

FELT TENTS AND PAVILIONS

The Nomadic Tradition and its Interaction with Princely Tentage

Peter Alford Andrews

Kölner Ethnologische Mitteilungen: Sonderband

eds. Ulla Johansen and Thomas Schweizer

This is the first historical study of the Central Asian felt tent based on indigenous texts and visual records: the sources, from the eighth century to the eighteenth, are interpreted through the experience gained in the author's extensive fieldwork. The author shows how the dwelling, at the centre of nomadic life, is much more than a physical structure, carrying a complex of associations with social practice, use of space, images and symbolism, which by defining it have helped to perpetuate the type. Analysis of the variants reveals a remarkable congruence of design, which allows a common origin to be traced.

New nomadic dynasties tended to adopt the more urban tradition of tentage familiar to their sedentary subjects. This served not only for military purposes, but had, since the Achaemenids, been used as an expression of power and prestige in terms of great size and height, rich materials, and novelty of form. Different as these criteria were from the more practically based nomad traditions, they drew on a common symbolic basis which facilitated the exchange, the more so as gifts of tentage were important expressions of respect. Typically, urban criteria came to supplant nomadic values and types. Similar developments occurred in the organisation of the camps so necessary for the administration of large territories.

These developments are traced in records from the early Turkish, Khitan, Mongol, Timurid, and Moghul periods, which are particularly rich in material. Primary sources in Turkish, Mongolian, Persian and Arabic are augmented with European descriptions of the same period. For the earliest stages of steppe nomadism, classical texts and Chinese accounts are used. Dr Andrews supplements his descriptive texts and visual sources with a minute investigation of the tent vocabularies, to arrive at a marriage of word, thing and idea. The publication is funded by the J. Paul Getty Trust. It should appeal not only to those studying Central Asian and Middle Eastern history, but to architects, ethnologists, art historians, and textile specialists.'

Opinions on this work before publication

'Its scholarship is outstanding ... monumental in its wealth of detail and its dogged mining of all possible sources.' *An independent reviewer for publication.*

'Nothing short of magisterial ... a triumphant conclusion. His work on Islamic sources is marked by the utmost care and precision, and his reading—as the text testifies abundantly—has been prodigious and omnivorous.'

Prof R Hillenbrand, University of Edinburgh

'An outstanding work of scholarship, of permanent value and wide interest. There is no other work like it, either in comprehensiveness of coverage, originality or scholarly

detail. It is unlikely ever to be superseded; works on the topic that come after will be mere footnotes to Dr Andrew's study.'

Prof R L Tapper, SOAS., University of London

'The author has worked through an enormous amount of material, giving minute attention to the slightest facts ... this study gives information not only on construction, but also on economy, customs, emblems of rank and so on in an inexhaustible way. It is a pleasure to read this work on what appears to be a modest topic, which actually provides us with knowledge on a great variety of life over hundreds of years ... This book has really developed into a kind of cultural history. The author has displayed extraordinary intelligence and accuracy in the interpretation of old sources and modern facts. In some ideal way, he has combined a discourse on word and thing to reflect the reality of life.'

Prof Dr A von Gabain, University of Hamburg

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