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A Look Inside and Behind Central Asian Ikats

by
Annie Carlano

The recent publications and exhibitions about Central Asian ikats have been highly acclaimed projects in both their scholarly and their interpretive excellence. Extensive information about the ikats is now available. But while much of the history of these silk luxury items is known, much less has been written about the “flip side” of the story, the original or indigenous linings of the robes and backings of the wall hangings. There are two types of such textiles. The earliest extant fabrics are the woodblock printed *chit* type which have been well researched. This presentation will focus on the other, more esoteric, type: Russian printed cotton. Examples of Russian fabrics, most of which were produced between 1850 and 1920, incorporated into the ikat masterpieces of The Guido Goldman Collection, form the core group of this study. Comparable examples in the *Musei Sittsa*, Ivanovo, Russia, and in several public institutions in Moscow will help to determine precise places of design and production. Made specifically for the Uzbekistan market, these textiles display a unique design sensibility that indicates, in part, the Russian idea of Central Asian taste. This is at times fascinating and at times amusing. As lower-end, export-market trade goods, their patterns draw upon a vast visual vocabulary, from British and French sources, to regional folk art, and traditional Near Eastern decorative motifs.

Annie Carlano has been a museum curator of costume and textiles, at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, and at The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Her collecting, exhibitions, and publications for those institutions represent a broad range of expertise. She has taught and lectured extensively. In all of the above she has demonstrated a particular interest in cross cultural and cross disciplinary influences. Now an independent curator and art advisor, to institutions and private collectors worldwide, she is on the faculty of the Masters Program in the History of the Decorative Arts, Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, and is a consultant to the Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts.