

ANIMAL AND TREE CARPETS

An Amorphous Group

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The nineteen rugs discussed here were all made in roughly the same area, over a period of no more than 150 years, between the mid 17th century and the first quarter of the 19th. There is little objective evidence to bind them together: they include examples with different structures, designs and individual motifs. We propose a system of sub-groups within the 'amorphous group', and look at changing attitudes to the dating of these rugs.

Some rug groups are more solidly constituted than others. In some instances, the 'naive animal and tree carpets' being one such, the word 'group' is not quite so obviously applicable and may require elucidation. It is possible that not all the rugs listed here would be included by other authors in this grouping, or that they would add other rugs which we have decided not to include (or which we do not know about).

The fact that within the group there are recognisable sub-groups of rugs with closely related designs and, in some cases, structures, indicates that we are dealing with the work of several weaving villages, towns or even regions within the larger area to which we assign all the rugs. We should therefore qualify our remarks by saying that what follows is 'work in progress', the first, we hope useful, observations on a number of carpets which have become more intriguing as more examples have come to light.

Because these rugs have so few characteristics in common, we have called them an 'amorphous group of naive animal and tree carpets', bearing in mind that two of them are without animals. It is an almost invariable feature of any generalised description of oriental carpet groups, whether based on structure or design, that there are exceptions. Within this overall terminology, we have created sub-groupings based on the presence of compositions, elements of compositions or individual motifs, which more closely relate the rugs within each sub-group to each other than to other constituents of the wider group.

The close similarity between the rugs in the sub-groups may suggest that these have more significance than the wider

group. However, definition of sub-groups gives greater cohesion to the idea of a more generalised grouping, and allows us to make observations which would otherwise have been impossible.

We have divided the 19 rugs into seven sub-groups. Some of these contain rugs so closely related in design, colour and, in some instances, structure that their manufacture in the same place at the same time can be accepted without qualms. This in turn demonstrates that within the general region where they were probably made, there were strong localised styles of weaving, as demonstrated by the survival of two or more examples. In the case of the carpet now in the Kirchheim Collection (3, D12), we have been unable to find a direct analogue and have placed it in a sub-group of its own. However, its composition of naively drawn animals, its colour and structure indicate that it is part of the larger grouping.

There is very little tangible evidence to indicate where any of the rugs were made. They are all symmetrically knotted, which suggests that none of them were made in any well-known Safavid weaving centre. In addition, a

shared naivety of drawing and composition, in some instances clearly based on an earlier Safavid prototype, suggests a 'provincial' origin. As to where this might have been, we believe that they were woven in what could be described as the 'Western Golden Triangle'. Thus some of the rugs might be thought of as 'northwest Persian' (Azerbaijan or Kurdistan), 'Caucasian' or even 'east Anatolian', an area to which at least one of the rugs has been vaguely attributed in the



1. The Haim carpet (A1), northwest Persia, late 17th century (?). 2.60 x 4.42m (8'6" x 14'6"). Published by Martin in 1908 as 13th century. The drawing of the trees relates it to the Kevorkoff carpet (G18). The Quill Jones carpet (A2), with an identical border, has the field design drawn on a smaller scale, giving it a rather cramped appearance. Wher Collection, Switzerland.



past. This example (2, B8), the splendid fragment in Berlin, almost certainly deserves this attribution.

To compound our attributional problems, it must be remembered that when we attempt to distinguish between 'north-west Persia' and 'the Caucasus' in the context of 17th and early 18th century rugs and textiles, the matter is complicated by geopolitical realities. At the end of the 17th century, the Persian realm extended north as far as (but did not include) Baku. Under Nadir Shah in the mid 18th century, this territory was extended to some 200 kilometres north of Batum on the Black Sea and Derbent on the Caspian. By 1813, the Russians had pushed the border back south to its late 17th century position, and by 1828 to close to its present location. When most of these rugs were likely to have been made, the region owed different allegiances and represented different cultural entities to those of today, thus to make a clear distinction between north-west Persian and Caucasian rugs of the 17th and 18th century is anachronistic.

We can avoid this dilemma by calling the entire group 'provincial Persian'. Its two main characteristics are symmetrical knotting and, in many instances, designs obviously based on asymmetrically knotted carpets attributed with varying unanimity to the principal Safavid weaving centres and the surrounding areas – Tabriz, Kashan, Esfahan, Kerman and Khorasan, as well as others such as Qazvin, the products of which have yet to be clearly identified. Exactly where in historical north-west Persia many of these rugs were woven is another, perhaps insuperable, problem. Many were probably woven in the huge province of Azerbaijan, north and south of the present Iranian border, but others may have been made in Persian Kurdistan or even

2. The Berlin fragmentary carpet (B8), east Anatolia, mid 17th century (?). Arguably the oldest as well as the most beautiful of all the rugs under consideration here, it was described by Orendi in 1930 as an "Armenisch-kleinasiatischer Bastard-Teppich", an insightful attribution. It has red silk warps and mixed cotton and red silk wefts, and a border design associated with many types of Anatolian rugs, some of them very old. Its field design is probably closest to the later and more degenerate Milan carpet (B5), but it has other features in common with the Worworsky (B6) and Bechirian (B7) carpets. A particularly noteworthy feature is its brilliant palette, including a rare yellow ground. Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin, inv.no. I.34.

by Kurds or Armenians in east Anatolia. The group is sufficiently diverse in structure and design to suggest that a wide geographic range is possible.

There is one other attributional problem, although it is as much ethnic as geographic. It contains within it the seeds of one of the great controversies in carpet history – the charged question of Armenian involvement in carpet production. Views on this emotive subject seem to polarise into political camps, one claiming that Armenians had little or nothing to do with rugs, while the other asserts that without Armenian involvement, the art of oriental rug weaving would not have existed.

In our view, the Armenian connection with carpet production in Iran, the Caucasus and Anatolia is so embedded in the existing historical records of carpet weaving that to deny it is absurd. There is firm evidence of the presence of Armenians as patrons, entrepreneurs, designers and weavers, from the time of Shah Abbas in Persia (at least two known examples of the 'Polonaise' type have Armenian inscriptions) throughout the 17th century in the northern border region, to a wide involvement in 'luxury' carpets for most of the 19th and well into the 20th century in Turkey. At the same time they were apparently involved with village production throughout the Caucasus. In other words, Armenians are documented as concerned with the production of carpets in major weaving centres, from the 17th century Esfahan 'Polonaise' rugs up to the Kum Kapı workshops in Istanbul of the 20th. They also seem to have had an equally lengthy interest in 'provincial' or 'village' weaving.

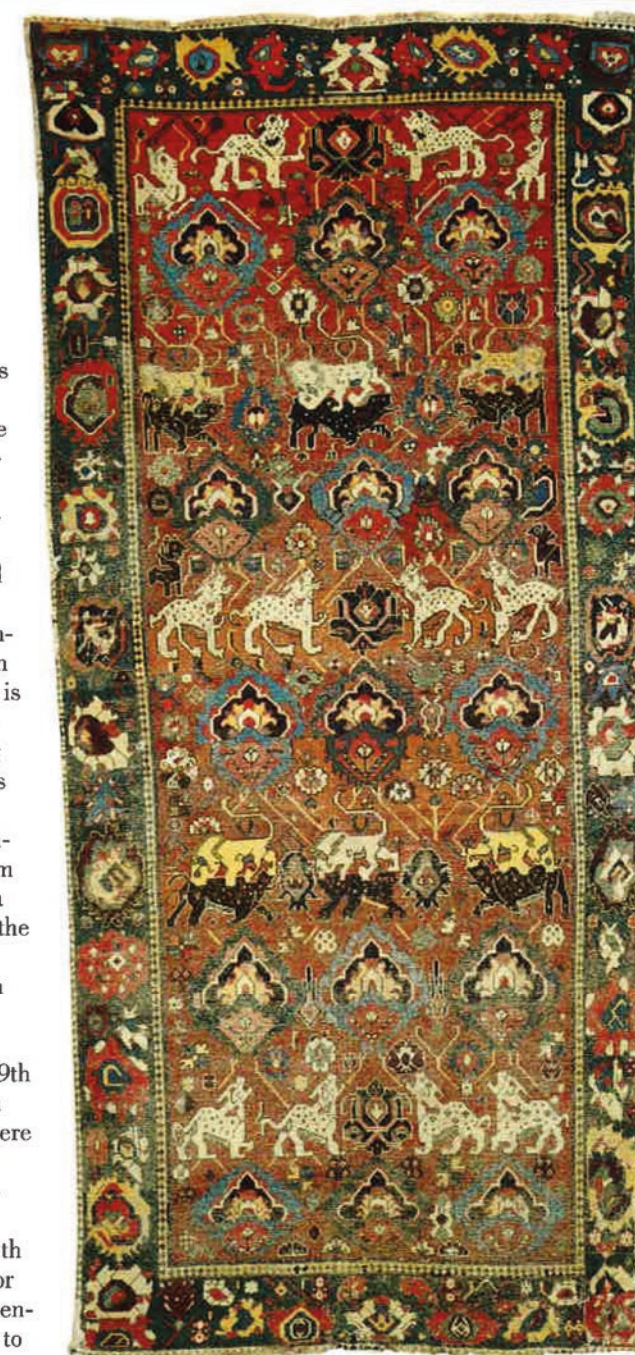
The 19 rugs in the 'amorphous group of naive animal and tree carpets' can be divided by design into seven sub-groups (A-G, see Appendix for full information).

Subgroup A

- A1. The Haim Carpet. Wher Collection, Switzerland (1).
- A2. The Quill Jones Carpet. Mr and Mrs Arthur Brilliant Collection, USA.
- A3. The Kouchakji Carpet. Whereabouts unknown (12).

Subgroup B

- B4. The Baltimore Carpet. Whereabouts unknown (5).
- B5. The Milan Carpet. Freiburger Collection, Munich (9).
- B6. The Worworsky Carpet. Whereabouts unknown (13).
- B7. The Bechirian Carpet. Where-



3. The Bausback carpet (D12), northwest Persia, 18th century (?). 1.45 x 3.03m (4'9" x 9'11"). Only two Safavid wool-piled carpets with animals in rows are known to survive, the Rockefeller rug in the Carpet Museum, Tehran (Pope, *Survey*, pls.1182-3), and the Marquand carpet, present whereabouts unknown (C. Bier, *Woven from the Soul, Spun from the Heart*, no.46). Some of the animals on these 16th-17th century rugs appear in similar form on the present carpet (as on small silk Kashans with rows of animals). The small white spotted animal, its head raised, is also found on several carpets of the Sanguszko group. The rather crudely drawn palmette border is also derived from Safavid carpets. Kirchheim Collection, Stuttgart.

abouts unknown.

B8. The Berlin Fragment. Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin (2).

Subgroup C

C9. The Durlaeher Carpet. Wher Collection, Switzerland (11).

C10. The Blum Carpet.

Whereabouts unknown.

C11. The McMullan Carpet.

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (4).

Subgroup D

D12. The Bausback Carpet.

Kirchheim Collection, Stuttgart (3).

Subgroup E

E13. The Andrassy Carpet.

Whereabouts unknown.

E14. The Oakland Carpet.

Webb Hill Collection, California (10).

E15. The Kevorkian Carpet.

Whereabouts unknown.

Subgroup F

F16. The Keir Silk Carpet. Keir Collection, Ham, Surrey (8).

F17. The Lempertz (Silk?) Carpet. Whereabouts unknown.

Subgroup G

G18. The Kevorkoff Carpet.

Herrmann, Munich (6).

G19. The Schürmann Carpet.

L.A. Mayer Memorial Institute for Islamic Art, Jerusalem (7).

The carpets contained within these divisions are, in some cases, especially sub-groups A, E and F, so clearly related in many aspects of design that they must represent the weaving production of one small area. The two carpets in group A have designs of fairly realistic predatory felines attacking deer and

what may be intended to represent onagers. Two such 'bum-biting' motifs appear in each row and are inset into a forest of diverse trees, including one with an idiosyncratic zig-zag shape. Both rugs have one narrow border flanked by plain guards, the border pattern a doubled system of overlaid split-palmettes.

Equally close to each other are the three rugs in sub-group E. These also have a field design of animals, usually arranged two to a row, among flowering trees. The principal animals appear in pairs, one above the other and facing opposite directions. One of these animals is dark and the other light, but they both have an oddly rectangular shape and are heavily spotted (this feature is often seen on the animals of this group). It is difficult to decide quite what they are intended to be; each has a tail and four legs but with a beak-like mouth and a hang-

ing turkey-like wattle. Various other smaller-scale animals also appear, which on the Andrassy (E13) and Oakland (E14) carpets look like a hybrid of goat, onager and fan-tailed bird. In some cases these animals face each other at the base of trees to form a typical 'animal-tree' motif.

All three rugs in sub-group E also have more easily recognisable raptor-like bird forms, with one foot raised. Apart from their general style and the obvious resemblance of their field compositions, one individual motif which appears in similar form on the rugs of both sub-groups A and E perhaps represents a plane tree. This is rather more realistically drawn on the sub-group A rugs but in both it has a curiously testicular base, and on the sub-group E pieces, the tree itself has a more phallic form, resulting from simplified drawing, which reminds one of a similar motif noted on some early Anatolian kilims. This coincidence of imagery is probably just that, the 'testicular' motif in pairs at the base of the trees may be a version of that curious round rock or small pool which appears on a number of Safavid and Mughal rugs, most memorably on the fragmented Frick tree carpet.

The two rugs in sub-group F are almost identical. The principal attributional problem of these two pieces concerns their material – we assume that the Lempertz rug, like its Keir Collection counterpart, is silk-piled. Despite the fact that there are hardly any other silk-piled Caucasian rugs of an early date,¹ Friedrich Spuhler, in his catalogue of the rugs and textiles in the Keir Collection, opted for a south Caucasian attribution, while noting the similarity of the border design to some early Safavid rugs, as well as to some later pieces with a very Persian medallion design but symmetrical knotting. He also posited an early 18th century date.

Coincidentally Spuhler, discussing the Keir silk rug, mentions a fragment in Berlin (2, B8) as having an analogous design, although piled in wool. He speculates that it may have a silk warp, which it does, as well as a part silk weft; the silk in both warp and weft is red. We include it among the five rugs of sub-group B, though this is perhaps the most amorphous of our sub-groupings.

The Berlin fragment is actually a patchwork, with two principal pieces sewn together, the join being through the



4. The McMullan carpet (C11), (see detail p.102), northwest Persia, 18th century (?). 1.83 x 3.71m (6'0" x 12'2"). One of the best known rugs of this group, its resemblance to the Durlacher rug (C9) is obvious. The main borders on both rugs strongly suggest a Persian provenance. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv.no. 1971.263.7.

base of a large chequered peacock's tail below the half bar-cartouche; this bar was probably placed at the base of a tree, in much the same way as it appears on some of the other rugs included in this sub-group. Similar large-tailed peacocks appear on three other rugs in this sub-group, the Kouchakji (12, A3), the Baltimore (5, B4) and the Milan (9, B5), though only on the last of these is the tail chequered as in the Berlin fragment. This feature is encountered on several

5. The Baltimore carpet (B4) (opposite), northwest Persia/the Caucasus, 18th century. 1.30 x 2.16m (4'3" x 7'1"). This seems almost like a reduced version, or 'blown-up' detail, of the Kouchakji rug (A3). It lacks all animal figures except the paired peacocks, which are drawn in a similar manner (including the decoration of their tails) to those on the Kouchakji. It has a white cotton foundation and generally beautiful colour (despite its poor condition). It was de-acquisitioned by the Baltimore Museum of Art, which first offered it in 1987, when it failed to sell. It was sold in 1991 and resold by the buyer in September 1992. Whereabouts unknown.

Safavid rugs, most notably the Anhalt medallion carpet now in the Metropolitan Museum.²

The Berlin fragment is arguably the most beautiful of all the rugs discussed here. However, like the Keir and Lempertz rugs, its materials, specifically the red silk in its foundation, make attribution difficult. In 1930, Julius Orendi described it as an "Armenisch-kleinasiatische Bastard-Teppich". He used a very similar phrase to describe the Worworsky rug (13, B6), substituting 'persisch' for 'kleinasiatisch'.³ Certainly the stylized palmette 'zig-zag' in the border of the Worworsky rug is associated with some early Caucasian rugs, and a variant can be seen

on one of the Caucasian versions of the 'Portuguese' design now in the Metropolitan Museum.⁴ These latter rugs usually have corner designs containing stylized animals, including spotted cats, in place of the maritime scenes of the classical Persian examples, which relate them to our animal group.

The Berlin fragment, however, has a border design which not only suggests an Anatolian origin but which, together with its wonderful colour and quality, indicate that it may be the earliest of all the rugs discussed here. One of the closest parallels is with the border of a superb double re-entrant rug in the Türk ve İslam Eserleri Museum, Istanbul, which, though more complex in composition, has a similar continuous bracket-meander, ragged-palmettes and the endless-knot motif in the form of four small conjoined squares.⁵ A similar pattern can also be seen in the outer border of the extraordinary rug with plain blue field, also in the





TIEM collection.⁶ These two rugs should probably be dated no later than the 16th century, but the border design continued in use in very similar form for some time on Anatolian rugs, and can be seen on some of the small white-ground 'bird' rugs of the 'Transylvanian' family.⁷

Its appearance on early Anatolian rugs of very different types is further attested to by the strange, but very beautiful, rug with a quincuncial medallion design in the Vakıflar Museum, Istanbul, which despite its symmetric knotting, is attributed by Balpınar and Hirsch to either Syria or southern Anatolia.⁸ This rug is probably no later than the beginning of the 17th century, and we are tempted to date the Berlin fragment to around the middle of the 17th century.

The closest parallel to the Berlin fragment is probably the Milan rug (9, B5), with many of the same motifs in similar positions, though the drawing is cruder and the palette, though as diverse, does not show the same colour saturation. Like the Berlin fragment, it has a finely drawn inner reciprocal trefoil guard, though its weird main border, unfortunately incomplete, is not found on any other 'animal group' rug, nor, indeed, on any other rug we can recall.

Despite the strong Anatolian flavour of the Berlin fragment's border, the field design of other rugs we have included in this sub-group, particularly the Worworsky, the Kouchakji, the Milan and the Bechirian (B7), strikes one as more obviously Persian in inspiration (as might the Berlin fragment if complete). Perception

6. The Kevorkoff carpet (G18), northwest Persia, 18th century (?). 2.06 x 4.85m (6'9" x 15'11"). This large and brilliantly coloured carpet is one of only two with compositions which do not include animals. Its derivation from a vase carpet is clear. Two large vases appear in the centre of the field at top and bottom and other typical vase carpet features recognisable here include large 'Shah Abbas' palmettes and huge curving sickle leaves. One vase carpet which makes an interesting comparison is a fragmented example with pieces in the Burrell Collection, Glasgow (inv.no. 9-15) and the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (inv.no. 360-1892), both published by Beattie (*Carpets of Central Persia*, nos.18-19). The rug has a foundation of undyed cotton and has been attributed by its present owner to Caucasian Azerbaijan. The 'rosette and cartouche' border can be found on two other rugs discussed here, the McMullan (C11) and Durlaehar (C9) 'hunting' carpets. Eberhart Herrmann, Munich.

of this Persian flavour is not just instinctive. There is at least one great Safavid carpet, the Berlin Sanguszko, sadly almost totally destroyed, which has a directional design containing many of the same elements as the later rugs arranged in much the same manner; these include flowering trees, 'bum-biting' animal groups, single animals and paired peacocks.⁹

Two of the sub-group C rugs, the Durlaehar (11, C9) and the McMullan (4, C11), are very similar, with mounted huntsmen drawn in 'carousel' style and with Persian looking star-and-cartouche borders. The third rug in this sub-group, the Blum (C10), seems to show a 'blown-up' detail of the design, though it also has a more rustic flavour. All three have several motifs arranged at right angles to the general design and have expressive mounted figures leaning forward to urge their horses on; other horsemen on both the Durlaehar and McMullan rugs do not appear in recognisable human form but are drawn in the same semi-abstract 'bird-like' manner. All three rugs have standing figures drawn in a similar manner (with baggy trousers). The Blum carpet has been cut all round and may be missing a main border, though the presence of an inner guard argues against this.

The designs of these three rugs appear to be based on Safavid hunting carpets, though very few of the latter survive. Those that do include the wool carpet attributed to Tabriz and now in the Poldi Pezzoli Museum, Milan, the famous Vienna, Boston and Stockholm silk carpets and the Maciet Sanguszko now in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris. Of these, the Maciet is perhaps the closest in inspiration to our sub-group C. As with the Berlin Sanguszko carpet this is an instance of the movement of Kerman designs (if 'vase' structure carpets were indeed made there, as seems most likely) from south-central Persia to the northwest from the late 17th century onwards.

Although neither has animals, the two rugs in sub-group G seem related to the wider group in their drawing style. The main border of the Schürmann 'tree-and-pool' rug (7, G19), with its unusual pale greenish-blue tonality, contains a distinctive design of a continuous vertical series of lyre-shaped palmettes which



7. The Schürmann carpet (G19), northwest Persia or the Caucasus, 18th century (?). 1.93 x 2.57m (6'10" x 8'5"). Without animals and with an unusual palette. The lyre-shaped border motifs appear on the Bechirian (B7) and some Caucasian rugs. Drawing relates it to the group but the unusual field can be related to the 18th-19th century 'Kurdish' 'garden' carpets. The direction of the trees and lobed pools also suggest a Caucasian link. L.A. Mayer Memorial Institute for Islamic Art, Jerusalem.

can also be seen, though in cruder form, on the Bechirian rug. It also appears on certain Caucasian carpets, such as one with large palmettes in the Textile Museum, Washington DC.¹⁰ The Kevorkoff rug (6, G18), however, has a more Persian border of rosette-and-bar cartouches. Similar borders can be seen on other rugs of this group, including the McMullan and Durlaehar 'hunting' rugs.

The field designs of these two rugs also have a strong Persian flavour and the Kevorkoff is clearly derived from a vase carpet. The Schürmann field design is less easy to pin down, but the conjunction of oddly shaped trees curving in opposite directions away from a lobed pool brings to mind the small rug in the Metropolitan Museum which has a very similar arrangement of motifs in its centre.¹¹

Space permits only a general overview of these carpets, our main purpose being to bring as many together as possible. Taken together, these designs show strong affinities with classical Persian carpets, with carpets which have been attributed to the Caucasus (whatever, in a historical sense, that means) and, in some cases, most notably the border of the Berlin fragment, with several types of early Anatolian rugs. The aesthetic quality of many of the group is arguable, though the colour reproduction of the Berlin fragment will, we hope, strike those seeing it for the first time with the same force as it struck us. Though perhaps displaying something of the decadence of design associated with Turkish pile weaving in the second half of the 17th century, it is an extraordinarily beautiful thing, characterised above all by brilliant colour.

In many respects the animals seen on so many of these carpets, naively drawn, spotted, but with great inner strength – the urgency of the horsemen on the Blum carpet is a remarkable instance – remind one of the animals found on some early Dragon carpets. Martin considered the Dragon carpets to be very early examples of Eastern pile weaving and also thought that the Haim carpet was one of the earliest manifestations of this art form, dating it to the 13th century. He noted that he had acquired it from a Persian who told him that it had come from a mosque in northern Turkey.

Martin was one of those pioneering

carpet writers who believed that the aesthetics of carpet weaving moved in a direct line from naive but powerful drawing and composition to great sophistication, and that the increase in complexity in a design was clear evidence of a later date. The idea of 'decadence', of a sophisticated design becoming cruder and more rustic as it moves away from the 'original' in time and place is a more modern concept, pioneered by Kurt Erdmann, which has had great influence over the majority of more recent writers on the subject. But it is one which has increasingly been questioned, especially in areas such as early Turkish pile weaving where the definition of 'crudity' and 'naivety' is subjective, depending upon the acuteness of the observer's eye.

When Charles Grant Ellis can persist in his opinion that the majority of the Turkish rugs in the Kirchheim and Alexander Collections are no earlier than the 18th century and are, in the main, 19th century, "carbon dating or no", it must be that we are witnessing immovable prejudice which cannot accept new ideas based on new material.¹² The problem largely derives from an entrenched notion of what constitutes earliness in Turkish weaving. Ellis believes that the well-known 15th and 16th century workshop groups – Lottos, small-pattern Holbeins, large- and small-medallion Ushaks, white-ground 'bird' and 'gintamani' rugs and so on – represent 'classical' Turkish weaving, and that anything that resembles them but which is clearly the product of a different milieu must be a later 'copy'.

Few people now argue that Martin's dating of the Haim carpet is believable. But his reasons are more in keeping with modern ideas than those of Erdmann and his intellectual disciples. We do not claim too much for the rugs discussed in this essay, and believe that, for the most part, they date from the mid 17th to the first quarter of the 19th century. The diversity of influences which they display indicates that they originated in a milieu where there was knowledge of a wide variety of earlier carpet designs. In other words, they almost certainly do not represent an indigenous weaving style but are based on carpets from well-known production centres. This phenomenon argues quite firmly for an Armenian connection, although in the absence of objective evidence we do not press this view too strongly.

Whoever made these rugs, wherever and whenever they originated, they constitute a fascinating 'group' which will certainly repay further detailed study. *Notes & supplementary illustrations see Appendix.*



8. The Keir silk carpet (F16), northwest Persia or the Caucasus, 18th century (?). 1.69 x 2.28m (5'6" x 7'6"). This most unusual carpet was discussed at length by Friedrich Spuhler in his catalogue of Islamic carpets and textiles in the Keir Collection, when the existence of another smaller but otherwise almost identical example was not known; the latter subsequently appeared in a small auction held by Kunsthaus Lempertz, Cologne. The dating of the Keir rug to the 18th century is possible, but a later date is equally likely. The silk piling makes any geographical provenance very difficult to determine. The presence of camels is interesting and unusual; these animals, as far as we know, appear on only one Safavid carpet, the destroyed Berlin Sanguszko (see A.U. Pope, *Survey*, pl.1213). Keir Collection, Ham, Surrey.



9. The Milan carpet (B5), northwest Persia, 18th century (?). 1.63 x 3.47m (5'4" x 11'5"). One of the few animal rugs of this overall group with a two-directional design. The presence of small mounted huntsmen, some of whom seem to be standing on their mounts rather than riding them, relates it to the three hunting rugs of sub-group C, as well as to the fragmented carpet in Berlin (B8). The Milan and Berlin rugs also have many of the same motifs arranged in a similar manner, though the Milan carpet seems cruder in both drawing and colour. Freiburger Collection, Munich.

10. The Oakland carpet (D12), (opposite), northwest Persia, 18th century (?). 1.40 x 2.52m (4'7" x 8'3") (reduced in length). Ivory wool warp, white cotton weft. One of three very closely related rugs with almost identical designs. One, the Andrassy (E13), is now known only from a black and white photograph in Erdmann's illustrations for his unpublished *Formenwelt*, and the Kevorkian has not been seen since it was sold in New York in 1927. A similar border design is found on a number of rugs of obvious Anatolian origin; see, for instance, a long rug with conjoined octagons of a design group usually attributed to Konya in Thompson, *Carpet Magic*, p.111. Note the 'testicular' base to the trees, found also on the Haim rug. Webb Hill Collection, California.

