

THE ARTS AND CRAFTS OF THE HUNZA VALLEY IN PAKISTAN-LIVING TRADITIONS

Jurgen Wasim Frembgen, A Publication of OXFORD

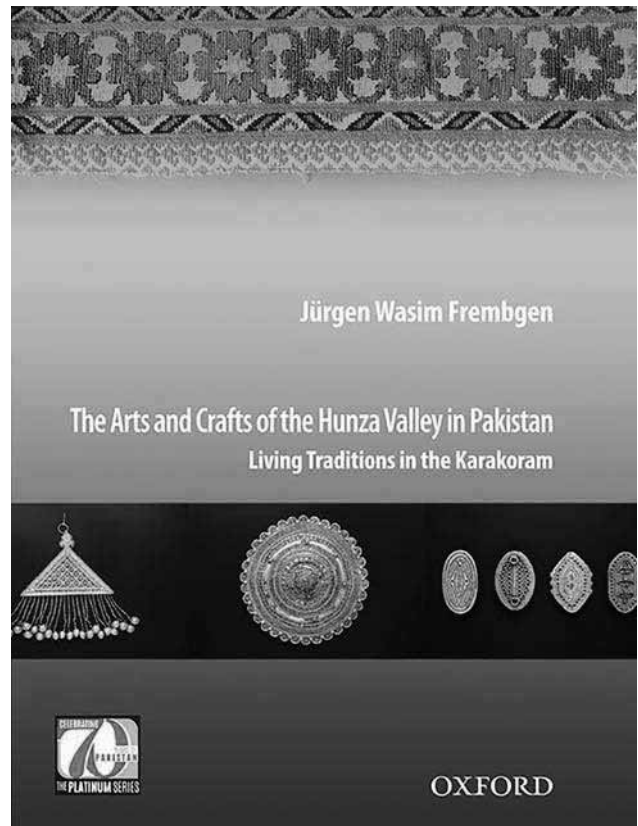
Reviewed by Madiha Salam*

BOOK REVIEW

Pakistan is enriched with various cultures and traditions; especially the northern areas of Pakistan flourish with breathtaking landscapes and diversified cultures and variety of attractive traditions. The Hunza and Nagar valleys in Gilgit Baltistan district are rich with traditions and carry a legacy of century old art and crafts, passed over generations. The book 'The Arts and Crafts of the Hunza Valley in Pakistan – Living traditions in the Karakoram' by Jurgen Wasim Frembgen depicts the beautiful arts and crafts from the valleys of Hunza and Nagar. This book is a field research done by ethnographer Jurgen Wasim Frembgen over a period of twenty years and is augmented by photographs of his choice. These visuals add a frame of reference to the wide assortment of arts, crafts and lifestyles that have been covered in this publication and that have flourished in the area for centuries.

Jurgen Wasim Frembgen has been an eminent professor of anthropology, Islamic studies and ethnography at various locations around the globe. He has been associated with various universities around the world including universities in Munich, Austria, Germany, USA and Pakistan. He has also worked as a curator at the Museum Fünf Kontinente in Munich. Dr. Frembgen has more than 130 books to his credit in both English and German language. Some of his celebrated readings include, *The Aura of Alif: The Art of Writing in Islam*; *Journey to God: Sufis and Dervishes in Islam*; *Pigeon Fanciers and Kite Fliers*. He has extensively written on cultures of the Muslim world, spanning from Iran to India with his major focus being on Pakistan. His books mainly focus on topics related to Islam, Sufi traditions, Muslim saints and their veneration, art, material, culture, anthropology and popular cultures.

He started this particular book with an ethnographic overview of Hunza and Nagar, explaining the origin of these valleys,



religious and cultural practices therein with a focus on the evolution of arts and crafts within the valleys. He then goes on to explain how the book was curated from field work, which was based on collection of the museum Funf Kontinente in Munich. The book is then divided into chapters about the material cultures of Hunza and Nagar and explains various rituals embedded within the cultural practices. The book also highlights in depth how various arts and crafts

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were prepared within the valleys by various crafters, along with the origin of the crafts and how they were used in the past and how they are used today. Concise, yet in depth explorations of fourteen crafts are included in the publication, ranging from luxury items for the elites like gold and silver jewelry; embroideries, silk production, weaving, architecture, carpentry, woodcarving, musical instruments, basketry, mat weaving, leather works, falconry accessories, stone vessels and calabashes. The author has also included interviews of master craftsmen and women from all walks of life to validate the reasons for diminishing crafts. Most of the crafts are mentioned using the regions' indigenous terminologies, which came into existence by the amalgamation of different cultures and routes from central Asia and Kashmir.

The author goes on to explain that this material culture of the valleys was the source of pride for the nobles and defined their status. The elite also took pride in showcasing various craft techniques derived borrowed from neighbouring, lands especially with which they had trade links. Artifacts like crowns, head gears, gilded throne like chairs, robes, precious jewelry and even the rugs and crockery were part of the extensive materiality swaggered by the elites. The craftsmen of these relics were meager peasants who were skillful and had to support their families in times of harsh weather which didn't allow any produce. These local farmers were dexterously self-sufficient with talents of producing ropes from goat hair, footwear made from leftover goat leather, stone pots, whetstones, sharp knives and axes.

The jewelry makers had origins from Kashmir. After partition many Kashmiri jewelers settled here and taught the craft to the local enthusiasts who still continue their legacy. These jewelers practice crafts in their workshops which are located near ancient royal palaces which were the abode of royalties for generations. These jewelry makers made jewelry not

only for men and women but also produced falcon accessories. This practice still continues in the region. The woodcarvers were skilled in making beautiful wooden boxes of different sizes that housed items from jewelry to cosmetics, and even clothing for the influential elites. They also mastered in making elaborate doors for the palaces, wooden partitions for rooms and ornate cradles for babies. Many beautiful wooden floral motifs can be found in the architecture of various mosques, palaces and shrines in the region that showcases the mastery of the locals.

The craftsmen of leatherworks are today, however, on the edge of extinction because of the tedious process of leather making and harsh climate of the region which does not support the process. Furthermore, the leather products have been replaced by other materials which are more accessible and easily available. Some of the products, however, which are still produced in leather, are raincoats, horsewhips, belts, protective gloves and small bags. Embroidery and weaving have also been the chief craft of Hunza valley; with intricate designs for bridal veils, jeweled caps for women, purses, bags, carpets and rugs. These products have special mentions in the book with examples of some finest pieces as pictures. The richness of articulation and uniqueness of diversification is manifest in these local crafts and many a times was acquainted from the neighboring lands through trades and marriage connections, especially from central Asian states like Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Yemen and neighborhoods of Kashmir and Gilgit.

Overall, this book is a good reference manuscript for those interested in indigenous arts, crafts, architecture and lifestyle of Hunza and Nagar regions. It explicitly gives the insight into the most uncommon and featured lifestyles of the regions and highlights how these crafts are an intrinsic part of the local economy and have a deep link with local tourism.