

# Musealisation and ethno-cultural stereotypes in Persian art: the case of Baluch carpets ca. 1870s - 1930s

Kassiani Kagouridi

The so-called Baluch carpets include pile and flat weaving carpets, saddle bags, saddle covers, decorative bands for camels, horses and donkeys, bags, pillows and eating mats.<sup>1</sup> Nineteenth century specimens are believed to have been created by Baluch tribes or nomads and their neighbours in areas that today correspond to eastern Iran, south Turkmenistan, east Afghanistan, and Baluchistan in southeast Pakistan.<sup>2</sup> As previous studies have argued, there is no reliable attribution of these weavings to specific tribes or sometimes to Baluch themselves.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, early nineteenth century literature does not contain detailed reference to their designs so as to enable a solid basis for dating.<sup>4</sup> Even if they are taxonomised among nomadic carpets with geometric designs influenced by Turcoman motifs they are also considered to be influenced by floral Persian designs 'filtered down to nomadic level' such as the 'Mina Khani' design that emerged in the Qajar court.<sup>5</sup> Research

---

<sup>\*</sup>This article is dedicated to the memory of the traveler-collector Yiannis Sarzetakis (1944-2023). Grateful thanks are due to Yuka Kadoi, who invited me to submit a paper on ethno-cultural stereotypes in Persian art and Baluch carpets. I also would like to thank Professor Walter B. Denny, who kindly offered further detailed advice on my article.

<sup>1</sup>In the present study I will use the transliteration 'Baluch' from Persian in accordance to the majority of the existing carpet literature and except when citing directly from sources.

<sup>2</sup>Richard Tapper and John Thompson, eds, *The nomadic peoples of Iran*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2002, 298-304; Naseer Dashti, *The Baloch and Balochistan: A Historical Account from the Beginning to the Fall of the Baloch State*, US: Trafford Publishing, 2012. For the term 'tribal' and the limited perception of the Baluch as nomads/pastoralists/tribal groups see Brian Spooner, 'Investment and Translocality Recontextualizing the Baloch in Islamic and Global History', *Crossroads Asia Working Paper Series*, December 2013, 2. In the existing literature Baluch weavings are referred interchangeably as 'tribal' or/and 'nomadic' without a clear definition of the terms but suggesting they are possibly made by ethnic groups living in harsh conditions, by groups in constant move, or both.

<sup>3</sup>Dietrich H. G. Wegner, 'Some Notes on the Rugs of Baluchi Nomads and Related Weavers', *Hali*, 1-3, 1978, 287-93; Alfred Janata, 'The So-Called Herat Baluch Rugs and their Weavers', *Oriental Carpet and Textile Studies* 1, 1985, 165-171; David Black, *The Macmillan Atlas of Rugs & Carpets*, New York: MacMillan, 1985, 158.

<sup>4</sup>Richard Kossow, 'A fragment of Baluch history, 1800-1850', in David Black and Clive Loveless, eds, *Rugs of the Wandering Baluchi*, London: David Black Oriental Carpets, 1976, 4-10.

<sup>5</sup>Hadi Maktabi, *The Persian Carpet: the Forgotten Years 1722-1872*, London: Hali Publications Ltd, 2019, 125-127.

indicates that the Baluch carpets came to be known in Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century among others through the acquisition and display of such weavings at cultural institutions, for example the South Kensington Museum (renamed to Victoria and Albert Museum in 1899) in 1876 or the Austrian Trade Museum in 1891, and through publications such as the one by Andreyevich Bobolyubov (1841-1909) in 1908 that enhanced the importance of tribal carpets.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the circumstances under which museums acquired, exhibited, and labelled the Baluch weavings during the nineteenth and early twentieth century have not been delineated in detail.

The interest of museums for carpets under discussion coincides with the foundation of institutions of applied arts in the nineteenth century such as the South Kensington Museum founded in 1852 in London, the Imperial Royal Museum of Art and Industry founded in 1863 in Vienna and museums of arts and crafts or decorative arts established in other cities such as Berlin (1868), Hamburg (1877), Budapest (built between 1893 and 1896), and Paris (1905). In contrast to museums of fine arts and curiosities from aristocratic European collections, these museums displayed objects as models to renovate commerce, industry, design and taste. Among them tribal carpets that were produced in Persia during the Qajar rule (1789-1925) were grouped according the art history narrative of the era by the suggested 'geographical origins and ethnic lineage of their creators' and as choices of museum curators and collaborators after the 1851 Persian Art exhibition in London. Also, the Persian carpet revival between 1872 and 1880, and the exploitation of non-urban populations as carpet weavers in Persia during the beginnings of the twentieth century, established a new awareness of village and tribal carpets produced in Persia within the museum sphere.<sup>7</sup>

In 1876, Major General Robert Murdoch Smith (1835-1900) in the exhibition catalogue of the Persian collection he had purchased for the South Kensington Museum expressed the ethno-cultural prejudiced view that urban carpets woven by native Persians of 'Aryan' origin surpassed the nomadic carpets of the 'Turanian or

---

<sup>6</sup> See for example Robert Pittenger, 'Mind the gap: 'Baluch' Rugs in the Victoria & Albert Museum', *Hali*, 73, 1994, 77-81,111; The Andrei Andreyevich Bobolyubov (1841-1909) catalogue published originally in 1908-1908 while it did not include Baluch weavings is acknowledged among the first serious publications dedicated to tribal carpets of Central Asia, see the revised edition Andrei Andreyevich Bogolyubov, J. M. A. Thompson (ed), *Carpets of Central Asia*, Fishguard, UK: The Crosby press, 1973.

<sup>7</sup>Éric Michaud, *The Barbarian Invasions, A Genealogy of the History of Art*, translated by Nicholas Huckle, Cambridge Massachusetts, London, England: The MIT Press, 2019, 6, 12; Stephen Vernoit, 'Islamic Art and Architecture: An overview of Scholarship and Collecting 1850-1950,' in *Discovering Islamic Art: Scholars Collectors and Collections 1850-1950*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2000, 1-61; Yuka Kadoi and Iván Szántó, 'Why Persian art needs to be studied and collected', in Yuka Kadoi and Iván Szántó, eds, *The Shaping of Persian Art: Collections and Interpretations of the Art of Islamic Iran and Central Asia*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2013, 3; Walter B. Denny, *How to read Islamic carpets*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2014, 42.

Turkish element in the population'.<sup>8</sup> Smith's hierarchical understanding is studied by scholars.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, as Patricia Baker demonstrates in her article 'Twentieth-Century Mythmaking: Persian Tribal Rugs', the aesthetic value appointed to tribal carpets according to their ethnic and/or regional identification was adopted in the twentieth century as well.<sup>10</sup> The present study examines the reception of Persian tribal carpets by focusing on the musealisation of the so-called Baluch weavings ca. 1870 and 1930.

The present examination is articulated according to the process of musealisation defined by the International Council of Museums as the reinterpretation of an artefact into the museum and influenced by the key figure in museology and active member of the International Committee for Museology, the Czech museologist Zbynek Stránský (1926-2016).<sup>11</sup> For Stránský, musealisation is linked to museum fieldwork and the value appointed to objects by humans.<sup>12</sup> Even if Stránský's musealisation was criticized as a system without a strong theoretical frame, limited to the western human-reality understanding, and based on the contestable idea that the object has no value *per se*, today his influence is re-discussed.<sup>13</sup> Thus, musealisation as a scientific process includes: i) the separation-detachment of the object from its original environment, ii) the reconstruction of the 'lost' reality of the object through preservation (collection, acquisition), research (including registers) and communication (exhibitions, publications), and iii) the transformation of the object into a 'museum object' (musealium) with a symbolic value (museality).<sup>14</sup>

Having in mind the above definition, it could be said that by retracing how museum objects were musealised it might be possible to decipher how a

---

<sup>8</sup> Robert Murdoch Smith, *Persian art*, London: South Kensington Museum, Committee of Council on education by Chapman and Hall, 1876, 4.

<sup>9</sup> Leonard Helfgott, 'Carpet Collecting in Iran, 1873-1883: Robert Murdoch Smith and the Formation of the Modern Persian Carpet Industry', *Muqarnas*, 7, 1990, 175; Yuka Kadoi, 'Arthur Upham Pope and his "research methods in Muhammadan art": Persian carpets', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 7, June 2012, 9; Moya Carey, *Persian Art: Collecting the Arts of Iran for the V&A*, London: Victoria and Albert Publishing, 2017, 33.

<sup>10</sup> Patricia L. Baker, 'Twentieth-Century Mythmaking: Persian Tribal Rugs', *Journal of Design History*, 10:4, 1997, 363-74, focuses on Qashqai carpets. See also Brian Spooner, 'Weavers and Dealers: the Authenticity of an Oriental Carpet', in A. Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 195-235 focusing on Turcoman carpets, and Pennina Barnett, 'Rugs R Us (And Them): The Oriental Carpet as Sign and Text', *Third Text*, London 30, Spring 1995, 13-28.

<sup>11</sup> 'Musealisation', André Desvallées and François Mairesse, eds, *Key Concepts of Museology*, Paris: ICOM, Armand Collin, 2010, 50-52, François Mairesse, 'What is Zbynek Z. Stránský's influence in museology?', *Museologica Brunensia*, January 2016, 27-36.

<sup>12</sup> Mairesse, 'What', 29-30; Jan Dolák, 'The role of Z.Z. Stránský in present day museology', *Museologica Brunensia*, August 2019, 15-26.

<sup>13</sup> Mairesse, 'What is', 36; Dolák, 'The role', 25-6; Milan M. Popadić, 'The origin and legacy of the concept of museality', *Вопросы музееологии*, 2:16, 2017, 3-12.

<sup>14</sup> Desvallées, *Key Concepts*, 50-52.

specific symbolic value was attributed to them.<sup>15</sup> In this context, the present study revisits the travel memoirs by Henry Pottinger (1789-1856) and Charles Masson (1800-1853), the South Kensington Museum register and the catalogue exhibition of its Persian collection in 1876 written by Smith, the catalogue of the carpets exhibition of 1891 at the Austrian Trade Museum and Alois Riegl's (1858-1905) presentation of these carpets, the registers and catalogues of The George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum, The Allen Memorial Art Museum, The Textile Museum in Washington, DC (now The George Washington University Museum and The Textile Museum), and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The scope is to compile a micro-study that refines these carpets as museum objects; also to delineate how art historiography linked tribal carpets and ethno-cultural prejudices in Persian art within museums of 'applied' arts as to those of 'fine' arts.

### **Nineteenth-century references on Baluch carpets before their musealisation**

During the nineteenth century, Baluch and neighbouring tribes were dependent on the Qajar rule, which was seeking to absorb and re-settle nomadic populations and delimit its eastern borders when Britain and Russia struggled to fulfil their colonial aspirations in Central Asia. Westerners and Persians described the Baluch as nomadic shepherds living in tents or in huts in harsh conditions with women sharing equal responsibilities and liberties with men, with a developed sense of hospitality, but also as caravan robbers like other tribal groups in Persia.<sup>16</sup>

Early references to Baluch carpets are mainly included in the memoirs of two British army officers, Henry Pottinger and Charles Masson. Pottinger volunteered to be sent in 1810 by the East British India Company, along with Charles Christie (d.1812), to explore the route from Bombay to Baluchistan, Sistan and the Makran as a possible area from which a European army could invade India.<sup>17</sup> In 1816 he published his *Travels in Beloochistan and Sinde*.<sup>18</sup> Even if he claims 'The Belooches...are a people whose origin is so obscure, and whose history, like that of all other barbarous tribes, is so blended with romantic fiction and tales of wonder,

---

<sup>15</sup>Lynn Maranda, 'Museology: back to the basics: musealization', in *Museology: Back to Basics ICOFOM Study Series*, 38, Belgium: ICOFOM/ICOM, 2009, (251-258),255; André Gob, 'Le jardin des Viard ou les valeurs de la muséalisation', *Cero Art*, Revue Électronique, 4/2009 <https://doi.org/10.4000/ceroart.1326>, accessed 26 April 2022; John Carman, 'Promotion to Heritage: How Museum Objects are Made', in S. Pettersson, M. Hagedorn-Saupe, T. Jyrkkiö, A. Weij, eds, *Encouraging Collections Mobility - A Way Forward for Museums in Europe*, Berlin: Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, 2010, 74-85.

<sup>16</sup>Joanna de Groot, 'Inclusion and Exclusion in the "Persianate World": Views of Baluch People in the Nineteenth Century' in Abbas Amanat and Assef Ashraf, eds, *The Persianate World, Rethinking a Shared Sphere*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2019, 196-215; Willem Floor, *Traditional Crafts in Qajar Iran (1800-1925)*, Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers, 2003, 12.

<sup>17</sup>Sir Martin Ewans, ed., *The Great Game: Britain and Russia in Central Asia. Volume II: Travels in Beloochistan and Sinde*, by Henry Pottinger, London: Routledge, 2004.

<sup>18</sup>Henry Pottinger, *Travels in Beloochistan and Sinde; accompanied by a geographical and historical account of those countries*, London: Longman, Hurst, Ree, Orme and Brown, 1816.

that I have found it exceedingly difficult to reduce either the one or the other to any credible form', he discusses Baluch origins from the Arabs, Mughhals, and Turcomans, concludes they originate from the Turcomans but decides to 'leave the point, if deserving of further inquiry, to be settled by someone better qualified for the task'.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, he as other travellers of the era would influence the western view on the Baluch.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, Pottinger documents carpets made by the Brahui of Beluchistan as tent floor coverings, being spread outside the tent for welcoming foreigners, praying, and relaxing, as items of dowry and trade.<sup>21</sup> He describes the floor of a shepherds' tent 'most comfortably spread with coarse carpets', while the floor of the square room at the court of the Governor of the city of Bam 'was covered with rich Persian carpets'.<sup>22</sup> This juxtaposition between 'coarse' and 'rich' reveals that the nomadic carpets he saw were simpler and rougher compared to Persian ones of more elaborated texture, colours, and designs due to different knot density, motifs and materials used. Finally, he focuses on Khorjins, as 'A kind of saddlebags, either for horses or camels, made of coarse carpet, and laced in the centre' and thus introduces them as items of carpet craftsmanship that combine pile and flat weave.<sup>23</sup> This is an interesting remark for the present study given the fact that saddlebags will be the first Baluch weavings to be muselised as will be demonstrated later.

In 1842 Charles Masson, British East Asia Company soldier and reporter during the first Anglo-Afghan War in 1838, renowned for collecting ancient items from Afghanistan now in The British Museum, publishes his *Narrative of various journeys in Balochistan, Afghanistan, the Panjab, and Kalat*, which he re-published in 1844 with a *memoire of Eastern Balochistan*<sup>24</sup>. In the latter, Masson adopts the romantic view of the 'barbarians': he presents the tribes of Baluchistan as a 'rude and unenlightened race' that 'hold but an inferior rank in the grand scale of society' but with 'natural qualities and many of those virtues which seem to glow and flourish with brighter luster and strength under the shade of the barbarian's tent, than under the more costly canopy which civilization expands over the heads of her refined sons' such as their strong sense of hospitality expressed by the custom of spreading

---

<sup>19</sup>Pottinger, *Travels*, 53-4, 267- 270.

<sup>20</sup>Brian Spooner, 'Lieutenant Henry Pottinger and 150 Years of Baloch History', in Shah Mahmoud Hanifi ed., *Mountstuart Elphinstone in South Asia: Pioneer of British Colonial Rule*, Oxford Scholarship, Online: September 2019.

<sup>21</sup>Pottinger, *Travels*, 35, 62-3, 69, 71, 73, 103, 108, 161.

<sup>22</sup>Pottinger, *Travels*, 35, 196.

<sup>23</sup>Pottinger, *Travels*, 95.

<sup>24</sup>Charles Masson, *Narrative of various journeys in Balochistan, Afghanistan, the Panjab, and Kalat, during a residence in those countries from 1826 to 1838*, vols 3, London: R. Bentley, 1842; Charles Masson, *Narrative of various journeys in Balochistan, Afghanistan, the Panjab, and Kalat, during a residence in those countries, to which is added, an account of the insurrection at Kalat, and a memoire of Eastern Balochistan*, vols 4, London: R. Bentley, 1844.

the carpet to welcome foreigners.<sup>25</sup> Thus he appoints carpets the value of a common ground for meeting and discussion without prejudices.

Masson also documents the Baluch carpets as coverings of other belongings packed in piles inside the tent, as carpet-bags in which to place cakes of bread, salt, flour, and records their materials such as sheep wool, camel hair or dyes such as indigo, madder and turmeric.<sup>26</sup> For Masson, carpets, coarse black coverings for tents, cloaks and fabrics made by sheep wool and camel hair 'of the Baluch pastoral tribes are as much surpassed by those of the corresponding classes of Afghanistan, as these latter are by the productions of the same grade of artisans in Persia' but without specifying further to whom he was referring to.<sup>27</sup> However, he points out the export trade potential of the abundant and excellent quality of Baluchistan sheep wool revealing how through British colonialism the exploitation of the Baluchistan natural resources and carpets were interwoven.<sup>28</sup>

In conclusion, Pottinger and Masson document not only important information regarding Baluch carpets but also create the impression that the Baluch might share a possible common origin to Turcomans and that their carpets are inferior to Persian urban carpets and the ones made by other tribal groups in Afghanistan and Persia.

### **The musealisation of Baluch carpets during the late nineteenth century in Europe**

One of the earliest acquisitions of Baluch weavings by the South Kensington Museum was a pair of bagfaces inventoried as 'Pair of carpets. Raised pile, with geometrical patterns in white and colours. Turcoman make. Persian. 2ft. 10 ½ in. by 2 ft. 6in., 22 Dec. 1975, Major Murdoch Smith (Richard Coll), £4 the pair, 853-853a-76'.<sup>29</sup> According the above information Robert Murdoch Smith, head of the Persian Telegraph Company, who from 1873 to 1883 was appointed by the museum to purchase objects of Persian art, acquired these bagfaces in December 1975 from the art dealer, the French Julius Richard (1816-1891), who was his main supplier and procured catalogue information on objects he sold to Smith.<sup>30</sup> In case Richard procured the misattribution regarding these bagfaces, a lack of knowledge concerning Baluch weavings origin and use among European dealers and museum suppliers is revealed; also, it is traced how Baluch weavings were misattributed to a Turcoman origin within the collection.

In April 1876 these bagfaces were presented in the exhibition of the Persian collection mislabelled as a pair of Turcoman carpets in the *Catalogue of Persian*

---

<sup>25</sup>Masson, *Narrative*, vol.4, 418-9.

<sup>26</sup>Masson, *Narrative*, vol.4, 60-61,440-442.

<sup>27</sup>Masson, *Narrative*, vol.4, 441.

<sup>28</sup>Masson, *Narrative*, vol.4, 409.

<sup>29</sup>Object 853-1875, Reference number MA/30/94, *1876 central inventory Victoria and Albert Museum*, 22. See also Pittenger, 'Mind', 80.

<sup>30</sup> For the collaboration of Richard and Smith see Moya Carey, *Persian Art: Collecting the Arts of Iran for the V&A*, London: Victoria and Albert Publishing, 2017, 100-108.

*Objects in the South Kensington Museum*.<sup>31</sup> The 1876 exhibition was also accompanied by *Persian Art*, a 'handbook' to the museum's permanent collection written by Smith and based heavily in Richard's information on the objects.<sup>32</sup> There Smith expressed the idea that the 'old Aryan stock' of Persia had a strong artistic sense while 'the Turanian or Turkish element in the population...has never imbedded the artistic idiosyncrasies of the latter'.<sup>33</sup> Smith's words echo the invalid idea that Persians belonged to the 'Aryan' Indo-Europeans that were culturally superior to other races, which derived from the Indo-European linguistic discussion that influenced racist theory presented among others by Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882) in his *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* published in 1853-185.<sup>34</sup> They also align with Owen Jones (1816-1874), who was influenced as well by the above discussion and underlined the 'finesse' of Persian design in *The Grammar of ornament* published in 1856.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, Smith's words are commented on by Leonard Helfgott to refer, without naming them, to a wide range of populations including 'Turks, Kurds, Baluch, and others'.<sup>36</sup> In fact, they might reflect the way Baluch were presented within the above 'Aryan' discourse. For instance, Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900), the Oxford-based German comparative philologist, in his *Lectures on the science of language* delivered in 1861 and translated in French, suggested that 'Beluch the name given to the tribes on the western borders of India, south of Afghanistan, has likewise been identified with the Sanskrit Mlechchha' meaning 'a person who talks indistinctively', 'a barbarian', to document how difficult it was for the culturally developed 'Aryan' Indo-Europeans to acknowledge the language of 'foreign nations'.<sup>37</sup> Müller, who was a most influential lecturer in Victorian Britain and whose opinions led to controversial debates on the relations between language and

---

<sup>31</sup>'Carpet, 853-'76' and 'Carpet 853a.-'76', *Catalogue of Persian Objects in the South Kensington Museum*, Science and Art Department of the Committee of Council on Education, 1876, London: George E. Eyre and W. Spottiswoode, 61-62.

<sup>32</sup> Smith, *Persian art*, 46.

<sup>33</sup> Smith, *Persian art*, 4.

<sup>34</sup>For the evaluation of Persian art within Gobineau's idea see for example Henry Hotze's (1833-1887) introduction of Gobineau's work translated in English: 'Their arts, if not Hellenic, still attained a high degree of perfection...Nay, I for one am willing to render myself obnoxious to the charge of classical heresy, by regarding the pure Persians as a people, in some respects at least, superior to the Greeks', Henry Hotze, 'Analytical Introduction' in Arthur Gobineau, *The moral and intellectual diversity of races: with particular reference to their respective influence in the civil and political history of mankind*, 1856, Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott and co., 38-39.

<sup>35</sup> Carey, 'Persian', 33, 109.

<sup>36</sup> Helfgott, 'Carpet', 175.

<sup>37</sup>Max Müller, *Lectures on the science of language delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain in April, May and June 1861*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., 1864, London: Longman, Roberts and Green, 87,426.

race, is worth citing because Baluch language would be later linked to an Aryan-Persian origin that would penetrate the evaluation of their carpets as will be noted.<sup>38</sup>

Smith went beyond his chiaroscuro by acknowledging Turcoman carpets astonished him when realizing the conditions under which they were woven 'in the tents of a wild nomadic race such as the Turcomans'.<sup>39</sup> Through this 'romantic' approach Smith promoted the tribal weavings he purchased – and among them the misidentified Baluch bagfaces- as an exception worthy to be musealised along with Persian carpets. But, even if the press adopted his hierarchical prejudice view, recognising him as an expert and his catalogue as a reference work for students and collectors, there were critical comments for the 'modern' carpets.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, in the years to come a sub-hierarchy promoting Turcoman carpets over other tribal products would be established. As Smith's purchase of the Richard collection was seen as a most profitable art investment thus he continued his purchases and collaboration with the Shah.<sup>41</sup> Consequently, it is not surprising that in 1887 Smith claimed Persians 'are one of the finest races in the world, physically and intellectually. They are imbued with a strong sense of nationality, and through their art, literature and general culture exert an influence in the East out of all proportion to their military power'.<sup>42</sup>

In April 1891 eight Baluch carpets were presented in the exhibition held at the Austrian Trade Museum (Handelsmuseum) in Vienna tracing carpet market and trade potentials.<sup>43</sup> They were among the many recent tribal carpets from Persia and Central Asia presented beyond the context of the Aryan artistic superiority of the 1876 exhibition in London at a time when the Viennese arts and crafts movement including the Secession aesthetics flourished.<sup>44</sup> The curator of the exhibition and art historian of the Vienna school, Alois Riegl (1858-1905), also curator of the museum's carpet collection, studied the carpets as representational surfaces for design and thus re-conceptualised the discussion on fine and applied arts that since Giorgio

---

<sup>38</sup> John R. Davis, Angus Nicholls, eds, *Friedrich Max Müller and the Role of Philology in Victorian Thought*, U.K.: Routledge 2019, 25.

<sup>39</sup>Smith, *Persian art*, 22-23.

<sup>40</sup> See for example, Anonymous, 'Persian Art at South Kensington', *The Athenaeum*, 2528, 8 April 1876, 506; Henry Wallis, *Illustrated catalogue of specimens of Persian and Arab art exhibited in 1885*, London: Burlington Fine Arts Club, 1885, viii; Isabelle Gadoin, 'British Collectors of Persian Art in the 19th century: from personal culture to Oriental taste?', *Figures pionnières de l'orientalisme: convergences européennes, Res Orientales*, vol. 20, 2011, 122-24; Carey, *Persian Art*, 110-112.

<sup>41</sup>William Kirk Dickson, *The Life of Major-General Sir Robert Murdoch Smith, K.C.M.G.*, Edinburgh: W. Blackwood and sons, 1901, 283,285-6.

<sup>42</sup>Dickson, *The Life*, 276.

<sup>43</sup> *Katalog Der Ausstellung Orientalischer Teppiche Im K.K. Österr. Handels-Museum, 1891*, Wien: Verl. d. K.K. Österr. Handels-Museums Print, 125-127, 131-133.

<sup>44</sup>Barbara Karl, 'Carpets and Empire: the 1891 Exhibition at the Handelsmuseum in Vienna', in Francine Giese, Mercedes Volait, and Ariane Varela Braga, eds, *A l'Orientale: Collecting, Displaying and Appropriating Islamic Art and Architecture in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries*, Leiden: Brill, 2019, 120.



Vasari (1511-1574) was based in the superiority of established masters and their masterpieces.<sup>45</sup>

Riegl's text 'On the history of oriental carpets' in the catalogue of the exhibition adopts the hierarchical reading of urban pile carpets over tribal ones, and older over modern carpets due to the 'decrease in delicacy of artistic feeling in the oriental modern carpet weavers'.<sup>46</sup> Riegl echoes Smith's view but he does not argue on specific races. His comment brings to mind the concept of *Kunstwollen*, 'a certain culture's "will to art"', that Riegl would introduce in 1901, and which presents art as a product of biology related to the racist terms that prevailed in the discourse during the turn of the century.<sup>47</sup> However, Riegl studies the carpets as 'documents' in a comparative context beyond age, rarity and origin, thus surpassing the above comment that weakens his contribution to the 'knowledge about non-Western arts...as the result of cultural mixing, migration, and circulation through time and space'.<sup>48</sup>

Baluch carpets are presented as made by 'the Baluchis in south-eastern Persia'.<sup>49</sup> As the exhibits were purchased from Baluchistan they form under the title of 'Belutschistan' a separate category among Central Asian carpets also represented by Turkoman, Khiva, and Bokhara groups.<sup>50</sup> They are referred for the first time in western art historiography as the 'so-called Baluch carpets' due to the limited knowledge on the origin of their weavers roaming in a vast area between Persia and Afghanistan up to Khorasan.<sup>51</sup> Following Riegl's formal analysis they are taxonomised as 'nomadic' due to the fact they are made entirely of wool, have elaborated kilim ends, long fringes, and most of all geometric designs.<sup>52</sup>

Information is given on their blurry sober deep dark blue, blackish brown or red field that is disrupted by a little white or rarely by a yellow motif, such as a little cross or a dotted diamond; also the division of the space of the carpet is described as geometrical where motifs are so densely packed and geometrical that it remains doubtful where the pattern and the field is directed even if, according to Riegl's comparative stylistic analysis, they are related to Qashqai and Caucasian designs.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> Among the vast amount of literature on Riegl, see Diana Reynolds Cordileone, *Alois Riegl in Vienna 1875-1905, An Institutional Biography*, London and New York: Routledge, 2014; Denise-Marie Teece, 'Through the Renaissance Frame: Carpets and the Beginnings of 'Islamic Art' in Nineteenth-Century Vienna and Berlin', *The Textile Museum Journal* 44, 2017, 61.

<sup>46</sup> Alois Riegl, 'Zur Geschichte des Orientalischen Teppichs', *Katalog Der Ausstellung Orientalischer Teppiche Im K.K. Österr. Handels-Museum, 1891*, Wien: Verl. d. K.K. Österr. Handels-Museums Print, 11, 14.

<sup>47</sup> Michaud, *The Barbarian*, 113-120.

<sup>48</sup> Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, 'Art history and the global: deconstructing the latest canonical narrative', *Journal of Global History*, vol. 14:3, November 2019, 432.

<sup>49</sup> 'den Belutschen im Südosten Persiens', *Katalog*, 31.

<sup>50</sup> *Katalog*, 125.

<sup>51</sup> 'die sogenannten belutschische Teppiche', *Katalog*, 125.

<sup>52</sup> *Katalog*, 126, 131.

<sup>53</sup> *Katalog*, 126-7.

These average size carpets are thick and heavy and distinguished for their impression of having silky sheen due to their soft wool and not particularly dense knot.<sup>54</sup> Combining these comments with the introductory text of the catalogue 'The texture and use of Persian carpet' that underlies the importance of the 'purity' of the pattern due to its 'sharp' and 'clear' contouring usually in a darker shade to the field, the exclusive use of natural dyes for which Qashqai weavings are praised, and the well shorn wool found in Qashqai, Kurd, Kirman, and Turcoman specimens, the impression of an evaluation of Baluch carpets as inferior to the above categories is given.<sup>55</sup>

Furthermore, the text mentions the trade routes through Mashad and (after the expansion of the Trans-Caspian Railway by the Russians) through Merv to underline how these carpets reached Vienna just a few years prior to the exhibition of 1891.<sup>56</sup> Two illustrations and the captions of the exhibits testify they were loaned by Jacob Adutt, an important Sephardic carpet dealer working between Iran and Vienna, who loaned the majority of Central Asian carpets in the catalogue<sup>57</sup>. Baluch carpets were possibly presented in the gallery that according to the list of exhibits and plan of the galleries was dedicated to Central Asian carpets.<sup>58</sup>

In conclusion, during the late nineteenth century Baluch weavings entered museums of applied and decorative arts such as the South Kensington Museum in London and the Austrian Museum for Trade in Vienna. They were misattributed as Turcoman carpets or classified as the distinct category of 'Beluchsitan' carpets possibly according information provided by the dealers Richard in Tehran and Adutt in Vienna. However, the perception of Baluch carpets was shaped inside the museum following the hierarchical view of Persian and tribal carpets combined with racist ideas as expressed by Smith, and Riegl's radical vision for carpets beyond the established distinction between 'fine' and 'applied' arts. Willem von Bode (1845-1929), who from 1905 to 1920 would be the director general of all the royal museums of Prussia, welcomed the catalogue's contribution to the study of 'Islamic art'; however he criticized the 'disorderly' hanging of older and more recent carpets reminding him 'an ordinary Turkish bazaar'.<sup>59</sup> Von Bode's opinion reveals that museum professionals of influence in the decades to come would follow

---

<sup>54</sup> *Katalog*, 127.

<sup>55</sup> *Katalog*, 40-1.

<sup>56</sup> *Katalog*, 127.

<sup>57</sup> 'Jac. Adutt, Wien', Riegl, *Katalog*, 125, 131-3 nos 115-120 and 122-3. Adutt had a gallery of Persian and Turkish carpets in Wien I., Fleischmarkt 7, (1<sup>st</sup> district of Vienna), 'Illustrierte Sport-Zeitung', 26-09-1880, ANNO, 1; 'Die Presse', 07-09-1861, ANNO, 5, 'Wiener Zeitung', 10-04-1879, ANNO, 17. For information on Adutt I would like to thank Barbara Karl and Lara Steinhäuser.

<sup>58</sup> The Baluch carpets (nos 115-120, 122-3) were listed among the nos '115-148-Saal II', 'Nummern-Index' in *Katalog*, 286; see also the 'Centralasien' hall, Plan of the exhibition supplement to the *Katalog*.

<sup>59</sup> Wilhelm von Bode, *Mein Leben 1845-1929*, Berlin: H. Reckendorf, 1930, 93.

evaluation criteria based on the age and rareness of oriental carpets; thus they would be reluctant to musealise tribal carpets such as Baluch ones.

### **The arrival of Baluch carpets in US museums at the beginning of the twentieth century**

At the start of the twentieth century, a Baluch origin was connected to Persia as 'the philologist, Longworth Dames, in his *The Baloch Race* (1904) and *Popular Poetry of the Baloches* (1907) classified Balochi as an Iranian language'.<sup>60</sup> This classification was also linked with Baluchistan carpets in an article at *The Burlington magazine* suggesting their superiority to Indian silk ones:

The grammar of the Baluchi tongue shows that its people are of Aryan or Sanskrit stock, though it has many idioms that come from the Persian, as indeed, do almost half its words, greatly disguised, however, by corrupt pronunciation. The Baluchistan carpets are made of goat's hair, which gives a singular and beautiful lustre to the pile, and renders its appearance finer ever than that of Indian silk carpets, than which, indeed its tones are more subdued despite the fact that the dyes used are richer.<sup>61</sup>

British officers in Persia reported that Baluch wove carpets in considerable quantities and various areas from Beluchistan to Khorassan for their own use and export.<sup>62</sup> In 1908 the French Louis-Joseph Olmer, a professor of physics and chemistry at the Imperial Polytechnic College in Tehran, acknowledged also the 'Belouchistan' as a distinct category of tribal weavings.<sup>63</sup> Omer also recorded that the vast majority of carpets in Persia was produced by tribal populations; that Persian carpets were not to be found in Persia but mainly in trade centres such as

---

<sup>60</sup>Taj Mohammad Breseeg, *Baloch Nationalism: Its Origin and Development up to 1980*, PhD thesis at the School of Oriental and African Studies University of London, 2001, x. For the connection of Baluch 'Aryan'– Iranian origin and history within British aspirations in the twentieth century see Breseeg *Baloch*, xiii-xiv, 92.

<sup>61</sup> 'The classification of Oriental carpets', Part III (Conclusion), *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, United Kingdom: Savile Publishing Company, vol. 8:35, February 1906, 335-336.

<sup>62</sup> See for example: 'There are 2,000 or 3,000 looms in which nomad carpets are woven. These Baluch carpets are mainly worked in dark shades of red and blue. They are distinctly pleasing, and make excellent carpets for a dining room or library...', *Board of Trade Journal*, vol.50, United Kingdom: H.M. Stationery Office, 1905, 534; 'The Baluch nomads, bring in large quantities of their rugs which are sent mostly to Meshed', Great Britain. Parliament. House of Commons, *Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 127, H.M. Stationery Office 1906, 22, 34; "Nomad" carpets, cushion covers, saddlebags, & c., are woven in Seistan but not exported... Those known as 'Baluch' and 'Bahluli, which are made by the nomad tribes of the same names. They are invariably small rugs of somber colours (often with a ground of self-coloured camel wool) and simple designs. Wool is used for both the warp and the weft. The looms are stretched over the ground', Great Britain. Foreign Office, *Diplomatic and Consular Reports. Annual Series*, Issue 4150, Part 60, 1908, 27. For the above citations I would like to thank Willem Floor.

<sup>63</sup> Louis- Joseph Olmer, 'Rapport sur une mission scientifique en Perse', *Nouvelles archives des missions scientifiques et littéraires*, Paris: Imprimerie nationale, vol. 16:1, 1908, 41.

Constantinople; and that even if there was a decrease of exports in European countries such as France 'America is buying more and more'.<sup>64</sup>

Thus, Baluch carpets as affordable collectibles attracted the interest of Americans through the flow of oriental carpets and publications that established a new awareness of them.<sup>65</sup> For example, George Herman Ellwanger (1848-1906) in his *Oriental Rugs, A Monograph* published in 1903 advises collectors to cut off the kilim ends from Baluch carpets 'like useless fringe'.<sup>66</sup> In 1909, the dealer Arthur Urbane Diley (1873-1959) in his *Oriental rugs* listed Baluch as Turcoman carpets and traced common designs among Baluch, Turcoman and Afghans.<sup>67</sup> However, in 1913 Walter Augustus Hawley (1850-1923) in his *Oriental Rugs Antique and Modern* stated: 'Nor are they closely related to the Turkoman rugs...others have some crudely drawn flower design, as the Mina Khani, that tells of Persian influences'.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, Baluch carpets were misidentified as 'blue Bokharas'.<sup>69</sup> But to what extent these views were associated to the musealisation of Baluch carpets in the US requires further investigation.

Baluch carpets were introduced in US museums when museum objects enabled new interpretations of the world as tokens of cultural philanthropy.<sup>70</sup> For example, a Baluch carpet (numbered 31.23.108) and two saddle bag faces for donkey from the collection of George Walter Vincent Smith (1832-1923) are cherished in The George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum founded in 1896.<sup>71</sup> In 1915 a 'Prayer rug, Persian, Baluchi' was among the carpets' bequest by the alumnus Charles Martin Hall (1863-1914) to Oberlin College in Ohio that would be part of the collection of

---

<sup>64</sup> Olmer, 'Rapport', 42.

<sup>65</sup> Brian Spooner, "Afghan Carpets" *Expedition Magazine* 15.2 (1973): n. pag. *Expedition Magazine*. Penn Museum, 1973 Web. 28 Jan 2023  
<http://www.penn.museum/sites/expedition/?p=2394> (accessed 28.01.2023).

<sup>66</sup> William De Lancey Ellwanger, *The oriental rug: a monograph on eastern rugs and carpets, saddlebags, mats and pillows, with a consideration of kinds and classes, types borders, figures, dyes, symbols, etc., together with some practical advice to collectors*, New York: Dodd Mead and Company, 1903, 85.

<sup>67</sup> Arthur Urban Diley, *Oriental rugs*, Boston: A.U. Diley and co., 1909, 19-20, 43-4.

<sup>68</sup> Walter Augustus Hawley, *Oriental Rugs: Antique and Modern*, New York: Dodd, Mead and Company [1913], 1927, 249.

<sup>69</sup> Rosa Belle Holt, *Rugs: Oriental and Occidental, Antique and Modern. A Handbook for Ready Reference*, Cambridge, US: The University Press, 1908, 98.

<sup>70</sup> Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926*, US: The University of Chicago Press, 1998, 4.

<sup>71</sup> Information procured by Walter Denny. See also Joseph V. McMulland, Donald O. Reichert, *The George Walter Vincent and Belle Townsley Smith collection of Islamic Rugs*, Springfield, Massachusetts: George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum, 1975, entry numbers 73 (in colour), and 73, 74; Julia Bailey, 'Early Rug Collectors of New England' in Julia Bailey, Mark Hopkins, *Through the Collector's Eye, Oriental Rugs from New England Private Collections*, Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 1991 <https://ne-rugsociety.org/xternal-html/gallery/collectors-eye/early-rug-collectors.htm> (accessed 16-11-2022).

the Allen Memorial Art Museum established in 1917.<sup>72</sup> Also, a Baluch pillow and four carpets described as 'Rug Belouchistan' of 'Turcoman' origin acquired in 1914 shaped the core of the Baluch weaving category within the collection of George Hewitt Myers (1875-1957) that in 1925 founded The Textile Museum in Washington, DC, to present objects as 'concepts embodied in an institution operating for public benefit'.<sup>73</sup>

However, it was the extensive carpet corpus of 129 objects and among them one Baluch carpet offered in 1922 by James Franklin Ballard (1851-1931) to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York that incorporated tribal carpets within prestigious institutions related to 'fine art'.<sup>74</sup> The collection was exhibited in 1923 and accompanied by a catalogue. Edward Robinson (1858-1931), director of the museum, welcomed this donation of 'extraordinary importance' including classical-style carpets from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century; however, he reluctantly underlines that the carpets of the 'particularly welcome accessions' of Caucasian and Central Asian carpets that entered for the first time the collection were selected with 'fine discrimination'.<sup>75</sup> Also, he admitted that the authors of the catalogue, Joseph Breck (1885-1933), art historian, assistant director and curator of the department of decorative arts, and Frances Morris (1866-1955) associate curator of the same department presented information from 'the Museum Library' while the entries were limited to 'notes on colours and to comment of general interest as each rug ...is separately illustrated'.<sup>76</sup>

Based on publications in the museum's library that probably included some of those already referred to, Breck and Morris concluded that 'the carpets woven by the Turkmen of Afghanistan and Beluchistan have much the same character with the Transcaspian, but are inferior to color, design and technique';<sup>77</sup> thus the impression that the weavers of the Baluch carpets could be of Turcoman origin was promoted. The two exhibits that represented the category entitled 'Beluchistan' weaved by 'nomad inhabitants of the desolate Beluchistan' included a tent bag (now regarded as a storage bag from Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan) and a rug with the tree

---

<sup>72</sup> Even if there is no detailed inventorying in the museum's archive according Kevin R. E. Greenwood, this reference is comprised in the *Allen Memorial Art Bulletin*, 36: 1, 1978-79, 21, fig.18. See also Charles Mason, 'The History of the Asian Art Collection at Oberlin', *Bulletin of the Allen Memorial Art Museum at Oberlin College*, 53, Ohio: Oberlin College 2003, 5, 10.

<sup>73</sup>This data from the old register of The Textile Museum in Washington DC were forwarded by Sumru Belger Krody. See also Sumru Belger Krody, 'The Question of "What Went Before?" and George Hewitt Myers: The Formation of The Textile Museum Archaeological Collection' in Antoine De Moor, Cacilia Fluck, Petra Linscheid, *Explorers, First Collectors and Traders of Textiles from Egypt of the 1st Millennium AD*, Cannibal Publishing, 2021, (22-33), 22-3.

<sup>74</sup>Joseph Breck and Frances Morris, *The James F. Ballard Collection of Oriental Rugs*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1923, no. 115, 57.

<sup>75</sup>Edward Robinson, 'Preface', in Joseph Breck and Frances Morris, *The James F. Ballard Collection of Oriental Rugs*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1923, vi.

<sup>76</sup>Robinson, 'Preface', vii.

<sup>77</sup>Breck and Morris, *The James F. Ballard*, xxv.

of life motif acknowledged as a 'typical Beluchistan' with foreign influence in the design 'less conspicuous' than in the tent bag.<sup>78</sup> Notes referred to their designs that varied from 'crudely drawn geometric figures to unpretentious adaptations of Persian floral designs...the use of yellow or ivory white to relieve the subdued tonality of the deep, rich color... the lustrous sheen in their pile, due to the soft, fine wool'.<sup>79</sup>

This new appreciation of Baluch weavings in art institutions is also testified as a 'Beluchistan mat' with the typical Baluch stylized animals from the Ballard collection was exhibited in the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh in 1923 and The John Herron Art Institute in Indianapolis in 1924.<sup>80</sup> As the director of the latter, John Arthur Maclean (1879-1964) clarified, carpets were appointed an accentuated symbolic museum value triggered by the fascination, information and evaluation procured by collectors-connoisseurs: 'We raise them to a more royal state—that is, into the field of art... First comes Persia because of its ancient priority...and finally a miscellaneous group, which includes the Central Asian rugs that might well have a classification of their own. These divisions are based upon the attributions of the owner, and include both provenance and date'.<sup>81</sup> The Baluch mat was grouped to 'The miscellaneous group... rugs which, with their predominating red tones and their somewhat sombre aspect, are distinctly characteristic of Central Asia'.<sup>82</sup>

During the early twentieth century Baluch carpets were integrated into US art museums following their past categorisation as 'Beluchistan'/ of Turcoman origin/ Central Asian within a raised status for village and tribal carpets promoted by collectors but still as inferior to Persian ones. As known, the American Persophile Arthur Upham Pope (1881-1969), who established a career as an expert in Persian art and curated the International Exhibition of Persian art in 1931 in London, stated, it was the older luxurious objects made by the charismatic Iranians of Aryan origin that constituted the essence of Persian art.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, collectors in US interested in village and nomadic carpets from Persia, Central Asia, the Caucasus and Turkey such as the members of the Hajji Baba Club of New York founded in 1932 by Dilley, and to which Ballard and Myers belonged, were 'largely uninterested in...Baluch

---

<sup>78</sup>Breck and Morris, *The James F. Ballard*, nos 114-115, 57, ill.75. No 114 was later attributed as an Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan storage bag, see Maurice S. Dimand and Jean Mailey, *Oriental Rugs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1973, no. 194, 294–95, ill. 295.

<sup>79</sup>Breck and Morris, *The James F. Ballard*, 57.

<sup>80</sup> Joseph Ballard, John Arthur Maclean, *Catalogue of oriental rugs in the collection of James F. Ballard*, Indianapolis, Ind.: the Hollenbeck Press, 1924, <https://www.loc.gov/item/24023925/>, 187,188. For Ballard as a connoisseur-collector and carpet varieties in the Ballard collection see Walter B. Denny, Thomas J. Ferham, *The Carpet and the Connoisseur: The James F. Ballard Collection of Oriental Rugs*, Hali publications Ltd., 2016.

<sup>81</sup> MacLean, 'Introduction' in Ballard, MacLean, *Collection*, ix.

<sup>82</sup> Ballard, MacLean, *Collection*, 180.

<sup>83</sup> Yuka Kadoi, 'Arthur Upham Pope and his "research methods in Muhammadan art": Persian carpets', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 7, June 2012, 9.

rugs – for which most of the group had no respect'.<sup>84</sup> This is quite intriguing as in the decades to come it would be collectors that through donations of Baluch carpets would change museum attitudes in US and beyond.

### Conclusion

This study clarifies that some general information before the musealisation of Baluch weavings by Pottinger and Masson (neither of whom can be described as a connoisseur) introduced a possible common origin of Baluch to Turcomans and evaluated their carpets as inferior tribal products. Despite that, the crucial point of their musealisation was the decision of the South Kensington Museum of applied arts to create a comprehensive Persian collection and the choice in 1875 of Murdoch Smith to include in it a pair of Baluch bagfaces from the Richard collection. Misidentified as Turcoman carpets these bagfaces were linked in Smith's ethno-cultural prejudice view in an attempt to evaluate artefacts according to the 'ethnic' origins of their creators echoing the 'Aryan' linguistic and racist discourse and Smith's role as collaborator in Persia with the South Kensington Museum that gave him the prestige of a connoisseur.

Baluch carpets were acknowledged as a distinct category of weavings within museums of arts and crafts in 1891, when they were presented in the carpet exhibition held in the Austrian Trade Museum. Riegl as an art historian and museum curator was the one to compile a concise presentation of the 'Beluchistan' category even if based only on eight carpets loaned by the Viennese dealer Adutt. In Riegl's comparative context similarities with Qashqai and Caucasian designs were noted even if the patterns in the 'Beluchistan' group were difficult to be traced due to the carpets' blurry colours, dense patterns and thick pile. However, it was through Riegl's radical vision to re-delineate boundaries between 'fine' and 'applied' arts that tribal carpets, such as the Baluch ones, were contemplated a museum objects.

Thus, the status of Baluch weavings was raised in important European museums of arts and crafts. In addition, a basis for the musealisation of these weavings in the beginning of the twentieth century was formed. During this latter period a Baluch origin was linked to Aryans, and a re-evaluation of their weavings was discussed in *The Burlington Magazine*, a world leading publication for fine and decorative arts. However, museums in US enriched their collections with a few Baluch weavings, based on repetition of the previous era's stereotypes. These were seen as specimens of the 'Beluchistan' category linked to a Turcoman origin and were classified as 'miscellaneous' thus not deriving from a consistent group with clarified characteristics. Even though, a new appreciation of these weavings was established by their integration into museum collections linked to 'fine' art such as the one from the Ballard donation at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

---

<sup>84</sup> Thomas Farnham, 'Rugs in the City-Seventy-five years of the Hajji Baba Club of New York', in Jon Thompson, Thomas J. Farnham, Daniel Shaffer ed., *From Timbuktu to Tibet: Exotic Carpets and Textiles from New York Collectors*, New York: Hali publications, 2008, <https://www.hajjibaba.org/rugs-in-the-city/> (accessed 22-01-2022).



During the same period Russian aspirations in Central Asia testify to a vivid interest for nomadic carpets, especially Turkoman ones, within the European stereotype regarding the superiority of Persian carpets.<sup>85</sup> Baluch weavings entered the collection of the Peter the Great Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (the *Kunstkamera*) in Saint Petersburg.<sup>86</sup> The most distinguished ethnographer-collector Samuil Martynovich Dudin (1863-1929) placed Baluch carpets at the end of his study dedicated to the carpets of Central Asia such as the Turkoman, Uzbek, Kirghiz and Afghanistan ones aligning with their evaluation in West Europe. At the same time he altered the above evaluation scheme. He suggested Baluch carpets were technically and aesthetically superior to Afghanistan ones: their weaving was denser, the cut of their pile smoother and of normal height, their motifs more original compared to those in Afghanistan carpets and despite the fact that they often reminded of elements in Turkmenistan carpets.<sup>87</sup> In addition, the *Kunstkamera* cherishes a series of photos from the Central Asian Ethnological Expedition of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR of 1929 that document the Baluch of Khorasan weaving and resting on carpets; this testifies a focused interest of Russians not only on the carpets but also on the Baluch as the creators of their own distinctive weavings.<sup>88</sup>

In particular, the Baluch weaving of Khorasan that emerged by the contact of dispersed Baluch populations with Turkmen tribes that were living there attracted the interest of western collectors after the middle twentieth century.<sup>89</sup> Among collectors' first attempts to identify individual tribes and their weavings based in western connoisseurship and dealers' information is the exhibition by the

---

<sup>85</sup> Е. Г. Царева, 'Восточные ковры в русских коллекциях и интерьерах.

Туркменские ковры в дворцах и музеях Санкт-Петербурга. XVIII–XX вв.' М.Е. Резван, *Русский ориентализм (наука, искусство, коллекции)*, МАЭ РАН 2018, 137-170 (Elena G. Tsareva, 'Oriental carpets in Russian collections and interiors. Turkmen carpets in the palaces and museums of St. Petersburg. XVIII–XX centuries', in M.E. Rezvan, *Russian Orientalism (science, art, collections)*, MAE RAS 2018, 137-170).

<sup>86</sup>Elena Tsareva, *Rugs and Carpets from Central Asia. The Russian Collections*, Vienna: Allen Lane- Penguin Books, 1984, 206-213.

<sup>87</sup> С. М. Дудин, 'Ковровые изделия Средней Азии (с 4 рис. и 8 табл.)', *Сборник Музея антропологии и этнографии (научные статьи) Сборник МАЭ; т. 7*, Ленинград: Изд-во АН СССР, 1928, 154-155 (Samuil Martynovich Dudin, 'Carpet products of Central Asia (Presented by Academician E. F. Karski at the meeting of the Department of Historical Sciences and Phylogeny on April 21, 1926)', *Collection of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography: (scientific articles)*, MAE 7, Leningrad: Academy of Sciences of the URSS, 1928, 154-155).

<sup>88</sup>See for example a woman weaving a pillow entitled 'Carpet production', MAE No. 4060-268, in 'Production of carpet products. Baloch Khorasan. Turkmenistan, Mary velayat, Bayramali etrap (Turkmen SSR, Bayramali district) 1929', in <http://collection.kunstkamera.ru/entity/OBJECT/87470?ethnos=3510139&expedition=3600149&rubrics=1242144317&index=11>, accessed 10 May 2022.

<sup>89</sup> Spooner, 'Investment', 8.



International Hajji Baba Society in 1974 in Washington DC.<sup>90</sup> Also, the exhibition entitled 'Rugs of the wandering Baluchi' in 1976 in London, in the catalogue of which the western collectors' view that the 'identification and grouping even without tribal association is an intriguing one, and certainly enhances the pleasure and interest in collection and study' is revealed.<sup>91</sup> In this context donations of Baluch weavings followed in the decades to come. The most comprehensive is the one compiled by Jeff W. Boucher (1915-1994) and donated in 1996 to the Indianapolis Museum of Art; thus Baluch weavings from 'miscellaneous' specimens were established as a complete weaving category meriting to be cherished in art museums.<sup>92</sup> Beyond US, the collection that Yiannis Sarzetakis donated in 2011 in memory of his son Jason Deighton-Sarzetakis at the Corfu Museum of Asian Art fosters Baluch weavings presence in European museums.<sup>93</sup>

Contrary to what the 'Baluchistan' category implied Baluch weaving is not exclusively connected to a single remote area that in the twentieth century was divided between Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>94</sup> It is linked to disperse Baluch and the spread of weaving among tribal groups within the Persian cultural sphere. Phylogenetic research tracing connections between Baluch, Shahsevan, Qashqai, Tekke and Yomut suggests that 'Baluchi weaving traditions, like those of the Boyer Ahmad and Bakhtiari, were originally borrowed from Turkic peoples their ancestors came into contact with'.<sup>95</sup> Field research in Khorasan testifies the use of geometric Turkmen and semi-geometric Arab Afhsar motifs by Baluch.<sup>96</sup> The Afghan Ghulam Rahman Amir documents that, during the 1970's, the Helmand Baluch in Sistan of southwest Afghanistan reproduced 'ancient designs' whereas 'flowers and leaves,

---

<sup>90</sup> Jones H. McCoy, Jeff W. Boucher, *Baluchi rugs: An exhibition featuring rugs of the Baluchi tribes of Iran and Afghanistan*, Christmas exhibition of the International Hajji Baba Society, Inc., Washington DC: The International Hajji Baba Society, Inc., 1974.

<sup>91</sup> Noel Hobbs, 'Baluchi weavings: a collector's study and evaluation', in David Black and Clive Loveless (eds), *Rugs of the Wandering Baluchi*, London: David Black Oriental Carpets, 1976, 17.

<sup>92</sup> Jeff W. Boucher, *Baluchi Woven Treasures*, Alexandria US: Jeff Boucher, 1989.

<sup>93</sup> Kassiani Kagouridi, Eirini Mexa, Victor J. Chen, Ying-Zhi Xu and Gregory D. Smith, 'In the field of Baluch: Dye analysis on weavings from the Sarzetakis Collection', *Annual Meeting of Pan-Hellenic Association of Conservators of Antiquities*, 03-04 December 2016, Athens; Kassiani Kagouridi, 'The Sarzetakis Collection: Dedicated to the nomads of Central Asia', *Carpet Collector* 4/2017, 50-55; Kassiani Kagouridi, 'Musealisation and museum management; A comparative study between the presentations of the Baluch weaving collections at the Indianapolis Museum of Art and the Corfu Museum of Asian Art' (in Greek), MSc thesis, The Open Hellenic University, Patras:2020, 52-55.

<sup>94</sup> For the understanding of Baluch in a comparative context see Spooner, 'Investment', 18-19.

<sup>95</sup> J.J. Tehrani, M. Collard, S.J. Shennan, 'The cophylogeny of populations and cultures: reconstructing the evolution of Iranian tribal craft traditions using trees and jungles', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B, Biological Sciences*, 365(1559), 01 December 2010, 3869, 3871.

<sup>96</sup> M.F. Nia, A. Piri, R. Erfanmanesh, L.H. Kermani, 'Carpets Design and Map Investigation of Baluch of Khorasan (Case Study of Areas Taibad and Khaf)', *Asian Social Science*, 12 (4), 2016, 159-170.

natural scenes, depictions of animals and birds or household implements do not exist in the carpets'.<sup>97</sup> However, carpets known as 'war rugs' produced after 1978 in Afghanistan also by Baluch document how their artistry evolves.<sup>98</sup>

The above various data sets challenge previous era's stereotypes as negotiable and non-absolute explanations. Having in mind that musealisation functions as one viewpoint among others 'so long as the object exists', the re-tracing of the early musealisation of Baluch weavings and related art historiography forms a strong argument to unlock and overcome their narrative frame inside the museum and within prejudices in Persian art.<sup>99</sup> Also, it enriches discussion not only regarding the prejudices against 'ethnographic' or 'primitive' objects already on higher respect but connects them to the whole idea of 'minor' or 'applied' as opposed to 'fine' arts and the role museums played in reshaping it.

**Kassiani Kagouridi** is Head of the Department of Museum Collections at the Corfu Museum of Asian Art; PhD candidate in Art History at the University of Ioannina under the supervision of the Assistant Professor Aris Sarafianos. Her PhD project explores the reception and history of the material culture of Baluch carpets in Western art narratives and collections.

kkagkouridi@culture.gr



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

---

<sup>97</sup> Ghulam Rahman Amiri, *The Helmand Baluch: A Native Ethnography of the People of Southwest Afghanistan*, United States: Berghahn Books, 2020, 107-113.

<sup>98</sup> Brian Spooner, 'Afghan Wars, Oriental Carpets, and Globalization' in *Expedition*, 53-1, 11-20, 2011.

<sup>99</sup>Lynn, 'Museology', 256.