



# The Saddlebags and Tribal Bags.

## The Hidden Language of Identity in the Nomadic World!

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### Introduction

The (xurcun, Khorjin, Heybe) or tribal bag has never been merely a carrying tool. Throughout history it has been an essential part of nomadic and pastoral life — a vessel of identity, memory and belonging. Whether worn over the shoulder, hung from a horse's saddle or balanced on both sides of a camel, its function exceeded practicality.

The motifs, colors and weaving structures of these bags formed a visual language — a kind of identity card, a cultural passport.



## Identity in the Nomadic World

Across Azerbaijan, Anatolia, Iran, Syria, Azerbaijani Turkmens, Qashqai, Shahsevan, Afshar, Qarapapaq, Qaradagh Turks and Turkmen tribes such as Salor, Teke, Yamut, Sarıq, Qaradashly, Kızılayak and others, tribal diversity was immense.

Each tribe and even each family branch had its own colors, motifs, techniques, border structures and rhythm. These differences were not aesthetic alone — they were systems of identification, answering questions like: “Who is this?”, “Which tribe do they belong to?”, “Is this woman from our clan?”, “Is this merchant from our people or from another group?”



## Dress and Bag: Dual Markers of Identity

Every tribe had distinctive clothing — colors, headgear, aprons, footwear, silhouettes — all markers of identity. Yet the xurcun often signaled identity even more strongly than clothing. If dress was the identity carried on the body, the xurcun was the identity carried on the shoulder, the horse or the camel.

Together, dress + xurcun formed the complete visual identity system of the nomadic world.



### Recognition from a Distance

On migration routes, in bazaars and in seasonal encampments, recognizing identity from afar was essential. Xurcuns hanging from horses, donkeys or camels could be recognized instantly.

An Afshar woman's bag — its red-navy rhythm, goat-horn motif, triangle pattern or zili band — revealed her clan immediately. A Qashqai saddlebag carried the unmistakable signature of its tribe.





### The Khorjin as Identity — Not a Simple Bag

The motifs woven into these bags expressed tribal identity, family heritage, a woman's personal life story, her social status and the protective cultural codes of her people.



## Conclusion

A xurcun is not merely a container. It is a cultural carrier of identity — a visual passport through which tribes introduced themselves, recognized one another and preserved memory. To look at an antique tribal bag today is to read the signature of a woman, the continuity of a family and the legacy of an entire tribe.

The xurcun is the passport, identity and soul of nomadic culture.









