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 when the successions of Shah Abbas I (c. 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.

METHODOLGY

Fig. 1: Details from Indo-Persian carpet. Field and border design exhibited in a Phillips de Champaigne painting, 1649. National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, USA.
Samuel H. Kress Collection 1951.311.

16th century

17th century

lower price

Fig. 3: 16th and 17th-century Islamic carpets belonging to Musée National des Arts Islamiques, Luxembourg, and Musée National du Château de Versailles, Chantilly, France, respectively (photos: Dennis D. Johnson, Jr., left, and Tom Fruin, right).

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

In the early 17th century, new carpets made of wool and cotton with floral designs based on scrolling vines began appearing in significant numbers in Portugal (with over 80 carpets documented). How, 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.

RESULTS TO DATE

Fig. 4: Border detail from 17th century Indo-Persian carpet, private collection, Lisbon, Portugal.

Fig. 5: Border detail from 17th century Indo-Persian carpet, private collection, Lisbon, Portugal.

Fig. 6: Border detail from 17th century Indo-Persian carpet, private collection, Lisbon, Portugal.

RESULTS TO DATE

Materials Science

Filrets & Dyes

Art History

Stylistic analysis of border and field designs

Written sources

16th or 17th?

16th century

17th century

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

METHODOLOGY

RESULTS TO DATE

Place of Production

Date of Production

Wool & Cotton

Iran / India

Group V

Type a - Cartouche and Medallion (Vine Scroll carpets)

This is the first study to identify Sappanwood in yellow and red in 16th Decanor 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 Decanor for the Indian carpets and probably somewhere in Iran for the ‘Indo-Persian’.

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

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 analyses 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.

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