

Afshar Rugs





Afshar rug

Dedication

To My Friend Dr. Mark R. Jones

You were the man that helped me to realize my dreams. Without you, none of this would be possible. Your interest and inquiring mind about oriental rugs inspired this project. You are the most imaginative and perceptive person I have ever met. Very few people have these gifts. You have faithfully believed in my vision and understood the importance of this project.

You came in as a curious investor, and have become my most loyal and trusting friend. You were the Godsend that made this all possible.

To My Father Mozafar Khazai

I dedicate this work to my late father – the man who initially cultivated the passion I have for thinking ambitiously and having big dreams. Acting as a living example, he nurtured the virtues of discipline and hard work within me, which have led to my life's achievements and overall success. His unending generosity, courage, friendship, networking, and ability to live life large will always leave me in awe.





Afshar tribe (History)

The immigration of the Turkic people to Iran began a thousand years ago. During this long period of time, hundreds of Turkic tribes have come from central Asia into Iran and have inhabited in different areas of the land.

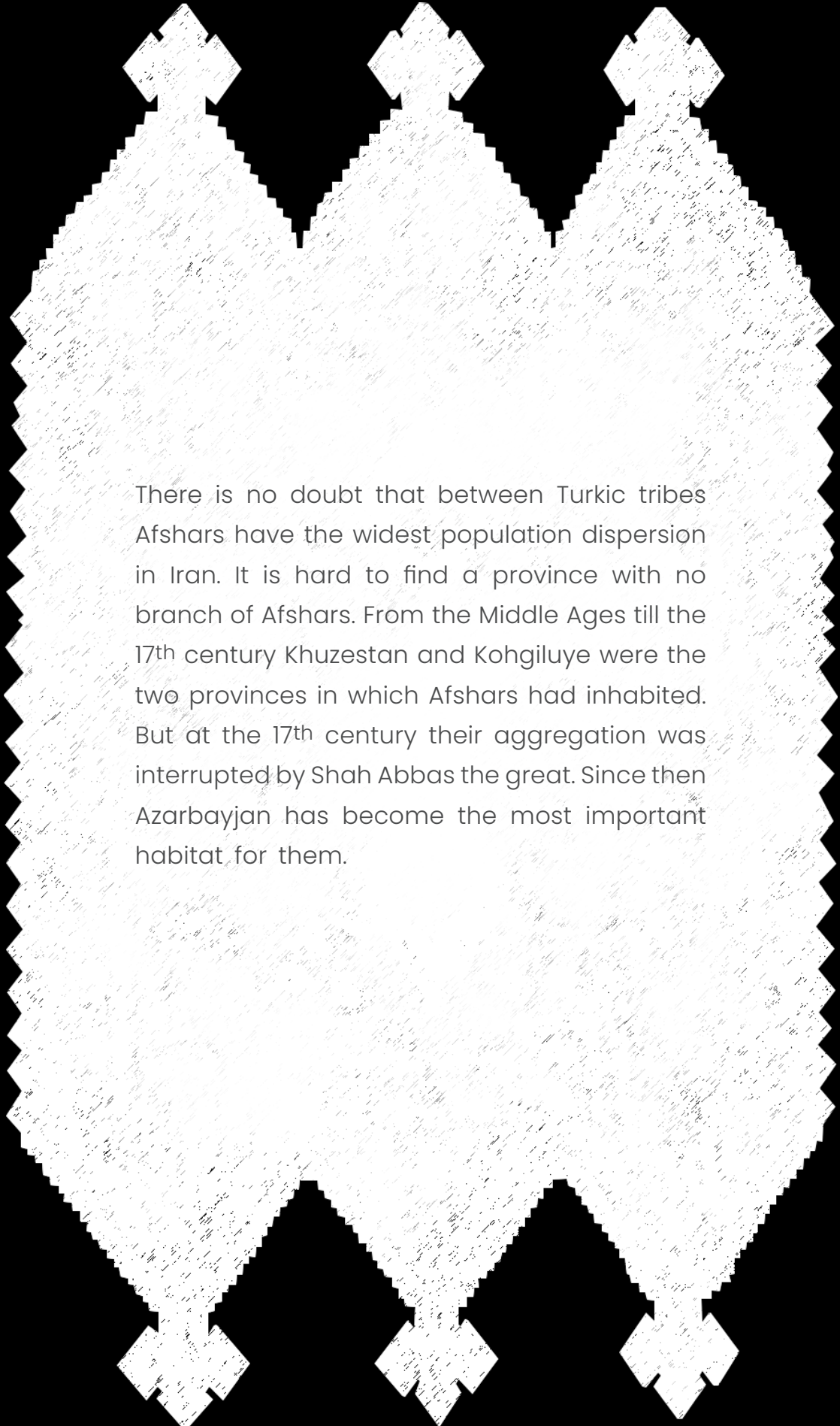
Afshars are so special and rare examples for Ghuzz Turks. These people, remained unchanged for a thousand years, and some branches of them are still continuing their nomadic life, with the same name.



Nomad migration, central Asia, Syr Darya Oblast circa 1860



The history of Afshars in Iran has a great importance. Their first great immigration to Iran seems to have occurred in the 12th century. But the second wave of immigration happened a hundred years after that, at the time of the Ilkhanate dynasty. This second group has inhabited in the Azarbayjan. Because of that, some historians claim that Afshars are Mongol. By the time of establishment of the Safavid Empire in 1501, Afshars gained a new opportunity. They were unified with six other tribes and helped Shah Ismail to crown in Tabriz. These seven tribes have become famous as Qizilbash and they have had an important role in ruling the country.



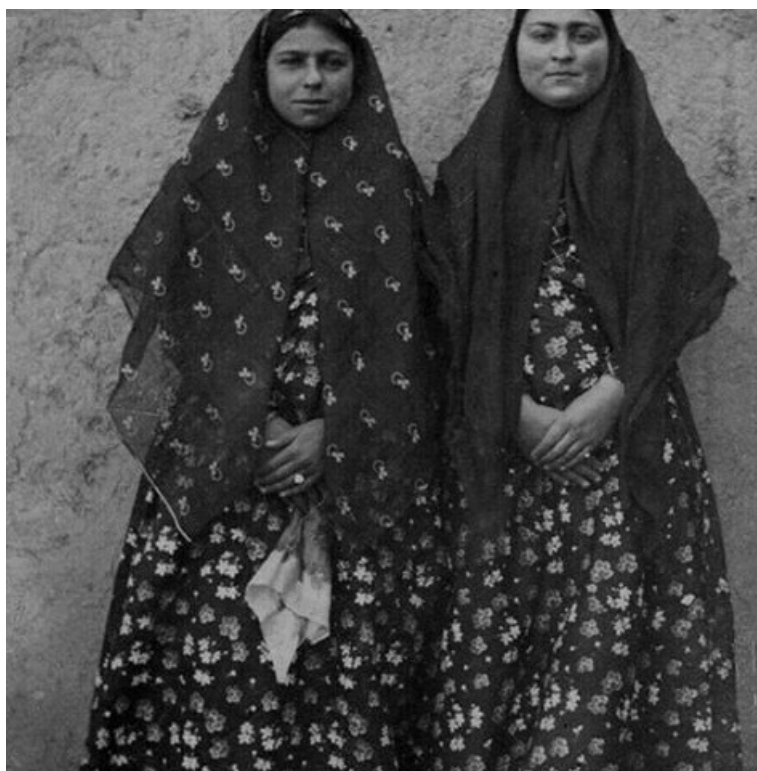
There is no doubt that between Turkic tribes Afshars have the widest population dispersion in Iran. It is hard to find a province with no branch of Afshars. From the Middle Ages till the 17th century Khuzestan and Kohgiluyeh were the two provinces in which Afshars had inhabited. But at the 17th century their aggregation was interrupted by Shah Abbas the great. Since then Azarbaijan has become the most important habitat for them.

Those Afshars, who were living in Kohgiluyeh and Khuzestan, had been centralized in the city of Shadegan, but after some while, they have been attacked by the Lur and Arab tribes. After Nader Shah's death, some of them were perished by the Arab tribe BanuKa'b. The others were affiliated with Lurs; first with northern Lurs and in the 19th century with Bakhtiari Lurs. There are also some Afshar tribes, which remained in the region, like Gunduzlu tribe which are inhabited in Dezful and Shushtar.



Dezful lur woman

The Afshars of Azarbayjan are the most important branch between western Afshars. They are inhabited around the Urmia Lake. The tribes 'Qerekhlu', 'Arashlu', 'Kohgilu', 'Inanlu' and 'Zanjan's Khamseh' could be mentioned as the most important tribes of the Urmia. Some branches of Arashlu live now a day in Kerman. Some other branches of the Afshar tribe live in Takab and Sain, which in the Safavid era have chosen this region for dwelling.



*Urmia Afshar women in traditional costume
early 20th century*



Khorasan is, also, one of the Afshar's habitats. They have moved to Khorasan at the time of Shah Ismail. With no doubt, the most famous person between Afshars have risen from this branch: Nader Shah Afshar (1747–1688). He ruled as Shah of Persia (1736–47) and was one of the most powerful rulers in Iranian history. He, too, displaced some branches of Afshars, for instance, from Urmia to the Mogan plain, between the Shahsevans. As well as Khorasan, Afshar have dwelt in other eastern regions like Sistan and Yazd, but among them Kerman has the main importance.



khorasan Afshar women in traditional costume



There are still some Afshar branches, which have a nomadic life, especially around the cities Abarqu and Kazerun, in the Fars province. But lots of them have been affiliated with the native Iranian tribes like the Bakhtiaris and the Kurds and most of them have adopted a sedentary lifestyle between Persian (or Turkish) speakers in towns and cities.

In relation to carpetology, we can categorize the Afshars into two basic groups:

1. The Afshars of Kerman
2. The Afshars of the northwest



*Kerman Afshar women in traditional costume
early 20th century*

The Afshars of Kerman

All of the temporary historians have the same opinion about Afshars arrival at Kerman. They entered Kerman between 1527 and 1537, at the time of Shah Tahmasb. In the first centuries they were spread all around Kerman, but gradually their habitat has become limited. In 19th century Afshars' Geographic locations were completely known.

Now a day the Afshars of Kerman are divided into two groups. The first group is still continuing nomadic life. They speak Turkish and their yaylaks are the hillsides of Lalehzar Mountain, Baft and Kughar, and, their kishlak is around of Hadjiabad. The second group includes villager Afshars. They speak Persian and live in the above-mentioned regions in villages or small towns.



*Kerman Afshar woman in traditional costume
early 20th century*



The Afshars and the structure of the Kerman rug

From the merchants' point of view, there are two types of Kerman rug: city-woven and nomad- (or village-) woven. But also, these merchants determine the rugs by using words, like "Afsharian Sirjan" or "Afshar Kuhi", before or after the two main types.

Residence in different places, continuous relocations and coexistence with many other races are the most important factors which made Afshar rugs rich and exquisite, both in quality and design.

In the study of Afshar rugs, we should pay attention to both Afshars' ancestral traditions and what they have learned from other people. We can trace their ancestral traditions in the structure of a large group of Turkic-woven rugs including, Qashqai rugs and the rugs from Azarbayjan, Caucasus and some parts of the Tukey. In searching for the common aspects between these examples and Afshar rugs, the searcher must observe step-by-step warp and weft, type of knot, motives and design, and every characteristic about the rug.

But there are some differences between Kerman-Afshar rugs and other Turkic rugs; for example the size. Afshar rugs are smaller than, for example, Qashqai's. But this smaller size (about 120x180 cm.) is common between Jebalbarezians, Balouchs of Khorasan and Kuhis of Kerman. However, rugs in bigger sizes are also woven by Afshars. The Afshars also do not weave long and narrow rugs, like Runner, which are so common in the Azarbayjan.



nomadic people in a camp near bardsir,kerman,iran

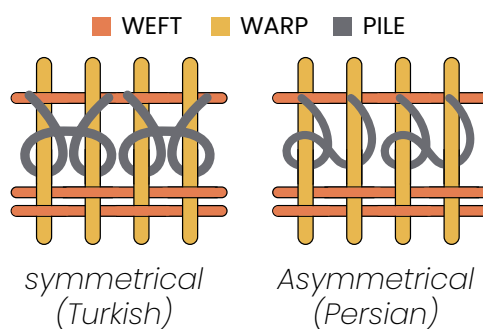






The warp in Afshar rugs is mostly of felted wool; Two layer twisted wool in the form of Z2s and rarely in the form of Z3s. (In the past, cotton warps and wefts were so rare in use, but in recent decades, cotton has become more common). All the Afshar rugs are du-wefted, except a small group of them, which is famous as Toroqi. Although there are some rugs with undyed weft, but the Afshar wefts are mostly in the red tonality, from pink to reddish ochre.

The knots are usually Turkish, and there is also a special type of Turkish knot common between Afshars in the form of 'Ssy'.





Design and pattern in the Afshar rugs

Before the 20th century, Afshar rugs had limited patterns and each area had its own designs. But after a boom in Kerman carpet industry, lots of patterns have been spread all over the region. The design and pattern of the Kerman rugs must be studied in connection with its other arts, for instance tiling. If one takes a look at the old Kerman building, which are decorated with floral patterns, could easily find out the roots of the most of Kerman rugs, including Afshar's.



Malek Mosque of kerman



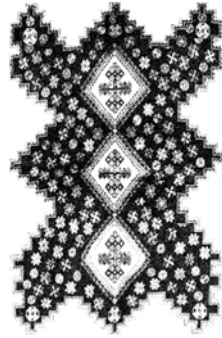
Malek Mosque of kerman

The Kerman shawl-weaving had also a great influence on the rugs. Since the end of last century, the shawl-weaving devices had been changed to rug-weavings and simply shift their patterns to the rugs. These patterns include several types of bush and paisley, with different names that each one have come from the weaving location or the princess, who the shawl have been woven for.

The city of Kerman was the center of these developments, but the result has been observed carefully by the watchful and creative nomadic mind. Afshar weavers could take the patterns from tiles, shawls and also city-woven rugs and adapt them easily to their ancestral designs.



antique kerman shawl



The Afshar design could be categorized into two basic groups.

The first one, which have come from the Turkmen traditions, includes the rugs with geometric patterns and are well known as 'Nomadic Afshars'.

The second group includes the designs which are under the influence of the Kerman city-woven and the other Iranian classical rugs, and, a large number of them have the patterns with flower, plants and trees and are famous as 'Afshar Pardis' (the Afshar Paradise). There are also several other famous designs in this second group like Medallion, Paisely-Fish, Morghi (avian) and Golfarang.



Afshar rug



Afshar rug (Sirjan), frequential design, Golfarang pattern



Afshari and non-Afshari regions of Kerman

For better analyzing of Afshari rugs of Kerman, we should first distinguish Afshari and non-Afshari regions in Kerman province:

Sirjan: Doubtlessly Sirjan is the most important center of weaving of Afshari rugs. Nomadic Afsharis as well as rural are taking part in weaving of these rugs. Also, some of rural weavers gain the title of 'Afshari' as a reputation for their quality products. One of these villages is Blord where some of the most delicate and exquisite rugs of Afshari are woven. This is also mentionable that another tribe with same name 'Blord' reside in the province of Fars. Although that is generally believed that these two tribes share a same origin, but they should not be confused with one another. By the way each of these regions' rugs has its own unique characteristics. For instance Blordi rugs of Fars are thicker and denser. Most of Sirjan rugs have hexagon medallion and their burlaps are red.



Afshar rug (Sirjan), medallion



Baft and Eqta: Baft is one other Afshari region. The most important group of Eqta rugs is 'Eqta-Toroq'. These rugs are unique for their plan, design and structure. Eqta rugs have dark burlap as same as Sirjani rugs.

Bardsir: the other region that has a strong connection with Afsharis is Bardsir. Most of the bardsir's tribes are not Afsharies. Some scholars believe that their origin was in the Zagros Mountains and they must have been mixed with Lurs and Bakhtiaries. But some others believe that some parts of their population are native people of Kerman who before the immigration of Afsharis reside in that region. Most of them are Persian speakers. The rugs of these people have some common characteristics that come in below:

Old rugs are all-wool with symmetric knotting. New ones may have a cotton foundation. The red used for the fields obtained from cochineal. Fish and vase designs have a tribal accent. Some patterns are similar to those used in Qashqai designs.



Babak City: Rugs of Babak city have a unique design. Flower and plants, birds and animals are some common motives in their plans. Their structures are more similar to rugs of Kerman and Yazd rather than Afsharis. They have asymmetrical knots, their wefts are blue unlike Afsharis rugs which have red wefts. And the number of their knots is more than Afshari's.

Jiroft: At least two styles of Jiroft rugs have fused in Afshari rugs. People of Jiroft are Persian speaker, but in winter their region hosts Afshari tribes.



Afshar rug (Babak city), three-medallion design



Kuhi: the word 'Kuh' in Persian means Mountain. And Kuhi is an adjective describing the people who live in the mountains. But in Kerman this word is used to describe a special type of rugs which are woven at Barez Mountains in the east of Jiroft plain. The rugs of this region are called Kuhi or Afshar-Kuhi in the market. This is not hard to distinguish Kuhi rugs from Afshari rugs while Kuhi rugs are thicker and their knots are symmetrical. Also, their wools are denser and shinier. The other distinguished characteristics of Kuhi rugs are their colors, they have deep colors, their red looks crimson, and brown and mustard colors are more preferable for them in comparison of yellow. It is also mentionable that the use of flower and vase motive are more regular in these rags. In all of their plan designs, compositions are dense, lines are thick, and corners are carved and too many elements of everyday life of Kuhi people are distinguishable in the rugs.



1920s Kouhi Afshar rug



Esfandaqe: Geography of Esfandaqe rugs is in the middle of region of Afsharis and the mountain of Barez, and therefore Esfandaqe rugs show the effects of those two types. Esfandaqe rugs are thick and have long lints. Their knots are symmetrical and usually have sharp colors. In these rugs colors of pink and light blue join in sharp colors. Red flower is one of Esfandaqe favorite colors. This particular style is shaped under the influence of north Afshris.



Afsharis of north-west regions

Afshari rugs of north-west have a vast variety. This region has many different styles of rugs in its neighborhood. Actually, this region is surrounded in the middle of many original styles of rug weaving: From north to East Azerbaijan, from west to Kurdistan especially City of Bijar, from south to Khamse region of Zanjan and also Hamedan. There are some similarities between Afshar rugs of this region and neighboring styles of rugs, due to their tribal, cultural and trade connections. But the most important point to mention is that the Afshari rugs of this region in compare to Afshari rugs of Kerman do not show that uniqueness and seem to be under the influence of its neighboring styles. By the way, there are some common characteristics among these Afshari rugs of northeast region which come in below:

1. Raw materials:

Afshar rugs are made from the wools of sheep of Afshari breed. Wools of Afshari sheep has some characteristics, for instance, they are long which made them good for the rug-weaving. But in the other hand their color is dark and this forced the Afsharis to dye them to the darkest ranges. So, they can barely be used as brightly colored wool in the rugs.



Afshari breed

2. Dyeing:

Afshars have some unique techniques in dyeing. For instance, they use sulfur steam for bleaching of wools. In traditional way most of their required colors were dark blue and red, and for dyeing of these colors they use natural dyeing materials of their own region, including leaf of walnuts and sumac, leaf of cherry and etc. and also traditionally, dyeing was the Jews' job. But in this century using of chemical became more regular and changed the dyeing method.





3. Plan and design:

they have a variety of medallions. And also they have various types of margin borders, but the motive of Samovar and fishes (well known as Farhad Mirza) are very regular in rugs of the north-west region.

4. Technical characteristics:

Knots of Afshar rugs are symmetrical and are made by hands. These types of knots are different from Kurdish knots. But some other analyses indicate that Afshari rugs of Bijar region have taken all the characteristics of Kurdish rugs except the type of knot.



Afshar rug, medallion



Afshar rug, frequential design



Afshar rug, medallion



Afshar rug, medallion



Afshar rug



Afshar rug, frequential design, mother-and-infant Botte Jeqqe (paisley bush)



Afshar rug, frequential design, Golfarang pattern



Afshar rug, vase design



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