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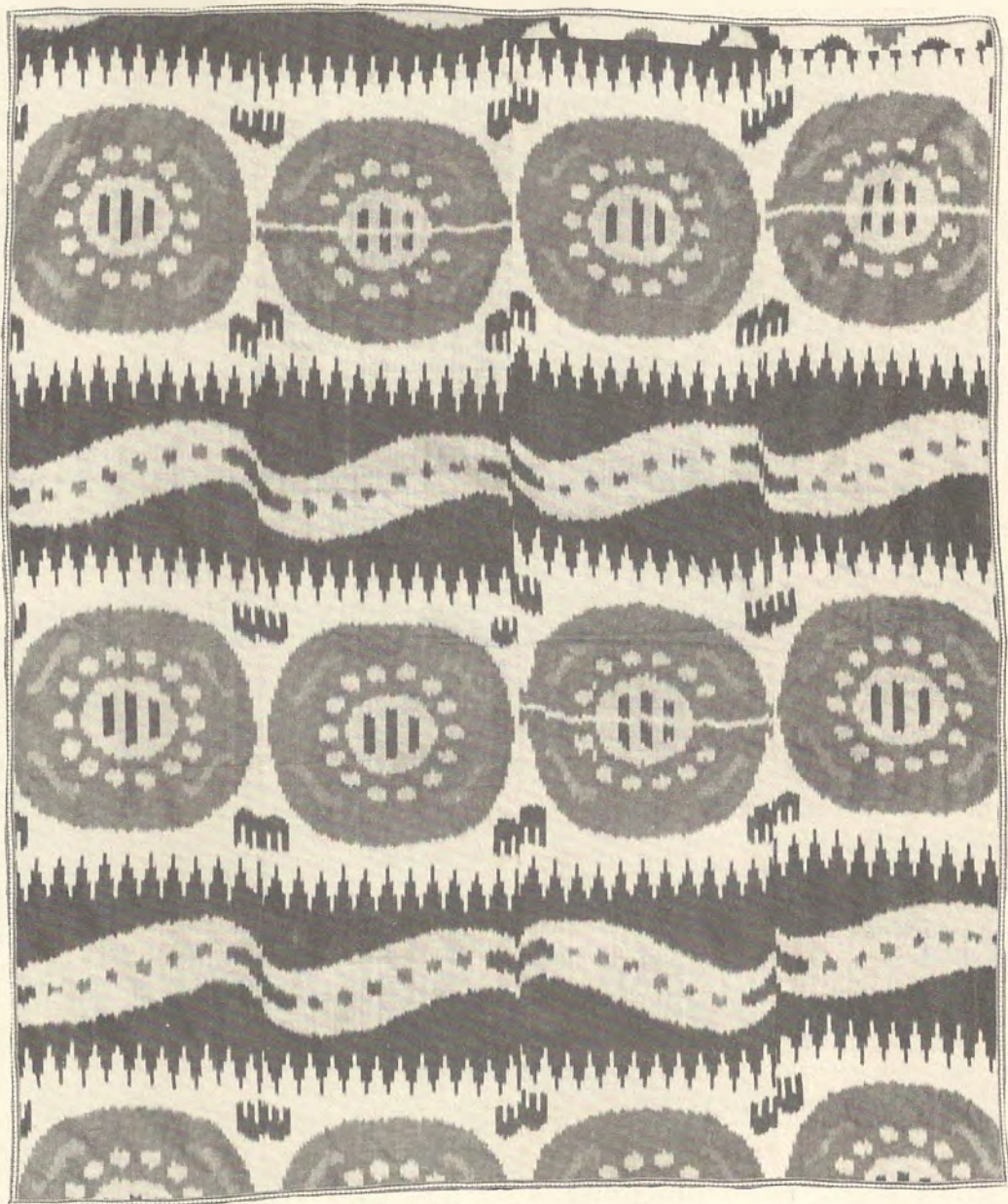


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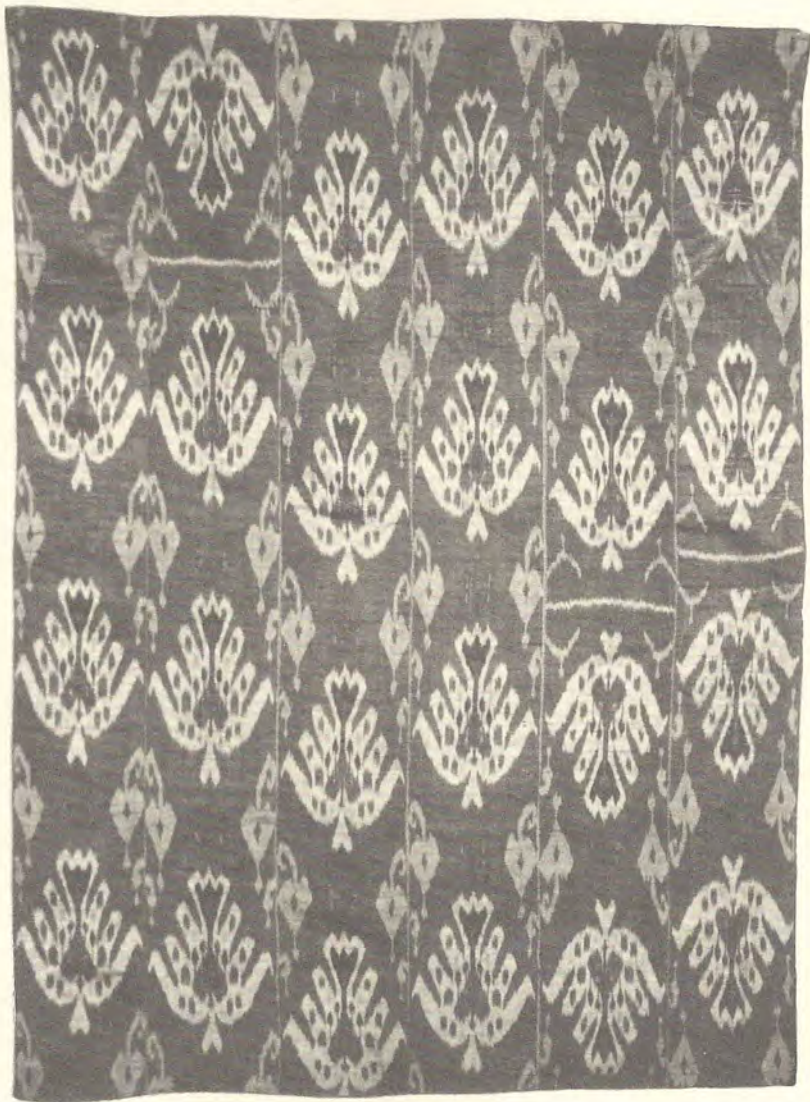
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# Bukhara: Traditional Weavings from Pre-Soviet Central Asia



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In southern regions of what was the Soviet Union lie five independent republics, the populations of which are predominantly Turkic: Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. During the course of the past fifty years, each of these areas has seen increasing industrialization as part of the centralized planning of the Soviet economy. Today, throughout the region, privatization of industry is rapidly occurring. Accom-

panying these new developments, and as part of the political and economic changes of the last few years, there has been an increasing awareness of ethnic identity and cultural inheritance. This may be expressed through literary and intellectual movements, or symbolically by the adoption of non-cyrillic alphabets which were used before Russian domination, or by wearing traditional garments and promoting traditional styles of ornament.

◀ *WALL CURTAIN (pardah), Bukhara, late 19th/early 20th century, The Textile Museum 1991.46.21. Gift of Guido Goldman. Photo: Franko Khoury.*

*WALL CURTAIN (pardah), Bukhara, late 19th/early 20th century, The Textile Museum 1991.46.13. Gift of Guido Goldman. Photo: Franko Khoury.*

But ethnic definition is never easy to determine out of context, and cosmopolitan Bukhara for the past several centuries has offered a startling mix of many peoples, including Uzbeks, Tajiks, Jews, Arabs, Russians, Hindus, Turkmens, Persians, Afghans, and Chinese. Robes (*khalat*) were given as gifts of honor, bestowed upon guests and selected individuals by members of the ruling aristocracy. Cloth and clothing became means of visual communication to convey information regarding a person's status and role, religious affiliation, and level of wealth, even more than expressing personal preference. While many such meanings are now lost to history, some may be reconstructed from diverse sources. The production of silk in and around the city of Bukhara assumed social significance historically, and cotton became a cash crop in the 19th century; cotton remains the major crop of Uzbekistan. Many surviving textile monuments today command an appreciation for their stark forms, clear sense of color and design, and penchant for dramatic display.

Three of the most characteristic forms of textile art from Bukhara and surrounding regions represent three distinct textile technologies:



1) *Ik*at weaving utilizes a pre-dyed set of warps which are strung on a loom and interlaced with a set of wefts to form a warp-faced plain weave. Color is imparted to the yarn by usual methods of dyeing, but sections of the warp yarns are tied in bundles to resist absorption. The resulting fabric is thus patterned by the warps, while the wefts are hidden beneath the surface. Typically this colorful weaving from Bukhara is woven in long narrow strips which are then sewn together. The visual effect of *ikat* (called *abr* in and around Bukhara) is fascinating, for the fuzziness of the designs (derivative of the process itself) is mesmerizing. The irregularity is intensified by purposeful misalignment of the pattern repeats when the narrow woven strips are sewn together to form a larger surface. In 19th-century Bukhara, such cloths were available commercially and used for a variety of purposes: narrow strips were pieced together for the tailoring of garments, for wall curtains (*pardah*), and as linings for other hangings and clothing.

2) Pile carpet weaving, as in other rug-weaving parts of the world, relies upon the insertion of supplementary weft yarns of different colors which are wrapped around successive pairs of warps and then clipped to form the pile or nap. One of several oases along the Silk Route which linked Europe with East Asia and India, Bukhara became a major market center attracting buyers and sellers from distant places. Rugs from surrounding areas, which were marketed in Bukhara, came to be named after the city. Locally produced rugs of the 19th century, sometimes called Ersari-Beshir, themselves betray Bukhara's position as a trading center, exhibiting the influence of rural and urban design traditions from near and far. The pile weavings selected for display (carpets and cargo carriers) show patterns which likely derive from local *ikat* weavings.

*PRINTED COTTON (ikat style), Russia, late 19th/early 20th century, The Textile Museum 1991.44.16. Gift of Gail Martin and Vladimir Haustov. Photo: Franko Khoury.*



*CARGO CARRIER (front face), Central Asia, Ersari/Beshir, 19th century, The Textile Museum R37.4.4. Acquired by George Hewitt Myers in 1915.*

3) Embroidery (*suzani*) was a domestic art practiced by young women who expended great effort in preparing their dowry. The silk embroidery thread was bought in the bazaar; the cotton or linen fabric might be homespun or purchased, but was typically ornamented by hand using a needle (*suzan* in Persian and Tajik languages). Groups of girls might work together to decorate a large cover. Each region has its own embroidery style, with considerable variety in the quality and coarseness of the foundation fabric. But in many areas the most substantial embroideries of whatever grade are large hangings used as covers and for ornamental display.

Many of the wall curtains (*pardah*) on view are a part of a group of 21 *ikats* from the Collection of Guido Goldman presented to The Textile Museum in December 1991.

Carol Bier, Curator,  
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#### Suggested Readings\*

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\* Many of the references cited are available in The Arthur D. Jenkins Library at The Textile Museum, or for purchase in The Textile Museum Shop.