



A VISUAL GUIDE TO
TRADITIONAL TECHNIQUES

WORLD TEXTILES

JOHN GILLOW AND BRYAN SENTANCE

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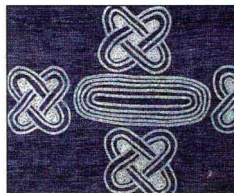
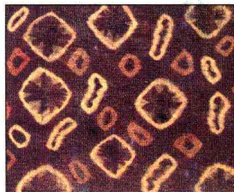
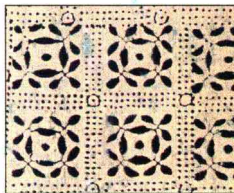
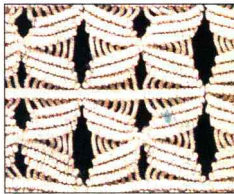
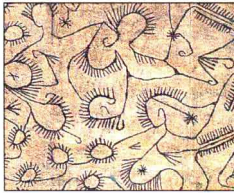


JOHN GILLOW AND BRYAN SENTANCE

WITH 778 ILLUSTRATIONS, 551 IN COLOUR



Thames & Hudson



FOR YVONNE GILLOW AND FOR POLLY

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half light
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven

John Keats

page 1, Embroidered shawl, from the Indonesian island of Sumba, worked in chain stitch; **page 2**, Indigo-dyed cloth made by the Mossi people of Burkina Faso with a pattern created by the stitched-resist technique; **page 3**, Raphia apron made by the Kuba of the Congo (formerly Zaire), employing patchwork, embroidery and stitched dye resist; **page 5**, Nineteenth-century tapestry-woven Kashmir shawl; **page 6, left**, Maranau woman's marriage 'malong', from Mindanao in the Philippines, with tapestry-woven silk bands; **page 6, top**, Black Miao girl's embroidered jacket; **page 6, centre**, Kano stripweave cotton blanket, Nigeria; **page 6, below**, Blanket, from Nagaland, India, with a central band painted with images of animals and trophy heads; **page 7, above, left**, Woman's tie and dye silk shawl from Tajikistan; **page 7, above, right**, Chauhan *rumal*, from Sind, Pakistan, sewn together from strips of cloth edged with sawtooth appliqué; **page 7, below, right**, Meghwal *choli*, from Sind, Pakistan, decorated with embroidery and mirrors.

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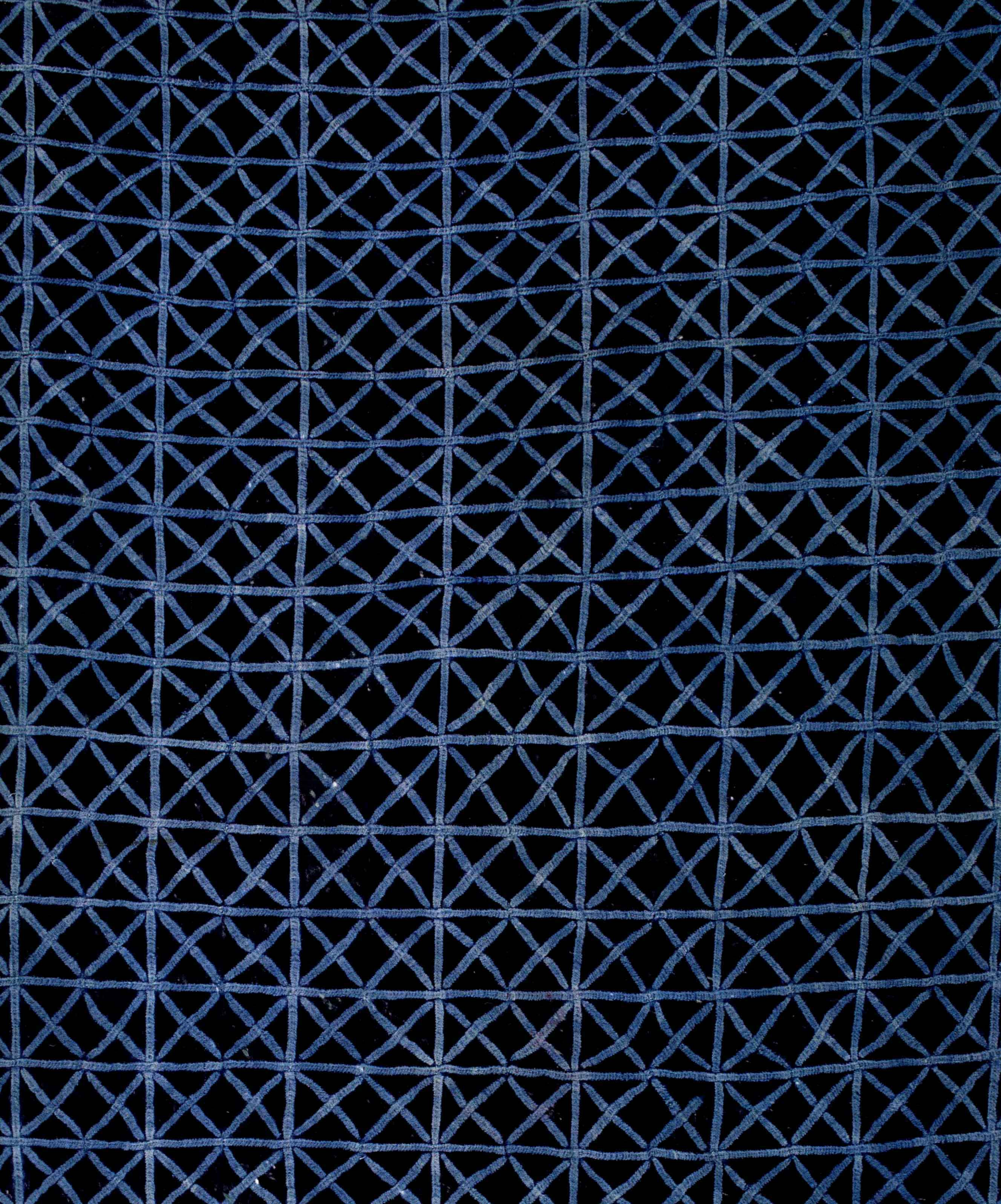
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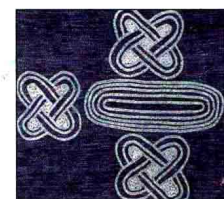
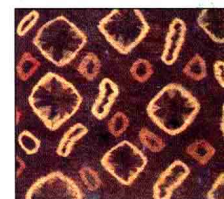
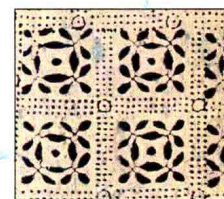
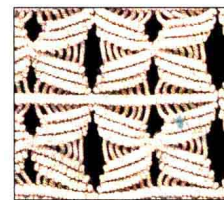
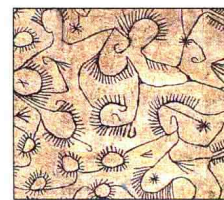
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Man is the shuttle, to whose winding quest
And passage through these looms
God order'd motion, but ordain'd no rest.
Henry Vaughan (1622–95), *Silex Scintillans*, *Man*



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INTRODUCTION

THE history of the world can be read in textiles; the rise of civilizations and the fall of empires are woven into their warp and weft along with the great adventures of conquest, religion and trade. The greatest highway ever made, the Silk Road, was not for the transportation of gold or armies, but for the trading of the most luxurious and desirable commodity of all, silk textiles.

Study of the traditional textiles of the world reveals at times an amazing diversity of techniques and styles, while at others we can only wonder at the way in which cultures separated by vast distances have developed such similar solutions to problems of design and construction. Sometimes only a limited number of solutions may be possible, but the frequency of similarities in techniques and the choice of motifs and symbols makes one wonder if this is evidence of ancient unrecorded trade routes or if it is substantiation of Jung's theory that we have a collective unconscious.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

THERE are many valuable volumes that concentrate either on an intensive study of one specific aspect of textile construction or decoration, such as weaving, dyeing or embroidery, or are devoted to the textiles produced in one geographic region. In this book, by displaying the fabrics of many places side by side, we hope to provide a basis for comparison and thereby a greater understanding of the techniques involved and a greater awareness of the diversity of stylistic interpretation. Our main priority in the selection of illustrations has been to choose not only the most beautiful textiles from the widest possible geographical range, but also those that show the techniques most clearly.

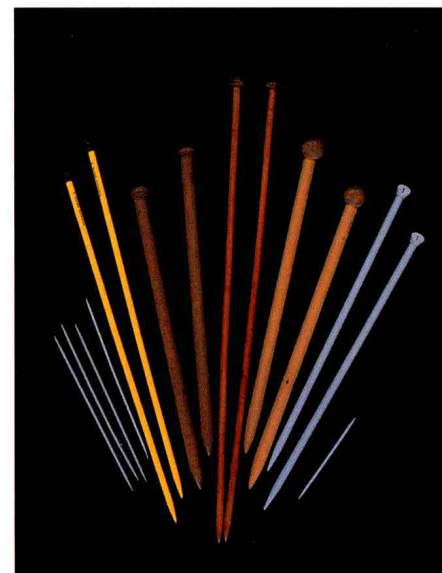
Our rather ambitious aim has been to include as many techniques as possible, often, in the interests of space, in a generalized rather than a specific form, and to provide illustrations from as much of the world as we possibly can. Many of the textiles illustrated were collected on our own travels over the last twenty-five years, and

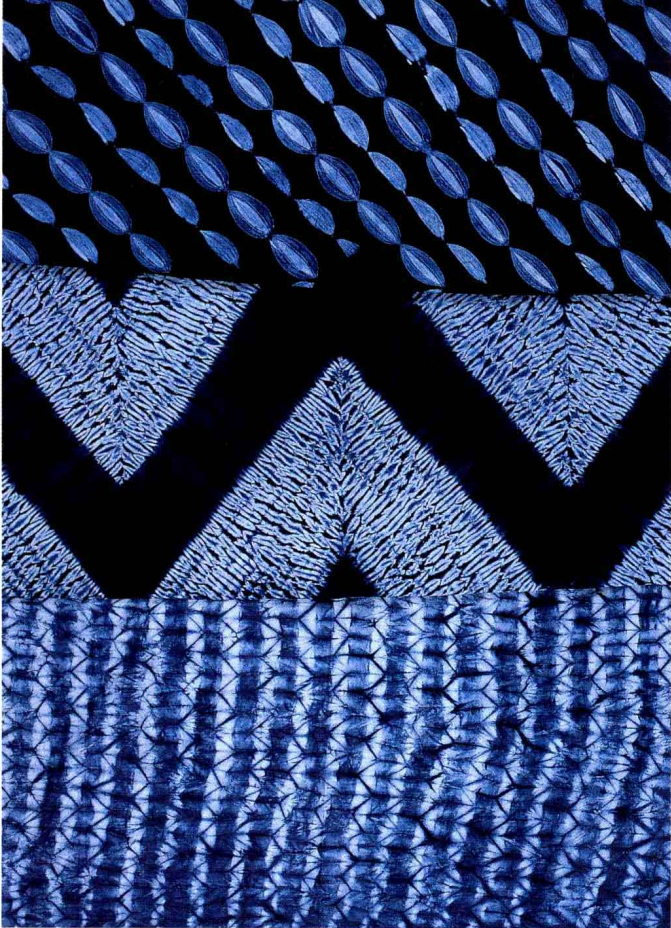


Opposite: This patchwork quilt from Banni Kutch in North-West India can be read like a textile compendium. Its construction involved a diverse range of techniques and it shows examples of printing, dyeing, embroidery, patchwork and appliqué.

Above: A kente cloth woven by the Ashanti of Ghana. Long strips, which have been woven by men on narrow looms, are sewn together to form a voluminous toga-like garment with a distinctive chequerboard effect.

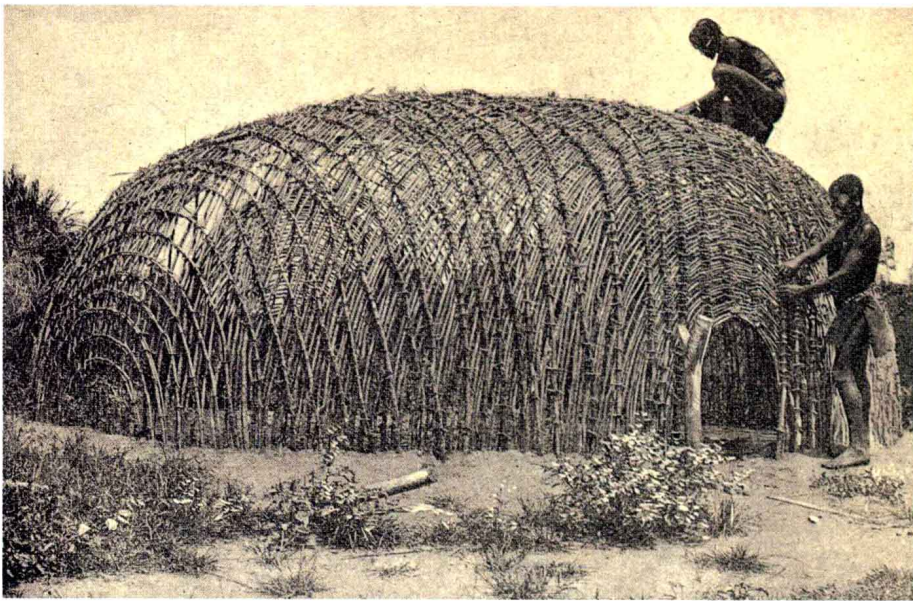
Below: This selection of metal, plastic and wooden knitting needles demonstrates the variety of materials that have been exploited to manufacture textiles. The four needles on the left are for 'circular' knitting without a seam and the small one on the right is for knitting cables.





Above, left: Indigo-dyed textiles from the Gambia. Indigo is a unique, colourfast dye that has been in use for more than 4,000 years. The patterns have been produced by tightly sewing the cloth before dyeing which prevents the dye penetrating into the areas designated for the white patterns.

Above, right: 'Casae ex arundine textae' (huts built of reeds). Zulus weaving a hut out of flexible branches.



others were generously lent by travellers, collectors and enthusiasts to whom we are much indebted.

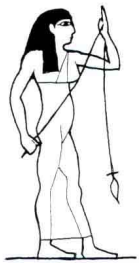
WHAT IS A TEXTILE?

THE word 'textile' comes from the Latin verb *texere*, a word which was used by the Romans to mean 'to weave', 'to braid' or 'to construct'. It is a fairly versatile word, open to interpretation, which was even used by Livy in the context of building when he wrote of '*casae ex arundine textae*' (huts built of reeds). In fact, whether it is a basket, a blanket or a wattle and daub hut, the techniques employed have much in common. Therefore, rather than confining our choice of fabrics and structures according to arbitrary, academic parameters, we have made a personal selection of what to include in this book based on our own interpretation of what is appropriate and what will bring a greater understanding of the subject as a whole.

THE HISTORY OF TEXTILES

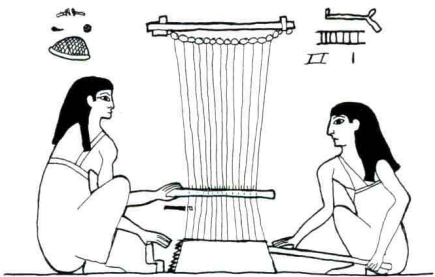
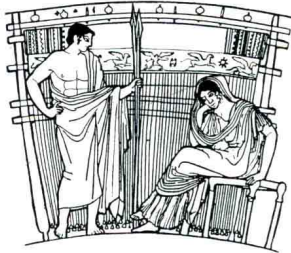
TEXTILES are made of perishable materials and only survive the millennia when preserved under exceptional circumstances such as the felts discovered buried in the permafrost of Noin Ula in Mongolia which date from around the 4th century BC, or the weavings found in the pre-Columbian tombs preserved by the dry air of the Peruvian coast. However, much has been learned from written sources and even from ancient carvings and artefacts. Egyptian tombs contain paintings of spinning and the weaving of linen while, in the *Odyssey*, the Greek poet Homer describes how Penelope, the hero's wife, evaded the attentions of her unwelcome suitors by weaving a large and delicate shroud for her father-in-law, Laertes, a scene illustrated on a 5th-century BC vase. The story of the development of textiles is therefore largely a yarn spun from deduction and conjecture rather than hard evidence. Archeological finds, though, point to a high level of skill and sophistication at an astoundingly early date.

DETAIL OF A PAINTING IN AN ANCIENT EGYPTIAN TOMB WHICH DEPICTS A WOMAN SPINNING FLAX.



RIGHT: PENELOPE AT HER LOOM, FROM A GREEK VASE, 5TH CENTURY BC.

BELOW: AN ANCIENT EGYPTIAN TOMB PAINTING OF WOMEN WEAVING ON A SINGLE HEDDLE LOOM.



BELOW: MEDIAEVAL
EUROPEAN PEASANT
SHEARING SHEEP,
FROM A BOOK OF
HOURS.



THE FIRST FABRICS

ONE of the most basic needs of mankind is protection from the elements. Early hunters utilized the skins of animals they had killed for food. The excavation of Neolithic sites has yielded evidence that tools were used to scrape the hides clean and that needles made from bone slivers were used to sew them together. The first prestigious garments were probably the skins of rare or dangerous animals worn by daring hunters. In many northern regions, such as amongst the Inuit of the Northern Territories of Canada, skins are still the preferred mode of dress since a satisfactory substitute for the insulation they provide against the cold and damp has never been found.

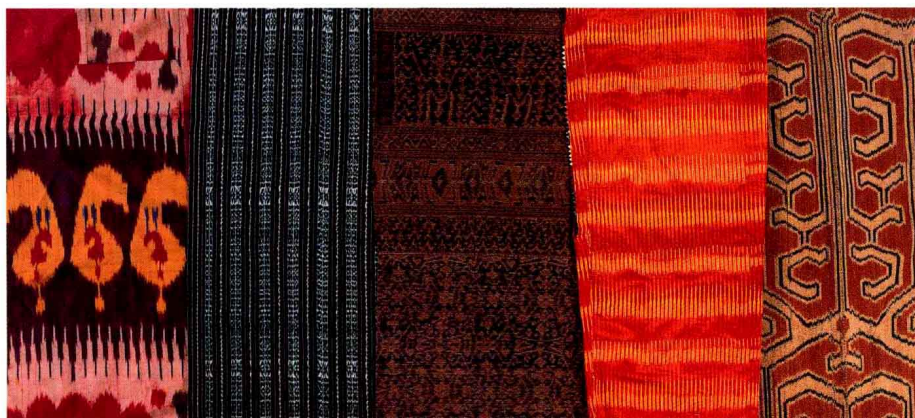
In some tropical regions, such as Fiji, Samoa and Central Africa, an alternative to leather was acquired by stripping the inner bark off certain trees and beating it until it became soft and flexible. A similar material – felt – was developed by pastoral communities who were inspired by the matted coats of sheep and goats.

As the craft of basket-making became more and more refined, it became feasible, with twining and interlacing, to employ an enormous variety of animal or plant fibres in the construction of flexible fabrics. Experimentation by succeeding generations also saw the development of techniques to make more flexible fibres and the invention of spinning which was used in different parts of the world to make yarn from wool, linen, cotton or silk.

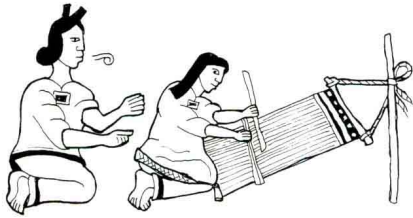
Above: Unyoro men, from Uganda, dressed in cloth made from the bark of *ficus natalensis*.

Below, left: Woven textiles decorated using the warp-ikat technique. Before weaving the cloth, the pattern is established by carefully tying and dyeing the warp yarn in preselected places. These examples were made in, from left to right, Bokhara, Uzbekistan; Oaxaca, Mexico; Flores, Indonesia; Aleppo, Syria; Sarawak, Malaysia.

Below: A Samoyed family of herdsmen from Siberia. In cold, wet weather they wear their reindeer-skin garments with the fur on the inside.



LEARNING TO WEAVE
IN 16TH-CENTURY
MEXICO, FROM THE
CODEx MENDOZA.



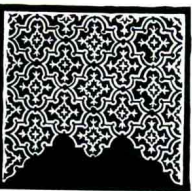
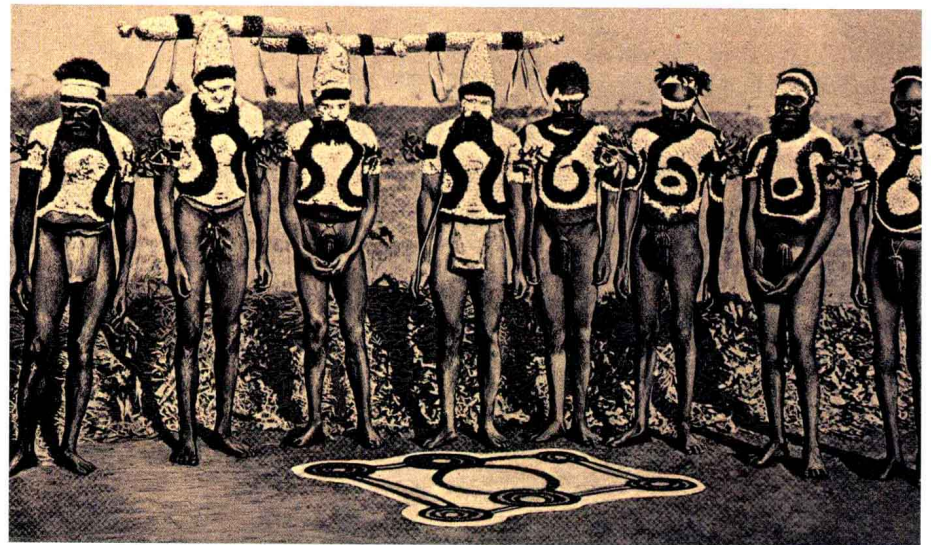
The development of better-quality yarns and further experiments with their manipulation resulted in fixed structures on which warp threads could be stretched out to maintain tension, while a weft thread was painstakingly woven in and out with the fingers. The true loom was developed from this structure with the invention of the heddle, a device that made the process quicker and simpler by raising alternate warps all at once, opening a shed through which the weft could be passed.



Above, right: An old woman in traditional Welsh costume. She is using four needles to knit seamless woollen socks.

Right: A group of Aborigine men, from Australia, decorated with paint and flowers. They are about to participate in a magical ceremony to make edible snakes abundant.

Below: A shawl, from Ahmedabad, in North-West India, with a pattern printed using carved wooden blocks. The finished item has been glazed with egg-white to impart a sheen. For centuries, textiles have been produced in India specifically for export. Shawls like this are intended for the Yemeni market.



ABOVE: CLAMPED-
RESIST DYED TEXTILE
FROM AHMEDABAD,
GUJARAT, NORTH-
WEST INDIA.



THE DECORATION OF TEXTILES

THE evolution of the decoration of textiles followed several unrelated routes. One developed from the textures produced by the actual process of construction and the effect of colour variations such as stripes, bars and checks. From these humble beginnings weaving specialists ultimately explored the complexities of tapestry, brocades and supplementary warp or weft patterning.

Another route, that of decoration applied to the surface of a piece of finished cloth, was probably developed from body painting and tattooing, initially employing the same pigments and dyes, and eventually achieved the sophistication of batik, ikat and multi-coloured printing.

From the experience of tailoring cloth, patching and mending it, and the need to use every available scrap of material, the sewing skills required for the making of appliqué, quilting and patchwork were developed, while the decorative possibilities of the stitches themselves led to the refined art of embroidery.