



## FORUM

A **TANGLED** TALE

In response to Linda Komaroff's discussion of the Mackay/Getty 'Coronation Carpet' in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Thomas Farnham offers a clarification of its provenance, and also touches on the other, less well-known, classical Persian weavings used to decorate Westminster Abbey during King Edward VII's coronation ceremony.

**I READ WITH GREAT INTEREST** and benefit Linda Komaroff's recent article on the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's 'Coronation Carpet' (HALI 162, pp. 46-49) and congratulate LACMA for simultaneously exhibiting the Coronation Carpet – so called because of its role in the coronation of Edward VII in 1902 – and the LA Ardabil Carpet, two undoubted masterpieces of Safavid art.

Dr Komaroff is also to be commended for her valiant attempt to unravel the tangled provenance of the LA Coronation Carpet. What has made its history so befuddling is the assumption by those who have tried to understand it that it was the only carpet on the dais during Edward's coronation. In fact at least three carpets helped to celebrate the event, each of them supplied by Duveen Brothers.

Many years later Edward Fowles, in 1902 a trusted employee of Joel and Henry J. Duveen,

discussed the coronation: "The overall effect was enhanced by the fine, old Persian carpets which Duveen had borrowed from his clients; they covered the pavement which mounts towards the dais." Whether Fowles was correct when he recalled that the coronation carpets were borrowed or whether they actually came directly from the Duveens' stockroom is impossible to know; the firm's records say nothing at all about who owned any of the three when they decorated Westminster Abbey at the time of the coronation.

In contrast, the carpets' post-1902 histories are no mystery. On 3 December 1902, four months after the coronation, Marsden Jaseal Perry, a financier, utilities and transportation magnate and art collector of Providence, Rhode Island, bought the carpet now in Los Angeles to decorate the mansion he had acquired the previous year.

In 1906, perhaps because he had suffered a minor stroke or perhaps simply because he was more interested in collecting Chinese porcelains and early editions of Shakespeare than in owning rugs, he sold it back to Henry Duveen. Henry, that same year, sold it again, this time to Clarence Mackay, who wanted it for Harbor Hill, his recently-constructed residence in Roslyn, Long Island. Mackay owned the carpet until 1939, when it was bought by J. Paul Getty.

The second Duveen carpet at the coronation, an 'in and out palmette' design Khorasan carpet, has had an essentially anonymous existence. Although Duveen Brothers' archive reveals that it was acquired from a cathedral in Spain, it fails to disclose when. Some time well after 1902, probably about 1920, it became the property of Nicholas F. and Genevieve Garvan Brady, who were, like Mackay, Long Islanders, residents of Manhasset. It came on the market again in 1937 when the American Art Association liquidated the Brady Collection, then appeared again at Sotheby's, New York in 1988, and at Christie's, London in 1997. Its present whereabouts are unknown. That it played a role at Westminster Abbey in 1902 is documented in a photograph of it under the coronation throne that has accompanied the carpet since Joseph Duveen acquired it.

The third carpet at the coronation came to be owned by John Augustus Holms of Renfrewshire, near Bishopton, Scotland, but it did not belong to him at the time of the coronation. If the Duveen Brothers did borrow the carpet, it was not from Holms, who acquired it (and a garden carpet), from them in 1903. This is the carpet, not the LACMA as Komaroff states, that came to the Duveens from Fernand Schutz in Paris.





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That the Holms carpet decorated Westminster Abbey in 1902 is indisputable. Documents in the Office of Works attest to its presence at the coronation, as did Morrison, M'Chlery and Company, the auction house that liquidated the Holms Collection in 1938. It was also used during the coronation of King George V in 1911 and at the wedding of Princess Mary in 1922.

The next owner of this carpet was Charles A. Hepburn of Glasgow, Scotland (my thanks to Jon Thompson who directed my attention to an obituary that mentioned Hepburn's ownership of the carpet). How he acquired it is unclear. He may have purchased it at the Holms sale, but according to one oft-repeated story, it came to him after it was stolen from the home of John Holms, slashed with a knife, and thrown in a ditch where it spent several months before Hepburn bought it and had it repaired. However he came to own it, Hepburn, before his death in 1971, gave the carpet to the Glasgow Cathedral, where it now decorates the tomb of St Mungo, the founder, in 550 AD, of the religious community from which the Cathedral eventually evolved.

One other statement in Dr Komaroff's article deserves brief comment, that: "according to some accounts" Clarence Mackay might have owned the LA Ardabil before Charles T. Yerkes. I cannot imagine where those accounts might have arisen, but they are hardly plausible. Yerkes acquired his carpet about 1893, soon after the South Kensington Museum purchased its Ardabil. At that time Mackay had just turned nineteen, was unmarried, and lived with his parents, hardly the sort of circumstances that might have encouraged a young man to fancy a Safavid carpet of his own. At no point in his life was he ever an enthusiastic carpet collector; he was interested in items medieval, in particular armour. If as a teenager he had badgered mom and dad for money to buy antiques, those would most probably have been items such as a tournament shield and perhaps a *Spangenhelm*, not carpets. Furthermore when Yerkes bought his Ardabil, the London dealer Vincent Robinson, eager to maintain the fiction that he had provided the South Kensington Museum with a carpet unlike any other, insisted that Yerkes not only pay a king's ransom for his carpet but also agree to

**1, 2** The Holms/Hepburn 'Coronation' carpet, one of three carpets supplied by Duveen Brothers for the coronation of King Edward VII in 1902. Given to St Mungo's Cathedral in Glasgow by Charles A. Hepburn in 1971

**3** Leather labels sewn to the back of the Holms/Hepburn carpet bear witness to its role in royal events during the first quarter of the 20th century. Photos courtesy Glenn Collie, Sessions Clerk, Glasgow Cathedral

keep its existence secret, a condition Robinson was unlikely to have entrusted to a teenager.

The minor missteps in Dr Komaroff's history of the LA Coronation and Ardabil carpets do not diminish either her success in bringing renewed attention to these historically important carpets nor her achievement in exhibiting them, to enthusiastic effect, side by side. These are notable accomplishments for which she deserves the thanks of all who appreciate carpet art.

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