Hands On Learning
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QASHQAI WOMAN'S TRADITIONAL DRESS G103

The beautiful garments in this box belonged to a Qashqai woman. The Qashqai are a group of people living in the central and southern provinces of Iran (see the map on the right). They speak a Turkic language, closely related to the Turkish spoken in neighbouring Turkey.



Traditionally, the Qashqai were nomadic. This means that they didn't live in one fixed place, but moved around the land tending to their livestock (mainly sheep and goats). The Qashqai used pastures in the Zagros Mountains to graze their livestock during the summer months and move down into the lowlands when the temperature dropped in the winter (see picture on the right). Some Qashqai still live in this way, but many have settled now and their way of life has changed a great deal.



The Qashqai are well-known for making hand-woven rugs. They use vibrant colours such as bright blues, deep reds and golden yellows to dye the wool and add geometric designs. There are some examples below. These rugs used to play an important role in creating the Qashqai's nomadic camps - there is a saying 'where my carpet is, there is my house' - but today they are mainly made to be sold in markets and exported. They have become famous all over the world.







Reading Borough Council

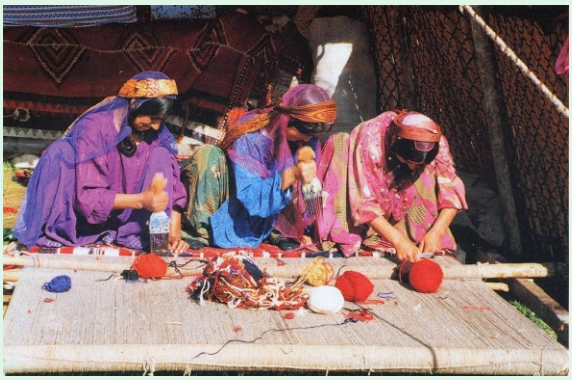
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Qashqai women are noted for wearing brightly coloured dresses made from floral fabrics. Look at the pictures below for some examples. The clothing in the box was made for The Museum of Reading by the wife of a Khan (or leader) from a Qashqai group.





Three skirts

The skirts are very long and full. They each have a draw-string to gather them in at the top. Skirts like this would have formed one of many layers, which were needed to protect the wearer from either the cold mountain conditions or the hot summer sun. Each skirt is brightly coloured and decorated with gold thread. Skirts as highly decorated as these might have been worn to a wedding. A Qashqai wedding is a very lively event, which can last up to three or four days. Many dances are performed during the ceremony and the full skirts add a flash of colour and sparkle as they swirl around.







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Tunic and jacket



Both the bright red tunic and the vivid blue jacket are decorated with floral designs. The silky red tunic would have been worn as a layer with the jacket over the top. Feel how heavy the jacket is - it would have definitely helped to keep out the cold.

Red is usually only worn by a bride. Perhaps this tunic was worn at a wedding, as described previously.



Head scarf



The silky head scarf is decorated with a hand-printed pattern. The yellow colour is very striking. It is in stark contrast to the headgear of the Qashqai men, who usually wear a brown or grey hat with two flaps folded up at either side. This hat is thought of as a symbol of Qashqai identity. There is a picture of a man's hat on the right.

Headscarves are worn to cover the hair, although this rule is less strict than in other Muslim areas.



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Veil

Qashqai women do not normally wear a veil, as other Muslim women often do. This thin piece of material might have been worn over the hair and sides of the face. Imagine how the gold flecks would shimmer in the sun. Thin scarves or veils like this are often decorated with extra sequins and beads for an even more dazzling effect.

The lady in the picture below is wearing something very similar.

