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The pelt and the origin of the prayer rug

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Welcome, **Filiberto Boncompagni**.
 You last visited: April 20th, 2014 at 08:59 PM
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Virtual Show and Tell Just what the title says it is.



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April 6th, 2014, 01:20 PM

#61

[Filiberto Boncompagni](#)
 Administrator

Join Date: May 2008
 Location: Cyprus
 Posts: 60



Hi Martin,

Quote:

A degression but here according to the source two jewish dervishes: Agha-Jaan Darvish and his brother, patriarchs of the Darvish family. Tehran, Iran, c.1922. (Image source: Esther's Children²⁰⁰¹, edited by Houman Sarshar.) Interesting that even jewish tradition ain't as monolithic as one might think in this:

Perhaps they were Jewish/Nestorian dervishes.



Regards,

Filiberto



April 6th, 2014, 02:37 PM

#62

[Martin Andersen](#)
 Members

Join Date: Jul 2008
 Posts: 56



Hi Horst and All

This thread is already very long, but still kind of focused around the Anatolian prayer rugs and a possible iconographic influence from the pelts. Perhaps this tread should have been named "The red Anatolian payer rugs and a possible influence from pelts", but thats rather long 😊

So Horst if you would like to generally discuss the Christian/Jewish cultural background of the oriental rugs it might be better to start a new thread, or perhaps even a salon? We all know its a highly interesting (and because of Volkmar Gantzhorn slightly explosive) topic.

all the best
 Martin



April 6th, 2014, 10:31 PM

#63

[Horst Nitz](#)
 Members

Join Date: Feb 2013
 Posts: 24



Hi Martin,

I'll stay dead focussed. Next post I'll pick up your valuable comment on the 'distinctive jagged border articulation along the niches.'

Best, Horst



April 13th, 2014, 12:28 PM

#64

[Martin Andersen](#)

Members

Join Date: Jul 2008
Posts: 56

Hi All

There is no doubt that snow leopard and snow tiger furs and pelts must have been highly prestigious objects in altaic culture:

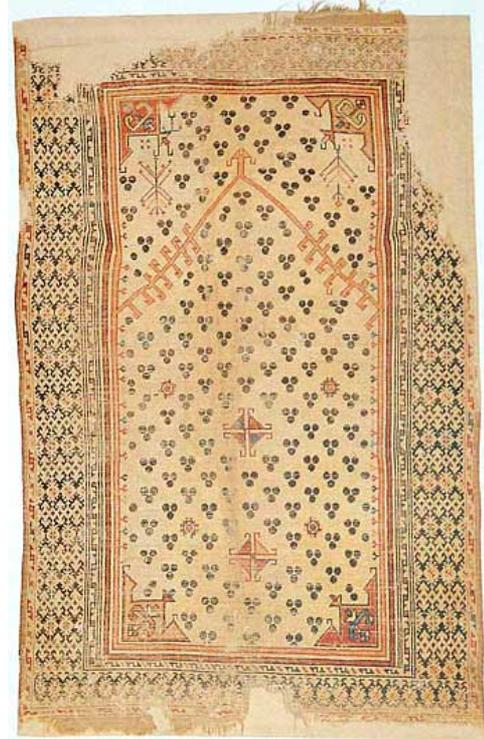


We have before discussed the very interesting cintamani motif in this tread

http://www.turkotek.com/misc_00126/cloudband.htm

And to me the article by Gerad Paquin in Hali issue 64 convincingly points out the merging of the patterns of leopard and tiger into a combined pattern used for example in the luxurious ottoman silk kaftans.

The white field cintamani prayer rugs are obviously related to this:



Here an orientalist drawing from 1855 of a dervish with a snow leopard pelt:



And the Timurid miniature with the snow leopard pelt and the rosary (the rosary of course clearly indicating prayer or meditation):



Any specific symbolic content may of course be speculatively discussed endlessly, but to me personally this kind of wraps it up: formally there is a fascinating historic relation between the pelt and the Anatolian prayer/niche rug 😊

best Martin

Last edited by Martin Andersen; April 13th, 2014 at 12:38 PM.



April 16th, 2014, 06:02 PM

#65

Guido_Engel

Guest

Posts: n/a



Hi all,

the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Turkey edited 5 catalogs on Anatolian rugs. One of them has a pelt design. Here is the description of this Bergama rug (18th. century):

"The pelt and oil lamps indicate that the rug was woven as a gift for a mosque. The use of pelt motif on rugs, which implies the "Central Asian animal style", may be related to the tradition of pledging animals as votive offerings. Pelt motif may be used to symbolize such offerings, as well as the expectation of wealth according to the myth of golden pelt."

Guido



April 16th, 2014, 06:24 PM

#66

[Horst Nitz](#)

Members

Join Date: Feb 2013
Posts: 24



Hi Martin,

am I understanding you correctly, in that you are proposing three major contributaries in the formation of prayer rugs: a sheep skin or pelt dyed red for enhanced spiritual quality, a snow leopard pelt with a spiritual connotation as indicated by a derwish meditating or praying on it in a Timurid era miniature; fitted into the template in the shape of a prayer niche, they constitute the red type prayer rug and the Cintamani / Selendi type (Selendi after the small town in West Anatolia were those white grounded rugs these days are thought to originate from) ?

Regards,

Horst



April 17th, 2014, 09:14 AM

#67

[Martin Andersen](#)

Members

Join Date: Jul 2008
Posts: 56



Hi Guido and Horst

Guido, is the Bergama you refer to the same as the Cintamani niche rug from post #64? if not is there a chance you could post an image? (The Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Turkey 5 volume series were online but I can't locate it. And putting in the myth of the golden pelt/fleece is rather speculatively bold of the Ministry 😊)

And Horst, I might have been a bit unclear, but my suggesting is still simply that the motif of the pelt at some point may have merged with the motif of the niche in some of the Anatolian rugs. And the Cintamani niche rugs, because of their to me obvious animal pattern, directly supports that such a merger is not unthinkable. Generally I would still think the architectural motif in itself to be the main motif in the prayer/niche rugs. But sufi/dervishes over all the islamic area seem to have had as one of their religious paraphernalia the pelt (not only sheep or snow leopard), and in some places as in the Mevlana/Rumi Konya tradition a red colored sheep skin had and still have a prominent place in their religious prayer practice. This to me seems directly related to the Anatolian red niche rugs - and visible in the specific details of the drawings and border patterns of the rugs niches, which clearly sometimes differs a lot from what we know in the architecture of both the Mihrabs and other niches. The prayer/niche rugs are figurative rugs, even in details like lamps and evers which are sometimes reduced to very simple signs and patterns, my point is that for example some of the border patterns of the niche may originate in the figuration of the pelt.



Merger of motives and patterns from multiple sources is as we all know one of the basic

dynamics in the continuous transformation of the rugs, and apart from any specific religious connotations I personally find the possible merger of pelt and architectural niche formally fascinating in itself.

best Martin

Last edited by Martin Andersen; April 17th, 2014 at 12:41 PM.



April 17th, 2014, 10:47 AM

#68

[Martin Andersen](#)

Members

Join Date: Jul 2008
Posts: 56



And I am of course aware that there is no proof in this, but where do I find a niche or a mihrab with a pronounced jagged border like this, especially in the lower section/the floor ?



best Martin

Last edited by Martin Andersen; April 17th, 2014 at 12:42 PM.



April 17th, 2014, 10:59 PM

#69

[Horst Nitz](#)

Members

Join Date: Feb 2013
Posts: 24



Hi Martin,

thanks a lot, its clear now. I am working on my bid and it won't take long now.

Best,

Horst



April
19th, 2014,
03:48 PM

#70

[Horst Nitz](#)

Members

Join Date:
Feb 2013
Posts: 24



Hi Martin,

thanks for the explanation. As it looks, we'll find ourselves in the luxurious position of having two perspectives on the origin of prayer rugs. For the time being I'll concentrate on mine.

Islam is the most recent of the established world religions, and a lot of history had happened already when it emerged into an ongoing play. The stage was set before, and this is strongly felt, when meditating on the origin of prayer rugs. Let's for a moment turn again to the lamp or candelabrum and to sura 24:35:

"Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The similitude of His light is as a niche wherein is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as it were a shining star. (This lamp is) kindled from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would almost glow forth (of itself)

though no fire touched it. Light upon light. Allah guideth unto His light whom He will. And Allah speaketh to mankind in allegories, for Allah is Knower of all things.”

This sounds familiar to western ears as well, and in fact, this sura is preceded by more than thousand years by psalm 119:105:

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

(Jewish Bible; English Standard Version ESV)

and 2 Samuel 22:29:

For you are my lamp, O LORD, and my God lightens my darkness. (Bible; ESV)

God commanded that a lamp filled with the purest oil of olives should always burn in the Tabernacle of the Testimony without the veil and gave very detailed instructions (Exodus 27:20, 21).

This shows the ancient synagogue with lamp / candelabrum / ner tamid under the gable in the Beth Alpha mosaic:



More on the ner tamid tradition: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanctuary_lamp

Let's look at two exhibits at the Islamic Arts Department in Berlin, both obvious prayer niches – or not?

http://www.discoverislamicart.org/database_item.php?id=object;ISL;de;Mus01;19;en

and:

http://www.discoverislamicart.org/database_item.php?id=object;ISL;de;Mus01;32;en

The second exhibit is more recent, but seems to stand in an older tradition. This becomes even more apparent, when we take into account the niche in one of the 3rd c Dura-Europos synagogue mural's as well :

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/64/Dura_Synagogue_ciborium.jpg

In comparison, again, the 18th curtain embroidery for Muhammad's tomb in Medina:

http://s149.photobucket.com/user/martinerikandersen/media/prayer%20rugs%20animal%20pelt/Sitarah_zpse708ea9b.jpg.html

Also from Dura-Europos, an early example of the usage of the colour red to indicate intense spiritual energy (the Israelites worshipping the golden calf – not burning it, sic !)

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1b/Dura_Europos_fresco_worshipping_gold_calf.jpg

Summing it up, we seem to have an architectural tradition of decorative recesses in a religious context, that precedes Islam. But it seems, that the specific sacral function transferred on it that makes it a prayer niche, is an Islam specific creation. And we have a tradition of prayer rugs based on the design of a prayer niche of course, even if the type is rarely observed in prayer. This may be so, because a prayer rug is not mandatory. And that it isn't mandatory, may be so for the practical reason, that one isn't always at hand when needed. When meditating about the origin of the prayer rug, another circumstance moves into focus, that may play in to. This type of rug, especially in its kelim variant, may be older than the prayer niche, much older probably, as it turns out.

Regards,

Horst



April 19th, 2014, 07:03 PM

#71

Guido_Engel

Guest

Posts: n/a



Hi Martin,

Here is a picture.



I bought an old Obruk kelim fragment this week with a "dragon(?)" design I hadn't seen before. So I borrowed the catalogs from my brother and saw this pelt rug. With the exception of the last two lines it is an interesting idea.

Guido



April 20th, 2014, 08:42 AM

#72 □

[Martin Andersen](#)

Members

Join Date: Jul 2008
Posts: 56



Thanks Guido, that sure is a good pelt rug candidate, I would personally turn it upside-down, getting the head on top 😊.

Regarding rugs as gifts for mosques its my understanding that they were generally given as floor coverings (which in some cases were never removed but covered with new rugs, creating layers of rugs. Thats how the Seldjuk rugs were found in Konya) and I suppose as rugs on the floor in the mosques they inevitably have been used for prayers. But no doubt that there may have been a lot of local variations in customs in this



The discussion of whether or not niche rugs were used for prayer is a small digression but I just found a sample more:



The Mughal emperor Aurangzeb performing Salat 18th.

And Horst, I sure agree that the main motif of the prayer/niche rugs is architectural, basically the mihrab. The origin of the Mihrab sure is interesting in itself (its etymologically seems unclear but may derive from "throne", and in the Quran its simply Muhammads private prayer chamber), as a religious niche or recesses I suppose one could trace it back all the way to altars or ossuaries from neolithic time. And surely no doubt that islam and the Quran historical is based on other religious thinking, and its logical that the mihrab may have taken specific aesthetics from converted churches and synagogues, both from images and architecture, and the Beth Alpha mosaic is fantastic. The reason why sura 24:35 is interesting here is that it combines the image of niche, lamp and tree (and perhaps even evers, if they could be thought to contain oil) into a singular aniconistic image and thus may be a simple *and* very direct islamic source for the

conventionalization of the main iconography of the prayer/niche rugs. My point in this thread has been trying to point out that the pelt via its use as a prayer mat or religious paraphanelia in islamic context (even though it certainly may predate it) may have slipped itself into the background of this image 😊

Best Martin

Last edited by Martin Andersen; April 20th, 2014 at 09:56 AM.



April 20th, 2014, 08:53 AM

#73

[Martin Andersen](#)

Members

Join Date: Jul 2008
Posts: 56



Steve and Filiberto, could I ask you to rename this thread to "The pelt and the origin of the prayer rug"?- my mistake from the beginning
best Martin



April 20th, 2014, 09:11 AM

#74

[Martin Andersen](#)

Members

Join Date: Jul 2008
Posts: 56



Here a closeup from the scanning below:



I am not familiar with this specific layout, but also a very interesting candidate for a pelt rug. If anyone has the name or other samples of this type it would be much appreciated.
best Martin

Last edited by Martin Andersen; April 20th, 2014 at 10:08 AM.



April 20th, 2014, 10:20 AM

#75

[Filiberto Boncompagni](#)

Administrator

Join Date: May 2008
Location: Cyprus
Posts: 60



Hi Martin,

We don't have the option to rename a thread, in the vBulletin software.

But I think we could create a new thread with the "The pelt and the origin of the prayer rug" title then merge the two. What do you think, Steve?

Regards,
Filiberto



April 20th, 2014, 02:19 PM

#76

[Steve Price](#)

Administrator

Join Date: May 2008
Posts: 62

Behold!



It can be split, too, if that's Martin's preference.

Steve Price



April 20th, 2014, 02:54 PM

#77

[Lloyd Kannenberg](#)

Members

Join Date: Jul 2009
Posts: 3

Hello Martin and all,

The rug in your most recent scan looks to me something like a Karapinar. Notice the "arrowheads" in the upper spandrels. Mae Beattie called these spandrels "cloud corners".

Cheers!

Lloyd



April 20th, 2014, 03:33 PM

#78

[Martin Andersen](#)

Members

Join Date: Jul 2008
Posts: 56

Thanks Steve and Filiberto - Pelt in the title should be enough to keep the focus 😊

And thanks Lloyd, it was actually the spandrels I were about to look into. Its interesting whether they should be seen a singular foreground corner patterns - or as background for the medallion (and I would of course say in some cases the pelt motif), they are probably variations of both.

Some of the Ushak medallion rugs are directional, a hanging lamp (and small rams horn) in only one end of the medallion. to me this medallion makes more sense as originating in the pelt than in a double niche



Ushak 16th.

And this fragment sure also is interesting, the strange fraying white lines in the red (haven't seen this elsewhere) and the large rams horned ending of the medallion also again makes me think depiction of red pelt:



17th Anatolian

best Martin



April 20th, 2014, 08:18 PM

#79

Guido_Engel

Guest

Posts: n/a



Hi Martin,

Possibly the direction depends on the "person" you want to contact (heaven or the underworld with the ancestors). It would be interesting to know the author's opinion. Below the pelt is turned around for you.

But now the serious informations: in the five catalogs 600 Anatolian rugs are shown. There are quite a lot with a red niche from all Anatolian areas, but only a small number with a pelt design all of them from the Western part (one from the Konya area).

Looking at the pelt below one could reflect on the question if the hexagon is its simplified form.





Guido



April 20th, 2014, 10:26 PM

#80

[Martin Andersen](#)

Members

Join Date: Jul 2008
Posts: 56



Hi Guido

Regarding the upside-down some of the prayer/niche rugs seems to have serious issues with this, f.ex upside-down evers hanging were the lamp should be, and plants growing downwards 😊



Apart from obscure symbolic interpretations (which I will not enter ☹) I am not quite sure how one can explain this, in a rug as good as this I find it hard to see it as an error. One could perhaps relate it to the double niche rugs, and that these rugs were made for view on the floor without an ambition of depicting perspective space in our sense of the notion - without fixed vertical orientation (the orientation towards mecca being horizontal, not vertical) - Well, on second thought, flowers growing from heaven towards earth might not be that obscure.

And the unambiguous pelt design rugs are very few, we may already have most of them in this thread. But if one accepts a possible merger of the pelt design with the niche and the medallion then the number raises. You might be right in looking for the motif in more simplified forms like the hexgone you have posted, it is tempting but of course even more speculative and would for me personally be difficult to substantiate.

best
Martin

Last edited by Martin Andersen; April 20th, 2014 at 10:37 PM.



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