



TRIBAL
TREASURES:
CARPETS
AND
JEWELRY
FROM
CENTRAL
ASIA.

BRUCE MUSEUM, GREENWICH, CONNECTICUT

Cover: Fig. 1
Teke Bride's Rug,
Late Nineteenth
Century
Bruce Museum
Collection
Fig. 2
Teke Wedding
Crown,
Circa 1900
Courtesy Mr. and
Mrs. Stephen Van
C. Wilberding

Inside Cover: Fig. 3
Ersari or Saryk
Kelim (detail),
Circa 1900
Courtesy George
W. O'Bannon

Right: Fig. 4
Teke Asyk,
Circa 1900
Courtesy Mr. and
Mrs. Stephen Van
C. Wilberding

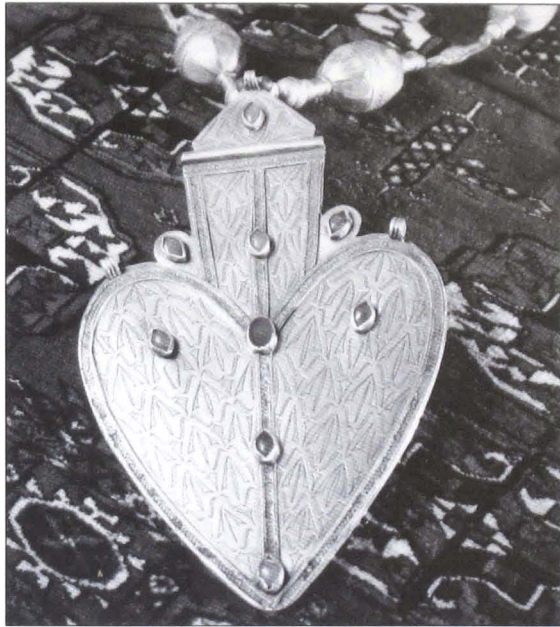
All jewelry in this catalogue
Courtesy Mr. and Mrs.
Stephen Van C. Wilberding

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George W. O'Bannon, Guest Curator
Robin Garr, Curator of Education

The exhibition is dedicated to the
Memory of Lee Beshar

Bruce Museum
Greenwich, Connecticut

EXHIBITION / MAY 15 TO SEPTEMBER 11, 1994

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We have dedicated “Tribal Treasures: Carpets and Jewelry from Central Asia” to Lee Beshar in acknowledgment of our enormous gratitude to him for having inspired this splendid exhibit. We are appreciative also of Lee’s friends and colleagues who supported and encouraged this endeavor after his untimely death—particularly Robert P. Beshar and Arakel Baroyan.

The Bruce Museum extends its sincerest thanks to Guest Curator George W. O’Bannon whose leadership, expertise, and commitment have created an exhibit which is remarkable for its visual splendor and for its scholarly importance. The dedication and professional skills of Robin Garr, Bruce Museum Curator of Education, who assisted Mr. O’Bannon most ably in arranging and organizing the project, were vital to the success of this undertaking.

We are indebted also to the twenty-three lenders to the exhibit, and especially to Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Van C. Wilberding, for the loan of their outstanding Turkmen jewelry collection.

Along the way, we have received advice, help and financial assistance from many others. We expressly appreciate the contributions of Doris Leslie Blau; the Near Eastern Art Research Center of Washington, D.C., and its Chairman, Russell Pickering; Sotheby’s, Inc. and two of its Vice Presidents, Mary Jo Otsea, Director of Rugs and Carpets, and Ben Cohen, Director of Photographic Services; and of Dr. William Irons, Chair of North Western University’s Anthropology Department, whose outstanding black and white photographs are featured in the exhibit.

—John B. Clark,
Executive Director



Fig. 5
Teke Manlajlyk,
Circa 1900

DEDICATION

The decision to mount an exhibition of Turkmen carpets and jewelry was made by the Exhibitions Committee of the Bruce Museum in October, 1992. When we called Lee Beshar to enlist his help, his enthusiasm, energy, and expertise resulted in contacts with needed collections and authorities.

Lee was generous with his time, money and hospitality. He was a supporter of activities which contributed to the long term development of an interest by the public in Oriental rugs. In the early 1970's he curated the first temporary exhibition of carpets at the Bruce Museum. He was an active advisor and lecturer to the Antiques Society of the Bruce Museum, regularly attending the opening gala luncheon each autumn.

Lee was also a man possessed of a great wit, who loved telling and hearing a good story. He was an active sportsman and a devoted supporter of Yale University, his alma mater. As the third generation head of the oldest continuous Oriental rug business in New York, A. Beshar and Co., Lee reshaped the organization to meet contemporary demands while also dealing with antique Oriental rugs, the basis on which the firm was established.

When Lee died in January, 1993, we felt we had lost not only a good friend but also a prime mover of the project. However, we have had a continuing sense of Lee's help throughout this exhibition as his friends, contacts and fellow collectors agreed to continue their participation.

We dedicate this exhibition to the memory of Lee Beshar, in celebration of his friendship and productive life.



INTRODUCTION

The geographic area known as Central Asia is the source of one of the major groups of Oriental rugs and tribal jewelry. The area includes the newly independent countries of the former Soviet Union known as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgystan and Turkmenistan and the northern half of Afghanistan. It is an enormous inland basin with an arid climate dominated by the Kyzyl Kum and Kara Kum deserts to the north and the mountains of the Hindu Kush and its extensions along the Afghan and Iranian boundaries to the south. The Caspian Sea is its western limit and the Tien Shan Mountains of China are its eastern limit. It is an area ideally suited for nomadism and the grazing of animals, particularly sheep, which produce a wool ideally suited for carpet weaving.

Nomads have inhabited this area for millennia. Settled populations developed around the oases scattered throughout it and along the few rivers which empty into the region. Its principal cities are Bokhara, Samarkand and Khiva which have been the centers of various states and empires. Because of its location at the intersection of several caravan routes, Bokhara has long been the dominant trading city in the area. For this reason Central Asian rugs have been known in the West as *Bokhara* since they were first imported by Europe and America in the nineteenth century. In recent years as more has been learned about who wove them, the names of the specific weaving tribes have been used to identify specific types.

The Turkmen of Turkmenistan are the most prolific weavers of all the Central Asian peoples, and so today most of the rugs formerly called *Bokhara* are mainly attributed to several of the various Turkmen tribes. Most of the weavings in this exhibition were created by them. A few pieces of other Central Asian peoples such as the Kirghiz, Uzbeks and Karakalpaks have been included to illustrate some of the differences in the styles of these groups.

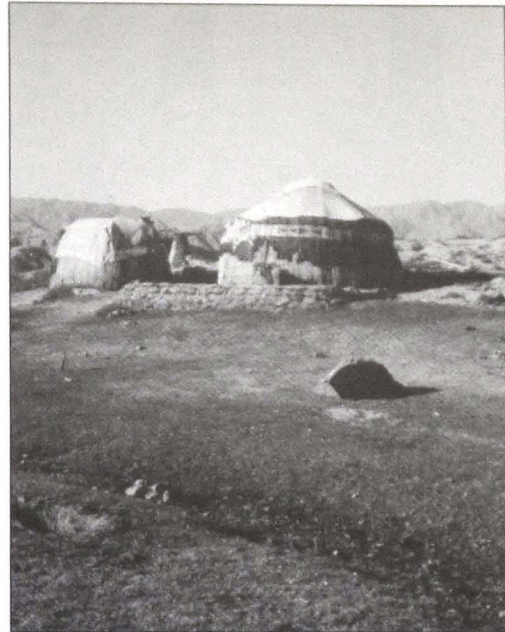


TURKMEN TRIBAL GROUPS

The Turkmen are the third most numerous of the Central Asian peoples after the Kazakhs and Uzbeks, and they are the most skillful and prolific weavers in the region. Throughout their history they have pursued a largely nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle. Their traditional lands extended from the Caspian Sea along the Kopet Dagh Mountains on the Iran border to the Merv Oasis where the Murghab River from Afghanistan disappears into the desert. From Merv they ranged northward to the southern bank of the Amu Darya which flows out of Afghanistan in a northerly direction to the Aral Sea. Turkmen territory continued along the southern bank of the Amu Darya to near the city of Khiva, just south of the Aral Sea. From Khiva they roamed westward back to the Caspian Sea. Today this is generally the boundary of the country of Turkmenistan.

Because of their nomadic lifestyle, the Turkmen have, until recently, had a mostly illiterate culture. Their history is known largely through the records of Uzbeks who dominated them politically. From these histories it is known that the Turkmen consider themselves to be descendants of an ancestor known as Oghuz Khan. Through his four sons and their sons, the tribal names have been derived. The principal ones used today in the attribution of rug types are *Teke, Saryk, Salor, Yomud, Ersari, Chodor* and *Arabachi*.

A few additional groups of rugs have been given names by some writers based on specific characteristics of weave structure, color or design. However, the names listed above are those which are most frequently encountered in the literature and used in labeling the rugs in this exhibition.



*An Uzbek yurt at
summer pastures in
northern Afghanistan
Photograph Courtesy
George W. O'Bannon*



*A Teke Turkmen headman
at his village near Gurian,
Afghanistan, 1967
Photograph Courtesy
George W. O'Bannon*

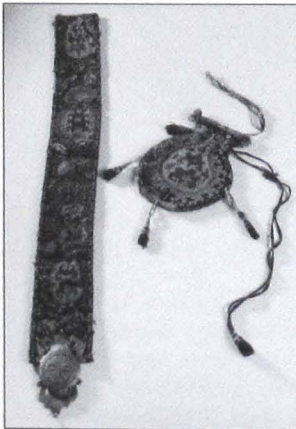
TURKMEN WEAVINGS



Fig. 6
Yomud Horse Cover,
First Quarter Twentieth
Century
Courtesy Bachelor's Hall
Collection

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Fig. 7
Embroidered Belt and Pouch,
Shabrisabz,
Nineteenth Century
Courtesy Ms. Arlene C. Cooper



Of the Turkmen tribal groups the Teke, Yomud and Ersari produced the greatest number of rugs which explains why most of the pieces in this exhibition are attributed to them. By the end of the nineteenth century they were the three largest of the Turkmen tribes. The Teke lived along the Iranian border area from Ashkabad, the capital of Turkmenistan, to the Merv Oasis. The Saryk and Salor lived among them mostly south and east of Merv. One group of Salors lived among the Ersari on the Amu Darya. The Yomuds inhabited the shores of the Caspian Sea from the Iranian border north and eastward towards Khiva. The Ersari lived mainly along the riparian areas of the Amu Darya. The Chodor and Arabachi were scattered throughout the northern area between the Yomud and Ersari. After the Russian Revolution and Communist reconquest of Central Asia in the 1920s, large numbers of Ersari, Teke and Saryk Turkmen moved into the adjacent border areas of northern Iran and Afghanistan, where they are still living today.

The Turkmen lead a mostly nomadic life centering on the herding of sheep, goats and horses. It is from the fleece of the sheep that they produce most of the goods and materials for everyday life. They live in a portable dwelling called a *yurt* which consists of a collapsible wooden frame. When erected the frame is covered with felts held in place by a variety of bands. The floor of the *yurt* is covered with felts, kelims and rugs. Bags of various sizes hold household goods, food, clothing and other possessions. They are suspended around the wall of the *yurt* for utility, household order and decoration. The entry to the *yurt* is decorated with a variety of weavings which are both functional and decorative. The interior space is divided into areas of specific use, e.g. cooking, sleeping, reception. All of these articles—felts, kelims and rugs—are produced by the women.

Before the 1920s, some Turkmen were more or less permanently settled at the major oases such as Merv, Tejend and Akhal, along the Caspian shore and on the banks of the Amu Darya. Although they built some permanent adobe houses, *yurts* were still constructed in connection with these and the same types of woven articles were made for them as well. The *yurt* and its contents were and remain the commanding reason for the production of weavings and textiles of many different types.

The second type of weavings produced are those for the horses of the men. If the *yurt* dominates the Turkmen woman's life, the horse dominates that of the man. It is absolutely necessary for mobility and is the basis of sport and entertainment in Turkmen society. The women, therefore, weave blankets to keep the horse warm in winter, covers for the saddle seat and girths of various dimensions to secure the saddle. Although highly utilitarian, these pieces are meant to be decorative, and they can exhibit some of the finest weaving.

Weddings are one of the most important social and ceremonial events of the Turkmen. Many special weavings which rank among the most unusual and rare are made by young brides and their mothers for these events. Most important are the pieces made for the bride's litter, called *kejebe*, which go on the camel that carries her to the ceremony. Special pieces are also made to decorate the camel itself. It is for these occasions that the women wear embroidered capes denoting their marital status and where they don the full accoutrement of jewelry they own.

THE TURKMEN GUL

The distinctive feature of most Turkmen rugs is the *gul*. The *gul* is a polygon which is arranged in rows on the field. In shape it varies from a diamond to an octagon and in size from 2" x 2" to 18" x 18". In most cases the *gul* is quartered with the same patterns repeated in each quarter. The shape of the *gul* and the interior patterns are given different names to distinguish one from another. A few of these *gul* names are the same as those of the tribes, e.g. *Teke*, *Salor*, *Chodor*. Others refer to a specific drawing or to pattern elements in the quarters of the *gul*, e.g. *dyrnak*, *kepse*, *tauk nuska*, *gul-i-gul*, *c-gul*, *omurga*, *juval*, *ertmen*.

Some of these *guls* are associated almost exclusively with the work of a specific Turkmen tribal group. The *Teke gul*, which is a rounded octagon with two birds' heads and three trefoils in each quarter is rarely woven by other tribes. The *Teke guls* are connected by vertical and horizontal blue lines. Most Turkmen *guls* are not connected by lines but float free of one another. The *Salor gul* is found on rugs of not only the Salor but Ersari, Yomud and Kizil Ayak. The *tauk nuska* is used by the Yomud, Ersari, and Chodor. The Yomud groups seem to weave the widest range of *gul* types but only they are known to weave the *kepse* and *c-gul* types. Thus the type of *gul* is not the best indicator of which specific tribe wove a given rug. Other factors must be considered as well.

In addition to the main *guls* a smaller field pattern is used, and these are called secondary *guls* although they are strictly speaking not polygons. Most of these are used by all the tribes in one form or another but some are more common to one tribe than another. The *chemche* and *kurbage* secondary *guls* are typical on Teke rugs. The *memling*, *ashik* and *juval guls* are widely used by other tribes. These secondary *guls* are commonly used as a main motif on small bags such as the *mafrash* and *torba*.

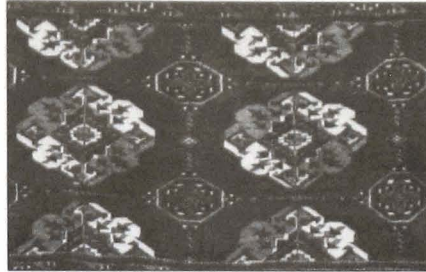
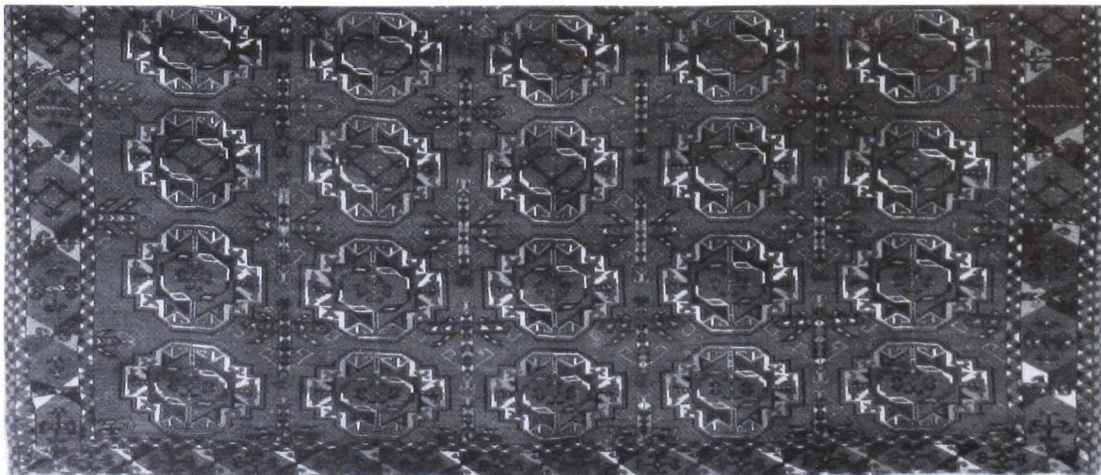


Fig. 8
Arabachi Juval (detail),
Mid-Nineteenth Century
Courtesy Mr. Kurt Munkasci
and Ms. Nancy Jeffries

Fig. 9
Saryk Main Carpet (detail),
First Half Nineteenth Century
Courtesy Bachelor's Hall
Collection



THE BESHIR RUGS



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Fig. 10
Teke Daghdan,
Circa 1900

There is one group of Turkmen rugs which does not follow the use of a *gul* as the primary pattern device. These rugs are referred to as *Beshir*, and the name comes from a village or group of villages on the Amu Darya river. The patterns used are most often derived from Persian sources and consist of *herati*, *mina khani* and other floral based patterns from Persian rugs. Some of their patterns are derived from *ikat* textiles which were made in Central Asian cities such as Bokhara and Samarkand. Others such as the “cloudband” pattern are unique to this group. Many of the rugs called *Beshir* were probably made by Uzbek as well as Turkmen weavers.

The *Beshir* rugs are among the largest Turkmen rugs. The length is typically 2 1/2 times the width and may be 8' x 20' or larger. In addition to these non-Turkmen patterns, they tend to have a greater use of yellow and blue in the execution of the designs than other Turkmen rugs. In many the ground color is mottled between red, blue and brown. Other than floor rugs from small to large sizes and *juvals*, few of the utilitarian type weavings are *Beshir*. This implies a settled and non-nomadic lifestyle for these weavers.



Fig. 11
Ersari Beshir Rug, Ikat Pattern,
Mid-Nineteenth Century
Courtesy Marc Feldman

THE COLOR RED

After the *gul*, the overwhelming use of the color red is the hallmark of Turkmen rugs. No other group of Oriental rugs uses red so predominantly. The ground color throughout the field and border is red. But the shades of red used vary considerably and in some instances it is incorrect to call them red. The red shades range from brown to purple, e.g. mahogany, a reddish-brown, to rust-red, carmine, rose, magenta, aubergine, purple-red and a dark brown-purple-red called liver. Certain shades of red are associated with different Turkmen groups. The Teke are noted for their nearly true red. The antique rugs attributed to the Salor are renowned for the strength and clarity of their red. Ersari rugs are by and large rust reds. Yomud rugs cover the entire spectrum. Arabachi rugs fall in the brown and purple ends of the color range and most Chodor rugs are purplish-red.

All other colors are secondary to the red color of the ground. A contrasting red, usually brighter and with an orange tint, is used in the patterns along with white, yellow and dark blue. Patterns are usually outlined in dark brown or blue. Blue-green or green are sometimes found. These secondary colors are frequently used in a diagonal sequence in the *guls*. It is most dramatic when white is used diagonally, but most commonly blue and blue-green are used for the diagonal emphasis.

Certain color usage is common to only one or two tribes. The Yomud and Chodor use white as a ground color for the main border more than any of the others. The Chodor and the Chob Bash Ersari use white as a ground color in the quarters of the *gul*. Diagonal coloring is very subtle in Teke rugs and more obvious in Yomud rugs.

These color characteristics are not static over long periods. They vary with time and place. For example, old Saryk rugs were woven with a rust-red ground and sometime in the last half of the nineteenth century began to shift to purple and mahogany tones which totally dominated the palette of these rugs by the last quarter of the century. This may have been due to taste or the type of dyes available to the weavers as they changed principal habitation sites. Likewise very old Ersari rugs have some of the brightest, clearest and truest reds to be found in Turkmen weaving.



Fig. 12
*Salor Juval (detail),
First Half Nineteenth
Century
Private Collection*

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Fig. 13
*Ersari Torba,
Mid-Nineteenth Century
Courtesy Mrs. John Sargeant*



MATERIALS AND STRUCTURE

The Turkmen rug is woven of the most available material at hand—sheep's wool—which can be obtained in abundance. The warp, weft and pile threads are handspun from wool. The wool is selected for each of these uses based on its characteristics. The warp used by the Teke, Saryk and Salor is white. The Ersari and Yomud use grayish wool, and the Arabachi and Chodor have a tendency to use browns. All use brown wool for the weft with a few rare exceptions. In general white wool is used for the pile because it allows dyes to produce the best colors, but gray and brown wool are also dyed to obtain certain tones.

Very minor amounts of cotton are used in the wefts or pile of some rugs. Wefts with cotton are found in Yomud and Chodor rugs. Cotton is common in the pile of Saryk weavings. Silk is commonly used in small areas of the pile by Salor, Saryk, and Teke.

The pile is tied into either Turkish or Persian knots. The Saryk, some Yomud and some Chodor rugs are tied with the Turkish knot. The Persian knot is used by all others but with variations. A Persian knot which opens left is mostly used in Salor and Arabachi rugs and certain Yomud weavings. A Persian knot opening to the right is used by the other groups.

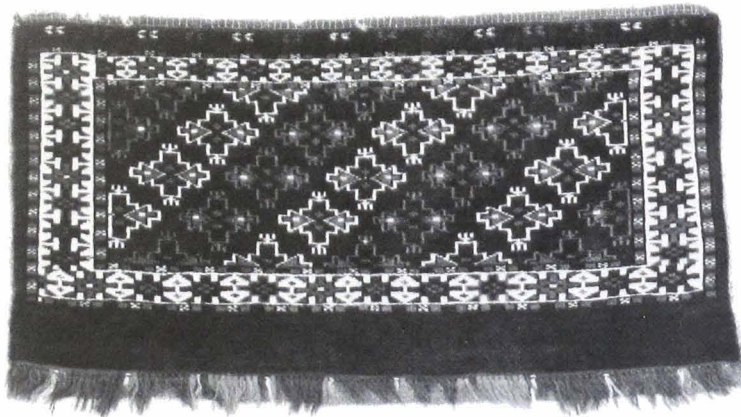
The knot density or number of knots per square inch is another identifying

characteristic of Turkmen rugs, although less reliable than other characteristics. In moving across a scale of most finely woven to coarsest, the major tribes would be arrayed as follows:

Knots/sq.in.:	200	150	120	100	90	80	70	50
	Teke,	Salor,	Saryk,	Yomud,	Chodor,	Arabachi,	Ersari,	Beshir

There is overlap at each connection point and this is not to say that a Yomud weaver could not have woven a piece as fine as a Teke for a dowry piece. As a general practice and on average Teke weavings are more finely woven than others and Beshir rugs are the coarsest with the other tribes arrayed in between. On picking up an exceptionally finely woven piece, the first assumption would be Teke until an inspection showed the knot to be Turkish. That would mean it was from another tribe and that other characteristics should be studied.

Fig. 14
Yomud Mafrash,
Last Quarter Nineteenth
Century
Courtesy A. Beshar & Co.



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Fig. 15
Teke Ak Juval,
Last Quarter Nineteenth
Century
Courtesy William Fern



TURKMEN DYES

The Turkmen have an abundance of the plant known as madder. It grows wild in the desert and near the cultivated areas. Madder is the primary source of most red dyes throughout all rug weaving areas. The shade of red produced from the dye-bearing roots of this plant varies depending on its age and type of soil in which it grows. This explains in part the wide range of reds found in Turkmen weavings. In dyeing the wool, the shade of red can also be altered by the metallic salts used to fix the dye as well as the natural mineral content of the water.

Yellow comes primarily from *isparik*, a type of wild larkspur which grows throughout Central Asia. Since yellow is the least light fast of all natural dyes, the yellows in Turkmen rugs can vary from clear bright yellows to those which have faded almost to ivory.

Blue comes from indigo which is imported from India. Dyeing with indigo is a more sophisticated process than that used for other dyes and most indigo dyeing is done by professional dyers in the cities, towns and villages. Indigo is expensive and this may explain why not more blue is used in Turkmen rugs. It is unlikely, except in the largest Turkmen settled areas, that the Turkmen women accomplish their own indigo dyeing.

Blue-green and green are the result of dyeing with yellow over indigo. For this reason it is rare to find really strong greens in Turkmen rugs. When encountered it is usually in some of the oldest pieces. Because the yellow fades and the blue does not, over time a strong green has a tendency to change to blue-green. It is not uncommon to see a much stronger green or blue-green on the back of a rug than on the face. This is because the back is not exposed to sunlight and the base of the knot does not fade as rapidly as the face.

Brown and white come from naturally colored wool. Since brown has a tendency to bleach with exposure to sunlight, the outlining of some very old rugs may be a medium or light brown. Camelhair is available to the Turkmen but is only rarely noted in the warp, weft or pile threads of their rugs.

Synthetic dyes which were developed in the 1850s had reached the Central Asian weavers by the 1870s. These early synthetic dyes, known as coal tar, aniline and azo dyes, have been identified in many antique pieces. By the turn of the century they had virtually displaced the vegetal dyes described above. It should be assumed that most Turkmen rugs of the 20th century are all or partially dyed with synthetics.

The introduction of synthetic dyes coincided with the beginning of commercial weaving for Western markets. Although Western demand is primarily for small and main carpet sizes, weavers continue to make utilitarian and festive bags for their own use in traditional designs.

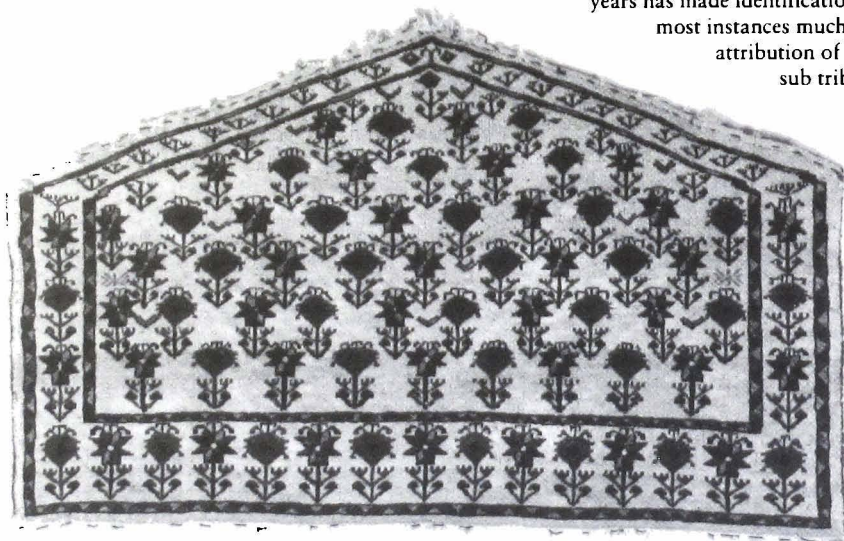


Fig. 16
Ersari Soumak Rug,
Mid-Twentieth Century
Courtesy George W. O'Bannon

IDENTIFYING TURKMEN RUGS

Thirty years ago Turkmen rugs were identified primarily on the basis of the type of *gul* used. Rugs with the *Teke gul* were *Teke*, those with the *Salor gul* *Salor* and those with the *gul-i-gul Khiva* and *Afghan*, after the city and area where they were thought to have been woven. Today, all of these are called *Ersari*. Rugs with a polyglot of *dyrnak*, *kepse*, *tauk nuska*, *juval* and any other rarely seen *gul* types were called *Yomud*. Scholarship in recent years has made identification much more complex but in most instances much more precise. Today the attribution of a rug to a specific Turkmen sub tribal group involves the *gul* type, the type of knot, the materials in the warp, weft and pile, the knot density and the shade of red, to name a few distinguishing characteristics.

If one remembers the characteristics mentioned above, it is not really so difficult. For example, a rug with a Turkish knot, a purple ground color, cotton and silk in the pile and white warp threads is almost certain to be from only one tribe.



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Fig. 17
Central Asian Asmalyk,
Last Decade Nineteenth
Century
Courtesy Bachelor's Hall
Collection

These five pieces of data are mentioned in the above text. What is it?
(Answer in back of this catalogue.)

There are many rugs that are still grouped into the *Yomud* and *Ersari* types which, with further study, will undoubtedly be broken into more precise groupings. Whether they are *Yomud* or *Ersari* per se is not important but the ability to identify distinct sets of pieces will lead to a fuller understanding and appreciation of these rugs.

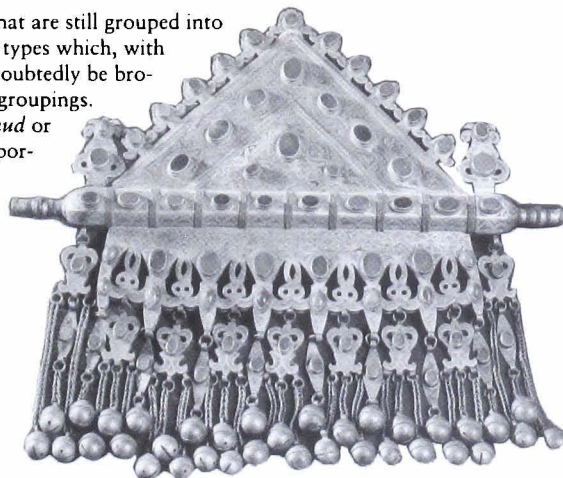


Fig. 18
Teke Tumar,
Circa 1900

AESTHETICS AND TURKMEN RUGS

By definition, aesthetics is a subjective determination of the beauty of a work of art and may vary from individual to individual. For example the characteristics defining the finest Turkmen rugs do not apply to the finest Caucasian rugs. These characteristics vary from one type of rug to another. There are generally no agreed upon criteria among Turkmen enthusiasts as to what constitute the most desirable features of the greatest Turkmen weavings, but some features are mentioned often in the literature describing Turkmen rugs. Some of these are:

Spacing. This refers first to the amount of open, unpatterned space around *guls* and the space between the elements within the *gul*. The more space or “breathing room” the *gul* has, the more it seems to float on the ground color. This is highly desirable. It implies that in main carpets of the same size and the same type of *guls*, the one with fewer *guls* will be more attractive than one with more *guls*. A rug with fewer *guls* will have more open space in it. Of two *Yomud juvals*, one with 3x3 (9) *guls* and one with 4x4 (16) *guls*, the one with 9 *guls* will always seem aesthetically superior. Another way of saying this is that busyness or closeness is not aesthetically pleasing. The amount of space needed to achieve a feeling of spaciousness can be extremely minor when measured in inches or centimeters. It is frequently not as obvious in pieces reproduced in books because of the reduction in size.

Roundness. This refers to the shape of certain *guls* such as the *Teke*, *Salor*, *gul-i-gul*, *tauk nuska* and *juval*. Roundness is the visual response to the shape of a *gul* where the vertical and horizontal axes are equal or near equal in length. In almost all instances the horizontal axis is longer than the vertical. In some pieces the axes are nearly equal resulting in something approaching a round *gul*. The *Teke* and *Salor guls* which have rounded outlines have nearly perfectly circular *guls* in some rugs. With the *gul-i-gul* and *tauk nuska* which have straight sides, this is less obvious but the effect is the same. One result of roundness is to provide more open space for the pattern elements inside the *gul*. Although *guls* such as the *dyrnak* and *kepse* are naturally wider than high, those pieces in which the vertical axis is longer than normal are considered more desirable than others.

Drawing. This refers not only to the clarity of outlining and detailing of individual elements in a *gul* but the addition of an angle to give lift to a pattern, the widening of an outline to add emphasis, the use of space between two areas which normally touch or the addition of an uncommon pattern. These are the small details which are the most difficult aspect of Turkmen aesthetics to grasp and can only be understood visually and by comparison of similar pieces.

Color. Color provides the first response to a Turkmen weaving. Ideally the red should be clear, deeply saturated, bright and intense. The other colors should have these same qualities but greens, blues and yellows with the same clear, mid range quality of the red are rare. Groups such as the *Chodor* rugs which are in the purple spectrum range rather than red should have good, strong, unmuddy purples. Whatever the typical color of a rug type, it should be clear and bright not murky or dull.

Border/Field Relationship. Rugs in which the borders occupy less space in



Fig. 19
*Teke Main Carpet (detail),
First Half Nineteenth Century
Courtesy A. Beshar & Co.*

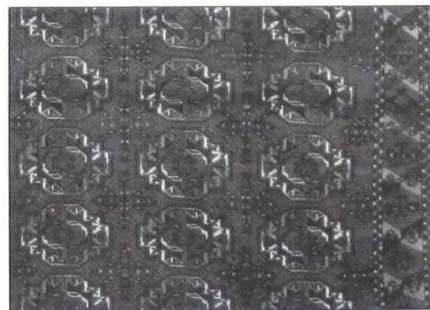
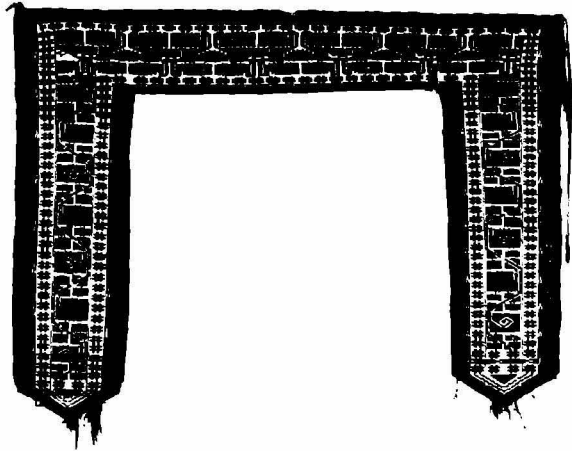


Fig. 20
*Saryk Main Carpet (detail),
First Half Nineteenth Century
Courtesy Bachelor's Hall
Collection*

relation to the field are the most appealing. In general this translates into the fewer the number of borders, the better. A main border flanked by two minor borders is the most desirable. Additional borders use field space resulting in less space for the *guls*. Few borders also mean the main border patterns can be open, well drawn and balanced.



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Fig. 21
Teke Kaplyk,
Third Quarter Nineteenth
Century
Courtesy Myrna Bloom

Fig 22
Yomud Sunsuleh,
Circa 1900



Wool. Wool is a basic but less important aspect of great weavings. All great pieces have excellent wool but not necessarily the best wool. Without excellent wool the color will not be as effective in its light reflective ability. Great dyes on bad wool result in a dead, dull weaving. Good wool enhances certain aspects of color and drawing.

Condition. A weaving can have all kinds of condition problems and still be great and aesthetically appealing. It can be a fragment. It can be a *juwal* with a hole in it. It can be a main carpet reduced in length and width from its original size. What these must have to retain a fidelity to color and drawing is sufficient pile to reflect light and represent the rug's original pile condition. A rug worn down to the base of the knots but otherwise intact is totally deprived of its main appeal—color.

Other Factors. To the Western eye, white or ivory grounds are considered among the most aesthetically attractive of Turkmen weavings. They seem to illuminate the patterns from behind making them stand out from the ground. Whether the Turkmen aesthetic agrees with this is unknown.

Rarity is another aspect which can make some pieces more appealing. The fact that something is unique or exists only as a few pieces heightens one's aesthetic response. This is frequently a transitory phenomenon.

Size. Some small weavings such as *mafrash* generally tend to be of higher aesthetic quality than others. The patterns of these weavings are adapted from border patterns and small repetitive field patterns. Used in pieces of small dimension, these patterns take on a new aspect and appeal. However, the same requirements of space, drawing, roundness and color apply to them as well.

It should be noted that fineness of weave or knot density has not been cited as a factor affecting aesthetic merit. It is a general misunderstanding that the best rugs are the most finely knotted. A given rug should fall within the standard knot range for its type, but it does not follow that a *Teke* rug will be aesthetically superior to an *Ersari* because it is more finely knotted.

The major factors listed above concerning high aesthetic quality are mostly found in older weavings, and few of these are available in the marketplace. However, even when comparing younger pieces of similar age and type, the same aesthetic criteria should be kept in mind.

OTHER CENTRAL ASIAN WEAVINGS

Other tribes of Central Asia also weave rugs but on a more limited scale than the Turkmen. The Kirghiz, Karakalpak and Uzbek are represented in this exhibition. In looking at these weavings, a color palette emerges which is not so overwhelmingly red. In general, the density of the weaving is not as fine. The drawing of the patterns is not so clear and patterns adapted from the Turkmen are not as true to the prototype. Because several of these groups are nomadic, they produce many of the same types of utilitarian pieces.

Research into Central Asian weaving has been done mostly in Russia and the Central Asian republics and is largely unknown in the West. Up until now these woven goods have been largely ignored by collectors, and many dealers are unaware of exactly where they come from and who weaves them. Yet they contain numerous qualities which are considered desirable for Turkmen weavings; they are made by nomadic peoples, for utilitarian and festive purposes and without commercial motivation.

THE FUTURE OF TURKMEN RUGS

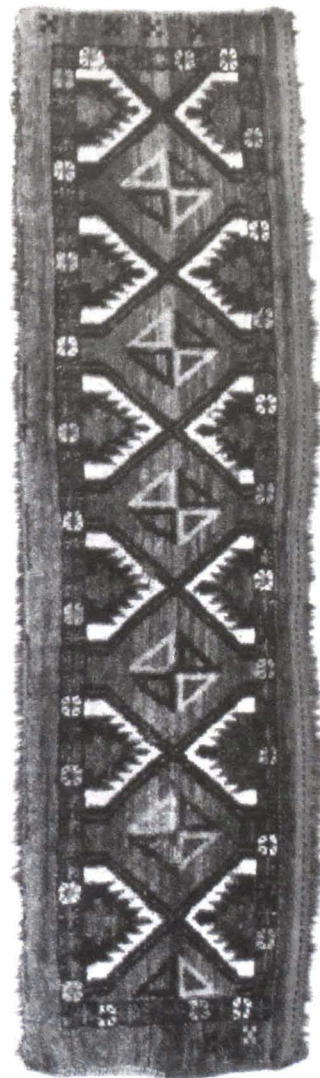
Turkmen are still weaving rugs in Turkmenistan, northeastern Iran and northern Afghanistan. In each of these countries weaving survives as a home industry where horizontal looms and handspun yarns are used. This is unique among the major rug weaving areas of the world. These home weavers are still aware of the traditional patterns and the various types of utilitarian weavings used in the yurt.

Although almost all weaving is of a commercial type—meaning that it is made to be sold in the marketplace—a revival of natural dyeing and artistic standards from the past is entirely possible. Vegetal dyeing was beginning in Afghanistan among the Turkmen in the 1970s and is starting in Iran at the present time. As Turkmenistan becomes a more active participant in international markets for Oriental carpets and is more aware of the need for a return to traditional methods, it too could move quickly to encourage its weavers to return to the earlier patterns and colors.

Turkmen rugs have always been among the most desired of Oriental rugs. Among collectors in recent years they have been one of the two most sought after groups. This is due mainly to the wide variety of types of weavings and the broad range of designs. Because many of these weavings are small, they are easier to display, use and store. Few people collect Turkmen main carpets due to their large size. As the number of the older weavings declines, those from the turn of the century will become more collectible. And if today's weavers can be encouraged to return to the old patterns and vegetal dyes, the future will be even brighter for the survival of this most traditional form of weaving, the Turkmen rug.

—George W. O'Bannon, Guest Curator

Fig. 23
Uzbek Torba,
Early Twentieth Century
Private Collection





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*Fig. 24
Yomud Neckpiece,
Circa 1900*

The basis for this exhibition is a collection of jewelry generously lent to the Bruce Museum by Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Van C. Wilberding. The collection comprising some 50 pieces can be classified as Turkmen jewelry from the Central Asian region known today as Turkmenistan. Turkmen jewelry is generally described as very bold. Individual pieces can be massive in size, crafted in simple geometric shapes with lavish ornamentation. Decorative techniques include gilding; wire filigree; punch work; carnelian, turquoise and colored glass insets; and bangles and bells that dangle. Traditionally, many of these pieces are worn together at once which surely must make a striking appearance as well as a joyous tinkling noise with the wearer's movements.

TRIBAL ATTRIBUTION AND DATING

The majority of the jewelry in the exhibition are from the Teke tribe characterized by large silver pieces with overall gold fire gilding patterns studded with orange-red carnelians.¹ A few pieces in the exhibition represent other Turkmen tribes including Yomud, Saryk and Ersari. The neckpiece for example, is most likely Yomud based on elements such as the ungilded silver surface and the use of gallery wire (raised scroll-like wire) which are features of the jewelry of that tribe.

As with the carpets, it is difficult to pinpoint exact tribal attributions of jewelry. Even within a single tribe the jewelry can show variable characteristics. Further mixing of styles, designs and production methods occurs with trade between the tribes. Also, the way in which individuals choose to wear their jewelry varies. A piece created for use as a hair ornament might be worn as a pendant for example. In this exhibition, we present the jewelry as it originally was designed to be worn.

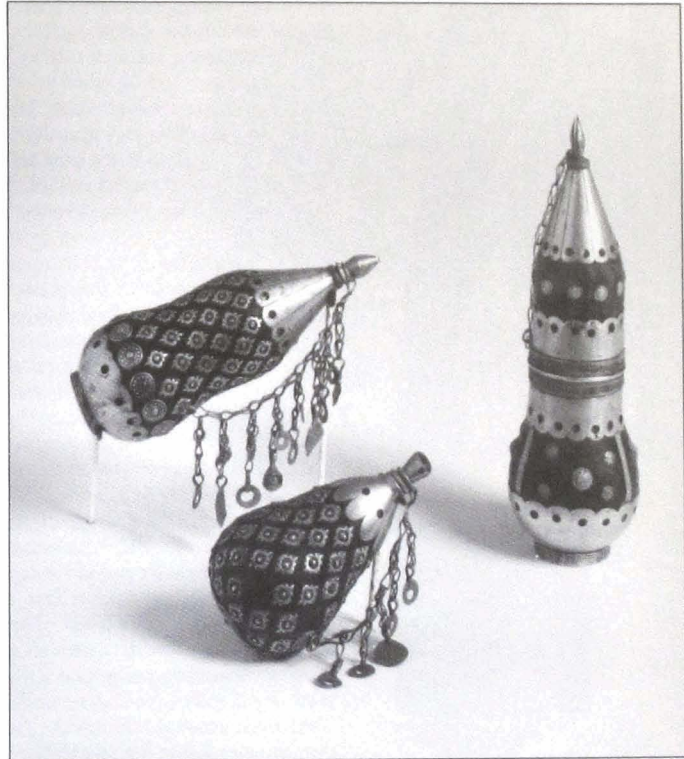
It is generally agreed by experts that the dating can only be an estimation due to the nomadic nature of the people and the enormous amount of trading that takes place. The most accepted dates put most pieces in the last few decades of the nineteenth century and first part of the twentieth century.

JEWELRY IN TURKMEN SOCIETY

Turkmen jewelry is designed and produced by men for use mainly by women, but children both male and female also wear jewelry. When a woman, young girl, or bride is dressed in full festive costume she can literally be covered from head to foot in silver ornaments.

Turkmen men by comparison do not adorn themselves, they decorate their horses. They sometimes use ornamentation on the small personal effects which are attached to their belts. The small gourd bottles, *sokadi*, are used for tobacco or snuff, for example. On occasion the belt is ornamented with a silver buckle. Yet the horses, beloved by their owners, are adorned in extravagant bridles covered in silver and brass and accented by carnelians and sometimes turquoise. The heavy tack elegantly sets off the features of the horse's head and reveals at one glance the importance of the horse to the Turkmen.

Jewelry plays a role beyond ornamentation in Turkmen society. The nomadic way of life helped to establish the custom of wearing all their jewelry as a way of transporting and controlling the family's wealth. Jewelry could serve as ransom or immediate capital as needed. Essentially the women are the bankers of the tribes, responsible for the maintenance and regulation of the herds which form the basis of the nomadic economic system.² Finally, and most recently, women's jewelry has become a trade good.

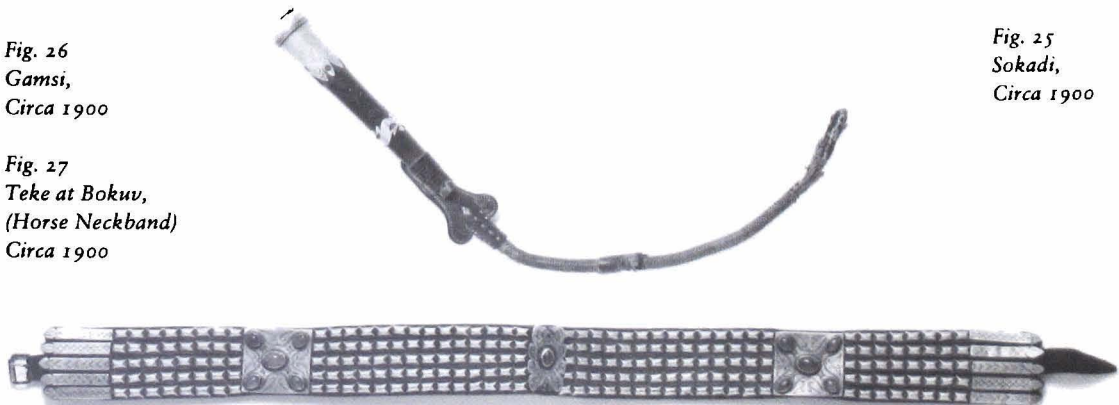


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Fig. 26
Gamsi,
Circa 1900

Fig. 27
Teke at Bokuv,
(Horse Neckband)
Circa 1900

Fig. 25
Sokadi,
Circa 1900



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Fig. 28
Teke Cheikel,
Circa 1900

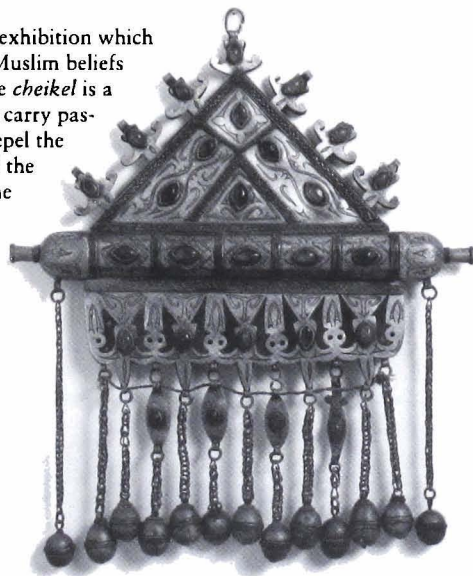
Fig. 29
Teke Tumar,
Circa 1900

Considering the many different Turkmen tribal groups and the minor groups within the tribes, one would expect to find immense variety in designs. There is, however, a single unifying bond: Sunnite Islam.¹ Islamic design principles are based on geometric and floral forms called by many scholars the forked leaf runner or arabesque. Sometimes this included the depiction of animals. In Turkmen jewelry these forms can be combined or influenced by the ancient, pre-Islamic worship of nature and shamanistic symbolism and traditions.

This iconographic mix results in jewelry created for religious and spiritual purposes. Many of the iconographic themes grounded in Turkmen traditions, are found both in the jewelry and the textiles. One such example in this exhibition is the “tree of life” motif represented on the Teke tentband, on the Ersari rug with icat design and on a lovely *daghdan* pendant (see fig. 10 and 11).

Jewelry is also used as amulets to promote good health, fertility, good luck, and to protect the wearer from demons and the evil eye. The brooch or necklace known as the *daghdan* is one of the oldest continuously used amulets. One of the most accepted interpretations of the motif is that it is a wish for new life. However, it must be noted that in all attempts at interpretation of motifs and their symbolism, often from intermixed and obscure traditions, the real significance can be easily overlooked or misunderstood.

Two examples represented in this exhibition which correspond directly to Islam and Muslim beliefs are the *cheikel* and the *tumar*. The *cheikel* is a purse-like object which is made to carry passages of the Koran or prayers to repel the “evil eye.” They are worn around the neck, usually by older women. The *tumars*, or Koran holders, are generally worn by younger women as breast ornaments. They always have a cylindrical portion intended to house written amulets or portions of the Koran. Because they are an important element of the bridal costume some scholars attach fertility symbolism to *tumars*.



SOCIAL STATUS

Turkmen jewelry can also represent various social meanings. For instance, headpieces or headgear, which are one of the most important elements of any Turkmen costume, indicate a woman's social status. Special clothing and jewelry are worn to distinguish eligible girls from brides and from married women with children. A woman is considered a bride until she has her first child.

SOCIAL STATUS

In Turkmen society a wedding is the most important event in a woman's life. A great deal of attention is paid to the traditional ceremony. The wedding crown, shown on the cover, is identifiable as such because of the elaborate silver, domed finial or *gupba* on top of the crown-shaped hat of embroidered wool and silk. An elaborate pattern is woven into the hat which along with finial and bangles, signifies its festive and ceremonial purpose.

A young unmarried girl probably wears a smaller, simpler hat or *tjubetejka*, with less ornament but often with a domed finial or *gupba* similar to one on the wedding crown. The unmarried girl is also unveiled and wears her hair braided forward over her breasts.

For the marriage ceremony the jewelry not only represents good luck charms but also makes up part of the dowry a bride brings to her new house. A bride is therefore fully dressed or draped in jewelry. In addition to the wedding crown, she might also wear coins or rondels sewn into her clothing; earrings or false earrings; temporal pendants; bracelets; and either a large pectoral plaque called a *gönzük*, a *tumar*, or a neckband known as a *bukov*. Often a young bride is so weighted down with jewelry she cannot walk unassisted to the wedding camel! The Yomud *sunsuleh* (see fig. 22) was possibly worn by the new bride from her wedding until the birth of her first child.

The costume of a woman changes to reflect her new status after marriage, and often only after childbirth. At this time her head wear changes, her face must be veiled when she is out in public or when facing men outside the family, and the hair is now braided down her back.

Turkmen women put a great deal of effort into their hair ornamentation. The braids are often completely covered by flat rondels with stamped floral motifs or coins connected by tubular or hollow silver ornaments in a chain-like decoration. Some women add pendants or tassels to the ends of their braids, often using false hair extensions. Large heart-shaped pendants called *asyks* are worn by some, braided into the hair and sometimes strung between the two braids.

The Teke are especially noted for wearing two or three smaller *asyks* together in a row and also for the double heart *asyk* known as the *goza-asyk*. The motif, which to the western eye appears as a heart, means something different to the Turkmen. In Turkmen society the form is related to fertility and the wish for offspring. The shape represents an anthropomorphic female design from which new life emerges. This view is supported by the fact that only married women wear the *asyk*.

Another type of headpiece worn only by a bride or married woman is the spectacular tiara headpiece or *egmeh*. These large and dynamic pieces are attached to a fairly tall hat usually covered in red silk. This forms a base on which the woman wears the *chirpy*, the embroidered robe with false sleeves, one of which she can pull across her face to serve as a veil. The *egmeh* and *chirpy* constituted high fashion in Turkmenistan in the beginning of the twentieth century.



Fig. 30, Teke Bukov;
Fig. 31, Teke Asyk;
Fig. 32, Teke Goza-Asyk,
All Circa 1900



All Turkmen women wear jewelry as decoration. Even the most utilitarian pieces are some of the most beautiful. The coat clasps known as *changah* are lovely closures for clothing as are the collar clasps known as *gul-yakah* (*gul* meaning flower, *yakah* collar.) We illustrate two tribal variations of *gul-yakah*: The Teke piece is typical with its curtain of pendants and the Yomud buttons are identified by the rich, stamped, geometric pattern and use of colored glass.

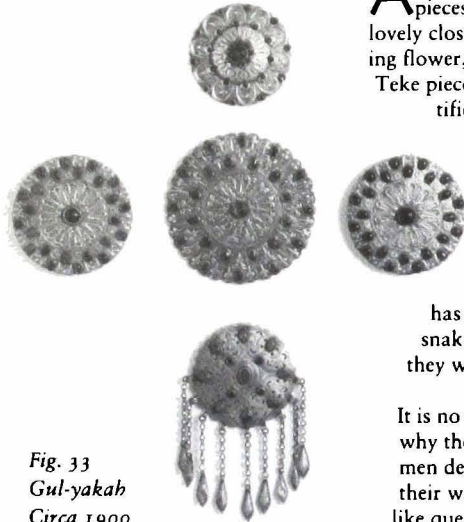


Fig. 33
Gul-yakah
Circa 1900

One of the most common forms of decoration are the bracelets. Usually worn in pairs, they can have from one to five bands or courses. Sometimes they cover a young girl's arms from wrist to elbow. This exhibition features one stunning pair of three-course bracelets with a noteworthy depiction of snakes. Natalya Sychova, noted author and curator at the Museum of Oriental Art in Moscow, has written, "It was believed that the evil forces could assume the shape of snake(s) . . . when they were confronted with their own likeness on jewelry, they were supposed to let the wearer go unscathed."⁴

It is no mystery why the Turkmen decorate their women like queens.

The women are the main providers in Turkmen tribal society. They establish the home site and are the housekeepers. They raise the children and they are the primary caregivers. They are responsible for the herds of sheep and goats. They are fully in charge of all textiles and textile production.



Fig. 34
Teke Bilezek
(Three-Course Bracelets),
Circa 1900

Ultimately the women are in control of the family finances. Therefore the men want to honor the women and their contributions to the society by bestowing on them the beauty and wealth of these magnificent tribal treasures.

—Robin Garr, Curator of Education

Fig. 35
Teke Egmeň,
Circa 1900



Footnotes

1. For complete technical analysis of jewelry production methods please refer to Kalter, J., pages 137-143
2. Kalter, J., pages 83-84
3. Kalter, J., page 30
4. Sychova, N., page 17

THE JEWELRY COLLECTION

Whenever our family finds itself living abroad we look for something curious to collect. The objects themselves are a source of wonderment leading us on a journey of discovery. They provide a vehicle for investigating the countryside and meeting regional people. Collections take us into unexpected situations and provide uncanny insights into local perspectives.

In 1984 we went to Saudi Arabia where we found a wide range of Middle Eastern curiosities: Yemeni silver; Bedouin jewelry; Syrian brass; Irani and Iraqi carpets. Occasionally we ran across massive pieces of beautifully shaped silver pendants and bracelets brushed with gold and studded with carnelian gems. They had a singular look of bold design, fine craftsmanship and surprising spontaneity which appealed to us. We pondered the weight of each piece and from photos learned that the women wore several pieces at once. We were impressed. We bought the odd piece here and there. This is how our collection of Turkmen jewelry began. Later we met Afghan refugees from the Civil War. Many sold textiles and occasional pieces of jewelry to raise money for their friends and families in Afghanistan. When it became known that we were collectors, large collections were offered to us before they had appeared in the souq (market).



The iconographic themes found in the jewelry are also found in the textiles. The exploration of these themes continues as a source of interest for us, as in the sharing of these unusual pieces with the public. We are happy to lend them so that you too will delight in their beauty, balance and whimsy. We hope to return the collection to its homeland when peace is restored.



*Fig. 36
Goza-Asyk,
Circa 1900*

*Fig. 37
Teke Gönzük,
Circa 1900*

The language of the Turkmen has no written characters of its own. When written, Arabic characters are commonly used. When words are translated into English, it is generally their second alteration. In the essay on jewelry, the Turkmen words used come from German and Russian translations.

GENERAL TURKMEN TERMS

Ak: White
 Gul: Polygon
 Ikat: Warp-patterned, resist-dyed fabric
 Kejebe: The litter used to carry the bride on a camel
 Kelim: Flatwoven textile which is reversible and the same on both sides
 Soumak: Flatweave
 Yurt: Tent of nomadic Turkmen

YURT UTILITY WEAVINGS

Qalin (Hali): The largest rug woven for use on the floor and referred to as main carpet, typically about 6-8ft. x 9-11ft. and placed away from the door in the main reception area of the yurt;
 Juval: A large storage bag, about 3ft. x 5ft., hung on the yurt wall and made in pairs;
 Torba: A long, shallow storage bag, about 1ft. x 4ft., hung on the yurt wall, made in pairs or singly;
 Mafrash: Small storage bag, about 1ft. x 2ft., hung on the yurt wall and probably used for women's personal items;
 Uk Bash. A small bag, about 8in. x 15in., to hold the ceiling poles of the yurt together during campsite change;
 Yolami: Flat or pile woven bands of various widths and lengths made for use in constructing the yurt and for purely decorative purposes;
 Ensi: A rug woven to go on the outside of the door frame, about 4ft. x 6-7ft., with a design in which the field is normally divided into four panels;
 Kaplyk: A "U" shaped weaving hung inside the yurt on the top and sides of the door frame, about 3-4ft. x 5-7ft., frequently with long wrapped fringes and for purely decorative purposes;
 Germetch: A long, shallow weaving, about 1ft. x 3-4ft., hung at the bottom of the door frame with patterns found in the elem and borders of ensis;
 Namazlyk: A prayer rug.

DECORATIVE HORSE WEAVINGS

At Joli: A horse cover or blanket, about 4ft. x 6-7ft., with "arms" to go around the chest of the horse and used under a saddle;
 Ichirgi: A saddle blanket, about 2ft. x 2ft., used directly under the saddle and without a slit for the pommel;
 Eyerlyk: A saddle seat cover, about 18in. x 18in., with a slit for the pommel;
 At Cheki: A strap or girth used functionally or decoratively with the saddle in pile weave or leather with silverwork.

GLOSSARY

WEDDING WEAVINGS

- Asmalyk: Pentagonally shaped hangings, about 3ft. x 5ft., made in pairs and hung on the sides of the wedding camel;
Diah Dyzlyk: Small pentagonal hangings, about 6in. x 6in., made in pairs and hung on the wedding camel's legs;
Dip Qalin: A small rug, about 3ft. x 3 ft., made as the bride's seat;
Chirpy: A woman's cape with embroidered patterns particularly about the neck, back and sleeves in blue-black, yellow and white with non-functional sleeves.

JEWELRY

- Asyk: Hair ornament;
Goza-asyk: double-heart ornament;
Asyk with abasy: ornament with connecting tubular chain;
Bilezik: Bracelet;
Bukov (bukau): Neckband or breast ornament;
Changah (capraz): cloak clasp;
Cheikel: Purse, amulet holder;
Daghdan: Pendant or brooch in a general anthropomorphic shape; "tree of life";
Egmeh (egme): Headpiece, tiara;
Engselik: Pendant, usually with smaller pendants attached to it;
Eurmeh: Headpiece for a turban;
Gönzuk: Pectoral pendant or coat plaque;
Gamsi: Whip;
Govuz bend: Horse breast band/plate;
Gul-yakah (guljaka): Collar clasp;
Gupba: Skull-cap finial;
Ildirgic (ildirgich) Articulated head ornament, usually with hanging pendants;
Manlajlyk: Articulated diadem;
Sandzalyk: Articulated headpiece with pins;
Serajna: Turban piece or headdress characterized by two large rondels;
Soerme: Articulated headpiece without hanging pendants;
Sokadi: Gourd bottles, used for holding tobacco or snuff;
Sunsuleh: Head band ornament of pendants and danglers;
Tenecir: Temporal pendants;
Tjubetejka: Small textile hat;
Tumar: Koran or amulet holder;
Ujah: Horse bridle.



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Answer to question on
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