THE ARDABIL CARPETS

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Rexford Stead

The J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, California 1974

COVER:

The field of The Ardabil Carpet

FRONTISPIECE:

Detail of the great central medallion of the Los Angeles Ardabil Carpet

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Preface

This publication is being issued in recognition of the recent agreement between the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and The J. Paul Getty Museum to share in the exhibition of the famous Ardabil Carpet. This carpet, considered by most to be among the finest carpets ever made, was a gift from Mr. Getty to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1953, shortly before the foundation of his own museum in Malibu. Because extensive refurbishing of the carpet was needed in order to insure its continued display, the Getty Museum volunteered to undertake the work and as a result was given the privilege of exhibiting the carpet for alternating periods. During the time when the Ardabil Carpet is absent from either museum, the Coronation Carpet, a similarly important sixteenth-century Persian carpet also given by Mr. Getty to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, will be shown in its place.

Burton B. Fredericksen, *Curator*
The J. Paul Getty Museum

Acknowledgments

This monograph has come into being with encouraging assistance from a number of friends and colleagues. An initial indebtedness is to my late teacher and mentor, Arthur Upham Pope, who aroused my interest in the Ardabils some thirty years ago. He was always their most eloquent champion. The Department of Textiles of The Victoria and Albert Museum has been ever cooperative: I particularly thank Mr. Wingfield Digby, former Keeper of Textiles, and Miss Natalie Rothstein, Assistant Keeper, for many kindnesses including intimate access to old records and the London carpet itself. Mr. Martin Weaver, who has been responsible for a joint Iranian Government and UNESCO survey of selected ancient Iranian monuments with a view to their restoration, has been of unique value with expert advice on the nature and history of the Sufi dervish monastery and Shrine of Sheikh Safi at Ardabil, long believed to be the original home of the Ardabil Carpets. Mr. Mehran Saberi was most helpful in determining the best interpretation of the inscription cartouche. Within the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, many fellow staff members have taken special interest. Mrs. Mary Hunt Kahlenberg, Curator of Textiles and Costumes, prepared the technical analysis of the Los Angeles Ardabil and climbed ladders with me to inspect the London pendant. My assistant, Miss Frieda Kay Fall, sleuthed countless references to the carpets and is largely responsible for the extensive bibliography. Head Conservator Benjamin Johnson and Textile Conservator Mrs. Pat Reeves have shared a continuing concern for extending the already long life of the Los Angeles Ardabil. Photographs of the London Ardabil were provided by The Victoria and Albert Museum; those of the Los Angeles pendant, except where noted, are by Museum Photographer John Gebhart. Mr. Jay Gluck, who has succeeded Oxford University Press as publisher of the remarkable *Survey of Persian Art,* has generously permitted me to reproduce certain drawings and plates from Arthur Upham Pope's epic work, along with quotations. My secretary, Mrs. Madge Freese, who has also been involved in extensive correspondence regarding the carpets, prepared the manuscript, which in turn was deftly edited by Mrs. Anne Koepfli.

Mr. Kenneth Donahue, Director of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Mr. Burton Fredericksen, Curator of The J. Paul Getty Museum at Malibu, have been helpful in countless respects, including patience.

The donor of the Los Angeles Ardabil, Mr. J. Paul Getty, has taken warm interest in this effort. His continued generosity has permitted recent corrective restoration for the Los Angeles Ardabil, along with publication of this study by The J. Paul Getty Museum. Mr. Getty's enthusiasm for the decorative arts, and the Ardabils in particular, is encouraging in an age given to forgetting that the fine arts include more than painting.

Rexford Stead, *Deputy Director*
Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Many antique Oriental carpets have a kind of charisma which derives from a fusion of beauty of design, technical construction, durability, symbolism, history, and age. The greater the carpet, the more powerful the charisma; for additional components enter the picture: rarity, intellectual clarity, significance. A truly great carpet, like the best work of Rembrandt, projects strong appeal to both the knowledgeable connoisseur and the lay admirer.

Although weavers in many regions of the Near and Middle East have produced carpets of distinction, few approach the consummate artistic genius and workmanship of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Persian production. It was during this time, following a long and generally enervating period of foreign domination, that the Safavids came to power in Persia. From their humble Ardabil beginnings, the Safavids restored to the arts a uniquely Persian direction. Out of their epoch — especially during the culturally rich reigns of Shahs Tahmasp and Abbas I — came a flowering of the arts. The art of the book and art of the loom, invariably related to each other, were notable Safavid triumphs.

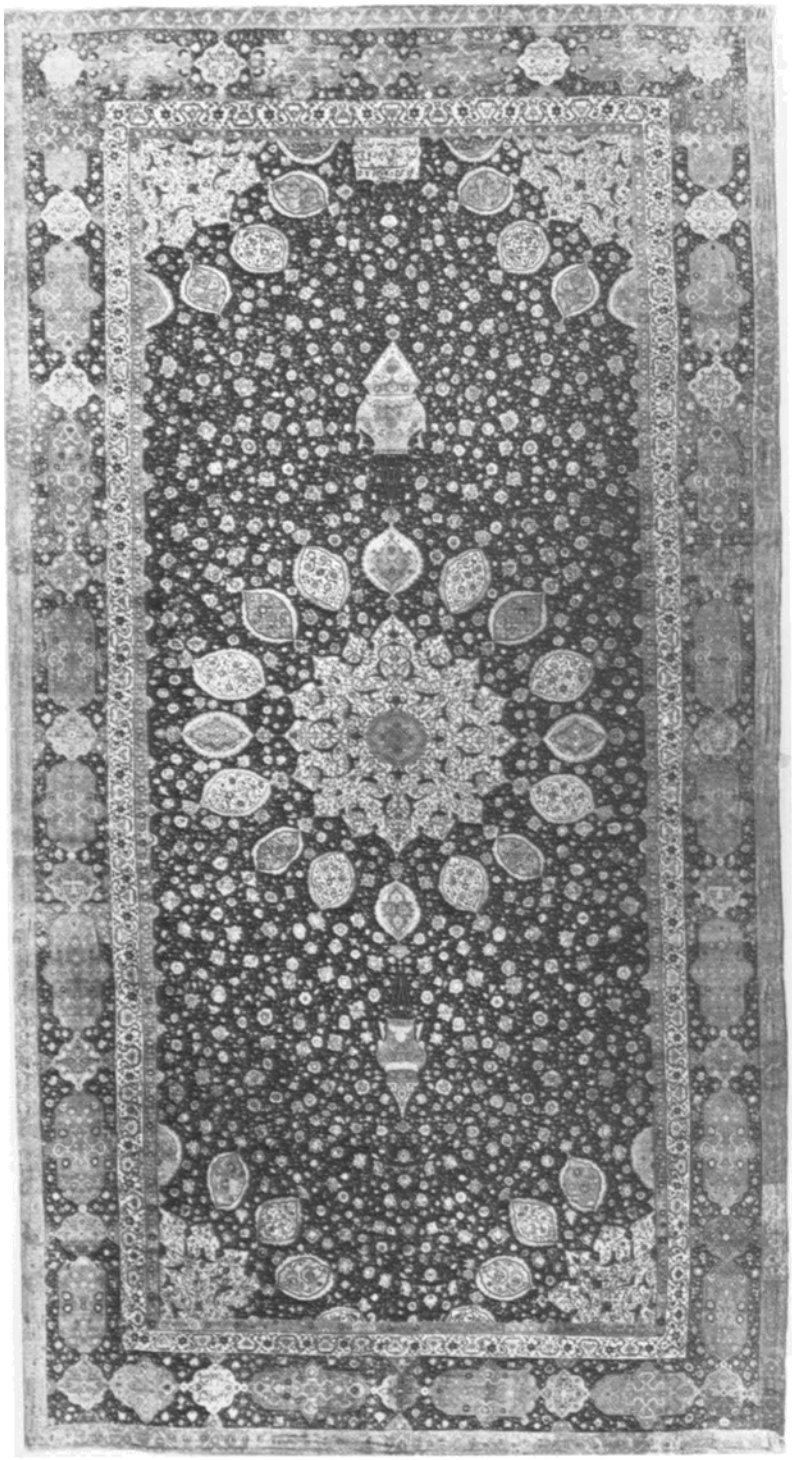
By the best estimate, some 1,500 Safavid period carpets and carpet fragments have survived into our own times. That so many have endured and come down to us over the centuries, despite vicissitudes of fire, climate, war, insects, wear, and time itself, is almost miraculous. But near-miracles can sometimes be explained. The existence of so many examples is clear tribute to the general excellence of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Persian carpet production. The human inclination is to cherish excellent things, whether a splendid Shang bronze or a brilliant Safavid court carpet, and to guard them and pass them safely from one generation to the next. In this way we may, at least in part, account for this remnant treasure of Iranian workmanship to be found in museum collections and private homes in almost every part of our contemporary world.

Of these extant examples, some eight emerge as truly superb artistic and technical triumphs. These, specifically, are the Anhalt Northwest Persian Medallion and Arabesque Carpet now in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art; the Northwest Persian Medallion and Tree Carpet in the possession of the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the pair of white-grounded Medallion and Tree Carpets with animals and figures, one in the collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and its partially destroyed mate in the Berlin Museum;[1] the Hunting Carpet of the Museo Poldi Pezzoli at Milan; the Multiple Medallion and Animal Carpet in the collection of The Victoria and Albert Museum; and the Ardabil Carpets, the subject of this monograph. Interestingly enough, all of these carpets are from northwest Persia, with most of them specifically assigned to Tabriz looms. It was Arthur Upham Pope who wrote of them: "each lays some claim to be the finest Persian carpet extant."

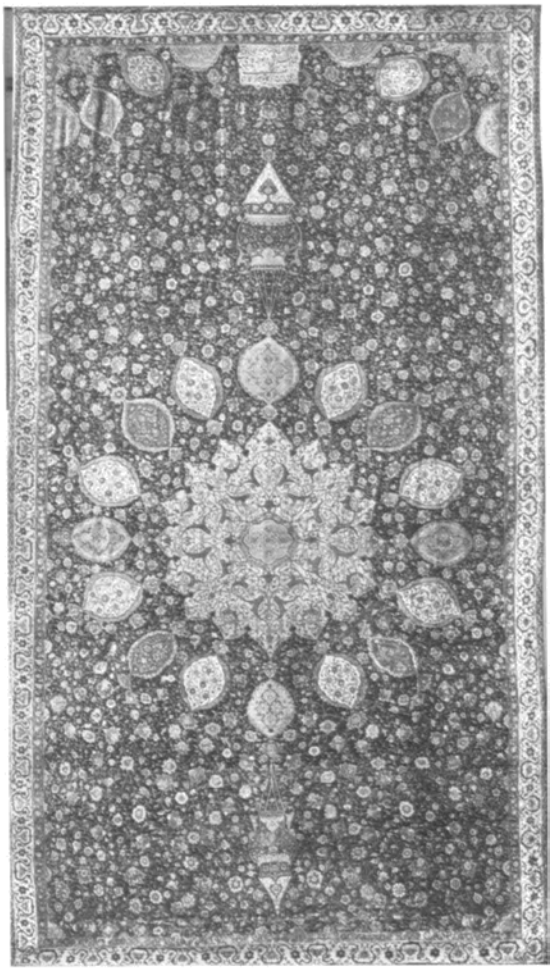
Yet of those cited, one set above all has captured both specialist and popular interest, and that is the matched pair, the Ardabil Carpets. The better known version has been on display at The Victoria and Albert Museum in London since the turn of the century (fig. 1). Its pendant, of reduced size,[2] was a munificent gift of Mr. Jean Paul Getty to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1953 (fig. 2).

The signed and dated Ardabils, of masterful design and impeccable workmanship, are clear proof of the genius of early Safavid carpet artistry. No study of them can be limited to their description, but must also make it possible to understand them in the context of Persian history, including that of the Shrine at Ardabil.

1 The Ardabil Carpet, Victoria and Albert Museum, London



2 The Ardabil Carpet, Los Angeles County Museum of Art



Persia's Moslem Heritage

The emergence of the Safavid Dynasty in Iran at the beginning of the sixteenth century is tied very strongly to the Shia (or Shi'ite) doctrine of the Moslem faith. Mohammed himself entreated a Sasanian Dynasty emperor to adopt the new faith of which he was both Prophet and administrator. But it was not until after his death that the Islamic fire and sword reached Persia in the form of some 30,000 Arab soldiers under the command of Saad Ibn Abu Waqqas. The Persian emperor, young Yazdagird, fled his sumptuous capital at Ctesiphon, and within six years' time, by 644, a decadent and corruption-ridden Persian Empire collapsed in the face of repeated Arab assaults. The conquerors, driven by fanatic belief in the righteousness of their cause, had already begun Persia's conversion to the Islamic faith — from Fars in the south, long a stronghold of Zoroastrianism, to Azerbaijan in the northwest and Khurasan in the northeast.

During the latter years of his life Mohammed had given no clear indication of his choice for Caliph or successor. Following his death in 632, the Prophet's closest disciples set about the task of determining a successor. The pragmatic decision to "elect" Abu Bakr as first Caliph apparently stemmed from political recognition that Islam was fast becoming an empire; its temporal and spiritual leader would need the loyalty and support of power structures beyond the birthplace of the Moslem religion.

But the question of successive Caliphates was to create a deep schism in the growing Moslem world, a schism centered largely about the person of Ali, nephew of the Prophet's uncle, Abu Talib. There were many who felt that Ali, particularly as he had married Mohammed's favorite daughter, Fatima, was the legitimate and proper successor. Ultimately he became the fourth Caliph, but his followers, who came to be known as Shi'ites (or literally, partisans) were convinced that only Ali and his descendents could be the true Caliphs. This early disagreement between the Shi'ites and the Sunnis (the traditionalists), was invariably at the root of inter-Islamic hostilities through later centuries. In Persia it manifested itself many times. More than in any other Islamic land, the Persians were attracted to Shi'ite Mohammedism, considering it the true faith, nurturing it through various orders, including Sufiism.

The Safavids

The Safavid Dynasty proclaimed itself Persia's rightful government after an interminably long night of alien rule.[3] Drawing principal sustenance from tribal peoples in the Persian provinces of Azerbaijan and Gilan, Ismail became the first Safavid Shah at the onset of the sixteenth century.[4] A warrior king, most of his reign was given over to battling the Central Asian Uzbegs and the Near Eastern Ottoman Turks. An uneasy peace was ultimately concluded with the Uzbegs, but the Ottoman Turks — under the Sunni banner of Selim the Grim, a despot credited with the massacre of more than 40,000 Shi'ites in his own dominions — persisted in attempts to crush the Safavids. That Ismail had decreed Shia doctrines as the Persian state religion could only inflame Selim.

Ismail's espousal of the Shia sect was not the result of personal whim or casual circumstance. His ancestors had been loyal to Ali and, notably, to the fourteenth-century Sufi, Sheikh Safi ad-Din, whose name (which translates as "purity of the faith") also provided the new dynasty with its name.

Sheikh Safi died in 1334 and was buried at Ardabil. In time a tall tomb tower was erected, embellished with the name of Allah, and the site

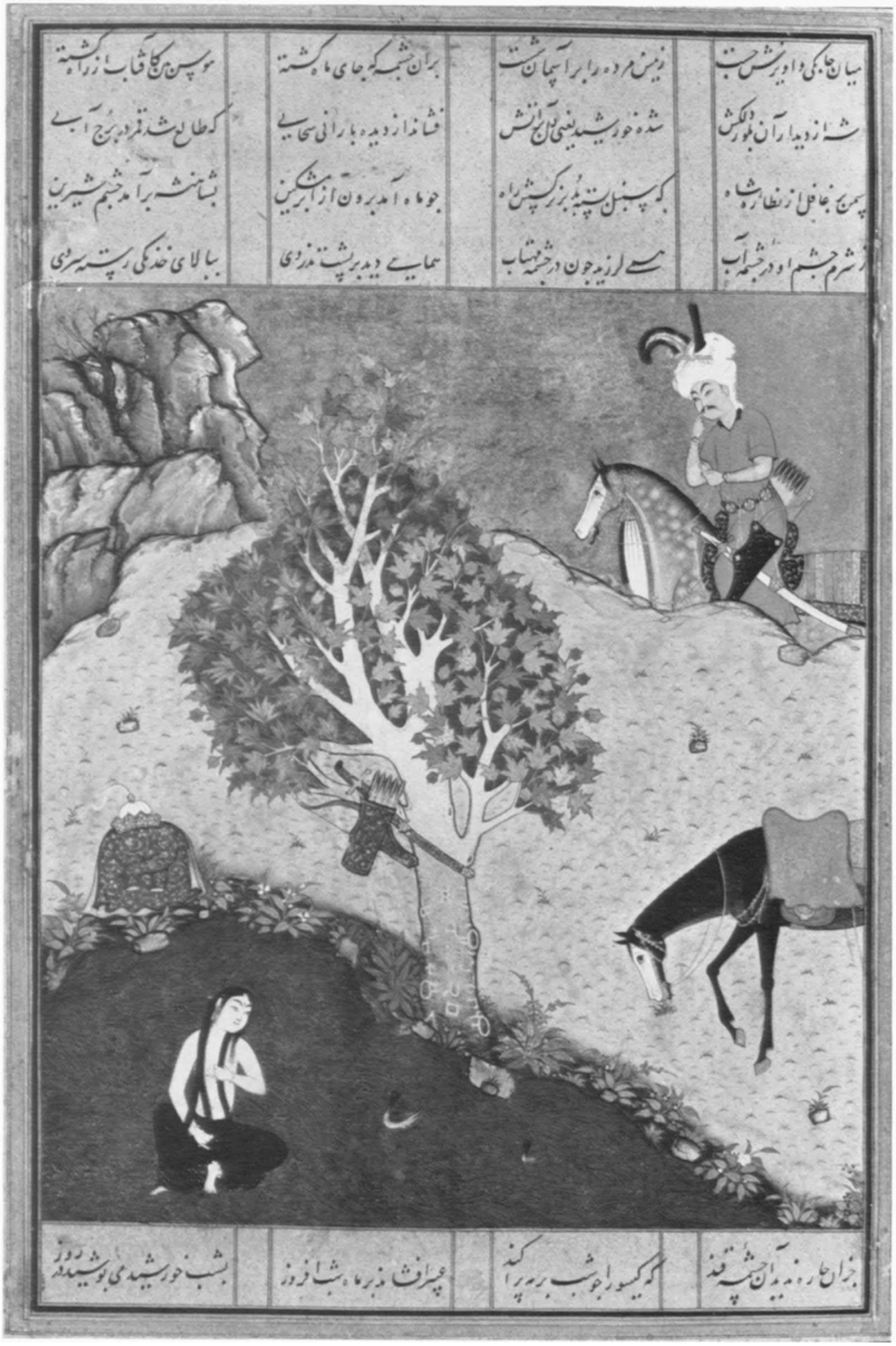
3 Tomb tower of Sheikh Safi ad-Din, in the Shrine at Ardabil, Azerbaijan, Iran

became increasingly sacred to Shi'ite pilgrims (fig. 3). Around the tower, in succeeding years, a complex of buildings developed. These included a prayer hall, a library, a Sufi dervish monastery, a mosque, courtyards, and appropriate related structures. A burial area accepted the remains of various of the Sheikh's family and descendents and of religious leaders close to the Shrine. Ismail ordered that his tomb be constructed in the complex during his lifetime and was eventually also buried at the Shrine. Thus Ardabil has its intimate relationship with the rise of the Safavid Dynasty and the Shia sect.

Today the Ardabil Shrine[5] is in a state of neglect. Some of the original buildings no longer exist. Earthquakes and subsequent rebuilding — more especially during the nineteenth-century Qajar Dynasty — have robbed the Shrine of the more beautiful mosaic faience and other decorative elements that so impressed earlier western writers — from Adam Olearius in 1637, to Pietro della Valle some twenty years later, to John Struys in 1671.

Tahmasp, second Safavid ruler and son of Ismail, ascended the throne at the age of ten and ruled for a period of more than fifty years. During the early years of his rule, Tahmasp had as his guardians the chiefs of the Kizilbash tribes, but in 1576 the mother of a tribal chief who sought the throne for her son poisoned the monarch. There followed a period of bloody, internecine feuding and assassinations until at last Tahmasp's grandson, the great Abbas, succeeded.

Tahmasp was troubled by Turkish and Uzbeg wars, as his father had been; and although this drain on his rule eventually diminished, his later capital at Tabriz was periodically captured or threatened by Turkish forces under the rule of


میان جابکی واو برش جست
زمین مرده را بر آسمان شست
بران چشمه که جای ماه گشته
موپسن من کافتاب از راه گشته
شه از دیدار آن بلور دلکش
شده خورشید یعنی تن آتش
فشانداز دیده باران سحابی
که طالع شد قمر در برج آبی
سمن بر غافل از نظاره شاه
که سنبل بسته بد بر نرگس راه
جو ماه آمد برون از ابر مشکین
بشاهنشه بر آمد چشم شیرین
ز شرم چشم او در چشمه آب
همی لرزید چون در چشمه مهتاب
همایی دید بر پشت تذروی
ببالای خدنگی رسته سروی
جز آن چاره ندید آن چشمه قند
که گیسو را چو شب بر مه پراکند
چراغش ذره بر ماه شب افروز
بشب خورشید می پوشید در روز

4 'Khosroe catches sight of the fair Shirin as she is bathing,' from the *Khamsah* of Nizami. Done at Tabriz, 931 A.H./A.D. 1524-5

Sulayman the Magnificent. Tahmasp was not the warrior king his father had been but was more of a diplomat. He treated, for example, with Moghul Emperor Humayun, the son of Babur, and the father of the illustrious Akbar. During an insurrection in Moghul India, Tahmasp gave refuge to Humayan, and at Ardabil one can still see the 1543 gift of Humayan: a magnificent wood catafalque, once set with rubies and emeralds, to cover the sacred tomb of Sheikh Safi. During Tahmasp's reign, also, diplomatic contact was made with England and several European countries.

It was at Tabriz, under the Safavids, that a first real renaissance of the ancient Persian artistic tradition developed. Ismail had already brought to his court, probably from Herat which he took from the Uzbegs in 1510, a group of accomplished painters. Throughout the history of the Near and Middle East, artists and artisans have been moved about to enrich a court or capital. The tradition is ancient: Cyrus the Great, the first Achaemenid, used Ionian masons in the construction of his first capital at Pasargadae; and later these and other non-Persian artisans carried out the construction of the vast ritual center at Takht-i-Jamshid, which we know as Persepolis.

The artists who came to Tabriz from Herat brought with them the heritage of the Herat School of miniature painting. But if Ismail had tilled renaissance soil at Tabriz, it was his son, Tahmasp, who planted and cultivated it. Early in his reign the revered Herat master, Bihzad, perhaps the greatest of the Persian miniature painters, came to Tabriz. Tahmasp appointed him first director of the *Kitab-khane,* an academy that quite literally developed the artistic styles and traditions for the court of the young ruler.

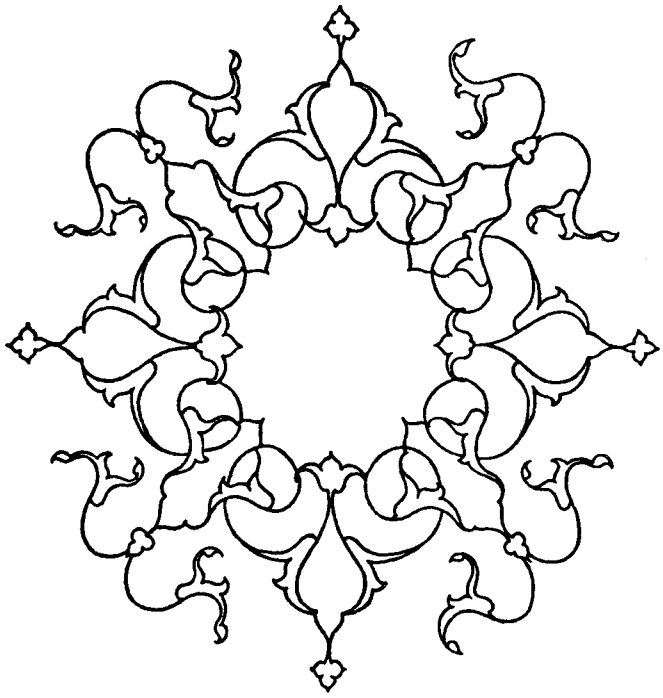
The Herat style, despite Bihzad, did not dominate the Tabriz court, for other painters were attracted to the king's presence. One of the greatest of these was Sultan Mohammed.

Tahmasp took keen interest in this activity and is said to have himself painted, though no examples survive. (Frequently, too, he was the subject for miniature painters. One such extant example in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art shows the shah in the person of Khosroe, the legendary Sasanian hero-king, observing the bathing Shirin (fig. 4).[6] Tahmasp is also reported to have designed the cartoons for carpets, though there is no evidence of this and certainly no indication that he played even the least role in the design of the Ardabils. There have survived, however, examples of Shah Tahmasp's interest in carpets, including correspondence with Sulayman the Magnificent, in which he asks the Sultan for specific room sizes of the great Sulayman Jami mosque at Istanbul in order that a gift of carpets might be sent.

Throughout his long reign, during the early part of which the Ardabils were created, Tahmasp proved himself as much a patron and champion of the decorative arts as his grandson Abbas would become of architecture.

That the Shrine at Ardabil was sacred to Safavid rulers and their subjects is obvious. A magnificent library (looted by Imperial Russian forces in 1828)[7] was the gift of Shah Abbas. And doubtless he directed to the Shrine an impressive treasure of Ming Dynasty porcelain, believed to be the royal gift of the Chinese Emperor Wan Li.

It has long been the custom in Iran to present offerings to shrines, mosques, and other sacred places. Ardabil, as a Shi'ite Shrine, was a particular magnet for such gifts, or *waqf.* Princes and other donors made gifts to the Shrine's inventory of lamps and candlesticks, carpets and silk brocades. Tradition declares that the famed Ardabil Carpets were in this manner presented to the Shrine. Stebbing and others have intimated that they were commissioned by Tahmasp to grace the tomb of his father. Yet the tomb chamber, which



5 Scheme for a typical Northwest Persian carpet medallion

still exists, is not large enough for one, much less the pair. That they might have been placed elsewhere in the complex, in a building that either no longer exists or has since been remodeled, is possible and is considered later in this study. The presentation would have been appropriate, and a finer *waqf* is hard to conceive. But appropriateness is not substantiation enough.

Classification of the Ardabil Carpets

The Ardabils under study are not to be confused with a type of Persian carpet called Ardabil. In common with Persian ceramics, many Persian carpets are given a general name (*i.e.*, "Isfahan," "Kashan," "Shiraz") which signifies little more than the physical location of the loom which produced the carpet, or at the very least a style of carpet common to a given locale. Such designations are not always reliable. Dealers frequently also use the names of Persian tribes who weave their rugs in distinctive tribal patterns that serve as signatures or trademarks (*i.e.*, "Kashgai," "Bakhtiari," etc.). The fact that the carpets under study are commonly known as the Ardabil Carpets has only one significance: a long-held belief that they were woven for the Shrine at Ardabil and remained there for more than three centuries until their transfer to England in the late 1800s. There were and are looms at Ardabil, but there is no evidence that this Azerbaijan city ever developed the more important reputation of cities like Tabriz and Kashan for carpet production, and one therefore assumes that the carpets must have been woven at one of these latter two sites.

By virtue of their design the Ardabil Carpets belong to a class known as Northwest Medallion Carpets, one of about thirty basic classifications for Persian carpets. Logically enough, they are given this title because their design is generally dominated by a central medallion (fig. 5). A

favored treatment, seen also in the Ardabil design, repeats quarter-sections of the medallion in the corners of the field (fig. 6). At times more than one medallion may occupy the field.

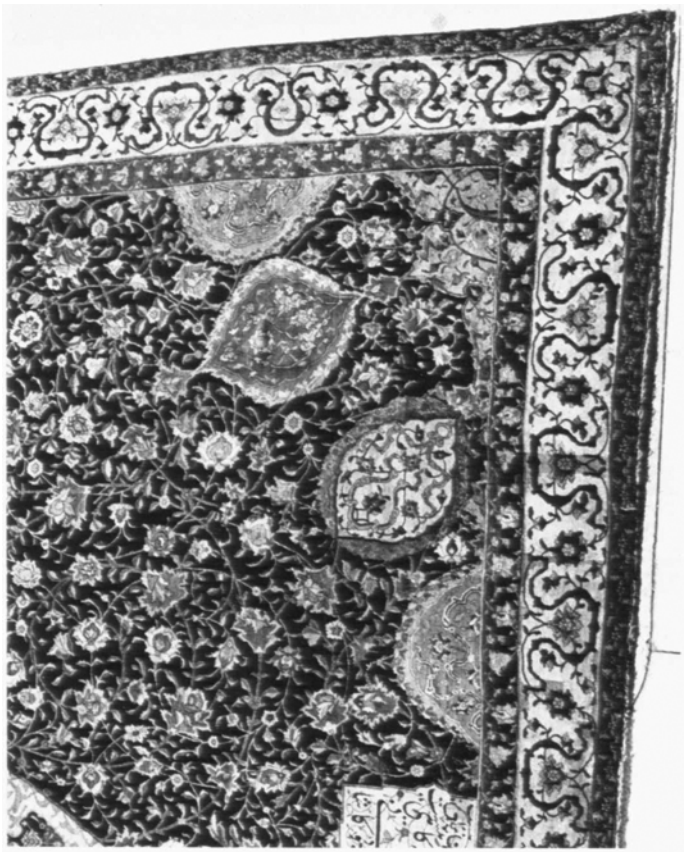
Tabriz as the Ardabils' Place of Origin

The phrase "court carpet" is not another classification, but applies to carpets of any design made to the commission of the court on royal looms. Just as the emperors of ancient China maintained royal factories for the production of ceramics, silks, and other works for court use and presentation, so did the shahs of Persia. Tabriz, despite states of siege and periodic occupation by the Ottoman Turks, was a site of royal looms during the early Safavid period. Although Arberry and others attributed the Ardabils to Kashan looms (perhaps led in this direction by the signature cartouche and a prevalence of Ghiordian knotting at Tabriz), Pope and Sarre and most other specialists assigned them to the imperial looms at Tabriz.[8]

Tabriz has been favored as the birthplace of the Ardabil Carpets for several reasons. First, sumptuous carpets of related design have traditionally been attributed to Tabriz, more especially those woven during the reign of Shah Tahmasp. Second, even as royal looms were maintained, so were imperial herds. On the basis of an Ardabil fragment in his possession, Pope related its wool type to wool of royal herds once maintained in the Ahar district, northwest of Tabriz. The grazing grounds of sheep have a definite effect on the quality of their wool, and the diet found in imperial grazing grounds might well be expected to surpass that of nomadic terrain.

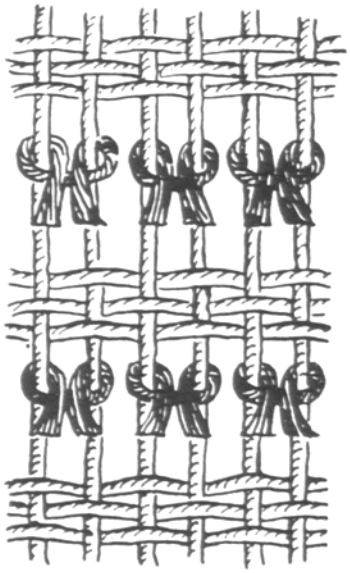
Structure of the Ardabils

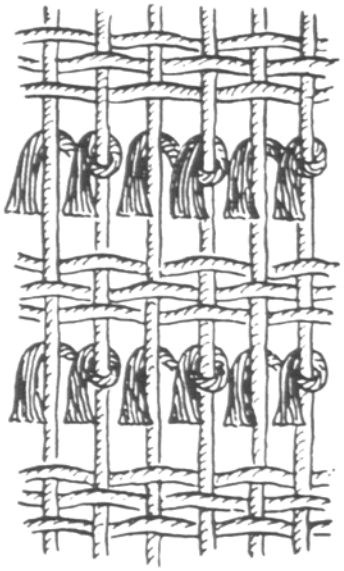
Wool yarns worked with Sehna or Persian knots[9] into firm and close pile on undyed silk warps and

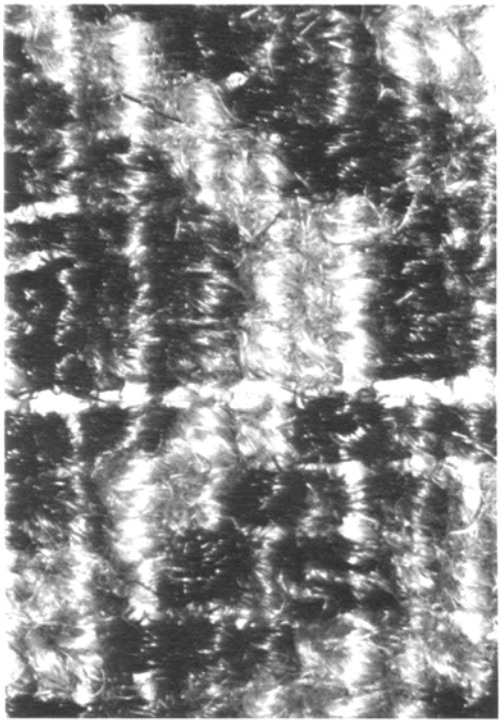


6 Medallion section in the upper left field of the Los Angeles Ardabil

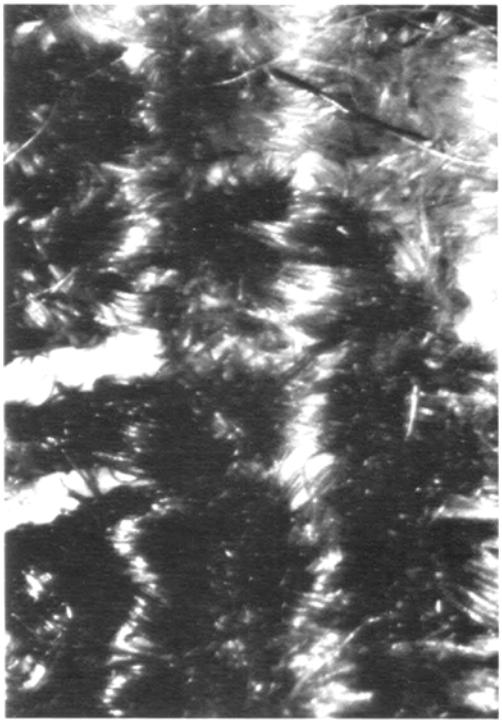
7 Left: The Ghiordes or Turkish knot
Right: The Sehna or Persian knot







8 16X magnification of the Los Angeles Ardabil, photographed from the back



9 40X magnification of the same section

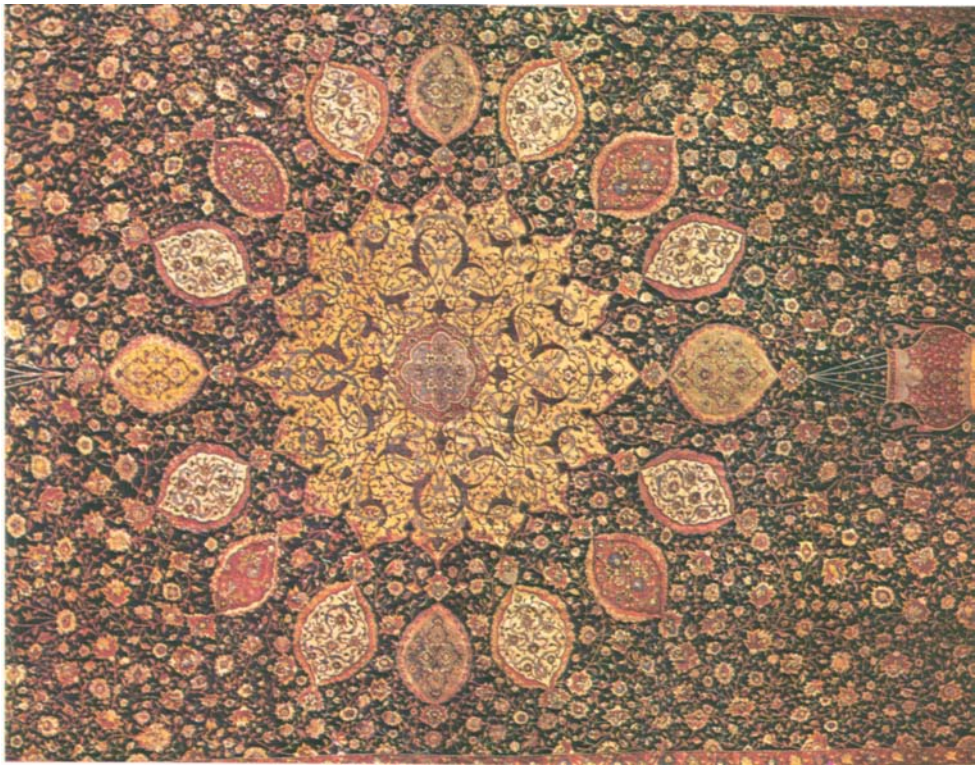
wefts hold the incredible design of the Los Angeles and London Ardabil Carpets (fig. 7). Aside from removal of the outer borders and a section of lower field on the Los Angeles Ardabil, which has diminished its overall size, the carpets are a nearly identical pair. The weaving of important carpets in pairs (but never more than two) was not an unusual circumstance in sixteenth-century Persia.[10] While some features and placements in both Ardabils are phenomenally duplicated — for example, the central sunburst medallion in each work measures precisely 5′10″ by 5′8½″ — there are variations in weaving technique and wool quality, along with minor changes in design.

The warps and wefts are identical: both are of undyed silk, with the warp Z-spun, S-ply, and the weft in three shoots — each shoot of paired ends with no discernible twist (figs. 8 and 9).

It is in knot count, texture, and pile length, curiously enough, that significant and puzzling differences are found. In the London work, there are seventeen to eighteen hand-tied Sehna knots to the linear inch, whereas the Los Angeles carpet averages nineteen to twenty. This results in an approximate count of 297 to 324 knots per square inch in the London Ardabil, and 380 to 420 knots to the square inch in the Los Angeles pendant. If nothing else, this discrepancy rules out conjecture that the carpets were woven simultaneously, although they bear the same date. This writer is inclined to believe that the finer weaving of the Los Angeles Ardabil makes it the older of the pair.

Close examination under a strong light indicates the same pile direction in both carpets, although there is a contrast in pile quality and length. This observation carries over even to the outer borders of the London carpet, despite the presumption that they were "transplanted" from

10 The main medallion with its sixteen ogival appendages



11 Ogival appendage to the central medallion

the Los Angeles work in the process of late nineteenth-century repairs to the London Ardabil. In general, the pile quality of the London carpet is harsher, shorter, stronger and more densely packed. The pile of its Los Angeles mate appears softer and more lustrous and is somewhat longer. The fact that the Los Angeles work is known to have been cleaned at least three times since 1920 could account for its more supple quality and its seemingly more vibrant coloring. Still, this would have no bearing on the pile length — a matter of trimming with shears and knife after the weaving process.

The regal Ardabils have a multi-level design that gives the viewer an almost three-dimensional impression:[11] this is caused by the fugue-like intricacy of the master design, in which the main medallion with its sixteen ogival appendages appears to float on a field of floral traceries (fig. 10), all this against a vibrant and pulsating blue background of varying tonality. A daring, uniquely Safavid use of color permeates the whole (fig. 11). Ten colors were used in the Ardabil design. These, except for the possibility of undyed yarn used in white ground areas, were derived from natural bases, perhaps all vegetable.[12] Allowing for an accumulation of grime on the London carpet, both versions have virtually identical coloring. Age, climatic conditions and light exposure have inevitably caused fading. Some colors, notably the green sections, are considerably brighter close to the knotting, compared with the more exposed pile.

Even with the advent of chemical dyes, natural-based dyes persisted in Persian carpet weaving into the nineteenth century, helped in part by decrees of the Persian government forbidding aniline dyes. (Ironically industrial colors have seldom exceeded the vibrance or even the lasting quality of colors in natural dyes.) One may safely assume that some of the traditional dye origins

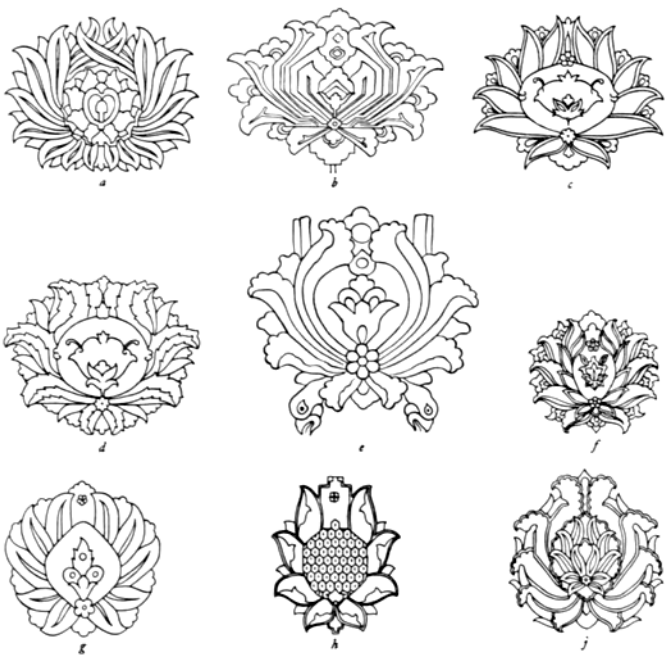
known in Persian carpet weaving apply to the Ardabil. Thus, the three shades of blue probably derive from indigo, as indeed repeated indigo dipping probably also produced the Ardabils' black. Although it is possible that the green of the Ardabils is a result of crossing blue with yellow, the color can derive from ripe turmeric berries. Pomegranate extract was probably used to provide the triumphant yellow of the central medallion, though saffron is also a source of yellow. The three red hues used may have a wild madder base. The white or cream areas are natural undyed wool.

The Unique Ardabil Design

The major design element in the Ardabil carpets is the great central medallion, a stylized yellow sunburst in a surround of sixteen radiating red, green and cream decorated ogees (see fig. 12). The medallion itself is overlaid with interlocking rose-blue arabesques which, in turn, interrupt a loose, yet always symmetrical arrangement of pale blue, undulating forms. These appear as sashes in the wind but are variations of *tchi,* the Chinese cloud-band motif brought to Iran by the Mongols (fig. 17). In the center of the medallion, not instantly recognizable because it appears almost as an inner medallion within the larger one, is a roundel that suggests a walled garden pool (fig. 12). On its light blue surface float open lotus blossoms, these enhanced with decorative rhizomes that seem, magically, below the water's surface. The pool is edged with flowering plants on a burgundy ground.

In many sixteenth-century Northwest Persian Medallion carpets, bar and pendant appendages appear above and below a longitudinal axis at the central medallion much in the manner of book covers of the period. More original and innovative, the Ardabil Carpets forsake this device in favor of a radically different approach that is not known on any other extant Persian carpet of the

12 The center of the sunburst medallion



13 Examples of lotus-peony motifs found in sixteenth-century Northwest Persian carpets

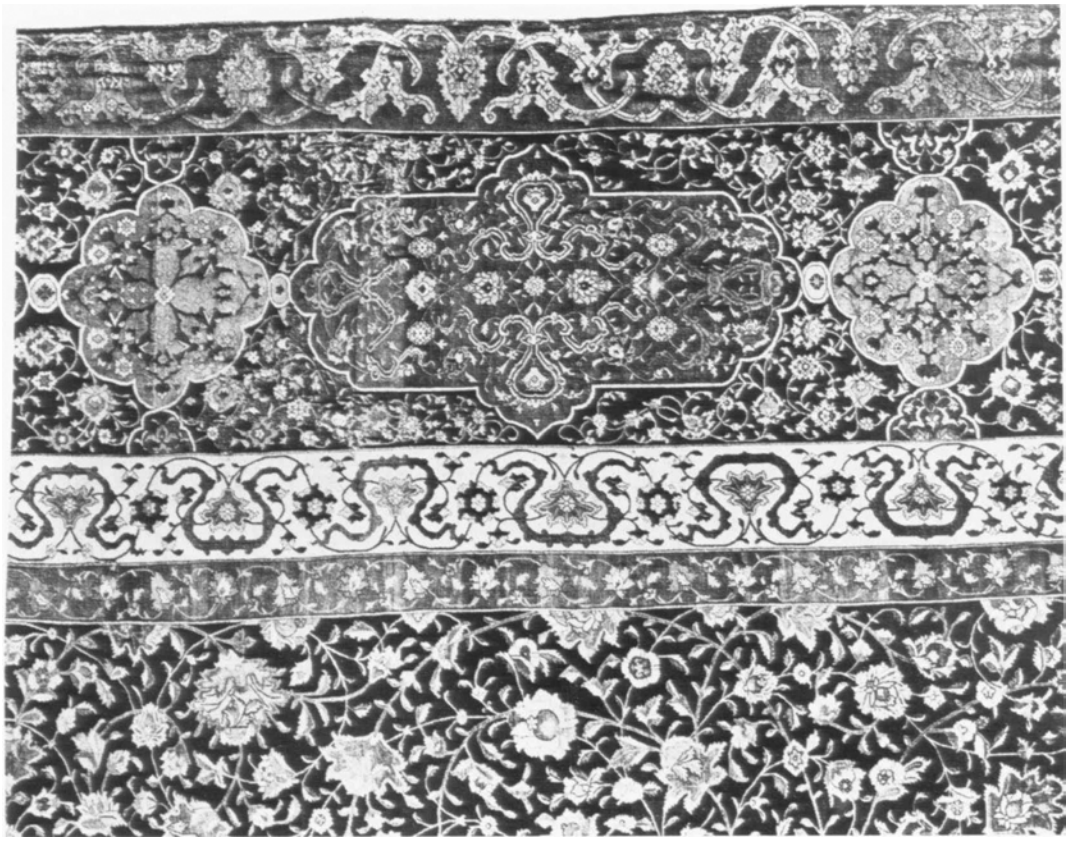
period: in place of the bar and pendant, what may perhaps be mosque lamps of different style are suspended outward from the uppermost and lowermost of the ogival panels which in turn radiate outward from stylized lotus blossoms that spring from the tips of equidistant minaret-type projections from the central medallion.

This major design element is emblazoned on a sumptuous deep indigo blue field of wavering tone, a dominant tonality that pulsates with a myriad of flower blooms which spring from undulating and interlocking leafed vines. The blossoms are a typical sixteenth-century Persian motif: the traditional Sasanian lotus palmette crossed with a Chinese peony (fig. 13). These Safavid creations appear full-throated in some instances and as barely emerging from bud stage in others. While balanced with astonishing precision, their arrangement is not rigid — they appear to have been scattered on the field. The serrated leaves, botanically impossible in the manner they vary on what are ostensibly related vines, resemble rose leaves. The effect is that of a *mille fleurs* tapestry on a truly grand scale (fig. 14).

Loss of Elements from the Los Angeles Pendant

Writings on the Los Angeles carpet often mention that the borders were sacrificed, presumably about 1890 or 1891, to accommodate repairs on the great "intact" version that hangs proudly in the Victoria and Albert. The first edition of the *Handbook* of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art mentions only the loss of the outer borders, and this derives from a statement in the museum files from a Mr. E. Fowles at Duveen Brothers. Would that just this were true.

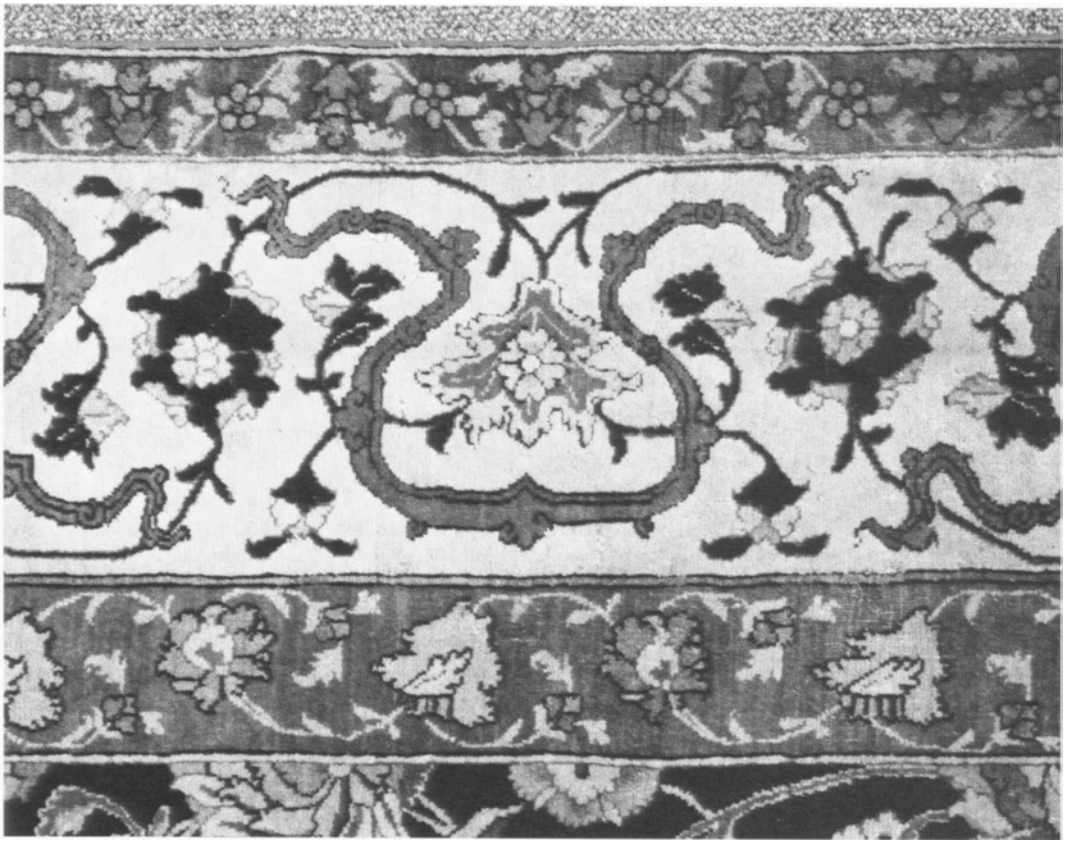
15 Detail of outer border section of the London Ardabil



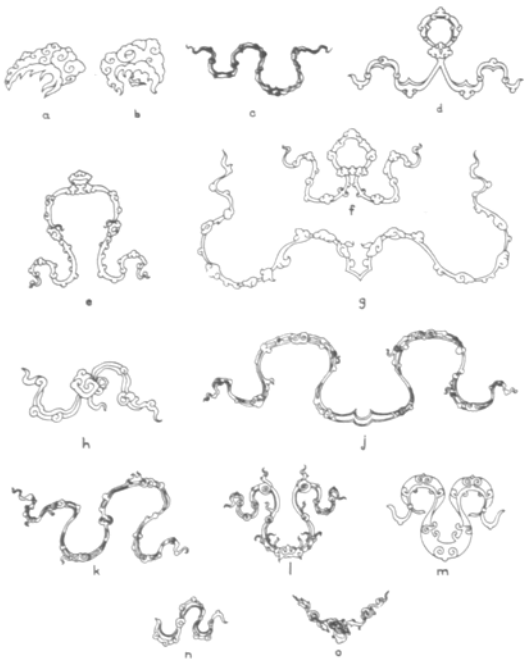
A comparison of the pair confirms that the Los Angeles carpet suffered more grievously (fig. 15). Not only were all borders beyond the inner cloud-band guard border removed, but also a substantial section of the lower field, accounting for the imbalance of the central medallion and its appendages within the field, and the absence of radiating ogees within the corners at the truncated end. Given such mutilation, it is perhaps little wonder that more than a decade went its way before existence of the Los Angeles pendant was revealed.

The missing Los Angeles borders are known to us only through the London carpet. They should extend beyond the seven-inch guard border of cloud bands (fig. 16) and interlacing

16 Detail of the Los Angeles Ardabil's present outer border, showing cloud-band stripe and, at its upper edge, a section of Ferraghan



17 Examples of *tchi*, or cloud-bands, from sixteenth-century Safavid carpets. Types c, e, j and k appear in the Ardabil design.

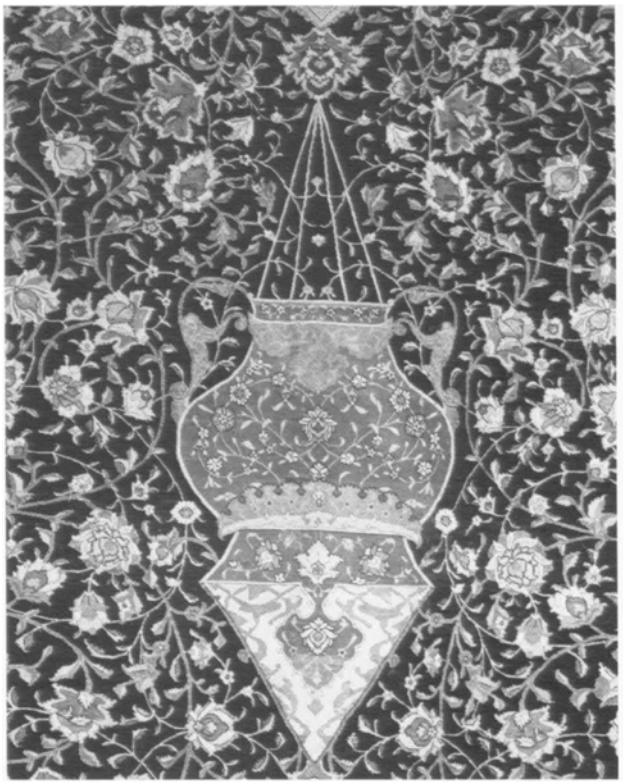


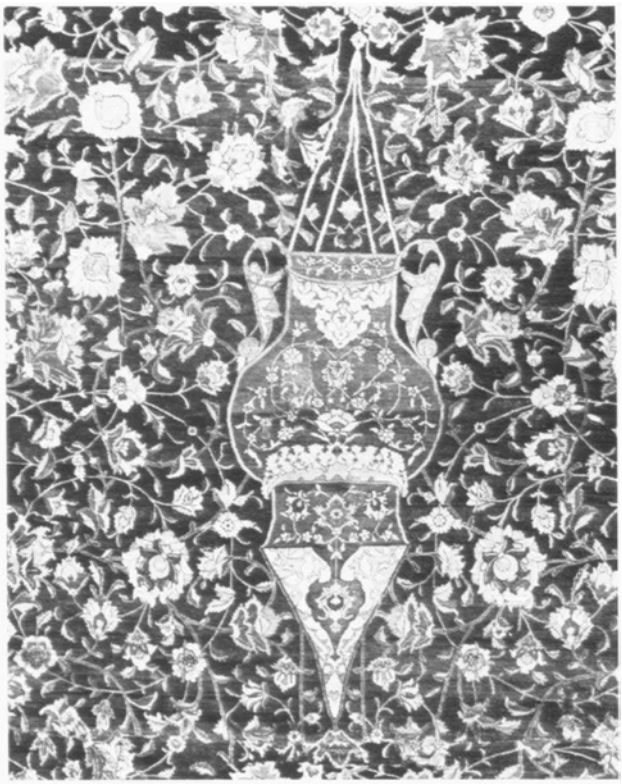
lotus palmettes (now the present outer border of the Los Angeles carpet) to two outer borders. The outside outer border on the London carpet is a wide twelve-inch, black-based strip of alternating red obloid panels and green octofoils, these containing rather formal and geometrically rigid palmettes. This pattern is placed atop a rich, brown ground covered with a far gentler design of flowering vines that seem to repeat those of the carpet's great inner field in smaller scale. The actual outer border of the London Ardabil, also seven inches wide, is of floriated and intertwining blue arabesques on a tawny yellow ground.

One final comment on the Los Angeles borders: during a 1926 public exhibition of the carpet at the Arts Club of Chicago, Arthur Upham Pope identified its extreme outer border as coming from a modern Ferraghan. This late addition remains on the Los Angeles Ardabil and may be recognized in a comparison of illustrations (figs. 15 and 16).

18 One of the two hanging lamps in the Los Angeles Ardabil

19 The second lamp in the Los Angeles Ardabil design





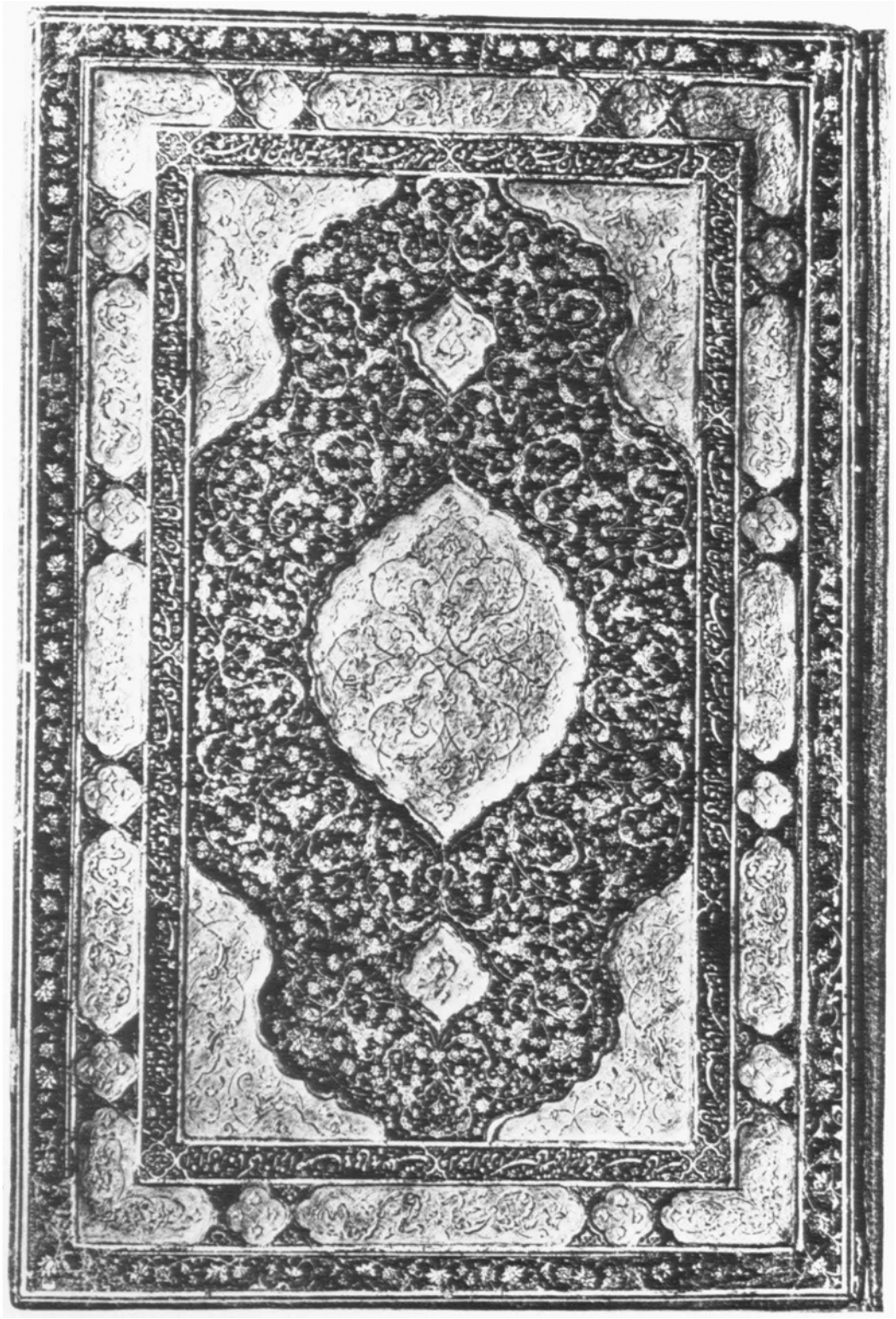
The Design: Its Symbolism and Inspiration

In all, the Ardabil design bespeaks abundance, fertility, paradise. And surely this was the intention. Paradise, after all, is a Persian word for garden: *peri-deisa,* adopted by the Greeks and then put into our own language. The concept of paradise is dear to the Shi'ite, no less to any Persian. It runs as a strain through the poetry of Hafiz and Sa'adi; it is extolled in the Persian miniature; it is exemplified in the renowned Persian garden.

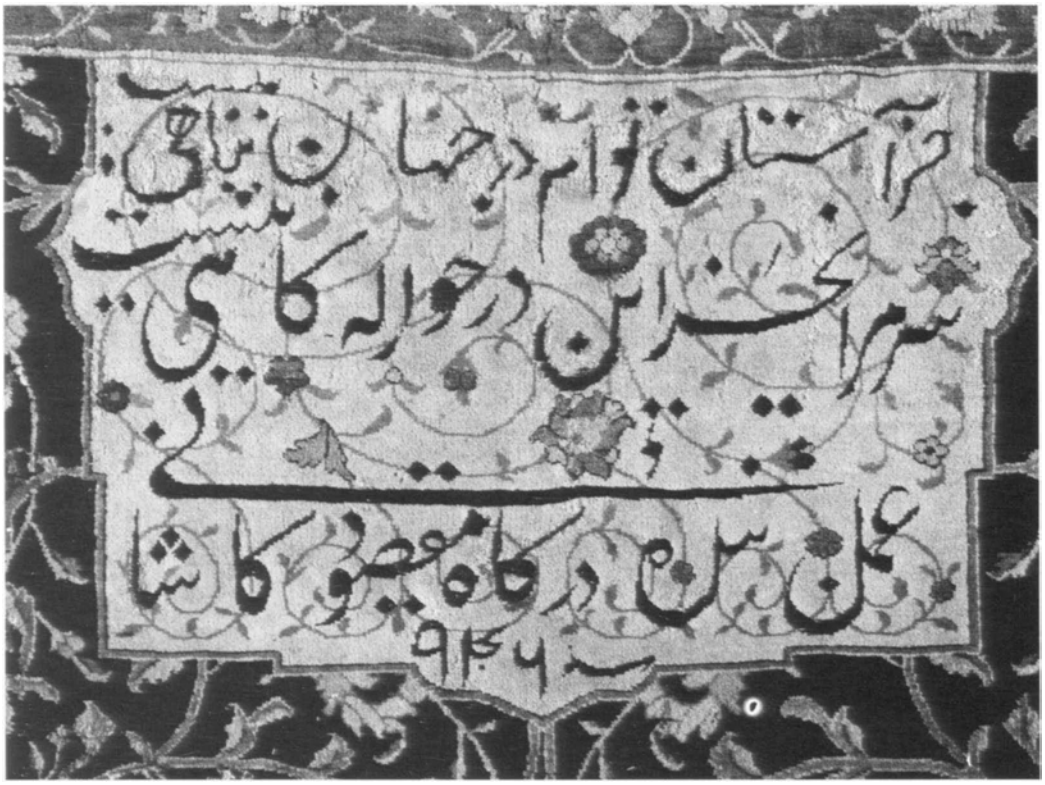
Aesthetically, the Ardabil design is bold, original, intellectual — eminently satisfactory in every way save possibly the introduction of the hanging lamps (figs. 18 and 19). Their use in this manner (a device not known in other examples from the period) might reflect a specific request of the patron of the carpets. In 1910, Sydney Humphries suggested that the lamps symbolized Sheikh Safi and Shah Ismail, an imaginative but not entirely convincing speculation. More convincing are suggestions by Tattersall, Kendrick, and Ettinghausen that the design repeats architectural features of the vast room for which the Ardabils were created. Seen in this context, the carpets may well "reflect" a high ceiling above, with the central medallion and its surrounding units mirroring a dome, the two lamps hanging down from either side. Kendrick and Tattersall found the ceiling of the Madrassah Madir-i-Shah in Isfahan to have a relationship to the Ardabil design. Yet that noble structure did not exist when the Ardabils were created in 1540 — it was built a full 160 years later. Martin and Dilley suggested the Blue Mosque at Tabriz, completed in 1465, as an inspiration for the Ardabil design; but not enough of this magnificent building, now earthquake-ravaged, remains to confirm the notion.

It was Pope's suggestion that inspiration for design of the Ardabils can be traced to the art of the book and, in particular, to book covers. This writer has been unable to locate a specific example in the Gulbenkian Collection that he once mentioned, but another Gulbenkian example illustrated here (fig. 20) most certainly suggests medallion carpets, with its border of repeated oblong and oval cartouches resembling the outer border of the London Ardabil.

20 Tabriz example of a Persian book cover of Tahmasp's time. From the Gulbenkian Collection.



21 Inscription cartouche of the Los Angeles Ardabil Carpet



22 Inscription cartouche of the London Ardabil Carpet

Although nomadic and village weavers work traditional designs by rote, sometimes singing out the color changes, they seldom use cartoons or sketches as an aid. Carpets of Ardabil stature, produced on royal and town looms, clearly required cartoons, or *naqsh*. Such aids, squared off to scale, permitted the team of weavers to proceed under the direction of a master weaver, confident that they were faithful to the intended design. Ideally, the *naqsh* was the creation of a *naqsh-kas,* or specialized carpet designer, totally familiar with the unique requirements of weaving and preferably a weaver himself. Much has been written about miniature painters who also designed Persian carpets, but a lack of familiarity with weaving techniques and capabilities could obviously lead to a disastrous production. The complex design of the Ardabils, and especially of their fields of balanced and interlocking flowering vines, could only have been created by a man who was the rare combination of master weaver and master artist.

The Inscription Cartouche and "Maqsud of Kashan"

Were they to be judged solely on the basis of design and quality, the Ardabils would be superlative carpets. Yet they are also signed and dated (figs. 21 and 22), which makes them all the more unique and significant. Their dating (946 after the Hegira, or A.D. 1540 in terms of the Christian calendar) is important not only in clarifying the Ardabils' history, but also in establishing the approximate ages of undated Persian carpets of similar styles.

Signed and dated Persian carpets are known more from recent times than from the Safavid period. Only about eight or nine Safavid examples are known to western specialists. These include the splendid Hunting Carpet now at Milan, dated 925 A. H. (or A.D. 1522) and signed by Ghiyath ad-din Jami, actually the oldest known signed and dated Persian carpet.[13]

The inscription cartouches are identical in both the London and Los Angeles Ardabils, allowing for earlier damage to their graceful and elegant *raqi* script. The first English rendering of the inscription was published in London in 1892 by Edward Stebbing and has persisted for many years as the accepted standard translation. It reads:

I have no refuge in the world other than thy threshold.

There is no place of protection for my head other than this porchway.

The work of a slave of the Holy Place, Maqsud of Kashan in the year 942.

The first two lines are from a *ghazal* or ode by Hafiz, the esteemed fourteenth-century Persian poet. Stebbing's version may derive from an 1891 English translation of *The Divan* by H. Wilberforce Clarke, a British Royal Engineer who rendered many of the Shirazi poet's works into English. But it is all *three* lines in the Ardabil inscription that concern us here. And rather than go back to versions that have become traditional, it seems more in order to propose an entirely new interpretation which, in effect, changes the implication of the last line and corrects the previously published Los Angeles dating to correspond with the London pendant's inscription. Here then, with minimal additions, is a modified version that this writer, in consultation with Persian friends, believes more accurate and appropriate:

Except for thy haven, there is no refuge for me in this world;

Other than here, there is no place for my head.

Work of a servant of the court, Maqsud of Kashan, 946.

The widely known earlier translation that has Maqsud appear as "a slave of the Holy Place" is certainly more romantic. But *dargah,* the word translated as "Holy Place," lacks a necessary qualifier to make this clear. The word can also mean "court." Similarly, *bandah-i,* which Stebbings translated as "slave," is more properly "servant," in the sense of a term of respect. Thus *amal-i bandah-i dargah* before the name Maqsud Kashani is perhaps better read as "work of a servant of the court."

Was Maqsud a servant in the sense of a worker, or was he a donor exercising appropriate modesty? There are many instances of later carpets presented to mosques, which, in their inscriptions, deliberately minimize the donor. One famous one has the donor describe himself as a "dog," and, as many Moslems regard canines as unclean, this would seem particularly self-deprecating. But here, obviously, is a gesture intended only to assert the donor's low position in the scheme of things: low in the presence of the shah, lower still in the presence of Allah.

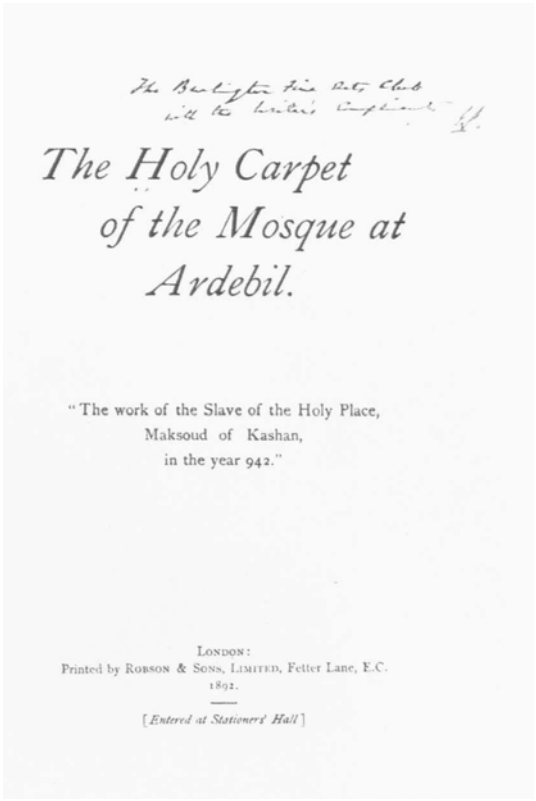
We have already seen that, if woven for the Ardabil Shrine, the carpets would not have fit into the small tomb chamber of Ismail. Even if they had fit, it is inconceivable that a donor unrelated to Shah Tahmasp, or a master weaver, would have had the temerity to emblazon his name on carpets designed for such purpose. A continuing argument as to whether Maqsud was the donor or master weaver has never been satisfactorily resolved. Many Persian mosques and shrines have, for centuries, kept exact inventories of gifts. A surprising number of these have survived from Safavid times. Maqsud's name, as either donor or principal artist or master weaver, has not yet turned up on surviving records, including, interestingly enough, an apparently complete list of carpets and other possessions of the Ardabil Shrine attested to by the Mutavalli of the Shrine in 1759. To further pique our wonder, the same listing, now preserved in the E.G. Browne Collection of the Cambridge University Library, provides the sizes of all the Shrine's carpets. None are as large as the Ardabils.[14]

This writer assumes, as did Pope, that Maqsud was the master weaver-designer, not the donor. His *nisbah* ("of Kashan," actually *Maqsud Kashani*) is an indication of his place of origin, not necessarily that of the carpet. Kashan was also a vital carpet-weaving center — where Maqsud doubtless received his early training — but a weaver of such excellence, together with his entourage of workers, might well have been summoned to Tahmasp's capital.

Early in the present century, after the London Ardabil had been placed on public exhibition, there was considerable — indeed, rampant — speculation on the length of time that would have been required to weave the Ardabil. Some of the more romantic speculators envisioned Maqsud alone at his loom, devoting most of his life to a Herculean task. By the time that *A Survey of Persian Art* was published in 1938, carpet specialist Heinrich Jacoby ventured that a crew of weavers, their speed governed by the slowest worker, might have progressed at the rate of 3/8" per day. He allowed for eight or ten men at the loom and, considering also the time required for preparation, shearing, and finishing, estimated a need for at least three and one-half years of work for each carpet.

Allowing for the curious difference in the number of hand-tied knots per square inch in both Ardabils, it can be estimated that the Los Angeles Ardabil, before it was shorn of its outer borders and lower field, contained approximately 35,000,000 knots. The London Ardabil has been traditionally credited with 33,000,000. Present-day Persian carpet standards are in terms of *reghs:* the number of knots to a seven-centimeter lineal measurement. In this respect, the Ardabils are fifty-three to fifty-five *regh* carpets. The normal *regh* count for a good contemporary carpet is twenty-five to thirty.

23 Title page of Stebbing's monograph as published in London in 1892. This copy, inscribed by the author, is in the Library of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.


The Holy Carpet of the Mosque at Ardebil.

"The work of the Slave of the Holy Place,
Maksoud of Kashan,
in the year 942."

LONDON:
Printed by ROBSON & SONS, LIMITED, Fetter Lane, E.C.
1892.

[*Entered at Stationers' Hall*]

A Provenance for the Ardabils

The Persian background of the Ardabils is more difficult to verify than their western sojourns. As has already been intimated, problems involving their clear attribution to the Shrine at Ardabil are rather substantial despite the appropriateness of this traditional assignment. We are on surer footing in tracing the carpets after their departure from Iran. And, in following them, we encounter some bizarre circumstances — notably, deliberate concealment of the existence of the Los Angeles Ardabil — that add to the romance and legend of these stellar Safavid creations.

Since the time that Persian carpets began appearing in the courts of Europe, they have been particularly favored by English collectors. A strong British market for Oriental and especially Persian carpets existed from Elizabethan through Edwardian times and certainly until mass-produced Axminster and Wilton carpeting and the exigencies of twentieth-century war and depression joined forces to diminish the demand. The London firm of Vincent Robinson and Company, which no longer exists, had a substantial dealership in Oriental carpets in the latter nineteenth century. They frequently lent Indian and Persian carpets for exhibition purposes to the South Kensington (later the Victoria and Albert) Museum and not infrequently sold them, including a group of seven in 1880 and five in 1884.

Late in December of 1891 the firm, which then had galleries on Wigmore Street in Cavendish Square, took possession of the London Ardabil. They had received it from Ziegler and Company, a Manchester-based rug importing and manufacturing firm with offices, agents and looms at Tabriz, Sultanabad, and elsewhere in Persia. Our knowledge of the initial circumstances is quite lacking, but the carpet, from its first London appearance, was reported as "the Holy Carpet of the Mosque at Ardebil."

Somewhat earlier that month, the Robinson firm's enterprising managing director, Edward Stebbing, presented a paper on Persian carpets at a meeting of the Art Worker's Guild. He was in the process of preparing that paper for publication when, apparently, the great Ardabil came into his firm's possession. Stebbing then decided to expand his presentation with a monograph he titled *The Holy Carpet of the Mosque at Ardabil* (fig. 23) and to arrange for a two-week public exhibition for the spectacular new find, along with a smaller group of about twenty carpets including other Robinson holdings and two from the collection of a Mr. J. E. Taylor.

Mr. Stebbing was not blind to the value of well-mounted publicity and arranged a preview for the press. The critics came, were awed, and quoted freely from what *The Times* described as a "charming little monograph issued to visitors."

In consequence, the *Manchester Guardian, The Academy,* and *The Times* each urged their readerships to visit the Wigmore Street galleries. Said *The Academy:* "The chief attraction is a carpet of unusual dimensions, and in perfect preservation, which shows by an inscription that it was made for the mosque at Ardabil in 1535 A.D." The *Manchester Guardian* was even more exultant: ". . . the crowning glory is a magnificent carpet from the Mosque at Ardabil, now exhibited for the first time in Europe, and which entirely beggars description. One can only say that it is beyond doubt the finest carpet known to modern times." And *The Times,* surely more staid then than today, nonetheless described the Ardabil as "without any exaggeration . . . the finest Persian carpet in the world. This is the Holy Carpet of the Mosque of Ardebil, in Persia; a carpet which for size, beauty, condition, and authenticated age is entirely unrivalled by any known example."

Public interest was then aroused. It was John Edward Taylor, a collector friend of Stebbing's and the owner of two carpets in the Robinson exhibition, who called the attention of the South Kensington Museum to the Ardabil, and it was he who offered to raise £500 in public contributions if the museum would pay £1,500 toward the purchase price of £2,000.

Pre-Raphaelite poet, artist, and designer William Morris — whose wallpaper and fabric designs frequently took inspiration from Islamic carpets and miniatures — became a champion of the cause. Disappointingly, however, by March of 1893, response to the public subscription was not equal to public interest, and the museum trustees were asked by Taylor to consider increasing the museum's larger share of costs to £1,750. It was at this time that Morris, who seems to have carefully avoided linking the carpet to Ardabil, wrote from his Kelmscott Press at Hammersmith to the museum's Department of Textiles:

> With reference to the big, dated Persian carpet I think that the Department should certainly buy it at the price you mention, and that no reasonable man who understands the subject would think it an extravagant price for such a remarkable work of art. For my part I am sure that it is far the finest Eastern carpet which I have seen (either actual carpets or representations of them). For firstly it must be remembered that this one has no counterpart, whereas the finest carpets hitherto seen, like the famous ones at Vienna, belong to a class of which there are many examples. Next, and this is the chief reason that I wish to see it bought for the public, the design is of singular perfection; defensible on all points, logically and consistently beautiful, with no oddities or grotesqueries which might need an apology, and therefore most especially valuable for a Museum, the special aim of which is the education of the public in Art. The carpet as far as I could see is in perfectly good condition, and its size and splendour as a piece of workmanship do full justice to the beauty and intellectual qualities of the design.
>
> Lastly the fact that it is dated is of real importance (I mean not merely from a commercial point of view) as it gives us an insight into the history of the Art, and a standard whereby one may test the excellence of the palmy days of Persian design.
>
> In short I think it would be a real misfortune if such a treasure of decorative art were not acquired for the public.

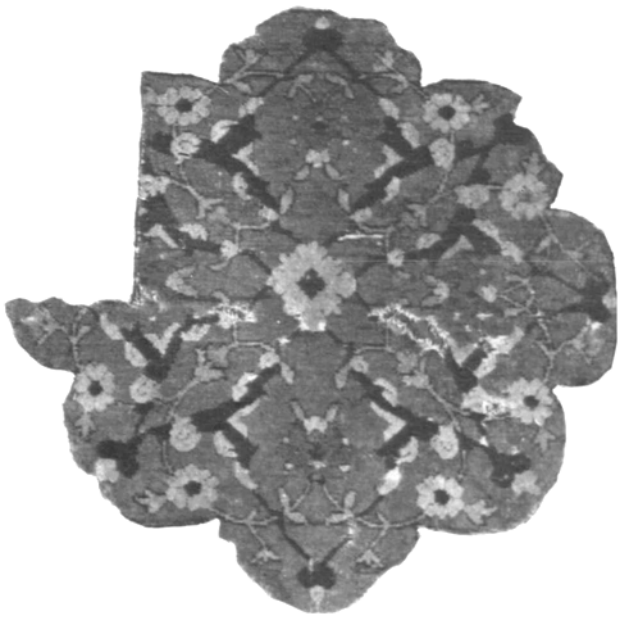
Morris himself regretted that it was but a "mite," but offered the sum of £20. Sir Frederick Leighton, E. Steinkopff, W. H. Franks "and other gentlemen" also joined with Taylor in contributing a total of £250. The museum upped its larger share of the ante to £1,750, and thus acquired the carpet on March 30, 1893.[15] Records made at the

time of its delivery note that it had been "repaired and restored," although someone apparently unfamiliar with the brittle wool of the Tabriz region identified it as being of "goat's hair."

To this point, and for some succeeding years, there was no mention of a mate for the Ardabil. Indeed, Morris stressed that it had no counterpart. Recall also that newspapers had noted its state of "perfect preservation."

Unexpectedly, in June of 1903, the London museum received a visit from a Mr. Shmavon Malayantz who offered to sell, for £25, a four-inch-square fragment of the Ardabil. The visitor claimed knowledge of other fragments in Persia and presumably was prepared to obtain them if the museum purchased his small section. But Mr. A. F. Kendrick, then the Keeper of Textiles, decided that the price asked "places its acquisition out of the question." The museum's files for the ensuing decade are, with respect to the Ardabil, significantly blank. There is nothing to indicate, for example, that any systematic investigation was carried out, although Sarre, in his work *Old Oriental Carpets,* observed that larger and smaller fragments of a similar carpet had been inserted, often with the warp in the wrong direction. Even today a careful lay observer can detect a number of areas on the London carpet that are obviously alien to the original. That this was not apparent to the museum from the beginning is hard to believe. We can only surmise that increasing evidence of a second Ardabil carpet was distasteful to the Director and Trustees, and that by tacit agreement it was deemed prudent to maintain silence.

What of the second, or Los Angeles carpet? A year or so ago, yet another fragment of the Ardabil,[16] (a section of top left border) was offered to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art by Mr. Eric Binns of Surrey (fig. 24). Mr. Binns' fragment had come to him through his father,



24 An Ardabil Carpet fragment in the possession of Eric Binns, Surrey

the late Albert Binns, who had been an agent for Ziegler and Company. The elder Binns had obtained it in Tabriz, about fifty years ago, from "someone in the carpet trade . . . who may have been connected with the first surgical and restoration operation when this was underway in Turkey."

John Kimberly Mumford in his catalogue of the Yerkes collection states in a most unqualified way that the carpet now in Los Angeles was brought to England by the Robinson firm "some years after" the London carpet's arrival and that restoration involving an interchange of sections and pieces had "occupied more than four years," presumably in England. That both spectacular carpets could have been worked on in England for a four-year period without someone in the highly competitive carpet business hearing about it is clearly improbable. Mr. Binns' information points to the restoration's having taken place in the Near East.

The first owner of the Los Angeles Ardabil was an American collector, Charles Tyson Yerkes. An American multi-millionaire, his unsavory methods of business operation included bribery and defamation, court injunctions and the control of politicians. Yerkes was compelled to sell his American business holdings in 1899 for about twenty million dollars. By 1900 he was in England where he headed a syndicate that built the London subways. During his later years, he developed a taste for lavish and exotic objects including a gold bedstead that had belonged to the king of the Belgians and, not surprisingly, the Ardabil carpet now at Los Angeles.

If an issue of the *American Art News,* dated December 1, 1919, is correct, Yerkes purchased his Ardabil from Vincent Robinson and Company in 1892 for the staggering sum of $80,000,[17] or approximately $76,000 more than that paid by

the South Kensington Museum for the larger London version. A footnote to this transaction is provided by Mumford in his Yerkes catalogue, this being that "the sole condition of sale" was that the second carpet would never be returned to England, which of course it was, for exhibition purposes, in 1931.

The Los Angeles pendant next passed into the hands of another American multi-millionaire, the more attractive, Dutch-born Joseph Raphael De Lamar, who purchased it for $27,000 at an April 1910 auction of objects from the Yerkes Estate held at the American Art Association in New York. De Lamar died in 1918, and, in November 1919, Duveen Brothers purchased the carpet at an auction of works of art from his Estate, also held at the American Art Association galleries. Joseph Duveen was eager for the carpet and cabled his New York agents to bid up to $250,000. To his delight, the carpet was his when the bidding reached $57,000.

It was Duveen who loaned the work we now call the Los Angeles Ardabil to the celebrated 1931 exhibition of Persian art held at Burlington House in London. Now at last the London public who had marvelled for years over the larger pendant in the Victoria and Albert could see, in a setting of other great Persian treasures, the carpet whose very existence had been so long concealed. It was the sensation of the exhibition.

The Ardabil was one of Duveen's proudest personal possessions. The English dealer-collector had kept it in his home and is known to have refused to sell it in response to a number of offers. But he was not loathe to lend it for exhibition purposes, and in 1938 it travelled once again, this time to a small but choice exhibition of Persian art held in Paris at the Bibliothèque National.

One of the many visitors to the Paris exhibition was Mr. Jean Paul Getty, who, in the tradition of the Fricks and Mellons and Morgans, was quietly but effectively building an impressive art collection with an emphasis on the decorative arts. Getty was instantly captivated and approached Duveen with a purchase offer. Mr. Getty recalls that he was politely but firmly rebuffed. "The carpet," said Duveen," is not for sale."

The passage of another few months, however, made a difference. The Anschluss and Hitler's continued megalomania clearly foretold another major war. And with this prospect, coupled with a desire for more liquid assets, Duveen capitulated to renewed Getty offers, finally selling the carpet at a shade under $70,000.

Following the Getty purchase in 1938, the Los Angeles carpet was used by its owner in his New York apartment. It was lent to the 1940 New York exhibition of The Iranian Institute. Somewhat later the Shah of Iran was to marry Princess Fawzia, eldest sister of Egyptian King Farouk. Mr. Getty relates that he declined Farouk's offer of more than a quarter of a million dollars for his Ardabil, which the Egyptian monarch wished to give the royal couple as a singularly appropriate wedding gift. Later the carpet was lent to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and ultimately it was sent to Mr. Getty's California home at Malibu from which, following "twinges of conscience," it was lent, and subsequently given ("not without pain," Getty has observed) to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Were the Ardabil Carpets ever the "Holy Carpets" of the "Mosque at Ardabil"? That they were *holy* carpets is, of course, not possible. This is pure invention. A Moslem may have prayer carpets, and carpets may be woven or presented for mosque use, but this does not make them holy. The fact that the Ardabils are without human or animal design content has often been cited as "proof" they are mosque carpets. This, however, is a weak contention, for in Persia, stronghold of the Shi'ite sect, there are certainly instances of birds, animals, and humans in mosque tiles and carpets, a break with the stricter Sunni tradition of other Islamic lands.

Secondly, based on the studies of Mr. Martin Weaver, we find that the Shrine complex at Ardabil did not constitute, at the time the Ardabils were woven, a mosque in the usual sense.[18] From his careful research, Mr. Weaver has also determined that a carpet the size of the Ardabil could not be placed or hung in any presently existing room of the complex without being folded or obstructed, and this is to say nothing of two such carpets, generally placed alongside or flanking each other when paired, as in this instance.

In 1914, Textiles Keeper Kendrick of the Victoria and Albert wrote to Mr. Stebbing and pressed gently for more information on the Ardabil history of the carpet in his custody. An attached Museum memorandum notes that no answer was received. Strangely, the memorandum is stamped "DONE WITH" and bears an admonition: "No further action may be taken on this paper."

But the story, from records in the Victoria and Albert, continued to unfold. In 1966 a Major R. Jackson reported that he had been in Persia in 1919 and came to know a Mr. W. L. Flynn, a Ziegler employee. Flynn told Major Jackson that Ziegler and Company had originally purchased one of the "Ardabil" Carpets in Tabriz, having heard that it came from the Shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad. Presumably to disguise its background, which most certainly would bring on diplomatic and other embarrassment if known, it was attributed to Ardabil. It was then taken to

Constantinople and ultimately sold to London, whereupon Ziegler was offered, according to Major Jackson's recollection of the Flynn story, a similar carpet in more damaged condition. This was also acquired and sent to Ziegler's looms at Sultanabad. From this point, it is reported, sections were taken to restore the London carpet, and entirely new areas were woven by a master weaver under the direction of a Ziegler agent named I. Moir. The accuracy of this intriguing story has not yet been verified.

Having implied some doubt about an Ardabil provenance for the Los Angeles work and its larger London mate, it is only right to cite one bothersome reference that remains the only strong support for the Ardabil attribution. In 1845 a "descriptive and pictorial" volume by William Richard Holmes was published in London under the title *Sketches on the Shores of the Caspian.* Although not referred to in the initial Stebbing monograph, it has been quoted in the considerable Ardabil literature. Holmes was a young English traveller — hardly a serious scholar, rather more an observer — caught up with the "mystery of the East." He had an uncle in Her Majesty's Service who served as a British consul in Persia, and this link might have given him access to a more than superficial judgment of the Persian scene. The third chapter of his book includes his description of the Shrine at Ardabil, which he visited with a local guide. He reports having seen, on the floor of the ante-chamber of the principal tombs, "the faded remains of what was once a very splendid carpet, the manufacture of which very much surpassed that of the present day. At one extremity," he wrote, "was woven the date of its make, some three hundred years ago." The ante-chamber, which Holmes described as "a long lofty apartment," was probably the main body of the prayer hall, known as the *ghandil khaneh* or lamp room because of its hanging gold and silver lamps. But the clear floor space of this hall measures only 8.90 x 5.80 meters (29 ft. 2½ in. x 19 ft. ½ in.), making it impossible to lay out a single Ardabil, no less a pair! Nor does the ceiling of the *ghandil khaneh* reflect elements in the Ardabil design, save for the appropriateness of the two woven lamps. There will probably always be conflicting lore about the Ardabils. They inspire delightful conceits, including the theory that they were plundered by the Imperial Russian Army in 1828.

Mr. Getty, donor of the Los Angeles pendant, recorded yet another in 1965 when he wrote that "on viewing the Ardabil carpet, James A. Whistler, the great American painter and etcher, confessed that he was awestruck and declared it to be 'worth all the pictures ever painted.' "

But artists enamored with great Persian carpets seem to speak as one, and we find Arthur Upham Pope recalling that John Singer Sargent wrote of the Gardner Museum's Herat: "I have seen today a picture more beautiful than any ever painted." Sir Charles Holmes used almost the identical words in reacting to the Milan Hunting Carpet. Whether one or both carpets were ever in the Ardabil Shrine, there is no question that today in London and Los Angeles, perhaps more than anywhere else, proof exists that sixteenth-century Persian carpet artistry has never been surpassed.

Footnotes

1. During the intensive bombing of German cities in the remaining months of World War II, the incredibly valuable Oriental carpet collection of the Berlin Museum was moved, for safekeeping, to vaults in the Berlin Mint. On March 10, 1945, Royal Air Force bombardiers scored direct hits on the structure. The unequaled collection was almost obliterated, including the Medallion and Tree Carpet. Its mate, presented to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art by Mr. Jean Paul Getty, is popularly known as the Coronation Carpet, as it figured in the Westminster Abbey coronation of Edward VII and appears in a painting of the ceremony by Edwin Austin Abbey, N. A., R. A.

2. The London Ardabil measures 34′ 6″ in length by 17′ 6″ in width, compared with a 23′ 11″ length and 13′ 5″ width for its Los Angeles pendant. It has long been assumed that the outer borders and part of the lower field were sacrificed in the late 1800's to accommodate repairs to the London carpet.

3. The initial Arab conquest placed Persia under the rule of the Umayyad Caliphate of Damascus, thence under the Abbasid Caliphate of Bagdad. Succeeding alien rules in most parts of the Iranian heartland included the Seljuks, Mongols, and Timurids. The Samanids and Ghaznavids held intermittent sway in eastern Iran during this period, as did the Buvayhids and Ottoman Turks in the western regions.

4. Ismail (1457-1524) was the son of Sheikh Heydar (1456-1488) and in turn a direct descendent of the Sufi saint, Sheikh Safi ad-Din (1253-1334). Most of this line are regarded by Shi'ite faithful as a continuum of the progeny of Ali, the Prophet Mohammed's son-in-law, as Safi claimed descent from Musa Kazim, the seventh Imam.

5. Studies by Martin Weaver represent the most accurate and detailed descriptions of the Ardabil Shrine (see Bibliography). An early western observer was Adam Olearius, who describes the Shrine in *The Voyages and Travells of the Ambassadors sent by Frederick Duke of Holstein to the Great Duke of Muscovy and the King of Persia* . . . (London, 1669). Friedrich Sarre visited the Shrine in 1897 and first published his findings in *Denkmäler Persischer Baukunst* (Berlin, 1901).

6. If we are to believe a 1571 physical description of Tahmasp by Vincentio D'Alessandri, Venetian Ambassador to the court at Qasvin, the monarch was "of middling stature, well formed in person and features, although dark, of thick lips and grisly beard." But this observation came close to the end of Tahmasp's reign, and the miniature illustrated was doubtless an earlier work. At the Ardabil Shrine, renovations to which were extensive during Tahmasp's reign and in which he is said to have had a vision, a large inscribed stone tablet in the forecourt attributed to Tahmasp proscribes standards of behavior. Included are prohibitions against gambling, taverns, music and the cutting of beards.

7. The Russians ultimately paid reparations, but most of the library remains today at Leningrad. A Russian description of the Shrine was published in *Moskovskiya Vedomosti,* No. 90, in 1828. There is no evidence that objects other than books were taken.

8. See Bibliography for sources of comment by other writers on the Ardabil Carpets. The Bibliography is limited to papers and publications having direct mention or illustrations of the London and/or Los Angeles Ardabils. Other publications used as source material are cited in footnotes.

9. Sehna knots (more correctly *Farsi-baf* or Persian knots) and Ghiordes or Turkish knots are in widespread use throughout Iran. Their names designate favored techniques of knotting, contrasted in fig. 7. The name Sehna, that of a small Persian town in Kurdistan, is a misnomer: the Ghiordes knot is preferred there. Most Persian tribes of Turkish origin use the Ghiordes knot.

10. The methods of Persian carpet weaving are ably described in Hans Wulff's volume, *The Traditional Crafts of Persia* (M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1966). Scores of people can be involved in weaving carpets the size and complexity of the Ardabils.

11. An excellent illustrated statement on dimensional design techniques may be found in Charles Grant Ellis' "The System of Multiple Levels," as published on pp. 3172-3183 of *A Survey of Persian Art,* new issue, Volume XIV (Tokyo and Osaka, 1967).

12. Color dyes in Persia have also derived from insects. A reddish brown, for example, is obtained from the *coccus ilicus,* whereas a lighter hue, a reddish orange, is a by-product of the crushed and dried wings of various beetles. There is no practical way at this time to analyze the dyes in the Ardabils. Similarly, short of sacrificing substantial areas, the carpets cannot be subjected to carbon-dating and other tests for age.

13. Although the Ardabils are frequently given credit for being the oldest known signed and dated carpets, they are actually the second oldest known. Their dating follows that of the Milan Hunting Carpet by eighteen years.

14. Reported to the Sixth International Congress on Iranian Art and Archaeology at Oxford in 1972 by Mr. Martin Weaver on the basis of translation of the document by Mr. Andrew Morton. As most Iranian mosques, shrines and related institutions kept inventories, it is conceivable that the original location of the Ardabils may one day be verified. The Shrine of Imam Reza at Mashhad has been suggested, for example. It is clear that research in Iran, and preferably by Iranians, is in order.

15. Thus the actual facts do not quite agree with many previous published references to an "overwhelming public subscription" in behalf of the Ardabil. Records at The Victoria and Albert Museum also suggest that the dealer had some difficulty in finally obtaining his £2,000.

16. Ardabil fragments are known to exist in some eighteen private and public collections, including The Textile Museum in Washington, D.C., The Asia Institute at Shiraz, the Museum of Fine Arts at Boston, and the Zurich Reitberg Museum. They are generally believed to have come from the removed outer borders of the Los Angeles Ardabil, most of which were presumably used to replace originally tattered outer borders of the London Ardabil. That some fragments are from the London Ardabil is certainly possible. Determination of knot count might offer clues to their "parentage." It is also possible, even probable, that certain areas were entirely rewoven at Ziegler's direction in Persia or Turkey. Late copies of the Ardabil were also made at Sultanabad, circa 1880.

17. Attempts to ferret out details on the Yerkes purchase from Robinson have been fruitless. According to G. Griffin Lewis, writing in 1911, "the late Mr. Yerkes of New York City paid $60,000 for his 'Holy Carpet,' the highest price ever paid for a rug." Whether $60,000 or $80,000, either sum would be staggering for the time, and it is strange, allowing even for Mr. Yerkes traditional methods of operation and possible duplicity on the part of the London dealer, that the transaction went unnoticed for more than a decade.

18. A mosque *was* constructed (the Masjid-i-Janat Sara) in the Shrine complex somewhat later than the time of the Ardabils' dating. It was an octagonal-shaped structure, the dome of which collapsed in early nineteenth-century earthquakes. More recently it has been covered with a flat roof, supported by timber columns. Whether the carpets were ever placed in this now revised structure is a matter of speculation. It has already been noted that no reference to them appears in an eighteenth-century inventory of the Shrine's possessions.

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Exhibitions

April 5-13, 1910: American Art Association, New York City. "Ancient Rugs, Sculptures of the Late Charles Tyson Yerkes."

January 4-February 10, 1921: The Detroit Institute of Arts.

1926: The Art Club of Chicago. "A Loan Exhibition of Early Oriental Carpets From Persia, Asia Minor, The Caucasus, Egypt and Spain." Cat. No. 6.

1926: The Pennsylvania Museum (Philadelphia Museum of Art).

January 7-February 28, 1931: Burlington House, London. "International Exhibition of Persian Art." Cat. No. 856.

1938: Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris. "Les Arts de l'Iran, l'Ancienne Perse, Bagdad." Cat. No. 183.

1940: The Iranian Institute, New York City. "Exhibition of Persian Art." Cat. No. 4.

1940-1941: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. On extended loan from J. Paul Getty.

February 6-March 16, 1947: The Art Institute of Chicago. Cat. No. 9.

October 7-November 11, 1951: Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts, Columbus, Ohio. "The Arts of Old Persia." Cat. No. 241.

November 18, 1951-January 1, 1952: Dayton Art Institute, Dayton, Ohio. "The Arts of Old Persia." Cat. No. 241.

January 13-February 17, 1952: John Herron Art Museum, Indianapolis, Indiana. "The Arts of Old Persia." Cat. No. 241.

April-May, 1959: Los Angeles County Museum. "Woven Treasures of Persian Art." Cat. No. 50.

1960: Fourth International Congress of Iranian Art, New York City.

September 2-November 24, 1964: William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. "7000 Years of Iranian Art."

April 1, 1974 — : J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, California. On extended loan.

APPENDIX

Comparison and Technical Analyses of the London and Los Angeles Ardabil Carpets

	Los Angeles (Acc. No. 53.50.2)	London (Acc. No. 272-1893)
Present Dimensions	Length: 23′ 11″ Width: 13′ 5″	Length: 34′ 6″ Width: 17′ 6″
Materials	Warp: silk, Z spun, 2 ply, S, undyed Warp level: 1½ Weft: silk, unspun, paired, undyed Pile: wool, unspun (slight Z) Colors: black, blue, dark blue, light blue, green, blue-red, light blue-red, orange-red, white, yellow	Warp: cream silk, Z spun, 2 ply Warp level: 1½ Weft: 3 shoots cream silk, each shoot of paired ends Pile: wool, unspun Colors: black, blue, dark blue, light blue, green, blue-red, light blue-red, orange-red, white, yellow
Structure	Weave: 3 (paired) weft yarns between each set of knots, 1½ levels Warp yarn count: 33-35 per inch Weft yarn count: 56-62 per inch Knot: Persian (Sehna) Knot count: 19-20 per longitudinal inch 20-21 per latitudinal inch 380-420 per square inch	Weave: 3 (paired) weft yarns between each set of knots, 1½ levels Warp yarn count: 28-32 per inch Weft yarn count: 52-58 per inch Knot: Persian (Sehna) Knot count: 17-18 per longitudinal inch + or − 18 per latitudinal inch 297-324 per square inch
Attest	Mary Kahlenberg, *Curator* Department of Textiles and Costumes Los Angeles County Museum of Art	Natalie Rothstein, *Assistant Keeper* Department of Textiles The Victoria and Albert Museum

Additional Photography Credits:

Fig. 3 From *L'Art de l'Iran,* by Andre Godard, Courtesy Mme. Godard

4 Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Alexander Smith Cochran

5 Courtesy *A Survey of Persian Art*

7 From *Der orientalische Knupfteppich,* by Kurt Erdmann, Courtesy Wasmuth Verlag, Tubingen

13 Courtesy *A Survey of Persian Art*

17 Courtesy *A Survey of Persian Art*

20 Courtesy *A Survey of Persian Art*

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