



1 Type 2 Beshir prayer rug [2.1], middle Amu Darya region, ca. 1800-1825. 1.45 x 2.31m (4'9" x 7'7"). Ralph & Linda Kaffel Collection, Piedmont, California, courtesy Rippon Boswell, Wiesbaden

2 Type 1-A Beshir prayer rug [1.4], middle Amu Darya region, first half 19th century. 1.12 x 1.93m (3'8" x 6'4"). Jim Dixon Collection, Occidental, California

3 Type 1-C Beshir prayer rug [1.24], middle Amu Darya region, ca. 1875. 1.12 x 1.70m (3'8" x 5'7"). Courtesy Sotheby's New York

Beshir prayer rugs

RALPH KAFFEL

Few Turkmen rugs are such obvious products of their environments as Beshir prayer rugs in that motifs associated with the surrounding rug weaving cultures can be clearly seen in their designs, and yet exactly where and by whom they were made still remains a matter of debate. In this context a well-known rug author and collector reviews the research into this enigmatic group and offers a method of dividing the known examples by design.



4 Type 2 Beshir prayer rug [2.17], middle Amu Darya region, first half 19th century. 1.07 x 1.73m (3'6" x 5'8"). Jim Dixon Collection, Occidental, California



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5 Type 2 Beshir prayer rug [2.46], middle Amu Darya region, ca. 1800-1825. 0.95 x 1.40m (3'2" x 4'7"). Courtesy Rippon Boswell, Wiesbaden

THE TAXONOMY OF MOST TURKMEN RUGS is meticulously precise: the weavings of tribes such as the Tekke, Yomut, Chodor, Ersari and Arabachi, as well as the 'S' (Salor and Saryk) and 'Eagle-göl' groups are, in most cases, clearly and unambiguously attributed. Not so with Beshirs: authors, scholars and collectors are not even able to agree whether the Beshir attribution refers to a tribe or a place of origin.

As late as 1998, Murray Eiland proposed that Beshir weavings were named either for the town of Beshir or for the acronym formed by Besh and Shahr, or 'Five Villages' on the Amu Darya (Oxus) River (most likely Beshir, Burdalyk, Khojambass, Chakyr and either Kerki or Khalaj; all but the last two on the east bank of the river). Eiland, who has travelled to the region, wrote that although "some writers have attributed Beshir rugs to the city of Bokhara itself, Bokhara dealers are particularly clear in denying this attribution."¹

Somewhat earlier, in 1975, H. McCoy Jones and Jeff Boucher had suggested another derivation for the name. They wrote that these rugs were marketed in Bukhara, which in the Sart language, according to Heinrich Jacoby, is known as Bas'chira – hence Beshir.²

Aside from the eponyms, there is little certainty to be found in almost all writings on the subject. Even one of the most comprehensive articles, written by Robert Pinner in 1981, begins "Our lack of knowledge about 'Beshir' carpets has recently been highlighted by the publication of two opposed theories about their origin".³ He was referring to the essays by Jon Thompson and Hans König published the previous year in the Washington ICOC exhibition catalogue, *Turkmen*.⁴ Under the heading 'Bukhara', Thompson discussed a number of rugs commonly described as Beshir, without once using the name. His view is that many of these rugs were woven by non-Turkmen people who, "in terms of culture and lifestyle, were closer

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- 1** Murray L. Eiland, Jr. & Murray Eiland III, *Oriental Rugs: A Complete Guide*, London 1998, p.244, pl.232: "The pomegranate prayer rugs often have features that closely relate them to Beshir-type rugs, although they have not been convincingly attributed to a specific origin, nor is it clear whether they were meant for use locally or in such cities as Bukhara."
- 2** H. McCoy Jones & Jeff W. Boucher, *The Ersari and Their Weavings*, Washington DC 1975, p.2.

- 3** Robert Pinner, 'Beshir Carpets of the Bukhara Emirate', HALI 3/4, 1981, pp.294-304.
- 4** Louise W. Mackie & Jon Thompson, *Turkmen, Tribal Carpets and Traditions*, Washington DC 1980.
- 5** *Ibid.*, pp.173, 187.
- 6** *Ibid.*, p.192. Pinner 1981, op.cit, pointed out in his notes that he had not seen the name 'Olam' in any of the tribal lists available to him, and that Moshkova had speculated that they were a non-Turkic tribe.
- 7** Valentina G. Moshkova, *Carpets*

- of the People of Central Asia*, edited & translated by George W. O'Bannon & Oavadan K. Amanova-Olsen, Tucson 1996, p.300. Moshkova makes scant mention of Beshir prayer rugs, just a couple of sentences on p.303.
- 8** A. Felkersam, *Alte Teppiche Mitelasien*, translation of the 1914 Russian text, Hamburg 1979, p.88. Felkersam described the Dudin prayer rug as "Uzbek Beshir".
- 9** Hans König, 'Ersari Rugs, Names and Attributions', HALI 4/2, 1981,

- p.139. König wrote that the prayer rugs "likely owe their origin in this area to non-Turkmen influences" and "the fact that Bukhara was a famous religious centre played a major part in this development".
- 10** William A. Wood, 'Turkmen Ethnohistory', in George O'Bannon et al., *Vanishing Jewels: Central Asian Tribal Weavings*, Rochester 1990, pp.31-2.
- 11** David Black, ed., *The Macmillan Atlas of Rugs and Carpets*, New York 1985, p.174. Echoing Felker-

6 Type 2 Beshir prayer rug [2.52], middle Amu Darya region, ca. 1850-1875. 0.88 x 1.49m (2'11" x 4'11"). HALI Archive

7 Type 2 Beshir prayer rug [2.56], middle Amu Darya region, ca. 1830-1850. 1.07 x 1.83m (3'6" x 6'0"). Jim Dixon Collection, Occidental, California



8 Type 3-A Beshir prayer rug [3.1], middle Amu Darya region, ca. 1800-1825. 0.99 x 1.85m (3'3" x 6'1"). HALI Archive

9 Type 3-D Beshir prayer rug [3.29], middle Amu Darya region, ca. 1875. 0.91 x 1.65m (3'10" x 5'5"). Ralph & Linda Kaffel Collection, Piedmont, California

to far-off Cairo and Istanbul than to their neighbours the Turkmen".⁵ In the same volume, König wrote that there was no doubt as to the Turkmen origin of Ersari rugs, which include those he refers to as "Beshir type". Citing V.G. Moshkova's 1970 Russian publication, *Carpets of the Peoples of Central Asia*, he offers the possibility that a large contingent of Salors and Olams were incorporated into the Ersari tribal structure.⁶ Moshkova had written that the Salor, "famous as the best weavers... switched to the tradition of local weavers. These rich and unique traditions probably belonged to the Olams and other ancient groups [who] populated this part of [the] Amu Darya".⁷

An important Russian author of an earlier generation, A. Felkersam, writing in 1914, stated that in the village of Kerki on the left bank of the Amu Darya, and Beshir on the right bank, there were 4,000 houses, half of which were engaged in rug weaving. According to K. Laurenti, who had collected rugs from this area for Felkersam in 1902, all weaving was done by women, with tools

and dyeing the province of men. Felkersam wrote that Kerki and Beshir rugs were very similar: both encompassed a group he called "Bucharer", while rugs with a more complicated design of flowers, with rich colours, were called Beshir. Attempting to distinguish between 'Turkmen Beshir' and 'Uzbek Beshir', he wrote that white-ground and floral prayer rugs, atypical of the Turkmen, were made by the Uzbek Beshir.⁸ König, in a 1981 HALI article, confirms Felkersam's views, writing that Beshir rugs could not have been produced by workshops in the area, as such workshops did not exist, but were cottage industry products commissioned by agents to be sold in Bukhara and its environs, either to wealthy locals or for export to other parts of the Islamic world.⁹

In his oft-cited chapter on 'Turkmen Ethnohistory' (1990), William Wood makes no mention of a Beshir tribe, even though the glossary in the same book, *Vanishing Jewels*, defines the Beshir as a "major Turkoman tribe".¹⁰ In 1985, David Black, or his co-authors,

identified the Beshir as "one of the most important of the Ersari sub-tribes" but offered no supporting evidence.¹¹ Writing in 1975, Siawosch Azadi, citing Karpov's *Turkmen Genealogy* of 1928, identifies the Beshir as a sub-group of the Uluğ-Tepe, one of the three sub-groups of the Ersari along with the Qara-Bekaul and Gunash.¹² Elena Tsareva is, however, quite firm in her contention (1984) that "while in [rug] literature such names as Pende, Beshir, Bukhara and the like are still common... in the cases of Pende and Beshir the names of the carpets and rugs derive from their places of origin".¹³

I could compare published views as to the ethnogenesis of Beshir carpets at some length, but no clear uncontradictory consensus would emerge. I favour an amalgam of the ideas of Pinner, König and Moshkova – that Beshir rugs were woven in the villages of the Middle Amu Darya by Ersari weavers, along with transplanted Salors and Olams, in a sort of 19th century Emirate-sanctioned DOBAG Project, marketed primarily from Bukhara.¹⁴

PRAYER RUGS

Beshir prayer rugs were influenced by designs from Turkey, Persia, Uzbekistan, China and Eastern Turkestan. Thompson commented on the relationship between the 'head and shoulders' designs of certain Beshir prayer rugs and the 'keyhole' or 're-entrant' mihrabs in 16th century Anatolian prayer rugs.¹⁵ Earlier, in 1940, Amos Thacher had associated Beshir prayer rugs with Turkish rather than Turkmen designs.¹⁶ Persian influences are evident in the Herati patterns, more common to secular examples than to prayer rugs.¹⁷ Uzbek influence is most apparent in certain early white-ground prayer rugs. Chinese influence manifests itself in the palette, and, to a lesser extent, structure. Thacher, describing one of his prayer rugs, mentions "Chinese yellow" and "wool which is more like Chinese wool than like Turkoman".¹⁸ Werner Loges too makes specific mention of the distinctive yellow, calling it "Beshir yellow", made from saffron, safflower (dye's weld), isparak and occasionally pomegranate peel.¹⁹

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sam, Black speaks of the "Beshir Ersari", who were settled and lived in domed mud-brick houses.

12 Siawosch U. Azadi, *Turkoman Carpets and the Ethnographic Significance of Their Ornaments*, Fishguard 1975.

13 Elena Tsareva, *Rugs and Carpets from Central Asia: The Russian Collections*, Harmondsworth 1984, p.6. Tsareva adds that while

in some cases (Pende and Beshir) the names derive from their places of origin, in others (Bukhara) the name refers to the place where the rugs came to market. She further states that pile weaving was not practiced in Bukhara and vicinity. Jones and Boucher, op.cit., add that "regardless of the origin of the name, it appears that the rugs were not woven by a Beshir sub-

tribe of the Ersaris, as none have been identified as living here by any authority known to us".

14 Robert Pinner, in Wilfried Stanzer et al., *Antique Oriental Carpets from Austrian Collections*, Vienna 1986, pl.118, note 47, quoting his 1981 HALI article.

15 Jon Thompson, in Mackie & Thompson, op.cit., p.187.

16 Jean Lefevre, *Central Asian*

Carpets, Fishguard 1976. In his notes to pl.17, Lefevre states "Beshir prayer rugs in particular are highly distinctive and have been associated by some authors such as Thacher with certain types of Turkish rather than Turkoman prayer rugs".

17 Herati pattern prayer rugs include: Reinhard G. Hubel, *The Book of Carpets*, New York 1970,

p.251; Sotheby's, London, 19 October 1983, lot 493; Tsareva, op.cit., pl.101; Lefevre, London, 25 June 1974, lot 12.

18 Amos Bateman Thacher, *Turkoman Rugs*, New York 1940, pl.46.

19 Werner Loges, *Turkoman Tribal Rugs*, Atlantic Highlands 1980, p.91.

20 Thacher, op.cit., pl.47.

21 Christopher Dunham Reed, *Turkoman Rugs*, Cambridge 1966, p.43.

Reed followed Thacher. East Turkestan (Xinjiang) influence can be clearly seen in the central medallion of a large (2.5 x 5.0m) Beshir carpet advertised in HALI 3/2, 1980, pp.70-71, with the statement: "This important ethnological heritage, although long suspected, has not been clearly demonstrated until now." Not everyone, however, agrees on the subject of pome-

granates. Friedrich Spuhler, Hans König & Martin Volkmann, *Old Eastern Carpets*, Munich 1978, discussing pl.99, wrote "the red and dark brown shapes hanging from trees are, in our opinion, blossoms. The attempt to derive this figure from East Turkestan-style pomegranates does not seem convincing".

22 Hans König, in Mackie & Thompson, op.cit., p.199.

23 Yomut prayer rugs: Alberto Levi & Edoardo Concaro, *Sovrani Tappeti*, Milan 1999, pl.111 = Rippon Boswell, Wiesbaden, 12 November 1994, lot 93; Rippon Boswell, 11 May 1991, lot 125 = Skinner, Bolton, 24 April 1993, lot 61; HALI 77, 1994, p.85 = Jennifer Wearden, *Oriental Carpets and Their Structure: Highlights from the V&A Collection*, London 2003, pl.76;

10 Type 3-D Beshir prayer rug [3.27], middle Amu Darya region, ca. 1825-1850. 1.10 x 1.62m (3'7" x 5'4"). Courtesy Rippon Boswell, Wiesbaden
11 Type 3-D Beshir prayer rug [3.23], middle Amu Darya region, ca. 1825-1850. 0.99 x 1.77m (3'3" x 5'10"). After Lefevre, London, 2 April 1976, lot 1
12 Type 3-D Beshir prayer rug [3.44], middle Amu Darya region, second half 19th century. Courtesy Gallery Arabesque, Stuttgart



13 Type 3-D Beshir prayer rug [3.50], middle Amu Darya region, ca. 1800-1825. 0.81 x 0.91m (2'8" x 3'0"). Ralph & Linda Kaffel Collection, Piedmont, California, courtesy Ronnie Newman, Riudgewood, New Jersey

Pomegranates are an important motif in Beshir prayer rugs, pointing to strong East Turkestan (Xinjiang) influence. They appear as a major field element in one specific prayer rug design type, and as border motifs on many of the rugs. This frequent use of the pomegranate motif may be attributed both to the Middle Amu Darya region's relative proximity to Samarkand, and to the influence of East Turkestan types, particularly those of Khotan. Thacher was among the first of the collector/authors of the 20th century to associate the "hanging pomegranates" design with Chinese Turkestan,²⁰ and he in turn was echoed by Christopher Dunham Reed.²¹

König wrote that "the Ersari are the only Turkmen tribe to have produced small prayer rugs".²² This is not completely true. While the great majority of Turkmen prayer rugs are ascribed to Beshir and/or the Ersari, small prayer rugs of the Yomut, Chodor, Kizil Ayak and Tekke tribes are also known.²³ König also suggested that "earlier prayer rugs seem to have been smaller than later ones, but further comparisons are needed to establish this assumption as fact". One of the largest and earliest Beshir prayer rugs known appears here as 1.

In 1969, Ulrich Schürmann wrote that "Ersari prayer rugs commercially known as Beshir, belong to the most sought after collector's pieces. Only a few examples have survived, being generally rather loosely knotted".²⁴ Thacher wrote that "rugs of this type are rare and when found are in poor condition. They are too loosely woven and are too soft and silky to stand much wear. None seem to have been woven for 75 years"²⁵ (if true, 1855 would have been the cut-off year). Dissenting from Schürmann and Thacher, Thompson wrote that "... a good number of these prayer rugs have survived".²⁶ Early authors were, by and large, much too generous in their datings; for example, Major Hartley Clark, writing in 1922, considered his prayer rug to be "150 years old", which translates to the 1770s.²⁷ However, there is no evidence to suggest that any Beshir prayer rugs (with one possible exception) predate the 19th century.

Pinner and Eiland, in their 1999 survey of the Wiedersperg Collection, wrote that the prayer rugs were "the first Beshir-type rugs to command high prices at auction".²⁸ That is indeed true; for instance a Beshir prayer rug prominently featured on the cover of a 1978 Sotheby's New York catalogue, estimated at \$4,000-5000, sold for \$22,000. It was later shown by Eberhart Herrmann in his 1985 Munich exhibition 'Rare Rugs of the Turkoman'.²⁹

Structurally, Beshir prayer rugs are, as mentioned above, loosely knotted, with woollen pile. Some have goat hair wefts, occasionally mixed with wool, and, less frequently, goat hair or mixed warps. The asymmetric knot open right is most often used, although instances of asymmetric knotting open left are known.³⁰ The average knot count is about 72/in² (ca. 1,116/dm²) with highs of about 137 and lows of 46. The median size is approximately 3'5" by 6'0" (1.04 x 1.83m).³¹

CLASSIFICATION BY DESIGN

The 140 Beshir-type prayer rugs for which I have data form the basis for this classification by design. This is by no means an exhaustive sample, but is undoubtedly representative (a full listing appears on the hali.com website). There are 24 white-ground rugs with tree designs which I call Type 1 (divided into sub-types A-C); 56 Type 2 pomegranate design rugs; 54 Type 3 floral or shrub design rugs (divided into sub-types A-D); and six unclassified rugs, excluding safs (multiple-niche prayer carpets), which are not included in the sample, but which are briefly mentioned below.

Type 1-A consists of seven rugs [1.1-1.7], among them the famous and much-published Dudin rug in St Petersburg [1.1], which is considered to pre-date 1800 (HALI 27, 1985, p.14). It was bought by Samuil Dudin in Samarkand in 1901, and was assigned to Uzbekistan as the work of the 'Uzbek Beshir' by Felkersam. Together with the other rugs in this small sub-group, including an unpublished example in the Dixon Collection 2, it has a white-ground covered with repeating clusters of curled leaves on slender winding stems or tendrils, described by Pinner as "bat shaped",³² and compared by some authors to the designs of suzani embroideries. Chevron-adorned poles or pillars are topped by *kochak* motifs, with the prayer arch formed by an inverted 'V', which itself is surmounted by a shorter

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- Dennis R. Dodds & Murray L. Eiland, eds., *Oriental Rugs from Atlantic Collections*, Philadelphia 1996, pl.198. Chodor prayer rugs: HALI 112, 2000, p.135; Murray L. Eiland, *Oriental Rugs: A Comprehensive Guide*, Boston 1981, pl.194A. Tekke prayer rug: HALI 112, 2000, p.152.
- 24** Ulrich Schürmann, *Central-Asian Rugs*, Frankfurt 1969, pl.48.
- 25** Thacher, op.cit., pl.47.
- 26** Mackie & Thompson, op.cit., notes to pl.85.
- 27** Hartley Clark, *Bokhara, Turkoman and Afghan Rugs*, London 1922.
- 28** Robert Pinner & Murray L. Eiland, Jr., *Between the Black Desert and the Red: Turkmen Carpets from the Wiedersperg Collection*, San Francisco 1999.
- 29** Sotheby's New York, 7 April 1978, lot 62 = HALI 26, 1985, p.89.
- 30** Asymmetric knot, open left: Hans Elmby, *Antike Turkmenske Tæpper IV*, Copenhagen 1998, pl.50; Eberhart Herrmann, *Seltene Orientteppiche V*, Munich 1983, pl.85; Spuhler, König, Volkmann, op.cit, pl.97.
- 31** See HALI 120, 2002, p.125, discussing Sotheby's, New York, 14 September 2001 (rescheduled to 20 September 2001), lot 55.
- 32** Wilfried Stanzer et al., *Antique Oriental Carpets from Austrian Collections*, Vienna 1986, p.120.
- 33** A number of saf fragments are extant, possibly all from the same monumental carpet: Moshkova, op.cit, p.293 (Ersari or Uzbek); Peter Bausback, *75 Jahre Sammlung Franz Bausback*, Mannheim 2000, p.192; Sotheby's, London, 29 April 1998, lot 96; Christie's, London, 17 October 2002, lot 141 = HALI 124, 2002, p.51.
- 34** [1.2], see Spuhler, König, Volkmann, op.cit, pl.98; HALI 3/1, 1980, ad.p.4; HALI 30, 1986, p.2; HALI 59, 1991, p.83; Eberhart Herrmann, *Asiatische Teppich- und Textilkunst 3*, 1991, p.83; Stanzer et al., op.cit., pl.120; Uwe Jourdan, *Oriental Rugs. Volume 5. Turkoman*, 1996, pl.298. This early 19th century piece is the closest comparison to the Dudin rug [1.1], whose meander border motif is replicated in the outer lateral strips of the field. It has eight colours versus Dudin's ten, and is not as finely woven.
- 35** Moshkova, op.cit., p.316, pl.XCIX, fig.9.
- 36** [1.3], Christie's, New York, 20 April 1994, lot 26. Dated to the 18th century, but thick and coarsely woven with a stiffness of the drawing that suggests a later date. Rugs with stylised quatrefoil 'tile' borders include Christie's, London, 24 April 1997, lot 422, and HALI 50, 1990, ad.pp.36-7.
- 37** [1.7], Phillips London, 16 June 1992, lot 5, with curled leaves on three vertical stems and an unusual border of octagons enclosing stylised palmettes, also seen in HALI 63, 1992, p.62 and HALI 64, 1992, p.168. While in four other related examples the *kochak*-topped poles are attached to a mihrab, here they are free-standing. The Auction Price Guide review in HALI 64 questioned whether this was even a prayer rug.
- 38** [1.13], see H. McCoy Jones & Jeff W. Boucher, *Weavings of the Tribes in Afghanistan*, Washington DC 1972, pl.22.
- 39** [1.14], see Murray L. Eiland, *Oriental Rugs from Pacific Collections*, San Francisco 1990, pl.154. Eiland's caption refers to the Dudin rug, but the comparison is tenuous. The unusual feature here is the design of its branches, with both pendant and ascendant buds. It has a border of tiny geometric flowerheads. Eiland & Eiland, op.cit, pl.230, state that it "...seems to be a part of an entirely different tradition than the pomegranate-type with its vari-colored field." It is possible that many of the Type 1-B rugs are products of the Afghan Ersari.
- 40** [1.23], see Adil Besim, *Mythos & Mystik 3*, Vienna 2000, pl.64; Phillips, London, 14 April 1986, lot 57; Phillips, London, 6 November 1986, lot 21; Phillips, London, 22 November 1988, lot 21; Rippon Boswell, Wiesbaden, 14 November 1992, lot 106. This rug appears to be a somewhat later version of the rugs cited in notes 38 and 39 above [1.13, 1.14]. It has a border of 'Uzbek-type' star octagons, referred to as a variant of the *tscharch palak* motif. The branched trees are referred to as the *gapyrga* motif.
- 41** [2.15], see Ian Bennett, *Rugs and Carpets of the World*, New York 1977, p.167, with the same border as note 40 above, flowering plants in a red mihrab and rosettes in the spandrels, but with the unusual addition of octagons (*besh ai* medallions) in the spandrels.
- 42** [2.42], see Jerome A. Straka & Louise W. Mackie, *The Oriental Rug Collection of Jerome and Mary Jane Straka*, New York 1978, p.43, pl.41, with the *tumar* band border and red mihrab, has a *kochak*-topped 'head' (see [2.1]). The red mihrab is filled with *segiz kelleh* motifs (a variant of Moshkova p.278, pl.LXXVIII, no.5). According to Besim, op.cit., pl.63, this motif, representing 'Eight Heads' or 'Eight Gates', is a "mysterious ancient Turkic motif with a protective function... part of the traditional repertoire of Ersari weaving and is found in the centre of the Gölli göl".
- 43** [2.42], also [2.47], see Schürmann 1969, op.cit., pl.46; Ulrich Schürmann, *Orientteppiche*, Wiesbaden 1965, p.71; Otto Bernheimer, *Alte Teppiche des 16. bis 18. Jahrhunderts der Firma L. Bernheimer*, Munich 1959, no.114; Spuhler, König, Volkmann, op.cit., pl.96. One of the smallest of the group, (4'2" x 2'11"), with a double serpentine band enclosing eight-pointed flowerheads in the inner mihrab and the outer ivory arch filled with small flowerheads. The outer bor-



14 Type 3-D Beshir prayer rug [3.52], middle Amu Darya region, ca. 1850. Each fragment 1.35 x 1.38m (4'5" x 4'6"). Jim Dixon Collection, Occidental, California

central pillar. The Dixon rug [1.4] is the only example known to feature a mihrab with five *kochak*-topped poles rather than the more usual three. There is no 'typical' border for this sub-group. The Dudin rug has a scrolling vine border, also seen on a group of Beshir saf fragments,³³ while the Dixon rug has a border of 'Uzbek-type' Solomon stars within octagons. A rug very similar to the Dudin piece, formerly in the Carlowicz Collection [1.2],³⁴ has a much narrower meander border,³⁵ while other border motifs used include stylised quatrefoil tiles [1.3],³⁶ and unusual palmettes within octagons [1.7].³⁷

The 13 rugs comprising Type 1-B [1.8-1.20] feature single or multiple tree trunks on white grounds, usually with ascending or descending blossoming branches. The trunks are usually surmounted by *kochak* motifs. Here too there is no 'typical' border as a wide variety of designs is employed. Most examples of this group are later than those of Type 1-A, and many could be the work of Afghan Ersaris. Indeed, one example with a single double-hooked topped mihrab, a single *gyjak*-striped tree with ascending branches and pendant buds, and a border of 'Uzbek-type' star octagons was catalogued as 'Afghan' by Jones and Boucher [1.13].³⁸ To my eye, the most aesthetically-pleasing example is a rug with a single tree and ascendant branches that once belonged to the Bay Area dealer Jay Jones, and was exhibited in 'Oriental Rugs from Pacific Collections' at Fort Mason during the 1990 ICOC in San Francisco [1.14].³⁹

There are just four rugs of Type 1-C [1.21-1.24]. Like those of Type 1-B, they have branched, chevron-striped 'trees' on a white ground, except that here the trees are topped by geometric 'T' shapes instead of *kochaks*. Three of the four have single prayer arches, one has twin prayer arches [1.23].⁴⁰ In two cases the borders are formed by boxed *ashik* güls, while in **3** the border is formed by boxed stars [1.24].

The common denominator for the 56 Type 2 pomegranate design Beshir prayer rugs [2.1-2.56] in my sample is the large white outer mihrab filled with pomegranates suspended from branches. I have not attempted to sub-divide this group because, aside from the common thread of pomegranate motifs, there are too many variations for well-defined sub-types to emerge. For example, in **1**, the inner mihrab and the spandrels are filled with a variety of flowering shrubs and plants [2.1], while in **4** the inner mihrab and spandrels feature rosettes or roundels [2.17]. In other rugs, both are present [2.15].⁴¹ Some examples have triangular bands added to the spandrels, in one instance the inner mihrab contains the *segiz kelleh* motif [2.42],⁴² and in two cases [2.46, 2.47] a serpentine band **5**.⁴³

In contrast to the borders of Beshir main carpets, which are often wide and elaborately complex, the borders of Type 2 rugs are predominantly narrow and feature simple motifs. The most popular variant shows either a repeating pomegranate motif **1**, or a variant of the pomegranate motif, not shown in Moshkova's catalogue of Beshir borders, that Peter Stone calls the "circle and cross" motif.⁴⁴ Other popular borders feature rosettes [2.22],⁴⁵ or flowerheads [2.34],⁴⁶ as well as the *tumar* band of reciprocal triangles [2.35],⁴⁷ and, more rarely, lozenges, serrated leaves, double *botehs*, meandering vines, and the *sary gyra* motif [2.45].⁴⁸

The Type 2 prayer rug in **1**, unknown prior to its appearance at Rippon Boswell in Wiesbaden in 1996, was subsequently resold at Sotheby's in New York in 2001. The largest rug in the group, it is also considered to be 'best of type' by the editors of HALI, by Rippon Boswell's Detlef Maltzahn, by Sotheby's Mary Jo Otsea and by the late Robert Pinner. In HALI's Auction Price Guide it was stated that "it is unsurpassed in our experience in its quality of drawing, proportions and clarity of colours, including the luminous red and white of the ground." Writing in the on-line *Cloudband* magazine, Pinner stated that "the dominant white area of this beautiful rug is filled with small pomegranates, a symbol of fertility also found on a group of silk rugs attributed to Yarkand in neighbouring East Tukestan. The 'head' which broadens out at the top of the white mihrab carries a *kochak* (ram's horns). Much rarer is the similar *kochak*-topped 'head' on the small red mihrab, which is missing in most of the rugs of this group".

The 54 Type 3 'floral' design Beshir prayer rugs can be divided into four sub-types. There are five Type 3-A double-hook design rugs [3.1-3.5], characterised by a large white-ground plant- or shrub-filled outer mihrab, which at the top splits into an oversized double hook (*kochak*) or ram's horn motif, in which the floral pattern of the ivory prayer arch is continued. The rug illustrated here **8** is arguably the 'best of sub-type' [3.1], other examples of which are often late and unappealing. Borders of this sub-type are narrow and simple, with either meandering vines or geometric flowerheads.

Type 3-B consists of nine prayer rugs [3.6-3.14] with simplified geometric renditions of flowers or shrubs **Fig.1**, also known from the secular repertoire of the Ersari. This motif is illustrated by Stone,⁴⁹ and is known from compartment or chequerboard rugs with an endless repeat pattern.⁵⁰ It is also used as a border ornament.⁵¹ As with Type 1-B rugs, some of the group have been attributed to the Afghan Ersari. Three in particular [3.7, 3.8, 3.9]⁵² are closely related to a drawing in the original Russian edition of Moshkova.⁵³

The eight floral rugs of Type 3-C [3.15-3.22] have the so-called *segiz kelleh* motif **Fig.2**, which, as with Type 3-B rugs, is also shared with secular Ersari weavings.⁵⁴ In the past rugs with this motif have not been viewed with particular favour by the editors of HALI; for example a rug published in Lefevre's *Central Asian Carpets* [3.19]⁵⁵ was described as "an ugly example of the ugliest type of Beshir prayer rug".⁵⁶

Type 3-D prayer rugs, with their design of flowering shrubs **Fig.3** comprise the largest (32 examples) and most representative sub-group of the floral types [3.23-3.54]. The plants and flowering shrubs depicted are more complex, naturalistic and botanically correct than those of Type 3-B. As with both of the preceding types, secular rugs are known with this motif in a chequerboard field layout.⁵⁷ A rare and interesting variant of the plant motif is seen on a rug published by Eberhart Herrmann.⁵⁸ Another unusual rug with an all-over pattern of these plants in both field and border may or may not be perceived as a prayer rug.⁵⁹ Many Type 2 border patterns are also used on rugs in this group. An unusual



Fig.1 Type 3B Geometric flowers **Fig.2** Type 3C Segiz kelleh motif **Fig.3** Type 3D Flowering shrubs

shrub type prayer rug **11** has a unique scalloped outer arch, and rosettes in the inner mihrab and spandrels [3.23]. Another **10** was anointed 'best of type' in HALI [3.27].⁶⁰ In **9**, both mihrab and field are filled with identical shrubs, and the spaces on either side of the mihrab are as wide as the mihrab itself [3.29]. The previously unpublished rug in **12** is one of a small sub-group of three with disproportionately large 'heads' topping the mihrabs [3.42, 3.43, 3.44].⁶¹ Completing the flowering shrub group are **13**, a very rare child's prayer rug [3.50], and a possibly unique, reconstructed, vertical format multiple-niche prayer rug or saf **14**, which was cut up and offered singly by two different dealers and is now reunited in the Dixon Collection [3.52].⁶²

Six rugs in my sample are unclassified [Ur-6]. All have designs that do not fit into any of the three basic types. For the sake of clarity it should also be noted that some peripherally related prayer rugs are not included in this survey, as they are of a very different design discipline from the rugs discussed here.

However, two such peripheral groups in particular deserve passing mention. The first consists of rugs with all-over patterns of various small motifs, including triangles in contrasting colours (evoking animal pelts), *botehs*, stepped diamonds, and stars, upon which are superimposed, in some cases, multiple linear prayer arches. These rugs originate with the Afghan Ersaris, rather than from the Middle Amu Darya. They are exemplified by a much-published and well-travelled rug,⁶³ variously attributed to the Ersari, Ersari-Beshir and Chodor, while closely similar rugs have been unambiguously attributed to the Ersari.

The second group, much rarer, consists of horizontal format safs (multiple niche prayer carpets), of which there are two basic sub-types: multi-level white-ground safs, attributed to the Ersari or the Uzbeks, such as the piece illustrated on the cover of the English edition of Moshkova's *Carpets of the People of Central Asia*, as well as a number of different fragments, some perhaps from the same rug.⁶⁴ The second sub-type are safs attributed to the Ersari-Beshir, such as an example from the Straka Collection,⁶⁵ and a large saf that has been offered several times at auction.⁶⁶

NOTES

der has remnants of the floral lozenge motif (see [2.46]), while the inner mihrab is framed by a repeat of the inner meander border. The extensive use of blue and black is a very unusual feature. **44** A diagram of this border motif appears in Peter Stone, *Tribal and Village Rugs: The Definitive Guide to Design, Pattern and Motif*, New York 2004, p.305, no.T-50, but I cannot locate a specific name for it, despite its great popularity. In my opinion it represents two views of the pomegranate. **45** [2.22], see Rippon Boswell, Wies-

baden, 10 November 1990, lot 150, and Sotheby's, New York, 16 December 2005, lot 65, with octofoil rosettes in the border, red mihrab and spandrels, triangular bands in the spandrels, and small plants in the upper sections of the spandrels. **46** [2.34], see Tsareva, op.cit., pl.100, with a flowerhead border (a variant of the *darak* motif). Tsareva calls the horizontal flowering branches in the spandrels and red mihrab "twinned, stylized toothed leaves". **47** [2.35], see Pinner & Eiland, op.cit., pl.75; Eiland & Eiland, op.cit., pl.232; Rippon Boswell, Wiesbaden,

20 May 1995, lot 11, with plants in the spandrels and red mihrab. **48** [2.45], see Skinner, Boston, 6 December 1997, lot 119, with outer circle and cross border, triangular bands and small pyramid-like floral motifs in the red mihrab and spandrels. For the rare *sary gyra* (Ersari) or *ak gyra* (Chodor) border, see Loges, op.cit., pl.89. **49** Stone, op.cit., p.294, no.T-27. **50** E.g., Eberhart Herrmann, *Seltene Orientteppiche IV*, Munich 1982, no.92; *Seltene Orientteppiche IX*, Munich 1987, pl.89; Jones & Boucher 1975, op.cit., pl.24.

51 See Rippon Boswell, Wiesbaden, 30 May 1992, lot 122, and 28 September 1996, lot 77. **52** [3.7], see Sotheby's, New York, 3 June 2005, lot 26; HALI 57, 1991, p.154, with horizontal plant forms in the mihrab and 'double comb' talismanic outer border. [3.8], see Edelmann, New York, 10 November 1979, lot 145, similar to [3.5] and [3.6], with a strange, elaborate and atypical border, and zig-zag bands in spandrels, assigned to Afghanistan: these three rugs relate closely to a drawing in the Russian edition of Moshkova, Tashkent 1970,

pl.LXXXIX, no.12. [3.9], see Mangisch, Zurich, 18 March 1989, lot 2070, and 3 June 1989, lot 3140, similar to the above, the border showing a smaller scale plant repeat. **53** Moshkova 1970, op.cit., pl.LXXXIX, no.12. **54** See, e.g., the infinite repeat grid pattern rugs in: Spuhler, König, Volkmann, op.cit., pl.95; Mackie & Thompson, op.cit., p.201, fig.64; Ulrich Schürmann, *Oriental Carpets*, London 1966, p.217; Rippon Boswell, Wiesbaden, 18 November 1995, lot 97 = HALI 85, 1996, p.140. This motif also appears

among the 'Tulip motifs' in Stone, op.cit., p.294, no.T-27. **55** [3.19], see Lefevre, op.cit., no.17 = Lefevre, London, 8 October 1976, lot 17; Christie's, London, 15 October 1987, lot 56; Nagel, Stuttgart, 23 June 1993, lot 3208. **56** See HALI 41, 1988, p.89. **57** See Loges, op.cit., pl.91; Sotheby's, New York, 9 October 1998, lot 1361 (Howard Feldman Collection) = HALI 113, 2000, p.114. **58** Eberhart Herrmann, *Seltene Orientteppiche II*, Munich 1979, no.99. **59** HALI 2/2, 1979, p.169.

60 [3.27], see HALI 106, 1999, p.140. **61** [3.44], the other two are [3.42], from the W'her Collection (Black, op.cit., p.174), and [3.43], see Peter Hoffmeister, *Turkoman Carpets in Franconia*, Edinburgh 1980, pl.21. **62** [3.52]. Offered, still complete, by Mustafa Solak on *cloudband.com*; then by Nagel, Stuttgart on 6 November 2001; then, separated, by Ziya Bozoglu in 2002 and by Ronnie Newman in 2004. **63** See Walter A. Hawley, *Oriental Rugs, Antique and Modern*, New York 1913, pl.57; Hartley Clark,

op.cit., p.119; Julius Orendi, *Das Gesamtwissen über Antike und Neue Teppiche des Orients*, vol.II, Vienna 1930, pl.1027; Eiland 1981, op.cit., pl.194a; HALI 2/2, 1979, p.133; Pinner & Eiland op.cit., pl.51. **64** See Christie's, London, 17 October 2002, lot 141; Sotheby's, London, 29 April 1998, lot 96; and Bausback 2000, op.cit., p.192. **65** Straka, op.cit., p.45, pl.XL. **66** See Christie's, New York, 9 April 1988, lot 79; Skinner, Boston, 20 April 2002, lot 54; Sotheby's, London, 28 September 2005, lot 27; and Jourdan, op.cit., pl.297.