The Metropolitan Museum of Art BULLETIN *June 1970*

Islamic Carpets

The Joseph V. McMullan Collection

Several distinguished Americans, from Benjamin Altman to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., have been pioneers in the appreciation and collecting of Oriental rugs. Historically speaking, they are followers of the European royal and noble houses, who in past centuries fulfilled this function. While churches were often the inheritors of such royal treasures, now the public museum is usually the final repository of these gifts from benefactors.

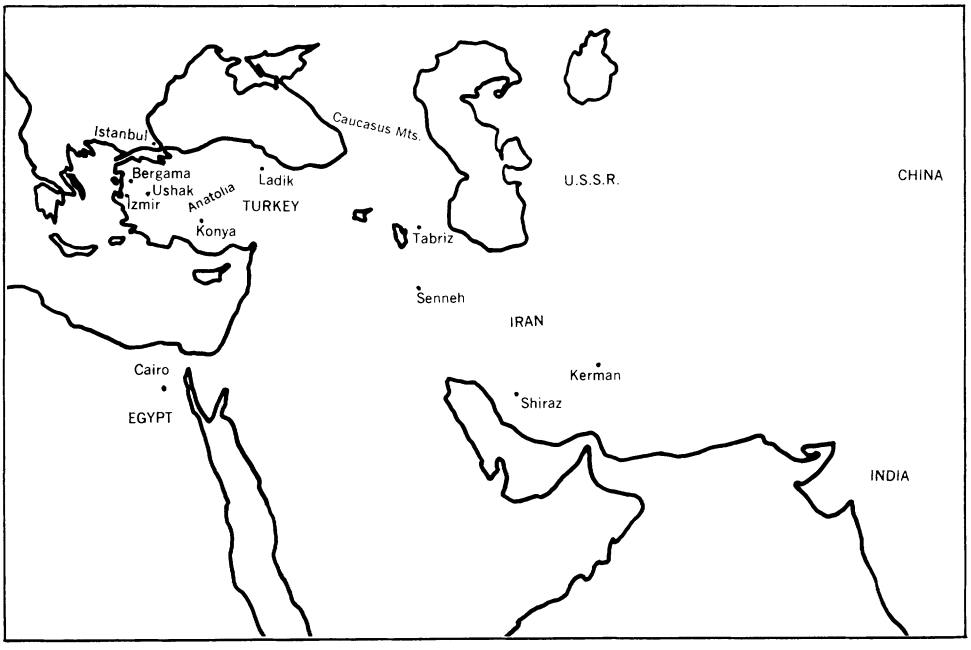
In the last four decades the most active and judicious collector has been Joseph V. McMullan, who has built up splendid holdings of every possible type of carpet produced between Egypt and Chinese Turkestan, from the late fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries. He has already given some of his finest pieces to the Museum and generously promised most of the others to it. The Metropolitan Museum exhibition this summer will show the cream of the collection and give our numerous Centennial visitors an opportunity to view many carpets that have not previously been shown to the public, as well as a number of pieces given by Mr. McMullan to other museums.

The show will demonstrate how, with energy and perspicacity, one individual can manage to assemble an outstanding collection even at a time when collecting has become difficult. Mr. McMullan achieved this distinction by acquiring not only the much admired classical examples made for courts and urban centers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but also the not-yet-appreciated minor masterpieces of later centuries made by simple village or tribal weavers.

THOMAS P. F. HOVING, *Director*

The nature and function of the pile carpet — the Oriental or Islamic carpet par excellence — becomes clear when it is understood where it was made. The so-called carpet belt covers a wide area in Asia, approximately 25° to 45° north latitude (Figure 1), in which Central Asia, Iran, the Caucasus, and Anatolia are (together with China) the main carpet-producing regions. In the sparsely populated areas to the north, furs have always been abundantly available as floor covers for the tents of nomadic people, while in countries to the south, the great heat during much of the year made reed mats preferable. The nomadic herdsman in the steppe country of the carpet belt, on the other hand, was loathe to slaughter his flock for their pelts, and so he created an artificial fur. He did so by knotting small bits of woolen yarn, usually around two vertical warp threads, which, in an upright loom, were fixed to beams above and below; once a row of knots had been applied in either of two methods of knotting (see Figures 2, 3), horizontal weft threads were woven in and pounded down to hold the knots securely in place. Row upon row

The color plates in this Bulletin are from Mr. McMullan's book, Islamic Carpets (New York, 1965), and were made from photographs taken by Otto Nelson



1. Primary areas of the carpet belt and ancillary production centers (Cairo and northern India)

of knots was applied in this manner until the carpet was completed, its pile projecting on one side of the foundation fabric. At first the knots were long and the carpet had a shaggy look and, we may assume, no, or only an indistinct, pattern. But then this wild-looking floor cover became domesticated: bits of wool of various colors were inserted and then shorn so that an even, upright, fairly short pile with a clearly discernible design resulted.

Because of the perishable character of the material, few early carpets survive, and it is not known when the first ones were knotted. A densely knotted carpet with figural Persian designs of the fifth century B. C. was found by the Russian archaeologist Rudenko in 1949 in the eternal ice of a tomb in southern Siberia. From the complexity of its design we infer that this type of carpet must have heavy a long prehistory. But the high technical and artistic competence of that period was lost in subsequent centuries and only simple designs were woven in the same technique. Fragments from some of these modest types, dating from the third to the sixth centuries, have been found in eastern Turkestan. Larger carpets of many designs dating from the thirteenth century have been discovered in Konya, the first Turkish capital of Anatolia, and are now in a museum in Istanbul. These ancestors of our own Oriental carpets show the characteristic division of each piece into field and border, the latter, in turn, usually subdivided into a central band and narrower outer and inner guard stripes. The Konya carpets are not the products of nomads or villagers but represent a more evolved urban production. Developments since the thirteenth century have been extremely complex: each region created its own patterns, which, through eventual intermingling, became even more numerous and varied. Designs reached their highest sophistication in the compositions of the Persian court workshops of the sixteenth century; they were made after carefully drawn cartoons planned first by illuminators and then by miniature painters. Nevertheless, simpler patterns also continued to be made. Irrespective of their decoration, however, pile carpets differ basically from the lighter, smooth-faced, tapestry-like carpets called *kilims*

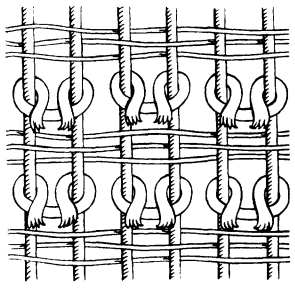
(after the Persian *gilīm*) (Figure 4). Both types have coexisted at least since the sixteenth century.

The history of this immense production is a world-wide success story. The craft was taken up outside the carpet belt: during limited periods, workshops in Egypt, Spain, the Indian subcontinent, and North Africa produced pieces with designs typical for each region. Untold carpets were exported to many lands and, since the late thirteenth century, especially to Europe. From the early fourteenth century on, the presence of carpets in Western paintings clearly demonstrates their early popularity. These representations help us to get an insight into many lost patterns and to reconstruct historical developments; they are also an aid in dating early carpets. Inevitably attempts were made by Western countries to copy Oriental carpets, but they always remained unsuccessful — the spirit of the Oriental carpet is inimitable.

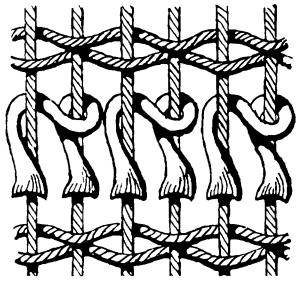
The enjoyment of carpets can be compared to that of music. One can derive great pleasure from just listening; likewise, the mere viewing of carpets can be a source of aesthetic satisfaction. On this level their appeal rests on the charm of ever-changing, colorful patterns, which have always been acceptable to non-Muslim sensibilities, blended easily into many interiors, and at the same time lent them an exotic glamour. However, as a critical reading of the score heightens both the enjoyment and understanding of music, so also does an analysis of the composition, motifs, and color arrangement increase one's appreciation of a carpet's beauty. To a Western observer such an analytical approach is not as easy to achieve in looking at carpets as in viewing representational paintings; on the other hand, people accustomed to looking at nonobjective paintings and boldly executed poster art should have no difficulties in responding to the colorful abstractions of Oriental carpets. There is, however, one basic difference between Western and Eastern nonrepresentational art: while the one can readily employ free forms or a simple, direct theme and at times reveals vacillating emotions, the other always follows rigid, usually mathematically determined rules that impose strict orderliness.

The comments accompanying the following illustrations emphasize visual aspects of these carpets that might escape many Western eyes. They are frequently augmented by quotations from Mr. McMullan's own catalogue, *Islamic Carpets* (New York, 1965).

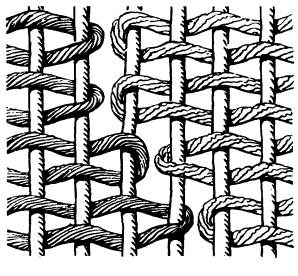
RICHARD ETTINGHAUSEN, *Consultative Chairman Department of Islamic Art*



2. Gördes (or Ghiordes) knot, typically used in Turkey and often called the Turkish knot



3. Senneh (or Senna, Sehna) knot, usually employed by Persian weavers and often called the Persian knot. Reproduced from Oriental Carpets (New York, 1962) by Kurt Erdmann



4. Kilim weaving pattern. Notice the slit caused by the creation of areas of different colors. Reproduced from Notes on Carpet Knotting and Weaving (London, 1920), with permission of the Victoria and Albert Museum

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5. *Carpet*

Mamluk Egyptian (Cairo), late XV century. 6 feet 4 inches × 4 feet 6 inches. SL 70.205.1

This large, typically Mamluk fragment is Mr. McMullan's oldest carpet; it belongs to the earliest major group of Near Eastern carpets. Their origin was long a mystery: they were called "Damascus" carpets, until, in 1921, Cairo was recognized as their production center. They were manufactured during the last seventy years of the Mamluk sultanate of Egypt (1250–1517), but the patterns were followed for a few decades after the Ottoman conquest in 1517.

Earlier weavers had used a coordinating composition scheme of one or two motifs whose repetition is stopped only by the border. Mamluk carpets of the fifteenth century were the first to display a centralized plan; the large octagonal medallion in the lower right of this fragment was originally its dominant central unit. For these centralized designs, traditional geometric patterns of Coptic weavers were a source of inspiration, while the complex grouping of numerous units has parallels in the marble floors in Cairene buildings. Two colors, burgundy red and light green, predominate in early Mamluk carpets. Here, as usual, a washed-out looking blue was added as a color of secondary importance.

> There is little distinction between field and border and between major and minor pattern elements in Mamluk rug designs.... Medallions, rosettes, cartouches, stars and arrow-head shaped units, all greatly varying in size and individual outline, create a pattern of unparalleled complexity.... In the "field" floral shrubs of the papyrus type and rolled leaves are used to fill every inch of the given space.

Although Egypt had once been a heavy importer of Turkish rugs, this group was definitely not imported: contemporary travelers observed weavers working in Cairo, and these carpets are not knotted with the characteristic Turkish Gördes knot (Figure 2) but with the Persian Senneh knot (Figure 3).

The finest carpet of the group and one of the finest ever made is very large (more than seventeen by nine feet) and knotted in silk. It belonged to the Hapsburgs and is now in the Museum of Decorative Arts in Vienna. The most extensive existing collection, comprising sixteen Mamluk rugs, is in The Textile Museum in Washington, D.C.

OVERLEAF LEFT

6. *Carpet*

Egyptian or Anatolian, XVI century. 6 feet × 4 feet 2 inches. 69.267

The color scheme of this carpet is the same as in the Mamluk carpet (Figure 5), but the blue here is as prominent as the red and green. The geometric motifs in the field also recall Mamluk patterns, as do the small cypress trees. Instead of a centralized composition, however, this carpet has a less complex coordinating one consisting of octagons in rectangles repeated in both directions. Another novel aspect is the clear distinction between the border, whose designs are of Anatolian origin, and the field. Nevertheless, because the knotting technique in this group is identical with that in Mamluk carpets, one cannot say with certainty that the group originated in Anatolia.

OVERLEAF RIGHT

7. *Rug*

Ottoman Turkish (Cairo or Istanbul), late XVI century. 6 feet 6¾ inches × 4 feet 4 inches. SL 70.205.3

Drastic changes took place in Mamluk carpet decoration after the conquest of Egypt by the Ottoman Turks in 1517: weavers introduced not only beautifully designed, stylized vegetal motifs, such as rosettes and palmettes, or realistically rendered carnations, tulips, hyacinths, and other floral delights of the Turkish garden as seen in Figure 8, but also other more formal designs. One of these — and characteristically Turkish, at that — is the short, double, wavy stripe, here combined with rows of single dots but more often with rows of dots grouped into threes. Several fanciful interpretations have been given to this motif by European, American, and Turkish writers, which indicate that the precise meaning is now lost. The explanation proposed by Ernst Kühnel is most likely to be close to the historical truth: it assumes an allusion to the leopard and tiger skins used as clothing by legendary ancient Turkish and Iranian rulers. The scheme of a central medallion and of quarter medallions in the corners reveals the influence of Turkish book covers and, indirectly, of northwest Persian medallion carpets, such as found in Figure 9, although a centralized composition was, as we have seen, familiar to weavers who came out of the Mamluk tradition. The Mamluk style has all but disappeared from this carpet, yet its main colors are still the same, except that the pale blue here is more conspicuous.

OPPOSITE

8. *Prayer rug*

Ottoman Turkish (Cairo or Istanbul), early XVII century. 6 feet × 3 feet 7 inches. SL 70.205.2

The field design in this carpet reflects the outline of the niche or *mihrab*, which in every mosque indicates the direction to Mecca; it readily establishes this piece as a prayer rug *(seccadeh*, from the Arabic *sajada*, to prostrate oneself), which is used during the five daily devotions. In spite of the apparent complexity and baroque quality of the design, its main components can easily be discerned:

A central theme of palmettes, varying in scale, is carried on a thin graceful trellis from which spring feathery, leafy fronds and arched small sprays of floral rosettes. The arches of the prayer niche are filled with curved arabesques; the ... corner pieces, with Chinese cloud bands.

The warm red ground of the field, the feathery, curved lancet leaves, the rosette-like flowers in the field and border, as well as the tiny carnations in the inner guard stripe, are all typically Ottoman Turkish and represent the art of the "establishment"; the pieces of this group have therefore been called products of the Turkish court manufactories, but where these were located is not certain. In spite of their official Turkish character, these carpets are woven with the Persian knot used in Cairo. There are also Mamluk survivals in color, materials, and occasionally even in design. Thus, these pieces may have been woven in the well-established Egyptian workshops according to designs from Istanbul, or the Cairene artisans may have worked in Istanbul.

FRONTISPIECE, OVERLEAF LEFT

9. *Medallion carpet (also called Tabriz carpet)*

Northwestern Iran (Tabriz), second quarter of the XVI century. 28 feet 2 inches × 10 feet 7½ inches. 64.311

Medallion carpets might be called the classical carpets of Iran. Judging from depictions in Persian miniatures, the centralized medallion scheme was known before the middle of the fifteenth century. Actual examples, however, date only from the first half of the sixteenth century, especially from the period of the second Safavid ruler of Iran, Shah Tahmasp (1524–1576). While the layout occurs in the frontispieces and on the bindings of manuscripts, which may indeed have provided the ultimate models for the weavers, the large scale of the carpets, their subtle but clear design, and the richness of detail make them masterpieces in their own right. It is easy to understand why it is generally assumed that they owe their origin to royal patronage.

No Persian carpet at any known period nor from any other area exhibits the severe austerity of this particular type from the Northwest. The deeply indented stellate central medallion is the base from which springs at each end first an oblong cartouche and finally a medallion pendant. These dominate the scroll system of arabesque stems and blossoms.... The field is relieved by four-lobed spandrels of a design different from the central medallion, consisting of two asymmetric cloud bands and small blossoms.

A harmonious effect is created by the skillfully balanced composition — from the spiral designs of the field around the medallion to the strategically placed larger flowers and arabesques. No less responsible is the coloristic treatment; the weaver worked primarily with shades in two major ranges: the various blues and the buff-rose-white tones. They are ingeniously juxtaposed in the main design, the surrounding field, and the border. The green in the corner quarter medallions introduces a contrasting but not stridently divergent color. The reds are used for accentuating the flowers and some delicate lines, especially in the central star and border.

Persian weavers frequently made a pair of carpets in the same design. The companion piece for this one was given by Mr. McMullan to The Textile Museum in Washington.

OPPOSITE

10. Floral carpet fragment

Iranian, mid-XVI century. 3 feet 11 inches × 3 feet 6 inches. SL 70.205.4

The underlying scheme of the design of small carpet fragments is often a mystery, like that of an unsolved detective story. Hence the eagerness of scholars to find the remaining parts and to recapture the beauty of the original. As many as sixteen fragments of carpets that were either divided up by looting soldiers or by a none-too-artistic householder have been reassembled after a successful sleuthing endeavor. No hope exists, however, that there remain more than orphan-like fragments of worn-out carpets whose defective parts were cut off and discarded.

Nevertheless, from surviving complete examples, we know that during the artistic preeminence of Persian carpet production refined designs were executed in a wide range of colors with "sophistication, complexity, and nervous energy." It is remarkable that their excellence was achieved with only a few motifs, which, to the Western mind, lack special interest and sensual appeal and hardly seem imbued with a dynamic potential. The chosen elements — stylized palmette flowers of various sizes, two-tined arabesques, floating cloud bands derived from Chinese models, winding stems, and here and there a few birds or quadrupeds — were, however, by the magic touch of the Persian designer and the skill of the carpet weaver, combined to create a dense, jungle-like world of utter intensity. They were not thrown about in unpremeditated sequences but were carefully aligned on two systems of thin spiraling branches, which interact and overlap each other and create a sense of three-dimensionality, belying the first impression of a haphazard conglomerate of motifs.

Like most of the classical, Persian floral carpets, this example presents opposing features:

> In strong contrast to the apparent freedom of the field pattern are the large-scaled geometrical units displayed in the border. Here we find a multilobed medallion containing what appears to be either a cheetah or a leopard attacking a gazelle. Adjacent is half of an oblong cartouche ... [and] along the border is a chain of balanced, interlocking cartouches, ornamented in the center with arabesques and on the flanks with huge half-palmettes. [These] elements ... create a field of odd-shaped areas ornamented principally with birds perched upon a simple scheme of vines and blossoms.

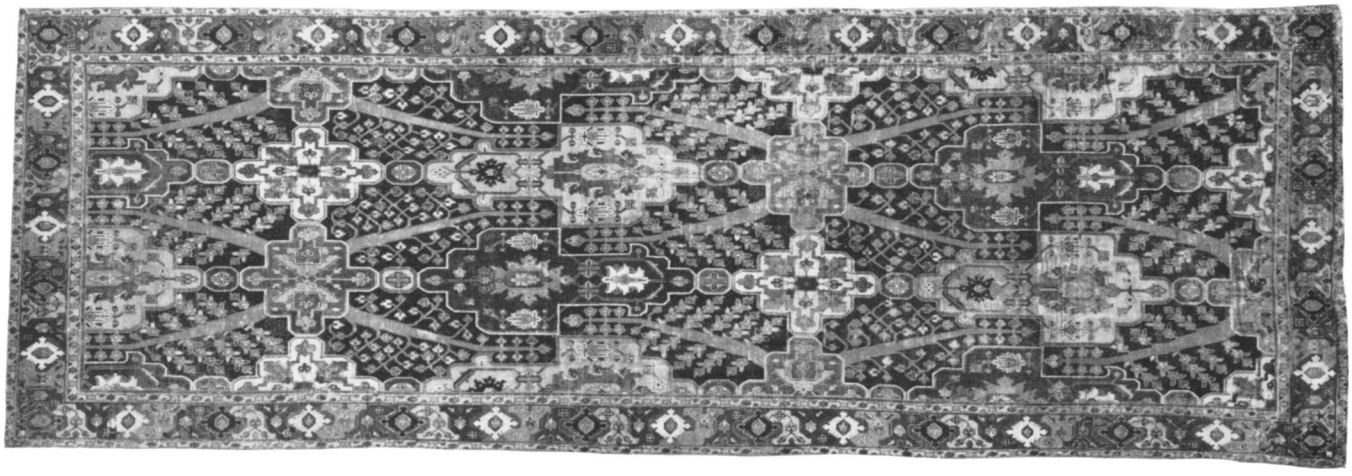
OPPOSITE

11. *Floral carpet*

Iranian (Kerman?), early XVII century. 6 feet 9 inches × 4 feet 8 inches. SL 70.205.5

Nothing is closer to the heart of an Iranian than a garden with its rich display of trees and flowers. As well as giving a sense of earthly peace and beauty, every garden evokes for the Muslim the even greater pleasures awaiting the blessed in paradise. It is not astonishing, then, that references to gardens occur in many different categories of carpet although only a few weavers made it their task to render all their formal details. Even though the obligatory watercourses, laid-out beds, and shade-giving trees are missing from this carpet, nobody can contemplate it without experiencing the poetic spirit with which Persian gardens are endowed. All kinds of flowers, identified as aster, calendula, campanula, carnation, iris, lily, narcissus, rose, and so on, are placed in serried rows on a warm, wine red ground; all plants are formally placed and slightly stylized yet readily recognizable. The stellar medallion in the center and the quarter medallion in the corners with their rigid blue arabesques on a yellow ground bring in coloristic and iconographic contrasts, and they also add a focal point to the basic composition. And just as a real Persian garden is shut off from the outside world by a high, forbidding wall, so is this imaginative recreation of a floral world closed off by a more somber, deep blue border with vegetal designs more severely stylized than those of the field.

The evocative assembly of this unusual design is so convincing that it seems an academic issue to note that such flowers are otherwise found only as secondary filling patterns in the so-called Persian vase carpets. Here, however, they have taken on a major role of their own. One is also reminded of certain Mughal Indian carpets that display individual flowering plants in serried rows. In the Indian examples, however, individual motifs have a larger scale and they are more widely spaced so that the red background is more prominent (see Figure 15).



ABOVE, DETAIL OVERLEAF

12. *"Cartouches and trees" carpet*

Iranian, early XVII century. 7 feet 2 inches × 21 feet 4 inches. 60.32

This carpet with its bold, simplified design shows a continuous, coordinated pattern. The highly complex layout, the dynamic tension, or the easy natural grace that characterize such Persian carpets as Figures 9, 10, and 11 are absent from this piece. Its immediate appeal lies in the formalization, which is apparent in the strict alignment of cartouches and medallions, and in the severe stylization of trees and flowers. This combination — unusual as it may seem to the Western mind — is not too strange in an Iranian setting, as it represents the quintessence of the effect of the Persian garden. Indeed, the formal aspect of the whole carpet gives it real monumentality.

Mr. McMullan feels that carpets of this type may have come from northern rather than northwestern Persia, since the border is less elegant than the borders of sixteenth-century northwestern Persian rugs from which it was derived. Kurt Erdmann, on the other hand, while also assuming a derivation from Tabriz carpets, attributed this small group to a wider, rather ambiguously defined "northwest Persian–Caucasian" region. The clear, direct rendition of the design and the strong but more limited range of colors does establish a relationship with the production in the Caucasus.

ON THE COVER

13. *Carpet*

Caucasian, XVII century. 24 feet 8 inches × 10 feet. 56.217

This rug has become famous as the "Niğde Carpet." Although certainly produced in the Caucasus, it was found in the mosque of Niğde in Central Anatolia, and was published in 1908 by F. R. Martin (a pioneering Swedish scholar) shortly after its discovery.

In contrast to the other important rug types ... (from this) area, the Dragon Rugs and the so-called Kubas, the design of this carpet is highly unusual. It is based on a continuously alternating system of diamond shaped medallions on a huge scale.... Large palmette blossoms appear at the tips of the diamond points and in ... each side of these panels. Alternating in the background color, the diamond panels create an almost unparalleled sumptuous effect.

The border design follows a common Caucasian motif consisting of an alternate row of hexagonal cartouches ... and small floral rosettes.

The special beauty of this carpet lies in its clear, easily readable design with its monumental motifs and in its bold, strong, and well-matched colors. Unlike the oversimplification and all too obvious aggrandizement of the floral elements in some Caucasian carpets and the weird stylization of their animal patterns, this piece presents a classical balance and forms an effective contrast to the more sophisticated and refined Persian designs.

OVERLEAF

14. *Prayer rug*

Iranian (Senneh), XIX century. 5 feet 3 inches × 4 feet. SL 70.205.6

This smooth-faced rug (*kilim*, Figure 4) happens to come from the Persian town for which the Persian knot (Figure 3) is named. The lighter weight of the pileless weave was, of course, preferable for a prayer rug that was to be carried along with one's belongings on journeys.

It demonstrates clearly that the great compositional skill and wealth of motifs prevalent in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (see Figures 9–12) were not kept up in subsequent centuries. Later carpet weavers paraphrased old designs and simplified them in various degrees, although these post-classical products did not necessarily lack aesthetic appeal or present a thoughtless assembly of patterns. Indeed, this unpretentious rug shows otherwise:

[It] is composed of a continuous succession of a small stylized flower, with a diamond-shaped blossom. Every shrub is identical in contour, but color changes at two intervals in both field and spandrels not only give life to the design, but also carry the eye from the base to the apex of the niche. The inner border, a diamond-shaped chain, provides an echo to the terminals of the shrubbery in the field. In contrast, an outer border consists entirely of detached hexagons, which contain leaf forms as delicate as those in the field. The whole is well set off and defined by minute reciprocal trefoils.

Westerners frequently wonder if there is a symbolism inherent in carpet designs. In many pieces this element exists, although to a lesser degree than is usually assumed. It often remains uncertain at what point the original symbolism was lost and the design became a mere pattern. The paradisiacal garden theme occurs more frequently than any other (see Figure 11), while the struggle between good and evil is reflected in the motif of the dragon and phoenix fight common in early Anatolian, Persian, and Caucasian carpets. Finally, references to royalty were made by the inclusion of scenes showing hunting, a favorite pastime of the rulers, in certain Persian court rugs of the sixteenth century.

Among religious allusions found in carpets are those to paradise and to Allah as seen in Figures 16 and 21. This piece also has a religious symbolism. The design in both field and spandrels has a strong directional emphasis to higher and higher apexes in a series of ever-expanding triangles, culminating in a "pole," the final summit, as it were, in the arduous road to divine illumination, gained through prayer.

OVERLEAF LEFT

15. *Prayer rug*

Mughal Indian, early XVII century. 5 feet 1 inch × 3 feet 4½ inches. SL 70.205.7

The field of this extraordinary rug is dominated by a single large flower, probably a chrysanthemum.... A highly realistic effect is achieved by rendering both leaves and flowers in almost full-face position [and]... in great detail.

This recognizable plant in a formal, specimen-like rendition is characteristic of Mughal art of the seventeenth century. In Mughal India similarly conceived flowers composed of semiprecious stones grace the white marble walls of palaces and mausolea and similar motifs appear on textiles, weapons, and in books.

Below, on either side of the main flower, appear smaller flowers, probably tulips. Interlacing leaf stems provide the transition from the field to the spandrels of the arch above. These spandrels are filled with a chrysanthemum scroll ... [of which] two of the blossoms on either side are drawn in profile view.

The border design is based on a meandering floral scroll. But the floral rosettes of this scroll are conventionalized and can no longer be identified botanically, with the exception perhaps of the ... poppies in the corners and ... in the centers of the ... borders.

Like Figure 8, this is a prayer rug with floral designs on a red ground, but there the similarity ends. Instead of agitated movement within the design we find a placid calmness, bordering on the static. Instead of many disparate, smallish elements, there is a single, larger-than-life-size plant. Rather than stylizing the motifs, the weaver made an effort to be true to nature, and finally, in place of a reticent background, he left a noticeable, uncluttered, red area surrounding the flowers. As a result, the carpet presents a picture of a plant growing in its habitat rather than a field filled with a spirited and varied design.

OVERLEAF RIGHT

16. *Prayer rug*

Mughal Indian, XVII century. 5 feet 8 inches × 3 feet 6 inches. SL 70.205.8

This prayer rug is one of three in the same style in the McMullan collection. They show an elegantly scalloped arch resting on cypress tress, and all three are filled with variations of a millefleur pattern. Even the spandrels and borders partake of this floral bounty.

In this rug, as usual in Mughal art, there are individual plants edged with and tipped by specific blooms on rising stems; all of them are skillfully combined to form a treelike composition, which emanates from a vase on a shallow bowl placed on a little hill at the bottom of the niche. While this arrangement lacks the dynamic force of the Ottoman prayer rug (Figure 8), it makes up for it by a more colorful and lyrical imagery. Indeed, the dark border makes us believe that we are looking through a window into a magic garden of unheard-of delights — possibly an allusion to paradise into which fervent prayer will lead the faithful.

The question of the country of origin of this carpet, of its two companions, and of a fourth one once in the Hapsburg Collection and now in the Vienna Museum of Decorative Arts is still controversial. Many scholars believe that the pieces are Indian because they are very close in composition to velvets and cottons of undoubted Indian origin. Other carpet specialists, and particularly Mr. McMullan, plead for a South Persian derivation, stating that the carpets were made in Shiraz during the short-lived Zand dynasty (1750–1794), and attributing the similarities between this group and contemporary Indian textiles to the active trade between the areas. It may well be that this carpet and the one in Vienna, in which the individual flowering plants are still executed in the Mughal manner, were woven in India, while the two others in the McMullan collection with a denser, more kaleidoscopic effect represent Persian adaptations.

OPPOSITE

17. *"Star Ushak" carpet*

Western Anatolia (Ushak), first half of the XVII century. 14 feet × 7 feet 5 ½ inches. 58.63

Of the many types of Oriental carpets, the "star Ushak" group is one of the most admired. They are named after their main decorative element and the assumed place of production, about 125 miles west of Izmir (formerly called Smyrna).

This group and its cousins, the "medallion Ushaks," present a skillful combination of both Anatolian and Iranian decorative schemes:

> Large, eight-pointed, indented stars in repeat alternate with ... diamonds, all enclosing several types of arabesques drawn with great feeling for space. The ... field seems to be filled with a loose floral spray. Closer examination reveals, however, an exceedingly fine trellis that connects all floral elements into a continuous, secondary pattern covering the entire field.

Owing to this contrast of primary and secondary motifs, the "star Ushaks" resemble certain Iranian carpets, especially the northwest Persian medallion carpets (see Figure 9), which seem to have influenced the Anatolian weaver and to have given him the idea of making a stellar (or ovoid) design the main element in the composition. However, the Turkish artisans eschewed the domineering centralized composition of the Iranian carpet, which was more akin to the limited scope of book illuminations and bindings, and instead adhered to the repetitive arrangement characteristic of the textile arts and usually followed by the Anatolian carpetmakers.

This piece is particularly attractive because of its "unusually beautiful and brilliant, intense, clear and vibrant color." By stressing two major colors — red and blue — with yellow employed only for interior designs, and by using the red for both field and border, the weaver achieved an immediate inner harmony.

The type appears in several paintings made in Italy, England, and Spain from the second quarter of the sixteenth to the seventeenth century. Of these, the most famous is Paris Bordone's Fisherman Presenting the Doge with St. Mark's Ring, in the Venice Academy, in which the ducal throne stands on such a carpet.

OVERLEAF

18. *"Bird" carpet*

Anatolian (Ushak?), early XVII century. 14 feet 7 inches × 7 feet 7 inches. 63.207

Many carpets have been designated by names that later research has proven to be erroneous or of little significance for understanding the composition. This piece is a typical example of the first category. An analysis of the design, undertaken in 1925 by R. M. Riefstahl, one of the pioneers of carpet research in the United States, showed that the ornithological aspect of the design, in which two birds seem to have coalesced into one body with the heads at opposite ends, is purely accidental and was undoubtedly not envisaged by the weaver.

In all "bird" carpets, the pattern is placed on a white ground, which in this piece has taken on the tonality of old ivory. The basic unit consists of a nondelimited rectangle showing a rising plant motif with a rosette in the center. At the corners of each unit are larger rosettes from which angular, schematic arabesque leaves emanate. Since the ground between adjacent leaves was given a red color instead of white, a novel figure came into existence that looks like "birds flying around the blossoms into which they seem to sink their beaks." However, similar combinations of arabesques also appear on other carpets and on tiles, and it is possible to establish earlier stages in which this deceptive effect caused by internal coloring had not yet been developed.

The border is one of two usually employed for this group. It is composed of large triangles pointed alternately in opposite directions and enclosing highly stylized palmettes and arabesques. The color scheme of field and border is basically the same, but the contrast between the two is provided by the dissimilar character of the designs and their different scale.

The earliest representation of a "bird" carpet is in a ceiling painting in the royal palace in Munich dating from 1587, which places the model several decades earlier. Later paintings, as well as a carpet made with the coat of arms of an archbishop of Lvov, Poland, indicate that the type seems to have been made till the middle of the seventeenth century.

OVERLEAF LEFT

19. *"Lotto" carpet*

Western Anatolia (Ushak region), about 1700. 6 feet 5 ½ inches × 4 feet 5 inches. SL 70.205.9

This type of carpet was formerly dubbed "Holbein" but, unlike two related groups with the same designation, it never occurs in the paintings of this Swiss painter. It is found, however, in works of Lorenzo Lotto and is now usually assigned his name. It also appears in other sixteenth-century Venetian paintings and in Flemish and Dutch pictures of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Its disappearance from Western art after 1700 suggests that the once popular carpet went out of fashion and was no longer produced in quantity or in the original production center. Here, as in other instances, European representations are of great importance for establishing a chronology, especially as there are no related designs in contemporary Turkish art that would allow us to date the group by analogy.

The identifying characteristic of the "Lotto" carpets is their stark allover design of stiffly frozen yellow arabesques placed on a bright red ground. This McMullan carpet is a unique exception to this rule, inasmuch as the ground is dark blue. The general arrangement and design are so striking that the underlying composition scheme of staggered rows of octagons and cross-shaped units both outlined by yellow arabesques was not recognized for a long time. This arrangement was hardly changed in the group's two hundred years of existence, except that in later examples, as in this case, the size of the pattern became too large in relation to the whole carpet, allowing only a very limited number of units to appear in the field and interfering with the effect of an allover repeat pattern. Also, in this example some of the lateral extensions of the crosslike units are rendered in red (instead of yellow), which indicates a breakdown of the design and implies a late production date. One realizes, of course, that this color substitution as well as the use of red in the core of the crosses was engendered by the recollection of the traditionally red background color of the group.

The relatively great width of the border is another late feature, as is the design of its main part, which is composed of diamond-shaped units with hooks emanating from their thin outlines and hooked crosses in the center.

OVERLEAF RIGHT

20. *"Lotto" carpet, variant*

Western Anatolia (Ushak region?), about 1700. 5 feet 10 inches × 4 feet 7 ½ inches. SL 70.205.10

What makes the study of carpets so exciting is the possibility of tracing mutations of forms. These are often found only among secondary features, while the main characteristics that determine the group remain intact. In other instances, as in this case, the whole composition is novel and only minor patterns reveal a relationship to well-known types. In this carpet it is a feature of the main border — the angularly drawn, yellow arabesque with its hooklike excrescences on a red ground — that connects the carpet with the "Lotto" group (Figure 19); such a relationship is also established by the grossly stylized leaf forms in the field, although they no longer show the typical yellow color of the prototype. However, the Anatolian character is clearly indicated by the coloring and the deeply indented floral motifs in the field and border.

The field is dominated by staggered rows of red rectangles, each decorated with a small internal star and framed and connected with each other by buff-colored lines that create octagons. These, in turn, enclose long, stylized red, green, and blue leaves, which form the second major element in the composition. The dartlike buff motifs between the leaves create a counter movement to the centripetally placed floral elements and thereby produce the specific inner tension, which, together with the strong coloring, gives this carpet its lively quality.

The red color of some of the four leaves in each of the octagons as well as of the small rectangles is taken up by the main border, while the buff color of the interconnecting lines of the field is echoed in the colors of the guard stripes and the palmette design in the border. Thus, in spite of the diversity of the constituent motifs and the apparent contrast between the colors of field and border, a sense of reciprocity is achieved that further enhances the aesthetic appeal of this carpet.

21. *"Transylvanian" double prayer carpet*

Anatolian, XVII century. 5 feet 7 inches × 4 feet 1 ½ inches. SL 70.205.11

So many small carpets have been preserved in Protestant churches of Transylvania (now part of Rumania), that they have been named after this region. Although the center of their production is still unknown, they are definitely of Anatolian origin. Their size, general composition, certain design features, and occasionally their colors are reminiscent of the Ushak prayer rugs of about 1600.

> They deviate, however, in many ways; new borders are introduced, and instead of the universally red background of the various Ushak types, the colors are far more variable. ... Backgrounds of yellow, ecru and white are frequently observed, together with a variety of patterns in both field and spandrels. They seem to be not earlier than the end of the 17th century and vanish by the middle or third quarter of the 18th.

As in many prayer carpets from the seventeenth century on, the basic motif is the prayer niche in which a lamp is suspended as suggested by a Koranic verse (*Sura* XXIV: 35): "Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth. The likeness of his light is as a niche in which there is a lamp ... in a glass ... as it were a shining star." For reasons of symmetry, the arch is repeated on the other side with a second, slightly different lamp. Both these lamps seem to assume the function of vases, foreshadowing the eventual development seen in Figure 16.

Like the Ottoman prayer rug (Figure 8), the field of this piece is filled with a floral pattern, but it is static and consists of highly stylized motifs. The rigidity of the design is echoed by the arabesques in the spandrels and in the border. The obvious difficulty encountered by the border units in rounding the corners indicates that the weaver of this carpet, like many others from the seventeenth century on, had lost the sense of compositional adroitness found in the earlier borders (see Figures 7–9, 11, 15–17). The black and red alternating trefoils of the guard stripes had often occurred on Anatolian and Egyptian arches and have been incorporated into many Persian and Turkish carpets. The addition of smaller guard stripes along the outer and inner edges of the border foreshadows the proliferation of borders in Anatolian rugs that began in the eighteenth century.

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22. *Prayer rug*

Anatolian (Ladik), XVIII century. 5 feet 2 ¼ inches × 3 feet 9¾ inches. SL 70.205.12

The triple arch with a wider and higher center unit has long been a favorite architectural composition, known particularly from Roman triumphal arches. The type entered Muslim architecture in the eighth century and was occasionally used for prayer niches in mosques. The architectural concept was incorporated into a small group of Ottoman prayer rugs probably made in Egypt in the early seventeenth century. A fine example from this group was presented to the Museum by James F. Ballard. This design was copied by the weavers of a large group of prayer rugs made from the late seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries in Ladik. The Ladik versions are simplified, yet also enriched by added features such as a floral cresting. The type became standardized and is easily recognized. Mr. McMullan's description applies to most other Ladik prayer rugs as well:

> Six slender columns support a triple arch and a gallery, resembling the decorative pinnacles of many Muslim buildings, from which a row of flowers grows straight up.
>
> The main border design consists of a continuous row of floral cartouches....

OVERLEAF RIGHT

23. *Prayer rug*

Anatolian, dated A. H. 1182 (A. D. 1768). 6 feet 8 ¼ inches × 5 feet 6 inches. SL 70.205.13

This carpet demonstrates how mutations in carpet design occur: the weaver left out the columns and bases of the triple arcade of the Ladik prayer rug (Figure 22) but duplicated the three arches as a mirror image. The weaver of the "Transylvanian" carpet (Figure 21) had also repeated his arch, but he kept much of the body of the niche. Here the combination of three narrow niche heads obscures the original architectural structure so that they look like three ribbons. This radical transformation resulted in a novel carpet of rather bizarre character. Yet the prototype is still recognizable: the arcade has been preserved, as have the red ground for the niches, the trefoil cresting, the row of flowers on top, and even the floral cartouches in the border.

Mr. McMullan assumes that such a drastic departure from the popular Ladik model could not have been made in the main workshop but must hail from a marginal area, possibly a village, where the dominant tradition was not so strong.

OPPOSITE

24. *Carpet*

Western Anatolia (Bergama region), XIX century. 5 feet 7 ½ inches × 5 feet 1 ¼ inches. SL 70.205.14

In spite of the existence of identifiable fashions in carpets, characteristic of specific periods and milieus, some carpets reveal the persistence of perennial traditions. While the first category is represented by the art of the court and the urban centers, the second group is formed by the humbler village production.

As demonstrated by Western paintings, there existed since the early fourteenth century numerous carpets whose design consisted of a series of octagons formed by cutting triangular corner pieces from rectangles. These units contained birds or quadrupeds, at first used singly but later on in pairs. The scheme of rectangles with octagons was still adhered to in the sixteenth century, when, probably for reasons of religious orthodoxy, figural elements were omitted and the animals were replaced by complex arrangements of stars. These nonfigural carpets are referred to as large-patterned "Holbein" carpets because they appear in so many of the pictures of Hans Holbein the Younger. In certain instances, the large rectangles were surrounded by a series of smaller ornamental octagons, which formed an inner frame within the actual border. Still another innovation of the sixteenth century was the alternation of the large rectangles with rows of two smaller ones, which brought a welcome change of rhythm into the composition.

This nineteenth-century McMullan carpet incorporates all of these early Anatolian features and is clearly in the tradition of the sixteenth century, the heyday of Anatolian carpet production. But this village rug harks even farther back: it quite unexpectedly includes four pairs of birds in the large center unit, while each of the four smaller octagons contains two summarily treated pairs and two vestigial pairs at the sides.

In its well-matched colors and balanced composition this simple carpet fully satisfies aesthetic demands for a decorative, warming floor covering, but it contains another dimension as well — its remembrance of an earlier type.

OVERLEAF

25. *Village rug*

Turkish (Anatolian), XIX century. 5 feet 2 ½ inches × 4 feet 4 inches. SL 70.205.15

While some Turkish village rugs follow well-established layouts (see Figure 24), others developed from variants of traditional patterns. To the latter group belongs this simple but carefully executed piece that is fashioned after a variant of a "Holbein" carpet. Here the central octagon within a square is small but inserted into a larger, kaleidoscopically colored diamond form; together they function as the dominant central unit, which is surrounded by a whole galaxy of lesser octagonal stars of different sizes and design. The recurrence of a standard shape gives unity and overall harmony to the whole composition, and the impressive weight of the central unit is skillfully balanced by the four large figures in the corners.

This pleasing centralized composition from Anatolia and the medallion carpet from Iran (Figure 9) offer the widest possible contrast and exemplify different regions, periods, and milieus. The Persian court carpet has a wider and much more refined color scheme. It has a denser range of motifs in the field around the medallion and its appended cartouches. Their arrangement is highly involved: they are applied to spirals that overlap delicate vegetal stems in a fashion that overcomes the limitations of a two-dimensional design. And finally a preference for floral forms is evident. On the other hand, the Turkish village weaver used clear, robust colors. His arrangement is simple and straightforward, and it strictly adheres to the two-dimensional principle appropriate for a flat surface. He showed a definite predilection for geometric patterns and eschewed floral forms. And he gave his background a role of its own in the overall picture.

The contrast between the royal Persian carpet and the humble Turkish village rug is evident even in the formulation of the border. In the Persian example it is a highly sophisticated composition: it consists of a harmonious interplay of two distinct systems, which themselves are overlaid with flowers. On the other hand, the Turkish carpet weaver unabashedly placed simple octagonal forms one next to the other, like so many beads, within the three border units.

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