



This is the first of two parts and concerns framed tents, in the main types of yurt. The second part, due out in 1999, will focus on 'velum' tents – the black tent. There is also, available separately, a map identifying every tent he has visited, which can only induce awe at the scale of the research involved.

The text covers nearly sixty different tent types with refreshing clarity and an obvious love of his subject. Readers will feel that if there was the slightest inconsistency in a tent design, Andrews will have harried the owner for a full explanation. One admission of incompleteness, however, is the lack of some ground plans of overall camp layouts due to the "bellicose and over-dutiful nature of the camp dogs" which anyone who has come up against a Karabaş on guard will fully understand.

The wooden structure of each tent is described in precise detail. The coverings, normally felt, all the cordage, the tent bands, reed-screens and furnishings are similarly fully recorded. Then the social and geographical context in which the tent is used is set so that the differences in style acquire an understandable relevance. Wisely he limits discussion of symbolism to one line "the dome is a model of the heavens and the roof wheel a sky door to reach them". Anything more would be cross cultural. However the text is dotted with references to

ceremonies so we can be sure which blessing to bestow upon the bride in her new yurt. Knowing how to breed the ideal long distance camel and how many ewes to pay for a set of felts is also usefully included.

As if the text were not enough, there is an accompanying volume of photographs and beautifully executed line drawings. No one can fail to be struck by the elegant simplicity of these structures and it is a testament to the skill of the artists, Mügül Andrews amongst them, that they have so successfully conveyed this. Once again the thoroughness and accuracy is quite remarkable. We are shown the exact double curvature of a particular trellis lath, the layout of a frame-maker's workshop and his tools and how to stitch the tassel onto a felt roof cap.

When dealing with structures as deceptively simple as yurts it soon becomes apparent that the reason for their enduring success is only partly due to the brilliance of the initial concept. It is an absolute correctness in every last detail that ensures the structure will weather the rigours of a winter on the steppes. To the native craftsman this certainty of knowledge is both inherited and intuitive. To the outsider it can probably only be shadowed by minute study. For this reason the thoroughness of Andrews' work is invaluable. His stated intent "to provide an archive against the eventual disappearance

of these traditions and the accumulated experiences they embody" has been nobly discharged.

Not only was it a challenge to review a book so dear to my wishes, but it also proved daunting to write anything cogent about such an informed study. However the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and on the two recent occasions when I have had cause to consult the relevant chapter while building new tent types, the information proved faultless. Providing not only exact dimensions of every last component but also lucid reasons – climatic, social, and material – for each detail. For tent makers this is the Bible, I can only assume it similarly answers the prayers of ethnologists. And, as a lesson to the architects building our future, there is a clear message. "Little goes to waste in traditional nomadic life. There is respect both for the material and the effort invested in it...The material is almost always of local provenance, its use arises directly from the techniques available without affectation. Compared to our extravagance this is exemplary."

If the book presents a drawback it is that some passages make difficult reading due to the preponderance of translated terms. Certainly this is not a light read. However even this, revealing a precise attention to language, should surely please the etymologists.
Hal Wynne-Jones

NOMAD TENT TYPES IN THE MIDDLE EAST. Part I. Framed Tents. Volume 1. Text. Volume 2. Illustrations
Peter Alford Andrews
Dr Ludwig Reichert Verlag,
Wiesbaden 1997
US Distributor, The Rug Bookshop,
Baltimore, Maryland.
Volume 1: 560pp., bibliography;
Volume 2: 93 b/w illustrations,
144pp. of drawings
ISBN 3882268905
Softbound DM258

It is difficult to write an unbiased review of a book that completely meets, and then exceeds, one's expectations. Peter Andrews' reputation for meticulous accuracy precedes him, but his latest work sets impossible new standards. Inspired by a remark thirty years ago that the architecture of tents had never been taken seriously, he has remedied this omission for good.