



ART FOR LIFE

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An Italian exhibition of antique silk embroideries from Daghestan allowed visitors to compare and contrast the aesthetic attributes of three rather different collections of the Kaitag genre.

THREE YEARS AFTER he organised 'De Mirabilibus Mundi', the surprising exhibition of classical carpets at the Monastery of San Francesco in Pordenone, a small town northeast of Venice close to the Austrian and Slovenian borders, Carlo Scaramuzza, an Italian physician fond of antique rugs and textiles and a collector himself, has again arranged an outstanding display of textile art in his native town – 65 first class Kaitag embroideries from European private collections, held in the Pordenone Museum of Natural History.

Kaitag silk embroideries from Daghestan first became known to the wider public of carpet and textile amateurs less than twenty years ago, when Robert Chenciner published his seminal book *Kaitag. Textile Art from Daghestan* (London 1993).

Chenciner had been involved in researching and studying Kaitag embroideries since 1986 when he was given special permission to visit Daghestan, then part of the Soviet Union. As he writes in the foreword to his book, his main purpose at that time was to study the little known group of Avar kilims, "...But there was

another compelling reason for wanting to go. A book on Daghestani decorative arts showed a tantalising photograph of a silk embroidery which was unlike anything I had seen during fifteen years of studying textiles..."

Since then, these extraordinary silk embroideries have become one of the most desirable and highly prized collector items in the field of oriental textiles: exhibitions of the examples collected by Chenciner and published in his book have been organised in London (Waddington Galleries, 1993), in Paris (Institut du Monde Arabe, 1994), in Sweden (Christinehof Slott, 1994), in Germany (Deutsches Textilmuseum, Krefeld, 1995), and in Istanbul (Sakıp Sabancı Museum, 2007, coinciding with ICOC XI). Over the course of relatively few years, important collections of the genre have been formed in both Europe and America, and other Kaitag exhibitions have been organised in Boston (1994), Sydney and Melbourne (1995) and Washington DC (2003, within ICOC X).

The Pordenone exhibition is quite different





1 Kaitag silk embroidery, before 1800. 0.67 x 1.11m (2'2" x 3'7").

MATAM Collection, Milan

2 Kaitag silk embroidery, before 1800. 0.50 x 1.02m (1'7" x 3'4"). Private collection, Italy

3 Kaitag silk embroidery, before 1800. 0.52 x 1.02m (1'8" x 3'4").

Private collection, Italy

4 Kaitag silk embroidery, before 1800. 0.60 x 0.98m (1'10" x 3'2"). Private collection, Austria

from all its predecessors, not just because it is the first ever to be organised in Italy, but more importantly for the careful selection of the 65 pieces exhibited, mostly from Italian collections, as well as for the attractive display of the works in the museum, and for its beautiful catalogue.

All the exhibits bar one (the catalogue cover piece belongs to Dr Scaramuzza himself) were selected from three different sources. The first is the Moreschini Collection of Florence, with some important new entries not published in Perugia dealer Ziya Bozoğlu's *Kaitag. Daghestani Silk Embroidery. An Italian Collection* (2007). Next is the Moshe Tabibnia Gallery Collection, including pieces intended to be part of the collection of MATAM Cultural Association (Museum of Ancient Textile Art Milan) with others belonging to a Milanese private collection. The third, smallest group of the Kaitags presented come from a well-known Austrian private collection.

It is amazing to note how these three groups differ one from the other to such an extent that, after half hour of visiting the exhibition and admiring the beauty of the specimens on display, I felt clearly that I was able to distinguish between the various ownerships. There is a subtle difference among them that is very



difficult to explain: it has to do with the richness of colours, the degree of abstraction of the design and the construction of the patterns.

Although the exhibition is mainly addressed to a general public of people attracted by art and beauty, not just to textile lovers, the attractive bilingual catalogue combines contributions by textile specialists, collectors, dealers and scholars such as Carlo Scaramuzza, Moshe Tabibnia and Robert Chenciner, with essays by art historians, artists and architects. There are also useful contributions on technique, and detailed

scientific analyses of dyes and colours, carried out by researchers at Milan and Bergamo Universities under the aegis of MATAM.

The exhibition 'Kaitag, Art for Life' is open until the end of January 2011, and I invite you, or rather encourage you, to visit it and to live this extraordinary experience.

KAITAG: ARTE PER LA VITA – ART FOR LIFE

Museo di Storia Naturale

Pordenone, Italy

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