

# The Wagner Garden Carpet



AGA KHAN MUSEUM

# A World in a Carpet



A very rare work of art is visiting the Aga Khan Museum: the Wagner Garden Carpet.

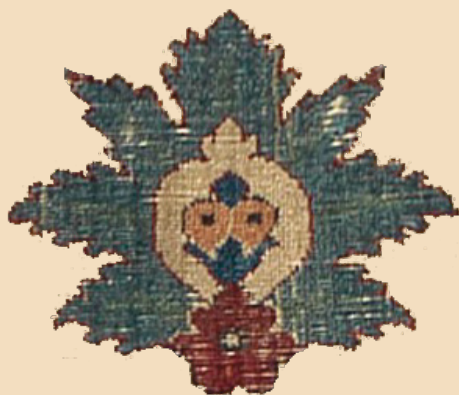
A world of teeming nature is alive within its borders – and a world of knowledge, too.

Discover how its many leaping, flapping, and swimming beasts are made from tiny knots of wool, tied one by one. Marvel at the brilliance of technologies that bring abundant water to arid lands.

Contemplate the carpet's relevance for today's world, where we struggle with climate change, diminished resources, and the loss of habitat of the very animals who roam along the garden's flowery paths, and of the trees that grow on its banks of flowing waters.

The garden awaits your discovery.

Use this brochure to guide you around its edges. Find the creatures, count the carpet knots, and dream up your own carpet adventure!

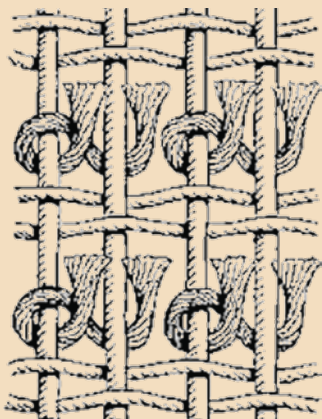


Iran, Kirman, 17th century, cotton warp, wool, cotton and silk weft, wool pile,  
H 5.3m, W 4.3m, on loan from the Burrell Collection, Glasgow.



# Carpet Making

This carpet was made on a large, vertical frame of stretched “warps” – strong cotton threads held tight. A team of weavers worked on different sections across the warp.



The carpet’s soft, dense surface (called “pile”) is made up of tiny wool knots.

To make this pile, weavers tied every knot by hand and beat it into place with a fork. Then, they cut the yarn with a knife.

Weavers worked from a paper drawing held in place behind the warp. That way, they could tell when to change the colours of the knots to make the animals and plants.

The carpet’s size is 530 times 430 centimetres. Each square centimetre has about 100 knots.

*How many knots are there in the whole carpet?*

*How long do you think it took to make it?*

*Look at the bottom and the top, inside the borders.*

*Where do you think the weavers started and finished the carpet?*

Above: Persian knots with two plain “wefts” between them.





# The Colours of the Carpet

Natural dyes like indigo (for blue), madder (for red), leaves and flowers (for yellow), and iron-rich muds and tree barks (for browns and blacks) once gave this carpet brilliant colours. Today, they look much more muted – why?

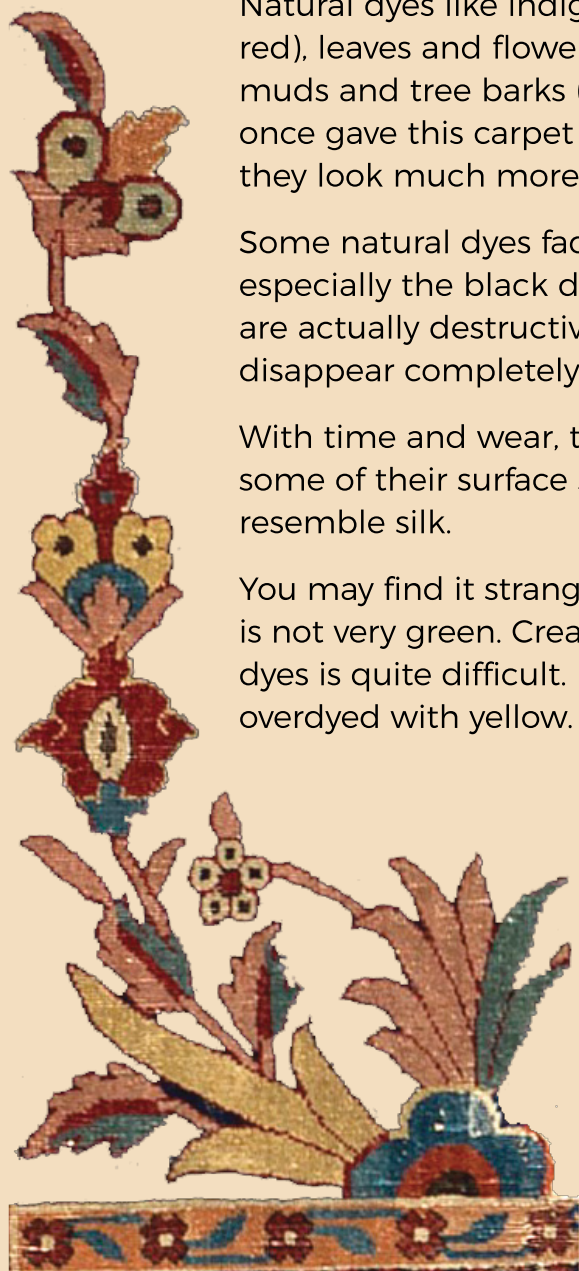
Some natural dyes fade with time. Others, especially the black dyes made with iron, are actually destructive, causing areas to disappear completely.

With time and wear, the wools can also lose some of their surface scales, causing them to resemble silk.

You may find it strange that this garden carpet is not very green. Creating green with natural dyes is quite difficult. Indigo blue has to be overdyed with yellow. The yellow dye (though easy to find in many common plants like goldenrod) fades quickly, leaving the blue behind.

*What is the dominant colour in the carpet?*

*How many colours can you count?*



# The Creatures

On this carpet, animals roam freely without fear of hunters or humans. If you are very still, you can almost hear the leaves rustling in the breeze, insects humming, birds cooing and calling, and dogs barking.



Find the many peacocks that wander among the trees. With its trailing tail, the peacock has long been a symbol of royalty and of paradise. The very blues, golds, and oranges of the carpet recall the shining colours of a peacock's tail. Today, some species of this regal bird are on endangered lists, threatened by habitat loss.



*What clues suggest that the carpet has elements of both a forest and a garden?*

*Find the very smallest creature in the garden. Why do you think it is the smallest?*

*Find the largest creature in the garden. Why do you think it is the largest?*



# The Plants

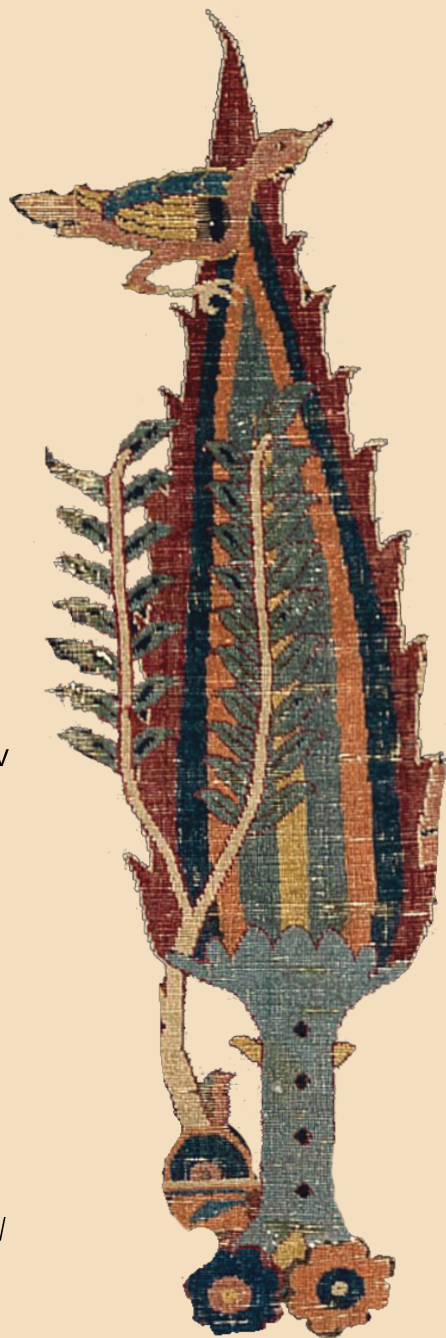
The carpet's garden is full of trees and plants, so many that every space has a leaf, flower, or stem.

Find the cypress trees that grow along the banks of the water channels (hint: they are tall, smooth, and pointed). Often associated with paradise in literature and visual art, this tree is chosen for many Islamic gardens. Its elegant spire points heavenward, seeming to invite quiet contemplation.

Some species of cypress are now on international endangered lists, threatened by habitat loss, pollution, and the clearcutting of forests.

Outside the Museum, the Aga Khan Park gives shelter to these graceful trees. See if you can spot them, and try identifying other trees as well.

*Close your eyes . . . can you smell the fragrance of the flowers?*



# The Water Channels



The carpet's garden is divided by three water channels modelled after the classical Persian *chahar bagh*, a formal garden with water courses. The third channel swells into a central area that may once have held a pavilion, and now has been repaired to show ducks and fish swimming within.

Canada has plenty of water. It is much scarcer in the part of the world this carpet comes from.

Engineers in Muslim societies developed ingenious water technologies to support the necessities of life, and to irrigate beautiful gardens. Many were later adopted in other regions of the world.

Just outside the Museum, the Aga Khan Park is inspired by the *chahar bagh* design. In summer you will find ducks and geese swimming in the pools, as they do in the carpet.

*Why not enjoy a picnic in the Park later?*



# Storytelling in the Garden

Invent your own story about how you feel when you can be in nature or in a garden. Imagine your adventures in the lush and fertile world of the carpet.



*Why don't you compose a little poem?*



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