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CARPETS X. AFSHARID AND ZAND PERIODS

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The rug production of Persia in the Afsharid (1148-61/1736-48) and Zand periods (1163-1209/1750-79) has been difficult both to identify and to document, owing to the lack of extant examples and the absence or misuse of historical and archival evidence. The generally held view has been that, in the political and economic decline resulting from the invasion of Persia by Nāder Shah Afšār, beginning in 1141/1727, rug production came almost to an end (Edwards, p. 5). Such concomitant factors as the destruction of urban centers, forced migrations, and other large population movements have been considered the immediate causes of the apparent establishment of new production centers and the diffusion of carpet designs, especially in northwestern Persia and the Caucasus. This explanation, which has caused much confusion in carpet studies, is based on the commonly accepted notion that Nāder Shah resettled large groups of carpet weavers both in the Caucasus and in west central Persia and Fārs (Martin, pp. 84, 86; *Survey of Persian Art* VI, p. 2356 and n. 2; Yetkin, I, pp. 90-91).

A careful review of 12th/18th-century histories, travelers' accounts, and trade records suggests a somewhat different picture of contemporary Persian carpet

production, however. Historical evidence suggests that forced migrations during this period were instituted largely in order to remove troublesome elements from the western frontier; Nāder Shah thus sought to shift certain western tribal groups to Khorasan while at the same time securing the latter area against enemy incursions and providing himself with manpower for his campaigns. These migrations did not have serious long term effects, however, for, according to a recent study, the resettled populations returned to their places of origin after Nāder Shah's death in 1160/1747 (Perry, pp. 208-09).

Although it is probable that magnificent silk-and-brocade rugs in the style of the Safavid court manufactories (see ix, above) were no longer produced in significant quantities, it seems reasonable to assume that production of less luxurious wool rugs continued in many traditional centers, even though on a smaller scale and mainly for domestic consumption, rather than for export. It is also likely that tribal rugs were still woven and that felts and other types of nonpile floor coverings, both local and imported, were still in demand.

According to an agent of the French Compagnie des Indes, in 1150/1738 "beautiful carpets of silk and wool" were available in the *bāzār* at Bandar-e ʿAbbās (Housego, p. 40). Nāder Shah himself ordered rugs and felt floor coverings from the city of Kermān to redecorate the church of Yerevan (Īravān) in Armenia and the shrine of ʿAlī at Najaf in Mesopotamia (Marvī, I, p. 410, III, p. 892). Such a sizable order seems to indicate active production in this center. He may also have ordered similar rugs for the shrine of Imam ʿAlī al-Reżā at Mašhad, which he repaired and improved (see āstān-e qods), as well as for his treasure house at Kalāt(-e Nāderī) in Khorasan and the small palace that he built in Qazvīn. The grandiose royal tent of silk installed for his coronation in 1148/1736 at Dašt-e Moḡān in Azarbaijan was strewn with silk carpets and carpets from Kermān (Marvī, II, p. 454).

The renewed local prosperity and stability that accompanied the reign of Moḥammad Karīm Khan Zand in Shiraz and southern Persia (1163-93/1750-79) must have been favorable for rug production there. Indeed, according to one of his contemporaries Karīm Khan himself claimed to be skilled in carpet weaving, as well as in several other métiers (Āṣaf, p. 309). The belief that carpet production continued is confirmed by a wool carpet in the Mūza-ye Īrān-e Bāstān, Tehran, with a design consisting of a single-plane lattice with flowering plants in the compartments; the knotting technique is the same as that associated with vase carpets (the "vase technique"; see iii, above). The date 1172/1758 and the name of the weaver, Moḥammad Šarīf Kermānī, are

woven into an epigraphic cartouche (Housego, p. 44; cf. Pope, p. 2266). This dated example can thus serve as the nucleus for a larger group of related rugs that are not precisely dated. A number of extant rugs in “millefiori” and “paisley” patterns (see iv, above) resembling rugs illustrated in contemporary paintings or with color schemes and designs paralleled in other Zand decorative media, have also been suggested as possible examples of Shiraz and Kermān production. Some rugs may also have been produced in Khorasan in this period (Housego, pp. 46-50).

By the 1780s and 1790s East India Company merchants in Persia were reporting the availability of carpets in Būšehr (Bushire; Issawi, p. 88) and extolling Khorasan carpets for their “brightness of colors and elegance of workmanship” (Housego, p. 48). Other travelers and diplomats in the 12th/18th century made only brief references to rugs: In 1786 it was noted that Yazd and Kermān were exporting felts and carpets (Franklin, p. 148); in the late 1780s beautiful carpets woven in Khorasan, some even with grounds of gold thread, were noted (Ferrières de Sauvebœuf, II, p. 8). In 1801, in a confidential report on the manufactures, exports, and imports of Persia made by Sir John Malcolm to the director of the board of control of the East India Company, Yazd, Kāšān, Ṭabas, and cities in independent Khorasan are mentioned as carpet-manufacturing centers (Malcolm apud Issawi, pp. 262-63; cf. Hambly, p. 81). In 1826 an immensely useful and detailed account of Persian commerce was published; it shows that carpets were being produced in sizable numbers in both traditional and new centers: Herat, Kermān, Yazd, Borūjerd, the Turkman areas of Khorasan, Isfahan, and Azarbaijan (Fraser, p. 362).

There thus seems to be enough evidence to establish continuity of rug production throughout the Afsharid and Zand periods; indeed, there is insufficient evidence for claiming the contrary. There is, however, a clear need for much more careful correlation between historical evidence and the dating and attribution of extant rugs to the 12th/18th century. Attention should also be focused on the scale of production and types of design, as well as on attributions to specific weaving centers. It is probable that many “classical” designs of the 11th/17th century (e.g., those on garden, lattice-and-vase, and floral-directional carpets; see iv and ix, above) were continued into the later period and that some new ones were also introduced (e.g., millefiori, Plate CXIII; repeat *bota*, Figure 71 above in iv; and *mīnāḵānī* designs, Edwards, pp. 42-43, fig. 25). It may in fact be suggested that the “movement” of Safavid lattice, floral, and garden designs into northwestern Persia and the Caucasus

in the 12th/18th century resulted, not from undocumented migrations of weavers, but from the “inspiration of great and colorful designs themselves” (Beattie, p. 70), like those on the carpets ordered by Nāder Shah to be sent to Erevan.

The decline in luxury rug production was as much a reflection of the overall decline of the Persian economy as of the depredations of the Afghans and Nāder Shah’s military campaigns; it seems to have been brought about by growing European control of the maritime trade (Hambly, p. 77), a shrinking European market for Oriental rugs in the late 11-12th/17-18th centuries (Housego, p. 40), and a drop in the production of raw silk in Persia.

Rugs with traditional Persian designs but woven in local techniques continued to be produced in border areas that were no longer directly under Persian political control. They included the floral and hunting rugs of the Caucasus, rugs with interwoven Armenian inscriptions and Armenian calendar dates of the 12th/18th-century, and the rugs of Herat, which was by then part of Afghanistan. Examples of the last group were even included in the list of imports from Afghanistan to Persia in the early 13th/19th century (Hambly, p. 79).

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