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Fig. 1: Embroidered appliqué buteh motif in gold thread work on a dark red velvet ground (with fake dark red 'rubies'). India, 20th century. Courtesy Textile Research Centre, Leiden (TRC 2020.5154).

Fig. 2: Wooden printing block for chikan work from Lucknow, with buteh motifs, India, early 21st century. Courtesy Textile Research Centre, Leiden (TRC 2017.2672).

Fig. 3: Wrap-around cloth (kanga) with paisley motifs, Tanzania, 1960s. Courtesy Textile Research Centre, Leiden (TRC 2014.0929).

Fig. 4: Detail of a woven woollen paisley shawl, with large paisley motif, mid-19th century. Courtesy Textile Research Centre, Leiden (TRC 2019.2029).

Fig. 5: Woman's black shawl with printed paisley motifs, Russia, early 21st century. Courtesy Textile Research Centre, Leiden (TRC 2019.2692).

From *buteh* to paisley: the story of a global motif

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The buteh or paisley motif is actually one of the few non-geometric design forms that can be found throughout the world. It is worn by men, women and children of all ages, literally from the cradle to the grave. Moreover, it is worn by people of many different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This contribution presents an overview

History of the Paisley Motif

There are various theories about the early history of the paisley motif, and it would appear that it originated in Iran during the early first millennium AD. At this date it was a bulbous, almond shaped form, which was often flowery and without the prominent hook so common in later examples. This motif is specifically known as a buteh. The end of the 17th century saw the hooked buteh becoming a popular motif in neighbouring Mughal India (c. 1526-1857). It was used especially on the fine woollen shawls that were hand woven and sometimes embroidered in Kashmir in northern India.

The motif travelled from India to Africa, Southeast and East Asia, but in particular to Europe. In the late eighteenth century, the buteh became even more popular as it was featured on the Kashmir shawls that were being exported in vast quantities to Europe. Joséphine de Beauharnais, wife of Napoleon Bonaparte, for example, is said to have owned over 200 of these shawls.

South and Southwest Asia

The use of the buteh motif started in Iran and spread to India, so it is not surprising that it remained so popular in these and neighbouring countries. There are numerous examples of 19th-century Qajar paintings from Iran, for instance, which include depictions of members of the various royal courts wearing garments with the buteh motif. In addition, household items such as prayer mats, wall hangings, and towels were often decorated with the buteh.

By the end of the 20th century, buteh remained a popular motif and was used for both urban and regional clothing in Iran and India [fig. 2]. It was used among urban, village, and nomadic groups for both men's and women's clothing, including headwear, saris, and a variety of shawls and head coverings.

The buteh motif can also be found in Afghanistan and Central Asia, especially Uzbekistan – again, it was, and still is, popular for both men's and women's clothing. In particular, it was used for headwear and items such as jackets and coats.

Southeast Asia

The paisley motif appears to have arrived in East and Southeast Asia by at least the 19th century and came mainly via Indian textiles. It has remained a feature of various East and Southeast Asian countries, notably Japan and Indonesia.

The paisley motif has been popular in Japan for at least two hundred years. It appears to have been introduced by European and Indian merchants, especially those dealing in textiles and garments. It is regarded by the Japanese as being a typically British or Scottish pattern. By the end of the 20th century the paisley motif was used for a variety of garments, including the kimono and obi (sash). In some cases, the motifs are small and discreet; on other cases, they may be large, ornate forms.

For several hundred years, the buteh motif has been a popular form in Indonesia, especially in Java. It can be found on batiks and take on ornate forms. In Indonesia, the buteh has become very popular among the Indian community. With the resurgence of

We all know the motif: that cone-shaped, curvy form which is so pleasant to look at and feels so peaceful [fig. 1]. The eye is taken from the side to the top and down again, all with a feeling of balance. It is so well-known that it is generally accepted as just being one of those patterns that have always been there.

Islam in the early 21st century, wearing the buteh motif declined as it was seen as a typically Hindu motif, although, ironically, it originally derived from Iran, a Muslim country.

Turkey and the Middle East

The paisley motif can be found in both Turkey and the Middle East. It was popular in Turkey during the 19th century and later, and it has survived in various parts of the country as part of regional dress, notably as decoration on headscarves and the resist-dyed aprons of eastern Anatolia.

In contrast to many other regions, the motif does not appear to have been so popular in the Arab Middle East, where it is sometimes simply called buteh. This minimal use of the motif may be due to a preference for geometric, rather than 'organic' designs. The paisley motif occurs mainly in areas where there was a strong European influence, such as in Algeria, Egypt, and Lebanon, which had access to imported European materials, ribbons, and bands.

Fig. 6: Square cloth (worteldoek) from the Netherlands, with paisley motifs, mid-20th century. Courtesy Textile Research Centre, Leiden (TRC 2019.2238).



Fig. 7: Woven and printed chest panel (baaf or bouw) with paisley motifs for a woman from the Dutch island of Marken, 20th century. Courtesy Textile Research Centre, Leiden (TRC 2017.0946).



Fig. 8: Woven and printed scarf with paisley motifs from the island of Rätik, Estonia, 2021. Courtesy Textile Research Centre, Leiden (TRC 2021.0408d).

Fig. 9: Woven corset made in China for the British market, for the Steam Punk group, with paisley motifs, 2020. Courtesy Textile Research Centre, Leiden (TRC 2020.3832).



Fig. 10: T-shirt made in Bangladesh for the British punk market, with the depiction of a skull filled with paisley motifs, 2020. Courtesy Textile Research Centre, Leiden (TRC 2020.4204).



Africa

The paisley motif can be found on a variety of West and East African objects, including the wrap-around garments for women known as *kanga* from East Africa [fig. 3], and printed women's headwear in West Africa. Many of these pieces used to be made in Europe and western India for the local markets, but more and more are being made in Tanzania and China.

In West Africa the situation is more complicated, as by the end of the 20th century, many textiles were designed and made in China for various markets in Africa. Sometimes these textiles have a mixed Chinese/African feel to the designs. As a result, sometimes the paisley motif can take on a Chinese yin-yang design.

Kashmir and European Paisley Shawls

By the beginning of the 19th century, Kashmir-style shawls started to be copied on handlooms and later on mechanical looms – especially the Jacquard loom in France and Britain, although the Europeans never managed to mechanically reproduce the striking number of colour combinations of the 'original' Kashmir shawls.

Paisley, which lies just south of Glasgow, became particularly noted for the production of 'Kashmir' shawls. For the next 70 years,

it was an important producer of shawls for domestic and export purposes. By 1850, for example, there were over 7,000 weavers producing shawls [fig. 4]. In addition, other versions of the Kashmir shawl were being woven in Paisley and elsewhere in northern Europe that consisted of different pieces of the shawl being woven on machines and then stitched together.

The high demand for these fashion accessories and fabrics resulted in other forms of the 'mass-produced' shawls being developed, such as embroidered versions and very cheap examples that were printed. Mass production globally popularized the *buteh* under the name of paisley. As a result, for most people in the West, and indeed elsewhere, it has remained the paisley motif. In addition, the motif began to appear on other garments, such as women's bodices, jackets, and skirts.

The popularity of the paisley shawl started to decline in the 1870's, following a change in fashion (especially the advent of the bustle, which meant that the shawls could not be draped to their best advantage). At the same time, shawls came to be seen as too popular and 'common.'

Paisley and European Regional Textiles and Dress

Given the popularity of the motif, it is not surprising that it can be found on various

forms of European regional dress. It occurs on Russian head coverings and shawls for the *babushka* ('grannies') [fig. 5], and on garments and textiles in Scandinavia, Germany, and the Netherlands [fig. 6]. It is a popular motif among the clothes worn by women on the Dutch island of Marken, where it occurs on both children's and women's garments [fig. 7]. Paisley motifs can also be found on some women's bodices from Staphorst, also in the Netherlands. The motif features prominently among the regional dress of the island of Kihnu in Estonia [fig. 8]. It is used for aprons, jackets, and headscarves worn by women. Much of the cloth used to make these garments comes from Russia.

Is Paisley Out of Fashion?

Famous figures such as Chuck Berry, Cliff Richard, and David Bowie have worn paisley, while designers and designer firms, such as Yves Saint Laurent, Burberry, Gucci, and Dolce & Gabbana, as well as well-known textile groups such as Liberty's of London, have all produced ranges of paisley fabrics.

In Italy during the 1950's and 1960's, the Italian designer Emilio Pucci created a successful print called *cachemire siciliano*, which mixed symbols of Sicily with the paisley motif. In addition, in the 1980s the Italian fashion brand ETRO made the paisley

pattern into its iconic motif and it remains widely used by them to the present day, especially in Italian prêt-à-porter.

Steampunk is a 'retro-futuristic' fictional genre and form of cult clothing that developed in the late 1980s. It is based on the concept of 19th-century industrial and steam-powered technology, mixed in with modern science fiction and horror. The associated fashion scene is a mixture of 19th-century retro-fashion and fantasy. Not surprisingly, paisley is a popular motif of this group and is worn by both men and women [figs. 9 and 10].

Finally, the front cover of a recent issue of *Vanity Fair* (March 2021) depicted a model wearing paisley, and the recent Dior (Spring 2021) fashion show also featured many models in garments embellished with the paisley motif.

To answer the question above: no, for the last two hundred years, this originally Iranian /Indian motif has never gone out of fashion, and is not likely to vanish in the near future.

Gillian Vogelsang is the director of the Textile Research Centre, Leiden (TRC), which provides research, teaching and display facilities, and houses a collection of some 33,000 objects, most of which can be consulted online in the digital catalogue. More details concerning the TRC and its varied activities can be found at: <https://www.trc-leiden.nl/trc/index.php/en/>