



# Persians

The Most Celebrated in the World of Rugs





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# ***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.*









*The Emperor's Carpet, second half 16<sup>th</sup> century*





Being used interchangeably, 'Iran' and 'Persia' are equivalent in most respects. Ancient Iranian folks include Medians, Persians, Bactrians, Scythians, Parthians, etc. Persians were those who conquered the ancient world, establishing the first world empire which they succeeded to govern it for two centuries. With this great achievement at the dawn of the Iranian written history (kept in the Greek Classics, the Babylonian chronicle, the old testament, etc.), Persians give their honored name to all Iranian lands and to the following kingdoms ruled over the Iranian plateau.



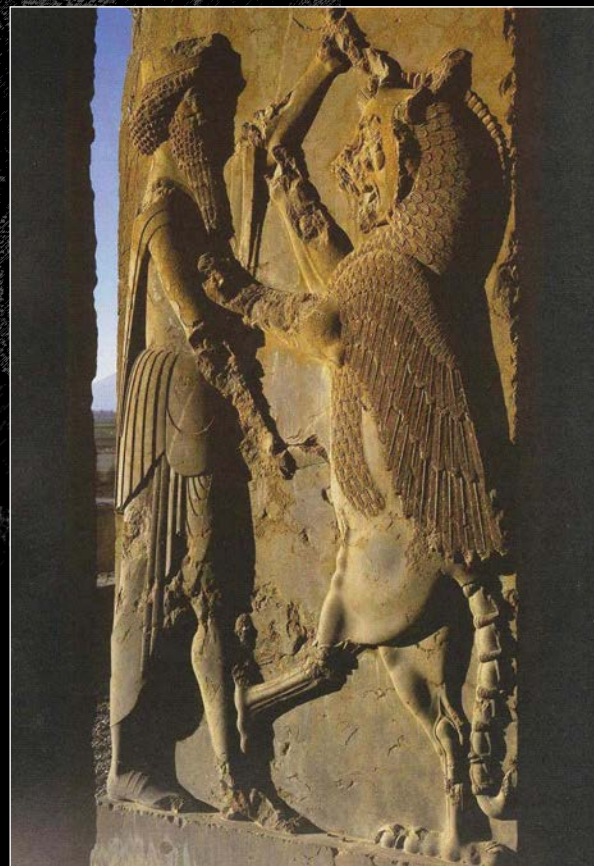




While their neighbors had used to call the land with equivalent pronunciations of "Persia", Iranians by themselves call her 'Iran' and use 'Pars' (their own pronunciation of Persia) for the southwestern part of the country where the ancient Persian kings originated and ruins of their castles and palaces used to be in sight during coming millenniums, founding mythological titles such as "the Throne of Jamshid" (Yama in Sanskrit) for Persepolis.





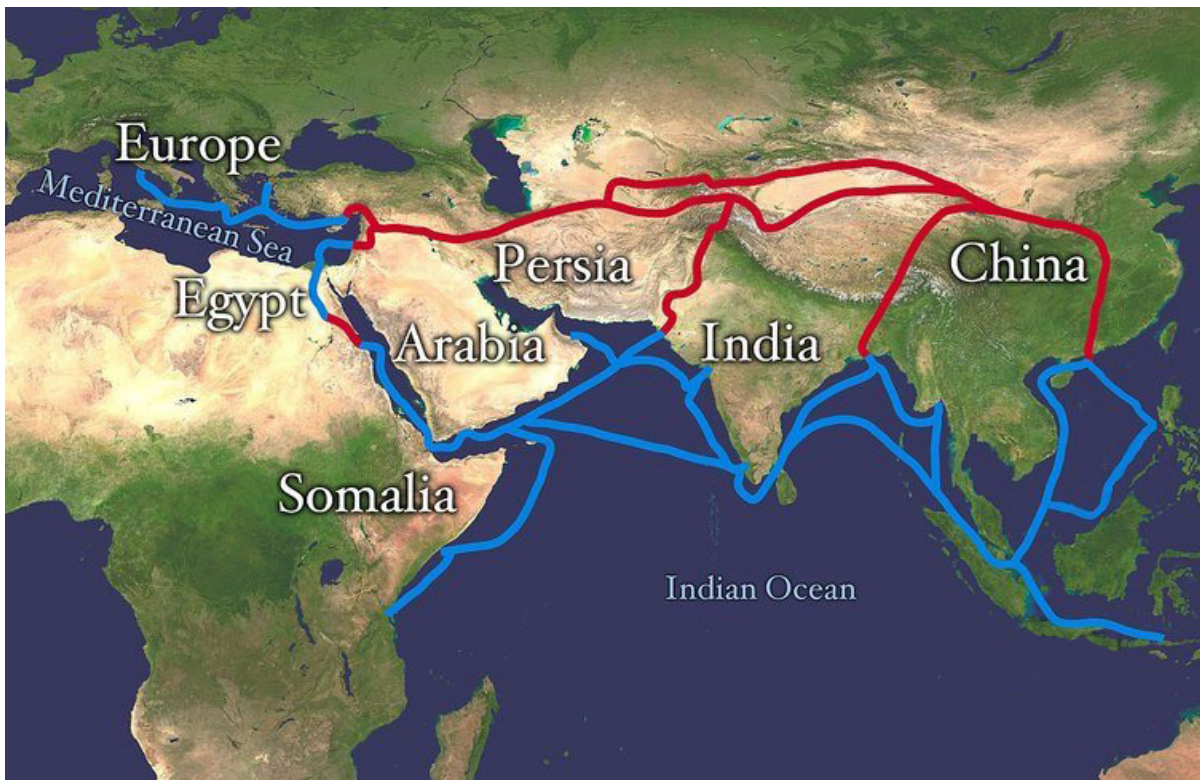


*Ruins of Persepolis have used to be a matter of interest for poets, artisans and nomadic artists. Qashqai tribe, who had used to camp near Persepolis in their seasonal migration, weave the scenes depicted in the reliefs*





Nevertheless, Iranians call their common tongue Parsi/ Farsi (Persian) despite the fact that Parsi-e Dari (namely: Courtly or Standard Persian) originated in eastern Iran. In this sense, too, 'Persian' just means 'Iranian', not being attributed to an ancient branch of them. This common tongue is a cultural heritage not only for the greater Iran but also beyond the plateau, for neighboring lands. Persian used to be the Silk Roads' lingua Franca, while it served as the court language for Persianized Turko-Mongol tribes who made empires from Anatolia to India during the last millennium.



*Map of the Silk Road*



Iranians appreciate the Persian poets not less than the Persian Kings of antiquity. Khayyam, Nizami, Rumi, Sa'di and Hafiz, should be mentioned, but above all stands Firdausi. His Shahnama (the book of the kings) is an integration of Iranian myths, legends, history and even fairytales, all forming a long uninterrupted narrative in verse. Consisting chiefly of Parthian's ballads of romance and chivalry, Bactrian mythological tales, Zoroastrian stories and Sasanid semi-historical texts, Shahnama's most celebrated heroic parts rooted in the Scythian lore. These are legends of a Scythian hero, Rostam of the House of Garshasp, who like other heroes of his clan, saves the Iranian crown for several times from the invading armies and evil jinxes.



*Rostam is mostly depicted with a double-pointed beard wearing Div-e Spid (The White Demon)'s skull as a helmet. This is a Caucasian rug telling the Tragedy of "Rostam and Esfandiyar"*





*Rostam is mostly depicted with a double-pointed beard wearing Div-e Spid (The White Demon)'s skull as a helmet*



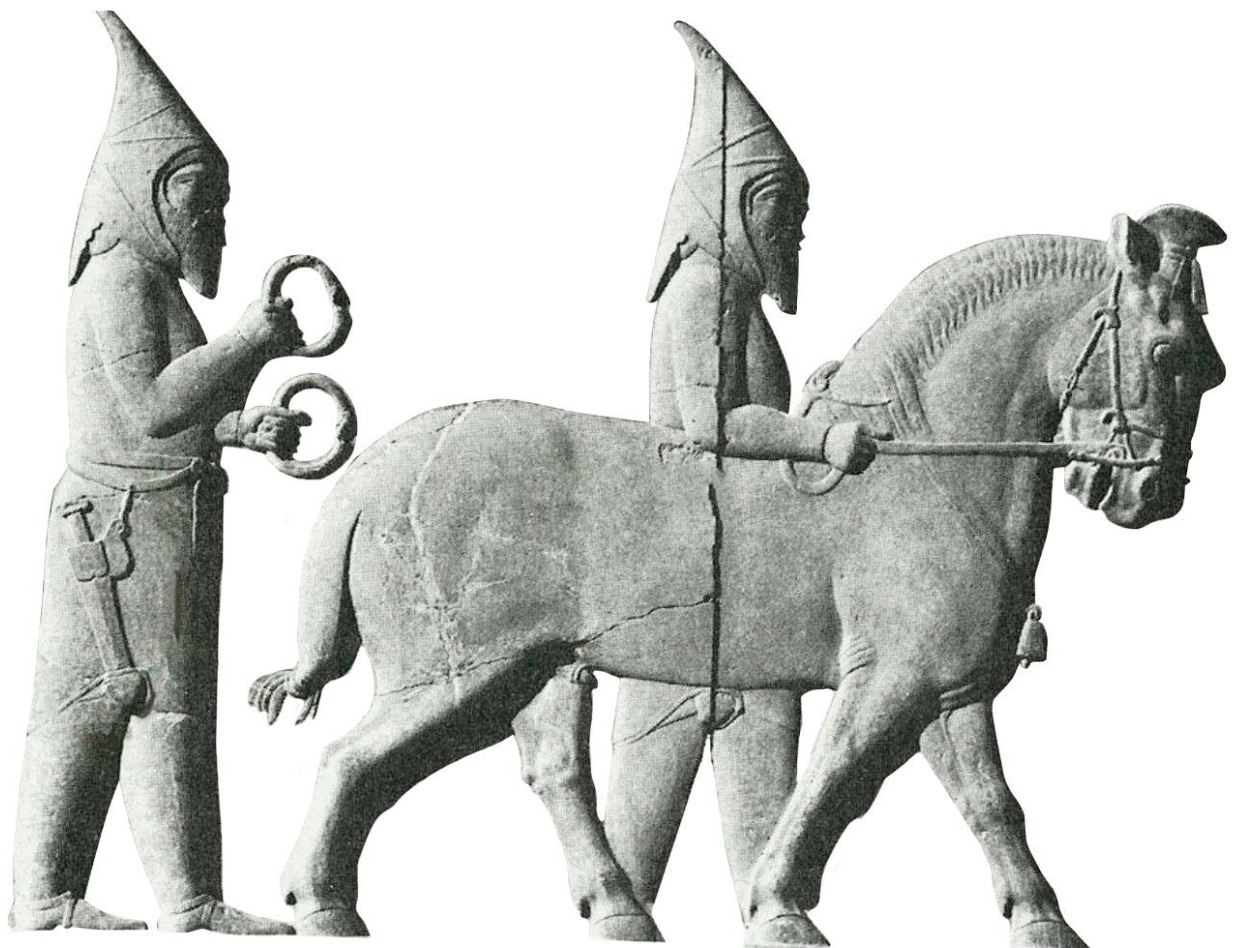


Scythians were a Eurasian nomadic people of Iranian origin, various branches of whom flourished during antiquity in far different places like north of the Black Sea, Ordos Plateau, the Central Asia and north of the Indian subcontinent. The Scythians are generally believed to have been among the earliest, if not the earliest, of the Eurasian peoples to learn to ride the horse. Owing to the uncertainty of life in the steppes, both the nomads and the farm laborers had to be protected by mounted warriors. Their gods and kings are frequently represented on horseback.

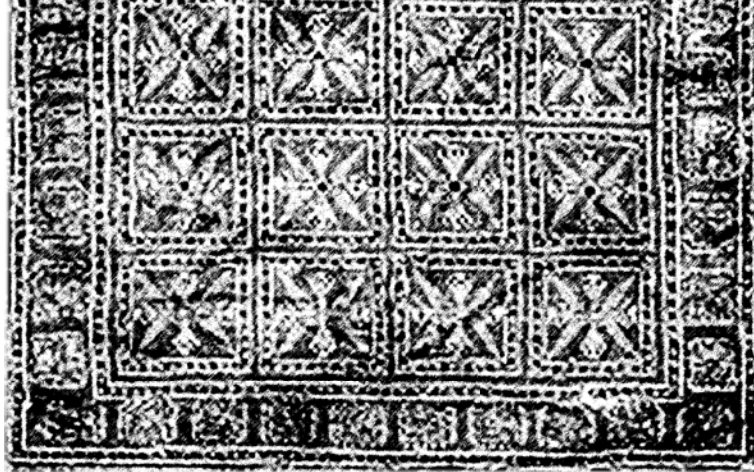


*Scythians (Sakas) in Persepolis relief*









Generally known as Pazyryk, the most ancient piled carpet found belong to a Scythian noble's tomb, designed with rows of mounted warriors. The Scythian noble buried with his most beloved belongings amongst which his horse would be the most beloved, just like Raxsh, the saffron stallion, whose body was put close to Rostam's in the tomb.

The Pazyryk burials are a number of Scythian Iron Age tombs (wooden barrows) found in the Pazyryk Valley and the Ukok plateau in the Altai Mountains, Siberia. The site is in Russia close to the borders with China, Kazakhstan and Mongolia. The Carpet measures 200×183 cm and has a knot density of approximately 360,000 knots per square meter, which is higher than most modern carpets. The middle of the carpet consists of a ribbon motif, while in the border there is a procession with elk or deer, and in another border warriors on horses.





*The Pazyryk carpet can be seen at the Hermitage Museum  
in Saint Petersburg, Russia*

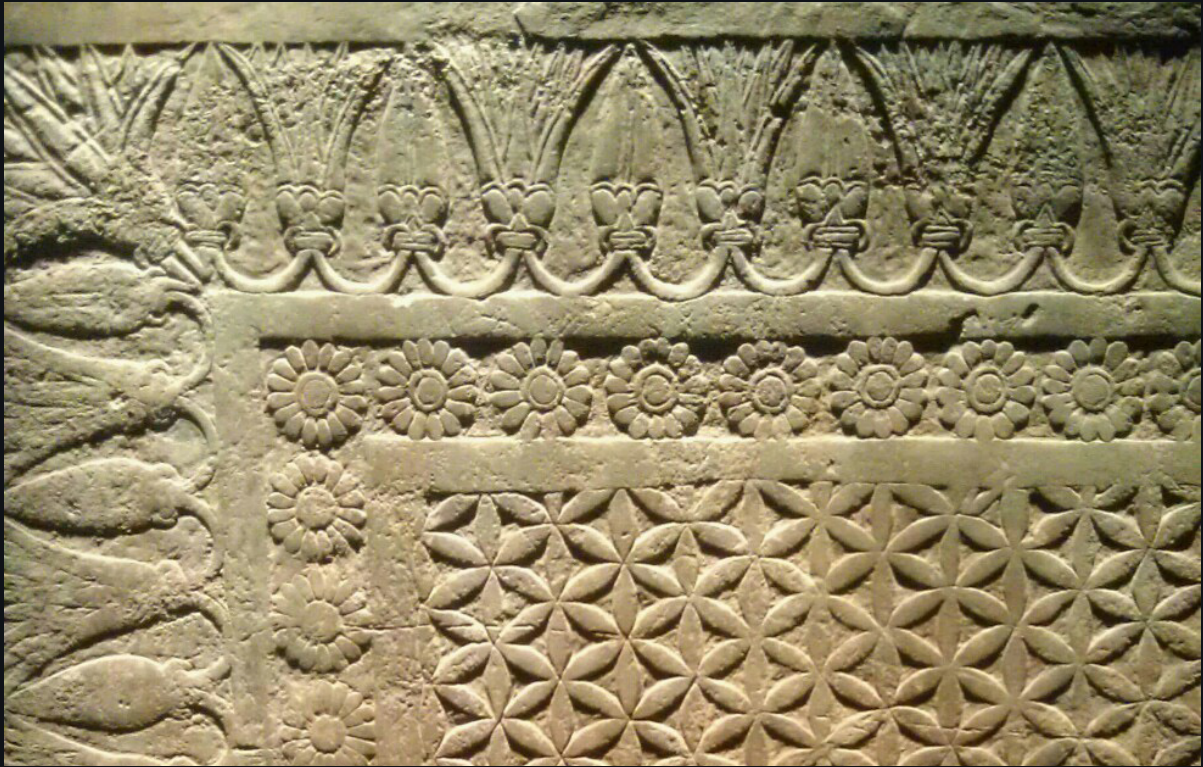


No one could be sure where the Pazyryk carpet was manufactured. Some suggest Ancient Armenia or Persia around 400 BC. When it was found it had been deeply frozen in a block of ice, which is why it is so well-preserved. As the wooden tomb dates from the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> or the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C., however, the carpet probably does not belong to the Achaemenid period, though it may well reflect the influence of Achaemenid carpet design. The field is divided into 24 framed squares, each containing a stylized floral element that may ultimately have been derived from the quatrefoils of Assyrian prototypes.



*The Pazyryk carpet details*

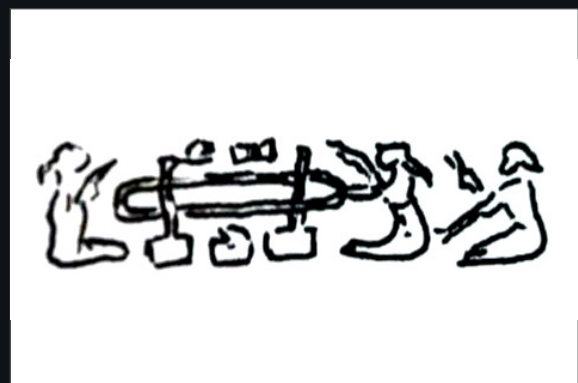




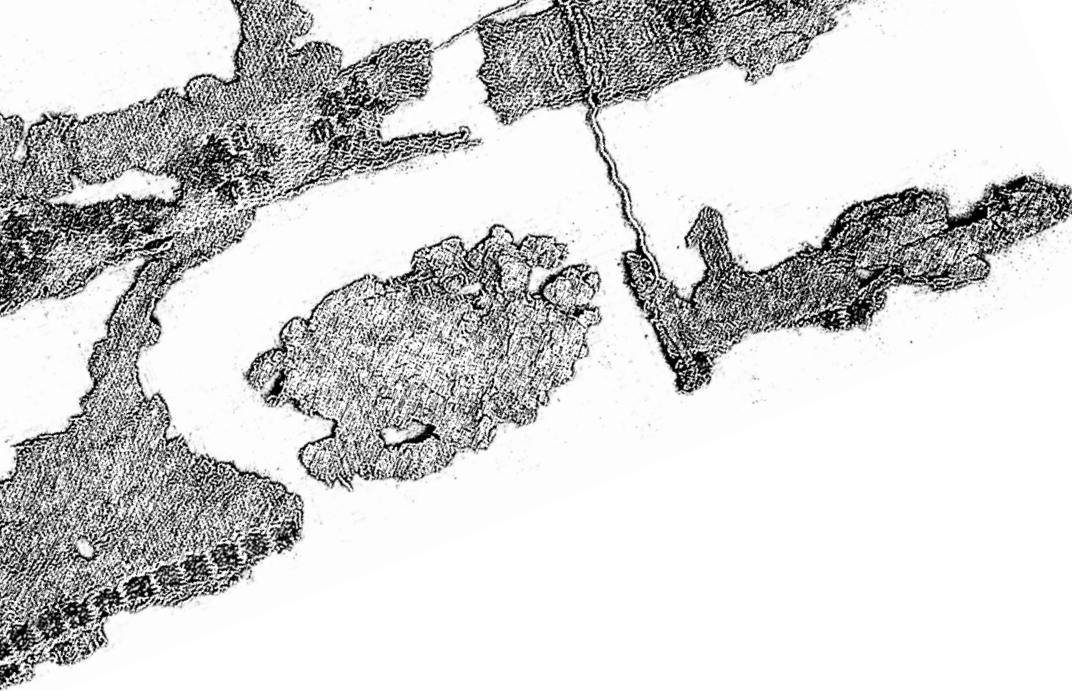
*Neo-Assyrian, 645BC-640-BC, Rectangular door-sill; carved from limestone; designed to appear as a carpet. The overall pattern of the principal rectangle is a field of interlocking circles, drawn with a compass, giving the effect of flowers with six petals. There is a row of rosettes around the edge, while an arcaded lotus and bud pattern forms an outer fringe*



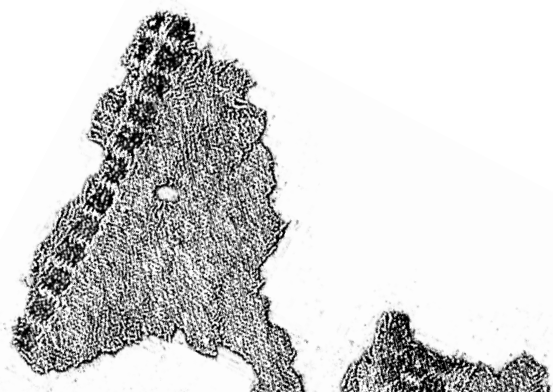
*Susa Woman Spinning Yarn (Approximately 4200 BCE), One of the oldest Susa artifact carvings*



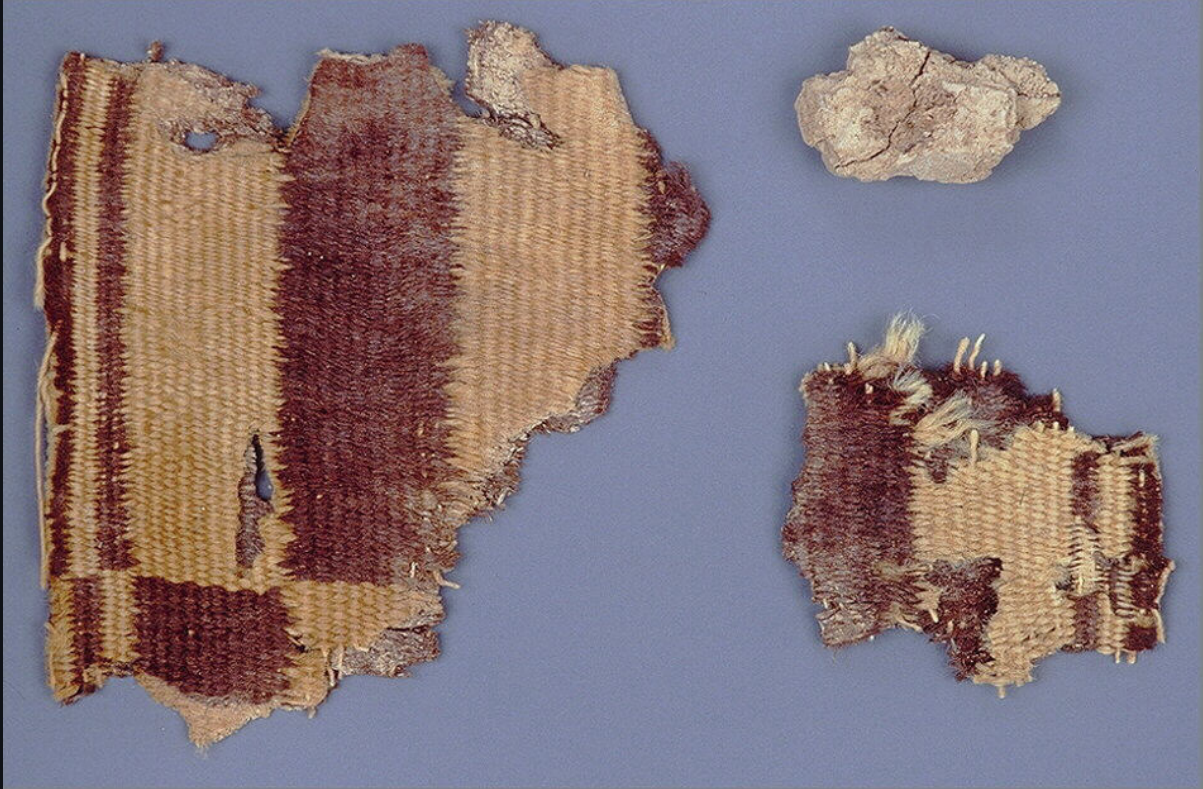
*Sitting women are probably warping, Susa (Approximately 4200 BCE) Iranians succeeded to transmit the piled weaving traditions from the antiquity to the contemporary era*



Actual carpet survived from no sooner than the late Antiquity. The most ancient pieces found in Iran belong to Qumis (also known as Hecatompylos, Saddarvazeh) which was the capital of the Arsacid dynasty by 200 BCE. The Greek name Hecatompylos means "one hundred gates" and the Persian term has the same meaning. The title was commonly used for cities which had more than the traditional four gates. It may be understood better as the "Many Gated".







*These wool textile fragments feature dark brown and white stripes. They were excavated at Shahr-i Qumis in northern Iran, which has been identified as the ancient city of Hecatompylos, established by the Parthians as their capital by about 200 B.C. However, these fragments come from Room 23 at Site VI, which was seemingly converted into a burial chamber during the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D., a date indicated by a coin of the Sasanian king Hormizd IV (reigned A.D. 590-579). The human remains discovered there consist of disarticulated bones, which is in keeping with Zoroastrian burial practice. Yet the bones appear to have been wrapped in leather and wool, which would be unusual for Zoroastrians, as is the inclusion of a coin with the body. Thus it is possible that in the 6<sup>th</sup> century Zoroastrian burial practices were still under development or that there were regional variations that are not recorded in surviving texts*





*These textile fragments are made of wool and cotton, and are decorated with bands of red rosettes and blue squares. They are made using a weft-faced tabby weave, such that the colored decorations are reversed when viewed from the back. This is known as a zilū, a type of Iranian carpet first attested in the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Yet these fragments, which were excavated at Shahr-i Qumis in northern Iran, date to the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and are thus the earliest known zilū carpet*





From the Parthian Era some sorts of woolen textiles have been found here. Parts of a dark brown felt garment, with the edge of the neckline and part of the left shoulder preserved. It is dated to the first half of the 1st century B.C. The silk cord that presumably secured the neck opening is the oldest excavated piece of silk known from Iran. Felt fragments, colored red and black, were also found in the Parthian levels at Qumis. From the Sasanid levels at Qumis actual Sasanid textiles are preserved. They include several yellowed fragments with pile, and fabrics of wool or wool and cotton, some with patterns. Fragments with dyed wool (striped in reddish orange, ivory, and blue), as well as pieces with natural brown and white (or ivory, light beige, very light khaki).

During the Sasanid Era Persian textile artistry flourished. Actual carpet fragments remained from the Sasanid Era, including piled pieces, flat-weaves and felts. What is more, there are a good number of well-preserved Sasanid textiles or Chinese, Coptic and Byzantine copies of them, give us a clearer perception of designs and patterns of the time. These include chiefly depictions of animals in rows or in pair inside roundel frames. Sasanid piled carpet fragments indicate curvilinear representations of stags, ibexes, horses, lions and mythological creatures.



*Textile fragment: walking ram with a neckband and fluttering ribbons  
ca. 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D (Sasanian)*





*Fragment of textile with horses ca. 5th–7th century A.D. (Sasanian)*





*Legging with war a scene. From the Roman town of Antinoe in Middle Egypt. Byzantine Period (1453-324). Dyed wool tapestry woven in a single piece, Musée du Louvre*



Sasanid kings made their names immortal through art patronage. Above all stand Khosrau the Immortal Soul, and Khosrau the second Parvez, the last great king of his house. Barbad, the great musician lived in Khosrau Parvez' court. The most retold love story in Iran, Khosrau and Shirin, is about him and his queen. And his Palaces were covered with the most legendary carpets of all times.



*Pictorial Khosrau and Shirin Scenic Persian Sarouk Rug*



Bahāristan (The Spring-Land) or Bahār-Khosrau (Khosrau's Spring) was a huge, late Sasanid royal carpet. It may have covered the floor of the great audience hall at the winter capital of Ctesiphon, bringing the spring to the King's wintertime, as the name suggests. The carpet measured 60 cubits square. Paths and streams were embroidered on it with gems against a ground of gold. Its border was embroidered with emeralds to represent a cultivated green field in which were flowering spring plants with fruit embroidered with different colored gems on stalks of gold with gold and silver flowers and silk foliage.



*There are a good number of Sasanid flat-weaves preserved indicating the common designs which are formed mainly with rows of animals and wavering borders rendered in curvilinear and semi-curvilinear lines*



Firdausi speaks of another carpet in Khosrau's palace, called "the grand carpet", on which depicted the Seven Skies, the Seven kingdoms on earth, and portraits of the 48 former Iranian kings, including Kay-Khosrau the mythological king after whom the two Sasanid kings were named. "The crowns", Firdausi said "was woven with golden threads" in the midnight blue of sky. Such carpets were used as wall hangings.



Persian King Antique Persian Kashan Rug





*Pictorial Antique Persian Kirman Mashahir*





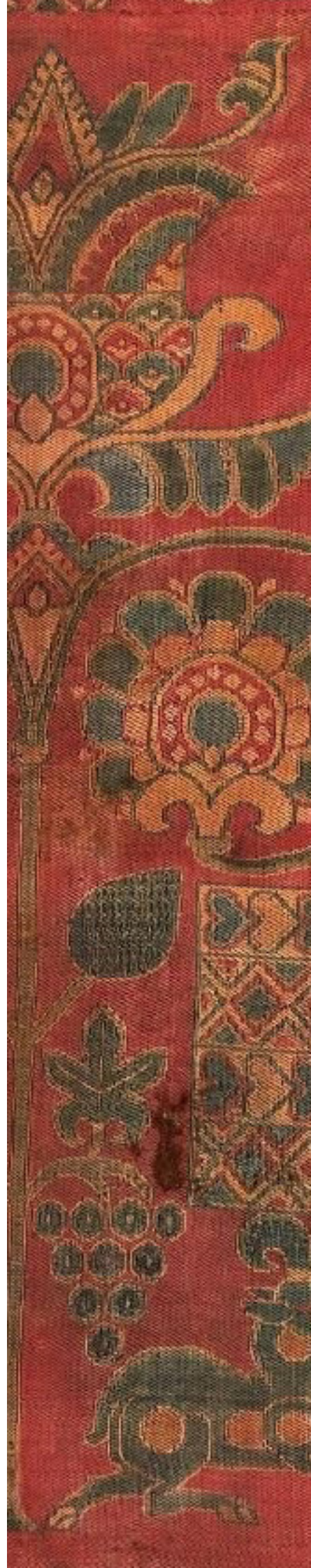
Pictorial Antique Persian Mohtasham Kashan Mashahir Pictorial rugs with the Persian kings' portraits are still woven. These may be consisted of rows of crowned heads and robed shoulders, or single portraits, or hunting scenes, or scenes of feasts





Early Islamic documents, show an enthusiasm of Arab governments to renovate the glory of their precedents empires. Umayyad Caliphs imitated Byzantine, Persian and Coptic cultures, and the Abbasids adopted chiefly the Persian Sasanid culture by the means of their arts and crafts. The latter proved to be dominant in Islamic territories. The Abbasid Caliphate first centered its government in Kufa, modern-day Iraq, but in 762 the caliph Al-Mansur founded the city of Baghdad, near the ancient Sasanid capital city of Ctesiphon. The Abbasid period was marked by reliance on Persian bureaucrats (notably the Barmakid family) for governing the territories. Persian customs were broadly adopted by the ruling elite, and they began patronage of artists and scholars. Baghdad became a center of science, culture, philosophy and invention in what became known as the Golden Age of Islam.

*An early Islamic copy of a Persian Sasanid textile depicting Khosrau the Second, Parvez*

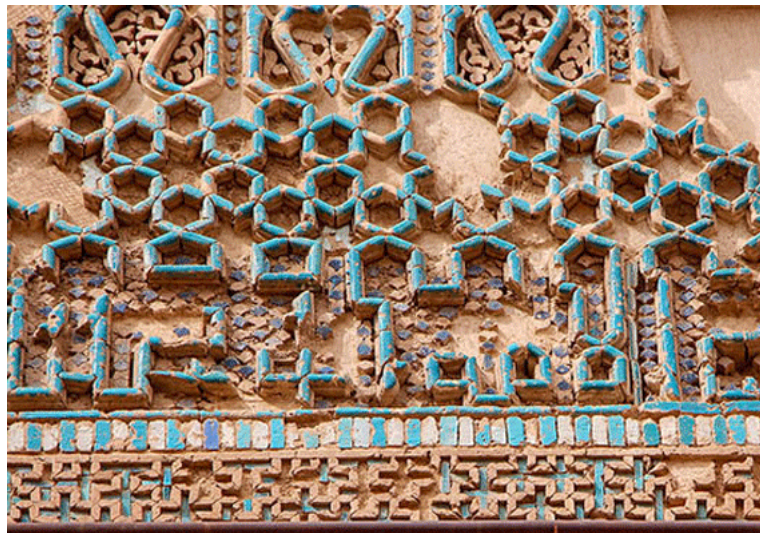








Medieval Persia faced continues immigration of various tribes of Turkic origin. The Caliphs of Baghdad strengthened the presence of the eastern Turkic tribes in martial and administrative affairs which proved to be fatal for their own actual rule. Soon the Caliphs were chosen by tribal heads. The climax of the Turkic dominance in Persia occurred under the Seljuk peace during which decorative elements became gradually more flexible and new patron's tribal taste merged with pre-Islamic Persian and Byzantine aesthetics, making changes in the "Islamic arts", in Persia, Mesopotamia and Anatolia.



*The Ancient Malek Zusan Mosque in Khorasan, Iran. The Ancient Malek Zusan Mosque located in Khorasan, Iran. It has been constructed around 800 years ago*





While in architecture no basic changes happened in the Iranian tradition, in the case of royal carpets the changes were radical. Nevertheless, in the absence of actual examples, these are all subjects of conjecture, based on the carpets depicted in Persian books' illustrations or descriptions in historical texts. The common Seljuk style have simple basis in patterns including rectilinear and semi-rectilinear repeats with limited diversity in basic forms: endless knots, multi-pointed stars, crosses, geometric shapes such as octagon, hexagon and pentagon, hooked lozenges and Kufic script used chiefly in rugs' margins. The Turkic peace' style, maintaining the common style of the steppes homeland to Turk ancestors, rendered, however, in royal stylization.





*An Anatolian Seljuk piece showing the common Seljuk style*





Such style for royal carpets lasted Throughout the Mongol Ilkhante and Timurid Dynasties, therefore called Turkic-Mongolian style. The last Abbasid Caliph, Al-Musta'sim, was executed under the command of Hulagu Khan in 1258 after the sack of Baghdad by the Mongols. They wrapped him in a carpet till he died, not to shed the Caliph's blood.



Sack of Baghdad by Hulagu





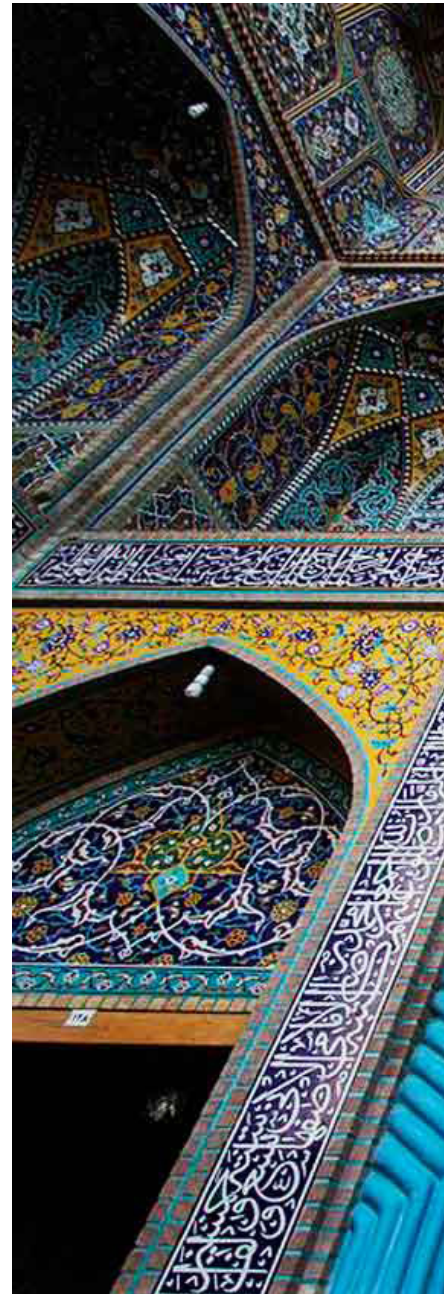






Cities of Maragheh, Tabriz, Shiraz, Herat and Samarkand flourished during the reign of Mongol' dynasties. Surprisingly, Genghis Khan and Tamerlane' successors proved to be not just great art patrons, but great artists too. In the prime of the Timurid rule, at Herat, a revival began in the Iranian arts and crafts. That made by a group of intellectual artists at Shahrukh court' liberary in Herat, including Mirak, Behzad, and Prince Baysunqur, son to Shahrukh and his queen Gowharshad.

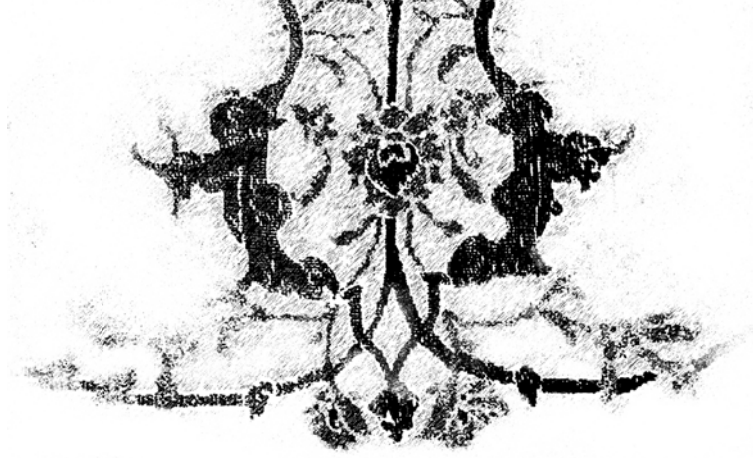
*Gowharshad mousque in Mashhad the epigraphs of which is done by her son Baysunqur*











Behzad was Mirak's apprentice, and he lived long enough to establish the Tabriz court library belonged to the next dynasty: the Safavids (1739-1501). Safavid kings' fame in art patronage rivaled that of the ancient Sasanids. The climax of Persian carpet design and manufacture was attained under their rule. Safavid Royal carpets are probably the best pile pieces ever made. Carpets and rugs were designed again with floral patterns in curvilinear style. The influence of court designers, Behzad's apprentices, on carpet weaving is clear. The two key design features of rugs in this period, the medallion design and figural elements, were borrowed directly from the arts of the book as practiced in the royal libraries.





*The Clark Safavid Sickle Leaf, vine scroll and palmette carpet (also called the Bacri-Clark throne carpet), probably Kirman, Southeast Iran, first half 17<sup>th</sup> century, Shah Abbas Period. William A. Clark Collection*





Shah Ismail the great, founder of Safavid Dynasty, crowned in Tabriz and chose this city as the capital of Iran. At that time Tabriz was more a rug trading center than a rug weaving center. His successor Shah Tahmasb, crowned in Qazvin, was an amateur designer and it is believed he had some rug designs too. He brings the rustic and tribal art-industry of rug weaving to the cities and established the urban style. Moreover he appointed great miniature painters such as Sultan Mohammad and Mir Seyyed Ali to design for royal carpets.



*Shah Ismail the founder of the Safavid Dynasty*



ز زرد و زبر جز نثار کی گون  
 فرو نیک پس را بهیما چمن  
 اگر آب دیدان بود نینان  
 خنده سپاسی در او رد کرد  
 گرفتند میریکد کر را گنار  
 دگر روز کر سپی و زامد کجا  
 شمرده ز هر کونه کون  
 پیالاراست سال از ترکان  
 بدان شهر خرم دوخت به بان  
 بشد شادمان تا سپاس کرد  
 سیاوش بر سیدار شهر  
 سیاورد با هدیه پیغام شد  
 ز کستر دینا و بوی مرنگ  
 بدو داد و کفش که ای شیر مرد  
 جو بشنید کر سیوز نامدار  
 سیاوش خوشنید سپر  
 بایوان کشیدند از انجا یکاه  
 سیاوشش بدان هدیه شهر  
 بسین تا ز کجخت حلیه کجک  
 بر این همه تا سپاس کرد  
 ز ترکان نایم کردند و نزار  
 پذیره شدن تا زینان سپاه  
 سیاوشش سپاراست جاسی  
 نکه کرد و شد چون کل ایندار



نشتد بر جوان شاه انجمن  
 برزگان مشه زانده رایان

The Shahname of Shah Tahmasp, the Persian Book of Kings (Shahname)





*Sheikh Safi rug (or the Ardebil rug) is the most recognizable masterpiece of Shah Tahmasb's time, which is now in Victoria and Albert Museum of London. This rug has a central medallion surrounded by 16 crests. The medallion's pattern has been repeated in Lachaks. For the medallion's crown, the designer has used a cresset hanging from the top crest. The ground has been filled beautifully with Xitai floral*





patterns. The ground flowers have been organized in such a manner that it is hard to follow their routes. The filled spaces and the empty ones are completely equal. The narrow margin has Mari Eslimi (snake Eslimi) patterns and the wide margin fixed the ground with its two forms of repeating frames. The design's main motives are Eslimi and Xitai



With changing the capital from Qazvin to Isfahan under the command of Shah Abbas the great, the golden age of Iranian rug weaving began. Isfahan has an appropriate geopolitical situation and Shah Abbas believed that the Iranian capital must be in the center of his kingdom to get rid of Ottomans and Uzbeks treats. He was fond of architecture, music, painting and poetry







and it is told that he himself was a skillful rug weaver. He established several royal rug weaving workshops in Isfahan. His own palace was adorned with exquisite rugs and among his political gifts rugs were of great importance. At the time Isfahan became a both domestic and international center for rug trading.





*Some of these pieces have artist's signature that should have been an innovation for the time; like the one in Poldi Pezzoli Museum, Milan, Italy which has an Islamic date*





equivalent of 1542 AD and a Persian inscription in verse right in the heart of its central medallion, reading: "with endeavor of Ghiāth ud-Dīn Jāmi, this renowned deed is done goodly."





What have been shaped during Safavid rule, made chiefly the Persian urban style led by Tabriz in the northwest, Herat in the northeast, Isfahan in the heart with Jolfa, Kashan, Yazd and Kerman around it. Persian carpets found their way abroad firstly as diplomatic gifts to the Ottomans, Mughal Indians and eventually to Europeans as gifts or in purchase. Both Ottoman Empire and India continued to import Persian rugs even after the establishment of royal workshops of their own in which royal Persian designs were copied. Safavid carpets represent both court production and commercial production, which often reflects courtly tastes.



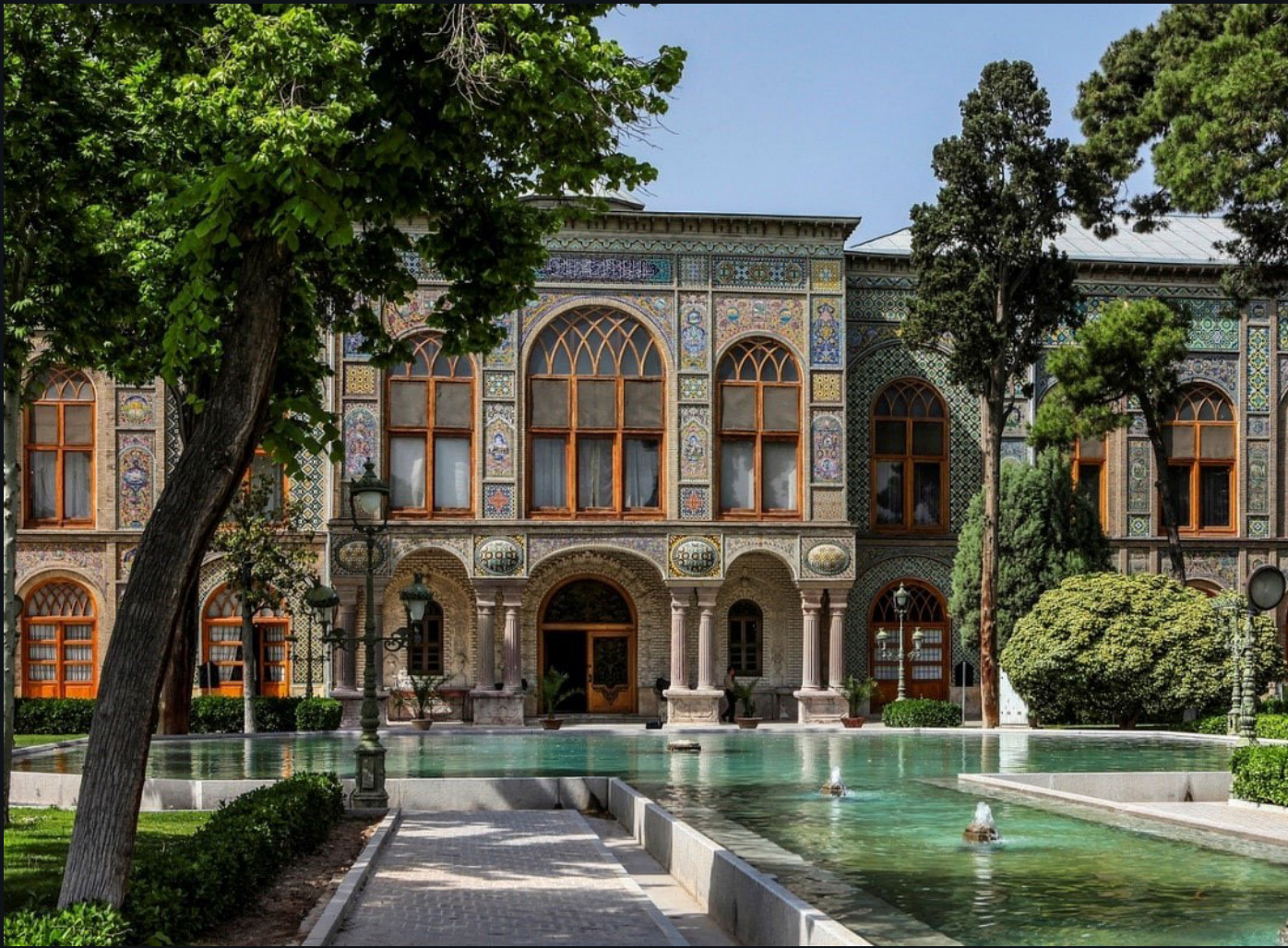
*A widely used Persian pattern attributed to the city of Herat (in northwest Afghanistan) which has spread westwards across Persia, Anatolia and Caucasia with lots of interpretations applied to different types of design, in both rectilinear and curvilinear renderings.*





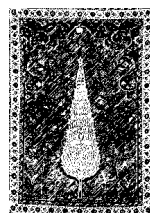






*Golestan (Gulistan/Rose-Garden) Palace in Tehran*





Carpet exportation from Persia to western markets increased little by little during the 18<sup>th</sup> century with serious interruptions caused by civil wars between unstable dynasties. Eventually, Agha Muhammad Shah established the Qajar Dynasty which was to rule all through the 19<sup>th</sup> century and more. They built a new capital at the Alborz skirt, with palaces within dense woods and rich gardens: Tehran.

The number of looms increased largely during the 19<sup>th</sup> century all over Persia. Now Persian rugs were sold to not only kings and aristocrats but also to European and American middle classes. During Qajar rule western companies showed an interest to invest in Persian rug production directly. These lead to changes in designs. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the carpet weaving was nationalized under the command Reza Shah.







*Shazdeh Garden, Mahan, Kirman*









*Most of Persian carpet designs are supposed to picture a 'pardis'. The word 'paradise' came from ancient Persian to Greek meaning a walled garden. The Greek word was used by Xenophon and others for an orchard or royal hunting park in Persia. It was later taken to mean "the garden of Eden," meaning "place of extreme beauty, blissful state like or comparable to Paradise"*









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