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[a rare chessboard border rug.](#)

Welcome, [Filiberto Boncompagni](#).

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[January 17th, 2012, 01:06 PM](#)

#1

[Pierre Galafassi](#)

Members

Join Date: Oct 2009
Posts: 85

[a rare chessboard border rug.](#)

Hi all,

The illustrated rug appears in a 1469-1480 painting (Pilate's hand-washing) by the Master of Schottenaltar.



It might belong to a group of carpets with simplified motifs and very low knot-density, which, according to some authors, might have been woven in Europe (see main essay).

The interesting border features a chessboard of squares of equal dimension, structured into crosses of various colors. I don't know of any extant rug with this particular motif. Does anybody?

As mentioned by Dimand (1), the field (not the border) of Spanish large Holbein rugs frequently features chessboard areas enclosing the central octagon. A hint, at best.

I also suppose that it would be pure speculation to attribute the crosses to any Christian influence.

(1) *M.S. Dimand, MET Art Bulletin, « Two fifteenth century hispano-moresque Rugs ».*

Best regards
Pierre



January 17th, 2012, 02:58 PM

#2

[Filiberto Boncompagni](#)
Administrator



Hi Pierre,

Join Date: May 2008
Location: Cyprus
Posts: 79

The most I can come close is this end of 19th Tree of Life Kazak:



I do not dare to suggest any connection, though.

Regards,

Filiberto

P.S. – some Karachov Kazaks have part of their medallions checkered too, but without crosses...



January 17th, 2012, 06:17 PM

#3

[Pierre Galafassi](#)

Members

Join Date: Oct 2009
Posts: 85



Hi Filiberto,

You are right, border- or field motifs based on a combination of multicolored little squares can be found in (very few) nineteenth century Caucasian rugs like your Kazak or a couple of Karatchoph or Erivan rugs. A similar combination is part of the border motif of the Anatolian rug below (FIG 1: Konya, eighteenth century).



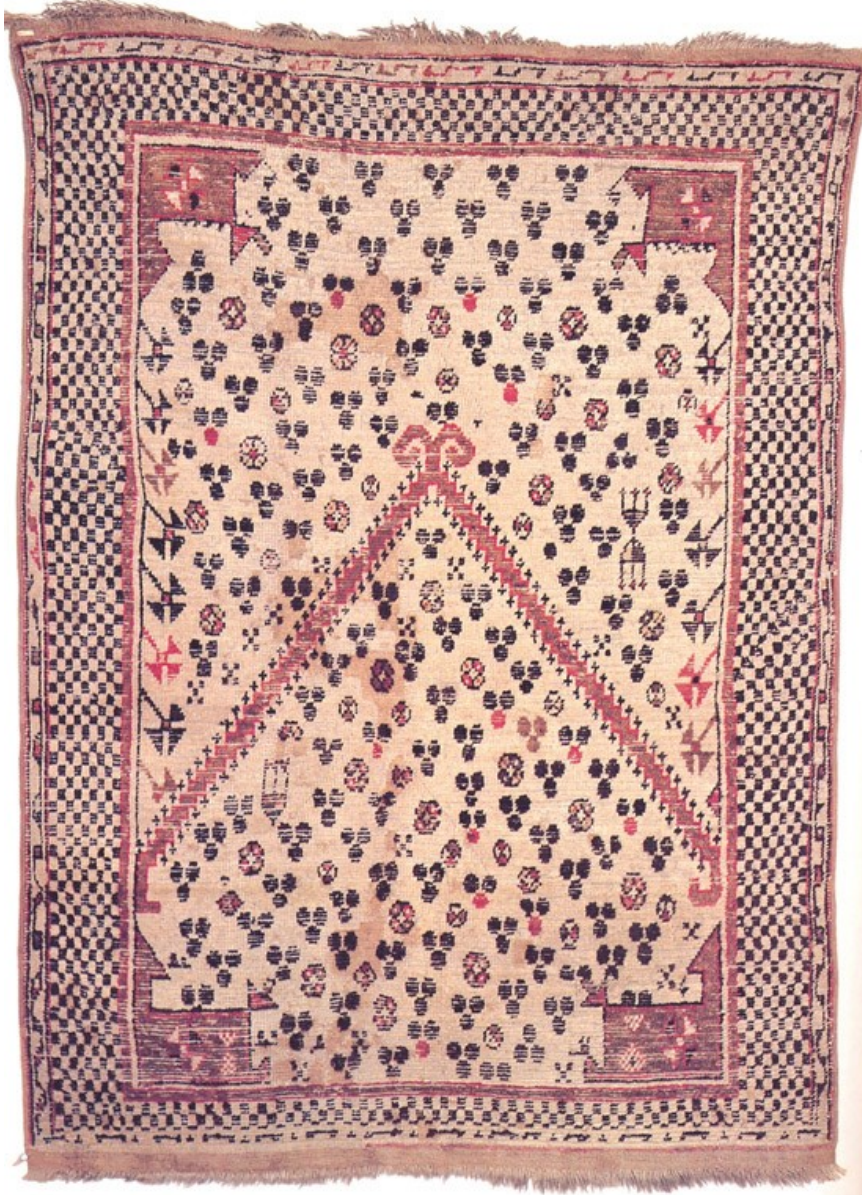
The Talish border sometimes display a cross pattern left in negative between four little squares.

But, as you write, it would indeed be difficult to see these rugs as being an evolution of the fifteenth century carpet featured in the painting by the Master of Schottenaltar.

Dimand does mention a chessboard field motif in large Spanish Holbein carpets (enclosing their trademark central octagons), but at least in the examples I am aware of, it rather looks like a chain-mail motif to me. (FIG 2: Alcaraz, fifteenth century, V&A London).



The border of the chintamani rug below (FIG 3: Anatolia, seventeenth century, M.A.A. Budapest) brings us perhaps a little closer to our target.



There is also a painting by A. Solario (FIG 4: ca.1470, Virgin and Child, Atri), which features a small, very basic rug with prominent squares which IMHO could have

come from a source of inspiration similar to the Master's rug.



By the way, I find it very strange that a simple motif like the cross would be so rarely used in rugs or in kilims.

Too simple and easy to weave for a proud weaver perhaps? Religious taboo? Chi lo

sa?

Best regards.
Pierre



January 17th, 2012, 07:48 PM

#4

[Filiberto Boncompagni](#)
Administrator

Join Date: May 2008
Location: Cyprus
Posts: 79



Hi Pierre,

I don't think the cross motif is so rare. Uncommon, perhaps, but not rare: in my very small collection I counted at least three rugs (1 Caucasian, 2 Afghan) and five flat-weaves (3 Caucasian, 1 Persian and 1 Iraqi) with crosses. Who knows, if I look in the storing chests there are more...

Regards,

Filiberto



January 17th, 2012, 08:47 PM

#5

[Pierre Galafassi](#)
Members

Join Date: Oct 2009



Hi Filiberto,

Posts: 85

Just simple 4-arms crosses? No other gimmicks?
Sure that you are not a "cross addict", are you?

How sad! Another nice theory of mine, killed even before it was born. 😞
Will do better next time.
Pierre



January 18th, 2012, 12:43 PM

#6

[Filiberto Boncompagni](#)
Administrator

Join Date: May 2008
Location: Cyprus
Posts: 79



Hi Pierre,

No, not all of them are "just simple 4-arms crosses". I realize now that the answer to your apparently simple question requires a good dose of ponderation. Which requires more time.
See you soon...
Regards,

Filiberto



January 18th, 2012, 03:24 PM

#7

[Steve Price](#)
Administrator

Join Date: May 2008
Posts: 75



Hi Pierre

I don't know whether this qualifies as an example with a chessboard border, but this inner guard border on this Salor trapping is fairly common:



Regards

Steve Price



January 18th, 2012, 04:55 PM

#8

[Pierre Galafassi](#)

Members

Join Date: Oct 2009
Posts: 85



Hi Steve,

Yes, they qualify and so do the little crosses made of five tiny squares in the (is it "aina"?) guls.

Pierre



January 18th, 2012, 05:03 PM

#9

[Steve Price](#)

Administrator

Join Date: May 2008
Posts: 75



Hi Pierre

Yup, *aina* or *ayna* guls. Not to be confused with the German *eine*, which sounds the same. I'm told that *ayna* means "mirror" to central Asians.

Regards

Steve Price



January 18th, 2012, 07:00 PM

#10

[Filiberto Boncompagni](#)
Administrator

Join Date: May 2008
Location: Cyprus
Posts: 79



Hi Pierre,

Quote:

Just simple 4-arms crosses? No other gimmicks?

I'm afraid that we have to agree first on the definition of "cross". Wiktionary presents fourteen definitions. For our purposes, we can use three of them.

The first one is "a geometrical figure consisting of two straight lines or bars intersecting each other such that at least one of them is bisected by the other. NO SYMBOL, no meaning attached.

The following two definitions have meanings, though, and they could concern us too: 2 (heraldry) Any geometric figure having this or a similar shape, such as a cross of Lorraine or a Maltese cross.

3 (Christianity) A modified representation of the crucifixion stake, worn as jewellery or displayed as a symbol of religious devotion.

I could add another definition, from this pdf document http://art-e.sdu.edu.tr/docs/olmez_3.pdf

Titled "DEATH" SYMBOLISM IN TURKISH WEAVINGS" by Filiz Nurhan OLMEZ, Dr. Suleyman Demirel University, Faculty of Fine Arts Department of Traditional Turkish Handicrafts,

The Motifs of Hook and Cross

The crosses and various hook types are frequently used in Turkish carpets to protect people.

...

The motif of cross is constituted by the interception of two lines; one is horizontal, the other one is vertical. Because of the shape of the cross that shows four different ways, it is believed that it divides the evil eye into four pieces and throws them into four different places. This is a commonly used symbol in Anatolia and has been depicted in Milas, Usak, Dosemealti, Kars and Kutahya carpets as well as Sivas, Eskisehir, Konya kilims.

I had no idea of who Mrs. Olmez is but, according to this link:

<http://www.turkishculture.org/whoiswho/applied-arts/filiz-nurhan-olmez-assistant-prof-1288.htm>

she is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Turkish Handicrafts of the Faculty of Fine Arts at Süleyman Demirel University. In 2008, Ölmez served as a Department Chair and a Chair of the Branch "Carpet-Kilim and Antique Textile Designs".

So, I think we should trust her. More, important, is the fact itself that she acknowledge the use of crosses on kilims and carpets in Anatolia. But we don't want

to rest on another "ipse dixit", don't we?



So... I said I have three rugs (found one more – now they are four) and five flat-weaves with crosses. I admit it could be disputable.

The first candidate is this Iraqi kilim



Could we consider as crosses the two devices in the middle of the two central medallions?

Next candidate is this Kazak:



The devices inside the medallions are indeed crosses, no doubt on that. But have they a symbolic meaning or are they just a decorative way to fill the negative space?

Same question for this Persian Kilim:



Geometrically, those central devices are crosses. But they are also part of a very basic composition, the stepped medallion. A technique-generated decoration, Marla Mallett would say. So basic that it's universal, one can find it everywhere, even in pre-Colombian cultures. This one, in a more complex motif, is from the Chancay culture, Peru (NO, this is not mine, unfortunately).



So, what is it, a cross or just the central part of a stepped medallion? I tend for the second interpretation, after all.

The small Afghan mat on the right has two crosses and half. They are at the center of their respective Memling guls, though. Like many other respectable Memling gul.



This Shirvan bag has a quite common Shirvan design with a lot of crosses.



This one is, I believe, a Zakatala bag with the same crosses.



Well, these crosses are not of the plain type: they are indeed quite similar to Armenian Crosses (but I do not think they are woven exclusively by Armenians)- which should put them in definition #3 or #2.

Finally, I have one more Caucasian rug:



a Shirvan Kilim:



And an Afghan rug (the cross is between the two birds):



I think we can assume quite comfortably that the crosses in the last three examples could be devices against the evil eye.

But then, who knows, really?

Regards,

Filiberto



February 4th, 2012, 06:06 PM

#11

[Chuck Wagner](#)

Members

Join Date: May 2008
Posts: 74




Hi all,

There are several implementations of crosses in this Azerbaijani soumak, and the placing of some make me wonder if they are intended to be rather more than simple geometric decoration.

In particular, the crosses in the upper and lower medallions seem thoroughly planned - they are not just coincidental fallout of negative space edges. Indeed, such weavings require so much more effort and planning than a pile rug that I think almost nothing is fortuitous.

And the crosses in the center medallion are far more asymmetrical than is necessary and I am inclined to see a more religious interpretation intended by the weaver:



BTW, my current plan is to ignore all the comments about lousy dyes... 

Regards
Chuck Wagner



February 4th, 2012, 06:29 PM

#12

[Filiberto Boncompagni](#)
Administrator

Join Date: May 2008
Location: Cyprus
Posts: 79



Hi Chuk,

Actually your soumak doesn't look bad at all on my monitor, apart perhaps some hot reds.
Around WW2, it seems, complete with swastika. Woven for an SS official?



Regards,

Filiberto



February 4th, 2012, 08:57 PM

#13

[Pierre Galafassi](#)
Members

Join Date: Oct 2009
Posts: 85



Hi Chuck,

That's a rather ecumenical sumak, featuring an amazing number of different motifs,

including a swastika which rather hints at fire worshipers than at good Christians. But you are right, there are many simple crosses and, yes, they seem planned. The

weaver was perhaps a crypto-Christian.



Dyes? No Sir, I was not mentioning any dye. 😊, Not me.
Pierre



February
5th, 2012,
05:45 PM

#14

[Chuck
Wagner](#)
Members



Hi again,

Join Date:
May 2008
Posts: 74

Yes, well, I noticed that particular swastika as soon as I looked at this thing - can't really miss the shape + color combination. Still, upon a more thorough exam, we see several others including some with the direction of the device reversed which are all on the left side of the piece.

There's one at the upper left outside the medallion, and another inside the star just below - but rendered in purple, so difficult to see in this image

But, back to the point, observe the cross atop the creature to the upper right of the medallion - rather obviously proportioned, say I. Not unlike the one in Filiberto's Memling gul, which conveniently happened to manifest itself as the weaver compensated for design proportions (at least, that's her story and she's sticking to it...).

There's another swastika - blue - above the creature as well, that rotates clockwise:



The absolutely spontaneous - large - assemblage of totemics on this thing made it easy for me to look past the hot red (and faded hot orange, BTW) and buy it.

Regards
Chuck Wagner



September 21st, 2012,
11:02 AM

#15

[Pierre Galafassi](#)
Members

Join Date: Oct 2009
Posts: 85

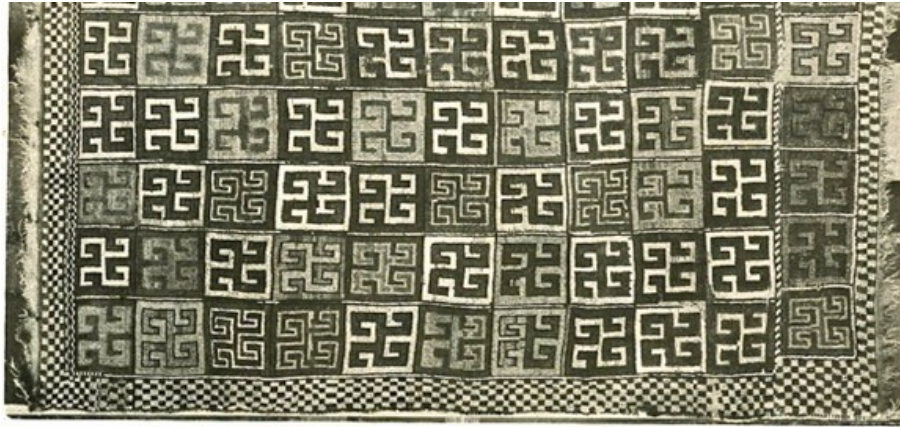


Hi all,

The rug below, described by Sarre early 1900's (but lost during a bombing of the Berlin Museum in 1945), features the same kind of chessboard border than the rug in FIG 3 and in the painting by the Master of Schottenaltar. Its age cannot be known precisely (C14 analysis was not available, back in 1945), but 15th or 16th century are possibilities.



The fied motif is interesting too. Sarre noted that the (seldom but not unique) motif was identical to a motif bordering the robe of a Hittite ruler (?) kneeling in front of his deity(?) on an Anatolian monument. The motif is also reminiscent of the (ubiquitous) swastika but this could be a mere coincidence.



ASIA MINOR CARPET WITH UNUSUAL FORM OF THE SVASTIKA RECENTLY ACQUIRED BY THE KAISER-FRIEDRICH MUSEUM, BERLIN



HITTITE MONUMENT OF IVRIZ, NEAR EREGLI



DETAIL OF THE MONUMENT, SHOWING UNUSUAL FORM OF SVASTIKA

IMHO the motif is unlikely to have perdured in Anatolian folk art during nearly three millenaries. One must rather suppose that a few local weavers took notice of it and found it nice.

Best regards
Pierre



September 22nd, 2012,
06:44 PM

#16

[Filiberto Boncompagni](#)
Administrator



Absolutely! Nice find 🙌🙌

Join Date: May 2008
Location: Cyprus
Posts: 79



November 2nd, 2017,
10:19 AM

#17

Bucciarelli

Registered

Join Date: Nov 2017
Posts: 1



Wow, some lovely collection, I am looking for such rugs in Australia but still unable to find out!

Protection!



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2. Geometric Rugs in Early Renaissance Paintings

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