Hands On Learning
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TEXTILES FROM TURKEY G61/A

The modern Republic of Turkey was created in 1922 after the decline of the Ottoman Empire. It is transcontinental, meaning that some of the country is in Europe and some is in Asia. Look at the map on the right to see an illustration of this. This position has given Turkey a unique blend of Eastern and Western culture.



Shawl



Wool is the most common raw material in Turkey for making large shawls, like the one in the box. This shawl would have offered great warmth to its wearer and probably covered a good portion of the body. Notice how heavy it is.

The word shawl comes from the Persian shal, which means to cover loosely. Persia was the name given to Iran up until 1935 and if you look at the map above you will see that Iran and Turkey share a border. They also share some cultural traditions, such as the production of textiles.

The pictures on the right show some similar Turkish textiles. They may have been used as shawls or as rugs.





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Scarf



Turkey has been a secular country since the modern republic was created in 1922. This means that the courts, university and army are separate from any religious involvement and no national religion is recognised. This rule was written into the country's constitution by the first president after 1922, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (pictured on the right). For this reason, Muslim women are not allowed to wear headscarves at work if they have a job that involves any state activities or if they go to college or university. This is a rule surrounded by much argument, because the majority of the Turkish population are Muslim and want the freedom to dress in line with their religious beliefs. But the state argues that the rule promotes fairness and neutrality without any religions being favoured over another.





Headscarves are also worn by non-Muslims in the more rural parts of Turkey. The picture on the right shows three women from a town called Kars in the north east of Turkey. Notice the decoration around the edge of their scarves, which is very similar to the scarf in the box. Some places have their own particular customs, for example in Kocakovacik (north west Turkey)it is traditional for unmarried women to wear one headscarf and for married women to wear two.



A small number of people in Turkey follow Orthodox Christianity and also wear headscarves, which tie under the chin, like the lady on the right who is from Kalkan on the Mediterranean coast of Turkey.

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Embroidered blouse



This blouse was designed for comfort. The material is loosely woven cotton called cheesecloth, which keeps the wearer cool in the heat of summer. Cheesecloth became a fashionable material to wear in Britain during the 1960s and 1970s, although it was originally used to make cheese, as the name suggests! (see the picture on the right, which shows some cheese being strained through a cheesecloth).



Apron



An apron, or önlük, is part of the traditional dress of Turkey. It is worn over baggy trousers called şalvar and an outer garment called an üçetek. It may be held onto the body with a belt, or have a tie sewn into the apron itself, like this one has.

Items of traditional dress are still worn for special occasions in the more remote areas of Turkey and the traditional methods of weaving, dyeing and embroidery are still practiced in these areas. Many of the items made are sold to dealers who then sell them on to tourist shops and markets.

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Prayer caps (modern and old)



A prayer cap, also known as a taqiyah or a kufi, is worn by Muslim men. Muhammad and his followers always covered their heads and so Muslim men do the same today to follow his ways. Some men only wear the cap whilst praying, others wear it all the time. The picture on the right shows a man wearing a cap similar to the modern one in the box. Caps are most often white like this one, but can be a variety of different colours.



The older prayer cap is more unusual. It is decorated with beads and coloured thread. It is not known when this cap dates from.



Baby or wood carrier



It is not exactly clear whether this object was used to carry pieces of wood or a child - it would have been used in a similar way, whichever one was carried! The design is very simple. The length of embroidered rope is wrapped around the body to secure the baby (or wood) in place.

It is decorated with beautiful blue glass beads and tassels, which look as though they are made from goat's hair.