

ASIAN TEXTILES

MAGAZINE OF THE OXFORD ASIAN TEXTILE GROUP

NUMBER 52

JUNE 2012



**The symbolism of livestock horns
amongst the Qaraqalpaqs of Central Asia**

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Front cover pic: 19th Century Qaraqalpaq *esikqas*, illustrating the 12-horn motif.

Rear cover pic: Afghan Kuchi nomad jewellery

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**DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE IS
MONDAY 8th OCTOBER 2012**

Contributions should be emailed or sent to
the Editor

Editorial

I am delighted that in this edition of *Asian Textiles* we have been able to include an article on the Qaraqalpaqs' use of animal horn motifs in their textiles. As many of you know, the authors, David and Sue Richardson, have spent years studying the textiles from this remote region south of the Aral Sea in Central Asia. Their magnificent book on the subject is just published and will be reviewed in the next issue of the magazine.

We also have a second article from Anna Portisch on the textile traditions of the Kazakh Mongols. This time Anna has concentrated on explaining the importance of particular textiles within the cultural traditions of families. Like the Qaraqalpaqs, the Kazakhs of Western Mongolia inhabit a remote and largely inhospitable region, but place huge emphasis on textiles in their everyday lives. Such traditions are disappearing from many parts of the world—which is also a theme in Joy Totah Hilden's book on Arabian weaving, reviewed in this edition of the magazine.

Our third article in this edition is another interesting piece, this time on the Kuchi nomads, by Azra Nafees, who has now covered much of Pakistan and Afghanistan in her writings. They too are being forced by circumstance to give up their old way of life and to settle, and in the process risk losing much of their unique identity.

One final point; no-one has yet come forward to identify the hat bought by OATG member Marilyn Wolf and illustrated in the last edition of the magazine. I find it hard to believe that none of our members can tell us more about it. Please take another look and contact me if you think you know where it has come from.

The Editor



Another postcard from Liebig, the French meat extract company that used to give these cards away with its products. This one shows Japanese artisans block-printing onto cloth. The Japanese are very strong in the art of printing coloured designs onto fabrics, says the back of the card. What this has to do with meat stock I do not know.

OATG EVENTS PROGRAMME

Wednesday 29 August 2012

Qaraqalpaqs of the Aral Delta

David and Sue Richardson

Authors of the recently published *Qaraqalpaqs of the Aral Delta*, 'the standard reference work on this fascinating people and their culture'

This Turkic minority group possesses a vibrant folk art tradition displayed in its textiles, costumes and furnishings. The talk will be illustrated with many photographs taken in location and also from national museum collections.

Wednesday 24 October 2012

AGM at 5.45pm for members only, followed by the talk at 6.15pm

Buried Textile Treasures—Discoveries from Medieval Egypt

Jacqueline Hyman

Textile conservator /restorer who runs her own studio.

The talk describes how the Mamluk garments came to be found in Egypt and outlines each garment's fabric analysis and construction, their conservation and historical background.

Wednesday 5 December 2012

Dressed to Impress

A study of the textiles carved in relief on the Singosari sculptures of late classical Java.

Lesley Pullen

Researcher and Lecturer for Material Culture of Southeast Asia at SOAS

Talks are held at the Pauling Centre, 58 Banbury Road, Oxford.
Refreshments from 5.15pm. Visitors welcome (£2)

Programme Coordinators:

Rosemary Lee 01491 873276 rosemarylee143@btinternet.com

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Dui Xiu Shan

(Hill of Accumulated Elegance)

This artificial hill was made of rocks piled on the original site of Guan Hua Dian (Hall of Appreciating Flowers), against the northern palace wall. Originally, it was named Dui Xiu Shan (Hill of Accumulated Embroidery), and in the Qianlong reign period, it was given its present name.

Thanks to Rosamund Cantalamessa for passing on these two photographs she took on a recent trip to China. The first, taken in Beijing's Summer Palace, mentions the 'Hill of Accumulated Embroidery'. Is this the only hill in the world named after embroidery, I wonder?

Below, a picture taken in Shanghai's superb museum, shows clothing made entirely from fish skin. I have seen similar costumes in St Petersburg's Museum of Ethnography, but nothing quite so elegant as this, which originates from northern China, close to the border with Siberia.



Woven treasures and Ottoman gardens

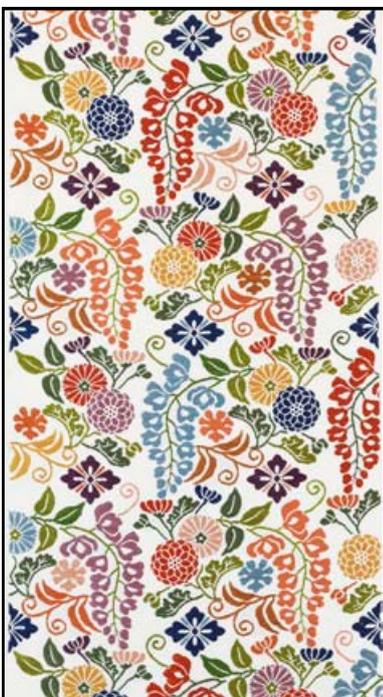
Washington's Textile Museum is holding two exhibitions that will be of interest to OATG members. Running until 12 August is Woven Treasures of Japan's Tawaraya Workshop, which for more than 500 years has been producing exquisite silks for Imperial garments and Noh theatre costumes. The exhibition has been organised with the help of Hyoji Kitagawa, the 18th generation head of the workshop, who was recently designated a National Living Treasure by the Japanese government.

Visitors will be able to see 37 pieces on loan from the workshop, including fabrics and completed costumes – the first time these silks have ever been exhibited in the United States. They include four *uchigi* – colourful robes worn beneath formal outer garments – and a *kosode* robe used in Noh theatre.

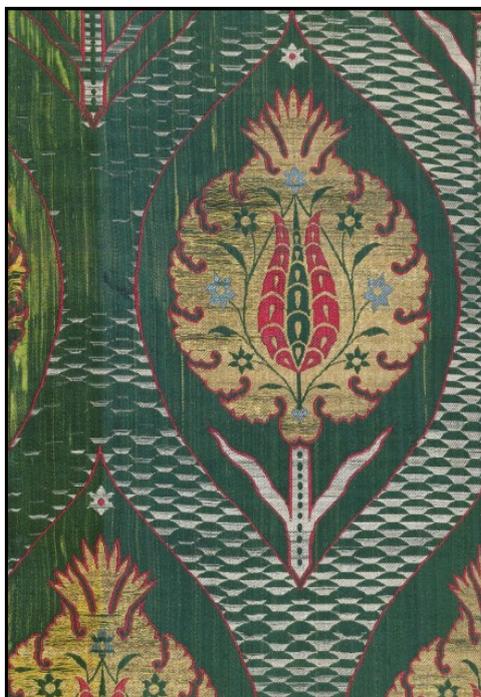
Many of the designs made by the Workshop are based on historic textiles (*jodai-gire*) preserved in temples. On show is a reconstruction of an 8th Century twill, made by Hyoji Kitagawa, who reformulated an acorn dye and mimicked the ancient practice of wetting yarns before weaving them. The Workshop is one of the few eligible to make Imperial robes, including those made for the 1989 coronation of Emperor Akihito and his wife.

The Workshop is based in Kyoto, long recognised as a great centre of silk production. Kitagawa learned his trade from his father, who in turn learned from his forebearers.

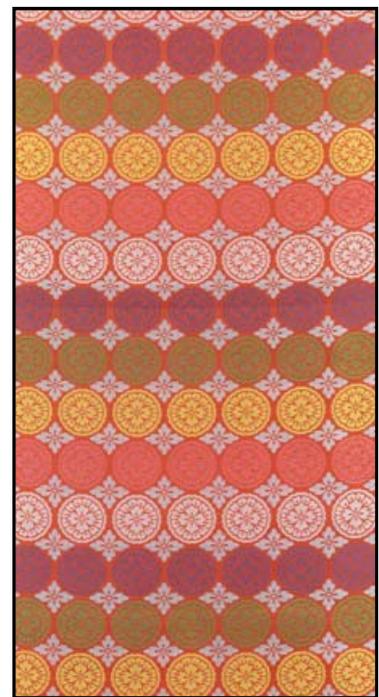
The second exhibition at the Textile Museum, due to run from 21 September – 10 March 2013 is The Sultan's Garden: The Blossoming of Ottoman Art, showing how the instantly recognisable aesthetic developed from the designs developed during the reign of Suleyman the Magnificent by the artist Kara Memi. These designs, inspired by nature and showing stylised tulips, carnations, hyacinths, roses and other flowers, instantly spoke of Ottoman patronage, luxury and taste and remain current until today.



Silk with wisteria pattern, Japan, Kyoto, 20th century. Courtesy of Hyoji Kitagawa. Photo by Renée Comet.



Fragment of green-ground *kemha*, Istanbul, First half 17th century



Silk with *go-kamon* ("five round sliced melon") motif, Japan, Kyoto, 20th century. Courtesy of Hyoji Kitagawa. Photo by Renée Comet.

Kabuki theatre costumes in Paris

The Pierre Bergé-Yves St-Laurent Foundation in Paris is holding an exhibition of the traditional and very extravagant costumes used in Japanese theatre. *Kabuki, Japanese theatre costumes*, runs until 15 July 2012 and is being curated by Aurélie Samuel, no stranger to OATG members.

On display are about 30 costumes and many accessories worn during kabuki performances. These exceptional pieces - on loan from the Japanese company Shôchiku Costume - are still frequently worn by actors. Included in the exhibition are also contemporary works and artifacts from the collections of the musée Guimet, which will also put on shows demonstrating how Kabuki is performed today, whilst at the same time evoking the deep roots of its vivid traditional heritage.

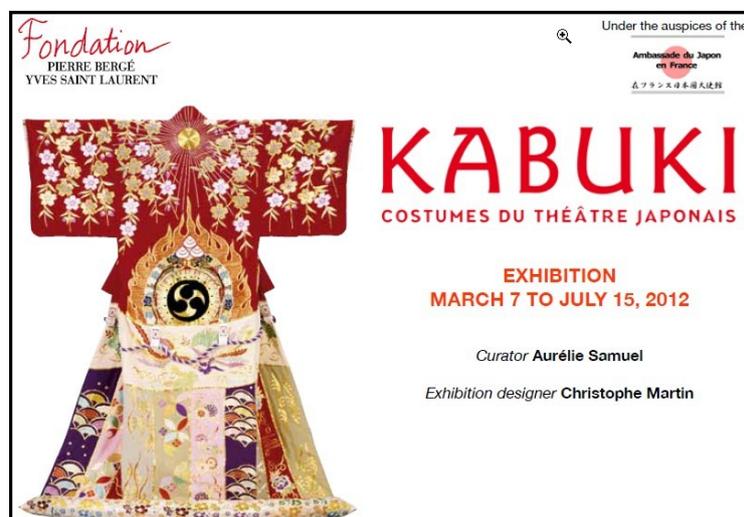
Kabuki is a traditional Japanese form of popular theatre, its core components including singing, dancing and acting. In 2005 it was proclaimed an "Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity" by UNESCO. This particular form of stage entertainment, centred mainly on historical themes and moral conflicts, coupled with the relationships that bind the characters together, is performed by men only. Costumes play a major role in Kabuki, helping the audience to differentiate at first glance men from women, heroes from villains, young lovers from elderly monks.

A key element in the spectacular performances, Kabuki costumes are often extravagant, sumptuous and colourful. Beyond their visible beauty, they adhere to precise classifications and feature elements that reveal the personality and status of the character that wears them. Each type of role is characterized by shape, colors, symbols, accessories and makeup. Therefore, costumes, by their cut, decoration and texture, determine characters and help the actors to possess their roles. They have a crucial impact on acting, pushing actors to perform specific moves that became, in time, characteristic features of the roles.

The exhibition is divided into three parts: the first part includes five costumes from the best-known plays in the Kabuki repertoire. Featuring a wide variety of fabrics and shapes, these costumes range from sumptuous, beautifully painted and richly embroidered silk kimonos, to more modest pieces of dyed cotton fabric.

The second part is devoted to dance costumes. Since its invention, kabuki has always been associated with dancing. A play must therefore include at least one choreographed moment, integrated into the action when made possible by a specific character (such as a courtesan or prostitute), or, if the plot does not allow it, as a kind of interlude.

Finally, in the third part, the most ancient pieces, which have not been worn for at least the last decade, are presented alongside *kamishimo*, costumes used for samurai roles in *jidai-mono* plays (historical dramas), and an amazing paper kimono, a material seldom used in clothing manufacture. Thanks to this exhibition, European audiences will be able to discover an ancient, amazing and little-known dramatic Japanese tradition.



Livestock horn motifs in the textiles of the Central Asian Qaraqalpaqs

Protection against evil forces is the most likely explanation of the horn motifs found extensively in the embroidered and woven textiles of the Qaraqalpaqs, say David and Sue Richardson

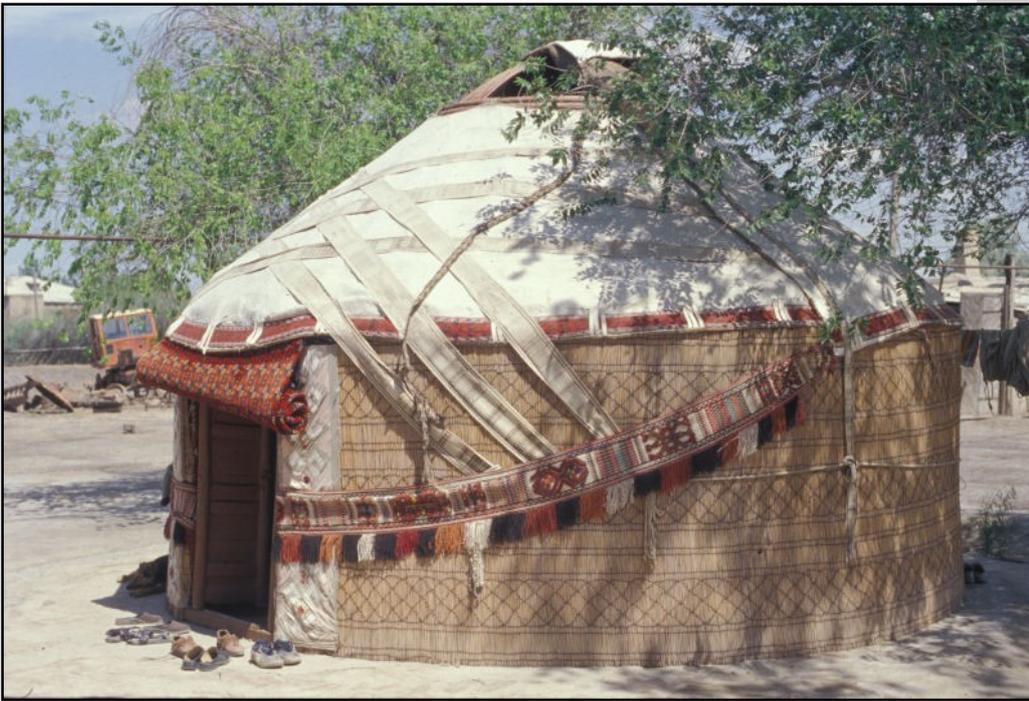
As many readers will already know, the majority of Qaraqalpaqs currently live in Qaraqalpaqstan, which despite having the status of an 'Autonomous Republic' is nothing more than the largest and most westerly province of Uzbekistan, effectively ruled from Tashkent. The Qaraqalpaqs are a relatively modern people who first formed as a small confederation of Turkic tribes in the oases of the lower Syr Darya river during the 16th century. Their traditional lifestyle was semi-nomadic; their economy based on a mixture of fishing, irrigated cereal farming, and cattle-breeding. They developed a rich and distinctive textile culture which blossomed in the first few decades of the 20th century.

Unfortunately we know very little about their early material culture because they lived in a remote and inaccessible region of Central Asia and very few foreigners ever visited or wrote about them. Even today almost nothing has been written about the Qaraqalpaqs in the West so their remarkable costumes and weavings remain virtually unknown outside of the former Soviet Union.

In the early 18th century the Qaraqalpaq confederation became fragmented and dispersed following a particularly violent invasion by Mongol Jungars from Eastern Turkestan. Some Qaraqalpaqs migrated into the regions of Ferghana, Samarkand, and Bukhara where they were eventually assimilated by the local Uzbeks. Others settled on the eastern seaboard of the Aral Sea but were progressively dislodged by their more powerful Qazaq neighbours. They migrated southwards towards the isolated marshes of the Aral Delta at the southern end of the Aral Sea, ending up as participants in a long-running civil war between local Qongrat/Kungrat and Manghit



Map showing the location of Qaraqalpaqstan



A decorated Qaraqalpaq yurt in a farmyard at Mu'yten awil (hamlet) in the northern Aral Delta

Uzbeks.

Although many Qaraqalpaqs initially allied themselves with the rebel Manghits in the Aral Delta, the ruling Qongrats of Khiva pursued a strategy of divide and rule. As an increasing number of Qaraqalpaq tribes were attracted over to the Khivan side by the lure of land grants, the rebel factions were increasingly isolated. By the early nineteenth century the entire Qaraqalpaq nation had been subjugated by Khiva and resettled within the Aral Delta.

Throughout their short and tumultuous history the Qaraqalpaqs experienced a life that was full of hardship and danger. In the winter there was the ever-present threat of Turkmen attack – the frozen waterways of the Aral Delta providing easy access for raiding parties intent on stealing their cattle and kidnapping their wives and daughters. In response many Qaraqalpaqs relocated their yurts to communal *qala* refuges, defended by high mud-brick walls. In the spring and summer the capricious Amu Darya could flood the lower delta channels without warning, forcing families to suddenly relocate their yurts and livestock to higher ground. Their spring crops were vulnerable to drought, blight, and plagues of locusts, while their animals were exposed to respiratory ailments, the bites of mosquitoes and gadflies, and attack by the Aral *tugay* tiger. Birth and infant mortality was high and diseases like scabies, scurvy, trachoma, and syphilis were common.

The Qaraqalpaqs coped with these vicissitudes with the help of a complex system of supernatural beliefs, overlain by a thin veneer of Sunni Islam. Many of these beliefs have ancient origins, going back to the time of the early Turks and perhaps even earlier. Of course the Qaraqalpaqs never documented their cults and rituals so, as modern outsiders, we can never fully comprehend their world view. We are left with a superficial understanding gleaned from elderly Qaraqalpaqs who were questioned by various Soviet ethnographers in the decades that followed the Second World War. One of the more comprehensive studies was conducted in the 1970s by the local ethnographer Xojamet Esbergenov, by which time people's traditional beliefs had been eroded by half a century of Communist rule.

The Qaraqalpaqs had no consistent theological system of spiritual belief. They believed in a plethora of holy saints, or *pirs*, and evil spirits known variously as *jins*, *shaytans*, or *albash*, along with a multitude of notions and superstitions affecting every aspect of their lives. These included not only the important phases of birth, marriage, and death, but even everyday tasks like the treatment of a sick calf, the tilling and irrigation of crops, the weaving of a yurt band, or the erection of a yurt. Each event required the performance of various traditional rites, and rituals. In some cases assistance had to be sought from one of the various holy saints who patronized a



Left: A ram's skull wrapped in red broadcloth with button eyes protects the entrance to a home in Nobis. Centre: a sheep's skull protects a yard at Bozataw. Right: Cattle skull protecting livestock at Qazayagh awil.

particular item, activity, or craft. For example there were patron saints of agriculture, water, horses, weaving, jewellery making, and even yurt-making.

One of the greatest dangers was the envious glance of the 'evil eye', the *ko'z tiygiziw*, which could give rise to numerous misfortunes. The evil eye was thought to be the cause of many of the illnesses suffered by people and their domestic animals – the result of a glance by a stranger or a visitor from another village. This led to many prohibitions. For example, strangers were forbidden to enter the cattle shed, walk into the herd, or even gaze at the cattle. In the event of misfortune, a piece of cloth was removed from the clothing of the culprit and was ignited so that the smoke could be used to fumigate the sickly animal.

In difficult situations help was sought from a *ta'wip*, a local sorcerer who dispensed quack medicine, or a *porxan*, a shaman who specialised in fortune-telling, predictions, and treatments, especially for female sterility. To treat an ailment the *porxan* organized a programme of daily *zikir* ceremonies inside the yurt, in front of an audience of family and village members, all dressed in their cleanest clothes. The 'patient' was 'treated' with wild leaping and howling to the accompaniment of tambourines, followed by the reciting of incantations and spells and the performance of rituals to drive away the evil spirits. This might involve beating the patient with the carcass of a black crow, suspending the carcass of a steppe eagle from the yurt roof, or perhaps the sacrificing of a ram or a cow and disposing of its bones (and hence the ailment). As we have seen with our own eyes, some of the simpler quack 'treatments' are still used by some rural and urban Qaraqalpaqs today.

Obviously prevention was always preferable to cure, so various measures were taken to protect people, property, and livestock from danger, especially those who were the most vulnerable such as infants, brides, and young animals. An armoury of devices were used to neutralize the evil eye – the colour red, needles, shards of glass, the herb *adiraspan* (Syrian rue), triangles and diamonds, and quotations from the Qu'ran. Readers should refer to OATG member Sheila Paine's book, *Amulets*, to comprehend the full gamut.

One of the most common countermeasures used by the Qaraqalpaqs was to exploit the amuletic power of livestock horns – usually ram's horns or bull's horns – either in the form of the horns themselves or depictions of horn-like motifs, both of which were referred to as *mu'yiz*.

Goats and cattle were tough, the only domestic animals that could tolerate the mosquito-infested swamps of the Aral Delta, while rams and bulls were indomitable and fearless. In addition to power, each symbolized wealth and fertility. In the pre-Soviet era the entire wealth of a Qaraqalpaq family of livestock-breeders was measured in terms of *tuwar* - literally cattle - so the concepts of wealth, fertility, and protection were closely related. Goats and sheep were almost regarded as sacred animals.

The Khorezmian Uzbeks, who lived to the south of the Qaraqalpaqs, used the entire animal as an amulet, tethering a breeding ram in the outside yard next to their dwelling. The envious glance of a newcomer would naturally fall on the ram, above all upon its powerful horns, thereby neutralizing its evil force. Likewise, the Qaraqalpaqs protected their livestock by erecting a post at the side of the animal enclosure supporting a pair of horns or a horned skull. Horns were sometimes fastened above the entrance to a house or were carved on the side of a lean-to *aywan* shelter. They were frequently placed on the side of a *mazar* (mausoleum), and were part of the funeral rite, a post or *sırıq* being erected on the sepulchral mound with a horn-shaped image at its upper end and a crescent moon at its apex.

Patterns incorporating *mu'yiz* motifs occur in almost every Qaraqalpaq textile, whether depicted boldly or concealed within a border decoration. Of course horn motifs, especially ram's horn motifs, appear as a common design theme throughout all of the traditional arts and crafts of Central Asia. They occur repeatedly in embroidery designs, especially on clothing, and are important motifs in Turkmen tribal carpets, Kyrgyz *shirdak*, and Uzbek *koshma* felts. However they seem to be especially dominant in Qaraqalpaq embroideries and weavings.

One of the foremost applications was to protect the entrance to the Qaraqalpaq yurt. Firstly



Rows of ram's horns (*qoshqar mu'yiz*) protect the entrance to a yurt at Moynaq from the evil eye

long rectangular panels, prominently decorated with two vertical columns of ram's horns, were fastened to each side of the outer doorway. This motif is normally referred to as *qos mu'yiz*, meaning a pair of horns, although some use the term *qoshqar mu'yiz*, ram's horns. The panels were called the *shiy o'n'ir*, literally the breast of the *shiy*, the woven screen of *shiy* grass that enclosed the outer wall. A matching pair of yurt bands was suspended in front of them like hanging garlands, one end of each fastened to the upright sides of the door frame, the other attached to the lower corner of the rear roof felt.

Known as the *sirtqi janbaw*, or 'outer sloping bands', these tent bands had no structural



function and were purely protective. They were woven with a sequence of decorative panels, frequently containing various figurative arrangements of horns, such as *segiz mu'yiz* (eight horns), *shitirmaq mu'yiz* (crossed horns), *toqalaq mu'yiz* (docked horns), *u'lken mu'yiz* (big horns), and *kishkentay mu'yiz* (small horns). The lower side of both bands supported a hanging fringe of red and brown tassels. Both the *shiy o'n'ir* and the *sirtqi janbaw* were woven on a simple narrow beam single-heddle loom with a warp-faced cotton ground, the decorative pattern formed from a symmetrically knotted woollen pile.

The outer roll-up door, the *esik*, was often made from a smaller reed screen panel called the *shiy esik*, normally backed with felt. The finest *shiy esiks* were called *qogas* and were decorated on their outer edges with narrow vertical strips called *shiy qayiw*, decorated with *qos mu'yiz*, and on their lower edges with a horizontal panel called a *suwag'ar* or gutter, often decorated with some additional arrangement of horns. A large inverted triangular amulet called a *duwashiq*, made from felt or woollen cloth and decorated with either horns or small appliquéd triangles and diamonds,



Top: A Qaraqalpaq knotted pile *esikqas* with the 'twelve horns' or *on yeki mu'yiz* motif.

Left: The front or *aldı* of an *aq kiymeshek* decorated with *Xorasanı mu'yiz* and other horn motifs

was fastened to the centre of the *qoga*. Again, its purpose was primarily amuletic, to protect the inhabitants of the yurt from the many dangers that lay beyond.

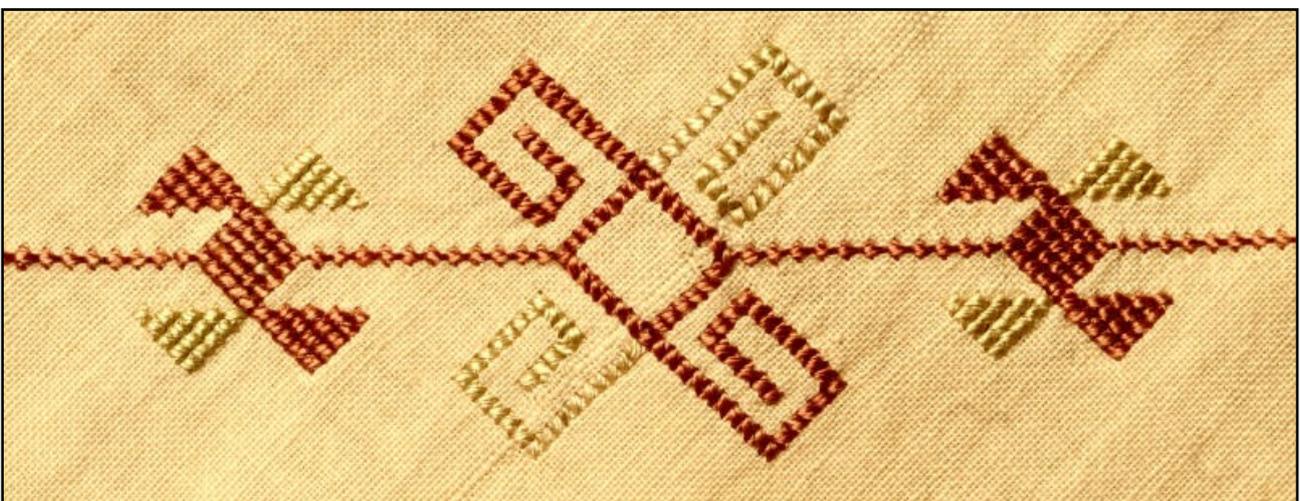
The protection did not end there. The fronts of the hinged doors which slotted into the *ergenek* wooden doorframe were carved with complex patterns of ram's horns. Just for good measure, the top lintel of the doorframe, the *man'laysha*, was topped with a horizontal panel, also carved with horns.

Even within the yurt a small rectangular knotted pile carpet called the *esikqas*, literally 'the eyebrow of the door', was positioned in the space above the door. In most cases it was decorated with a row of *on eki mu'yiz* or twelve horns motifs, in the centre of which was a pair of *jumalaq mu'yiz* or curved horns. Again its role was to act as a talisman, protecting the occupants of the yurt from the evil forces that lurked outside. Matching decorative yurt bands called *ishki janbaw*, 'internal sloping bands', were sewn to each side of the *esikqas* and suspended symmetrically, their other end fastened to the top of the lattice wall. They were like a narrower version of the external *sirtqi janbaw*.

Another important application of horn motifs was to protect the bride at the time of her wedding, when she was the centre of attention. In the mid nineteenth century a well-off bride was dressed in an *aq kiymeshek*, a cowl-like headdress with an integral rear cloak that completely concealed her hair but left her face exposed. It was always topped with a matching turban. People believed that the bride's long hair exposed her to danger, providing a conduit for evil forces to enter her body and mind with the intention of damaging her, her fertility, and her unborn child. By completely concealing the hair the *kiymeshek* offered a woman protection from harm, particularly when she was especially vulnerable – during her marriage and her later childbearing years. It was also vital that one's hair should not fall into the hands of ill-wishers. For example hair that had fallen out during the process of washing was hidden in the cracks of the clay walls of the house or buried under the threshold of the yurt.

The *aq kiymeshek* was always made from *bo'z*, coarse calico that had been home-woven from home-spun cotton yarn. The front was always decorated with geometric cross-stitch embroidery, using mostly raspberry red silk threads – red being the favourite colour for the costume of girls and young women because it was another defence against the evil eye. The most common embroidery motif had the appearance of two crossed pairs of angular horns and was called *Xorasanı mu'yiz*, or the 'horns of Khurasan cattle'. A row of these was normally arranged horizontally along the bottom of the triangular front, the *aldi*, and the same motif sometimes appeared in some of the vertical columns above.

Outside of the home the *aq kiymeshek* and turban were covered with an *aq jegde* cloak, the body and arms of which were also embroidered in cross-stitch. Rows of horn-shaped motifs, such



Xorasanı mu'yiz (centre) and *qoltiqsha mu'yiz*, embroidered in cross-stitch, decorating a middle-aged woman's festival *aq jegde* mantle, that was worn above her other clothing when she left the home.

as *Xorasanı mu'yiz* or *qoltıqsha mu'yiz* ('armpit horns', so-called because they were often used to decorate the underarms of a garment) were aligned along straight guide lines which were arranged as either zigzags or a diagonal lattice.

The rarest surviving item of Qaraqalpaq costume is the *ko'k ko'ylek* wedding dress (the term means blue dress), only seven examples of which survive in the museums of No'kis and Saint Petersburg. One of its unusual features was that its front was richly embroidered in cross-stitch in a pattern that was called *sawıt nag'ıs* or armour (i.e. chain-mail) pattern, its amuletic power protecting the young bride from the envious evil eye. As a consequence the *ko'k ko'ylek* was revered for its mystical supernatural powers. *Porxans* sometimes 'treated' sick people by enveloping them in the smoke from a smouldering piece of *ko'k ko'ylek*. People also believed they would benefit from the longevity of an elderly female relative. On her death fragments would be cut from her *ko'k ko'ylek* to be shared among members of her surviving family. This may be the reason why the sleeves have been removed from some surviving *ko'k ko'yleks*.

Most *ko'k ko'yleks* have two or three bold *Xorasanı mu'yiz* motifs embroidered down the front, while the two most common motifs that make up the *sawıt nag'ıs* design are *segiz mu'yiz* (eight horns) and *at ayıl nag'ıs* (horse's bellyband pattern, so called because it was always used to decorate a horse's bellyband). The latter consists of a diamond enclosing a stepped diamond and a cross, a motif that seems to be similarly associated with protection and fertility.

In the late nineteenth century a radically new style of *kiymeshek* emerged, inspired by the arrival of new imported textiles – red and black fulled woollen *ushıga* from the factories of Moscow and ikat-patterned silk and cotton *adras* from the workshops of Khiva. The fulled wool cloth had a featureless surface, which encouraged women to abandon their traditional cross-stitch and to develop a completely new style of chain-stitch embroidery, probably inspired by the neighbouring Chodor Turkmen.

The new red or *qızıl kiymeshek* still fulfilled the same protective role as its *aq kiymeshek* predecessor but was a much more stunningly colourful garment. Its armoury not only included the colour red but also a wide range of new chain-stitch *mu'yiz* motifs. Even the design of the silk *adras* which formed the rear tail of the *kiymeshek* incorporated red and green ram's horns. Many *qızıl kiymesheks* were decorated on the front with a horizontal panel containing either *segiz mu'yiz* or an interlocking lattice of small *mu'yiz* motifs. Others used new diamond-shaped motifs incorporating flowers or even scorpion's tails. In all cases the edges and pattern borders were edged with continuous rows of smaller horn motifs, such as *qos mu'yiz* (pairs of horns) or *taq mu'yiz* (odd horns).

Horns also frequently formed part of the most prestigious item of bridal jewellery, the *ha'ykel*, which was worn conspicuously on the breast. The two most common forms of *ha'ykel* incorporated curved ram's horns, either twisting upwards or downwards. Its purpose was primarily talismanic, to protect the bride during her wedding and her later child-bearing years and to ensure that she was reproductively fertile. It even incorporated a hollow *tumar* container to hold amuletic items such as strips of textile, knotted threads, needles, salt, or a piece of paper inscribed with a prayer by the *mullah*. Once her child-bearing days were over a woman replaced her *ha'ykel* with a simple hornless *tumar*.

We must re-emphasize that many of these motifs are not unique to the Qaraqalpaqs. They are also found in the textiles and weavings of the Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Turkmen, and Kyrgyz. The Siberian ethnographer Sergey Ivanov went further, reporting in 1957 that they also occurred among the Tatars of the Volga (the Bashkirs, Chuvash, and Udmurts), the Slavs of Ukraine, the Ugric and Finnish people of the Ob River in Siberia (the Mordvin, Mari, and Khanty), and the Tatars of the Altai.

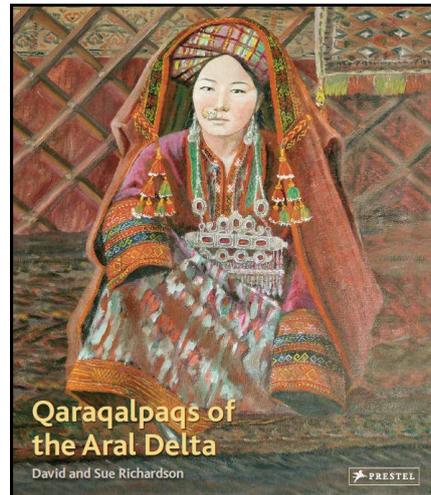
In 1958 the Ukrainian ethnographer Tatyana Zhdanko, who specialized in studying the Qaraqalpaqs, suggested that some of their simple angular horn motifs were ancient, linking them to patterns on the ceramics of the first millennium Bronze Age steppe nomads, the Andronovo. Indeed Ivanov found archaeological materials linking some of the Siberian horn motifs back to the Neolithic. However within a year Zhdanko had to acknowledge that it was impossible to establish

cultural continuity. The Andronovo designs disappeared at the end of the Bronze Age. The Scythian and Saka nomads of the Iron Age had a radically different 'animal style' of decoration.

Researching the origin of designs can be a foolhardy occupation. Anthropologists warn us that when analogous traits of culture are found among different peoples they have usually been developed independently. The horn motifs that we find in Qaraqalpaq and other Central Asian textiles seem to be much more recent. Angular horns appear in some 13th century Seljuq carpets discovered in the Sultan Alaeddin mosque at Konya in Anatolia and in Oriental carpets depicted in the 15th century paintings of Hans Memling, some of which were probably also woven in Anatolia. It is tempting to suggest that the Seljuqs introduced these patterns from Central Asia, where no weavings of comparable age have survived. It is noticeable that angular horns primarily appear in supplementary weft-patterned tent bands, slit tapestry flat-weaves, knotted pile carpets, patterned reed screens, and cross-stitch embroideries, where it is easier to depict motifs delineated by straight or diagonal lines. Curved horn motifs are more common in chain-stitch embroideries, appliqués, and items that have been painted or carved, where such constraints do not apply. This suggests that technique had an overriding influence on the development of angular horned motifs, the motifs becoming an intrinsic part of the weaving or embroidering process.

The widespread occurrence of these bold and varied livestock horn patterns coupled with the mystery of their origin and the protective purposes for which they were used only increases our interest in these remarkable and powerful textiles.

David and Sue Richardson's book, *Qaraqalpaqs of the Aral Delta*, now published by Prestel Verlag, Munich, (ISBN: 978-3-7913-4738-7), will be reviewed in the October edition of *Asian Textiles*.



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Passing on textile traditions within the family

In her second article on the Kazakhs of Western Mongolia, Anna Portisch explains the importance of textiles to families, through the eyes of one of the women she got to know

Having described the kinds of textiles and felt artefacts made by Kazakh women living in Bayan-Ölgii aimag, the western-most province of Mongolia, in the previous issue of *Asian Textiles* (see 'The Kazakhs of Western Mongolia', *Asian Textiles* No51, February 2012, p20-25), I would like to introduce one of the craftswomen whom I got to know during fieldwork in 2004 -2005.

Kulash's story provides a personal perspective on the sense in which it is a domestic craft tradition that is undertaken in the home and passed on within families, and the importance of these textiles as material expressions of the ties that link families through marriage.

Kulash was one of the foremost local Kazakh craftswomen I got to know during fieldwork, and at the same time her example was an unusual one. She made a wide variety of artefacts, from densely embroidered wall hangings (*tus kiiz*), embroidered and woven bed valances (*tösek ayaq*), large complicated mosaic style felt carpets (*syrmaq*) composed of several mirroring sections, decorative reed mats (*shi*) to line the lattice walls of the yurt (photo), embroidered waistcoats, dresses, skullcaps, lambskin-lined winter coats, and other artefacts intended for wedding-related gift exchanges.

Kulash was 'fluent' in the use of a wide variety of techniques and tools. She worked with thick, coarse felt pieces, she spun unbreakable thread from scratchy camel's wool, and also worked with fine silks and embroidered delicate pieces to wear and to decorate the home.

When we visited her in the winter of 2004, the living room - which also served as the family's bedroom - was her workspace. There were sections of unfinished felt carpets spread over the low dining table, several reed mats in the process of being decorated with dyed lamb's wool sat along the far wall, and a large metal frame sat against the wall revealing an embroidered piece in process. All of these artefacts were intended to be part of a gift bundle for a young woman's marriage.

Most households are exceedingly busy in the period leading up to a wedding. Not only are there initial and formal meetings between the two families, and main parties held by either side, of which there are many, to be organised. In addition, extensive sets of gifts are prepared and exchanged between the two families. Felt carpets and embroidered wall hangings are an important part of the many gifts given by the bride's side.

A few generations ago, young women made felt and other textiles in preparation for their own wedding, and some young women still do. But today the responsibility for preparing these gifts usually falls to the mother of the bride. The mother of the bride may also call on the help of particularly gifted craftswomen in the family, and Kulash, having only sons, was often called upon by relatives to help in the production of textiles for these gift exchanges. In fact, an extensive group of relatives usually contribute to the sets of gifts that will be given to the groom's extended family, either with funds or resources or by making felt carpets and embroidered textiles.

One such set of gifts is given to the young couple (called the *tösek oryn*, meaning 'bed seat'). A second set of gifts is given to the groom's parents, and further sets of gifts are given to each of the groom's siblings (the same is true in the reverse). As part of each of these sets, a felt carpet is given.

If the groom has many siblings, this can result in an extensive number of *syrmaq* having to be made. As one young Kazakh woman commented, certain gift bundles that include textiles and felt carpets do not have to be given on an exact date. Occasionally, they are given up to a year after the actual wedding. Extensive work and considerable resources go into their making.

It is thus usually the case that women within the bride's family contribute to these gift bundles. For the occasion of a wedding, Kazakhs would usually not buy textiles made by women belonging to other families. Such textiles often bear the names of the makers or dedications that are specific to the occasion and to the couple or the individual. In addition, on the occasion of a wedding, these textiles are a material expression of the skills of the women in the bride's family,



Kulash shows off a completed *Shi* screen, made by wrapping reeds with coloured woollen threads and then binding the reeds together.

of her mother's skills and by extension, they are a reflection of the bride's technical and aesthetic abilities and inheritance.

These textiles are personal to families in this sense. They are passed down generations, and are material reminders of gifted women in the family of whom one is proud. Some are inter-generational pieces that grandmothers, mothers, daughters and sisters may have worked on together. Kulash, now in her 60s, still had *syrmaq* made by her mother. Her mother had unexpectedly died when Kulash was only 13 years old. She left behind several unfinished felt carpets. Kulash took it upon herself to complete these carpets. As she later explained, it is considered bad luck to leave unfinished, projects started by those who are deceased. In virtue of being unfinished, those projects will tie the dead to the world of the living. Kulash had seen her mother working on *syrmaq* sewing on the double cord (*jiek*) and thereby assembling the mosaic pieces and the bottom and top layers. Kulash continued her mother's work, and could show us, some 50 years later, where her mother's stitches stopped and her own began.

Her mother had taught Kulash embroidery techniques, and Kulash had participated in preparing and sorting wool and making felt. She had not spun thread however, and, in the process of trying to complete her mother's carpets, she soon ran out of the thick home-spun thread, essential for assembling the *syrmaq*.

Kulash tried to copy the work with the hand-held spindle that she had seen her mother do, but having no teacher, she could not manage to spin an even, unbreakable thread. 'I sat and cried over the wool, but try as I might I could not manage to spin the wool.' An aunt who visited the house saw her bundle of wool and spindle and she, in the end, taught Kulash how to spin wool so that she might complete her mother's carpets.

Kulash continued to make felt pieces and woven and embroidered textiles for her childhood home, and for the weddings of her siblings. She prepared the textiles and felt carpets for her own wedding. As she became more skilled, she integrated new techniques into her repertoire and experimented with materials and dyes.

After marrying, she got a job at a workshop in the district centre, where she worked alongside other women from the village, producing felt items, Mongolian style leather boots, clothing and other artefacts. Here she continued to expand her craft knowledge and became friends



Coloured reed screens—*shi*—are used to insulate the yurt and brighten up the interior



Erecting the yurt—work that is usually done by women.

with many of the women with whom she worked. She also built up a reputation as an exceptionally skilled craftswoman, and this would follow her when the workshop closed in the early 1990s, as a consequence of the political and economic changes that affected the country, following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

When she and her husband moved to a smaller village some distance from the district centre, they built a house adjacent to that of their youngest son and his wife. Here, former colleagues from the workshop and their relatives would occasionally come to commission work when they were short of time or short of skills within the family. For this work they paid Kulash, although when asked how much she charged, she responded, “They pay as much as they can. I have no fixed price list”.

On a winter’s day when we visited, Kulash and her husband, their son, his wife and young daughter were living in one house. They had boarded up the second adjacent house in which one family usually lived to save on coal. As we sat down next to the stove to warm up, Kulash sent her daughter-in-law to get milk from the neighbours. Families are normally self-sufficient in dairy products. Kulash’ family had one cow and that winter it had only enough milk for its calf. Milky, salty tea, sometimes served with a knob of butter or cream in summer when dairy products abound, is the only drink and it is taken five times a day. Black salty tea (without milk, butter or cream) is a sign of poverty. It can never be offered to visitors.

The abundance of colourful, beautifully decorated textiles and felt carpets which she unfurled in the living room stood in stark contrast with the family’ material living conditions. Kulash’s craft commissions did compliment the family’s livelihood and its reliance on a small herd of sheep and goats. But her craft practices were not the foundations for a profit-making business. This was perhaps partly because of her generous nature, and partly because of the unusual situation in which she found herself: discreetly helping relatives of friends with a task which those families themselves are socially expected to fulfil.

Kulash was able to take on commissions, partly because her daughter-in-law and grand-daughter did most of the housework, collecting dried dung for the stove, chopping coal, collecting water, cooking, washing clothes and suchlike. Her daughter-in-law also occasionally worked on Kulash’ craft projects, undertaking some of the more repetitive tasks involved in making these pieces. Having no daughters of her own, Kulash was thus able to pass on the craft knowledge she had developed over the years, and was proud to show how well her grand-daughter was learning and making her own small pieces of embroidery.

The Kuchi nomads of Afghanistan

Azra Nafees describes the textile traditions of the Kuchi nomads, who once migrated vast distances in south Asia, but whose very existence today is threatened by war and modernisation

Kuchi means migratory, derived from *kuch*, a Persian word meaning migration. The nomadic Kuchis are potentially the largest vulnerable population living in an area that stretches from the rugged borderlands of Khyber-Pukhtunkhwa province in north-western Pakistan down into the deserts south of Kandahar in Afghanistan.

For centuries their semi-annual migrations with their herds of sheep, goats, donkeys, and camels have been one of the great spectacles of south Asia, although today these are much less regular than in the past, due to the ongoing war in Afghanistan. The Kuchis were once celebrated in the west as handsome, romantic nomads adorned with silver and lapis jewellery. Traditionally, they live by selling or bartering animals, wool, meat, and dairy products for foodstuffs and other items with villagers as they move from pasture to pasture.

Since the fall of the Taliban, life for most Afghans has improved. However, this has not proved true for the Kuchis. The reasons are numerous. The demise of the Kuchi tradition is the result of continued war, destruction of roads, drought, air raids, Soviet and US bombing and other war-related causes. In addition, landmines and other unexploded ordinances forced the Kuchis to flee their summer grazing lands in parts of central Afghanistan. When they returned, they found that locals in the areas had converted much of their pastures to farming lands. Consequently, some Kuchis have given up their nomadic lifestyle and have taken up residence on the outskirts of cities, in slums.



Dress for a young Kuchi girl

**Buttons and
coins on a
Kuchi outfit**



Once the Panjsher valley in Afghanistan was populated with Kuchis and their livestock - camels, goats, sheep, donkeys and horses. Their black, low-slung tents, made from goat hair and local weeds from rivers, were dotted all up the valley.

Kuchis tend to travel in large extended family groups with heavily laden camels (between two to five) carrying tents, pots, water jars, bedding, firewood and materials to trade, etc. The men are dressed in the way of normal Afghans with shalwars and shirts, but the women are conspicuously different. They wear brightly coloured dresses with scarves tightly wrapped around their upper torso.

Younger women, under 30, have their hair parted in the middle and wear brooches or hair clasps on the fringes. Facial tattoos are noted on almost all women, either on the cheeks or sometimes one on the chin and forehead. Their frocks are heavily embroidered and adorned with old coins, beads, glittery laces and cowrie shells. Kuchi dresses are embroidered in an exceptionally minute chainstitch at points like the neckline, sleeve edges, hem, chest, shoulders and seams.

Black is the customary colour for a Kuchi women's upper garment and it is worn with loose-fitting plain pants. In the gaudy, glittering array of colourful, embroidered dresses and accompanying large jewellery, it is sometimes difficult to tell where jewellery ends and costume begins.

The Kuchi, Pashtun and Baluchi nomads of Afghanistan decorate their clothing with a dazzling variety of motifs and materials, especially the bodices of women's dresses. These dresses, with their colourful embroidery and abundance of coins, beads, tassels and mirrors are highly inspirational. For those who can 'read' a garment, these dresses tell a tale of the hopes, fears and values of the culture that created it. These messages are also worked into jewellery, where the elements of personal adornment enhance each other.

The dress bodices consist of heavy embroidery. Colours and patterns go back to ancient traditions and entail powerful protective symbols of horns and triangles. Ordinary buttons are stitched on with red wool, sometimes faded by age. The buttons, originally of mother-of-pearl, later plastic ones, signify brightness while the contrasting red wool is used as a highlighter. Red, in many cultures, is the colour of choice for decorations. It is seen equally often in jewellery: red materials such as carnelian or coral are widely used on silver pieces. Together with blue, red is the dominant colour in the region when it comes to jewellery and costume.

Blue is also seen in the many small beads that often decorate borders and edges on the bodice, as well as around the buttons. These felt and beaded objects have a very long history and are used throughout Central Asia on clothing and horse-gear.

Another aspect that immediately catches the eye is the use of coins. These are sewn on in neat rows that jingle softly when walking: both a testimony to the wealth of the wearer and a sound that chases away any demons that might be lurking nearby. Coins are also used in jewellery for the same reasons: they are used in rings and bracelets, and are sewn into broad textile collars that have been stitched intricately with silver thread. Unfortunately, the Kuchi art of embroidery textiles is beginning to disappear with the influx of warm and comfortable western clothes, most of which are made in China and are available in the local markets at cheaper rates.

The nomad women care well for their animals. They tenderly carry lambs in their arms, an old sheep, probably lame, riding on the back of a camel. The camels are usually adorned with colourful braids; goats have bells on their necks and the donkeys carrying saddle bags. Babies and young children are tied onto the backs of camels or donkeys and wear intricately embroidered hats or bonnets. The children seem so content sitting on the backs and thrive on their mobile geography lessons. The children and young women learn to become gatherers of wood, berries, leaves, wild vegetables and plastic bottles for filling water.

There are two types of nomads. One type is fully nomadic while the other is semi-nomadic. The latter group consists of herdsmen who move as a group from summer to winter pastures and back again. Most nomads are Pashtun, Baluch, or Kirghiz. The Pashtun and Baluch move more horizontally rather than vertically; but the Kirghiz in the Pamir Mountains move more vertically rather than horizontally. Trade items - tea, sugar, kerosene, matches, guns, ammunition, etc. - are offered to villagers by the nomads; itinerant peddlers function only where the nomads do not control the monopoly. Animal dung, a primary source of fuel and fertilizer, is liberally sprinkled on farmers' fields by the nomads' flocks after harvesting.

The richness of its history, the diversity of the landscape, everything inspires to make Afghanistan a stronghold of traditions and art forms. Each valley has its own cultural identity, its own originality. In a country where the main routes of communications were overrun by invaders, the mountaineers turned in on themselves. Access was difficult and uncertain, the valleys became isolated.

Few of the itinerant tribesmen have settled down and prospered by adapting different professions. Besides dress embroidery, carpet and rug weaving is, of course, a major activity. It is the ancient ethnogenesis of these great Steppeland nomads who gave rise to the piled rug concept, and particularly the cosmic symbolism of motifs and designs.

There are certain specific design types associated with specific tribes, for instance, *Dokhtar*



From l to r: Aimaq rug; Bahluli rug; Doktor-e-qazi rug

-e-*Qazi*, which means ‘daughter of the judge’. There is a beautiful legend, part of the oral tradition, from the times of Queen Bilkish of Sabzevar, known as the *Bahluli-e-Dana*. As the story goes, about 150 years ago, the daughter of a Taimuri *qazi* (judge) was wooed by a dervish shaman of the Bahluli tribe. Her father disapproved and attempted to chase him off with threats of death. So he performed all sorts of miracles to impress the *qazi* and was allowed to marry her. But the Bahluli had their own rug designs, and those woven by the judge’s daughter are the only true *Dokhtar-e-Qazi rugs*, 23 in all. Her daughters also wove rugs which may be included in this group, perhaps 70 altogether. But in the true sense of the word, there are no others aside from these original pieces which we may call by that name. The rest are merely Taimuri or Ghurian.

The principal motif on the rugs is the *mirah boteh* design. It looks like a Christmas tree with a bent-over paisley design. It has a flat bottom to it. Many of the *boteh* designs on these rugs have a bottom which resembles an arrow head.

Bahluli

The Bahluli have an interesting history. They are descendants from the Afsar tribe. Around the 11th to 12th century, the Afsar and the Arsari (Ersari) split and the Afsar came into Afghanistan. Soon after, the bulk of the Afsar moved into the Kerman region of Iran. One group, the Istajlu, remained in Afghanistan, and it is from them that the Bahluli are descended. They are part of the Baluch confederation and adherents to Sistani culture. They always weave using the symmetric knot. They are the ones who weave the true, small burial rugs, called *kaffani*. These are more elongated than the average prayer rug, and usually not as wide, with opposing niches that resemble those on prayer rugs.

Mashwani

The Sarabani Mushwani are a huge group who came from Caucasia after the fall of the Turkic state of Khazar. The Sarabani left after the Swedish Vikings ransacked that area and escaped into Afghanistan. Now the Mushwani are just one subgroup of the Sarabani. There are some near Quetta (Pakistan) and some in southeast Afghanistan. There are even some in the vicinity of Islamabad, Pakistan. Depending on where they are located, they speak different languages, including Farsi, Pushto, Brahui and Rakshani Baluchi.

But the rug weaving groups called Mushwani are located near Adraskand in western Afghanistan and in Seistan. All the designs they create are original, though there are copy artists. Of course intertribal marriages did occur, and a blend of design and styles naturally ensued. The woman would weave her tribe or clan’s border design around her husband’s tribe’s field design. Among adherents, defeated clans or tribes who adhered to a dominant tribe, weavers would put their border around the field design of the dominant tribe.

The Shia Hazaras were copy artists, or they wove rugs in the Mashad area, including those red prayer rugs with the hands in the hand panels. But in Afghanistan they do not weave pile rugs. Some Hazaras were employed around Herat as copy artists in workshops. The same is true of the Jamshidi and Firozkohi, who were only copy artists in workshops and did not traditionally weave pile rugs. Now the Hazaras also inhabit other parts of Afghanistan, including central Afghanistan, ranging all the way down almost to Kandahar, and also the mountains near Ghor. There they weave beautiful jagged kilims and blankets with lightning-like designs, but not piled rugs. The Hazara are a beautiful people, whose social groups are dominated by their womenfolk.

Taimani

The Taimani are a totally different people. Taimani is a very old name and they are a proud ancient nomadic tribe. They move all the way down to Farah and Chakhansur. They live in huts composed of reeds, a common material used throughout Seistan in south-east Persia. The reeds are taken from local lakes. Taimani weave large *pushtis* (*chival*-like bags for storage and transport) with large-scale designs that one sees in Afghanistan. Woven in pairs, many of them are cut and separated, and then they are mistaken for rugs.

Aimaq

The Aimaq tribe, as opposed to the tribes of the Chahar Aimaq, is a division of the Hazaras, or at least related to the Hazara groups. They are called Chengezi Mongols and still speak a Mongol

language. There are deposits of them in northern Afghanistan as well as near Haripur on the east bank of the Indus River. They only make flat weaves. There are no pile weavings in their tents. Some of them live in yurts like the Turkoman, but most of them live in huts like the Hazaras of the area. Some of the tribe tend flocks and move with their herds, but they are essentially an extension of a fixed settlement, some of whom also engage in sparse agriculture – like the Jamshidi.

The wool in Baluch rugs is very soft and shiny. They use lambs' wool and the wool from the throat and belly, the best wool on the animal. The animal is unwashed and the wool therefore retains all the lanolin. The wool has so much natural oil which keeps it soft, fluffy and shimmery.

These nomads weave dowry pieces also which consist of a 4ft x 6ft rug, a prayer rug, a pair of *balisht*, *khorjin* (saddle bags), a salt bag and a shepherd's bag (*showandan*). The *dastarkhan* (spread for meals) or *sofreh* are woven by married women, as are many other functional pieces. *Khorjin* are also made for dowry. Sistani *khorjin* have a piled shoulder on both sides, while those from Afghanistan are open across the middle, plain flat weave with no piled shoulder connecting the two bags.

Some rugs have very coarse goat hair selvages, while others don't. This disparity in rugs that essentially come from the same culture is logical. The goat hair acts as a shield against snakes. They will not cross it as it is like barbed wire on their skin. Therefore rugs used in a nomadic context will always have the coarse goat hair selvages, while those used in a sedentary environment will usually have wool selvages.

For the majority of nomads, life has been pushed to the brink by poverty, war, shrinking access to land, ethnic tensions and leftover land mines. Kuchis are among the poorest of the battered country's poor, owning little more than a tent and a few sheep and cows. Nomadic life is coming to an end now because the grazing land is not there, and because transportation and trade has changed so much. Sadly, the Kuchis are not needed anymore.



Kuchi nomads on the move, all their worldly goods packed onto camels and donkeys

Chinese silks in Oxford and Nottingham

**Ming Wilson's OATG talk, *Dressed to Rule: The Qing Emperor's wardrobe*,
25 April 2012.**

**Living in Silk Exhibition, Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery,
until 16 September 2012**

Ming Wilson, senior curator in the Asian Department of the V&A, gave OATG members a glimpse into the vanished world of colour and symbol of the last Chinese imperial dynasty. The Qing, rulers of China from 1644 to 1911, were originally Manchu, and they imposed their dress style on their subjects. Closer-fitting in cut than the robes worn by the preceding Ming dynasty (and hence more practical), this clothing commemorated the Manchu nomadic lifestyle. As in many societies, one of the means of expressing status was through highly regulated clothing.

The great systematiser was the Emperor Qianlong, who came to the throne in 1736 and ruled for 60 years. One of his aims seems to have been to suppress Ming attire: accordingly, few Ming textiles survive. Qing ones however are relatively abundant, thanks to the pious practice of retaining (though not wearing) ancestors' clothing, and, very usefully, the original owner is often identified. So our knowledge of these imperial garments rests both on contemporary depictions and on the extensive collections kept in the Forbidden City: since the 1980s these have been studied and published, allowing a proper understanding of the role of court dress in expressing and maintaining the structure of society.

Handbooks still extant prescribed the correct dress for everyone from Emperor downwards, through all the gradations of male and female royal kin, right down to the very lowest ranking officials. Everyone knew their place (and could of course identify where every other person stood in the hierarchy), and each element of the dress had significance.

Not only style but also colour was stipulated: for example, for the very formal public rituals at the altars of Heaven, Earth and Sun, the appropriate colours were respectively blue, yellow and red, while the Moon altar was accorded the beautifully named 'moon white', (a light shade of blue). 'Auspicious' or 'festive' dress was worn for rituals of lesser importance; and sober-coloured robes were everyday wear.

Given the length of the rituals and China's cold climate, it was good to learn that boots and fur-lined hats could be worn. Interestingly, emperors could 'dress down', and in private some of them, as we know from pictures, actually adopted styles from their Han subjects. Riding gear was important, as an emperor went on regular progresses through his vast domain in order to check on his subordinates, and he also hosted hunting parties as a means of consolidating diplomatic ties.

Ming Wilson's talk was superbly illustrated from various sources, and of course that makes one wish to see actual examples. So a visit to Nottingham came most opportunely, since the Castle Museum and Art Gallery is currently hosting an exhibition called '*Living in Silk*'. The items are on loan from the China National Silk Museum in Hangzhou and Zhejiang Provincial Department of Culture. There are fascinating early items (fragments of patterned weave, the earliest of which date from 5th to 3rd century BCE), and silks from a number of dynasties from the Han onwards. But the stars of the show are the stunning Qing robes and bolts of fabric, woven and embroidered. One of these is a *mang* dragon robe (*mang* have four claws as opposed to the five possessed by true dragons), and also a child-size dragon robe, made for a youthful emperor. Thanks to Ming Wilson, it was possible to identify the twelve symbols placed at specified points on this garment – and to wonder what the young wearer felt as he performed the rituals demanded by his role.

Clemence Schultze

Lavish textiles to decorate the heart of Islam

OATG visit to the British Museum's *Hajj: Journey to the Heart of Islam* Exhibition
(now closed)



OATG members were especially privileged on their visit to this Exhibition to be met by Venetia Porter, Curator of the Exhibition, and Helen Wolfe, Textile Collections Manager. Venetia gave an introduction to the Exhibition, giving the background and explaining the complexities of arranging loans and gathering treasures from around the world, as well as explaining the significance of some of textiles. Helen gave a short tour of the Exhibition, not only highlighting textiles but also the maps, a manual for calculating prayer times, compasses, paintings, candlesticks and other paraphernalia needed on a long journey and now displayed in this engrossing Exhibition before the group were left to seek out pieces of special interest to themselves.

Hajj - the annual pilgrimage to the sacred city of Mecca - is a deeply personal journey undertaken every year by about three million people from across the world. A pilgrimage that goes hand in hand with trade to finance the Hajj. It occurs in the last month of the Islamic calendar. Muslims believe that the rituals of Hajj have their origins in the time of the Prophet Abraham which link them to the Prophets Adam and Muhammed.

Naturally, members concentrated on the textile collection of which I will mention just a few. All are magnificent, richly embroidered textiles, lavishly and exquisitely decorated often with gold and silver thread, and it is pointless to constantly repeat the overwhelming standard of the workmanship. We stood in awe before one beautiful piece after another.

On entering the Exhibition you came face to face with a door hanging for the *Ka'ba* - a cube shaped hollow structure, eight square metres and made of granite. This is circled seven times by the pilgrims. Helen let us into the 'secrets' of displaying this piece - a combination of scaffolding, Velcro and strong nerves! Textiles to cover the *Ka'ba* were made in Egypt up to 20th century but are now made in Mecca. The decoration was lavish and bold with Qur'anic inscriptions.

Further on there was an embroidered bag which held the key of the door to the *Ka'ba* - nothing is overlooked. Further along still was a curtain that marked the entrance to the *Ka'ba*, again more bold inscriptions but in more muted colours and with delicate palm fronds at the base that almost appeared to move in a gentle breeze. The *hizam*, the belt that goes all the way round the *Ka'ba*, was heavily embroidered with verses from the Qur'an described as being designed by an accomplished calligrapher, emphasising the many individuals who gave of their expertise.

The *Mahmal*, a fabric-covered ceremonial palanquin carried by a camel, formed the centrepiece of any caravan en route to Mecca. Prior to departure from Cairo, it is recorded that in the 1800's pilgrims paraded this and other sacred textiles through the streets so that all could admire the red silk cover embroidered with silver gilt wire and appliquéd in green and dark cream silk. Carried in this caravan were the textiles made for the *Ka'ba*. Once on the road these hangings were removed. The *Maqam Ibrahim* is the cover for the place where Abraham is believed to have stood when he rebuilt the *Ka'ba*. Made in Egypt in the late 19th century it is of a floral design with Qur'anic verses but also with the names of the Prophet's family.

Ending on a more prosaic note, as hangings are replaced - and many are replaced annually - the pieces are cut up and given as gifts, used as tomb coverings or, even, made into garments. Witness the stylish 19th century waistcoat from Malaysia. There was much to ponder as we walked back into the Great Court which was thronged with people waiting to see the Exhibition.

Rosemary Lee

Weaving the 'King of Wools' in the Punjab

Jasleen Kandhari tells us about her OATG talk in March on
Art of the Sikh Loom: Phulkaris and Kashmir Shawls

My lecture explored the textile traditions of the Punjab in North Western India, in particular the Kashmir shawl and *Phulkari* textiles. I talked about how they came to be exported to the West and included the stylistic development of textile patterns and contemporary usage, using previously unpublished examples from collections in museums and private collections in the Punjab.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the first ruler of the Punjab's unified Sikh kingdoms of the 19th century, took over Kashmir in 1819 and made good use of Kashmir shawls and textiles as illustrated in 19th paintings from the Sikh courts. Kashmir is known for producing the finest and softest Indian shawls, decorated with swirling paisley patterns surmounted by elongated tips. Wool obtained from the Central Asian species of the mountain goat, the *Capra hircus*, is called *pashm* which is used to make the fine *pashmina* fabric. There are 12 to 14 stages between the collection of the *pashm* wool from the goat to the weaving of the *pashmina* fabric.

The best quality of Kashmiri *pashmina* shawls has been described as 'slippery as a wet surface and possessed of fine hair and softness'. The best wool came from the King of all Wools, the *shahtoosh* which is the finest, lightest and most expensive wool. *Shahtoosh* fibres are a fifth the diameter of human hair and so fine they can pass through a ring, hence the name 'ring shawls'.

The motif which symbolizes Kashmiri art, the *boteh*, also known as *ambiya* or *kairi* or paisley in the West, is shaped in the form of a pine cone or teardrop and was incorporated into the design of the Kashmiri shawl from the mid-eighteenth century onwards and later developed into an artistic convention in Kashmir as well as Europe in the 19th century.

Shawls produced by the weaving technique known as twill tapestry became fashionable for women to wear across their shoulders from 1770 in the west. In the early 18th century, as the British East India Company began regular trade with India, soldiers returned with cashmere shawls as presents for their wives such as the wife of Clive of India, Margaret Maskelyne. Not only did the shawl become one of the most sought after fashion items of the 19th century, it was also put to practical and decorative use as covers for beds and to drape over furniture. Technical advances meant that textiles could be produced much more cheaply, so that manufacturing centres in Norwich and Paisley in Scotland pioneered the imitation Kashmir shawls whilst factories in Paris and Lyon perfected the process with the invention of the Jacquard Loom.

Back in the Punjab, during the 19th century, ever more complex designs were brought in, resulting in the extraordinary Kashmiri map shawls. These are minutely detailed embroidered Kashmiri shawls illustrating a map of the central part of the capital of Kashmir, Srinagar with streets, public buildings, religious centers of pilgrimage all being visible.

Another type of textile production which originated in the Punjab in the 19th century is the *Phulkari* which means 'flower work'. Whereas Kashmir shawls represent the classical masculine high art of the loom, the vibrant and colourful embroidered *phulkaris* represent the feminine art of the home - a textile production not for commercial means but for the community's heritage, made by women of the Punjab in a collective spirit and worn by the bride on the day of her marriage, called *suber phulkari* or on other auspicious occasions and religious festivals.

This form of embroidery has become expressive of the spirit of the Punjab with its richness of colours, bold patterning and the laborious hours it takes to produce a *phulkari*. The heavy embroidery work is done in long and short darn stitch to create the designs and patterns. The way they skilfully manipulate the single stitch adds a characteristic dimension to this form of needlework. The base material for the embroidery has traditionally been hand-spun, hand-woven, natural dyed *khadi* using silk yarn called *pat*.

Different styles of *phulkari* exist with those of eastern Punjab in today's India being pro-

duced from strips of cloth sewn together and embroidered with figurative motifs in different colours compared to those of western Punjab in Pakistan which use a finer cotton illustrating more geometric motifs sewn with fine silk thread in two colours.

Phulkaris have become interwoven with the lives of the women of the Punjab so that the joys, sorrows, hopes and dreams of the women who embroider the *phulkaris* are transferred onto cloth. I spoke about how a *phulkari* which belonged to a girl named Preeto from the rural village of Bhatinda in Punjab is so culturally significant in that the motifs of animals are semiological forms presenting a conceptual network of metaphysical beliefs and precautions necessary for her to go through important milestones in this village girl's life, including her marriage and death. I highlighted motifs which represent the most characteristic symbols of a rural Punjabi girl's life, that of the spinning wheel and the churning of butter-milk, embroidered into the *phulkari*.

To end my lecture, I spoke about contemporary representations of Kashmir shawls and *phulkaris* and the commercialisation of these forms of textile production in the Punjab with examples from Bollywood and Punjabi fashion designers. This was followed by a handling session of a variety of shawls, *dupattas*, soft furnishings like cushion covers and blouses which I have collected in the Punjab. This included one fine rare ring shawl which was handed down to me as a family heirloom, providing a rare chance for the audience to actually feel the buttery softness of the finest *shahtoosh* Kashmiri shawl. These types of shawls are no longer in production as the *chiru* antelope, from whose undercoat the *shahtoosh* shawl is made from, has been declared an endangered species due to over-hunting. It means there are shawl lovers around the world mourning the loss of such beautiful ring shawls.

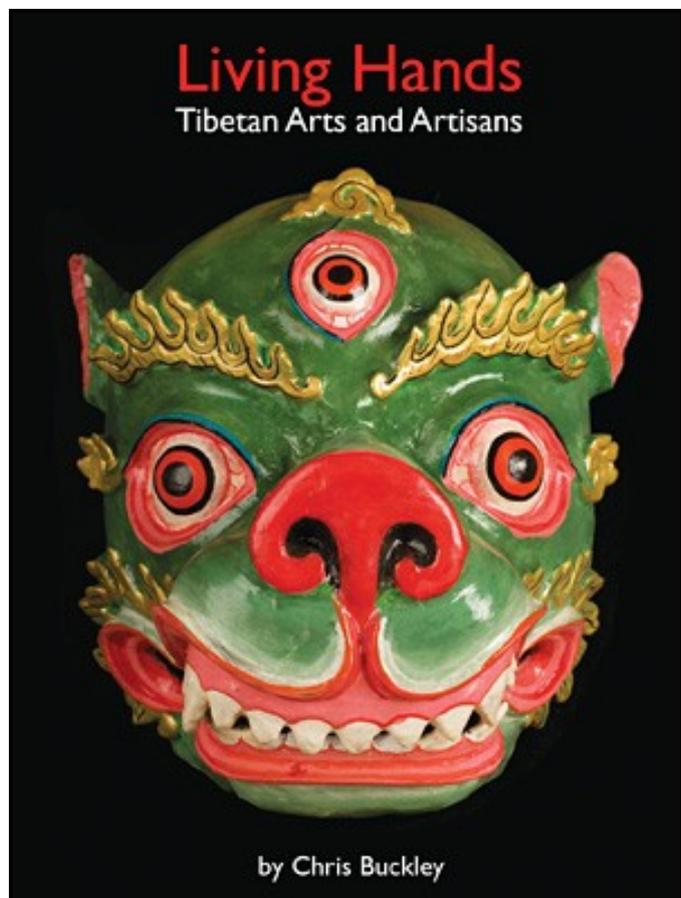
Jasleen Kandhari will be speaking at the Ashmolean Museum on 19 July on **The Indian Textile Trade: Chintz to Carpets. 2-4pm.** (See panel opposite).

Documenting the revival of Tibetan arts and crafts

Chris Buckley, *Living Hands: Tibetan Arts And Artisans*,

Published by Torana, Hong Kong 2011, £20.00, ISBN 988-98526-1-6

Living Hands is a fascinating introductory overview of active traditional Tibetan craftsmen largely based in the core cultural area in and around Lhasa, within the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR). Examples are also taken from Amdo and Nepal. Tibetan textile techniques, including spinning, weaving and natural dyes are described as well as horse regalia and traditional rugs. These techniques make up about 50 percent of the book. Tibetan painting, metalwork, the making of clay statues, Cham masks, household painted furniture and some jewellery is covered in the rest of the book. The reasons for the emphasis on textiles may be that some of the later topics are covered extensively in Chris's book on *Tibetan Furniture* and John



Clarke's book *Tibetan Jewellery*.

Many of these crafts in the past were supported by the rich monastic establishments of the region, but after 1959 the crafts declined with the destruction of the monasteries and the dispersal of the monks and nuns. Even crafts supported by the domestic market declined as old traditions were curbed. In the 1980's 'things Tibetan' were gradually revived and monastic rebuilding began to be supported by Tibetan donors, other Buddhist as well as the Chinese government.

This has encouraged Tibetan crafts to be revived, supported by passionate sponsors or organisations. The book, brilliantly photographed in colour by Chris Buckley and Miranda Kuo, shows current practitioners, gives precise technical summaries of their crafts, as well as showing superb pictures of their work, often comparing pieces with older examples or other contemporary works.

After reading the book one is aware of the vitality, colour and uniqueness of Tibetan arts and crafts. As a Tibetan traveller I have rarely seen such superb examples for sale, with two exceptions. The first is when I dropped into 'Drophenling' in Lhasa in 2009, which has now been taken over by 'Lhasa Villages'. Here I was delighted to buy well-crafted Tibetan objects such as described in the book. I found them difficult to order on their website. This possibly indicates a limited number of items being produced, which hopefully, with support, will improve over the years.

Crafts are not readily available to tourist groups travelling in the region as they are usually taken to the main sites and one can be hugely disappointed if seeking craftspeople. The exceptions in TAR are carpet-making and *thangka* painting. Those visiting Repkong in Amdo will be invited to see clay statues, *thangka* painting and appliqué being made.

But many Tibetans continue to wear the traditional style *chuba* and ornaments, especially when on pilgrimage or at festivals. Fragments of this lifestyle will possibly be seen and one must remember Chris has an in-depth knowledge of these craftspeople, built up over the years and he warns that many Tibetan artefacts are often outsourced and made in Nepal, India and elsewhere in China. I thoroughly recommend the book.

Gina Corrigan

(OATG members who would like to purchase a copy of Chris Buckley's book can obtain one for the special price of £15 (inc.p+p) from our website manager, Pamela Cross. Address on the back page of the magazine).

The Indian Textile Trade: Chintz to Carpets

The Ashmolean Museum Lecture Theatre, Oxford

Thurs 19 July 2-4pm

With Jasleen Kandhari, Indian art historian & previously Curator of Asia at the University of British Columbia and curator of the Sikh exhibition at the British Library .

Discover textile exports from India to the West including costumes, shawls and furnishing fabrics from the 17th Century to contemporary times. Following the lecture, feel the texture, material and stitching of these textiles in a handling session.

£8/£7 concessions (inc tea and cake). Booking opens 19 June.

01865 278015 Education dept, www.ashmolean.org/whatsonbooking

Diversity of Pakistan's exuberant textiles

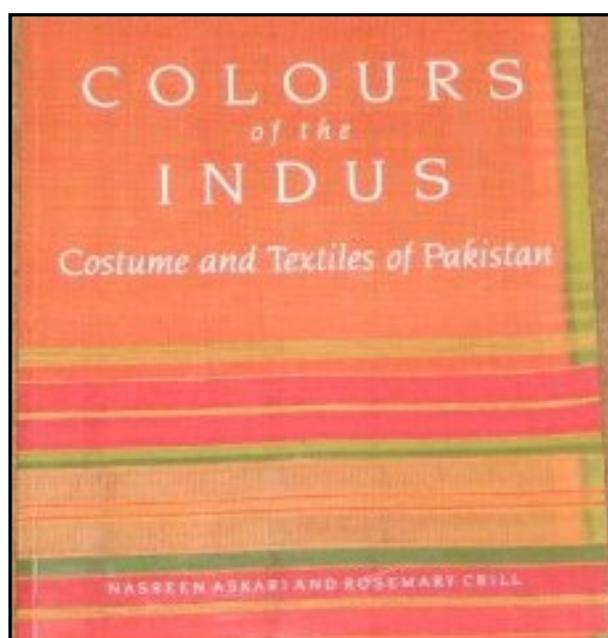
Nasreen Askari and Rosemary Crill, *Colours of the Indus: Costume and Textiles of Pakistan*, Mohatta Palace Museum Karachi, 2010.

First published in 1998 to coincide with an exhibition at the V&A in 1997-98, the reprint of this wonderful book is still great value for money. Full of superb colour photos, the book is divided geographically and examined the textiles of Sindh, Baluchistan, Punjab and the North West Frontier Province (now known as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa).

Pakistan contains more diversity in textiles than almost any other country in the world. Textile traditions also stretch back far into antiquity, with spindle whorls and needles dating back more than 4,500 years found on sites belonging to the Mohenjodaro culture of the Indus Valley. Since then waves of immigrants and emigrants have passed through the region, each bringing with it different textiles and techniques. Weaving, dying, embroidery, carpet making and every technique in between can be found in Pakistan, many of them influenced by the Mughal Empire that flourished on the subcontinent.

Lahore shawls, *ajrak* block-printed cottons, Hazara *phulkharis*, Baluch embroideries, embroidered leather mats from Sindh, tie-dye embroidery from Tharparkar, the remarkable textiles of the Kutch Rabaris and many other local variants are all profusely illustrated in this excellent book by Nasreen Askari, an advisor to the Sindh government and Rosemary Crill, deputy curator of the Indian and South-East Asian Department at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London. The Kohistani garments from northern Pakistan and the Swat Valley embroideries are particularly well illustrated, including those from the Kalash minority.

If you want an excellent guide to the diverse textiles of Pakistan, look no further. The book is not available from bookshops in the UK. Copies may be ordered from Nasreen Askari, 22 Overington Square, London SW3 1LR at £20 each inclusive of postage and packing. All sale proceeds are used to support the Mohatta Palace Museum in Karachi.



The Bedouin weavings of Arabia

Joy Totah Hilden, *Bedouin Weaving of Saudi Arabia and its neighbours*, Arabian Publishing, London, 2011, ISBN: 978-0-9558894-8-6. £35.00

Born in Jerusalem to a Palestinian father and American mother, Joy Totah Hilden has been doing field research on Bedouin weaving since 1982. When her husband moved to Dharan in Eastern Saudi Arabia to teach, she was able to accompany him and from there, to travel to remote parts of the Kingdom to research this highly informative and lavishly illustrated book.

Fluent in Arabic, she was able to speak to the women who produce the beautiful woven textiles that are the subject of this book. Packed with technical detail, this book is the first systematic study of this group of textiles and it is unlikely to be bettered for many years to come.

Hilden's book could not be more timely. Nomadism as a way of life is declining in Arabia, just as it is elsewhere in the world. She recalls that when she first arrived in Saudi Arabia in 1982 it was still possible to find weavings and hand-spun yarns being sold in local markets. Twelve years later it was a different story: "When we left for good in 1994, there was little new wool weaving and hardly any hand-spun yarn; they are being replaced by synthetic yarns. Old pieces continue to surface, however, and items were smuggled over the border from Iraq, recently ravaged by war."

The book starts by examining the Bedouin and their lifestyle, in particular the three-poled black tents, with their awnings, dividing *qati* and *sahah* curtains, their rugs and cushions. She moves on to describe textiles made specifically for animals, and for camels in particular. Amongst the most remarkable photographs in the book are those showing enormous *markab* (riding litters), decorated with ostrich feathers and ridden into battle carrying women of the tribe to inspire the men to fight for their honour. The book even lists the camel brand marks of the most prominent Saudi families.

Techniques for spinning, weaving and dyeing of wool are discussed in great detail, with correct Arabic names for each process and object. The wide range of differences in technique that allow most artefacts to be identified geographically and socially – in terms of tribe, for example – are also set down with great clarity. In the Appendices, Hilden has set out seven pattern drafts for the most basic simple and pickup warp-faced designs, followed by instructions for five specific patterns. The second appendix sets out another 35 weaving designs and finishes. Also provided separately are dye recipes given to Hilden by women she met. Overall, a wonderful book that will undoubtedly become the standard reference text.

Tribal marks included in the warp designs of a Bedouin tent divider.

Pic: courtesy Joy Totah Hilden



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