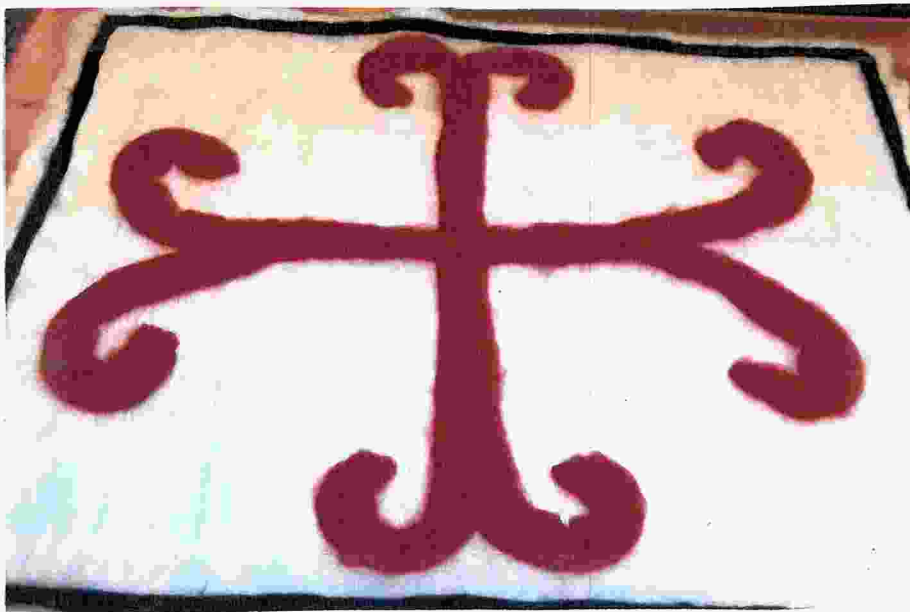


A simple Mongolian rug-wall hanging



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I was introduced to felt in spring this year when I took a class at my art store. I loved it instantly. I loved the smell and the touch of Marino wool. Felting is simple and functional, a lot less time consuming than weaving or naalbinding.

I was curious how felt was made in the middle-ages and started research. While I was looking for a primary source, I found lot's of secondary and tertiary sources. I was amaze about the information I have compiled yet surprise that a primary source was so hard to find.

Pazyryk finds

The Pazyryk finds is a good example of a society that uses felt in everyday life. The finds is dated between 300 to 600 BCE. It is located in the Altai Mountains today it's Siberia. They were nomads from Scythians. The climate conditions of the graves permit the perfect preservation of the felt. They have found rugs, wall hanging, horse saddle pads and much more. The quality of the felt and the motifs used reflect the high position of the family in the nomadic society. (State Hermitage museum website)

I was fascinated by the beauty and the skill needed to do such a wall hanging. Here is a picture of a fragment of the wall hanging.



It's a wonderful piece yet it's not done in the middle-ages. So I continue my research, I found pictures of felted pile carpet in the Stein Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum. (VAM) This fragment is one of the 650 textiles recovered by Stein from Central Asia on the road of silk. The excavated took place in Karadong, China. The historians think that« Karadong was possibly a fortified post which dates from the 3rd to the 4th century AD. Textiles from Karadong are of a utilitarian rather than a decorative type». (VAM, 4) Most of the fragments in the Stein Collection are not fancy but one was interesting because it was a felted white wool rug with an appliqué in red. The Victoria and Albert Museum describe the felt technique as a non-woven cloth that is produced by matting, condensing and pressing the wool fibers. The best felt were produced in Khotan between 300-400AD.

I still was not happy with my research. One of my SCA friends told me about the Mongolians: «They are the Felt people». Really! So I continue my research. The Collection of felt from the Henu Empire as «the earliest piece of Mongolian felted rug. It's a 3rd century rug depicting stylized animals and motifs around the borders. » (Mongolian Cashmere and crafts, 2) in the same Collection, they have felted ceiling hanging using the same techniques. The Mongolian rugs and the ceiling hangings are made from felt and appliqué felt. The technique is very similar to those in the Pazyrik finds. They are all done on a white background with appliqué design. (Mongolian Cashmere and crafts) In the same article, the author said that the basic technique and design has not changed for hundreds of years.

Then I saw pictures a modern gers fully decorated. It's breathtaking. I realized that the motifs and the technique used are similar. Len Charney wrote in his book that these rugs were used as floors, could be hung on walls, over the doors and even as bedcovers. So I decide to do a small rug-wall hanging for a gers. I choose a motif that seemed to me simpler. The motif I had chosen was taken from Ornaments of the Turk-Mongolian Tribe article. It is only after that I realize that the motif was in the ceiling hanging in the Hunnu Collection and on the photo of a modern gers.

So to honor the Mongolian Culture, I settle a date of the 13th century, because of their power and beautiful art that they produce in this period. The rugs were used for decoration and to keep the cold wind out during the winter months.

Making of a 13th century rug-wall hanging

My rug-wall hanging is made from 3 pounds of Marino wool. Marino wool come from a sheep, it's felt easy, it's abordable and available in Laval. I don't know which sheep they used to make the rug or the ceiling hanging. I will have to do more research.



The technique I used was the rolling technique that was common in Mongolia. In Sjoberg book, the author describes the methods. They lay the wool on a mother felt then roll it around a log, wet it with hot water. Then it will be pulled around the Mongolian steppe by a horse until it is felted. I even find a video describing the Mongolian technique. Nobody is sure about how it was done in the middle ages, but today technique is simple and doesn't need a lot of material. I think the technique fits with their nomads life.

I laid the uncarded Marino white wool on a pre-felted piece (30X30"), then added pieces of Marino wool to form the motifs. I choose black and red because in almost every felted piece those two colors were on most of the felted piece of the Hunnu Collection and on the modern felt rug.



Then, the next step was to gently pour hot water and gently rub Marseille soap on the wool piece. I used a 4 inches pool needle to roll my rug-wall hanging. I rolled it back and forth for about 5 hours. I stopped every 30 minutes to see I it was going and to check that the design was not out a place. It was a long process and my shoulders were tired.



When I thought it was fully felted, I rinsed it under hot water then cold water and laid it flat to dry. Some of the black lines were not fully felted so I took a felted needle to insure adherence. My rug-wall hanging was not square anymore but rectangular (21X27"). I am happy with the result.

I chose to sew a wool backing to add strength in case I want to use it as a wall hanging.

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