

History of Carpet Weaving in Iran (Before Safavid era)

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Historical evidences confirm that carpet weaving has flourished from Sasanid era; related to a Chinese calendar called "Suyi", which belongs to 590 to 617 AD, a short time before the decline of Sasanid dynasty, "Suyi" mentioned carpet among Iranian products. During three centuries of Sasanid dynasty, there are other signs, although vague and not convincing.

The above mentions prove that the Sasanid carpets contained images adorned with gold and valuable stones. Certainly, such carpets are not suitable as floor-coverings. The same glittery adorning style has been used in the king Khosrow Anoushiravan's large carpet with Garden design, that covered the floor of great hall of Tisfoun Palace. Probably it has not been the same type of present carpets.

Somehow in the beginning of Arab's rule, carpet weaving declined in Iran. Because of racial and tribal reasons, Arabs did not need any carpet or floor-covering, so despite pottery art, that they were the best in, they had not paid any attention to carpet weaving in any time of their history.

On the other hand, in the beginning of Islam religion, there was no type of luxurious carpets among Arab's. This stop and decline lasted only until the time of Omavid and Abbasid Caliphs, who decorated their dreamy palaces with precious and magnificent Persian Carpets.

In 11th century AD Seljuk Turks occupied large part of Iran and Settled in Azerbaijan and central areas of Iran. With this invasion, they brought their language and culture, along that mixed with Persian art and culture. Its result was changes in Iranian carpet designs. Unfortunately, there is no carpet sample left from that period of time; but their similarity to Aladdin Masque's carpets in Qounia (Seljuk Capital) Could be noticed. Flourishing of Iranian carpet weaving continued only until the time of Mongol. But after the Mongol invasion, like other artistic activities, carpet weaving also stopped for the period of time in Iran.

After 15th century, Broken patterns became common in carpet weaving. Western painters were specially interested in carpets with Broken Patterns and showed it in their paintings.

The reasons below may make this special interest clear.

1- Since 15th century AD, carpets having curvilinear images, were considered Royal carpets and were not suitable for common places, but the Royal Courts.

2- Fine Arabesque images, yellow flower (Palmette flower), Chinese Birds, Animal's combat and other very fine curvilinear images did not match the painter's works, because these images attracted too much attention in their paintings.

3- Regarding the environments painted by mentioned painters, Broken patterns could inspire painter's favorite space better specially unusual and illusory parts of it.

4- Iranian Broken Patterns have a complicated communicating language, that makes paintings more strange and considerable. This is what calls a painter's interest.

Going over Iranian painting up to 14th and 15th century AD, clears that patterns and images had not changed until that time.

There is no Important carpet pattern among the works of first centuries of Islam, except Stripped design (like Elijah carpet) in carpet and other weavings.

Since Persian painting glitters and changes from Ilkhanid era and exactly Abu Said Bahador's period, carpet influence on painting is also observed, exactly in the same era.

For instance at Timur, the Lame's, domination over Iran, most of art specialties changed essentially. Changes in carpet images were as follows:

Geometric designs changed gradually towards designs having rotating and curved lines. Images like Ivy and flowers, Palmettes, cloud shape masses of Mushrooms, Imaginary and real animals and birds like dragon, Simorgh (a fabulous monstrous bird), wild cat and... mixed with designs.

One of the most important period in carpet weaving evolution is 16th century AD and the most important time is 15th century AD, that essential changes appeared in Persian carpet images and altered them from the image known as 'Broken' to 'Curvilinear'. This change is the result of 15th century AD designers effort. As it is seen, this change was not done simply and by sudden, but it progressed very carefully and cautiously to prevent any conflict with tradition and disagreeing with carpet weaving art and techniques of time.