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The history of the USSR in printed fabric patterns: from the 1920s to the 1940s

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the reflection of indigenous social and ideological breakdowns in the history of Russian Soviet textiles from the 1920s to the 1940s. Soviet power significantly changed the textile industry in Russia. Many factories changed the form of management, retaining their equipment and the direction of work. The printed fabric patterns of the 1920s actively reflected new realities. Propaganda textiles are viewed as the most important innovation of the new era. Printed fabrics with patterns on propaganda topics were produced by the Soviet industry in the second half of the 1920s and the early 1930s. Clothing as some kind of boundary between the body and the world played an important role in the formation of the new Soviet man. Along with the "new" abstract fabric patterns, searches were carried out in the pictorial material for printed fabrics. The article points out that propaganda textiles have become a way of introducing Soviet ideology and at the same time preserving the pre-revolutionary traditions of textile production. Along with traditional motifs (flowers, stripes and squares, cucumbers), propaganda textiles included new ornamental details: tractors and sickles, airplanes and gears, ears and rockets. In the 1930s, the Soviet approach to consumption changed, and floral ornaments began to return.

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Keywords

Soviet textiles, cultural revolution, 1920s, Soviet fabrics, textile industry, propaganda textiles.

Introduction

The sources of the study of history, along with printed and handwritten texts, include artifacts of material culture, in particular, decorative and applied arts. Printed fabrics, the patterns on which vividly reflect the trends of their era, are a specific source of knowledge of the historical period of the first decades of the USSR's existence [Alpatova, 1964; Beschastnov, 1986; Beschastnov, 2010].

Printed fabrics are fabrics whose surface is decorated with some printed pattern; color was initially applied to fabrics manually, but then the term was transferred to those fabrics on which patterns are applied by textile printing machines.

Printed fabric production in Russia

The beginning of printed fabric production in medieval Russia was associated with economic and religious restrictions; in particular, it was forbidden to use foreign fabrics for manufacturing priestly vestments in order to avoid foreign sinfulness. Traces of printed patterns are found in the church clothes of St. Barlaam of Khutyn in the 12th century [Sobolev, 1912, 15]. The first fabric printers were most likely icon painters, who performed many types of decorative work.

Printed fabrics were widespread. N.N. Sobolev wrote the following about Russian antiquity: "In ancient books of orders, monastic inventories and other acts, there are indications of printed fabrics, which were used for making church vestments, clothes for priests, book covers, tents and banners for regiments, curtains, bench covers, feather beds, mattresses stuffed with cotton fabrics, for covering chests and sacristies, and for sewing telogreikas, kaftans, and sarafans—in a word, printing was used everywhere" [Ibidem, 4-5], i. e., printed fabrics were also used in everyday life.

Ancient prints were traditionally made from hardwood (walnut, pear, maple) boards with carved patterns. The dimensions of the boards were equal to or exceeded 30×40 cm. Boards began to be supplemented with metal inserts in the form of strips and nails since the 18th century in order to show details; then wooden boards began to be replaced with metal boards, often ones made of copper. However, traditional wooden boards were used in the north of Russia for a long time.

Manual printing began to be replaced by textile printing factories manufactories in the 18th century. N.N. Sobolev wrote the following about this substitution process at the beginning of the 20th century: "Manual printing, which fed entire districts in Russia, disappeared almost everywhere in a relatively short time, and the huge buildings of modern textile printing factories completely obscured the figures of those printers whose art laid the foundation for mechanical printing" [Ibidem, 3]. The first Russian chintz printing factories that arose under Elizabeth of Russia were run by foreigners, e. g., William Chamberlain and Richard Cosenz were the first factory managers [Gordeeva, 2008, 94].

The reflection of the surrounding reality in printed fabrics

Printed fabrics have long reflected the surrounding reality and demonstrated the cultural level and identity of the masters. In particular, the printed fabrics made from the 16th to 18th century and preserved by the beginning of the 20th century, reflected ancient foreign influences: these patterns bear "the traces of the culture that came from somewhere far away, from the steppes of the Orient. In the small components of these patterns there are some details of the classical forms of ornaments, the stylization of plants that flourished in Muslim art, and the influence of Byzantium, which, despite the remoteness of its existence, affected the details of the late patterns" [Sobolev, 1912, 23-24]. Such traditionalism is obviously connected with the fact that handy fabric printing boards could be used for decades. Exquisite

floral motifs are evident in the 17th-century pattern (Figure 1).

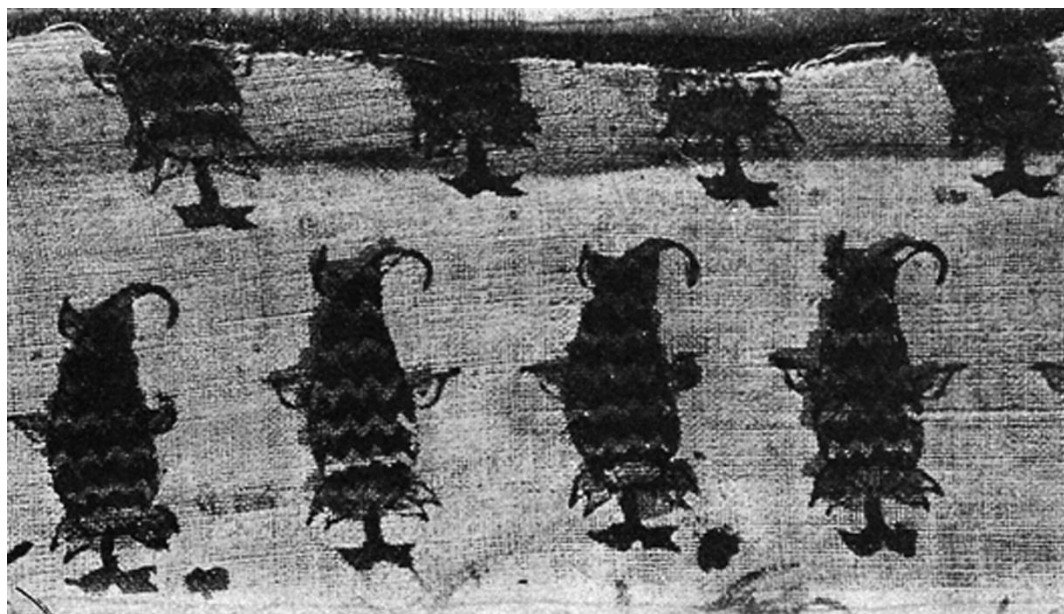


Figure 1 - The pattern of 1668: the upholstery of the back part of the icon stored in the State Historical Museum of Russia [Ibidem, 23]

However, printing also reflected new phenomena, including technical innovations. The fabric printing board of the end of the 19th century depicts a steam locomotive as technical novelty (Figure 2).

fabric printing continued to preserve the old forms of organization, expressed in close connection with the manual production of linen and fabric printing boards and in the stability of the existing printing techniques" [Ibidem, 11]. The patterns were indicative of "the high skill of folk artists, their ability to create an endless variety of decorative compositions through laconic means, using several ornamental elements and only two or three paints" [Plotnikova, www].

The First World War and the civil wars led to a significant decline in the textile industry. The volume of production in 1913 was restored only 20 years later.

The Soviet government significantly changed the textile industry in Russia, in particular, in the field of fabric decoration—more than 25,000 floral fabric ornaments disappeared throughout the country in 1929-1931 [Blyumin, 2010, 22].

Many factories just changed the form of business, retaining their equipment and the area of work. These factories included the Trekhgornaya Manufactory (formerly the Prokhorovskaya Manufactory, Moscow), the First Chintz Printing Factory (formerly the Emil Tsindel Manufactory, Moscow), the Semenovskaya Dyeing and Finishing Factory (formerly the Semenovskaya Weaving and Bleaching Factory, Moscow), the Molotov Weaving and Finishing Factory (formerly the Big Ivanovo Manufactory, Ivanovo), and the Second Chintz Printing Factory (formerly Konshin's Manufactory), Serpukhov [Vostrikova, 2004].

The construction of the largest textile enterprises in the Ivanovo region began in the 1920s: several factories, including the Krasnaya Talka Factory, the Dzerzhinsky Factory, and the Melange Plant, were built from 1925 to 1935. The Ivanovo industrial region, which united the Vladimir, Kostroma and Yaroslavl provinces, produced 49% of cotton and 77% of linen in the USSR by the end of the 1920s [Kareva, 1999].

The printed fabric patterns of the 1920s actively reflected the new realities. Propaganda textiles—fabrics with propaganda designs produced by the Soviet industry in the second half of the 1920s and the early 1930s—was the most important innovation of the new era [Karpova, 2011]. "After the civil war, the question of the need for new patterns in textiles arose almost immediately. It is important to note that this need arose not due to economic reasons, not due to competition for buyers, as in Western European countries with a market economy, but solely due to ideological goals" [Blyumin, 2010, 16].

In accordance with the new ideals, the impact of images on society could re-educate people. It was believed that "the objects of everyday life affect us differently—directly emotionally, often completely beyond any logical connections" [Widdis, 2010, 102], and in this sense textiles influenced not just on consciousness—on subconsciousness. Clothing as some kind of boundary between the body and the world played an important role in the formation of the new Soviet man.

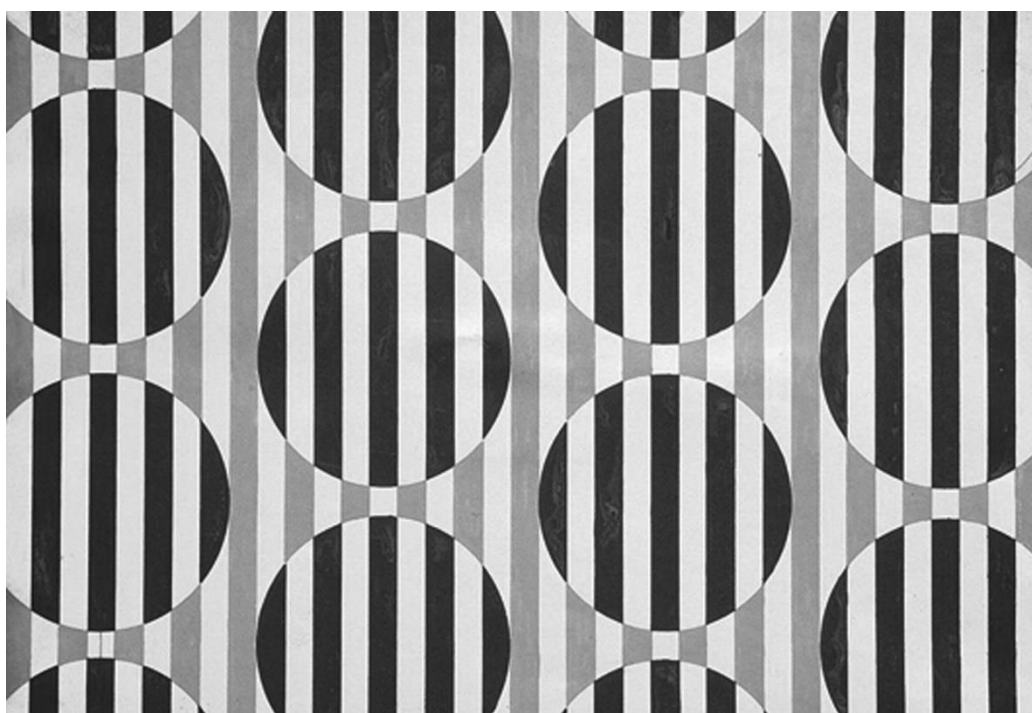


Figure 2 - A fabric printing board. The end of the 19th century. The Solvychegodsk district of the Vologda province. S.V. Tikhonov's workshop. The State Russian Museum [Plotnikova, 1995, 41]

Cube patterns in the Russian countryside existed until the 1930s: "in the 20th century, the peasants' Osip Brik wrote: "Chintz is a product of artistic culture that is similar to a painting, and there is no reason to draw any dividing line between them... Moreover, the painting, inextricably linked with the

forms of the capitalist system, is dying, and chintz is becoming the center of creative attention" [Goroshek..., www]. In 1923, A. Karabanov demanded that artists, instead of bourgeois flowers and cupids, should give new colors and patterns of fabrics that, being poorer in fiber, would defeat world competition with the richness of their design, courage, and revolutionary beauty of thought [Ostarkova, 2010, 17].

Lyubov Popova and Varvara Stepanova, Russian avant-garde artists, took seriously the appeal in P.P. Viktorov's article "Artists, respond!" in 1923, where he recommended serving the entire population of the USSR, creating new motifs for chintz patterns and new combinations of colors" [Blyumin, 2010, 17]. These artists, who transferred the principles of their own easel painting to fabrics, managed to create really bright and interesting patterns and set, according to F.S. Roginskaya, "the first Soviet fashion" [Ibidem]. Their fabric patterns reflected the rhythm of the new dynamic life [Abramova, 1963]: "the first fabric patterns created by Popova and Stepanova were mostly geometric and non-objective, interspersed with emblems and figures (teeth, levers) borrowed from the machine industry and transformed from recognizable images into abstract forms" [Widdis, 2010, 105] (Figure 3).



**Figure 3 - V. Stepanova. A fabric pattern. 1924. Paper, gouache. 31.5×37 cm.
A private collection [Varvara Stepanova..., www]**

Preserved fabric samples show "a certain influence of geometric patterns created by Popova and Stepanova on products made not only by Moscow factories, but also by enterprises in Ivanovo-Voznesensk" [Blyumin, 2010, 17]. At the same time, the geometric non-objective ornament did not find its way so easily. Stepanova was forced to leave the First Chintz Printing Factory in 1926 because of the unwillingness of the management to multiply geometrically mechanized patterns; the Soviet consumer was not yet ready for such an innovation. People wanted more objective patterns [Nesterova, 1983].

The Ivanovo artist S.P. Burylin, who studied and worked in Kuvaev's Chintz Printing Manufactory and the Large Ivanovo-Voznesensk Factory was one of the pioneers of Soviet fabric patterns. He

created exquisite patterns with depicting the details of ears, stars, the sickle and the hammer in 1924-1925.

Along with the "new" abstract fabric patterns, searches were carried out in the pictorial material for printed fabrics, and these searches led to the creation of real paintings, in particular, ones depicting the life in the countryside similar to the film *Cossacks of the Kuban* (Figure 4).



Figure 4 - The Trekhgornaya Manufactory. Moscow. The agricultural cooperative society. Decorative chintz. The late 1920s [Sitets dekorativnyi..., www]

The discussion about fabric patterns continued in the late 1920s. It led to the use of propaganda textiles [Rabotnova, 1973; Solov'ev, 1989; Tan'shina, 2007].

Propaganda textiles were a way to introduce Soviet ideology into human consciousness, while

preserving the prerevolutionary traditions of textile production: "How can we tell about the achievements of the new government in the simplest and most accessible form? The first large-scale experiment on managing mass consciousness with the help of propaganda textiles begins. This is done by the sector of fabric ornamentation created by the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia" [Goroshek..., www].

Propaganda kerchiefs were a special genre of propaganda textiles (Figure 5).



Figure 5 - L.M. Chernov-Plessky. A kerchief. Propaganda textiles. The Teykovo Manufactory. 1922 [Platok dlya Pervoi vystavki..., www]

Propaganda textiles were formed, in particular, in the Higher State Artistic and Technical Workshops together with textile design. Graduates were expected to become not just draftsmen, but textile artists. Lyudmila Mayakovskaya taught innovative airbrushing at the Higher State Artistic and Technical Workshops. There was a specially designed course for textile artists taught by the best teachers of that time (Nikolai Ladovsky, Alexander Rodchenko, etc.).

Propaganda textiles "became a continuation of Popova and Stepanova's experiment in the creation of new textiles, but there was one significant difference in this experiment—the replacement of geometric ornaments by symbolic ones" [Akinsha, 2010, 94].

Along with traditional motifs (flowers, stripes and squares, cucumbers), propaganda textiles

included new ornamental details: tractors and sickles, airplanes and gears, ears and rockets. All this reflected the processes of industrialization, electrification and collectivization that took place in the country [Makarov, 1974]. The five-pointed star, included in the ornamental motifs of 1925-1926 in the New Ivanovo-Voznesensk Factory, was an important motif.

The exhibition "Soviet Household Textiles" on new textiles organized by the Higher Art and Technical Institute in 1928, showed the following patterns reflecting the new reality: tractors and industrial motifs, garlands and fruit. The names of the fabrics and genres were connected with the new reality: the kerchief "Sportsman", the fabrics "Rural Industrialization" (V.I. Maslov), "The Rural Komsomol" (K.A. Shchuko), "The Industrial" (D.N. Preobrazhensky), and "Factory Whistle" (S.P. Burylin), etc. [Blyumin, 2010, 19; Widdis, 2010, 105].

New people—workers and peasants—were often depicted. Scenes from the life of the new Soviet countryside were distinguished by the colorfulness and symbolism of abundance (Figure 6).

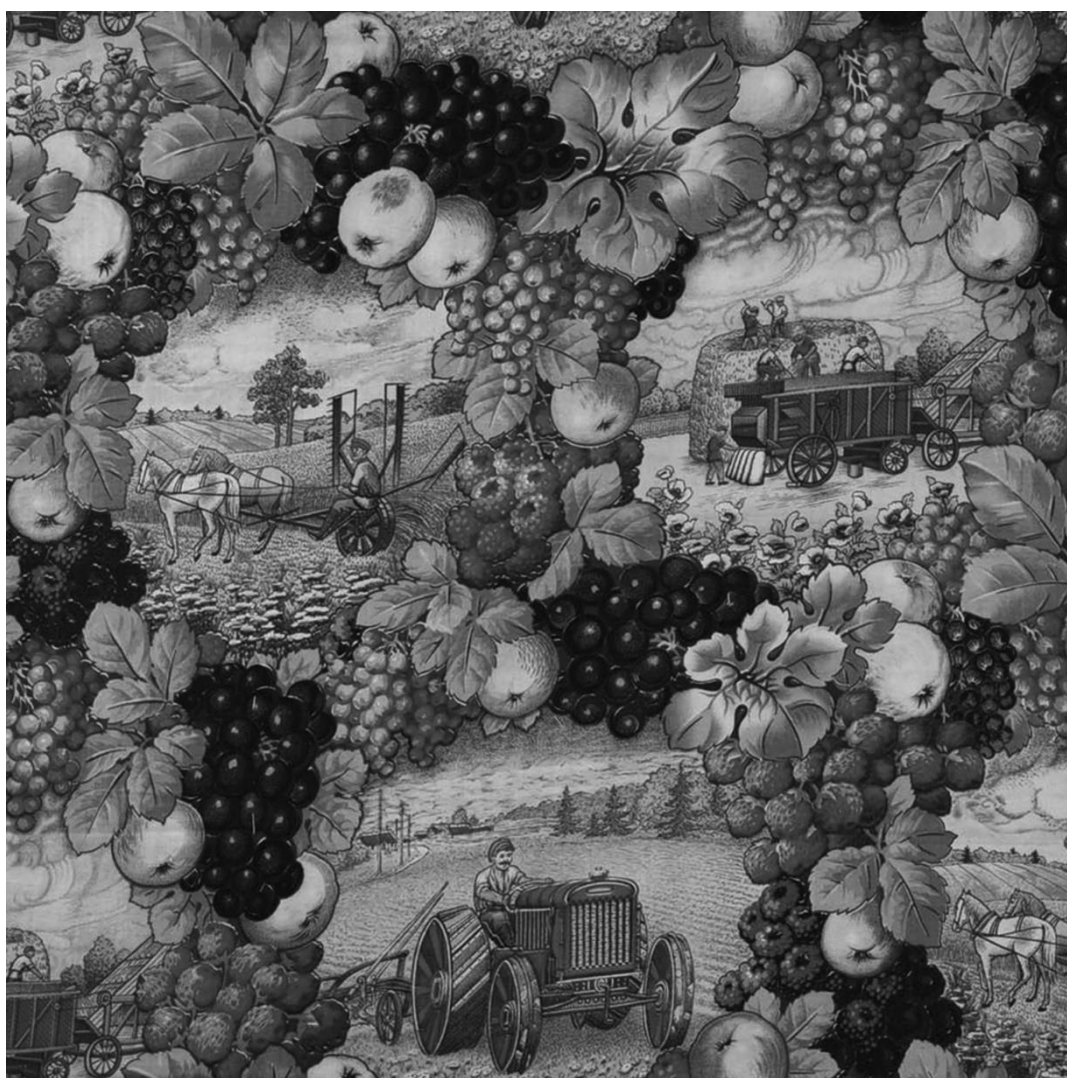


Figure 6 - V. Maslov. The countryside. Chintz. The Ivanovo-Voznesensk State Textile Trust. 1925 [Satin..., www]

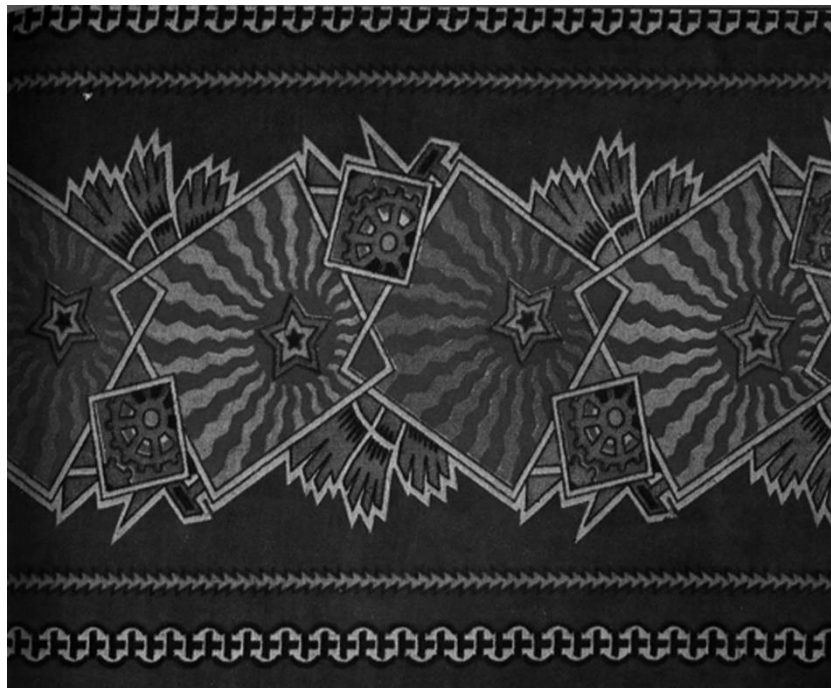
Actual abbreviations (the USSR, the RSFSR, etc.) were also often depicted. Propaganda textiles were used for propaganda posters, banners, and tailoring. They actively replaced floral patterns.

The themes of propaganda textiles coincided with the vocabulary of the new era: "Tractors, steam locomotives, factory whistles, "Ilyich bulbs" and other symbols of Soviet modernization replaced flowers. The themes of the iconography of propaganda textiles differs little from ideological themes of that time in photography and poster-making. The magazine "The USSR in construction" demonstrates an absolutely identical set of iconographic images: factories and plants (with the "anatomy of machines" as a classical manifestation of industrial fetishism that is so dear to the heart of a radical photographer/artist), electrification, the cult of aviation in particular and transport in general (locomotives opposed to camels (the Turkestan–Siberia Railway), ships, etc.). In the ornamentation of propaganda textiles there are also athletes, marching pioneers, columns of Red Army soldiers—in a word, the masses turned into an ornament" [Akinsha, 2010, 95].

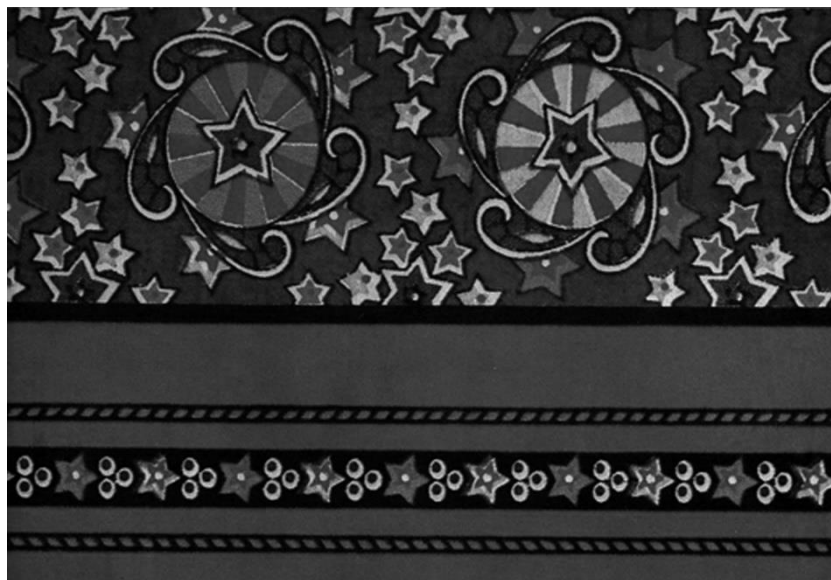
There are the following thematic groups of images associated with the new historical reality:

- elements of revolutionary and state symbols;
- portraits of leaders and statesmen;
- appeals, abbreviations (text ornaments);
- holidays;
- industrialization;
- electrification;
- collectivization;
- national defense (aviation, the army, the navy);
- a healthy lifestyle (sports, tourism, childhood) [Blyumin, 2006; Tan'shina, 2009; Yasinskaya, 1974].

Revolutionary symbolism actively invaded textile ornaments. The five-pointed star became an important symbol, which found its way on fabrics, sometimes being put in more traditional ornaments (Figures 7-8).



**Figure 7 - S.P. Burylin (?). Decorative chintz. The late 1920s and early 1930s.
I.M. Yasinskaya's collection. Leningrad [Yasinskaya, 1977, 93]**



**Figure 8 - S.P. Burylin (?). Decorative chintz. The late 1920s and early 1930s.
I.M. Yasinskaya's collection. Leningrad [Ibidem, 95]**

The portraits of the leaders represented a special kind of creativity of textile artists. After the death of V.I. Lenin, Nikolai Demkov designed kerchiefs intended for the delegates of the First All-Union Congress of Teachers in Moscow (Figure 9).



**Figure 9 - N.S. Demkov. A kerchief. The Large Ivanovo-Voznesensk
Manufactory. 1924 [Platok dlya delegatov..., www]**

The problem of preserving the visual expressiveness of the new ornaments remained an important issue. Do "swimmers", "athletes", etc. become an abstract pattern, or are they sketches from the street, similar to newspaper photographs, i. e., do they remain an illustration? For example, "the figures of female workers in white skirts and green T-shirts, schematized elements of textile machinery form a dense rapport structure on the fabric designed by Dina Lekhtman-Zaslavskaya, which is visually perceived as a geometric ornament" [Vlasov, Vlasova, 2017, 142].

The "ornament" had its own ideological opponents. Liya Raitser, a textile artist and the organizer of the textile section of the Moscow Union of Artists, believed that the ornament as a decorative element is essentially bourgeois and should not be used in Soviet textiles.

The visual opposition of the old and the new, this world and the foreign one became an expressive means confirming the advent of the new time. This technique was used both in printing and in textiles, i. e., in one of the fabric patterns designed by S.P. Burylin (Figure 10).



Figure 10 - S.P. Burylin. The fabric pattern "A Ploughman and a Tractor Driver". July 1930 [Ostarkova, 2010, 95]

In addition to figurative ornamentation, there were ornaments close to ideograms—a combination of numbers, abbreviations, and symbols. The interlacing of the numbers 4 and 5, which meant "the five-year plan in 4 years", was one of the most popular patterns of this type. The repetition of such ideograms turns such patterns into purely ornamental, poorly readable signs: this distancing of signs partly resembles the distancing that occurs with fonts in tagging in graffiti culture.

The propagandistic significance of industrial ornaments was expressed, in particular, in the visual strengthening of the "right" parts of reality: the multiplication of factories and tractors, marching columns and peasants on fabrics was supposed to magically increase their number in reality (Figure 11).

Soviet propaganda textiles reached its peak by the end of the 1920s, which coincided with the restructuring of the national textile industry during the first five-year plan. At the same time, during the late 1920s and 1930s there was a shortage of fabrics, as well as other industrial goods [Vlasov, Vlasova, 2017, 142].

However, the overproduction of images emasculated any content from them and turned them into virtual signs. In the early 1930s, the avalanche of the images of tractors and combines began to cause ironic comments. The article "A Tractor in Front, a Combine in Back" written by Grigory Ryklin and published in Pravda in 1933, became a sign of the times—a message that propaganda textiles no longer reflected the aspirations of the authorities and outlived their time.

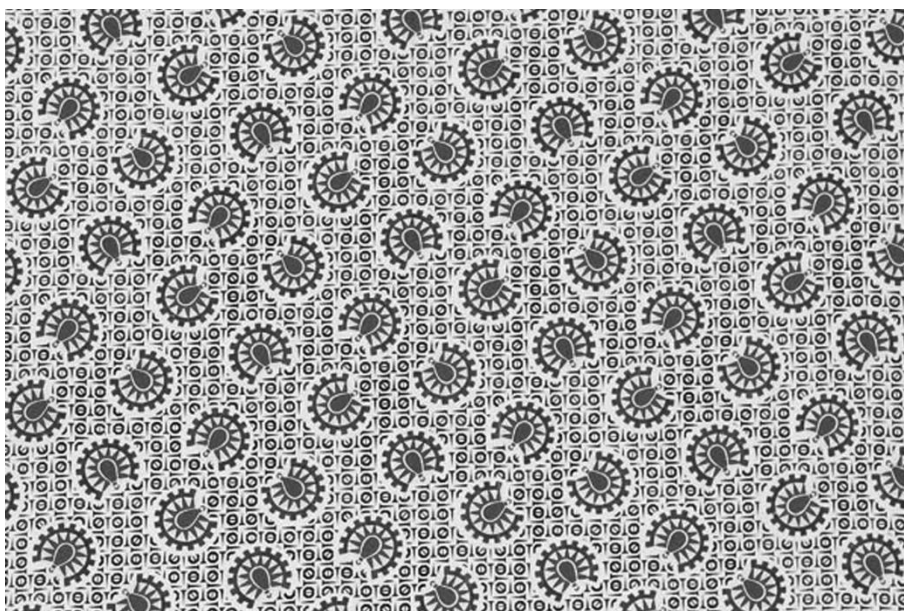


Figure 11 - The fabric pattern "Lamps". The First Chintz Printing Factory in Moscow. The 1920s and 1930s [Tkan'..., www]

Propaganda textiles were criticized for the lack of a fundamental renewal of the artistic system. In 1931, the art historian Alexei Fedorov-Davydov wrote that the artists "did not go anywhere beyond simply replacing roses with tractors" [Goroshek..., www]. However, this judgment is not entirely fair. Propaganda textiles were not a violent turn in the decoration of clothes, but fully corresponded to their time and succeeded the art of the Russian avant-garde, in particular, suprematism (Figure 12).



Figure 12 - The fabric pattern "Fishermen". The Trekhgornaya Manufactory in Moscow. The 1920s and 1930s [Tolstoy, 1990, 258]

"The images of the Soviet reality of the post-revolutionary period and expressive means based on the achievements of avant-garde artists are among the most important features of propaganda textiles" [Blyumin, 2010, 18]. The themes of propaganda textiles did not determine their style; schematic images of airplanes, workers, and stars spoke more about suprematism and constructivism than about the editorials of Soviet newspapers (Figure 13).

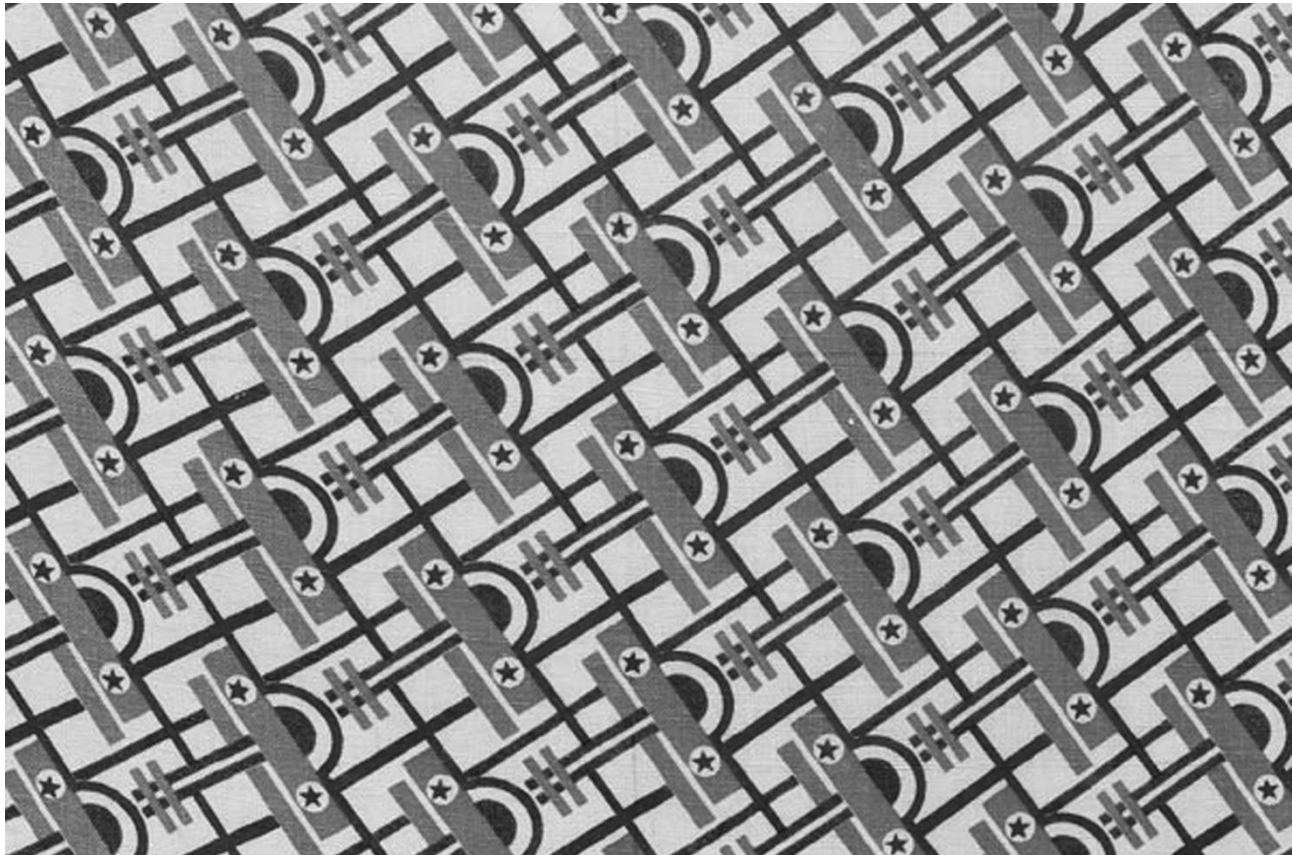


Figure 13 - V.D. Latonina. The pattern "Transport" ("Airplanes"). Chintz. 1929 [Risunok..., www]

Propaganda textiles are not a purely Soviet trend, they were also used in the USA, Great Britain, and Japan during the pre-war period. In Japan, "textiles for men's kimonos were often decorated with military symbols, dominated by aviation themes—images of military aircraft and falling bombs" [Akinsha, 2010, 99]. Propaganda textiles were used primarily for women's clothing; however, Soviet propaganda textiles were the first in this sequence.

The mid-1930s, associated with the revolution in art that led to the triumph of socialist realism, were marked by a turn to "understandable", simple art that is popular with people. Floral and ornamental motifs began to return to textiles, and "Ivanovo chintz was decorated again with with bright, garish flowers" [Ibidem]. The motifs of propaganda textiles began to fade into the past, giving way to the usual vegetable themes (Figure 14).

Thus, the Soviet approach to consumption changed in the 1930s, and the floral ornament began to return, which is also noticeable from the materials of the press of that time: "In the second half of the 1930s, floral summer dresses were a new visual ideal of Soviet recreation on screen and on the pages of fashion magazines" [Widdis, 2010, 107].



Figure 14 - P.G. Leonov. Flowers and stars. Chintz for East China. The Zinoviev Factory. 1930 [Sitets dlya Vostochnogo Kitaya..., www]

Conclusion

The textile industry of the USSR went through the processes that were parallel to the general artistic ones. Just as the left front was defeated in art, "formalists" and "naturalists" were criticized, industrial and social experiments were welcomed in textile decoration throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, but in the mid-1930s, it was decided to move towards the "understandability" of art and to return to traditional floral and ornamental motifs.

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История СССР в отражении рисунков набивных тканей: 1920-1940-е гг.

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Аннотация

Статья посвящена отражению коренных общественных и идеологических сломов в истории русского советского текстиля с 1920-х по 1940-е гг. Советская власть значительно изменила облик текстильной промышленности в России. Многие фабрики просто поменяли форму хозяйствования, сохранив свое оборудование и направление работы. Набивные

рисунки 1920-х гг. активно отражали новые реалии. Важнейшим новшеством наступившей эпохи стал агитационный текстиль – ткани с рисунками на агитационную тематику, которые выпускались советской промышленностью во второй половине 1920-х – начале 1930-х гг. Одежда, граница между телом и миром, играла важную роль в становлении нового советского человека. Наряду с отвлеченным, абстрактным «новым» рисунком для ткани шли поиски в предметном, живописном материале для набойки тканей. Агиттекстиль стал способом, который позволил, сохраняя дореволюционные традиции текстильного производства, внедрять в создание людей советскую идеологию. Наряду с традиционными мотивами (цветы, полосы и квадраты, огурцы) агитационный текстиль включал новые орнаментальные детали: трактора и серпы, самолеты и шестеренки, колосья и ракеты. В 1930-е гг. поменялся советский подход к потреблению, и стал возвращаться цветочный орнамент.

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Ключевые слова

Советский текстиль, культурная революция, 1920-е годы, советские ткани, текстильная промышленность, агитационный текстиль.

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