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Photographic Evidence for 19th Century Central Asian Ikat Production

by Kate Fitz Gibbon

Rare, early photographs can provide both factual information about the various technical processes used to produce Central Asian ikat fabrics and an evocative vision of the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara in the 19th century. These photographs demonstrate the physical structure and equipment of the various craft workshops necessary for ikat production, the preparation of the ikat warp, the application of the pattern, the dye process, and the weaving and finishing of the cloth. Other photographs show the production of the most common 19th century lining materials, and the marketing of ikat in the bazaars. Ikat fabric received wide distribution to Central Asian peoples of various backgrounds, including nomadic tribesmen, and photographs demonstrate their use in 19th century yurt dwellings. Portraits of urban families of Uzbek, Tadjik and Jewish background show the ways in which ikat cloth was utilized in household decoration and in the construction of various luxury garments. Photographs of ceremonies ranging from betrothal and marriage rites to funerals further demonstrate the important social role played by luxury textiles in Central Asia. On-site examination of ikat wall hangings will elucidate the evolution of ikat technique and design in response to the social and economic changes that took place during the 19th century. The relationship of the structure and coloration of various ikats to a system of dating may be seen in a direct visual analysis of the ikat wallhangings.

Kate Fitz Gibbon is a textile consultant and author in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Together with co-author Andrew Hale, she has written numerous articles on Central Asian textiles and jewelry, and two books on Central Asian ikat, *Ikats, Woven Silks from Central Asia, The Rau Collection*, (1988) and *Ikat: Silks of Central Asia, The Guido Goldman Collection*, (1997), which received the George Wittenborn Memorial Book Award for 1997. She has lectured frequently on Central Asian art, notably at the Textile Museum Annual Convention in 1992, and the 1991 and 1995 International Bead Conferences in Washington, DC.