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OATG events

Thursday, 21 November 2024 18:30 / 6.30 pm GMT UK

Irresistible: The Global Patterns of Ikat a talk by **Lee Talbot**

Zoomed for viewers worldwide

The exhibition *Irresistible: The Global Patterns of Ikat*, currently on view at the George Washington University Museum and the Textile Museum in Washington DC, celebrates the artistic and cultural legacy of ikat.

Lee Talbot is Curator of Textile Museum Collections at the George Washington University Museum and the Textile Museum in Washington DC.

Thursday, 28 November 2024 starting at 11:30 GMT UK

Visit to the British Museum, London, to see the **Silk Roads** exhibition and also to have a **curator's talk and viewing of the Afghan War Rugs** exhibition.

(Neither zoomed, in-person only.)

11:30: Afghan War Rugs exhibition led by British Museum Modern Middle East curator Zeina Klink-Hoppe, followed by lunch, and at
14:00: viewing the Silk Roads exhibition.

In this context, members might be interested that the British Museum has issued 11 short videos *Conserving Vulture Peak* about the conservation of the embroidered Buddha textile from Cave 17 at Dunhuang. These may be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3yKQMmsVF-U>

Thursday, 12 December 2024 18:30 / 6.30 pm GMT UK

Natural dyes and the dyeing culture of Anatolia through history, a talk by Deniz Coşkun. **Zoomed** for viewers worldwide.

Throughout history Anatolia has been a key area for dyeing initially as a result of its unique location, and the richness of its natural resources and diverse geography, and later as a result of systematic production chains established by the Turks, and the stability in the country.

Deniz Coşkun is a chemist by university education but has dedicated for the past several years the studying of the weaving traditions of Anatolia and natural dyes. He led the 2024 Hali tour of Anatolia associated with the ICOC XV conference in Istanbul.

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Front cover *A matching bib-collar to wear over a Turkmen boy's talismanic tunic bought from Ashgabat Sunday Market in 2000. The piece has the date 1971 embroidered on it. See article page 11.*

The *saukele* and other tall hats from Central Asia

by Nick Fielding

Gavin Strachan's fascinating article on *tanturs* and similar cone-shaped headdresses in *Asian Textiles* 88 has opened up an intriguing topic. The *tanturs* he describes are new to me, but I am very familiar with another group of tall hats from Central Asia that may have inspired the women's tall medieval *hennin* hats seen in Europe from the 14th century and their counterparts in the Middle East

The earliest examples of tall hats in Central Asia can be found amongst the clothing worn by the so-called Urumchi mummies – a large group of well-preserved burials in Xinjiang, western China, and dating back as far as the second millennium BCE. The burials belong to a group of people who, for the region, exhibit many unusual physical features such as tallness and red hair. They include three females known as the Witches of Subeshi, whose grave goods include tall, wide-brimmed and decorated hats made of felt. One hat was too large even to fit inside its owner's grave without folding. These people had access to wool, and perhaps therefore grazed sheep, centuries before sheep arrived in China which was in the 2nd century BCE.



Left 'The (so-called) Beauty of Xiaohu' (ca. 1800–1500 BCE) from Ördek's Necropolis is well preserved. Her body was found wrapped in a woollen cloak and she wears a tall hat.



Right Cone-shaped high-peaked hat from Subeshi cemetery.

These Tarim mummies were found in what is now a harsh desert region in the most western part of China – although it was much wetter four millennia ago when the earliest of these graves was created. One suggestion, reinforced by the plaid woollen clothing in which many of them were buried, is that they were part of an eastward movement by various groups from Europe dating back to 2000 BCE.

Similar headgear has not been found in Europe itself. However, there may be some clues, including gold foil 'hats' found in Germany and France dating back around 3,000 years. Although discovered in different locations, they are similar in size, shape, design, and construction. Two were discovered in the early 19th century, one in

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Germany and one in France; another was excavated in Germany in 1953, while the fourth turned up in the art market in 1995, but probably came from Germany or Switzerland. The earliest dates to around 1300 BCE, while the most recent dates to circa 800 BCE.



- 1 The Avanton Cone found at Avanton near Poitiers in 1844, circa 1000–900 BCE.
- 2 Berlin Gold Hat, found probably in Swabia or Switzerland, circa 1000–800 BCE; acquired by the Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Berlin, in 1996.
- 3 Golden Hat of Schifferstadt, found in 1835 at Schifferstadt near Speyer, circa 1400–1300 BCE.
- 4 Golden Cone of Ezelsdorf-Buch, found near Ezelsdorf near Nuremberg in 1953, circa 1000–900 BCE; the tallest known specimen at ca 90 cm.



German archaeologists and historians now believe that the hats were used during the Bronze Age by those who would have been viewed as wizards. These golden conical hats are banded with engraved astrological symbols of circles, discs and eye-like motifs that might have been used to make agricultural and/or astronomical predictions, possibly raising the wearer to divine status. Tracking the stars and the sun could aid decisions on when to plant and harvest. There is no evidence that the hats were actually worn: they could just as easily have been stood on the ground. But perhaps, just perhaps, wizard hats retained the association with power and magic?

According to Wilfried Menghin, the director of the Berlin Museum, the king-priests 'would have been regarded as Lords of Time who had access to a divine knowledge that enabled them to look into the future'. He adds that the sun and moon symbols are a match with the Metonic Cycle, which provides an explanation of the time relationship between the sun and moon. The knowledge from the cycle would have allowed long-term predictions of sun and moon cycles, and therefore the potential to assume temporal powers.

'The Golden Man'. Found at the Issyk kurgan in eastern Scythia, just north of Sogdiana in 1969, was a skeleton, warrior's equipment, and funerary goods including 4,000 gold ornaments. The sex of the skeleton is uncertain. It may be an 18-year-old Saka (Scythian) prince or princess from about the 5th century BCE. The 70cm-high headdress bears skyward-pointing arrows, a pair of snarling snow leopards, and a two-headed winged beast.

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Much clearer examples of tall ceremonial hats were worn by both men and women in the Scythian/Saka culture, which dates to the 1st Millennium and stretched from the Black Sea to Tuva and beyond. Kazakhstan's 'Golden Man' (*Altın Adam*), who dates to the 9th or 10th century BCE, and who was excavated from a *kurgan* in south-east Kazakhstan, wears a remarkable tall hat known as a *kulah*, dressed with golden accessories. Like the modern-day Kazakh *saukele*, it is made up of three parts.

I was not aware of many other Central Asian tall hats until, as Gavin Strachan pointed out, the Mongolian *boqtagh*, which can be seen in illustrations dating to the 12th century. There may be a connection back to the Saka hats, or even to those from the Tarim Basin. As for the Egyptian *tartur* mentioned by Gavin, I think clues to its origin probably lie in the name. The Mamluks were Turkic Kipchaqs from Central Asia who were captured and sold into slavery, but rose up to conquer what is now Egypt and much of the surrounding territory at the end of the 13th century. After defeating the Mongols, they held on to their empire for the next three centuries and no doubt introduced many fashions from their homelands.

Both John of Plano Carpini and Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo wrote about the tall women's hats they saw on their travels through Central Asia, to Karakorum in the 13th century, and to Samarkand in the 15th century respectively. High hats from eastern Central Asia are also mentioned in old Chinese sources. It is possible that the very tall hats that are still seen in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Qaraqalpaqstan and Tuva (to my own knowledge) hark back to these earlier Mongol prototypes.

In Kazakhstan and Qaraqalpaqstan these hats are known as *saukele*, and in Kyrgyzstan they are called *shukulu*. In Kazakh, *sau* means beautiful and sunny, and *kele* means head. We find copious references to *saukele* in David and Sue Richardson's book on the Qaraqalpaqs (see Note 1). They point out that the Qaraqalpaq *saukele* was first described by a Russian officer in 1740. Calling it a *shevkali*, he described it as made of glued layers of coarse calico decorated with strings of pearls, coral and split seeds. A conical metal tube set with stones and called a *kasava* made up the structure of the tall hat. Over this was draped a white cloth sash, tied under the chin. Other 18th-century accounts show that similar headdresses were worn by the Kazakhs of the Junior jüz, the Aral and Khivan Uzbeks, the Astrakhan Tatars, the Chuvash, the Mari and the Udmurts of the Volga.

As the Richardsons point out, the expeditions organised throughout southern Russia and Siberia by Peter Simon Pallas in the mid/late 18th century found complex,

large hats among dozens of nationalities, including Bashkirs, Chuvash, Mordvins, Mari, the Noghay, Kazakhs and many others. John Castle, the English adventurer who spent several months in the 1730s with Abul Khayir, khan of the Junior jüz of the Kazakhs, also drew pictures of women and children wearing tall hats adorned with feathers (see Note 2).



Illustration from 'Into the Kazakh Steppe: John Castle's Mission to Khan Abulkhayir (1736)'. Castle was commissioned by the Russians to take part in the Orenburg Expedition in western Kazakhstan.

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All of these perhaps descended from the Mongol *boqtagh*, although the Richardsons make a good case for the Kipchaq Turks being the originators, and that the design came from antiquity long before the Mongols existed as a people. This fits neatly with the fact that the Kipchaqs were the ancestors of the Mamluks of Egypt.



Kazakh woman wearing a wedding dress and a saukele. Semirechenskaya province, Kazakhstan. 1898. KunstKamera collection.

Describing the *saukele* as it existed in the 19th century, Inga Stasevich, a senior researcher at the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (the KunstKamera) in St Petersburg, writes that this traditional bride's hat was a richly decorated headdress that was not affordable to all (see Note 3). At the end of the 19th century, it could cost as much as 5,000 silver roubles. It had to be ordered a year in advance of a wedding, at which point the girl became a bride-in-waiting.

No two are the same. Each jeweller decorated differently, but according to strict rules. Stasevich believes that some have region-specific characteristics, but all conformed to a general design and décor. The height could reach up to 70 cm, white felt making up a major component, albeit sheathed in other fabrics always red in colour as a sign of fertility.

A three-lobed cap sat inside each *saukele*, with an embroidered strip behind, called a *nakosik* and used to hide the hair so that it was not seen by a stranger. On each side of the *saukele* would hang

decorated pendants called *jahtau*. The tall cone was decorated with precious stones and beads including coral, glass and pearls. Coral would help a woman have many children, and pearls are also associated with childbearing, while carnelian would protect her against the evil eye. A scarf called a *jelek* is a veil that covers the shoulders of the bride and sometimes her face too.



The ornamental decoration of the *saukele* is made up of three parts, according Stasevich. The upper part, the 'upper world', usually comprises a lot of metalwork. This connects with Kazakh traditions that the top of the head, like the liver, is the seat of vitality, known as *kut*. The Turkic goddess of women and children, Umai, sent the soul of a young child to the woman through the top of her head.

'Arrival of the bride at the home of the groom, Jetisu Region, 1897' from the album collection Kazakh Traditional Culture, KunstKamera.

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Left Saukele woman's wedding headdress. Karaganda region, Karkaralinsky district, Kazakhstan. Watercolour by Antonia Voronina-Utkina 1913.

Right Portrait of women and girls dressed for a wedding including saukele headdresses. Kazakhs, Caspian region, late 19th – early 20th centuries.

Both from the KunstKamera collection.



Inside a Kazakh yurt showing a Kazakh family and a woman in traditional bridal dress. Taken some time between 1911 and 1914 by Russian photographer Sergei Ivanovich Borisov (1867–1931).

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The second part of the *saukele*, the 'middle world', is inhabited by people. Here the ornamental plates are to remind us of women giving birth. The 'lower world' of the *saukele* was often decorated with the fur of animals that lived in water, including beavers and otters, but later these were replaced by fox.

Provided that this universe in three parts is all in harmony, the young bride will be protected from danger. She wore her *saukele* for a year before the first child was born, at which point it was replaced by the *kimeshek* headdress of a married woman. Unlike the rest of her dowry, which would go to the groom's family, the bride would keep her *saukele* to hand on to another female relative.



Left Kyrgyz bride with a headdress covering her face. **Right** Kyrgyz girl.
Both drawings 1869 or 1870 by Vasily Vereshchagin (1842–1904).

The great Kyrgyz ethnographer, Klaudia Antipina – who was exiled to Bishkek from Soviet Russia – writes that the conical-shaped hat, known as a *shukulu* in Kyrgyzstan, was still widespread in the mid-19th century in the southern parts of the region and had deep historical traditions (see Note 4). It was always sewn from red or raspberry-coloured cloth into a conical hat of around 25 to 28 cm in height, with rectangular earflaps and a triangular blade about 40 to 45 cm in length down the back. The entire cap was quilted and sewn to give the impression of ribbed cloth. This technique is also very typical of Mongolia and parts of China.

The *shukulu* was always richly decorated. The side was often adorned with feathers from a peacock, crane or pheasant. Pearls, mother-of-pearl and brocade were sewn onto it, along with silver and gold-plated figurines made by local specialists. The Kazakh ethnographer and historian Chokan Valikhanov recorded some of the patterns in his notebooks. The entire hat was sometimes covered in a net of small coral beads known as *marzhan*. Of course, not every herder could afford such a thing for his daughter, and for every elaborate ensemble there were probably many plainer ones.

By the early 20th century, the Kyrgyz *shukulu* had become just ritual wedding attire, worn when the bride-to-be left home, and for the following several days, after

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which it was stored away until the next female relative's big day. By the end of the 19th century these remarkable hats had become highly decorated, covered in brass plates and inlaid with precious metals and gemstones, similar to those in neighbouring Kazakhstan, and often adorned with eagle owl feathers. Antipina notes that in Kyrgyzstan at least, there were many stories and customs associated with the *shukulu*. She says they were often associated with special gloves called *meeley*, also made of red cloth and decorated with embroidery and fur. Brides-to-be would say '*Koluh meeleyden, bashyn shukuluden*' (Hand in the gloves, the *shukulu* on the head), as they dressed for their wedding.

However, as time went by, so the popularity of the tall hats declined. It was replaced in Kyrgyzstan by the skullcap (*topu*) which had not previously existed. This too would be decorated for a wedding. The large white turban known as an *elechek* or *ileki*, was also important, with its component parts of a cap, adornments and upper shawl.



A group of Kazaks with two brides. Lithograph by Thomas Witlam Atkinson (1799–1861) from 'Oriental and Western Siberia : a narrative of seven years' explorations and adventures in Siberia, Mongolia, the Kirghis Steppes, Chinese Tartary, and of Central Asia' published in 1858. The lithograph is in fact titled 'A group of Kirghis with two brides'.

The Kazakh *saukele* has been well documented by travellers to the steppe regions. Thomas Witlam Atkinson, who with his wife Lucy, travelled extensively throughout Central Asia and Siberia in the 1840s and 1850s, drew a family group which included two brides wearing their version. They would have been painted in eastern Kazakhstan, close to the present-day border with Xinjiang. The great Russian artist, Vassily Vereshchagin, more noted for his bloody paintings of the Russian conquest of Central Asia, also painted Kazakh women wearing various versions of the *saukele*, including one which covered the entire face (see drawing page 8).

The British scientist William Bateson, who spent 18 months in what is now northern Kazakhstan searching for tiny snail fossils in the early 1880s, also came

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Women wearing saukele in the Karaganda region in the early 1880s. Photograph by William Bateson (1861–1926).

It is unlikely that you now will find good examples of the *saukele* amongst the declining numbers of pastoralists who still live a traditional life on the steppe. However, today most Kazakh brides wear a stylised form of the *saukele* for their wedding. The same can be said for Kyrgyzstan, and parts of southern Siberia and Qaraqalpaqstan. Some reports suggest that they are now more popular than ever, although they are seldom as ornate as the examples found in museums.

From a collecting point of view, I should add that in spite of years of looking, I have never come across an old *saukele* in the marketplace. Where they still exist, they remain treasured family possessions, unlikely ever to be sold. If you want to see a good example, you will have to go to one of the many ethnological museums in Central Asia.

across women wearing *saukele* in the Karaganda region and was able to photograph them. Nor was it only women who wore tall hats. As recorded in Russia's famous *Turkestan Album*, eminent men, particularly *bis*, also wore a tall embroidered hat with an upwardly-curved brim. Photographs in the KunstKamera in St Petersburg taken in the late 19th century illustrate the intricacy and beauty of both men's and women's headgear.



Kazakh man wearing a tall hat with an upturned brim. From the *Turkestan Album*, a visual survey of Central Asia commissioned for the Russian government in the 1860s.

Note 1. David and Sue Richardson, *Qaraqalpaks of the Aral Delta*, Prestel Verlag, 2012, pp169–172.

Note 2. See Beatrice Teissier (ed), *Into the Kazakh Steppe: John Castle's Mission to Khan Abulkhayir*, Signal, Oxford, 2014.

Note 3. Inga Stasevich, *Deciphering the Saukele: The Traditional headdress of Kazakh Brides*, Voices on Central Asia, Retrieved from <https://voicesoncentralasia.org/deciphering-the-saukele-the-traditional-headdress-of-kazakh-brides/>

Note 4. KI Antipina, Special material culture and applied arts of the Kirghiz, Academy of Science, Kirghiz SSR, Frunze, 1962.

Nick Fielding is a writer and author and a former editor of *Asian Textiles*.

