The Chilkat Dancing Blanket

Dancing Blanket.

The Blanket was adorned with girdles, leggings and a robe. These were made of woven Chilkat blankets. The Chilkat Blanket is a form of weaving that is unique to the Tlingit people of Southeast Alaska. It is made from mountain goat wool, which is harvested from the back of the animal. The wool is then carded, spun into yarn, and woven into blankets. The weaving technique is done by the Haida, Tsimshian & Tlinget people of British Columbia and Alaska. Labor intensive, Chilkat blanket weaving required much planning: from harvesting materials, to produce the yarns, gathering the fibers, and finally weaving. Traditionally, Chilkat blankets were worn or used on ceremonial occasions, including the potlatch, which included feasting and dance. During this time Gonaqadet's wife began weaving. She created a magnificent ceremonial robe that told of the meeting of his land and sea. She discovered that her rescuer was not human; he was the benevolent sea spirit "Gonaqadet." They lived happily in his home for many months more. Blankets were often finished with fine fringe. Preparation of the materials could be accomplished by rolling the wool using bare hands. Dye was produced from natural sources including tree lichen, copper or hemlock and set with aged urine. The blankets were worn or used on ceremonial occasions, including the potlatch, which included feasting and dance. These complex blankets were prized for their craftsmanship and worn during ceremonial dances. These blankets were so prized, that guests who had received a piece of Chilkat blanket would sew the fragment into a piece of clothing like an apron, leggings or tunic. Some collections contain such intricate blankets that were so prized, that guests who had received a piece of Chilkat blanket would sew the fragment into a piece of clothing like an apron, leggings or tunic. 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