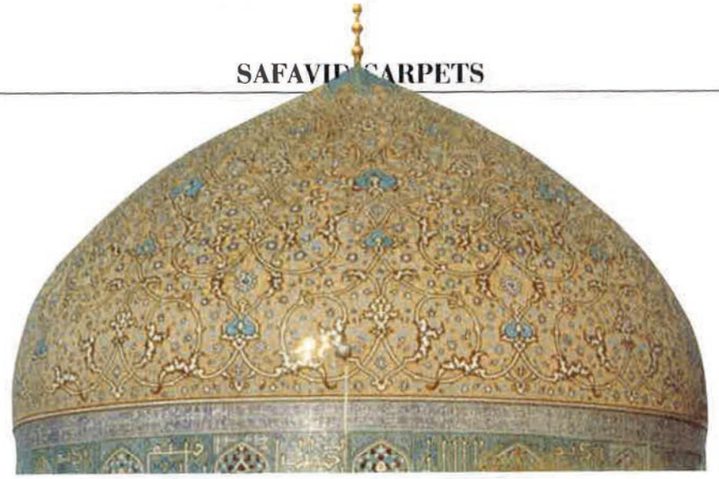

ISFAHAN 'STRAPWORK' CARPETS

By Ian Bennett

Visitors to the European Fine Art Fair in Maastricht last March enjoyed the special exhibition of 'Carpets in 17th Century Dutch Paintings'. Dr John Mills, reviewing the exhibition in HALI *39, drew attention to the 'astonishing' Portrait of Don Francisco Lopez Suasso, which depicts a 17th century Isfahan carpet belonging to the 'Strapwork' design group. This article, which had its genesis in the comprehensive exhibition notes* HALI*'s Contributing Editor prepared for Maastricht, discusses the seven wool carpets of the group as well as two closely related silk rugs.*

We owe Onno Ydema, HALI's Dutch representative, a considerable debt for recognising the significance of the virtually unknown portrait of Don Francisco Lopez Suasso by an anonymous Dutch artist of the late 17th century (assumed to be copying a lost painting by Nicolaes Maes).[1] At the Maastricht exhibition, it was fortunate that a large photographic reproduction of the painting could be shown alongside the Jaipur 'Strapwork' carpet, the only extant example known outside a museum. The coincidental appearance of two such interesting works of art prompted this examination of the small number of 'Strapwork' carpets now known to exist.

The Jaipur Carpet (detail left)

Dome of the Lotfallah Mosque, Isfahan (above)
Built between 1601 and 1628 to the order of Shah Abbas, the dome's exterior tile decoration has a similar 'strapwork' arabesque to that of the Jaipur and other carpets of the 'Strapwork' group.
Courtesy Eskandar Nebavi.

Arabesque Designs

Arabesque designs appear on many Safavid carpets, but the version found on the 'Strapwork' group differs from others in that it takes the form of broad bands of solid colour overlaid with smaller and more delicate floral stems. The bands themselves, almost 'rococo' in character, form bold lobed hexagons and trefoils in a series of continuous upward spirals arranged in the field so as to indicate an endless repeat.

In most 'Strapwork' carpets, these spiralling systems are perfectly regular and symmetrical, although on the Cincinnati Art Museum's Emery carpet they are off-centre, altering the emphasis of the overall design. This manipulation of a symmetric endless repeat so as to create asymmetry is comparable to the use of another highly abstracted arabesque pattern on the 16th and 17th century 'Lotto' carpets from Ushak, where the design is frequently broken into at apparently arbitrary points or arranged to emphasise different elements of the overall design.

The Isfahan 'Strapwork' Group

Before continuing with a discussion of the 'Strapwork' carpets, a list of the known wool-piled examples should be given:

1. The Jaipur Carpet. The Textile Gallery, London.[2]
2. The Tabbagh Carpet. Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg.[3]

SAFAVID CARPETS

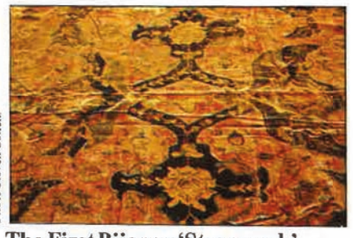

Photo Steven Cohen.

The First Bijapur 'Strapwork' Carpet (and detail)
Persia, Isfahan, early to mid 17th century. No size available, approx. 7.5m (25') long.
This is one of a group of 17th century carpets in the Asar Mahal, Bijapur, which presumably arrived there in the mid 17th century. Like its companion in the Archaeological Museum, Bijapur, the Tabbagh carpet in Hamburg and the Clark carpet in the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., it has a simplified version of the 'Strapwork' design in dark blue. Both Bijapur carpets have the familiar 'maple leaf palmette' and floral borders found on many Isfahan carpets. Asar Mahal, Bijapur. Previously unpublished.

3. The Emery Carpet. Cincinnati Art Museum.[4]
4. The Benguiat Carpet. Present whereabouts unknown.[5]
5. The Clark Carpet. Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.[6]
6. The First Bijapur Carpet. Asar Mahal, Bijapur.[7]
7. The Second Bijapur Carpet. Bijapur Archaeological Museum.[8]

In addition to the seven known wool-piled examples of the 'Strapwork' group there are two closely related silk-piled rugs, the Aberconway fragment in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London,[9] and the vast and wonderful carpet made in two parts which was given to the Shrine of Imam 'Ali at al-Najaf by Shah Abbas the Great.[10] These share a design of gold 'strapwork' on a crimson ground and may well be the Imperial models for what was to become one of the many designs adopted by the Isfahan *ateliers* for commercial production in the 17th century.

The Jaipur carpet is perhaps the most imposing of the woollen examples of the group. Its complex and colourful version of the design is also found on the Emery and Benguiat carpets, while the other four have blue rather than polychrome 'strapwork'. Of these, the small Tabbagh carpet in Hamburg is perhaps in the best condition and has retained a remarkable freshness and vividness of colour.

Indian Connections

No less than three of the seven wool rugs have Indian connections. It is assumed that the Jaipur carpet entered the possession of the Maharajah of Jaipur, Jai Singh I, known as Mirza Rajah (1625-1667), in the 1640s or 1650s and was used as a Durbar carpet in the Amber Palace. When it was sold by order of the then Maharajah at Sotheby's, London, in 1963, it had a label attached to its back describing it as a 'Lahore carpet', but there is little likelihood of this authentic label having belonged originally to this particular carpet. A. J. D. Campbell, in his important but unpublished 1929 *Report* on the Jaipur carpets,[11] specifically noted that the 'Strapwork' carpet had no label. In any case, we now know that the description found on the labels attached to various carpets still at Jaipur indicating an origin in Lahore means that such pieces were purchased in that city, not necessarily that they were woven there.

Both the Bijapur carpets were once in the Asar Mahal as part of a small group of 17th century Safavid rugs. The manner in which they were supposed to have arrived in the city was recounted by Sir George Watt in his catalogue of the 1902-3 Delhi Exhibition,[12] a story retold virtually unchanged by Twigg and other early writers on Indian art:[13]

'The woollen carpets have been

The Jaipur 'Strapwork' Carpet
Persia, Isfahan, early 17th century. 3.17 × 8.23m (10'5" × 27'0").
This magnificent carpet, a masterpiece of Isfahan weaving, is the most imposing of the seven woollen carpets of the group. One of its most immediately impressive features is its palette. All the carpets in the group are on rose red grounds and this example has the 'strapwork' in a wide range of colours – dark and light blue, dark blue-green, magenta, copper-red, two shades of orange and brown. The central 'double interlock' contains two pairs of intertwined 'straps' in orange and brown, arranged in 'blocks' of eight circles with split-palmettes forming large downward and upward pointing trefoils at either end of the 'block'. Three complete 'blocks' can be seen on the vertical axis. There is no apparent colour sequence from top to bottom, although in any one horizontal row the central large trefoil is flanked by half trefoils of the same colour (except in one corner). Previously unpublished. Courtesy The Textile Gallery, London.

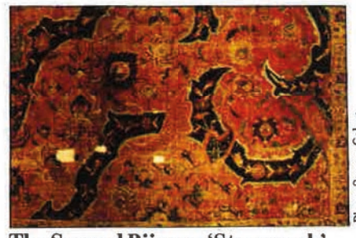

Photo Steven Cohen.

The Second Bijapur 'Strapwork' Carpet (and detail)
Persia, Isfahan, early to mid 17th century. No size available, approx. 7.5m (25') long. This carpet has a better drawn, more colourful border and is in better condition than its companion piece in the Asar Mahal. Archaeological Museum, Bijapur. Previously unpublished.

Don Francisco Lopez Suasso
(detail. see cover)
Unknown Dutch artist after Nicolaes Maes, ca. 1688.
Oil on canvas,
1.44 × 1.20m (4'9" × 3'11").
This portrait, which may have been painted to commemorate Suasso's role in financing the historic journey of William and Mary to England, now hangs in the Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam, on loan from the Amsterdam Historical Museum. Dutch Portraits of the period often contain oranges, for obvious reasons, but the pose adopted here, with the right hand holding an orange, is a gesture of wonderful arrogance, which would not have been lost on Suasso's contemporaries. The 'Strapwork' carpet draped over the table is one of the more ornate and colourful versions with polychrome 'overlays'. Amsterdams Historisch Museum. Inv. no. A487.

preserved in the Asar Mahal, an old palace which has acquired sanctity in the eyes of Muhammadans on account of its containing the relics (Arabia Asar – relics) of the Prophet in the shape of two hairs of his beard. These relics were brought to Bijapur in the time of Ibrahim Adilshah II (1580-1626) and during his reign and those of his successors appear to have been widely known throughout the Mussalman world, as is evidenced by the rich offerings made by the foreign Muhammadan potentates to the Asar. It is, however, not known whether these carpets were presents. They were probably ordered out by King Mahamad Adilshah. An old manuscript *Haft-Kursi-e Padshahan* gives the date of their arrival from Kashmir in the year A.H. 1067, equivalent to 1657 of the Christian era, which is the last year of Mahamad Adilshah's reign. This date is probably authentic as after Mahamad, the decline of the Bijapur kingdom had commenced and it is not likely that costly foreign materials could have been ordered out after his reign. It is, therefore, almost certain that the carpets are about 250 years old and probably made in Kashmir. The carpets are supposed to be used only once during the year, when they are spread in the upper halls of the Asar Mahal on the birthday of the Prophet, the 12th of Rabi I. They have, however, been much damaged in bygone days by the apathy and to a certain extent helplessness of the custodians. A few of them were sent out about twelve or fifteen years ago to Yeroda Jail to be repaired and lined with canvas with a view to better preservation.'[14]

The Asar Mahal was begun in 1591 and contains 'fine painted wood decoration and wood inlay', although its condition today is described as somewhat delapidated.[15] Watt's suggestion that the carpets arrived in Bijapur in 1657 accords well with their probable date of manufacture. Unfortunately his source, the *Haft-Kursi-e Padshahan*, is unknown to modern scholars and must be considered apocryphal unless and until its existence is established.

Problems of Attribution

Watt's additional statement that the carpets were probably made in Kashmir does not seem tenable. Writers on Mughal and Safavid carpets over the last eighty years have generally found that grey area called 'Indo-Persian' or 'Indo-Isfahan' confusing, although early dealers and collectors had no such obvious difficulties. Vitall Benguiat, for instance, catalogued his 'Strapwork' carpet as Isfahan in 1925, a view shared by most of his colleagues.

The Swedish scholar F. R. Martin preferred to call all red-ground carpets with cotton foundations and floral arabesque designs 'Herat', and in 1908 put forward a somewhat long-winded and, on examination, totally unconvincing argument for this hypothesis.[16] Surprisingly, his view has tended to prevail among carpet scholars, although more recently they have become increasingly concerned with differentiating between Persian and Indian examples. In the process, matters have become even more muddled. The most recent solution, that of Charles Grant Ellis in his Philadelphia catalogue, is to attribute all such carpets to India and have done with them.[17]

The Benguiat 'Strapwork' Carpet
Persia, Isfahan, early 17th century.
1.93 × 5.00m (6'4" × 16'5").
This carpet, which is missing its main and outer borders, was last seen at auction in New York in 1925. Unfortunately no colour picture of it exists but the American Art Association catalogue description indicates that it was one of the three examples with multicoloured 'strapwork'. Present location unknown.

The 'Herat' Attribution and Jufti Knotting

Regarding the 'Herat' attribution, in recent years a number of 17th century carpets and fragments have been noted as sharing a distinct structural peculiarity, namely the extensive use of jufti knotting (asymmetric knotting over four warps). This characteristic undoubtedly has an effect upon the

The Tabbagh 'Strapwork' Carpet
Persia, Isfahan, early to mid 17th century.
2.30 × 3.60m (7'7" × 11'10").
This well-known carpet was included in the great exhibition of Persian Art in London in 1931 and was published by Pope in the Survey *(pl. 1215), when it belonged to Eric Tabbagh. It is the smallest of the 'Strapwork' carpets and has retained a remarkable vividness of colour. The drawing and colour of the 'Strapwork' and floral details relate it very closely to the two Bijapur carpets. Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg. Inv. no. 1959.90 St.132.*

nature of the design and especially on the way it is drawn. Experience shows, for example, that the presence of a particular style of sharp diagonal in curved lines is usually indicative of jufti knotting. Unfortunately, current attitudes to the use of the jufti knot are due largely to the almost apoplectic rage which it engendered in A. C. Edwards, who considered it 'a fraudulent device'.[18]

However, while we do not wish to underestimate the great importance of his book, even Edwards, who clearly misunderstood the significance of jufti knotting, made one interesting observation: 'Twenty-five years ago, it was little used except in northern Khurasan.' This statement is borne out by the fact that jufti knotting does not appear to have been used in any 19th or early 20th century Persian carpets except those which other factors clearly demonstrate are from one of the major Khorasan weaving centres – Mashad, Birjand, Mud, *et al.*

Dr Jon Thompson was perhaps the first to state clearly the significance of jufti knotting found in certain distinctive groups of Safavid carpets in an essay published in 1977:

'The Jufti knot in the past has been rather misunderstood and acquired a reputation that fails to take into account its positive features. It is true that Jufti knotting reduces the amount of work required to cover a given area and that it wears less well than the normal Persian knot. However, simple observation suggests that its use was an accepted craft practice in some Persian workshops capable of producing weavings of the highest quality . . . Furthermore the use of the Jufti knot in a group of weavings from Khorassan is so characteristic as to constitute a special style of weaving – the appearance and handle of these rugs is like nothing else.'[19]

In this context, a specific group of Khorasan rugs given to the Victoria & Albert Museum by the Shah in the 1880s are, as we would expect, jufti knotted. Examination of them and other examples of late 18th and 19th century Khorasan carpets indicates that in wool, colour, handle and knotting they are very closely related to various Persian carpets and fragments from the 17th and early 18th centuries.[20]

In summation, there is a fairly extensive group of Safavid carpets which has a similar multiplicity of design and consistent structural idiosyncracies to the 'vase technique' carpets. There are also several well documented late 18th and 19th century Khorasan carpets which share the structural feature and also palette, wool and handle with the Safavid jufti knotted rugs. Thus we are inclined to attribute the Safavid rugs to Khorasan and to believe, for reasons outlined below, that the 'Strapwork' carpets, as well as the better known red-ground floral carpets, are commercial products of the Isfahan looms.

Isfahan and al-Najaf

Isfahan is one of the five great cities of Persia to which Safavid carpets of the 16th and 17th centuries are usually attributed, the others being Tabriz, Kashan, Kerman and Herat. During the reign of Shah Abbas I (1588-1629), the Safavid Empire enjoyed comparative stability, which facilitated a great outpouring of artistic creativity. In 1598, Abbas

SAFAVID CARPETS

Photo P. J. Gates

The Clark 'Strapwork' Carpet
(detail)
Persia, Isfahan, early to mid 17th century.
3.15 × 8.00m (10′4″ × 26′3″).
Unfortunately no recent photograph of this carpet exists. It has been in storage for some time and the Corcoran is strangely unwilling to have one taken, despite the carpet's beauty and importance. Its solid blue 'strapwork' relates it to the two Bijapur carpets and to the Tabbagh carpet, although it has a version of the 'palmette and leaf bracket' design in its main border, as do the Jaipur and Emery carpets. Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., gift of Senator W. A. Clark. Inv. no. 26.271. Photograph after Erdmann, 1955, fig. 76.

moved his capital from Qazvin to Isfahan and immediately established workshops for painters, weavers and other craftsmen within the Imperial Palace. According to contemporary reports, the Shah himself was skilled in weaving and the surviving carpets of the period which can be attributed with some degree of certainty to Isfahan are testaments to the fact that the workshops he established produced carpets of the highest quality.

Many of the attributions to individual cities and regions made for both Safavid and early Ottoman carpets are extremely subjective. However, there is strong circumstantial evidence regarding certain early 17th century rugs which allows us to ascribe them to Isfahan with confidence. There is, in what is now Iraq, one of the holiest of Shi'a shrines, that of Imam 'Ali at al-Najaf. During the 17th century, Iraq experienced almost constant warfare between the Safavids and Ottomans, but in 1623, Abbas occupied a large part of the country, including the capital Baghdad and al-Najaf itself. In 1638 his successor, Shah Safi I, was forced out of Iraq by the Turks, and the country remained under Ottoman rule until after the First World War. However, al-Najaf was a place of pilgrimage for Persians, whose national religion is Shi'a Islam, and devotees were allowed access to it by the Ottomans.

It may have been during the short period towards the end of his life when he controlled al-Najaf that Shah Abbas donated a group of rugs to the shrine. Three complete rugs have been preserved as well as fragments of three others. Two are woven with silk pile and the others with wool. All six have gold and silver brocade and two bear inscriptions to the effect that they were 'Donated by the Dog of this Shrine, Abbas'. The pious Safavid ruler often referred to himself as 'the Dog of Ali ibn Abu Talib' – a sign of his devotion to the Imam 'Ali and an indication of his own humility, dogs being considered the dirtiest of beasts in the Muslim world.[21]

The most extraordinary of the al-Najaf pieces is a silk carpet woven in two halves with gold 'strapwork' arabesques on a crimson ground. Its total dimensions are 9.56 × 14.03 metres (31′5″ × 46′0″), making it by far the largest complete Safavid carpet known to have survived. In style and technique it can be directly related to a fragment of a very similar carpet, woven on a much smaller scale, and to a knotted silk vestment, both in the V&A. The design is also closely related to the wool carpets of the 'Strapwork' group. The vestment bears the remains of an inscription band in Armenian and, with its *Annunciation* and *Crucifixion* scenes, was almost certainly woven for All Saviour's Cathedral in New Julfa, the Armenian suburb of Isfahan which was established under Imperial patronage in 1605.[22]

Arthur Upham Pope remarked that the cartoon for the vestment was almost certainly supplied by an Armenian and went on: 'The Armenian Community was greatly valued by Shah Abbas and certain of their leaders had his complete confidence.' It is worth remembering that Shah Abbas put the entire Persian silk trade into the hands of Armenian merchants, in which they proved extremely successful. It is known that their Dutch trading partners not only paid them in cash but also in bartered merchandise, including paintings.

Because the al-Najaf carpets were

The Emery 'Strapwork' Carpet
Persia, Isfahan, early 17th century.
3.36 × 8.23m (10′11″ × 27′0″).
This carpet has the most complex version of the 'Strapwork' design, with multiple 'overlapping'. Despite extensive wear and large rewoven sections it appears to be complete in width. It has one double system on the vertical axis, which has been pushed to the side, and one adjacent half system (the Jaipur carpet has a double central design system with a half system on either side). Given its long, narrow, format, it is possible that it was once one of a pair, and, if its companion repeated the layout in mirror image, the two carpets would have formed an impressive ½-1-1-½ composition. It is difficult to think of any other reason for the strange off-centredness of the design, and we know from the Bijapur examples that such carpets were made either as pairs or companion pieces. Cincinnati Art Museum, Ohio, gift of the Emery Family. Inv. no. 1954.480.

The Vienna 'Strapwork' Cope
Persia, Kashan or Isfahan, early 17th century
1.15 × 1.08m (3'9" × 3'7").
This lovely silk textile with multi-coloured brocading on a dark blue ground was included in the great 'Meisterwerken Muhammedanischer Kunst' exhibition in Munich in 1910 (Cat. no. 2389, pl. 201) and by Pope in the Survey, *pl. 1066. It is signed in* nastaliq *script by the Safavid court artist Djan Mohammed, the only textile known to bear his signature, Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst, Vienna. Inv. no. T 7266.*

gifts from the Shah himself, they can be dated with some certainty to the first third of the 17th century. The 'Strapwork' design itself is considerably older. Ernst Kühnel[23] illustrated an Egyptian woodwork panel of ca. 1000 A.D. with a very similar system to that seen on the carpets – indeed he compares it directly with a 'Polonaise' rug in the Liechtenstein collection.[24] The design can also be seen in many manuscript illuminations, for instance a tent canopy with blue 'strapwork' on a red ground depicted in a miniature by Mir Sayyid 'Ali of the Tabriz school, *Majnun brought in chains to Layla's tent*, in a manuscript of Nizami's *Khamsa* in the British Library, dated 1539-43. However, it may not be entirely coincidental that one of the closest parallels to the form of 'strapwork' seen on these carpets is the tile decoration on the exterior of the dome of the Sheikh Lotfallah Mosque in Isfahan, built by Shah Abbas between 1601 and 1628, which accords well with the putative dating of the carpets.

'Strapwork' on other Carpets and Textiles

A silk embroidery in the Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst, Vienna, has a wonderful 'strapwork' design in polychrome brocade on a dark blue ground with superb floral borders and flowers in the field. This textile, in the form of half a cope, is signed by the court artist Djan Mohammed and is dateable to the early 17th century. The 'strapwork' design on textiles was not confined to Persia, and can also be seen on a silk kaftan in the Topkapı Palace which, in gold on a red ground with small flower heads embellishing the broad 'strapwork' bands, is remarkably similar in colour and design to the two silk 'Strapwork' carpets. It bears a label stating that it belonged to Selim I (r. 1512-20), not too far fetched if one remembers the tent canopy in a Persian miniature of about 1540.[25]

As indicated, parallels can be found on many other types and groups of Safavid carpets, although the particular rendition of the design on the seven wool and two silk carpets is very distinctive. The use of the split-palmette or *rumi* arabesque is ubiquitous and has been described by Kühnel as the characteristic form of the Islamic arabesque design. It is found in the main borders of medallion carpets attributed to Tabriz in the first half of the 16th century. On one of the most beautiful examples of this group, the carpet formerly in the Austrian Imperial Collection and now in the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum in Lisbon, formal 'strapwork' arabesques are used not only in the borders but also as a major part of the field decoration above and below the central medallion.

Similar 'strapwork' can also be found in the borders of most other well-defined design groups of Safavid carpets. It is common in the borders of 'vase technique' carpets from Kerman, including those of the Sanguszko group, in the minor border of the Ardabil medallion carpets and the Paris-Cracow white ground carpet, as well as in the main border of the silk Branicki carpet and an identical silk border fragment in the Kunst und Gewerbe Museum, Hamburg. These last four pieces perhaps represent the weaving industry in Kashan in both wool and silk. It is found in the main borders of carpets of the so-called 'Portuguese' group which, being jufti-knotted (amongst other reasons), are attributable to Khorasan, and in the main borders of an extensive group of floral and animal carpets attributed to Isfahan. It can also be related to the elegantly spiralling arabesques seen in the main border of the Anhalt carpet in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and in even more elegant form in the main border of the Stockholm silk hunting carpet, which also has a variant 'strapwork' design in its minor borders.

The Bardini-Bingham Carpet
Persia, Kerman, 17th century.
2.49 × 5.74m (8'2" × 18'10").
One of only two carpets in the 'vase technique' with a field design of broad 'strapwork' and thus clearly related to the Isfahan carpets. It has animals in the field, whereas a second example, a pieced fragment on the London market nearly 20 years ago, does not (see Hoare, 1971). The 'strapwork' is in greenish blue and ivory on a red ground. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, gift of Mrs. Harry Payne Bingham. Inv. no. 59.75.

There are several carpets in which an arabesque of elegant banding is a major element of the field design. Perhaps the best known of these is the Bardini-Bingham carpet in the Metropolitan Museum, which has an arrangement of over-and-under blue and ivory 'strapwork' forming a series of five central cartouches with trefoils. The design is 'opposed' and has a rich profusion of animals, palmettes and flowers in the field. It is woven in the 'vase' structure of

The Aberconway 'Polonaise' Fragment
Persia, Isfahan, first third of the 17th century
1.45 × 2.59m (4'9" × 8'6").
This fragment of a scaled down version of the great carpet at al-Najaf is perhaps the most beautiful of all 'Polonaise' rugs in the West, executed in gold brocade on a crimson silk ground. The similarity of its weave, colour, drawing and overall quality led Pope to suggest that it might even have been by the same weaver as the Marcy-Indjoujian vestment, also in the Victoria & Albert Museum (see HALI *35, pp. 22-23). The Aberconway fragment is one of a very small number of finely knotted 'Polonaise' rugs woven with silk warps and all or part silk wefts. Victoria & Albert Museum, London. Inv. no. T.36-1954.*

carpets attributed to Kerman, as are two in the Burrell Collection, Glasgow, which have split-palmette arabesques in 'double overlays', forming circles and quatrefoils in the field. We should also note the elegant arabesque design of the red-ground jufti knotted fragment of a Khorasan carpet which was in Berlin before the war but of which only tiny pieces now remain.

'Polonaise' Carpets

Not surprisingly, the closest parallels can be observed on silk carpets of the so-called 'Polonaise' type, two of which, the al-Najaf carpet and its pendant, the Aberconway fragment, have already been discussed. Three 'Polonaise' rugs illustrated by Pope are also significant.[26] An interesting comparison can be made with the example formerly with Bernheimer (*Survey*, pl. 1248), which has a central diamond medallion around which radiates a vine arabesque with huge trefoils in the same arrangement as the Benguiat 'Strapwork' carpet.

Two other 'Polonaise' rugs, one in the Liechtenstein Collection to which we have already referred, the other from the Czartoryski Collection, now in the National Museum, Cracow, have closely related schemes, although their arabesques are more floral and sinuous in character. The inner guard of the Czartoryski carpet contains the same floral meander as the outer guard of the Jaipur carpet, while the main border of the Liechtenstein carpet contains a feathery 'mannerist' version of the palmette, bracket leaves and double *rumi* repeat seen in the main border of the Jaipur, Emery and Clark carpets. This main border design is found on a number of 'Polonaise' rugs and on other woollen red-ground Isfahan carpets with the more familiar floral fields.

Other 'Polonaise' carpets with related designs include examples in the Treasury of San Marco, Venice and another at al-Najaf. Their designs can also be connected very closely with an example in wool with metal brocading in the Shrine of Imam Reza at Mashad. Interestingly, the Liechtenstein and Czartoryski carpets have long associations with European nobility, the San Marco, al-Najaf and, possibly, Mashad carpets have direct links with Shah Abbas, while the Jaipur and Bijapur carpets are associated with powerful Muslim courts in India.

It is, however, the clear design and structural links between the silk 'Polonaise' carpets and the red-ground wool carpets of Martin's so-called 'Herat' group which make it difficult to understand his attribution and its wide acceptance. Added to this, the Isfahan rugs are so clearly different in wool, colour and handle to Indian versions that it is difficult to understand how such confusion has arisen. In fairness, however, it is hard to distinguish between these rugs if one relies on photographs.[27]

It is instructive to recall that, in 1624, the Governors of the Dutch East India Company wrote to their factor in Surat ordering 540 high quality Persian carpets. They added that if cheaper Indian examples of better quality were available, these should be bought and shipped with 300 Persian carpets. Surat, on the northwest coast of India was, like Goa, one of the great trading ports of the 16th and 17th centuries. Why would the Dutch East India Company order their agent to acquire large numbers of Persian carpets in India if Surat was not a major port of entry for commercially made Persian rugs? If, as Mr Ellis maintains, all the red-ground floral rugs, which appear so frequently in 17th century Dutch paintings, are Indian, what *were* those Persian carpets which were available in such great quantities to a Dutch merchant in an Indian port in the third decade of the 17th century?[28]

Footnotes, Bibliography & Acknowledgements see Appendix