

ISLAMIC CARPETS IN POLISH PAINTING.

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE ICONOGRAPHY OF ORIENTAL TEXTILES

Summary

Poland has played a leading role in the history of Oriental carpets in Europe. Products of Oriental decorative art reached our country already in the Middle Ages, for Poland lay on one of the most important trading routes linking the East to the West. Merchants' caravans reached Lvov, from where they continued their travel either northward, through Vilnius, or to Western Europe, through Cracow. A large part of merchandise, which comprised mainly textiles and carpets, stayed in Poland, as testified by inventories of movables owned by kings, magnates, noblemen and townspeople, church inventories and entries in custom registers, with quantities and prices of the imported goods.

Information about Oriental carpets in Poland can also be drawn from iconographic sources, sometimes even more accurate than written records. This is because carpets were depicted in paintings, often exactly dated, with such a high precision that we can define the centre of carpet-production for the model of the represented work, all on the basis of ornaments applied.

The painting from the 2nd quarter of the 17th century kept in the parish church at Zawada shows the Reverend Andrzej Tarło kneeling on a carpet spread on the altar's steps. The motifs used in its decoration indicate that the painting depicts a Turkish carpet of the Ladik type, whose primary function was to serve Muslims during their ritual prayers. In the collections of the National Museum in Cracow there exists a carpet with the composition close to the painted one, thus the latter can be dated as an early 17th century product. In the Museum at Liw a painting is kept representing Zbigniew Ossoliński with his sons, painted in the mid-17th century. The picture's background contains a table covered with a carpet. All the details of the ornament that embellishes this textile point to a Turkish carpet, so-called Transylvanian, as a model (the name comes from the place where a group of stylistically similar carpets was discovered). In the collections of the National Museum in Cracow some carpets of this type have been preserved, one of which is particularly close to the textile in the Liw painting. Thus, it can be dated, in accordance with the date on the Liw painting, around the mid-17th century. The so-called Transylvanian carpets more frequently appear in Polish painting. On the refectory ceiling in the former Piarist monastery in Rzeszów appears a scene with the meeting at Emaus. Christ with his disciples has been represented against a landscape. The table which is the composition's centre has been covered with a carpet decorated with a double mihrab and a characteristic border with octagonal medallions carrying geometrized

motifs of palmettes. In the collections of the National Museum in Cracow a very similar textile, coming from around the mid-17th century, has been preserved.

Popular in Poland were also Persian carpets. On the portrait representing Prince Ladislas Sigismundus Vasa painted around 1625–30, now in the Czartoryski Collections in Cracow, we can see a table covered with a carpet, whose prototype was a Persian carpet executed in the period of the greatest development of classical Persian manufactories, on the turn of the 16th and 17th century. Similarly, a Persian carpet was reproduced by the painter of Stanisław Tęczyński's portrait, executed around 1634. In this case the prototype may have been the so-called Polish carpet, imported from Persia at the beginning of the 17th century. In turn, in two portraits showing King John III Sobieski alone and with his son Jakub, respectively, painted by J. Tricius in 1676, the table is covered with an identical carpet, whose pattern repeats the design typical of Persian tied carpets produced in Kirman in the 17th century. Still another type of Persian carpet appears in some pictures painted by P. Danckers around 1630 (two male and one female portrait). The analysis of ornaments demonstrates that these paintings reproduce the so-called medallion carpet, according to the literature on the subject, executed in Persia in the early 17th century.

In the analysed Oriental carpets preserved till our days a certain regularity is visible. Though it was easy to find in the Polish collections the specimens related to Turkish carpets represented in the paintings, only with difficulty could we link the painted Persian carpets with the items preserved in the collections. From what can be judged on the basis of the material, there exist no analogies to the latter in Poland. Turkish carpets were imported to Poland in larger numbers; they were also smaller in size than the Persian products, owing to which they were less exposed to destruction. What is more, they were kept mainly in the estates of the gentry, church and monasteries and in burghers' houses. Thus, being better protected, they suffered less from wars and pillages.