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ASIAN TEXTILES

MAGAZINE OF THE OXFORD ASIAN TEXTILE GROUP

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Kiymesheks of the Karakalpaks

Also in this issue: Travels in Western China, Clothing of the Pashtuns of the Af-Pak border, unknown museum in Kyrgyzstan and much more.

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Front cover picture: A complete *aq kiymeshek* from the Richardson Collection

Back cover picture: A Kyrgyz embroidery pattern called Camel's Eye (Photo by Nick Fielding).

Asian Textiles is published three times a year, with deadlines on the first Monday in February, June and October.

DEADLINE FOR THE NEXT ISSUE IS

MONDAY 1st February 2010

Contributions should be emailed or sent to the Editor

— contact details on the back page

Editorial

This month's issue of *Asian Textiles* appears a little later than usual due to the fact that I have been abroad. However, to make up for it we have a wonderful selection of articles. David and Sue Richardson have written a fascinating article about that most unusual of garments - the *Kiymeshek* of the Karakalpaks. This all-encompassing and highly embroidered headcover is unique to this group that inhabits that part of Uzbekistan to the south of the Aral Sea. David and Sue have made many visits to the area and produced ethnological research which is both valuable and thorough.

Further to the east, Susanna Reece decided to celebrate her fiftieth birthday with an unusual journey. Following in the footsteps of authors Peter Fleming and Ella Maillart, Susanna travelled from Beijing to Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan. OATG member Sue also writes a blog on knitting (http:susannareeceknits.blogspot.com/).

Then to the south, we have an informative article by Azra Nafees on the clothing of the Pashtuns. Usually the only thing we hear from this region is sad news about the conflict along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, but Azra explains in great detail the clothing worn by people in this region.

One final point: this is the last edition of Asian Textiles to be published while our founder Dr Ruth Barnes is still in Oxford. I will not be the last person to pay tribute, but on behalf of the magazine I would like to add my thanks for all she has done to put Asian textiles in Oxford on the map. Thankyou Ruth and good luck in your new endeavours.

Here'a another postcard from my bottomless pit. This one, probably printed in the 1920s, shows a lacemaker from Colombo in Sri Lanka—then known as Ceylon. Lacemaking was introduced to Sri Lanka by the Portuguese in the 16th century and further improved by the Dutch in the 17th century. You can read more about it here: http://www.lankalibrary.com/phpBB/viewtopic.php?f=68&t=3039

OATG EVENTS PROGRAMME

Wednesday 21 October 2009 at 5.45 pm

A Biography of the Cloud Collar

The changing role of dress in Chinese ceremonial culture

By Rachel Silberstein

Rachel is a DPhil student at Oxford and is just completing her study of Chinese dress

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Wednesday 11 November 2009

AGM at 5.45 followed at 6.15 by a talk

Felts in Central Asia through time and place

by Dr Stephanie Bunn

Lecturer and author of the recent book *Nomadic Felts*

Wednesday 9 December 2009

Dr Ruth Barnes has kindly offered to give two guided visits at

The Textiles Gallery in the New Ashmolean Museum

The visits will be at 11am and 2.30 pm and numbers will be limited.
Please book with the programme coordinators indicating your preferred time
on or after Wednesday 11 November.

Wednesday 10 February 2010 at 5.45pm

Researching Stories and Dance in Bali

By Fiona Kerlogue,

Deputy Keeper of Anthropology at the Horniman Museum, London.
Author of numerous articles and books relating to Southeast Asia

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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
Fiona Sutcliffe 01491 872268 j.v.sutcliffe.t21@btinternet.com

Textile Museum shows ikats, Japanese high fashion

The Textile Museum in Washington DC is holding a number of exhibitions this autumn that will be of interest to OATG members. *Colors of the Oasis,* which began in mid-October, features a selection from the 148 high calibre Central Asian ikats given to The Textile Museum by collector Murad Megalli in 2005.

The stunning, colorful textiles on view include coats for men and women, and women's dresses and pants (trousers), as well as cradle covers, hangings and fragments -- all on view for the first time ever.

Also running until next April is an exhibition of the Mary Baskett Collection, an art dealer and former curator of prints at the Cincinnati Art Museum who has been collecting and wearing Japanese high fashion since the 1960s. The Japanese *avant garde* designers Issey Miyake, Rei Kawakubo and Yohji Yamamoto are all well represented in her collection.

And anyone who has not yet seen the online exhibition '*Flowers of Silk and Gold: Four centuries of Ottoman Embroidery*' can find some wonderful exhibits first shown at the museum in 2000 at http://www.textilemuseum.org/fsg/gallery/thumbnails_frmset.html

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Newsletter rises out of the ashes of Hong Kong society

Bonnie Corwin, who edited the newsletter of the Hong Kong Textile Society until its demise earlier this year, has launched a new publication, called *Textiles Asia*. She says that "*Textiles Asia* is aimed at those with an established knowledge in all aspects of Asian textiles, as well as those who are just beginning their interest in this ever wide-ranging field of study."

She has gathered round her an impressive group of contributing editors, including Dale Gluckman, retired curator of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Valery Garrett, Hong Kong-based Chinese clothing scholar.

Textiles Asia newsletter will be published three times a year (spring, autumn and winter). The inaugural issue features an article by architect Bernhard Bart describing the revitalization of western Sumatra *songket* weaving (brocaded fabrics featuring metallic threads) in the late 1960s following its suppression under Japanese occupation in the 1940s. Sally Yu Leung, an independent curator and teacher who serves as a commissioner at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, writes about the meaning of the "*yinxitu*" or pictures of boy's at play, commonly known as one hundred children and its resonance within the contemporary culture of the People's Republic of China. And collector Paul Prentice writes about his collecting philosophy.

The newsletter editor, Bonnie Corwin, has designed packaging and displays in the cosmetic industry in New York, working for Revlon, Clairol and L'Oreal. Her love of Asian textiles developed in the early 1980s when she lived in Hong Kong for two and a half years. Travel to Thailand, Laos, Indonesia and other South East Asian destinations introduced her to the fascinating world of *batiks* and *ikats*. Bonnie and her husband returned to Hong Kong in 2005 where she became a member of the Textile Society and eventually editor of the newsletter, a job she continued after moving to Japan in 2008.

The *Textiles Asia* newsletter editorial board includes Dorothy Berry, Norrie Peal and Lisbet Rasmussen, all former members of the Textile Society of Hong Kong executive committee. John E. Vollmer, Advisor. Contributing editors: Valerie Foley, Valery Garrett, Dale Gluckman, Gill Green, Linda McIntosh and Pramod Kumar. Subscriptions manager, Debbie Leung.
For more information about *Textiles Asia* newsletter or for a free copy of the inaugural issue please contact: Bonnie Corwin, *Textiles Asia* newsletter, P.O. Box 423, General Post Office, Hong Kong. Tel: Japan 81-(0)3-3440-2205 or email: bonniecorwin@gmail.com

The unknown Kyrgyz textile museum

Just off the main street in the small Kyrgyz town of Kochkor, a few miles west of Lake Issyk Kul, there is a surprise awaiting the diligent traveller. This small market town is a well-established stop-off for anyone travelling from the capital Bishkek down towards Naryn and the border with Xinjiang. Most people stop for delicious *manti*, *laghman* or the hot *shorpo* soup .

But tucked away in a backstreet, far from the bustle of the main road, there is an extraordinary little museum. Run by Lilya Ayipova and her sisters, the Kochkor-Kutu Museum of Ethnography and Traditional Art is a remarkable place. Hidden behind large metal gates, with no sign of what lies beyond, the museum has no official back and is the creation of Lilya and her family.

"My sister was travelling in Xinjiang and she was struck by the number of old Kyrgyz textiles and jewellery pieces in the markets," says Lilya. "She realised that these pieces were disappearing from our own country, so she spoke to our mother about it and we decided to create a museum to show off the traditional work of this region."

Some of the first pieces for the museum came from Lilya's grandmother – wonderful pieces of dowry silver, including hair dressings and bracelets. Soon the three small rooms became a repository for weavings, embroideries and other items of folk art. In one corner lies a dozen or so coiled yurt tent bands (*ormuk*), most of them old, but including a few new ones that are made for sale to tourists. Next to them is a collection of reed screens (*chii*), decorated by wrapping each reed with coloured wool to form a composite pattern.

Lilya Ayipova from the Kochkor-Kutu museum

In the next room, there are literally hundreds of old textiles, spread out over metal rails that line the wall. Here you will find *tush kyiz* made to decorate the most auspicious spot in the yurt and behind which the bedding is stored during the day. Behind the textiles on display there are cupboards filled with more examples.

"We have around 3,500 textiles here," says Lilya. Most of them were brought here by local people who wanted to make sure that our culture was preserved.

In another room there are wonderful examples of nineteenth century brocade coats, felt boots, winter coats and fur hats.

Another room is also a shop where the museum sells good examples of local felt work including large appliqué mats (*shyrdak*) and simpler *ala kiyiz* carpets. In

Wonderful textiles line the walls of the museum in Kochkor

the courtyard outside several women are at work cutting and stitching felts. Lilya explains the patterns used and their meaning.

Having visited the state museums in Bishkek and the regional museum at Naryn, I have little doubt that the collection put together by the Ayipova family in Kochkor is probably the best collection of textiles in Kyrgyzstan—maybe the world. The national museums have good pieces but very few of them. And when I asked to see the reserve collection at Naryn, I was told there was not one.

The Kochkor collection has been neither catalogued nor photographed. I could not help thinking that only a miracle will prevent this incredible collection being lost, either to insects or a dreadful accident. Moves are now afoot to at least photograph the textiles for posterity and to collate the remarkable information held by the Ayipova family. If you would like to become involved, please contact the editor.

Nick Fielding

Membership announcement

This is just to remind you that membership subscriptions are due for renewal on 1st October each year. Thank you to all those who have already sent me cheques and to those who have set up banker's orders.

I know that – in this busy world – it is sometimes hard to remember whether one is up to date with payments and by what means one pays. In future mailing labels will include the information about method of payment CS [cash], CH [cheque], BO [banker's order], PP [PayPal], HON [honorary] and which was the last year that your subscription was paid eg 08/09.

Those who joined after 1 June have their subscription carried over to the following year. If you pay by cheque I look forward to receiving your subscriptions soon…and if you are not on e-mail and would like to receive a receipt, please include a stamped addressed envelope with your payment.

Felicity Wood, Membership Secretary

A Vietnamese project focusing on traditional crafts

Jennifer Glastonbury reviews a talk on a crafts project in Vietnam by Professor Michael Hitchcock, Deputy Dean, University of Chichester, on 24 June 2009

Professor Hitchcock gave OATG members an unusual angle on textile culture in describing his involvement in an EU-funded multi-agency project in the Red River area of North Vietnam from 2002 to 2004. The project had several strands, including tourism development, heritage trails and the design and marketing of handicrafts in the context of EU import regulations.

However, for us the most interesting aspect was the survey of craft villages. As North Vietnam was under Chinese rule for 1,000 years, Hai Duong was a repository of Vietnamese and Chinese craft knowledge and in former times village-founders travelled to China to learn their trade.

Many of the villages around Hai Duong were engaged in both agriculture and specialist craft production: Chu Dau, for example, was famous for its blue and white floral ceramics in the Le Dynasty (1427-1788) and a Saigon-based company has now established a modern factory there repro-

I spotted these two Afghan nomad children on the back of a horse in Natyagali, in the Murree Hills, north of Islamabad in Pakistan. Both are covered in amulets and are wearing *kohl* around their eyes. The girl's dress seems to be made from a Turkoman carpet. Note the lamb lying between the two children. They were part of a large group bringing their huge flocks of goat and sheep down from the mountains for the winter. (Ed)

ducing the old designs. The most prosperous craft villages would hire in labour to farm their land.

Professor Hitchcock said that only 32 craft villages have survived out of the hundreds that used to exist. Hai Duong is rapidly becoming a major industrial centre, but unemployment remains a problem in the countryside- so handicrafts provide work there, easing migration to the city and reducing the trafficking of young women across the border to China.

As far as textiles are concerned, there was evidence of thread production in Phu Khe village from the 13th century and of dyeing in Dan Loan from the 15th century. In a specialist village like Thong, locals combined tussore, cotton and fine silk weaving with the sale of traditional medicines, and in Phu Khe yarn spinning continues to this day on an industrial basis, the yarn spinning workshops there having gone down from 216 in 1955 to only 20 in 1983.

Embroidery has become important for tourism: there are embroidery workshops in Hai Duong city and an embroidery factory on Route 5 on the provincial border. The latter sells to visiting cruise passenger groups and supplies an upmarket shop near the Opera House in Hanoi. Embroidery is also exported to France and Japan: the French have markets for this embroidery in Brittany, and innovative embroidered Vietnamese jewellery is also sold to France.

Asked about the embroidery patterns, Professor Hitchcock said that traditional flower and countryside motifs are the most popular.

Professor Hitchcock's talk illuminated an encouraging example of an international project which focused on traditional crafts and tried to understand how these could be sustained in a village and urban society.

A comprehensive introduction to the Karakalpaks

Sheila Paine reviews Sue and David Richardson's talk on 'Karakalpak Costume: Ever-changing fashions in Western Central Asia' on 22 July 2009.

The iconic image of stranded fishing boats lurched high and dry on the scrubby hillocks that were once the bed of the Aral Sea is all most people know of Karakalpakstan, if that. The Richardsons did not even mention them or the salt-blown landscape around. The only image they showed us of the sea was of intense blue water fringed by verdant banks that is the northern part still remaining: they love the place. Their talk was a sharing of their enthusiasm and of the profound knowledge they have acquired of all aspects of Karakalpak life and of their textiles in particular.

They began with a description of the landscape, the Karakalpak's history of migration and their activities as semi-nomadic cattle breeders. In fact a comprehensive answer to the natural question: who the hell are the Karakalpak and where's Karakalpakstan?

Moving on to their textiles, the Richardsons analysed the traditional marriage costume: the embroidered indigo robe, *kok koylik*; the elaborate headdress, *saukele,* appliquéd in coral and the *to'belik* crown, all now of extreme rarity.

They then discussed the *kyzil kiymeshek*, the Karakalpak version of a type of hooded cape like the Uzbek *paranja* and the Turkmen *chyrpy*, but with a unique bib front. Such traditional costume disappeared in the Soviet era, replaced by Western clothing under the impact of schooling for girls and of Russian TV.

The Richardsons brought along some magnificent items from their collection: some *kyzil kiymeshek* with beautiful embroidery in complex patterning; also *chapan* - the ubiquitous coats worn by both men and women - made of *alacha*, a striped cotton polished to a high glaze.

`The Richardsons' research is impeccable, their information faultless, their dedication total and, as the person who first introduced them to Karakalpakstan, I am full of admiration for all they have achieved. **Sheila Paine**

(See article pp 17-23)

An Insight into Pashtun clothing

We are all familiar with the flat hats from the North West Frontier region of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Here Azra Nafees explains the intricacies of the clothing worn by the Pashtun people in the traditional areas of the region.

Dress is considered to be an important part of any culture, representing as it does the taste, the social structure and the climatic needs of a particular region. Dress distinguishes one nation from others and is an identity and symbol of pride. Fortunately, the Pashtuns who live in North-West Pakistan and parts of Afghanistan have a beautiful and unique taste when it comes to fashion and clothing.

Traditional Afghan clothing – in particular the afghan dress for women and the *Perahan Tunban or Partug Qamees* for men - has become a very popular, fashionable and favourite dress all around the World. Pashtun hats and waistcoats easily can be found in London markets.

However, the traditional names for these items are much less well-known and so in this article I will endeavour to explain some of these beautiful items worn by men, women and children in the main Pashtun areas.

Different designs of *Perahan Tunban*

Pashtun waistcoats

The Dress of Pashtun Men

The *Perahan Tunban* or *Partug-Qamees*, as is commonly known, is the national and traditional Pashtun men's dress, equally popular on both sides of the Durand line that divides Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The design of dress is unique due to exquisite silk embroidery on the chest or down the collar as well as around the two sides of collar buttons which adds an awesome look to the dress.

The *Perahan Tunban* comes in several designs and colours depending on the choice of the wearer which colour he likes, but the most commonly used colours are: whitish blue, white, khaki, black, gray and a few more.

The white colour dress is mostly common with all men but it's more acceptable by older men because the white colour describes the purity of the older person.

Men usually wear a coat or a waistcoat on top of their *Perahan Tunban / Partug Qamees***.** Waistcoats come mostly in grey and black colors, whereas a silver stitch style waistcoat is also common among men.

Men also wear a long-sleeved, calf-length *Chapan*. This long coat is made of silk, and it comes in striped colours. The *Chapan* is worn over the *Perahan* and is an exclusive part of dress due to

Man wearing a *chapan*

Long warn embroidered coats with *Qarakul*

its high cost. It normally signifies comfortable environs and is frequently worn by the rich and well to do. It is taken as a symbol of dignity and grace.

In winter men wear nice coats with a full lining of lamb skin (even in the arms) and the cuffs and opening are trimmed with the softest long sheep or goat hair for decoration. It is a really warm garment for the cold winter of the mountainous Pashtun regions. There is embroidery around the body of the coat and at the sleeves.

These coats are tailored to last for a long time. Many will have a very antique looking clasp to do the coat up. It is fully hand stitched and is also embroidered in different colours in a psychedelic pattern on the front and the back.

This coat is worn with a hat called a *Qarakul* which is made of lamb skin. The *Qarakul* is a unique hat made of special lamb skin, very popular among Afghans. It can easily fold flat. Being very expensive, few people opt to wear it.

Another significant part of men's winter dress is the woollen shawl popularly known as a *Sharhai.* This is wrapped all around the upper torso covering shoulders and chest. Normally a *pakool* felt cap) is complimented with the *Sharhai* to keep the skull warm. This part of dress is equally liked by men of all ages, no matter how young or old, particularly because it is comfortable and economical.

Most Pashtun men cover their heads by wearing hats of different types such as the *Pakool*, (made of felted wool), the turban or the *Shamla*, (made of silk or cotton) or regular caps(made of cotton) which mostly come in white and black colours.

Different types of caps or head gears are worn in different regions depending on the weather conditions. In the Peshawar Valley, the preferred headgear is the white cotton cap, whereas in areas like Swat, Dir and some mountainous regions of Afghanistan, where the weather is generally cold, men prefer to wear warm caps known as *Pakool* made of lamb's wool.

There are several other varieties of caps also which are worn with different regional dresses.

Top: Man wearing *Sharai* and *Shamla*.

Bottom: Man wearing a *pakool*

Pashtun women wearing traditional dresses with typical embroidered yokes and sleeves

Traditional outfits for Pashtun women

The traditional dress for Pashtun women is really unique and beautiful. It is unique because of the exquisite handmade embroidery and distinctive design. The dress is usually long and made of cotton with a combination of different colours and comes with matching trousers, a head scarf and sometimes with an embroidered cap, a purse and a pair of flat shoes known as paizar.

The style of pure Pashtun women's dresses has changed over the last several decades due to cultural influences from the neighbouring countries. Now the dress for women has changed significantly; long sleeved, ankle-length dresses with embroidery or long knee-length dresses with trousers and a headscarf are common.

Women's dress for indoors is usually a long knee-length dress with white, black or matching trousers usually made of cotton and worn in summer. In some areas striped material is used and often dyed, usually in red although shades of blue and brown are among the favourites. Loose sleeveless, hip-length jackets are worn inside full-length striped coats for warmth as well.

Pashtun women also opt to wear the *Partug Qamees* which has become very popular, being

Dresses have changed noticeably in recent years due to the impact of outside influences

available in a variety of attractive colours. The fabric comes in wool and silk as well as cotton, depending on the season. A matching coloured scarf or *Saadar* invariably goes with the dress.

The fabric used for the *Saadar* is relatively thinner than that of the fabric of the dress. Pashtun women wear bottle *burqas* in rural areas and villages, whereas the white *Saadar* (popularly known as *Parunay*) in urban areas and cities and towns for outdoor travel.

The colour of the *Parunay* depends on the choice of the wearer, but it mostly comes in white. In Afghanistan cotton and wool are the main material used for clothing. Silk, though more expensive than wool or cotton, is also frequently used for making headscarves and embroidered shawls.

Costumes for young Pashtun children

The costumes for children, especially the traditional Pashtun boys' clothes, are almost the same as those for adults, depending on their size. Often boys will wear an embroidered *Perhan Tunban* or *Partug Qamees* with a golden, silver or bronze stitched embroidered waistcoat and a matching embroidered hat.

The golden embroidered open shoes or sandals, known as '*Saplai*', in different varieties, make an integral part of boys' and men's traditional costume, worn on special occasions, although men usually wear *Saplai* of black, brown or grey colour.

The costume for girls is a smaller version of the women's traditional clothing with an embroidered cap and decorative shoes. This dress comes in rather unique and attractive colours and looks stunning on young pretty girls.

The writer, Azra Nafees, is an ethnic Pashtun who hails from Dir and was raised and brought up in Peshawar. She has a Masters Degrees in Economics, English Literature and Education from the University of Peshawar and is a teacher trainer by profession. The author has travelled extensively across the globe and has exposure to multicultural environs and to people with different religions, languages, ethnicities and creeds.

Azra Nafees is also the Editor in Chief of a monthly eMagazine, SAHAR-The Voices of Pashtuns, http://khyberwatch.com/Sahar/ and is working proactively for enhancing the image of Pashtuns living around the world by promoting Pashtun history & architecture, language, dress and designs, art & culture, and the traditional code of Pashtunwali. This article originally appeared in the August edition of the magazine. Azra can be contacted at editorsahar@gmail.com.

Young Pashtun boys and girls wear miniature versions of their parents' clothing.

Central Asia's enigmatic Karakalpaks

OATG members David and Sue Richardson explain the cultural significance of the one of the most unusual garments of Central Asia—the *kiymeshek* worn by women from the Karakalpaks, a Turkic minority living close to the Aral Sea in Uzbekistan.

The Evolution of the Karakalpak *Kiymeshek*.

The Karakalpaks are one of the most interesting Turkic minorities living in Central Asia. Totalling no more than 600,000 they mainly reside today in the Autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan, the most westerly part of Uzbekistan, watered by the Amu Darya and lying just to the south of the fast disappearing Aral Sea.

The Karakalpaks are a heterogeneous confederation of many earlier tribes, organised into two major divisions or *arıs*, the Qon'ırat and the On To'rt Urıw (meaning fourteen tribes). Genetically they are virtually indistinguishable from the Uzbeks, yet linguistically and culturally they are far closer to the Kazakhs. They emerged during the 16th century from the same pool of tribes that

A Karakalpak family photographed next to their yurt by Alexandr Melkov in 1928

a century earlier had given birth to the Uzbeks. However for the first few centuries of their existence they lived in close proximity to, and under the domination of, the Kazakhs.

Traditionally the Karakalpaks were semi-nomadic, pursuing a mixed pastoral-agricultural-fishing economy, breeding cattle rather than sheep. They lived close to the rivers and marshes and migrated seasonally from their wintering grounds, or *qıslaw*, to their summering grounds, or *jazlaw*, which were usually located fairly close together. Karakalpaks belonging to the Qon'ırat *arıs* were more nomadic and focused on cattle breeding and fishing close to the Aral Sea, while the more southerly dwelling On To'rt Urıw were more settled and primarily occupied with agriculture.

Karakalpak married women wore a strange ceremonial garment known as a *kiymeshek* – possibly one of the most dramatic and unusual costumes to come out of Central Asia. It was a sleeveless woman's cloak that was worn over the head, veiling the hair, neck, shoulders and upper breast. The closest European analogy would be the medieval wimple, which dates back to the 12th century. It is possible that the *kiymeshek* evolved from the much earlier Islamic *khimar* head cover, which predates the time of the Prophet.

Kiymesheks are associated with an ancient pagan belief that a woman's hair was potentially dangerous and provided a conduit for evil forces to enter her body and mind with the intention of damaging her, her fertility, her unborn child, and perhaps even those around her. By concealing the hair, a *kiymeshek* offered a woman protection from harm, especially when she was particularly vulnerable – during her marriage and later childbearing years.

Karakalpak *kiymesheks* were always decorated with red, which itself was believed to have protective powers against the evil eye. Red was the most common colour for the clothing of girls and younger women throughout Central Asia. Indeed, the protective force of a *kiymeshek* was so powerful that old *kiymesheks* were cut up and used to make over shirts for small children, thereby shielding them from danger. If there was an illness in the family, a section of *kiymeshek* might be burnt to facilitate a cure, whilst if an old woman died her *kiymeshek* was cut up and distributed to

A rare example of a complete *aq kiymeshek* from our own collection

the surviving family members, guaranteeing that they too would benefit from her longevity.

The *kiymeshek* consists of a triangular front, known as an *aldı*, containing a small u-shaped opening for the face, a larger diamond-shaped cloak, known as a *quyrıq* or tail, which covered the back, and a small cotton cap. The *kiymeshek* was generally worn with a turban, or *oramal*, and when a woman ventured outside of the home she would place an unlined cloak, known as a *jegde*, over her head. The latter had false sleeves and was similar to the Uzbek *paranja* and Turkmen *chyrpy*.

There are 2 basic types of *kiymeshek*: *aq* (white) and *qızıl* (red). We believe the *aq kiymeshek* to be the oldest type.

The *aq kiymeshek* was made of hand-spun and hand-woven cotton known locally as *bo'z*. The *quyrıq* at the back was also of the same fabric. The *aldı* was decorated with cross-stitch motifs usually embroidered in raspberry and pale yellow silk. Obviously the structure of a fairly coarsely woven cloth with the warps and wefts visible made it ideal for cross-stitch. The design layout on the *aldı* was fairly uniform with a horizontal row of motifs along the bottom (generally *mu'yiz* or horns) and an odd number of vertical columns rising up from this.

Typical decoration of a 19th century *aq kiymeshek aldı*

White *kiymesheks* were not unique to the Karakalpaks. They were also worn by the Kazakhs, who had several different types with regional variations, and by the Uzbeks who wore a plain white version known as a *lyachek*.

It is often stated that the *aq kiymeshek* was worn by elderly women who were beyond child-bearing age. However we believe this was not the case. It seems far more likely that these relatively simple garments were originally worn by younger women who over time adopted the more dramatic *qızıl kiymeshek*. The adoption of this new fashion took place in the second half the 19th century, initially amongst the small elite of wealthy Karakalpaks. The majority of Karakalpaks at that time lived in abject poverty under the brutal rule of the Khivan Khans.

The reason for the change was the increasing availability of two brand new fabrics, *ushıga* and *pashshayı*. The first of these was a fleeced woollen broadcloth, known as *sukno* in Russia from where it was mainly imported, and called *ushıga* by the Karakalpaks. It was available in two colours, red and black or *qızıl* and *qara*. *Ushıga* was an expensive textile, only available from merchants in the big towns. For many Karakalpaks the purchase of such material was a major investment and not a scrap was wasted.

At first women began to embellish the edges of the *aq kiymeshek aldı* with a narrow border of *qızıl ushıga*. Eventually the use of this became more widespread and they started to add extra borders of *qara ushıga*.

An *aq kiymeshek aldı* edged with red and black *ushıga*

The intrinsic nature of this textile with its felted surface meant that it was entirely unsuitable for cross-stitch. In time the nature of the fabric encouraged the alternative use of chain stitch, known in Karakalpak as *shınjır tigis*. This resulted in the introduction of a completely new set of free-flowing floral and zoomorphic motifs.

It is important to note that chain-stitch was only used on the *ushıga* borders – the main part of the *aq kiymeshek aldı* continued to be executed in cross-stitch.

The next stage depended on the greater availability of, and access to, *qızıl ushıga*. In time the *bo'z* fabric used for the *aldı* was replaced by *ushıga*. Due to the high cost of this fabric women often could not afford one large piece and we see many *kiymesheks* in which the *aldı* is made from a patchwork of smaller sections sewn together.

As mentioned earlier it was impossible to use cross-stitch on this new textile so the Karakalpaks came up with an ingenious solution – they simply executed their typical *mu'yiz* motifs in cross-stitch on a piece of checked cotton fabric, known as *shatırash*, and then inserted this into a hole cut out of the *qızıl ushıga*.

The earliest *qızıl kiymesheks* had an *aldı* decorated with a horizontal band of cross stitch

The design layout of this new version is reminiscent of the *aq kiymeshek* with a horizontal band of *mu'yiz* motifs and lines of other motifs rising from them.

Gradually more and more areas of the *qızıl kiymeshek aldı* were covered with embroidery and it was obviously only a matter of time before the *shatırash* in the centre was itself replaced by *ushıga*, in this case black or *qara ushıga*. This central panel then became known as the *orta qara* or middle black.

A *qızıl kiymeshek aldı* decorated in chain stitch with the *qoralı gu'l* or "fenced flower" pattern

Now there was an explosion of different chain stitch embroidery motifs, some undoubtedly inspired by contact with Turkmen and Kazakh embroiderers. Many of these motifs understandably related to the world around and were based on flowers, plants, insects, and household tools.

With the universal adoption of this exciting new garment by brides and married women the *aq kiymeshek* became the preserve of the elderly.

The *orta qara* patterns of the *qızıl kiymeshek aldı* can be broken down into several types. Researchers have sought to understand whether or not these patterns were specific to any particular region or group. The ethnographer Nina Lobacheva certainly believed that the Mu'yten tribe had their own pattern which she also described as being wider than that of other Karakalpak groups. We do know that some Karakalpak jewellery designs were tribe/clan specific.

However Karakalpaks have a tradition of exogamy. As well as being obliged to marry outside of her clan, it was traditional for the bride to move to the village of her new husband. Consequently patterns that may have originally been specific to one group quickly spread throughout the whole population.

The main types of *orta qara* pattern are as follows:

- *Qoralı gu'l* (fenced flower). Cattle were kept in reed enclosures known as *qora* hence the name of this pattern which is said to show enclosed apricot flowers. This seems to have been the most common pattern and is often associated with the Qon'irat *arıs*.
- *Shayan quyrıq* (scorpion's tail).
- *Segiz mu'yiz* (eight horns). Associated with the Kegeyli region, the use of horns in many Karakalpak embroideries is clearly linked to their cattle breeding economy. There is also a less common *on yeki mu'yiz* or twelve horns pattern.

- *Mu'yiz nag'ıs* (horn pattern). This appears in various forms the most intricate known as *shubal nag'ıs,* meaning "no beginning and no end". This latter pattern is linked to the Mu'yten and Qoldawlı tribes who formerly lived on the shores and islands of the Aral Sea.

A *qızıl kiymeshek aldı* decorated in chain stitch with the unusual s*hayan quyrıq* or "scorpion's tail" pattern

Let's turn now to the back of the *kiymeshek*. We mentioned earlier that the back of the *aq kiymeshek* was of simple white cotton. The introduction of the vibrant *qızıl kiymeshek* obviously led to the search for a more striking *quyrıq*. The solution to this was the use of colourful ikat-dyed silk *adras*.

Researchers such as the Karakalpak Ag'ınbay Allamuratov and the Russian Anna Morozova thought that the ikat-dyed silk used in *qızıl kiymesheks* came from Bukhara as this was obviously the major centre of *adras* production. We quickly noticed the predominance of the use of

certain patterns for the *kiymeshek quyrıq* and wondered if they were made in Bukhara but for the local Khorezmian taste. Later we began to hear that three specific designs were produced in Khiva. We have finally been able to track down written references from 1834 and 1836 to a small community of Jewish dyers working in Khiva who had been exiled from Bukhara.

All three of these ikat patterns were used in Karakalpak *qızıl kiymesheks*, by far the most popular design of all being that with a pattern of red and green horns and a central turquoise stripe, a textile which blends well with the red, black and green colour combinations used in the rest of the *kiymeshek*.

The three patterns of ikat *adras* produced in Khiva

The examples on the left and in the centre are ones that we can definitely say are from Khiva. The one on the right is unfortunately a Bukharan example as we have not yet been able to track down a genuine Khivan version. However we believe that, as in the other two examples, the Khivan version was a simplified form of this original Bukharan pattern.

Some authors have claimed that 100% silk *shayı* (referred to as *shoyi* in Khiva, meaning kingly) was also used for the production of *kiymesheks*. However we have never encountered a single example made from *shayı*, not surprising because it is simply not strong enough for the job. The *qızıl kiymeshek* contains a fundamental design fault – the silk *quyrıq* is simply not strong enough to support its heavily embroidered border. As a result even the stronger *pashshayı*, (50% silk and 50% cotton), which is clearly recognisable by its finely ribbed structure, tends to tear over time.

The *kiymeshek* blossomed for only a brief period and declined in popularity in the late 1920's to early 1930's. Our last record of one being worn was from a woman we interviewed who had worn it for her wedding in 1937.

There were many reasons for its decline, probably one of the main ones being female independence. Under the soviets girls began to attend school and women were encouraged to leave home and work in the fields. Many elderly women that we have interviewed said they had no time, and sometimes no inclination, to embroider. Imported Russian clothing and fabric became increasingly available and affordable. From a political point of view there was obviously the pressure to conform. Those wearing traditional costume were seen as backward and rebellious whereas those wearing the new (Russian) fashions were seen to have embraced the new ideology.

By the start of the Great Patriotic War the Karakalpaks were finally free from their traditional feudal lifestyle. Sadly one of the inevitable costs they paid was the loss of their traditional material culture, little of which has ever been seen or written about outside of the former Soviet Union.

David and Sue Richardson. www.karakalpak.com

Following in Peter Fleming's footsteps

Susanna Reece decided to mark her fiftieth birthday with the journey of a lifetime. Starting in Beijing, her travels took her to the western Xinjiang region of China and then on to Bishkek, capital of Kyrgyzstan. Textiles were never far from her mind....

In February1935, Peter Fleming (brother of *James Bond* creator Ian Fleming, and soon-to-be husband of the *Brief Encounter* actress Celia Johnson) and his travelling companion the Swiss explorer Ella Maillart began what he described as "an undeservedly successful attempt" to travel overland from Peking to Kashmir, a journey of around 3,500 miles that took them seven months.

Fleming's account of this journey, *News from Tartary*, one of the classics of travel writing, is the origin of my interest in Central Asia, and in turn has led to my fascination with its textiles. His crossing of the infamous Takla Makan desert ("go in never come out again" in the local dialect) has been *the* image of adventurous travel for me for quarter of a century, since I first read the book. So when a decision needed to be taken about where to spend my 50th birthday this June there wasn't much doubt that it should include a journey across this isolated desert wilderness.

Fleming, employed by *The Times*, went to find out what was happening in what was then known as Sinkiang, or Chinese Turkistan. Cut off from the rest of China for two years, there were rumours of civil war, and of Soviet troops operating in the capital, Urumchi, and of the Tungan rebel army being confined in the string of oases which run through the desert with Khotan at the

A woven motorcycle seat cover

Traditional embroideries like this cross stitch hat are still found in everyday use in Kashgar

centre.

Other recent European visitors had been imprisoned or arrested; flights into Urumchi had been abandoned; and the wife of the British Consul-General in Kashgar had been shot through the shoulder while standing on the terrace of the consulate and a doctor killed. "None of this was reassuring", Fleming noted. As it turned out our trip to modern-day Xinjiang, from Urumchi to Kashgar, now firmly under Chinese control, and on into Kyrgyzstan, coincided with a summer when the normally isolated regions of "Tartary" have been firmly in the news once again.

"The trouble about journeys nowadays", Fleming wrote, "is that they are easy to make but difficult to justify… All along the line we have been forestalled by better men than we. Only the born tourist – happy, goggling ruminant – can follow in their tracks with the conviction that he is not wasting his time. But Sinkiang was, in 1935, a special case; and the seemingly impossible journey through it could, at a pinch, qualify as political if not as geographical exploration."

Our own trip began in the *Metropolis*-like atmosphere of Beijing airport where our temperatures were taken to assess if we had swine flu, and although much of our trip from Beijing to Bishkek fell into the "ruminant" category, with long days in an air-conditioned bus, I think it too can be justified on the grounds of political and cultural exploration. Few Western tourists visit Xinjiang and it is still a place where adventures and encounters, both friendly and unfriendly, can be had simply because of that fact.

Whereas at times the Chinese authorities were suspicious to the point of paranoia, the local Uighur people were at worst curious and more often welcoming and friendly. The trip was a remarkable insight into the traditional desert life of these peoples, which may be on the verge of extinction from Chinese "development". And of course I went in search of textiles also.

This was my first trip to China and it would not be my first choice of tourist destination, being no supporter of its government's human rights record. I gritted my teeth through our crossing of Tiananmen Square, on 29 May already heavily policed in the build-up to the 20th anniversary of the massacre on 4 June 1989, relaxing only among the delights of the Forbidden City and the Temple of Heaven park, where azure-winged magpies flew among the trees.

(The Dowager Empress Ci Xi and the Imperial Concubines watched operas in the Forbidden City for 15 days to celebrate *her* 50th birthday.) Feeling thoroughly fleeced, and definitely ruminative, we took a late night flight to Urumchi. Here it felt like the journey was really beginning, and the double strangeness of the aggressive offering of sexual services from the hotel basement and newspaper headlines about the bull-dozing of Kashgar contributed to a sense of being in the Wild East at last. It is not just hindsight to say that the city felt tense.

The next morning we visited the Regional Museum on a very controlled visit which presented the different ethnic groups of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region as a collection of rather quaint folk traditions reminiscent of old-style Soviet attitudes to the peoples of the USSR. Here I encountered my first examples of Atlas Silk, alongside other examples of Ikat cloth, printed calico and cotton and some weft-woven silk.

From the museum we went to a fascinating local Uighur market where we bought just-baked bread, lamb pastries called *samsas* and fresh lychees for our picnic lunch. The lively bustle of this outdoor market where we were asked about our families and where we came from, was a complete contrast to the cool unfriendly halls of the supermarket populated only by Han Chinese. As we left Urumchi we had our first sight of the snow-covered Tian Shan mountains.

Reading Fleming's book as I travelled, I was struck by the number of times he and Maillart felt that at last they were really starting, and this is how it felt to us, too. Perhaps it's the nature of travel in the desert, the arrivals and departures from the oasis towns that string along the old Silk Route. For us, it was also about the contrasts and tensions between the traditional towns and practices of the Uighur peoples and the manufactured Chinese towns built for non-native oil and gas workers.

Korla was one of these, although the people were friendly and we had a terrific meal in a Uighur restaurant, including a wonderful sheep's yogurt. (Although others had various tummy upsets on the way, I was fortunately not affected. I've always put this down to sticking to vegetarian food, a theory that didn't stand up to a fellow vegetarian in our party ending up in a Kashgar hospital on a drip!) At no point, however, could we forget that we were living in a highly controlled society.

On to Kuqa, where we walked through the old town and where several women invited us into their homes. One older woman told us that she now lived alone, her children and grandchildren having moved out into a modern apartment block. Another woman was sitting doing beautiful

Crossing the deserts of Xinjiang

Uighur children in Kashgar

cross-stitch embroidery and she and her daughter brought out other pieces for us to admire. There was no question of any commercial transaction being suggested. I have been haunted by this woman since, wondering about her life and how it can continue in the face of the changes going on around her.

In Kuqa we also visited a mosque for the first time. Perhaps one of the reasons that the human rights abuses in Xinjiang have been less in the news than those in Tibet, is due to the fact that the local peoples are Muslim rather than Buddhist. Appeals from Uighur campaigning groups have sometimes taken the form of calls to an international Muslim brotherhood, which is not seen as helpful by Western human rights groups.

I certainly did not find it comfortable to go from being a group of 18 equal Western adults to a group separated on gender lines by the wearing of a headscarf. We were told by our local guide that it was not discriminatory but I have heard this argument before and find it very hard to understand, especially when you observe the realities of women's second class status and their exclusion from the public sphere.

The next day we noticed a lot of military activity on the road and wondered if this was in some way connected to the anniversary of the massacre in Tiananmen Square, now only three days away. We were able to access the BBC website which told of a strong military build-up, the arrest of certain dissidents and the blocking of social networking sites. Our blogs indeed were inaccessible throughout our time in China and it was perhaps surprising that the BBC news remained available.

On 2 June, my fiftieth birthday, we travelled from Kuqa to Aksu, on the edge of the Takla Makan, with a stop for lunch at Onsu that proved unexpectedly exciting. Most of us went off for a meal in a local restaurant but a few of the rest went to buy lunch in the market. This apparently aroused the suspicion of the police, perhaps on the alert for trouble in the run up to the Tiananmen Square anniversary, perhaps always concerned about foreign tourists talking to Uighurs.

Anyway, when one of our party refused to show her passport to the police, they became very nervous and wanted us all to register at the local police station. I must confess that I did send up a little prayer at that point asking that this not be the way I spent my birthday! Fortunately our

local guide calmed everything down and we were allowed to go on our way.

Whereas Fleming and Maillart crossed the desert along its southern edge by horse and camel and took several weeks, we took only four hours to go across the northern tip along the newly built desert highway in our bus. If not ruminative it was certainly hypnotic and utterly beautiful. Despite the tarmac, this was also the most barren wilderness I have seen since visiting Antarctica a couple of years ago. The briefest of rest stops resulted in sand-filled teeth.

Two nights in Khotan followed, still a major silk production area, and we visited the Atlas Silk factory which uses traditional silk-making techniques, and where I was able to buy a beautiful piece in natural dyes. We also visited the local museum, where there were some really interesting examples of textile work (unfortunately no photos allowed), and the old town. Continuing our journey towards Kashgar, we stopped off at a local market in Kargalik (one of our best stops) where I bought some very simple woven braids.

In Kashgar we visited the livestock market which was utterly absorbing, with lots of the famous fat-tailed sheep for sale and evidence of felting and weaving techniques in the blankets and decoration on traditional wooden carts and donkeys. Young girls wore exquisite cross-stitched hats and there were examples of different embroidery techniques on the men's hats. I also became fascinated by the apparently machine-knitted brown veils that some of the older women wore.

These had a definite and consistent pattern, mixing garter stitch with basket weave, although it was hard to get too close without being considered rude! Although made of quite lightweight yarn they must have been very difficult to see through unless you really know the way.

Back in the centre of Kashgar near the mosque, I watched one woman sifting through brightly covered synthetic scarves set out for sale on the pavement. She used one hand for sifting and the other to lift her veil to see, but very expertly so that her face remained invisible. Yet I saw other women wearing this type of veil folded back over their heads revealing the face, so there were clearly subtleties of practice and expectation of which I was completely unaware. I would have liked to buy one of these brown veils but didn't see any sign of them for sale in the local markets.

Complex mosque roof

The old town in Kashgar is clearly being destroyed by the Chinese. One corner we saw had been bull-dozed since the previous tour group had visited two weeks before. The pretext is that the old style buildings (which have been there for 500 years) are vulnerable to earthquakes.

Kashgar itself did, however, feel much more relaxed than Urumchi, and it was delightful around the Consulate where Fleming and Maillart stayed for a fortnight, the Consul-General's wife having recovered sufficiently from her bullet-wound to arrange twice weekly polo matches. "The raptures of arrival were unqualified. Discovery is a delightful process, but rediscovery is better; few people can ever have enjoyed a bath more than we did, who had not had one for five and a half months", Fleming wrote, promptly dubbing it Kashgar-Les-Bains. Unfortunately we were not able to stay in the usual tourist hotel near to the Consulate. Whether by coincidence or not, after the Onsu Incident we were moved to a different hotel in every town we visited for the remainder of our stay in China.

From Kashgar we did a one day trip along the Chinese bit of the Karakoram Highway (another highlight). At the checkpoint on the way back I saw a woman using a drop spindle, the only time during the trip. Unfortunately as we were at a sensitive area I was advised by our guide that asking to take her photo was not a good idea. Our crossing from Kashgar into Kyrgyzstan was an experience in itself - nearly four hours to complete the crossing, through at least four check-points. For one bit two Chinese soldiers decided to come onto the bus with us. They promptly fell asleep, and I think just wanted a ride in our air con, but not before they had told our tour guide to put his shoes back on...I decided that the Chinese government's mission statement must be "Just Because We Can".

Kyrgyzstan, probably the poorest of the five former Soviet Central Asian republics, is a stunningly beautiful country, although still prone to some soviet-style attitudes to tourism. We were wonderfully welcomed and looked after everywhere we stayed (two nights in yurts, two nights in a lovely guest house in the capital Bishkek) but we had three long travelling days during which rest breaks and photo stops were only grudgingly given.

We were also rushed through a textile stop (some interesting felting techniques but items for sale mostly adapted for a Western tourist market) in order to visit a very polluted and un-scenic lakeside in a run-down town at Lake Issyk-Kul. I was not impressed. However, much the best bit of our stay in Kyrgyzstan, was a day at leisure in Bishkek (our last day before heading home) where we wandered round in a very chilled state, had leisurely meals and took a ride on a Ferris wheel in one of the many leafy parks.

At the local history museum, as well as beautiful textile displays and a weird but extensive Lenin collection, we met the lovely Nina and Rita, who run a souvenir shop which provides an outlet for local women to sell handmade textiles, mostly embroidery with some woven pieces. These are mainly older pieces that have been created within the seller's family and are adapted for modern use. I shopped.

I did wonder about the ethics of encouraging the chopping up of old textiles for sale (reminiscent of dismembered atlases we saw in the markets in Istanbul). However, as a business opportunity for Kyrgyz women who are no longer living the traditional nomadic lifestyle it seems unanswerable, particularly as an alternative to selling sexual services from a hotel basement as we witnessed in Urumchi. I certainly hope to return to Bishkek and elsewhere in the region before too long and develop my understanding of both the situation and the textiles.

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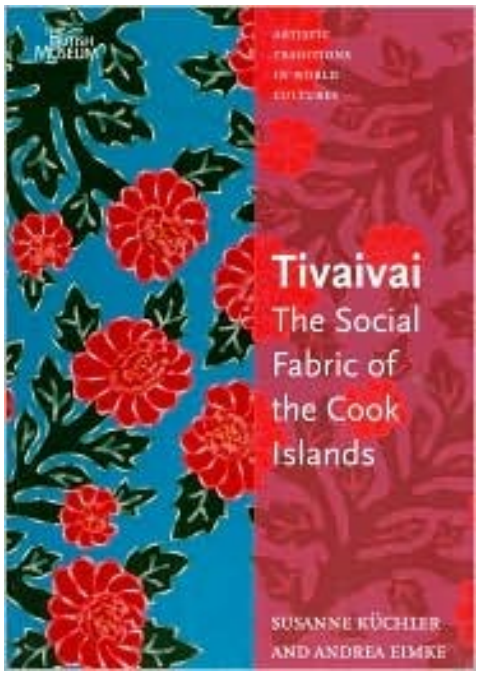
The BBC News website also has good material about the latest situation in Xinjiang

Quilts that bind an island society together



Andrea Eimke and Susanne Kuchler , Tivaivai: The Social Fabric of the Cook Islands, British Museum Press, 2009, pbk. £25.00.

Reviewed by Dymphna Hermans

Stunningly designed and colourful patchwork quilts known as *tivaivai* have been produced by women in the Cook Islands since the late 19th century. They supplanted the traditional giving of *tapa* cloth on ceremonial occasions such as weddings, funerals and hair-cutting. *Tivaivi* is a communal activity and several women will work on them together.

The original idea was introduced by the wives of missionaries from England and nuns from Tahiti who taught embroidery, needlework, sewing and crochet. Despite its European origin, patterns and techniques have evolved into styles which now belong quite distinctly to the Cook Islands. The *tivaivai* reflect the women's surroundings and usually employ designs of flowers, leaves, birds, fish, insects and animals.

Tivaivai has not only become an important and recognised art form and provides a structured and accepted channel for creativity, but also forms and maintains connections—through simple thread and cotton fabric- among a people who embrace the condition of living in diaspora as a part of their history and landscape. In the authors' words:

> "*Patchwork makes tangible the wider material relations that encapsulate the character of a place and a time, and can allow us to sense these relations long after they have perished*" (page 42);

and

> "*The prevalence of patchwork in households does therefore not speak so much of economic necessity or virtue but of a value placed on fabric as a material that is uniquely able to blend together the tangible and intangible resources which together make up a person's identity*" (p.43-44).

Tivaivai are in fact not made primarily for use; they are mostly made as gifts for love and friendship. But even though most quilts are given away, not all quilts circulate equally rapidly.

In *tivaivai taorei* several thousand tiny square, diamond shaped or hexagonal pieces of cloth, sometimes as small as a square inch are cut and joined freehand (unlike English piecing in which a paper foundation is traditionally used). *Taorei* always consist of a single, replicated motif connected by trails, thus creating a asymmetrical chequerboard pattern.

Because they are so time-consuming to make and require so much fabric, *tivaivai taorei* are amongst the more treasured *tivaivai taorei* personal possessions: they are often wrapped around and buried with the owner at death. Others are gifted as tokens of succession and thus hardly ever leave the household.

The most popular from a sewing point of view is the *tivaivai tataura*. Large floral motifs with leaves are replicated and appliquéd onto a background fabric. Each motif is then embroidered identically with much precision. They reflect Cook Island's women's love for colour and drama. Such *tataura* are the preferred gift at weddings and son's hair-cutting ceremonies.

The third type of technique is called *tivaivai manu*, a snowflake-style cut-out appliqué which results in a wonderful symmetrical pattern (as opposed to *taorei* which are wonderfully asymmetrical) that is superimposed upon a background of opposing colour. Such *manu* quilts are the quickest to make and less expensive. They are the preferred gift for those outside the immediate family and are readily 'lent' to friends who need help in acquiring sewing that can be gifted or are even sold to strangers.

Thus in the Cook Islands, *tivaivai* are stitched to be given away at funerals, at weddings and other events marking stages of loss and severance in the life of a person. Although often kept for years in trunks far away from the homeland as a result of the migrant diaspora, the *tivaivai* and its threads connect those who have been parted.

Written from both an anthropological and an artistic perspective, this book explores how connections are formed and maintained; it describes the visual and cultural characteristics that have made the *tivaivai* one of the most stunning and captivating art-forms to emerge from the Pacific. The colour photographs are stunning and the textboxes illuminating. This book provides insight into a culturally rich tradition and a visual feast and as such inspires both the patchwork quilt enthusiast and those interested in the broader field of anthropology and textile design.

From nomads' tents to poodle skirts—the history of felt

Willow G Mullins, *Felt*, Berg, Oxford and New York, 2009, 224pp, pbk, £24.99

Willow Mullins' well illustrated book covers the history of felt from the earliest period of prehistory - around 8,000 years ago - right up to the work of contemporary fibre artists and sculptors. She rightly emphasises the importance of felt and felt-making in Central Asia where it is used to make the ubiquitous *yurt/ger/bozu* and has proved to be one of the most practical forms of dwelling ever invented.

The book starts by explaining how felt is made before looking at its early history, particularly its use by the Pazyryk culture based in the Altai Mountains of Central Asia. The book then looks in more details at the felt traditions of particular cultures and countries. The author explains some of the folklore connected to the production of felt and quotes poetry that extols its virtues.

Having traced the movement of felt making into Europe, the book explores the use of felt in both art and fashion, not to mention in industry.

Willow Mullins received her BA in Folklore from Brown University and her MA in Textile History and Conservation from the University of Rhode Island. Having worked as a textile conservator, she is now studying for her PhD in Folklore at the University of Missouri, Columbia.

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