

THE PERSIAN RUG AND ITS ARTISTIC VALUE

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND FINE ARTS

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DENTON, TEXAS

MAY 1982

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to the members of my committee: Ms. Nancy K. Davis, Mrs. Linda Stuckenbruck, and Dr. John F. Rios.

I also thank my family, who helped me in every way possible.

And finally, I extend thanks to my husband, Majid Setoudeh, who is and has been a constant joy. This work would never have been completed without his enthusiasm, help, and encouragement.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Statement of the Problem

The researcher proposed a study of the Persian rug and its artistic value. The proposal included using the study as a resource guide to illuminate the great artistic tradition in which the Persian rug has occupied the first and most important place throughout its history.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this proposed study was to provide a resource guide for Persian rugs and their aesthetics of varied designs and fascinating colors. The researcher attempted to provide information about the history of Persian rugs and about where and how these exquisite pieces were and are woven in Iran.

#### Justification for the Study

Most of the finest hand-knotted rugs in the world today come from Iran, where, in all probability, this unique art originated. However, Persian rugs often remain a mystery to the general public, who possess little

knowledge about them. This thesis thus provided needed information about the Persian rug.

### Historical Background

"Today when machines are the monsters of industry and the authors of countless types of textiles, Iran continues quietly and painstakingly to carry on its ancient rug weaving tradition just as it has throughout its turbulent past."<sup>1</sup>

In order to gain a full understanding of the development of Persian rugs and their various designs and color, one must study a bit of Persian history. The area called Persia<sup>2</sup> lies between the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf. Geographically this land is located west of Pakistan and Afghanistan, east of Asia Minor, and south of Russia. Two sides of the country are covered with mountains: the Alborz Range from west to east and the Zagros Range from north to south (Fig. 1). Intellectually and geographically Persia has been a land bridge between the East and the West for centuries. About one-sixth of the land is desert, but Persia possesses a variety of climates because of its

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<sup>1</sup>Arthur T. Gregorian, Oriental Rugs and the Stories They Tell (New York: Nimrod Press, 1977), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Persia is the ancient name for Iran.

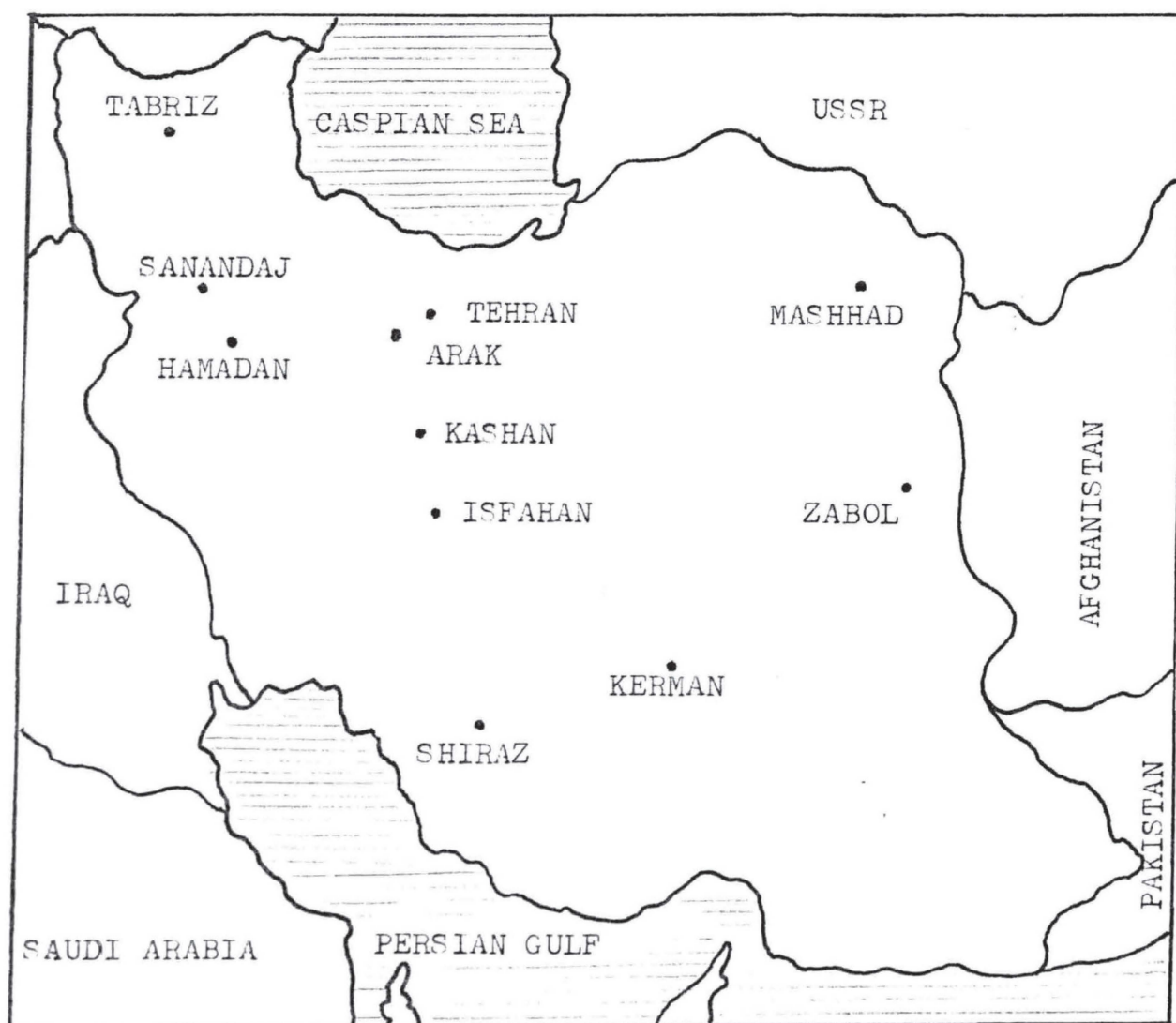


Fig. 1. Map of Iran (Persia)



differing topography and altitude; both continental and tropical climates are encountered.

The part of Persia below the Caspian Sea was first invaded by Aryan tribes during the second millennium B.C., and they called this region "Persa." In time the regional name became "Fars," but other countries called the country "Persia." Its language was Farsi/Persian.

It can be verified that rugs were being made in Persia as early as the fifth century B.C. The oldest known example of knotted pile weaving, dating from this time, appears in a rug found by Soviet archeologists in 1949, frozen in a grave in the Altai Mountains. Many of the motifs in this carpet, known as the Pazyryk rug, are in the same style as the sculptures of Persepolis (Fig. 2).<sup>3</sup>

Weaving began as a simple industry created by the ancient Persians to fulfill requirements of everyday life. The people needed tents, clothing, and saddlebags, so they used materials from their surroundings such as the wool from sheep to weave these items. These weavings were smooth and flat without any pile, like kilims. Originally, every family had at least one weaver to provide for its needs. However, over a period of time,

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<sup>3</sup>Gregorian, frontispiece, p. ii.



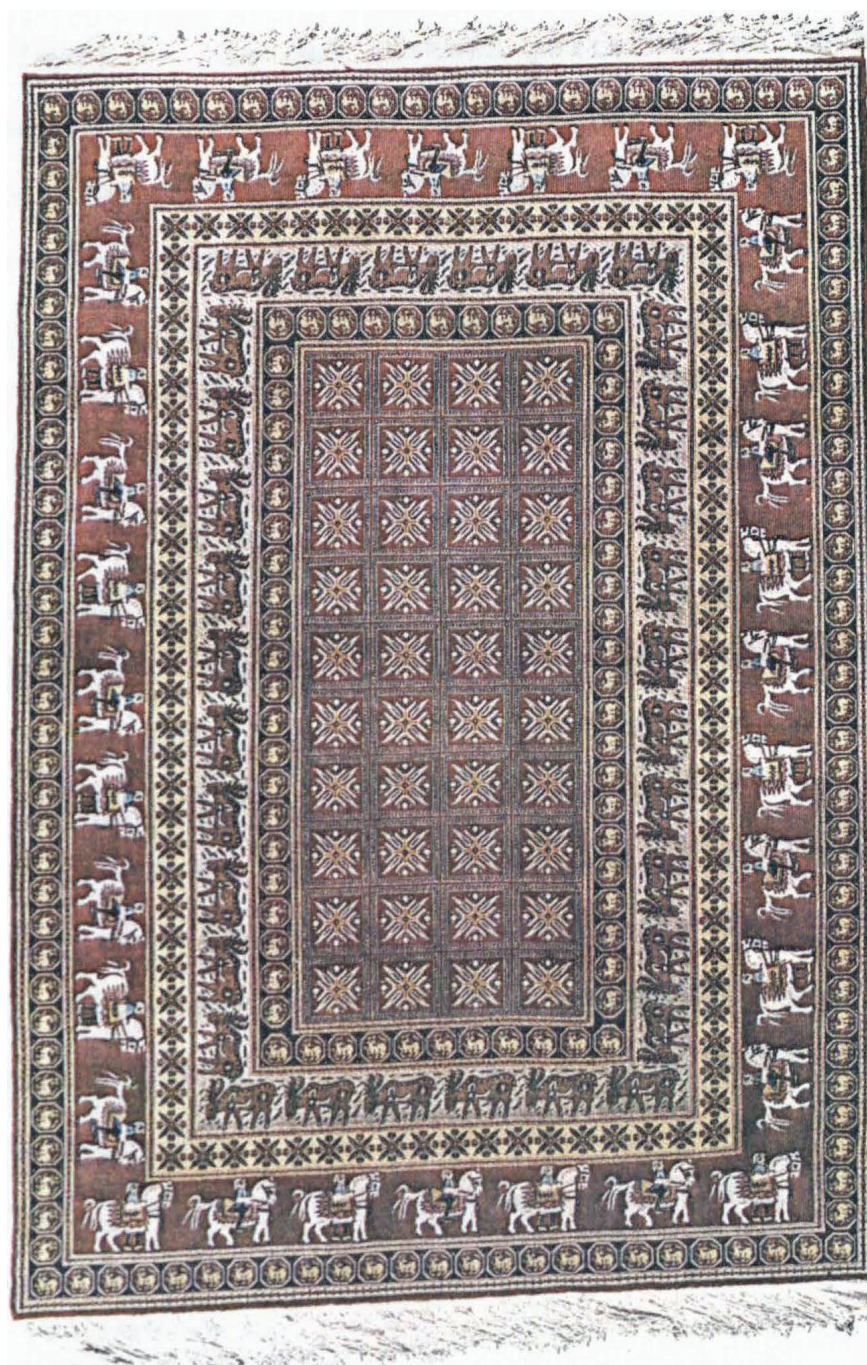


Fig. 2. Pazyryk Rug

specific families created certain patterns and techniques which passed on from generation to generation until they became known as families of fine weavers.<sup>4</sup>

Historical discussion must begin with the Safavid period, from which many examples of woven rugs have survived. In the sixteenth century, under the Safavid Dynasty, art in Persia flourished. Shah Ismail (1502-1524) was the first ruler who patronized Persian art. He made Tabriz his capital city, and it became one of the great art centers of Persia.<sup>5</sup> Shah Tahmasp (1524-1587) continued Shah Ismail's work, and it is said that he designed rugs himself. The Safavid rulers established so many private rug-weaving factories in Tabriz, Kashan, Herat, and other locations that now the great rugs produced there are listed among the finest examples of rug weaving. The rugs made in these great centers were considered more as art works than as items for daily use. All surviving rugs from this period have the basic form of Persian rugs, including field and border; and the basic designs of these rugs are arabesque,

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 8-11.

<sup>5</sup>Luciano Cohen and Louise Duncan, The Oriental Rug (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1978), pp. 38-39.



floral, hunting, garden, medallion, vase, and jungle.<sup>6</sup> The Safavid Dynasty was the golden age of the Persian rug.

After the Afghans invaded the land in 1723, Persia remained backward and the rug industry suffered a period of stagnancy. Later the Afshars and Qajars ruled Persia for short periods until Reza Shah, the first Pahlavi, took control of the country in 1926. By the mid-nineteenth century, rug trade between Persia and the West had been established and rug weaving was Persia's main industry for many years. Then, in the twentieth century, after oil fields were discovered under the regimes of Reza Shah Pahlavi and Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Iran began to make up for lost time. For example, Reza Shah ordered five carpets from the Emogli factory in Mashhad. These exceptional carpets have about 1,404,000 knots per square meter, or 906 knots per square inch. Although foreign influence has always been powerful in Persia, the Persian rug has maintained the character born of its ancient tradition.<sup>7</sup>

Today, as the world turns and understanding of human beings becomes more important, a study of Persian rugs is

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<sup>6</sup>Murray L. Eiland, Oriental Rugs (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1973), p. 34.

<sup>7</sup>E. Gans Ruedin, The Splendor of Persian Carpets (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1978), p. 10.

an introduction to the understanding of another race of people with a rich history and culture. By learning to appreciate their art one comes closer to an understanding of this ancient people's hearts and minds.<sup>8</sup>

### Delimitations

In consideration of the collection of information available in area libraries, the limitations in writing this thesis were the following:

1. The purpose of the proposed study was to develop a resource guide for Persian rugs which was to be limited to the rugs from main areas of rug weaving in Iran.
2. The proposed study was also planned to include a study of the main areas of tribal rug weaving in Iran.
3. Sketches and illustrations were to be limited to details of the Persian rugs selected for this study.

### Methodology

1. The researcher developed a resource guide for Persian rugs by obtaining information from selected books, articles, and research reports.
2. The researcher gathered relevant information and pictures of tribal rugs.

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<sup>8</sup>Gregorian, p. 17.

3. One of the purposes of this study was to analyze the pattern and designs of rugs in Iran. Thus, the researcher presented many pictures of Persian rugs with a variety of designs.

4. The researcher gathered information from Persian rug vendors to supplement that gained from written sources.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PERSIAN RUG BEFORE THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Today most of the Persian rugs preserved in the museums of Iran, Europe, and the United States date from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The finest examples were woven during the Safavid Dynasty. Unfortunately, knowledge regarding the origin of these rugs is still largely based on hypothesis; therefore, most of these rugs are classified according to their design. Historical and stylistic evidence permits the classification of rugs according to the centers in which they were produced, such as Tabriz, Kashan, Isfahan, and Kerman. Perhaps the discovery of additional documents in the future will make it possible to pinpoint the exact location of the production of these rugs.<sup>1</sup>

#### Medallion and Compartment Rugs

As early as the fourteenth century, Persian designers were breaking up their endlessly repeating geometrical

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<sup>1</sup>E. Gans Ruedin, The Splendor of Persian Carpets (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1978), p. 28.

patterns with medallions and compartments. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the medallion and compartment designs were further developed.<sup>2</sup> A typical medallion rug is usually large in size and has a symmetrical figure in the center. Sometimes the medallion is simple in form, but often it is complex, varying from circular to oval in shape. In some cases, cartouches are attached to the medallion on the long axis of the rug. The corners usually have similar elements.<sup>3</sup> The design may include one medallion or several in a series, arranged at intervals across the field. Intermediate between the medallion and repeating designs are various compartments or panel arrangements in which the field is broken up into rectangular, square, or lozenge-shaped areas containing similar or diverse design motifs. These circumscribed areas may appear in diagonal or parallel arrangements, and they are sufficiently varied in size so that the field may be covered by several or dozens of compartments.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>M. S. Dimand, Oriental Rugs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1973), p. 28.

<sup>3</sup>Friedrich Spuhler, Islamic Carpets and Textiles (London: The Trinity Press, 1978), p. 82.

<sup>4</sup>Murray L. Eiland, Oriental Rugs (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1976), p. 9.



All early medallion rugs may be assigned to northwest Persia, particularly to Tabriz, the Safavids' main artistic center. The style of the ornament, especially of the floral decoration, indicates that they were made in the time of Shah Ismail (1502-1524).<sup>5</sup> Stylistic evidence for this dating appears in a medallion hunting rug in the Museum of Milan (Fig. 3), whose inscription gives not only the year of its manufacture, 1543, but the name of its maker, Ghiyat ud din-i-Jafi. The large sixteen-pointed red medallion, sections of which are repeated in the field, contains cranes in flight and cloud bands against a background of floral scrolls. The dark blue field is decorated with hunting scenes in which seven hunters on horseback and one on foot pursue animals such as lions, antelopes, bears, lynxes, and boars. Other small animals cluster around the medallions--hares and falcons attacking the deer. The border is divided into medallions patterned with arabesques encircled by undulating bands of flowers and birds. Other masterpieces of medallion rugs are located in various museums and private collections.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Dimand, p. 42.

<sup>6</sup>Ruedin, Splendor, pp. 34-35.





Fig. 3. Medallion Hunting Rug



### Animal Rugs

In addition to using animals in medallion and compartment rugs, the Safavid artisans produced rugs in which animals were combined with floral designs.<sup>7</sup> A famous rug of this type, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, came from the Shrine of Shaikh Safi at Ardebil (Fig. 4). The most noticeable feature of this carpet is its display of animal life amid a carefully balanced arrangement of floral figures. Four-fifths of the field can be divided into two perfect squares with sides equal to the breadth of the field, and the remainder is equivalent to one-half of one of these squares. Each quarter of a square contains animals, probably intended to represent a lion, a leopard, and a boar, that are perfectly balanced with those of the adjacent and alternating quarters. Moreover, the same balance exists in the case of the smaller animals and floral forms.<sup>8</sup> The dark blue border is decorated with arabesques interlaced with floral scrolls and overlaid with cloud bands. The color scheme and the perfection of the ornaments are all characteristic of

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<sup>7</sup>Dimand, p. 53.

<sup>8</sup>Walter A. Hawley, Oriental Rugs Antique and Modern (New York, Dover Publications, Inc., 1970), pp. 82-83.

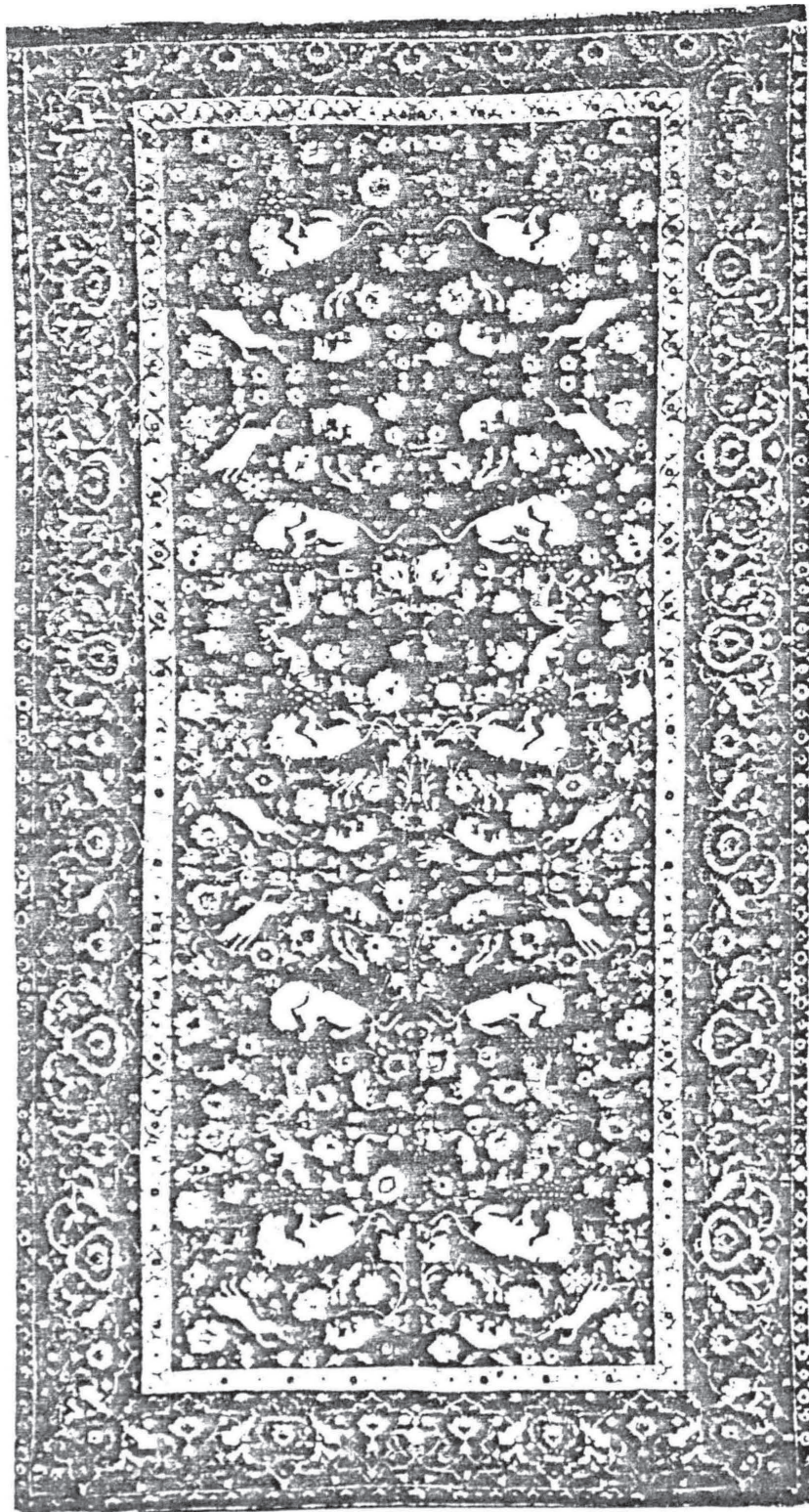


Fig. 4. Animal Rug



many rugs produced at Tabriz between 1524 and 1550, during the reign of Shah Tahmasp.<sup>9</sup>

The manufacturing of animal rugs continued in the seventeenth century and later. In the time of Shah Abbas (1587-1628), both wool and silk animal rugs were made in Isfahan and Kashan.<sup>10</sup>

### Silk Rugs

The most luxurious products of the Persian court manufacturers were silk rugs. These were made, according to literary sources, as early as the fifteenth century. In the sixteenth century, these fine rugs, of both large and small size, were often enriched with a brocading of gold and silver threads. They were made both for the Safavid courts and as gifts for foreign rulers.<sup>11</sup>

Objections have been posed to the use of the confusing term "Polish" for such richly brocaded planes of gold and silver thread, since the original attribution to Poland has been proved false. Nonetheless, as a technical term, it has prevailed against all attempts to overthrow it. The manufacture of these rugs flourished

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<sup>9</sup>Dimand, pp. 52-53.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

under Shah Abbas and probably continued until the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>12</sup>

The most famous of this group is a rug in the Museum of Vienna, generally regarded as one of the greatest Persian rugs ever woven (Fig. 5). The knotting of this beautiful rug is so tight that for many years it was considered to be a silk velvet. In the center of the field is a star surrounded by a notched motif; this shape is repeated in the four spandrels. Inside the motif are flowers, foliage, and animals. Beyond, on a salmon pink ground, riders and men on foot dash off in pursuit of lions, panthers, antelopes, stags, chamois, boars, hares, foxes, bears, jackals, and other wild animals. The border consists of a frieze of flowers, birds, and figures. According to F. R. Martin, this rug was made during the reign of Shah Tahmasp (1524-1576).<sup>13</sup>

The weaving of fine silk rugs continued in the time of Shah Abbas, who made Isfahan his capital and established state manufactories for the production of silk rugs and brocades.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Spuhler, p. 108.

<sup>13</sup>Ruedin, Splendor, pp. 68-73.

<sup>14</sup>Dimand, p. 59.





Fig. 5. Silk Rug

### Floral Rugs of the Herat Type

From the middle of the sixteenth century until the beginning of the eighteenth, Persian looms produced rugs with an all-over floral pattern, often combined with arabesques and cloud bands.<sup>15</sup> Characteristic features of these rugs are large floral palmettes with serrated outlines; they are placed mainly where the scroll systems fork or where they touch on their symmetrical axes. The field is always a deep red; the border, dark blue or dark green. The early type of Herat rug is much rarer than the later one, although it follows the same principles. These so-called "Isfahans" were the ones most widely imported throughout Europe, and they are frequently to be seen in seventeenth-century Dutch paintings.<sup>16</sup>

One of the early Herat floral group is a rug exhibiting characteristic flowers, foliage, cloud bands, and animals such as lions, stags, tigers, panthers, and ibexes tearing at each other (Fig. 6). The wide border is decorated with arabesques and flowers. The inscription on the guard band separating the border from the field is an ode to the rose, meadow, wine, and trees, and also a prayer on behalf of the shah, appealing for eternal

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>16</sup>Spuhler, p. 90.





Fig. 6. Floral Rug of the Herat Type



power and glory. This rug is in the collection of the Vienna Museum.<sup>17</sup>

### Vase Rugs

A distinct group of Safavid rugs takes its name from the vases introduced into their designs. The central symmetry which appears in many Persian rugs is here replaced by a vertical composition that is "right side up" in one direction only. Some of the rugs also exhibit a partial side-to-side symmetry, although the colors of the corresponding areas differ. A technical feature of the vase rugs, as well as of a group of floral rugs related in design, is that they have double warps, lying on two levels.<sup>18</sup> The designs of these rugs are stylized with large floral rosettes and palmettes in attractive colors; to these are added naturalistic flowering plants. The borders are narrow and often without guard stripes, and the symmetry is often broken by asymmetrical coloring. The lozenge compartments, formed by inconspicuous undulating scrolls or diagonal dual scroll systems, generally overlap. Sometimes the lozenges so formed are stressed by means of encircling lanceolate leaves, or by variations in color.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Ruedin, Splendor, pp. 64-66.

<sup>18</sup>Dimand, p. 72.

<sup>19</sup>Spuhler, p. 94.

A rug of this type is on exhibit in the Baltimore Museum of Art (Fig. 7). The other type of vase rug, the one best represented by surviving examples, has a design of greater complexity. At first glance it may seem that the large palmettes are placed arbitrarily over the field. However, analysis of the design reveals a definite pattern, with the scrolls forming a lozenge diaper. The large palmettes, rosettes, and vases are placed at the junctions of the stem or on the diagonal stem.<sup>20</sup> An example of this type of vase rug is in the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection in Lugano, Switzerland. The vases and their forms of flowers all face in the same direction. Other flowers, large and small in size, and elegant arabesques complete the pattern of the field (Fig. 8).<sup>21</sup>

#### Garden Rugs

Gardens, forming an essential part of palaces and houses, played an important part in the daily life of Persia. Persian writers of all periods mention gardens frequently, naming their poems after them; and Persian painters delighted in depicting them, either alone or, more frequently, as a background for figure subjects.

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<sup>20</sup>Dimand, pp. 73-74.

<sup>21</sup>Ruedin, Splendor, pp. 130-131.

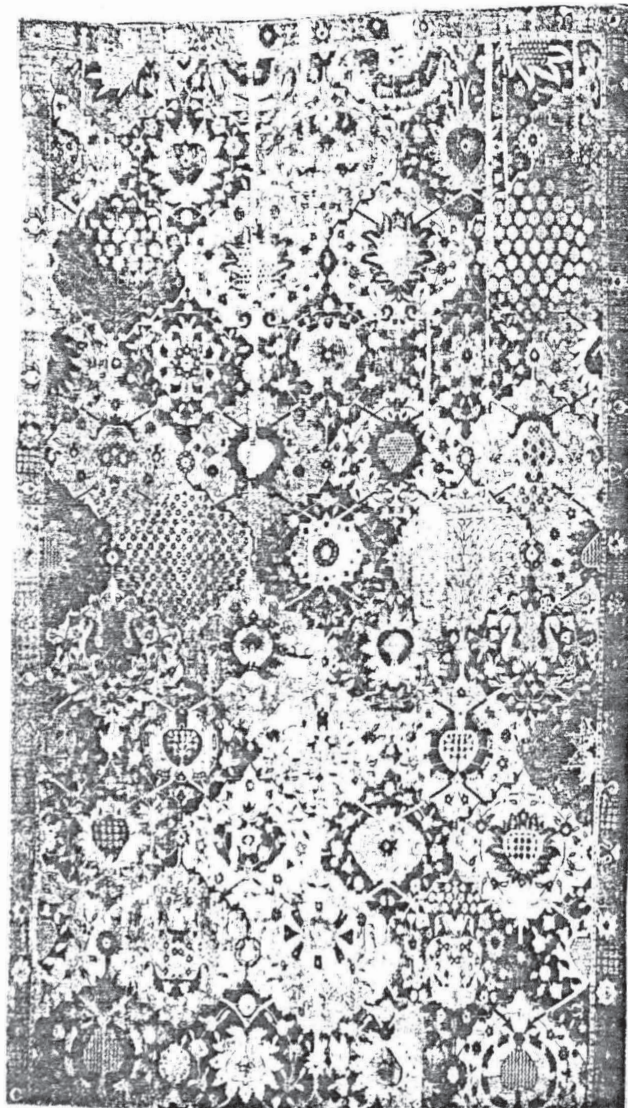


Fig. 7. Vase Rug





Fig. 8. Vase Rug

This love of gardens, especially during the Safavid period, is perhaps the reason for the floral character of these rugs.<sup>22</sup>

There are two groups of garden rugs; in the first landscapes with trees are depicted, and in the second geometrical arrangements of Safavid gardens with their pools and canals are represented. One of the earliest Safavid landscape and tree rugs includes a composition of cypresses and flowering shrubs arranged on a red field (Fig. 9). Some of the intervening spaces are filled with large and small palmettes, attached either to branches of the flowering trees or to small stems. It is probable that the rug was woven in Tabriz in the time of Shah Ismail.<sup>23</sup>

Rugs of the second type, which are more justifiably called garden rugs, are often large, sometimes more than nine meters in length. An eighteenth-century example from North Persia represents a garden divided into four sections by two intersecting canals which are bordered by rows of cypress trees, alternating with bird-filled bushes. These sections are divided by smaller canals

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<sup>22</sup> Dimand, pp. 77-78.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 78-79.



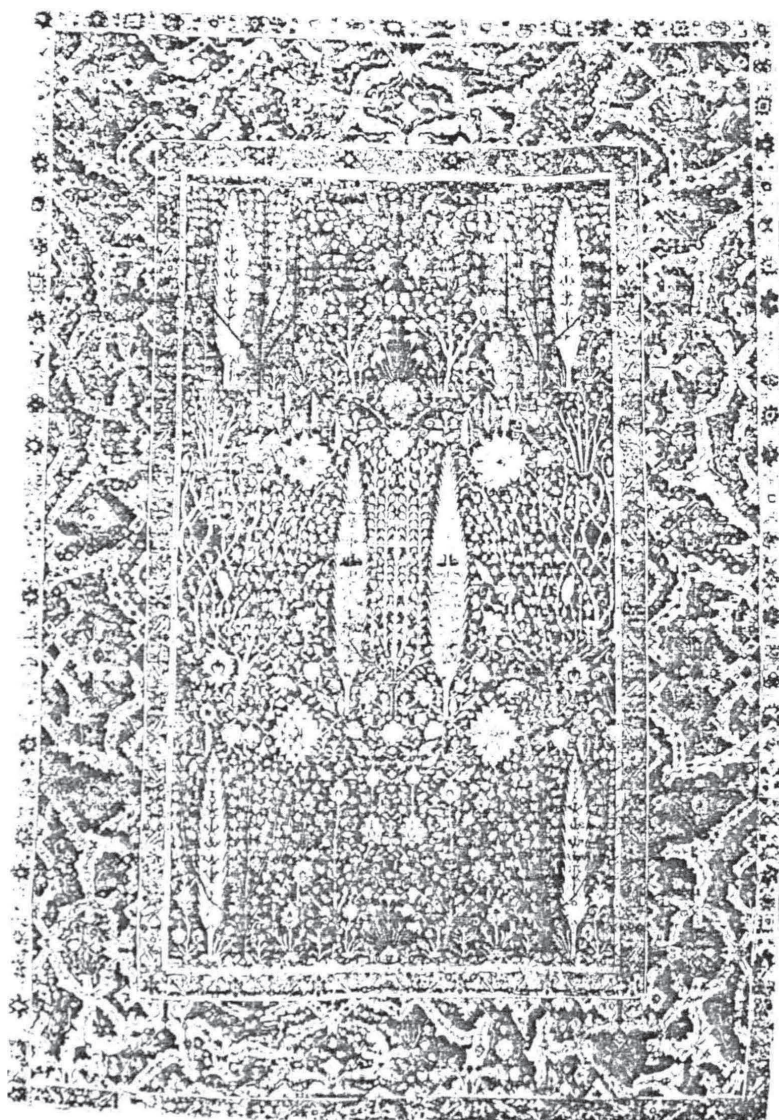


Fig. 9. Garden Rug

into smaller plots that meet at the four pavilions of each side, containing trees and flowering bushes (Fig. 10).<sup>24</sup>

### Arabesque Rugs

In this group arabesques are the most conspicuous feature of the decoration, covering the whole field in the form of scrolls or broad bands; the secondary pattern consists of floral motifs. Such rugs were made in all parts of Persia from the late sixteenth to the nineteenth century. In this colorful group, related through its floral patterns to the vase rugs, two systems of interlacing arabesque scrolls in contrasting colors cover the field, and flowering shrubs fill the intervening spaces. In a later variation, vases were introduced (Fig. 11). In another type of arabesque rug the scrolls are replaced by bands, usually dark blue, that are overlaid with floral stems. The bands form half-palmettes or combine into full palmettes, and the rest of the field includes palmettes of various sizes and leaf motifs.<sup>25</sup> A rug of this type is now in the collection of the Shrine of the Mosque at Mashhad, Iran. An old catalogue of the

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<sup>24</sup> Kurt Erdmann, Seven Hundred Years of Oriental Carpets (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), pp. 67-69.

<sup>25</sup> Dimand, pp. 85-87.



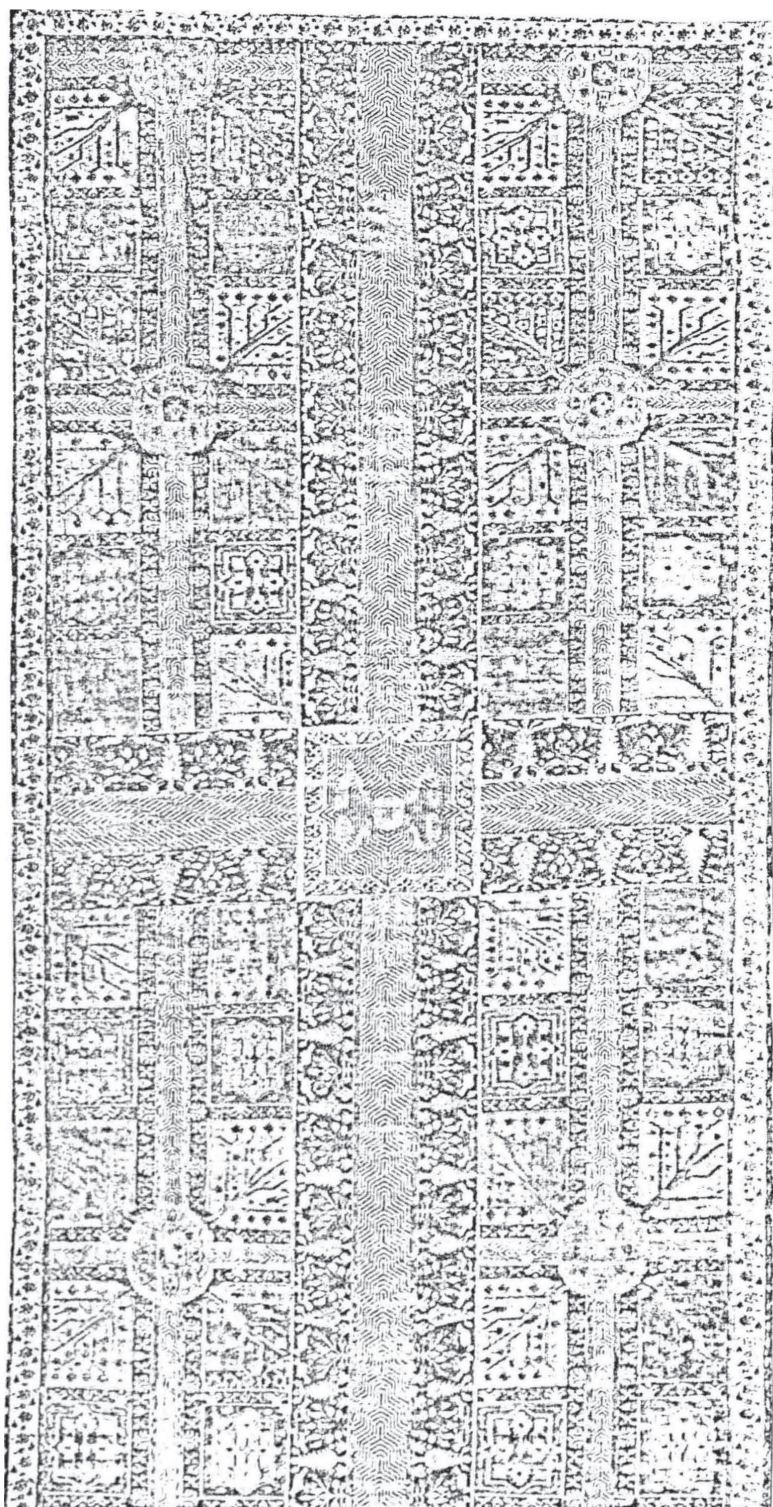


Fig. 10. Garden Rug





Fig. 11. Arabesque Rug

museum states that the rug was made for the mosque by the order of Shah Abbas; this document confirms the existence of rug factories in Mashhad as early as the sixteenth century (Fig. 12).<sup>26</sup>

### Prayer Rugs

The prayer rug represents a distinct format in which an arch at one end orients the rug in a single direction. This "prayer niche," also called a mehrab, is probably adapted from mosque architecture, in which the wall nearest Mecca is designed to indicate the proper direction for prayers.<sup>27</sup> A fine example dating from the sixteenth century has a mehrab field with a typical design of palmettes, leaves, flowers, and cloud bands (Fig. 13). In the upper part, a cartouche contains the inscription "Allah is the most high, the Great." Inscriptions in Arabic in the border and frame are taken from the Koran. The outlines of the mehrab, the cloud bands, and some of the palmettes are brocaded in silver. Naskh, a Persian ornamental script, is used for the inscriptions on the border, where the palmette motif reappears.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Ruedin, Splendor, pp. 82-83.

<sup>27</sup>Eiland, p. 11.

<sup>28</sup>Ruedin, Splendor, pp. 60-61.



Fig. 12. Arabesque Rug





Fig. 13. Prayer Rug

In addition to rugs for individual worshipers, larger rugs for family prayers were also made, with two mehrabs placed one above the other or several mehrabs placed side by side.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Dimand, p. 88.



### CHAPTER III

#### THE PERSIAN RUG FROM THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT TIME

Following a comparative decline in the eighteenth century, great improvements were made in the production of Persian rugs in the nineteenth century. Since the end of the 1800s, the success of the export trade has expanded, leading to increased foreign influence and consequent alterations in the choice of colors and motifs for rugs. Persia has been able to assimilate these changes, however, by retaining the personality and value of its ancient and glorious tradition.<sup>1</sup>

Modern Persian rugs are usually divided into groups corresponding to various regions. The main regional groups are those of Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Hamadan, Feraghan, Kashan, Isfahan, Kerman, and Khurassan. Classification is sometimes difficult because centers often borrowed patterns from each other; nevertheless, every locality produced rugs with distinct characteristics.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>E. Gans Ruedin, The Splendor of Persian Carpets (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1978), p. 159.

<sup>2</sup>M. S. Dimand, Oriental Rugs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1973), p. 88.

### Azerbaijan

This fertile province, located in the north of Persia, is famed for wool rugs, the main material used for hardweaving. Its weather is harsh--frost and snow in the winter, heat in the summer--a perfect climate for breeding sheep. As a result of this climate, the sheep of the area are hardy animals with high quality wool which guarantees great strength in the rugs produced there.<sup>3</sup>

### Tabriz

In general, rugs with simple, rustic designs are made in Azerbaijan, but those produced in the capital of Tabriz are quite different. Several factories function there, producing extremely fine rugs with designs of a purely Persian refinement which contrast with the simple designs from the rest of the province. The Tabriz weavers are very skilled and work quickly by using a special hook for the knotting process.<sup>4</sup>

Since many of the rugs are made for the requirements and preferences of Western buyers, the patterns are

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<sup>3</sup>Ruedin, Splendor, p. 161.

<sup>4</sup>E. Gans Ruedin, Antique Oriental Carpets (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1975), p. 227.

various. Most of them consist of a large central medallion surrounded by a broad field of ivory, blue, or red that extends to the sides and ends of the rug. Other parts of the field are filled with short, slender stems supporting fronds, leaves, and flowers. The Ghiordes knot (Turkish knot) used in Tabriz rugs is carefully tied; the warp and weft are generally cotton but frequently linen. The pile is wool, and the border contains from five to eight stripes. These rugs are made in all sizes; most are large and almost square (Fig. 14).<sup>5</sup>

### Heriz

Heriz, a small town in the eastern part of the province of Azerbaijan, has produced some of the world's most popular rugs for a century and a half. Its rugs are characterized by their simple geometric design. Another well-known and interesting type consists of a field of white. In older rugs a large central medallion occupies the field and is partially reproduced in one of the four corners. The main elements of the design are leaves, branches, and flowers. Heriz rugs were woven in

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<sup>5</sup>Walter A. Hawley, Oriental Rugs Antique and Modern (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1970), pp. 145-146.



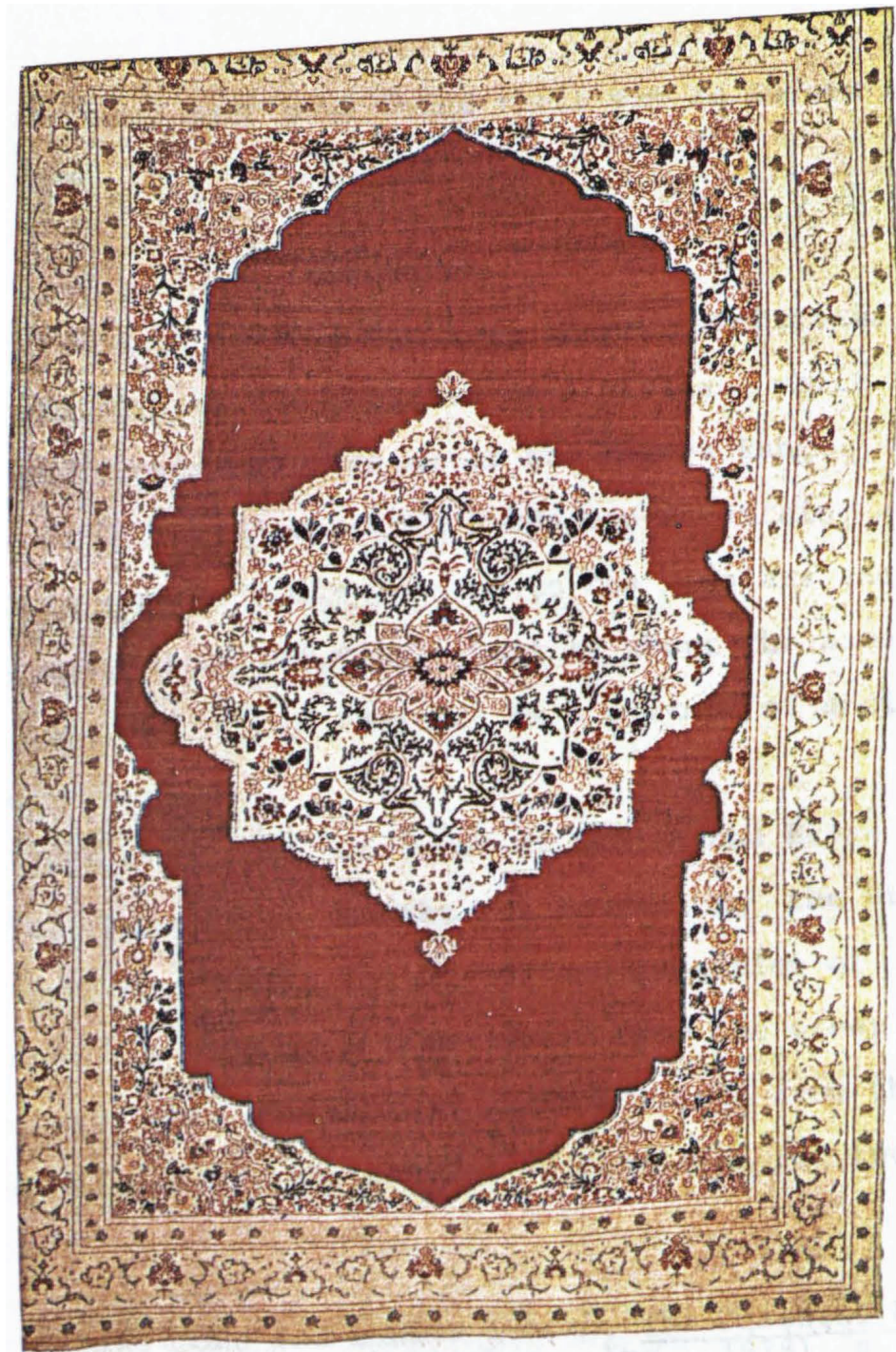


Fig. 14. Tabriz Rug

large sizes, and many have found their way to Europe and America (Fig. 15).<sup>6</sup>

### Kurdistan

Kurdistan is a large district in Western Persia. The eastern part of the district is a plateau, while the western part includes portions of the Zagros Range.

The ethnic origins of the Kurds are uncertain, although they are obviously related to the Persians and probably arrived in the Middle East at about the same time in history. Their language is a mixture of ancient and modern Persian.<sup>7</sup>

In Kurdistan, the two towns of Senneh and Bijar are famous for their rugs. Unlike the Senneh rug, the Bijar rug is somehow rustic. The design and execution of Senneh rugs put them in a class apart from the other Kurdish rugs; this distinction perhaps arises from the fact that Senneh was the capital of Kurdistan for two centuries.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Luciano Coen and Louise Duncan, The Oriental Rug (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1978), p. 51.

<sup>7</sup>Murray L. Eiland, Oriental Rugs (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1973), p. 44.

<sup>8</sup>Ruedin, Antique, p. 228.





Fig. 15. Heriz Rug



### Senneh

Now called Sanandaj, Senneh is the city that gave its name to the Persian technique of knotting, although the Turkish knot (Ghiordes) is used there. The rugs of Senneh have a unique texture that has not changed in two hundred years. The main designs used are either a hexagonal central medallion or a colored background filled with small flowers.<sup>9</sup> The nap of Senneh rugs is very short and their patterns are well established. Colors are dark blue, red, and ivory with some green and yellow. Since the nap is so short, these rugs are very thin and are therefore not well suited for floor use (Fig. 16).<sup>10</sup>

### Bijar

The town of Bijar lies about forty miles from Senneh. By adopting some of the best qualities of both Persian and Kurdish rugs, the Bijar weavers have produced pieces of unusual merit. The foundation of these rugs is generally of wool, and they are very heavy and durable. Moreover, their warp and weft threads are thick, so that the rugs are invariably thick as well even when the nap is not long. Their colors are bright and strong.<sup>11</sup> Unlike rugs from Senneh, Bijar rugs exhibit many designs. The medallion

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<sup>9</sup>Coen and Duncan, p. 61.

<sup>10</sup>Hawley, p. 134.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 136.



Fig. 16. Senneh Rug



pattern is found with an open field, or the field may contain a number of typical Kurdish features. Repeating patterns also appear, with the Herati being quite common. Both the Mina Khani design and the Weeping Willow pattern may have originated in the Bijar area (Fig. 17).<sup>12</sup>

### Hamadan

Hamadan, the capital of the province of the same name, was an important commercial and government center for at least three thousand years. Under the name of Ec-batana, it was the capital of the Madian Kingdom, and during the Hchamenian Dynasty it was a summer capital because of its mild climate.<sup>13</sup> Although Hamadan was not very famous as a rug production center, in the nineteenth century it was an important market for all the rugs of the region. Rugs from Hamadan are easily recognizable by their simple design and by the predominating color of the camel wool from which they are made.<sup>14</sup> The use of camel wool in its natural color on runners brought these rugs wide acceptance in Europe, where long, dark nineteenth-century corridors were lightened by their soft beige tones.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Eiland, p. 48.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>14</sup>Ruedin, Antique, p. 228.

<sup>15</sup>Coen and Duncan, p. 50.





Fig. 17. Bijar Rug

Hamadan rugs are made in many sizes; some are simply mats, others are prayer rugs, and large numbers are runners. The typical pattern of the mats and smaller prayer rugs consists of a central diamond-shaped medallion surrounded by a field of contrasting colors, from which the triangular-shaped corners are set off. In the large prayer rugs and in the runners, which are sometimes twenty feet or more in length, three or more pole medallions appear which are covered with small drawn geometric figures or with floral designs. Moderately old Hamadan rugs contain more camel wool than any other class of rugs. In most of them this wool forms the pile of the field and outer edging, where its soft tones contrast with the bright shades of blue, red, and yellow used in other parts of the rug. This lavish use of camel wool, the broad encircling edging, the cotton warp, and a single thread of coarse weft passing once between two rows of knots are distinguishing features of Hamadan rugs (Fig. 18).<sup>16</sup>

### Feraghan

The former province of Feraghan and its capital, Sultanabad (now Arak), are located 184 miles from Tehran. This area has been an important center of rug manufacture

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<sup>16</sup>Hawley, pp. 123-124.





Fig. 18. Hamadan Rug



for more than a century. Unlike other regions, however, it does not have a specific production, so dealers are able to order the patterns and quality desired by individual purchasers.<sup>17</sup> Rug weaving began in Feraghan during the late sixteenth century, and at first all of these rugs were made for use inside the country; later, they were exported in great numbers to the West. The following rugs were almost all woven in classical repeating patterns: the Herati (the most common), the Mina Khani, and the Gul-Hannai designs. The knot was Persian (Senneh) on a cotton foundation, with the weft usually dyed light blue or pink. The pile was short and of soft wool. Most of the newer Feraghan rugs now have the same general characteristics as the older Feraghans, with the exception that the pile is long and thick; field colors are deep rose or maroon (Fig. 19).<sup>18</sup>

### Sarouk

Sarouk is a village near Arak whose rugs are the most pleasant and beautiful in all of Iran. The rug most often consists of a large oval or round medallion on a red or blue background. The field is made up of four

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<sup>17</sup>Ruedin, Splendor, p. 277.

<sup>18</sup>Eiland, pp. 56-59.

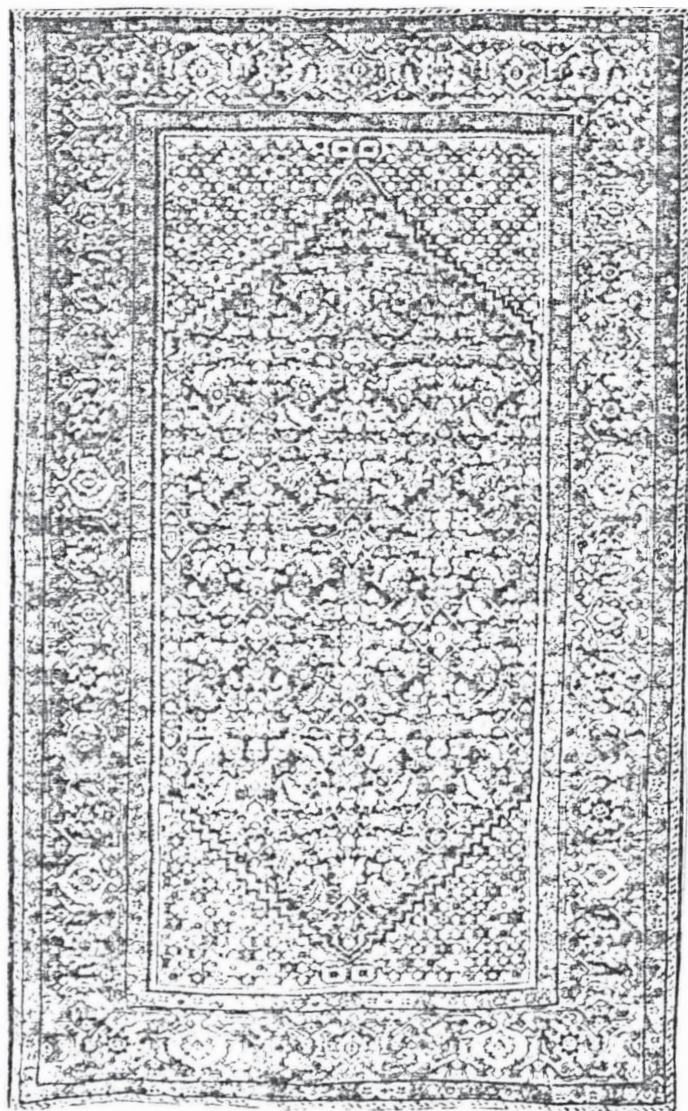


Fig. 19. Feraghan Rug

pointed floral designs, and the rug has fringed ends. Sarouk rugs are as expensive as they are attractive (Fig. 20).<sup>19</sup>

### Kashan

Kashan, a fairly important industrial city, is located 160 miles from Tehran. It is famous for its silks, and many observers have said that nowhere in the whole of Persia are there more satins, velvets, taffetas, rugs, plain or flowered brocades, and silks, plain and mixed with gold and silver, than in Kashan.<sup>20</sup> The city is one of the finest rug weaving centers, and works like the Vienna Hunting Rug and other great products of the Safavid period were produced there.<sup>21</sup> For a long time the practice in making Kashan rugs has been--regardless of cost--to take raw silk from other sites to be spun and dyed there. Some of this silk is used for rugs, which are considered among the best of modern pieces, even though the demand for them is small.

On the other hand, woolen rugs are now also woven in Kashan. Occasionally they are defined as a higher

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<sup>19</sup>Coen and Duncan, p. 60.

<sup>20</sup>Ruedin, Splendor, p. 332.

<sup>21</sup>Eiland, p. 62.





Fig. 20. Sarouk Rug



grade of Sarouks in texture, color, and design; yet certain differences exist between the two: the warp of Kashan rugs is often linen, the nap is a little shorter, the texture is slightly firmer, and the rugs have a large number of border stripes. Kashan woolen rugs are among the most perfect, but not the most expensive, products of Persia. The fine wool is dyed with rich, deep tones of blue, olive, red, and brown. The nap is very short, but the drawing of each detail is clear. The velvet-like surface of these rugs gives them an appearance like that of silken pieces (Fig. 21).<sup>22</sup>

### Isfahan

Countless world travelers have described Isfahan as the most beautiful and pleasant city not only in Iran but in the world. Tourists have also viewed Isfahan as an elegant and entertaining city whose art works are among the finest in Persia. Isfahan was the capital of Persia until the nineteenth century, and one of the royal court manufactories of Shah Abbas flourished there. Many of the finest Safavid rugs were woven in Isfahan.

In the present day, the carpet industry of Isfahan has echoed the general recovery in the city's status.

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<sup>22</sup>Hawley, p. 128.



Fig. 21. Kashan Rug



Although the industry was practically nonexistent during the early part of the twentieth century, it is now responsible for many modern rugs. Until World War II, Isfahan rugs were almost all of moderate quality; their design and workmanship were excellent, but their overall quality was reduced by the use of poor dyes. These rugs were exported to Europe until the war effectively shut off the European market. The industry then faced a crisis, but it was resolved by increasing the quality of the weave and materials.

This improvement occurred when local demand expanded, and today many Isfahan rugs are woven for domestic use. Most of them have very elaborate and complex floral designs, and cream and light blue fields are common, often with a heavy use of bright red. Recently the tendency has been to use silk warps in fine rugs; sometimes they are made entirely of silk or with a yarn blended of silk and wool. The medallion design and hunting scenes of Safavid court pieces are still popular, and some of these rugs have more than 800 knots per square inch (Fig. 22).<sup>2 3</sup>

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<sup>2 3</sup>Eiland, pp. 66-67.

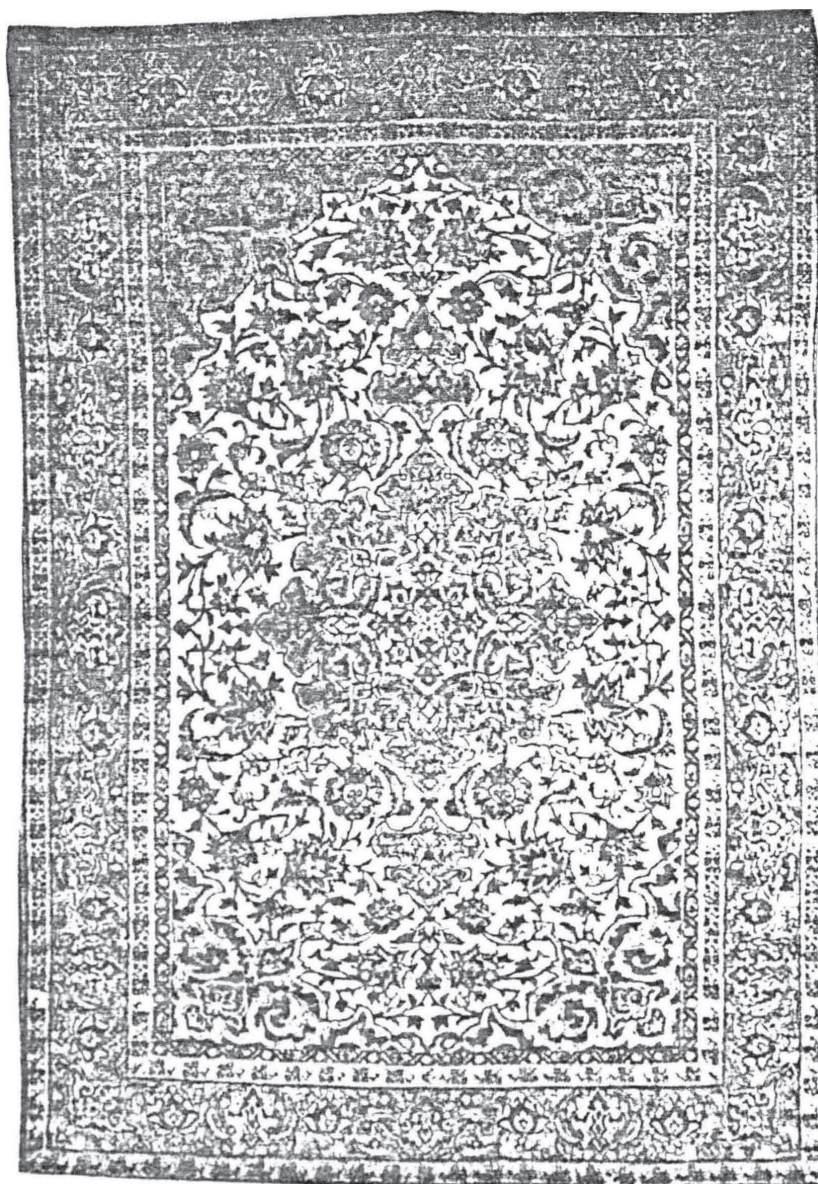


Fig. 22. Isfahan Rug

### Kerman

Kerman, the capital of the province of the same name, is a major rug-producing city in Southeastern Persia, housing a considerable number of looms and many good factories. In addition, about thirty villages in the surrounding area also produce rugs which are indistinguishable from those made in the capital. One of these villages, Ravar (incorrectly known abroad as Lavar), some 87 miles from Kerman, is highly regarded for the quality of its rugs.<sup>24</sup>

Although certain sixteenth-century rugs have been identified as products of the Kerman area, only since the eighteenth century has it become the largest exporter of Persian rugs to the West. Kerman was one of the first cities where Western agents made a large-scale industry of rug weaving, and today Kerman produces thousands of rugs every year, most of which are exported to Europe and the United States. Because of the universal influence of the buyer on the output of the artisan, these rugs cater more to Western than to Eastern tastes.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Ruedin, Splendor, pp. 423-424.

<sup>25</sup>Coen and Duncan, p. 54.



Silkworms have long been cultivated and fed on the mulberry trees that grow wild in the hills of Kerman. Thus, it is not surprising that a small portion of this silk is occasionally utilized in the production of rugs, but as a rule the pile of the rugs is wool. This wool, which is white and of unusually fine texture, is partly the product of the sheep and a variety of goats that live among the hills of the region.

The love of the people of Kerman for roses has probably been responsible for this flower's frequent appearance in their rugs. Sometimes roses are represented as filling vases set in rows, or as formal bouquets arranged in regular order on the field; they are also woven in the rug borders among green leaves. They are usually red, contrasting with a field of soft ashy grey. Sometimes other designs are employed instead of roses, such as sunflower and cypress; however, the general design is strictly floral, with the occasional introduction of birds, animals, or human beings (Fig. 23).<sup>26</sup>

#### Khurassan

Rug weaving in the province of Khurassan is now unknown, but it is said that the art began there as early as the tenth century. Some miniature paintings in Herat,

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<sup>26</sup>Hawley, p. 114.



Fig. 23. Kerman Rug



the capital of Khurassan which was later seized by the Afghans, show rugs of a rectilinear design, attributed to the court of Shah Rukh in the fifteenth century. In addition, many rugs from the Safavid period are also described by art historians as probably having been produced in Herat. Among the first wave of mid-nineteenth-century Persian exports were a large number of rugs from Khurassan. Many were long, narrow pieces with a Herati pattern on a dark blue ground.<sup>27</sup>

### Mashhad

Mashhad, a center of pilgrimage and the capital of Khurassan, is one of the most beautiful cities in Persia. As a religious shrine it is the burial place of Reza, the Eighth Imam of the Muslim people, where the most spectacular mosque in the country was built. The area surrounding the city is rich in agriculture and is one of the best wool producing centers of Persia. Mashhad is the only place in Persia where two types of knots are used by weavers, the Persian and the Turkish. The latter was introduced by merchants from Tabriz at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Now the Emogli factory in Mashhad produces rugs of great beauty, some of which have more than 900 knots per square inch.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Eiland, p. 71.

<sup>28</sup>Ruedin, Antique, p. 229.



In design the early Mashhad rug was often a medallion type or Herati pattern. During recent decades Mashhad weavers have been copying the designs of other areas, but their rugs are distinguishable by their vivid colors and soft wool (Fig. 24).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Eiland, p. 74.



Fig. 24. Mashhad Rug

## CHAPTER IV

### TECHNIQUES OF PERSIAN RUG MAKING

Persian rugs can be divided into two groups: those without a pile (with a flat surface) and those with a pile. Flat woven rugs are produced by a number of methods; most of the pile rugs are knotted, with the individual knots tied by hand. Since rugs with a pile are encountered most often, this chapter will deal primarily with the techniques utilized in producing them and with the factors determining the quality of both types of rugs.

#### Materials

The materials that were formerly used in weaving were generally of animal origin, such as the wool of sheep, goats, and camels. Occasionally, silk and cotton were also used. In most ordinary rugs the materials chosen would depend primarily on their availability and their cost. For example, instead of woolen rug foundations, cotton would be employed if it were available and cheaper than wool. This replacement has been widespread in recent years, for cotton has been introduced into rug



weaving areas and is now used instead of wool in the foundation of most rugs.<sup>1</sup>

The fine, supple wool of the Persian "oily sheep" is of exceptional quality, and this wool is an integral part of most of the Persian masterpieces. It provides the pile of the rug and sometimes the material for the warp and weft as well.<sup>2</sup> Wool quality is dependent on climate and pasturage and on the care of the sheep. In cold, dry regions the wool is long, fine, and lustrous. The best Persian wool is produced in Azerbaijan and Khurasan; rugs made of this wool have a soft and silky feel. The wool of the goat is much less used, but it appears in some rugs as the warp and weft and as the pile.<sup>3</sup>

Camel wool may also be found in rugs, such as those of Hamadan and Kurdish villages. The wool of older camels is coarse and dark; that taken from younger

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<sup>1</sup>Roger F. Gardiner, Art of the Loom (London: Ontario: The University of Western Ontario, 1973), p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>E. Gans Ruedin, The Splendor of Persian Carpets (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1978), p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>Walter A. Hawley, Oriental Rugs Antique and Modern (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1970), p. 31.

animals is finer and lighter. When the latter is used, it cannot be distinguished from sheep wool.<sup>4</sup>

Silk has been incorporated in rugs at least since early Safavid times. It was sometimes used as pile material or for the warp strands, since it has greater strength than either wool or cotton. Recently, its use has been limited to a few centers, of which Kashan is the most important.<sup>5</sup>

#### Dyeing

As important as the weave of Persian rugs is their color, the source of their most pleasing effects. For centuries natural dyes were the only source of color; many of these were not only expensive but also required complex techniques for their proper application. Until the importation of European aniline dyes in the second half of the nineteenth century, Persian craftsmen colored their yarn with a great variety of natural dyes, most of which were obtained from vegetable sources. A number of dyes of different strengths and qualities produced an infinite variety of rich and delicate shades. Some of

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<sup>4</sup>Murray L. Eiland, Oriental Rugs (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1976), p. 26.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

these dyes are acquired in distant countries, but most of the plants employed grow wild on the hills and plains of Persia.<sup>6</sup>

The blue color for Persian rugs is obtained from indigo, one of the most valuable of dyes. The Indigo Fera *Tinctoria* plant grows in the East Indies. When it is cut, soaked in water, crushed, and made into a paste, the indigo dye forms as a precipitate.<sup>7</sup>

Madder, which was known to the ancients, has been used throughout history. The plant grows wild to a height of several feet in many areas of Persia. From its thick red root a red dyestuff can be extracted. The roots do not develop this property, however, until their third year; they are then pulled up in the fall and ground into a powder. Another source of red is the dried bodies of the insect cochineal, cultivated extensively in Northern India.<sup>8</sup>

Yellow dyes are obtained from several sources, including dried vine leaves, turmeric blossoms, the rinds of pomegranates, and saffron flowers. Brown is made from gall apples, or nut galls, and the darkest brown is

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<sup>6</sup>M. S. Dimand, Oriental Rugs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1973), p. 4.

<sup>7</sup>Hawley, p. 38.

<sup>8</sup>Eiland, pp. 16-17.



obtained from oak apples. Black is sometimes derived simply from the wool of black sheep, but more often it is made from gallic acid. Shades of orange are frequently obtained from henna leaves. Other colors can be prepared by mixing two or more dyes.<sup>9</sup>

The process of dyeing the rug material is unique and is as important as the preparation of the dyes themselves. Each strand is dipped into the dye, then gathered together and dried in the open air. This method has the advantage of imparting to the material an infinite variety of tones and, above all, a natural sheen. Rugs made of these dyed materials have a glowing pile with countless reflections, unlike the dull, uniform coloring of wool dyed synthetically. This method of yarn dyeing for Persian rugs dates from the very earliest times. Unfortunately, however, about 1870 synthetic dyes were introduced by foreigners and were quickly adopted by Persian rug makers because they were cheaper, less complicated in their application, and easier to carry and handle.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Luciano Coen and Louise Duncan, The Oriental Rug (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1978), p. 19.

<sup>10</sup>Ruedin, Splendor, pp. 12-13.

### Equipment

Persian rugs are made on looms of varying sizes and shapes. The horizontal loom, used by nomads, is convenient since it can be easily rolled and packed for transportation. Its operative principle is simple and involves little preparation. Two strong beams are selected and placed in a simple frame created by driving four stakes into the ground. Between these beams are warp threads, with the tension maintained by stakes which push the beams apart so that the weaver is able to begin her work in a kneeling sitting position without discomfort all day long.<sup>11</sup>

Three types of vertical looms are used: the village loom, the Tabriz loom, and the roller loom (Fig. 25). The village loom is the simplest of the three, consisting of an upper beam and a lower one; the warp threads are wound around the lower beam, and the free ends are gathered into bundles and tied to the upper beam. As the work progresses, the position of the seat is elevated since the plank on which the weaver is seated may be raised slowly to higher levels of ladders on each side of the loom. In making larger rugs the woven section is moved downward and rolled around the lower beam, and the

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<sup>11</sup>Eiland, p. 23.

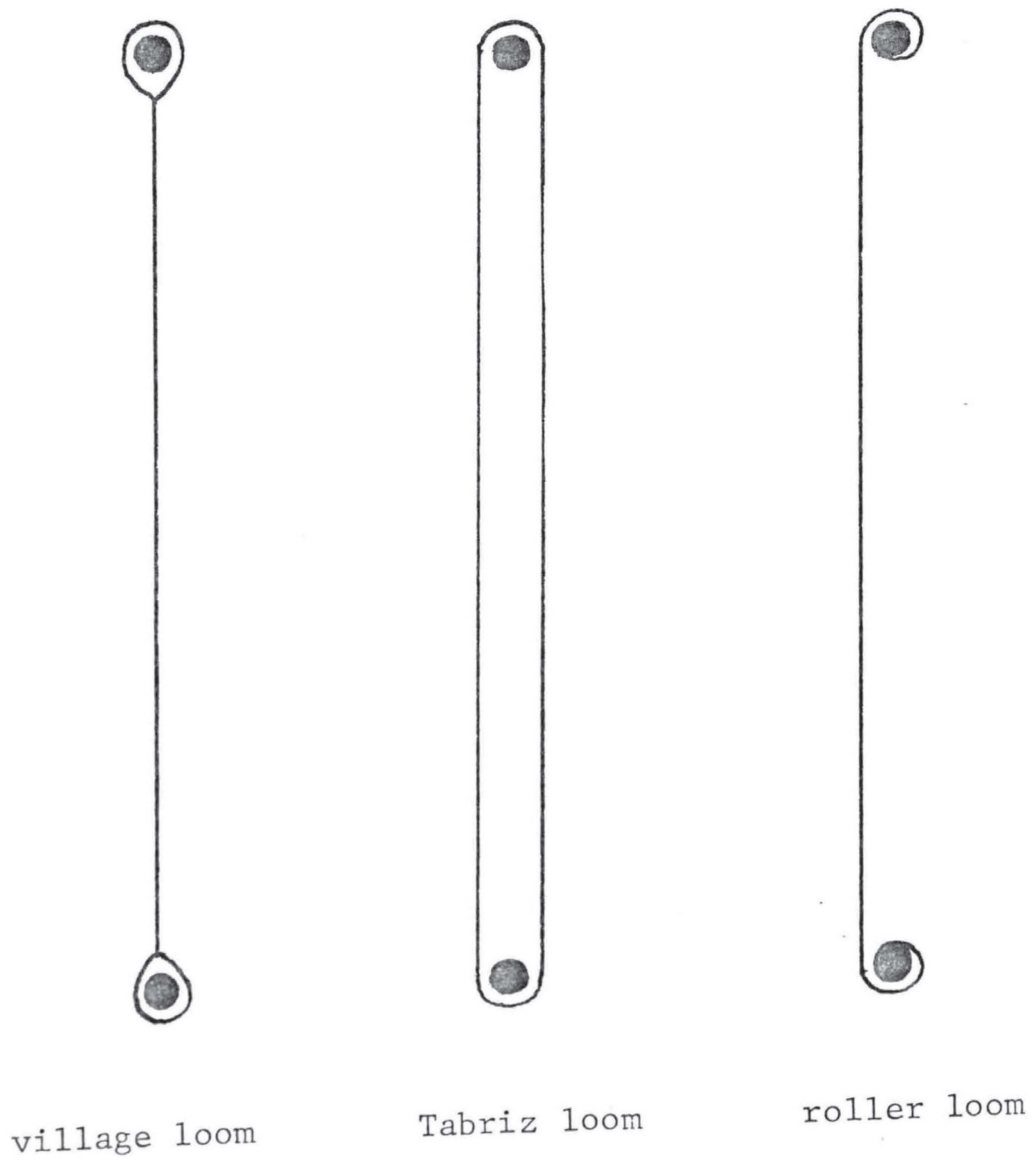


Fig. 25. Vertical looms (side sections)

upper warp ends are retied to the upper beam. Then the seat is replaced at the bottom of the ladder.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 24.



The Tabriz loom, which is slightly more complex, provides greater scope because a rug almost twice the width of the distance between the beams can be woven as compared to rugs made on a village loom. The warp is applied directly to the loom around the beams, and the finished portion of the work can be turned up behind the lower beam so that weavers need not change the level of their seats.<sup>13</sup>

The roller loom is used in Kerman and some other districts of Persia. In this loom the warp is wound onto the upper beam and, as weaving proceeds, the finished part of the rug is wound around the lower beam while the warp is unwound from the upper beam. This allows rugs of any length to be made.<sup>14</sup>

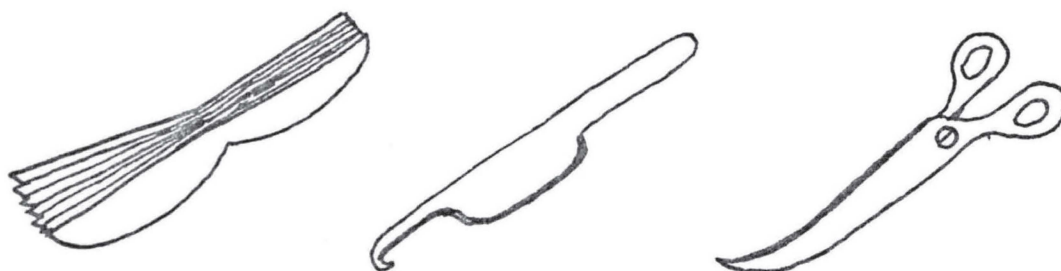
Other small instruments used for weaving rugs are a knife and scissors for cutting the yarn and a comb for beating down the wefts. Cutting is usually done both with a knife, for clipping the yarn after a knot is tied, and with scissors, for trimming the pile after each row is tied (although in some weaving centers the pile is trimmed after the entire rug is finished). The

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<sup>13</sup>Gardiner, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

weavers of Tabriz use a hook to tie the Turkish knot. One edge of this instrument is sharp so that it may be used as a knife (Fig. 26).<sup>15</sup>



comb

hook and knife

scissors

Fig. 26. Rug making instruments

### Knotting

The structure of a Persian rug consists of warp, weft, and pile. In the making of the rug two processes are combined: weaving and knotting. As mentioned earlier in this paper, the two types of knots used in Persian rugs are the Ghiordes, often called the Turkish knot, and the Senneh, or Persian knot.

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<sup>15</sup>Eiland, p. 25.

### The Ghiordes or Turkish Knot

Turkish knotting begins by leaving three or four warp threads free at the sides for the selvedge. The knot is tied around two warp threads, encircling each warp, with the ends coming together between them. The ends of the strand are cut, and the action is repeated on the next two threads. When a row is completed, two shoots of weft are passed through a shed formed by two shed sticks that separate the warps (Fig. 27).<sup>16</sup>

### The Senneh or Persian Knot

This knot, named for the city of Senneh in Kurdistan, is also tied around two warp threads, after leaving the first few warps free for the selvedge. One end encircles one of the warps, and the other passes behind the second warp and comes to one side of it. This knot may be made in either direction--from right to left or from left to right (Fig. 28).<sup>17</sup> Although Turkish knots are firmer than Persian knots, the latter may be used to produce more delicate designs because the two ends of the thread emerge at different places.

A rug must have a selvedge and ends to prevent it from raveling; the edges of a rug are finished by either

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<sup>16</sup>Ruedin, Splendor, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 16.



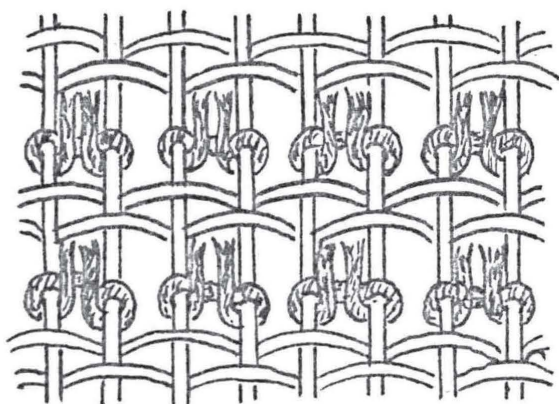


Fig. 27. The Turkish Knot

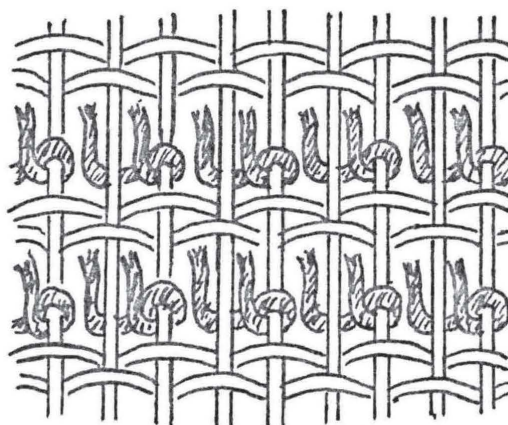
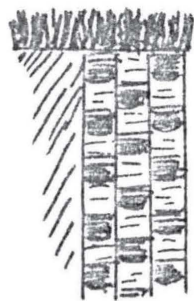
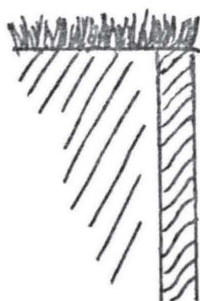


Fig. 28. The Persian Knot



knotted fringe

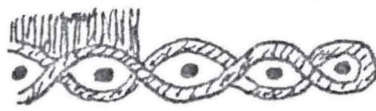
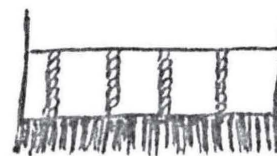
Persian  
overcastTurkish  
selvedgeknotted fringe  
with kilim border

Fig. 29. Rug Finishing Techniques

the Persian overcast or the Turkish selvedge technique. Webbing is threaded through the ends of the warp and knotted to keep the rug from fraying. The fringes are usually about four to eight inches long and are sometimes woven or knotted into a trellis-like pattern (Fig. 29).<sup>18</sup>

### Designs

Persian artists are gifted with an imagination that they express in a great variety of rug designs. Each region creates its own designs, which are related to its traditions. Thus, by means of such distinctive patterns, various centers of rug production may be identified. Religion has also had a great influence on the character of Persian rugs, manifested in the symbolism of both designs and colors.<sup>19</sup> The designs and symbols used in Persian rugs, in which every motif has had a special meaning, are repeated generation after generation. Weavers continue to weave the patterns that their ancestors produced for centuries. The simple nomads used geometrical motifs with primitive figures; the city weavers designed and wove highly sophisticated works of art, complex in pattern and intricate in meaning. The beauty of a Persian rug can

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<sup>18</sup>Coen and Duncan, p. 17.

<sup>19</sup>Ruedin, Splendor, p. 13.

be perceived, of course, whether one comprehends the significance of the designs or not, but if an observer understands these meanings the rugs become still more interesting and alive.<sup>20</sup>

### The Kilim Flat Weave

Among the flat woven Persian rugs one is known as a kilim, which consists of warps and wefts of wool, silk, or sometimes cotton, and occasionally wefts of metal thread. Wefts of different colors pass over and under alternate warps. In this technique, unlike that used for pile rugs, the front and back surface look the same. Two principal variations in the tapestry technique may be used. In the group of kilims made by nomads, slits mark the places that different colors meet but do not join (Fig. 30); in the group of kilims made in Persian court manufactories, on the other hand, the pattern threads turn back on the same warp, eliminating such slits (Fig. 31).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Arthur T. Gregorian, Oriental Rugs and the Stories They Tell (New York: Nimrod Press, 1977), p. 83.

<sup>21</sup>Dimand, pp. 2-3.



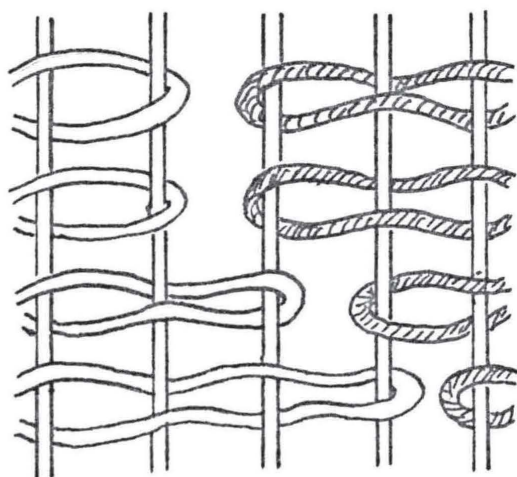


Fig. 30. Nomadic Kilim  
Technique

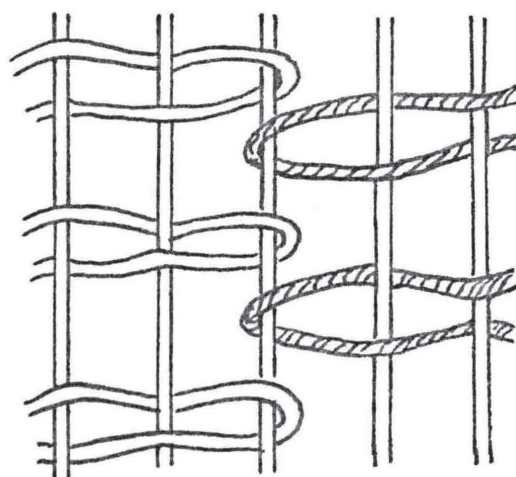


Fig. 31. Persian Court  
Kilim Technique

## CHAPTER V

### TRIBAL RUGS

Persian tribal rugs are part of a tradition which has a power and vitality of its own. They are very different from regular rugs since their designs are geometrical and abstract, with bold colors that are sometimes reminiscent of contemporary paintings. Unlike the commercial rugs, they are woven exclusively for home use, such as floor coverings, decorative bedding bags, and other bags in all shapes and sizes which are handed down from generation to generation.

Since tribes in the past have moved freely across the country, it may be a difficult task to classify the design of a certain rug to a specific tribe; in most cases, however, it is possible to indicate the region in which a particular rug was made by the type of the wool, the weaving technique, and the color and designs employed. Most of these rugs are probably less than one hundred years old, because they were woven for everyday use and then replaced when they wore out. Modern tribal rugs are characterized by harsh, bright colors

stereotyped designs, and coarse weaving.<sup>1</sup> The main tribes of Iran are the Shahsavan, the Bahktiyari, and Qashqai, the Baluchi, and the Turkoman.

### The Shahsavan

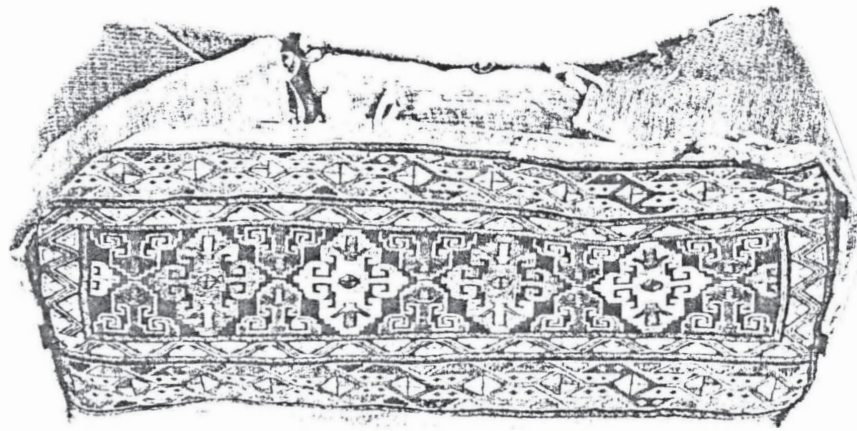
Several tribal groups are scattered in the northwest part of Iran, among which the Shahsavan is the largest and best known. This Turkic tribe was formed in the Safavid period (1500-1736). Its members migrate from the plains of Mughan, in the northwestern part of the province of Azerbaijan, to summer pastures on the slopes of the 14,000-foot Mount Savalan, west of the town of Ardebil. Their most important contributions to rug weaving are ceremonial horse-blankets, kilims with repeating palmette designs, a wide variety of interesting bedding, and saddlebags in bright colors (Fig. 32). These are woven by a weft-wrapping technique; popular colors are bright reds, blues, greens, oranges, pinks, and a characteristic purple. White is often made with cotton but is sometimes created with undyed ivory wool.<sup>2</sup>

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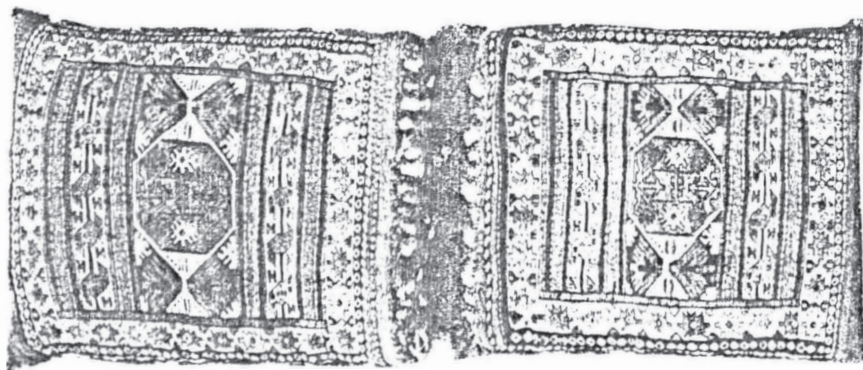
<sup>1</sup>Jenny Housego, Tribal Rugs (New York: Litton Educational Publishing, Inc., 1978), pp. 7-8.

<sup>2</sup>Martine Sheon, Yoruk: The Nomadic Weaving Tradition of the Middle East (Pittsburgh: Charles M. Henry Printing Co., 1978), pp. 43-49.





bedding bag



saddlebag

Fig. 32. Shaksavan Bedding Bag and Saddlebag

Until recently all such pieces were mistakenly attributed to the Caucasus, but the characteristics of this type of weaving and design are now recognized as Shahsavan. These pieces exhibit other distinctive differences as well. The wool used in Shahsavan weaving is dry to the touch and dark in color, whereas the Caucasian wool is ivory and soft; and Shahsavan designs incorporate human figures, animals, birds, and floral or tree forms, while the Caucasian pieces are more concerned with fineness of weave, clear line, and an uncluttered field. Unfortunately, the Shahsavan weave little now, except for some commercialized weft-wrapped brocades. However, their patterns are based on traditional designs which, together, with the few old pieces, are enough to provide an idea of Shahsavan weaving in the past.<sup>3</sup>

#### The Bakhtiyari

The Bakhtiyari is a large tribe of over 400,000 inhabiting an area west and south of Isfahan along the eastern slopes of the Zagros Mountains. The tribe's history is almost unknown, although it is said that they came from Syria in the tenth century. A group of highly individualistic flat weaves has now been attributed to

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<sup>3</sup>Housego, pp. 9-10.

the Bakhtiyari. In older products wool was used for both the warp and weft, but Bakhtiyari rugs now have a cotton foundation and are generally more coarsely knotted. The Turkish knot is almost always used, and the weft crosses once between each row of knots. Sides are finished with a double overcast of thick yarn. Bakhtiyari designs consist of rectangular or lozenge-shaped panels, or stylized animal and bird forms. Double saddlebags, salt or flour bags, bedding bags, and kilims are common items of Bakhtiyari work (Fig. 33).<sup>4</sup>

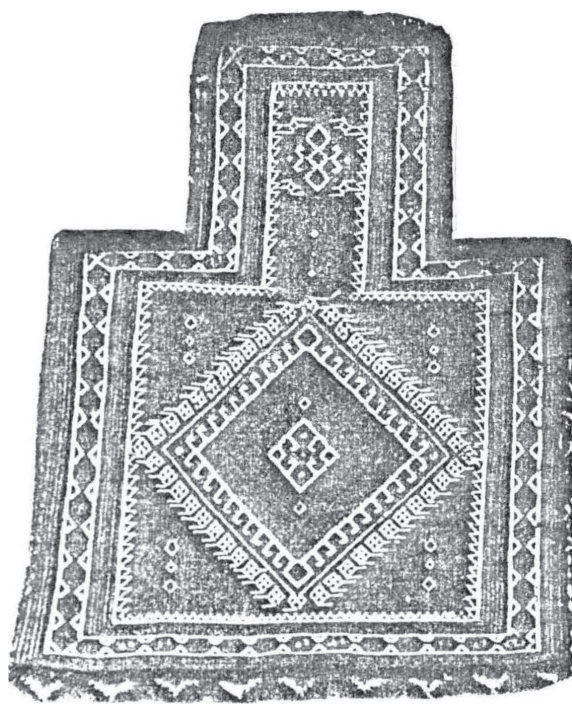
### The Qashqai

Among the most famous Persian tribes is the Qashqai. The members of this largest tribe in the country migrate twice yearly from the summer pastures to the fertile area around Shiraz in the province of Fars. Like the Shahsavan, the Qashqai is actually a confederation of tribes of mixed origins. The Qashqai still employ the horizontal or ground loom, since it can be used for tapestry weaving and other processes. Flat weave techniques range from tapestry to compound weaves, including double cloth, kilims, or slit tapestry which

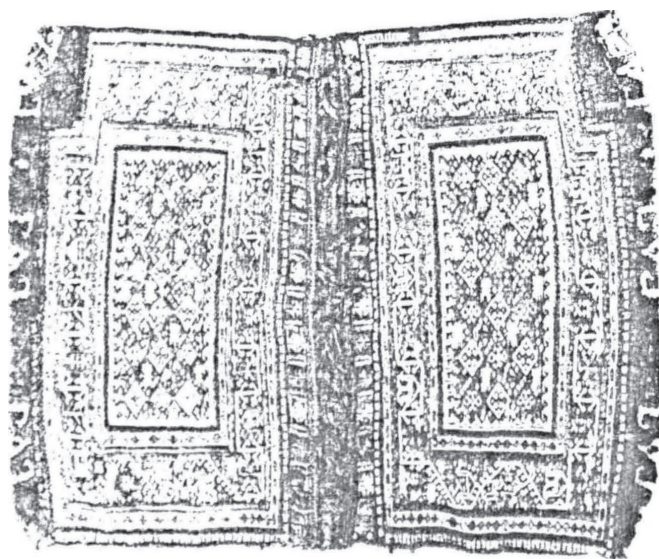
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<sup>4</sup>Murray L. Eiland, Oriental Rugs (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1976), p. 70.





salt or flour bag



saddlebag

Fig. 33. Bakhtiyari Salt or Flour Bag and Saddlebag

are usually made from undyed wool or goat hair warps. The Qashqai produce a variety of single and double multipurpose bags which are usually pile woven with geometric designs of rosettes, birds, and botehs. The most interesting features of these bags are their finishes, especially the fastenings, which are brocaded and decorated in a variety of ways. Common colors are reds, blues, greens, and a great deal of yellow and ivory. Both Turkish and Persian knots are used (Fig. 34).<sup>5</sup>

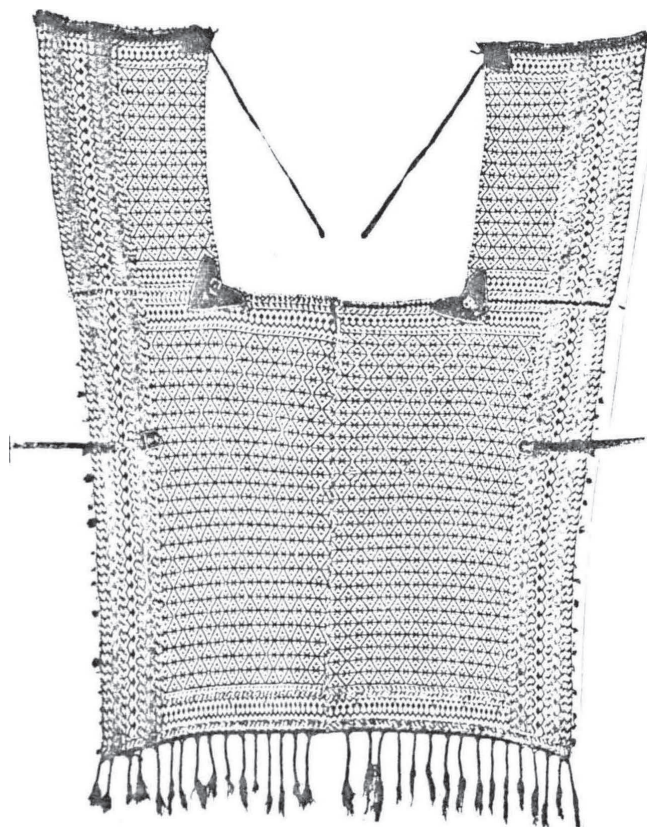
### The Baluchi

In the eighteenth century the Baluchi tribes were settled in the province of Baluchistan, which lies in the eastern part of Iran bordering on Pakistan and Afghanistan; a second immigration then occurred towards the end of the nineteenth century. Baluchi rugs, which were produced by these immigrant tribes, thus do not come from the province of Baluchistan. By contacting numerous weavers, the Baluchi have copied the designs of other regions, but their rugs nevertheless maintain distinctive characteristics. Pile rugs are the most famous products of the Baluchi. Their colors include deep reds, blues, white, yellows, oranges, and sometimes greens and mauves. They

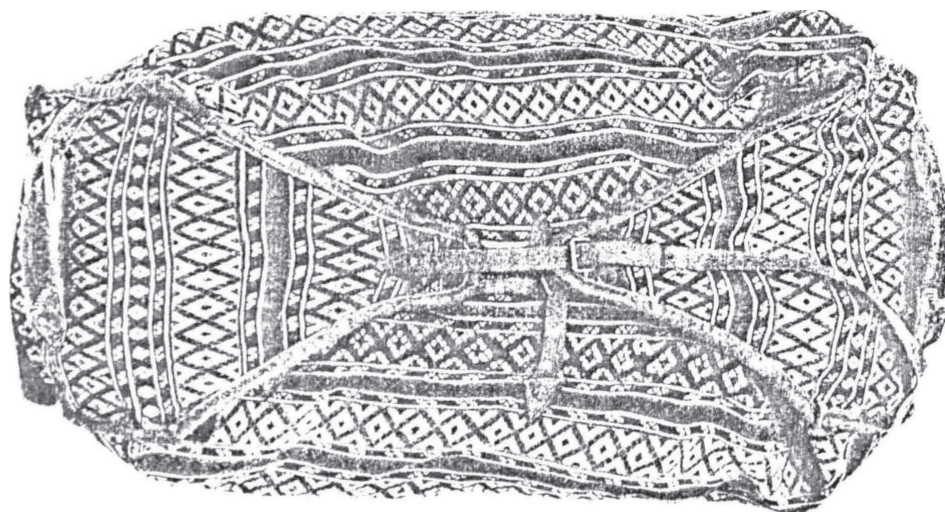
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<sup>5</sup>Sheon, pp. 52-55.





horse blanket



bedding bag

Fig. 34. Qashqai Horse Blanket and Bedding Bag



are often made of camel wool, and the Persian knot is employed in the weaving process. The most popular patterns are lattices containing geometric or floral motifs. Prayer rugs typically have camel grounds with formalized tree forms. Interesting features are the flat woven skirts at each end of the rugs and the use of goat hair for finishing the edges. The various characteristic Baluchi patterns in dark blues and reds give these pieces a "look" that is entirely their own (Fig. 35).<sup>6</sup>

#### The Turkoman

The Turkoman tribes originated in Central Asia rather than in Iran, and their weaving is quite different from that of other Persian tribes. Turkoman rugs are woven with traditional gul (flower) motifs and a lavish use of bright red. Blue is the second main color, with limited use of ivory and brown. All the major Turkoman tribes have their own rug designs. One consists of repeated gul-like rhomboid figures, and another common motif employs salor guls (octagonal motifs) which are arranged diagonally across the field with no minor guls (Fig. 36).

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<sup>6</sup>Housego, pp. 17-18.

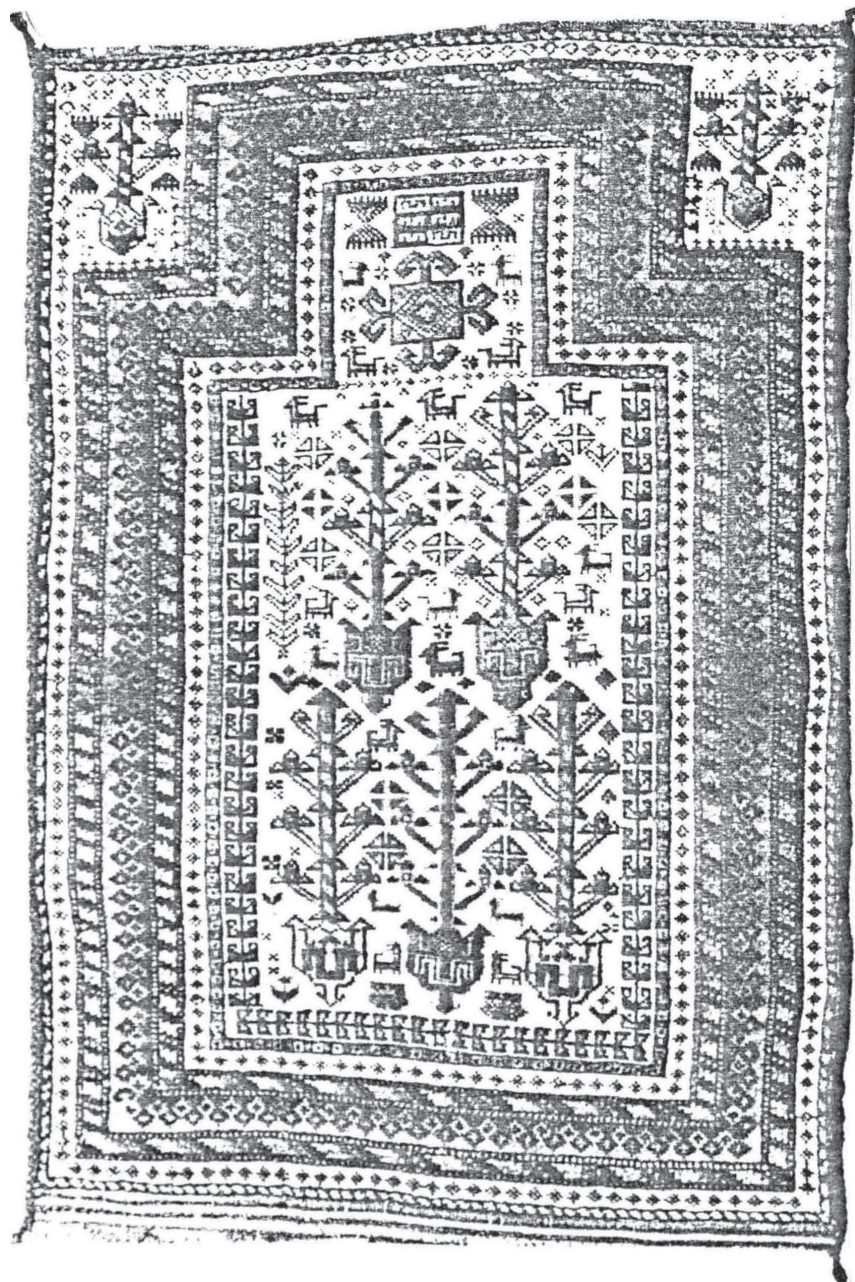


Fig. 35. Baluchi Rug



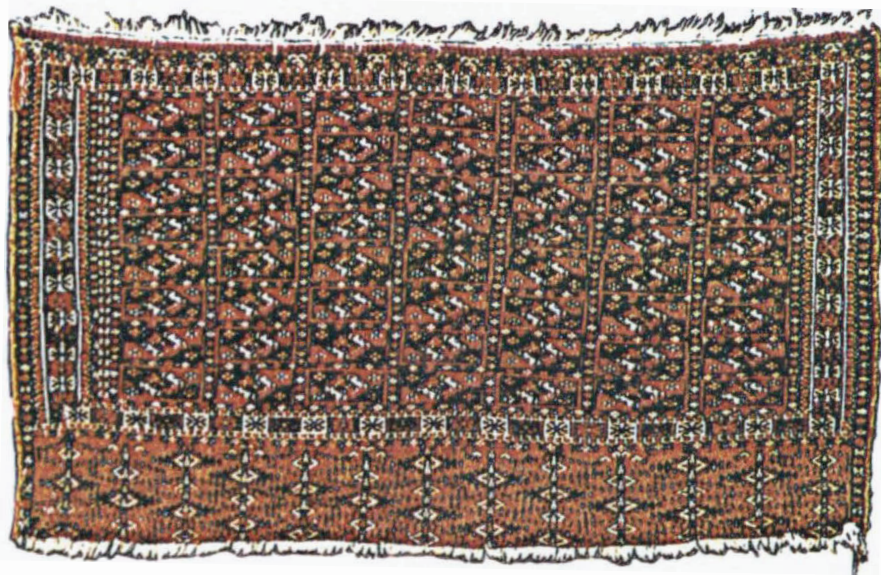


Fig. 36. Turkoman Rugs



These rugs are made on a wool foundation. Mashhad and Tehran serve as market centers for Turkoman rugs.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Eiland, pp. 174-175.

## CHAPTER VI

### CARE OF PERSIAN RUGS

The task of caring for a Persian rug is continuous but not difficult. It is true that these rugs can take an astonishing amount of wear--usually five to ten times that of modern wall-to-wall carpeting--and, if well cared for, they will last a lifetime. Since a rug takes the greatest amount of wear when it is used on a floor, it must be laid carefully on a rubber or felt mat, and it should be rotated in place every six months for even distribution of wear. A sturdy rug should be selected for use in entryways where, naturally, it receives more dirt than on a less used floor. Heavy pieces of furniture placed on a rug can break down its pile; casters may be used to cushion them when such an arrangement is unavoidable, although they are a distraction in the aesthetics of the room.<sup>1</sup>

For storage, a rug should be rolled, not folded, since the warp and weft may be worn out along the fold lines. If rugs are to be stored in the home, they

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<sup>1</sup>Luciano Coen and Louise Duncan, The Oriental Rug (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1978), p. 27.

should be rolled with a moth deterrent, wrapped in heavy paper, and placed in a dry room. Moths can be a problem both in winter and summer, whether a rug is in or out of storage, so it should be professionally mothproofed at least once a year.<sup>2</sup>

To clean a rug, the best method is vacuuming with the nap of the pile, a process which will do no harm to an average or even a poor rug. When the rug is dirty, it can be sponged at home at least once a year. A synthetic sponge may be dipped in a soap and water solution, then squeezed. The cleaning motions selected should be the easiest for the person doing the work--up and down, cross-wise, in a circular direction, or any combination of these. If a rug is extremely dirty, a good method is to wash it at home with an oil-based soap, followed by a rinse of vinegar or lemon and water in order to remove the soap.<sup>3</sup>

A rug need not be cleaned professionally more than once every few years, unless it is laid in a very active part of the house. Many professionals use a chemical

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>3</sup>Charles W. Jacobsen, Check Points on How to Buy Oriental Rugs (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., Inc., 1969), pp. 172-174.



solution similar to those available on the market, but a soap and water wash is best. Some cleaning factories use rotary brushes on the surface of the rug, but a machine with a wringer and a jet spray is equally good since the rug dries just as quickly after either type of process.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Coen and Duncan, p. 29.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

Persian rugs have gained a reputation as the finest in the world and are noted for their infinite variety of designs and colors. The art of rug making in Iran has fluctuated throughout history, but its techniques and patterns have sustained few changes over the centuries. Today, the Persians are making rugs under the same conditions as in the past, for they still possess the desire, patience, and ability to express themselves in this way.

Among traditional Persian artifacts, rugs are the most popular in the West; they have served to add exotic glamor to designs and furnishings of Western public buildings, churches, and homes. It is not surprising that since the sixteenth century, and particularly in the last century, a great many rugs have been exported to Europe, and United States, and other parts of the world. They have been bought in the West because every rug contains a human element that adds life to a room.

The rugs which have been discussed and illustrated in this paper are just a sampling of the wealth of

material and design represented in Persian rug making, but they clearly demonstrate the degree of perfection attained in and the position held by this art in Iran.



## APPENDIX

### DEFINITION OF TERMS

Arabesque: The classic Islamic flower-and-leaf design, characterized by graceful splitting and joining vines often meandering around a central medallion.<sup>1</sup>

Border: An immutable convention of Persian design, usually consisting of a middle band--the actual border--with one, two, or three narrow guard bands on either side.<sup>2</sup>

Boteh: A famous Persian motif that, in its most simplified form, seems to be a serrated leaf; the name is derived from the Persian word for "princely flower." The boteh originated in India and was adapted throughout the Orient. Experts differ in their opinions of what it represents: a pine, a palm, a cluster of leaves, or the Sacred Flame of Zoroaster.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Luciano Cohen and Louise Duncan, The Oriental Rug (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1978), p. 183.

<sup>2</sup>E. Gans Ruedin, The Splendor of Persian Carpets (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1978), p. 527.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

Brocading: A manner of embellishing a carpet by using additional weft threads, called filling threads, to form all-over patterns of slightly raised flowers and figures worked in gold and/or silver thread.<sup>4</sup>

Cartouche: A design often seen in Turkish prayer rugs or Persian rugs depicting persons; a shape containing words.<sup>5</sup>

Cloud-band: A small, shell-like ornament occurring in various forms, some compressed, some elongated and resembling the conventional Chinese "cloud-band" motif.<sup>6</sup>

Diaper: An overall pattern resembling lattice-work.<sup>7</sup>

Field: The area of a carpet inside the borders.<sup>8</sup>

Fringe: Decorative border or edging of hanging threads on a carpet composed of the visible ends of the warp threads, which have been trimmed and knotted.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 528.

<sup>5</sup>Coen and Duncan, p. 183.

<sup>6</sup>Ruedin, Splendor, p. 529.

<sup>7</sup>Coen and Duncan, p. 183.

<sup>8</sup>Ruedin, Splendor, p. 530.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

Gul-Henna: The flower of the henna plant used as a design.<sup>10</sup>

Herati: Very popular Persian design consisting of leaves, flowers with arabesques, and lozenges arranged in a regular pattern. The name of the design derives from the town of Herat, which was the chief center in the region where this motif probably originated.<sup>11</sup>

Kilim: A flat woven, double-faced rug.<sup>12</sup>

Lozenge: Motif in the shape of a diamond.<sup>13</sup>

Mina Khani: Pattern consisting of daisies; characteristic examples are found in carpets from Arak, Tabriz, and Heriz.<sup>14</sup>

Palmette: Honeysuckle ornament probably derived from the flower of the Egyptian or Chinese lotus. This is an extremely popular motif that has embellished Persian carpets since the time of Shah Abbas the Great (1587-1629); thus, it is often called the Shah Abbas pattern.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Arthur T. Gregorian, Oriental Rugs and the Stories They Tell (New York: Nimrod Press, 1977), p. 222.

<sup>11</sup>Ruedin, Splendor, p. 131.

<sup>12</sup>Coen and Duncan, p. 183.

<sup>13</sup>Ruedin, Splendor, p. 533.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 534.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 535.



Pile: The mass of raised tufts formed by the strands of wool that have been cut at the carpet's surface. The pile produces the rug's soft, compact, furry surface.<sup>16</sup>

Rosette: Motif resembling an open rose, consisting of a circular arrangement of parts around a center. In Persian carpets the motif is figurative; in Turkoman carpets it is highly stylized.<sup>17</sup>

Scroll: Motif characterized by various spiral or convoluted forms derived from the curves of a partly unrolled parchment scroll.<sup>18</sup>

Tree-of-Life: One of mankind's oldest symbols of life and a religious symbol of Islam. Representing a tree that may be highly stylized, this motif is often found on prayer rugs because of its religious significance.<sup>19</sup>

Warp: The vertical threads attached to the loom that, with the weft, form the underweave for the knots of the carpet.<sup>20</sup>

Weft: The horizontal threads woven between the warp threads.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 536.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 537.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 538.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 539.

<sup>20</sup>Coen and Duncan, p. 184.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

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