Fragment - The Stein Collection

Object: Fragment

Place of origin: Miran Fort (excavated)

Date: 8th century (made)

Artist/Maker: Unknown

Materials and Techniques: Tablet weaving with stitching


Museum number: LOAN:STEIN.588

Gallery location: In Storage

Public access description

This piece consists of two textiles stitched together with brown wool thread. Both are tablet woven bands, one showing a row of animals in cream on blue. The other showing a geometric design. It is unclear what this piece would have been used for, although it is likely to have had a decorative purpose. It was recovered from the site of Miran Fort on the eastern verge of the Taklamakan desert. Many textile fragments were discovered here in the remains of a fort held by the Tibetans during their domination of the southern Taklamakan in the 8th century AD. The site is part of an area now referred to as the Silk Road, a series of overland trade routes that crossed Asia, from China to Europe. The most notable item traded was silk. Camels and horses were used as pack animals and merchants passed their goods from oasis to oasis. The Silk Road was also important for the exchange of ideas – while silk textiles travelled west from China, Buddhism entered China from India in this way. This fragment was brought back from Central Asia by the explorer and archaeologist Sir Marc Aurel Stein (1862–1943). The Victoria and Albert Museum has around 700 ancient and medieval textiles recovered by Stein at the beginning of the twentieth century. The textiles range in date from the second century BC to the twelfth century AD. Some are silk while others are made from the wool of a variety of different animals.

Descriptive line

Fragment of polychrome pattern woven wool with tablet woven animal design border and a main geometric design

Physical description

One piece consisting of two tablet woven borders stitched together with brown wool thread, similar to the weft of the borders, a thread of fibres in natural brown and light colours. Welt fibre has been identified as yak by Michael Ryder:

Border I: A tablet woven border with a multicoloured edge and a blue and white pattern section showing running animals, perhaps lions - or stags.

Border II: A tablet woven border with a bottom colour of two red colours in stripes and pattern in different colours showing geometrical patterns.

Description of weaving method: Border I: One edge is striped in dark blue, white, light blue, yellow, red, pink colour and woven in plain forward tablet weaving with 11 opposed tablets. After this a pattern section of app. 29 tablets each threaded with two white threads and two blue threads. There are no edge tablets in the other side. the border is app.3.6 cm and have in all 38 tablets, which is close to 10 tablets per cm. The weft count is app. 9 per cm. The technique of the pattern section is double faced 3/1 broken twill. The pattern of running animals seems to be repeated quite accurately.

Border I: There are no edge tablets in the side sewn together with border I. The other side is not preserved. The whole border is threaded in the same way and woven in one continuing geometrical pattern based on diagonal lines. The threading is app. 10-12 tablets each threaded with two red- and one white- and one blue thread, then app. 10-12 tablets each threaded with two pink-, one light blue- and one blue thread. There are at least 18 stripes of pink or red bottom colour, all together 180-200 tablets. The technique is a combination of double-faced 3/1 double twill and a technique similar to the tablet woven border from Snartemo in Norway. The bottom weave have a diagonal texture which follow the different diagonals of the pattern. The pattern is two coloured 'combs' which is also a part of the patterns of the Snartemo band. The width of the 'combs' are 1.5 cm. The width of the border is at least 16.5 cm and the warp count app. 10 tablets per cm, which is app. 40 threads per cm. The weft count is 10 per cm.

The warp threads of the two borders are quite similar, a z-spun double thread quite hard twisted (Lise Reeder Knudsen, August 2008).

Dimensions

Length: 28 cm, Width: 19.5 cm

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Object history note

Michael Ryder has identified the wool used as yak underwool. There is another fragment of this border in the British Museum.
Historical context note

The Miran fort lies midway along southern Silk Road, at the foot of the Kunlun Mountains. When Tibetan troops occupied the area in the late eight century AD, they built the fort to guard one of many routes through which they moved into Central Asia. In 1907, Stein excavated rubbish heaps at the fort and found wood slips, dating from the eight to the ninth century AD, which provided early examples of Tibetan writing. He also found fragments of wool rugs in bright colours and pieces of silk. The V&A holds a large number of textiles from the Miran Fort on loan, including spun wool, pattern and plain woven silk and wool, woven and spun hemp, woven horsehair, cords and painted silk.

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O91172/the-stein-collection-fragment-unknown/