

ENLIGHTENING APPROACHES
ON ‘INDO-PERSIAN’ CARPETS

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INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 16th century, Turkish wool carpets were more economical and widely available to European consumers than carpets produced in Iran. This changed at the end of the 16th century with the succession of Shah Abbas I (r. 1587-1629). Transformation in textile production was initiated by the Shah, a weaver himself, who sought to strengthen the Iranian economy by developing a major textile industry. This included the production of carpets for export to meet the demands of international taste. Workshops started to focus on minimizing production time and costs by developing a new carpet type that could compete with lower-priced Turkish carpets. As a result, carpets of large dimensions and new designs, using less expensive materials, fewer colours and a lower knot density began to be produced.



Fig. 1: Details from ‘Indo-Persian’ carpet field and border designs depicted in a Philippe de Champaigne painting, 1649. National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, USA. (Samuel H. Kress Collection 1952.5.35).

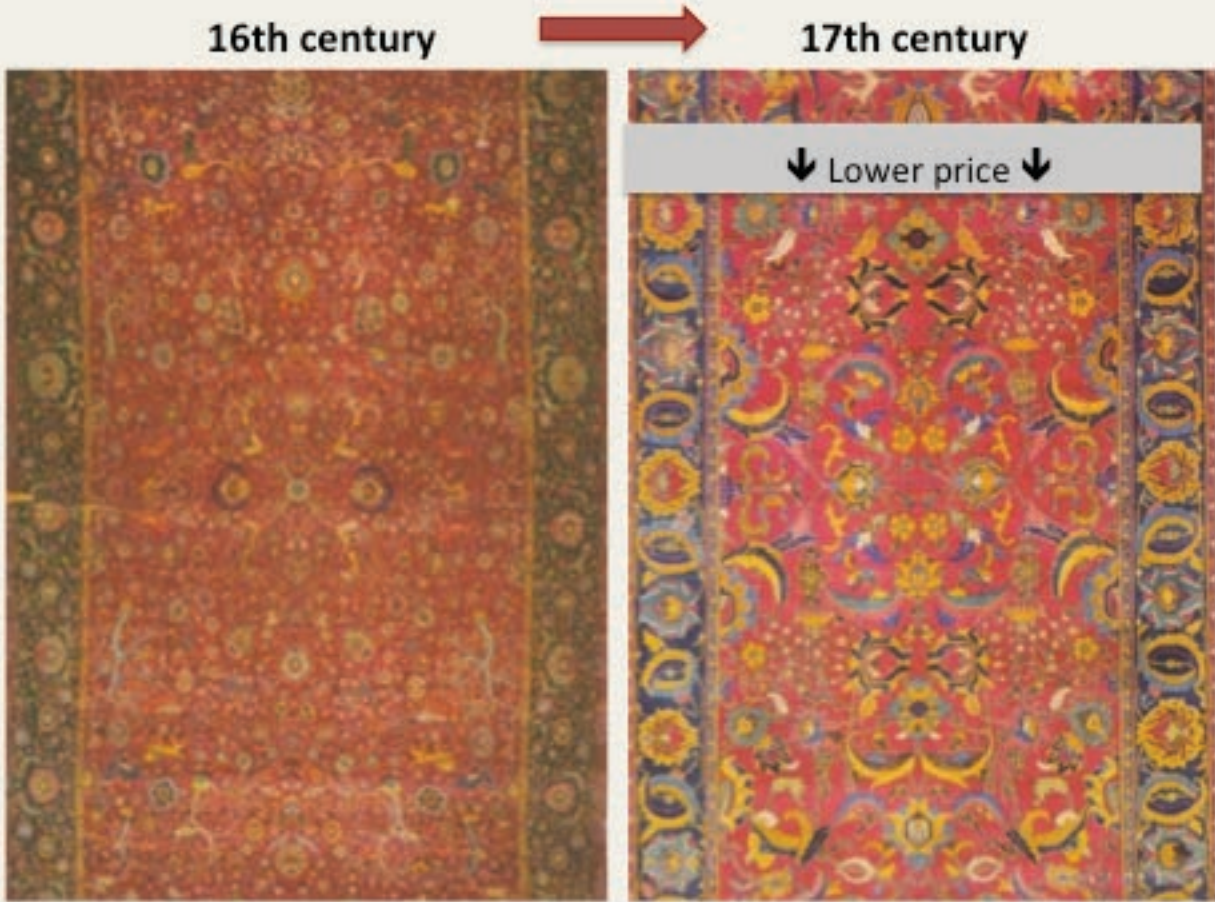


Fig. 2: 16th and 17th century Islamic carpets belonging to Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon, and Museu Nacional Machado de Castro, Coimbra, Portugal, respectively (Inv. Numbers 47Tp-left and T761-right).

INVENTION OF A NEW TYPE: ‘Indo-Persian’ carpets

In the early 17th century, new carpets made of wool and cotton with foral designs based on scrolling vines began appearing in significant numbers in Portugal (with over 80 carpets documented). How, where, when and why these carpets were produced are questions that remain unanswered and they are still referred to as “Indo-Persians”, owing to intense debate about their origin. Thus, this project takes a interdisciplinary approach using material science, art history and history to the study of these carpets from Portuguese and USA collections.

METHODOLOGY

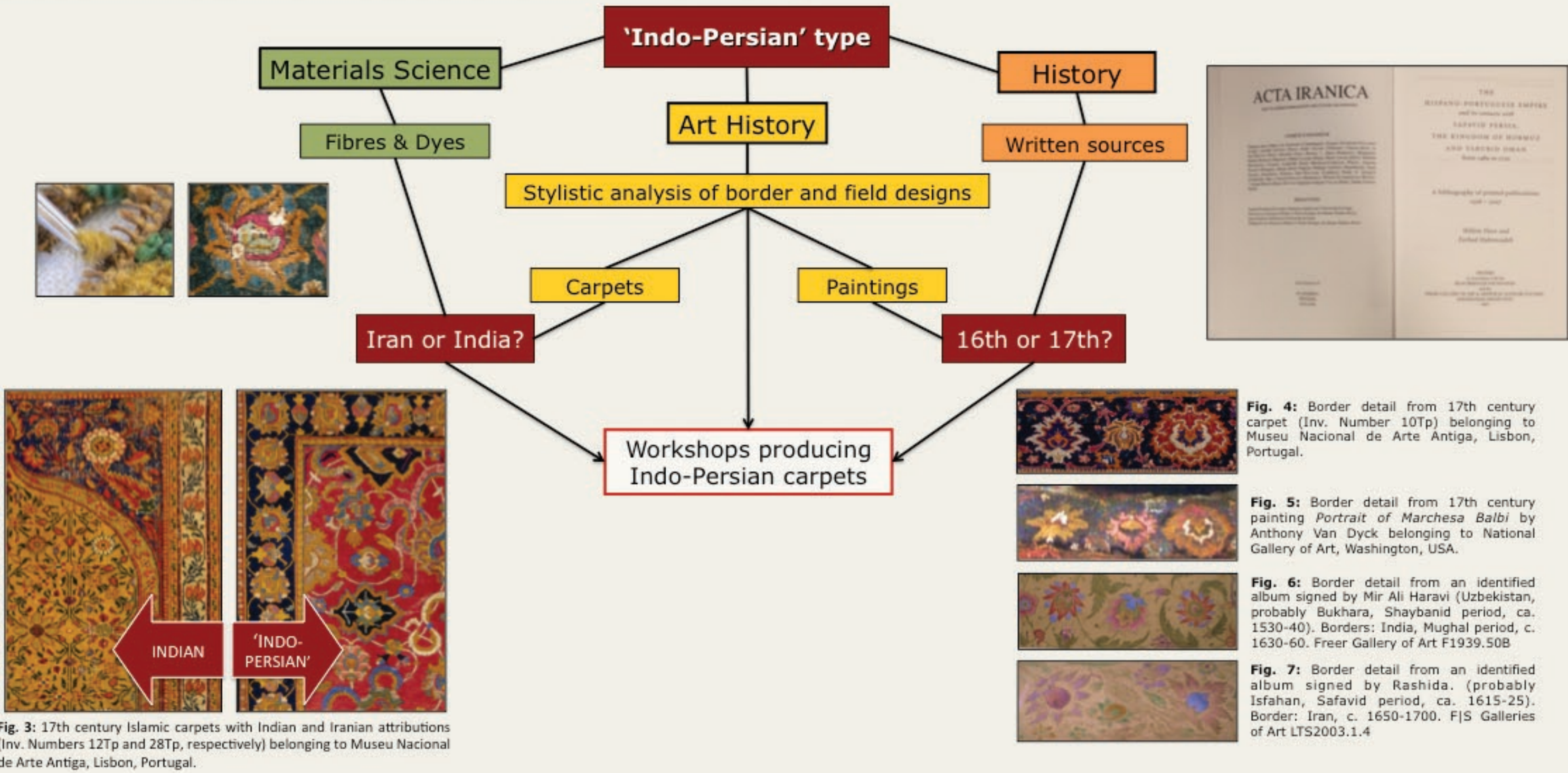


Fig. 3: 17th century Islamic carpets with Indian and Iranian attributions (Inv. Numbers 12Tp and 28Tp, respectively) belonging to Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon, Portugal.



Fig. 4: Border detail from 17th century carpet (Inv. Number 10Tp) belonging to Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon, Portugal.



Fig. 5: Border detail from 17th century painting Portrait of Marchesa Balbi by Anthony Van Dyck belonging to National Gallery of Art, Washington, USA.



Fig. 6: Border detail from an identified album signed by Mir Ali Haravi (Uzbekistan, probably Bukhara, Shaybanid period, ca. 1530-40). Borders: India, Mughal period, ca. 1630-60. Freer Gallery of Art F1939.508



Fig. 7: Border detail from an identified album signed by Rashida. (probably Isfahan, Safavid period, ca. 1615-25). Border: Iran, c. 1650-1700. FJS Galleries of Art LTS2003.1.4

RESULTS TO DATE

Place of Production

Wool & Cotton

Iran / India

This is the first study to identify Sappanwood in yellows and reds in both Deccani and ‘Indo-Persian’ carpets. Results have revealed that different yellow dye-sources were combined to achieve different shades of yellow. This points to the existence of different dye traditions consistent with different geographical attributions; production in the Deccan for the Indian carpets, and probably somewhere in Iran for the ‘Indo-Persian’.

Date of Production

Group V

Type a - Cartouche and Medallion (Vine Scroll carpets)

The extensive technical and stylistic analysis performed on all 60 carpets included in this study resulted in twelve different groups of carpets. Each of these groups are a combination of the fourteen different field types and twelve major borders identified. Following phases will compare these results with others from material analysis to understand if these groups can be associated with specific workshops. Paintings provide relative dates for each style and allows us to better understand design evolution.

Fig. 8: Aromatum et Simplicium Aliquot Medicamentorum Apud Indos Nascentium Historia by Garcia de Orta

Written historical sources such as travel accounts, inventories and records of diplomatic gifts also offer important historical evidence. Records of traded raw products proved that Sappanwood was a major item during the 17th century, when it was exported from Southeast Asia across the globe.

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