *martenitsa* ‘twined red and white threads’, loaves of bread, *podnitsa* ‘flat earthen baking dish’, colored and decorated eggs, ritual figures and bunches of flowers) are done by women and others (shepherd’s woodcarving) – by men. To a large degree this division is preserved to the present day. Relatively strictly are observed some local specificities in the making of the objects, some regional names are preserved, as are also some of the traditional prescriptions and beliefs associated with the making of the ritual objects. Today, as in the past, a large part of the domestic activities are ubiquitous, and the skills for their fulfillment are not rare. They are a socially significant opportunity for the realization of human creative abilities.

As a whole, men’s craft activities are preserved to a much lower degree than those of women; but in the same time much less in use are those women’s domestic activities, the products of which in the past were for sale on the market – for instance, making point-lace. Although comparatively rare, data are also available about some home activities that are typical only for a certain ethnic group. Examples in this respect are the Romanian cut-and-embroidered lace and the Muslim *oya* (embroidered lace), specific for some groups of the Muslim population; the making of the traditional Muslim women’s wedding costume, etc.

It must be specifically pointed out that in the large variety of domestically manufactured products, preserved to the present day, some are of unique artistic value.

In contrast to domestic activities, crafts are much more closely linked to the market. The selling of the produce, through which the craftsman provides his own and his family’s living, is a necessary condition for the vitality and the

reproduction of crafts. Due to this, surviving until today are some crafts that still have an economic significance, although a rather restricted one: black smithery, cart-smithery, cooperage. They are still practiced today in many places of the country and are still capable of satisfying the immediate needs of some part of the population.

In the nowadays conditions enjoying the attention of the public are silver and gold smithery and copper smithery, woodcarving, gravestone making and folk stone plastic art, pottery, traditional stone masonry, leather processing, saddler-making (making bridles, halters and other leather strap accessories for draft cattle). Rather rare are today some crafts that used to be typical for the country, such as making cutlery and hardware, gun smithery, homespun manufacturing and tailoring, making goat's hair products, felt making, shoes and slippers making, making packsaddles for draft animals, making small sheep and cattle bells, wooden wine vessels making, yarn and textile dyeing, making traditional homespun braids, horn processing, making toys and folk musical instruments. Most of these were thriving during the National Revival period but today are preserved only in some isolated places. Their value as components of a unitary complex of crafts, traditional for Bulgaria, practicing mainly ancient technologies, and in many cases entirely manual, has been accounted for by including them in the lists.

Parallel to that in the lists are also included some more recent crafts, such as bell casting, phaeton making and millinery, which originated later, but became established as traditional for the Bulgarian reality. Today they are rare, too, and can only occasionally be observed in certain places.

Both the old and the more recent traditional crafts are transmitted to the following generations directly, as a living human experience. Learning the subtleties of the craft goes hand in hand with the mastering of a number of professional norms and criteria that guarantee the quality of the produce. The crafts that are practiced in shops or workshops are done mainly by men and are transmitted from the master to the apprentice or, not infrequently, by heritage. Today crafts are occasionally practiced by women too, and the fundamentals of some of them (woodcarving, pottery, textile manufacture,

etc.) are taught in specialized art schools. In spite of all this, the direct transmission of knowledge and experience from person to person is still preserved today and sometimes, as for example with whittling, making spindles and spoons, and tinkering, it is restricted mainly within a particular ethnic group.

Two basic criteria are employed for including one or another craft or domestic activity in the lists.

The first is related to including some very common and today still vital activities and crafts, characteristic for many settlements and practiced by a significant number of people – for instance smithery, weaving and embroidery, making hand-knitted lace. In order to determine which are the common and which are the rare crafts or domestic activities for a given region, leading is the number of settlements in which they are practiced and the number of people practicing them. The data are outlined on the basis of comparisons.

The second basic criterion presupposes the including of rare domestic activities and crafts which are already extinct in many places but in separate towns or villages continue to be practiced – for example, shepherd's woodcarving, gaytandzhystvo (stranding braids), making felt, making straw-mats, town clock repairing, etc. Also taken into account is the way in which the skills for practicing the craft or home activity are acquired (in the family, at school or in other ways), what the masters in question produce and whether they transmit their skills to others, which would ensure the vitality of the particular craft or home activity. Priority is given to the cases in which the skills are transmitted in the family, in the workshop or by other people; when the traditional objects are made using old technologies or when forgotten samples are restored. Very important is the transmittance of these traditional technological skills and knowledge to the following generations, i.e. training young people with the purpose of their mastering the traditional activities and crafts, which are typical for the particular settlement or for the ethnic or religious community in question.

In preparing the lists some other considerations are taken into account as well.

Special focus are those crafts and domestic activities the products of which are of an artistic nature or have artistic functions in the clothing, at home, in the social or the religious buildings. Of special interest are also the crafts and activities creating objects that have ritual functions – for example, colored and decorated eggs at Easter.

At the same time, in separate settlements or communities objects are made which lack artistic qualities but the masters of which apply rather old technological skills that are transmitted from generation to generation in the course of decades. For example, in individual cases some very old technologies are applied in the making of horseshoes or strawmats. These cases are also the object of special attention.

In some cases, in view of the development of technological culture and the use of more modern instruments, leading is the fact that the objects are made according to traditional samples in form, decoration, etc.

The traditional manufacturing of objects is labor-consuming and is related to an extinct or a dying out culture of clothing, of home arrangement and of preparing and consuming food. Today crafts and domestic activities have largely lost their economic significance. Their study within the project “*Living Human Treasures*” shows that they are practiced most frequently by elderly people for satisfying certain needs or as a kind of social activity providing an opportunity for the expression of the creative and the artistic principle in every person. The rare exceptions in this respect are connected with the making of some ritual objects like colored and decorated eggs, *martenitsa*, *survachka* (decorated cornel twig used to tap people’s backs while wishing them a Happy New Year) and, less frequently, ritual loaves of bread. The interest towards this type of domestic activities, predominantly women’s, is significant and with no doubt related to the revived interest towards the traditional elements in the celebration of some family and calendar rituals. Relatively stable are also the non-ritual domestic activities. They have a social significance and are related to the traditionally close relationship of man with nature and the object produced, a relationship which proves to be rather durable and flexible.

In need of special protection today are mainly the masterly practice of these crafts and the making of objects of a high artistic nature, as well as some unique manual activities, ancient as technologies, which have their modern technological variants. It would be worthwhile to specially assess and stimulate the use of objects and technologies connected with these home industries in the framework of the cultural tourism currently developing in Bulgaria.

Crafts need to make profit and could not possibly survive without any support. Today the profit comes only from cultural industries and is quite insufficient. Although in an extremely restricted scale, the skills for practicing most of the crafts known in the past are still preserved. In spite of their declining economic functions in some places they continue to exist in their natural form until approximately the 1950s.

During the 20th century care is also taken for the creative acquisition of models and technologies by some home industries for the purposes of crafts. Older masters have taught a limited number of young people in these crafts. What is characteristic in these cases is that the artisan skills are acquired at first hand by another master and more rarely through the restoration of forgotten or half-forgotten samples and models. Today, however, the transmission of these skills to the new generations is rather an exception, because it is not the object of a special protection aimed at their preservation and survival as an immediate, living human experience.

The use of the traditional crafts and the domestic activities for the purposes of the cultural industries is an expedient and a condition for their closer integration in the contemporary world. The roots of the traditional skills are very often hidden in times immemorial. Their vitality as a living human experience transmitted to the generations to come is with no doubt an important component of the identity of the Bulgarian citizens.



One of the basic occupational activities typical of the Bulgarian traditional living style and culture is *farming*. In Bulgarian folklore culture many songs and ritual practices are

devoted to the earth and to the farming work as a basic source of living. Not only the work rituals, but the traditional ritual culture as a whole is directed, in the more general sense of the word, to provide fertility, which is tantamount to family welfare.

There are many evidences about the well-developed farming of the Bulgarians as early as the time of their settlement on the Balkans. Of special significance for the rich farming tradition in the Bulgarian lands are the natural conditions and also the well-developed technology for farming the land both of the Slavs who settled here and of the local Thracian population. Evidences of farming as a basic occupational activity of the population in the Bulgarian lands are found also after the foundation of the Bulgarian state – in the early and the later medieval archaeological and written sources such as John the Exarch's *Hexameron*, for example. During the Ottoman rule until the Liberation in 1878 and in some regions for a long time after that, traditional farming tools and technologies are preserved. At the end of the 19th century instead of the traditional wooden plough, the iron plough becomes frequently used, especially in the larger farms in Dobrudzha, Thrace, and the Vidin region, where the industrial ploughs started to be used for the first time. Thus, with the introduction of the capitalist type of mechanized production and later also in the conditions of socialist intensification, many of the traditional farming tools and technologies gradually die out, but in the conditions of the home or the small family business some of them continue to be employed. In spite of the modern technique, the experience and the knowledge accumulated by the Bulgarians for farming the land and for harvesting crops prove to be valuable, and especially after 1989, when private enterprise is stimulated, a process of restoration of some traditional technologies is also observed.

Even in the past Bulgarians are well known for growing different grain cultures, for their developed fruit-growing, vine-growing and gardening. Later other cultures like tobacco, attar-yielding rose, poppy, rice, maize, cotton, sesame, etc. are introduced into the country.

Vine-growing is an ancient tradition in the Bulgarian lands. The cult towards wine has a marked presence in Bulgarian

folklore culture. It is no coincidence that one of the feasts most preserved until today is Trifon Zarezan (St. Trifon's Day). In almost all regions of the country, where natural conditions allow, different sorts of grapes are grown, oldest among which are the *gamza* and the *pamid*.

Among the oil-yielding cultures especially valued is the rose, from which in the Rose Valley (in the regions of Karlovo and Kazanluk) is still obtained the famous for its high qualities *Bulgarian rose attar*. There are old traditions in the growing of *tobacco* as well. It is a basic traditional occupational activity mainly of the population along the southern and the western slopes of the Rhodopes, Pirin, Belasitsa, along the valley of the river Maritsa, etc., but recently it has turned into a source of living in other regions as well.

Just like farming, *stock-breeding*, too, has always been a basic traditional occupational activity in the Bulgarian lands. Archaeological and written sources from the past tell us about strongly developed sheep breeding as early as the Thracians, about an old tradition in the breeding of domestic animals of the Proto-Bulgarians and the Slavs who settled here later. Especially during the Bulgarian National revival period sheep breeding is an important occupational activity for the population in some regions of the country such as the Srednogorie region, Pirin, the Rhodopes, the Kotel region, Strandzha, the Balkan, Dobrudzha, etc.

The traditional breeding of domestic animals and the manufacturing of animal products is related to the observation of a number of prescriptions and taboos, regulated through different ritual practices. Many of them are realized on a particular calendar day (for example, the weaning and the first milking of sheep are traditionally performed on St. George's Day).

Bee-keeping, the obtaining of honey and honey products is also a traditional activity in the Bulgarian lands, known as well to the ancient Thracians. Today *apiculture* is an activity which directly depends not only on the specialized knowledge and the skills of its bearer, but also on the natural conditions – a necessary condition for raising bees is the availability of ecologically clean regions.

Fishing is a traditional occupational activity of only part of the population in certain regions along the Danube, the Maritsa River and the Black Sea. In the rest of the cases it is mainly a pastime.

The sources published so far show that, with the exception of fishing, the traditional occupational activities mentioned, albeit in a different degree and scope, characterize all the regions of Bulgaria. The aim of the questionnaire card study carried out is to obtain more concrete information on the contemporary state of the traditional occupational activities in the country and in the different regions. The data required are organized not only around the fixing of the separate occupational activities, which are still existent and typical for a particular town or village. We are also interested in the kinds of products and the techniques of production, whether the activity is practiced in domestic conditions or through a small family business, whether it is transmitted from generation to generation, and to what ethnic group its bearers belong. Because of this, the questionnaire representation of the occupational activities does not conform to the standard classification (farming, animal-breeding, etc.), but in separate columns are introduced the respective sectors of the traditional occupational activities (for example, wine making, brandy making, etc.), as well as activities that are practically related to more than one occupation (for example, culinary productions). The questionnaire table is open for registering the data about more than the given occupational activities, which according to the person filling in the questionnaire card are typical for the particular settlement or region.

The analysis of the information from the questionnaire study shows that there are certain specificities for the separate regions in the existent practicing of the traditional occupational activities, but the traditional production of wine, brandy, milk and meat products, honey and honey products can be found on the whole territory of the country. In the traditional production of wine prevalent is the production of red wine. Along with the ancient sorts of grapes (*pamid* and *gamza*) the ones most often pointed out are cabernet and merlot. Yoghurt and cheese (mostly cow's and sheep's), although mainly for home use, are also produced in almost all towns and villages. Fishing and the traditional preparing of

fish products are existent practices in the regions already mentioned, but the questionnaire study allowed also the registration of various techniques of fishing and catching crayfish and mussels, most of which are quite old. In the pointed regions occupational activities such as the growing of roses, tobacco and other cultures continue to be practiced. To satisfy domestic needs and in the conditions of the small family business old techniques are still applied today in gardening (in vegetable production, fruit-growing and floriculture). Still in progress is the traditional production of *bozah* and other non-alcoholic drinks, as well as the production of various types of *halvah*. The traditional confectionery specialties (*halvah*, *kadaif* ‘Turkish syrup-soaked shredded sweet’, baklava, sweets, sweet pies, etc.) are also made in all the regions of the country, but they are of greater importance and have a larger spread in the areas with a Muslim population. Ritual breads, *banitsa* (cheese pastry), vegetarian dishes made of beans, rice, potatoes, etc., meat dishes and delicacies (various types of *sudzhuk* ‘flat sausage’, sausages, *kavarma* ‘highly seasoned fried meat’, etc.) today are still present on the table. The general impression from the questionnaire study is that the preservation of different ritual and festive practices maintains even today the preparation of various traditional foods. Of course, in the separate regions and among the different religious and ethnic communities they are represented with different variants and designations.