

ANTIQUUE CARPETS



CAUCASIAN
SUMAKH
(76.687)

The rug collection— Ross Memorial Museum

Visually and technically, Oriental carpets can be divided into three distinct groups: nomadic, village and town carpets.

Nomadic carpets always have geometric designs and are knotted on warps of wool. At the other end of the spectrum are **town** carpets which usually have complex curvilinear designs and cotton or silk warps. The **village** carpet is aesthetically between these two forms of weaving. Its model is either the tribal carpet or the curvilinear town carpet. The designs of the town carpet, however, become more geometric and simplified in the process.

It is interesting to observe that the rugs of the Ross collection are, with one exception, all village or nomadic rugs from Persia, the Caucasus and Turkmenistan. There is only one town carpet in the collection and it is not a prime example of the genre. In fact, it has a distinct village feel about it. We can only speculate about why there was this emphasis on the more 'primitive' type of carpet. It might have been a deliberate choice, as we find in the collection flat weaves which were not considered worth collecting at the turn of the 20th century, their aesthetic value having only recently been

appreciated. The large number of flat-woven examples in the collection, which are of great artistic merit, suggests the Rosses were collectors independent of the fashion of their time.

There seems to have been a clear predilection for certain patterns. For instance, both **boteh** and Kurdish **mahi** patterns prevail. (*Boteh* refers to a leaf or pine design, the ancestor of paisley. The *mahi* pattern consists of a delicate pattern of flower vases and little fish around a rosette.)

morning room

MORNING ROOM

Tekke-Turkoman (large rug)
Antique (76.688)

Turkoman rugs are characterized by highly formalized abstract designs on a red background.

The systematic arrangement of hexagonal or octagonal motifs, the so-called *gul*, makes them easily recognizable. The *gul* (Persian for flower) is a tribal emblem with heraldic significance. Every Turkoman tribe has its own renditions of the *gul*, the symbol of the honour and pride of the tribe. The rug shows a superb drawing of the Tekke *gul* against a madder red background. Of note is the embroidery on the Kelim (flat-woven) ends with anthropomorphic and circular designs. Originally, the rug would have had extensive flat-woven ends.

“To Mr. and Mrs. Henry Phipps Ross—
true rug lovers”

The author's inscription appears in the Rosses' copy of Rosa Belle Holt's 1908 edition of her book, *Rugs Oriental and Occidental*.

Salor Turkoman (small rug)
Semi-antique (RR 84.29)

This rug shows the rose colour typically associated with the Salor tribe, but not the Salor *gul*. Only the minor *gul* is typically Salor; the main *gul* here is Tekke. This change of *gul* is the result of the many inter-tribal conflicts between Turkoman tribes. The vanquished tribe had to surrender its *gul* and adopt the emblem of the victorious tribe, in this case the Tekke, the most powerful tribe of the century.

Compared with the Tekke-Turkoman displayed in this room, this rug shows much less precision in the design and execution of the Kelim ends, which are very simple.

It is a typical export piece of the early 20th century. The rugs were collected in the city of Bokhara—hence the name Bokhara, which became the Western name for Turkoman rugs.

MORNING ROOM

TEKKE TURKOMAN
(left) 76.688

SALOR TURKOMAN
(right) RR 84.29



drawing and dining rooms

DRAWING ROOM

Heriz
Antique (76.789)

This northwest Persian carpet shows the influence of the neighbouring Caucasus in its field design. An unusual all-over geometric pattern of blue stylized flowers fills the white field. Normally, Heriz carpets display a geometric central medallion, parts of which are mirrored in the corners of the field. Their rectilinear patterns are naive renderings of curvilinear town carpet designs from Tabriz, the major city in the area.

Tabrizi merchants supplied the designs to the village weavers in an effort to work with the cartoons (drafts) necessary for the execution of curvilinear designs.

This carpet seems to pre-date the commercialization of Heriz village weaving and the ensuing standardization of design. This assumption is supported by the traditional dimensions of this carpet; it is twice as long as wide. In Persian carpets made for export to the West, a shorter and more square format prevails.

DINING ROOM

South-east Caucasian (at entry)
Antique (76.679)

This Caucasian rug combines elements from various areas of the Caucasus. The scorpion border is taken from Shirvan carpets of the Eastern Caucasus. The field design with its ascending tree of life flanked by shield-like palmettes and birds is frequently found in carpets from the North.

The wool quality and knotting technique used, as well as the greenish-blue field suggest, however, a southeastern origin—the Moghan or Gendje area. A major indicator of origin is the selvage which here, unfortunately, has been replaced.

Caucasian Sumakh (under table)
Semi-antique (76.687)

The northern Caucasus is justly famous for its embroidered flat weaves which are called Sumakh (the name is supposed to derive from the city of Shemaka); however, a more likely origin is Kuba in the northern Caucasus. The four geometric medallions and the dominant red, blue, green and yellow colouring are all characteristic features. In spite of considerable wear all the distinctive braided fringes have survived.

DRAWING ROOM

HERIZ
(left) 76.789

DINING ROOM

CAUCASIAN
SUMAKH
(right) 76.687



study and blue bedroom

STUDY

Feraghan-Saruk
Semi-antique (76.683)

The most finely knotted rug in the collection (approximately 400,000 knots per square metre) comes from the plains of Feraghan in western Persia. There, in the late nineteenth century, the little village of Saruk was famous for its small rugs rivaling the best of the curvilinear town carpets from Isfahan, Kashan and Tabriz.

This rug shows the typical Saruk border and weaving technique; its field, however, is a traditional Kurdish design from the Feraghan area. Two small formalized fish are depicted around a rosette embodying the old Persian myth that the earth was a flat disk kept in constant revolution by two giant whales. In the Feraghan area madder red was customarily fixed with cow's urine rather than alum; therefore, it is not quite as stable and runs when exposed to water.

With its velvety texture, short-cropped pile and Kurdish design, this rug is very similar to some Kurdish Senneh carpets in the Ross collection. The knotting, however, is not the traditional Kurdish single-weft but the typical town knotting with depressed warps and two wefts.

BLUE BEDROOM

Western Persian Kurdish
Antique (76.672)

A typical Kurdish runner with woollen warps and a single woollen weft. Characteristic of Kurdish carpetmaking is the webbing on one end which is traversed by a two-coloured band.

The dark blue field with a *boteh* (leaf or pine design) pattern is surrounded by a yellow border showing a typical Kurdish band of daisies.

The yellow colour is made from vine leaves; indigo is used for the medium blue in the border as well as the dark blue field, both in a very characteristic Kurdish tonality. Of particular interest are the animals randomly interspersed in the field design.

STUDY

FERAGHAN-SARUK
(left) 76.683

BLUE BEDROOM

WESTERN PERSIAN
KURDISH
(right) 76.672





The information for this brochure was provided by a number of people: in particular rug expert Dr Hans -Gunther Schwarz, Dalhousie University, Halifax, who helped mount a major rug exhibit at the museum in 1993, and at that time said:

“The Ross collection is certainly one of the major collections of nomadic and village rugs in North America.”



gentleman's sitting room & master bedroom

GENTLEMAN'S SITTING ROOM

Seneh-Kelim
Antique (RR 84.33)

Seneh is the main town in the Kurdish region of western Iran. Compared with other Kurdish carpets, Seneh rugs are uncommonly fine. In spite of their single weft, normally associated with coarse village weaves from the Hamadan area, Senehs rival the most finely knotted Persian town rugs in elegance, design and knot count. This is an extremely fine Kelim (a woven, rather than knotted rug) with a characteristic design of diamonds and *mahi*. The pale but distinct colouring in subtle reds, greens and yellows is typical of the finest Kelims woven in the second half of the nineteenth century.

MASTER BEDROOM

Bidjar
Antique (RR 83.24)

Bidjar carpets are the heaviest found in Persia. Up to six wefts are inserted after every row of knots and the wefts are wetted in order to facilitate the beating down with a heavy iron comb. The resulting pencil-thick weft produces a weighty, stiff fabric without breaking the weft threads. This carpet shows a typical Bidjar pattern: a central medallion with ram's horns within a lattice filled with flowers. Another Bidjar characteristic shared with other Kurdish carpets is the embroidery on the Kelim (woven) ends.



In order to produce stable vibrant colours the wool has to be white—but grey wool was more economical.



lady's sitting room and bedroom

LADY'S SITTING ROOM
 Western Persian Kurdish
 Semi-antique (76.667)

This rug possesses classic Kurdish designs with a typical Hamadan influence visible in the border of the motif. It is made with either synthetic dyes (Perkin's mauve) or has undergone an acid wash and later been repainted.

LADY'S BEDROOM
 Hamadan
 Semi-antique (76.686)

Originally this runner must have been part of a triclinium—that is, a carpet which is three carpets in one, reflecting the typical Persian room arrangement of a large carpet in the middle and two long ones on either side. These *kenerahs* would be used while the centre carpet would be just for looking at. The direction of the warp threads confirms that this long rug was originally part of a larger carpet. The border is *shotori*, a brown colour made from walnut husks and typical of the Hamadan district. The area surrounding the three medallions shows the *shekiri* (honey and milk) design, the contrast of light and dark used to form a lattice pattern. You can see where the dye did not take because of the use of grey wool.

sleigh bedroom and stairwell

SLEIGH BEDROOM

Western Persian Kurdish
Semi-antique (RR 76.674)

This runner shows a fairly sophisticated design of seven full diamond medallions which are mirrored by two half-medallions. The deep red ground dyed with cochineal reminds one of the carpets from the town of Hamadan. More typically “village” are the daisy borders and the random scattering of little dogs in the field. They contrast oddly with the severity of the medallions in the centre and the stars of Solomon forming the main border. The minor border with its geometric diamonds is more typical of southern Persian than Kurdish rugs.

BACK STAIRWELL

Hamadan
Semi-antique (RR 83.28)

The so-called “lightening design” is the trademark of the villages of Noraban, Mazlaghan and Kerdar in the Hamadan area.

It is a rectilinear version of the curvilinear medallion found in Persian town rugs

The villagers give it their very own geometric interpretation. It is most unusual to find this design on a runner.

This is a well-loved collection of rugs. Juliette and Henry Ross enjoyed living with and *using* the things they collected.

SLEIGH BEDROOM

WESTERN PERSIAN
KURDISH
(left) RR 76.674

BACK STAIRWELL

HAMADAN
(right) RR 83.28



