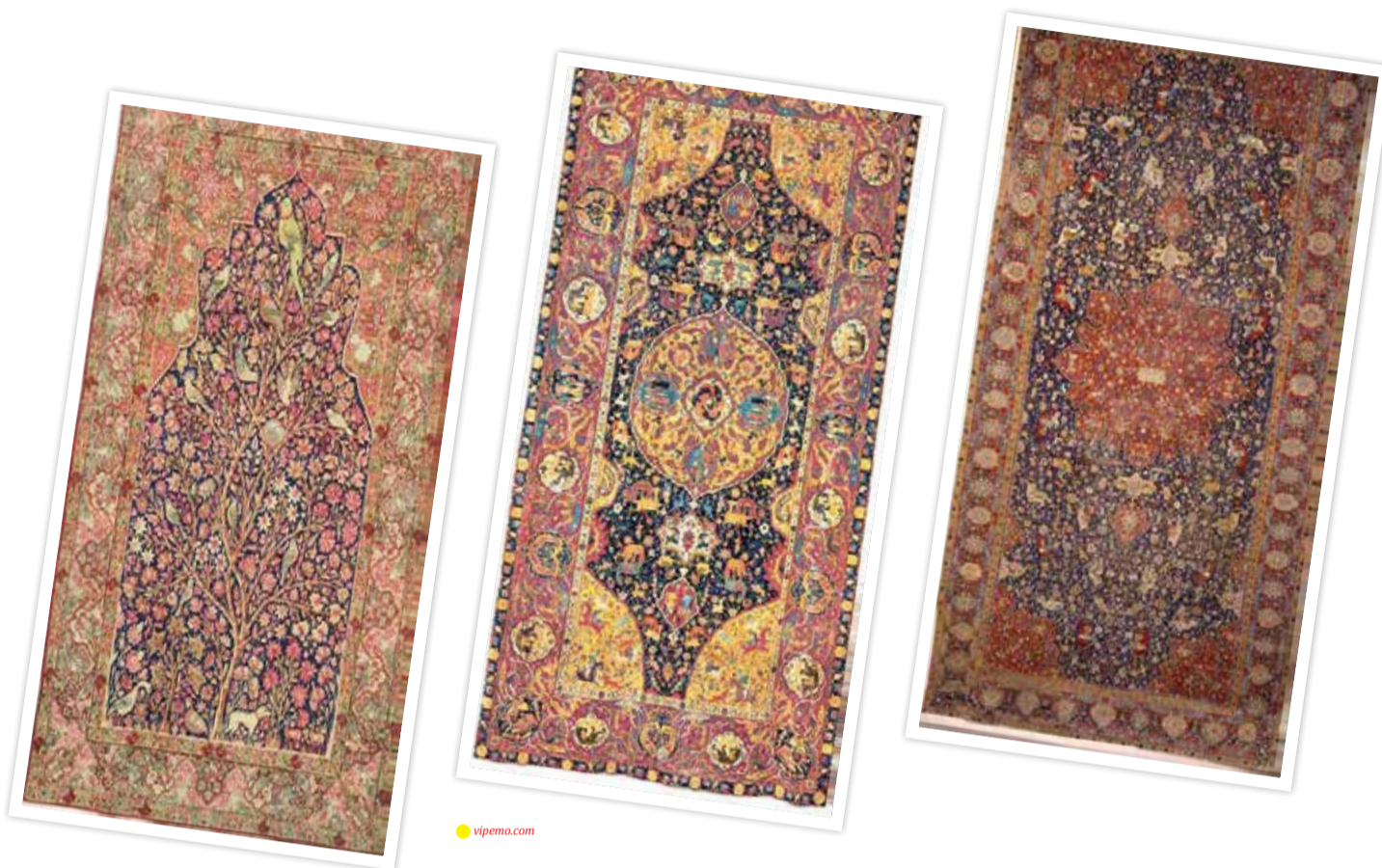


Isfahan carpets in the Safavid era



While architecture and painting were the main artistic vehicles of the Safavids, the making of textiles and carpets were also of great importance. In the 16th century, hitherto primarily nomadic crafts were transformed into royal industries by the creation of court workshops. The best known carpets of this period, dated 1539 CE, come from the Mausoleum of Sheikh Safi al-Din in Ardebil and, in the opinion of many experts, represent the summit of achievement in carpet design, vipemo.com wrote. The larger of the two is now kept in London's Victoria and Albert Museum, while the other can be seen at the Los Angeles County Museum.

Shah Tahmasb admired carpets so much that he learned weaving techniques and designed several very refined models himself.

Under Shah Abbas, artists developed the use of gold and silver threads in carpets, culminating in the great coronation carpet now held in the Rosenberg Castle in Copenhagen. As one would expect, the carpets made for Abbas the Great were large in scale and grandiose in design.

The "vase" pattern, also called Shah Abbasi, contains great palmettes, huge leaves, flower-strewn meadows, and sometimes animals. The so-called "Polonaise" carpets, most of which have found their

way to Europe, are enriched with threads of silk, gold covered silver, and silver.

The predominantly geometric themes of earlier Iranian carpets were not abandoned entirely, but tended to be replaced by the plant, animal, and occasional human themes; medallions and Shah Abbasi flowers are the most usual motifs.

The Safavid carpets are also characterized by arabesque tendrils, and margins in colors which contrast with those of the center. Modern Isfahan carpets are characterized by a pale beige or light blue palette. However, sometimes as many as fifteen colors are used for contrast and outlines, includ-

ing several different shades of red. Both warp and weft are made of wool and cotton, though silk wefts are also found. Sometimes gold or silver threads are used for small highlights, recalling the early "Polonaise" rugs. Carpets vary in size, though large carpets are quite rare. Modern Isfahan carpets bear mostly the Shah Abbasi designs; patterns are very intricately drawn and precisely executed.

Among other carpets woven in Isfahan are Armani Bafs made by Christian Armenians with the Turkish knot, and Isfahan Mirs, nomads' carpets from the vicinity of Isfahan, also finely woven with the Turkish knot.

Dasht-e Rivas, a red gem on desert of Yazd Province

Iranica Desk

Dasht-e Rivas (Rhubarb Plain), extending in an area of 76.6 hectares, is the only habitat of rhubarb plant in Yazd Province and one of the few in Iran.

The plain is located 60km from the provincial capital city of Yazd, in the southwest of Kalmard Protected Area and west of Aliabad Dargazi region.

The distinctive vegetation of the plain, which lies next to numerous moorlands, depicts a beautiful landscape.



In the spring, when the plain turns green, the newly-grown leaves of rhubarb bushes spread across the plain, creating a unique landscape. This is while this area is a dry desert in other seasons of the year.

The growth of the plants is directly related to the amount of precipitation; in rainy years they are numerous, full of leaves with crimson, red and yellow flowers.

The unique plain has attracted the attention of people in recent years. A large number of tourists arrive in the area, especially in the spring, to enjoy its amazing landscapes and collect rhubarbs.

The region, with significant elevation differences, is a suitable habitat for various plant and animal species. The natural site was registered on Iran's National Heritage List in 2019.

All parts of the rhubarb plant are used for various purposes, for example, rhubarb stew is made from its stem which is rich in vitamins and minerals. The flower of the plant is also used in the cosmetics industry.

Rhubarb is a plant that has long, sour-tasting red and green stems that can be cooked and eaten as a fruit.

Old textile shows importance of maritime trade

A textile, dating back to Safavid Era, illustrates the importance of maritime trade and exchange with Europe, both themes so central that they increasingly found their way into the Safavids' visual world. The discovery of a sea route to India in the early sixteenth century permanently changed the economic and political equilibrium in the region and enabled a direct exchange with Europe without having to travel by land and stop off in territories belonging to the Ottoman Empire, for example.

The conquest of Gombroon/Bandar Abbas in 1614-15 by Shah Abbas I ended the dominion of the Portuguese in the Persian Gulf. Its expansion into an important trading centre ultimately enabled maritime trade under the Safavids to flourish.

The fragment shown here has two complete pattern units and other truncated ones. Each of them consists of a large sailing boat under which two smaller rowing boats are placed diagonally. The individual pattern units are arranged in alternating rows and the

areas between them enlivened with ducks and jumping fish.

The large sailing boat has a central mast, which simultaneously forms the mirror axis of the entire scene, making the boat appear to have two fore-castles.

Topped by small fluttering flags, these look like pavilions. A sitting figure can be discerned in the doorway of one of them, while a man holding an oar with both hands stands to the left or right of the mast. Behind him flies a larger flag.

He is dressed in a belted jacket, trousers and

boots; his headgear identifies him as a European. Portuguese and Dutch wearing similar hats appear on Portuguese carpets and paintings from the sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth century. The mast is crowned with an architectural element, perhaps a crow's nest.

The two rowing boats depicted diagonally beneath the sailing boat are also mirror images and show two men sitting in the bows and the stern as well as a standing rower. The clothing of the man in the stern has been interpreted as Indian

on account of the scarf thrown over the shoulder.

The double weave exhibits an extraordinary wealth of detail with elaborate renderings of ducks' feathers, the decoration of the boats and their flags. The potential monotony of a strictly symmetrical composition is broken up by the diagonal depiction of the rowing boats and the freely swimming ducks and fish.

Many other fragments of this originally very large textile are to be found in museums and collections in Europe and the United States.



The above is a lightly edited version of part of a chapter entitled, 'The Safavid Era - A Sense of Place' from a book entitled, 'Iran, Five Millennia of Art and Culture', edited by Ute Franke, Ina Sarikhani Sandmann and Stefan Weber, published by Museum of Islamic Art. The photo was taken from the book.