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CARPETS XIV. TRIBAL CARPETS
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CARPETS

xiv. Tribal Carpets

The term “tribal carpets” includes both floor coverings and other objects woven by nomads and semi-nomads for their own needs (see ʿašāyer; confederations, tribal). Although the terms “Persian carpet” and “Oriental carpet” theoretically cover all carpets produced in the Iranian world, as a rule they are taken to refer only to the finely knotted floral carpets manufactured in cities like Mašhad, Kermān, Kāšān, Isfahan, Tabrīz, and so on (see iii, above). Knowledge of rural carpets, especially nomadic carpets, is still very limited because specialists in carpet studies have generally interested themselves only in court carpets from the 10th/16th and 11th/17th centuries, often going so far as to dismiss other weavings as peripheral local products of no scholarly interest. For example, the noted early authority Wilhelm von Bode stressed the necessity of distinguishing “mainstream Persian from provincial work and the typical from what is only of historical or local interest” (p. 7). Half a century later Kurt Erdmann expressed the same fundamental notion in an only slightly modified form (p. 44). The European assumption that an art form is generally developed in an ecclesiastical or courtly environment and then is imitated with varying degrees of simplification and misunderstanding in more popular settings cannot,

however, be applied to study of Persian carpets. In fact, the carpet was not introduced as a courtly art but was evolved among nomadic peoples at an early date (see vi, above). During the approximately 150 years when Safavid power was at its height (907-1077/1501-1666) perhaps 2,000-3,000 court carpets were produced; connoisseurs are familiar with most of those that survive (see ix, above). In the same period, however, approximately 2 million carpets were made by nomads, peasants, and city dwellers on the Iranian plateau. These weavings should not automatically be labeled Safavid carpets, however, for they cannot be viewed as such (Āzādī, 1978d, pp. 262-64).

In Persia rural carpets have been made in nearly every possible technical variation and for a wide range of uses (see v, above). Yet there are many nomadic groups whose works are absolutely unknown, and the weavings of other groups have been only very imperfectly studied and described. For that reason there are still many objects of which the function is obscure; in this connection it must be acknowledged that at present the nomads of Iran, as elsewhere, are experiencing a sudden and irreversible change in their way of life, owing to the impact of modern communications media. Tribal weavings can thus already be said to belong to an earlier cultural phase.

Almost all nomadic weavers work on horizontal looms, in contrast to village and urban weavers, who usually work on vertical looms (see iii, v, above). For warps, wefts, and pile they normally use wool from sheep that they shear themselves. The wool used for warps is two-plied with an S twist and Z spin; usually the wefts are also of wool, two-plied and Z spun but with an S twist so slight that they cannot properly be said to be twisted. The Baḵtīārī almost always used undyed cotton for warps and wefts, though wool was the primary material for knotting. The Šāhsevan and Afšār used cotton for wefts and the former occasionally for warps as well. Both warps and wefts of Qaragözlü works (so-called “Hamadān carpets”; see below) from the turn of this century and earlier were of cotton, the main feature that distinguishes these works from carpets produced by the Šāhsevan from around Sarāb. The latter are identical or very similar in color and design and in the extensive use of undyed camel hair; usually, however, there are two weft shoots after each row of knots, whereas in Qaragözlü pieces from the Hamadān area there is only one. Among other groups camel hair is seldom used for warps, though occasionally it is used for pile, usually undyed. Goat hair is not often used in Persia, though it is more common in Afghanistan. The use of silk for wefts is attested in the finest objects produced by the Qašqāʾī, the Ḵamsa

confederation, and the Göklan Turkmen (Gūklān). Whereas it was the custom in the first two tribes to introduce pairs of ruby-red silk wefts only in pieces of exceptional quality, the Göklan normally used undyed silk wefts, a practice that distinguished their work from that of all other Turkman tribes in Iran and elsewhere (Āzādī, 1989); they were able to do so because they cultivated silk. It is rare for silk to be used for knotting in nomad works; when it is used, it is limited to small areas and is a sign of the highest luxury.

Nomads traditionally obtained most of their dyes from natural sources (see ii, above). The most common red was madder (*rūnās*; *Rubia tinctorum*). Yellow was obtained from weld (*esparak*; *Reseda luteola*) and turmeric (*zard-čūba*; *Curcuma longa*), as well as from grape leaves (*barg-e mow*), pomegranate rinds (*pūst-e anār*), walnut shells (*pūst-e gerdū*), and many other vegetal sources. Indigo (*nīl*; *Indigofera tinctoria*) usually had to be purchased or obtained through barter. Although the plant was cultivated in Kermān and Ḵūzestān, the best kinds came from India. Most nomads dyed their wool themselves, but for certain shades, like blue, the yarn had to be sent to professional dyers.

Tribal carpets are known to have been produced in the following regions.

Azarbaijan. The Šāhsevan in particular have been making carpets, mainly *gelīm*s and sumaks but also knotted carpets, since the 11th/17th century (see v, above; Āzādī and Andrews; Housego; Tanavoli). In contrast to the floral carpets from urban workshops in Azarbaijan, the Šāhsevan carpets have geometric designs. Such carpets were first comprehensively exhibited in 1971 at the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe in Hamburg and the Museum für Kunsthandwerk in Frankfurt (Meister and Azadi). In addition to the Šāhsevan, the Kurdish tribes of Azarbaijan, especially in the Qarādāḡ region, weave carpets that are very similar to those of the Šāhsevan and of Kurdish groups in the neighboring districts of Iraq, Turkey, and the southern Caucasus.

Kurdistan. Aside from the urban products of this western Persian province there are also Kurdish nomadic carpets, the best known of which are those of the Sanjābī and Kolyāʾī, though until the recent publication of two monographs (Eagleton; Buckhurst-Hill) little research had been done on Kurdish weaving at all. On the other hand, there are Afšār in Kurdistan, mainly settled north of Bījār, whose works have hardly been studied; their early production in this province had red wool wefts, as did the carpets of the main body of this tribe, which is located primarily in the province of Kermān (see below). There are also several Šāhsevan groups in Kurdistan; they

produce work similar to that of their fellow tribesmen in Azarbaijan, though naturally with some differences. For example, their *mafraš*es (see Figure 103.1) are ornamented only on the front sides, whereas in Azarbaijan all four sides are decorated. Until the turn of this century members of the Qaragözlü (Qaragozlū) tribe, who may already have been half-settled, wove carpets; most so-called "Hamadān carpets," which incorporate undyed camel's hair, are products of the Qaragözlü.

Isfahan. The following nomadic tribes in this province have traditions of rug weaving: the Lorī (Opie; Collins); the Baḵtīārī, the largest tribal group in Iran (s.v. baḵtjārǰ carpets); the Kurds, probably Lak, whose works are unknown; and the settled Qašqāʾī, Lorī, and other groups, who presumably play a significant role as weavers of so-called Hinegun carpets.

Fārs. The Qašqāʾī, with their numerous subtribes and clans, form the largest weaving group (Black and Loveless, 1979; Parhām and Āzādī; Azadi, 1987). Other tribal weavers in the province include the Boir Aḥmad (Löffler and Friedl); the Mamasanī; and the Ḵamsa confederation, which consists of the Nafar, ʿArab, Bāṣerī, Bahārlū, and Aynallū tribes, on whose work no research seems to have been conducted. It is not known whether the Afšār and Kurds of this province produced carpets.

Kermān. The main tribal carpet weavers are Afšār, whose works have been treated only superficially in general works. Although the majority of the Baluch tribes live in Kermān and Baluchistan, they produce very few carpets. Whether or not the Kurds of the province of Kermān weave carpets is entirely unknown.

Khorasan. This province has the most varied population of tribal weavers in Iran. Beside the Baluch (see baluchistan v; Azadi and Besim) the Tīmūrī, the Brahui, the ʿArab (mainly around Ferdows and Ṭabas), and the Barbarī all work in the Baluch tradition, as do the Jamšīdī, whose carpets are somewhat cruder. The Kurds produce several types of carpet; as they have mingled with neighboring tribes, some of these types show the influence of other traditions. There are a purely Kurdish type, the Qūčān carpets, which are knotted and have polychrome geometric designs; knotted carpets that are somewhat darker than the Qūčān, though still lighter than the monochromatic Baluch carpets; and quasi-monochromatic geometric carpets in the Baluch tradition. Among the Turkmen three main tribes have woven carpets in northern Khorasan for a very long time. The largest is the Yomūt (Yamūt), with

numerous subtribes and clans. The range of objects produced, in both knotted and flat-woven techniques, is more varied than that of almost any other Turkman tribe (Figure 102, Figure 103). The works are generally characterized by geometric ornament and monochromatic color schemes (Azadi, 1975; idem and Vossen). The work of a second Turkman tribe, the Göklan, which has lived in the area of Gorgān and Atrak for at least 700 years, is almost always incorrectly ascribed to the Yomūt (Azadi, 1986). The third tribe is the Tekke (Takka), small groups of which live with the Awlīād tribes. The Afšār of Khorasan weave and knot carpets, but their work is largely unknown (Azadi, 1979). Although other tribal groups have long been established in Khorasan, for instance, the Lak, Qājār, Jalāyer, Bayāt, Qelīčī, and Gārīlī, it is not known whether or not they produced carpets, either in flat-woven or knotted technique.

Māzandarān and Gīlān. There are also tribes in this province whose works are unknown. The Kurdish work of Kalārdašt has been known only since the beginning of the 1340s Š./1960s. In addition, there is no information on whether the Qājār made knotted carpets.

Tehran. Knowledge of tribal weaving in this province is limited to the works of the Šāhsevan, Hadāvandī Lor, Borbor, Afšār, and other tribes from the vicinity of Varāmīn and some groups at Garmsīr (Garmsār).

As mentioned above the nomads produce many objects in both flat-woven and knotted techniques for their own use. Originally they were only simple pieces designed to fulfill daily needs, but at some point objects began to be made for functions that had been elaborated beyond daily needs. It seems, for example, that such objects as horse blankets, the trappings of the marriage camel, knee decorations, and double bags constitute a separate tradition, one that is still partly observed and followed, for example, among the Yomūt Turkman tribes in Iran, as can be seen in the drawings of specific items in Figure 102, Figure 103. In addition to the illustrated objects, the following are included in the common Yomūt repertoire: the *germeč*, a threshold carpet between a *gap* and a *torba* in size but ornamented in the same way as the added lower border (*alam*) of an *ensi* (see Figure 103.1, 9, 15); the *ojaqbāš*, a U-shaped hearth carpet, measuring 250-350 by 150-80 cm, in the opening of which the fire is placed; the *at čeki*, the saddle girth, which in exceptional cases can also be made in knotted technique; and the *hali*, or *qali*, measuring 170-350 by 120-230cm, a Turkman domestic carpet that has taken on cultic significance and must be understood as a highly precious object. The terms and

explanations for all these objects have been drawn both from the literature and from research in the field (Āzādī, 1975; idem and Vossen).

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ILLUSTRATIONS IN CARPETS i to xiv.

Figure 64. Foundation: a. warps; b. wefts

Figure 65. Knots: a. symmetrical knots; b. asymmetrical knots, open right; c. asymmetrical knots, open left

Figure 66. Loom: a. warp; b. shed stick; c. heddle rod; d. weft

Figure 67. Side finishes: a. overcasting; b: selvedges

Figure 68. Central-medallion format a. Field; b. Main border stripe; c. Minor border stripes; d. Medallion; e. Guards

Figure 69. Cartouche

Figure 70. Arabesque

Figure 71. *Bota*

Figure 72. Palmette

Figure 73. *Herātī* pattern unit

Figure 74. S-stem

Figure 75. Balanced plain weave. Drawing by Houshang Adorbehi; after Tanavoli, p. 67, fig. 51

Figure 76. Loosely packed weft-faced plain weave. Drawing by Houshang Adorbehi; after Tanavoli, p. 68, fig. 53

Figure 77. Tightly packed warp-faced plain weave. Drawing by Houshang Adorbehi; after Tanavoli, p. 68, fig. 52

Figure 78. Loosely packed weft-faced plain weave with discontinuous weft, known as slit-tapestry weave. After Acar, p. 47, design 3

Figure 79. Dovetailing (shared warp). After Housego p. 22, no. 4

Figure 80. Single-interlocking wefts. After Burnham, p. 145, center

Figure 81. Double-interlocking wefts (front of carpet). After Housego, p. 23, no. 5

Figure 82. Double-interlocking wefts (back of carpet). After Housego, p. 23, no. 6

Figure 83. Twill weave in a ratio of 2:2. Drawing by Houshang Adorbehi; after Tanavoli, p. 72, fig. 62

Figure 84. The warp-float face of a float weave with weft passes of 3:1 and 1:1 in alternating rows, with the span under three warps in each successive row of 3:1 offset one warp. Drawing by Houshang Adorbehi; after Tanavoli, p. 72, fig. 64

Figure 85. Face of extra-weft float brocading with spans of different lengths on balanced plain-weave ground. Drawing by Houshang Adorbehi; after Tanavoli, p. 73, fig. 66

Figure 86. Back of weaving in Figure 85, showing reverse pattern created by extra wefts, which float on the back when not used on the front. Drawing by Houshang Adorhehi; after Tanavoli. p. 73, fig. 67

Figure 87. Two-color complementary-weft compound weave forming lozenge motifs. Drawing by Houshang Adorbehi; after Tanavoli, p. 77, fig. 77

Figure 88. Plain two-strand, two-color weft twining on balanced plain-weave ground. Drawing by Houshang Adorbehi; after Tanavoli, p. 78, fig. 81

Figure 89. Countered two-strand, two-color weft twining on balanced plain-weave ground. Drawing by Houshang Adorbehi; after Tanavoli, p. 78, fig. 82 .

Figure 90. Plain extra-weft wrapping (plain sumak) with ground weft. After Acar, P. 70. design 20

Figure 91. Countered extra-weft wrapping (countered sumak), with ground weft. After Acar, p. 72, design 22

Figure 92. Reverse extra-weft wrapping (reverse sumak), with ground weft. Acar, p. 74, design 24

Figure 93. Diagonal supplementary (“extra”) weft wrapping on plain weave with discontinuous wefts. After Acar, p. 53, design 9

Figure 94. Structure of *zīlū* carpet, showing both faces. For demonstration purposes the diagram depicts the structure of a fabric with a checked pattern. Drawing by Milton Sonday (Copyright 1989)

Figure 95. Fringe produced by knotting groups of warps together. Drawing by

Houshang Adorbehi; after Tanavoli, p. 99, fig. 146

Figure 96. Fringe produced by knotting alternate groups of warps together in successive rows to create a net or web. Drawing by Houshang Adorbehi; after Tanavoli, p. 99, fig. 148

Figure 97. Fringe produced by interlooping warps. Drawing by Houshang Adorbehi; after Tanavoli, p. 100, fig. 150

Figure 98. Fringe produced by braiding groups of warps in flat vertical plaits. Drawing by Houshang Adorbehi; after Tanavoli, p. 100, fig. 152

Figure 99. Fringe produced by plaiting warps diagonally. Drawing by Houshang Adorbehi; after Tanavoli, p. 101, fig. 154

Figure 100. Fringe produced by twisting pairs of warps, and leaving ends uncut. Drawing by Houshang Adorbehi; after Tanavoli, p. 101, fig. 156

Figure 101. Fringe produced by twisting groups of warps together. Drawing by Houshang Adorbehi; after Tanavoli, p. 101, fig. 158

Figure 102. Examples of Yomūt weaving. 1. Tent band; the finest examples are considered to be those with white ground (*aq yüp*) in warp-faced weave with knotted decoration. Tent bands range from 11 to 20 m long and from 20 to 75 cm wide. 2. *Kaplyk*, frame for the interior of the tent entrance, ornamented with fringes, tassels, and sequins. 3. Horse blanket (*tainakša, konakča, at joli*). 4. Saddle cover (*čerlyk, ayerlyk*). 5. *Kalyk*, similar to the *kaplyk* but much smaller, decorative frame for the opening of the camel litter (*kajava*) in the bridal procession.

Figure 103. Yomūt woven objects. 1. *Qap, qab, mafraš*, small bag that Turkman women use for storing their jewelry and other valuables. 2. *Dis* (*duz*) *torba*, small bag for storing salt, an extremely valuable commodity among nomads; similar bags in different shapes are used for sugar, tea, rye, and other staples. 3. *Bokča*, an unusual kind of bag the function of which has not been clearly established; often used for carrying the Koran. 4. *Tutaš, tutač, gazan tutaš*, small pockets for carrying large or small jars (*dieg*). 5. Another form of saddle blanket. 6. *Darak baš*, small bag woven on both sides and with projecting teeth, used for carding and cleaning wool. 7. *Diah dizlyk*, small pentagonal object covered with tassels and small sequins and used as knee decoration for the bridal camel. 8. *Ok baš*, hood for the stakes (*ok*) of the new white tent (*aq oy*)

given to each bridal couple; the fifty to sixty stakes are tied in two bundles with an *ok bas* decorated with bells and sequins sheathing the sharp points at each end; the two bundles are carried by camels on the right and left sides of the procession. 9. *Čowal, gaṛčīn*, largest Turkman storage bag, for clothing and other household furnishings. 10. *Torba*, similar to the *čowal* but less than half as large. 11. *Asmalyk*, one of a pair of pentagonal or heptagonal objects, sometimes with pendants, placed on each side of the wedding camel under the litter and later hung in the tent as memorabilia (comparable to wedding pictures). 12. *Čemča-torba*, small bag for storing wooden spoons and other utensils. 13. *Ḵorjīn*, double bag. 14. *Salaṭčak*, used as a weighing bag or cradle, with inherent magical function of protecting babies from illness, insects, snakes, and other threats. 15. *Namaslyk, ayatlyk*, prayer carpet, with specific form, dimensions, and ornamentation, used especially in funerary rites. 16. *Ensi, engsi*, carpet for the tent entrance, with specific dimensions and ornamentation, much of which seems to have an amuletic character.

Plate CV. Drawing of Pazyryk Carpet; after K. Jettmar, *Art of Steppes*, Art of the World, New York: Random House, 1964, fig. 103 p. 121

Plate CVI. “Lion Carpet”—reconstruction drawing by Steven Sechovec. Museum purchase, the Rosco and Margaret Oakes Income Fund, The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, no. 1986.4

Plate CVII. “Laylī and Majnūn at School,” detail, from a copy of Neẓāmī, *Ḵamsa*, illustrated in Baghdad or western Persia in 866/1461. Topkapı Sarayı , Istanbul, Hazine 761, fol. 106r

Plate CVIII. Medallion carpet, Museo Poldi Pezzoli, Milan, no. DT 1 (partly restored)

Plate CIX. Ardabīl carpet. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, no. 272-1893

Plate CX. Emperor’s carpet (one of a pair). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, no. 43.121.1: Rogers Fund, 1943

Plate CXI. Polonaise carpet, Rosenborg Castle, Copenhagen, no. 31-R1

Plate CXII. Polonaise carpet, Rosenborg Castle, Copenhagen, no. 31-R1, detail

Plate CXIII. Millefiori carpet attributed to Persia in the second half of the 12th/18th century. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, T.99-1973

Plate CXIV. Cartoon for one-quarter of a medallion-and-corner carpet commissioned by Emil Alpiger from the Farāhān, (*šahrestān* of) Solṭānābād, workshop, 1311/1893-94; private collection; watercolor on hand-drawn graph paper, 39 x 40 cm

Plate CXV. Cartoon for one-quarter of a medallion-and-corner carpet produced for Ziegler's before 1313/1896; private collection; watercolor on hand-drawn graph paper, 50 x 50 cm

Table 48. Distribution of looms, 1319 Š./1940

Table 49. Persian carpet exports before World War II

Table 50. Knotted-pile carpet imports into U.S.A. and West Germany 1978-1987

Table 51. Prices of Nehāvand rugs in the Hamadān *bāzār* (rials per m^2)