

**Selvedge: Issue 22**, “the Paper Issue” Spring 2008, page 90,

Review of: **Between The Sea and the Desert: The Many Cultures of North Africa**

21 November 2007-18 May 2008, Textile Museum of Canada, 55 Centre Avenue, Toronto Ontario,



01 Rug, Tunisia, mid 20th century

This exhibition of cloth from the northwest part of Africa, or the Maghreb [an Arabic word meaning 'place of the sun set'] is the result of curator Natalia Nekrassova's, skilled selection from the 250 specimens of Northwest African textiles belonging to the Museums permanent collection.

Two 19th-century wedding belts from Fez, in Morocco demonstrate extraordinary weaving skill. They were both woven on a draw loom using a warp faced twill technique to create multiple patterns with a resist-dyed silk thread. The technique necessitates a change in warp colour in the middle of the belt allowing the weaver to continue the patterns in a new colour, traditionally inverting the motifs so they mirror those in the preceding section. In the second piece there is no mirror effect but rather a radically different set of designs in each area of colour warp. Floral designs start out along the red warp and turn architectural in the yellow, this piece seems to draw from a whole range of Islamic imagery.

Each piece on display can lead to speculation on the origin and meaning of pattern. Moving from these delicate silk weaving and embroideries to the rougher, less refined textiles, the patterns, use of colour and the skill of the weaver remain strong. In her curatorial essay, Nekrassova informs us that there are two traditions in rug weaving in Maghreb. The urban based 'pile weaving' along with the older 'flat weave' traditions which includes the rugs and weaving of the Barber people of the Atlas Mountains. The rural rugs are woven on horizontal looms by women using the wool of the local white and brown sheep to create intricate geometric designs in supplementary weft and well-float weave, with two-strand twining exclusively a characteristic of Barber weaving in the High Atlas Mountains.

There is a mid-20th century Gerber rug from Gefsa, Tunisia in the show, which is a hybrid of both traditions, and assumed to be a result of rural weavers exposure to urban rugs. The Ait Ouaouzguite Gerber tribes location on the trans-Atlas and trans-Saharan trade routes..., make this cultural influence possible" explains Nekrassova. The rug, though simplistic in design, has an incredible graphic beauty. Borders and horizontal bands are woven in a knotted-pile technique in a palette of orange, red and yellow not the traditional brown and white flat weave.

This combination of influence and tradition occurring over generations, in a small geographic area may appear to be of no particular consequence. In an internet age where ideas, designs and materials are a click away the thought of waiting for the next Camel seems like a Hollywood story line not the reality of less than a century ago. These textiles have travelled through a long history and without a voice or the given name of a specific weaver this exhibition creates a sophisticated choral symphony. "Every thread has a soul" [Arab proverb] and current trends in writing and curatorial work would have us believe they can tell stories.

In the past two years with *Wandering Weavers: Nomadic Traditions of Africa* 2006 and this current exhibition, Natalia Nekrassova has provided an expansive look at Islamic textiles. She has made an important collection available to the public and presented sufficient information to invite the viewer to engage with — rather than merely observe — these textiles. ••• Joe Lewis

The exhibition on the TMC's website at

[http://www.textilemuseum.ca/apps/index.cfm?page=exhibition\\_detail&exhId=270](http://www.textilemuseum.ca/apps/index.cfm?page=exhibition_detail&exhId=270)



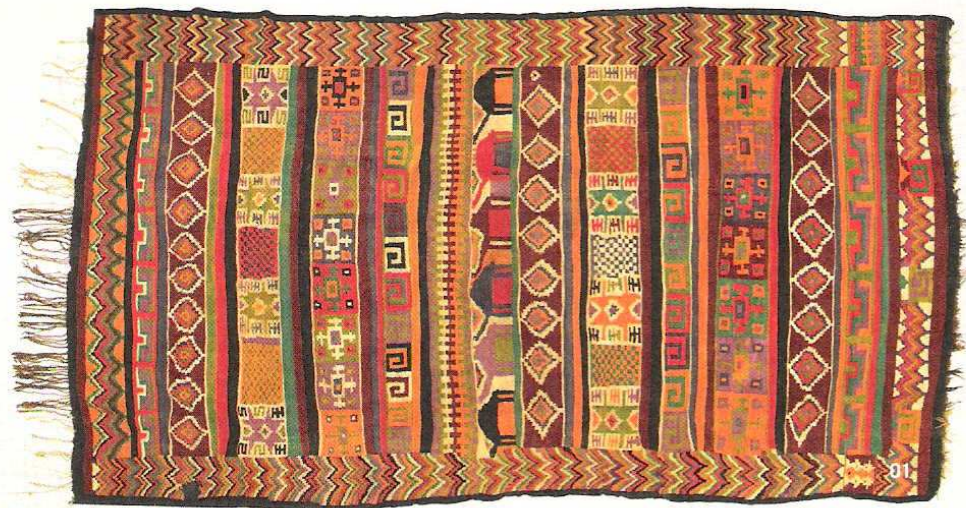
This is the rug mentioned in the review, not the one printed with the review

rug, l'ahmal n'ibouli

Africa: North Africa, Morocco, High Atlas Mountains; wool; knotted pile; twined; weft-faced; fringed;  
Berber, Ait Ouaouzguite tribe

1920 - 1940;

early to mid 20th century T88.0482



Opaker/Webster collection

### Between the Sea and the Desert: The Many Cultures of North Africa

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