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A timeline of kufic borders in rugs

Welcome, [Filiberto Boncompagni](#).

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September 13th, 2012,
03:38 PM

#1

[Pierre Galafassi](#)

Members

Join Date: Oct 2009
Posts: 51

A timeline of kufic borders in rugs

Hi all,

The kufic rug borders are a highly interesting topic, as demonstrated by the very lively discussions in a recent thread (which was one of the longest ever in Turkotek history), brilliantly led by Martin Andersen.

This type of border pattern was rather frequent in rugs painted by Renaissance Masters and I got interested in giving a look to its history.

The result of my (dilettantish) research is an obese post of unusual length, which interested readers will find below:



http://www.turkotek.com/old_masters/timeline/essay.html



September 13th, 2012,
03:59 PM

#2

[Steve Price](#)

Administrator

Join Date: May 2008
Posts: 56



Hi Pierre



Steve Price



September 16th, 2012, 11:15 AM

#3

[Martin Andersen](#)

Members

Join Date: Jul 2008
Posts: 24



I will have to line up with Steve

Pierres systematical approach (to any subject), is a huge asset for the discussions here at Turkotek. (but I can't take credit for leading the former discussion, Filiberto and Pierre sure did theirs - and pro et contra certainly has interesting dynamics in these discussion)

There is no doubt that the discussion about the rugborders being Kufic, Kufesque, pseudo-Kufic or non-Kufic is old. It goes at least back to Frederik Robert Martins discovery of the Seljuk rugs and his book "A History of Oriental Carpets from before 1800" in 1908.

Volkmar Gantzhorns "The Christian Oriental Carpet" from 1991, and its quest for giving all oriental rugs a primarily Armenian/Christian origin seem to be the, from my point of view, problematic source of the non-Kufic origin standpoint today.

best Martin



September 23rd, 2012, 11:10 PM

#4

[Martin Andersen](#)
Members



Hi All

Join Date: Jul 2008
Posts: 24

If Volkmar Gantzhorn is the main source for the non-kufic interpretation of the kufic borders it is of course relevant to look at his arguments - and his timeline, which is important because he argues that arabic Kufic is influenced by christian pseudo-kufic ornamentation. Here is an example where he is referring to the seljuk rugs:



Ill. 114 (left): Lower church, Hosios Loukas: sarcophagus of Romano II, 10th century: ornamental frieze from the lid.



Ill. 115 (left): Apse of St. Mary's Church in Hosios Loukas, 10th century: ornamental frieze from the outside wall.



Ill. 116 (left): Frieze of writing from a window jamb in Ghasni; detail, 12th century. Lindenmuseum, Stuttgart, Inv. no. A 35 904 L.

It is striking that the ornamental friezes of Christian origin correspond much more closely to the borders than does the much later 'florid' Kufic. This gives rise to the suspicion that the influence may possibly have run in the opposite direction.

The problem for me here is the dating of the first pseudo-kufic ornament, I would personally stylistically find it much later. Gantzhorn's dating must be based on the ornament being on the Byzantine emperor Romanos II sarcophagus. But according to Byzantine historic sources Romanos II were buried in Constantinian's mausoleum in Church of the Holy Apostles, which were sacked by the crusaders (<http://www.scribd.com/doc/36339475/The-Tombs-and-Obits-of-the-Byzantine-Emperors>). There are only a handful remaining Imperial sarcophagus, and none of them can be ascribed with certainty to any specific emperor. The monastery Hosios Loukas is on Unesco's world heritage list, the monastery has a homepage and none of these sites mentions the extraordinary existence of an Byzantine imperial sarcophagus. The real explanation for the probably wrong attribution to Romanos the II is here:

The founding of the monastery has traditionally been associated with the names of famous Byzantine emperors. The earliest testimony, from Cyriac of Ancona, who visited the monastery in 1436, which maintained that Constantine Monomachos built the monastery, is not substantiated by any other source. It should perhaps be put down to the 15th-century monks' desire to represent their splendid monastery in an even more dazzling light. Nevertheless, we should not preclude the possibility that the already flourishing monastery benefited from some imperial donation during the reign of Constantine Monomachos (1042-1054).

An oral tradition passed down by the monks, as recorded by 17th-century travellers (Spon and Wheeler, 1676) identified the founder as the Emperor Romanos II, who had paid tribute to the saint who had prophesied that the reconquest of Crete from the Arabs (961) would happen in his reign (959-963). Moreover, the monks attributed the tombs in the crypt to this same emperor and his consort Theophano. All these traditions have been preserved in the work of Kremos (1874-1880), though he already had doubts about their reliability, given that there was no documentation to support them before some rather unreliable 19th-century texts (Sophianos). Of course, it is not impossible that Romanos played some part in the construction of the first church, now known as the Panagia Church (L. Boura).

"Hosios Loukas" Nano Chatzidakis [http://images.icon-art.info/public/Byzantium/Chatzidakis%201997%20-%20Hosios%20Loukas%20\(BAiG\).pdf](http://images.icon-art.info/public/Byzantium/Chatzidakis%201997%20-%20Hosios%20Loukas%20(BAiG).pdf)

The dating of the second much stylistically simpler ornament is probably correct. But this ornament can easily be explained as directly influenced by islamic Kufic ornamentation. Some have even suggested that these specific ornaments could have been made by force moved craftsmen from the reconquered islamic Crete, the islamic Crete which is directly connected to Hosios Loukas foundation.

"In the context of the Greek School of architecture, these decorative patterns appear in impressive abundance and multiformity during the second half of the 10th century, falling thereafter gradually into decline" *The church of Kapnikarea in Athens: Remarks on its history, typology and form Nikolaos Gkioles*. But these pseudo-kufic ornaments never seem to appear in center of Byzantine art, Constantinopel, were they are directly associated with the rivaling Islam (p.83 http://books.google.dk/books?id=ftUsNvH7c_AC&pg=PR6&lpg=PR6&dq=Art+and+Identity+in+Thirteenth+Antony+Eastmond&source=bl&ots=ttyCZySb3k&sig=idAFwZ5UVdEvfOIz7_ymZLMcyYY&hl=da&sa=X&ei=82hfUOa5H83U4QTJ3IDIDw&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Art%20and%20Identity%20in%20Thirteenth%20Antony%20Eastmond&f=false)

The argument with the third illustration were Ganzhorn uses a rather random 12th c kufic ornamented text to argue that the "christian" ornaments corresponds more closely to the seljuk borders is in my opinion totally topsy-turvy. Much more relevant samples proving the opposite are easy to find.

Ganzhorns book is as a Taaschen publication published in german, french and english. It must be the most wide spread rug book in the world today. I haven't seen any serious review or critique of it online. If the book as whole is as flawed as it seems to me, then I find it rather problematic, as it must generate misunderstandings for decades to come.

Martin



September 24th, 2012, 11:18 AM

#5

[Filiberto](#)
[Boncompagni](#)

Administrator

Join Date: May 2008
Location: Cyprus
Posts: 39



Hi Martin,

My Italian edition of the "Christian Oriental Carpet" is dated 1991 and I think the first original (German) one was published the year before. Plenty of time for negative "in print" reviews in Rugdom before the rise of the almighty web (and indeed in the 1998 edition the title changed to a more neutral "Oriental Carpets"). I think now the general negative opinion on Gantzhorn's book is so well established that nobody bothers anymore with further on-line comments.

Even if I have the book translated in my mother tongue the prose is so badly expressed that it makes for very tiring reading. Nevertheless, Gantzhorn succeeded in convincing me that the Armenians should hold a more important position in the history of carpet weaving... But the blatant overdoing of his thesis destroys most of the trust he could have acquired by using a more restrained approach.

Anyway, here's a very short on-line review of Gantzhorn's "Oriental Carpets" (from Amazon.com): *"a mildly goofy interpretation that claims Armenian Christian origin for oriental carpets, ill organized, with excruciating page layout, but the sources consulted and the rich illustration make an interesting read and as well an incredible bargain"* to which I fully subscribe.

Regards,

Filiberto



September 24th, 2012, 11:53 AM

#6

[Martin Andersen](#)

Members

Join Date: Jul 2008
Posts: 24



Hi Filiberto

uh, so its in Italian too, wonder when it will come in Danish 😊

I am not qualified to disagree that Volkmar Gantzhorn might have some good points regarding the Armenians as carpet weavers. But I can see he has a very bad point regarding

pseudo-kufic and the Seljuk rugs in writing that Romanos II was Armenian.

And sure the photographic reproductions are great, but they are all accompanied with misleading graphic illustrations which forces each and every rug pattern to be originated in christian crosses, actually terrible manipulative.

If the general level of facts and interpretations is like the section on the Seljuk rugs, and the book is the most widespread rug book in the world, then I hope someone will make the effort to put up a thorough critical review online. I do think this book will mislead a lot of people for a long time to come. Perhaps it could be a worthy topic for a tread or a salon which would pop-up in google search on Volkmar Gantzhorn along with all the good buying offers?

best Martin
(who got the book for 5,75\$, sure a good bargain for the photos)

Last edited by Martin Andersen; September 24th, 2012 at 12:09 PM.



September 24th, 2012,
12:33 PM

#7

[Filiberto Boncompagni](#)

Administrator

Join Date: May 2008
Location: Cyprus
Posts: 39



Quote:

But I can see he has a very bad point regarding pseudo-kufic and the Seljuk rugs in writing that Romanos II was Armenian.

Oh, right, I see now that he belongs to the Macedonian dynasty!

But that is the problem with this book: better to check its references thoughtfully on the Internet before taking them into consideration.

Perhaps it could be a worthy topic for a tread or a salon? What a monumental task! No, thanks, I don't volunteer!

I didn't pay my copy that cheaply – I don't remember how much exactly, but anyway it was so inexpensive, compared to the normal outrageous prices normally asked for rug books, that before buying it I asked the bookseller if that was indeed the price or it was a mistake... The price is surely the book's winning point.

Regards,

Filiberto



September 24th, 2012,
01:53 PM

#8

[Steve Price](#)

Administrator

Join Date: May 2008
Posts: 56



Hi Martin

I doubt that Gantzhorn's book is the most widely read rug book in the world, and I don't think many ruggies take it as serious scholarship - it's much too ethnocentric. His ideas are interesting, but are mostly fantasy masquerading as scholarship.

Regards

Steve Price



September 24th, 2012,
06:09 PM

#9

[Martin Andersen](#)

Members

Join Date: Jul 2008
Posts: 24



Hi Steve

Well probably not the most read book by ruggies with some critical sense, but as a Tashen book in English, German, French and Italian (and what else?) it must be one of the most widely distributed rug books ever. Tashen sure do have an extraordinary efficient distribution of large-scale printed numbers (which of course is the reason for the book being sold for its comparatively very low price)

If you read this follow up on "the German scholar Volkmar Gantzhorn, with his groundbreaking documentation of strong Armenian participation in the craft of weaving"
<http://circa1440.blogspot.dk/2009/10/carpet-index.html> you will see that some today do take Gantzhorn very serious.

best Martin

Last edited by Martin Andersen; September 24th, 2012 at 06:32 PM.



September 24th, 2012,
07:02 PM

#10

[Filiberto Boncompagni](#)

Administrator

Join Date: May 2008
Location: Cyprus
Posts: 39



September 24th, 2012, 08:56 PM

[Pierre Galafassi](#)

Members

Join Date: Oct 2009
Posts: 51



September 25th, 2012, 12:50 AM

[Martin Andersen](#)

Members

Join Date: Jul 2008
Posts: 24



Hi Martin,

Yup, I see what you mean (Pierre, you should read it too 😊).
Not much of a following, though.



#11



I already have. Good example.



#12

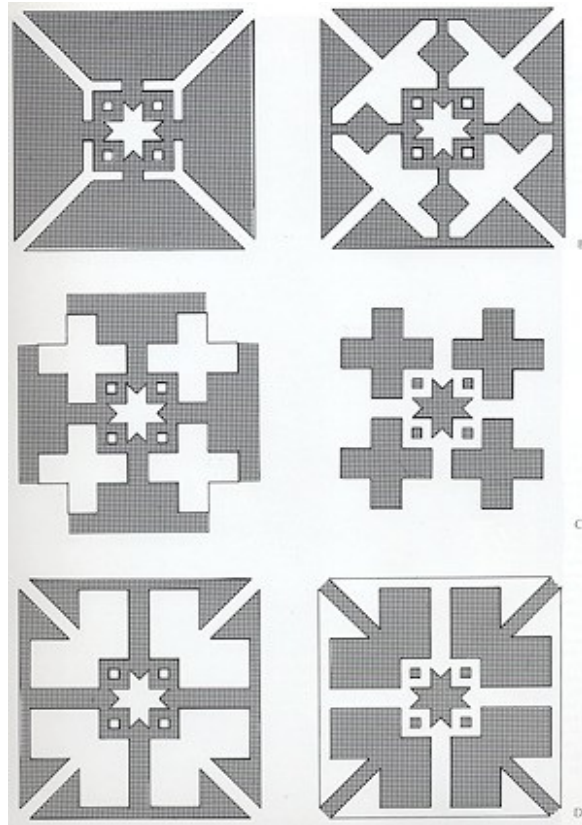


Hi All

Well I will just pursue my mini anti-Gantzhorn crusade for one more post.

(and I will try to remember writing Volkmar Gantzhorns full name a lot when I criticize him, in the hope that the search engines will pick it up, probably a futile little battle against all the good offers from f.ex amazon.com 😊)

Volkmar Gantzhorn uses a serie of very basic squared cross variations to categorize all rug types. The crosses do at the same time, according to Volkmar Gantzhorn, correspond to christian armenian ornamentation:



This is of course in itself a highly questionable method of categorization, but the actual way that Volkmar Gantzhorn uses and misuses his own method on specific non-cruciform patterns is even more questionable. Here is an example:



To make this very important 13th c Seljuk Kufic border fit into an Armenian context Volkmar Gantzhorn has to fantasize that the motif is a distorted half of another pattern which coincidentally must have looked like an Armenian cross. This is in my opinion a highly disingenuous approach towards the simple fact that Seljuk pattern exist as it is, and of course primarily should be put into the context of other relevant existing patterns and motifs - and not imagined or non existing patterns.

Another example where Gantzhorn compares a geometric pattern from an Il-Khanid miniature with a minor border from a Seljuk rug:



Volkmar Gantzhorn starting point regarding the simple and very generic geometric Il-Khanid border is this: *"Needless to say, what we have here is clearly a Christian symbol, in fact one of the most common among the monophysites in Armenia"*. In itself a gross overinterpretation of this fine little generic Il-khanid pattern, which of course might as well be turned 180 degree, making it something completely different from a cross on a hill - and turning the whole illustration the 180 degree would actually also show the Seljuk minor border as what it is: a miniature version of the larger Kufic motifs on the Seljuk main borders.

best
Martin



September 25th, 2012,
02:07 AM

#13

[Steve Price](#)
Administrator

Join Date: May 2008
Posts: 56



Hi Martin

The Pazyryk rug, which predates Christianity, has a field of

compartmented crosses.

Just sayin'

Steve Price



September 25th, 2012,
02:18 AM

#14

[Martin Andersen](#)

Members

Join Date: Jul 2008
Posts: 24



sure Steve

Cruciform patterning I suppose is inherent in the weave structure itself, weft and warp simply crossing each other. And actually when I think about it, aren't the Pazaryk felts overly curved in their design?

best Martin

Last edited by Martin Andersen; September 25th, 2012 at 02:25 AM.



September 26th, 2012,
02:09 PM

#15

[Martin Andersen](#)

Members

Join Date: Jul 2008
Posts: 24



Criticizing Volkmar Gantzhorn and any followers may be, as Steve hints, like beating a dead horse in the knowledgeable part of the rugworld, but still, Tashen....and so on.

I want go into details regarding Lauren Arnolds blog (long time since I read it), but her main conclusion goes something like this: the large main part of oriental rugs appearing on early european paintings are placed in a specific religious christian setting (a very large percentage with the Mary and the Jesus child) and therefor has to be interpreted iconographical on par with all other christian symbolic elements. And this leads her to the bold conclusion that the carpets must be produced by christians.

I would like to offer a very simple alternative iconographic interpretation: The biblical stories are of course set in israel/the exotic orient, the painters have with the oriental rugs made a painterly setting which to everyones understanding visually places the setting as exotic oriental. This goes for palms and turbans too, whitout palms and turbans having to be associated with christian western origin - actually exactly the contrary is the case.

best Martin

Last edited by Martin Andersen; September 26th, 2012 at 02:15 PM.



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