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WOVEN STRUCTURES UPDATE - Part 6

Kurdish Twill-Tapestry Covers from Djezire

Mehmet Kiliç, of Antwerp, has assembled an interesting group of Kurdish twill covers and curtains that have not, to my knowledge, been previously published. They are dramatic pieces with austere designing that come from villages south of Djezire (in Turkish: Cizre) in southeastern Anatolia near the point where the Syrian, Iraqi and Turkish borders meet. The pieces collected by Mehmet were woven by Goyan Kurds in the village of Nireh (in Turkish: Bislak Basi).



Herringbone twill weave in a Djezire cover.

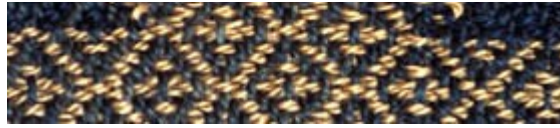


The area south of Cizre, Turkey, settled by Goyan Kurds. (Photo: Mehmet Kiliç)

These weavings display a structure that I have not seen elsewhere among Middle Eastern tribal textiles: *single interlocked twill tapestry*. Daniel Deschuyteneer has done a thorough study of seven pieces currently in Mehmet's Tribal Kilim Gallery collection, and his photos here are representative of the group.



Single interlocked twill tapestry detail from a Djezire cover. This particular pointed twill weave variation is usually called "Bird's-Eye Twill" by Western weavers.



Although Middle Eastern rug weaving is done on simple, sturdy looms that produce only two sheds, this group of Kurdish covers requires a more complex loom set-up--a loom with four harnesses that can lift several different combinations of warp yarns. The basic weaves shown here are all variations on ordinary 2/2 twill. Threadings designated "herringbone" or "pointed twill" are among those used, and the surprising ornamentation shown above has been accomplished by combining discontinuous wefts of contrasting colors with the twill structure. In the photo at the right, a needle has been inserted to show how the red and blue wefts interlock. The generic label for this group of structures is *interlocked (2/2) twill tapestry*, although if we wish to be more specific, we can say *single interlocked twill tapestry*. The fabrics are balanced weaves, rather than the weft-faced structures used for conventional tapestry.



Interlocking twill tapestry wefts.

The ornamentation on these pieces is very nicely integrated with the structure, because most of the motifs are constructed with diagonals. Pattern edges often are coordinated with the twill diamond weave pattern. Thus diamonds and triangles predominate. In another interesting design approach, a kind of "hatching" appears, as in traditional tapestry (see the example below). Pairs of wefts alternate over short distances, to produce transitional areas of horizontal lines between adjoining color areas.





Two Djezire covers, each made with four panels. Kurdish interlocked twill tapestry weavings from southeastern Anatolia.

The Djezire covers and curtains in Mehmet's collection have been made with 16-inch-wide (40 cm) sections. Each has from three to six panels stitched together. Most of the joins are made with an open *Cretan stitch*. A diagram of that join appears as Figure 16.22 in *Woven Structures*. The people told Mehmet that these pieces were used as covers, but that the smallest also served as prayer rugs. These smaller pieces, they called "mezer."



The colors are fully saturated in these weavings, with reds and blues predominating. The palettes are limited in most of the pieces to three or four colors, to emphasize the structural subtleties.

Both warps and wefts in the covers are 2-ply wool, with warp sett of from 16 to 18 warps per inch. In one exception (the red and yellow piece below), wool singles were used for both warp and weft, with a warp sett of 33 per inch. In some pieces two or more plied yarns were combined for wefts. All are balanced weaves, however.



In four of Mehmet's examples, the selvages were given no special treatment, while in three pieces, the selvages were reinforced with a button-hole stitch in various colors after the weavings were removed from the loom.

The end finishes vary: included are hems, braided warp fringes (sometimes bound together in pairs, as on the left), overhand knotted fringe, and groups of warps wrapped with blanket-stitch (below, left).

One piece (the example below) has added touches of embroidery along the bottom edge. Two of the curtains have retained attached loops: on one example, braids have been stitched along a side, while on the piece below, a loop was attached at each end of the top hem and wrapped with button-hole stitch.



A Djezire twill curtain made in six panels. Unlike the other pieces, this example has wool singles used for both warp and weft. Groups of warp fringe yarns have been wrapped, using a button-hole stitch construction.



In some pieces, the twill structure is emphasized by horizontal bands and vertical stripes with warps and wefts of contrasting colors. Sections of the bands are sometimes elaborated with patterning made by discontinuous wefts (below, right). Plaids are sometimes formed by intersecting warp and weft stripes.



A three-panel Djezire Cover. Detail at the left. This piece has a herringbone-twill weave, but no tapestry elements.

The twill patterning in most of the pieces above is elaborated by a herringbone threading. A zigzag sequence was established when the warps were threaded through the loom's heddles. The patterning was then produced automatically when a plain treading sequence was used. A narrow section of weft floats was offset in one direction, and that next to it offset in the opposite direction.

By reversing the treading sequence after a few wefts, diamond shapes could be produced in the twill, as with the blue and yellow motif near the top of this page. With these options, and sparse discontinuous patterning, the best weavers created stunning



Detail of a plaid Djezire twill cover with interlocked tapestry

textiles.

For a draft of the type of weave structure used in the Djezire covers, [click here](#).

details in the wide bands.



Pastures south of Cizre, Turkey, with flocks belonging to Goyan Kurds--makers of the twill covers above. (Photo: Mehmet Kiliç)

An Historic Comparison

Thus far, the only documented historic use of single-interlocked twill tapestry that I have found was among early Pueblo weavers in the American Southwest. Pueblo, Hopi and Navajo weavers have used twill and pointed twill structures prolifically, and references to cotton twill pre-historic archaeological fragments that featured discontinuous wefts appear occasionally. The photo below shows a fragment found in a cave near Montezuma's Castle National Monument, Arizona. The colors are said to be white, red and blue-black. Charles Avery Amsden, who published the piece, assumed that it was not loom-woven because of the discontinuous pattern wefts -- an unwarranted assumption.



Interlocked twill tapestry fabric, Charles Avery Amsden, Navaho Weaving: Its Technique and its History, Santa Ana, CA, 1934, Plate 35c.

A Central Asian Example

Gurung weavers in Nepal have used 2/2 interlocked twill tapestry for simple decorations on blanket/rugs called *rari*. The patterns are typically based on triangles, squares, crosses, meander and key motifs, and the pieces are felted in the finishing processes. The example shown uses a simple twill, not the pointed twill above.



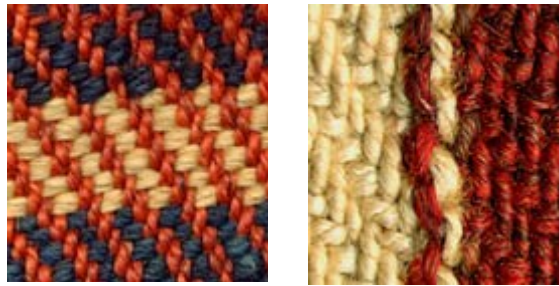
Nepalese rari. Susi Densmore, Nepalese Textiles, London, 1993, p. 139.

A Related Structure: Double-Interlocked Twill Tapestry



The *double-interlocked twill tapestry* structure found on south Persian *moj* is more familiar to rug collectors. In these weavings, the designs are usually limited to simple blocky, horizontal/vertical motifs and stripes, rather than the more delicate diagonal patterning of the Anatolian Kurdish Djezire covers. When forming the design, each discontinuous weft interlocks with two different wefts, and pattern edges are neater if the yarns are carried straight upward. The basic weave on these Persian pieces is nearly always a plain 2/2 twill. All floats are offset in the same direction, creating consistent diagonals. As with the twill structures above, this weave requires a four-harness loom. Front and back details are shown below.

South Persian moj with double-interlocked twill tapestry structure. Also from the collection of Mehmet Kiliç.



Double-interlocked twill tapestry is also found in south Persian shawls and the still more well-known Kashmir shawls from India--in production that reached a peak in the mid-19th century. The scale of the structure in these weavings, however, is incredibly fine. Magnified details of both front and back of a Kashmir shawl are shown below.



A Similar Textile, with an Unrelated Structure

After seeing Mehmet's twill covers from the Djezire area of southeastern Anatolia, I came across the photo below by N. Kasraian in *Kurdistan*, Z. Arshi and K. Zabihi, 1990, Östersund, Plate 71. It shows a weaver in the Hawraman-i-Takht village near the Iraqi border in Iran. Although this weaver is producing narrow panels with an appearance similar to some of the Anatolian Djezire pieces, his loom has only two harnesses, and the narrow balanced-weave panels (supposedly silk) on the wall, appear to have been decorated with tapestry. The same over-all effect is produced, but with a simpler loom set-up and plain-weave discontinuous wefts. The narrow panels have not yet been assembled.





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