

Armenian Rugs

The Armenians are one of the most ancient peoples of the world. Their arts date back to thousands of years. However, the Armenian arts, as, such, took their own national features in the period of the Armenian Middle Ages thanks to the development of architecture, music, literature, fine arts and the applied arts (jewellery, pottery, rug and carpet making).

Still way back in the Middle Ages the rug, already turned into a profitable commodity, had brought worldwide fame to the Armenian rug-making art and its glory keeps shining in the world market to this day.

The rug makers of Soviet Armenia are the bearers of the age-old traditions of the Armenian classical rugs and carpets. Having renovated that ancient art, they are now enriching it with new motifs, introducing new ideas, new styles and means of expression into it, technically perfecting the art of rug-making.

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In the territory of Armenia some remnants of carpets I have been discovered at the grave-yard of the village of Artik (XIV-IX B. C.). A fragment of a carpet reminds of the so-called jejim-carpet with the swastika symbolizing water and snake. It was for this motif that the Armenian rugs were called dragon-rugs by foreign scientists. Both these motifs have been persistently predominant in all the branches of the Armenian medieval arts-architecture, jewellery, pottery, rug-making, needle-work, etc.

In Yerevan, at the Karmir Bloor (VIII-VII B. C.) clews of dyed wool and various types of woven fabrics have been discovered. The ornaments of murals, the compositions and the harmony of red and blue colours of Arin-Berd (Yerevan) have almost been transferred to the rug-making of our days.

At Karmir Bloor a flaxen strip of carpet was discovered, dating back to the VII c. B. C. The fabric of this strip of carpet and the Armenian carpet are absolutely the same. Another find discovered here was a piece of piled carpet.

Sargon II, the king of Assyria (722-705 B.C.) when plundering the Temple of Mousasir had also taken motley textiles and flaxen clothes. In Sargon's inscription (7.14 B.C.) there is mention of 130 multicolour clothes, flaxen dresses and especially of a great number of sheep flocks (up to 100 thousand) all looted from Urartu.

The historian Herodotus (485-425 B.C.) informs us that "the inhabitants of the Caucasus dyed the wool with a number of plants having dyeing qualities and they used it to make woven fabrics covered with drawings which never lose their brilliant colour ..."

In the second half of the IV century the Persian King Shapuh forced 131 thousand Armenian families, mostly urban citizens, artisans, out of Armenia into Persia. As a result, the economic life, the handicrafts and arts in our country experienced a heavy set-back, and it was only after two centuries that the economic life began to flourish again.

The Arab historians mention that in the 80s of the VIII century the taxes levied from Armenia included 20 rugs. In 911, the caliph had been given a rug, "60X60 kangoons" (an Armenian measure) in size, on which the Armenian masters had worked for ten years.

The Bulgarian king Krum (A. 0.813-814) in captivating the Armenian inhabitants of Adrianople had at the same time looted a great number of Armenian rugs. The Armenian population of that town was forced out of Karin (in 590) by the Byzantine emperor Morik (Morick) .

During the reign of the Armenian Bagratides (IX- XI centuries) thanks to the large-scale trade relations carried out the countries under Arab domination and influence, the Armenian rugs were glorified over a large territory stretching from the Kama kingdom

of Bulgaria to Turkmenia, from Baghdad to Constantinople.

Ibn-Haukal in his "Book of Travels" (977-978) gives preference to the silk textiles of Dabil (Dvin) compared with those made in Rumium (Byzantium) .

An unknown Arab geographer of the X century characterizes the Armenian rugs by the word **kali**. According to his data, the Armenians living in Khoi, Berkri, Arjesh, Khlat, Nakhichevan, Bitlis and other towns produced "kali carpets and carpets". By the "kalicarpet" he surely had in mind the piled carpets.

The Ambassador of the Arab caliphate Ibn Tadmur testifies that in the first half of the X century the Armenians were busy in trading and making rugs in the Volga basin. The ground space under the enormous tent of the Bulgarian king of Kama, which could seat a thousand people, was entirely covered with Armenian rugs. The Armenians were busy here not only in trading but also in handicrafts.

In a Georgian source (XI c.) we are informed of the "Armenian tapasta" (rug).

Yakoot, an Arab historian of the XIII century (1178- 1229) wrote: "The Armenians make huge rugs in the town of Van. The rugs made in Kalikali (Karin) were called 'kali' after the name of the town".

As a result of the policy carried out by the Byzantine Emperors the Armenian municipalities along with the urban population were gradually forced to move into the inner parts of the Empire. This weakened the country and made easy Seljuks invasion. These deportations took a massive nature later on during the Turkish-Seljuk and Mongolian-Tatar invasions. In such conditions, rug and carpet-making was carried out only by people settled in the impregnable mountains.

Marco Polo, the Italian traveler (XIII c.) passing through Turkmenia (the name given to the Turkish-Seljuk state of Cappadocia in the XI-XIV centuries) commented: "The Armenians and Greeks in the three major towns of Konya (Ikonio), Kaiseri (Kesaria) and Sivas (Sebastia) made the most beautiful and finest rugs". The Armenians of those three towns had been deported in the first half of the X.I century from Vaspurakan, Ani, Kars. In the XI century Armenian colonies were founded in Egypt as well, where the Armenians continued making rugs. In addition, the Armenians were also making rugs in the Ukrainian, Polish, Bulgarian, Rumanian and Hungarian Armenian colonies.

According to the Russian historians Karamzin and Glinka, the first Armenian colony in Kiev, founded in the early 60s of the XI century, had grown into a large settlement by the end of the next century. Here the Armenians were busy in jewellery, sericulture and rug-making. By the example of the Armenian commercial inns, later on other Armenian colonies began to appear in Astrakhan, Nor-Nakhichevan, Theodosia, Moscow and Petersburg. The Armenian traders in Nor-Jugha acquiring facilities in Persia and Russia especially from the Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich (1667 -1672) , began to expand trade over Russia on a large scale. The yearly turnover of the silk textiles and rugs exported from Persia into Russia and Europe constituted some 22 thousand bales. Interesting facts have been preserved on the Armenian traders of Cilicia, Cyprus, Western Armenia and Persia having established commercial ties with Europe over the Mediterranean. In the price list of the commodities exported from Cyprus to Florence from 1275-to 1330, one can find the price of the Armenian carpets, as well. Another source informs us that the Armenians (1340- 1354) were selling rugs in the square of the church of St. Donatien in Brugge. During this period (and perhaps even earlier) the Armenian commercial ships sailed to the shores of France, Spain, England and Holland.

In the period of the Crusades the commercial links with France grew stronger. In the XIII century the Armenian rugs in France were known as the "Saracen" rugs.

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In the Armenian manuscripts the word carpet (**carpet**) was first used in the translation of the Bible" (V.A.D.), whereas we find the word "**gorg**" in the XIII c. as a synonym to carpet. The Armenian linguist Grigor Ghapantsian was of the opinion that the Armenian word **gorg** originated from the Hittite-Armenian word-stock in the form of **koork**, **koorkas**. The linguist E. Sartvent explained that the **koork** was used as a cloth for covering horses or mules. By the way, in the Armenian villages as far back as the forties of the XX century horses could still be seen covered with such carpets, of which quite a number of samples are now preserved in the State History museum of Armenia There are other records and pictures concerning the Armenian rugs still preserved on

the Armenian medieval architectural memorials and on the frescos of churches. In the Armenian miniature art and murals we find rugs, ornamented cushions, coverlets and needlework shawls displaying the seated Virgin, Jesus Christ, the Apostles, the saints. The ornamental forms of the Armenian rugs and carpets are often repeated in the various ornamentations found in the miniatures of the Armenian manuscripts. Or, perhaps, one would better say they repeat and complete one another as elements of the common national art. The Armenian Catholicos Abraham Kretatsi (1735) has left behind a record testifying the importance of carpet and rug-making in the Armenian domestic life. He informs us that in the village of Khndzoresk a great many people had been making carpets and rugs. But, as the historian informs us painfully, the Turks came, massacred them and plundered everything they had. And only very few of the remaining people continued to make them. Now, after the age-old deprivations, that art of vital necessity has been restored again in this part of the country.

In the second half of the XIX century and the first fifteen years of the XX century, Armenia was a major rug exporter. The Armenian population in Turkey, Persia, Russia (and especially the Transcaucasus) took up the production of rugs and carpets with a new impetus. In Western Armenia there appeared workshops for silk-worm breeding and rug-making and people began to weave Armenian traditional rugs, carpets and other cloths.

In 1902, in Caesarea alone there were 2000 looms, and in its suburbs- 1500 (of which 700 in Kemerek and its suburbs). In Caesarea there was even a shop commission with its own rules and statutes. Both the workers and the head masters were Armenians. Its yearly output amounted to 10000 rugs (both silk and wool). The silk was supplied by the Armenian population of Brussa, the wool by that of Kyurin. The number of looms operating in Sebastia and Caesarea amounted to 10000, that of the workers-12000.

The Armenian rugs exported from Western Armenia (Turkey) were sold mainly in Europe and America where the products of Karin, Baberd, Manazkert, Moosh, Sassoon, Van, Akhtamar, Norshen, Vostan, Artskeh, Berkri, Moks, Shatakh, Akni, and other towns were given high prices.

In the towns of Eastern Armenia and the Transcaucasus - Kars, Yerevan, Olti, Surmalu, Kaghzvan, Karakilissa (now Kirovakan), Karvansara (Ijevan), Alexandropol (Gyumri), Akhalkalak, Akhaltsikha, Tiflis, Borchalu, Nakhichevan, Agulis, Gantsak (Kirovabad), Partev, Kazakh, Khuba (Kuba) this form of traditional Armenian art made also a new headway. In Shushi there even operated a rug-making workshop-school.

In the Iranian towns also with Armenian population there was a growing interest towards that art. Only in Tabriz there were already 10 rug-making Armenian workshops with mostly Armenian workers.

But the market suggests its own roles resulting in the appearance of elements of eclecticism in the techniques of the Armenian classical rugs. But the skilful weavers of traditional rugs endowed with their creative individuality continued to develop this unique and national art with their own innovations.

The first World War and the Armenian Genocide in Turkey (in 1915) utterly destroyed the national economy of Armenia. The remnants of the Armenian population survived from the Turkish yataghan found refuge in Syria, the Lebanon, Egypt, Greece, France, Italy, Iran and Russia. Western Armenia was completely emptied of its Armenian population. The entire property of the two million victims and the hundreds of thousands of refugees were bestially looted. During the years of the first World War and following the Armistice, the Armenian rugs and carpets looted by the Turks were especially sought after and highly priced in the home markets of Turkey and abroad, though under the label of Turkish rugs! Hunger and poverty, the flow of refugees resulting out of the I World War, threw out into the foreign markets enormous numbers of Armenian rugs and carpets. In 1918, according to eye-witnesses, from the district of Ijevan alone some 5000 rugs were sold at the most trifling prices, and another 3000 from Zanghezour found their way to Europe and America.

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From ancient times carpets and rugs have been regarded as a vital necessity in the Armenian domestic life. Probably it was the lack of wood as a building material that

made the people to cover the ground floors of palaces, public and ecclesiastical buildings with bast mats, mattings, carpets and rugs. In almost all the towns, villages or settlements of historical Armenia people used to make the so-called **jejims**, **house-flannels**, **coverlets**, **curtains**, **khurjins**, **blankets**, **salt-bags**, **horse-coverlets** and finally **carpets** and **rugs**. This type of handicraft was so strongly linked with the domestic life of the people that it had become a necessity for every family. The carpets and rugs formed an indispensable part in the dowry of the Armenian girls, who familiarized themselves at an early age with that art and, till their marriage, prepared their own dowry of rugs and carpets themselves.

One can find numerous records concerning the rugs and carpets in the Armenian folklore, the tales, legends, etc. In studying the tale of "Anahit" as elaborated by L. Aghayan, one finds that rug-making was highly appreciated among heathen Armenians. From time immemorial the simplest and primary variant of floor coverings was the mat woven with green branches, reeds, grass, etc. Technically it did not differ from the floor-cloth made of flaxen or woollen threads. When the common woven drape began to give way to the striped floor-cloth with its surface covered with narrow or large stripes of natural colours (as the dyeing technique was unknown yet), there was need to enrich those simple rhythms with the simplest geometrical forms. At first they had to break that coloured line, the narrow stripe, and proceed in zigzag lines. This break in the horizontal line gave way to an altogether new type of technique unknown as yet in weaving. It meant the birth of carpet weaving. With the juxtaposition of the broken, horizontal and vertical jagged lines it became possible to bring about various geometrical designs on the flat surface in the form of triangles, quadrangles, squares, rectangles, circles, hexagons, octagons, etc. The use of various colours made its way to new graded forms, "volumes", patterns familiar to the applied arts, under new interpretations. Thus, the carpet became a complex fabric with a diversity of themes, with a definite system of patterns and ideological content. The various forms of the floor-mat and carpet differed from each other by their weaving techniques. A rhythmic break in the horizontal line or stripe combined with the addition of a vertical pattern in the fabric brought about a qualitative change which gave the differentiating feature to the woven carpet compared with the fabrics of the other floor-cloths.

The types of the Armenian carpets and their development show that there came a transitional moment in the weaving technique - that of the rug-making. The weaving of carpet, giving the possibility of creating a complex and diverse form of patterns and compositions, made the whole surface subject to vertical, long or short splits, which, on the one hand, loosened the toughness of the fabric, and, on the other, deprived the carpet of displaying any circles, or vertical lines or stripes.

The tendency and efforts of avoiding these two shortcomings led to the making of the rug and its weaving techniques. In the case of rug making, knots were added to the vertical wefts, the two ends of which were brought out on the visible side of the rug. In the case of cloth weaving, the patterns were needle-worked on the warp; thus the main difference between the weaving of floor cloths, carpets and the rug was that the patterns of the rugs were exclusively created through the knots. Such rugs were later known as knot-rugs or knot-carpets. Thus the main differentiating external feature of a rug was its pile. That is why it is often called a piled rug or carpet (the Turkish expression of "khavlu khalicha" is derived from the Armenian word "khav" meaning pile, nap in Armenian). This napped surface was obtained by cutting the ends of the knotted threads over the surface of the rug. It was usually 4-6 mm. in length for the Armenian rugs. At times its length was even measured in centimetres, in accordance with the demand of the clients. Rugs which have a shorter nap were very thin and light, not typical to the Armenian rugs and might be of machine product.

Most familiar types of the Armenian rugs are divided into seven groups, such as, the **palas**, **mazar** (transition from the drape to the carpet), **jejim**, **the matnakash carpet** (a double faced carpet, the most important of the group), the **shoolal carpet**, **the oghjids**, both straight and diagonal, which the Armenians call **kazakhi**, the **Turksvern**, the kurds-yamani. The latter also include the famous Armenian snake-carpets, the **Sileh**, (**zjleh**), the **Sumakhi (Shamakhi)** carpets and finally the fringed carpets.

The materials used in the Armenian rug-making, such as the weaving thread (wool, silk

flax, hemp, cotton), the dyes (vegetal, animal, mineral, chemical) the instruments, the weaving techniques and the ornaments date back to remote times.

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Of various domestic animals, living in the Armenian territory, our rug-making ancestors have given preference to the kind of sheep giving the white, soft and long-hair wool. The best thread was that obtained from the spring shearing. The density of the knots for each square decimetres of the area of the rugs varied in most places; thus IJevan and Zangezur rugs counted 900- 1600 knots, Vaspurakan - 784-900, Artsakh (Gharabagh) - 1300-1600, and those of Sebastia, Karin up to 2025-2100.

They first made the warp on the loom, then the drape of the mouth of the rug (2,5-3,5 cm.) followed by the layer or the weaving of knots which were mostly made in doubles. The chain was done in one or both directions, from right to left. In stamping the middle-thread usually one working thread was used, or sometimes, two. The rug was woven either individually or collectively. The skilled masters tied all the knots of the patterns, while the comparatively inexperienced ones filled the gaps, or the background of the rug. The patterns used were of a great variety of forms (flowers, waters, blooms, small snakes, birds, fruits, etc.). In selecting the decorations it was the clients' wishes that were mostly taken into account, with either the vegetal, animal or imaginative patterns predominating.

The most ancient instrument of rug-making discovered in Armenia was the so-called "ktutich" dating back to the II century B.C.. It was made of bone and was very similar to those in use up till now. The investigations have shown that the horizontal loom was the simplest and oldest form of instrument which was in use in the mountainous regions of Armenia up to the XX century. Being primitive and small in size it did *not* offer the possibility of making large carpets and rugs. The huge vertical looms were also known in Armenia from ancient times, and one can find them mentioned in the popular tales, books of historians and many archaeological finds.

The vertical wedged loom, which was in use up to the 70s of the XIX century, had a number of advantages over the horizontal one. The rug-maker was free to see the rug before his eyes as the painters do, to make comparisons of the colours and forms, to make instant corrections on the spot, to keep the symmetry and enrich the compositions with new ones, if necessary. In addition, it gave ample opportunity of making rugs in great sizes.

As the Armenian rugs and carpets entered the world market the Armenian rug-making masters began to improve their instruments of production. The vertical wedged loom had a number of technical shortcomings which often resulted in having the wefts broken, or the whole surface of the fabric somewhat unequal when shaped as a quadrangle.

At the beginning of our century the wood en wedged vertical loom was replaced by the screwed loom made by the masters of Eastern Armenia. A new kind of scissors came into being together with an improved kind of knife which made it possible to clip the nap on an equal level and to cut and tie the knots in the best way. The clean, long, white wool was washed seven times under the flowing water, then dried up scutched and combed. The white handfuls of the combed wool were then spun by the spindles and the spinning wheels. Then the hanks of wool were dyed by vegetal, animal and chemical dyes.

Of all the colours used in the Armenian classical rugs and carpets were mainly those of bright red and the clean blue in all their hues. The golden yellow and the green colours were also used extensively. But the brown-black seldom found its place in the rugs.

Some Arab historians (Al. Mugadasi, Al. Fakh) inform us of the colour of "kirmiz" (red) used by the Armenians. It is a red worm living in the soil and found only in Armenia. In spring people come and collect them in platefuls and boil them on the fire, and with the co- lour thus obtained they dye the wool. There were workshops in the town of Artashat where people made this vivid red. In Armenia this colour was called "vortan karmir", of which the medieval Armenian miniaturists prepared a great variety of colours ranging from fine pink to dark violet.

The red colour toron (marena), obtained from the plant of the same name, was also much used by the Armenians. The blue, light and dark yellow, the coffee-colour , the

beige, black and brown colours were being extracted from various plants, flowers, leaves and grasses. Some other dyes were obtained by the mixture of red, blue, green and other dyes.

The woollen threads were first enamelled in a solution of lime, then submerged into the boiling dye-water. When boiling was resumed, salt or alum was added and removed from the fire for cooling. Then the dyed threads were twisted slightly and left to dry in the shade to avoid discolouring.

There are interesting data preserved at the Matenadaran named after Mesrop Mashtots on the composition and preparation of dyes. Here is one in a manuscript (No. 774) of the XV century: "...when the black and red are mixed together, there emerges the blue colour, and so on... ". The characteristic feature of the Armenian classical rugs, and those being still made conventionally up to day, is the narrow fabric of the two heads, or the so-called sackcloth designed to preserve the walls of the rug. The main composition of the rug involves three circular bands, two of which are sometimes too narrow and encircle the large one. In colour and in patterns these circular bands have a feature of their own, although sometimes they repeat separate patterns of the rug. The total sum of the two narrow circular bands equals, as a rule, to that of the large one. The main part of the rug (almost 9/10th) forms the background or the centre.

The characteristic feature of the Armenian medieval traditional rugs is the highly stylised and imaginative depiction of the vegetal and animal motifs which easily differentiate them from those prepared in other eastern countries. All the human and animal pictures are displayed in their movement and are similar to the motifs found in the Armenian rock drawings and medieval miniature art.

In the age-long period of Armenian rug-making one can find an enormous diversity of vegetal, animal and other motifs of nature, instruments of labour and domestic articles involving almost the entire surrounding world. But of all these things only a small part was to survive owing both to their significance in the human life and their plasticity. The snake, the scorpion, the dragon and other animals must have probably had a totemistic significance for the primitive people and existed for a long time as such. Man worshipped both the useful and harmful animals. In worshipping the poisonous animals he believed he was saving himself from their harmful effects. Totemism, as time went by, gradually lost its primary meaning and turned into decorative patterns. Every district of Armenia engaged in rug-making had its own preference of displaying the vegetal and animal ornaments having local significance. Predominating in the rugs of Lori-Gugark, (Ijevan-Kazakh), are those of the deer, goats, rams, nightingales, cocks, scorpions, carts, ploughs and many vegetal patterns. In the district of Arakatsotn preference was given to the peacocks, rams, horses, the Sun and stars. In the Ararat district - to grapes, clusters, leaves, ears of corn and cotton flowers. In Etchmiadzin district - to lilies, doves. In the Syunik and Artsakh districts - to the sun and dragons, deer, rams, beetles, spiders and butterflies. Iri Shirak - to the rams, dragons, lances, etc.

Some characteristic features proper to the Armenian miniature art are sometimes being reproduced in the compositions of Armenian rugs, such as the cock-fights, bull-fights, connected with the regeneration of nature in Shrovetide time. The winner of such fights was regarded as an object of worship.

Another characteristic feature of the Armenian national classical rugs, (Lori, Artsakh), is the depiction of a medallion in the centre of the rug representing the sun as the source of life surrounded with heavenly birds, as its heralds. The sun was at times represented in the form of a curved cross, as well. Lalayan, an Armenian archaeologist and ethnographer, informs us that in Akhtamar he had seen "a rug with a swastika in the field". Other national rugs (Lori-Gugark, Zanghezur, Vaspurakan) display patterns of weapons, arrows, swords, lances, etc., as symbols of self-defence from the evils, just as the crosses were the signs of faith. Apart from them the rug-makers designed other symbols as well, which were thought to be important as part in the dowries of girls, such as, the dragon as the symbol of the guardian of water, the tree of life as the symbol of the eternity of the family, the bloom as the symbol of fertility. The S sign, which was in use in all the branches of the Armenian applied arts, was known as the backbone of fish, or a small snake, or waters. Other symbols most frequently found in rug-making were also those of horns or sometimes the heads of rams. These were

regarded to be not only a totem, the symbols of fertility and prosperity, but also those of rug-making itself. And it is the horns of rams in their most diverse linear and colour forms that were extensively applied and are predominant in the Armenian rugs, ancient and modern.

All these patterns ornamenting the Armenian rugs, were closely connected with the legendary notions, superstitions, the pagan faith and worship rites of the remote ancestors of the Armenian people, inscribed in the ancient manuscripts and popular folk songs. There exists a tale the essence of which is that dragon with their golden swords and drive them out the dragon with their golden swords and drive them out the clouds". This is, no doubt, the Christian assessment of our pagan hero Vahagn, who, according to legend, was fighting the dragons trying to stop the movement of the chariot of the sun. The worship of water was also no less important for a people living in a country of continental climate. This is testified by the heroes of our legendary epos "David of Sassoun", Sanassar and Balthassar who were the offsprings of water, together with their wise horse **Kurgig Jalali**. The dragons were the forces of darkness; the struggle between the Eagle and the Dragon was the reflection of that world outlook. The dragons had to be defeated so that the water could flow freely and the sun shine brightly over the, Earth. And the Armenian rug-masters took great pain to represent all this in their rugs.

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In the museums of various countries and personal collections more than a hundred Armenian rugs are being preserved, most of them dating back to the XIII-XVIII centuries. These are scattered in the museums of Vienna, Berlin, London, Chicago, New York, Leningrad, Istanbul, and other cities.

In composition and technique, all these rugs are closely linked with the age-old features of the Armenian applied and miniature art.

The most ancient rug is that preserved in Vienna, dating back to 1202. It was made in Gantsak (now Kirovabad), in the Banants village. It bears an Armenian inscription. It depicts a three-arched vault very similar to that found in the Armenian miniature art. Patterns in the form of palmettos, rosettes, crosses and doves abound in it. It has three circular bands, characteristic of Armenian rugs, which abound in rich tracteries of rosettes and lilies. One of the narrow bands bears an Armenian inscription, informing the place and date of making the rug. The band is traced with the symbol S, which is one of the most characteristic signs found in the Armenian dragon-rugs and snake-carpet; according to the rug scholar V.A. Holley, "that sign is characteristic of most ancient rugs". The centre of the rug reflects the dark vivid red of "vortan karmir". The columns are outlined with white threads. The centre of the large band is golden; the leaves and branches-green; the surface of rosettes is intermittently mixed with yellowish and reddish colours.

An Armenian rug of great interest is the one being preserved at the Berlin Imperial Museum; it dates back to the XIII century, to the period of Mongol domination over Armenia. It was made in Lori and displays the fight between a dragon and an eagle against the yellowish background. On the large circular band there is a white cross and the initials of an Armenian name, testifying to its Armenian origin and repudiating the biased opinion that it must have been an Islamic work of art made in the period of Chinghiz Khan, in India. It is also interesting to note, that the composition has been reproduced in its very likeness by the Italian painter Domenico di Bartolo (Venezianos) in the murals of the hospital of Sienna, in 1440. According to the rug scholar V.S. Temourjian this rug symbolizes the struggle of the Armenian people against the Mongols. The eagle was the symbol of power of the ancient Armenian Kingdom of Artaxiads, the dragon- that of the Mongol conquerors. Thus the rug, apart from its applied and decorative meaning, acquires the significance of a highly valuable work of art.

Another unique rug is the one called "Anahit", which displays the Garden of Eden. Its intricate tracery and decorations of a diversity seldom to be found on any rug, links it, with no doubt whatsoever, to the period of the Armenian medieval miniature art (XII-XIV centuries). The rug abounds in patterns of plants, palmettos and animal images, dragons, lions and bears placed in between the free spaces of the principal motifs. The

whole meaning underlined by the composition is the enjoyment of the benefits of life, the glorification of secular life by man repudiating the so-called mystic, spiritual, monastic life, expressed in the form of two stretched hands ready to pick the flower of Eden. This kind of composition has often been reproduced with some changes by both Armenian rug-makers and those of the neighbouring countries.

The rug preserved at the Hermitage has two narrow and one large borders like the one called "Yera-khoran". Its composition and patterns resembling those of "Anahit", are closely linked with the Armenian early medieval art. It was probably made in the XVI-XVII centuries in Poland, in the town of Sljuk inhabited by many Armenians.

The rug made in 1680 (1699, 1700?), probably in Vaspurakan, is known as the "Gohar" rug. Its background is formed of quatrepetal decoration, and right in the centre, in an octagonal design there are crosses and schematic pictures of birds. It has only one circular band and bears the inscription of the rug-maker Guhar by name.

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In 1921, after the establishment of Soviet power in Armenia, the Armenian government issued a decree "On means of helping handicraft and domestic industries". Thus, new artels and workshops for rug-makers were organized the first of which opened in 1924 in Yerevan. Others soon followed suite in Kirovakan, Gyumri, too. Parallel to them, special schools opened to teach rug-making to new specialists under the tutorship of Srboohi Broyants and Hovsep Abrahamjan.

New rug-making artels came into existence all over the republic (Lori, Ijevan, Shamshadin, Goris, Stepanavan, and others). By 1930, almost 5000 square meters of rugs had already been produced. The government provided the artels with all the necessary raw materials, wool, dyes, designs, and bought the products. A new breed of sheep got under way for the production of white and long-hair wool.

In 1932, in Tbilisi a new workshop for the designs and reproduction of rugs was opened, headed by the well-known rug-specialist and painter Michael Ter-Mikaelian, with the aim of specializing the artistic designing of rugs in the three Transcaucasian republics of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan.

In Armenia everything in rug-making was gradually mechanized: the washing of wool, its spinning, dyeing. The Armenian engineers found a new mechanical method for the chemical washing of the ready-made rugs, which was in former times a painstaking process and took a long time. This chemical method considerably improved the quality of the rugs giving them a special luster, softness, similar to silk, and making them thick and durable and smooth.

In 1932, a new big combine of rug-making was set up in Yerevan, and later on in other towns as well, in Ijevan and Kirovakan. Rug-makers from all over the Soviet Union kept coming to Armenia to study the Armenian rug-making industry.

Ever since 1924, the Armenian rug-makers were busy making new technical improvements in the structure of looms which made it possible to weave the rugs at the required length and width, up to 25-30 meters.

In 1937, Armenian rugs, now already well-known in the international market, were awarded the gold medal at the Paris international competition.

In 1949, Armenian rugs won the Grand Prix at the New- York International Exhibition.

In 1958, Armenian rugs received the second gold medal at the International Exhibition in Brussels.

In 1965, Armenian rugs were awarded the great Gold Medal at the Jubilee Trade Fair in Leipzig.

The Armenian rugs, especially those of "Lori", "Yerevan", "Karabagh", "Shirak", "Anahit", "Shirvan", etc., have always been awarded great prizes at the international exhibitions in Moscow, Leningrad, Paris, New- York, Montreal, Brussels, San Paolo, Leipzig and Damasc.

The Armenian hand-made rugs are especially in great demand in most European countries, such as England, Canada, France and the countries of the Middle and Near East. Armenia produces some one hundred types of rugs mostly hand-made.

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The "Yerevanian" rugs of the past are closely connected with the rugs of Artsakh,

Shirvan, Karin, Van, especially in graphic forms, composition, harmonious colours, ornamental elements and preferences of animal and vegetal motifs. They are in general characterized by their carpet design, which is a specific feature of the Armenian traditional rugs, in contrast to those of the neighbouring peoples. In the Soviet period, the Armenian painters of the "Yerevan" type of rugs have preserved little of the old features. The new series express the artistic rather than the graphic trend, depicting in form, some twelve types of this series were produced. The rug "Yerevan-12" (density 40 X 40, size 240 X 350) designed by Hakop Keshishian, Honoured Painter of the Armenian SSR, is somewhat close to the historical rug "Anahit" in composition and graphic solution. But the painter left no doubt of his ability of bringing about new forms of interpretations, especially in the reproductions of abstract forms.

The next "Yerevan" rug (density 45 X 45, size 150 X 210) made by the same painter is a floral-rug woven in the traditions of Armenian miniature art and tracery. Another interesting type of the "Yerevan" rug (density 40 X 40, size 233 X 152) is that designed by the painter Robert Markarian.

A beautiful example of the "Yerevan" type of rug (density 40 X 40, size 172 X 118) is also the one designed by the painter Miletta Vartanian.

We have the so-called Armenian popular "Karabagh" type of rugs and carpets coming deep down from the centuries and as a domestic commodity still much sought in the XIX-XX centuries in the local and foreign markets. They showed to be a real school of learning the old traditions not only for the Armenian population of that historical Armenian district of Artsakh, but also in the sixty years of Soviet power for the "Haygorg". firm painters who studied them creatively and brought about some twenty new highly original rugs, each being unique in itself. An example of this kind of rugs is the "Karabagh" rug named after its popular similarity (density 35 X 35, size 130 X 205).

The "Shirvan" ("Khachen") types of Armenian rugs are characterized by the graphic solution of linear, geometrical forms, proper to the carpets. Their main component part is the line, not the colour which is there only to distinguish the forms. It abounds in highly stylised and abstract forms of heavenly bodies, animal and vegetal designs which suggest to possess a symmetric trend. Of about a score of the "shirvan" rugs designed by the Armenian master-painters of rugs, such as Hasmik Shahnazarian ("Shirvan-321") , Makar Mnatsakanian ("Shirvan-33") ,Harutiun Grigorian and many others, a most beautiful sample is the "Shirvan" rug elaborated by Tajat Igitian.

In the "Shirvan" types of rugs and carpets we also find the so-called "Khoranatip" or the vault-like rug (density 40 X 40, size 120 X 189) .The composition is vertical with the arch covering one third of the centre which is entirely filled with diagonal ornaments in the form of interwoven flower motifs which are also characteristic of the Artsakh (Karabagh) rugs and carpets. The four circular bands also abound in floral ornaments. The centre bears colours of the gold-yellow, the diagonal ornaments-the vivid red, edged by the dark-blue colour. The narrow bands are of a dark-blue and the large one (the second) carries a vivid red background. A good example of the "Lori" type of rugs, comprising a vivid red background, also much sought in the foreign markets, is the one designed by the painter Hakop Keshishian (density 40 X 40, size 100 X 130).

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In the distant past, Ijevan was a district glorified for the production of such famous rugs, as the "Kazakh"* , and the "Deghnakyunj" designed by Nounoufar Edilian in 1905, which was and still is in great demand in foreign markets. *("Kasakh" is the distorted form of the Armenian region khagh-khagh.)

In the post-war years, a huge plant equipped with the most up to date foreign and home-made machinery for the mechanical production of rugs began to operate in Ijevan. Among the rugs produced by this plant already most celebrated everywhere in the world are the "Erebuni", "Deghnakyundj", "Yerevan", "Hayastan", and others. They are all characterized by their unique colour harmony, composition and ornamentation and have a close resemblance to the best hand-made Armenian traditional rugs.

Apart from the rugs, the mechanic production of carpets and strip-carpet is now developing fast. They are especially in great demand in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Moldavia and elsewhere.

The development of rug-making In Armenia was greatly contributed by the establishment of the "Haygorg" firm.

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At present the rug-painters and rug-makers of Soviet Armenia, pursuing their main task, pay a greater attention to the artistic-decorative arrangement of the rug by enriching their imagination and experience through the study of the classical heritage of the past involving the Armenian murals, miniatures, the decorative and applied arts and most of all the Armenian classical rugs and carpets.

There is no doubt whatsoever that the Armenian rugs, renowned in the remote Middle-Ages and even earlier, are proof of the fact that the Armenian people have played a most important role in the creation, development and perfection of rug-making, one of the applied arts of the most ancient peoples of Asia Minor, the Middle East and the Transcaucasus. Today the Armenian rug-makers, rug-painters and skilled masters are the bearers of the centuries-old traditions of the Armenian rug-making art.

The present Album includes only a very small number of the rugs preserved at the firm "Haygorg", the State Museum of the History of Armenia (SMHA) and the State Museum of the Ethnography of Armenia (SMEA). The ever growing interest for the Armenian rugs can only be met by the periodic publication of the rich funds of the Armenian rugs, begun in fact by this Album.

A. H. MARGARIAN