

APPLIED ARTS: TEXTILES AND CARPETS

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Part One

TEXTILE FABRICS OTHER THAN CARPETS

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From the sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, artistic fabrics, one of the oldest art forms of Central Asia, were at the peak of their development. The fabrics of Iran, India and Central Asia enjoyed unprecedented fame. These high-quality fabrics were produced according to a long-standing tradition, and incorporated favourite decorative motifs and distinctive colour schemes. The fabrics were decorated with interwoven threads, printed patterns and embroidery. The ornamental patterns consisted mostly of geometric, floral and epigraphic motifs.

Iran

Iran was famed far and wide for its luxurious silks, satin, velvet, brocade and wool, which were produced during the period in question in Tabriz, Isfahan, Kashan and Yazd. In the sixteenth century, fabric decoration underwent great changes. This was due, above all, to the appearance of the human figure. In addition to floral patterns interwoven with geometric figures alternating with bands of inscriptions, fabrics once more began to depict human figures or complete scenes with a particular theme. They have come to be known as 'theme fabrics'. They depicted court banquets, lovers' meetings and hunting scenes. Nor was it uncommon to encounter illustrations to popular poems by Nizāmī, such as 'Majnūn among the beasts in the desert', 'Majnūn's meeting with Laylāin the desert' and 'Khusrau sees Shīrīn bathing'. In the composition of scenes and the depiction of figures one can clearly detect the influence of the miniature paintings of sixteenth-century Tabriz and Qazvin, seventeenth-century Isfahan, and the style of the great masters, Sultān Muhammad and Rizā-i °Abbāsī (see Chapter 19, Part One). Scholars are probably correct in thinking that the original sketches for the fabrics were done by miniature painters.

One characteristic feature of Iranian weaving is a traditional type of composition involving repetition of the scene along the vertical axis, thereby creating a special recurrent rhythm within the fabric. Invariably a repeated scene would feature two persons facing one another, and between them would be a tree in blossom, a cypress, a bush or simply a flower. Landscapes were also encountered, as they were in miniature paintings. The theme motifs were often separated from each other by subtle borders with delicate geometric ornamental designs.

Besides such theme motifs, floral patterns were also popular. These were repeated all over the area of the fabric. They might be stylized depictions of carnations, tulips, hyacinths, irises, peach blossoms or bouquets of flowers in a vase. All decorative patterns, whether floral, geometric or theme motifs, were characterized by the subtle contours of their lines, for which a special dark base-thread was used. This technique was borrowed from miniatures, in which each silhouette was enclosed by a dark contour.

Characteristic of the sixteenth century was a special technique applied to fabrics whereby a metallic thread ran from edge to edge in the form of a very fine wire wound on a silk thread, giving the appearance of a thread made of pure gold. Seventeenth-century velvet had a cotton thread instead of a metallic one, a technical characteristic of the fabrics of that period. One more difference between sixteenth-century and later fabrics is worth noting: the front of sixteenth-century fabrics usually consisted of thick cloth, while the obverse side involved meticulous finishing processes; seventeenth-century fabrics were usually thinner.

In the seventeenth century, the decorative patterns on fabrics became larger in size. Often the composition of the fabric comprised bands with ornamental floral designs: small decorative patterns on narrow bands and a large separate pattern on wide ones. We see the appearance of satins woven with gold and silver metallic thread and decorated with bouquets of daffodils and stylized, many-petalled flowers arranged all over the fabric area in chessboard fashion. In the early seventeenth century the warm, beige-brown colour range of the fabrics was enriched by pink, green, light blue, dark blue and yellow, while the introduction of metallic threads created a graceful silver-gold shimmering effect.

At the end of the sixteenth century, Iranian artistic fabric weaving began to show traces of European influence in the depiction of figures, as well as in the incorporation of foreign thematic elements. This was connected, above all, with the practice of sending diplomatic gifts to royal personages in Russia and Europe, and with market demand in Europe. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Europeanizing trend continued to develop. This is seen in the adoption of European interpretations of eyelids, eyebrows and hair styles, and the appearance of a small cross on a chain around the neck of human figures, and later in the depiction of slimmer figures dressed in European fashions. There was also sometimes

a wholesale reproduction of European themes, as in the velvet brocade entitled 'The Holy Family' presented as a gift in 1603 by Shāh ʿAbbās I (1587–1629) to the Venetian doge, Marin Grimani.

In articles of this type in the seventeenth century, as in fabrics with purely Iranian themes, human figures began to be portrayed without any connection or contact between one another. Such independent figures, perceived as a separate pattern, are typical of the ornamental designs found in Iranian fabrics of the seventeenth century.

In the second half of the seventeenth and in the eighteenth centuries the production of fabrics became highly developed in Yazd, Isfahan, Kashan and Mashhad. Characteristic of this later period are silk fabrics, brocade and mixed fabrics in which the background consists of brocade, while the floral patterns are in velvet. Patterned silk sashes also became widespread. Other common fabrics from this period have intricate ornamental designs using large patterns which are often set inside rhombuses, medallions, rosettes and rectangles. Embroidered part-silk fabrics made their appearance, sometimes with a metallic gilded thread with a large, chiefly geometric pattern, as did prints on cotton fabrics.

Our period saw a considerable increase in the exports of silk, brocade, velvet and sashes to Central Asia, Russia and European countries. They exercised a perceptible influence on European fabric design and even led to the appearance of workshops producing similar fabrics, such as sashes (in Poland and Russia). The European demand for Iranian fabrics encouraged the expansion of their production inside Iran itself.

India

The establishment in India of the Great Mughal dynasty (1526–1857) in the sixteenth century gave a new impetus to the development of artistic fabrics. New types of fabric appeared, which were to a large extent characterized by new technology, the emergence of new patterns, an expansion of the range of colours and the use of expensive materials. During this period Indian fabrics were extremely diverse.

Fabrics were either plain-weave or patterned. Plain-weave fabrics were decorated with ornamental designs during the final stage of production by dyers, printers or embroiderers. The designs in patterned fabrics were woven in during the production process using a shuttle. During this period, cotton, silk, part-silk and woollen fabrics were produced. Indian plain-weave fabrics were no less celebrated than patterned ones, thanks to their unusually delicate manufacture. The most exquisite cotton fabrics were delicate and elegant muslins, the most famous of which were from Dacca (Dhaka). Testimony to the unsurpassed quality of this fabric is a tale still told today of how the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb (1659–1707)

became enraged with his daughter for appearing before him 'naked', although she was in fact dressed in seven layers of muslin.

The ornamental design used in fabrics was very diverse. In addition to the aforementioned geometric, floral and epigraphic decorative patterns, Indian fabrics also used theme motifs. By looking at the patterns it is possible to determine where the fabric was produced. In Uttar Pradesh the fabrics were decorated by the use of two techniques: the first involved a fine two-colour pattern, with the tree of life at the centre, and around the edges broad ribbons consisting of garlands of flowers or stylized depictions of architectural details. The second technique consisted of a colourful pattern framed with edging of broad red and dark blue bands with flowers, while the intervals between the bands were filled with black and white epigraphic ornamentation.

Characteristic of Rajasthan and central India were fabrics decorated with fine dot-like specks or a design featuring bouquets of flowers against a white or pale pink background. These decorative patterns were applied to the fabric by printing. The pattern on *jāmdānī* (Hindustani: cloth with woven flowers) fabrics consisted of flowers and branches arranged in strips or scattered all over the material like a net. Fabric of this type was never dyed in a contrasting colour scheme. Sometimes it included gold, silver or silk threads.

The most famous silk items were the so-called *butedār* (Hindustani: 'flowered') fabrics manufactured from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century in Baluchar (in Murshidabad region) (hence called *bālūcharī*), *patola* (with warp and weft pre-dyed) silk from Gujarat and the Benares brocade or *kimkhāb*, manufactured at Varanasi (Benares). Without doubt, the silks from other Indian towns were equally beautiful, yet the fabrics just mentioned were distinguished by their special luminescence, beautiful patterns and harmonious colouring. The colour of the background in *butedār* fabrics was red, dark purple or blue, while the pattern was woven using white, cream, yellow, orange, red or green threads. These fabrics were decorated with floral and geometric patterns and human figures. The ornamental design of Gujarat silks consisted of geometric and floral patterns in white, dark red, dark blue and yellow which stood out clearly against a dark background.

The ancient art of India's gold-weave and silver-weave silks, locally referred to as *kimkhāb* (brocade), was developed between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries in a large number of towns, including Varanasi, Ahmadabad and Hyderabad. However, the most luxurious brocade was woven in Varanasi. Its base was silk, while the pattern was interwoven with gold and silver threads. The manifold patterns consisted of floral shoots, the tree of life, and figures of horsemen and wild animals (tigers, elephants, deer and hares).

The exquisite cashmere fabrics made from the wool of wild goats were particularly famous. They were either pure wool or mixed, in which case the warp consisted of wool

and the weft of silk threads. The numerous patterns, either embroidered or woven, were always made from wool. More often than not the fabric was filled with floral decorations and sometimes stylized architectural designs. Incomparably beautiful shawls and special suit-lengths for clothes were made from cashmere wool.

Embroidery using satin-stitch, feather-stitch, chain-stitch or darning stitch was particularly widespread in India. There was a great range of types of embroidery, depending on the place of origin and the product's purpose. The patterns were chiefly based on floral motifs. The embroidery featured silk and woollen threads. Magnificent white embroidery was produced in Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh. The elegant embroidery used on cashmere fabrics for clothes featured soft and gentle tones. Velvet embroidery with interwoven gold thread was popular at the Mughal court in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This was referred to by the Persian word *zardūzī* (*zardozi* in Hindustani). Such fabrics were used for canopies, awnings and umbrellas. India's luxurious fabrics were exported in large quantities to Central Asia, Russia and Europe, giving rise to a fashion for such fabrics, as well as influencing the textiles manufactured in those countries.

Transoxania

The textiles of Transoxania were particularly distinctive. Even though Iranian, Indian and Chinese fabrics were exported to the region in large quantities and were very popular, the textiles of Transoxania, whose origins go way back to ancient times, never lost their originality or their own traditions.

Between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, artistic fabrics in this region, like those of Iran and India, underwent substantial development. In that period, the centres most famous for the production of textiles were Bukhara, Samarkand, Khujand and Ferghana, where various types of cotton, silk and part-silk fabrics were manufactured. Unfortunately, no examples of fabrics from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century have survived: our knowledge of them is derived solely from written sources and their depiction in miniature paintings.

The most famous of all cotton fabrics were *karbās*, *alācha* and *zandān-īchī*, which were much in demand and exported in bulk to Russia. Of the three, the most popular was *karbās* – a smooth fabric of interwoven linen, bleached or dyed black, dark blue, yellow, green or grey (Fig. 1). *Alācha*, a fabric decorated with broad stripes and made from fine yarn, was manufactured in many areas of Central Asia. In Bukhara and Kokand (Khoqand) it was made from cotton, while in Khiva it was woven from cotton and silk. The decorative pattern and the colouring of the stripes varied according to the place of origin. The famous



Fig. 1. Bukhara. Two details from *karbās* (silk on cotton) *sūzanīs*. Mid-nineteenth century. (Photo: Courtesy of Omar Masom, Turkmen Gallery, London.)

Bukhara *alācha* featured well-coordinated multicoloured stripes of varying widths, with a dark, usually blue weft. By the end of the nineteenth century Bukhara *alācha* had ceased to be made. In nineteenth-century Samarkand, however, good-quality striped *alācha* was the main type of woven product. Its pattern consisted of fairly narrow white, red and dark blue stripes called *qaraqāsh* ('black eyebrows' in Uzbek); another pattern consisting of thin alternating stripes forming a chain was known as *gajdumak*, after a locality 40 km from Bukhara. In ancient times the *zandān-īchī* fabric, which originated in the village of Zandana not far from Bukhara, was made from silk, but by the Middle Ages it had begun to be made from cotton, and in the period covered in the present volume it continued to be a cotton-based product.

A number of fabrics had glazed or printed patterns. Glazing gave fabrics a special *moiré* effect. The printed patterns relied on floral motifs. From the sixteenth century onwards Samarkand specialized in the production of printed fabrics. In Bukhara, however, printed goods were never manufactured. This is a typical instance of specialization where textiles are concerned.

Transoxania was best known for its silk and part-silk fabrics. These were *adras*, *be-qasab*, *kanaus*, velvet, satin, brocade and a special fabric for making kerchiefs. *Adras* was a part-silk, heavily glazed fabric of local origin. It was decorated with a pattern called *abr* ('cloud' in Persian), which was obtained by binding together separate warp threads, with

the characteristic effect of making the colours run into each other along the seam. *Adras* was produced in Bukhara, Samarkand, Marghilan, Khujand and Karatagh. The patterns used in Bukhara fabrics were large, multicoloured and bright. In Samarkand and Khujand the patterns were more restrained, often recalling the almond tree (*bādām*), and were known variously as *bādāmcha*, *āftāba* (jug) or simply *darakht* (tree).

The part-silk fabric *be-qasab* was very popular. There were local variations with regard to patterns and colouring. *Be-qasab* had a patterned silk base and a cotton weft. It was decorated using fine narrow stripes that alternated with wider coloured ones. *Be-qasab* could also be glazed, which lent it a characteristic *moiré* incandescence.

Kanaus, or *shāhī*, was a luxury fabric of pure silk. This fabric had a silk warp and weft that were equal in thickness. More than anything else, Bukhara *kanaus* fabrics were valued for their compactness and smoothness.

In Samarkand and Bukhara, a magnificent smoothly woven crimson velvet was made called *bakhmal* or *makhmal*, which was exported to Russia and other countries. In addition to this smooth velvet Bukhara also manufactured a mottled velvet with *abr* drawings. Bukhara velvet featured both silk and cotton weft. Bukhara also manufactured two types of satin, one with a silk weft and the other with a cotton weft. There was a great demand in Bukhara for a fine, transparent fabric for kerchiefs that was decorated with a printed pattern consisting of geometric and floral motifs.

The nineteenth century saw the widespread development of Bukhara's art of gold embroidery (*zardūzī*). A few magnificent examples from the first half of the century have been preserved to this day, as have a rather greater number of items dating from the middle of the century. Our knowledge of the art of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century gold embroidery is based exclusively on written sources. Gold embroidery was done chiefly on velvet, silk, *alācha* and satin, using a variety of gold threads. The most widespread ornamental designs were floral and geometric patterns. Predominant until the middle of the nineteenth century were floral compositions with small patterns spread evenly over the entire embroidered area. The overall style was one of simple, clearcut forms. These magnificent products combined the bright lustre of gold and silver patterns with the softly iridescent matt shimmer of the background, and the lively play of light-reflecting surfaces created pieces of great beauty.

Between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, the centres of Central Asian fabric production that we have examined underwent rapid development and greatly increased their output. They were in contact with and influenced one another, borrowing various motifs, while at the same time preserving their individual traditions and uniqueness. In the period under consideration, there was an increase in the variety of fabrics and in the

diversity of their design and colouring. The market for fabrics expanded, as did the volume of imports and exports, thereby making Transoxanian artistic fabrics celebrated worldwide.

Part Two

TEXTILE ARTS IN TRANSOXANIA¹

(L. Carmel and M. Niyazova)

The physical topography of Transoxania supported a population engaged in three lifestyles: sedentary, semi-sedentary or semi-nomadic, and nomadic.² Both in their materials of construction and in the varieties of sizes and shapes, Central Asian textiles are reflective of these lifestyles. They typically share a bold sense of design and a preference for vibrant colours. Silk and cotton textiles were made by the sedentary and semi-sedentary populations, living in the oases and engaged mainly in agriculture. Wool and leather textiles derive primarily from pastoral nomads. The use of silk or cotton, and wool or leather in a single textile product is indicative of the interdependence of the three lifestyles.

Extant Transoxanian textiles made during the period covered by this volume are mostly those attributed to the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Surviving textiles display high levels of artistic and technical achievement that suggest a continuum of earlier, well-developed textile traditions. It is usually impossible, however, to date the surviving textiles with a high degree of precision. Dating attributions to the late eighteenth century or early, middle or late nineteenth century are generally possible, with types well identified, but the dates should still be treated as approximate.

Since much work already exists on the textiles of Iran and India, it has seemed to the Editors that a detailed study of the textile arts of Transoxania and adjacent areas could be of special interest to readers. Part Two of this chapter is thus, in effect, a supplement to Part One.

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² Van Leeuwen et al., 1994, p. 37.

Sources for study

Written sources for Transoxanian textiles before 1850 are scant and our knowledge is based primarily on extant textiles located in museums and private collections.³ The fieldwork of ethnographers over the last century or so has shed light on textile production after 1850,⁴ while historians have generally focused on material prior to 1500.⁵ From a study of both the earlier and later material, a picture of aspects of textile production from 1500 to 1850 emerges. In Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, archives may yet yield additional information about the textile traditions of Central Asia.

Risālas (treatises; here, books of regulations of artisans' guilds) preserve information about the late nineteenth century.⁶ Travellers' accounts, written mostly in the late nineteenth century but also earlier, are useful for their narratives of visual impressions.⁷ Photographs from the late nineteenth century provide excellent visual records of contemporary garments and furnishings.⁸ Archaeological excavations in the oases of Transoxania have produced few, if any, textiles made from the period 1500–1850.⁹ The excavations at the Chār-Bakr cemetery, on the outskirts of Bukhara, have yielded silk fabrics made in the eighteenth century. These silks were probably imported from Syria.¹⁰

Craft workers and guilds

Textiles made for sale were produced in workshops by men and boys, often with the assistance of female relatives at home. Men were organized into guilds called *kāsabas* (from *kasb*, profession). The women's work at home was part of a production system based on family participation.¹¹ The guilds of textile craftsmen, like other craft guilds in Central Asia, held regular meetings of a quasi-religious and social nature. Each guild had a patron

³ The majority of textiles held in public institutions are in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Russia. Outside the former Soviet Union, major museum collections are in Germany, the United Kingdom, Israel, Canada and the United States.

⁴ These ethnographers include Chepelevetskaya, Goncharova, Makhkamova, Pisarchik and Sukhareva.

⁵ See Mukminova, 1992.

⁶ Gavrilov, 1928, pp. 223–41; Goncharova, 1986, pp. 9–13; Mukminova, 1976, pp. 25–9, 57, 75; Skallerup, 1990, pp. 86–8; Sukhareva, 1984, pp. 201–15.

⁷ There are numerous accounts; see, e.g. Clavijo, 1928; Moser, 1885; Schuyler 1966; Vambéry 1865; Wolff, 1845.

⁸ Naumkin, 1993.

⁹ For excavations at the Bibi Khanum mausoleum, see Sukhareva, 1954, p. 45; 1962, p. 80; at Gur-i Amir, see Shishkin, 1964, pp. 3–73; at Ishrat-khana, see Kononov, 1958, pp. 139–41; at Shah-i Zinda, see Nemtseva, 1972, pp. 243–51; in the Tashkent region, see Voronets, 1951.

¹⁰ Nekrasova and Levushkina, 1994, pp. 193–207.

¹¹ Skallerup, 1990, p. 96; Sukhareva, 1966, p. 197.

called *pīr* who was believed to have founded the guild or significantly advanced the craft. At meetings craftsmen venerated their patron and the souls of artisans who had passed before them. Meetings began with a reading of the *risāla*, the guild's book of rules and customs.¹² Studies of *risālas* of the textile guilds could shed light on the organization of textile production.

The guild members were master craftsmen called *ustāds* (masters), who passed on their expertise to their sons or to hired apprentices.¹³ Craftsmen belonging to the same guild typically lived in the same neighbourhood, sometimes with the neighbourhood named after their craft. The Suzangar quarter, as the name implies, was where many *sūzangars* (needle-makers) lived.¹⁴ In Bukhara, the Jūybār quarter produced *ikat* (dye-resistant textile) fabrics.¹⁵ The Mīr Dostum quarter, called *guzar-i zardūzī* (the gold-embroiderers' passage) by Bukharans, was home to many masters of the so-called Bukharan gold embroidery.¹⁶

Expertise that was passed on from father to son, and neighbourhoods that were insulated from one another, supported a division of craft labour often along ethnic lines. In Bukhara, the cold dyers were Jewish or former Jews called *chalias*. Evidence suggests that the hot dyers were Tajiks. It should be noted also that Persians from Merv, forced to settle in Bukhara, were involved in the production of silk cloth.¹⁷

Silk manufacture

The manufacture of silk was concentrated in the cities of Bukhara, Marghilan, Kokand and Khujand.¹⁸ The city or town of manufacture was often a part of the name of silk, or silk-and-cotton, fabrics. For instance, the silk-and-cotton striped fabric known as *alācha* could be *alācha-i bukhārī*, *alācha-i karshigī* or *alācha-i kitābī*.¹⁹

The designations of artisans reveal a highly specialized system of silk cloth production.²⁰ Reelers (*pillakashs*) softened silkworm cocoons, often cultured at home, and wound them onto reels. Spinners (*ashtābs* or *charkhtābs*) twisted the silk onto bobbins. *Davragars* or *tanigachīs* strung the warp yarns on looms. Working on hand looms, weavers specialized

¹² Gavrillov, 1928, pp. 227–8; Mukminova, 1976, pp. 28, 57; Sukhareva, 1984, p. 203; Skallerup, 1990, pp. 84–8.

¹³ Goncharova, 1986, p. 11; Skallerup, 1990, pp. 95–6.

¹⁴ Sukhareva, 1958, p. 90.

¹⁵ Gibbon et al., 1988, pp. 11–12; Sukhareva, 1966, pp. 198–9.

¹⁶ Goncharova, 1986, p. 9; Sukhareva, 1958, p. 94.

¹⁷ Gibbon et al., 1988, pp. 10, 12; Sukhareva, 1958, p. 92; 1966, p. 159.

¹⁸ Skallerup, 1990, p. 61; Sukhareva 1954, p. 18.

¹⁹ Mukminova, 1976, p. 51; Niyazova, 1993, pp. 154–6.

²⁰ Mukminova, 1976, pp. 148–50; Sukhareva, 1966, pp. 197–8.

in a variety of cloths named after materials, weave structures and patterns. The titles of weavers such as *bakhmalbāfs*, *shāhībāfs* or *alāchabāfs* reveal the types of cloth they wove. Silk-and-cotton cloth was given a glossy finish by *pardāzgars* who applied a starch solution and rubbed it to a shine.

Silk velvet was called *bakhmal*. Structurally a form of weave with pile, the plush surface of velvet is formed by the raised and cut ends of a supplementary set of silk warp yarns. High-grade cloth woven with silk warps and wefts, called *shāhī*, was either monochromatic, usually red or green, or multicoloured. *Kimkhāb* (brocade), also monochromatic or multicoloured, was an all-silk cloth with equally thick warps and wefts. *Atlas*, with silk warps and wefts, was multicoloured and patterned, a resist-dyed *ikat*. Several varieties of cloth were woven in silk and cotton yarns. *Adras* was multicoloured and patterned, resist-dyed *ikat*; *be-qasab* and *alācha* were striped fabrics.²¹

Cotton manufacture

The first stages of cotton-fibre production were performed outside the guild system, by girls and women at home. Women separated the cotton fibres from the bolls by hand and cleaned the fibres of seeds. The cleaned cotton fibres were spun into yarn using spinning-wheels.

A number of cotton cloths were made in Central Asia. The highest grade was *karbās* (or *karpās*, finer cotton) or *bayāz*, which was sometimes bleached by *shustagars* (washermen) to make cloth called *shusta*. *Khāsa* was a fine grade of white cotton muslin used for shrouds, linings, turbans and women's headwear. *Qalamī* was a coarser variety of cotton cloth made at home in rural areas. *Alācha*, mentioned above as striped cloth of silk and cotton, could also be made entirely from cotton.²²

Classification of textiles

Textiles may be classified according to a number of criteria. The most common are the region of production, ethnic identity of maker, time of production, function of the textile and material of construction. The remainder of this chapter will present textiles classified according to three main features: resistdyed, embroidered and woven.

²¹ Makhkamova, 1983, p. 81; Mukminova, 1976, pp. 69–72; Skallerup, 1990, pp. 62–5; Sukhareva, 1954, pp. 21–33; Zernikel, 1997, p. 214.

²² Mukminova, 1976, pp. 46–53; Skallerup, 1990, p. 56; Sukhareva, 1954, p. 26; 1966, p. 197.

RESIST-DYED TEXTILES

Ikat

In the West the well-known resist-dyed textiles from Central Asia are called *ikat* (dye-resistant textile). They are made by a technique where sections of yarn or cloth are selectively tied and made to resist dyes. The tied areas do not absorb the dyes and therefore retain their original colour. Successive tying and dyeing produces varied colours so that patterns emerge with a characteristic fuzziness.²³

Central Asian *ikat* or *abr* is characterized by bold motifs, abstract patterns and brilliant colours. Made in Ferghana and in major cities like Bukhara and Samarkand, *ikat* fabric was made into garments for men, women and children. Wall hangings, room dividers and covers were made up of four to six loom-width panels sewn together. *Ikat* fragments were recycled into parts for quilted and appliqué covers, coats, wall hangings and small storage bags.

Ikat from Central Asia is warp *ikat*. Bundles of warp yarns are resistdyed prior to weaving, creating patterns that have a characteristic blur of colour in the warp. While warp yarns are always of silk in Central Asian *ikat*, silk or cotton is used for the weft. Woven in variations of a plain-weave structure, *ikat* with cotton-weft yarns, or *adras*, is warp-faced, while *ikat* with silkweft yarns, or *atlas*, is a predominant-warp weave. In warp-faced, silk-andcotton *ikat* the thick, white, cotton-weft yarns form parallel ridges in the cloth, but are hidden by the silk warps. Only shiny, multicoloured silk-warp yarns are visible. Both warp and weft yarns are visible in all silk-predominantwarp *ikat*, but the warp yarns predominate (Fig. 2). The red weft yarns, seen with the multicoloured warp yarns, create overall hues of pink and red.

Ikat production required the expertise of highly specialized craftsmen and their assistants and apprentices. The *nishānzan* marked the warp yarns that would be tied into bundles with cotton threads. These bundles were then brought to a dye house where they were immersed in dye baths. The bundles were returned to the *ikat* binding workshop, or *abr-bandī*, and retied. This process was repeated up to three times, creating *ikat* patterns with up to seven colours.²⁴ Dyers specialized in hot or cold dyeing. Blue was obtained by a cold indigo dye bath. An excessive application of indigo created shades of purple and green. Yellow and red were obtained by hot dye baths made from flowers or insects.²⁵

²³ Larsen et al., 1976, p. 129; Sukhareva, 1954, p. 22.

²⁴ Sukhareva, 1954, p. 22; Zernikel, 1997, p. 224.

²⁵ Mukminova, 1976, pp. 79–94; Skallerup, 1990, pp. 64–5.



Fig. 2. Uzbekistan. Woven *ikat* (silk warp and cotton weft) *chapan* (coat). Late nineteenth century. (Photo: Courtesy of Omar Masom, Turkmen Gallery, London.)

The multitude of motifs and patterns seen in Central Asian *ikat* textiles suggests different places and times of production. However, the scarcity of bodies of firmly dated materials makes precise attributions difficult.²⁶ It is generally accepted that *ikat* textiles showing smaller motifs and six or seven colours date to the first half of the nineteenth century, while those showing larger motifs date to the late nineteenth century.²⁷

Tie-dye

Central Asian tie-dye (*qalqai*) is distinguished by the quality of exceptionally fine and soft silk used to tie and die,²⁸ and a range of bold colours and geometric motifs. Tie-dye material was used to make women's garments – head covers, undergarments and dresses. Tie-dye is a resist-dye technique where the dyeing process is carried out after weaving, in contrast to the resist-dyeing for *ikat* which takes place prior to weaving.²⁹ Jews specialized in the production of *qalqai*.³⁰

²⁶ See Browne, 1989, for the collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum, acquired in 1880; Makhkamova, 1983, pp. 69–89.

²⁷ Gibbon et al., 1988, p. 14; Sukhareva, 1954, p. 23.

²⁸ Lancet-Muller, 1967, Figs. 4.10 and 4.26; Sukhareva, 1966, p. 197.

²⁹ Larsen et al., 1976, p. 27.

³⁰ Lancet-Muller, 1967, p. 3; Sukhareva, 1958, p. 92; 1966, p. 197.

Block-Print

Block-printed textiles (*chīt*) were made in major cities and small towns in Central Asia. Bukhara and the surrounding towns of Jandar, Chitgaran and Rametan were especially well-known for their block-printed textiles. Those made in Bukhara show two colours, red and black. Block-prints made in Tashkent were multicoloured, showing blue, green and yellow in addition to red and black. Used as covers for mattresses and heaters, and linings for clothing and furnishings, block-printed textiles were printed on *karbās*, plain-weave cotton cloth.

Like *ikat* and tie-dye, block-printed textiles were resist-dyed and required a series of processes carried out by specialized craftsmen. Woodworkers carved motifs in wooden blocks, and cold and hot dyers prepared dyes. The textile printers (*chītgars*) applied mordants to resist dyes where desired, and repeatedly stamped the cotton with blocks. Black contours were made with a block called a *basma*, carved from a hard wood such as pear. The block used for red colour areas, called a *dud*, was carved from a soft wood such as poplar.³¹

EMBROIDERED TEXTILES

Metallic yarn

Metallic-yarn embroidery, or *zardūzī*, is often referred to as Bukharan gold embroidery. Produced in both Samarkand and Bukhara before the nineteenth century, it was made solely in Bukhara from the nineteenth century.³² Garments such as coats, boots and slippers, and forehead bands for women called *pishānabands* were embroidered under the auspices of the emir for the ruling class and the privileged of the khanate. Levels of rank, wealth and influence were indicated by the amount of embroidery on a garment. The application of semi-precious stones and metal plaques were further means of displaying wealth.

Metallic-yarn embroideries from Bukhara are broadly classified into two groups: *zamīndūzī*, ‘ground embroidery’, which covers the entire foundation fabric; and *guldūzī*, ‘flowered embroidery’, which partially covers the fabric. Embroidered motifs were often stitched over stencils of kidskin or thick paper. Craft workers producing metallic-yarn embroidery used mostly imported yarns that they secured with a couching stitch of silk or cotton. Foundation fabrics were typically imported or locally produced velvet and fabrics made from silk, cotton or wool.³³

³¹ Perlina, 1984, pp. 77–8; Sukhareva, 1954, pp. 49–50.

³² Goncharova, 1986, p. 8; Sidorenko et al., 1981, p. 8.

³³ Goncharova, 1986, p. 17; Zernikel, 1997, p. 233.

Sūzanī embroidery

Sūzanī, from *sūzan* for needle, are embroideries made in cities and villages that are recognized by particular floral designs and an abundance of red and dark pink colours of embroidered yarns. Large naturalistic and abstract flowers are the predominant motifs. *Sūzanī* embroideries can be attributed to cities and towns in present-day Uzbekistan and Tajikistan by an analysis of their style.³⁴

Sūzanī embroideries were made outside the guild organization, by girls and women for a bride's trousseau in various sizes determined by function. The largest, measuring 2.5 x 2.0 m or more, were used to decorate walls, to partition rooms and to cover beds. A smaller version, serving the same functions, is known as a *nīm-sūzanī* and usually measures 1.5 x 2.0 m. A ceremonial wedding-night sheet, or *rāijā*, is slightly wider than a *nīm-sūzanī*, usually measuring 1.8 x 1.2 m. A prayer cloth, or *jā-namāz*, measures 1.6 x 1.2 m. Embroideries were made and used for numerous household furnishings such as wall-niche covers (*gulkurpas*), wrapping cloths (*jāypūshs*) and pillow cases (*bālīnpūshs*).³⁵

Like *ikat* covers and wall hangings, *sūzanī* embroideries are typically made up of four to six narrow loom-width panels sewn together. The embroidery yarn is usually silk, but cotton and wool are also used. The foundation fabric of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century *sūzanī* embroideries is plainweave cotton *karbās* (Fig. 3), and reportedly sometimes linen. Motifs were drawn on the narrow panels by a professional or a family member prior to embroidery. The panels were sewn together following embroidery, often in a slightly unmatched manner.

The stitch repertory of *sūzanī* embroideries consists of variations of three basic types of stitches – couching, looping and counted stitch. The couching stitches, Bukharan and rumanian (*basma* and *kanda-khayāl*), fill the spaces of the large flowers that are so characteristic of *sūzanī* embroideries (Fig. 4). Couching is a stitch where a laid yarn is secured to the ground fabric by another yarn. Bukharan and rumanian couching stitches employ the same yarn for both laying down and securing. The looping stitches, called chain (*yarma*) and buttonhole, also fill large floral areas and outline flowers, leaves and stems. The counted stitch is a cross-stitch called *īrāqī*. *Sūzanī* embroideries that display cross-stitches are entirely covered with these stitches, so that their ground fabrics are not visible.³⁶

Extant *sūzanī* embroideries are most often attributed to Bukhara, Nurata, Shahr-i Sabz, Samarkand, Ura-tepe, Pskent and Tashkent. There are clear stylistic distinctions between embroideries made in the cities and towns of western and central Uzbekistan,

³⁴ Chepelevetskaya, 1961, pp. 25, 39.

³⁵ Tursunaliyev, 1976, p. 5; Yanai, 1986, pp. 17–18.

³⁶ Taube, 1994, pp. 7–15; Thomas, 1954, pp. 21, 33, 55–6, 60–5.



Fig. 3. Bukhara. Embroidered *karbās* (silk on cotton) *sūzanī* and detail. Mid-nineteenth century. (Photo: Courtesy of Omar Masom, Turkmen Gallery, London.)

including Bukhara and Nur-ata, and those made in eastern Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, including Tashkent and Pskent. In the broadest sense, embroideries made in western and central Uzbekistan display naturalistic floral forms and those made in eastern Uzbekistan and Tajikistan show repetitions of large disc-like forms. A single *sūzanī* embroidery made in any one of the towns and cities between the eastern and western areas of production

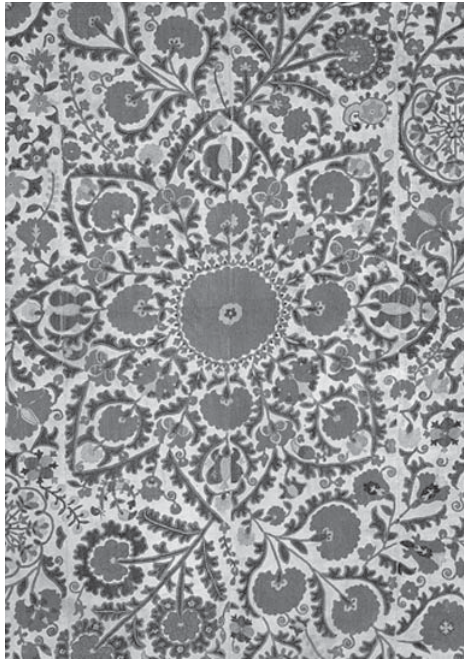


Fig. 4. Bukhara. Detail from *karbās* (silk on cotton) *sūzanī*. Second half of nineteenth century. (Photo: Courtesy of Omar Masom, Turkmen Gallery, London.)

often displays characteristics associated with more than one centre. Attribution to a city or town must therefore be approached with a degree of caution.³⁷

Sūzanī embroideries attributed to Nur-ata are easily recognized by their delicate floral forms, rendered in the most naturalistic manner. Rows of large red disc-like shapes cover the cloth's entire surface in embroideries attributed to eastern Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Referred to as *palak* in Central Asia, but as *sūzanī* in the West, they may display as few as 6 or more than 60 disc-like shapes.³⁸

Lakai embroidery

Abstract curvilinear forms, brilliant colours and particular small-scale formats distinguish embroideries made by the Lakais. Written sources are scanty regarding the history of this Uzbek tribe and the goods they made. The Lakais seem to have been pastoral nomads until the late nineteenth century when they turned to agriculture for their livelihood.³⁹ The shapes and sizes of Lakai embroideries suggest their origin and use in a nomadic context. These include large rectangular bags for storing mattresses and bedding; V-shaped fringed bands

³⁷ Lindahl, 1975, pp. 63–5.

³⁸ Yanai, 1986, pp. 11–13.

³⁹ Gibbon et al., 1994, p. 69.

to hang between layers of quilts; long narrow bands for securing tent structures; small bags for holding cooking utensils; and trapezoidal covers to place under saddles.

A particular size and two related shapes of embroideries called *iglich* are characteristic of Lakai textile production.⁴⁰ One is a simple square shape, often with a triangular flap on one side, measuring approximately 60 cm on each side. The other is a pentagonal, shield-like shape, measuring approximately 60 x 40 cm. Both types were used to decorate tent interiors.

Lakai embroideries may also be recognized by a particular style of motifs and patterns. They are characterized by curvilinear forms surrounded with much visible ground fabric. The curved lines of wave-like and horn-like forms are reinforced by the use of looped embroidery stitches, chain-stitch and blanket stitch, that adapt well to curved forms. Silk embroidery yarn and a variety of foundation fabrics with different weave structures are also typical of extant Lakai embroideries. Wool in plain weave and cotton in twill weave are common. Appliqué is often seen with luxury fabrics, but is used sparingly.

Turkmen embroidery

Turkmen embroideries are characterized by highly organized arrangements of abstract flowers and trees and precisely executed embroidery stitches (Fig. 5). A type of looped stitch, the buttonhole stitch, is the most common. Girls and women used to embroider with silk yarns on locally woven silk fabric.

A type of head cover called *chyrpy* worn by Turkmen women may be identified by its characteristic shape in the form of a coat (Fig. 6). Its narrow, vestigial sleeves are joined together across the back of the garment with a band of fabric, but it was placed over the head rather than worn as a coat. It is usually made from silk woven in a plain weave and embroidered with silk yarn in buttonhole stitch. Abstract floral forms are stitched mostly in dark red, yellow and white. The colour of a *chyrpy* indicated the stage in life of its wearer. Dark blue was for young women, yellow for middle-aged women and white for older women.⁴¹

Also embroidered in buttonhole stitch, a pentagonal-shaped camel trapping called *asmalyk* was made for use in wedding processions. Typically embroidered with red silk yarns on white foundation fabric, *asmalyks* were draped on the sides of a camel (Fig. 7).⁴²

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 70.

⁴¹ Kalter, 1984, p. 88; Rossi-Osmida (ed.), 1996, pp. 165–7.

⁴² Franses, 1996; Pinner and Franses (eds.), 1980, p. 165.

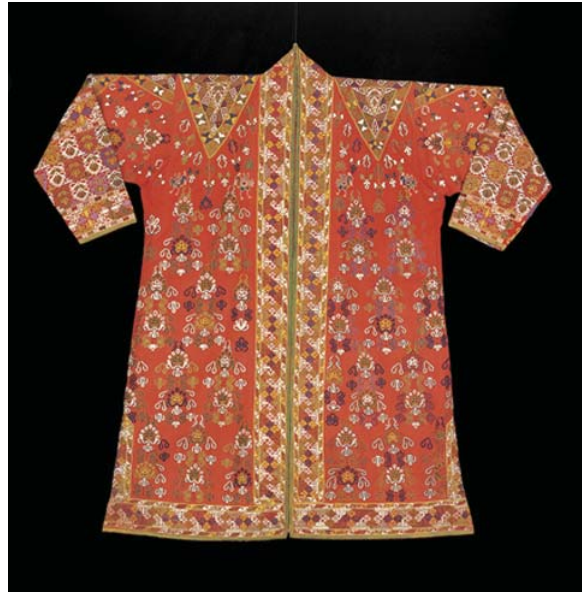


Fig. 5. Extremely rare embroidered silk on red felt *chapan* (coat). Chaudur Turkmen tribe. Mid-nineteenth century. (Photo: Courtesy of Omar Masom, Turkmen Gallery, London.)



Fig. 6. Turkmenistan. Rare embroidered white silk *chyrpy*. Mid-nineteenth century. (Photo: Courtesy of Omar Masom, Turkmen Gallery, London.)

WOVEN TEXTILES

All the textiles discussed above are woven, but their distinctiveness results from resist-dye or embroidery techniques carried out on cloth that was already woven. Central Asia also produced highly valued cloth patterned with woven stripes. There was no further embellishment to the cloth. These striped fabrics, made entirely from silk, or silk and cotton, or only cotton, were made primarily into garments. Weavers produced striped fabrics that were associated with their cities and regions. The Bukhara region was known for the



Fig. 7. Turkmenistan. Turkmen *asmalyk* in woven wool. Late nineteenth century. (Photo: Courtesy of Omar Masom, Turkmen Gallery, London.)

production of *alācha-i gajdumak*, a multicoloured cotton fabric with narrow stripes of yellow or dark red. Samarkand was known for *mushk-i zafar*, a fabric of yellow and blue stripes, and Khwarazm for cotton fabrics of narrow red, green and light purple stripes.⁴³

Conclusion

Dazzling colours, swirling motifs and varied textures and shapes characterize the surviving textiles made in Central Asia in the late eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries. These textiles, which still today delight the eye, offer material evidence of ways of life shrouded from our understanding by the lack of available written documentation. They may yet yield a wealth of knowledge about the oasis cities inhabited by multiethnic peoples and about the semi-nomadic groups whose pastoral lifestyles have come to an end in more recent times.

⁴³ Sukhareva, 1954, p. 21; 1982, pp. 28–9.

Part Three

CARPETS

(*E. Tsareva*)

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries constitute a special period in the history of Islamic carpet-making, and it is rightly described as 'classical'. During this time, pile weaving – a craft dating back thousands of years in Central Asia and Khurasan – came to acquire patterns and compositions which greatly enhanced the image of the craft throughout Eurasia, becoming a type of cultural symbol shared by all the civilizations located within this large area. Carpet-making in these territories reveals a unique diversity of techniques, which can nevertheless be divided into three main groups: flat weaving, knotted weaving and felting. While acknowledging the importance of the first and last as major crafts of many countries in the region, our present concern is exclusively with pile weaving.

Like many other arts and crafts that flourished from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, pile weaving in the Islamic East presents an extremely colourful picture. At the same time, there are many aspects of it that frequently make it difficult to provide an exact attribution in terms of date or place. There are a number of explanations for this, but arguably the most important is the practice, typical of the age of empires, of forcing groups of craft workers, the communities of small and large towns and even entire tribes to relocate to alien territories. This inevitably led to a fusion of artistic and technological processes, as well as to the emergence of many marginal variants. The situation was further complicated by the large variety of weaving traditions present among the nomadic and settled populations, as well as by the diversity of local technical and decorative canons, many of which have been insufficiently studied to this day.

Carpet-making in the territory under consideration – an area stretching from north-eastern Iran to western China and from Transoxania and Khurasan to northern India – reveals a knotting technique that was common to the entire region: the asymmetrical (Persian) knot. The dominance of the right-hand open-on-left knot points to the common source

of the local carpet tradition. Exceptions are to be found in the pile weaving of the Turkmen-Saryks (Sāriqs), Yomuts (Yamuts) and Karakalpaks, who used the symmetrical (Turkish) knot, and also in Tibet, which favoured looping techniques. Another feature common to the period in question was the absolute dominance in carpet design of the frame composition, with the decorated surface divided into a central area framed by rows of borders. Exceptions to this rule are extremely rare and, as we shall see later, constitute attempts to imitate archaic patterns of special types.

We shall examine the carpet-producing territories in the following order: Khurasan (north-eastern Iran and Afghanistan); western Turkistan; Transoxania; East Turkistan (Xinjiang); Mongolia and north-western China; and northern India. These regions will be analysed first in terms of urban and rural carpet production, to be followed (where appropriate) by weaving among nomadic tribes.

Khurasan (north-eastern Iran and Afghanistan)

Our knowledge of Persian carpets before the sixteenth century is based largely on writings and depictions in miniature paintings showing geometric-style small rugs. From the sixteenth century onwards the situation changes and we have at our disposal an increasing body of material evidence revealing significant changes in carpet appearance: these include large carpets with floral and medallion motifs, hunting scenes, and depictions of heavenly gardens with intricate multi-layer compositions. Without doubt, these changes were brought about by the interest of the Safavid royal house and later dynasties in pile weaving, and, as a consequence, the craft of carpet design was elevated to the level of court art. Carpets, together with ceramics, calligraphy and miniatures, were created in a style characteristic of each dynasty and named accordingly. Because the patrons were Muslims, the works of the court master craftsman came to be classified as Islamic art in modern studies.

As for the organizational side of the trade, the weaving shops sometimes carried out only orders placed by the court. More often, however, they would combine the manufacture of articles intended for the court with the production of more broadly commercial products, which inevitably came under the influence of 'high' style. The phenomenon whereby folk tradition continued to use and develop subjects that had long ceased to be a feature of court fashion was not uncommon.

After the break-up of Timur's empire, Herat was annexed by the Safavids to Persia. The new dynasty equalled its predecessors in its love of luxury and the decorative arts, and throughout the entire sixteenth century Herat remained a very important cultural centre not only for Khurasan, but also for the country as a whole. Herat and Mashhad also remained

famous as important carpet-making centres, and, as before, their products were rated highly both in Iran and in the neighbouring countries. Adam Olearius, who visited the country in the early seventeenth century, wrote that ‘Herat is the biggest and most beautiful provincial town after Mashhad, and it is here that the most beautiful carpets in all Persia are made.’⁴⁴ This is also corroborated by Indian sources, which state that the best carpets were produced in Herat in the sixteenth and at the beginning of the seventeenth centuries.⁴⁵

Like many other pile products of the classical period, the carpets of Khurasan, as we have already seen, can be difficult to categorize. The weaving techniques used in Khurasan carpets remained unchanged for many centuries: a cotton, or occasionally silk, base and weft, pile incorporating wool of the highest quality, and the use of an asymmetrical knot (*juftī*) on four, or sometimes six threads of the base. However, a large number of local products were made using the usual asymmetrical knot, which was brought to this territory by weavers from the western regions of Iran who were forced to settle there by Shāh ʿAbbās.

One of the most characteristic artistic features of Herat and Mashhad was the domination of floral forms, including the motif of the ‘heavenly garden’ and palmettes with wide dentate leaves. The latter were combined with arabesques, portrayals of wild animals and birds and the ‘cloud bands’ motif. Another distinctive feature of the Herat carpets of this time was a wide border with alternating large and small palmettes.⁴⁶

During the rule of Shāh ʿAbbās I (1587–1629), thousands of carpets with large fan-shaped palmettes, lanceolate leaves and arabesques were exported from Herat into Turkey, India and Europe (we often find them in European paintings of the seventeenth century, particularly in the works of Velázquez, Rubens, Van Dyck, Vermeer, Terborch, Metsu and other artists).⁴⁷ Thousands more were used in Iran itself. In addition, we know that, in the seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth, Herat carpets were copied enthusiastically by weavers in Kurdistan, Azarbaijan and India. As a result, specialists have as yet been unable to identify with certainty the attributive features of Khurasan carpets from the classical period.

Patronized by Shāh ʿAbbās, the weaving shops of Herat produced large, more or less square-shaped carpets of up to 15 m in length. They are noted for the unusual richness and warmth of their colours. The most common colours used as background are red for the central field and green/cobalt for the main border, although cobalt backgrounds with

⁴⁴ Olearius, 1696, p. 288.

⁴⁵ See Martin, 1908, p. 69.

⁴⁶ Dimand and Mailey, 1973, Figs. 71–6.

⁴⁷ See, for example, King and Sylvester, 1983; Mills, 1983.

white bordering are also to be found, as in the large sixteenth-century carpet in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York,⁴⁸ and yellow backgrounds with red bordering, as in the ‘Potemkin’ carpet to be seen in the Musée des Tissus in Lyons (Fig. 8).⁴⁹

From the second half of the seventeenth century, patterns on Herat carpets became smaller and compositions a little simpler.⁵⁰ After 1731, following the destruction of the city by Nādir Shāh (1736–47), Herat’s weaving shops almost went out of existence and weavers were relocated to the western regions of the country. Some time later the craft revived somewhat, albeit in forms that were a far cry from the classical models: patterns became smaller and smaller, and the range of colours increasingly poor.

Khurasan’s suppliers of luxurious carpets to the court and the eastern and European markets worked in a large number of small settlements and villages that catered for the needs of the local market. In the nineteenth century, carpets were produced in Tuna, Turshiz, Kain and Birjand as well as in Herat and Mashhad. There is evidence to suggest that local production had roots going far back into the past. The best products manufactured include the ‘basic’ latticework carpet of the seventeenth century with its changing background colour and its large number of narrow borders.⁵¹

We know little about the village carpet industry of this period. We can only assume that many later forms are imitations of earlier prototypes.⁵² These imitations have been heavily distorted and are therefore no longer easily identifiable. At the same time, miniature paintings provide evidence of the aristocracy’s continuing use of small rugs which were, in all likelihood, produced by nomads. For a number of centuries they comprised part of the local carpet-making tradition and served as prototypes for a series of ‘urban’ compositions.

For the nomadic inhabitants of the steppes, the carpet was not simply a pleasant artefact with which to furnish the home, but an integral part, since textile coverings and sacks for keeping utensils in were used by the inhabitants of yurts and tents as a substitute for virtually every item of furniture. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the main livestock-breeders in Khurasan and the adjoining territories were Turkmens, Baluchis and a number of other tribes whose products are usually classified as Baluchi.

Turkmen and Baluchi carpets from north-east Iran are in many ways similar to those of western Turkistan. We shall discuss the Turkmens shortly, in the section covering western Turkistan. The Baluchis themselves came to Khurasan from the south-west in the

⁴⁸ Dimand and Mailey, 1973, p. 68, Catalogue nos. 30, 33.

⁴⁹ Published in Bennet, 1987a, Vol. 34, p. 44, Fig. 12.

⁵⁰ See Dimand and Mailey, 1973, pp. 70, 71, Catalogue no. 30, 33.

⁵¹ See Sovrani, 1999, Fig. 58.

⁵² See Ellis, 1988, Figs. 51, 52.



Fig. 8. The Potemkin ‘Portuguese’ carpet. Khurasan. Late sixteenth century. Photo: © Musée des Tissus et des Arts décoratifs, photo D.R.

fourteenth century and, as certain features of technique and ornamentation suggest, brought with them skills that had been influenced heavily by the Turkmens.

Unlike the Turkmens, whose products are classified by tribal groups, Baluchi carpets incorporate characteristic territorial indicators and divide into the following types: Sistan, Chakhansur, Farah and Shindand, Adraskand and Herat, Afghanistan–Iran border, and Iran. Irrespective of the exact place of production, Baluchi carpets are noted for a strict, somewhat dark colour gamut and compositions with geometric flora and fauna as their



Fig. 9. Baluchi rug. Second half of nineteenth century. 168 x 91 cm. (Photo: © The Hali Archive, A247/5197, Lefevre Archive.)

subjectmatter (Fig. 9). As regards production techniques, the carpets were woven using mostly the asymmetric open-on-left knot, though some groups also used asymmetric open-on-right and symmetric knots. The warp, weft and pile were made from wool of the highest quality; the pile could often include silk, cotton and camel hair.

As well as the Baluchis, this territory was inhabited by such groups as the Timuris, Taimanis, Jamshedis, Bahluris, Tajiks, Pashtoons, Kurds and Arabs. Most of them were active producers of pile carpeting, whereas the Tajiks and Pashtoons, at least in the time known to us, did not produce any pile weavings (they made flat-woven ones). With an appearance similar to that of Baluchi carpets, Kurdish carpets were woven using a symmetrical knot, while the Arab variant had a cotton base and a brighter colour range.⁵³ Despite the popularity of pile carpets throughout this region, their manufacture was by no means universal, and the territories of Nuristan and Kuhistan, although close to carpet-producing Khurasan and India, did not practise this type of weaving.⁵⁴

⁵³ For details of Baluchi carpet-making, see Black and Loveless, 1976; Wegner, 1978, p. 287; T. Z. Dhall and D. P. Dhall, 1983, pp. 481–7.

⁵⁴ Selandia, 1987, pp. 33–5.

Western Turkistan

During the period in question the territory of western Turkistan (the area between the Amu Darya, or Oxus, and the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea) was settled chiefly by nomadic and semi-nomadic Turkmen tribes: the Sālors (Sālars), Ersaris, Saryks, Tekes, Yomuts, Chaudurs, Arbachis, Igdiris, Goklens and many other small groups. Unlike the towns, where carpet production was commercial in character and was operated by men, weaving among the nomads was the exclusive domain of women.

From the earliest times, the Turkmens were famed as makers of magnificently designed and manufactured pile carpets, and they played a large part in popularizing this type of weaving over the territory of Eurasia. Because of important inter-tribal differences, all the tribes adhered to specific decorative canons, which meant that Turkmen pile carpeting could easily be differentiated from that of other peoples of the steppe.

Turkmen carpet-making is typified by a number of characteristic features. One of these is the use of wool for the base, the weft and the pile. However, cotton and silk (the latter often in very large quantities) are sometimes used for the pile. The robustness of the carpet depended on its purpose, with the number of knots varying from two to five – and in individual models 8,000 and even 10,000 per square decimetre. The specialist Turkmen craftswomen were magnificent dyers, creating deep, bright colours which with time not only did not fade, but even acquired a special depth and a glowing sheen. For all the outer modesty of the palette, the number of colours present in the best old carpets could comprise from 18 to 24 tones.

Another important feature of Turkmen carpet-weaving was the manufacture of a large number of different kinds of items. The majority of them were used for furnishing the yurt: as floor carpets, door hangings, wall bags and bands for tying the yurt. Others were used for decorating riding animals, including camels used for wedding caravans.⁵⁵ This was prompted not only by specific features of the Turkmen economy, which was oriented towards seasonal migrations, but also by the special relationship with the carpet as a distinctive narrative source and a bearer of symbols and markers important to the Turkmens.⁵⁶

One such symbol used in the decoration of pile carpets was the *hālī* (*khālī*) (decorative) system of medallions and *gols* (tribal designs on rugs), which served, in their own way, as tribal coats of arms, as every tribe had one or two of its 'own' *gols*, not used by other groups.⁵⁷ A second marker was the use by each tribe of strictly regulated techniques:

⁵⁵ Moshkova, 1996; Tsareva, 1984b.

⁵⁶ Tsareva, 1993a, pp. 21–4.

⁵⁷ For *gols*, see Moshkova, 1948; 1996, pp. 319–22.



Fig. 10. Chaudur carpet. Early nineteenth century. 3.78 x 2.21 m. (Photo: © The Hali Archive, A152/3914, Lefevre Archive.)

asymmetrical open-on-right and open-on-left knots, as well as symmetric ones sometimes combined with specific methods of irregular weave (offsetting, packing knots, etc.); some groups used wefts of different material and colour, and individual manners of finishing the sides and the ends.⁵⁸

By the sixteenth century the vast majority of tribes were united into two confederations: the Sālors (Soinkhans) and the Chaudurs (Esenkhans). Membership of one or the other union was reflected in a distinctive artistic style characteristic of the carpets of each group. Thus, the tribes of the Sālör confederation used bright and light tones of red for colouring the central field, whereas those groups gravitating towards the Chaudurs preferred dark purple and brown hues (Fig. 10).⁵⁹ The former ‘narrative’ type included cosmogonic and mythological subjects that predominated in early forms of carpet decoration, as well as numerous symbols employed for purposes of protection and self-identification.

Favourite compositions found in the central areas of Turkmen pile carpets (*hālīs*) include rows of *gol* medallions; straight and diamond lattice; and panel compositions. The most intricate variant of the latter is the decoration of *ensi* door curtains, depicting a picture of

⁵⁸ Azadi, 1975; Bogolubov, 1973; Tsareva, 1984b.

⁵⁹ Tsareva, 1993a, pp. 15–17; 1993b, pp. 77–9.



Fig. 11. Turkmenistan. *Ensi* door rug: Sālör Turkmen. (Photo: © Courtesy of Peter Hoffmeister Coll. Hali 97 fragment.)

the universe from the lower regions of *zamīn* (earth) to the vaults of the heavenly firmament that crown the composition (Fig. 11).⁶⁰

Turkmen carpet design is executed in an expressive, geometric style. However, it is not uncommon also to find elegantly executed floral motifs whose creation was made possible owing to the Turkmen craftswomen's use of offsetting and depression.

By using carbon-dating techniques a whole range of Turkmen pile articles have been dated to the sixteenth and even fifteenth centuries. Comparison with later carpet products

⁶⁰ See, for example, Tsareva, 1993b, p. 37, Fig. 15.



Fig. 12. Uzbek *julkhyr*. Nineteenth century. 207 x 115 cm, grey wool, mixed with white and brown. (Photo: © The Hali Archive, Leningrad Book 98.)

reveals an unusual constancy in tribal decoration and weaving techniques. Changes were very rare and occurred only when a tribe switched to the mass production of carpets for urban and particularly foreign markets. A typical example of this phenomenon is found in the carpet-making practices of the community of the central Amu Darya, a supplier of floor carpeting to the bazaars of Bukhara, Transoxania and Khurasan, and later to Russia and Western Europe.

Transoxania

In the period under consideration, Transoxania, home to many arts and crafts, was not a large producer of pile carpets. In essence, we can speak only of carpet-making among the Uzbek-Turkomans and among small groups of Uzbeks, Tajiks and Arabs who made long-pile carpets (*julkhyrs*) (Fig. 12).⁶¹

The Uzbek-Turkomans were the descendants of Turkmen groups of different origins who migrated to the Nur-ata basin between the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries. Their carpet-making differed very little from that of the Turkmen and, as is characteristic of marginal variants, preserved early features. These included the use of archaic-style *gols*, used to decorate large floor carpets (*gilyams*), and the use of the asymmetrical

⁶¹ Moshkova, 1996, pp. 83–7, 156.



Fig. 13. Beshir carpet. Second half of the nineteenth century. 3.73 x 1.95 m. (Photo: © The Hali Archive, A188/4297, Lefevre Archive.)

open-on-left knot with a depression (Fig. 13). Living in the Uzbek environment encouraged the emergence of features characteristic of more eastern territories, among which should be mentioned the muted colour palette typical of the Uzbeks and the Kyrgyz-Khydyrshas and a limited number of borders with simple geometric ornaments.⁶²

The second group of pile products manufactured in Transoxania are the long-pile *julkhyr* carpets, made of narrow panels sewn together; their name, translated from the Tajik, means ‘bearskin’. The single-level knotting used in *julkhyr* carpets is considered an age-old

⁶² Moshkova, 1996, pp. 90, 321.

feature of this territory and one of the most ancient forms of pile techniques, whereas the carpets themselves are seen as an imitation of animal skins, which, indeed, is reflected in the name. The compositions of these carpets are simple and comprise one or two recurrent major elements. The colouring is noted for its brightness and the use of a fairly small number of tones. The manufacture of carpets from sewn strips often leads to irregularity in the design, something which does not, however, detract from their own special charm. Carpets of this type are made also by the Tajik and Uzbek populations of Afghanistan.

East Turkistan (Xinjiang)

The division of the population of the Great Eurasian Steppes into inhabitants of clearly designated regions – western and East Turkistan, Transoxania, etc. – is by and large arbitrary because it was these territories in particular that were the scene of numerous migrations of the peoples of Eurasia. These migrations continued almost until the eighteenth century and were accompanied by the wide dispersal of individual groups in different regions. All this led to the blurring and erosion of boundaries between ethno-cultural zones and the peoples who were the bearers of these different cultures. The same fusion and blending of traditions took place in carpet-making and the entire area to the east of Transoxania saw the development of a particular carpet style that bears elements of Central Asian, Chinese and north Indian decorative canons.

East Turkistan carpet production was based in the ancient settled oases of the region, the most famous of which are Yarkand (Yārquand), Kashghar and Khotan, although at an earlier time it is possible that Aksu and Turfan were no less active manufacturing centres. Local weaving was mainly commercial in character: families, of course, made carpets for their own needs, but worked chiefly with a view to selling. The markets could be in very remote areas both to the west and the east of the region; thus the products made in Xinjiang were also oriented towards a variety of customers and, as a result, were highly diverse in shape and design.

From the technical point of view, the carpets demonstrate generally uniform weaving techniques: asymmetric open-on-left knot, cotton warp and weft in the case of a woollen pile. Sometimes silk (in all three components) and metal threads are to be found in carpets with a *sumakh* (plain-weft wrapping structure used for ornamented carpets) background and a pile pattern, usually referred to as ‘Kashghar’.⁶³

The most widespread form of local carpet products are floor carpets of some considerable length (400 × 200 cm), corresponding to the size of the terraces surrounding interior

⁶³ Dimand and Mailey, 1973, pp. 297–307.



Fig. 14. East Turkistan, Khotan. *Saf* carpet. First half of nineteenth century. 290 x 100 cm, white cotton. (Photo: © The Hali Archive, Leningrad Book 16.)

courtyards and rooms in Central Asian homes. Quite often one also finds rugs for covering seats, saddle rugs and large square-shaped rugs presumably intended for ritual purposes.⁶⁴

The ornamental designs of East Turkistan carpets can be classified in different groups according to pattern and composition. Possibly the most common was a composition featuring various types of medallions, which numbered from one to five and could be of extremely varied character and origin. Another popular subject was the pomegranate motif, usually depicted in two ways: a vase composition and a slanting lattice. The most popular composition for decorating prayer rugs (*safs*) was a horizontal row of arcs filled with floral designs (Fig. 14). Quite distinct from these was a straight checked pattern, each compartment containing a stylized rosette.⁶⁵

A number of subjects, for instance the ‘Herati’ pattern, are considered borrowings from Khurasan, although with substantial changes made in keeping with Khotan taste. In its turn, a local variant of ‘Herati’ gave rise to the original motif of the ‘five rosebuds’. The ‘four-leaf clover’ is ascribed to Indian influence.⁶⁶

If a number of subjects found as the centrepiece of East Turkistan carpets reveal similarities with Western depictive motifs, the decoration of most borders gravitates towards the East (the swastika, the T-shaped border, the ‘sacred mountain’). Certain borders share similarities with the decoration of mosaicpatterned felt rugs, another popular form of local textile. By and large, border decoration in East Turkistan carpets is so highly varied and unusual that it constitutes a unique feature of local pile weaving in its own right.

In the world of the nomads the most consistent and active representatives of the East Turkistan carpet-making tradition were the southern Kyrgyz, who used medallions, pomegranate motifs, lattice compositions, etc., that were traditionally used in East Turkistan to decorate floor carpets (*kilems*). Besides *kilems*, the Kyrgyz – a people that lived in

⁶⁴ Bidder, 1979, Pl. XI; Dimand and Mailey, 1973, Fig. 297.

⁶⁵ Bidder, 1979, Pls. XI–XIII.

⁶⁶ Oasi, 1999, Pl. 18.



Fig. 15. Kyrgyz rug (*eshik tysh*). Nineteenth century.
162 x 95 cm, brown wool. (Photo: © The Hali Archive, Leningrad Book 32.)

yurts – made large numbers of wall bags and door rugs, whose decoration reveals a more independent character and whose range of colours is characterized by its red and dark blue tones (Fig. 15).⁶⁷

Mongolia and north-western China

On its eastern side, Turkistan is bordered by Mongolia and China. We do not possess information concerning the large-scale production of pile carpets among the Mongols in the period before 1800.⁶⁸ As for the Chinese, they were well acquainted with the pile products of their northern neighbours and as part of their everyday life made fairly active use of carpets that were imported from the west and the north.⁶⁹ However, they did not show an interest in this form of weaving before the reign of the Qing emperor Kang Xi (1661–1722). In 1696 and 1697 the emperor visited the border town of Ningxia, shortly after

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⁶⁷ Moshkova, 1996, pp. 129–52.

⁶⁸ Eiland, 1979, pp. 101–7.

⁶⁹ Dimand and Mailey, 1973, pp. 297–307.

incorporation into China's dominions. He showed an interest in local carpet-making and decided to bestow on it the royal patronage.⁷⁰

For a long time Ningxia was to be the country's most famous centre of carpet manufacturing. We come across the first references to other centres – Suiyuan, Kweihwa, Paotou – only much later, although certain differences in styles, colouring and quality of materials used in the carpets they produced suggest the existence of a developed local tradition. Like Ningxia, most of these centres are situated in the north-western provinces of China.⁷¹

Chinese weavers mostly preferred asymmetric open-on-left knot and cotton for warp and weft, though early pieces could also represent woollen foundation. The pile might be derived from sheep, camel, goat or yak hair, or silk. The carpets are noted for their loose weave (400–600 knots per square decimetre) and somewhat long pile. The colour range of Chinese carpets is varied and is based on the use of natural and dyed tones of wool or silk. One feature of early Chinese carpets is the instability of the dyes employed (except indigo), which led to their fading fast and acquiring a highly distinctive and individual appearance.⁷²

Early products demonstrate a wide variety of forms, including long rugs for spreading over *kang* trestle beds (150–180 × 240–300 cm); coverings for armchairs; large ceremonial carpets of up to 6 m in length and approximately square in form; pillar rugs for use in temples; prayer mats and runners; and saddle covers.

As a rule, the composition of Chinese pile carpets follows a system that is common to the East as a whole, with the central section surrounded by rows of borders. Clearly, those rather rare items which are without borders copied the designs of silk fabrics.⁷³ The design of early carpets is noted for its eclecticism and East Turkistan influence. The most popular was a composition that included from one to five large medallions of geometric, or more often curvilinear, form. Other common patterns were diaper or flowing vine-work, often supplemented by small motifs.

Favourite subjects included Manchurian cranes with outspread wings, which could either feature as an element in the decoration of the medallions or as a subject in their own right. Depictions of other birds and animals often adorned carpets from Suiyuan, Kweihwa and Paotou, whereas mythical *kilins* (fantastic animals) such as fo-dogs and dragons with

⁷⁰ Franses, 1982, p. 133, with references to Du Hadle. Recent research has brought important changes concerning our knowledge of the period of the rise and development of Chinese carpet weaving: see Franses, 1999.

⁷¹ Eiland, 1979, p. 41.

⁷² Ellis, 1988, p. 266; Eiland, 1979, p. 64.

⁷³ Dimand and Mailey, 1973, Fig. 278.

feng-huang are more characteristic of Ningxia (Fig. 16).⁷⁴ The decoration of carpets typical of the Kang Xi period consists of luxuriant flowers with wide leaves on heavy scrolling stems, which we often see in official portraits of that time.⁷⁵

It should be noted that dragons, one of the most important symbols in Chinese art, appear only rarely on royal carpets of the Kang Xi period. According to sinologists, this is because the dragon with five claws, the imperial emblem, was not used to decorate items that were placed on the floor and, hence, liable to be trampled upon.⁷⁶



Fig. 16. The Abadjian Four Lion-Dogs dais cover. Western China, Ming dynasty, Tianqi period (1621–1628). 495 x 490 cm, wool pile on a cotton foundation. Private collection. (Photo: © Longevity, London.)

⁷⁴ Some particularly beautiful ancient carpets of these types are shown in Franses, 1982, pp. 135, 137; 1999, Pls. 2, 3 and 4.

⁷⁵ See, for example, the *Catalogue of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 1942.

⁷⁶ Dimand and Mailey, 1973, p. 322, Fig. 296.

Simple small rugs were usually adorned with depictions of goldfish, bats, the Five Blessings and Eight Trigrams. Buddhist symbolism was used mainly for decorating pillar rugs⁷⁷ and covers for chairs used by the lamas. Saddle cushions – rectangular or, more often, round in form – were the most popular type of Chinese pile product. They were typically decorated with medallion compositions.⁷⁸

Northern India

The warm climate of northern India determined the mode of the local population's way of life and obviated any need for thick floor coverings, at least in the summer, and consequently influenced the development of pile carpet-making in the region. Although modern research points to the existence of this type of weaving in India at a fairly early period,⁷⁹ the appearance of large-scale carpet production is connected with the names of the emperors of the Mughal dynasty, such as Akbar (1556–1605) and Shāh Jahān (1628–58).⁸⁰

Founded on the orders of Akbar, the weaving shops worked originally to satisfy the needs of the court and produced designs that followed the Persian model, mainly the Herat and Kirman styles, and employed weavers from Iran. However, already by the seventeenth century in various Indian centres – Lahore, Agra, Cambay and Ellur – distinctive local styles emerged that differed significantly from the original prototypes. Perhaps the most well-known feature of Indian pile weaving is the incredible tightness of the weave, with thousands of knots per square decimetre. Yet another remarkable characteristic is the magnificent wool, which is almost like silk in its decorative quality and lustre.

The characteristic artistic features of Indian carpets are their bright, deep colour range, the realistic representation of floral motifs, birds and animals, and the background devoid of small additional motifs. Another typical feature of Indian carpets is the presence of a 'top' and 'bottom' in a number of compositions (it is quite likely, however, that these were commercial products, as carpets of this type indicate a far cruder technique than those which are associated with products made for the royal court).

Wide diversity in styles was a notable feature of products from Lahore, a centre that produced not only long carpets of huge dimensions used at official functions but also small domestic rugs. Their compositions were often reminiscent of miniature paintings: they included depictions of people and scenes of animals in combat, many floral subjects and

⁷⁷ See, for example, Franses and Pinner, 1982, pp. 142–8.

⁷⁸ Eiland, 1979, pp. 46–8.

⁷⁹ Walker, 1982, pp. 255–6.

⁸⁰ Dimand and Mailey, 1973, Fig. 134; Denny, 1979, Fig. 25.

rows of plants in bloom. Slanting lattices with the motif of a flower in every cell were popular, as too were compositions with small palmettes based on the Herat pattern.

The weavers of Agra were more inclined to follow Herat prototypes of palmettes and arabesques. However, they interpreted them in a brighter range of colours and on a larger scale. It was these carpets that were long referred to as Indo-Persian, Indo-Isfahan or simply Isfahan. At the present time they are designated as Indian, at least those that date to later than the sixteenth century and are distinguished by their enormous size and bright colour range. Smaller articles of similar design were manufactured on a silk base with interwoven silver thread.⁸¹

In the north, Kashmir proved to be the most susceptible to Persian influence. It is considered that the patterns of intricately made *sajjādas* (prayer rugs) produced there were originally devised in the eighteenth century in Shiraz for the court of the Zand dynasty.⁸²

The high output of the Indian workshops, and also certain features in the form and design of the carpets they produced, stemmed from the great popularity of their manufactured articles in Europe, particularly in Portugal, Britain and Denmark. In the eighteenth century, with the loss of patronage and changing fashions, the carpet trade practically died out in northern India. However, in the nineteenth century it revived and was actively practised in many centres.

⁸¹ Denny, 1979, Pl. 4.

⁸² Ellis, 1988, Pls. 59–63.