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CARPETS XI. QAJAR PERIOD

CARPETS

xi. Qajar Period

During the Qajar period there were dramatic alterations in the traditional organization and orientation of the Persian carpet industry and, consequently, in Persian carpets themselves. Particularly significant was the substantial increase both in the number of looms and in the volume of carpet exports from the 1290s/1870s to World War I. (For a summary of visible carpet exports from Persia in the years 1885-1914, compiled from available British consular and commercial reports, see Ittig, 1983, I, table I.) Although the literature on Qajar carpet production is focused almost exclusively on external and imposed factors, the indigenous, locally funded industry, which provided the organizational model for export manufacture both before and after this “boom” period, must also be considered.

The locally financed industry. In publications on Persian carpets 13th/19th-century production before the boom is generally categorized as “an isolated, largely rural craft, practiced primarily by pastoral nomads and carried on only in a few urban locations” (Helfgott, p. 117). Yet Persian and Western primary sources, as well as inscriptions on extant examples, confirm that carpets were produced for both domestic use and sale in urban, rural, and tribal settings in most parts of Persia throughout the Qajar period. This industry consisted of a mosaic of regional units; the centers most frequently mentioned include Kermān, Borūjerd, Isfahan, Azarbaijan, Kurdistan, Kāšān,

Farāhān, Hamadān, Herat, and Mašhad (Blau, p. 104; Fraser, 1826, pp. 354, 356, 362; U.K., House of Commons, *Parliamentary Papers* LXVII, p. 107; Ferrier, pp. 26 n. 125; Burgess, 1942, p. 4; Amanat, 1983, pp. 146, 160; Polak, II, p. 168; Armstrong, p. 152; Kinneir, p. 115; Malcolm, p. 25). Each locale produced its own distinctive weaves and patterns, for example, the *herātī*-patterned rugs (see iv, above) of Farāhān and the arabesque carpets of Garrūs (Brugsch, II, p. 13 and ill.; Ittig, 1983, I, appendix; idem, 1981, pp. 125-26 and figs. l, 3, 5, 6; for other regional types, see Polak, II, p. 168; Goldsmid et al., p. 99; Malcolm, p. 25; Fraser, 1826, p. 356; 1838, II, p. 333; Blau, p. 104). The importance of regionalism in Persian carpet weaving is further demonstrated by the persistence of local designs, structures, and traditional palettes even after the introduction of Western-influenced decorative themes, machine-spun yarns, and synthetic dyestuffs in the later decades of the 13th/19th century (e.g., Ittig, 1981, table I and figs. 1, 3, 5; Housego, 1978, pls. 45, 97, 125, 126; for specific local carpet structures see Edwards; Neff and Maggs). Undoubtedly the variety of both sedentary and nomadic ethnic and tribal groups in Persia, as well as the physical geography, which made interregional communication among regions difficult, contributed to and reinforced the development of local weaving styles.

Despite the variety in types of carpets woven, certain patterns of production and finance were observed throughout the country both before and after the boom. Pieces not made for the weaver's own use were either commissioned directly or manufactured commercially for more general markets, both in Persia and abroad. Commercial production was sufficiently diversified so that in weaving centers like Mašhad and Farāhān more than one quality, or line, of carpet was manufactured to suit a range of customers (Blau, p. 106; Ittig, 1983, I, appendix). Both commercial and custom weaving was conducted in cottage, as well as workshop, settings (Armstrong, p. 152; Blau, p. 106; Churchill, p. 2; Brugsch, II, p. 13; Goldsmid, p. 280; Sayyāḥ, p. 164; Ittig, 1985, p. 119). At least some tribes also worked on commission and were involved in commercial production (Amanat, p. 116; Blau, p. 106; Ker Porter, I, p. 265).

Carpet manufacturing, whether specially commissioned or for a mass market, required inputs of material and labor (Ittig, 1985, p. 118); there was an implicit contractual arrangement between entrepreneur and weaver for supply of materials, completion of each carpet, and payment (Wazīrī, p. 189; Sayyāḥ, p. 164; Ittig, 1985, p. 118 and figs. 1, 5, 7). Until the 1290s/1870s it appears that both commercial and custom production were financed locally, either by

Persian notables—court figures, provincial dignitaries (Ferrier, p. 26 n.; Blau, p. 106; Āzādī, 1978, no. 32; Gans-Ruedin, pp. 384-85; Ittig, 1983, II, no. 4), and tribal khans (Blau, p. 106); merchants (Blau, p. 105); or loom owners, *ostād*s (lit., "masters"; Gans-Ruedin, pp. 426-27; Ittig, 1983, II, no. 29). The economic basis for the involvement of these three groups in carpet manufacture can be summarized as follows.

Provincial notables owned both the requisite raw materials and the transport animals necessary to collect and distribute these materials and the completed carpets (Ittig, 1983, I, pp. 48-49; idem, 1985, p. 118). Not only did this group finance commercial production (Ittig, 1985, p. 112; Blau, p. 106), but sources and surviving examples of rugs with commission inscriptions from the Qajar period (e.g., Wazīrī, p. 189; Goldsmid, p. 280; Āzādī, no. 32; Gans-Ruedin, pp. 384-85; Ittig, 1983, II, no. 4; 1985, fig. 1) also suggest that it provided the principal patronage for custom weaving. Custom and commercial carpet manufacturing and distribution by merchants were funded through established commercial and credit networks (Blau, p. 105; Ittig, 1983, I, p. 49; Ittig, 1985, p. 119 n. 32 and figs. 7-9; Polak, II, p. 169; White, II, p. 121). The importance of individual loom owners in the production process (Ittig, 1983, I, p. 50) is reflected in substantial numbers of inscribed Qajar carpets on which specific *ostād*sare named as manufacturers, either singly (evidence of involvement in commercial production) or in combination with those who commissioned particular carpets (e.g., Āzādī, no. 29; Gans-Ruedin, pp. 426-31, 436-39; Ittig, 1985, fig. 1). Unfortunately, though references to various quantities, qualities, and prices of rugs available in local *bāzār*s and carpet *anbār*s (warehouses) suggest that a large portion of production was oriented to market demand even before the boom (see, e.g., Brugsch, II, p. 13; Blau, pp. 104, 106), there are no known statistics on the volume of either custom or commercial carpet weaving financed by local sources at this time.

Little is known about the hierarchy of craftspeople involved either in preparation of raw materials for carpet manufacture or in the actual weaving process before the 1290s/1870s, but references to the spinning and dyeing of yarns for use in carpet workshops, differentiation in wages between senior and apprentice weavers, and preparation and use of cartoons (Sayyāḥ, p. 164; Goldsmid, p. 280) demonstrate that a highly specialized personnel structure was already in existence before the boom and probably even before the Qajar period.

Nor are there quantitative data on either domestic or international trade in

Persian carpets before the 1280s/1860s. Certainly carpets were transported from one province to another (U.K. Foreign Office Records, Public Record Office, 60.92, enc. no. 1; Burgess, p. 4). Indeed, it appears from the sources that during the first half of the century carpets were among the chief articles of internal commerce, along with silks, cottons, and shawls (U.K. Foreign Office Records, Public Record Office, 60.92, enc. no. 1; Malcolm, p. 24; Polak, II, pp. 168-69; Blau, pp. 104ff.). Accounts from the same period indicate that most carpets exported from Persia were initially destined for India, Turkey, or Russia (Malcolm, p. 26; Shoberl, p. 24; Jaubert, p. 288; Fraser, 1826, pp. 354, 362; Pottinger, p. 226; U. K. Foreign Office Records, Public Record Office, 60.117, no. 25 and enc. no. 2; Blau, p. 106). Although, according to contemporary observers, the volume of Persian carpets on the Constantinople market declined during the 1250-70s/1840-50s (White, II, p. 118), values cited for visible Persian carpet exports to Constantinople through Trebizond in 1266/1850 and 1272/1856 indicate that trade was still significant in that period (Blau, p. 105). While there are unfortunately no statistics, at least some of these carpets were subsequently forwarded to Europe; but traditional Persian design formats and dimensions were generally considered more suited to Eastern than to Western interiors and tastes (Blau, pp. 105-06; Polak, II, p. 169).

By the middle of the century Persian carpets faced competition in their traditional export markets due to the development of substantial pile-carpet industries in both Turkey and India. At the same time, however, European and American demand became significant, and carpets therefore became more important as exports to these new markets (Quataert, p. 474 and table I; Ittig, 1983, I, table I). The rapid rise in both numbers of looms and carpet exports from Persia beginning in the 1290s/1870s, already noted, reflects the general growth of the industry. These figures cannot be considered complete, since, as attested in numerous references widespread smuggling also occurred; nevertheless, they do demonstrate that carpets were becoming more prominent in the international trade of Persia.

The Persian carpet "boom." One of the most common explanations in the literature for the general increase in carpet production during the third quarter of the 13th/19th century is that the "boom" resulted from a search by Western exporters of manufactured goods to Persia for profitable commodities to replace silk, the single most important visible Persian export before 1281/1865. An outbreak of the silkworm disease pébrine in that year had sharply reduced the amount of silk available, and it has been argued that

consequently “income from the sale of carpets supplanted that once derived from the export of silk” (Bier, p. 254). This hypothesis does not, however, take into consideration the importance of regionalism and regional economies in Persia; a surplus of imports in one region was thus not necessarily offset by a surplus of exports in another (Gilbar, pp. 328-29). The local response to pébrine in the Caspian provinces and northeastern and central Persia was to increase cultivation of such cash crops as rice (see berenj), opium (see afyūn), tobacco, and cotton. Furthermore, it appears that even in northern Persia, where silk was the most important visible export, it may already have been equaled or surpassed in the balance of payments by specie before 1281/1865 (U.K. Foreign Office Records, Public Record Office, 60.21, 30 October 1820; idem, 60.75, 29 October 1840; Burgess, p. 85; U.K., House of Commons, *Parliamentary Papers* LXIV, p. 201). Furthermore, the impact of the carpet boom was not uniformly felt throughout Persia; rather, different regions were affected at different times (Ittig, 1983, I, pp. 256-57; Ittig, 1985, pp. 116-17).

It appears, in fact, that the major catalyst in the Persian carpet boom was a growing international market for these products, directly linked with the increasing strategic and commercial importance of the Middle East to the industrialized nations. Factors contributing to the popularization of both antique and contemporary Oriental carpets included the great world’s fairs and major museum exhibitions, the contemporary Arts and Crafts movement in England and comparable phenomena in Europe, and resulting changes in furnishing fashions (Ittig, 1985, p. 118; Bierman, pp. 53-59; Quataert, p. 474; Reitlinger, II, pp. 520-2l; Ittig, 1983, I, pp.70-72). The growing purchasing power of the Western middle classes fueled this demand (Ittig, 1985, p. 118; Hobsbawn, p. 160).

To satisfy the rise in demand for Persian carpets in turn required capital investment, but contemporary observers suggested that, as local Persian capital was not adequate to support expansion beyond traditional parameters (U.K. Foreign Office Records, *Diplomatic and Consular Reports*, A.S. no. 1376, p. 57; Ittig, 1985, p. 122 and n. 39), the gap was filled by funds from outside groups. Prominent among such investors were Persian, particularly Azarbaijani, wholesalers, import-export traders (*tojjār*), and merchant bankers (*ṣarrāf*s), as well as Western importers. It was through investment from these sources that the weaving industry was able to expand. Furthermore, the participation of such Persian and Western investors in international trade and banking made it possible to integrate the manufacture

and export of Persian carpets into previously established systems of collection and distribution (Ittig, 1985, pp. 119-21).

Although the exact date when large-scale production specifically for a Western clientele commenced is uncertain, by at least as early as 1274/1858 Persian carpet manufacturers had begun to alter the traditional dimensions and designs of their carpets for that market (Blau, p. 105). In 1283/1866 rugs were first listed as an export commodity separate from other woven articles in British Foreign Office reports on Persia (U.K., House of Commons, *Parliamentary Papers* LXI), but it is not known whether or not these items differed in any way from those woven for the domestic Persian market. By 1290/1873, however, some regions were definitely producing for the Western market (U.K., House of Commons, *Parliamentary Papers* LXXV, p. 206). The organization of this export-oriented industry was initially undertaken by native, rather than foreign, investors, at least, in Tabrīz and Kermān (Edwards, pp. 55-56; Ittig, 1985, pp. 119-120). Furthermore, contemporary accounts and inscriptions on carpets provide evidence that Persian entrepreneurs followed extant domestic production models, arranging contracts with local *ostād*s and retaining the traditional hierarchy of craftsmen while expanding and reorienting these regional industries to the new markets (Ittig, 1985, p. 120 and figs. 7-8). Notable among *tojjār* and *ṣarrāf*s engaged in carpet manufacture and export during (and after) the Qajar period were the Dīlmaḡānī, Ṣadaqīānī, and Mīlānī families (Ittig, 1985, pp. 119-20 and fig. 9; Edwards, p. 56 n. 2; cf. xiii, below).

The earliest known effort to organize rug manufacture in Persia with foreign capital was the Ziegler enterprise in Solṭānābād (now Arāk). Ziegler's was a firm of Manchester-based factors primarily involved in the import to the Near and Middle East of European printed cottons and the export of a wide variety of raw and manufactured goods for remittances. The firm's first Persian agencies were established in Tabrīz and Rašt in 1284/1867. Although the common hypothesis of a connection between pébrine and the carpet boom has often been applied specifically to Ziegler's organization of a cottage industry in Solṭānābād, the facts that the firm did not establish its first Persian agencies until two years after the onset of the disease and that it subsequently expanded commercial operations (including the exporting of silk) in Gīlān during the 1290s/1870s (U.K., House of Commons, *Parliamentary Papers* XLVII, p. 363; U.K. Foreign Office Records, Public Record Office, 60.401, no. 13) are evidence that it was not seeking alternative commodities to silk for export.

Rather, the decision to reinvest capital in carpet production at Solṭānābād appears to have been influenced primarily by contemporary growth in Western demand for Oriental carpets (Ittig, 1983, pp. 133-36).

Ziegler's initial involvement in the Persian carpet trade was limited to the purchase and export of both new and "used" rugs that were available on the market (Ittig, 1983, I, p. 138 and appendix); undoubtedly the most famous antique carpets to be handled by the firm were the so-called Ardabīls (see ardabīl carpet). The necessity for a dependable supply of suitable carpets to meet the ever-increasing demands of Western retailers was a major factor in establishment of an agency in Solṭānābād between 1294/1877 and 1299/1882 (Ittig, 1983, I, pp. 139-40 and notes 33, 37). The choice of this town was influenced not only by its role as market center for a major carpet-weaving area but also by its position on the route between Tehran and Baghdad via Hamadān and Kermānšāh, through which the company had already begun to import goods into Persia.

Ziegler's manufacturing activities involved the already-existing locally financed cottage industry. The firm negotiated agreements with local agents (*ʿāmel*s; Dehqān, II, pp. 165ff.), through whom it provided raw materials, including dyed wool and patterns (Plate CXIV, Plate CXV) prepared by specialized dyers and designers engaged by Ziegler's, and cash advances toward the finished carpets (Ittig, 1983, I, pp. 165-66, 175-78; Whigham, p. 5; U.K. Foreign Office Records, *Diplomatic and Consular Reports*, A.S. no. 1376, pp. 57, 59). The *ʿāmel*s then distributed the materials to the weavers, who were often their own kinswomen (Aubin, p. 315; Dehqān, II, pp. 165ff.; U.K. Foreign Office Records, *Diplomatic and Consular Reports*, A.S., no. 1376, p. 57). They also supervised the weaving process and collected the finished carpets for delivery to Ziegler's compound in Solṭānābād, where the rugs were carefully inspected before being packed for export.

Ziegler's production was oriented particularly toward European and American consumers, and the firm altered traditional palettes, dimensions, and designs to the specifications of Western retailers (see below; U.K. Foreign Office Records, *Diplomatic and Consular Reports* 69, p. 499; Dehqān, II, pp. 166-68). Although such changes were deplored as contributing to the commercialization and deterioration of the Persian carpet (Whigham, p. 5), Ziegler's product sold extremely well, and by 1311/1894 the firm had expanded its operations to include 111 villages around Solṭānābād (see below; U.K. Foreign Office Records, *Diplomatic and Consular Reports*, A.S. no. 1376, p. 58).

The firm's success encouraged other Western entrepreneurs to invest in the carpet industry, and before World War I such foreign firms as Oriental Carpet Manufacturers, Nearco Castelli & Brothers, and Persische Teppichgesellschaft-AG were in competition in various carpet-weaving centers in Persia (see xii, below). Ziegler's organization of a cottage industry provided the model for these "second generation" companies, but they operated with a significant difference: In addition to organizing cottage and workshop production through local agents (e.g., Ittig, 1985, pp. 120-21), they also established their own weaving factories (e.g., U.K. Foreign Office Records, Public Record Office, 248.1147, no. 42, p. 16), which permitted greater quality control through more immediate supervision of weavers. The factory weavers were salaried (U.K. Foreign Office Records, Public Record Office, 368.38, file 393R, pp. 93-94), which obviated the risk inherent in making advances payments when little redress was possible in instances of default (U.K. Foreign Office Records, Public Record Office, 248.1177, 24 October 1917).

Production of carpets in Persia for export was influenced by fluctuations in supply and demand on the world market, as well as by the state of international trade generally. The industry thus suffered a slump in 1322/1904, a period of worldwide recession, which was aggravated by a surplus of inventory on the British market (Sykes, 1906, p. 427; U.K. Foreign Office Records, Public Record Office, 368.38, file 3938, pp. 50, 94; U.K. Foreign Office Records, *Diplomatic and Consular Reports*, A.S. 3374, pp. 5-6). The industry soon recovered, however, and the value of Persian carpet exports seems to have peaked in 1324/1906-07 (Ittig, 1983, I, table I), despite considerable domestic insecurity in Persia during the period of the Constitutional movement. Production was interrupted during World War I, and hostilities between German- and British-protected interests in Persia resulted in substantial losses for both local and foreign carpet manufacturers there (e.g., U.K. Foreign Office Records, Public Record Office, 248.1147, 42/16, 42/206, 76). With resumption of large-scale manufacturing for export after the war an even larger proportion of production was geared to the American market (Edwards, pp. 92-93, 136, 140-41, 208), though locally financed commercial and custom carpet weaving continued throughout the period.

The Qajar carpet. The volume of extant Persian rugs securely datable to the Qajar period permits a number of general observations on carpet design. Formats and motifs derivative from those of the Safavid period, particularly centralized-medallion, medallion-and-corner, and lattice designs in arabesque

and *Shah ʿAbbāsī* patterns were woven throughout this period (see iv, above). Indeed, fine carpets woven in designs reminiscent of the classical period were produced into the late 13th/19th and early 14th/20th centuries (for example, Ittig, 1981, figs. 1-5; Ittig, 1983, II, no. 4 and pls. 28, 29; Gans-Ruedin, pp. 164-65); such pieces were generally specially commissioned and may represent local survivals of pre-Qajar workshop production. In contrast are those carpets with "classical" designs deliberately copied from older pieces or illustrations in carpet books and museum and sales catalogues, which were represented as antiques to meet a particular market demand (see above); such rugs were often treated in chemical baths and by other methods to make them appear older (Sayyāḥ, p. 192; Ittig, 1983, I, p. 245).

Depictions of carpets in early 13th/19th-century miniatures and paintings provide a *terminus ante quem* for the incorporation of such small repeat patterns as the *herātī* and *mīnāḵānī* into the design repertory (Falk, 1972, fig. 2 and pls. 19, 20, 25). The offset *bota* repeat pattern so popular in both Qajar textiles and carpets may have been introduced during the Zand period (Housego, 1986, p. 48, fig. 9; Parhām, n.p.; see iv, x, above). Descriptions of the dwellings of notables in the early 13th/19th century attest that carpets from Herat were also fashionable at the time (Fraser, 1826, p. 60; idem, 1838, II, p. 56; Ker Porter, I, p. 235), though, surprisingly, carpets with field patterns generally categorized as "Herat" (or "Indo-Persian"; see ix, above) do not seem to be illustrated in contemporary Persian paintings.

In addition to nonfigural patterns, Qajar carpets also exhibit a multitude of pictorial motifs, of both local and foreign derivation. Among those of Persian origin the most common are based on literary themes, particularly scenes from Ferdowsī's *Šāh-nāma* and Neẓāmī's *Ḵamsa* (Gans-Ruedin, 1978, pp. 192-93, 446-47). Also popular were depictions of historic Persian figures (Ittig, 1983, II, no. 27). The appearance of Western pictorial themes in carpets, particularly notable from the 1290s/1870s onward, was part of the contemporary fashion for European imagery in Persian art generally (see art in iran. qajar i-ii). Favorite foreign themes for carpets included scenes from classical mythology and portraits of Western historic personages, which were derived from available European newspapers, books, postcards, and paintings (Burgess, p. 93; Ittig, 1985, fig. 1). Manchester cotton goods were another source of Western designs (U.K. Foreign Office Records, *Diplomatic and Consular Reports*, A.S. 1376, p. 58).

As the economic importance of the export market increased in the late

13th/19th and early 14th/20th centuries, widespread adaptation of traditional designs, dimensions, and palettes was undertaken to meet the requirements of foreign consumers. Some of the earliest documentation for the introduction of foreign models into the traditional weaving repertory is provided by a series of carpet cartoons prepared for Emil Alpiger, manager of Ziegler's Solṭānābād agency between 1883 and 1896; many of these exhibit the elaborate floral medallion-and-corner designs then fashionable in the West (Plate CXIV; cf. Ittig, 1983, I, p. 162, II, nos. 15, 17, 19). Rugs for export to the West were produced in standard dimensions suitable to European and American interiors—for example, 3 x 5, 4 x 6, 8 x 10, and 9 x 12 feet (Ittig, 1983, I, pp. 238, 258-59)—in contrast to those used in traditional formal Persian settings (Edwards, 1953, pp. 55, 125 and pl. 38).

Various types of synthetic dyes, first developed in Europe in the 1850s (Mushak, table 2), were noted in Persian carpets by the 1290s/1870s (Floyer, p. 278). Although less expensive and time-consuming to apply than natural dyestuffs (see ii, above), some of the early synthetic colorants were often unstable in light; others were not fast when washed (Mushak, 1984, p. 9). Furthermore, the vivid shades produced by these dyes were unacceptable to the American and European markets, where a softer color palette was preferred, and they were probably one of the factors in the 1322/1904 slump (F.O. 368.38, p. 94). A variety of methods was devised to soften the harsh synthetic colors, including washing in chemical baths (Ittig, 1983, I, p. 245, II, no. 37). Although efforts by the Persian government to ban the import of synthetic colorants were ineffective, as were attempts to confiscate all carpets made with artificially dyed yarns, it is not clear to what extent synthetic dyes were used, other than in lower-grade Persian rugs made for the Western market in the late 13th/19th and early 14th/20th centuries. Edwards' observations that several carpet-weaving areas continued to use natural colorants after World War I (Edwards, 1953, passim) are supported by the variety of extant late Qajar carpets in which no artificial dyes appear to have been used.

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