

THE TENTMAKERS OF ISLAMIC CAIRO



In the labyrinthine milieu of old Cairo, in the vicinity of Bab Zuwayla, the last remaining gate of the medieval city, craftsmen have been producing textiles of both utility and striking beauty for centuries.

Intended originally for tents, these decorative pieces of stitched cotton, known as *khayamiyya*, have long attracted local Cairenes as well as distant travellers. Large pieces line pavilions set up to celebrate weddings or returning pilgrims; other pieces assume a decorative domestic function as wall hangings, bedspreads, or pillow cases.

Whether publically or privately displayed, the floral, geometric, calligraphic, or Pharaonic patterns visually charm and, as both artisans and traders, the tentmakers of Cairo form part of an enduring, creative world which often recedes into a background that few see.



In these photos, we see the Other as sharing with us, while preserving his or her difference, a common and easily understandable humanity. Our eye is invited to linger on the beautiful banality of daily gestures, and even on the objects that accompany our everyday life. The end result, therefore, relates not only to aesthetics, but to ethics. Photographer, anthropologist and humanist, Massimiliano Fusari helps us being more aware, more open. In a few words, more human.

Ambassador Roberto Toscano, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs



As a digital consultant, scholar and results-driven visual strategist, I have worked from Morocco to China, bridging academia with the creative industries to produce multicultural communication.

My latest interactive project on the tentmakers is online @ www.storytelling.website/tentmakers

The exhibition *The Tentmakers of Islamic Cairo* represents the main output from the 2014 AHRC-funded collaboration between the University of Durham (UK) and Dr. Fusari.

The exhibition includes 40 (forty) colour prints measuring 80 by 67 cm (32 by 25 inches) on a 5mm light metal support, and is complemented by a screen interactive show presenting more than 400 documents including videos, texts and photographs via a multimedia platform.

The exhibition opened in March 2014 at the Cathedral of Durham (UK), to travel to The Italian Cultural Institute of Brussels (Belgium) in April 2014. Between April and June 2015 it was visited by more than seven thousand people at the Brunei Gallery of London (UK) to later become part of the permanent collection of the Durham Oriental Museum (UK).

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