

Turkish Carpets History

The history of carpets, which have always emerged in regions inhabited by Turks, is closely tied to the Turks. The Turks introduced this technique first to the Islamic world and then to the entire world, particularly through the states established during the Great Seljuk Sultanate period. However, no carpets from the Great Seljuks have survived; the Konya carpets from the Anatolian Seljuks formed the foundation of carpet art that developed until the twentieth century. For seven centuries, Turkish carpet art has shown continuous and brilliant development, always creating new types.

The oldest carpet, extracted from the ice in the fifth Pazyryk kurgan in the Altai Mountains, comes from the region of the Asian Huns. In fact, this area is dominated by the use of fur and animal hides. The Asian Huns also incorporated these motifs in their metalworks. In contrast, the reindeer seen in the wide inner border are part of this region's fauna.

The carpet found in the fifth kurgan stands out with its incredible fineness, high quality, richness of motifs, and distinctive features. Discovered in a kurgan chamber that had turned into ice, among a mummified dead horse, a four-wheeled carriage, and other household items, this carpet first garnered widespread attention when it was published in 1953 and was later extensively introduced. The carpet, measuring 1.89 x 2 meters and made from very fine wool (yarn), is an incredible masterpiece with 36,000 Ghiordes knots per 10 cm², showcasing unparalleled craftsmanship that has not been surpassed since. The carpet features a wide border with cavalry figures, a second wide border with deer figures, an inner and outer narrow border with gray backgrounds, and a central design with 24 squares of cruciform flowers in a checkerboard pattern dominated by white, yellow, and blue colors on a red background. Rudenko attributed the carpet and other items in the kurgan to the Scythians, dating it to the 5th century BC.

In later publications, Ghirsman and Bussagli dated the carpet to the 4th-3rd centuries BC; finally, Mongait noted that many researchers found it appropriate to date it between the 3rd century BC and the birth of Christ. Subsequently, J. Zick Nissen suggested that the carpet might have been made in any center between Susa and Phrygia in the 5th century BC, with artistic traditions pointing to Northwest Iran. However, when comparing the burial customs, types of mummified dead, the history of the Altai region, and other artifacts found in neighboring kurgans, attributing the carpet to the Asian Huns and dating it to the 3rd-2nd centuries BC seems plausible. Meanwhile, the carved stone motifs of cruciform four-petaled lotus flowers from the 8th century BC in the Assyrian Palace of Nineveh Kuyunjik, and the cavalry types and deer figures seen in the reliefs of the Achaemenids in Persepolis, when considered together with the gray background in the outer border, show that various influences were successfully integrated. This development could only have been achieved by the Hun Empire, which dominated much of Asia

Carpets Found in East Turkestan About 40 years before Rudenko's discovery of the Pazyryk carpet, Aurel Stein found knotted carpet fragments dating from the 3rd and 4th centuries D in Loulan, west of Lop Lake in East Turkestan, during his 1906-1908 expeditions. These fragments were made by knotting threads twisted from hard, thick, and undyed wool onto a single warp, sometimes interweaving five rows of weft. The simple patterns consisted of bright and vibrant colors—three shades of yellow, dark blue, red, matte green, and brown—forming diamonds, stripes, and highly stylized flowers. These pieces are now preserved in the British Museum in London and the National Museum in New Delhi, India. A few years later, in 1913, A. von Le Coq discovered another knotted carpet fragment while conducting Turfan research in Kizil, west of Kuqa. The 16 x 26 cm fragment was also made from hard, thick,

undyed wool, knotted onto a single warp with wefts, but it also featured a more intricate technique with fine wool threads knotted onto alternating warps. Considering that Samarra, the Abbasid capital, was established (838-883) for Turkish guard units, it is easy to connect the early Abbasid period carpet art of the 9th century with these findings.

On the subject of knotting two pieces of carpet on a single warp, Lamm discovered and published two carpet fragments found in Fustat. Both pieces are knotted on a single warp and feature short wool threads lined alternately on alternate warps, reminiscent of the techniques found in carpet fragments from East Turkistan. Additionally, their geometric compositions, resembling baklava motifs, are entirely consistent with examples found in Turkish carpets.

Three other carpet pieces found in Fustat, attributed to the Abbasids, are exhibited at the Cairo Arab Museum, the Washington Textile Museum, and the Berlin Museums.

Other intriguing pieces found in Fustat are housed at the New York Metropolitan Museum. These pieces are adorned with a strip composed of red backgrounds and triangles and circles in blue, yellow, green, and brown, as well as latch decorations and dark blue borders in Kufic style.

The Kufic borders are more advanced compared to Abbasid pieces. These pieces can be linked to the early Turkic-Islamic states like the Tulunids and the Ayyubids, or possibly to the Fatimid period. Whether these Fustat pieces were made in Egypt or came from other provinces (such as Iraq) remains a question. However, in either case, their connection to Turks due to Turkish elements is an undeniable fact. The legend of the Flying Carpet, mentioned in the tales of "One Thousand and One Nights, emerged after a magical carpet brought by Turks in the past stirred great fascination.

In the initial development stages of carpet weaving, three eras persisted until the Konya Seljuk period. The Pazyryk carpet, dating back to the 3rd century BC and left by the Asian Huns, was woven in East Turkistan using a simple knot technique on a single warp. Fragments of carpets with geometric patterns from the 3rd and 6th centuries and examples from the Abbasids found in Fustat also survive.

It is known that in the 10th century, as in earlier times, carpets were woven in Buhara and other major centers of Turkistan and were exported to other countries. This continued until the Mongol invasions of the 13th century. From this period onwards, carpets woven with the Gördes Turkish knot, which originated from the Great Seljuks and later, emerged as the oldest carpets forming the foundation of all carpet weaving.”

Anatolian Seljuk Carpets:

Until the year 1905, none of those who visited Alâeddin Camii, including Sarre, who worked here for years and produced works, noticed our Konya carpets. These carpets were first discovered by the Swede Martin, who was then serving in the German consulate and of Danish descent, and he pointed out their great scientific value to Loytved.

They gained recognition and became famous in a short time. Martin published them in 1885 in a work consisting of two volumes, one of textiles and the other of plates, with dimensions of 67 x 56 cm and weighing ten kilograms in the textile volume, both in monochrome and color. On page 113, it is written: 'The photographs I reproduce I owe to the courtesy of H.R.H. Prince William of Sweden who, when visiting Konya, asked the Governor-General to have such made for this work, and by order of H.H. the Grand-Vizier Ferid Pasha, they were executed'.

Note 247, explaining how he obtained these photographs, states that the German Consul Loytved of Danish descent was commissioned by the Prince to preserve the photographs and watercolors requested, but without permission, he sent copies to Berlin on his own initiative. However, a year before Martin, Fr. Sarre had already published an article in which he described three Seljuk carpets based on the photographs and paintings sent by Loytved, even before seeing the originals himself."

Sarre's article, published in the journal *Kunst und Kunsthandwerk* under the title 'Mittelalterliche Knüpfteppiche,' not only preceded by a year but also widely circulated, quickly led to the recognition of these carpets. After Sarre re-published the same carpets in his book 'Seldschukische Kleinkunst' in 1903, Bode-Kühnel included these carpets in the second edition of their book 'Vorderasiatische Knüpfteppiche aus älterer Zeit' in 1914, marking the foundation of carpet studies.

However, it was only through Erdmann's work that these carpets were widely recognized. These carpets are large in size, with one measuring up to 15 square meters. They exhibit an incredible richness in color and decoration. The background is generally dark blue or red, while the motifs are light blue and light red. Occasionally, light and dark yellow as well as light green are also present. The harmony between dark and light colors is very soothing, creating a serene atmosphere that caresses the soul.

Despite the use of few colors, a great richness is achieved through various nuances of the same color. They reveal a color sense that competes with the most advanced painting arts."

The motifs creating the decorations often include geometric shapes such as stars with eight points, octagons surrounded by hooks, and rosettes. Occasionally, plant motifs adapted to geometric patterns are also included. The composition of the background consists of these simple shapes arranged side by side and stacked on top of each other. However, what gives the Konya Seljuk carpets their monumental and characteristic appearance are the large Kufic script decorations in their wide borders.

Later, developing into braided and floral Kufic borders, which influenced the carpet depictions of the 14th and 15th centuries in miniatures, from Spain to early Caucasian carpets, Kufic borders largely provided decorative richness.

The carpets found in the Alâeddin Mosque in Konya in 1221, when the mosque was expanded by Sultan Alâeddin Keykubad and subsequently dedicated to it during his lifetime, must date from that time. These large carpets, measuring 5-6 meters in length and designed to cover vast spaces, are among the most monumental examples of Seljuk art. They predominantly feature dark and light shades of blue and red. Green is also seen in two tones.

A somewhat indistinct off-white or cream color, along with a dark brown that defines contours more, occasionally a bit of bright yellow, is less prominent. All examples are fundamentally composed of geometric motifs arranged in axes, consisting largely of small shapes in relation to the large ground. The knot density, not very fine, varies between 80 and 100 thousand knots per square meter. Each knot of these carpets is truly a royal work of art, Seljuk. The looms of these carpets, approaching widths of 2.50 and even 3 meters, require large workshops. However, they must have been made in the same place as the manufacture of the city

25 years later, in 1930, four more carpet fragments were discovered by American Professor R. Riefstahl in the Eşrefoğlu Mosque in Beyşehir (a district southeast of Konya and on the shores of Lake Beyşehir).

One of these pieces closely resembles a carpet from Konya, while the other two must date from the end of the century or the early years of the 14th century. The fourth piece is from the 15th century. One of the Seljuk carpets displays a variation of the diamond pattern. Another fragment, almost 5 meters in length and part of a larger carpet, features floral motifs stylized in light blue on dark blue, arranged alternately left and right along a vertical axis.

Hanging from small stems emerging from these motifs are angular buds, their tips curved like hooks, with small leaves extending from both sides of the stems. All patterns are surrounded by a white stripe contour. Seljuk Carpets Found in Fustat: In 1935-36, approximately a hundred carpet fragments were excavated in Fustat (Old Cairo), most of which were taken to Sweden by Lamm. Currently, many are housed in the National Museum of Stockholm, and several are part of Lamm's

private collection. A significant portion has been attributed to the Benaki Museum in Athens. None of the pieces in the Benaki Museum have been introduced or published, and their details remain unknown. The knots of the Fustat carpets are denser and finer than those of the Konya carpets, and their dimensions are smaller.

Initially, Kufic script characterized by pointed triangles resembling arrowheads can be seen. Later on, it underwent various changes and developments. In Kufic borders, narrow and elongated sides are extended straight without any connection between them, leaving corners almost empty. Alongside very successful corner transitions in later developments, these earlier characteristics illustrate an archaic period where such problems were not yet addressed.

The collection preserved in Swedish museums includes images and designs of 29 pieces published by Lamm. These carpets all date from the 13th to 15th centuries and were imported from Anatolia.

Among them, seven pieces are classified within the group of Konya Seljuk carpets, further enriching the examples of Seljuk carpets. Additionally, these pieces demonstrate that Anatolian Seljuk carpets extended into the 14th century. Warps are a dull white or brownish hue close to yellow, while wefts are red wool. Thus, Seljuk carpets are found in 18 pieces—eight in Konya, three in Beyşehir, and seven in Fustat. Three of these are heavily worn but mostly intact, while 15 have only survived as fragments.

Of these 18 carpets, only two (in the Istanbul Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts, inventory numbers 692 and 693) are identical, with the rest displaying various patterns or colors. This means we encounter 17 distinct patterns among these 18 carpets. The richness and diversity of such varied examples in such a limited number of surviving carpets signify an incredible creative force.

Based on the examination of these 18 original Seljuk carpets from the 13th century, they generally display examples of geometric patterns, sometimes strongly stylized plant motifs, and compositions in borders developed from Kufic script. Geometric patterns are prominent due to the repetition of motifs.

Plant elements flow indistinctly, while there are no figurative representations. From the 14th century onwards, animal figures, stylized and embellished, began appearing in Anatolian carpets. These were inserted as fillings within geometric sections. Birds placed on either side of a tree are a particularly favored composition.

Towards the end of the century, dynamic scenes featuring groups of attacking animals are observed. The earliest carpets with animal or bird figures appeared in European painters' works in the 14th century, indicating their origins likely date back to the 13th century. Depictions of these motifs in paintings continued until the mid-15th century. In the 1880s, a piece purchased by Bode for the Berlin Museum in Rome depicts a composition portraying a fight between a dragon and a phoenix, repeated twice. This carpet, dating from the latter half of the 15th century, is from Anatolia. Such carpets were highly recognized and depicted in Italian paintings of the 15th century.

In 1925, a second Anatolian carpet featuring stylized bird figures on either side of a tree was found in the Marby village church in Sweden. Here, the branches of the tree are repeated below in a manner that resembles a reflection in water, representing a late variation from the end of the 15th century.

Three pieces found in Fustat feature bird or animal figures. In the Konya Museum, one carpet composition consists of rows of four rooster figures each, while another piece dates from the late 15th century.

Towards the end of the 15th century, paintings depict carpets with geometric patterns instead of those with animal figures. These carpets, known as "Holbein carpets," were first depicted in Italian paintings after 1451 and later in Flemish and Dutch paintings until the early 16th century, gaining their name from the frequent appearance in Holbein's works.

The 15th century carpet discovered by Riefstahl in Beyşehir, found last summer in the museum's storeroom, completes an example with pieces that were found. The carpet is notably large and stands as the oldest of the Holbein carpets. It features very rich and ornate borders, with a characteristic use of purple color seen for the first time in the 15th century.

The newly discovered rug stored in the Istanbul Vakıflar administration's warehouse represents a more advanced example than the Marby carpet. While the carpet's division into main sections remains the same, there is a richer composition within the octagons. The central motif consists of a tree with a bird on each side, adorned with crests to enhance its decorative appeal.

Additionally, stylized animals, likely dragons, are placed in the corners. This carpet gains significance for combining the characteristic motifs of animal-figure carpets into a new composition, a previously unseen example. Dated to the late 15th century, this carpet stands out with its characteristic bird figures, fitting in among other carpets featuring similar motifs, indicating an advanced phase.

The distinguishing feature of the 15th century was the emergence of carpets associated with Holbein.

Some had previously been seen in Italian paintings, while others, named after Holbein, were neither depicted in his paintings nor properly named. These carpets are characterized by indistinct octagons arranged in shifted baklava-like patterns or adjacent, differently colored small squares. Holbein carpets are among the oldest, originating in the 15th century, but did not continue extensively beyond the 16th century. Their borders often feature kufic decorations. Those showing a reduced baklava octagon pattern similar to the Beyşehir carpet also fall into this category.

The carpets that resemble crosses due to the combination of vegetal motifs and the rich scattered shapes of contourless octagons also maintain the same pattern as other Holbein carpets. These carpets, seen in Lorenzo Lotto's paintings, are named Lotto carpets. Made predominantly with yellow examples on a red background, they feature cloud motifs alongside the classic Uşak border with kufic motifs.

Estimated to have been seen in paintings from around 1500 to 1800, these carpets have numerous surviving originals, some reaching lengths of 6 meters and featuring coats of arms. Simple Holbein carpets, with large squares filled with octagons stacked one on top of the other, developed throughout the 15th century and continued into recent years. Another variation of Holbein carpets, showing for the first time a grouping in examples with two octagons above and below the large squares, represents a different form of these carpets.

All four types of Holbein carpets were made in the Uşak region or Western Anatolia. In the 16th century, a new era began with carpets made in the same region. Holbein carpets facilitated the transition between the art of the Seljuks and Ottomans throughout the 16th century. The rich and diverse group of Uşak carpets has not been extensively studied. Medallion and star Uşak carpets are two main types that originated from the second group of Holbein carpets.

Medallion carpets, some as large as ten meters, feature a large central medallion with smaller medallions above and below, and two truncated medallions on the sides, symbolizing infinity. The medallion motif comes from Tabriz carpets and was adopted from book arts.

However, these are compositions with defined boundaries. Medallion Uşak carpets continued from the 16th century to the mid-18th century.

Star Uşak carpets, which show an alternating arrangement of medallions and baklavas in the star pattern, present a clearer example of infinity. These carpets ceased to be seen after the 17th century, and original examples are rare. An exquisite example of a star Uşak carpet is depicted in Paris Bordone's painting from 1533, "The Fisherman Presenting the Ring of St. Mark to the Doge," housed at the Accademia in Venice.

However, the oldest originals feature borders bearing the Montagu coat of arms and date back to 1584 and 1585, belonging to the Duke of Buccleuch. The 1584 example, featuring three stars and two baklavas in an alternating pattern, is extremely rare. In the mid-16th century, white-ground Uşak carpets, mentioned in historical sources and later seen in paintings, became known as Bird Carpets and continued until the 18th century. They earned this name because two leaf motifs facing each other gave the illusion of a bird due to the varied colors of the background.

Some white-ground Uşak carpets also feature the çintemani motif, with blue and yellow çintemani patterns on the red-ground versions. Various Uşak carpets showed bright development over three centuries, but by the late 18th century, they began to experience decline and deterioration.

**** The oldest Iranian carpets date back to the end of the 15th century. Carpets seen in miniatures from the end of the 14th century are linked to the tradition of Turkish carpets with their hexagonal composition and kufic border.**

Another group that developed from the large-patterned Holbein carpets are the Bergama carpets. In these, geometric patterns prevail, sometimes adorned with stylized botanical motifs arranged in the same scheme. Dating back to the 16th century, these carpets have preserved many motifs of Seljuk carpets and kufic borders to the present day.

Alongside classical Anatolian carpets, from the second half of the 16th century onwards, a distinct group known as Ottoman Palace carpets emerged, differing entirely in technique and decorative style. These carpets combine Ottoman naturalistic leaf and floral motifs with the Iranian knot, unlike all other Turkish carpets which use the Gördes knot, creating a soft velvety effect with dense knots.

The Ottomans conquered Tabriz in 1514 and Cairo in 1517, marking significant milestones in Turkish art. Palace carpets were influenced by the technical, material, and color effects of Mamluk carpets. After 1600, Mamluk carpets ceased to exist. Unlike Uşak carpets where the medallion layout dominates, in Palace Carpets, the main design is often centered around an infinite pattern. The Turks, guided by textile laws, staunchly rejected any strong connection with book art.