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## Salon du Tapis d'Orient

The Salon du Tapis d'Orient is a moderated discussion group in the manner of the 19th century salon devoted to oriental rugs and textiles and all aspects of their appreciation. Please include your full name and e-mail address in your posting.

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### Rugs and Old Masters: Part 1 - Animals in Paintings

by Pierre Galafassi

More than forty European paintings, frescos and miniatures dated between 1250 and 1455 feature rugs with clearly recognizable animals as main motifs. It is possible that at least some of the rugs that served as props were already old (conserved in some church treasury, for example). Most of these motifs are not found in any extant carpets, which makes us wonder whether they are always faithful representations or are, in part, fruit of the painter's fertile imagination.

Two of the oldest rug representations (dated ca.1250 and 1258) come from regions in the eastern marches of Europe, Bulgaria (still part of a shrinking Byzantine Empire at that time) and Armenia. The former seems to follow classical Roman and Byzantine canons, with imperial eagles and other animals included in roundels (laurel crowns?), a pattern also seen in many Roman mosaics. The latter might either be from a similar origin or an import from further east: China, India or Persia (elephants?).





FIG 1 and 2: Anonymous artist, ca.1258. *St Nicholas and the Carpet Seller*. Boyana church Bulgaria



FIG 3: Toros Rolin, *The Armenian Royal Family*. Manuscript illustration, ca. 1250; Patriarchate Library. Jerusalem

In a second group of paintings, the rugs feature highly stylized **filiform** animals. One can recognize, for example, single birds (anorectic eagles?), or two birds facing a central pole (a life-tree?), or two trees enclosing a single bird, or the fight of a phoenix and a dragon (surely for food, poor beasts!). The animal motifs are always included in square or octagonal cartouches. To our limited knowledge, although no carpet with this filiform style survived, the fact that at least seven different painters (Giotto, Mantegna, Fra Carnavale, L. Memmi, Sassetta, G. Di Paolo, and S. di Pietro) featured such carpets in more than a dozen paintings dated from 1330 to 1455 suggests that they are truthful copies of existing rugs.



FIG 4: S. di Pietro, *Marriage of the Virgin*, 1448, Vatican



FIG 5: Giotto di Bondone, detail from *The Stefaneschi Triptych*, 1330, Vatican



FIG 6: S. di Pietro, detail from *Marriage of the Virgin*, 1448, Vatican



FIG 7: L. Memmi, detail from *Virgin and Child*, 1340, Berlin



FIG 8: A. Mantegna, detail from *Martyrdom of St. Christopher*, 1448, formerly in Padua

Another important group (more than 20 paintings by at least 13 artists), featured equally strongly stylized, but better fed, more **bulky** animals again inscribed in squares, cornered squares or octagons. All but one of the paintings are dated between ca. 1252 and 1475, the puzzling exception being a ca. 1616 portrait by W.

Larkin. With a bit of fantasy one can see quadrupeds with raised tails (lions?) including spotted species (panthers?) crabs, centipedes, various birds: long-legged species (cranes?), strongly beaked birds (eagles?), and unmistakably heraldic eagles. There are frogs, phoenix and dragon fighting each other, and even diplodocouses (the latter seen with the help of a suitable intoxicating liquor). We know of no extant carpet with this extreme stylization, but again we can assume that the painters copied real rugs. Gaddi's studio prop (FIG 11) even shows rows of knots!



FIG 9: Anonymous, *Annunciation*, 1252, Church of the Santissima Annunziata, Florence



FIG 10: Fra Angelico, detail from *Virgin and Child*, 1438-1440, San Marco Museum, Florence

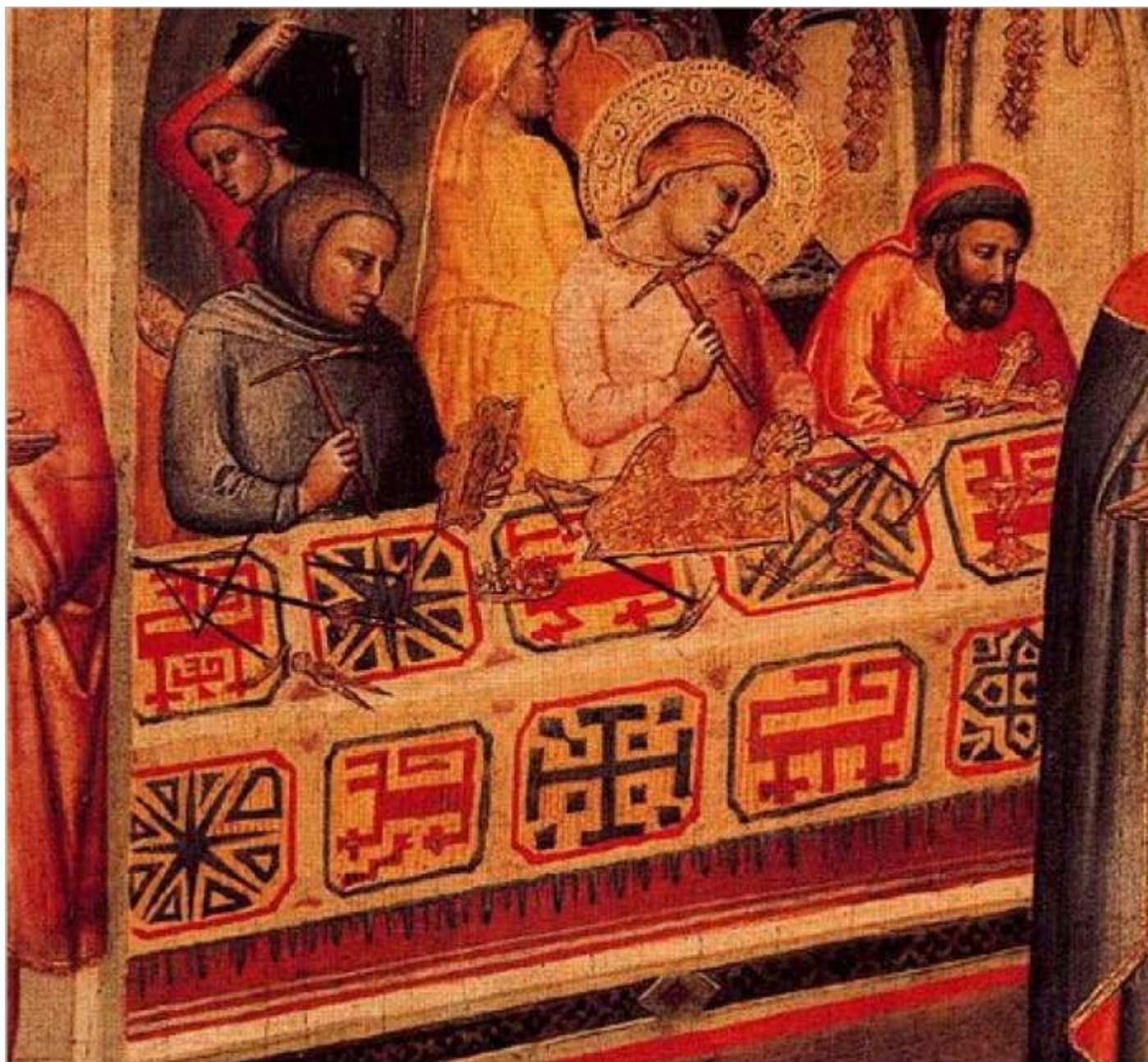


FIG 11: T. Gaddi, detail from *Calling of St. Eloi*, 1360, Prado, Madrid



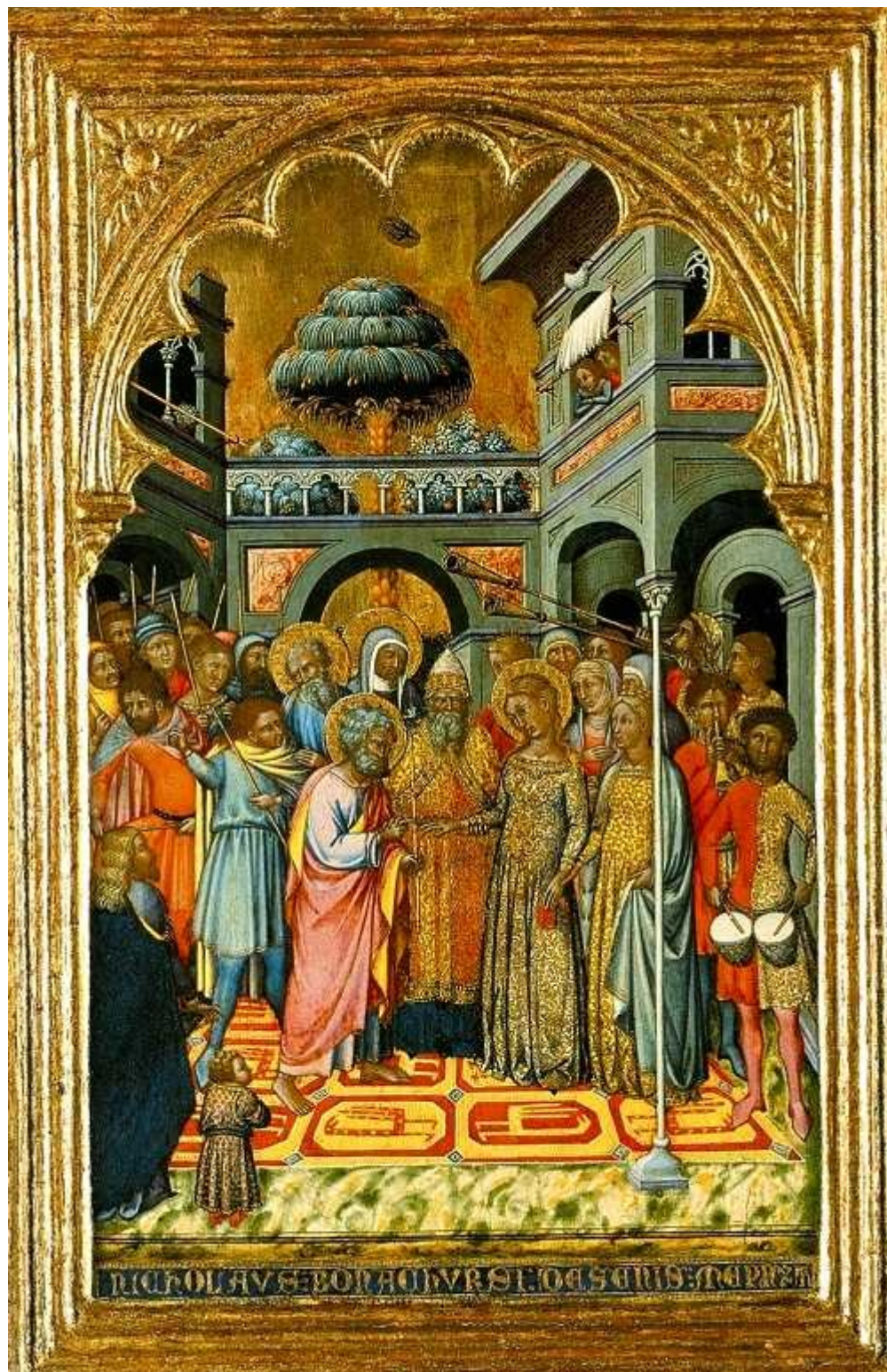


FIG 12: N. Buonaccorso, *Marriage of the Virgin*, 1380, National Gallery, London



FIG 13: G. da Fabriano, detail from *Annunciation*, 1425, Vatican



FIG 14: C. Petruccioli, detail from *Coronation of the Virgin*, 1391, Spello

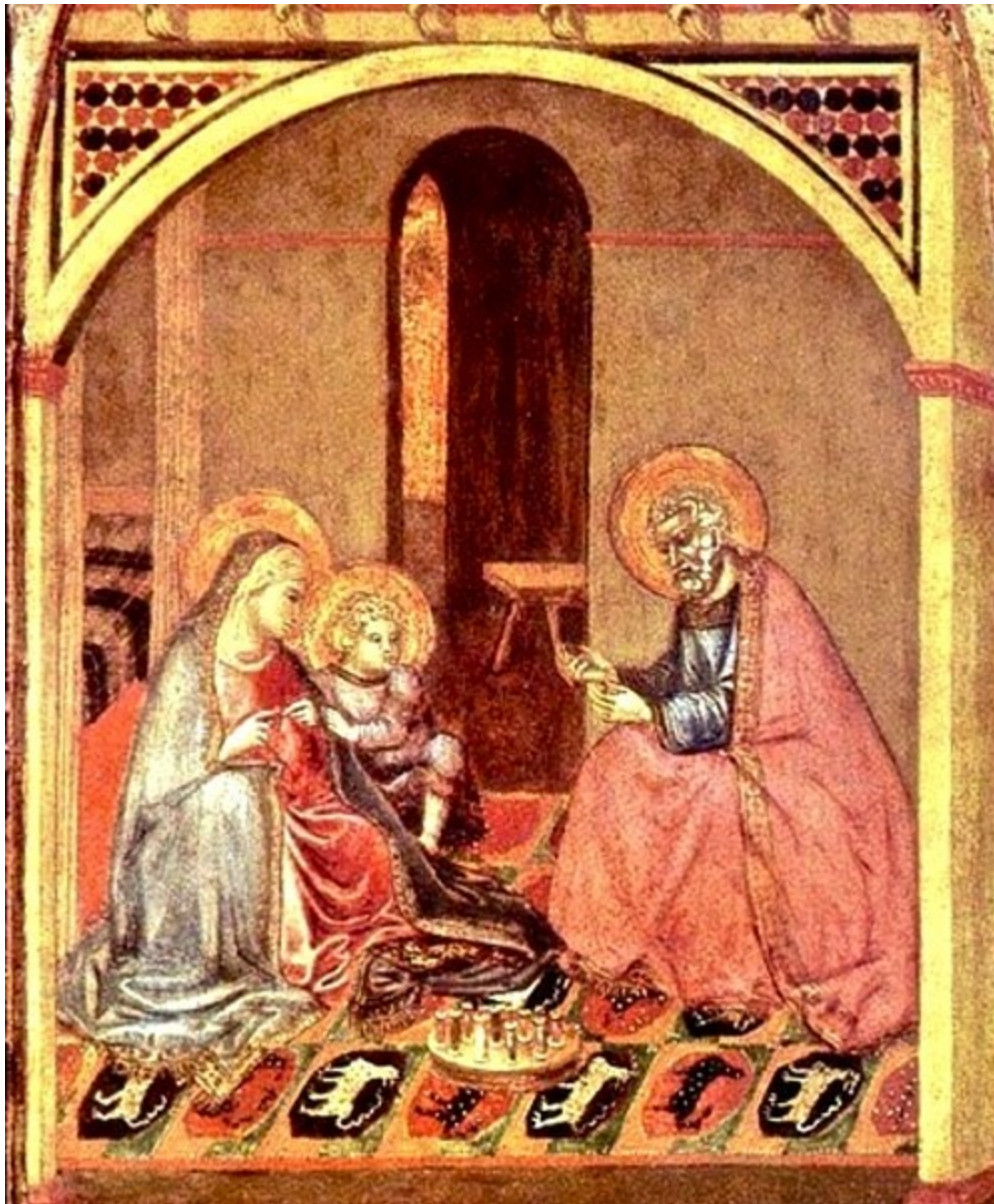


FIG 15: A. Lorenzetti's studio, *The Holy Family*, 1345, Riggisburg, Switzerland

A characteristic of most of the rugs belonging to these first three groups is the limited importance of the border, even its absence. Another particularity is a saturated yellow used with a frequency and importance comparable to those of saturated red and indigo shades; a rather rare occurrence in Rugdom.

A fourth group, illustrated only by two Crivelli paintings (ca. 1482-1486), incorporates recognizable birds, but only as secondary motifs in a dominant geometric pattern. There is a "normal" border in one of them. We know of only one extant Crivelli fragment (15th century, Budapest Applied Art Museum).



FIG 16: J. C. Crivelli, *detail from Annunciation with St Emidius*, 1386, National Gallery, London.



FIG 17: C. Crivelli, *detail from Annunciation*, 1482. Frankfurt.

A fifth group, illustrated in four paintings (between 1350 and 1465) by Huguet, Gozzoli, and an anonymous artist, features a field densely covered with small, semi-naturalistic animals (cockerels? lions? heraldic eagles). In contrast to the first three groups, these rugs display a fully developed "normal" border. The "cockerel" motif is seen on a number of 19th century Caucasian and Belouch rugs with only minor modifications.



FIG 18: J. Huguet, detail from Virgin, Child and St Inez, 1465



FIG 19: B. Gozzoli, detail 1 from Annunciation, 1449, Narni.



FIG 20: B. Gozzoli, detail 2 from Annunciation, 1449, Narni



FIG 21: Anonymous, detail from *Virgin and Child*, ca. 1350, Berlin

The Konya Museum shows a rug fragment with a "cockerel" motif identical to Huguet's painting, and the "lion" in Gozzoli's painting is reminiscent of a few extant 15th and 16th century Spanish rugs.





FIG: 22: Konya fragment, 15th century, Konya Museum, *Turkish Handwoven Carpets, Vol. I, THC 160*



FIG 23: Alpujara? 16th century, Spain

Most known extant animal rugs display motifs which, while still a little stylized, are rather more realistic than the styles immortalized by the Renaissance painters. They also display important, even spectacular border motifs. For reasons unknown to us, none of these "semi-figurative animal rugs with important borders" was ever used as a prop by a Renaissance painter.



FIG 24: Anatolia, Marby rug, SHM Stockholm, *Turkish Handwoven Carpets. Vol. 1, THC50*

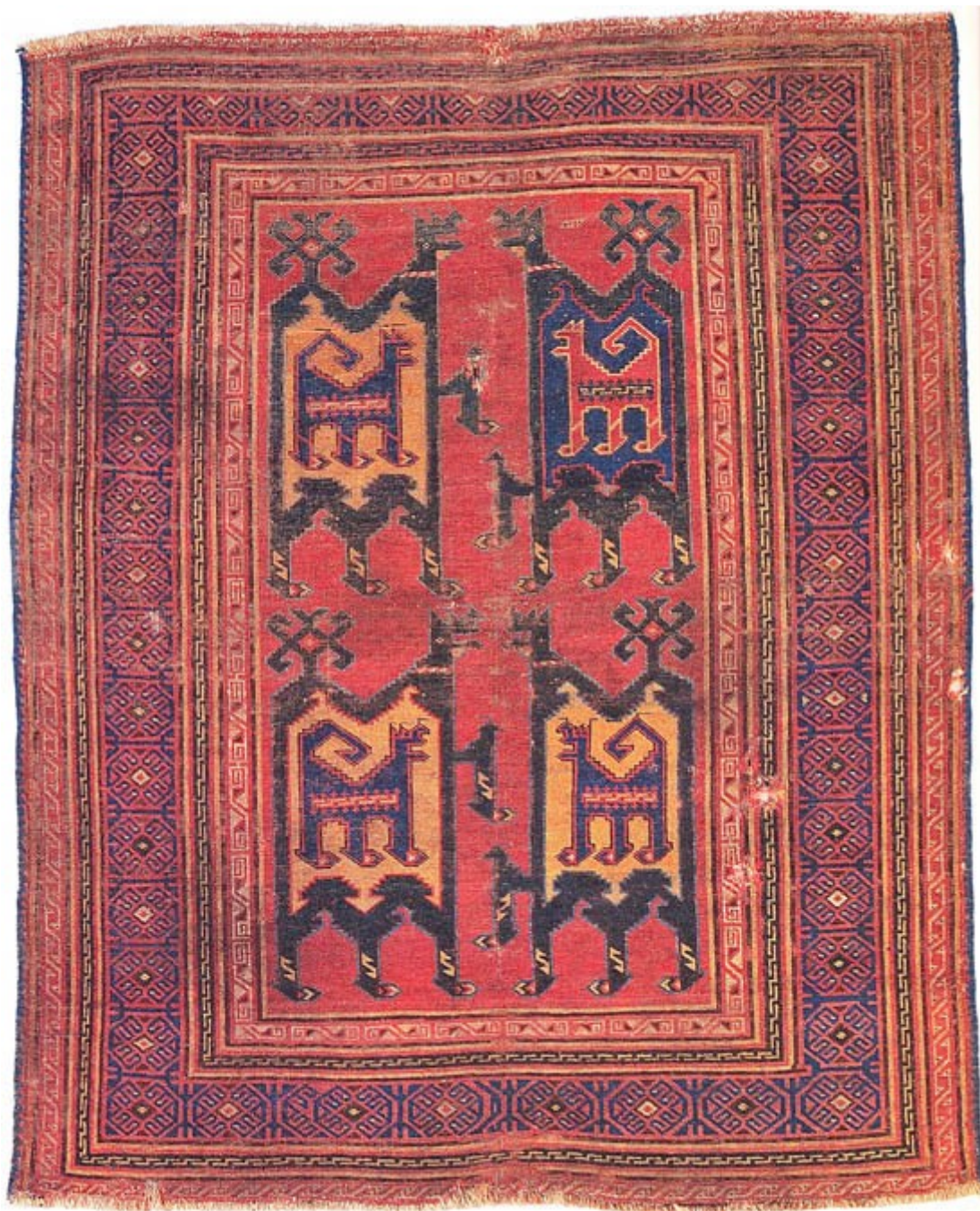


FIG 25: 14th century, Anatolia, MET, New York, J. Opie, *Tribal Rugs*, p. 273



FIG 26: 13th-14th century, Anatolia, (C14 tested 1190-1300), Kirchheim, *Orient Stars*, p. 15



FIG 27: 14th century, Anatolia, .Vakiflar Museum, Istanbul, B. Balpınar, *Teppiche*, page 191.

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