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AZERBAIJANI CARPET OF SAFAVID ERA

*Fragments of the Sheikh Safi carpet. Tabriz, 1539.
Victoria and Albert Museum, London*



The Azerbaijani carpet has always, especially during the cultural upsurge in the East, been a synthesis of many aesthetic principles. Remaining traditional in their spirit and organization of the material, carpets absorbed a variety of elements of the reality - their creators drew motifs from literature and creatively

mastered the art of miniature painting. In this respect, the 16th century, which went down in the history of Azerbaijan as a golden age of culture, is characteristic. The authentic masterpieces of carpet making of that time combined the subtlety and grace of miniature painting, the traditional decorative-planar solution of motifs and

*Sheikh Safi carpet. Tabriz, 1539.
Victoria and Albert Museum,
London*





*Namazlig. Tabriz, 16th century.
Topkapi Museum, Istanbul*

a magnificent color palette reflecting all the colorfulness and diversity of nature.

In the 16th century, the Azerbaijani Safavid dynasty, which created a strong centralized state, encouraged the development of culture and art. In Tabriz, the capital of the mighty Safavid state, which became one of the leading cultural centers of the East, a bright and distinctive school of miniature painting took shape. Miniatures of this period stored in private collections, in the British Museum in London and in the Topkapi Museum in Istanbul depict beautiful carpets with Kufic inscriptions, art compositions "islimi", "khatai", "bulud", namaz (prayer) rugs with a smooth background, afshan compositions, "lachak-turunj" compositions, etc., as well as carpets with a plot. The magnificent miniatures of the Tabriz school of this period not only captured unique examples of Azerbaijani carpets, but also became vivid evidence of the influence that miniature painting had on carpet art.

Artists modified and rethought the carpet tradition. Long-time ideas took on a new form, fitting into the modern artistic process. New landmarks - the combination of artistic plasticity and expressiveness of the image - became characteristic for carpets of the described period.

Sufism, a mystical current in Islam, in the teaching of which an original transformation of ancient ideas related to the beliefs of shamanism took place, had a significant influence on the development of carpet art in Azerbaijan. Sufism adapted the traditional art system, including carpet weaving, to the needs of esoteric training. The Azerbaijani carpet was given special coordinates and a system of values. The carpet was perceived as a service, more precisely - worship. As the Sufis reinterpret issues of cosmogony and eternity, contemplation of being and worship of beauty are among the main motives of Sufi carpets. Enjoying the mystical beauty of the universe, striving for beauty as the highest spiritual value, contemplating the unearthly, divine light and uniting with it in prayerful ecstasy are a mystical practice of Sufism, which finds its artistic embodiment in a special soft manner of the image called a smooth manner. Long smooth lines do not speak, entertain or build up - they plunge you into meditation. In a sense, this meant engaging in spiritual practices or meditation.

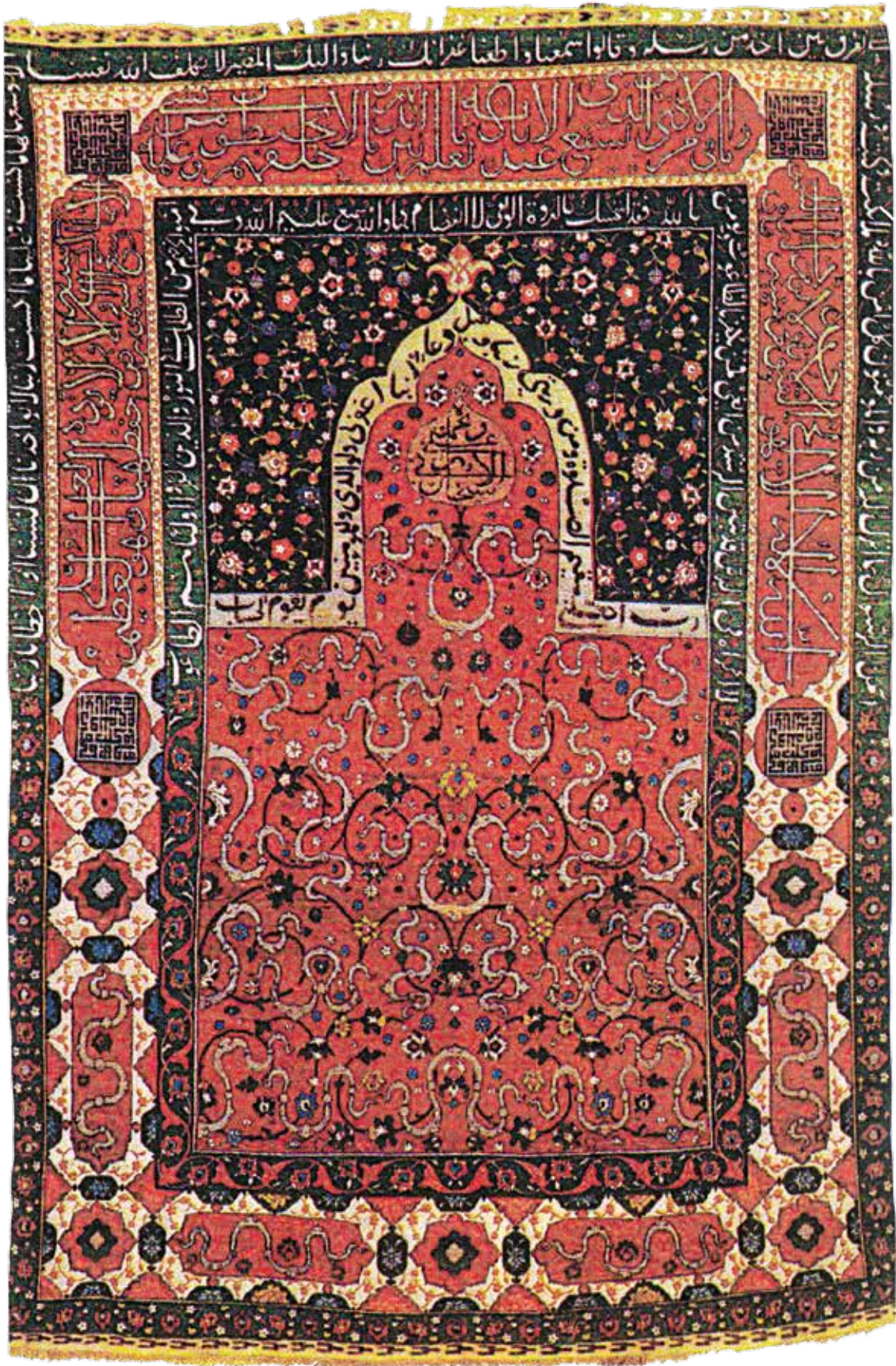
The rotation, the compositional spiral from the periphery to the center, is an expression of spiritual evolu-



tion from everyday life to the Absolute Reality and the One and Eternal by means of visual means, achieving a special sound and authentic perfection in the new compositions of Tabriz carpets "afshan", "shah-Abbasi", "lachak-turunj" and "Sheikh Safi". Classic examples of these carpets, which the American scientist Arthur Pope called great, can be found in the collections of the Milan museum Poldi Pezzoli, London's Victoria and Albert Museum, the Budapest Museum of Applied Art, the New York Metropolitan Museum and the Paris Museum of Decorative Arts.

One of the peaks of the Azerbaijani carpet art of this period is the Tabriz carpet "Sheikh Safi" (1539), known in the West as "Ardebilian" and stored in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

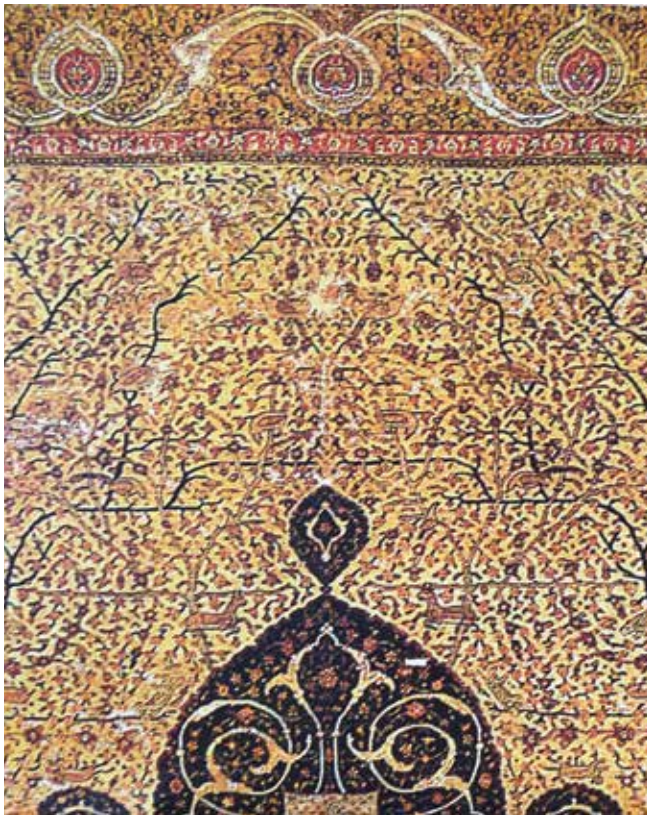
Since the 16th century, there has been an increase in the influence of miniature painting on the interpretation of the plot of carpets. Subject-themed compositions with scenes of hunting, animal chase and animal fights, supplemented with floral ornaments, served as a traditional and sustainable motif in the decorative art of Azerbaijan. It was the sixteenth century that determined



*The Karabakh carpet. 17th century.
Museum of Turkic and Islamic Art, Istanbul*

the main directions for the further evolution of subject-thematic carpets, becoming the starting point of today's assessment of the artistic value of Azerbaijani carpets. The Azerbaijani carpet weaving of this period successfully developed techniques and methods of classical miniature painting and enriched them with a new interpretation of traditional motifs, achieving a high harmony of decor, color and composition. Carpets of this time differ in the unity of style, harmonious combination of real motifs with decorative ornamentation, precise shapes and proportions of constructions, elegance of weaving and coloring.

The golden period of the 16th century, when art was designed to reflect the brilliance and power of the reigning dynasty, manifested itself in the dissemination of images of the monarch's pompous high-society hunting with courtiers and feudal nobility on Azerbaijani carpets in a truly national spirit and in the development of plots and ornamental decoration. A special group is the carpets with a plot that carry illustrations to the works of the great poets of the East, and, above all, the great Azerbaijani poet Nizami Ganjavi. ❖



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*Silk carpet. Tabriz, 17th century.
Carpet Museum, Tehran*