INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 16th century, Turkish wool carpets were more economical and widely available to European consumers than carpets produced in Europe. This changed at the end of the 16th century with the succession of Shah Abbas I (r. 1587-1629). Transformation in textile production was initiated by the Shah, a weaver himself, who sought to strengthen the Iranian economy by developing a major textile industry. This included the production of carpets for export to meet the demands of international taste. Workshops started to focus on minimizing production time and costs by developing a new carpet type that could compete with lower-priced Turkish carpets. As a result, carpets of large dimensions and new designs, using less expensive materials, fewer colours and a lower knot density began to be produced.

METHODOLOGY

RESULTS TO DATE

This is the first study to identify Sappanwood in yellows and reds in both Deccan and ‘Indo-Persian’ carpets. Results have revealed that different yellow dye-sources were combined to achieve different shades of yellow. This points to the existence of different dye traditions, consistent with different geographical attributions: production in the Decan for the Indian carpets, and probably somewhere in Iran for the ‘Indo-Persian’. The extensive technical and stylistic analysis performed on all 60 carpets included in this study resulted in twelve different groups of carpets. Each of these groups is a combination of the fourteen different field types and twelve major borders identified. Following phases will compare these results with others from material analysis to understand if these groups can be associated with specific workshops. Paintings provide relative dates for each style and allow us to better understand design evolution.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank to Teresa Pacheco and Patricia Machado (MARA), Pedro Perraço (MNPMC), Sumro Krody and Esther Méthé (The Textile Museum), Corcoran Gallery of Art, Mary Jo Otsea (Sotheby's) and Julia Burke (NGA) from granting access to carpets’ collection and sampling. Also, we are grateful to Dr. Richard Leaussen and Dr. Chika Mori, Toyo Bunko for their project Redevelopment of Traditional Plant-based Dyeing Techniques in Iran to Help Women in Iran to Help Women in Local Communities Become Self-supporting and to Getty Conservation Institute for the Asian Organic Colorants for providing reference samples. Finally, to FCT for the PhD grant SFRH/BD/72882/2010.

ENLIGHTENING APPROACHES ON ‘INDO-PERSIAN’ CARPETS

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16th century

17th century

Fig. 2: 16th and 17th century Islamic carpets belonging to Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon, and Museu Nacional (currently Coimbra, Portugal). (Inv. Numbers 47Tpe and T761-7, respectively). (Inv. Numbers 47Tpe and T761-7, respectively).

Fig. 4: Border detail from 17th century Portuguese carpet (Inv. Number T761-7). Belonging to National Museum of Ancient Art, Lisbon, Portugal.

Fig. 5: Border detail from 17th century Portuguese Lisbon carpet belonging to National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, USA.

Fig. 6: Border detail from an identified album signed by R. F. Elan (Iranian, 1550-1600). 1530-40. Borders: India, Mughal period, possibly Bukhara, Safavid period, probably Bhutan, probably Uzbekistan (Valdman collection). Borders: India, c. 1610. Freer Gallery of Art, Washington DC, USA.

Fig. 7: Border detail from an identified album signed by Mir Ali Haravi (Uzbekistan, 1610-50). 1530-40. Borders: India, Mughal period, c. 1630-60. Freer Gallery of Art F1939.50B.

Indian and Persian: 'Indo-Persian' type

Materials Science

Fibres & Dyes

Stylistic analysis of border and field designs

Art History

Written sources

Carpets

Paintings

Workshops producing Indo-Persian carpets

In 16th or 17th?

16th century

Fig. 3. Details from 'Indo-Persian' carpet field and border designs adapted in a Phillip de Champaigne painting, 16th century, Musée du Louvre, Paris, France (Inv. Numbers 47Tpe and T761-7). (Inv. Numbers 47Tpe and T761-7).

Type a - Cartouche and Medallion (Vine Scroll carpets)

Recent historical sources such as travel accounts, inventories and records of diplomatic gifts also offer important historical evidence. Records of traded raw products proved that Sappanwood was a major item during the 16th century, when it was exported from Southeast Asia across the globe.