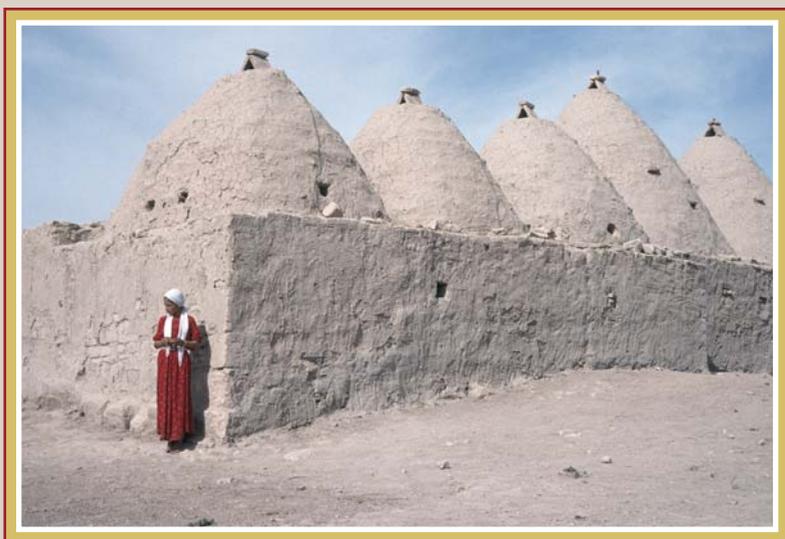


Embroidered Visions

Photographs of Central Asia and the Middle East

by Sheila Paine



Woman wearing a long embroidered dress and plain headscarf, standing outside one of the interlinked domed houses unique to Harran in Anatolia, Turkey. 1992.

1 November 2016 – 30 April 2017

Long Gallery, Pitt Rivers Museum

www.prm.ox.ac.uk

This exhibition presents a selection of photographs taken by textile expert Sheila Paine during travels in Central Asia and the Middle East in the late 1980s and through the 1990s. The images have been chosen both to demonstrate the extent of Paine's travelling, which has culminated in books on embroidery and other subjects, and to reveal her eye for colours and textures also evident elsewhere in her research. Photographs of Central Asia were taken in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkmenistan and the trading city of Kashgar in western China. Scenes from the Middle East include Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Turkey and, in particular, Yemen. A video screen also shows highlights of a travel documentary presented by Sheila Paine in Yemen, originally broadcast in 1996.

“My interest was in embroidery but I quickly discovered how much decoration had a protective amuletic function.”

Decoration and Protection

The social significance of embroidery has been central to Sheila's Paine's research. This has included seeking out and photographing makers, tracking how textiles and designs migrate across distances, and understanding the meaning, especially protective amuletic functions, applied to many of the motifs. Her published travel trilogy – *The Afghan Amulet* (1994), *The Golden Horde* (1997) and *The Linen Goddess* (2003) – was written about the journeys featured in this exhibition's photographs, and documents her search for the origins of a triangular amuletic motif that takes her from the Hindu Kush to North Africa. Her interest in the power of such symbols and wearable talismans also resulted in the 2004 book *Amulets: A World of Secret Powers, Charms and Magic*. Travelling extensively since the mid-1980s, Paine acquired numerous textiles and amulets in the course of this work, many of which are now held in the Pitt Rivers Museum, alongside her collection of over three thousand photographs generously donated since 2012.



Women in burqas at the Shrine of Hazrat Ali, also called the Blue Mosque, in Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan. 1992.



A man and boy holding an embroidered textile typical of the Palas valley in north-western Pakistan. 1993.



People at a trader's stall in Kashgar, making and selling horse-trappings. China. 1994.



Kurdish shepherd wearing a traditional felt coat. Iraq. 1992.

Pattern and Colour

The cool blues, dusty taupes and golden hues pictured here record the traveller's movement through different landscapes, and are punctuated with auspicious red and pink tassels and threads, woven motifs, hats, masks and spices. Decorative tilework and architectural façades also feature, reflecting Paine's interest in pattern and colour, as exemplified in her illustrated volume *Embroidered Textiles: A World Guide to Traditional Patterns* (1990, revised and expanded in 2008).

People and Process

The photographs have been taken from assorted vantage points, sometimes from the top of a bus while travelling between towns, at other times as more intimate portraits of people encountered. Clothing depicted ranges from plain felted cloaks to elaborately embroidered Turkmen tunics. Other photographs show the material processes behind different types of textile, from spinning wool and winding silver thread, to the manufacture of fur hats and pompom horse-trappings.

FREE Admission

Opening hours

10–16.30 Tuesday to Sunday
and bank holiday Mondays

12–16.30 Monday

Pitt Rivers Museum, South Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PP

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Entrance through the **Oxford University Museum of Natural History**



*Sheila Paine with a group of mujahideen in northern Afghanistan. Around her neck she is wearing a triangular embroidered amulet, central motif of her book *The Afghan Amulet*.*

Exhibition curated by Katherine Clough and Philip Grover

Special thanks to Siân Burgess, Jenny Duff, Amanda Feldon,
John Gillow, Timea Kovats and Janine Rankin

Framing by Isis Creative Framing

Print design by Alan Cooke

Supported by The Friends of the Pitt Rivers Museum

For more information, please visit www.prm.ox.ac.uk/embroidered_visions



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