

The artistic value of sofas from the territory of the Republic of Moldova (late 19th century - first half of the 20th century)

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Summary

The analysis of the sofas on the territory of the Republic of Moldova is necessary to capitalize on the artistic potential, which was especially observed in the realization of this piece of furniture having a symbolic content, related to the custom of the wedding.

Sofas appeared in the middle of the nineteenth century, the piece that gradually replaced the dowry box. Such a piece fulfilled the function of rest and at the same time, of storing things. These were executed by professional lathes or carpenters and less often by the homeowner.

The analysis of specialized works to field research has contributed to a classification of sofas. What differentiates them is the decision of the compositional ensemble as well as variations of the ornaments. The analysis of the sofas on the territory of the Republic of Moldova is still necessary to capitalize on the artistic potential, which was especially observed in the realization of this piece of furniture.

Keywords: Sofa, artistic value, function, composition, classification

The furniture of the peasant house from the end of the century XIX - first half of the century XX, on the territory of the Republic of Moldova, was not so varied. The furniture that had a greater artistic value, in the peasant house, is related to the custom of the wedding,

which was offered as a gift (dowry), from the girl's family, it is the dowry box and later the sofa. In this paper, we aim to follow the evolution and artistic value of sofas (reg. sofca).

Sofa (sofca) appeared in the middle of the 19th century, a piece that became very common at wedding ceremonies, gradually replacing the dowry box. The skeins, being expensive, were passed down from generation to generation and donated as dowries to girls. It was found that the sofas are found in the center and north of the country, in the southern part, practically, the sofas are not found. Most people in the south of the country have not even heard of the sofa (sofca).[7, 78] Bâzgu Eugen, a scientific researcher at the National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History of Moldova (MNEIN), also stated that the sofas are evolved benches, made with carpentry means that entered the traditional peasant environment towards the end of the nineteenth-century through fairs and wealthy blankets.[3,65] This furniture took over the social role of the old dowry boxes. The girl who did not have a sofa, out of necessity, married her mother's dowry box. [5, 317]

The origin of the sofas spread in the space between the Prut and the Dniester was established by Anton Golopenția, at the beginning of the 20th century: „Lines that have the classic rigidity of the Empire style by applying two lateral supports and by continuously increasing the dimensions...Sofa - the testimony of a foreign culture, close to the western countries, brought by the families of Ukrainians and Poles settled in Cornova”[6, 558-559]. Also, the sofa is mentioned in Maria Bâtcă's work, *The spiritual dimensions of Bessarabia*, “The dowry chest was replaced, in turn, with large sofas, first in the wealthier strata (dvoreni, mazili, răzeși), towards the end of the 19th century, later entering inside the peasant houses.”[2, 30]

Sofca has a double functionality. Inside it is a crate in which a variety of things were kept. Such a piece served the function of rest and at the same time, of storing things. These were executed by professional lathes or carpenters and less often by the householder in house conditions. Sofca is a wooden bed with a top beam and lathe legs. Most of the time, the locks have arms at both ends. The bars of the arms and legs are shaped, adorned with combinations of different spheres, belts, rings, always arranged proportionally and rhythmically, rarely are the sofas that also have a backrest. The ornamental compositions are applied on the front plane. It can be seen that the proportion of the decor is usually applied in three registers. The decorative motifs in all three registers represent the same element or may have asymmetry with an obvious center, so the central register may differ in size, being smaller or larger than the other two lateral registers, or the central element itself may differ in shape or decoration, than in the other registers. Following the field research, more than 100 sofas were analyzed, in which, in addition to the turned sidearm, which characterize the sofas, the following decoration techniques were observed: sofa with applied carved elements (decorative sticks, diamond dots, geometric shapes, decorative profiles, etc.) (Fig.1); sofa with



Fig.1. Sofa with carved elements applied (diamond dots).
 Museum of History and Ethnography, Balti
 Dating ~'40 of the 20th century, size 174/67/80
 Photo by Elena Madan (2008)



Fig.2. Sofa with engraved contour shapes.
 Owner Nagornaia Elizaveta
 Tipova village, Rezina district,
 Photo by Madan Elena (2007)

engraved contour shapes (Fig.2); sofa with undecorated flat panels being processed only the edges (Fig.3); sofa with painted surfaces (rhombus, solar rosette, chessboard ornaments, floral motifs, rarely landscapes) (Fig.4).



Fig.3. Sofa with undecorated flat panels being processed only the edges.
 "Borosenii Noi" Public Library
 Photo by Tibuleac Zinaida (2020)



Fig.4. Sofa with painted surfaces
 Grigore Vieru House-Museum,
 Pererita village, Briceni district
 Geometric motifs - solar rosette, rhombus
 Photo by Ciutac Veceslav (2020)

The description of the furniture, including the sofas from the National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History of Moldova (MNEIN), can be found in Maria Ciocanu, MNEIN scientific collaborator: "The sofas have arms at both ends. The bars of the arms and legs are shaped, rounded to the grapes. The ornamental compositions made of wooden elements,

applied on the front plane, give the piece a modest decoration. The furniture is covered with paint in shades of brown but can be found in some houses colors in red, white, or blue. It should be mentioned that in our villages you can find models of sofas, which, in addition to the arms, also have backs. Interesting to point out the paintings on some copies. From the completion of 2010, the sofa with backrest and arms from Dondușeni stands out. The back is decorated at the top, in the center it has mirror frames and a painted sun. The oldest sofa in the museum's heritage was made in the second half of the 19th century by craftsmen from Hotin County and belonged to a family of Ukrainians, displaced from this county to the village of Stolniceni, Edinet. It is distinguished by the color of the lacquered wood, the shaped arms, and legs, carved cylindrically on the lathe. It draws attention to the front of the sofa through the decoration organized in three registers with compositions of triangles painted in brown and arranged in white boxes.”[5, 311]

From the materials accumulated from our field investigations as well as those made by Maria Ciocanu we find out that the sofas were purchased with other pieces of furniture from the craftsmen from Ungheni, Călărași, Nisporeni, Pârlița, Hâncești, Costești (Râșcani), Rezina, Botoșani (Romania), Telenești, Cârpești (Floresti), Râbnița, Rașcov etc.[5, 317] The authors of these works are not known, there were certainly local craftsmen, known in rural areas, and carpenters sold their furniture in the villages around the fairs. Later, during the Soviet period, carpenters employed in the artels and social service houses produced furniture and sofas at the request of the rural population.[5, 310]

The analysis of specialized works together with the field research has contributed to a classification of sofas. What differentiates them is the decision of the compositional ensemble as well as variations of the ornamentation techniques. The analysis of the sofas on the territory of the Republic of Moldova is still necessary to capitalize on the artistic potential, which was especially observed in the realization of this piece of furniture.

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