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[Turkotek Discussion Forums](#) > [Virtual Show and Tell](#)

[Seistan Rug](#)

Welcome, [Joel Greifinger](#).

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### Virtual Show and Tell Just what the title says it is.



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 October 17th, 2013, 01:52 AM

**#197**

[Pierre Galafassi](#)

Members

Join Date: Oct 2009  
Posts: 82



Hi all,

A friend of mine operating a dyeing / weaving workshop in Afghanistan, told me that Hazarah from central Afghanistan (Bamiyan etc..) provided, at least for the past 40 years, competent weavers, working with the **symmetric** knot, unlike the ethnic Turkmen-, Uzbek- or Tadjik weavers of the area. Do your sources confirm this info?

Of course, this could well be a recent development, especially since this minority, which Burnes and Co saw as the poorest and most persecuted in the country, received during the past half century some govt. attention and development funds which they used wisely.

However, **if** this ethnical group was already weaving rugs during the nineteenth century, it seems quite likely to me that they were already using the symmetric knot.

Is there agreement in this discussion that the rugs discussed

here were woven with the asymmetric knot instead? If so, this point would rather disqualify the Hazarah as possible weavers of the pieces, no?.

Back to the **green** issue now:

Green shades made with natural dyes are based upon a double dyeing with indigo and a neutral- or greenish yellow. Before the introduction of synthetic dyes, the only significant alternative was dyeing with Saxon blue (a sulfonated indigo molecule, thus «semi-natural» ) and a yellow.

Now, Indigo, especially in a saturated color, yields a rather **reddish** blue (in pale shades it is a less reddish «sky blue»). This means that any saturated green made with indigo comes out rather **dull**. To obtain a bright («electric») green one would need to use a blue with a neutral- or greenish tone instead.

Saxon blue would be -shadewise- more suitable for making a bright green, but it is a lousy dye with poor light- and wet fastness, which, besides, does not build well on wool (difficult to achieve a saturated shade, which, even if achieved, would tend to «run».)

My point is: **If** the green shades of the rug group in question, judged with rug in hand, under natural light, really seem to you significantly brighter than any antique green (before mid-nineteenth century), you met before, one must take into consideration the high probability that this green is using a synthetic dye (bright, neutral- or even greenish blue). Such blue synthetic dyes first appeared during the early decades of the twentieth century (Anthraquinone or phtalocyanin chemistry).

Best regards  
Pierre

*Last edited by Pierre Galafassi; October 17th, 2013 at 02:00 AM.*



October 16th, 2013, 11:41 PM

#196

[Philip Loftus](#)

Members

Join Date: Apr 2012



Hello Rich

Location: Tokyo  
Posts: 56

I was thinking more about the circumstances the pieces could have been made in, the weavers' access to *abiyat abiyat gedan gedan* wool. That's wool that's been processed (I forget how but some kind of mildly acidic bath I'm half remembering). Maybe village dyers could do it, I dunno.

Sadly the last pic in my post was the only one needing a flash. In reality it's a bit darker, not electric at all.

As far as modern repros go we could also consider including the tasseled bags that look like recent production copies of Boucher's pl 50 which Joel posted, the post with the 'poster child' balisht pic.

However there is a lack of surface uniformity in the balishts in the green orange purple group I've handled. The selvages are convincing, the kilim endings less so but they weren't on the floor.

Philip



October 16th, 2013, 10:37 PM

#195

[Rich Larkin](#)

Members

Join Date: Jun 2008  
Location: Massachusetts  
Posts: 36



Hi Phil,

Quote:

In this group could we consider processed and unprocessed whites and the resultant 'Tide' white as opposed to the yellowish white of older pieces as a marker. Does that seem reasonable?

I wouldn't say it's unreasonable, but I think it's a somewhat gratuitous assumption. I recall that some of the snowiest whites I've ever seen in any rug appear in some undoubtedly old (more than, say, 125 years old) Caucasian rugs and Western Anatolian rugs. So, I wouldn't say 'Tide' white necessarily means new. Was that your point, or did I miss it?

Regarding your images,

Quote:

The last piece is maybe Seistan but I don't think it's part of the purple orange green group.

Really? It isn't especially important, but if Joel's poster child candidate was going to retire from the job, I was thinking of putting this piece up. Anyway, aren't you begging the question here of where these come from, and in fact, what they are? We're saying "Seistan," but how do we know? Our good friend, the *highly* reliable and authoritative (IMHO) Pierre, assures us that modern dyes competently applied can mimic any natural color. Perhaps I'm the only skeptic in the crowd, and in truth, I do not doubt these pieces as such; but I can't be sure they aren't some considered and deliberate market production from a savvy source. Perhaps that's excessive, but the thread is looking into the provenance of this material, presumably with an open mind; and aren't all possibilities on the table? Or can someone state with authority that such pieces have been in the market for a long time.

Rich



October 16th, 2013, 07:47 PM

#194

[Philip Loftus](#)

Members

Join Date: Apr 2012  
Location: Tokyo  
Posts: 56




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Hello Joel

We have so few sources from the time that I hesitate to question any of them. However Harlan sounds a bit...fanciful can we say?

Burnes, Stirling, Bellew (in a second book about Afghanistan) all comment about the poverty and low status of all the Hazarah incl the Dahi Zangi (sic) over a period from 1828 up to 1880.

The three Brits all have similar stories and it is not one copying from the previous traveller. Bellew goes into considerable detail and expands on Stirling's earlier info per my previous post's ps in his Ethnicity of Afghanistan which was presented at the 9th congress of Orientalists in 1889. Bellew was retired surgeon general of the army and so had a

scientific background. He and Stirling tell exactly the same story, the latter account going into far more detail. It included 'Tymani, Tymuri, Dahi Zangi, Dahi Chopan' all living around Ghor with the Aimaq. All of them as poor as church mice.

Acc to your quote from Harlan the Hazarah had factories producing 'predominantly yellow' rugs and this production was in exactly the same time period as Burnes expedition. These rugs were sold across the country according to this quote and even exported as cheap versions of Persian carpets. Does Pittenger or anyone else corroborate this? Stirling for example noted the copyists of Kirman were using the Illustrated London News as cartoons for some rugs. It's a bit of a surprise but it's not off the charts. Predominantly yellow Afghan Baluch rugs 'bed sized' were being exported in the 1830's and the untouchables of Afghanistan, the Hazarah were running this thriving enterprise when they weren't digging wells and shoveling snow! Mate, that's off the charts.

I'd be interested to see some later Pittenger references with a bit more weight before abandoning the hypothesis about the Hazarah.

Regards

Philip



October 16th, 2013, 05:00 PM

#193

[James Blanchard](#)  
Members

Join Date: Jun 2008  
Posts: 59



I posted this earlier, but did someone mention "yellow"?

James



October 16th, 2013,  
04:55 PM

#192

[Joel Greifinger](#)

Members

Join Date: May 2008  
Location: Massachusetts  
Posts: 49

Quote:

Hmmmm... but no green?

Hi folks,

I don't think the quote from Harlan supports the Hazara (of 1839) as the weavers responsible for the POG pieces under discussion. I do think it brings into question Philip's speculation that:

Quote:

Perhaps we can dispense with the Hazarah as possible weavers of these pieces (*or any other except for utilitarian pieces incl shawls and flatweaves*).

(*emphasis mine*)

Quote:

Is it a given that we would see this type of rug as a "Baluch type?"

It's certainly hard to tell from the description. Harlan continues, "The designs consist of the same inexplicable diversity of figures prevailing in all the oriental carpets, with some rude attempts at the representation of birds and flowers." Does that help? 🤔

Quote:

Has anyone seen many "Baluch" type rugs with a lot of yellow?

I wouldn't say it qualifies as many (or "a lot of"), but certainly some. I think of it as most often found in pile weaving that has been labelled 'Salar Khani' (e.g. Boucher #15):



but, in addition to those, Azadi also has three rugs (#2, 3 & 5) he labels "Madad-Khani, Sistan, Zabol" that contain yellow, as well. Craycraft (#21) shows a prayer rug on what he labels a yellow (is it really "camel"?) ground. Black and Loveless show #29 and #32.

Here's a 'star in octagon' bag face with some apparent age where the yellow is used as a highlight:





Clearly, not in the "a lot of" yellow category. 😊

Quote:

were they the weavers producing rugs that have been

*erroneously attributed to Seistan tribes?*

*(emphasis mine)*

Does the evidence clearly indicate that such an attribution is erroneous?

Joel

*Last edited by Joel Greifinger; October 16th, 2013 at 05:02 PM.*



October 16th, 2013, 04:33 PM

#191

[James Blanchard](#)

Members

Join Date: Jun 2008  
Posts: 59



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Rich Larkin**

*Hi folks,*

*Good question. In fact, here's another: Is it a given that we would see this type of rug as a "Baluch type?" I would love to see one of them.*

*Rich*

I think it's important to separate the questions: 1) did the Hazara weave rugs? 2) if so, were they the weavers producing rugs that have been erroneously attributed to Seistan tribes?

James



October 16th, 2013, 04:26 PM

#190

[Rich Larkin](#)

Members

Join Date: Jun 2008  
Location: Massachusetts  
Posts: 36



Hi folks,

Quote:

Has anyone seen many "Baluch" type rugs with a lot of

yellow?

Good question. In fact, here's another: Is it a given that we would see this type of rug as a "Baluch type?" I would love to see one of them.

Rich



October 16th, 2013, 03:19 PM

#189


[James Blanchard](#)

Members

Join Date: Jun 2008  
Posts: 59

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Joel Greifinger**   
*Hi Philip,*

*Let's not be hasty.* 

*A quick perusal of Pittinger provides this, published in 1839, from Gen. Josiah Harlan's Central Asia. Writing of "The Hazarrahs of Dye Zungee", "an excellent carpet is made in Dye Zungee in imitation of the Herat manufacture, whence the best Persian calleches, or small prayer rugs, are exported. These are of various sizes from... 'bed-size' carpet, to the dimensions suitable for extensive divans. The Dye Zungee article is sold in the markets of Herat, Kandahar, Cabul, and Bulkh, and other markets of Asia, as an inferior Persian carpet. The colors are permanent and vivid, being chiefly blue, crimson and yellow; the preponderance of the latter color distinguishes the Dye Zungee manufacture."*

*Harlan was an advisor to Dost Muhammad Khan on military tactics from 1837-1840.*

*This is just the earliest mention of Hazara pile weaving in the Pittinger collection.*

*Joel*

Hmmmm... but no green?

Has anyone seen many "Baluch" type rugs with a lot of yellow?

James

*Last edited by James Blanchard; October 16th, 2013 at 03:32 PM.*



October 16th, 2013, 03:05 PM

#188

[Joel Greifinger](#)

Members

Join Date: May 2008  
Location: Massachusetts  
Posts: 49



Quote:

Perhaps we can dispense with the Hazarah as possible weavers of these pieces (or any other except for utilitarian pieces incl shawls and flatweaves).

Hi Philip,

Let's not be hasty. 😊

A quick perusal of Pittinger provides this, published in 1839, from Gen. Josiah Harlan's *Central Asia*. Writing of "The Hazarrahs of Dye Zungee", "an excellent carpet is made in Dye Zungee in imitation of the Herat manufacture, whence the best Persian calleches, or small prayer rugs, are exported. These are of various sizes from...'bed-size' carpet, to the dimensions suitable for extensive divans. The Dye Zungee article is sold in the markets of Herat, Kandahar, Cabul, and Bulkh, and other markets of Asia, as an inferior Persian carpet. The colors are permanent and vivid, being chiefly blue, crimson and yellow; the preponderance of the latter color distinguishes the Dye Zungee manufacture."

Harlan was an advisor to Dost Muhammad Khan on military tactics from 1837-1840.

This is just the *earliest* mention of Hazara pile weaving in the Pittinger collection.

Joel



October 16th, 2013, 12:59 AM

#187

## [Philip Loftus](#)

Members

Join Date: Apr 2012  
Location: Tokyo  
Posts: 56



Joel

Here are the Hazara in a synopsis of Burnes 1831 trip...We also meet the unfortunate Hazaras, isolated in the snowy valleys around Bamiyan, downtrodden and regarded as legitimate prey by the man-stealing Uzbeks on account of their 'heretical' Shi'a faith.

Burnes describes how money amongst them is of little value and rarely seen; how they live by barter, of cloth, tobacco,pepper; how the women are of great influence, 'handsome, and not very chaste.'

Nothing about the Aimaq Hazara yet. (Or their ladies.)

Philip

PS Perhaps we can dispense with the Hazarah as possible weavers of these pieces (or any other except for utilitarian pieces incl shawls and flatweaves).


Firstly the Hazarah did not refer to themselves as such. This name most likely comes from the Persian word for 1000 *hazar*. They were military colonists settled in 1000 lot encampments by Gengiz Khan in the 13th c. 9 detachments were placed around Kabul and 1 around Pakli (east of the Indus).

They called themselves by their individual tribal names based on these groups. Jaghuri, Bihsud, Bahia Zangi etc.

In 1888 they were 'poor and hardy', worked as well-sinkers, wall builders, day labourers and servants. They used to clear the snow off the roof tops in Kabul. They were thought of as potential Ghurkas of Afghanistan because they liked the foreigners more than the Afghanis and were also extremely warlike.

*Last edited by Philip Loftus; October 16th, 2013 at 06:38 AM.*



 October 15th, 2013, 10:24 PM

#**186**

[Philip Loftus](#)

Members

Join Date: Apr 2012  
Location: Tokyo  
Posts: 56



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Hello Joel, James, Rich

In this group could we consider processed and unprocessed whites and the resultant 'Tide' white as opposed to the yellowish white of older pieces as a marker. Does that seem reasonable?

Here are some greens from the purple orange green group, except for one which is south Persian and maybe elderly and which I included because of similar saturation and design features to Baluch pieces.

The last piece is maybe Seistan but I don't think it's part of the purple orange green group.





Philip





October 15th, 2013,  
02:54 PM

#185

[Joel Greifinger](#)

Members

Join Date: May 2008  
Location: Massachusetts  
Posts: 49

 **When did the 'Baluch' get electricity?**

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Quote:

To be sure we are on the same wave length, when I say "this group," I was referring to the very strongly and brightly colored Baluch type pieces..."electric," to use Henry's term. I assume it is a group that belongs substantially in the set Tom Cole was promoting in his "Baluch Aesthetics" article.

Hi James and Rich,

Back in that "Baluch Aesthetics" piece, Cole wrote:

Quote:

I have fielded more than a few questions regarding the greens seen in Seistan area weavings. Some people were concerned that green is a late feature in Baluch weavings. It is difficult for me to imagine from where that idea came, but clearly the presence of green is not a late feature.

I don't think he ever explained the basis for his assertion.

He went on to provide a detail of what must be the 'poster child' of the "electric" sub-group:

Quote:

This next photo clearly shows the range of colour seen in old weavings from the Seistan region of Persia, a delicately handled palette of beauty.



My quick survey of "early" Baluch publications (i.e., 1970's-1980's) didn't come up with clear asymmetrically-knotted Purple-Orange-Green (POG) examples, particularly not of the 'high-voltage' variety. I thought perhaps that the ACOR 6 (Indianapolis 2002) exhibit "Inclusively Baluch", with its emphasis on colorful 'Baluch' weavings, might have something to do with the trend. But none of the pieces in the exhibit were asymmetrically-woven POG's.

Quote:

Boucher published a small bag of this group.

James, I figure you mean this one (Pl. 50):



but perhaps this one (Pl. 63) may be somewhere in the mix, as well?



Joel

*Last edited by Joel Greifinger; October 15th, 2013 at 08:52 PM.*



October 15th, 2013, 02:40 PM

#184

[James Blanchard](#)

Members

Join Date: Jun 2008  
Posts: 59



Hi Rich,

I'm not sure if I subscribe particularly to notion of an "electric" group as distinct from others in the general "Seistan" group (which I have subsequently suggested as being defined by a palette with abundant use of green, purple and orange). I think that they belong to the same basic genre.

I'm not sure that the "Mushwani" group fits with this group, other than the use of latch-hook medallions. The structure, and particularly the palette of many of the so-called "Mushwani" groups don't fit. For me, the widespread use of the latch-hook medallion in various weaving groups in this region makes it an unsuitable criterion for grouping weavings on its own.

I'm still not sure when these weavings started to appear in numbers in the markets of that region, or even whether there was any particular inflection point in the volume. All I know is that they have been around for the past dozen years or so, and I continue to see new pieces emerge into the market.

James



October 15th, 2013, 01:54 PM

#183

[Richard Larkin](#)

Members

Join Date: May 2008

Location: Massachusetts

Posts: 6



Hi James,

To be sure we are on the same wave length, when I say "this group," I was referring to the very strongly and brightly colored Baluch type pieces..."electric," to use Henry's term. I assume it is a group that belongs substantially in the set Tom Cole was promoting in his "Baluch Aesthetics" article. (That's the article in which I too often recognized the "also ran" comparison piece as much more suggestive of my own collection. 🤔) I would think your balisht was of the ilk. Your large Mushwani type looks aggressive in color, especially in the detail shots, but I'm not so sure I would place it with those other ones.

As this thread was developing (maybe the word is "exploding"), it seemed there was going to be a critical examination of the putative Seistan provenance, as well as of the group of rugs that might acquire the "Mushwani" label. I was interested to see what came of those two topics, as well as to see whether there was any clear overlap to be identified. Both terms cover a multitude of rugs to be sure, each in its own way, probably too many for a single label. To the extent

there might be some common ground between the labels, I thought your opening piece might in there.

In addition, given your extensive travels in the region, I thought you might have some sense of when and in what volume these rugs began to appear in country. Perhaps you just told me that you think they've been around for a while. I'll check my Boucher at the first opportunity.

Rich



October 15th, 2013, 01:02 PM

#182

[James Blanchard](#)

Members

Join Date: Jun 2008  
Posts: 59



Hi Rich,

I have not personally addressed the market dynamics in this thread, and I am much too much of a novice in "collecting" to trace the history.

I do know that varieties of rugs like the one I showed to start this thread have been published in some of the earlier Baluch publications, so they have been around.

You don't see so many balishts in older literature or catalogues, but I think that's true for most types of small weavings and trappings. Boucher published a small bag of this group. The balishts with more green and in rectangular formats seem to come in various ages. My interpretation is that these pieces have been around as pillows / bags for some time, but many have now made their way to the market often with the backs stripped off and then sold as mats.

In answer to your other question, I do think that the rug (from the original post) and the small colourful piece come from the same genre, but perhaps different generations.

James



October 15th, 2013, 11:32 AM

#181

[Rich Larkin](#)

Members

Join Date: Jun 2008

Location: Massachusetts

Posts: 36



Hi James,

Excuse me if you have addressed the following question earlier in the thread (I do plan to plow through, but it's a long trip), but what has been your experience in seeing this group of rugs in the market? Before about 1990, I don't recall having seen any. After about 2000 (I put rugs on the back burner for about ten years), I saw some, and noted them as featured on sites like Tom Cole's. It seems to me this sudden appearance in volume of the type must be taken into account in any analysis.

Also, do you count your piece that opened the thread, or your little gem in frame #9, within the type? (I'd say a firm "yes" on frame #9).

Rich



October 15th, 2013, 10:44 AM

#180

[James Blanchard](#)

Members

Join Date: Jun 2008

Posts: 59



Quote:

Originally Posted by **Joel Greifinger** *Hi James,*

*I am under the impression that Konieczny's work on Baluchistan is considered a solid ethnographic study of the local textiles at the time of his field work. While it obviously can't answer our questions about historical practices, are there other shortcomings of which you are aware?*

*Joel*

Hi Joel,

I am not familiar enough with Konieczny's work to comment on the authenticity of his observations.

However, Pierre has given us some reason to question his

assertion regarding the use of Safflower as a dye in that region. I have never seen a fading orange-red dye or a fugitive green in rugs from that region. So if it is not possible to create a light-fast dye with safflower, then it makes me wonder whether Konieczny might have been mistaken.

It's a puzzle, to be sure, and I think we are not much closer to understanding why this particular group of weavings has such a distinctive palette, and what that palette might indicate in terms of the attribution of the weavings.

Until a stronger critique and alternative is provided, I am content to continue to attribute this genre to "Seistan / Sistan".

James



October 15th, 2013, 09:50 AM

#179

[Joel Greifinger](#)

Members

Join Date: May 2008  
Location: Massachusetts  
Posts: 49

**Konieczny**

Quote:

Whatever we might think of the account(s) of Konieczny

Hi James,

I am under the impression that Konieczny's work on Baluchistan is considered a solid ethnographic study of the local textiles at the time of his field work. While it obviously can't answer our questions about historical practices, are there other shortcomings of which you are aware?

Joel



October 15th, 2013, 07:32 AM

#178

[Pierre Galafassi](#)

Members

Join Date: Oct 2009  
Posts: 82



Hi James,



**Quote:**

*«...there are direct references to the use of Safflower as a dye component of rugs and other woolen textiles in that region...»*

I have no hands-on experience with safflower dyes, only, like you, hints from the literature, which seem indeed a trifle contradictory:

About the red component of safflower (the expensive carmin dye, which appears in very small proportion late during the blooming of the petals ), Harald Böhmer (Koekboya , page124-125) mentions a peculiar dyeing process (without mordant, but with pH variations of the dye-bath which temporarily solubilize the red dye during dyeing, then leaves it as an insoluble pigment on the fibre). He claims a poor lightfastness (as the chemical structure of the carthamin molecule indeed suggests) and states that despite this handicap, carthamin was used for dyeing prestigious wool- and especially silk carpets (especially the «polonaise» Safavid carpets), due to its unique coloration. One can fully trust Böhmer and the supporting Marmara University for having analytical proofs backing their opinion. Quoting Böhmer *«...many have survived to the present. Characteristic of them is that the red has faded entirely. Only deep in the knots can one get an idea of the once magnificent safflower red...»*.



Persian. Safavid period.  
So-called «Polonaise» carpet.  
Ispahan. XVII.  
200X140

About the (plentiful and cheap) yellow safflower dye, Böhmer mentions that it is usually applied on a fibre mordanted with alum, but that its lightfastness makes it adequate «only perhaps for hobby dyers». Again, the chemical structure speaks clearly and confirms Böhmer's experimental work. Böhmer's illustration shows a strong and bright yellowish orange shade, perhaps the «burning orange» mentioned earlier in this thread. Of course, Sistan weavers, enthused by this shade, may have decided to use the safflower yellow not only for clothing but for rugs too, despite its poor lightfastness. One would expect significant fading on any rug aged more than half a century though. Is it the case?

The Chinese scientific paper (your link) basically confirms Böhmer's results. It indicates that mordants hardly improve the light fastness of the yellow: with alum mordant one reaches a rating of 3, (which would be too low for rugs, borderline for clothes). Copper and iron mordants improve it half a rating (but the brownish and greenish shades thus achieved are not interesting anymore).

Quote: *«...What did you think about this Wiki quote? Is it good info regards the fluorescent yellow do you think?...»*

A strong fluorescence of the dye in solution is possible, yes, but does not necessarily imply that the shade on wool and silk would be strongly fluorescent too (effect of «solvation»).

A last point :

If the shade of safflower yellow on wool and silk is indeed as described by Böhmer (a reddish, nearly orange yellow), this dye was certainly not used as a component for any **green** shades (with indigo as the blue component), unless one wants to reach a khaki, of course.

A neutral- or even a greenish-yellow would be much more adequate. Besides, dyeing a green using a very lightfast blue (indigo) and a poorly lightfast yellow would be a mistake (the shade would quickly drift to blue with time and light-exposure)

Best regards  
Pierre

P.S. You may be right about your pic, it might illustrate safflower flowers too .





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