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Welcome, [Filiberto Boncompagni](#).  
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December 6th, 2011,  
03:15 PM

[Filiberto Boncompagni](#)  
Administrator

Join Date: May 2008  
Location: Cyprus  
Posts: 39

[Mills on para-Mamluks](#)

Hi Pierre,

About the para-Mamluk on FIG 50



I found an article by John Mills on Hali 93 (July 1997) presenting the painting: *Mark Enthroned with Saints* (detail) by Giovanni Martini da Udine, 1501, Duomo di Udine.



and a related rug



1. Above: 'para-Mamluk' prayer rug, east Mediterranean region, Syria or southeast Anatolia, 15th century. 1.05 x 1.41m (3'5" x 4'8"). Chihil Sutun kiosk, Esfahan.

Title of the article:

"THE CHIHIL SUTUN PARA-MAMLUK PRAYER RUG – *An unusual and enigmatic woolen prayer rug is among the precious relics preserved in the Chihil Sutun kiosk in Esfahan, built in the mid 17th century by Shah Abbas II. This article considers the relationship of the Chihil Sutun prayer rug to the well-known East Mediterranean (so-called 'Damascus') 'compartment' or 'chess board' carpets and the design-related 'para-Mamluk' rugs.*"

Trying to synthesize at the maximum the article: while compartment rugs share design elements with the Cairo-made 'Mamluks', they differ in structure. Their wool is Z-spun, like the Anatolians but unlike the Cairenes, which are S-spun. Their knots, however, are asymmetric, like the Mamluks and unlike the Anatolians. That's why many attribute them to the environs of Damascus or Aleppo.

The structure of the 'para-Mamluk' is less defined, meaning that they could use both types of knots (even on the same rug).

The prayer rug in question is symmetrically knotted. Its unique Kufik border is unknown (according to Mills) in its exact rendition on surviving rugs but illustrated on other paintings of the same period.

In short, "*The evidence from the paintings and the Chihil Sutun prayer rug itself suggests that it is a 15th century artefact woven within the Mamluk cultural sphere, in an area susceptible to direct and relatively recent Timurid influence. This seems to point once again to the northern part of the Mamluk domain, either Damascus or further north in Aleppo or the Adana Plain.*"

I hope this is of some interest...

Best regards,

Filiberto



December 7th, 2011,  
10:01 AM

[Pierre Galafassi](#)  
Members

Join Date: Oct 2009  
Posts: 25



#2 □



Hi Filiberto,

Thank you for having discovered the author of the painting and this superb extant rug !  
As stated by Mills, the beautiful border of the Chihil Sutun rug caught the eyes of several other renaissance painters. For example A. Mantegna in a famous fresco (1471-1474) of the Ducal Palace in Mantova. FIG 1 & 2 . below), T. D'Andria (1487. Duomo di Savona) or A. Previtali (1508. Annunciation. Vittorio Veneto).



Does Mills write anything about the red dye used in the Chihil Sutun rug? Does he perhaps mention lac (Kerria lacca)? This red insect dye has a typical shade, rather easy to differentiate from madder- or cochineal reds and is claimed to be a very rare occurrence in rugs, except on (Cairene) «Mamluk» carpets and sometimes on Safavid Persian pieces. Its presence (or not) could give a minor clue about the provenance of the rug.

By the way, while «Para-Mamluk» rugs were frequently used as studio props during the 14th and until well into the 15th century, I am a trifle puzzled by the conspicuous absence of so-called «Mamluk» rugs in paintings before 1540 M. da Brescia was perhaps the first to feature Mamluk rugs in "Daughters of the House of Martinengo" ca. 1543-1547). Did the Ottoman not hang the last Mamluk ruler ca. 1515 or 1517? Do we have other proofs (C14 tests on extant rugs for example) that these «Mamluk» rugs were indeed woven during the Mamluk empire? Or should we rather call them «Cairene Ottoman rugs» or perhaps «Posthumous Mamluk rugs»? Perhaps the explanation is that their traditional low-contrast patterns and subdued shades which did not appeal to most Italian painters nor to their patrons?

Best regards  
Pierre



December 7th, 2011,  
05:34 PM

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

Join Date: May 2008  
Location: Cyprus  
Posts: 39



#3



Hi Pierre,

No, Mills doesn't mention anything specific about the kind of dyes. Actually, he doesn't mention having met personally the rug in question, which I doubt.

About your perplexity on "the conspicuous absence of so-called «Mamluk» rugs in paintings before 1540", I went to read "in diagonal" Michael Franses' article (second part) on the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha. It's available in pdf format on HALI's website here:  
<http://www.hali.com/Assets/Files/157FeatQatarWeb.pdf>

but I think you should have it already.

Franses's phrase:

*"Carpets in the 'Mamluk-style' (I use this term because most surviving examples were probably made after the Ottomans overthrew the Mamluk Sultanate in 1517)"*

should clarify your doubts, as well as the following:

*Recently published research by Marco Spallanzani informs us that "...in 1545 Iacopo Capponi went to Alexandria with instructions to buy various things for Duke Cosimo I de Medici, including an unspecified number of rugs to be made to order", which were shipped to Livorno in 1547.*

By the way, note 70 of the same article lists "fifteen European paintings... that depict identifiable Mamluk-style carpets from Cairo" which you may want to check if some of them are missing from your database. 😊

Regards,

Filiberto



December 9th, 2011,  
03:23 PM

[Pierre Galafassi](#)  
Members



#4

Hi Filiberto,  
So, Frances already had stated that «Mamluk rug» is a misnomer? But how comes? Fantasy names are such a rare occurrence in Rugdom 😊.

*Quote: "fifteen European paintings... that depict identifiable Mamluk-style carpets from Cairo"*

I agree. Indeed, several «Mamluk» rugs are probably missing in our painting data base. However, I do claim extenuating circumstances: the lack of contrast of these rugs does not make their identification easy on pictures.

In Da Brescia's «Daughters of House of Martinengo, 1543-1546», one can note an interesting point:  
Many (most?) extant «Mamluk» rugs show a dominant «lac» red shade. See for example FIG 1 (15th century, Thyssen Bornmisza collection) and FIG 2.

FIG 1

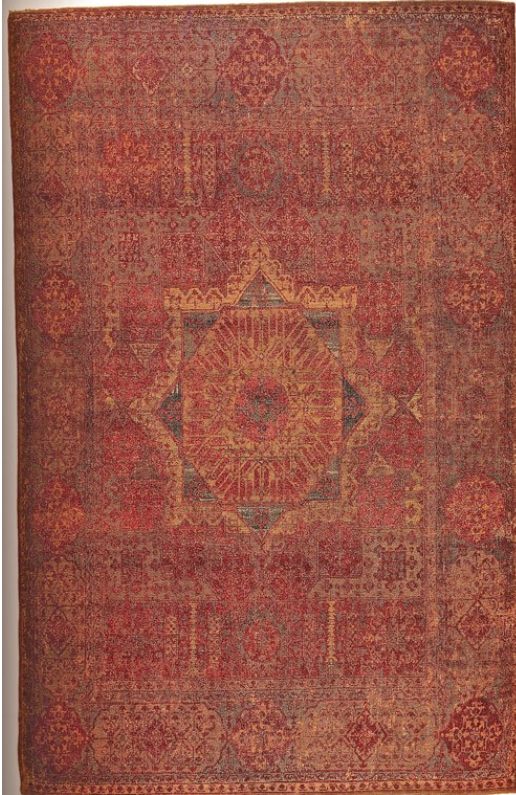


FIG 2



But in the six Martinengo rugs a reddish-brown shade dominates (FIG 3). Perhaps these rugs were made on order, (the 6 rugs are very similar) and Sig. Martinengo influenced the choice of the shade. Or Da Brescia's red pigment was poor.

FIG 3. M. da Brescia. 1543-1546. Daughters of the House of Martinengo. Brescia.



Regards  
Pierre



December 9th,  
2011, 06:58 PM

#5

[Filiberto Boncompagni](#)  
Administrator

Join Date: May 2008  
Location: Cyprus  
Posts: 39

Hi Pierre,

Using colors of an old painting as yardstick is not a good idea. I don't want to bore our few readers, but colors change with age, varnish oxides. As such the painting may be in need of cleaning and so on (and while cleaning, good restorer should leave a nice patina in any case).

As far I can see, Moretto da Brescia's murals (that - it seems - combined different techniques: fresco, tempera, and oils) show on the "sky" part traces of a yellowish varnish that, if present also on the rugs section could alter the perception of the original red. But that section looks like a "fresco" technique, so no varnish... 🤔

Then, there is the old, classical problem... Is the photo itself good? This one seems too yellow.

It took a while, but I found better photos at the Web Gallery of Art. This, for example:



(link: [http://www.wga.hu/html\\_m/m/moretto/fresco1.html](http://www.wga.hu/html_m/m/moretto/fresco1.html))

The shade of red here is much more compatible – with the aforementioned caveats – with the photos of those Mamluk rugs, I think. Do you agree? If so, you owe to Mr. Moretto da Brescia an apology for questioning his pigments. 😊

Regards,

Filiberto

P.S. - I *do* apologize for posting a picture too wide, but I did it for the sake of proper visibility of the colors



December 9th, 2011,  
08:50 PM

#6

[Pierre Galafassi](#)  
Members

Join Date: Oct 2009  
Posts: 25



Yes Filiberto,  
The combination of a better picture and your expertise of painting restoration is persuasive enough. I hope Mr. Da Brescia will accept my apologies.

Pierre



March 15th, 2012, 08:36 PM

#7

[Marvin Amstey](#)

Members

Join Date: May 2008  
Location: Fairport, NY  
Posts: 13



Pierre,  
I'm curious about your statement concerning the rarity of lac-dyed rugs. Is that specific for these 16th c rugs or do you mean all rugs. If the latter, how do you account for the descriptions of lac in many Turkmen pieces? ("many" is relative, of course, but there a quite a few truly antique Turkmen with this description.  
Best,  
Marvin



March 15th, 2012, 11:02 PM

#8

[Pierre Galafassi](#)

Members

Join Date: Oct 2009  
Posts: 25



Hi Marvin,  
  
Well, lac has been found in some persian- (see for example H. Boehmer, Kekboya, page 202) and Mamluk rugs. But I haven't met, so far, any analytical work proving its presence in Turkmen rugs. Do you? It would be interesting.  
  
A few mentions of lac dyes in Turkmen carpets have been made in collector- or dealer books or articles, but I can't remember any mention of analytical tests. I have seen a rather... creative theory about Salor tribesmen being involved in lac trade, but have serious doubts, especially when the description of the lac shade conflicts with reality.  
  
Of course, the possibility that some lac had found its way to this region cannot be completely excluded.  
  
By the way, the dyes of a rather large number of anatolian rugs of the museum of Budapest have been analyzed too, and unless I err, lac has not been identified in any.  
  
I can offer no explanation for the limited use of this beautiful (but rather dull) dye, which is not difficult to apply on wool or silk and has excellent fastness.  
  
Best regards  
Pierre



March 16th, 2012, 03:34 PM

#9

[Marvin Amstey](#)

Members

Join Date: May 2008  
Location: Fairport, NY  
Posts: 13



Thanks, Pierre, for that comment about the lack of evidence for lac in Turkmen pieces. I had always believed that dealer/collector comments about its presence was suspect. Just another myth to add to the many in the rug literature. Too bad there is no report of the analysis of these lac-red areas in Turkmen pieces.



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