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Man's Sash (Patka)

RISD Museum

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I'm Brooks Hagan and I'm an Assistant Professor in the Textiles Department. And today we're looking at a sash.

My first impression on looking at this piece is its scale. It's an enormous woven length with additional printing on the surface, and it looks like it has experienced the weathering of time and then a transition of color over the entire length.

In encountering any sort of woven length like this, it's always a very satisfying experience for the eye. It's not simply a graphic presentation, but also one that's expressed materially. So the longer we look at this piece, the more we're seeing—like light catching the metallic yarns and reflecting in a certain way, or these undulations of the paisley, or even the transition of the color over the entire expanse, or these stainings on the surface that have happened as a result of being stored a certain way. So there's so much kind of visual matter to be feasted upon in a way. It's a very satisfying thing, almost, to eat with your eye to some degree. But also, I think, the color—the more one looks at it, the color really has this optical quality. This particular periwinkle blue that's kind of glowing on the gold ground, and this almost fluorescent pink weft yarn, which I is kind of existing on their own plane of activity. And the entirety of the experience is one of kind of vibrating richness.

I am Dr. Mallica Kumbera Landrus, a lecturer at the Rhode Island School of Design, and what we are looking at today is a sash from Persia, probably Safavid, or Mughal, India. I think it is Safavid, Persia, because of the boteh motif which appears all along the field.

Now, what is the boteh motif? The boteh in India, as far as I know, comes from Persia. It has been translated by various textile specialists in different ways. Some have called the boteh motif the pine cone motif—the outline of the paisley as you see it on this particular sash is the outline of a pine cone.

This particular sash would have been worn by a man, not a woman.

The patka or the sash was specifically worn by men, and the line that you see right there that runs in the center of this particular sash is where you would put the first fold. Then you could fold it another time and wind it several times around your waist, depending on how broad your waist is. And this end, the end panels, would hang, and you would see that.

What's relevant about looking at this sash today? For me, the idea of crossing cultures, the idea that it is not just for my student who is studying Indian art or Asian art or Eastern art. But it is equally relevant for someone who is in a European course of some kind to see the connections between cultures, to see how the sash or the cummerbund or the patka has become an article of fashion across cultures.