

**Franz Xaver Erhard and Thomas Wild, *Drumze: Metamorphosen des tibetischen Teppichs***

Potsdam: Edition Tethys, 2021. 102 pp. 17 black and white illustrations, 54 color illustrations, 41 plates, 2 maps, bibliography. Hardcover, €42,00. ISBN: 9783942527132.

*Drumze: Metamorphoses of the Tibetan Carpet* forms the complementary catalogue to the eponymous exhibition on display between October 16, 2021 and December 31, 2022 at the Teppichmuseum Schloss Voigtsberg in Oelsnitz, Germany. But this catalog should not be treated lightly; the two authors, Franz Xaver Erhard and Thomas Wild, have produced a meticulously immersive and broadly educational history of the Tibetan carpet—an everyday object that transcends its quotidian usage and permeates every stratum of Tibetan society. Their pairing, a regional scholar and fine arts dealer, makes the catalog an indispensable resource for scholars and appeals equally to the general museum-goer.

The mission statement of both the catalog and exhibition is to track the origins and diachronic adaptations of the Tibetan carpet within specific historical epochs. Rather than focusing on individual or exemplary carpets, the catalog takes a broader tapitological approach to understand the sociohistorical context for evolutions in carpet making and to reconstruct how an archaic handicraft, made on a rudimentary loom, has morphed into a global heritage symbol and mass-consumed product (7).

In seven concise chapters spanning one thousand years of Tibetan history, the reader is treated to excellent translations of primary source material. These materials are reinforced by field research conducted by the two authors; since the 1990s and into the early 2000s, the authors have canvassed monasteries in Central Tibet to ethnographically record carpet weaving technologies and techniques. Consequently, every page of the volume offers archival photographs and is attuned to relevant archaeological material evidence—even drawing from radiocarbon dating evidence for historical precision. It also includes winsome and eccentric travelogue excerpts from a motley group of explorers, including Italian Jesuits and Russian and English adventurers. Each chapter ends with either a tapestry-related overview or high-resolution illustrations, which bring the material off the page and into the reader's imagination.

To be clear, this is not merely a picture book peppered with quotations. The authors advance our scholarly understanding of Tibetan tapitology through an impressive literature review of Tibetan-language and secondary sources. Carpets from the Wangden (*Dbang ldan*) region in the Central Tibetan Nyang valley—*Wangdrum* for short—are a fitting example. The authors persuasively argue that the *Wangdrum* technique is virtually identical to the knotting technique of ancient burial carpets from Khotan (fourth to sixth century). This means that with relative certainty we can trace influences from the Eurasian carpet belt into the Tibetan carpet tradition, which is attested for at least the fifteenth century (25). Building on this insight, distinctive motifs of the *Wangdrum* were identified during fieldwork visits to monasteries of the Drigung, Gelug, Sakya, and Bon traditions of Tibetan Buddhism. The popular throne carpets in such monasteries can be interpreted as testimony to an older ecumenical or Rimé (*ris med*) tradition (23). This is astonishing to historians, as this non-sectarian Rimé movement has, up to now, been conservatively dated to the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries.

The authors' object-based and anthropological approach promises to fill several lacunae in textual historical research, which might otherwise have remained obscured to scholars. At times, the exhaustively technical descriptions of weaving techniques and historical adaptations may not appeal to a general readership. At other times, I would have appreciated even more explanation, especially regarding the differences between the general Tibetan cushion (*gdan*) and carpet (*grum ze*), which is only addressed in a single footnote (12).

Next, the book introduces secular (non-monastic) carpets, especially the so-called *Khamdrum*. The biography of a Tibetan cabinet minister named Doring Paṅḍita (1721–1792), whose family founded a carpet workshop on their country estate in Gabshi (Dga' bzhi), constitutes the backbone of the discussion. The Paṅḍita family instigated a trend that was soon to be followed by other noble families; the volume tracks this trend forward several centuries to its fullest social impact, as discussed in chapter 5, "Designer Carpets in the Early 20th Century." Erhard and Wild's crisp narrativizing of the social history of secular carpets enlivens a subject often treated with dry scholasticism.

With Tibet's declaration of independence by the thirteenth Dalai Lama in 1913, numerous Western influences began "weaving" their way into Tibet. This included a magnificent Tibetan Art déco rendition, which was reflected in carpet designs from some workshops of ministerial households (such as the Paeonia carpet immortalized on the cover; see also plate 30). Another outcome was the import of synthetic dyes, which negatively heralded the gradual decline of traditional carpet making in Tibet and positively allowed Tibetan handicraft artists to image new carpet motifs, which appealed to the burgeoning demand for Tibetan Chinoiserie.

A particular point of excellence within the catalog is the adroit pairing of explanations of historical processes and visual demonstrations of such processes through fifty-four illustrations. Weighing in at a slim 102 pages, obviously short of a standard historical monograph, the volume nevertheless comprehensively analyses and evaluates Tibetan carpets against the incisive events of Tibetan history. Chapter 6 is devoted to the "Dissolution of the Tibetan Carpet" when, at the beginning of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the CCP classified Tibetan carpet making as reactionary under the *Kampfbegriff* of the Four Old Ones (*si jiù*). Although carpet weaving bans were lifted in Tibet in the 1980s, the Chinese influence led to the export-oriented production of carpets and everyday objects such as bicycle saddles and car seat covers.

Parallel to this, various initiatives were undertaken by exiled Tibetans in South Asia to preserve Tibetan carpet-making artistry and provide employment for the refugees. With international help, the Tibetan carpet-making practices underwent revision and renewed flourishing, beginning in the 1980s, as the "Nepal Tibetan rug." In this way, the authors track how the archaic knotting technique brought by Tibetan refugees formed the basis for the second-largest industry after tourism—and at one point Nepal was astonishingly exporting about three million square meters of carpet (47–48).

The final chapter, with its catchy title "International Designer Carpets: What Remains Is the Knot," showcases numerous modern designers and presents the latest trends that have emerged from this hoary tradition of carpet weaving. Despite some difficulty in conclusively demonstrating the full "metamorphosis" of Tibetan carpets audaciously proclaimed in the book's subtitle, the authors conclude that adaptability has been essential to the centuries-long persistence and popularity of the Tibetan carpet. Given its rigorous scholarship and high production quality, their volume is wholeheartedly

recommended to both the amateur enthusiast of Tibetan handicrafts and art historians and Tibetologists. An English translation of the catalog is expected in summer 2022.

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