The Ottomans were a Turkish dynasty that governed a multiethnic, multilingual and multi-religious population and ruled an empire that spread over much of southeast Europe, Western Asia, North Africa, and the Horn of Africa for six hundred years. In the middle of the sixteenth century, Ottoman court artists developed a new style characterized by a vocabulary of highly stylized, distinctive, yet easily recognizable garden flowers: *lale* (tulip), *gül* (rose), *gonca* (rosebud), *sümbül* (hyacinth), *karanfil* (carnation), and *hanimeli* (honeysuckle).

The style was initially a court-centered phenomenon that established both an Ottoman aesthetic and an Ottoman brand, which then spread to other artistic productions and traditions. In a sense, this style enabled Ottoman culture to find a pictorial voice through which to express its identity. In the centuries following its creation, the floral style had a profound impact on the broader spectrum of artistic production. The impact of this new style has been evident not merely in the Ottoman world of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but also across four centuries since that time, in the Ottoman Empire, modern Turkey, and in the broader Islamic world and Europe.

Textile designs favored in the sixteenth century Ottoman court in Istanbul exhibited very strong colors in jewel tones. The designs were powerful visually, attractive to look at, and were adaptable to a variety of cultural preferences. This textile represents the Ottoman aesthetic sensibilities by combining the power of large-scale
ornamentation, seen in the medallions themselves, and the delicacy of the beautifully executed floral sprays inside the medallions and along the ogival lattice.

The ogival layout was the one most frequently employed by Istanbul silk weavers in the sixteenth century. It allowed for fairly large basic units—the staggered rows of ogival medallions—while at the same time allowing for a delicacy of detail and a subtlety of design that was highly prized by Ottoman artists and their patrons alike. Incorporated into a court costume, this fabric would have made a strong impact at a distance, which would have been reinforced by an impression of ornate and detailed richness as the viewer came closer.

Known as kemha, this fabric showcases two interconnected weave structures (satin and twill weaves), with colorful motifs incorporating gilt silver- or gold-wrapped metal yarns in their designs, usually in twill weave, on a satin weave background.

The design of this kemha length consists of a major ogival lattice on a bright red ground, created by wide gold bands bearing minor decorative elements of white interlaced thin ribbon from which small red tulips grow. This gold band is outlined on both sides with a thin blue feathered band. The spaces created by the ogival lattice bear large medallions. Each medallion in turn bears an oak leaf with a single rosebud, two carnations and two tulips. The rest of the surface of the medallion is dominated by two large blue cloudbands with elegant knots.

Silk warp and weft yarns, metal-wrapped silk supplementary weft yarns; satin weave patterned with twill weave
The Textile Museum 1.70, acquired by George Hewitt Myers in 1952

Written by Sumru Belger Krody
Bordered by Turkey, Iran, and Russia, the Caucasus has been an arena for political, military, religious and cultural rivalries and expansionism for centuries. The result of these events is an ethnic, religious, artistic, and cultural melting pot of the three surrounding regions. Drawing from the rich and varied influences of its neighbors, the diverse Caucasian peoples have created distinctive art forms, which include textiles.

This eighteenth century cover features bold stylized floral designs and strong colors that are similar to those found in seventeenth-century carpets attributed to southern Caucasus and northwestern Iran. The embroidered covers are proof that a single design repertoire was preserved and shared by people in the regions west of the Caspian Sea.

At the time period this embroidered cover was made, textile production in the Caucasus was centered in the homes, rather than in organized workshops. Depending on the quality of the material used, embroiderers encounter technical constraints and challenges, and each embroiderer must confront them by altering and adjusting the design as they embroider. This is especially true for very curvilinear floral designs. The thickness of yarns used for embroidery, the skill of the embroiderer, the complexity of original design, and the tradition are all factors that affect the final design.

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The source designs for this group of embroidered textiles and carpets might derive from sources originating in the sixteenth century, possibly silk textiles woven on complex looms. Over millennia, costly silk textiles were among the most valuable items available, and were only accessible by the wealthy. Thus silk textile designs were widely copied in less expensive media, such as knotted-pile carpets and embroidered textiles, an important source for imitation to people in towns and villages who wanted to be fashionable.

Cotton warp and weft, silk embroidery thread; plain weave, embroidered in cross-stitch
The Textile Museum 2.18, acquired by George Hewitt Myers in 1952

Written by Sumru Belger Krody
Identity Markers

Textile fragment, possibly from a jacket
Safavid dynasty (1501-1736), Iran, mid-16th century

Achieving a complex design such as the one seen on this textile and executing it in the complicated velvet weaving are extraordinary feats of achievement. The motifs and colors chosen for this fabric and the costly materials used in its making indicate that this jacket was made for a gentleman who might have been a member of the Safavid court and had immense wealth and very refined taste.

The masterful work of the designer and the weaver makes it easy to identify the cast of characters in the medallion; they were drawn extremely well and with great detail. The dresses and headgear of the figures in the lobed medallions identify the man with the bird on his arm as a high ranking person, a Safavid courtier. He has the famous Safavid turban with its long red inner structure, called tāj. Very careful and correct representation of this hat points to the fact that this textile was woven in the mid-sixteenth century during the reign of Shah Tahmasp (1514–1576). The other person, holding a small bucket, is the servant; he is less well dressed and does not have the famous turban. The bird on the courtier’s arm is no ordinary bird either; it is a bird of prey, a falcon, probably a peregrine falcon. What is about to be hunted, but still flying above, is a duck.

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Anyone familiar with European and Asian culture and art quickly recognizes the scene presented on this velvet textile as a courtly hunt, more specifically falconry. Falconry was a popular sport and status symbol among the nobles of medieval Europe and Asia. Both Christian and Muslim courtiers were able to understand the visual vocabulary of falconry and recognized the imagery instantly. Falconry was largely restricted to the noble classes due to the prerequisite commitment of time, money, and space. This sport remained a status symbol long after it was no longer popularly practiced, as late as the eighteenth century.

Silk warp and weft yarns, metal-wrapped silk supplementary weft yarns; voided and brocaded velvet
The Textile Museum 3.219, acquired by George Hewitt Myers in 1938

Written by Sumru Belger Krody
Textile fragment
*Mughal empire (1526-1857), India, 17th century*

This textile is an example of the luxury arts created in abundance for the court of the Mughal emperors. While the floral style emerged gradually in Mughal art, it is perhaps most strongly associated with the reign of Shah Jahan (r. 1628-1666). From the mid-seventeenth century onwards, flowers permeated Mughal art as the dominant decorative motif. Their impact persisted in Indian art long after the Mughal empire functioned as an effective ruling force.

The flower represented in profile on this textile is easily recognizable as the poppy. Mughal artists, however, drew poppies differently than artists in other Islamic cultures because of the distinctive artistic preferences. Mughal artists, like their Safavid and Ottoman contemporaries, created a culturally distinct visual language based on floral designs while using compositions similar to European botanical drawings; many of the flowers were represented, using the motif of the same plant, in their full life-cycle, from bud to full bloom to withered remnant.

Although the European botanical drawings of late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries served as a basis for floral compositions, Mughal artists never slavishly copied them. Instead, they adapted and added details to express their own individual approaches. While borrowing from a foreign culture, they utilized and adapted...
those qualities which were closest to their own inherited artistic heritage. Mughal artists painstakingly recreated many minutely-detailed flower motifs that are easily and taxonomically recognizable, although close examination might reveal much artistic license in the small embellishments of individual flowers.

Silk warp and weft yarns, metal-wrapped silk supplementary weft yarns, silver foil; plain weave with supplementary-weft patterning, calendared
The Textile Museum 6.262, acquired by George Hewitt Myers in 1952

Research partially conducted by Jessica Evans, curatorial intern

Written by Sumru Belger Krody
In Qing-dynasty China, imperial courtiers and government officials wore badges on the front and back of their outer garments to visually communicate their role and rank in the imperial system. Different types of birds identified each of the nine ranks in the Qing civil service, four-legged animals signified the nine ranks of military officers, and mythical animals such as dragons indicated high-ranking courtiers and the imperial family.

Chinese society was extremely stratified during the Qing period, and laws dictated the types of clothing allowed the various social classes. According to the teachings of Confucius (551-479 BCE), which were highly influential during the Qing dynasty, social and even cosmological harmony would prevail if all citizens knew their place in society and acted appropriately in their roles. Conformance to proper dress codes was viewed as particularly important in this regard. Since widely held cosmological beliefs envisioned the earth as square and the heavens round, the civil and military officials who administered the empire wore square badges on their uniforms while the imperial family wore round ones, reflecting the emperor’s status as the “Son of Heaven.” The round shape, small size, yellow color, and front-facing, five-clawed dragon patterns of these badges identified the wearer as the emperor’s young son.

In the previous dynasty, the Ming (1368-1644), the empress’s first-born son became the emperor’s heir apparent, but Qing emperors could choose as their successor whichever son they considered to be the most capable.
IDENTITY MARKERS

among their offspring by the empress and imperial concubines. While Qing emperors enjoyed a sumptuous material life, many of them worked extremely hard and followed a demanding daily schedule in the effort to effectively govern their vast empire. Although these glittering badges vividly proclaimed the wearer’s potential to ascend the “dragon throne,” the emperor’s sons had to demonstrate their worthiness for the position by excelling in their studies and successfully negotiating court intrigue.

Silk warp and weft yarns, metal-wrapped silk weft yarns; slit tapestry weave (kesi)
The Textile Museum 51.29A and B, Acquired by George Hewitt Myers in 1931

Written by Lee Talbot
People across time and cultures have worn garments, hats, and badges that visually identify their occupation. During the late Edo period (1603-1868), certain Japanese firemen wore quilted jackets and hoods like these examples. Made from several layers of sturdy cotton quilted with running stitches (sashiko) this jacket and hood helped to shield the wearer from flying sparks, impacts, and hot flames. When in use these would have been drenched with water to further protect and cool the fireman, whose clothing could weigh as much as eighty pounds when wet.

The Japanese traditionally constructed buildings using highly flammable wood, bamboo, straw, and paper. The frequent outbreak of fires—called with a certain irony edo no hana (the flowers of Edo)—led to a well-developed firefighting system in Edo, the city now called Tokyo.

An Edo firefighter’s uniform also could identify his brigade, rank, and even social class. The buke bikeshi, an elite core drawn from the samurai (military nobility), fought fires in the castles and mansions of the ruling class. High-ranking buke bikeshi wore fine uniforms of expensive wool and leather. The machi-bikeshi, recruited from the chonin (ordinary townsmen), safeguarded the homes and businesses of the commoners. In the late Edo period, leaders of the machi-bikeshi wore quilted cotton coats like this example.

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Many firefighters and their families painstakingly quilted jackets, hoods, and other uniform components at home, but dyeing remained a specialist skill performed in professional workshops. Some firemen’s coats are reversible, with exteriors featuring symbols that identified the wearer’s brigade and interiors richly decorated with pictorial patterns created using tsutsugaki, a freehand paste-resist technique. The interior of this coat depicts a fierce hawk flying above craggy rocks and crashing waves. Firemen’s jacket designs often include images associated with bravery as well as motifs symbolic of water—the peerless ally of firefighters.

After the fire was quelled and during festival celebrations, firemen turned their coats inside out to display the auspicious and protective designs on the interior as they paraded proudly through the streets. Many machi-bikeshi tattooed their bodies with the same vocabulary of motifs that decorated their coats. Both respected and feared in Edo society, firemen were particularly popular heroes among young boys, who admired them for the strength and courage expressed so vividly in these bold patterns.

Coat
Cotton warp and weft yarns; plain weave, paste resist dyed, quilted

Hat
Cotton; quilted, paste resist dyed.
The Textile Museum 1983.65.4, Ruth Lincoln Fisher Memorial Fund

Written by Lee Talbot
**Sarung** (hip wrapper)
_Peranakan (Indonesian Chinese), Indonesia, Java, Pekalongan, 19th century_

When worn by an Indonesian woman of Peranakan birth, this sarung, with its finely worked pattern and extraordinary range of indigo dyes, would indicate a state of mourning. Darker shades of blue would signal a close relationship to the deceased, while more moderate tones implied a more distant relation.

In the color system that most Javanese recognize, the colors progress clockwise from red in the east to yellow, to yellow and red in the south, then to darkened red and some blue in the west and finally dark blue in the north. These colors are paired with the stages of life. In some regions the colors of appropriate costume are dictated by this system. However, this was not true for all ethnic groups. For example, Indo-Europeans reserved the use of blue and white for wedding garments.

Cotton warp and weft yarns; plain weave, hand-drawn wax resist dyed (batik _tulis_)
The Textile Museum 1991.32.1, gift of Mary Jane and Sanford Bloom

Written by Mattiebelle Gittinger
The floral style of this carpet indicates its relationship to Mughal court arts, in particular to the red ground floral carpets associated with the palaces at Jaipur in northern India. The dark red field is covered with a diaper lattice composed of stylized leaves; inside of each cell is a different spray of flowers. The flowers all grow in the same direction, giving the carpet design a directional orientation; there is only one way to view it so that the flowers are right side up.

Characteristic of the Mughal floral style is the greater use of botanical details and more complex compositions than in the arts of the neighboring Islamic empires to the West. This is largely due to the circulation of European herbals, illustrated books describing the medicinal uses of plants, which were a major source of inspiration for the Mughal artists. However, the Mughal artists created more idealized floral representations. Mughal flowers are more symmetrically composed and display a greater degree of orderliness in the individual details of the plant compared to their European originals, which arise from naturalistic representations through direct observations.

The way flowers are represented in art depends upon the artist’s medium. Carpet weaving has technical constraints and challenges, and each carpet weaver must confront them by altering and adjusting as they weave. This is especially true for floral designs. It is the pile that carries the designs in carpets. Thus, a carpet design...
is created knot by knot, row by row. Only a highly skilled weaver can transfer sophisticated curvilinear floral designs, such as the ones seen on this carpet, to this medium. The materials used for the weaving also need to be very fine so that the weaver can pack as many knots as possible into each square inch to create curvilinear lines of flowers in a medium which favors 90° angles. In summary, the thickness of yarns used for warp, weft, and pile, the type of knot, the construction of the loom, the skill of the weaver, the complexity of design, and the weaving tradition are all factors that affect the final carpet design.

Cotton warp yarns, silk and wool weft yarns; plain with supplementary knotted pile, asymmetrical knot that is open left
The Textile Museum 1994.12.1, gift of James D. Burns

Research partially conducted by Jessica Evans, curatorial intern
Written by Sumru Belger Krody
Kazakh man’s coat  
_Uzbekistan, Tashkent (?), second half of the 19th century_

Peoples of Central Asia have developed certain garments to suit the harsh climate and their active way of life on the move from one pasture to another. An array of clothes to be worn in layers was considered necessary on the steppes of Central Asia. One outstanding example is this winter coat, possibly made by a very skilled Uzbek tailor and embroiderer for a Kazakh man of status.

A leather coat like this was worn over a shirt and trousers and, if necessary, a coat made out of felt was worn over all of these. This coat is made of animal skin, possibly doeskin, and since it is intended to be worn loosely over the body, it is not tailored to take the shape of the body. The coat has a standing collar that is incorporated into overlapping front panels on either side of the neck opening. After the coat was sewn together, it was embroidered, lined with printed cotton fabric (possibly imported from Russia), and edged with fur trimming. The embroidery technique, motifs, and colors on this coat contain characteristics of both embroidered textiles from northwestern China and from Uzbekistan, especially Tashkent. The main decoration is on the back of the coat where it falls between the shoulders, and consists of a large roundel of lotus blossoms and leaves surrounding a rosette.

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A doeskin coat, trousers, cap, and boots were often produced as a matching set and would have been constructed in a traditional way and lavishly embroidered. Such items would have been the best set of clothes worn on special occasions and celebrations, were particular signs of wealth, and were quite rare. Such a fine coat would have cost as much as one or more good horses—a man’s most prized possession in the deeply rooted equestrian culture of Central Asia.

Embroidery has long been a feature in Central Asian clothing. On this coat, we see a type of embroidery technique known as tambour work. When it is mastered, tambour work is much quicker than most other forms of embroidery and often used by professional embroidery workshops. Although done on doeskin instead of loosely woven fabric, the embroidery on this coat is very fine, possibly indicating the work of a skilled professional embroiderer. Embroidering on leather is not easy unless the embroiderer is trained and has special equipment for the job. Very often Kazakhs and other nomadic groups commissioned rich and expensive items, especially garments, from settled Uzbek and Tajik craftsmen.

Dating to the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, this coat clearly descends from a traditional Central Asian steppe costume that has remained unchanged in cut and decoration for centuries. It offers a splendid opportunity to appreciate and explore continuity and change in the textile arts of Central Asia. It embodies the cultural crossroads of Asia. The palette and decoration of this garment showcase the influences informing Kazakh culture and art—amalgamating ancient (large motifs outlined in blue), nineteenth-century West Asian (borders), and East Asian (central medallion) motifs.

Doeskin ground, fur border, silk, embroidery thread and cotton lining; embroidered in chain stitch; lined with block printed cotton fabric
The Textile Museum 2002.5.1, gift of Caroline McCoy-Jones

Written by Sumru Belger Krody
Kilim

*Safavid dynasty (1501-1736), Iran, Kashan, late 16th to early 17th century*

This splendid kilim, considered to be one of the finest surviving flat woven carpets from Iran, still retains its vibrant colors and metallic sheen. Its wonderfully animated imagery visually communicates the classic design favored by the opulent Safavid court under the patronage of Shah Abbas I (1588-1629).

The design arrangement of a central medallion with quarter medallions in the corners, framed by a border of alternating cartouches and small lobed-medallions, was developed in the kitābkhāne (royal design atelier), initially for book bindings and illuminated manuscript pages, and then adapted for use in architectural decorations and the decorative arts, which included textiles.

Ornamental motifs of the kilim consist of floral elements, birds, and quadrupeds popular in the decorative arts of the time. Several of these elements, such as the dragon and phoenix in the center and the *qilin* with flaming shoulders and haunches in the corners, are Chinese in origin, but had been absorbed in the Persian ornamental vocabulary. The dragon and phoenix representing benevolent visual symbols in Chinese art, assumed new meanings in the art of Iran and were adapted to conform to the age-old animal combat iconography of the Middle East.

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The craftsmanship apparent in the planning, drawing, and execution of this kilim is quite extraordinary. The precisely laid-out design was executed using the finest materials available at that time. Silk tapestry weave is an exacting textile-making technique. The craftsmen who produced this textile were highly skilled and respected masters in their chosen craft, possibly the best craftsmen in Iran. Their training and apprenticeship would have taken decades before they reached a sufficiently high level of mastery to be selected to work on a project like this. Someone at the court of Shah Abbas I, or Shah Abbas I himself with his great human and financial resources, could have commissioned a kilim of such high quality as this one.

Textile production was the most advanced technology in the world until the industrial age, and creating raw materials and producing textiles were extremely labor intensive. As such, textiles were objects of pivotal importance in pre-modern societies; they were appreciated highly and all strata of society understood their intrinsic value and designs.

Silk warp and weft yarns, metal-wrapped silk; dovetailed tapestry weave
The Textile Museum R33.28.1, acquired by George Hewitt Myers in 1926

Written by Sumru Belger Krody
**Palepai (ceremonial hanging)**

*Paminggir people, Indonesia, Sumatra, Lampung, Possibly the Kalianda Peninsula, 19th century*

This hanging served as the backdrop behind the principal person of a life transition rite, such as a wedding, circumcision or death. The right to use such a hanging, however, was limited to the family of the head of a *suku* (clan). Hung in the inner room of the house, they were flanked on the right and left by cloths belonging to other clans who existed in a similar positional relationship to the principal.

Ship imagery pervades much of the Indonesian archipelago. It may be found in house structure, village layout, ceremonial processions and founding myth. None of these, however, surpasses the arresting imagery of the Sumatran cloths with their dynamic scenes of ships, ancestor shrines, and trees, all rendered by the weavers’ art.

*Cotton warp and weft yarns; plain weave with supplementary-weft patterning*

The Textile Museum 1962.41.1, museum purchase

Written by Mattiebelle Gittinger
Turkmens, organized in tribal groups, lived nomadic and semi-nomadic lives in Central Asia. Their textiles, woven to be functional as well as decorative and ceremonial, were their most treasured possessions. Because they traveled throughout the year with their herds, they used lightweight textiles for protection and transportation. A majority of their textiles were made by women on portable ground looms and were for their family’s consumption.

Among the Turkmen, it was customary for a girl of marriageable age to have woven or made all of the ceremonial items required for the wedding and her new home. These included the textiles used to decorate the camel on which she would ride from her family’s tents to that of the groom. The decorations included a pair of large weavings used to cover the flanks of the camel, one on each side. During the ride, the bride was concealed within a covered litter, or palanquin, carried by a camel decorated with her work. The palanquin was roofed with curved wooden rods and covered with a white curtain decorated with tassels. The decorations outside included a pair of large weavings used to cover the flanks of the camel, one on each side.

Asmalyks were approximately rectangular in shape, but fashioned into a point at the top so that they became five-sided. Due to the importance of the occasion, great care was taken in weaving these decorative hangings,
and they could be among the most spectacular examples of Turkmen woven art, as evidenced by this example. This camel trapping not only advertised the bride’s dexterity and ability as a textile artist, which was considered a crucial asset in marriage negotiations, but also symbolized the transition to a new life as a married woman.

Wool warp and weft yarns; plain weave with supplementary knotted pile, asymmetrical knot that is open right

Written by Sumru Belger Krody
Empress or Empress Dowager’s long gua (surcoat)

Qing dynasty (1644-1912), China, late 19th century

Among the many ceremonies and festivities held at the Qing-dynasty imperial palace, the most lavish and exuberantly celebrated were those associated with weddings. The marriage of a reigning emperor involved many months of planning, and the production of thousands of objects. Labor-intensive products such as textiles and ceramics could require several years to manufacture in sufficient quantity for an imperial wedding. Court artists in Beijing first painted the designs for the needed garments, furnishings, and utensils on paper, and then these plans were sent to silk weavers and porcelain kilns in southern China for meticulous fabrication.

In traditional China, the decorative schemes for objects used in weddings typically included auspicious imagery that conveyed wishes for the couple’s health, happiness, and fertility. Surrounding the imperial dragons on this woman’s surcoat are xuang xi (double happiness) ideograms in red—the color of happiness in Chinese cosmology. During imperial wedding celebrations, “double happiness” characters were displayed throughout the Forbidden City, decorating banners, valances, lanterns, dining utensils, and other articles used in nuptial celebrations.

The roundels on the chest, back, and shoulders of this jacket feature images of the sun, moon, stars, and sacred mountains—four of the so-called “twelve symbols of imperial authority.” Signifying the ruler’s sacral role as

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an intermediary between the heavenly and earthly realms, these ancient motifs were reserved solely for the emperor during the late Qing dynasty. The non-sanctioned appearance of these patterns on a woman’s garment may point to the identity of the surcoat’s original owner. The Empress Dowager Cixi (1835-1908) wielded supreme power in China during the reigns of her son, the Tongzhi emperor (r. 1862-74), and her nephew, the Guangxu emperor (r. 1875-1908). Photographic evidence reveals Cixi’s appropriation of at least several of the twelve authority symbols. The Tongzhi and Guangxu emperors both married their empresses in the Forbidden City with much pomp and circumstance, so Cixi may have commissioned this jacket to wear during one of those occasions.

Silk warp and weft yarns, metal-wrapped silk weft yarns; slit tapestry weave
The Textile Museum 1985.33.288, gift of The Florence Eddowes Morris Collection, Goucher College

Written by Lee Talbot
Kyogen costume  
*Meiji period (1868-1912), Japan, 19th century*

*Kyogen*, the classical comedic theater of Japan, literally means “crazy words” or “wild speech.” It is best known for its brief skits performed in conjunction with Noh plays. In contrast to the formal solemnity of Noh drama, *kyogen* skits are comical, fast-paced, relatively colloquial, and based on the everyday lives and popular folktales of commoners in feudal Japan. *Kyogen* plots usually revolve around cunning servants cleverly hoodwinking their upper-class masters. Like the Italian *commedia dell’arte*, *kyogen* theater features a cast of stock characters largely identified by their costume.

*Kyogen* costumes are based on actual clothing forms worn in medieval Japan. Comprising a short, wide-sleeved jacket paired with long, pleated trousers, this *kyogen* costume, called *suo*, approximates outfits worn by male samurai (military nobility). The decorative patterning on *suo* can help the audience to identify the character wearing it. *Suo* with large patterns in bright colors, often created using time-consuming dyeing techniques such as *yuzen-zome*, distinguish a high-ranking *daimyo* (feudal lord). Unlined *suo*, like the example shown here, with smaller, overall patterns in restrained colors made with cut-paper stencils, signify characters somewhat further down the social ladder, such as small landowners, gentlemen farmers, and financially-strapped samurai.

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The sinuous pattern on this suo, suggesting the rapidly eddying effect of rippling water, was created with black ink stenciled over a plain-weave hemp ground fabric dyed light blue with indigo. Traditional Japanese garments for formal occasions feature ka-mon (family crests) emblazoned across the back and shoulders. The design of this suo includes standard “kyogen crests” in the form of snowflakes enclosing dandelions.

Hemp warp and weft yarns; plain weave, stenciled paste resist dyed
The Textile Museum 2003.34.1a and b, gift of Caroline McCoy-Jones

Written by Lee Talbot
Kimono and replacement sleeves
Showa period (1926-1989), Japan, 1930s

A Japanese kimono’s materials, color, patterning, and tailoring can convey multiple messages about the wearer’s identity as well as the occasion and season of the year. As evidenced by this kimono, sleeve length can indicate a woman’s marital status. For formal events, unmarried young women traditionally dress in furisode, long-sleeved kimono like this example, while married women wear kimono with shorter sleeves. This furisode, created in the late 1930s in the Tango region of Kyoto Prefecture for a young woman to wear during her wedding ceremony, is accompanied by a pair of kaesode (shorter replacement sleeves) that could be attached after the wedding to render it appropriate for use in her new life as a wife.

The color of a kimono’s fabric and its number or absence of kamon (family crests) communicate the garment’s formality. This furisode’s predominant black color and inclusion of five family crests represent the highest level of formality. At the time this kimono was made, the most expensive and highly regarded women’s garments often were patterned using time-consuming yuzen—a paste-resist and brush dyeing technique that allows the creation of freehand designs in multiple colors. This furisode features a finely rendered yuzen-dyed pattern of stylized pine trees. Symbolizing long life, good fortune and steadfastness in Japanese culture, pine trees are widely evoked motifs in weddings and New Year’s festivities.

The interior of the furisode is fully lined with lustrous silk dyed brilliant red with safflower (benibana). During the Edo period, sumptuary laws demanded that all citizens dress in colors and styles assigned by social class,
and banned commoners from wearing red kimono. Some wealthy commoners subtly flouted this law by lining their kimono with forbidden red silk. The flash of bright red revealed with the wearer’s body movements epitomized the notion of *iki*—sophisticated and restrained chic. Connoting youthful beauty and charm in traditional Japan, red remained a popular color for kimono lining through the first few decades of the 20th century.

*Silk warp and weft yarns; plain weave, paste resist dyed*

The Textile Museum 2010.11.1a-c, Naoki Nomura collection.

Written by Lee Talbot
In the year 1544, the Mughal emperor Humayun (1508-1556) came to the Safavid court seeking Shah Tahmasp I’s (1514-1576) help to recapture his kingdom. Tahmasp I obliged and Humayun eventually recovered his throne. This cemented a centuries-long artistic and commercial relationship between Safavid Iran and Mughal India in which goods flowed in both directions. Luxury textiles were one of the most highly valued and sought after commodities. The fabric of this jacket was probably woven in India and was brought into Iran by Indian merchants from Gujarat in northwestern India. Indian merchant communities were established in most of the major Persian cities by this period.

There are various characteristics contained in the fabric that point to a provenance of Mughal India rather than of Safavid Iran. The fabric is thin and pliant, as well as being calendared for a glossy surface, often characteristic of Mughal fabrics. The tulip stems are surrounded by generous amounts of interstitial space, creating an open and airy design. The level of naturalism achieved in the representation of the botanical specimen also points to Mughal artists. Tulip stems are enclosed in diamond-shape frames forming a subtle lattice pattern. This lattice was stamped on the fabric after weaving and the glossy surface creates a perfect reflective surface for this decorative technique favored by Mughal textile artists.
The term *cadabi* is frequently used to describe a man’s close-fitting robe with bell-shaped skirt that became fashionable in the seventeenth century Iranian court of the Safavid dynasty. The coat has long sleeves tapering to the wrists and pointed cuffs. The hem of the coat reaches to the mid-thigh or just above the knees but not to the ankles, as was required of a woman’s coat. Also, the front opening is cut in a straight line that is closed off with horizontal rows of gold frogged braids and knob-shaped buttons, and not in a V-shape as expected in a woman’s coat.

The robe could be combined with a neat belt or the folds of a knotted sash. A coat worn over the robe, of similar shape with shorter sleeves and skirt, was made of silver or gold brocade patterned with variations of the popular flower motifs woven in colored silk. Headdresses were equally ostentatious. One historical fact that is often overlooked is that due to the regular commercial and political contact between Iran and Europe in the seventeenth century, notably Britain and the Netherlands, the concept of the three-piece suit, fundamental apparel in Asian steppe cultures, has survived to this day as the classic form of three-piece male apparel.

Silk warp and weft yarns, metal-wrapped silk supplementary weft yarns, silver foil; twill weave with weft substitution, stamped The Textile Museum 3.112, acquired by George Hewitt Myers in 1927

Research partially conducted by Elsa Yvanez, curatorial intern

Written by Sumru Belger Krody
Carpet

*Mamluk sultanate (1250-1517), Egypt, Cairo, ca. 1500*

Carpets, such as this impressive example, were woven in Egypt between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries during the Mamluk dynasty. Many carpets of this style were attributed to Cairo workshops, and they clearly reflect the environment of a flourishing and luxurious city with international links.

Many Mamluk-style carpets were of large size. There are even examples of square or circular shapes and those seem to have been specially made for export to Europe for use on tables. Although considerable numbers of these carpets were exported to Western Europe and survived in European collections, surprisingly little evidence of their presence has been found in European paintings. Their large size, complex designs, and analogous colors might have made these carpets unbefitting or undesirable as subjects for painters.

Mamluk-style carpets are readily distinguishable from their contemporaries woven in Iran, Turkey, and Spain by their designs, colors, and structural characteristics. First, their overall design is contained and centralized; they do not have infinitely repeating patterns. Mamluk designs are centralized on a large and dominant octagonal medallion, with a great variety of smaller motifs arranged around it. Some of the characteristic Mamluk carpet motifs are umbrella leaves, lancet leaves, and cartouche borders, all of which are present on this carpet.

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Although the repertory of motifs was fairly small, the designs of the Mamluk-style carpets were quite varied. Second, the colors often are limited to a very special tone of red and light tones of blue and green with occasional light yellow highlights. Their red dye is lac instead of madder. Third, this group of carpets differs structurally from Turkish, Persian and Spanish carpets, because their wool is spun in an S direction instead of the more usual Z direction. They are also knotted with the asymmetrical knot, as was often the case with carpets from Iran.

Wool warp and weft yarns; plain weave with supplementary knotted pile, asymmetrical knot that is open left
The Textile Museum R16.2.4, acquired by George Hewitt Myers in 1927
Written by Sumru Belger Krody
COSMOPOLITAN IDENTITY

Carpet
Safavid dynasty (1501-1736), Northwestern Iran, 16th or early 17th century

By the middle of the sixteenth century, Iran was an important producer of luxury textiles that gained renown abroad for their beauty and craftsmanship. Safavid carpets first came to the attention of Europeans in the early seventeenth century and from the beginning were valued more highly than Turkish carpets. Shah Abbas I (1588-1629) reigned over extensive urban planning and development, the encouragement of industry and trade, and economic reforms. Carpets produced as part of this economic boom were aimed especially at a luxury market, namely the Safavid court and its satellite courts, palatial houses of the Persian elite, grand mosques, churches, perhaps synagogues, the elite of Mughal India and, to a limited extent, the European nobility.

Some measure of the popularity of Safavid textiles can be gained from their appearance in European painting, which rose to a peak in Dutch painting around the 1660s. Another measure is provided by the records of various merchant companies returning with Persian carpets for personal use or for sale; The Dutch East India Company during 1651-66 carried as cargo 522 woolen and 32 silk carpets from Iran to Europe. Even the English East India Company tentatively explored their domestic market potential, selling fourteen Persian carpets in 1687 and seventeen in 1688.

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These classical carpets produced in commercial workshops are defined by the shared main feature of their design: a central, deeply indented star medallion with pendant cartouches and finials overlaid on top of finely-drawn leaf and floral scroll. Medallion designs dominated carpet making in Iran in the sixteenth century. The finest sixteenth-century Persian carpets produced for the Safavid court and for grand shrines were designed by accomplished painters working in royal kitābkhāne (design atelier) and woven by very skilled weavers. The finest carpets were the design inspiration for the later classical carpets such as this example, which by itself is splendidly impressive and monumental.

Cotton warp yarns, wool weft yarns; plain weave with supplementary knotted pile, asymmetrical knot that is open left
The Textile Museum R33.1.2, acquired by George Hewitt Myers in 1926

Written by Sumru Belger Krody
COSMOPOLITAN IDENTITY

Carpet

*Ottoman empire (1299-1923), Turkey, Uşak, second half of the 17th century*

The largest and grandest of the Ottoman Turkish carpets are the so-called Medallion Ushak carpets. These highly prized carpets appear to have been woven from the late fifteenth into the eighteenth centuries and were attributed to the town of Uşak (Ushak) in western Anatolia. The immense sizes and complex and continuously curvilinear designs of these carpets must have required huge financial capital and large and well-organized workshops, located presumably in a flourishing urban environment, such as that of Uşak, although “Ushak” is often used as simply a convenient group-name rather than as an accurate attribution.

Medallion Ushak carpets make their earliest appearance in European paintings in the mid sixteenth century in the works by artist such as Zurbarán, Velasquez, Vermeer, de Heere and ter Borch. Immensely coveted, these carpets were exported in great numbers and became status symbols. They are seen in paintings accompanying, either on a table or underfoot, the elite of most Western European counties.

A blue/green-ground central medallion and four half medallions of different type in the corners float on the deep wine-red plain central field of this carpet, and create the illusion of an infinitely repeating pattern. The medallion design, characteristic of the group, sometimes was elaborated with additional floral scrolls. This carpet displays a slightly simplified version of a medallion design originally developed further east than Anatolia,
probably in Central Asia; how, why, and exactly when this design and associated design ideas arrived to Anatolia have not been fully identified yet. The Medallion Ushak style carpets were the work of carpet designers in court and commercial carpet workshops, working in response to these eastern influences.

Wool warp and weft yarns; plain weave with supplementary knotted pile, symmetrical knot
The Textile Museum R34.1.7, acquired by George Hewitt Myers in 1922

Written by Sumru Belger Krody
Cover or hanging  
*Portugal, Arraiolos, 17th century*

The design of this large textile is a graphic reminder of Portugal’s complex history of international trade and conquest. The cover belongs to a group of textiles known as “Arraiolos carpets.” They were embroidered in wool on a plain woven fabric of jute, cotton, or linen, and are attributed to the village of Arraiolos in central Portugal.

The design bears a strong resemblance to sixteenth and seventeenth century carpets imported from Safavid Iran, especially the sumptuous Kashan silk carpets. The original Persian models would have had one large small-lobed medallion superimposed on a balanced arrangement of graceful floral stems and, possibly, lively animals or combat groups. Here, the design was artfully synthesized and reformulated by a Portuguese embroiderer.

The discovery of a direct sea route from Portugal to India in 1498, the establishment of a new Safavid Dynasty in Iran, and the arrival of the first Portuguese ambassadorial mission to the capital of Isfahan six years later in 1507 all had a direct effect on the availability of Persian carpets in Portugal. In the sixteenth century, Lisbon became the first port-of-call for Persian carpets and they soon became for Portugal, symbolically and economically, what the Turkish carpet had been for Italy and Venice during the previous century.
The Portuguese elite responded with enthusiasm to the sheer beauty of Persian carpets, and inventories of royal and aristocratic households record their arrival in lavish detail from at least the 1550s onward. Silk Kashan carpets in the inventories of Queen Catarina (1507-1578) and the Fifth Duke of Bragaça, D. Teodósio I (1520-1563), in particular attest to the availability of very high-end silk carpets from Iran. Their enormous prestige arose from their high cost, novel designs, and luxurious use of silk. Persian carpets were worth three times the value of Turkish wool carpets with equivalent dimensions, and at least three and even fifty times the price of a painting by a famous contemporary painter. Thus their designs were imitated frequently for other locally produced textiles, such as the embroidered “carpets” from Arraiolos.

Linen warp and weft yarns, wool embroidery thread; plain weave, embroidered in herringbone stitch
The Textile Museum R44.6.1, acquired by George Hewitt Myers in 1945

Written by Sumru Belger Krody
Prayer cloth
Qajar dynasty (1785-1925), Iran, Tabriz (?), 18th to 19th century

Prayer cloths—seccade (sajjadah) or namazlık (namazlyk)—are easily recognized through their depictions of an arch. These arches are generally assumed to symbolize the mihrab, or prayer niche, in every mosque, which traditionally marks the direction to Mecca that worshippers are to face. A prayer cloth provides the ritual “clean place” required for the performance of the five daily Muslim prayers (salat).

One of the finest forms of Persian embroidery, called “white work,” was done on balanced plain weave white cotton ground fabric with white silk embroidery threads. Although the stitches—stem stitch, satin stitch and two variations of hem stitch—used for this work are basic embroidery stitches seen in many other types of embroidery, the delicate scale of the workmanship is masterly.

The characteristic of this embroidery is the contrast it creates in many forms. The matte surface of the ground fabric contrasts with the sheen of the silk floss embroidery threads. In addition, by varying the direction of the satin stitches, the embroiderer has created a shimmering surface for silk threads, which reflects light at different angles and creates a second type of contrast. An octagonal medallion with delicate naturalistic floral motifs surrounded by sinuous lines of Arabic script creates yet another contrast with the very stylized motifs, placed in diagonal alignment, covering the rest of the prayer cloth.

Cotton warp and weft, silk embroidery thread; plain weave, embroidered in stem stitch and satin stitch with drawn and deflected element work
The Textile Museum 3.3, gift of Louise Chase Myers, 1958

Written by Sumru Belger Krody
Fragment from a jacket made of *tiraz* fabric
*Buyid dynasty (934-1062), Iran, Shiraz or Iraq, Baghdad, ca. 1000 (banner fabric), 11th or 12th century (jacket construction)*

This exquisite silk textile, a banner, had a life full of twists and turns. It was produced around 1000 C.E. for Adud al’Dawla, the Buyid ruler of Iran. He presented it to his treasurer, Abu Said Zadanfarrukh, as *khil’a*, a gift to honor stellar military and public service. The costly material (silk) and technique (*samit*/compound weft-faced twill woven on a drawloom), large size of the original textile, and personalized nature of the inscription on it would suggest that the textile was unique. It may have been hung at an entryway, heralding the eminent presence of someone favored by the ruler, or perhaps it was a literal herald, a banner that was displayed whenever Zadanfarrukh was performing official duties. It would then have served to legitimize the treasurer’s authority as a designated officer of Baha al’Dawla. Supplying appointed officials with banners was a known practice of investiture among the Abbasid caliphs in the ninth and tenth centuries, a practice the Buyid amirs, such as Baha al’Dawla, would have continued.

About two hundred years after its weaving and its use as banner, the textile was turned into a jacket, possibly a talismanic garment protecting the wearer. The garment became part of the sepulchral textiles buried in the Bibi Shahr Banu Shrine near Rayy, Iran.
SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

*Tiraz,* a Persian word meaning adornment or embellishment, is usually understood as inscribed adornment or embellishment, through embroidery or other techniques, on a garment or furnishing. These written embellishments were fashionable in the early Islamic period from the ninth to the twelfth centuries. They contained formulaic pious sayings and blessings, and often included the current Muslim spiritual leader’s (caliph’s) name, the factory or town where the textile was woven, the date of production, and the official in charge of the factory.

The date of this textile has been gleaned from information in the two lines of inscription. The first, larger line reads: “Glory and prosperity to the King of Kings, Baha al’Dawla, Light of the People, Strengthener of the Nation, Father of Victory, the son of Adud al’Dawl, Crown of the People, may his life be long.” Since this Buyid ruler reigned from 989 to 1012 CE, we can establish these dates as parameters for the date of production. Below, in smaller script, a second inscription reads: “For the use of Abu Said, Zadanfarrukh ibn Azadmard, the Treasurer.” Since Zadanfarrukh was treasurer to Baha al’Dawla in 1001, many scholars believe this to have been the precise year in which the textile was produced.

The original size of the textile was probably six to nine feet wide, with no indications of its length. The *kufic* lettering is consistent with other examples from the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. The deep yellow silk used for the inscription appears to emulate more costly gold-wrapped threads.

*Kufic* is a writing style used for Arabic script. The style is characterized by a straight angular shape of lettering, and it is a term associated with the town of Kufa in southern Iraq, one of the main centers for the development of Arabic scripts. Even though other types of script were developed in later centuries, *kufic* remained the most common form of writing used in architecture and art objects, because of its graphic qualities.

Silk warp and weft yarns; complementary-weft weave with twill effect (*samit*)
The Textile Museum 3.116, acquired by George Hewitt Myers in 1927

Research partially conducted by Meredyth Winter, curatorial intern

Written by Sumru Belger Krody
SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

Daoist Priest’s Robe
*Qing dynasty (1644-1912), China, late 18th to early 19th Century*

The *jiangyi* (“robes of descent”) worn by Daoist priests are among the most technically accomplished and visually splendid works of Chinese textile art. Made using the highest quality materials and workmanship, this robe would have been worn by a high-ranking priest when conducting certain Daoist rituals and ceremonies. Most of the colorful patterning is embroidered on the back, visible to worshippers as the priest faced the altar. These symbolic motifs graphically communicated ideas of cosmic harmony, universal order, and the priest’s role as an intermediary between heaven and earth.

The central roundel on the back depicts the palace of the Jade Emperor, the ruler of the Daoist heavens, surrounded by golden circles representing the twenty-eight “lunar mansions” – constellations situated along the moon’s orbit. The three large discs on the upper back signify the heavens of Jade Purity, Great Purity, and Highest Purity, the celestial homes of The Three Pure Ones, revered deities in the Daoist belief system. On either side of these three disks are an embroidered sun, containing an image of a rooster, and the moon, shown with a rabbit pounding the elixir of immortality. White cranes, symbols of long life and vehicles for Daoist immortals on their journeys through the heavens, fly among five-colored clouds, potent harbingers of an auspicious event. The dazzling colors and meaningful patterns on this robe, created with consummate artistry in precious silk and gold, served to emphasize the priest’s spiritual efficacy and to transform the temporal setting into a sacred space where the human and numinous worlds could commune.

Silk warp and weft yarns, metal-wrapped silk yarns; satin weave, embroidered, mostly in satin stitch and couching
The Textile Museum 51.24, acquired by George Hewitt Myers in 1929

Written by Lee Talbot
SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

Garment fragment
*Nasrid dynasty (1238-1486), Spain, Granada, early 15th century*

During and after the Crusades, Europeans became increasingly interested in acquiring sumptuous Islamic and Asian textiles. Such fabrics frequently appeared in paintings to signal their wearer’s elite status. The fabrics often were donated to church treasuries for use in religious ceremonies. More fascinating yet is the role of the band of Arabic calligraphy that appears on these textiles. Unfamiliar with Arabic inscriptions, later Europeans often mistakenly associated the language and the textiles with their perceived place of origin—the Holy Land—and used them to express reverence for the Eastern roots of Christianity.

The refined silks produced in Al-Andalus and the later Nasrid Kingdom (1230-1492), which was based in Granada in southern Spain, were also coveted by Christians in the north of the Iberian Peninsula. Kings and bishops acquired such textiles through direct commerce, as diplomatic gifts, and as trophies and spoils of war. Surprisingly enough, a large number of silks, as well as other luxury goods, from Islamic Spain have been preserved through the centuries in Spanish ecclesiastical treasuries. In addition to being used as hangings and vestments in religious ceremonies, Islamic silks were employed as wrappings for saintly relics and as burial shrouds for Christian royalty.

The foliated cursive inscription of this textile transmits ideas neither political nor religious, but prosaically secular. It reads: “*I am for pleasure. Welcome. For pleasure am I. And he who beholds me sees joy and delight.*” This poem refers to the textile itself and might have been composed for this purpose.

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Complex-woven silk textiles with Arabic inscriptions and blocks of abstract design elements in horizontal bands became popular throughout the Islamic world in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. This was a result of increased contact through commercial trade routes between Central Asia and the Mediterranean following the Mongol invasions of the mid-thirteenth century. A record dated 1306 states that the ruling Sultan in Cairo, Muhammad an-Nasr ibn Qala‘un, sent Egyptian silk textiles and other gifts to James II in Barcelona. Such a gift may well have provided the Egyptian prototype for this design, in which bands containing Arabic inscriptions alternate with interlacing foliation.

The red ground bands contain a repeated Arabic inscription that combines some of the local Maghribi style with delicate swinging curves, and ornate curved upper endings of the verticals with thuluth style writing. Thuluth is a large and elegant cursive Arabic script style which made its first appearance in the eleventh century. The curved and oblique lines of the thuluth script replaced the straight angular forms of kufic. In thuluth, one-third of each letter slopes, from which the name, which means “a third” in Arabic, comes. Various calligraphic styles evolved from thuluth through slight changes of form, such as the one seen on this textile.

Enough fourteenth- and fifteenth-century textiles displaying varying renditions of Arabic inscriptions and abstract design elements in horizontal bands survived to evidence of the popularity of the design. Both the fine drawing and coloring on this textile suggest a first half of the fifteenth-century date. Without any specific Sultan’s name attached to the inscription, it is assumed that the original textile of which this is a part was woven in Nasrid workshops for commercial sale. Subsequently, it was cut to form part of a Christian ecclesiastical vestment.

Silk warp and weft yarns; satin weave patterned with twill weave
The Textile Museum 84.29, acquired by George Hewitt Myers in 1936

Research partially conducted by Sana Mirza, curatorial intern

Written by Sumru Belger Krody
The function and iconography of this textile remain mysterious, although its imagery might have some religious significance. There was no writing system in Peru before the Spanish conquest, making it impossible for scholars to answer all the questions about the culture and arts of the region.

In the Americas, indigenous looms did not produce yardage, as Eurasian treadle looms did. Rather, fabrics were woven to the exact size needed, with selvedges on all four sides. This textile takes this idea to its extreme, where each color area has selvedges on all edges, and the yarns of adjacent color areas are interlocked. In small areas it is not possible to use the normal loom mechanism and the yarns must be darned in with a needle; the process is therefore very time consuming, and seems to have been prestigious on that account.
Many textiles come into our hands with little information to tell us about their origins and history. It becomes our task to unravel the mysteries that these textiles hide, a very engaging pursuit for many curious minds.

The identity of this garment is a mystery, although we can identify the Islamic textiles that were used in its construction. The shape of this garment, a cope, deviates from the usual ecclesiastical vestment of a long semicircular cloak. When opened, this garment, instead, takes the shape of a large circle. Nonetheless, it is thought to have been worn by priests in the large Christian Armenian community of New Julfa, near Isfahan.

The primary fabric creating the body of the garment is a late sixteenth century Ottoman Turkish fabric. The secondary fabric, cut in bias strips and added to the edges to frame the garment, is of early seventeenth-century Safavid Iranian origin. Both the Turkish and Iranian fabrics on this garment represent the high artistic and technical standards achieved by Ottoman and Safavid court weavers.

The crescent motif is closely associated with Islam and widely used in Ottoman arts. The smaller inside circles of the crescents have a yellow ground and are detailed with eight small and eight medium sized silver stars surrounding a large central silver star with a smaller six pointed red star in its center. The rest of the red circle is filled with cloud bands that create double S shapes punctuated by small rosettes. The cloudband motif was very
SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

popular in the late fifteenth century in the West Asia, especially in the late fifteenth century in the Akkoyunlu court of Iran. From there it was introduced into the repertoire of Ottoman motifs in the early sixteenth century. The motif plays a more dominant role in Ottoman illuminations and pottery. In the textile arts, it is often relegated to a secondary role or, like the crescents seen on this garment, fills in the larger more dominant motifs.

The garment is framed by a very interesting Iranian lampas fabric cut in bias strips. The design of the fabric is made out of compartments. Each compartment represents a scene and a cartouche containing inscriptions. There are four scenes, two of which are clearly identifiable as being from the Layla and Majnun love story. One shows Layla in her houdah on top of a camel. In the other compartment, her famous beloved Majnun is depicted in his wilderness state as he befriends wild animals, one of which sits on his lap. These two scenes are placed one above the other in the fabric. The third compartment contains a falconer on horseback while the fourth depicts perhaps a prince with an attendant who holds a drinking cup while both ride on top of an elephant. These last two scenes also are paired one above the other. All the compartments are placed in a staggered fashion in vertical stripes. The presentation of the Layla and Majnun scenes is very similar to those appearing on works by Ghiyath, who was active in the court of Shah Abbas I (r. 1588-1629), thus indicating a possibility that this fabric may have been produced in the same artistic milieu.

This brings us to the most interesting characteristic of the garment, the presence of Ottoman Turkish and Safavid Persian textiles in one single garment. It is thought to be the only known garment made with both Turkish and Iranian silk fabrics. This blend and ‘internal evidence’ suggested by scholars that it was tailored in Iran, and that it may have been worn by Armenian Christian priests in New Julfa, near Isfahan. If true, the cope could have been constructed no earlier than 1604-05.

It is not clear how the Ottoman fabric found its way to Iran. Was it a diplomatic gift or plunder? Either one is a strong possibility. Both the Turkish fabric and Iranian fabric on this cope represent the high artistic and technical standards achieved by the Ottoman and Safavid court weavers. Finding both on the same garment is a pleasure and a puzzle to solve.

Silk warp and weft yarns; satin weave patterned with twill weave
The Textile Museum 1994.27.2, gift of the Neutrogena Corporation

Research partially conducted by Elsa Yvanez, curatorial intern

Written by Sumru Belger Krody
Ritual Cloth (*Pua Kumbu*)
*Iban people, Malaya, Sarawak, Baleh area, 19th century*

Large, intricately patterned cloths like this warp ikat were hung at Iban ceremonies to entice ancestors and the gods to attend and bless the occasion. They define a ritual space, cover ritual food or assist a shaman in his journey.

This cloth from the 19th century has large vertical serpent forms, one of the most powerful Iban images. The serpent occurs in Iban origin myths and guards the door to the land of the dead. The weaver acknowledges the fearsome aspect of the serpent and places a small offering in its mouth.

Patterned cloth among the Iban is not meant for everyday use. Rather, it is an element of ceremony and may be essential to the efficacy of ritual. All patterns are not equal. Some, such as the serpent, are so powerful that they endanger the weaver. Only ritually strong and experienced weavers undertake such patterns. Such courage earns the weaver prestige in her society equal to that of great warriors.

* Cotton warp and weft yarns; warp-faced plain weave, warp ikat
* The Textile Museum 2000.22.8, gift of the Christensen Fund
* Written by Mattiebelle Gittinger
SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

O henro-gi (Buddhist pilgrim’s jacket)
Taisho (1912-1926) or Showa (1926-1989) period, Japan, first half of the 20th century

Followers of many faiths worldwide embark on pilgrimages—journeys of spiritual significance, usually to a sacred place, undertaken as an act of devotion. Buddhist pilgrims in Japan, known as o-henro-san, usually wear an outfit comprising a conical hat, a walking staff, and a white cotton jacket like this example. Undyed, white fabric can symbolize purity, the renunciation of worldly luxury, and death in Japanese culture.

Most of Japan’s approximately 300 pilgrimage circuits include either 33 or 88 sacred sites—numbers auspicious in Buddhism—and a pilgrim usually visits them in a set order. These pilgrimages are often physically arduous and may require many weeks to complete. When pilgrims arrive at a sacred site, they recite a Buddhist chant or sutra and then may receive the temple’s cinnabar stamp and inscription in a booklet or on their jacket to document the visit.

This jacket made of hand-stitched, hand-woven cotton, likely dates to the middle of the 20th century. It graphically traces the journey a pilgrim who traveled the Kumano kodo (Kumano pilgrimage route), which passes through the Kii Peninsula and Mt. Koya, the headquarters of the Japanese Shingon sect. Devout believers consider these jackets to be imbued with great spiritual power, and after the pilgrimage may wear them when dying and, after death, during cremation.

Cotton warp and weft yarns; plain weave, stamped

Written by Lee Talbot
SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

Talismanic shirt
_Burma, Mandalay (?), 19th century_

The magic of the written word comes to a climax in the inscribed talismanic textiles of Burma, Thailand, and Laos. Inscriptions by Buddhist monks or shamans, trained in the esoteric arts, on cotton vests, shirts, carrying cloths, and token squares, empower the cloths. Although the script used was most often unintelligible or the language foreign, the perceived message was one of protection and mythic power. Worn by men, the shirts and vests were thought to provide protection against injury from weapons, sickness, or malevolent spirits. More recently, similarly inscribed garments are called upon to enhance fortune, strength, and virility. Both women and men may seek protection in an inscribed carrying cloth, particularly when traveling. In addition, home builders strategically place small inscribed squares to help guarantee the welfare of the house and its inhabitants.

The front of this shirt, once worn by a Burmese Shan, has a mosaic of inscribed grids cast in rectangular shapes called _yantra_. Usually these are inscribed with esoteric chants known as mantras or a few letters that represent an entire verse. Occasionally a few numbers that encode sayings will be inscribed. The back of the shirt carries similar features arranged in bilateral symmetry about an image of the Buddha, which is framed in an arch of text. The Buddha’s right hand touches the earth in the powerful _mudra_ of calling the earth to witness his enlightenment. The animal forms that contain _yantra_ on the front and back may originate in animistic concepts reflecting the syncretic religious nature of the textiles.

continued >
SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

These inscriptions on cloth are drawn only by those with spiritual power and understanding of the magical and religious arts. They employ a variety of scripts not commonly in use, such as old Mon, Khmer, or Burmese. The script here is a form of Khmer. These are rarely understood by the layman, which increases their mystical power. The shirt is known as suea yan in Thailand and engwet engyi in Burma where it was purchased. Such talismanic shirts are rarely seen today. Instead, small printed textiles now serve a less demanding market.

Little is known about the talismanic textiles, but considering their functions, understanding tattoos with quite similar designs informs an understanding of the cloths to a great extent. Specially trained Buddhist monks draw most tattoos. They first consult the stars to select an auspicious day and time. The monk must have skill in drawing the yantra, which must be completed in precise correlation with the completion of the recitation of the mantra. Power is instilled in the drawing through the monk’s intense concentration. Power is the ultimate goal for both tattoos and the talismanic cloths.

Cotton warp and weft yarns; plain weave, drawn in ink
The Textile Museum 2009.15.2, gift of Stanley O. Roth

Written by Mattiebelle Gittinger
Since the tenth century, rulers from the widespread Islamic world considered it an honor to send contributions of money, food, and precious gifts, including sumptuous silk, for display at the pilgrimage sites of Mecca (the Blessed), the birthplace of Muhammad and site of the Ka’ba, and Medina (the Radiant), where the house, mosque, and tomb of the Prophet Muhammad are, and the city from which Islam spread.

Each year, precious gifts, among which textiles had a prominent place, were carried to Hijaz—Mecca and Medina—by special caravans called surra. The textiles in these gifts were used as covers for the Ka’ba in Mecca and for the Prophet’s tomb (Ravza-i Mutahhara) and for the graves of the Companions of the Prophet in Medina. The Ottoman tradition of sending textile covers to the holy lands started during the reign of Süleyman I (r. 1520-1566). The most precious among the covers were the kiswa that clothed the Ka’ba as well as the embroidered curtain for its door, and the surrounding band that carried the name of the donating sultan. These covers were adorned with Qur’anic verses and prayers arranged in stacked chevron, or zigzag, rows with inscriptions sometimes supplemented with sprays of flowers.

The intended destination of the textiles could be inferred from their color—red for Mecca and green for Medina—and the content of Qur’anic verses—whether they refer to the Ka’ba or the Prophet. Based on the inscriptions (from top to bottom), this cover might have been destined for Medina:
God is my Lord, Nothing is equal to Him, Muhammad is the prophet of God. Everything perishes except His face [God’s], His is the wisdom and you will return to Him. There is no divinity except God, Muhammad is the messenger of God. He is Allah, the one, Allah, the eternally Besought of all! He begotteth not nor was begotten. And there is none comparable unto Him. [Ikhlas (The Unity) surah # 112]

O Dear God, grant peace and blessings upon the prophet and messenger [Muhammed]. Truly, God and his angels bless the prophet [Muhammed], O you who truly believe, also bless him and wish him peace.

After being taken down for replacement by new ones, old textiles were distributed as holy relics to pilgrims or religious institutions. The presence of inscriptions on these textiles emphasized the holiness of the surroundings or provided protection for the person carrying them. For Muslims, writing has been the vehicle of God’s message, and every letter or word encapsulates a small element of the divine.

Silk warp and weft yarns; satin weave patterned with twill weave
The Textile Museum 1.84, gift of Mrs. Hoffman Philip

Written by Sumru Belger Krody
SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

Parochet (Torah curtain)
Ottoman Empire (1299-1923), Egypt, Cairo, early 17th century

This curtain probably covered a Torah Ark containing the Torah scrolls in a synagogue. Above the arch a Hebrew inscription from Psalms CXVIII:20 reads, “This is the Gate of the Lord: Through it the Righteous Enter.” Material, technique, design elements, and coloring supply sufficient proof that the carpet was woven in an Ottoman court-controlled atelier in Cairo, Egypt, although it is unknown over which synagogue’s ark it was hung. When the Ottoman Turks conquered Egypt in 1517, there was already an established carpet-weaving industry there. This carpet, and others woven at the same time in Cairo, reflect Ottoman taste in design, but they were produced for a wide range of clientele, from European aristocracy to Jewish communities in Ottoman lands.

This Torah curtain was probably woven for a Sephardic Jewish community who settled in the Ottoman Lands after their expulsion in the late fifteenth century from the Iberian Peninsula. It shows many of the same stylistic characteristics as the previous two seccade. The artistic forms shared between the Muslim seccade and the Jewish parochet are no coincidence, for they indicate a shared vocabulary of symbolism: door-like forms as a gateway to heaven, and hanging lamps and light as a metaphor for God.

Wool warp and weft yarns; plain weave with knotted pile, asymmetrical knot that is open left
The Textile Museum R16.4.4, acquired by George Hewitt Myers in 1915

Written by Sumru Belger Krody
Textiles referred to as seccade (sajjadah) or “prayer rugs” or “prayer cloths” in Islam often follow a distinct size and format. The main design element is a central archway or niche, sometimes with supporting columns. Spandrels in the corners are surrounded by multiple borders of various widths. In some variations, the central niche is supported by two smaller side niches. A lamp suspended from the center of the niche is also commonly included.

The niche and the lamp represent the gateway and the guiding light (Allah), which leads the believer to a higher spiritual plane. This concept appears as a design element among many textile traditions, regardless of the differences in religion and functions these textiles served, as the following Torah curtain bears witness.

There are direct scriptural references to a niche and a lamp in the Qur’an, most notably the famous verse from the Light Verse (24:35):

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His light is as if there were a niche and within it a lamp: the lamp enclosed in glass: the glass as it were a brilliant star: lit from a blessed tree, an olive, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil is well-nigh luminous, though fire scarce touched it: Light upon Light! Allah doth guide whom He will to His light: Allah doth set forth parables for men: and God doth know all things.

Wool warp and weft yarns; plain weave with supplementary knotted pile, symmetrical knot
The Textile Museum R34.22.1, acquired by George Hewitt Myers in 1925

Written by Sumru Belger Krody
SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

Carpet

Spain, Cuenca (?), ca. 1500

The imagery and the Latin inscription suggest that this carpet might have been intended for use as a tomb cover or as a temporary coffin cover during a funerary service.

On a delicate blue and white patterned ground reminiscent of fifteenth-century Renaissance silks, five medallions bear motifs associated with death and resurrection: four skull and crossbones bracket a phoenix rising from flames. The Latin inscriptions around the phoenix reads: EX MEMET IPSO RENASCOR (from myself I shall regenerate) and VICTORIA DOCTIS (victory to the learned). What today appears as a date of 1520 above the phoenix is the result of repair; “1520” was probably IPSO (by myself/myself). In Greek mythology, a phoenix is a long-lived bird that is cyclically regenerated or reborn. Associated with the sun, a phoenix dies by fire and obtains new life by arising from the ashes of its predecessor. The phoenix was subsequently adopted as a symbol in Early Christianity.

A carpet with funerary iconography is rare. There are only two known examples, this carpet and another one in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Both of these carpets are more finely and tightly woven than most Mudejar carpets. Although the design on this carpet is austere, its colors and delicate lace-like designs on the main field and borders achieve graciousness on one hand, and splendor and dignity on the other.

Goat hair warp yarns, wool weft yarns; plain weave with supplementary knotted pile, single-warp knot

The Textile Museum R44.3.2, acquired by George Hewitt Myers in 1926

Written by Sumru Belger Krody
Cushion cover

_Qing dynasty (1644-1912), China, mid-19th century_

The emperor of China inhabited vast and magnificent palace complexes that vividly proclaimed his political authority. In order to furnish these residences in suitable splendor, the Imperial Household Department requisitioned thousands of yards of fine silk each year from the three imperial workshop centers in southern China. The dimensions, colors, materials and designs of imperial furnishings conformed to carefully formulated regulations. These portable curtains, hangings, cushions, and carpets were changed regularly so as to properly coordinate the physical setting with rank, occasion, and season.

This textile would have covered a padded cushion that provided comfort and meaningful decoration on a wide _kang_ the raised, brick seating platforms common in northern China. Heated by a system of flues connected to a stove, the _kang_ provided a warm surface for sleeping, eating, and other daily activities during the cold winter months. In the imperial family’s residence halls, _kang_ were hung with silk curtains and their surfaces covered with matched sets of cushions and large textile spreads.

Whereas the cushions and covers used on thrones in audience halls featured five-clawed dragon imagery that graphically symbolized imperial rule, furnishings used in residential chambers typically were ornamented with flowing floral and tendril motifs. Carefully designed by court artists, these patterns were replete with auspicious symbolism. Peonies, first popularized in China in the palaces of Sui- (581-618) and Tang-dynasty (618–906) emperors, remained closely associated with the aristocracy. Throughout the floral scrolls are _continued >_
red bats, which symbolize blessing in Chinese culture. The tapestry weave technique allows the creation of crisply delineated patterning, and after weaving, fine details were painted onto the fabric with a brush.

Silk warp and weft yarns, metal-wrapped silk yarns; slit tapestry weave (kesi), painted
The Textile Museum 51.18, acquired by George Hewitt Myers in 1940

Written by Lee Talbot
Hanging or curtain
Eastern Roman Empire, Egypt or Turkey, 4th to 5th century

This is the largest and arguably the most important late Roman textile yet discovered. It once hung on a wall or in the doorway of a Roman villa built for an upper class family, possibly in Egypt. The villa would have been a sprawling edifice with hypocaust-heated rooms, their floors decorated with mosaic, and large hangings embellishing their walls.

When such a hanging was displayed in the tablinium (reception room), there would have been no question that this house belonged to a very wealthy family. During the Roman period, wealth most often brought political influence and high standing in society.

The precisely laid-out design, very fine wool yarns, and the extraordinary quality of craftsmanship indicate this hanging’s production in a workshop that wove textiles for a very wealthy clientele who could afford a luxury such as this.

The hanging is composed of vibrant and detailed banded scenes. An array of brilliantly dyed woolen weft yarns forms the colorful, luxurious, and realistic imagery. The gradation of color produces a naturalistic effect, mimicking light and shadow, found in contemporary mosaics and wall paintings. The result is a sumptuous textile fashioned as a careful use and display of wealth within the home.

Linen warp yarns, wool weft yarns; slit and dovetailed tapestry weave with eccentric wefts and weft-wrapping
The Textile Museum 71.118, acquired by George Hewitt Myers in 1950

Research partially conducted by Brooke Maake, curatorial intern
Written by Sumru Belger Krody
Man’s tunic
Inca style, Peru, ca. 1410-1532

The Inca empire originated in Cuzco, in the highlands, but included the entire coast of what is now Peru, where the desert has preserved many textiles. Like earlier Wari tapestry tunics, Inca examples are finely woven and beautifully finished on both sides.

Men in the higher level of Inca administration wore such tunics, which the Emperor conferred as gifts. Fine tunics also served as religious offerings. Inca art was highly standardized, and this main pattern motif also appears in other types of textiles, although its significance is unknown. While numerous other tunics with the same pattern survive, this example is exceptionally well preserved.

Camelid hair warp and weft yarns; interlocked tapestry weave
The Textile Museum 91.147, acquired by George Hewitt Myers

Written by Ann Pollard Rowe
Leg wrappers
Taiwan, Paiwan People, 19th to early 20th century

Once joined by a waistband, these cloths of the Paiwan of Taiwan were tied around the lower leg where they served as protective wrappers. This practice was common on the island but the use of patterning distinguishes these as belonging to men of the Paiwan nobility.

The Paiwan, belonging to the Austronesian language family, is one of seven distinct Taiwan groups and they are located primarily in the south of the island. Neither their origin nor relationship to an even more ancient people is known. Theirs is a strongly hierarchical society with nobles holding all land ownership, the right to depiction of ancestors, and responsibility for the welfare of the village. Ancestors, both recent and mythological, must be placated through proper ceremonies and ritual. They are represented in the human figures and Vorun, the “hundred pace snake.” This snake is considered responsible for the origin of the noble class. Only nobles may use the human form and the snake as motifs. As seen on the leg wrappers, the human figure is dominant and the snake ancestor appears as a zigzag flanking motif. These do not represent an identifiable ancestor, but a class of “ancestors.”

The only exception to nobility-restricted use of the ancestor motifs is granted to Paiwan shamans, women who officiate at rites of passage. According to some writers, they inherit their position from their mothers, while others report that they are called to the profession in special trance sessions.

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The leg wrappers are ramie patterned with red wool, which comes from imported cloth that was unraveled for use in this patterning.

Ramie warp and weft yarns, wool supplementary weft yarns; twill weave with supplementary-weft patterning
The Textile Museum 1960.11.11, museum purchase, funds provided by Mrs. George Hewitt Myers, Mr. Alan Sawyer, and Miss Irene Emery

Written by Mattiebelle Gittinger
**Kinzembe or zamba kya mfumu (chief’s tunic or cape)**  
*Kongo-related peoples, Democratic Republic of Congo or Angola, possibly 19th century*

This tunic is unique for being one of the few ceremonial garments from Central Africa for which there is a long historical and visual record, documenting the continuity of the style and its association with Kongo nobles and chiefs for over 400 years. It is similar to an openwork cape worn by Antonio Manuel Ne Vunda, the first ambassador from the Kongo kingdom to the Vatican, who died after arriving in Rome in 1608 (Ne Vunda was commemorated with a marble portrait by Francesco Caporale, commissioned by the Pope in 1629). Kongo chiefs were still wearing this emblematic garment in the 1880s.

The form of the *kinzembe* embodies the process that transforms elemental raffia fiber into cloth, with the individual raffia filaments at the bottom rising up to become a column of twisted yarns and then woven cloth. These three steps – from fiber to thread to cloth – are consonant with fundamental principles in Kongo thought that also unfold in threes: the three-part passage through birth, life, and death; the three-stepped throne and tomb of the ruler; and the three levels of the cosmos. Kongo cultural historian Fu-Kiau Bunseki states that the *kinzembe*’s openwork lozenges “represent a pattern of the complete world in which we live,” suggesting the extraordinary cosmogenic and cultural significance of this rare textile.

Raffia palm fiber yarns; looped  
The Textile Museum 1962.1.14, museum purchase

Written by Vanessa Drake Moraga
The arms on the right of this “armorial” carpet are that of Maria Enriquez (nd -1441), daughter of Alfonso Enriquez who held the prestigious title of 25th Admiral of Castile. The arms on the left are that of her husband, Juan de Rojas (1380-1454), Lord of Cabia.

Carpets can only rarely be firmly dated. However, since Maria Enriquez died in 1441 and Juan de Rojas in 1454, the carpet must have been woven sometime in the 1430s, and may have been eventually donated to the Convent of Santa Clara at Palencia which was founded by Maria Enriquez’s parents.

The carpet-weaving industry in Spain existed by the twelfth century. The towns of Chinchilla and Cueca were noted for their woolen carpets. By the fifteenth century, Alcaraz, Letur, Lieto, and Hellin were the centers of carpet-weaving industry and the production was entirely in Mudejar hands. Mudejar is the name given to the Muslims of Al-Andalus, who remained in Iberia after the Christian Reconquista, but were not converted to Christianity.

During the fifteenth century, only a few of the Christian elite could afford to commission the Mudejars to weave carpets with their coats of arms. Undoubtedly, only carpets of the finest quality and with the most fashionable patterns were produced for these clients, and these carpets symbolized the families’ wealth, and social and political status.
Armorial carpets, iconographically and stylistically, form a special group among Mudejar carpets. The patterns display design elements that were part of the shared artistic repertoire of the Iberian Peninsula. Brilliant, eye-dazzling colors; all-over field patterns composed of relatively small motifs; and borders with numerous stripes are characteristic of the group. Against such a background, the coats of arms stand forth as dominating personalities, reflecting the powerful positions of the individuals for whom the carpets were woven.

Cotton warp yarns, wool weft yarns; plain weave with supplementary knotted pile, single-warp knot  
Written by Sumru Belger Krody
Carpet

*Ottoman Empire (1299-1923), Egypt, Cairo, second half of the 16th century*

This large carpet was woven by Egyptian weavers with Egyptian wool dyed in colors common to Egyptian Mamluk carpets, but its design is in the style of their rulers, the Ottoman Turks. In 1517, the Ottomans took control of Egypt and ended the reign of the Mamluk dynasty. With the new Ottoman administration came a new artistic language.

The design layout of a single central medallion and four-quarter medallions allows for fairly large basic units which would have made a striking impression from a distance in the great public court ceremonies where this carpet might have been present. At the same time each large unit allows space for filler motifs with delicacy of detail and a subtlety of design, which was highly prized by Ottoman artists and their patrons alike.

In the sixteenth century the Ottoman artistic language was also in transition. During the first half of the sixteenth century, Ottoman artists employed curving sinuous leaves, stylized lotuses, and imaginary floral palmettes and rosettes, while the second half of the same century witnessed the introduction of an Ottoman floral style characterized by a vocabulary of highly stylized, distinctive, yet naturally represented and easily recognizable garden flowers: tulip, rose, rosebud, hyacinth, carnation, and honeysuckle. In this carpet we see that these two artistic styles are blended into one harmonious design, the former style decorating the field and borders and the latter inside the medallions and the end border.

Wool warp and weft yarns; plain weave with supplementary knotted pile, asymmetrical knot that is open left

The Textile Museum 1976.10.6, museum purchase, Arthur D. Jenkins Gift Fund and Acquisitions Fund

Written by Sumru Belger Krody
Kain limar songket bertabur (Sarung)
Malaysian people, Malaya, Terengganu, mid-19th century

Luxurious textiles such as this once were woven in Malayan court-sponsored ateliers and limited to royal usage. They were worn at weddings, circumcisions, and other ceremonies of the court. Rulers also presented them as gifts to other members of the nobility or followers, and their acceptance implied allegiance. On occasion they were valued gifts bestowed on honored visitors, as was the case with this cloth, which was given to an American visitor to Malaya. The owner subsequently displayed it in the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893.

The finest cloths of this type were woven in the east coast state of Terengganu, particularly in the capital, Kuala Terengganu, which was surrounded by small villages in which each house boasted one or more looms. The textiles of the area were sold throughout the peninsula and served as wedding garments for the bride and groom, making them royalty for the day. They also were a component of the bride price and important heirlooms used as hangings on the ritual wedding bed that announced the wealth of the bride and her family.

Terengganu imported silk, metallic yarns, and cotton for its looms. These imports were available because the export of pepper, tin and commodities from further east in the archipelago made the area wealthy.

Ultimately, Terenggau weaving traditions were grounded on those found in Sumatra by way of the sultanate in Johor. Textiles of this type were woven in other Malay states, particularly in Kelantan, which at one time was continued >
a part of Terengganu. However, textiles of this quality, in which patterning was done in weft ikat and supplementary metallic yarns, were never as accomplished as those of Terengganu and have not been woven in Malaysia since the 19th century.

Silk warp and weft yarns, metal-wrapped silk weft yarns; plain weave with supplementary-weft patterning, weft ikat
The Textile Museum 1982.25.1, gift of Cici Brown

Written by Mattiebelle Gittinger
POLITICAL IDENTITY

Jacket
Safavid dynasty (1501-1736), Iran, 17th century

Extravagant display of dress was a permanent fact-of-life at the Safavid court. Members of the royal circle, the numerous emirs and court officials used the symbolic vocabulary of fashion to display prestige and personal taste. As a result, Safavid court costume, based on the layering of different garments in striking variations of colors and patterns, became characterized by great elegance of line and cut, combined with brightly colored and lavishly designed fabrics.

The garments themselves were of simple cut and construction and did not need additional embellishments like ruffles or bows. The luxury of Persian dress was based on layering of long robes with rich silk fabrics of figured brocade, velvet, and “cloth of gold,” and intricately wrapped turbans accessorized with carefully chosen jewelry. Knowing how to mix and balance contrasting patterns and colors in well-coordinated ensembles was regarded as proof of impeccable personal taste.

Silk warp and weft yarns, metal-wrapped silk supplementary weft yarns; plain weave with supplementary-weft patterning, stamp printed, block printed
The Textile Museum 1985.5.1, Ruth Lincoln Fisher Memorial Fund

Research partially conducted by Elsa Yvanex, curatorial intern

Written by Sumru Belger Krody
In Qing dynasty China, the emperor held supreme political power at the apex of a vast pyramidal bureaucracy. Members of the imperial government wore clothing displaying forms, colors, and designs that clearly indicated their position and rank in the political hierarchy. The color yellow and five-clawed dragons in circular patterns signified the imperial family, and different shades of yellow specified one’s familial relationship to the emperor. This robe’s *ming huang* (bright yellow) color and five-clawed dragon roundels rendered it appropriate for the emperor himself. Widely held cosmological beliefs associated yellow with the center and the earth; the emperor was viewed as the center of all things and the ruler of the earth. During the Qing dynasty, only the imperial family was allowed the lavish display of yellow in their clothing and living environment.

The tailoring of this garment visually communicated the emperor’s Manchu ethnicity. Although representing less than one percent of China’s population, the non-Chinese Manchu people succeeded in conquering the empire in 1644 and establishing a new dynasty, the Qing. While the Chinese emperors and courtiers of the preceding Ming dynasty (1368-1644) wore luxuriously voluminous, wide-sleeved garments that could impede physical movement, the Qing imperial court maintained more practical clothing forms favored by their semi-nomadic Manchu forbears. With a tapered silhouette, vents in the front and back, and narrow sleeves ending in protective ends called *matixiu* (“horse hoof cuffs”), this garment form was suitable for horseback riding, archery, and other activities viewed as central to Manchu identity.

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Court protocol dictated the clothing that the emperor would wear for all occasions, from rituals, festivals, and military maneuvers to travel and inclement weather. This robe is an example of the emperor’s “regular” dress (changfu), worn when he was performing official duties that did not require elaborate ceremonial garments. The sheer, lightweight fabric was appropriate for the hottest summer months, when the court usually retreated to the lakeside summer palace in the hills north of the sweltering capital, Beijing. The fineness of the gauze weave reveals the technical mastery of imperially patronized silk manufactories in nineteenth-century China.

Silk warp and weft yarns, metal buttons; gauze weave with weft-float patterning
The Textile Museum 1999.2.1, Ruth Lincoln Fisher Memorial Fund

Written by Lee Talbot
In Joseon-dynasty (1392-1910) Korea, royal family members and government officials wore clothing and accessories that clearly communicated their position in the political hierarchy. Colorfully embroidered silk aprons like this example, called husu (後綬), were worn on the back of court officials’ ceremonial robes. During the observance of sacrificial rites at the royal ancestral shrine, high-ranking men wore husu with je-bok (祭服), a round collared robe of black silk, and during morning audiences with the king and other ceremonial events, they wore husu with a jo-bok (朝服), a red silk robe.

The Gugjo o-rye ui (The Five Rites of State, 國朝五禮儀), a manual for state ceremonies issued in 1474, states that a husu’s materials, colors, and ornamental patterns should differ according to the wearer’s rank. Royal family members were to wear husu with five-colored fringe, and court officials were assigned blue-fringed husu. While first and second rank officials were allowed husu embellished with gold rings and embroidered with cranes, clouds, and flowers using four different colors of silk thread, officials of the third through the ninth ranks were distinguished by husu with rings of silver or brass and embroidered with eagles, paradise flycatchers, or mandarin ducks, using between two and four colors. By the late Joseon dynasty, however, the metals, bird patterns, and color combinations on husu had ceased to differentiate among the nine court ranks. All surviving non-royal husu date to the 19th century and feature crane, cloud, and flower patterns.

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Throughout the Joseon period, *husu* were the most colorful and elaborately patterned components of ceremonial court costume. The fine, tightly twisted silk thread and delicate needlework seen on this *husu* characterize *gungsu*, a type of embroidery that developed in the Korean royal palace. Costly metal-wrapped threads, rare in Korean vernacular embroidery, outline many of the motifs, and the polychrome silk threads are twisted in various thicknesses to create different textures and visual effects.

Silk warp and weft yarns, brass rings; satin weave, embroidered
The Textile Museum 2010.7.1, gift of Dorothy D. Miller

Research partially conducted by JeeAhn Han, curatorial intern

Written by Lee Talbot
Fragment from a curtain
_Nasrid dynasty (1238-1486), Spain, Granada, late 14th century_

This luxurious silk fragment with two inscriptions represents the enduring legacy of Spain’s Muslim rulers in Al-Andalus, the portion of the Iberian Peninsula under Muslim rule. The first inscription, in Kufic script, located at the top in dark blue on a red ground and reads in mirror image “sovereignty belongs to the God.” The same arrangement applies to the second inscription in small red-ground cartouches, which reads “happiness and prosperity.”

During the Nasrid period, the dynasty appears to have compensated for the gradual weakening of the Islamic presence in Spain by emphasizing splendor and magnificence in the production of great works of art, including textiles. Textiles along with other architectural details of Alhambra palace in Granada would have been interpreted as a sign of the ruler’s wealth, and his successful position and experience in the international realm. These textiles not only pleased the eye, but situated the viewer and the displayer within a larger socio-economic landscape.

Complex-woven silk textiles with Arabic inscriptions and blocks of abstract design elements in horizontal bands have a long history in Islamic Spain and North Africa. The earliest examples survive from the thirteenth century. This textile, dating from the late fourteenth century, was a quarter width of a large curtain which decorated the walls of the Alhambra, during the last Islamic dynasty in southern Spain (1232-1492).
The design elements of textiles produced in this period are closely associated with decorative style of the stucco and cut-tile work seen in the Alhambra, therefore their association with the Nasrid court can hardly be doubted. The decorative elements are disposed in horizontal bands of different widths; the two large bands are filled with elegant interlaced ribbons employing the basic motif of the eight-pointed star. During Nasrid rule, a fashion developed for the use of a brilliant golden-yellow silk thread instead of precious metallic thread.

Silk warp and weft yarns; satin weave patterned with twill weave
The Textile Museum 84.11, acquired by George Hewitt Myers in 1931

Research partially conducted by Sana Mirza, curatorial intern

Written by Sumru Belger Krody
The carpets used at Islamic courts were most often produced by court workshops and intended to convey very different messages from those found in private homes. Court carpets belonged to the ensemble of objects that helped assert the right to rule and shaped the ruler’s public image, which also included the throne, crown, royal ceremonial robe, regal standards with their pennants, scepter, and ring.

Spread before or beneath the ruler or religious leader, a carpet served to designate the privileged space around the most highly esteemed individual and to present him regally to his audience. As a special object, it helped to maintain the dignity and authority of the ruler enthroned upon it.

Through its design, a carpet is clearly isolated from its surroundings by its well-defined borders. It immediately creates an independent space within its own environment. Thus the design of the carpet frames and emphasizes the individual who sits on it and serves almost as an aura, filling the immediate space around him.

Stepping on this carpet was possible only with the ruler’s permission and was regarded as a great honor, an act demonstrating mutual confidence, obedience, or the subject’s unconditional support of the ruler; in some cases it recalls the act of bestowing a robe of honor upon the most loyal subject.

Silk warp and weft yarns, pashmina pile; plain weave with supplementary knotted pile, asymmetrical knot that is open left
The Textile Museum R63.00.21, acquired by George Hewitt Myers in 1945

Written by Sumru Belger Krody
Horse cover
*Shahsevan people, Northwestern Iran or Caucasus, second half of the 19th century*

This extremely fine silk cover would have adorned a high official’s special thoroughbred during ceremonial events. This luxurious cover’s weaving structure and design concept were characteristic of Shahsavan people who settled in a large swath of land between the southern Caucasus and northwestern Iran.

Horses and equestrian equipment have been considered high status items for millennia. The horse gave mobility, power and prestige. For rulers and men of power, fine riding horses furnished with richly decorated harnesses, saddles, and covers were a must-have. The horses decorated with such furnishing would have created a marvelous spectacle when paraded.

Eurasia’s vast grasslands hosted a prehistoric revolution in transportation, communication, and warfare 5,000 years ago: the domestication of the horse, which is evidenced by archeologists’ findings of the wear pattern on horses’ teeth that could only have been produced by the use of a horse-bit. In many societies, especially nomadic ones, horses and equestrian equipment have been considered high status items for millennia. The horse gave nomadic pastoralists mobility, power, and prestige, which was not available to settled peasants, and put them on an equal footing with the forces of central powers.

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Between rulers and men of power in general, gift exchanges were part of the ritual and the pattern of establishing supremacy depending on the value of the gifts given. The most common items to be exchanged were costly textiles, weapons, items connected with important people from the past, exotic animals, and fine riding horses furnished with richly decorated harnesses, saddles and covers.

Silk warp and weft yarns, metal-wrapped silk supplementary weft yarns; plain weave with supplementary-weft wrapping
The Textile Museum 1979.35.3, gift of Arthur D. Jenkins

Written by Sumru Belger Krody
People across time and place have used textiles to transform the shapes and proportions of the human body. While reflecting culturally specific ideals of beauty, these manipulations of the physical form through clothing and accessories can express wealth and status, cultivation, sexuality, and personal or group identity. Shoes provide perhaps the most widespread and persistent examples of the impulse to impose an idealized shape on the natural anatomy.

For more than a thousand years, many Chinese women deliberately reformed their feet though systematic binding. During the Qing dynasty, when these shoes were made, girls between five and eight years old began a painful binding process that collapsed the instep and folded under all but the big toe, resulting in feet of diminutive size and distinctive shape called san cun jin lian, the three-inch golden lotus. Since a woman with bound feet could not easily engage in hard labor, the binding of a girl’s feet signaled her family’s wealth and high status. A principal marker of feminine beauty and respectability, bound feet were crucial in ensuring a girl’s prospects for a favorable marriage.

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In contrast to Western footwear, typically manufactured by specialists working in leather and wood, shoes for Chinese men and women alike usually were handmade by the females of the family using silk and cotton. This soft footwear wore out quickly, so the making and repairing of shoes was a constant chore for women and a skill carefully passed down from mother to daughter. In Qing-dynasty China, a woman could be judged by her peers according to the quality of the shoes that she made. Young women might spend many months creating shoes to present to her future husband’s family, and shoes were common gifts for birthdays and other celebrations. The domestic activities and rituals that surrounded the binding of feet, the making of shoes, and the exchange of footwear between female friends and family members were central in women’s culture and identity formation during the Qing dynasty.

Women of the Manchu ethnic group, which conquered China in 1644 and ruled as the Qing dynasty, were forbidden to bind their feet. This physical distinction became a principal differentiating marker between upper-class Manchu and Chinese women. During the nineteenth century, however, fashionable Manchu ladies began to wear shoes elevated on central pedestals, which forced them to walk with the small steps and swaying gait characteristic of women with bound feet. When viewed under a long skirt, the pedestals on Manchu shoes approximated the appearance of a Chinese woman’s “three-inch golden lotuses.” The pedestals also fulfilled a practical function by raising the delicately embroidered shoe uppers and the hems of fine dresses above dust and mud; when soiled, the pedestals could be easily cleaned or coated with white pigment. While the Manchu admired tallness, the elevation in height provided by platform shoes may also have held political connotations, as Manchu women literally looked down on their Chinese subjects who had bound feet.

Shoes for bound feet
Silk warp and weft yarns, paper; assembled, embroidered, painted

Shoes for Manchu woman
Silk warp and weft yarns and embroidery thread, wood; embroidered, assembled
The Textile Museum 2011.12.1a and b, gift of Susan and Charles Devillier in memory of Reverend and Mrs. Leonard J. Larson

Written by Lee Talbot
Tunic
_Banum people, Cameroon, Early 20th century_

In the Grassfields region of Cameroon, boldly patterned cotton cloths proclaim the political, economic, and religious power of the divine chief (_fon_). Sacred rulers of numerous Bamiléké and Bamum chiefdoms use these display cloths to demarcate royal space, clothe themselves and their close associates during special occasions, and present to other _fon_ in gift exchanges. This tunic likely was worn by a member of a royal regulatory society in the service of Njoya Ibrahim (1873-1933), the seventeenth Fon of Bamum.

During the nineteenth century, the cotton for display cloths typically was grown, processed, and woven on narrow strip looms in northern Cameroon and Nigeria, then traded to peoples in the Grassfields and highland chiefdoms. Bamiléké artists took the first step in this plain white cloth’s resist-dye patterning process by sewing raffia strips onto the areas where it was to remain white. The cloth was transported back to the north for dyeing in that region’s renown indigo pits, then sent back south, where the stitching was removed and the final product sold to Bamiléké and Bamum royalty.

In 1910, Njoya Ibrahim invited Hausa craftspeople to work at the Bamum royal court in Foumban, where they established an atelier for weaving and dyeing display cloth. Several innovations resulted, including the use of two shades of blue. The present tunic is a rare survival of this court production, which lasted only about ten years. The large circles on the tunic represent kola nuts, a symbol of hospitality and diplomacy, while the

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diamond-shaped lozenges may depict kola nuts broken up for distribution among guests. The inclusion of red along the borders typically indicates high rank.

Handmade, resist-dyed display cloth continues to receive great respect, but a mass-produced printed version now fills the needs of non-royalty and more mundane occasions. In modern-day Cameroon, where people of various regions and ethnicities often live intermingled in urban centers, the wearing of imitation display cloth can be a potent public demonstration of Bamiléké identity.

Cotton warp and weft yarns, animal hair tassels; plain-weave, stitch resist dyed
The Textile Museum 2007.30.3, gift of Harry Greenberg
Written by Lee Talbot
Robe

_Uzbekistan, Bukhara, late 19th century_

Central Asian costume in the nineteenth century consisted of layered garments made out of luxurious materials and a variety of headgear, jewelry, ornaments, and accessories, and was a feast to the eyes of many nineteenth-century travelers to the region. Each garment had a myriad of bright colors, was cut full, and hung loose with flowing lines. Although our contemporary eyes may consider them bulky, Central Asian people wore many layers of clothing not only to protect themselves from the elements, but also to show off their wealth, and thus their importance in society. This was the accepted aesthetic of the times.

It could be argued that wearing one’s wealth was the vestige of a nomadic past still lingering among the long settled former nomadic societies. Because textiles meant wealth, they were treated with due respect. They were kept in the family, recycled for new generations, and when they were constructed, their fabrics were cut so there was no waste. This practice follows a pattern well known among many textile producing cultures, where so much effort goes into making the cloth itself that none is wasted, so people in these societies choose to wear garments that are loosely tailored without any angling and sculpting.

This robe is particularly sumptuous because the owner acquired not only a lavish fabric woven with metal threads for its outer layer, but he was able to afford ikat fabric for its lining.

_Silk warp and weft yarns, metal-wrapped silk supplementary weft yarns; plain weave with supplementary-weft patterning, warp ikat, warp twining_

The Textile Museum 2011.11.1, gift of Guido Goldman

Written by Sumru Belger Krody
Woven by a Yomut woman with supreme knowledge of her artistic heritage, thorough understanding of design making and color combinations, and full control over technical aspects of her art, this carpet probably was a prized possession of a Turkmen family. In a Turkmen household, this type of carpet meant that female members of the household were exceptionally skillful weavers, which was considered an asset for the family. The fine weaving also illustrated that the family had enough surplus money and time to invest in creating textiles of this size and visual power.

The purpose of this large carpet was to establish the status of the head of the family in the tribal society as well as to honor a guest. Invited or uninvited, guests in Turkmen society were considered “God sent” and always welcomed in the tent and given refreshments.

Carpets woven by the nomadic Turkmen tribes in Central Asia are usually patterned by rows of small medallions called gül on a deep red ground, as seen in this richly colored carpet, one of the oldest of its type. Few other Turkmen tribal textiles rival the best Yomut weavings in quality of material and excellence of weave. A masterpiece of Yomut weaving, this soft lustrous pile carpet blends the traditional stylized and geometrized form of gül with more naturalistic floral forms seen in the long end panels, all of which are clearly drawn.

Wool warp and weft yarns; plain weave with supplementary knotted pile, symmetrical knot
The Textile Museum R37.5.2, acquired by George Hewitt Myers in 1914

Written by Sumru Belger Krody