

# The Muslim Carpet and the Origin of Carpeting

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# THE MUSLIM CARPET AND THE ORIGIN OF CARPETING

## Abstract

The Muslim carpet has long been a luxury commodity sought by textile museums, rich collectors and wealthy merchants all over the world. The fame of the flying carpet of 'Al'a Al-Din added some emotional mystery and value to its already exceptional beauty and tangible quality. It is not surprising that carpets still represent one of the most valuable art items obtained by museums and wealthy families of the West. Furthermore, carpeting is becoming one of the essential ingredients of today's living standard in the modern world. Modern sophisticated manufacturing has made it one of the cheapest available flooring methods enabling carpeted floors to invade all houses, apartments and offices. Meanwhile its comfort and warmth has increased its popularity becoming the largest used flooring system replacing the ceramics and mosaics. What are the origins of this tradition? What is the Muslim contribution to this subject? This brief account initially provides an historical background to the appearance and development of Muslim carpet making. Later, it follows the trail of its transfer to the West so gradually setting up a western carpeting tradition.

## Background

Muslims regard the carpet with special esteem and admiration. For the traditional Bedouin tribes of Arabia, Persia and Anatolia the carpet was at the centre of their life being used as a tent sheltering them from the sand storms, a floor covering providing great comfort for the household, wall curtains protecting privacy and useful items such as blankets, bags, and saddles. It was indeed a resourceful inspiration to make use of the abundant wool produced by their herds.

With Islam, another significant value was added to the carpet, being a furniture of Paradise mentioned numerous times in the Qur'an. For example in Surah 88 the carpet is counted as one of the riches the believer will be rewarded in the Hereafter:

*(Other) faces that Day will be joyful, Pleased with their striving, In a Garden on high, Where they shall hear no (word) of vanity: Therein will be a bubbling spring, Therein will be Thrones (of dignity), raised on high, Goblets placed (ready), And cushions set in rows, **And rich carpets (all) spread out.** Do they not look at the Camels, how they are made?- And at the Sky, how it is raised high?- And at the Mountains, how they are fixed firm?- And at the Earth, how it is spread out? "*  
(Surah 88: 8-20).

There is a considerable material dealing with the history, nature and character of the Muslim carpet. Such material is published under three main themes; the Oriental carpet, the Muslim carpet, or under regional classification such as Turkish carpet, Persian carpet and the like. Historic sources from this material have established that the carpet tradition is a very old custom practised by early civilisations. Recent discoveries (1949) of a carpet in the tomb of a Scythian prince in Pazyryk in the Altai Mountains (southern Siberia) date back to the sixth century B.C. This carpet, now in the Hermitage Museum in Leningrad, is the oldest extant knotted carpet.<sup>1</sup> From a study of its knotting technique, as well as its decoration, it appeared clearly that

the so-called "Pazyryk carpet" had a Persian origin<sup>2</sup>. The next evidence, in the early development of the carpet, available consists of small sixth century C.E.<sup>3</sup> fragments from Turfan (east Turkestan), on the old silk road, which were discovered between 1904 and 1913. From these two evidences it appears clear that the carpet was first made in the region of what was to become later a substantial part of the Muslim world.

The earliest surviving Muslim carpet, however, are fragments found in Al-Fustat (old Cairo). The oldest of these belonged to ninth century (821 C.E.), while the remaining were dated to 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>4</sup>. Based on the form of their knots and decorative designs, these fragments were classified into two types. The first group included fragments having a knot similar to a later Spanish knot (knotted onto a single warp) and decorated with geometrical design similar to Spanish (Andalusian) carpets of the fifteenth century from Alcaraz<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, these were considered to be the first prototype of the latter Spanish design. The other category of fragments incorporated stylised animal presentations and were considered to be of Anatolian typology of fourteenth and fifteenth centuries when animal decorative designs were the fashion. The similarity to the Spanish and Anatolian carpets has made some historians think they were only Fatimid imports. However, the fame gained by the so-called "Cairene carpets" during the seventeenth century can only refer to the refinement reached by the Fustat carpet tradition. Rice confirmed this as he argued<sup>6</sup>:

*"The fact that similar designs inspired the woodwork of the middle period in Egypt, as well as the known competence of Egyptian weavers in other veins in early times, tends to support the existence of a local carpet industry, and that, if it existed at all, it was probably established as early as the eighth or ninth century."*

Under the Seljuks Muslim carpet reached a high degree of proficiency of technique and high quality of design. Descending from Anatolian origins<sup>7</sup> the Seljuks brought with them the talent and tradition of carpet making and other arts as they spread their reign to Persia and Baghdad by the eleventh century. Ettinghausen<sup>8</sup>, and many others, considers the Seljuks to be the real originators of the Muslim carpet. A study of two specimens of this period, found in Museums of Turco-Islamic art in Istanbul and Konya, revealed the characteristics of the Seljuk carpet art. Carpets in Istanbul Museum belonged to Ala'-Al-Din Mosque of Konya, were dated back to thirteenth century when the Mosque was first built and Konya was the capital of the Seljuk of Rum (1081-1302). The carpets of Konya Museum, however, were originally made for Eshrefoglu Mosque at Beysehir, built in 1298. The carpets incorporated beautiful geometrical designs of stars framed by a band of calligraphy.

By the collapse of the Seljuk Caliphate under the invasion of the Mongols who by 1259 took Persia, Syria and Baghdad, carpet manufacturing seems to halt for a while. The barbarity of the Mongol attack wiped out any artistic production, inevitably affecting the development of the carpet industry. There are no recorded examples of this period but historic sources indicate that carpet manufacturing recovered after a short period. The famous traveller Ibn Buttuta (1304-1377), for example, talked of the quality of Anatolian carpets, which he found in the hospice to which he was invited<sup>9</sup>, and in his travels Marco Polo (1254-1324) praised them<sup>10</sup>. Historic sources talked of the spread of stylised animal designs during this period (14<sup>th</sup> century) (figure 1). However, the only evidence available is found in some European paintings made by artists of this period who made contact with some of these carpets. The first painting, of "Saint Ludovic

crowning Robert Angevin" made by Simone Martini (circa 1280-1344) in 1317, which is kept at the Capodimonte Museum in Naples, depicted a carpet with geometrical patterns and eagles under the throne. More paintings of carpets having stylised animal motifs were executed including; "The marriage of the Virgin" of Nicolo of Buonaccorso<sup>11</sup> (1348-1388), the "Madonna and Child with Saints" of Stefano de Giovanni, or that of Anbrogio Lorenzetti "Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints".



Figure 1. Anatolian Prayer- Rug  
 (pre-15<sup>th</sup> century) showing stylised animal motifs in symmetrical rectangles.

The origins of the depiction of animals have been traced back to ninth century Egypt as excavations at Fustat (Cairo) have revealed the existence of such designs in Cairene carpets. There is also a Turkish element in these carpets, as shown in these paintings, exhibiting similar traditional knotting techniques<sup>12</sup>. Sometime in the fifteenth century, carpets with animal motifs ceased to exist but so far no concrete explanation has been established. It might be due to the rise of more religious Ottomans who could have prohibited the depiction of such animals, which depiction is Islamically discouraged. Consequently, a return to abstract geometrical forms took place signalling the beginning of the Ottoman art.

The Ottomans gave great impetus to art as reflected in the quality of various works they produced, especially in architecture and textile. Ottoman carpets gradually became renowned for their proficient treatment of plant motifs, in addition to the sophisticated geometrical and colour schemes. Historic evidence gathered from European paintings, produced around the second half of fifteenth century, shows the eminence and distinction which the Muslim carpet reached under these leaders. The most famous of these paintings are those of the renowned Holbein brothers<sup>13</sup>. These two German brothers, especially Hans Holbein the Junior, dedicated their paintings to Muslim (Ottoman) carpets that they became named after them the "Holbein carpets". These carpets are characterised by their geometrical design which consists of a repeated number of squares as the main frame and octagons as the border followed by a band of "S" pattern and calligraphic designs. The arabesque is used in abundance to fill the squares and the rest of the area.

In the seventeenth century, and under the influence of the Persian carpets, the Ottomans adopted a new style consisting of the inclusion of star medallion and prayer niche patterns, features which extended to most Ushak carpets<sup>14</sup> (Figure 2). The design and presentation of these elements varied considerably; in some instances the carpet was dominated by the central medallion, and in others smaller medallions and scrolls were arranged in particular patterns or in a band around the main theme of the centre. It is worth noting that such designs coincided with the appearance of the Baroque and later Rococo art styles which

appeared in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries respectively. These styles, which were based on arabesque forms organised around geometrical frames and medallions, influenced the development of these two art forms. This is confirmed by Sweetman, 1987 in his statements:

*"If we look back from here to 1660 at the fortunes of Islamic and Islamic-inspired art in France and England, we have an overwhelming impression of the importance of decorative arts. The style had a part to play at the Baroque courts of Europe...In England, under later Stuarts, as under the Tudors, the brilliance of Islamic textiles and the captivating intricacy of the arabesque found a happy correspondence with existing tastes and also made notable contribution to them"<sup>15</sup>.*

The Baroque, especially in architecture, is highly ornamented with medallions and irregular shapes as the word 'Baroque' means. Historians admitted its connection with the Muslims, at least in language format, as Baroque came from the Portuguese 'Barueco' and Italian 'Barocco' which is derived from Arabic meaning irregular shaped pearl. The Rococo, however, used light and linear rhythms together with natural shapes like shells, corals and ammonites breaking form the formalities of the Baroque style. The Rococo was developed in France at a time when it had strong contacts with the east as explained earlier under the reign of Louis the fourteenth, a time when the *Turqueries* and Turkish themes were highly appreciated in France.



Figure 2. Ottoman Rug, Ushaq type, (16-17<sup>th</sup> centuries) Berlin Museum.

The niche carpets were mainly rugs destined for Muslim prayers, which explains the inclusion of the directional niche (Mihrab) in their centre sometimes with pendulum of light hanging from its arch. This development is a clear sign that the Muslim artist develops his themes from religious as well as natural sources. The use of the mihrab and the lantern in the carpet was highly symbolic reflecting that part of the mosque which locates the direction of the holy Ka'aba as well as translating the Divine meaning of the niche as defined in Surah 24, Ayah 35:

*"Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth, a likeness of His light is as a niche in which is a lamp, the lamp is in a glass, (and) the glass as it were a brightly shining star, lit from a blessed olive oil tree, neither eastern nor western, the oil whereof gives light though fire touch it not, light upon light, Allah guides to His light whom He pleases." (24:35)*

The next development in carpet chronology is the contribution of Mamluk Egypt (1250-1570). Although there are only a few specimen left of the Mamluk carpet, the oldest dates back to only the fifteenth century which leaves a considerable period from which no samples are extant. However there is some evidence that these carpets became renowned for their quality and rich décor<sup>16</sup>. They were generally characterised by their geometrical designs which included stars, octagons, triangles, rosettes and so on, often arranged around a large central medallion. Once more we find arabesque and floral motifs being successfully inserted to fill around these shapes giving the design the unity it requires. The Mamluk carpets set a design tradition that continued to be influential in most Egyptian carpets of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries until the present day.

Besides the Ottoman (Turkish) carpet, no other carpet reached the status and popularity of the Persian carpet. As mentioned above, the Persians had a long carpet tradition extending back to the Sassanian times. However, the earliest surviving evidence of carpet manufacturing in Muslim Persia are dated to fifteenth century mainly through illustrations in miniatures. Carpets were clearly knotted, comprising a rectangular centre dominated by a medallion and a border which sometimes took the form of several bands of various widths<sup>17</sup> (figure 3).



Figure 3. Persian carpet from Azerbaijan, late 19<sup>th</sup> century with large central medallion bordered with "S" pattern band.

The earliest surviving specimen, however, are only dated to sixteenth century, the period of the reign of the Safavids when the production of carpets became a state enterprise as these rulers developed trade relations with Europe and carpet exporting was at the centre of this trade<sup>18</sup>. Carpets were also considered as valuable gifts, exchanged during diplomatic missions to Europe. Under Shah Abbas I (1587-1629), in particular, carpet export and the silk trade became the main sources of income and wealth for the Safavid state. The production took on a wholesale dimension as manufacturers were receiving orders from European consumers. Carpet making became a professional art requiring designers to draw patterns first on paper before translating it into woven designs<sup>19</sup>. Persian craftsmen from Tabriz, Kashan, Isfahan and Kerman produced eye dazzling and mesmerizing designs ranging from the medallion centred carpets, mihrab carpets (figure 4) and vase carpets to 'personalised' carpets bearing the coat of arms of a number of European rulers. Besides these carpets, the Persians excelled in the execution of carpets depicting human and animal scenes, a new style unparalleled in the Muslim world. By early nineteenth century the carpet

industry started to decline partly due to historic events and conflicts which lost Persia its stability and security in addition to the decline of carpet export as Europeans established their own manufacturing.

Table 1 Comparison between Turkish and Persian carpets.

Features	Turkish	Persian
Knot form and technique	In the Turkish (or Ghiordes) knot the yarn is taken twice around two adjacent warp threads and the ends are drawn out between these two threads.	In the Persian (or Sinneh) Knot, the wool thread forms a single turn about the warp thread. One end comes out over this thread and the other over the next warp thread.
Decorative design	Turkish carpets are prominent in the treatment of plant motifs, using rich colours.	Persian carpets use more human and animal figures and often refer to landscape elements, using dominant delicate interplay of red and blue colours

The above brief is not exhaustive as other parts of the Muslim world such as Andalusia, North Africa, Afghanistan, and India made also their own contributions to the richness and quality of the Muslim carpets. The concentration, however, has been on these regions for their lasting impact on European art.



Figure 4. Beautiful mihrab Persian prayer rug from Azerbaijan, late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## Europe before the carpet.

How did Europe manage before the arrival of the Muslim carpet?

Historic sources indicate that the earliest floor covering in Europe consisted of rushes. Rushes were scattered over the floor and renewed from time to time<sup>20</sup>. This practice continued up to the second half of the fifteenth century. The evidence is found in the illumination in a MS. At Lambeth Palace (*The Dictes and Sayings of the Philosophers*) depicting King Edward IV (1461-83) receiving a copy of it from its translator

William Caxton<sup>21</sup>. The King was seated in a room strewn with bright green rushes. Hampton Court is said to have had its rushes changed daily on the orders of Cardinal Wolsey<sup>22</sup>.

Erasmus (1466-1536) revealed that these rushes were sometimes left too long that he condemned their use:

*"The doors are, in general, laid with white clay, and are covered with rushes, occasionally renewed, but so imperfectly that the bottom layer is left undisturbed, sometimes for twenty years, harbouring expectoration, vomiting, the leakage of dogs and men, ale droppings, scraps of fish, and other abominations not fit to be mentioned. Whenever the weather changes a vapour is exhaled, which I consider very detrimental to health. I may add that England is not only everywhere surrounded by sea, but is, in many places, swampy and marshy, intersected by salt rivers, to say nothing of salt provisions, in which the common people take so much delight I am confident the island would be much more salubrious if the use of rushes were abandoned, and if the rooms were built in such a way as to be exposed to the sky on two or three sides, and all the windows so built as to be opened or closed at once, and so completely closed as not to admit the foul air through chinks; for as it is beneficial to health to admit the air, so it is equally beneficial at times to exclude it"<sup>23</sup>.*

In a later stage rushes were woven into mats and widely used in Europe in this form. A miniature in the *Book of Hours* in the Chateau at Chantilly entitled, "Tres riches Heures du Duc de Berri" depicts the Duke (1340-1416) seated at a table under which the floor is covered with rush matting<sup>24</sup>. The miniature is dated to early fifteenth century. Another miniature, found in Bibliotheque Nationale de Paris, shows the Duke of Burgundy, John the Fearless (1371-1419), receiving a book in a room displaying rush-matting floor. Even at times of Queen Elizabeth I floor rush-matting was still used in England. Evidence from a portrait of William, Earl of Pembroke (d. 1570) shows the persistence of this practice. In fact rush matting continued till the reign of Charles I (1625-49)<sup>25</sup>.

### **The Muslim carpet and Europe.**

The European fascination with Muslim textile products goes back to the Middle Ages when contacts with the Muslim world, made during the Crusades and trade, resulted in the import of oriental art items including textiles. Such products were so valued that the Pope Silvester II<sup>26</sup> was buried in luxurious Persian silk cloth. The reader may appreciate the significance of this if he learnt that Queen Eleanor, the Castilian Bride of King Edward I, brought to England Andalusian carpets as precious items of her dowry in 1255<sup>27</sup>. However, the earliest recorded English contact with Muslim textiles was in the twelfth century when the grandson of William the Conqueror who lived in the Abbey of Cluny in the that century gave an Islamic carpet to an English church<sup>28</sup>.



Figure 5. *The Ambassadors*. 1533. Oil on wood. National Gallery, London, UK

In France, as expected, Muslim carpets were known much earlier and were particularly popular at the time of Louis IX (1215-70 ) under the name "tapis Sarrasinois" and in 1277 there were trade privileges for this *tapis* in Paris<sup>29</sup>. A silk cope from a Mamluk sultan of Egypt was inscribed on it "the learned Sultan" dating from the fourteenth century was found in St. Mary's Church at Danzig. This is not surprising as the famous geographer and philosopher, Al- Idrisi (c.1096 - 1166), revealed that woollen carpets were produced in the twelfth century in Chinchilla and Murcia (both now in Spain) and were exported all over the world.

In addition to these historical facts, there is another source which provides credible evidence enabling us to evaluate the extent of use and the position of the Muslim carpet in Europe. The study of paintings made in late medieval period supplied considerable information on how and where these carpets were used and how they were regarded. The earliest occurrences of carpets in European paintings go back to early 1300s, starting with the painting of the Italian Simone Martini, Nicolo of Buonaccorso, Stefano de Giovanni, or that of Ambrogio Lorenzetti (see above). In addition to the depiction of stylised animals, there was also a Turkish element in these carpets which consisted of using similar knotting technique<sup>30</sup>.

*In Renaissance paintings one can easily notice a considerable increase in the popularity of Muslim carpets, particularly the Turkish and Persian makes. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries growing trade relations and increasing prosperity of Europe resulted in more importation of Muslim artistic and luxurious goods as European society (i.e. the educated and wealthy) started to experience a more comfortable life. Large quantities of rugs, ceramics and other items formed an essential part of this trade, as confirmed by Mills: "By 1500 we reach a time when certain Turkish products were being produced and exported to the West in large number, and pieces evidently*

*belonging to the same group are to be found represented by painters both of Italy and Northern Europe*<sup>31</sup>.

Portraits of important dignitaries from Italy, France, Germany, Holland and Belgium illustrated the luxurious usage of these carpets. Examples of these are those portrayed in the work of the German Hans Holbein, the Junior (1497-1543). He chose large patterned carpets, centrally decorated with octagons and framed within a pseudo-Kufic inscription. His painting known as *French Ambassadors*, for example, depicts two wealthy men standing in front of a table topped with an Ottoman carpet (figure 5). There other instances where Ottoman carpets were present in Christian themes i.e. depicting the Virgin Mary in a setting displaying Ottoman textiles (figures 6&7).



Figure 6. Virgin and Child with the family of Burgomaster Meyer, 1528 Oil on wood  
Schlossmuseum,Darmstadt, Holbein the younger.

In Belgium similar processes took place as carpets were subjected to similar privileged treatment. Two examples may suffice here including the works of Van Eyck (1390-1441) and Hans Memlinc. These two artists, like Holbein, incorporated the Muslim carpet in their drawings with holy and noble themes. Van Eyck's painting of *the Virgin and Child with St. Donatian, St. George and Canon Van der Paele* (figure 8), which he painted in 1436 at Bruges, shows Mary (puh) seated on a carpet with geometrical shapes essentially circles drawn around rosettes combined with lozenges and eight pointed star motifs. His fellow artist Hans Memlinc in his *Mystical Marriage of St. Catherine* (1479) and *The Virgin Enthroned* (figure 9) used those Anatolian patterns very closely resembling the carpet of Eshrefoglu at Beysehir<sup>32</sup>.

In Italy, the earliest evidence of carpets is traced to the end of twelfth century, appearing in increasing number of paintings of this period, either below the throne of the Madonna (as in the work of Martini above) on the floor of sacred rites, or hanging from windows of homes on feast days. By the fifteenth

century, carpets gained more popularity as they began to appear in documents showing that they were used as table carpets (*tapedi de tavola*), and desk carpets (*tapedi da desco*). These were both *tapedi damaschini*, Damascus carpets, and *tapedi ciarini*, Cairo carpets, which invaded the trading markets of Venice<sup>33</sup>.



Figure 7. Details of Figure 6. Here we have medallions made up of diamond and squares. The main border is a connected "S" pattern that is more common as a minor or guard border.

In other occasions, Muslim carpets formed fashionable diplomatic gifts, especially the stylish Mamluk carpet from Egypt<sup>34</sup>. The portrait of *Husband and Wife* of Lotto (1480-1556) shows the use of the "S" pattern for inner border combined with a delightful arabesque followed by another wider border made essentially of vine leaves (figures 12&13). The painting of the Venetian Cittero Carpaccio, "*St. Ursula taking leave of her father*" shows the popularity of rugs appearing on the boat and on balcony of the tower. It is said that these carpets (of the painting) were made by Turkish artists living in Venice in the "Fondaco dei Turchi" which provides another light on how the reproduction of Muslim/Turkish carpet, transformed into the so called "Venetian Carpaccio", took place<sup>35</sup>. In late fifteenth century paintings show the "Venetian Carpaccio" hanging from the windows and balconies of houses as well as thrown on table tops and places where they can be more visually seen and appreciated. From this time, the representation of carpets in paintings spread to Spain, Germany and France<sup>36</sup>.

The first arrival of this Ottoman/Turkish carpet to England was recorded in 1518 when Cardinal Wolsey ordered seven from Venice and another 60 Damascene carpets were dispatched to him in 1520<sup>37</sup>. King Henry VIII (1509-47) of England is known to have owned over 400 Muslim carpets<sup>38</sup>. A portrait made for him by Holbein in 1537 shows him standing on a Turkish carpet with its Ushak star<sup>39</sup> while Arabesque is bordering his garment, and other Muslim interlacing patterns appear on the curtains (figure 10). In another portrait showing the King and Princess Mary (later Queen 1553-8) seated at a table on which a Turkish carpet is spread (figure 11). Records also show that the Earl of Leicester, Robert Dudley, (1532-1588), who lived during the time of Elizabeth I (1558-1603), left a total of 46 Turkish carpets and one Persian<sup>40</sup>.

Turkish carpets were also acquired by Hardwick Hall, formerly Bess of Hardwick which was built by Elizabeth of Shrewsbury in the 1590's. An inventory of the hall's will of 1601 counted 32 carpets<sup>41</sup>. Records also show that the Hall purchased in 1610 two Turkish carpets for the price of £1315<sup>42</sup>. Thus when they were first introduced to England, carpets were used in display places, such as tables, desks, and coffers, by households with prestige.

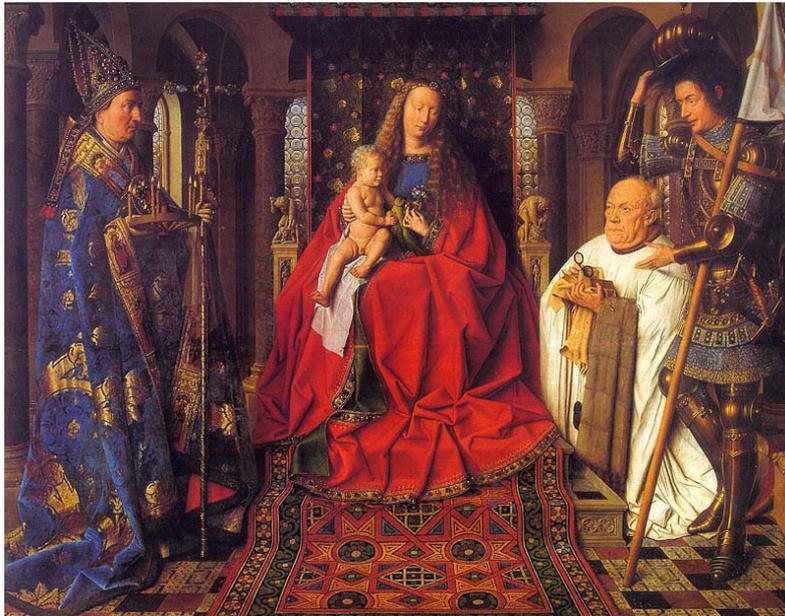


Figure 8. Van Eyck: Virgin and child with ST. Donatian, St. George and Canon Van der Paele, Burges (1436).

Muslim carpets continued to decorate most of Tudor England's tables, chests, and walls. It was not until the Victorian period (18<sup>th</sup> century) that they were used on floors. There is evidence suggesting that some carpets were made specifically for European customers. The presence of round shaped carpet that could be used for tables and other cross-shaped carpets that were produced in Egypt can only be suggestive of a European destination<sup>43</sup>. In other carpets the figure of the crucifixion was inserted in floral motifs, while others carried the European coat of arms of which some were sent to King Sigismund III (1566–1632) of Poland.

It is quite clear that the Ottoman carpet reached an unprecedented position in European high society, as confirmed by Ettinghausen who wrote:

*"There is no doubt that carpets exerted a great fascination on would-be buyers and owners, whatever their social position-whether they were Hapsburgs or members of the royal house of Sweden, princes of the church, the nobility, or were just well-to-do members of the bourgeoisie. Their esteem can be gauged by the fact that they served as the setting for coronations and other important festive occasions. They became what is now called a 'status symbol'"<sup>44</sup>.*

In the seventeenth century, the carpet fashion took off strongly as records reveal the existence of many types of carpets; foot carpet, table carpet, cupboard carpet and window carpet<sup>45</sup>. Such overwhelming popularity continues till the present day while the import of carpets from Islamic countries continues strong despite the fierce competition from the Chinese carpets (table 2).

Table 2. Imports of Oriental (Muslim) carpets.

Country	1929	1967
Austria	-	355
Belgium	425	-
Canada	-	170
Denmark	600	720
France	-	70
Great Britain	300	100
Holland	-	340
Sweden	295	510
Switzerland	-	1960
USA	-	90

Source: Wirth, E. (1976) 'Der Orientteppich und Europa', Heft 37, Gedruckt in der universitätsbuchdruckerei Junge & Sohn, Erlangen, p.337.



Figure 9. Hans Memling Flemish (c.1440-1494), The Virgin Enthroned, Belgium.



Figure 10 Holbein the Junior, Henry 8<sup>th</sup> (c.1540) showing the Ushaq carpet.

### Europe's Imitation of the Muslim Carpet.

The first imitation of Muslim carpets in Europe was undertaken under the sponsorship of English patrons<sup>46</sup>. Attempts to introduce the craft of weaving carpet into England were made as early as the times of Elizabeth I. A Victoria and Albert Museum publication reports that a chapter in Hakluyt's *Voyages*, entitled " *Certaine directions given...to M. Morgan Hubblethorne, Dier sent into Persia, 1579*" refers to a plan to import Persian carpet makers into England: "In Persia you shall find carpets of course thrummed wool, the best of the

world, and excellently coloured: those cities and towns you must repair to, and you must use means to learn all the order of the dyeing of those thrums, which are so dyed as neither rain, wine, nor yet vinegar can stain....If before you return you could procure a singular good workman in the art of Turkish carpet making, you should bring the art into the Realm and also thereby increase work to your company"<sup>47</sup>. According to Sweetman, the earliest carpet made in Europe was that of Verulam carpet which was produced in 1570 at Gorhambury. Other three carpets were in the collection of Duke of Buccleuch at Boughton bearing the dates of 1584 and 1585. There are other suggestions which point to the existence of other copies made in Britain.



Figure 11. Holbein the Senior, lost Mural at Whitehall.

Between sixteenth and seventeenth centuries smaller objects such as chair covers, cushion covers and the like, some of which can be found in Norwich Cathedral, were reproduced in similar knotting patterns as those of the Turkish carpets<sup>48</sup>. In seventeenth century small panels to cover cushions upholstery were produced using Turkish techniques. An oak chair dated in 1649 and covered with such panels is to be found in Victoria and Albert Museum.

By the eighteenth century the carpet industry was established in Britain. A certain French man with the name Pavisot made carpets, imitating the Savonnerie carpets, at Paddington moving to Fulham by the middle of eighteenth century. However most of his production was destined to fulfil orders for furniture covers<sup>49</sup>. Later, in 1751, the Royal Society of Arts promoted the establishment of successful carpet manufacturing "on the Principle of Turkey Carpets" through subsidies and awards. For example between 1757 and 1759, the Society spent £ 150 as awards for the best Turkish "imitated" carpets. The manufacturers benefiting from these awards were Thomas Moore in Chisewell Street, Moorfield, Thomas Whitty at Axminster, Passavant at Exeter, and William Jesser of Frome<sup>50</sup>.

In France a similar approach was followed. In 1604 King Henry IV promoted a certain Monsieur Fortier and made him "tapissier ordinaire de sa Majeste en Tapiz de Turquie et facon de Levant" to make copies of Turkish and Eastern carpets. A year later, 1605, a company Savonnerie, was set up by Pierre du Pont to do this copying. Later, in 1750 the company expanded into England, two Frenchmen from Savonnerieat

Chaillot moved to London and set up a carpet factory first in Westminster and later expanded into Paddington and Fulham<sup>51</sup> as outlined above.



Figure 12. Husband and Wife, Lorenzo Lotto, c. 1543.



Figure 13. Close up of carpet in 'Husband and Wife'. Details of the octagonal design on the tapestry.

Other countries followed suit. In 1634 Polish companies were set up in Brody by a certain Hetman Stanislaw Koniecpolski to produce Turkish and eastern styled carpets<sup>52</sup>.

### Summary and Conclusion.

From the above it appears that the European perception of Muslim carpeting has developed over time from being a rare luxurious item gifted to the holy and saintly figures to being possessed only by the rich and ultimately to the establishment of local carpet industries thus making it available to a wider public. In this process one can distinguish five phases:

- Carpets were first reserved to holy rituals as seen in paintings which incorporated them in the depiction of the Virgin (puh), Jesus (puh), the saints and other holy scenes. This took place between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.
- In late fifteenth century the carpet reached the landed gentry becoming a status symbol to be displayed from such as windows and balconies (as seen in the "Venetian Capaccio").
- In the seventeenth century, carpets were a popular decorative item covering tables, as seen in the Dutch paintings. This period also saw the appearance of foot carpet, table carpet, cupboard and window carpets.
- The eighteenth century marked the start of the carpet manufacturing.
- The last two centuries have seen a wider spread of carpet spreading reaching most houses and offices of the Western world.

This contribution shows the humane dimension of Islam in catering for the comfort and well being of people through the development and spread of carpets. An insignificant item maybe, if compared to those higher intellectual achievements in such as science, literature, poetry and the like, but undoubtedly a useful contribution.

## Notes.

- <sup>1</sup> Gans-Ruedin, E. (1975), 'Antique Oriental Carpets, From the seventeenth to the early Twentieth century', translated from, *le tapis de l'Amateur*, by Richard and Elizabeth Bartlett, Thames and Hudson, London, p.10.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.12.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.13.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.14
- <sup>5</sup> Spuhler, F. (1978), 'Islamic Carpets and Textiles in the Keir Collection', Faber and Faber Ltd., London, p.27.
- <sup>6</sup> Rice, D.T. (1975), 'Islamic Art', Thames and Hudson, Norwich, p.139.
- <sup>7</sup> For more on the Seljuk Caliphate please see **Muslim Architecture Under Seljuk Patronage (1038-1327)**, Muslimheritage.com.
- <sup>8</sup> Ettinghausen, R. (1974), 'The Impact of Muslim decorative arts and painting on the Arts of Europe', Schacht Joseph and Bosworth, C. E. ed., *The Legacy of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, The Clarendon Press, Oxford, p.300.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibn Battuta: 'Travels in Asia and Africa 1325-1354'. Translated and selected by H.A.R. Gibb. Edited by Sir E. Denison Ross and Eileen Power, Robert M. McBride & Company, New York, p.126.
- <sup>10</sup> t'Serstevens, A. (1955), 'Le Livre de Marco Polo', Albin Michel, Paris, p.73.
- <sup>11</sup> Which contains a floor carpet with octagons depicting eagles, now at the National Gallery of London.
- <sup>12</sup> Mills, J. (1975), 'Carpets in Pictures', Publications Department National Gallery, London, pp.4-5.
- <sup>13</sup> Hans Holbein (1497-1543) the Junior, and Holbein the Senior
- <sup>14</sup> Spuhler, F. (1978), 'Islamic Carpets and Textiles in the Keir Collection', op. cit., p.47.
- <sup>15</sup> Sweetman, 1987, pp.71-72.
- <sup>16</sup> Gans-Ruedin, E. (1975), 'Antique Oriental Carpets, From the seventeenth to the early Twentieth century', op.cit., p.21.
- <sup>17</sup> Elke Niewohner (2000) 'Iran: Safavid and Qajars; Decorative arts', M.Hattstein & P. Delius eds, *Islam: Art and Architecture*, Konemann, Cologne, pp.520-529.
- <sup>18</sup> Blair, S. & Bloom, J. (2000), 'Islamic Carpets', M.Hattstein & P. Delius eds, *Islam: Art and Architecture*, Konemann, Cologne, pp.530-533.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.532.
- <sup>20</sup> Scott, S.P. (1904), 'History of the Moorish Empire', Vol2, The Hippincot Company, Philadelphia.
- <sup>21</sup> The book was translated from French "*Les ditz moraulx des philosophes*" by Guillaume de Tignoville. Apparently it was the first book to be published in England in 1477.
- <sup>22</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum, op., cit., p.59.
- <sup>23</sup> Cheyney, E.P. (1908), "**Readings in English History**", Ginn and Company, New York, pp. 316-317.
- <sup>24</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum, op., cit., p.59.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> Reigned 999-1003; also called Gerbert. Born at or near Aurillac, Auvergne, France, about 940-950, of humble parents; died at Rome, 12 May, 1003. Gerbert entered the service of the Church and received his first training in the Monastery of Aurillac. He was then taken by a Spanish count to Spain, where he studied at Barcelona and also under Arabian teachers at Cordova and Seville, giving much attention to mathematics and the natural sciences
- <sup>27</sup> Sweetman, (1987)
- <sup>28</sup> Boase, T.S.R. (1953) 'English Art 1100-1216', p. 170).
- <sup>29</sup> Sweetman,
- <sup>30</sup> Mills, J. (1975), op.cit., pp.4-5.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.16.
- <sup>32</sup> Gans-Ruedin, E. (1975), op., cit., p.20.
- <sup>33</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum (1920), op.cit.
- <sup>34</sup> Erdmann, K. (1962), 'Europa und der Orinetteppich', Mainz, Berlin, pp.11-17 .
- <sup>35</sup> Mills, J. (1975), op.cit., p.17.
- <sup>36</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum (1920) '**Guide to the Collection of Carpets**', HMSO, London. p.3.
- <sup>37</sup> Beattie, M. (1964) 'Britain and the Oriental Carpet', in LAC 55, and Mills, J. (1983) the coming of the carpet to the West, in ARTS cat., the Eastern Carpet in the Western World.

- <sup>38</sup> King, D. (1983) 'the inventories of the carpets of King Henry 8', in *Hali* 5, pp.287-296.
- <sup>39</sup> The Ushak star consists of eight point indented star motif alternating with lozenge shapes.
- <sup>40</sup> Ettinghausen, (1974) , op. cit., p.301.
- <sup>41</sup> Beattie, M.H. (1959) 'Antique Rugs at Hardwick Hall', in *Oriental Art*, vol. 5, pp.52-61.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>43</sup> Ettinghausen, 1974, op.cit., p301.
- <sup>44</sup> Ettinghausen (1974) op.,cit., p. 301.
- <sup>45</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum, op., cit., p.9.
- <sup>46</sup> Sweetman, 1987, op. cit., p.16.
- <sup>47</sup> Quoted by Victoria and Albert Museum, op., cit., p.62.
- <sup>48</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum, op., cit.,p.63.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid., p.64.
- <sup>50</sup> Sweetman, 1987, op. cit., note 39, p.274,. Also see Victoria and Albert Museum, op., cit., p.64.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid., note 39, p.40.
- <sup>52</sup> Ettinghausen, (1974), op., cit., p.302.

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