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ROMANIAN RUGS

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On the cover: *Detail of Oltenian rug*

(Photo by Radu Sorin)

Black-and-white photos: G. Șerban (E. F. I. A. P.)

Colour photos: *Radu Sorin*

Thanks to their beauty, the wealth of their decoration and the harmony of their colours, Romanian carpets have attracted the attention of many ethnographers and amateurs of folk-art.

The interiors of peasant cottages best reflect the way in which village arts and crafts responded to the needs of life under certain given historical circumstances. They express a synthesis of various crafts and are at the same time a witness to the skill of the craftsmen and to their feeling for beauty. Different crafts contributed to shaping the interior of a peasant cottage: furniture carved out of high quality timber (oak, walnut, maple, etc.); beautifully-shaped pottery added the brightness of enamels and their live colours; woven cloths and embroideries clad the room in festive vestments.

Even household implements and kitchen utensils, such as wooden spoons, distaffs and spindles are often individual works of art. The perfect adaptation of form to function and the masterly way in which they are decorated, arrest our attention. What is characteristic of a peasant interior is the fact that these various elements form a rich and beautiful whole. Peasant interiors never look cramped, the available space being used in the most rational way. All this is due to age-old traditions, handed down from generation to generation, traditions which summarized the practice and experience of centuries. Each object is to be found in its appropriate place, each one adequately answers the demands made on it by a given way of life. This fact alone explains why such a heterogeneous assembly of objects showing such differences in shape, colour, decoration and function is no eyesore, but, on the contrary, forms an organic whole from which nothing can be taken, and to which nothing can be added without disturbing its unity. Such interiors are common in Romanian villages in every ethnographic zone of the country, in the mountainous regions of Transylvania, (Hunedoara and Mara-

mureş), as well as the hills of Moldova, Bukovina and Wallachia, or the plains of the Banat, Dobruja or Oltenia. The cottages of each of these regions, and sometimes even of some of their districts display features of their own. But this variety is in forms which have their place within a common style, thus expressing the unity of the Romanian people through its arts and crafts.

A calm pleasant, harmonious atmosphere prevails in these cottages, where the useful and the beautiful appear together. Rugs play their part in helping to bring about this atmosphere. The care of those who made them was lavished on these large and expensive pieces, which were a source of pride. In certain circumstances they were displayed for the whole village to see. In a carriage with a bride's dowry for instance, or at the solemn occasion of a funeral.

To describe Romanian rugs one must first of all explain the commonly used term for them. The word "rug" commonly used in the trade, is not really adequate for thus named objects. Nor do people in the villages call them that, their vernacular name is: *scoarță*. This name draws attention to the difference between them and other objects which are similar in appearance but are differently made. This precise expression is deeply rooted in the language of the people and reveals much about their distant origins.

The Romanian *scoarță* is a noun of Latin origin, having the same root as the French *écorce*, the Italian *scorza* and the Spanish *escuerzo* (Latin *scortea*). The word refers to the bark of a tree. In Romanian its meaning has been extended to cover certain textiles, a process that has not occurred in any other Romance language*. To explain this, it is necessary to recall briefly the peculiar circum-

* In Spanish the Arabian *al-jumra*, meaning a palm-leaf texture has turned into *al fombra*, meaning woollen fabric. Its evolution is similar to the Romanian term (W. Meyer-Lübke, *Romanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Heidelberg, 1935)

stances under which Romanian popular architecture developed. Whereas in Italy, Spain and most of France, peasant houses and cottages were made mostly of stone, in Romania, a country covered by vast forests, timber used to be the main building material. In Europe, Romania provides some of the most important examples of timber buildings. Already in the distant past Romanian peasants used timber to build their homes. They constructed walls out of long beams, filling the space between with dry forest moss to stop holes and prevent draughts. For the same reason the inside walls were lined with *scoarță*, that is tree bark.



1. Interior of a peasant cottage in Northern Moldova (Cimpulung District)

In time and given changing living conditions, bark was replaced by woollen or hempen fabrics. Since these fabrics were used for the same purpose (i.e. to keep rooms warm), they were naturally called *scoarțe*. Actually the aspect of the earliest, a sort of brown-striped hangings, sometimes recalls the rough bark of a tree.

Their purpose as linings for walls becomes even more evident when we observe that in Romanian peasant cottages rugs never cover the floor but are always hung on the walls. To this end rooms were provided with long rods fixed near the ceiling yet at a distance of 30–50 cm. from the walls. These rods are called *culmi* (summits), serving as hangers for rugs or other draperies. Sometimes they run along three sides of a room. Hanging from these rods, rugs look like decorative screens which help to maintain a comfortable temperature inside,



II. Moldovian *lăicer* from the Vrancea country

thanks to the insulating layer of air formed between them and the wooden walls.

Their use as wall hangings serves to distinguish Romanian rugs from Oriental ones, which are usually spread on the floors.

In addition, Romanian rugs are used to cover various pieces of furniture such as the benches along the walls and dowry chests and also as bedspreads and tablecloths. An important change in the design of peasant cottages must be mentioned; in houses of the old pattern consisting only of a living room and an anteroom used as larder, the living room only was furnished and decorated with rugs, hangings, etc. Yet, because of its permanent use, and because food was prepared there, and a fire made, it was hard to maintain it properly. The addition in time of another room brought a great change with it. The so-called "fine room", usually left unused and unheated, became the "museum" and treasure room of each household. The finest pieces of furniture and particularly rugs, hangings and embroideries were kept there. The dowries of the daughters, blankets and cushions row upon row and the rugs fixed directly on the walls or hanging from rods gave the room (together with the pottery and icons painted on glass) a festive aspect.

Rugs were also the most valued treasure in a boyar's house. More than once they were the only objects to be saved during disasters or when the owners were forced to flee. They were loaded on carriages and served to line and furnish tents in camps of war or refuge.

The Romanian term for the native rug not only reflects its distinct function, but also draws attention to the difference in manufacturing technique between Romanian and Oriental rugs. There are two basic techniques: knotting and weaving. Many Oriental rugs, true masterpieces of craftsmanship, are knotted. (A single square metre of such a rug often contains tens or even hundreds of thousands of knots which make up the pattern.) The Oriental rugs are much valued luxury articles and are widely used in Asia as well as in Europe. The second technique, that of weaving is used, for instance, in Karaman rugs. Romanian rugs are also produced by the technique of weaving.

The raw material out of which rugs are made has always been plentiful in this country and is so today. The breeding of sheep as of other animals was carried on alongside agriculture. The large



III. *Lăicer* from Northern Moldova with decorative pattern between the stripes



IV. Corner in a peasant cottage of Southern Moldova (Focșani District)

quantity of wool produced and the living conditions prevailing in the country favoured the development of a cottage textile industry as part of the closed peasant economy during feudalism and also later. Every processing stage from shearing and wool-washing to spinning and dyeing took place within the household.

In the earliest times woollen threads were used both for warp and weft; the rugs woven in that way are the most valuable. In more recent times, i.e. from mid-19th century on, the warp was made of cotton thread, and sometimes of hemp or flax. The wool for the weft was carefully spun into very thin thread of uniform thickness, which is very hard-wearing.

Rugs were woven then as now, on looms available almost in every household. The horizontal loom

is used in Romania, excepting some parts of the country where a sort of primitive vertical loom is used, made up of two "forks" (solid pillars) fixed firmly in the ground and joined on top by a horizontal beam. This latter kind of loom served to weave the so-called "shaggy covers", out of thick and long wool, which are used as blankets during the cold season. Even when they had a coloured pattern, the "shaggy covers" could not be included in the category of rugs.

The Romanian weaving loom is narrow. This technical detail makes clear why rugs mostly consist of two or even three lengths, woven separately and then sewn together to obtain the required width. Sometimes this sewing leads to a charming lack of symmetry since the patterns do not always fit together. The loom is

usually provided with two or four harnesses. Yet of late, especially after the first world war, a technique making use of 30—40 harnesses has become widespread. Very few rugs of high quality were worked in this technique. The really valuable pieces are produced in the old traditional way of weaving even today.

One of the most appreciated features of Romanian rugs is their refined and harmonious colour, with bright shades that are never strident and subdued shades that are never dull. The peasant women who weave the rugs know how to obtain a kind of glow from the colours, to which is added a mastery of the art of blending.

Sometimes the necessary threads are not dyed, when weavers need white or grey thread. In the past the dyes were exclusively of vegetable origin mostly grown in this country, and rarely imported by merchants trading in Balkan and Oriental markets. The dominant colours were: black, red, green, brown and yellow. Red was obtained from madder, yellow from saffron, and brown or black from alder bark or ordinary marjoram. Blue, just as for pottery, was very expensive and came from the Orient. The recipes for obtaining vegetable dyes varied from region to region according to natural resources and local experience. Even today the range of colours is most comprehensive; however, in this age of industrial development aniline dyes have gradually replaced those of vegetable origin.

It was usually the women who knew the plants, the time for their gathering and how to obtain dyes from them. In that way a craft came into being, whose importance is obvious from the richness and multitude of colour on fabrics, leather objects, Easter eggs and pottery, each handicraft possessing recipes of its own appropriate to its raw materials and the technique used.

It is worth mentioning that women did not dye the whole amount of wool needed for a rug all at once, since weaving a rug took a long time and, besides,



V. *Păretar* from the Banat decorated with geometrical patterns

dyes were hard to get and available in small quantities only. That is one of the reasons why one finds several shades of the same colour in the same piece of work. Another is the quality of the wool, which differed, as did that of dyes. Anyhow the results are delightful and, as in the case of Oriental carpets, they help to identify genuine pieces*.

Carpets were as a rule woven late in autumn and throughout the winter, when work in the fields was over and women spent their time weaving cloth for garments and household needs. In the past, all the activities related to weaving, as almost all peasant activities, assumed a communal character, being joined in by the entire village. All the villagers planted and then harvested hemp, and sheared sheep in at just about the same time. The processing of hemp and wool had to be completed within a given period. Women often gathered and worked together, sometimes each one doing her own work, but more often than not

* Interesting data are contained in Tudor Pamfile and M. Lupescu's *Cromatică poporului român* (The Colour Sense of the Romanian People), Bucharest, 1910, and Artur Gorovei's *Meșteșugul vopsitului cu buruieni* (The Craft of Plant Dyeing), Bucharest, 1922

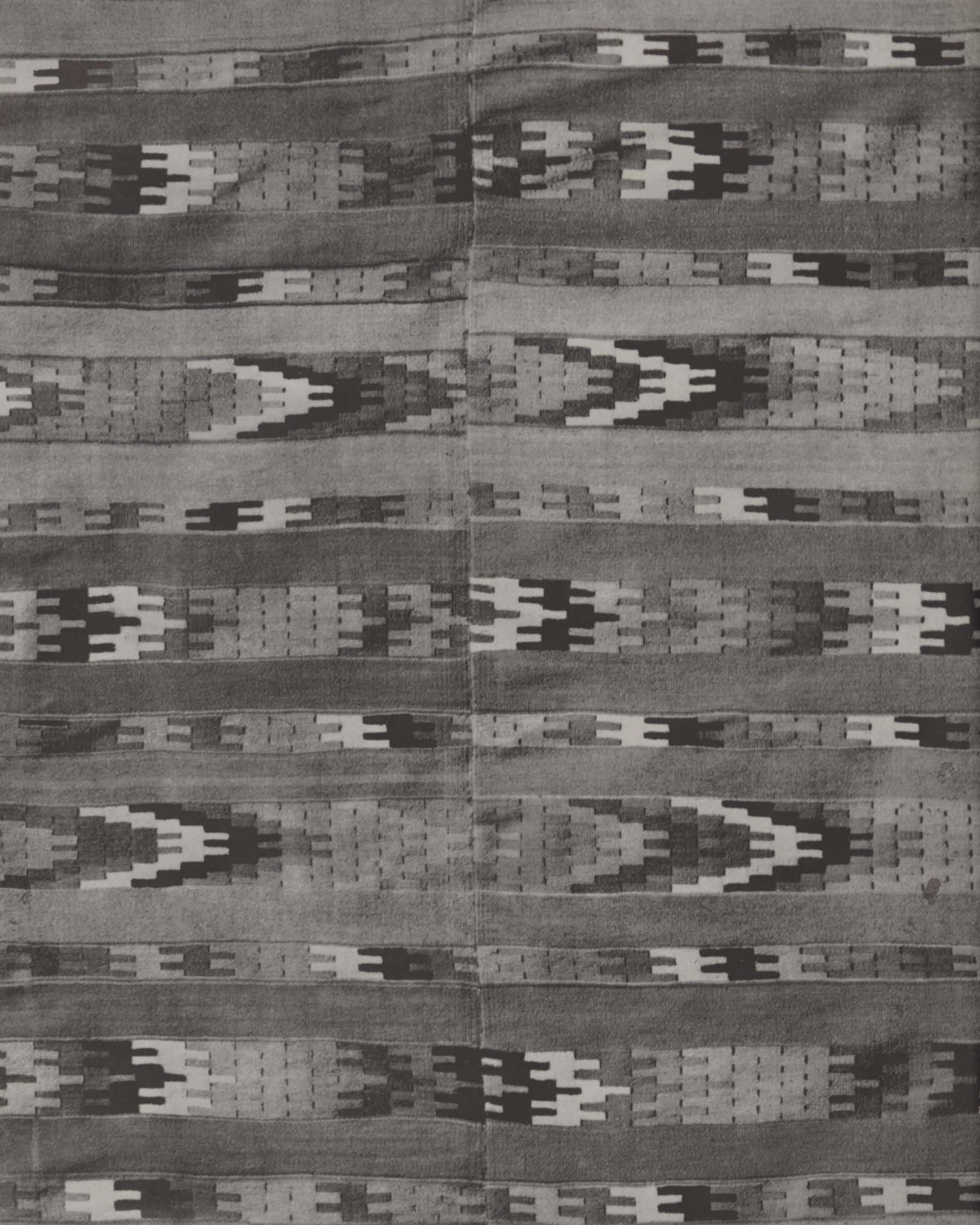
doing the work of the woman whose house they were in. She in turn was obliged not only to feed them but also to go and work for other women too. Before a wedding, girls gathered together to get ready the cloths given as a dowry to the bride. Where rugs were concerned things differed, since it took a long time to make them. It often happened that several women in the same household worked in turn at the same rug which finally was the result of their collective endeavours. The same thing frequently happened in the Middle East where whole families, sometimes even several generations, worked on the same carpet.

There are several stages in the evolution of the Romanian rug. Pieces illustrative of each stage are not only to be found in peasant cottages but are also manufactured nowadays. Thus the ancient forms coexist with others characteristic of our new times.

The oldest woollen fabric decorating the inside of cottages and at the same time the ancestor of the Romanian rug is the so-called *lăicer* or *păretar* (bench or wall coverlet). It was typical of Romanian houses throughout the country in the past and in some regions it survives to the present. The benches are placed on the two sides of the room opposite the hearth and the oven which are always built in a corner. The table stood inside the angle formed by the two benches. The benches, each made of a massif plank 6–7 m. long, were sometimes fastened together at the near ends and fixed into the walls during building. Or they were simply supported by blocks of cut stone or round

VI. Corner in a peasant cottage in the Banat (Lugoj District)





VII. Wallachian rug with stripes and geometrical patterns

polished logs. The peasants sat down to dinner on these benches. In houses with big families, larger benches (60–70 cm. wide) were often turned into beds overnight. Narrow strips of woollen fabric were woven as coverlets for these benches. Similar items were made to cover the walls above the benches or the bedsteads. As a whole, the wall coverlets are larger and their length is sometimes astonishing. There are such pieces in the region of Vrancea, up to 10–20 m. long. They run along the four sides of a room in a continuous strip. They are there for their usefulness, not as decoration. Their purpose is to cover the walls half way up, protecting those who lean against them against direct contact with the bare wood. The fact that they were always hung at the same level is confirmed by the shape of the hangings in the Bistrița Valley and the Suceava Region in Moldova, which are narrower under window sills, having a rectangular depression to let light enter the room. Such items are made for certain rooms and cannot be used for others.

Woven with two or four harnesses, these hangings are still widespread in this country. They are present in every type of country, in the plain, on hills, in the mountains and in everyone of the historical regions, thus showing the



VIII. Wallachian rug. Its central field consists of big rhombs

unified character of Romanian art. The hangings, however, are not identical: those woven in the Banat are unlike those in Bukovina, whereas the hangings in the Hațeg County are distinct from those used in Wallachia. But the differences are of an ornamental and technical nature only, not in the least affecting their common origin and function which expresses the needs of a certain way of life.

Examining their patterns we can go back to the earliest attempts to decorate fabrics and to the trends common to folk art in general. In this way we can trace the links between the art of various peoples, who sometimes live at great distances from one another.

IX. Interior of peasant cottage in Wallachia (Cislău District)



Stripes which form right angles with the long side are typical of the hangings' decoration. The first attempt at decoration was the use of two different colours — later many more — which alternated, the so-called *vîstre*. It was most simply produced by putting differently coloured threads in the ball for the weft or round the spindle. This kind of pattern has no beginning and no end, the succession of stripes being theoretically unlimited.

In time, this simple pattern developed variants. At first, colours multiplied, alternating according to certain rules. As simple as it is, this pattern delights the eye through its blending of colours that harmonize particularly well.

It is not easy to describe the colours typical of each region's hangings. Generally speaking, the colours prevalent in Moldova are brown, yellow, pale green and blue; in Central Transylvania, beside green and red, various shades of orange, whereas in Southern Transylvania black is predominant; in Oltenia, blue and white and cherry or purple red, and finally, in Eastern Wallachia, red and yellow. The second stage in the evolution of design is marked by the appearance of coloured stripes hemmed with narrow strips of a different colour, most often white. During the third stage, these narrow strips were replaced by *dinți* (teeth) or small oval dots (*pupi*). They are an intimation of patterns that were to develop in the future. From then on the hangings gradually changed from alternating stripes, to stripes alternating with patterns. These are the most widespread and artistically the most successful kind of hangings. Patterns are geometrical and have names which, a proof of the imagination of the people, have their own charm: "chain mail", "little corners", "little mouths", "double crosses", "tablets", "spindles", "little sticks", "saw teeth", "eyelets", "starlets", "stamp crosses", and so on and so forth. These patterns testify to the popular talent for analysis and observation which allows the stylization of objects in the immediate environment as well as to a poetic imagination in calling purely geometrical patterns by the names of things they resemble.

The evolution of hangings does not stop at this stage. At the beginning of the 20th century, a flower pattern replaced more and more geometrical decoration in certain regions of the country, such as for instance in Bistrița Năsăud. This process was not limited to hangings only, it can be seen in many branches of folk art (pottery, wood-carving, costume, etc.).

Sometimes the new pattern shows a tendency towards a realistic rendering, although the ornamental principle remains the same — an endless succession of patterned and simple stripes of different colours. Each sequel contain either two or more elements. At all times though the principle is a rhythmic alternation of stripes. A pattern of alternating stripes is widely used, being found even on peasant women's clothes (particularly on skirts). Thus the pattern of Maramureş skirts is made up of two alternate colours, that of Gorj, Vîlcea and Făgăraş of alternate stripes and geometrical figures, and that of Năsăud of stripes and a flower pattern. The evolution is the same: from the simple stripe, characteristic of the

X. Moldovian rug with stylized floral patterns

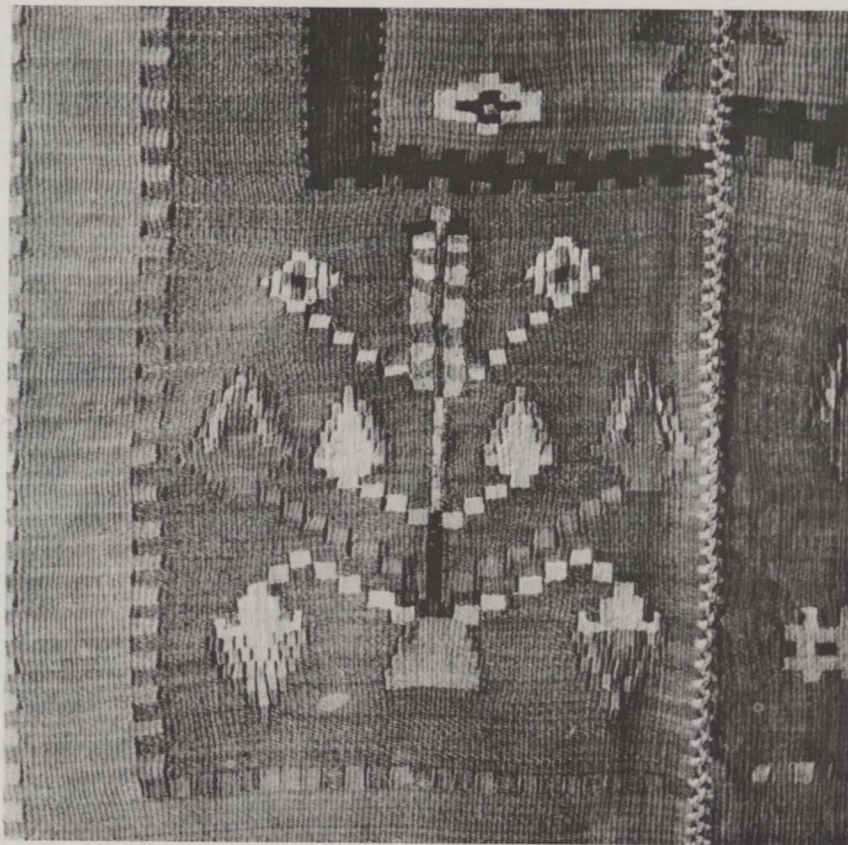


distant past, to geometrical and then flower patterns. Fabrics similar to Romanian hangings are to be found in different parts of the world. The same display of colours in stripes, the same sequence of simple and decorated stripes, and particularly the same geometrical patterns may be seen on wraps woven by peoples who could hardly have been in touch with one another. The resemblance is striking, sometimes going so far that Romanian hangings are taken for Scandinavian and especially Norwegian fabrics*. They are also like Peruvian and Central American fabrics**, or Manipur and Assam wraps (India). The explanation must be sought in the common stock of human knowledge and craft, which under similar living conditions

* Sirelius: *Finlands Ryor: L'Art rustique en Suède*, Helsinki, 1928

** *Индейцы Америки*, Publishing House of the USSR Academy of Sciences, Moscow, 1955

XI. Banat rug with the
Tree of Life motif
(detail)



yielded similar results in the centres of human civilization. It is worth stressing that achievements of the past were preserved and perpetuated in certain parts of the world only, where folk art developed to a high peak, owing first and foremost to the stableness and continuity of the population. This is the case in Romania, whose people was formed and developed inside its present territory.

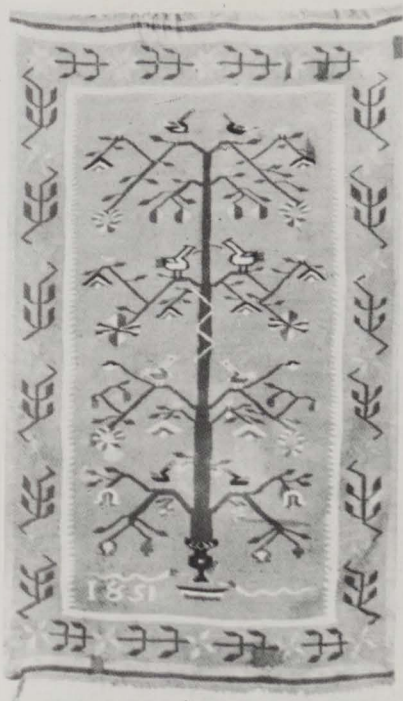
The second stage in the evolution of hangings is marked by the appearance of the peasant rug proper, consisting of two or three joined hangings. This solution

answered the need to cover larger surfaces than those of narrow benches. As looms were narrow, the weavers were obliged to sew coverlets or hangings together, two (in regions with larger looms as in Oltenia) or, when looms were too narrow, three, as in Western Transylvania and the Banat.

These peasant rugs (up to 2 m. wide) were used to cover bedsteads or the wall next to them. In the areas of Făgăraș, Hunedoara, the Banat, the Apuseni Mountains and Maramureș, they are used to cover tables also; at meal time another white table-cloth, made either of hemp or cotton, is spread over the rug; in other parts the white table-cloth lies under the coloured rug which is removed at meal-times. This kind of rug is similar to hangings both in pattern and technique of manufacture. The alternation and rhythm of stripes, without anything that could be called a beginning or an end is still the basis of decoration. These rugs, made up of two or three hangings, show the same pattern of simple stripes or stripes alternating with geometrical or flower designs.

The finest items of this type are to be found in the Hunedoara Region and particularly in the Hațeg district. Their stripes are very large and wholly covered by geometrical designs, forming large decorative patterns. The black or red groundwork brings out the white lines of the geometrical motifs in bold relief. Among the latter the most frequent are the so-called "rams' horns" — an ancient design spread throughout the country, but developed especially in the Hunedoara, Crișana and Banat Regions — "the meander", and also different variants of the solar symbol such as "the broken-limbed cross", "the rhomb with hooks", etc. The large patterned stripes are divided by sequels of narrow stripes — white parallel lines on a coloured groundwork.

The double or treble rug was long lived. Even today it is spread throughout the country, showing different regional variants, or representing various stages of development characterized by their respective patterns.



XII. Moldovian rug with the Tree of Life motif

There are also rugs belonging to a third and probably later stage. These rugs are entirely and uniformly covered by geometrical patterns but are still frameless. The essential difference lies in the gradual disappearance of stripes.

A very interesting Wallachian rug from Chiojdu Mic (Buzău area) shows a blend of the two different ways (stripes and the uniformly repeated design covering the whole groundwork). It looks like a geometrical pattern of rectangular frames distributed chain-like on a groundwork of simple coloured stripes. The decorative effect is unexpected: the rectangles appear to stand out in relief. Chequered rugs also belong to this stage of development. Equal in size and uniformly distributed over the entire surface, the squares contain a geometrical design. This pattern was obtained by

weaving oblong stripes perpendicular to the original horizontal ones. The chequered pattern resulted from these intersecting stripes. They are frequent in Oltenia, Eastern Wallachia and the Ciuc and Sf. Gheorghe areas. The finest though are to be found in the Maramureş Region. Here, there is an obvious tendency to produce more intricate patterns, such as that consisting of two larger central panels on a borderless chequered groundwork with zoo- and anthropomorphic designs. The Maramureş chequers are white, brown, or violet. The designs on them show considerable stylistic refinement. One of them features a stylized female figure in bell-shaped skirts, with arms lifted as if spinning, recalling a



XIII. Oltenian rug with floral decorations and human figures

XIV. Oltenian rug with treble frame and female figure in the centre

XV. Oltenian rug decorated with flowers and birds, in the centre a parrot

northern goddess on Prussian, Lithuanian or Old Slavic carpets. Alongside such figures stand peculiar antler-bearing animals, something between a stag and a he-goat, and rough portrayals of household utensils such as, for instance, the card. Sometimes there is a row of women that seem to be dancing a probably long forgotten dance. These are ancient local designs as are also the Romanian inscriptions in Cyrillic letters, visible on old Maramureş rugs, telling the name of the weaver and the year the rug was finished.

A third stage is marked by the production of stripeless



rugs, the so-called "winding" rugs. Their general pattern consists of circumscribed rhombs bordered by zig-zag lines. Sometimes they cover the whole groundwork and include two or three small central designs ("crosses", "starlets", or "stamp crosses"). Typical pieces can be found in Oltenia, Wallachia, Maramureş, the Bran area and in the Ciuc and Sf. Gheorghe areas. Another frequent design is a zig-zag, which is country wide because of its easy execution.

In the fourth stage the pattern began to be framed by borders along the longer sides. They were larger or narrower, with varying designs, differing from those on the field, and one may come across them throughout the country (in Oltenia, Wallachia, Moldova, Maramureş, and the Ciuc and Sf. Gheorghe areas). The field was still covered by geometrical designs, most frequently rhombs and zig-zag lines, in all possible combinations. The Wallachian rugs are most typical of this stage. Four to six rhombs are scattered careless of symmetry on a dark blue groundwork, which sometimes may be black or green. These rhombs, made up of zig-zag lines, are filled with smaller uniformly distributed rhombs with red, white, brown, or blue outlines.

At the same time, rugs made in this stage also display decorations belonging to another ornamental system. Though highly stylized and sometimes turned into strictly geometrical forms, these designs are of oriental origin. They penetrated during a transitional period (when pure geometrical designs appeared mixed with Orientally-inspired stylized plants). This combination gradually established itself in certain regions of the country, giving birth to such brilliant patterns as those

to be found in Oltenia, Moldova and the Banat, which are compositionally characterized by a four-sided border and a distinct central pattern.

The geometrical patterns are typical of the first four stages (hangings, double or treble rugs, rugs with field wholly covered by a repeated motif, and rugs bordered on two or three sides). They form the ancient local artistic stock, where geometrical elements predominated in all crafts (woodwork, pottery, distaffs, spindles, dyed Easter eggs, house-building, peasant costumes, etc.). This situation is not limited to Romanian folk art only, but is common to all early stages of civilization. It resulted not only from the prevailing techniques in weaving, it was also the earliest style in art, its means of expression.

The old tradition with its compositional rules has survived, and is detectable even in rugs with predominantly Oriental elements. Among these rules, the best preserved are the principles of succession and rhythm.

The powerful tradition of Romanian rugmaking has assimilated Oriental elements and welded them into new patterns that have entered our decorative patrimony, as is the case with Oltenian rugs. The Oriental elements we are going to mention lower down are important in the history of culture and provide us with evidence showing the routes along which certain designs spread.

Oriental influence entered the country through the southern regions and also through Northern Moldova and the Bukovina. In the south, this influence affected



XVI. Peasant interior in Oltenia (Tirgu Jiu District)

mostly Oltenia and the Banat which were linked to the Near and Middle East through the Balkan world. It was here that the important highway of Vidin passed, going southward through the Vardar Valley. Oriental rugs brought in to decorate boyars' manors, and the courts of princes, as well as the big monasteries of Tismana, Cozia, Bistrița and Hurez were always luxury articles, which alongside other Eastern wares (brassware, pottery, fabrics, etc.) were often brought by caravans led by Romanian or Macedo-Romanian merchants settled in the trade centres of the Balkan Peninsula. However the influence of Oriental rugs showed itself much later than the earliest evidence of this trade. It is probable that rugs were woven in this country for the ruling class as early as the 17th century, and for certain, in the 18th century when the local weavers blended ancient designs with contemporary Oriental elements. In the countryside, nevertheless, Oriental influence became noticeable only as late as the 19th century. In Moldova and the Bukovina, the penetration took place earlier, possibly through the Armenian colonies settled around the City and Monastery of Suceava, yet more probably due to the flood of goods pumped along the old highways going down to the Crimea and the Black Sea port of Ackerman.



XVII. Oltenian rug with double frame and central field decorated with flowers, birds, animals, human figures. Among the animals there are camels and some of the human figures wear Oriental dresses

The introduction of Oriental patterns was a gradual process needing adjustment to local traditions. There still exist double pieces with Oriental designs on patterned stripes or on the fields, such as some of the Oltenian peasant framed rugs. Throughout feudalism and capitalism such rugs, called *khilim** in Oltenia, were woven almost exclusively for boyars, and were very seldom to be found in peasant houses, where the old traditional designs persisted.

The influence exerted by Oriental rugs by way of the far from simple Balkan world, where Oriental ways had long been current and established such rug-weaving centres as Pyrotus, made Oltenian rugs display some peculiar features emerging from the blending of old native elements with those brought from abroad. The Oltenian rug is a local adaptation in the field of textiles, just as the Romanian fortified manor was the most northerly example of a Balkan architectural style adapted to the conditions of this country.

The design of an Oltenian rug consists of a central field bordered by a double or treble frame. Sometimes the central field is limited by a narrow stripe and looks like a framed painting placed against a background. This impression is due to the wide border. The interpenetration of the sources — the local and the Oriental — is visible in the frame too. Most of the Oltenian rugs have their hems marked by “little corners” or “saw teeth”, which form a 4–5 cm. wide strip, part of the local tradition of decoration. A second border follows, which more often than not is obviously of Oriental origin and represents rectangular crenels or broken arches, typical of Moslem architecture. The frames display patterns that, as a whole, remind one of the strict and rhythmic order of the

* A widely used term, common to the languages of various peoples that neighbour Romania

earlier pieces. The designs often consist of stylized flowers and of birds and animals that are sometimes hardly recognizable because of their stylization. Here, the stylization, similar in many respects to that common in the Balkan folk art, goes so far as to become almost identical with that on Egyptian peasant rugs. The central field is a wonderful sight. It is the image of a bright and picturesque world inhabited by people, birds, animals and flowers, a fairy-tale garden, where sometimes everything is displayed in a certain order, whereas at other times the order is upset by a multitude of designs creating an exotic and luxurious scene. The design recalls Persian miniatures, once so widely spread in the East from far-away India with her renowned schools of miniaturists to the shores of the Bosphorus. Yet only fragments and odd reminders of Persian illuminated poems with hunting scenes and love stories, mailed knights with hawks, princesses in sumptuous bowers, and intervening deities reached the banks of the Danube. These fragments were joined together, but lost their original meaning. From scenes illustrating a definite narrative, they were turned into independent images, reshaped by the imagination of our native peasant weavers. The curves and slender lines of the miniatures, sometimes faithfully reproduced on Oriental tapestries and carpets became angular, owing to the rigid weaving technique dominant in this country. Human figures, flowers and animals of shapes unknown in Romania were helping to develop the basic fairy-tale atmosphere – by the presence of fantastic figures. Amongst them we see, however, the usual well-known objects from the environment of the weaver: ears of corn, poppies, lilies-of-the-valley and mallows; hoopoes, cuckoos, dogs, etc. The design of Oltenian rugs is a blending of peasant fantasy, Romanian fairy tales, surrounding life and elements of Oriental art.

XVIII. Oltenian rug with checkered central field. Each square has a decoration showing birds, plants, deers

A very beautiful piece in the collection of the Folk Art Museum of the Socialist Republic of Romania has its treble frame made up of a narrow serrated stripe and two differently coloured frames decorated with geometrical flowers. Its field is a Garden of Paradise where human figures move amid animals, some native other exotic such as camels and antelopes, as well as birds, big and small, with multicoloured plumage, some even holding flowers in their beaks. In the centre, next to several unintelligible letters imitative of an inscription the weaver could not decipher in her model, an Arab leads a camel, on which a woman and a child are mounted. Plants are spread here and there as in a real garden.





The same filled and rich scene may be seen on another rug in the Museum's collection. It has a potted Tree of Life in its centre with a dove on top – the dove is the ancient Oriental symbol of the spirit. Human beings form the central subject of another rug. The female figures dressed in period costumes (it is difficult to say whether they are Oriental or Western) hold fans in their hands, and the males hold riding whips. Female figures on other rugs are more stylized, whereas the design generally observes the rhythm and geometrical pattern of earlier rugs. Sometimes the female figures are distributed in rows as if dancing.

Finally there are certain rugs that preserve details characteristic of Oriental prayer rugs (crenelled border, and central medallion-shaped pentagon), featuring horsemen in 19th century military uniforms. Among them there are soldiers in rows firing pistols. Civilian couples, ladies with hats, and top-hatted gentlemen carrying sticks, placed at the sides, watch the parade.

The refined colouring of Oltenian rugs uses only a few hues: cherry-red, white and blue predominate.

Banat and Oltenian rugs together form a large category, related to those that were developed in Western Bulgaria, Eastern Yugoslavia and by the Romanians south of the Danube. The technical characteristic feature of the Banat rugs is

XIX. Maramureş rug having two symmetrical central fields decorated with stylized anthropomorphic and zoomorphic patterns



XX. Peasant interior in Maramureş (Vişeu District)

the presence of interstices made by the woven threads that mark the limits of colours, a feature common with Karaman carpets.

Another characteristic is the limited field, sometimes a simple central square, at other times rectangular or cross shaped. The frame is very broad, almost field-like, mostly purple, as in Macedonian rugs. Generally small-sized, the design of Banat rugs often implies two perpendicular symmetrical axes. Their small central fields are framed by four big vases with flowers. The pattern is made up of geometrically shaped flowers, an expression of old local tradition and of links with Macedonian weaving centres that preserved the geometrical design.

A different kind of Romanian rug developed in Moldova. Its primary distinctive feature is its colouring. The old Moldovian rugs had blue or green groundwork. Later (in the 19th century) the groundwork became black. As a design they preserved the central field-border division. The stylized flowers were scattered throughout the central field and often appeared individually isolated. The flowers were white, red, yellow, green and blue, sometimes bright, at other times pale, and their size varied. Nosegays and female figures with lifted arms were placed horizontally. The rugs were hung lengthwise on the walls, and so the flowers and figures were woven at right angles to the longer sides. Another pattern, also typical, is composed on a vertical axis made up by a single central design, a tall slender cypresslike potted Tree of Life, identical with those on rugs woven in Asia Minor and the Caucasus. The tree has birds on its branches. The subdued colours – among them unusual pinks – that fit in with the usual Moldovian colour range lend a special charm to these rugs, distinct from the gaiety of those woven in Oltenia.

Generalizing, we may say that Romanian rugs display alongside common unitary traditional characteristics definite regional peculiarities determined by conditions developed locally. As in other popular crafts, the two aspects live side by side, as do the artistic forms characteristic of different stages in the evolution of weaving. Peasant weaving today largely preserves the above-described patterns and shares a floral design that may be detected in the designs used in all domains of folk art. Handicraft production goes on in the peasant tradition, in the specialized workshops set up by the Central Union of Handicraft Cooperatives. Mention should also be made of the rugs designed by artists, which are often inspired by folklore. Rugs, as other products of the arts and crafts of the Romanian countryside show a skilful blend of colour and design which is a witness to the imagination, good taste, craftsmanship and practical good sense of the people.

moldovian

RUGS

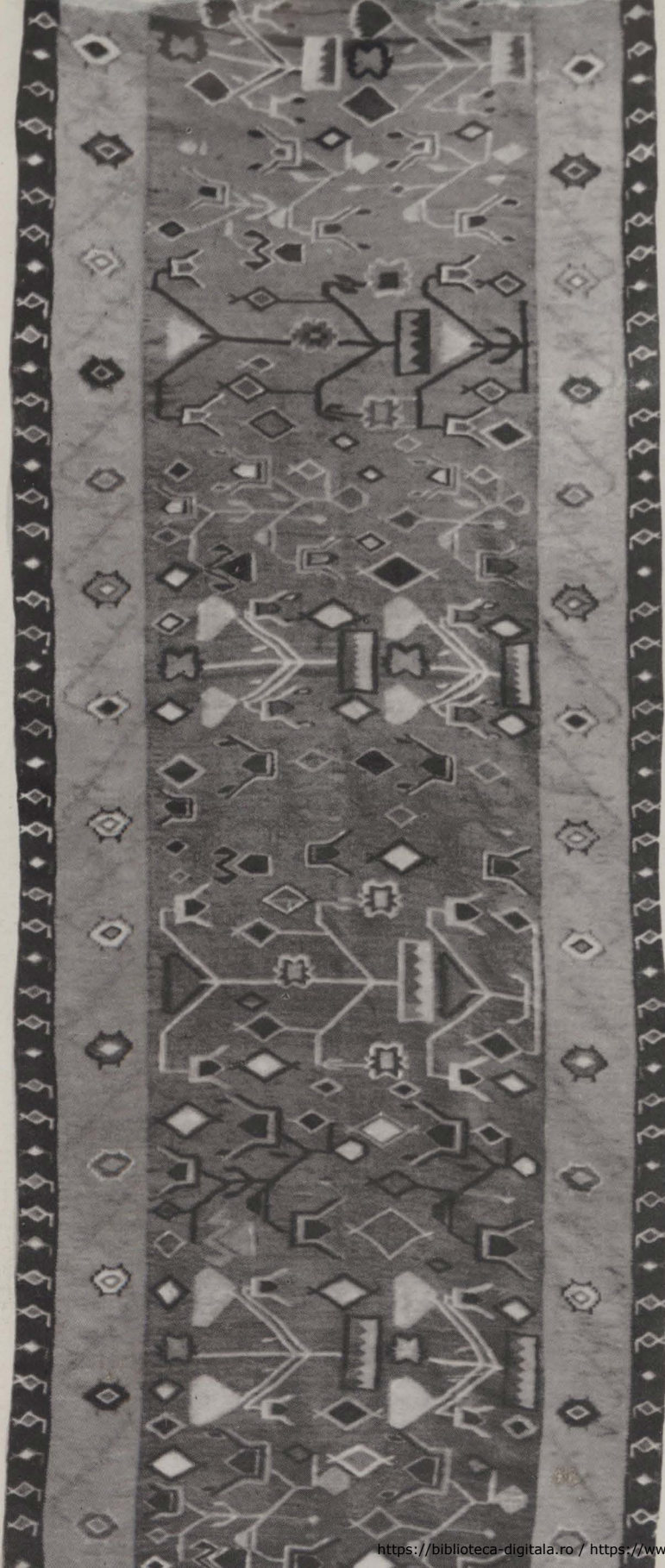
1. *Lăicer* with stripes from the North of Moldova
2. Moldovian *lăicer* with decorated stripes from the Vrancea country
3. *Lăicer* with stripes alternating with simple stylized patterns from the Vrancea Country (Southern Moldova)
4. *Lăicer* with stripes and decorative pattern from the Vrancea Country (Southern Moldova)
5. Moldovian rug with the flower-pot pattern (detail)
6. Moldovian rug with the flower-pot pattern
7. Moldovian rug with stylized floral pattern (detail)
8. Moldovian rug with meander frame. The stylized patterns are arranged in variously coloured stripes (detail)
9. *Lăicer* from Northern Moldova with geommetrical design
10. Moldovian rug with floral pattern and inscription (detail)
11. Moldovian rug. The patterns showing the Tree of Life and human figures are strongly stylized (detail)
12. Moldovian rug with strongly stylized flower-pot pattern (detail)
13. Moldovian rug with stylized floral and anthropomorphous patterns, rhombs and stamp crosses (detail)
14. Moldovian rug with stylized floral pattern and inscription (detail)
15. Moldovian rug with architectural pattern of Oriental-Persian inspiration
16. Moldovian rug with stylized flower-pot pattern (detail)
17. Moldovian rug with stylized floral pattern. On the lower part of the rug the pattern shows birds (detail)
- 18-19. Moldovian rug. Details of stylized anthropomorphous and zoomorphic patterns









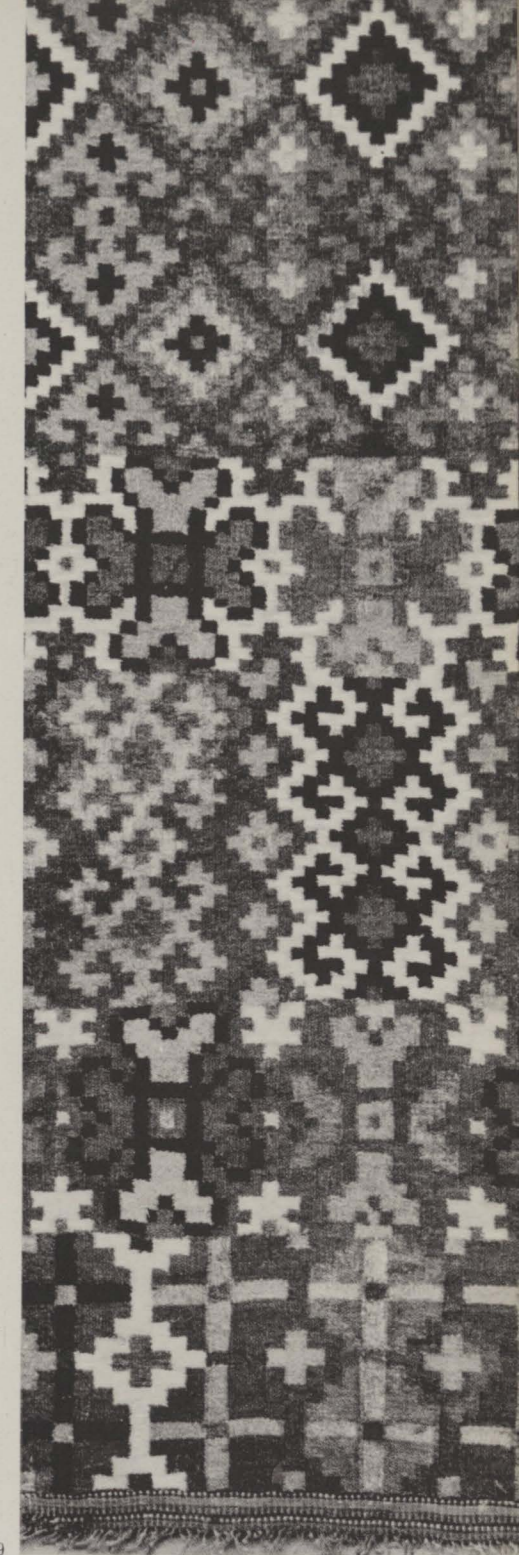




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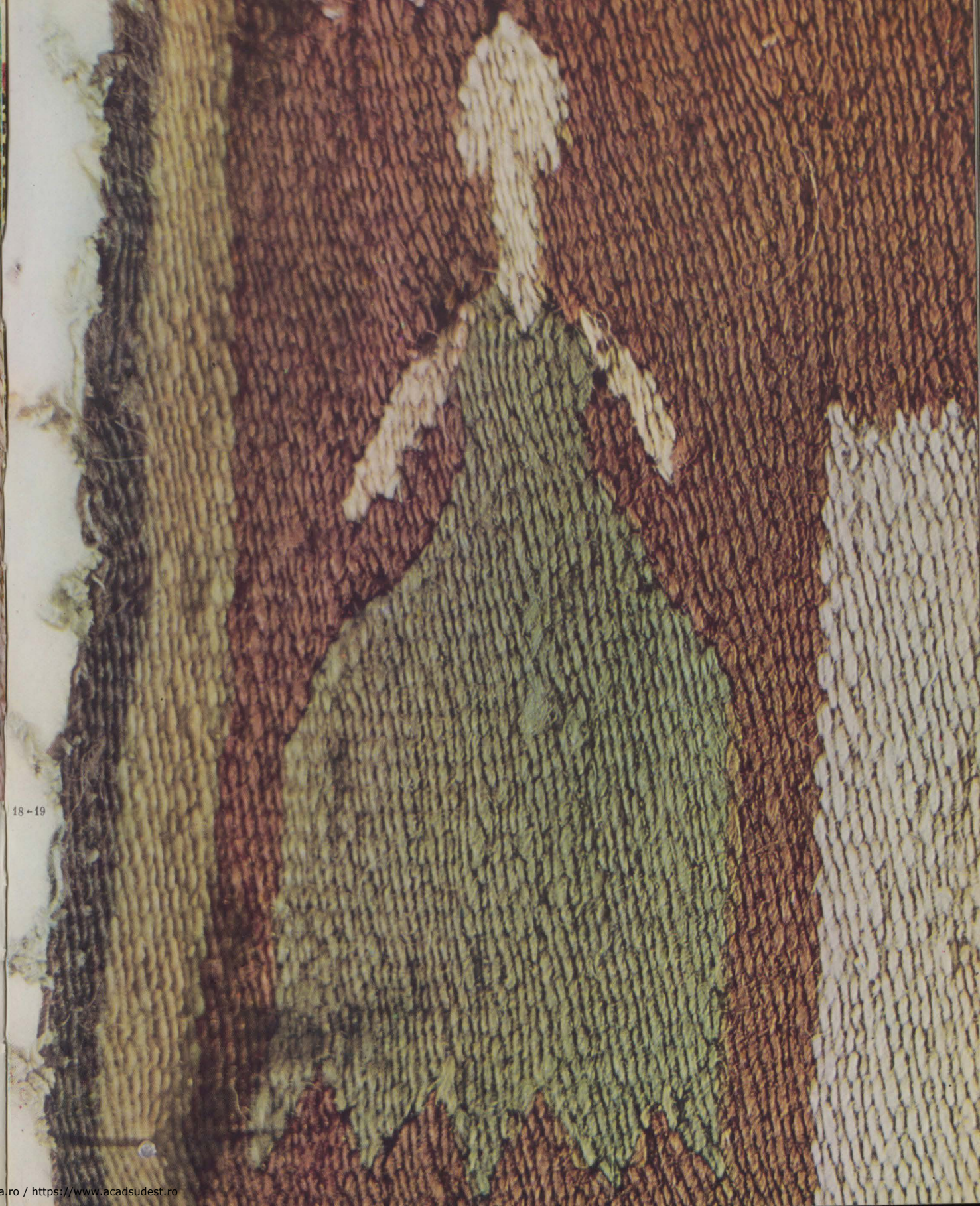








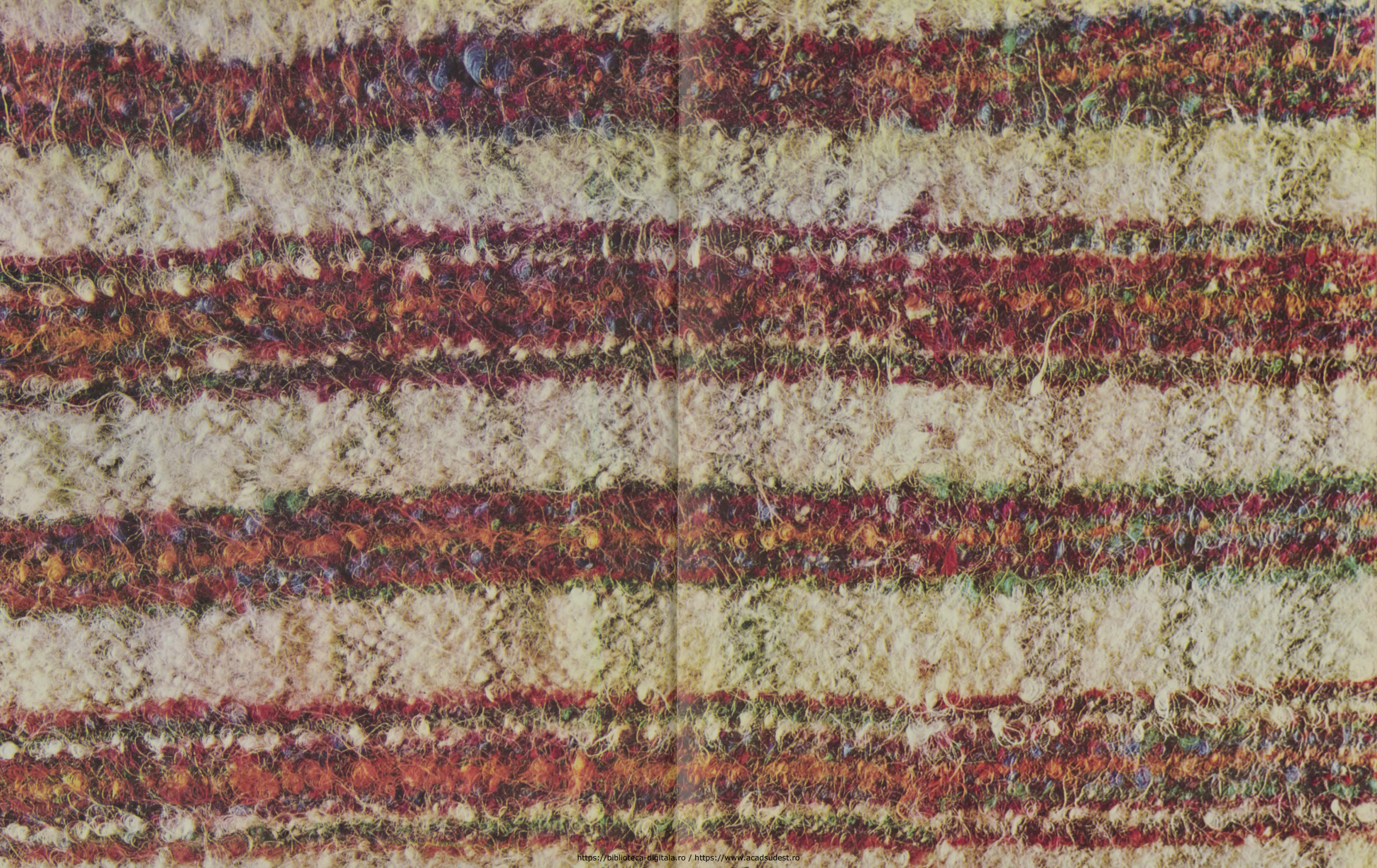
16 17



18-19

maramureș
RUGS

20. Striped blanket from the Oaş Country
21. Maramureş rug with anthropomorphous and floral patterns arranged in differently coloured registers
22. Maramureş rug decorated with rhombs
23. Maramureş rug with geometrical and floral pattern arranged in rhombs
24. Maramureş rug with stylized flower patterns arranged symmetrically
25. Maramureş rug. The field covered with rhombs shows geometrical pattern (detail)
26. Detail of Maramureş rug with the *hora* (round dance) pattern on the border
27. Maramureş rug with geometrical, anthropomorphous and zoomorphic pattern
28. Maramureş *lăicer*. The stripes are covered with geometrical pattern
29. Maramureş rug decorated with rhombs
30. Maramureş rug decorated with rhombs including geometrical patterns
31. Maramureş rug decorated with rhombs, arranged in registers







24



25







28 - 29







hunedoara

R U G S

32. *Lăicer* from Hunedoara with patterns in stripes (detail)
33. *Lăicer* from Hunedoara with geometrical decorations showing solar rhombs
34. Rug from Hunedoara made up of two lengths sewn together. Its decoration consists of simple stripes alternating with patterned ones
35. Rug made of two *lăicers* decorated with geometrical design (Hațeg Country — Hunedoara Region)
36. *Lăicer* from Hunedoara. The stripes are decorated with geometrical patterns
37. *Lăicer* from the Hațeg Country, Hunedoara Region. It is made up of two parts, one with decorative design, the other striped (detail)







banat
RUGS

38. Striped *lăicer* from the Bănat
39. *Lăicer* from the Banat with striped geometrical pattern
40. *Păretar* from the Banat decorated with stripes and geometrical patterns
41. Checkered cover from the Banat with geometrical design (detail)
42. *Lăicer* from the Banat. The geometrical patterns are alternating with stripes
43. Banat rug with central motif and six frames
44. Banat rug with treble frame and geometrical patterns
45. Banat rug with central motif framed by four stylized flower-pots arranged on two symmetrical axes
46. Banat rug with elaborate central motif. The field is covered by stylized geometrical and floral pattern
47. Banat rug made up of two parts with the solar rhomb motif
48. Detail of Banat rug
49. Banat rug (detail)

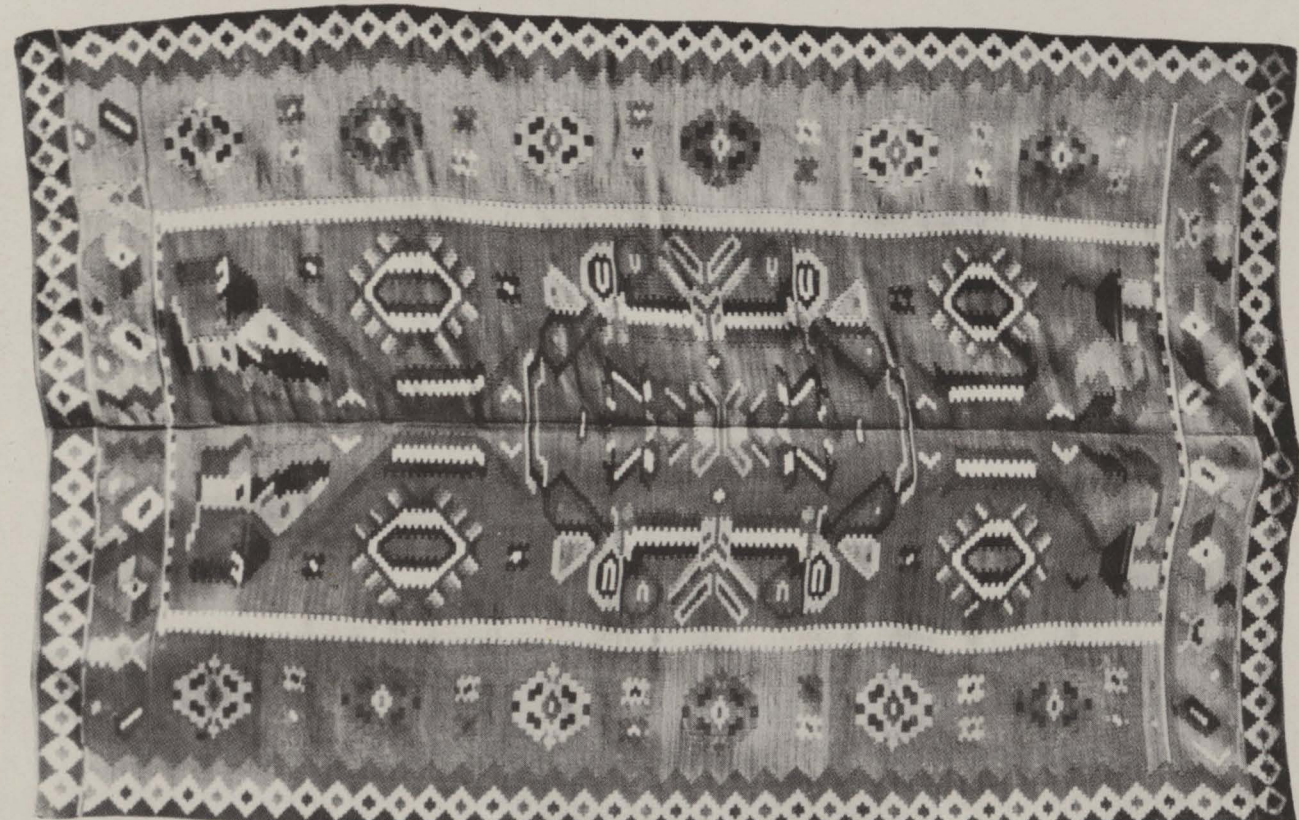




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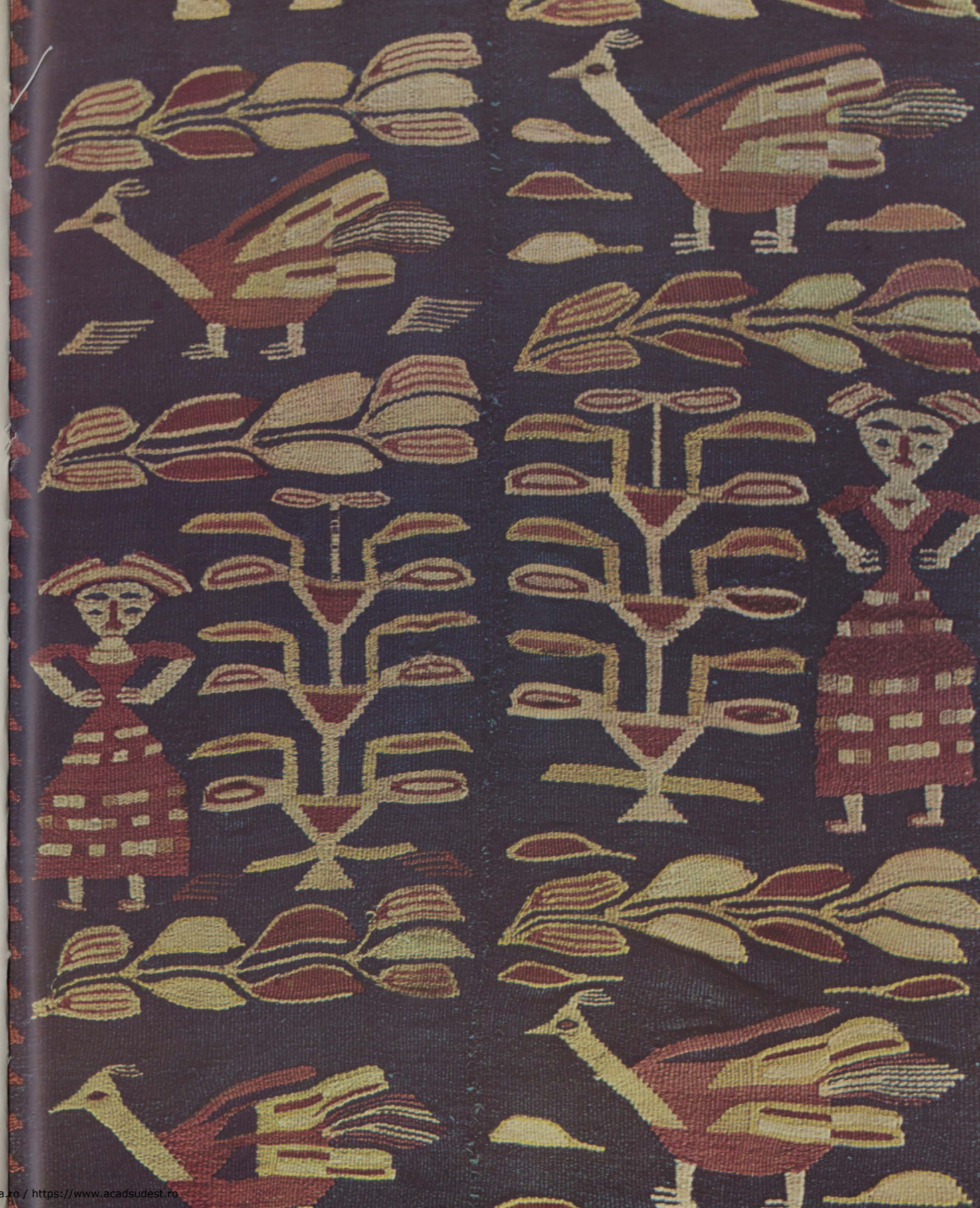
oltenian
RUGS

50. Oltenian *lăicer* with stripes and decorative designs
51. Oltenian *lăicer* made up of two lengths sewn together and decorated with stripes and patterns
52. Oltenian rug with double border and central field decorated with vegetal motives and human figures in military uniform
53. Oltenian rug with double border and central field decorated with human figures, flowers and birds
54. Detail
55. Fragment of an Oltenian rug with personages dressed in town clothes
56. Detail of Oltenian rug
57. Oltenian rug (detail)
58. Oltenian rug. Its border and central field are lavishly decorated with vegetal pattern and birds
59. Oltenian rug with vegetal decoration and a bird placed in the centre
60. Oltenian rug with treble border and central field decorated with geometrical designs and human figures among whom cavalrymen
61. Detail of Oltenian rug
62. Oltenian rug decorated with vegetal and zoomorphic pattern
63. Detail of Oltenian rug
64. Oltenian rug (detail)
65. Detail of Oltenian rug with decorative designs showing plants, birds and militarymen
66. Detail of Oltenian rug with decorative designs showing plants and two lions
67. Oltenian rug (detail)
68. Oltenian rug (detail)
69. Oltenian rug with treble border and central field decorated with plants, birds and human figures
70. Oltenian rug. The border is decorated with female figures













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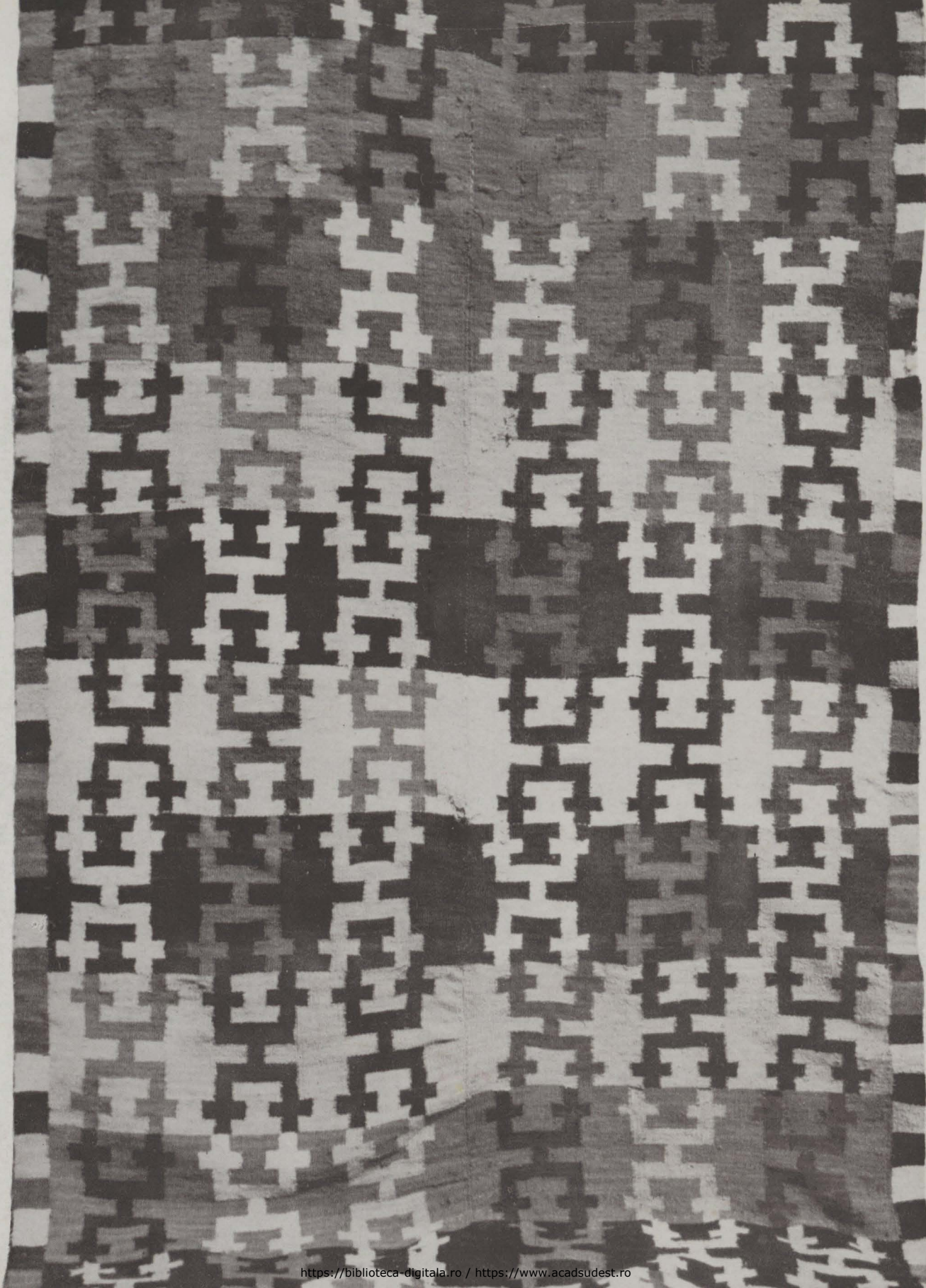




wallachian
RUGS

71. *Lăicer* from the North of Wallachia
72. Blanket from Wallachia (Prahova) with alternating stripes
73. Rug from Wallachia (Drăgănești) with stripes and decorative designs (detail)
74. Wallachian rug. Its decoration consists of stripes alternating with geometrical patterns
75. Wallachian rug with a central field and lateral borders. The central field is decorated with superposed and concentric rhombs
76. Rug from Wallachia (Drăgănești) with stripes and decorative designs
77. Rug from Wallachia (Mușcel) with stripes and decorative designs
78. Wallachian rug decorated with rhombs and stamp crosses
79. *Păretar* from Wallachia (Mușcel) with stripes and decorative designs
80. Wallachian rug with broad frames and stripes which are decorated with flower-vases and human figures
81. Rug from Rucăr in Northern Wallachia (detail)
82. Rug from North-western Wallachia (Șuici) with border on the sides and a central field divided into equal parts decorated with geometrical pattern (detail)
83. Wallachian rug with typical decoration consisting of parallel rows of rhombs
84. Wallachian rug (detail)
85. Wallachian rug with border and central field decorated with rhombs





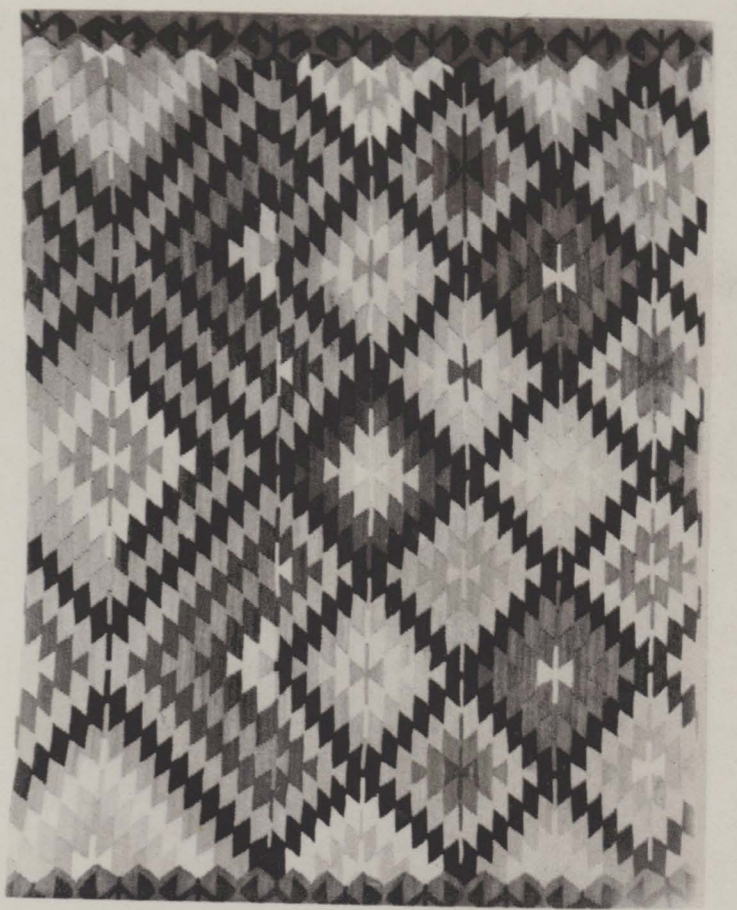






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