

Architectural Textiles: Tent Bands of Central Asia

Exhibition at the Textile Museum, Washington DC March 30 - August 19, 2007.

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Tent Bands of Central Asia will be on view at The Textile Museum March 30 – August 19, 2007.

The exhibition features the utilitarian and beautiful bands of trellis tents, which have made nomadic life possible across Central Asia for at least 1,500 years. Through the display of approximately 40 objects drawn from The Textile Museum's collections and private holdings, Architectural Textiles will provide a window into the lost world of nomadic life on the Central Asian steppe.

The woven tent band is an important component of trellis tent construction, used to girdle the lower part of the wooden roof struts. This critical engineering element provides the tension necessary to brace the roof dome against outward collapse under the load of heavy felts and the force of strong steppe winds.

Beyond their utilitarian function, tent bands are objects of great beauty and design. They are often elaborately decorated with a wide range of colors, patterns, structures and materials, resulting in vibrant textiles. Designs of tent bands generally differ from those of other nomadic textiles, including bags and carpets. The weaving skills and the quality of dyes and materials used for the bands are of the highest order, reaching their technical and artistic peak in the bands made by Turkmen women.



A Central Asian tent band is typically one foot wide by 45 feet long – an imposing scale. Because of the large size, a tent band would be woven in one piece on a narrow horizontal loom placed on the ground outside the trellis tent, rather than inside the shelter of the tent. It could take one to three years to complete a single tent band.



The finished tent band would be installed on a young couple's first home and become a treasured family heirloom, used on special occasions and passed on for several generations. Turkmen used a very special decorative white band with knotted design in connection with their wedding festivals.

Architectural Textiles: Tent Bands of Central Asia includes tent bands made by different Central Asian ethnic groups, including Turkmen, Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Kazakh. The objects on view represent a diverse array of structures, designs and materials. Tent bands were occasionally transformed in function by their owners, both in Central Asia and the west. Through examples and photographs, the exhibition will show how they were recycled by nomads into rugs and animal decorations and by Europeans for use as home furnishings.

Supplemental materials will complement the textiles and provide a richer context for greater understanding of the lost world of the nomads. These will include period photographs of nomadic life and weaving and an educational gallery, where visitors can learn how to "read" a tent band. A scale model of a nomadic tent, complete

with miniature bands and furnishings, and a film on the assembly of a real trellis tent, will help provide a better understanding of the context in which the bands were used.

The exhibition is curated by Richard Isaacson, a member of The Textile Museum's Advisory Council.

The [Textile Museum](#) is located at 2320 'S' Street, NW in Washington, DC. The Museum is open Monday- Saturday 10:00 am to 5:00 pm and Sunday 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm.

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