



BAḲTĪĀRĪ TRIBE III. BAḲTĪĀRĪ CARPETS

iii. Baḳtīārī Carpets

“Baḳtīārī” is a label generally applied, in both the trade and literature, to a wide range of flat-woven and knotted pile carpets from southwestern Iran. As such, the term must be considered a territorial, rather than an ethnic, designation, since it may refer not only to the weaving of pastoral nomads, but also to that of the region’s sedentary agriculturalists, and each group includes both Baḳtīārī and non-Baḳtīārī elements.

Flat-woven rugs. Although the manufacture of a variety of flat-woven objects such as weft-wrapped decorated saltbags (*namakdān*), saddlebags (*ḳorjīn*, *ḳorzīn*), and warp-faced tablet-woven straps and bands (*malband*, *tang*) by the nomadic Baḳtīārī is well documented in publications by anthropologists, ethnologists, geographers, commercial travelers, and others, whether flat-woven rugs (*gelīm*) are produced by this group, or by the region’s sedentary population, is controversial. There is, however, a type of *gelīm* classified, in both the trade and recent literature, as Baḳtīārī which is distinguished by its double-interlocked tapestry structure. In this type of weft-faced weave, wefts of adjoining color areas are looped through each other, backward and forward, at each passage, creating two parallel ridges at each join on the back. While this structure is not reversible, it is far stronger than the double-faced slit-tapestry weave more commonly seen in Persian *gelīms*.



Woolen warps and wefts are characteristic of the “Bakṭiārī” *gelīm*; *side finishes may include either wool or goat hair. Undyed cotton yarns may be included as design highlights.*

Motifs frequently seen in “Bakṭiārī” *gelīms* include highly stylized double-headed bird forms, horned animals, *būta*, and swastikas. It must be noted that, as these motifs also occur in flat-weaves attributed to other groups, particularly the Lurs, basing provenance solely upon them is problematic.

Knotted pile carpets. Although the label Bakṭiārī has traditionally been applied to any pile carpet thought to have been woven in that region, recently writers have tried to distinguish rugs made by the area’s nomads from those produced by its sedentary population, on the bases of structure and design. Accordingly, double-wefted, symmetrically knotted carpets with woolen foundations are classified as “tribal,” or nomadic, Bakṭiārī products. In contrast, single-wefted carpets with cotton foundations are considered indicative of Bakṭiārī “village” manufacture; these rugs are generally termed “Čahār Maḥāl(l)” after the district near Isfahan where the bulk of such carpets are thought to originate. This method of classification cannot be considered absolute, as there are variations in numbers of weft passes, knotting density, and types of knot in both categories. Moreover, Digard has documented the employment of cotton warps and wefts by nomadic weavers in the manufacture of their woolen pile carpets.

Differentiating Bakṭiārī pile carpets according to design is also difficult. As with flat-weaves, many of the designs seen in “tribal” Bakṭiārī carpets, such as the offset repeat of cypress trees also appear in carpets attributed to the Lurs. Others, including what is probably the best-known Bakṭiārī design, the so-called garden or brick (*kešt*) design, in which the field is divided into square compartments, each containing a flowering plant or tree, is produced by both Čahār Maḥāl and nomadic weavers. Other designs are more specifically associated with Čahār Maḥāl. These include medallion (*toranj*) and corner (*lačak*); *prayer niche and figural designs; notable in the latter category is a group with heraldic lions. Čahār Maḥāl attributions are supported by published pieces with these designs which bear inscriptions stating that they are products of specific villages in that district, e.g., ‘Amal-e Šalamzār-e Bakṭiārī.*

Rugs attributed to Čahār Maḥāl manufacture are generally considered to be commercial products; as Edwards indicates, at least one major Western firm exported carpets from several of that district’s villages from the early



twentieth century onward. Moreover, even prior to that time, as Mrs. Bishop noted, at least some of the nomadic Baḳtīārī were engaged in weaving for the market. In the trade, the most finely woven Baḳtīārī carpets are termed *bībībāf* (see Digard, 1975); to this category belong a group of carpets which contain presentation and commission formulae and the names and titles of various Baḳtīārī khans.

Dyes. Although Edwards noted the use of natural dyestuffs in at least some of the Čahār Maḥāl villages, today it has become more usual for both nomadic and settled weavers to entrust the dyeing of yarns for weaving to sedentary dyers who employ artificial colorants. Traditionally, dyes were derived from locally available substances, the most common of these being indigo (*nīl*) and madder (*rūmās*), for various shades of blue and red, respectively. *Gandal*, from the herb *gandalāš*, produces the mustard yellow and, in conjunction with madder, yellow-orange colors considered distinctive of both pile and flat weaves from the Baḳtīārī region; interestingly, *gandal* does not seem to have been extensively used as a dye in other parts of Iran.

For a music sample, see [Song of carpet-weaving](#).

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