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MASTER

ORIENTAL CARPET
&
TEXTILE STUDIES
II

Carpets of the
Mediterranean Countries
1400—1600

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ORIENTAL CARPETS

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The Origin and Development of Ottoman Court Carpets

Walter B. Denny

According to the standard published histories of Ottoman court carpets, the central documentation for the creation of an Ottoman court carpet manufactory is an Imperial order dated to the year 1585, in which the Sultan, Murad III, ordered that 11 master carpet weavers from Cairo be brought to İstanbul, along with a supply of their dyed wool.¹ The demonstrable technical relationships between Cairene carpets of the so-called 'Mamluk' designs, and other carpets with so-called 'Ottoman' designs have led to the logical conclusion that Ottoman court carpets, that is, carpets woven with designs which can be demonstrated to have originated in the style of the Ottoman *nakkashane* or court design atelier, must have been woven either in Cairo itself, or in other parts of the Empire by Cairene artisans or their pupils.²

The transition in Cairene weaving between what we recognize as the 'Mamluk' style (a style whose origins are much in dispute) and the 'Ottoman' style is documented in a number of examples, most notably a fragmentary example in the possession of the Munich firm of Ostler.³ In the Ostler rug, a Mamluk central medallion design is combined with Ottoman forms at the two ends, consisting of 'lappets' filled with the familiar Ottoman stylized tulips with spotted petals, a form current in Ottoman ceramics around the year 1560. It now appears clear that many of the great 'Mamluk' carpets were woven in Cairo in the middle third of the 16th century, well after the Ottoman conquest, and that the gradual shift in designs from the 'Mamluk' forms to the Ottoman court vocabulary began in Cairo before 1585. In this light, the migration of the Cairene weavers to İstanbul is probably not the important event it had formerly been imagined to be, since the change in venue of weaving had relatively little impact on a gradual shift in style that had begun decades before. The coming of Cairene weavers to İstanbul, or to near-by Bursa, if we accept the division of Ottoman court carpets into Bursa and Cairo provenances,⁴ would appear therefore to have had an impact on technique, but rather little impact on style. This sort of phenomenon should not be at all surprising, since the

history of Islamic art is full of the migrations of styles from place to place, the history of Iranian painting from 1336 to 1650 being the best-known example.⁵

Using the evidence available to Kühnel and Bellinger, and to Erdmann before them,⁶ we might well therefore term the Ottoman court carpets (that is, carpets using Ottoman court designs, and woven to a technical standard appropriate to the taste and standards of Ottoman court patrons) synthetic creations, suddenly called into being in the late 16th century, in much the same way as the Mamluk carpets themselves magically and puzzlingly appeared in Egypt in the 15th century. Since the second half of the 16th century marked the heyday of Ottoman miniature painting, Ottoman ceramics, and the culmination of the classical age of Ottoman architecture under the great architect Sinan, this picture of the Ottoman court carpet production was consonant with everything then known about Ottoman art. A much older commercial tradition of carpet making did exist in the Ottoman empire; the 'Holbein' carpets and the various carpets assigned to Ushak can be documented to exist throughout the 16th century. But the idea of a court-controlled atelier, which the Ottomans would have referred to as *hâssa* carpet-weaving, appeared from the 'classical' evidence to have come from Cairo.

The Ottoman Documents

In 1963, in the Turkish journal *Türk Sanatı Tarihi*, Volume I, Bige Çetintürk published an article dealing with court carpet artists in Istanbul up to the end of the 16th century, in which he documented the existence at the Ottoman court among the *Ehl-i Hiref* or 'people of artisanry', individuals with the occupational designation of *kaliçebâftân* – that is, carpet-weavers.⁷ The first indication of such individuals appearing on the Ottoman payroll is found in a register of the court guilds dated A.H. 932 (A.D. 1526), that refers to two masters, Hamza and Mustafa, who had entered the *Ehl-i Hiref* in the reign of Mehmed Fatih (1451-1480). Another indication that rugs, possibly under court control, might have been woven at this early date is the Venetian Barbaro's reference in 1474 to Bursa rugs.⁸

In 1503, another record of the *Ehl-i Hiref* refers to 19 members of the rug weavers' guild, (*Cemaat-i Kaliçebâftân*) including both masters (*usta*), and apprentices (*şakird*). In A.H. 909 (A.D. 1503), Master Ilyas was paid 900 *akçe* for a *seccade*, that is, a 'prostration (prayer) rug'. Other rug prices listed in documents of this year ranged from 800 to 2000 *akçe*. When we look in the lists of *şakird* we find a number of names including towns of origin, and the presence of a *Niğbolulu* and a *Kosovalı* (apprentices from Nicopolis and Kosovo) suggests that like many of the *hâssa* guilds, that of rug-weavers was staffed by young men from the *devşirme* or 'levy of youths' that also supplied soldiers for the elite Ottoman Janissary troops and administrators for the entire Ottoman Ruling Institution.⁹

According to Çetintürk's documentation, many of the same masters listed in 1503 continue to appear on the registers of court rug weavers under Sultan Selim I (1504-1520). What is more interesting is that although Sultan Selim sacked Tabriz after his victory over Shah Ismail at Chaldiran in 1504, and although other Ottoman records show

that numbers of artists from Tabriz were taken to Anatolia afterwards, and although Selim conquered Cairo in 1516, no rug-weavers from either Iran or Egypt appear on the rolls of the *Cemaat-i Kalıçebâftân* during his reign.¹⁰

One of the most illuminating of Ottoman documents, the Register of Court Artisans of A.H. 932 (A.D. 1526), was completed six years into the reign of Süleyman I (1520-1566). At this time, Hamza (probably the same artist mentioned as having joined the guild in the time of Mehmet II) is listed as *kethüda* or foreman of the guild, an important position as it made him the representative of the guild in the determination of wages and prices. His salary was listed as 15½ *akçe* per diem. In 1526 there were 25 rug weavers listed on the registers, but there were again no 'Tabrizis' and no Cairenes. Among the masters there were however two 'Hirvats' (Croatians), three 'Çerkes' (Circassians), and most intriguingly, a 'Frenk Osman' (Osman the Frank — i.e., a West European).¹¹

During the reign of Selim II (1566-1574) the same names continue to appear in occasional documents mentioning the court carpet atelier. The next important set of documents emerges between the years A.H. 974-1001 (A.D. 1566-1592), concentrating in the reign of Murad III (1574-1596). At this time the *cemaat* includes 16 artists, many of whom have the second name 'son of 'Abdullah' — an indication that many of them were *devşirme* recruits, probably originating in the Balkans.¹² Among the artists we notice the names of Gürcü Mustafa (Georgian) and Macar Keyvan (Hungarian). The salaries range from 4 to 23 *akçe* per diem, which represents, given the inflation of the 'eighties, a net reduction in purchasing power for the artisans of the *Cemaat*.¹³ The *Cemaat-i Kalıçebâftân* finally disappears from the Ottoman historical records in the reign of Sultan Ahmet I (1603-1617), when for reasons left unexplained in the documents, its name was changed to the *Cemaat-i Sorguçiyân-i Hâssa*, or the 'association of royal aigrette-makers'.¹⁴

The documents published by Çetintürk, Aslanapa, and others clearly cause some problems for the orthodox theory of the origins of Ottoman court carpets, especially since the term *hâssa* — literally 'private' or 'reserved' — used in the documents makes it clear that we are dealing with a legitimately-constituted workshop under royal patronage, and not simply an extension of the existing Turkish rug manufactories from Anatolia.¹⁵ We might legitimately then ask first, what rugs, if any, can we assign to this production; second, what did these rugs look like; third, how do they relate to the 'Cairene' phase of court carpet weaving in the Ottoman empire; and fourth, where were they woven?

Early Ottoman Court Carpets

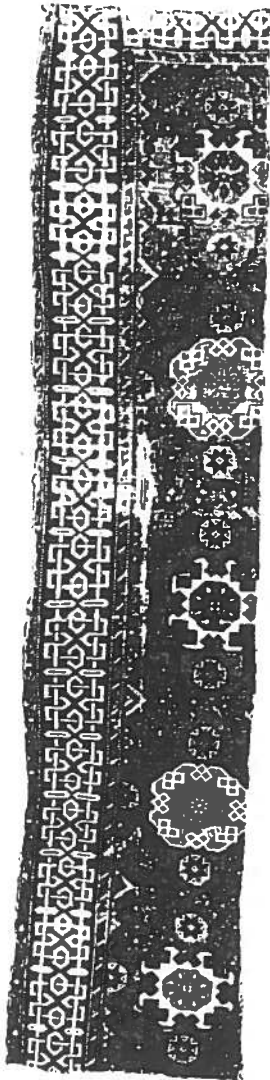
Our almost embarrassingly rich sources on the names of the actual weavers of rugs is unfortunately complemented by an even more embarrassing lack of rugs readily identifiable as court production of this period. At the outset, we should not be unduly surprised by a situation where few (if any) examples of a type of court production exist, despite the documents. The reason for this is the extremely centralized nature of

the *hâssa* ateliers and the concentration of vast numbers of their products in one place – the palace of the Sultans in İstanbul. Until the early 20th century, for example, over 99 per cent of all of the royal Turkish manuscripts ever executed were still in the libraries of İstanbul and especially that of the Topkapı Palace, and with few exceptions most of them remain there today.¹⁶ To study the history of Ottoman court-designed textiles, there is only one collection of great significance, and that is concentrated in the Topkapı Palace. In fact, there was a tendency in the Ottoman Empire to collect works of art commissioned by the court, such as royal garments, as a dynastic record, serving in the aggregate as a sort of 'dynastic reliquary'.¹⁷ Under such circumstances, a large percentage of art-historical resources was concentrated in a single place, in which case the fires that periodically swept both the city of İstanbul and the royal palace almost certainly on occasion may have almost obliterated entire artistic traditions.¹⁸ One of the most common art historical fallacies is to assume that 'all we have is all there was' – even more distressing is the corollary that anything that does not fit into the prevailing pattern of what we know must be a forgery or a reproduction.

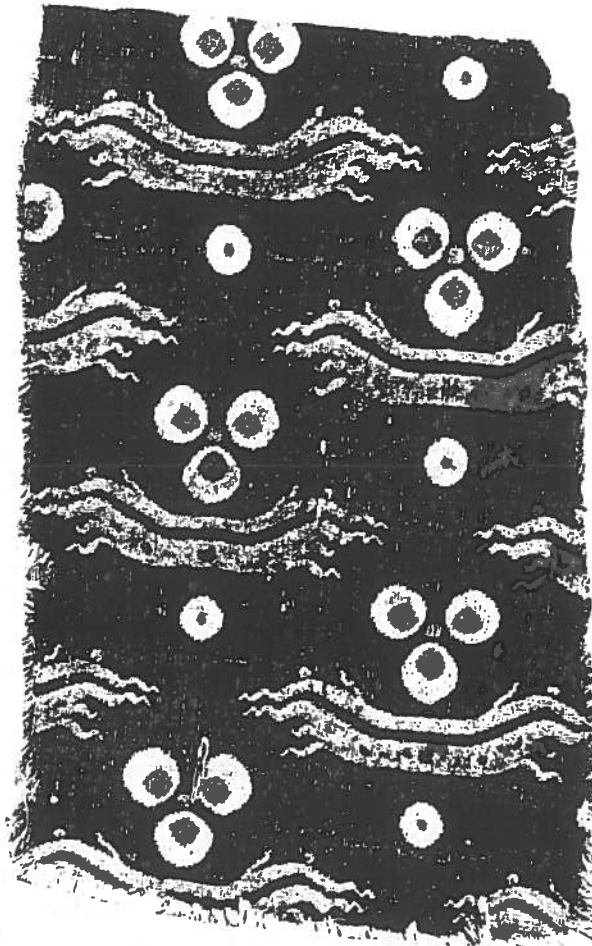
Given this situation, then, there are several alternatives, all hypothetical to some degree, that may give us some understanding of the carpets that were undoubtedly produced in the *Cemaat* before the reign of Murad III. The first, and altogether the simplest, would be to assume that the court carpets were simply more finely woven and designed versions of familiar types. Weavers from established centres, following this reasoning, would either have been called to the court, where they would have set up their looms and continued their established traditions (much in the same way as the Cairene weavers may have done), or they may have continued weaving in their traditional place of work in Ushak or other provincial towns, a less-likely alternative given the nature of the documents published by Çetintürk. Under these circumstances, the earliest Ottoman 'court' carpets may simply have been akin to the familiar 'Holbein' family of early Anatolian rugs, commercial examples of which have survived in substantial numbers (fig. 1). Given the documented popularity of the *çintamani* motif in Turkish art from the reign of Mehmet II (1451-1480) onward, there are other possibilities, such as the interesting maroon-and-gold fragment from Munich, that has no exact counterparts in other fragments or whole carpets (fig. 2).

A second alternative, perhaps the most probable if one considers the totality of the evidence, requires that we take another look at the situation of the 1585 documents – not at the documents themselves, but at our traditional interpretation of them. Here we have a royal order that simply states that 11 weavers of carpets from Cairo, together with a large quantity of their dyed wool, are to be brought to İstanbul. Given the situation of the Ottoman archives, it is not, on reflection, a misinterpretation of the evidence to assume that in the absence of other documents this incident of 1585 was unique? The Ottoman Empire absorbed Cairo in 1516, and there are known examples of Cairene artisans specializing in other media working in the vicinity of İstanbul from the 1520s onward.¹⁹ Moreover, the Ottoman court had an established record of broad-ranging patronage, encompassing artists from the east, south, and west, since long before the reign of Mehmet II.²⁰ Why, therefore, do the artists mentioned in the 1585 document

Ottoman Court Carpets



1. Fragment of 'small-pattern Holbein' design carpet.
Providence, Rhode Island School of Design Museum,
Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke (12.008)

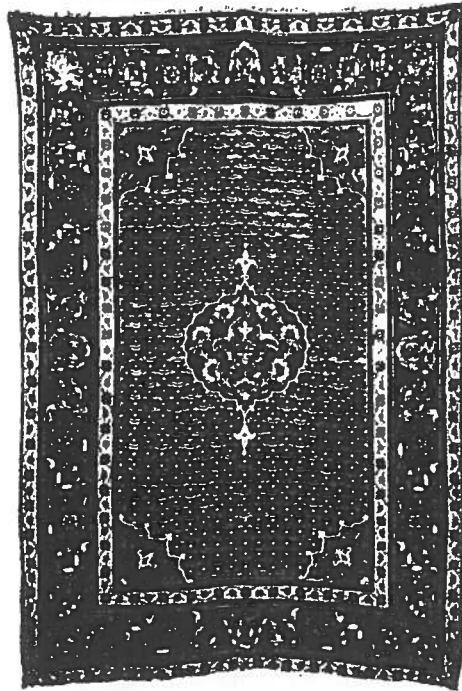


2. Fragment of 'chintamani' pattern carpet. Munich,
Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, (32-50-19)

have to be the first links between Cairene and İstanbul weaving? Indeed, to assume so, we must again subscribe to the fallacy, this time in terms of the documentary evidence, that 'all we have is all there was'.

If we then accept the hypothesis, given the evidence of commercial contacts between Ottomans and Mamluks, and of the military subjugation of Egypt in 1516, that rugs in the 'Egypto-Ottoman' technique may have been woven in the Ottoman Empire, and specifically in İstanbul, since the second third of the 16th century, and possibly since

even earlier times, it becomes easier to explain certain rugs that have survived. For example, there is a group of small Ottoman court rugs, with *rumî*-ground central medallions, a maroon-ground field with repeating *çintamani* designs, and a border of *hatayî* palmettes and *rincaux*, that on stylistic grounds can be dated much earlier than the bulk of the so-called Ottoman court production (fig. 3).²¹ Nowhere in these rugs appears the vocabulary of stylized flowers that dominated Ottoman art after 1560. Moreover, the very palette of the Ottoman court carpets, as this writer has suggested elsewhere, includes the colours that were fashionable in Ottoman textiles and ceramics dateable to the middle third of the 16th century.²² Following this argument makes even more sense if we look at other perspectives as well. For example, it is now much easier for us to date Ushak carpets to the first half of the 16th century, especially given the brilliant



3. Small rug with 'chintamani' field. Metropolitan Museum of Art; Bequest of Joseph V. McMullan, 1971. (1941.263.2)



4. Detail, medallion Ushak rug with 'chintamani' field. Istanbul, Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art

deductions and use of comparative stylistic inference by Dr. Julian Raby in his paper published in this volume.²³ In looking for the sources of design of such commercial carpets as the Textile Museum (ex-Dumbarton Oaks) *çintamani* carpet, the large Ushak medallion carpet (fig. 4) in the Türk ve İslam Eserleri Museum with *çintamani* field,²⁴ and other, similar carpets, could we not posit court prototypes, finding their way from the media of illumination and bookbinding to court weavings, and finally to commercial weavings, in the classical Ottoman pattern? Moreover, as I have demonstrated elsewhere, the vocabulary of the Ottoman court carpets, consisting of what we call *hatayî* palmettes

and *saz* leaves, can easily be demonstrated to have become the predominant court style of the Ottoman Empire at least several decades before 1585.²⁵

What we have proposed to this point is only a partial answer to the question of what actually constituted the early Ottoman court carpets, documentary evidence of whose manufacture we have from the İstanbul archives. It does not satisfactorily illuminate production from the reigns of Mehmet II through that of Selim I (1451-1520) even though the documents indicate the presence of rug-weavers in the *Ehl-i Hiref* from before 1480. In the absence of other examples of rugs themselves, is there any other evidence to which we can turn?

Peripheral Evidence for Early Court Production

Inevitably, in the search for documentation of almost any phase of Ottoman history, we turn to the evidence of miniature painting. The much-vaunted 'realism' of the Ottoman historical manuscript illustrations on occasion has borne real fruit, such as the use of Matrakçı Nasuh's illustrations to the *Beyan-e Sefer-e Menazil-e İrakeyn* of 1537 by Professor Nurhan Atasoy in her well-known historical reconstruction of the İbrahim Pasha palace.²⁶ However, this method is as subject to misuse as it is to constructive use. In this connection, one has only to examine Dr. Murray Eiland's arguments concerning the purported court origins of early carpets with *gül* designs, based on a 40-year-old article by Amy Briggs,²⁷ miniature paintings can tell us some very basic information about dating general types, but they cannot be used for sophisticated arguments based on detail. Using miniature paintings as though they were photographs is to misunderstand entirely the nature and degree of the Islamic painters' transformations of the real world, in all of their immense complexity and variety. A challenge to those who believe otherwise is to explain the literally scores of pink, mauve, and pale blue carpets illustrated in a manuscript such as Darir's *Siyer-i Nebevi* of the late 16th century.²⁸

Keeping this in mind, and then looking at the very small number of Ottoman illustrated historical manuscripts created before 1540, we find nothing of substance to give us insight into the possible design of rugs from this era. For all of its architectural realism, the 1498 *Khamsa* of Amir Khosrau presents us with improbable rugs, in which the individual motifs, *rumî* arabesques and *çintamani* dots, are plausible but the synthesis is not (fig. 5). As late as 1558, when the mature Ottoman historical style begins to emerge in the *History of Sultan Süleyman* by Arifi, the rugs illustrated partake of a recognizable vocabulary of forms (cloud-bands, *rumî* arabesques, and the like) but the syntax and grammar is improbable, especially the colour schemes.³⁰ More recognizable rug types appear in the *Nüzhet al-Ahbar* of Ahmed Feridun Pasha of 1569, corresponding to our ideas of Safavid medallion carpets (fig. 6), but again the colour schemes appear, from everything we know of Turkish textiles of the period, somewhat improbable.³¹ Arguably, there is only a single illustration of a rug in an Imperial Ottoman manuscript that can plausibly be linked with a known type of weaving, and this is the large Ushak medallion carpet illustrated around 1570 on folio 54 verso of the *Şehname-i Selim Han* (fig. 7).³²



5. Miniature from a *Khamsheh* of Amir Khosrau. Istanbul, Topkapı Palace Museum Library



6. Miniature from the *Nuzhet al-Ahbar* of 1569. Istanbul, Topkapı Palace Museum Library



7. Miniature from the *Şehname-i Selim Han* of 1570. Istanbul, Topkapı Palace Museum Library

In the matter of bookbindings, we are able to construct more plausible parallels between the art of the court and the art of rug-weaving, both in the Ottoman and in the Safavid domains. Julian Raby has demonstrated the remarkable parallels between carpets and certain bookbindings using a particular Türkmen-style ornamental vocabulary, dateable from the time of Mehmet II through the early part of the reign of Süleyman I, and on this basis has proposed a re-dating of some of the Ushak carpets in medallion format.³³ What carpet historians have persisted for some time in calling 'double-ended prayer rugs' clearly owe their layout to the arts of the book, particularly illumination and binding.³⁴ One thing is clear: despite the somewhat bizarre colours used by artists of miniature paintings in depicting rugs, the medallion format in carpets was both well-known and well-liked at the Ottoman court from the early 16th century onward. The flow of Tabrizi artists to the Ottoman *nakkāshane* or court design atelier is well documented from 1526 onward,³⁵ and these artists could have designed rugs for the *hâssa* rug weavers to execute, regardless of whether those weavers actually came from Iran (for which there is no evidence) or from the Balkans (for which there is evidence in abundance). Just as historians of bookbindings often must give a Safavid-Ottoman blanket attribution to certain works, so might we want to consider, after painstaking collation of technical data, the possibility of a wider provenance for some of the smaller medallion rugs heretofore invariably labeled 'Safavid' in museum inventories.

Matters of Chronology

At the outset, we asked four questions about early Ottoman court carpets; to this point we have addressed, without having definitively answered, two of these questions: what surviving carpets may be attributable to the early Ottoman period of weaving; and what other early Ottoman carpets may have looked like? We move now to the question of the relationship between carpets with Ottoman court designs, and carpets with what are generally termed 'Mamluk' designs, whatever and wherever their origin. As Alberto Boralevi has confirmed for us in this volume,³⁶ many of the large carpets with Ottoman court designs, such as the great carpet from the Pitti Palace, seem to have been made in Cairo and were definitely labeled 'Cairene' in early inventories. Just as clearly, differences in matters of construction and materials allow us to divide carpets with Ottoman court designs into at least two major categories, silk-warped and wool-warped, suggestive of two different places of manufacture if not specifically Cairo and Bursa.³⁷ As this writer has discussed elsewhere, the Ottoman state organization made it possible to transport large quantities of raw materials, as well as numbers of artisans, from place to place, and thus traditional provenances such as 'İznic', 'Bursa', and 'Ushak' may not have as much meaning as we once thought them to have.³⁸

It is clear that the two types of designs overlapped in chronology; the existence of 'bridge' objects such as the Ostler rug suggests this. Given the demonstrable evolution of design in Mamluk rugs (as well as the existence of two basic sub-groups distinguished by palette among other things) it is highly probable that rugs with 'Mamluk' designs were produced well into the 16th century, that is, well after Egypt (and Syria, for that matter)

became Ottoman provinces; moreover we are far from demonstrating the absolute certainty of Cairene provenance for all of these rugs.

As the designs with their origins in the Ottoman court became more popular in rugs utilizing the 'Cairene' technique (irrespective of where these rugs were woven), it becomes possible on the basis of what we know of the evolution of the Ottoman court style to suggest a chronology of rugs with 'Ottoman' designs. The earliest examples, probably dating to the middle third of the 16th century, include the small carpets with '*çintamani*-stripe' fields discussed above, a *saz*-design rug in the Victoria and Albert Museum (fig. 8), and a large carpet in the Metropolitan Museum.³⁹ In all of these carpets we see a splendid command of technique, and a tentative quality in the adaptation of the court motifs, which originated as drawings on paper, to the large format of the carpet. The medallions are sometimes very small, and when quartered provide most inadequate corner-pieces. The colouring is rich and the wool is glossy. In these early carpets we never see the vocabulary of stylized flowers, but are much more likely to see the traditional vocabulary of motifs: *çintamani*, *hatay*? palmettes, *rumî* arabesques, and cloud-bands.

After 1560, as the stylized flowers with their origins in ceramic decoration become more and more popular in court designs as well, we see the second group of Ottoman court rugs. Irrespective of where they were woven, these include the Vienna, Walters, MMA/Ballard, and Kuwait prayer rugs (fig. 9), and larger carpets such as the black-ground rug in the Musée des Arts Décoratifs.⁴⁰ Following the established Ottoman traditions of propriety, with their genesis in the famous tile revetments of İznik, the carpets of this period show a strict separation of genres of decoration, with *rumî* motifs or cloud-bands confined to cornerpieces or spandrels, and the flowers generally appearing in the borders only, exactly as they would have appeared in tile panels. Moreover, again on the basis of comparison with tile panels, the most celebrated Ottoman prayer rugs cannot have emerged before the later 1570s.⁴¹ The variations in technical quality observable in carpets of this design group leads to two conclusions: first, that these carpets were probably made in several different places, and second, that only a portion of them were actually the product of the *cemaat-i kalıçebâftân*. The others, by analogy with other types of Ottoman artistic production, were probably rugs woven 'on spec' for sale on the open market or to Europeans; sale to European markets in particular became important in many sectors of the Ottoman economy after the 'Price Revolution' that struck the Empire in the later 16th century.⁴²

A third group of carpets with Ottoman court designs is distinguished in the main by the poor quality of its drawing and a coarser weave. In this group typical examples include the Tryon Palace carpet from New Bern, North Carolina; the carpet from Munich exhibited at Ingolstadt in 1981; and the Rijksmuseum carpet from Amsterdam (fig. 10). Carpets in this general category appear to have been produced, probably in Cairo, over the last two thirds of the 17th century and possibly later.

Places of Manufacture

In the literature, three places of manufacture of Egypto-Ottoman carpets (i.e. 'Cairene')

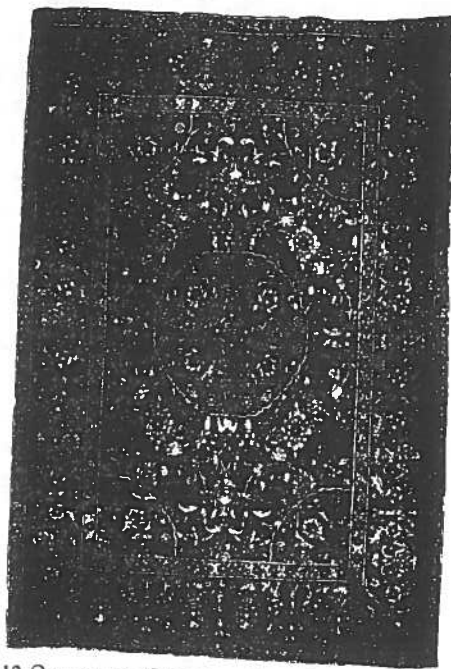
Ottoman Court Carpets



8. Detail of an Ottoman rug, mid 16th century. London, Victoria and Albert Museum



9. Ottoman prayer rug, last third of 16th century. Dar al-Achar al-Islami, Kuwait, al-Sabah Collection



10. Ottoman rug, 17th century. Amsterdam, Rijkmuseum, (1959:1)

and technically related carpets, the 'checkerboard' examples excepted) have been proposed: Cairo, İstanbul, and Bursa.⁴³ Documentary evidence and evidence of Ottoman commercial practice might tempt us to add Damascus to the list.⁴⁴ The evidence for Cairene manufacture has been proven, and in this writer's opinion the Cairene provenance is likely to withstand, without cracking, the seductive but unconvincing arguments proposed by Ms. Housego elsewhere in this volume.⁴⁵ For a Bursa provenance our evidence is scanty, beyond Barbaro's enigmatic comment of 1474, and inferences of the major authorities derived in the main from the undisputed fact that Bursa was a great centre of Ottoman silk-weaving and sericulture during much of the period under discussion.⁴⁶ For an İstanbul provenance we have the evidence of the records of the *Ehl-i Hiref* and some intriguing arguments about place-names. If one accepts the modern Turkish *halıcılar* as the equivalent of *kaliçebâstân* — that is, 'rug-weaver' rather than the more conventional 'rug-seller', Çetintürk would have us believe that the Halıcılar districts in the İstanbul Eski Odalar and Yenibahçe quarters might have originally been the sites of rug manufactories. There is no question that, in the 19th and 20th centuries rug-weaving was carried on in İstanbul and its environs at sites ranging from Feshane in Eyüp to Kumkapı, Topkapı, Etyemez, İstinye, and Usküdar, by Ottoman citizens of various ethnic groups.⁴⁷

Ottoman Prayer Rugs

Alberto Boralevi's rescue of the Padua prayer rug from the limbo of a small and fuzzy black-and-white illustration in an obscure journal, detailed elsewhere in this volume, has added to the complexity of the entire question of *seccade*-format rugs utilizing either Islamic or Jewish religious themes in their decoration.⁴⁸ Since the basic publication on these rugs by Charles Grant Ellis,⁴⁹ a number of other examples have come into the public eye, including the Kuwait prayer rug first published by Eberhart Herrmann,⁵⁰ and the two examples with Jewish inscriptions from the Padua Synagogue and from Jerusalem.⁵¹ In addition, unpublished examples have surfaced in Cincinnati and in a most important Italian private collection. The iconography of these carpets, following Cammann,⁵² seems definitively established as a door rather than as a *mihrab*, except to the extent that the *mihrab* itself partakes of the imagery of a door — i.e. a doorway to paradise that one enters as a result of the act of prayer. Such an interpretation is definitely suggested by the carpets with Hebrew inscriptions, which read:

'This is the Gate of the Lord through which the
Righteous enter' (Psalm CXVIII, verse 20).

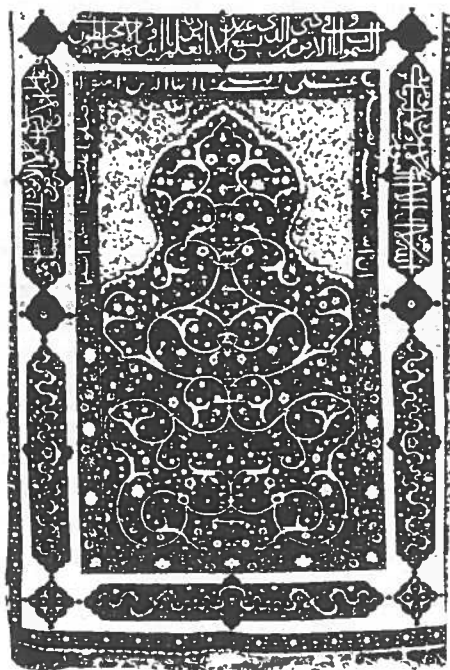
The observation that the weavers of the rugs with Hebrew inscriptions, and probably the *usta* who graphed the Hebrew inscriptions for weaving purposes, apparently did not know Hebrew well,⁵³ confirms the probability that these rugs were produced by Muslim weavers for Jewish clients, just as with so many rugs with non-Islamic inscriptions from various cultures.

The prayer rugs fall into at least two of the three categories of dating that we have

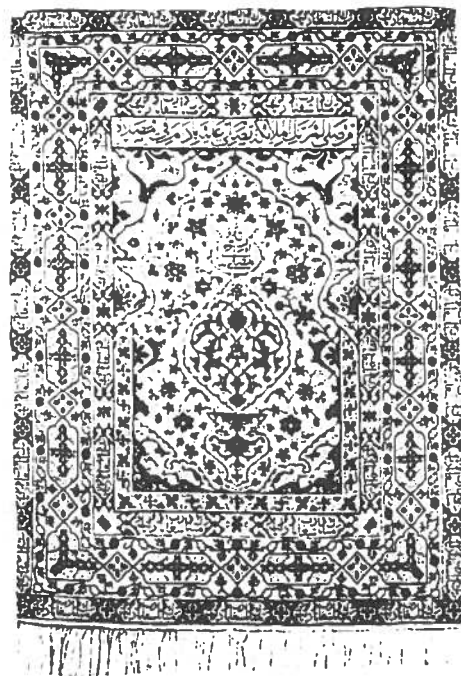
outlined for Ottoman carpets in general: true court products woven after 1560, such as the Vienna, Baltimore, Kuwait, and New York/Ballard examples; and later court-inspired rugs such as the Textile Museum/Benguiat example, or the New York/Fletcher carpet.⁵⁴ The rugs with Hebrew inscriptions, which we might expect to be commercial rugs made for private clients, exhibit a high level of overall drawing, especially in the Padua example, that suggests their origins in the *hâssa* atelier. If we remember the extremely prominent role played at the Ottoman court in the later 16th century by Ottoman Jews such as Joseph Nasi, Duke of Naxos, it should come as no surprise to find rugs such as the Padua example stemming from the Sultan's own *hâssa* workshops.⁵⁵

The Problem of the Topkapı Prayer Rugs

As we mentioned above, it was the practice in the Ottoman court to save works of art resulting from royal patronage. The extensive collections of documents, costumes, regalia, books, embroideries, Chinese porcelain, jewellery, and other works of art with royal associations, kept in the Topkapı Palace, are an eloquent testament to this practice. There is also in the Topkapı Palace a small collection of rugs that until 20 years ago had



11. Prayer rug in 16th century style, ca. 1900. Istanbul, Topkapı Palace Museum



12. Prayer rug in 18th century style, ca. 1900. Istanbul, Topkapı Palace Museum

been assumed to be the equivalent of the other Topkapı collections. Discussed by Kurt Erdmann under the broader rubric 'Persian Rugs of Turkish Provenance',⁵⁶ these rugs, all of them in *seccade* or prayer-rug format, employ asymmetrical knotting, and range in style from elaborate designs in an international 16th century style, and complex inscriptions, many in the stately *thuluth* script so favoured by Ottoman calligraphers (fig. 11), through designs self-consciously imitating Mamluk carpets, to designs recalling Anatolian rugs of the 18th century (fig. 12). Revision of the original 16th century attributions has placed these rugs in the late 19th or early 20th century, as products of the Feshane atelier in Eyüp, near İstanbul.⁵⁷ If we accept this dating, three intriguing questions remain. First, why, with the exception of the well-known prayer rug attributed to the reign of Ahmet I, are the only rugs to come to light in the royal collections of the Topkapı Palace all in the same technique, all produced in the same place (Feshane), and all of late date, and yet in a variety of archaïcising styles? Second, why were these late 19th century rugs discovered in the Topkapı Palace collections, rather than in one of the many other palaces for which the Ottoman royal house had abandoned the Topkapı by the middle of the 19th century? Third, why are their styles so self-consciously archaic, rather than reflecting the Europeanized designs common to Hereke products and other finely-woven Ottoman rugs of the period?

To answer these questions we must first identify these rugs as court carpets in the very strictest interpretation of that term; it seems almost certain that they were indeed made for the court, in very limited production, although a few have found their way to Western markets or were given as gifts to other Islamic rulers.⁵⁸ Their archaic style may be explained by the time at which they were made, a period when the Ottoman Empire was seeking new accommodations with a nationalist age, and when an almost archaeological eclecticism was in vogue in architecture and other arts.⁵⁹ I would like to suggest that these rugs were commissioned at this time specifically to fill in a void in the royal collections, either as replacements for rugs destroyed by some misfortune, or simply because this art form was unrepresented in the Ottoman royal collections. Given their anomalous status compared to the other Topkapı collections (i.e. all being of identical date and place of manufacture) they would appear to be the result of a self-conscious 'museum mentality' consonant with the Young Turk political and cultural policy at the beginning of the 20th century. There is the possibility that they constitute a reconstruction from memory of a vanished historical collection, and therefore we should carefully consider whether or not the Topkapı rugs in fact might constitute an answer, of sorts and in part, to our question 'what did the early Turkish court rugs look like?'

Summary of Arguments

The Ottoman documentary evidence establishes beyond any doubt that the making of carpets as part of the court manufactories began at least as early as the first years of the reign of Süleyman I and probably as early as the time of Mehmed II. A survey of the available evidence, both in extant carpets and fragments, and in peripheral evidence such as miniature paintings, gives us very little idea as to what these early carpets must have

looked like, beyond the probability that some utilized the medallion format and the prevailing Safavid/Ottoman court vocabulary of decorative motifs: cloud-bands, split-leaf *rumî* forms, lotus-palmettes, calligraphy, and networks of vines.

Given the documentary evidence, we must reappraise our use of the 1585 documentary evidence of Ottoman interest in Cairene weavers and their products; the probability is that Cairene weavers influenced Ottoman court production before the reign of Murad III, and probably as early as the reign of Süleyman I or his father Selim II. This is supported both by stylistic and by historical arguments. Moreover, we can distinguish in the rugs with Ottoman court designs among true court products, and commercial rugs woven using court designs, but utilizing a lower grade of wool, different colours, and a noticeably looser quality of drawing and fineness of weave. Other evidence for earlier Ottoman production may be found in peripheral documentation, or in the peculiar set of prayer rugs today found in the Topkapı.

This article represents a first step in a reappraisal of the Ottoman court rug-weaving tradition. Further steps await the publication of certain most important Ottoman-design rugs in private collections, and the publication of other Ottoman documentary material now being studied by scholars. One might also hope for the emergence of undiscovered examples of early Ottoman weaving. Despite the good fortune represented by Sr. Boralevi's recent discoveries, however, it would be overly optimistic to expect that full answers to our original four questions will emerge either easily or quickly.

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Footnotes

1. See K. Erdmann, 'Kairener Teppiche I', *Ars Islamica*, V, 2 (1938). The author of this paper is indebted to his many colleagues from the United States, Europe, and the Middle East, who have aided in the research for this paper and in the obtaining of illustrations, and to all of them he offers his deepest thanks
2. E. Kühnel and L. Bellinger, *Cairene Rugs and others technically related*, Washington D.C., 1957, pp. 41-42
3. See W. Denny, 'Origin of the Designs of Ottoman Court Carpets', *Hali*, II, no. 1, p. 6
4. See C.G. Ellis, 'The Ottoman Prayer Rugs', *Textile Museum Journal*, II, 4 (1969), p. 5
5. See B.W. Robinson, *Persian Miniature Painting*, London, 1967
6. See notes 1 and 2 *supra*; also K. Erdmann, *The History of the Early Turkish Carpet*, London, 1977, pp. 27 ff.; and also Ş. Yetkin, *Historical Turkish Carpets*, İstanbul, 1981, pp. 101 ff.
7. B. Çetintürk, 'İstanbul'da XVI. Asır Sonuna Kadar Hassa Halı San'atkarları', *Türk San'atı Tarihi Araştırma ve İncelemeleri*, I, İstanbul, 1963, pp. 715-731
8. G. Barbaro, quoted by K. Erdmann, *op. cit.* (1938), p. 180, no. 1
9. See Ménage, 'Devshirme', *Encyclopedia of Islam* (hereafter *EI*), II, Leiden and London, 1965, pp. 210-213
10. B. Çetintürk, *op. cit.*, p. 723
11. *ibid.*
12. The construction, 'ibn 'Abdullah', that is, 'son of the servant of God', used in lieu of a Muslim patronymic, often but not invariably indicates a convert to Islam, such as the young men inducted into the service of the Ottoman state through the *devşirme*
13. The impact of the European 'Price Revolution' in the 1580s resulted in tremendous inflation in the Empire
14. B. Çetintürk, *op. cit.*, p. 730
15. On guilds in general, see the chapter 'Occupations' in R. Lewis, *Everyday Life in Ottoman Turkey*, London, 1971
16. Unlike the other great Islamic empires where miniature painting flourished, the Ottoman Empire was never conquered or colonized. By contrast, the overwhelming bulk

- of the great royal Iranian manuscripts were by 1900 outside the country
17. See W. Denny, 'Contradiction and Consistency in Islamic Art', in Y. Haddad *et al.* (eds.), *The Islamic Impact*, Syracuse, New York, 1984, p. 162
18. In his classic guide *The Tourists' İstanbul*, İstanbul, 1953, Ernest Mamboury lists 62 of the major fires to have devastated the city (pp. 144-148)
19. Discussed in a paper given by J.M. Rogers in Washington, D.C., in the 1981 symposium 'Art of the Mamluks'. The *ablaq* marble revetments of the mosque of Çoban Mustafa Pasha at Gebze, near İstanbul, are the best-known products of Egyptian artisans in Anatolia
20. From the reign of Murad I (1360-1389) onward, we have evidence of foreign artists working in the Ottoman realms. In this connection see especially J. Raby, *Venice, Dürer, and the Oriental Mode*, London, 1982, and J. von Karabacek, *Abendländische Künstler zu Konstantinopel im XV. und XVI. Jahrhundert*, Vienna, 1918
21. Examples in Berlin-East (Staatliche Museen), Paris (Musée Jacquemart-André), London (Victoria and Albert Museum), and New York (Metropolitan Museum)
22. W. Denny, *The Ceramics of the Mosque of Rüstem Pasha and the Environment of Change*, New York and London, 1977, p. 138 (hereafter *Ceramics*)
23. Dr. Raby's presentation firmly links the style of ground ornament on the Ushak medallion carpets to that of the arts of the book beginning in the time of Mehmed II, a style which however still appeared from time to time throughout the first half of the 16th century
24. See L. Mackie, 'A Turkish Carpet with Spots and Stripes', *Textile Museum Journal*, IV, 3 (1976), pp. 5-20. The Ushak in the TIEM was recently exhibited (summer, 1983); see E. Atil's review in *Hali*, VI, no. 2, p. 160, fig. 12
25. W. Denny, *op. cit.*, (*Ceramics*), pp. 177-187. See also W. Denny, 'Dating Ottoman Turkish Works in the Saz Style' in *Muqarnas*, I (1983), pp. 103-122
26. N. Atasoy, *İbrahim Paşa Sarayı*, İstanbul, 1972; and also her 'The Documentary Value of the Ottoman Miniatures', *IVème Congrès international d'art turc*, Aix-en-Provence, 1976, pp. 11-17
27. M. Eiland, 'Origins of Turkoman Guls', *Oriental Rug Review*, II, 4 (1982), pp. 1-5
28. Topkapı Palace Library H. 1221, H. 1222, H. 1223; Chester Beatty Library Cat. 419; dated to H. 1002/A.D. 1594-95. Cf. Z. Akalay Tanındı, *Siyer-i Nebi* (İstanbul, Hürriyet, 1984)
29. Topkapı Palace Library H. 799; dated to H. 903/A.D. 1498. Cf. N. Atasoy and F. Çagman, *Turkish Miniature Painting*, İstanbul, 1974, plate 2
30. Topkapı Palace Library H. 1517; dated to H. 965/A.D. 1558. Cf. N. Atasoy and F. Çagman, *op. cit.*, plate 9
31. Topkapı Palace Library H. 1339; dated to H. 976/A.D. 1569. Cf. N. Atasoy and F. Çagman, *op. cit.*, plate 11
32. Topkapı Palace Library A. 3595; dated to H. 988/A.D. 1581. Cf. I. Stchoukine, *La Peinture turque*, I, Paris, 1966, plate 30
33. Again, see Dr. Raby's contribution on Ushak carpets in the present volume
34. Ç. K. Çig, *Türk Kitap Kapları*, İstanbul, 1971; also the exhibition catalogue *The History of Bookbinding: 525-1950 A.D.*, Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, 1957, entries 35-101; and G. Bosch, J. Carswell, and G. Petheridge, *Islamic Bindings & Bookmaking*, Chicago, 1981
35. Cf. R.M. Meriç, *Türk Nakış Sanatı Tarihi Araştırmaları*, I, Ankara, 1953
36. See also his article on the Pitti Palace carpets in *Hali*, V, no. 3, pp. 282-283, entitled 'The Cairene Carpets of the Medici'
37. E. Kühnel and L. Bellinger, *op. cit.*, pp. 79 ff.
38. Cf. W. Denny, *op. cit.* (*Ceramics*), pp. 167-168
39. Cf. M. Dimand and J. Mailey, *Oriental Rugs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York, 1973, catalogue numbers 103 and 104; roughly contemporary in dating, these carpets were almost certainly made in different places
40. The prayer rugs in question are discussed and technical analyses published by C.G. Ellis, *op. cit.*; the Paris rug, stylistically contemporary with these but almost certainly made in a different place, is illustrated in *Arts de l'Islam des origines à 1700 dans les collections publiques françaises*, Paris, 1971, catalogue number 5
41. W. Denny, *op. cit.*, illus. 215-223
42. Cf. H. Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300-1600*, London, 1973, pp. 121-129; also R. Mantran, *İstanbul dans la seconde moitié du XVII siècle*, Paris, 1962, Chapter 2, 'Le problème de l'argent'

43. Again, see E. Kühnel and L. Bellinger, *op. cit.*
44. Ms. Housego's lively and provocative communication in London (see Chapter 19), with its sometimes startling comparisons of images, recalled for this writer the saying attributed to Archimedes: 'Give me a long enough lever, a fulcrum, and a place to stand, and I will move the world'
45. See note 8 above
46. C.G. Ellis, *op. cit.*
47. B. Çetintürk, *op. cit.*, p. 717
48. The Padua prayer rug, an object of enormous importance for the history of Ottoman carpets, was originally published by Franz Landsberger, in his article 'Old-time Torah Curtains', *Hebrew Union College Annual*, XIX (1945-46), figure 4; the illustration was almost unreadable. See A. Boralevi, 'Un Tappeto Ebraico Italo-Egiziano' in *Critica d'Arte*, XLIX, 2 (1984), pp. 34-47. Sr. Boralevi has since 1984 uncovered more documentation that now very strongly suggests an Italian place of manufacture for this unusual carpet
49. C.G. Ellis, *op. cit.*
50. E. Herrmann, *Seltene Orientteppiche*, IV, Munich, s.d., pp. 57-60
51. The Jerusalem example, almost identical to that in the Textile Museum, is published by Y.L. Bialer, *Jewish Life in Art and Tradition*, New York, 1976, p. 104
52. S. Cammann, 'Symbolic Meanings in Oriental Rug Patterns', *Textile Museum Journal*, III, 3 (1972), pp. 5-54
53. Cf. E. Kühnel and L. Bellinger, *op. cit.*, p. 53
54. C.G. Ellis, *op. cit.*, figures 13 and 14
55. Cf. S.W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, XVIII, New York, 1983, pp. 84-109
56. See K. Erdmann, *Seven Hundred Years of Oriental Carpets*, Los Angeles and Berkeley, 1970, pp. 76-80, where the Istanbul rugs are discussed along with carpets of the 'Salting' group. See also K. Erdmann, 'The Art of Carpet-Making', *Ars Islamica*, VIII, (1941), pp. 164 ff.; and the query raised by C.G. Ellis in his review of *Seven Hundred Years* (in *Textile Museum Journal*, III, 2 (1971), p. 43; many of the rugs are illustrated by Y. Durul in 'Halı ve Seccadelerdeki Yazı Süslemeleri', *Türkiyemiz*, 17, (1975), pp. 13-16, and by Ü. Bilgin, in 'XIX Yüzyıl Seccadeleri' (19th century Palace Prayer Rugs) in *Sanat Dünyamız*, VI, 17 (1979), pp. 18-25. May Beattie has discussed these carpets in a paper presented at the Textile Museum symposium on prayer rugs in 1974, which to my knowledge has not been published
57. B. Çetintürk, *op. cit.*, p. 717; the probable Feshane provenance for the Topkapı rugs was first communicated to me by Belkis (Acar) Balpınar
58. K. Erdmann (*op. cit.*, 1970) mentions other examples not in İstanbul; see discussion on page 78
59. Revivalist neoclassicism in Turkish art, which has had various manifestations beginning as early as the 17th century, has been discussed, among others, by G. Goodwin in his *The History of Ottoman Architecture*, London and Baltimore, 1971, pp. 425 ff.; the architectural manifestations of this movement were paralleled to some extent in other arts as well