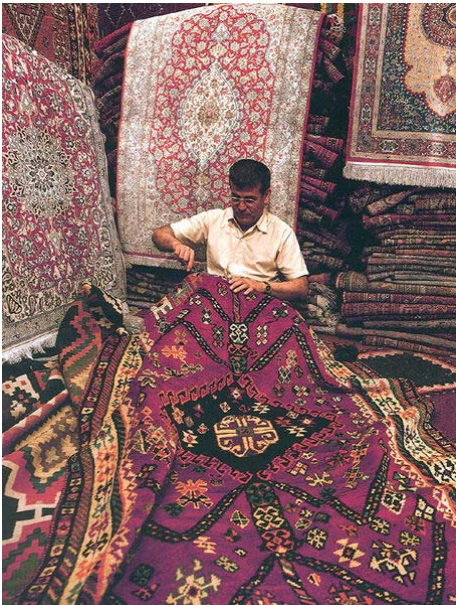


Turkish Carpet Information Sheet

Carpet and rug weaving have been a traditional occupation and cultural product for centuries in Turkey. Traditionally the carpets were created for very practical functions as saddle bags for horses and camels, as warm blankets, as room dividers, and even as baby cradles. No one knows exactly when the technique of carpet weaving first appeared; however, the oldest surviving carpet in the world is from the 5th century and made in the Turkish style of a double knot.



Turkish rugs are made from five basic materials, consisting of sheep wool, goat hair, cotton, floss silk, and silk. The carpets have been naturally dyed for thousands of years using vegetables, bark, roots, and other natural products. The color yellow usually comes from onion skin or saffron; browns are created from pine cones or dry tobacco leaves; blue emerges from indigo; reds arise from cochineal or madder root. Since the 19th century, synthetic dyes have also been used.



The art of carpet weaving continued and developed throughout Turkish history. Towards the end of the 14th century, these rugs began to enter European homes, churches and castles. Travelers and merchants to the Middle East began bringing the rugs home with them. In the 16th century "Classical Ottoman Rugs" emerged, in which the designs and colors on the rug were determined by palace artists and then sent to weaving centers. The designs of this time, which consisted of twisting branches, leaves, and flowers such as tulips, carnations and hyacinths, were woven in a naturalistic style and established the basic composition of the rug. This style can still be found in Turkish rugs today.



There are many different types of motifs and emblems which can be seen on Turkish rugs. They are usually either geometrical and stylized motifs or nature and floral designs. These compositions, motifs, and designs are not created at random. Instead they represent meaningful symbols. Some of the most common motifs on rugs include the “Tree of Life” symbolizing long life and re-birth, the “Horns of Animals” symbolizing power, the “Hands on Hips” symbolizing female fertility and the mother of God, as well as the “Hanging Candle” symbolizing holy (eternal) light.

The “eye motif” can be seen on the carpet opposite. It is believed that the best way to prevent harm from coming to one’s self is to ward it off with an “eye.” Woven into the carpets and rugs are traditional symbols that tell a story and have meaning. Different regions and designers utilize various motifs and symbols to create a carpet. Turkish carpets are usually named after the town or region where they are made, and each type is distinctive.



Today, Turkish carpets serve not only practical functions as floor or wall coverings to keep out the cold, but they are also used as prayer rugs by Muslims. Carpets are also often traditionally a part of wedding and funeral ceremonies. The floors of mosques are often covered by carpets and in Turkey there is a tradition of donating carpets to mosques.