



A RARE PERSIAN PORTRAIT RUG “DATING & ANALYSIS”

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ABSTRACT

This paper publishes and analyzes a Persian portrait rug. This rug is preserved in Store of Islamic Antiquities, Fayoum, Egypt, and register number 288. The problem of the study is that the carpet does not have a date. Therefore, the study depends on the analytical method in studying the writings and decorations and also studying the industrial technique of this rug to date it. This rug is from the second half of 19th century during the era of Nasser Al-Din Shah. The name written down on the rug reads “Āraj Ibn Fīrwn” the son of Ādhārbāyjdjān ruler. Probably, the title Shahīn Shah in the ‘Āraj portrait honoring himself inside the court of Ādhārbāyjdjān ruler or that the title is specific to Naṣir al-din Shah a contemporary to this Prince.

KEYWORDS

Rug - Persian -Portrait - Wool - Cotton -knot – Qajarī.

المخلص

تتعرض الورقة البحثية لنشر ودراسة لسجادة من طراز السجاد المعروف باسم سجاد البورتريهات، وتحفظ هذه السجادة في مخازن منطقة الآثار الإسلامية بالفيوم بجمهورية مصر العربية، وتحت رقم سجل 288، وتتمثل إشكالية الدراسة في أن السجادة لا تتضمن على تاريخ للتحفة وبالتالي سوف تعتمد الدراسة على المنهج التحليلي والمقارن للكتابات والزخارف المنقذة على السجادة لتاريخ التحفة، وقد دون على السجادة اسماً يقرأ " ابرج ابن فيرون" وهو أمير أذربيجان في عهد الدولة القاجارية، ودون كذلك لقب شاهنشاه وهو لقب خاص بالحكام وليس بالامراء لذلك فمن المحتمل ان يكون لقب شاهنشاه تلقب به "ابرج ابن فيرون" داخل اذربيجان فقط أو أن يكون هو لقب خاص بناصر الدين شاه قاجار المعاصر لهذا الأمير، وبالتالي يمكن تأريخ هذه السجادة لفترة ناصر الدين شاه أي النصف الأول من القرن 19م.

الكلمات الدالة

قاجاري – فارسي – سجاد – صورة شخصية – عقدة – قطن – صوف

INTRODUCTION

The greatest Persian rugs were made for kings and princes who would commission famous painters to prepare drawings to adorn their rugs which lead to the painting theme genre of Persian rugs.

1.50 meter



2.20 meter

Pl.no.1: Persian portrait rug, Store of Islamic Antiquities, Fayoum, Egypt

The focus of this paper is a rare Persian so-called portrait rug; a masterpiece that broaches many queries – what type of portrait is it, who is its owner, what is its dating, its inscriptions and its relationship with the owner of the rug bearing the name of an unknown person alongside a royal title – Shahīn Shah; and who is this person in relation to the

portrait and if the title is referring to the portrait owner or to the name of the unknown person.

Our methods for dating the rug include a study of the pictorial scenes, analyzing the manufacturing style i.e. a microscopic examination of the wool to determine the types of threads used in manufacturing of the rug and the type the knot used.

STYLE OF THE RUG

This rug is preserved in Store of Islamic Antiquities – Fayoum - Egypt, brought through judicial seizure. The carpet measures 2.20 m long X 1.5 m wide, and can generally be classified as a portrait carpet attributed to Persia because of its general style and inscriptions (Pl. no.1). Persian rugs differ according to their makers, having reached their noontide during 10th – 11th centuries when ṣafavīd traditions were dominant. The trend in general¹ weakened during 12th and 13th centuries² because of political conditions –Russian and Ottoman interference in the crowning of Nadīr shah Āfshari– artistic life was substantially affected, rug manufacturing in particular.³

After the coronation of the Qajarī in Persia, three of its kings – Fatīh Ali shah, Naṣīr al-din Shah and Mūzafar al-din Shah– who followed ancient Persian traditions which led to a period of stability and subsequently the revival and flourishing of the tradition.⁴ During 13th A.H/19th A.D, European influence on Persian rugs reached their height as a result of their significant presence in the industry trading them in European markets.

Things were changing in the rug industry, rug export created a sense of openness with Europe and foreign companies began to establish offices in Persia. The Office of Manchester in Sultanabad was one of these companies, cotton importers to Persian.⁵

In khūrasan and Farg‘ona, there were significant developments toward the end of 19th century during the period of Nasser Al-Din Shah. Foreign artists came to Persia contributing to the European influence on Iranian arts.⁶

The Persian rug industry developed during 19th century with European influence, which is why we suggest attributing this masterpiece to the 19th century. The portrait allows no doubt of European influence, in fact it is often possible to deduce the subjects of the portraits from the facial features alone. Portrait carpets were known before the Qagārī era⁷ though they were particularly prolific with the Qajarīs.⁸

These rugs first appeared in the Nadīr shah Āfshari period where we find rugs bearing his portrait. This tradition continued to the Qajarī era where we find rugs with portraits of

¹ Walker, *Oriental Rugs*, p.123.

² Somia, *al-Madrassa al-Qajarī fī al- ṭasūīr*, p.34.

³ Hawley, *Oriental Rugs*, pp.112–113

⁴ MahshId, *Qajar Painting*, p.33.

⁵ Formenton, *Oriental rugs*, pp. 22–23.

⁶ Leonard, *Carpet Collecting in Iran*, p.175.

⁷ Abbas, *Tarīkh iran ba ‘d al-islamī*, p. 741 .

⁸ MahshId, *Qajarī Painting*, p.43.

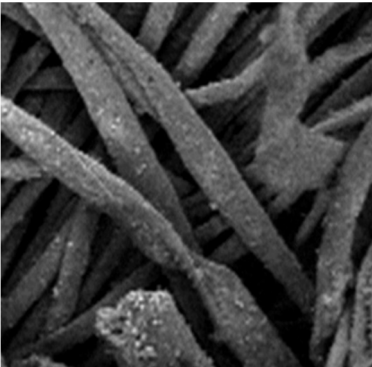
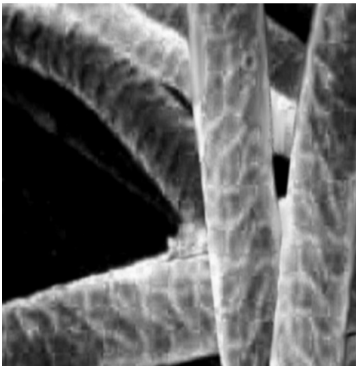

Qajarī rulers such as Mohamed Shah and Ahmed Shah. This artistic style – the mixture European and Iranian motifs – is called the Euro Qajarī style.⁹

0.40 meter

0.49 meter

◀Pl.no. 2: The portrait which mediates the carpet.



▶Pl.no.3. Roukaa & velvet Khmila, which made it into the carpet.

Pl.4a: Electron microscope image scanner SEM sample of the "cotton" used in the carpet's yarns

Pl.no.4b: Electron microscope image scanner SEM sample of the "Wool" used in the carpet's node.

Pl.no.5: Iranian Knot used in the carpet

Pl.no.6a: The name implemented on the carpet

Pl.no.6b: The Nickname implemented on the carpet

The portrait motif flourished due to the Qajarī kings' interest in portraits.¹⁰ Portraits were primarily painted for kings, princes and elite such as Fatīh Ali shah and Abas mīrza.¹¹ The Qajarī era witnessed the appearance of a collection of complete portraits either oil paintings or wall paintings.¹² By the end of safavīd era, half portraits appeared showing the face and neck in a frontal position with a three quarter appearance, a style which continued

⁹ Ehabe, *saūar al-salaḥīn wa al-aūmara* ,p.151.
¹⁰ Rabia, *Fan a-Isaūar al-Shakhsāa*, p.8.
¹¹ Abbas, *The Kayanid Crown*, p.14.
¹² Layla, *A Monumental Battle Painting*, p.98.

to the Zīndī and Qagārī eras.¹³ The same position which appeared in the portrait depicted on our rug (Pl.no. 2). European influence appeared in the Qagārī era in portraits represented in clothes and head coverings. Portraits in the Qagārī era were rather realistic in representing features of faces in contrast with early Persian portraits.¹⁴ By the end of 19th century, portrait drawing became an important factor of decorating Persian rugs as the main themes.

The backgrounds of the rugs were often in arabesque depicting realistic scenes. Inscriptions were written inside cartridges at the main corners and inside the two small inner bands.¹⁵ Portraits of kings and Shahs of Persia were prominent themes in decorating Qagārī rugs.

Because of the aforementioned, we could confidently attribute this masterpiece to 19th century Qagārī era, which we will further explore in more detail below. Now, after a microscopic analysis of the type of knot and fibers used in manufacturing as well as wool quality, we can further corroborate our claim that it is an eastern rug because of the a vamp and Kmilp¹⁶ (pl. no.3) method of manufacturing.

The vamp is the under the vest consisting of stamen and weft, and the fibers used in the under vest are cotton.

Cotton was the second most commonly used material next to wool in making carpets in Persia between (16:19 A.D) in particular "where it was sometimes used in the stamen and weft"¹⁷ (pl. no.4a). The kmilp is a separate skein of wool knotted on vamp threads. The knot was made of wool. The most important materials in making Persian rugs was wool as 50% was used in making vamp and stamen while also being 90% of the surface pile.¹⁸ Persia was particularly famous for quality in the industry because of the solidity of its wool used in making rugs (pl. no.4b). The wool used was of high quality which we have determined from the smell after burning simple margins of the sample, and from its turning into grains resembling sand grains after rubbing it.

The type of knot¹⁹ used in the rug is the Persian knot "Senna", which ultimately proliferated throughout the Islamic world. The name was taken from a village in western present day Iran famous for making rugs. This kind of knot twists around skein making is easy to drawing and color on.²⁰ (pl.no.5)

THE PORTRAIT

A round medallion with a human figure inside in a royal uniform is situated in the center of the rug. At the sides of the face are Persian inscriptions in Nasta'lique which read (شاهنشاه ایران) "Iran Shahin Shah" on the left and (ایرج ابن فیرون) "Āraj son of Fīrwn" on the right. The human figure is in a three quarter half portrait position, with his face bearing

¹³ Rehab, *Al-tūhaf al-iranīa al-mūzakhrāfa*, p. 237.

¹⁴ MahshId, *Qajar Paintīng*, p.43

¹⁵ Iman, *al-ta'thīrat al-ūrūbīa a'la al-funūn al-islamīa al-iranīa khāl al-a'sr al-Qajarī*, p.94.

¹⁶ Oriental handmade carpets consists of a vamp and Khamila, vamp is the under piece consists of warp and weft made of cotton or linen, the Khamila is a thread of wool Knotted on warps and wefts. On the other hand, the western machine textile, its Khamila from uts vamps. Zaki, *al-funūn al-iranīa*, p. 145.

¹⁷ Mohamed, *al-sajad al-maghūlī al-hindī*, p. 29.

¹⁸ Hawley, *Oriental Rugs*, p.32.

¹⁹ Salah, *sajad al-sharq*, p.15.

²⁰ Abu al-Hamad, *al-funūn al-zukhrūfāia*, p. 170.

feminine features – almond eyes, a long nose, a small mouth, filled cheeks and neck, and thin eyebrows. Over his head is a crown-like European head covering. In his left hand is a handkerchief, and he is wearing an adorned garment with repeated floral and geometrical decorations.

As we continue substantiating our attribution of this rug to the Qagārī era we are still left with the questions: who was the owner, who is in the portrait, whose name is inscribed on the rug (plate No. 6a), whose title is “Shahin Shah” (Pl.no. 6b), and, what the relationships are between all these elements?

We began by identifying the name of this person. The inscriptions read “Āraj ibn Fīrwn ”, however, there is no biography found of him during the Qagārī era. So, the first query is: who is “Āraj ibn Fīrwn ”? He was neither a Shah of Iran nor a ruler of any Persian province. Incidentally, we found that that was not the first rug to bear the name ‘Āraj as there is another rug that included this name alongside another names. There are 24 rugs in the collection containing portraits each having a name in front and among them is the name ‘āraj. Some of the people in the portraits are wearing military or army uniforms for leaders. This rug is now preserved in a private collection. (Pl.no.7). was crowned by a figure of a lion and a sun disc, the symbol of Qagārī state.

Āraj appeared in military uniform beside a portrait of a military leader. In front of it recorded the name Frydwn (pls.nos.8/9). Frydwn was the younger brother of Shah Mohamed Shah, 1250-1264A.H/1843–1848A.D, a prince of Ādhārbāyadjān who considered himself the rightful Dauphine although he also acknowledged Nasser al-Din Shah as the Dauphine.²¹ He could possibly be the father of āraj, the inscriptions could be mistaken. He could also be Āraj Ibn Frydwn who held a leading position in Qagārī army as he appeared in a military uniform, presumably being a Qagārī prince contemporary to Shah Nasser al-Din Shah, 1264-1313A.H/1848-1896A.D, the second half of 19th century A.D.

The question now is: if this portrait was of Āraj or an Iranian Shah due to the title of Shahin Shah found on the rug. There are two possibilities.

The first possibility is that this portrait is Āraj because of the feminine features, the typical depiction of princes at that era. The range of beauty in Qagārī paintings varied from men to women. Paintings of women had thick connected eyebrows and light moustaches, while male portraits had thin separated eyebrows without moustaches or a beard.²² The paintings of the Qagārī princes were depicted to have feminine features holding either a handkerchief or small rose in one hand, this trend proceeds the Şafavīd school²³ which further strengthens our claim that our subjects one of the Qagārī princes. This style appeared strongly in the Nasser shah era, 1264–1313A.H/1848–1896 A.D.²⁴ For example the image of prince on jug of copper inlaid with silver and enamel from Iran 19.(Pl.no.10)

It was common for portrait rugs to have the names of portraits owners as the previous rug (Pl. no.8) as well as in the rug with portraits of Persian rulers with their respective names above each painting, among them Mohamed Ali Shah and Ahmed Shah (Pl.no.11), in

²¹ Latifeh Hagigi, *Qajar Royal Succession*, p.76.

²² Ali, *The Power-ful Art of Qajar Photography*, pl.3-4.

²³ Ehabe, *Al-musaūr al-Qajarī abū al-hasan*, p. 33.

²⁴ Isabel, *Some Iranian and Afghan Portraits*,p.344.

addition to rugs with portraits of princes such as of Abbas Mirza the dauphine next to Fatih Ali Shah.²⁵

The second possibility is: the portrait owner is one of Qagari Shahs depending on the title of Shahin Shah that was a title of great kings and not a title of a ruler of a province, the name of "Arāj" recorded to be a present from the Shah to one of army leaders for his military efforts. This possibility put another query: who was that Shah the owner of this portrait. From the previous it is clear that Arāj was contemporary to Nasser Al-din Shah that suggests the possibility of being the owner of this portrait. There are other proofs to say that: portrait owner is Nasser Al-Din Shah²⁶ due to the appearance of European style in this portrait that known strongly at the era of Nasser Al-Din Shah.

There were many instances of interaction in this era with European countries which in turn lead to economic excellence.²⁷ Nasser Al-Din Shah was known for his strong love for European culture prevalent in his private life which made him disinterested in having a beard.²⁸ Nasser Al-din was the first Shah who visited Europe as a tourist after he became a Dauphine.²⁹ His uniform changed toward the end of his era apparent from his later portraits where his clothes became more European.³⁰ He didn't wear a customary *Chaba* typical of previous Shahs, rather he wore formal suits with bands and two rows of buttons, under which he wore pants as well as a fez "tarbush" decorated with a feather in the front containing a wonderful diamond, with garters on his chest bearing a European appearance.³¹

One of the reasons for attributing this portrait to Nasser Al-Din Shah is aesthetic standards for men in portraits at the time with distinct feminine features (pl.no.12). In some instances Nasser Al-Din appeared as a youth toward the beginning of his rule in Persia.³²

We can overrule the first possibility because Arāj might have added the title of Shahin Shah in honor of himself using this masterpiece within his province only. This period witnessed paintings of military men such as our rug as well as a collection of ceramic tiles in "gulistan palace" in Tehran at the gate and on outer facades that included a group of portraits depicting Qagari soldiers as a symbol of protection. Scenes of soldiers applied on facades overlooking fountains.³³ The era of Nasser Al-din also witnessed the coming of European artists to Iran such as Luis Emil, a French artist who drew a number of portraits of soldiers with their weapons. All the above suggests either this portrait was of Nasser Shah or Prince Arāj. We can, however, definitely attribute it to the second half of 19th A.D century, the era of Nasser Al-Din Shah.

²⁵ Iman, *al-ta' thirat al-aurubā*, p.75.

²⁶ Nasser al-Din Shah was born in Tabriz in "6 Safar 1247 A.H | 18 May 1831 A.D " was the fourth king of Qajarī dynasty and was the son of Mohamed Shah who made him his dauphine. Lane, *Catalogue of Persian Coins*, p.123.

²⁷ Jennifer, *Entertainments East and West*, p.455.

²⁸ Somia, *al-Madrassa al-Qagari fi al-taswir*, pp. 64-66.

²⁹ Mahdi, *rihalat Nasir al-din shah al-Qajarī*, 157

³⁰ MahshId, *Qajar Painting*, p.20.

³¹ Ehabe, *sa'ar al-salaḥīn*, p.121.

³² Robinson, *Qajar Lacquer*, p.137.fig.11c.

³³ Islamic Republic of Iran Iranian Cultural Heritage, *Handicrafts and Tourism Organization*, p.132.



Pl.no.7: carpet , Iran 19th c., A private collection

Pl.no. 8: Portrait Āraj & Firiydun with Military clothes



Pl.no.9: Portrait Āraj implemented on the carpet subject of study.

Pl.no.10: Jug of copper inlaid with silver and enamel. Iran 19th c..Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo.

Pl.no.11: Carpet. Iran 19th c.



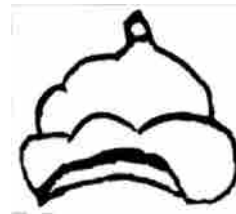
Pl.no.12: Features of female in the portrait.



Pl.no.13: European influences in the portrait.



Pl.no.14 a: European clothes in the portrait.



Pl.no.14b: The headdress. (Crown)



Pl.no.15: Cypress carried out on the carpet



Pl.no.17A: Forms of Lions



Pl.no.16: Animals climbing trees



Pl.no.17B: Forms of Tigers



Pl.no.17C: Forms of deers



Pl.no.17D: forms of pigs



Pl.no.18. Forms of the birds on the carpet



Pl.no.19a: Forms of Lions



Pl.no.19b: Forms of Tiger



Pl.no.19c: Forms of Deers



Pl.no.19d: Forms of Pigs



Pl.no.20: Forms of the birds on carpet

EUROPEAN INFLUENCES IN THE PORTRAIT

Characters with European influence in Iranian society were prevalent in the era of Nasser Al-Din Shah through the common European traditions and customs as indicated in clothing. For example, oriental head coverings changed to hats.³⁴ Import & export offices played an important role in transferring these influences before the Qagārī era as they were the brokers between Persia and Europe. The coming of Western artists increased awareness of modern techniques in painting; in turn the royal court imitated the style of European artists.

These European influences appeared in the portrait on the rug. (Pl.no.13). European influences also appeared in costumes. European clothes were common during the Qagārī era due to strong commercial relations leading to the demand for European product. In addition to European clothing we find European head covering especially for ladies as well as wearing imported European clothes or those made in Persia imitating Europeans.³⁵

We find in our portrait a caftan. It is typically made of wool, open in the front and is worn over clothes.³⁶ Dozy mentioned it has open peplos in front without sleeves, usually red or green in addition to other colors, and decorated with small decorative repeated units in a European motif (Pl.no.14a).

Crown in Arabic means garland, in Persian it is a special kind of head covering for decoration. It is a high bonnet with a special shape for crowning the king. It could be of woolen textile inlaid with gold and silver as well as jewelry.³⁷ Crowns appear as head covering in drawings in Qagārī arts.³⁸ In our portrait we find a European style crown confirming European influence; a serrated face, its top is pointed resembling military helmet. This crown appeared in Qagārī era in a portrait of Shah Mohamed Ali Qagār (1907-1909 AD).

³⁴ Jennifer, *Entertainments East and West*, p.457.

³⁵ Iman, *al-ta`thirat al-aurūbīa*, p.95.

³⁶ Ehab, *saūar al-salaḥīn*, p.152.

³⁷ Rinhart, *a-lmua`gam al-mufasal bāasma` al-malabis a`nd al-arab*, p.136.

³⁸ Robinson, *A Royal Qajar Enamel*, p.30.

DECORATIONS EXECUTED ON THE CARPET

Our rug contains many decorative motifs in the background of the portrait toward the center. Among them were floral ornaments having different forms of floral branches, rosettes in various colors (red, yellow and green) as well as flowers of carnations and roses. In addition we notice Cypresses in green at the bottom of the carpet that was common in Persian rugs at that time. The Cypress trees had rangy and high pointed leaves at their sides (Pl.no.15). We also find floral ornaments at the corners inside the four frames of the rug.

Decorations on this rug are diverse as we see birds, and animals that distributed throughout including frames of golden animals with predacious heads climbing trees (Pl.no.16).

We also find depictions of lions and tigers at the bottom that were common in Qagārī arts usually alone or in hunting scenes (Pls.no.17a/17b), as well as gazelles (Pls.no.17c/17d), and pigs – tame in blond color wild in black with two long canines and short strong neck with short legs, in addition to other unknown animals; some still, others moving or on trees (Pl.no.19). We also find birds (Finches) over floral branches in all corners of the rug and the second frame from outside (pls.no.18, 20).

Generally we can say that the background decorations were typical for Qagārī era. In the most well-known portrait rugs in Qagārī era we find a portrait in the center with various ornamented background decorations, either floral or with animals.

Geometrical decorations were very rare as they appeared only at the outer frame in small triangles next to each other in red and yellow and in simple decorative form.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The portrait rugs spread in the Persian Qagārī era and it did not necessarily contain only one portrait but may also contain multiple portraits. Classes appearing in portrait rugs in the Qagārī era varied. We find rulers of Persia before the Qagārī era as well as portraits of Qagārī rulers such as Fatīh Ali shah and Ahmed Shah in addition to the appearance of princes and high ranking men as well as portraits of Dauphine such as the rug containing a portrait of Fatīh Ali shah and Abbas Mīrza the Dauphine.

The portrait rug, which is the subject of the study, is attributed to the Persian Qagārī era and it consists of a vamp and Kmilp. The vamp made of cotton while the pile is made of wool; in addition the knot type is a Persian knot. The name written down on the rug reads "Āraj Ibn Feron", he was the son of Ādhārbāyjdjān ruler, a military man; a leader Qagārī army. He was a Princes of Qagār confirmed by the feminine features typical in Qajari Qagārī painting. In addition the title Shahīn Shah in the Āraj portrait honoring himself inside the court of Ādhārbāyjdjān ruler. There is a possibility that the portrait owner may have belonged to one of Persian Shahs of Qagār because of the title Shahīn Shah implying he may have been Nasser Al-Din Shah a contemporary to this Prince as there is another rug dating back to 19th century containing a portrait of Āraj and Fredon in military clothes with hints of European influence common in the Nasser Al-Din Shah era in addition to feminine features. Finally, this rug is from the second half of 19th century during the era of Nasser Al-Din Shah. It is necessary to transfer this carpet from the Store of Islamic Antiquities, Fayoum to be displayed in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo at the hall of Iranian Arts due to its artistic and historical importance as it is a rare example of Persian art.

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