

**PROPAGATION OF “SABUNLU (SOAPY) RUGS” PATTERN OF  
GAGAUZ TURKS***Didem ATİŞ ÖZHEKİM\****Abstract:**

Gagauz Turks have been living mostly old Soviet Union, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Gagauz Autonomy at Moldova. They accept both Christian Orthodox and Islamic ideas. Their historical background goes back to Middle Asia but there are lots of absences and confusions. Field research was conducted in Comrat, Çeadır-Lunga, Vulcaneşti, Kongaz, Avdarma, Beşalma, Cazaklia, Gaidar and Çeşmeköyü's museums and houses in 2013. In article, woven examples examine which is describing as “sabunlu” (soapy) rugs in the region and spread of the worldwide with visual datas.

**Key words:** Turks, Gagauz, Rug, Tapestry, Sabunlu (Soapy).

**INTRODUCTION**

There are a lot of hypotheses about the roots of the Gagauz: The researchers state that they descended from Turkified Christians, Christianized Turks, Bulgarians which accepted Turkish language, Northern Turkish tribes which settled in the Balkans as from Xth century (Patzinak, Uz) and grandsons of the Little Asian Turks which migrated to Dobruja in XIIIth century, by the lead of Sultan Keykavus (Radova-Karanastas, 2012, p. 143). Prof. Dr. N. Demir has written “A major part of the Gagauz are the Huns and Bulgarians which migrated to Europe in IV.- Xth century. It is an indisputable fact that one part are the Turks which migrated from the northern part of the Black Sea to the west, before the Seljuks between IX.- XIth centuries (Demir, 2011, p. 7). Comrat Museum draws the information that the Gagauz reaches from the Tuna towards the empty Bessarabia coasts during the Russian – Turkish War between 1806-1812 and later. The immigrants from Tuna, in 1822 have settled to five places. Yukarı-Bucak, İzmayıl, Asaaki-Bucak, Kabul, Prut. “The Christian Turks which are referred as Gagauz Turks, continue their existence as a Christian Turkish community, mixed of Patzinak, Uz, Cuman-Kipczak and Anatoian Turks” (Anzerlioğlu, 2004, p. 76). Today, Gagauz are living in Gagauz Autonomous Okrug's Comrat, Dezinja, Congazic, Avdarma, Chirsovo (Başköy), Tomai,

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Besalma, Gaidar (Haydar), Congaz, Ceadir-Lunga, Svetlii, Baurci, Cazaclia (Kazayaklı), Taraclia (Taraklı), Aluat, Cahul (Kohul), Copciac (Kıpçak), Vulcanesti, Cismchio (Çeşmeköyü) and Etulia (Tülüköy) villages.

## 1. RUG WEAVING IN GAGAUZ

Rug Weaving in Gaguz is being done in two type of benches. Heald loom is referred as "ground loom", "layout", "palatar" and vertical loom is referred as "rug" or "ramka". Recorded documents indicating the loom quantities show that the Gagauz had a considerable amount of weaving. When we examine the loom quantities; in 1829: 1999 pcs, in 1830: 1439 pcs, in 1831: 1538 pcs, in 1832: 2621 pcs (because merchants provided the looms), in 1833: 2528 pcs, in 1834: 3138 pcs, in 1841: 4136 pcs, in 1843: 5375 pcs, in 1845: 5557 pcs, in 1846: 5100 pcs, in 1849: 4810 pcs, in 1850: 4810 pcs, in 1851: 1851 pcs (Özhekim, 2015, p. 87).

In the field study of Gagauz Autonomous Okrug, the examined samples had an age between 15 to 100-150 years. It was seen that cotton was generally used in the weave warp threads, while the wreaths S thread layer differing from 2 to 4. In spite of that the weft threads are wool. When the Gagauz rugs are examined from pattern and color features; predominantly herbal, figurative, geometrical and striped patterns are being used. The design predominantly from rose, including lilies, cloves, vervains, and leaves are realistically woven. The rugs feature black or grey background and light red, middle red, dark red, grenadine red, maroon, yellow, grey, cream, light green, dark green, grass green, tan, light pink, middle pink, dark pink, orange, buff, light brown, dark brown, red brown, light blue, middle blue, turquoise, cobalt, navy blue, lilac and purple colors above.

## 2. "SABUNLU" (SOAPY) RUGS

Factors like the migrations of the Gagauz in the centuries, causing them to remain within the borders of various countries, being minority in the social relations, wars, natural disasters had caused subtractions and losses in their lives and cultures. The struggle for survival, caused descension and even extinction of the rug weaving, the weaving samples and therefore the weaving culture.

A field study was conducted in all the Turkish villages in the Gagauz Autonomy, covering old weavers, history and ethnography museums in 2013. During the study, it was discovered that Concordia Almshouse and some living were naming the rose patterned rugs as "sabunlu (soapy) rugs". Katerina Dilsiz (Nikli) (born in 1921) explained this as "In the old times, scented soaps from Russia were brought with paper wrapping and had a rose pattern on it. As the time went by, women transferred the roses to the rugs. Therefore we call the rose rugs as "sabunlu (soapy) rugs" (Özhekim, 2015, p. 91).

When the “Sabunlu (Soapy)” rugs are technically examined; generally 2-4 layer “S” twist cotton yarn is used as the warping raw material. The warp density differs between 30 and 40 yarns in dm<sup>2</sup> which is an average quality. 2 layer wool yarns are preferred for the weft. The weft density differs between 72 to 105 lines in dm<sup>2</sup> in the samples produced in medulla rug technique. This density increases or decreases according to the pattern detail. As the background pattern is coherent with the repeat system; they were produced in various sizes.

### 3. TECHNICAL ANALYSIS OF THE RUGS

#### Sample no: 1



*Pic. 1:* “Sabunlu Kilim”  
(Photo: Didem Özhekim, 06.06.2013)

Place: Gaidar Village (Haydar)

Kind of weave: Slit tapestry (rug).

Woven place: Gaidar Village (Haydar)

Age: Approximately 20-22 years

Weaver: Elena Ceban (58 years old, born in Gaidar)

Ethnic source: Gagauz

Width x Height: 151 x 249 cm.

Edge rug, çiti, starting rug, finishing rug, lattice fringes: None

Fringe of height: 6 cm.

Material of warps: White cotton, 4 foldes (S twist), numbers of warp/dm.: 30.

Material of wefts: Wool, 2 foldes, numbers of weft/dm.: 105.

Colors: Black, pink, dark red, red, light green, dark green, dark blue, turquoise, yellow, orange, brown.

**Sample no: 2**



*Pic. 2:* Sample no: 2.  
(Photo: Didem Özhekim, 03.06.2013)

Place: Gaidar Village (Haydar)  
Kind of weave: Slit tapestry (rug)  
Woven place: Gaidar Village (Haydar)  
Age: approximately 50 years  
Weaver: İvana Topal, (67 years old, born at Gaidar)  
Ethnic source: Gagauz  
Width x Height: 141-142 x 204 cm.  
Edge rug, çiti, lattice fringes: None  
Starting rug: 1 cm  
Finishing rug: 1 cm  
Fringe of height: 7 cm  
Material of warps: White cotton, 3 foldes (S twist), numbers of warp/dm: 33.  
Material of wefts: Wool, 2 foldes, numbers of wefts/ dm.: 96.  
Colors: Orange, Brown, light green, dark green, cabbage green, pink, dark pink, red, dark red, purple, turquoise, dark blue, yellow, salmon.

**Sample no: 3**

**Pic. 3:** Usage of the ground of Sample 3.  
(Photo: Didem Özhekim, 29.05.2013)

Place: Gaidar Village (Haydar). House of Kapsomun Georgi İvanoviç.

Kind of weave: Slit tapestry (rug)

Woven place: Gaidar Village (Haydar)

Age: 1962

Weaver: Lena (First surname: Moşoglu)

Ethnic source: Gagauz

Width x Height: 193 x 410 cm.

Edge rug, çiti, starting rug, finishing rug, lattice fringes: None

Fringe of height: 7 cm

Material of warps: White cotton, 2 foldes (S twist), numbers of warp/dm: 40.

Material of wefts: Wool, 2 foldes, numbers of weft/ dm.: 79.

Colors: pink, red, 3 tones of green, black, yellow, cream, 4 tones of blue, light brown, orange.

**Sample no: 4**



**Pic. 4:** Sample no: 4.  
(Photo: Didem Özhekim, 04.06.2013)

Place: Museum of Comrat, Comrat

Kind of weave: Slit tapestry (rug)

Woven place: Comrat

Age: approximately 100-150 years. It was donated by Sülemes Nikolay Petroviç from Comrat at 1971.

Weaver: Grandmother of Sülemes Nikolay Petroviç.

Ethnic source: Gagauz

Width x Height: 99 x 450 cm.

Edge rug, çiti, starting rug, finishing rug, lattice fringes: None

Fringe of height: 7 cm

Material of warps: Grey hair, 2 foldes (S twist), numbers of warps/dm.: 30

Material of wefts: Wool, 2 foldes, numbers of weft/dm.: 72.

Colors: red, pink, dark red, 3 tones of green, black, camel, 2 tones of blue, brown.

**Sample no: 5**

*Pic. 5:* Detail of sample no:5 at Museum of Ceadir-Lunga.  
(Photo: Didem Özhekim, 03.06.2013)

Place: Museum of Ceadir-Lunga, Ceadir-Lunga

Kind of weave: Slit tapestry (rug)

Woven place: Ceadir-Lunga

Age: 1980

Weaver: unknown

Ethnic source: Gagauz

Width x Height: 250 x 400 cm.

Edge rug, çiti, starting rug, finishing rug, lattice fringes: None

Fringe of height: 7 cm

Material of warps: White cotton, 2 foldes (S twist), numbers of warp/dm.: 35.

Material of wefts: Wool, 2 foldes, numbers of weft/dm.: 78.

Colors: Yellow, orange, red, pink, light purple, dark red, 3 tones of green, 2 tones of blue, black, light brown, white.

#### 4. POSITION OF ROSE IN THE HISTORICAL PERIOD

"Fossil evidence in Asia dates back some 70 million years, and North American fossils from 35 million years ago (the Oligocene epoch) tell us that some rose species did exist at that time. The fossil specimens found near Canyon City, Colorado, most closely resemble the existing species, *R. nutkana*, and *R. palustris* (the Swamp Rose). There is no way, of course, of knowing if either of these species actually survived through 35 million years to exist today...The English archaeologist, William Flinders Petrie (1853-1942), discovered in the tombs of Hawara, Egypt, wreaths made of flowers, among them, roses" (<http://www.rose.org>). Famous historian Herodotus mentioned about the four leaf scented rose gardens of Phrygian King Midas who lived in Central Anatolia in 700 B.C. and the roses with sixty leaves in Anatolia. Greek poet Sappho (600 B.C.) has named the rose as "queen of flowers".

"In the Northern Asia, which is referred as the homeland of the Turks since bronze age, there is an encounter with an astral iconography. This point is especially observed: Northern Asia is an area where the astral patterns are not developed as pictogram, but as stamp and phonogram in the Turkish age. This feature points out an archaic maturity as well as expressing the simplification inclinations of migratory arts and techniques, petroglyphs, felt, rug and mineral handiwork patterns towards pictograms" (Esin, 2003, p. 65). Once again, according to Esin; Uighur wall paintings feature the figures which symbolize the sun and the moon standing on the right and left of the Mount Meru and in a painting with an arrow or pike on the sun and a bud on the moon and a lotus on the top (Esin, 2003, p. 83-84).

Migrations after some point, are mentioned as rose and lotus flowers due to many reasons including cultural changes. "Some cultures have myths explaining exactly how the rose earned its place at the top. According to a Persian poem, the lotus was the original queen of flowers, but it made the mistake of sleeping during the night. When the other flowers complained to Allah, he named the white rose queen. A Hindu legend has it that Vishnu had to convince Brahma of the rose's superiority to the lotus. As a reward for changing his mind, Brahma created a bride for Vishnu out of hundreds of rose petals" (<http://www.slate.com>). According to a creation story of Egyptian culture, in the start of the time, the first rose came out from a water filled chaos and transformed into a giant lotus. In some sources of Chinese folklore and symbolism under the influence of Buddhism, lotus is referred as the sea rose (<http://arts.cultural-china>).

In Greek mythology, the roses are associated with the myth of Aphrodite's lover Adonis and the first rose was grown with his blood. This way, the rose could exceed death and became the symbol of resurrection. In ancient Rome "Rosalia" festival has been celebrated between May 11th to



June 15th, in various eras and regions as a part of death cult. Rosalia tradition is still being protected in Italy, under the name of “Domenica Rosata”.

“In Christian symbolism the red rose stood for the blood shed by Jesus on the Cross, and thus for God’s love (compare “rosa candida” in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*). The troubadours, however, saw the rose as a tangible symbol of earthly love, and this tradition continues into our own time. The white rose, however, is a legendary symbol of death. Christian iconography made the rose (the “queen of flowers”) a symbol for Mary, the Queen of Heaven, and for virginity; in the Middle Ages only virgins were permitted to wear rose garlands, and the Madonna was frequently portrayed as surrounded by roses... The rose is of great importance in the symbolism of freemasonry. Three roses are placed in the grave of a Mason when he is buried. The three “St. John’s roses” stand for “light, love and life”... In traditional Chinese symbolism the rose is considerably less important than in the West: it signifies “youth” but has no specific association with love” (Biedermann, 1992, p. 289-291).

After the 11th century, Kutadgu Bilig and “*Divanü Lügati’t Türk*” describes the benefits of rose and the syrup, oil, etc. extracted from it. “In Islam, rose has been a subject to various simile regarding to its shape and fragrance” (<http://www.islamansiklopedisi>, p. 221). “Muhammad’s physical appearance, the hue of his skin, and his ambrosial scent have been frequently compared to the rose in Islamic literary traditions of different languages... For example, in his *Shama’il al-nabi* (Characteristic of Prophet), the early hadith collector Muhammad b. Isa Tirmidhi (d. 892) notes that Muhammad had a rosy ( or reddish-white) skin tone... a number of pre-modern Islamic paintings depict the Prophet through a combination of physical and symbolic signs that doubly loud his corporeal characteristic and spiritual dimensions” (Roxbrugh, 1966, p. 224).

As Yunus Emre’s verse “Çiçek eydür ey derviş gül Muhammed teridir (Flower recites santon, Rose is Mohammad’s sweat)” explains it is believed that the fragrance of the rose is obtained from the sweat of the most granted prophet. Colloquially the statement “Smelling a rose is good deed” is originated from this flower, being the symbol of the prophet. It is common to regard the prophet, when one smells a rose or when some offers a rose oil or rose water. This belief shows that it has a rooted tradition among the Muslims” (<http://www.islamansiklopedisi>, p. 221).

##### 5. PROPAGATION OF “SABUNLU (SOAPY) RUG” PATTERNS

Mankind has been always in improvement since the first era of existence. It is distinct from other living through its talents and imagination. Throughout the history, all civilizations chose one single way to transfer

their existence and value judgments to the following generations. Art. As a cultural indicator, art is the heritage of the society for the future.

Societies, produced works of art in order to transfer their cultures, beliefs, emotions and value judgments. In this process, throughout the different societies from various areas in the world, similar designs and patterns are used, even if under different names. The formation process of the designs and patters are can not be examined in a separate category then the societies historical and cultural values, daily life, belief system and regime which create the integrity.

In the beginning, the basic geometrical forms and followingly, the derivatives and repentance of the forms are described in the Turkish Language Institution's Grand Dictionary as "Each one item, coming side by side and forming the ornament work and as solitary forming a unit" (<http://www.tdk.gov.tr>). Throughout the centuries, different meanings are attributed to the patterns, but the visual features have been preserved till today. In this aspect; when making a visual comparison in different cultures, of the rose bundle pattern (Picture 6) named as "sabunlu (soapy) by the Gagauz Turks; following data can be reached:



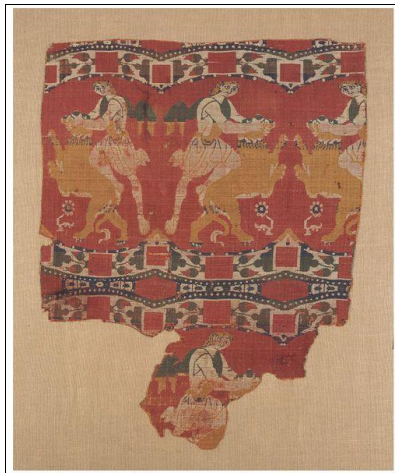
*Pic. 6:* Bunch of roses that named "Sabunlu".

The rose picture can be seen on the. Greek-Rhodes originated Terracota amphora in the years 220-180 B.C (Picture 7). "The circular stamp bears the name of the potter Damokrates, with at the center a large rose, symbolizing Rhodes (the Greek word Rhodon means rose)" (<http://www.metmuseum.org>).



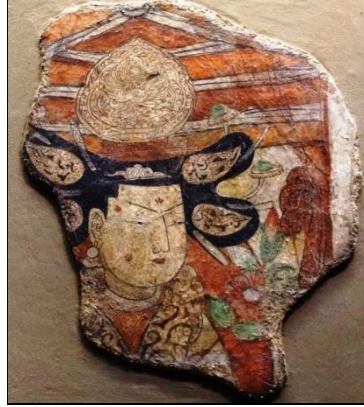
**Pic. 7:** Rose emblem on amphora.  
(<http://www.metmuseum.org>, 05.03.2014)

In the background pattern of the silk fabric which was thought to be woven in 780- 900 years in Syria (?), the struggle between man and lion can be seen. (Picture 8). In the top and bottom narrow borders, the rose and its bud is woven (<http://collections.vam.ac.uk>).



**Pic. 8:** Rosebuds at borders.  
(<http://collections.vam.ac.uk>, 22.08.2014)

In the wall painting which reached from the 11th – 12th century Uighur era till today and being preserved in the Hermitage Museum, there is a figure holding a rose (Picture 9).



**Pic. 9:** There is a rose at the right sight of the picture.  
(Photo: From archive of Prof. Dr. Ayşe Üstün, 12.09.2014)

According to written sources; in the 14th century France, with the migration of the Fleming workers, tapestry weaving has started in Aubusson town and become popular after spreading to other regions. Georges Jacob is the designer of the armchair and created it in the years 1780-89, at Paris and it is classified as Beauvais tapestry (Picture 10).



**Pic. 10:** A berger from Gulbekian Collection.  
(Photo: Didem Özhekim, 03.10.2014)

“In the 1940’s, there was a market demand for rugs in French floral designs inspired by Aubusson and Savonneries” (Picture 11 a-b) (Stone, 2004, p. 16).



*Pic. 11 a-b:* Rose motifs at Kirman and Afgan carpets (Stone, 2004, p. 16)

Azerbaijan Karabagh has been an area of settlement since the ancient era, due to its geographic advantages and became the country of Turkish communities over a thousand years. “Karabagh rugs reflect unique features in regards of color, composition and technique. New compositions were created with the classical of 18th centuries Shusha patterns, magazines from various places of Central Asia, scarves and various wares. Roses in the garden, roses in pots, cloud, etc. patterns were woven” (Parlak & Ergüder, 2010, p. 96). “The 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian court adopted French tastes and fashions, including furnishings. Commissions for rugs in the French style were given to Karabagh weavers. Russian officers involved in the pacification of the Caucasus may also have ordered rugs in rough imitation of Aubussons, Gobelins and Savonneries. So, the cabbage rose came to the Caucasus” (Picture 12) (Stone, 2004, p. 142).



*Pic. 12:* Rose motif at Kafkas rugs (Stone, 2004, p. 142).

This type of pattern is only seen in Bardız, which is a part of Erzurum city in Anatolia.(Picture 13) In the written sources it is mentioned that "In the Xth century, the Muslim traders went from Erzurum to Trabzon and they would barter with Khazars, Bulgarians and Patzinaks by taking furs, leatherworks, cotton and baldachin fabric with the goods that they brought" (Demir, 2005, p. 28); however such pattern is not present in Trabzon and around. "Rug weaving in Bardız goes back a long way. In the Salnamei Viayete dated 1871, it is mentioned that all sorts of rugs were woven in Erzurum, Bardız, Narman and Penek Bucak's where Oltu county use and sells" (Görgünay Kırzioğlu, 1997, p. 249). "In the years 1940-1945, a woman by the name of Müzeyyen applied the canvas samples to the rugs, and rose pattern rugs began to be produced. Medallion is referred as ball in the region and this woman's rose medallion sample is called Müzeyyen's Ball... Actually in this type of rugs, where the living creatures in the nature are processed, just like the geometrical patterns, goes back to the homeland of the Turks; Altai's Pazırık cairns" (Görgünay Kırzioğlu, 1997, p. 250). Şarköy rugs which were dated as the end of 19th century also embody the rose patterns, but it was left out of subject due to not finding earlier samples.



**Pic. 13:** Erzurum Bardız rug (Parlak & Ergüder, 2010, p. 168).

In fact rose bundles can not be found in the Ottoman Palace Rugs which takes place in the literature with naturalist style and same weaving technique. However from 16th century till the end of 18th century, rose patterns were commonly used Turkish Book Arts; which the "rugani" master Ali Üsküdari's flower works are the best sample to this.

A rose can be seen among the flower bundle stylized on a wool rug which is thought to be woven in India Lahora in the second half of 17th century and today it is present at Lisbon Gulbenkian Museum (Picture 14). “Until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, naturalistic flower representations did not appear in the Indian art repertory... Naturalistic flower representations – mostly on a plain background – are found in book illuminations and mural paintings, on book covers, on decorative tiles, in stone intarsia work and in stone reliefs. In addition to carpets, many textiles in different techniques exhibit this flower style: painted cotton, embroideries, velvets and silks. One should not forget that all these examples were produced only from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards” (Klose, 1993, p. 141).



**Pic. 14:** Bunch of rose at border design.  
(Photo: Didem Özhkim, 03.10.2014)

Rose pattern is used with the same realistic style on a 19th century Catholic religious outfits embroider located at Moldova Muzeul National de Istorie a Moldovei (Picture 15).



**Pic. 15.** Rose design at cloth.  
(Photo: Didem Özhekim, 24.09.2009)

Flower pattern cloth on a skirt of Fallas woman model of 1935, in Spain's Valencia Fallas Museum (Picture 16 a-b).



**Pic. 16 a-b:** Fallas models and usage of rose design on the fabric.  
(Photo: Didem Özhekim, 14.09.2014)

19th century French velvet coat in Lisbon Monarch Phaeton Museum; a gift for Queen Amelia in her visit to Paris in 1886, for the compliment of her marriage with Prince Carlos. Rose patterns are embroidered to the coat's ridge and skirt parts (Picture 17 a-b).





*Pic. 17 a-b:* Usage of rose design at cloak.  
(Photo: Didem Özhekim, 08.10.2014)

Rose pattern is used within a different function on a 19th century tapestry curtain located in Madrid Cerralbo Museum (Picture 18).



*Pic. 18:* Usage of rose design a tapestry curtain.  
(Photo: Didem Özhekim, 04.11.2014)

## 6. CONCLUSION

Turkish communities with a history about 4000 years, their expansion in the geographical area, the strong states that form in the migrated areas; and their traces starting from Central Asia to Asia, Europe and Africa can be found. Correspondingly, only a part of the Gagauz Turks history is confirmed and there are issues which are still being discussed. In the study

of the rug weaving Gagauz Turks, living in the Gagauz Autonomy, 25 rug samples were confirmed. The study began with Katerina Dilsiz's (Nikli) (born in 1921) words starting with "In the old times, scented soaps from Russia were brought with paper wrapping and had a rose pattern on it. As the time went by, women transferred the roses to the rugs. Therefore we call the rose rugs as "sabunlu (soapy) rugs" and surveyed with comparative visual data. In the historical development process, the Central Asian and Chinese communities show a strong stylization; while the artistic development in the European countries, depended upon art trends and developed iconographically and realistically as well.

As a result of the survey, rose pattern and its derivatives widely took part in Uighur, China, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Iran arts; but also in many European countries like Austria, England, France, Spain, Belarussia, Romania, Bulgaria and Moldavia in the plastic arts and also folk arts. Unfortunately the archiving of the Turkish communities which migrated from Central Asia to Anatolia was not developed and this caused the loss of important knowledge sources. A lot of archives are still waiting to come to light and to be translated. The rose pattern, which is seen in such a wide geography, founded in the late era except the book arts; requires the historical connections of its propagation as soon as possible.

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