Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

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IRAN - DONKEY BOY COSTUME G160

The Bakhtiari are a group of people from southwest Iran that traditionally lived a nomadic life. A nomad does not live in one place but move their homes and cattle during the winter and summer months in search of water and food for their animals. Their survival is dependent upon their cattle, sheep and horses.



Most of the Bakhtiari have given up the nomadic life and live in villages or towns. The opportunity to make money through industries such as oil provides a more regular income.

Jacket



This is a boy's jacket. Feel how coarse the material is. Would you be comfortable wearing this?



Bakhtiari clothes need to be durable, versatile and protective. The people move from cold to hot weather. Their clothes must be carried on the journey with them. It means they don't have a huge selection to choose from. Imagine trying to carry all your family's clothes thousands of miles!

Parents attach trinkets like a little bell, a piece of rabbit's skin or beads to the back of the jacket. They are said to protect the child from illness or accidents.

Saddlebag



Horses are very important to nomadic people. They carry possessions quickly and easily up mountains and across the land. Some of the nomads are now using trucks to transfer their animals and belongings.

The saddlebag is laid across the back of the donkey. Pouches are filled with possessions. They are packed up by the boys each day for the journey.

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Trousers



Look at how baggy the legs of these trousers are! The trousers are fixed around the ankles with embroidered bands and at the waist with a cloth band.



Wearing these trousers is a source of pride for Bakhtiari men. It represents the tribe the people belong to. Visitors who did not wear these trousers were often called 'shawlar-tang', meaning straight trousers. This was considered an insult.

Hat



The hat is made from felt. It can be used as a cup for drinking water. When the group are walking their cattle to a new area they can scoop up a drink from the river. They don't need to search for a cup that has been left at the bottom of the bag! The hat is also waved like a flag to attract attention across long distances.





The hat's shape is said to have been adapted as a protest against the headwear worn by a rival tribe called the Pahlavi. They led the country and from 1928 had instructed everyone to wear a particular style of hat. The Bakhtiari wore this felt hat as a sign of defiance against them.

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Harness



The harness helps control the donkey and the metal chain acts as a rein. It can be altered depending on the animal's size. The coloured piece is called a noseband and is placed over the donkey's nose. Leather straps are then attached around the back of the head. These are called the cheek pieces because they run from the mouth up the cheeks to the ear. The strap has been shortened and is now too small to fix around a donkey's head.



It may not look a very nice piece of equipment but the donkey needs to be kept under control. They are very valuable to nomadic families. If they ran off with the supplies or refused to move then it could threaten the lives of the people.

Browband



A horse wears this over the eyes. The browband runs from just under one ear, across the forehead, to under the other ear. The long, thin leather strips cover the horse's eyes. Can you guess why? The horse would still be able to see where they were going but it keeps flies and sand out of the eyes.

The blue beads are protection from the 'evil eye'. The evil eye is a belief that a person can harm somebody or something important by looking at them with envy. Sometimes the beads are put on string and tied round the neck of a donkey. This can be seen in a picture above.