

# The Genuine Persian Rug

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In a restricted sense only rugs from Turan and Iran are implied by the term "genuine Persians." The rugs from Turkey are generally designated as "Turkish" or collectively as "Orientals." The wide plains of Southern Russia and the east of Afghanistan are known as Turan; Iran is the west of Afghanistan and the great Persian Empire.

## History of the Oriental Rugs

The first beginnings of rug weaving date back to the most ancient ante-Christian times. Probably the Parthians who ruled over Persia in the middle of the third century B.C. and were overthrown by the Persian Artaxerxes in 226 B.C. introduced the art of weaving rugs while passing Persia. The cradle of this art probably stood on the banks of the Araxes river, which is now the border between the Northwest of Persia and Southern Russia. In 632 A.D. the Arabs took from the Shah's palace one of the most valuable rugs ever made. This rug was made from silk in connection with gold, other precious metals and jewels and was estimated at one million dollars in present-day value. The bandits cut it up and distributed the parts among themselves, so that nothing remained of its splendor.

Since that time rug weaving began to spread. In 1704 A.D. an explorer of the Orient found that more than 400 looms were in operation in the eastern Persian province of Chorassan. The most prosperous time for the Persian rug-weaving art was during the 16th and 17th centuries, especially under the rule of the Shah Tammasch (1524-1576). Under his reign the famous Ardebil rug was made, which is still kept in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London as the most remarkable of the 16th century. At the end of the 16th century under the reign of Shah Aba, highly valuable and matchless rugs were created, the best of them in the town of Herat in Western Afghanistan. Here this art flourished until 1731, when this region was devastated by the Shah Nadir. This forced the rug weavers to emigrate into Persia and Asia Minor. Very fine silk rugs, partly woven with gold threads originated in the 17th century. A very beautiful silk rug is kept in the Osmanic Museum in Constantinople. Experts consider it as one of the finest pieces of the 15th century. In Kirman the rug industry began to flourish since the 16th century. In this southern Persian region the unusual, fine and white wool formed the basis for this industry.

Long before the conquest of Constantinople the Turks already showed great interest in the Persian rug-weaving art. The Turkish rulers attracted Persian rug weavers to their courts and thus came into existence works of art of highest perfection as to colors, ornamentation and workmanship. From this work for the court the more simple public art derived. A number of beautiful pieces has been found among the oldest Turkish rugs in the Ala-Eddin Mosque in Konia, Asia Minor, some of which were probably made before 1220 A.D.

The nomads produced these rugs mainly for their own use in tent and camp as protection against the rough mountain climate, and rugs of beauty and richness in colors were found especially with the wealthy tribes. Preferably old patterns were used, the yarn was dyed with fast vegetable dyes only; the wool had a soft silky luster which brought out colors and design in a wonderful manner.

The first time that rugs came to Europe was—according to Ernst Frehse—when the Moors conquered Spain in 711. Later the crusaders brought some rugs back to the Occident. Venetia, since the crusades in close contact with the Orient, was especially rich in products of the Oriental rug-weaving art. Venetian as well as Dutch artists of the 15th century drew many of their marvelous color combinations and motifs from the splendor of Oriental rugs. The first Oriental rugs which reached America were introduced by the Spaniards in the beginning of the 17th century, this import amounting, however, to only a few pieces. Works of art are in America, since a few decades only, most of them being of more modern origin.

In connection with the two world exhibitions of Paris in 1867 and Vienna in 1873, where for the first time the admiring public had an opportunity to inspect all kinds of the marvelous Oriental art, the European trade in Oriental rugs began an extensive development. Such rugs today are forming the finest decoration in the European castles as well as in mansions and palaces in this country.

At the same time in Europe and later in America workshops were established which made hand-woven rugs, exclusively copying Turkish designs and knots. Later on the Persian patterns were copied and after the war the Persian knot was used besides the Smyrna knot in European workshops. (Recently a machine is said to be invented which produces these two kinds of knots mechanically.) The Smyrna knot is also

known as "Chiordes" and the Persian knot as "Senne" knot.

Besides these workshops in Europe and later in

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Fig. 1. Map of Persia Showing Main Wool Districts

America, factories were founded which engaged in the mechanical weaving of rugs. Their products enjoyed popularity as practicable floor coverings for the average household due to the endeavor of the manufacturers to copy as closely as possible colors and patterns of the Persian and Turkish originals. Copies of Persian designs can be found in all mechanically made rugs, whether Axminster, Kidminster, Tournay-Wilton, Smyrna, Velours, Velvet, Tapestry or Bruxelles rugs.

When the Persian government in 1929 recommended to their own manufacturers to copy the Shah Aba designs more extensively than before to revive the quiet business, an eager search for such designs started in Europe and in America. This may be considered as a proof of the great demand for these beautiful designs even in a mechanical duplication. Everywhere one tries to approach the Oriental and especially the Persian rug art closely, but it will hardly be possible to

komanian and Turkish wools represent a raw material which is unique. Explorers and wool experts like Matthews traveled through these districts and especially emphasized the fine quality of these wools and their suitability for rug manufacturing, without giving a detailed description of their character however.

### The Raw Materials and Wool Types of Persian Rugs; The Sheep-wool

The quality of the wool in the genuine Oriental and Persian rugs is of considerable variety. It depends especially upon the climatic conditions and the pasture for the wool-bearing animals. The quality of the wool—aside from the design and tightness of weaving—determines the value of a rug. Such wool material may be soft, flexible, lustrous and silky, or hard, brittle, dull and rough—always a rug can be made from it, but the latter loses its value. Especially the wool from



dead animals, "tanners' wool" and so-called stitche hair, are inferior, dull and without luster. One of the finest and most durable carpet wools is found in the Kirman region in Persia, where besides a brilliant white sheep wool the hair of the Angora—or Persian goat—the Kurk is used.



Fig. 2. Bridge near Mianéh on the Road from Tabriz to Teheran

The sheep wool of Turkestan represents a harder wool; the Northeast of Persia and the Northwest of Afghanistan produce a similar kind. The Caspian Sea districts of Talisch, Shirwan, Cuba and Jomud produce a heavier hair, while the region of Coi and Maku in the Northwest of Persia yields a light, durable and fine wool. The wool from Kirmanshah (Luristan) resembles Kirman-wool, but has a high silky luster besides a beautiful white. These wools from Coi, Maku, Kirman and Kirmanshah may be regarded next to the Angora-Kashmir hair as the best rug material in the world, as they combine properties which no other wool material has to that extent. The wool of these districts—especially in a short pile of the rug—has a keen sheen which in years develops into an extraordinary luster. A similar somewhat subdued sheen is characteristic also on rugs from the Northwest, Southwest and South of Persia. The East of Persia—Chorassan, Meshed (America's preferred choice in rugs)—gives its rugs a softer, finer finish, the Mesheds resembling raw silk in luster. The rugs from these districts—especially when closely woven—due to their material give wonderful color effects, which are typical for these rugs.

The peculiarity of these wools is probably based upon the pasture, water and climatic influences. The soil of Iran and Turan is covered with brown, rough and hard grasses and similar herbs with high salt content, which yields strength to the body of the sheep, goats and camels. This salt content of the grasses is

next to the climatic influences essential for the development of a strong, long wool of low specific weight. The soil of the West of Persia is also rich in oil, which mainly shows up on plants and in the water of the Southwest. The pasture growing on this soil gives the wool an unusual luster and elasticity, which cannot be found anywhere else.

The chemical composition of the Persian wool and the climatic influences of the dry regions can probably be regarded as the main causes for the lustrous, silky, elastic-flexible, light but durable wool, which gives the rug good resilience, sheen, richness of colors and durability. As the whole production of these wools is mainly utilized on the spot with little being exported to the Southern Russian rug districts, the Persian rugs are still unmatched in the world. As far as the wool material is concerned the Northwest Persian rugs are excelled in luster and whiteness only by the Kirman rugs, and in fineness of the hair by the Mesheds, Kirman using a large amount of Cashmir hair and Chorassan (Mesheds) mixing a little Cashmir hair with its own soft, sheeny and fine sheep wool. In the following paragraph the wools of the various districts will be described in detail.



Fig. 3. Wool-Sorters in Tabriz

The main wool districts of Persia are:

*Aserbeidshan* in the Northwest: Sheep wool, goat hair and camel hair. Goat hair is of medium quality and partly comparatively fine; camel hair is fine and light.

*Kurdistan*: Sheep wool and goat hair; sheep wool partly coarse and rough; goat hair coarse, hard and ordinary.

*Luristan*: Sheep wool and goat hair; sheep wool

coarse, white, lustrous, elastic, light; goat hair coarse, hard and of low quality.

*Persian Irak*: Sheep wool, camel hair and goat hair; sheep wool medium fine—in fineness between Kurdistan and Luristan—lustrous and mainly white; camel hair is coarser than in the North; goat hair resembles Angora hair.

*Arabistan*: Sheep wool and camel hair, sporadically some goat hair. It has very good sheep wool with good suitability for rugs; the camel hair is similar in these properties.

*Kirman*: Sheep wool, goat hair and camel hair. The sheep wool is outstanding in its snow white luster, so is the Cashmir hair (Kurk) of the goats.

*Seistan and Kuhistan*: Generally lower grade sheep wool. Kuhistan has fine and finest goat wool and in its northern part very beautiful and soft, fairly fine sheep wool.

*Charassan*: Sheep wool, camel—and goat hair. This sheep wool is the finest in Persia; goat wool is similar to that in the Kirman region—a kind of Cashmir, which does not differ in fineness much from real Cashmir.

*Masanderan and Gilan*: Sheep wool, camel hair and sporadically goat hair. The sheep wool is coarse, smooth, very durable and of good elasticity; camel hair is rather fine.

Goat hair is found in all parts of Persia and Afghanistan; it is excellent in Kirman, Chorassan and in Afghanistan.

### Camel Hair

The hair of the Persian camel can be classified into three qualities, the best coming from Chorassan and the Irak, the medium grade especially from the Irak and the low quality from Arabistan and the Southwest of Persia.

The hair of these camels is abundant in growth, especially in the Northwest. The downy hair is very

soft, the coarse hair appears somewhat abundantly only in the South, while the downy hair is plentiful and fine in the North. The downy hair is longer and finer than that of the African camel.

The color of the downy hairs is light to medium brown, seldom dark brown; they are very fine, uniform, soft and silky. They fall off once a year, while the other hair is shorn off. The shorn wool—from 2 to 3 inches long—is used in some regions in mixture with sheep wool for rug weaving, while the falling downy hairs are worked into fine fabrics or exported to Europe and America.

### Goat Wool of Persia

The Persian goat represents a type between the Angora and Cashmir goats. The amount of coarse hair, however, is higher than on Cashmir goats, and finer than on the Angora goat. The downy hair is coarser than on the Cashmir—and Tibet—goats and resembles more the finer upper hair, being especially good in the South and East of Persia, while in the West both kinds of hair are coarser and inferior. The word "Persian Goat Hair" or "Kurk" indicates a hair between Cashmir and Angora qualities.

The hair is up to 16 inches long. Goats in the Kirman region are of silver-white to cream-white color, sporadically one finds mustard-yellow, brown and dark brown animals, while in the North the dark and mustard colored goats are not so rare.

The downy hair on white and yellowish goats is white to grayish-white, on darker goats up to ash-gray. It has a beautiful, odd, silky luster; the coarse hair has a more glassy luster, it is smooth, almost uncurled and very strong. It is used for rug making mainly in the Kirman—and somewhat in the Meshed districts. In Sarabent the Kurdish goat with its coarser upper hair furnishes the raw material for the Sarabent rug.

(To be continued)

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