



# Oriental

A COMPLETE GUIDE

# Rugs

Murray L. Eiland Jr.  
& Murray Eiland III



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Murray L. Eiland Jr. & Murray Eiland III

LAURENCE KING



First edition published as  
*Oriental Rugs: A Comprehensive Guide* by  
Murray L. Eiland Jr.  
by the New York Graphic Society in 1973

Revised editions in 1976, 1981

This revised edition published in 1998 by  
Laurence King Publishing

© 1998 Calmann & King Ltd

Laurence King Publishing is an imprint  
of Calmann & King Ltd  
71 Great Russell Street  
London WC1B 3BN

Tel + 44 171-831 6351  
Fax + 44 171-831 8356  
e-mail: enquiries@calmann-king.co.uk

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A catalogue record for this book is  
available from the British Library.

ISBN 1 85699 132 2

Edited by Lucy Trench  
Cartography by James Anderson  
Picture research by Murray L. Eiland,  
Nick Purdon and Mary-Jane Gibson

Printed in Belgium

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© 1998 Calmann & King Ltd

Laurence King Publishing is an imprint  
of Calmann & King Ltd  
71 Great Russell Street  
London WC1B 3BN

Tel + 44 171-831 6351  
Fax + 44 171-831 8356  
e-mail: enquiries@calmann-king.co.uk

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*Terminology and spelling*

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## Introduction

During the late 1960s, when I began work on the guidebook to oriental rugs that was first published in 1973, there was virtually no such thing as a serious discipline of rug studies. Many of the standard books to be found in libraries or book stores were later editions of works that had first seen the light of day during the early decades of the twentieth century. Few of them were based on any firsthand information, which comes from travel to the areas where rugs are woven, and many included a kind of dealer sales talk that focused more upon making the rugs mysterious or romantic than upon leaving the reader with a genuine understanding of these artifacts from another place and another culture.

There had, of course, been a handful of truly important books, including several thoughtful

accounts of the history of the oriental carpet, for the most part from museum personnel. With a few significant exceptions,<sup>1</sup> books written by carpet dealers tended to focus upon the mythology of the rug field, often repeating the same stale misinformation as other dealer books. Several important collections had been published,<sup>2</sup> and there were a few well produced catalogs of major exhibitions. Yet, relative to the enormous variety of rug types and designs, there were not many color plates that were available to study the rugs themselves. The Textile Museum in Washington, D.C., was at that time a center of serious research,<sup>3</sup> but outside of *The Textile Museum Journal* a year could go by without the appearance of any serious papers on oriental rugs.







This meant that a newcomer to oriental rugs could not simply put in the requisite hours of study and emerge as reasonably knowledgeable about the subject, as he could in other fields of art. There was so much unreliable and conflicting information in print that the study took far more than just skeptical reading. Getting acquainted with the field was a major undertaking in 1965, and it was my task – in preparing a guidebook – to make it easier.

In the meantime, after three decades of growth, the study of oriental rugs has become unrecognizable. There are currently several journals on the subject,<sup>4</sup> and my bookshelf, which included less than a dozen volumes when I began to write about rugs, has expanded to hundreds. While not all that reaches print is inspired or accurate, a surprising amount of it is useful in elucidating even minor points. There are multitudes of high-quality color plates available of even some of the more obscure rug types, and carpet enthusiasts have been able to travel to parts of the world that were previously inaccessible, often for political reasons. Tibet, Eastern Turkestan, Uzbekistan and other regions are no longer off limits, though travel in Afghanistan is currently more difficult.

The result is an information explosion, one that allows us access to oriental carpets in a way that was never possible before. Currently, with the assistance of a library of rug books and periodicals, one can readily acquire a good basic understanding of the field. Indeed, it is this accumulation of more complete information that requires a greatly expanded and updated basic guidebook. In making this fresh attempt to present an overview of the field, the focus will be upon producing a volume that may serve as a reference for both the general reader and the serious rug student. Consequently it cannot focus solely upon those rugs considered by connoisseurs to be the great masterpieces of the art, but it must also include a representative sampling of the commercial rugs that have ordinarily constituted the bulk of rug production at any given time. A basic guidebook must, to some extent, present good examples of the typical as well as the exceptional.

As before, there is an emphasis on identifying the source of a rug. Since structural analysis is so important in determining where a rug was woven,

it will continue to be a focus of the book. While it is preferable to provide an analysis of each rug that is illustrated, in some cases the structural information was not available. There are also types of rugs in which each specimen is structurally so similar to every other example that it is more instructive to call attention to the exceptions with unusual structures than to provide essentially identical descriptions of the standard output. Rugs from the same group of workshops in a given city, for example, tend to be substantially alike in structure, so the omission of details for every piece is not an oversight but an attempt to reduce tedious repetition.

During the last several decades the meaning of the term “oriental carpet” has also undergone a subtle change to encompass not just knotted pile rugs, but kilims and other pileless fabrics as well. Some are used as floor covering, some have altogether different functions. There is good reason to take these flatwoven fabrics as seriously as pile weaves, as in some areas the pile fabrics are made for export while kilims are the indigenous art intended for local use. Nevertheless, the same volume cannot provide a sufficiently comprehensive coverage of both; so here the choice has been to concentrate on pile carpets, which are more practical as floor covering and also the focus of attention for the majority of collectors. The bibliographies include material on various flatweaves, about which the literature has enormously expanded during the last decade.

The improvement in the general level of rug scholarship has, however, precipitated several changes in format. More of an effort has been made to refer the reader to sources of additional information on specific topics. The footnotes will at times provide documentation for material that may be controversial or poorly understood, but they are primarily intended to help the reader in further research. Since there is a limit to the number of color plates any single book may have, reference is often made to rugs that have been published in color elsewhere, as well as to books that provide a more detailed text on specific points.

The list of suggested reading at the end of each section is in no way intended to be a comprehensive bibliography (such as those produced by Enay and Azadi<sup>5</sup> and George O'Bannon<sup>6</sup>). Some of the

most important early books are thus omitted because they are extremely rare and costly. Even some of the most useful recent books have been privately published in editions of less than 500 copies. Consequently, one cannot expect to find the greater part of the most valuable oriental rug literature in public libraries, and at times many of these books are difficult of access. Those books referred to here represent, for the most part, a compromise between availability and quality. Some are cited because their information is extremely important, even though their accessibility is limited.

In compiling this edition, the original author has benefited from the services of his son, Murray L. Eiland, III, who has recently obtained a doctorate in Near Eastern archaeology and has acquired specialized knowledge of scientific textile analysis and the evolution of early textile technologies. From this point, references will be to the "authors," in the plural, and they will pertain to both Eilands who have worked on this project.

To better prepare themselves for the task, the authors – during the summer of 1995 – made a journey across the rug weaving areas of the former Soviet Union into western China. For the most part this was territory that had seldom been reported firsthand in earlier publications, and it added a depth of observation on such places as Ashkhabad, Merv, Tedjend, Sarakhs, Samarkand, Bokhara, Almaty, and the oasis cities of the Takla Makan. These inquiries have resulted in a somewhat more critical view toward previous accounts of Turkmen weaving and more accurate accounts of non-Turkmen Central Asian rug production.

#### TERMINOLOGY AND SPELLING

Deciding upon a coherent, user-friendly terminology and spelling for this volume has involved many compromises, which guarantees that not everyone will be satisfied. Readers of previous works of the senior author will also notice that there have been some changes, and this requires an explanation.

The problem originates not only with different languages, but with different alphabets, which often involve sounds divergent enough from those associated with English that no exact written equivalent may be found. Various writers have attempted diverse solutions to representing the

sounds of Arabic, Farsi, and various Turkic languages, but there has been no general agreement. Wertime<sup>7</sup> has coherently described this problem, though his suggestions may not fully reflect the regional variations in the pronunciation of common words. The common reference works largely agree about place names, but they do not give approved versions of the names of obscure tribes, weaving techniques, or design elements. Also, there are many times when the authors have found it expedient to use non-standard forms of spelling, based upon usage and pronunciation they have heard on their travels, or to modify some terminology to make it more accessible to their readers. Even Persian words used in Central Asia, for example, may be given a characteristic local pronunciation.

The names of various western Anatolian towns have raised yet another question. In the old rug literature there were references to such places as Ghiordes and Oushak, although these same towns now appear on Turkish maps as Gördes and Uşak, complete with the markings the Turks have used in adapting the Latin alphabet to their own phonology. The diacritics in *ç* or *ş* give a sound like the English *ch* or *sh*, while umlauts have a similar use to those in German. A *c* in Turkish is pronounced like an English *j*. In previous works of the senior author the forms found in earlier rug books were often used, but here the Turkish alphabet will be employed for Turkish words, with few exceptions, as there is now a larger group of potential readers familiar with Turkey and its culture. The town formerly written as "Mudjar" is thus listed now as "Mucur." A letter like an undotted *i* (as in *halı*, the word for "carpet") is pronounced like the *u* in "sodium." The Turkish alphabet also includes a dotted *i* even in capital letters, as in Istanbul, a form the authors have decided not to use. Similarly trade terms, such as "Mejedieh," of Turkish origin but used primarily by Western dealers, will similarly not employ the Turkish alphabet, nor will the country name "Turkey" be written as "Türkiye."

There are numerous other problems with place names, however. The authors recently noted in Ashkhabad, the capital of Turkmenistan, that four different spellings of this city appeared on government buildings alone. In sound these ranged from Ashkabad to Ashgabat, with the latter being the



best approximation to the most common pronunciation by local Turkmen, though the local Russians have another way of saying it. The term “Turkmen” itself is a problem. In previous work of the senior author, “Turkoman” has been used, a form often heard in Turkey, but not in the way it is pronounced by Turkmen in Turkmenistan. The authors have, indeed, listened attentively for a third syllable in the way the Turkmen of Turkmenistan pronounce their name for themselves. Almost always there is no trace of a middle syllable, an observation that will be reflected here. A change is also being made from “Yomud” to “Yomut,” although both pronunciations may be encountered among people of this tribe. At times the word is pronounced in such a manner as to make the final consonant something between the *d* and *t* sounds.

As for the multitude of terms for minor Turkmen design motifs and woven artifacts, there is a steady change in fashion from year to year. Thus “osmolduk” has changed to “asmalyk,” and there has recently been a claim that the small bag previously called an “ok bash” should now be called an “ook bash.” The authors have chosen forms that take into consideration their best information on local pronunciation and what has previously appeared in the rug literature. This is complicated by the fact that pronunciation may differ from one region to the next. The people we call “Kurds” are called “Kürt” in western Turkey and “Kordi” in most parts of Iran.

Pinyin, the system of writing Chinese characters in the Latin alphabet, as adopted by the People’s Republic of China in 1979, is used in most contexts, but the authors have opted for a certain inconsistency by retaining the previous spelling for the names of emperors and for quotes from earlier literature. Peking and Tientsin thus become Beijing and Tianjin. The authors have decided not to use Pinyin forms for Tibetan and Xinjiang place names, but have retained spelling better reflecting pronunciation by the local peoples.

The overall intent has been to chart a path that does not introduce artificial or unnecessary barriers between the material and the readers’ understanding. To avoid confusion, we have at times been inclined to maintain spellings and terms consistent with much of the rest of the rug literature, which is

no mean accomplishment in a world of creative spellers. Some years ago the senior author noted four different spellings of the word “Chaudor” in the same issue of *Hali*, and all were plausible approximations. On our map of Central Asia, we will use the spelling “Tashkent,” although we know that the people there pronounce it “Toshkent.” We have rejected spellings such as “Qazaq” and “Qazaqstan,” after noting the local use of “Kazakh” and “Kazakhstan” during our visit there. We have also decided not to mark the long vowels on words which are transliterated from Farsi, as it is difficult to see how this will make them more accessible to our readers.

One may find the Iranian city of Isfahan also spelled as “Esfahan,” with approximately the same sound, but “Ispahan” is simply not the way it is pronounced in Iran. Indeed, transliteration of words from Farsi has led to many problems, as the Arabic alphabet in which it is written includes sounds that do not completely match those of any western European language. Even with solid information and the best intentions, it is possible to miss the mark when one compares the various English transliterations with the way many words are pronounced locally. One author,<sup>8</sup> for example, after criticizing the forms used by other writers of rug books, chooses the word “Torkaman,” a spelling apparently based upon written forms in Farsi and suggesting a pronunciation that would be puzzling to the Turkmen of Turkmenistan.

There are situations in which the authors have opted for a type of precision even at the risk of confusion. To refer to a person as Turkish, as the word is most commonly used, implies that he is a citizen of Turkey. We thus refer to the majority population of Turkmenistan, for example, not as Turkish, but as Turkic peoples. There are some who would question use of the word “Persia” in referring to the modern nation of Iran. Although the former term may be technically construed either as obsolete or as having some regional connotation, the Iranians themselves, along with much of the West, have retained the word for carpet-related subjects. The recent conferences in Tehran, for example, were called by the Iranians themselves the Grand International Conferences and Exhibitions of Persian Rugs.

## TECHNICAL TERMS

The few basic terms defined below are those essential to an understanding of the structural material presented in this book. In each case a more thorough explanation is included in the chapter on construction.

**WARP** The threads that run from one end of the loom to the other, usually in the long dimension of the fabric, around which the pile knots are tied. The warps are held taut by the beams of the loom and, when cut, the loose warp ends form the fringe.

**WEFT** The threads that run across the width of the loom, perpendicular to the warps, with which they interlace. The weft is not attached directly to the loom. Each passage of the weft is referred to as a “shoot,” and there may be a number of shoots after each row of knots. The weft usually runs across the short dimension of the fabric.

**PILE** The cut ends of the pile knots, which project from the rug. Rugs without pile are known as flatweaves.

**KNOTS** The process of wrapping yarn around the warps to form a pile is known as knotting. There are two basic types of knot commonly used in areas where rugs are woven. The symmetrical knot (also referred to as the Turkish or Gördes knot) is used in Turkey, the Caucasus, northwestern Iran, and by some Turkmen groups. The asymmetrical knot (also referred to as the Persian or Senneh knot) is used in most of Iran, in the majority of Turkmen rugs, and in China. These are illustrated in figure 20, along with variants. The country names are misleading, as the so-called Turkish knot may be used in Iran and vice versa.

**KNOT COUNT** The number of knots per square inch or square decimeter describes the fineness of the rug. The total is obtained by multiplying the vertical by the horizontal knot count.

**SPIN** The manner in which fibers are twisted together to form a yarn (see figure 19). Yarns may be spun either clockwise or counter-clockwise, and they may be described as Z- or S-spun, depending upon whether the fibers are inclined in the direction of the diagonal stroke of the S or the Z. The yarns used in rugs depicted in this book, with the exception of those from North Africa, are all Z-spun.

**PLY** The manner in which single strands of yarn are twisted together to form a thicker, stronger yarn. The ply is also described as either S or Z, but with rare exceptions the ply is in the opposite direction from the spin. Plied yarns in the rugs depicted in this book are, again excepting those of North Africa, S-plied. Some multiple-strand yarns, particularly for the pile or weft, show a virtually undetectable twisting together, which may be unintentional.

**SELVAGE** A woven edge finish formed either from the wefts as they turn back to recross the rug, or from additional yarns incorporated to protect the exposed wefts.

Throughout this book, the authors provide substantial information about the finer points of carpet structure because these are often important in distinguishing one type from another. Types of knot, number of wefts between the rows of knots, and various types of edge and end finishes provide clues as to where a given rug was woven. Although carpet scholars recognize the importance of this material, the literature today suggests that in reality it is being taken less rather than more seriously. Many of the most important rug books published during the last five years provide no structural information at all (including the works by Kirchheim and Alexander listed in the bibliography). Also, despite some sporadic discussion on the subject, there is still no standardized form of representing structure in print.

The authors have considered various ways to revitalize this important area, or to present it in a fashion least likely to bore the general reader. In his previous work the senior author tried to avoid all shorthand notations and to spell out the basic elements of structure in a simple vocabulary, but even that became extremely repetitive and probably counterproductive for many readers. Consequently we have now attempted to provide a simpler format without any loss of information. Since every rug illustrated in this book – with the exception of those from North Africa – has Z-spun yarns, and the ply is always counter to the spin and thus in the S direction, this information is omitted from the analyses. North African rugs with S-spun yarns will be noted specifically.



## CHAPTER 1

*Anatolia**Safavid Persia**Moghul India**The Caucasus**Eighteenth-century production**A note on dating*

## Origins

## and

## Early

## History

The structural materials of carpets are more perishable than those of sculpture and architecture, while carpets themselves are customarily subjected to harsher use than are paintings, for example. As a result, there is a much smaller legacy of specimens from the past than with other art forms, and our ability to trace historical developments is therefore severely limited. Consequently, only the vaguest evolutionary outline exists, and the origins of rug making must remain a subject for speculation. As with many indigenous arts, the carpet's history has been virtually ignored by its native cultures. Efforts to piece together fragments of the story have come mostly from the West and have been made only in comparatively recent times.

Although this book relates primarily to rugs from the last two centuries, some historical perspective is necessary to view the nineteenth-century reawakening of foreign interest in the oriental rug and the great expansion of oriental carpet weaving that was stimulated by it. The authors will here provide a brief account of current theories as to how, why, and possibly where the pile carpet came into existence, tracing the broad outline of its theorized development up to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when its role in the culture of the Safavid, Moghul, and Ottoman courts is known.

Either of two approaches may be taken to explain why the carpet came into existence. Probably most popular is the suggestion that the first carpets were made by pastoral nomads, who differ from