



BALUCHISTAN V. BALUCH CARPETS

BALUCHISTAN

v. Baluch Carpets, Rugs, and Other Products

A distinct group of carpets, woven by Baluch (بلوچ) tribes in the northeastern Iranian province of Khorasan and the Sīstān area, is known as Baluch carpets (Edwards, p. 185). These carpets were not, as is frequently erroneously assumed, made in Makrān, where the main body of the Baluch tribes live (Wegner, 1980, pp. 57, 59).

In addition to the Baluch, many other ethnic groups in Khorasan weave carpets that look like the Baluch carpets and are designated as such. The tribes that make such carpets in the same region are the Tīmūrī, the Kurd, the Arab, the Brahui, the Jamšīdī, and the Barbarī (Azadi and Besim, pp. 15, 16). The main characteristics of carpets in the Baluch tradition are the following:

Colors. The use of dark colors like dark blue or blue-black, dark brownish red, dark reddish brown, dark brown verging on black (mainly for outlines), dark purplish brown, dark brownish violet, and occasionally some ivory is characteristic. Because of the almost black outlines the dark colors appear even darker. These carpets thus possess a somber charm that appeals to many connoisseurs and collectors.



Camel hair is sometimes woven into the niches (*mehṛāb*) of Baluch prayer carpets. These rugs are less somber, even occasionally light in ground color. The idea that this material is actually wool dyed with walnut husks (Edwards, p. 186) is incorrect; it is undyed camel hair.

Occasionally a few old carpets are found with ivory fields; most of them come from the Qā'enāt and Sīstān areas. They sometimes seem more colorful than the normal Baluch carpets.

Ornament. Because of the prevalence of ornaments like rectangles, hexagons, and octagons, Baluch carpets belong to the geometric category of nomad carpets. Repeated or alternating lozenges and medallions, in regular or offset rows, play an extremely important role in the design of these carpets. Frequently the rows create a honeycomb pattern, so that the ground color of the field is no longer distinguishable. Indeed, this feature is characteristic of Baluch carpets. Plant motifs also occur in the Baluch repertoire of forms, but they have been rendered angular and geometric.

The nomenclature and meaning of Baluch motifs are not very well known. Statements in the carpet literature that the craftsmen did not understand what they were weaving are incorrect. Such statements are a sign of retreat before the extraordinarily difficult problems of research in this area. Such complex questions cannot be understood or explained through quick investigations. Rather, they require years of arduous study in the field, which have not yet taken place.

Technique. Baluch carpets are all knotted with the asymmetrical knot, that is, the so-called "Persian or Senna knot," open to the left. In traditional pieces the warp (*tār*) always consists of two-ply wool, Z-spun and S-twisted (*čap-o-rāst rīsīda*), and is light in color. In newer pieces the warp can also be of cotton. The weft (*pūd*) of Baluch carpets consists of two sinuous brown or dark brown shoots, contrary to C. A. Edwards' opinion that all Baluch carpets are single-wefted (p. 186). On rare occasions the first weft is drawn taut, thus creating a difference in levels, as for example in the Kurd Baluch. The weft is usually two-ply, Z-spun, and loosely twisted. Frequently, however, the weft can be a single strand.

The pile is also two-ply, Z-spun and loosely twisted. Many Baluch carpets, for example, the Sālār-kānī from the area of Torbat-e Ḥaydarī, include some silk in the pile of wedding and dowry carpets. This material is extremely expensive



for the Baluch and represents the ultimate in luxury. They must buy or barter for the silk because they do not themselves manufacture it.

Selvedges. One of the most notable characteristics of Baluch carpets is the way in which their selvedges are handled. These can be up to 2 cm wide; the material is dark brown or black goat hair. In rare instances the selvedges may be worked in a form of braiding with supplementary wefts. Usually, however, they are produced by passing the supplementary wefts over and under groups of four or more warps two, three, or four times, thus creating respectively double-, triple-, or quadruple-corded selvedges.

Uses. The Baluch, like many other nomads, manufacture a number of objects in pile or flat-woven technique, which serve different functions. Such products include double saddlebags (*korjīn*, *asb-jol*); cushion covers (*bāleš*); saddle covers (*rūzīnī*); horse blankets (*rū-asbī*); ground covers on which meals are served (*sofra*); weavings for catching flour as it comes from the mill (*sofra-ye ārd*); bags for special purposes (*dārāk*); donkey chest bands (*gūr-band*); blinders for donkeys, horses, and camels (*čašm-bandān*); etc.

Although we have general knowledge of the characteristics mentioned, it is nevertheless extremely difficult to attribute carpets to specific makers (tribes, subtribes, clans, etc.) and regions (Khorasan and Sīstān, Saraḡs, Torbat-e Ḥaydarī, etc.). The main reason is that there are almost no detailed publications on Baluch carpets, in contrast, for example, to Turkman carpets, on which there are many Russian field studies. Besides, it is still not known even which tribes and subtribes produce carpets at all. The single published monograph (Azadi and Besim, pp. 28-29) includes only the second attempt (the first being Edwards, p. 185) to provide a list of tribes that manufacture knotted-pile carpets. These tribes are as follows: ‘Alī Akbar-ḡānī from the Qā’enāt region; ‘Abd-al-Sorḡ from the area around Saraḡs, Nišāpūr, and Sabzavār; ‘Alī Mīrzā’ī, from the Saraḡs area; Bahlūlī (or Bahlūrī) from the vicinity of K̄vāf, Jangal, and Torbat-e Ḥaydarī; the Bāyazīdī from around Maḡvalāt and Torbat-e Ḥaydarī; the Jān-Begī from the area of Rošḡvar and Torbat-e Ḥaydarī; the Jān-Mīrzā’ī from the Torbat-e Ḥaydarī district; the Faṭḡ-Allāhī (Fatollāhī) from the northern Zābol area; the Ḥasanzā’ī found dispersed throughout the entire region; the Qarā’ī, who belong with the Sālar-ḡānī, from Torbat-e Ḥaydarī; the Ḳānzā’ī from the Saraḡs area; the Kolāh-derāzī from the neighborhood of Kāšmar and Torbat-e Ḥaydarī; the Kūrḡa-īlī or Sālār-ḡānī in the area of Jangal and Torbat-e Ḥaydarī; the Kurd from around Saraḡs; the Lākī from the area of Saraḡs and Qā’enāt; the Madad-ḡānī from the region of



Zābol and Qā'enāt; the Narīmānī from the area of Torbat-e Jām and Mašhad; the Raḥīm-kānī from the Saraḳs and Torbat-e Ḥaydarī area; the Sarbandī from Sīstān; the Šāhzā'ī from around Torbat-e Jām; the Tūkī subtribes Jamālzā'ī and Sūrānī from the area south of Nehbandān and the Sīstān region; the Vākerī in the neighborhood of Seydābād in the Mašhad district.

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بلوچستان، فرشهای بلوچی baluchistan baluchestan