



Peter Alford Andrews, *Felt Tents and Pavilions: The Nomadic Tradition and its Interaction with Princely Tentage*. 2 vols. (= Koelner Ethnologische Mitteilungen, Sonderband), Melisende, London 1999, ISBN 1 901764 05 2, 1472 pages + 257 black and white illustrations + 16 colour plates. £ 90.00.

These two monumental volumes (largely sponsored by the Getty Grant Program) seem at first glance "only" to be a work on nomadic and princely tents of Central Asia and beyond, but on closer inspection they amount to a comprehensive encyclopaedia of the tentage of the region, including Iran and the Mughals, dealing with almost

every historical and cultural aspect of a fascinating topic. If we consider the relatively short life of this type of dwelling, it becomes clear just what a difficult task the author has taken upon himself in providing a history of such tents, for to achieve this he must refer to virtually all possible sources.

The reader learns in the General Introduction that "the concept of the structure is more important than the perishable material in which it is realised" (p. XXX). Nevertheless, a normal nomad tent frame lasts "for up to 50 years" (p. 550), which, by the way, is 10-20 years longer than the life of a normal *kerpiç* (mud brick) building, until recently the prevailing house type in rural Anatolia. Princely tents seem to have an even longer life-span, including, at least in some cases, their vulnerable (but well-kept and meticulously repaired) cover, as shown by the example of a gigantic Mughal *dal-bādal*, which dazzled spectators in 1745, more than a century after it was first built (p. 984). A tent register we saw in the Ottoman state archives in Istanbul some years ago contains another example, the state tent of Ahmed I, which had been made in 1021 (1612-13). It was repaired in 1129 (1716-17), one hundred years after this Sultan's death, and must therefore have been (more or less regularly) in use for more than a century (Istanbul Başbakanlık Arşivi, D.BŞM 1354, p. 9).

Peter Andrews' book is built up strictly chronologically, starting with the covered carts used as dwellings in the Ukrainian Steppe in the fourth millennium B.C., going into the findings of several *kurgans*, dealing with Scythians and Sarmatians, then with the tentage of ethnic groups one might call proto-Turkic (Hsiung-nu, Huns), that of the early Turks, the Mongols (comprehensively), Timur and the Timurids. Volume II is devoted to the Mughal tentage, finally closing with the 19th century. Thus, the sequence of chapters follows a historical order in combination with ethnical or tribal correlations. All sections can be

read and used independently, which is a big advantage, given the fact that even passionate aficionados might not find the time and leisure needed to read more than 1400 pages in one go from cover to cover. This is, however, not the only convenience: the reader finds in every chapter on the tentage of a specific ethnic or political group not only a map (20 in total) of the geographical setting but also a detailed discussion of all available literary (and pictorial) sources, mostly with extensive quotes in translation (often by the author himself, whose tremendous command of languages is indeed extraordinary). Extremely useful are 19 drawings (by Mügöl Andrews and A.J.P. Jansz), most of them illustrations in the text, which thanks to their accuracy are a big help in visualising certain features, as, for example, the frame and the felts of a nomadic (Turkmen) trellis tent (p. xl), where we find the relevant terminology in English. The term "trellis tent" stands for the type of tent, which in Western languages is mostly (but wrongly) called *yurt*, a structure in which frame and cover are independent of each other. For someone not familiar with the construction principles of a trellis tent this is of pre-eminent importance.

The physical structure of this type of tentage is, however, only one aspect. A whole cluster of correlations with every facet of nomadic life is analysed in this work as well. Hence, the book offers essential insights for anyone interested in life style, use of space and social practices of Central Asian nomads. Although the author writes (p. xxxix) that he "left aside a full discussion of the symbolism of tents" (to be investigated in a later book), this does not mean that this element comes off badly. The main symbolic features, such as the power and glory of a tent or the heavenly imagery of its domed roof, become very clear.

The approach of the first two chapters is rather broad, due to the scarcity of source material. Nevertheless, the reader will be amazed to learn about the existence of any sources for the early groups treated there. In this context it should be mentioned that no evidence could be found that trellis tents were used before the 8th century AD (when it appears, for instance, in the inscription of Bilge Qaghan of 735 AD), although the author suggests (p. 85) that the "hundred-man tent" of the Hsiung-nu, referred to in a Chinese source of the first century BC might have been an early form of this type.

In the following chapters of the work the treatment becomes increasingly more specific, as sources flow more bountifully and allow the author to interrelate between tribal nomadic traditions and "urban", princely practices. In the latter dwellings, foreign influences could be highly significant, such as Chinese elements at the court tents of the Khitan (pp. 237-239).

A substantial part of volume I is dedicated to diverse aspects of Mongolian tentage and the available Mongol, Chinese, European and Middle Eastern sources. One of this chapter's focuses refers to the question of the Mongolian trellis tent's origin. There is namely no evidence for the existence of trellis tents under Chinggiz Qan; it first appears in a Chinese report of 1236. Evaluating sources and linguistic clues, the author suggests that the emergence of the Mongolian trellis tent can be explained "by the fusion of a pre-existing

Mongolian felt tent [...] and the Turkic form" (p. 459). Hence, and this is one of the book's main propositions, the origin of the trellis tent is Turkish.

The splendour and extravagance of Tamerlane's tents was impressive enough to leave detailed contemporary descriptions, which give us a rather clear picture. As Timur's and the Timurid's cultural charisma was to have a great impact on developments and fashions of Islamic art in the whole Middle East, the reader will be especially grateful for many details in this section, described with meticulous methodological accuracy. The author makes clear that Donald Wilber's reconstruction of Timur's Twelve Pole Pavilion, based on Le Strange's misleading translation of Clavigo, is wrong and offers his own new reconstruction presenting a tent pavilion very close to Timurid or Timurid-inspired architectural kiosks (such as, for example, the Çinili Köşk near the Topkapı Palace in Istanbul). The plans and drawings of this structure, which is, as P. Andrews states, closer to architecture than to nomadic conventions, certainly belong to the book's highlights. Despite this, so to speak, a-nomadic tendency the chapter contains evidence for the continuity of other nomadic traditions, such as the *ordo* (mobile palace) principle (which enabled each of Timur's wives to direct a specific *ordo*), already set up by the Khitan and kept on by the Mongols.

In volume II the main section (in total 439 pages) is dedicated to the tent culture of the Mughals, which seems to be not only the best documented, but presumably also the most elaborate tentage of all three contemporary great Muslim "gunpowder empires". One might think that this was just a perpetuation of a specific part of Timurid culture, but there is evidence that "the contrasting imagery of nomad and princely tents already existed before the Mughals arrived" (p. 827). Thus, an intense blend of different traditions can be noted in India, where for a lengthy span of time the princely trellis tent was in use at court for rites of passage. This might have been a particularly distinctive feature at the Mughals. If we look, on the other hand, at contemporary Ottoman practices, trellis tents turn out to be used not so much for rites of passage but for highly ceremonial occasions. There are numerous Ottoman miniatures of the 16th century with throne scenes in trellis tents which were also used as temporary structures for royal funerals. Since the trellis tent was given up almost everywhere in the Islamic Middle East approximately towards the end of the 17th century, the Mughal use of this form of tent for birth, marriage and death might have a similar background as the Ottoman practice: the old-fashioned aura of the tent implying particular nobility.

Striking in Mughal tent culture is the tendency for tentage to be integrated into architecture, especially under Shah-Jahan. It seems that here Timurid habits and the long-established Indian tradition of portable wooden pavilions merged. The eclecticism prevailing in other branches of Mughal art is, of course, alive in tentage as well: Central Asian and native forms, such as the *bangla*, materials from the home market, from Europe, the Ottoman Empire, China appear in varied combinations. Furthermore, a conspicuous feature of the Mughal court

seems to be the changes in the order of the royal camp, which were made by every new ruler. This is indeed an indication for the vitality of a Turkic and Central Asian nomadic tradition, a peculiarity of the royal (including the ruling elite's) self-image.

The two volumes of this work show clearly how eminently rewarding the study of material culture and its objects can be – if carried out, as here, with subtle methodology, sense for details and painstaking accuracy. A book like Peter Andrews' *Felt Tents and Pavilions* that answers questions of nomadic and princely life-style, economy, aesthetics and political self-representation by studying with a broad approach one branch of "things" can only be welcomed as an enormous gain for the world of learning.

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