



THE TEXTILE MUSEUM

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Splendid Attire of 19th-Century Central Asia

September 2, 2005 – February 26, 2006

August 5, 2005, Washington, DC — On view at The Textile Museum from September 2, 2005 through February 26, 2006, the exhibition [Silk & Leather: Splendid Attire of 19th-Century Central Asia](#) features 38 19th-century garments and accessories worn by the ruling class and urban and nomadic elites of the region which today encompasses Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and part of Kazakhstan. The exhibition includes seven stunning coats, children's clothing, and accessory items such as hats, boots, belts, pig tail covers, purses, pouches and veils. Few of the objects have been previously exhibited or published, and all but two, gifts to The Textile Museum from Caroline McCoy-Jones, are drawn from private collections. A full-color catalogue accompanies the exhibition.



The Exhibition

Until the Russian conquest completed in the late 19th century, the western part of Central Asia was ruled for much of its history by different groups who originated in the Eurasian steppes. Although they largely gave up their nomadic lifestyle, these ruling elites retained their taste for rugs, textiles and the garments worn on the steppe. Their apparel was created to please the wearer and to express political power, wealth, group identity or marital status in a multi-ethnic region that included many nomads and settled nomads. Seven coats in the exhibition – including three for men, three for women, and one for a child – illustrate the kinds of materials, dyes, designs, methods of decoration and structures used

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during the 19th century, a period that ended a long tradition of sartorial splendor. The coats are complemented by other embroidered items on display, including hats worn by men, women and children and belts with the pouches, purses and sheaths that were hung from them. Additional items of interest are a Tajik wedding veil and a Turkmen child's embroidered silk over-shirt.

Silk and Leather in Central Asia

Silk and leather have lengthy, intertwined histories as materials for Central Asian dress. Silk was first and most prolifically produced in China, where for centuries its source and production methods were closely guarded secrets. Over time, the potent cavalry of Central Asian nomadic groups extorted vast quantities of coveted luxury goods from the Chinese and other sedentary societies – first and foremost silk – which the nomadic groups later utilized and sold.

Leather, felt and fur, as well as distinctive clothing styles that included trousers, belts, tunics and caftans, were worn by horse-riding nomads as long as 3,000 years ago. This apparel became the clothing of conquerors – Iranian, Turkic, or Mongol – who came off the steppe to dominate Central Asia throughout most of its history. In turn, this style became the predominant form of dress among the conquered and evolved into the clothing worn in Western cultures to this day. The continued use of leather, combined with the copious production of silk, its brilliant dyeing and multifaceted use, were all part of the spectacular blossoming of the textile and related arts during the 19th century in western Central Asia.

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Founded in 1925 by George Hewitt Myers, The Textile Museum is an international center for the exhibition, study, collection and preservation of the textile arts. The Museum explores the role that textiles play in the daily and ceremonial life of individuals the world over. Special attention is given to textiles of the Near East, Asia, Africa and the indigenous cultures of the Americas. The Museum also presents exhibitions of historical and contemporary quilts, and fiber art. With a collection of more than 17,000 textiles and rugs and an unparalleled library, The Textile Museum is a unique and valuable resource for people locally, nationally and internationally.

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. Admission is free; suggested donation is \$5.00. For further information, call 202-667-0441.

For more information or images, please contact Cyndi Spain at 202-667-0441, ext. 17, or by email at cspain@textilemuseum.org or visit www.textilemuseum.org/about/pressroom.htm.