

Arthur Upham Pope and his 'research methods in Muhammadan art': Persian carpets

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In 1925 Arthur Upham Pope (1881-1969) published a short article in *The Art Bulletin*, entitled 'Research Methods in Muhammadan Art'.¹ Despite its overarching title, the article contains only a very brief introductory remark regarding the general weakness of current criticism within this emerging field of research, and is in fact directed critically towards an article on Persian medallion carpets by Maurice S. Dimand (1892-1986), then the curator in charge of the newly created section for Islamic art in the Department of Decorative Arts at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.² While Pope's decision to write this article is likely to have been motivated by his steadily and profoundly deteriorating personal relationship with Dimand – who, together with other Islamic art historians of his generation, was to become a major rival to Pope³ – it is interesting to take a close look at the article from a historiographical perspective.

Before turning to a more detailed look at Pope's carpet discourse, the use of the terms 'Oriental' and 'Persia' should be addressed. Throughout the present article, the term 'Oriental' is used as an overarching label for carpets or rugs originating from the Middle East and West Asia: this reflects the use of this term during the 1920s, and its use in Pope's publications of that time. Although it is a historical term that may convey an art-historiographically provocative stance in current academic parlance, 'Oriental' is still widely used in carpet studies, a point to

* This article has grown out of my research into the life and career of Arthur Upham Pope, and an edited volume on this topic is currently under preparation. I would like to thank the editors of the current issue, Moya Carey and Margaret S. Graves, as well as the anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this article.

¹ Arthur Upham Pope, 'Research Methods in Muhammadan Art', *The Art Bulletin*, 8(1), 1925, 43-9. Pope's scholarship in 'Oriental' (see the discussion of the use of this term and 'Persian' in the main text of this article) carpets remains controversial: his attributions and dating methods prevent some scholars from considering his work seriously, as do possible fabrications, such as the poem 'Ode to a garden carpet', supposedly written by an unknown Sufi poet around 1500 (Arthur Upham Pope and Phyllis Ackerman, eds, *A Survey of Persian Art: New Studies 1938-60*, Tokyo: Meiji-Shobo, 1967, 3184-6; see Jon Thompson's proposed identification of this poet as Pope himself, 'Early Safavid Carpets and Textiles', in Jon Thompson and Sheila R. Canby, eds, *Hunt for Paradise: Court Arts of Safavid Iran 1501-1576*, Milan: Skira, 2007, 311, note 3). It is, however, not the intention of this article to argue what Pope knew or did not know about 'Oriental' carpets during the formative period of Islamic art studies in the West.

² Maurice S. Dimand, 'Medallion Carpets', *The Art Bulletin*, 6(3), 1924, 82-4.

³ Notably Mehmet Ağa-Oğlu (1896-1946) and Myron B. Smith (1897-1970). This subject is discussed in detail in a forthcoming article by Robert Hillenbrand, 'The Scramble for Persian art: Pope and his Rivals', in Yuka Kadoi, ed., *Arthur Upham Pope and A New Survey of Persian Art*, Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

which this article will return below.⁴ Another umbrella term employed here – 'Persia' – has provoked terminological controversies as to whether it should be replaced with 'Iran'. Yet the use of 'Persia' in the context of 'Oriental' carpet discourse in this article has nothing to do with the modern state of Iran, its official language and its literature. Rather it is here used adjectivally to refer to a form of carpet that was perceived as a collectable and marketable item in the Euro-American world prior to 1935, and thus before the name Iran was internationally recognized. The fact that the terms 'Iran' and 'Persia' are still entangled in carpet discourse indicates the near-impossibility of setting a clear border between these interchangeable terms.⁵

Although Pope is widely known as the pioneer of Iranian art studies in the West, especially for his monumental *Survey of Persian Art* (1938-9),⁶ his career development prior to the London *International Exhibition of Persian Art* held in 1931 was circuitous. Born on Rhode Island and educated at Brown University in Providence, Pope moved to California to take up a teaching position at University of California Berkeley. Initially pursuing an academic career in philosophy and aesthetics, he became involved in the art business soon after he left the university environment in the late 1910s as a result of the scandal caused by his involvement with his then student Phyllis Ackerman (1893-1977).⁷ By the time the *Art Bulletin* article had appeared, Pope had been an independent scholar for nearly ten years and had established close connections with private collectors and museums, working as a consultant in order to make a living, and often styling his expertise as 'antique, Oriental rugs and decorative arts', along with 'tapestries' under the name of his wife and colleague, Phyllis Ackerman.⁸ Among the media in which Pope

⁴ The International Conference on Oriental Carpets (ICOC; since 1976), for instance, retains 'Oriental' in its name. Although the very label 'Oriental carpets' may disguise a heterogeneous corpus of historical, geographical and cultural contexts, thus far there is in fact no perfect alternative to 'Oriental' that can be generically used for describing rugs from the Middle East and West Asia.

⁵ It is increasingly argued that the term 'Persia' should be limited to contexts related to the language and its literature, thus Persian poetry and Persian manuscripts, and the term 'Iranian' should be employed for material culture, such as Iranian ceramics and Iranian metalwork. However, it is very difficult to apply this rule consistently to all types of art originating from what is now Iran: if objects contain Persian inscriptions, these should be categorized as 'Persian', whereas as a medium these belong to 'Iranian' material culture.

⁶ Arthur Upham Pope and Phyllis Ackerman, eds, *A Survey of Persian Art from Prehistoric Times to the Present*, London: Oxford University Press, 1938-9.

⁷ For a concise biography of Pope and Ackerman, see Noël Siver, 'Pope, Arthur Upham', in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* [<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/pope-arthur-upham> accessed 30.01.2012]; and Cornelia Montgomery, 'Ackerman, Phyllis', in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* [<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ackerman-phyllis> accessed 03.03.2012]. Both are featured in Talinn Grigor, '(Re)Framing Rapid Modernities: American Historians of Iranian Architecture, Phyllis Ackerman and Arthur Pope', *Arris: Journal of the Southeast Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 15, 2004, 39-55.

⁸ For example, this designation can be seen on Pope's receipt for the shipment of a pair of tapestries, 10 February 1923, Paris (Pope Papers, New York Public Library, MssCol 2454). While there is a widespread view of Pope as a dealer, it may be fairer to say that he acted mainly as a broker, who mediated between the seller (i.e. dealers) and the buyer (i.e. museums and private collectors). According to *Nine Lives*, Pope's unfinished autobiography: '... meanwhile I had to make a living ... so for thirty years I functioned, on a professional basis, as: purveyor of works of Persian art to several very famous collectors and finally exclusively to nearly a score of museums in both this country and

specialized, carpets always took a special position in his personal and professional life. Having been intrigued by the beauty of rugs from the Islamic world since his younger days, Pope entered into this field first as a self-taught connoisseur, then an amateur scholar and later a professional consultant, advising legendary American collectors such as George Hewitt Myers (1875-1957), the founder of the Textile Museum in Washington DC, and John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (1875-1960), one of the major philanthropists of this time.⁹ Myers in particular established something of a love-hate relationship with Pope.¹⁰

When Pope embarked on a critical approach to Oriental carpet studies, as he did in his 1925 article, American private collectors and museum professionals had been fully aware of the value of non-Western arts – and woven products in particular – as collectable and displayable items. Initially brought through immigrants from the Old World mainly as home furnishings, carpets had already been part of American cultures of consumption before the nineteenth century.¹¹ The turning point came from the late nineteenth century onwards, when, as was also the case in Europe, carpets from the Middle East and West Asia became regularly included in the national pavilion displays at international exhibitions held in the United States and were eagerly bought by wealthy private collectors. The growth of American interest in carpets was thanks particularly to the large-scale participation of carpet dealers of Armenian origin, who fled from Ottoman Turkey during the persecutions that took place between 1890 and 1918; many of them eventually settled down in the USA.¹² New York hosted some notable exhibitions of Oriental carpets as early as 1910 – namely, a loan exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York,¹³ and the exhibition of the Yerkes collection, both of which drew

abroad...' (quoted in Jay Gluck and Noël Siver, eds, *Surveyors of Persian Art: A Documentary Biography of Arthur Upham Pope and Phyllis Ackerman*, Ashiya: SoPA, 1996, 45-6).

⁹ It is difficult to determine exactly what made Pope embark on carpet connoisseurship, and when this occurred. Although it was probably not a decisive factor, his aunt's collections of carpets inspired the young Pope when he visited her house during his study at Brown University (Gluck and Siver, *Surveyors of Persian Art*, 48). For one of the early carpet studies conducted by Pope, see J. Nilsen Laurvik, ed., *Catalogue Mrs. Phoebe A. Hearst Loan Collection*, San Francisco: The Palace of Fine Arts, 1917, which was a collaborative work conducted by Pope, Rudolf Meyer-Riefstahl (1880-1936) and Phyllis Ackerman.

¹⁰ For the unique relationship between Myers and Pope, see Sumru Krody's forthcoming article in Kadoi, *Arthur Upham Pope and A New Survey of Persian Art*.

¹¹ See Sarah B. Sherrill, 'America and the Oriental Carpets: Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', in Jere L. Bacharach and Irene A. Bierman, eds, *The Warp and Weft of Islam: Oriental Carpets and Weavings from Pacific Northwest Collections*, Seattle: The Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, 1978, 35-46.

¹² See Malcolm F. Topalian, 'Rug merchants in Armenia', *HALI*, 4(4), 1982, 361-2. The Chicago 1893 World's Columbian Exposition was, for instance, associated with a number of art dealers of Armenian origin, including Dikran Garabed Kelekian (1868-1951), who acted as commissioner for the Persian Pavilion, and many of them later established their own dealership in the USA, especially in New York (see Marilyn Jenkins-Madina, 'Collecting the "Orient" at the Met: Early Tastemakers in America', *Ars Orientalis*, 30, 2000, 73). See also Wesley Towner, *The Elegant Auctioneers*, New York: Hill & Wang, 1970, which captures the exclusive life of art dealers in late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century America and features Vitall Benguiat (1859-1937), one of the powerful carpet dealers of this time.

¹³ Wilhelm R. Valentiner, ed., *Catalogue of A Loan Exhibition of Early Oriental Rugs*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1910. Valentiner (1880-1958), a German-born curator of decorative arts at the Metropolitan Museum, assembled fifty carpets from ten private collections and three museums (the

heavily from private American collections.¹⁴ These shows were, however, organized on a much smaller, more intimate scale than had been the case with the exhibitions held in Europe, such as the Vienna 1873 International Exhibition (*Die Wiener Weltausstellung*)¹⁵ or the Munich 1910 exhibition of Islamic art (*Die Ausstellung Meisterwerke muhammedanischer Kunst*), each of which showcased hundreds of carpets that were to become labelled as 'masterpieces'.¹⁶ The carpet boom in the USA was also related in part to a shift in the location of the major art markets from Europe to North America during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and especially in the period following the 1914-18 war. Artworks and antiquities, including carpets, which had once been housed in the showrooms of art dealers in London, Paris and elsewhere in Europe eventually found new homes in the mansions of thriving American magnates.¹⁷

While heavily indebted to the carpet scholarship of continental Europe, particularly works by scholars based in Berlin such as Wilhelm von Bode (1845-1929) and Friedrich Sarre (1865-1945),¹⁸ as well as the monumental volume on Oriental carpets by the Swedish collector-scholar Fredrik R. Martin (1868-1933),¹⁹

Museum of Fine Arts in Boston; the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin).

¹⁴ John Kimberly Mumford, *The Yerkes Collection of Oriental Carpets*, London: Batsford, 1910.

¹⁵ Aside from the 1873 Exhibition one of the first important international exhibitions dedicated to Oriental carpets was also held in Vienna in 1891, where 515 carpets were exhibited. Compared with other deluxe art monographs of this time, the catalogue (*Katalog der Ausstellung orientalischer Teppiche im K. K. Österr. Handels-Museum 1891*, Vienna: Verlag des K.K. Österr. Handels-Museums, 1891) is modest in appearance, but it includes all the necessary information, such as essays (including one written by Alois Riegl (1858-1905), 11-23), entries, illustrations, exhibition map and advertisements. For further discussion, see Kurt Erdmann, *Seven Hundred Years of Oriental Carpets*, ed. Hanna Erdmann, London: Faber & Faber, 1970, 33-4.

¹⁶ For the Munich 1910 exhibition in historiographical contexts, see Andrea Lerner and Avinoam Shalem, eds, *After One Hundred Years: The 1910 Exhibition 'Meisterwerke muhammedanischer Kunst' Reconsidered*, Leiden: Brill, 2010, and Eva-Maria Troelenberg's essay in the present journal.

¹⁷ Josef Duveen was one of the trans-Atlantic art dealers whose career in the art trade involved woven products, including carpets (see also the discussion in the present article of his involvement with the portion of the Ardabil Carpet now in LACMA). A list of his American 'squillionaire' customers, including Andrew W. Mellon (1855-1937), the founder of the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC, describes the transitional period of the art markets in Europe and North America. For Duveen's life, see Meryle Secrest, *Duveen: A Life in Art*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004.

¹⁸ This was in marked contrast to France, where Persian manuscript painting had been more heavily featured than carpets in the scholarship of the early twentieth century (see Robert Hillenbrand, 'Western Scholarship on Persian Painting Before 1914: Collectors, Exhibitions and Franco-German Rivalry', in Lerner and Shalem, *After One Hundred Years*, 201-29). In the late nineteenth century British state collections assembled excellent examples of Persian carpets, including the Chelsea Carpet (acquired 1890) and the Ardabil Carpet (acquired 1893), both of which were bought for the South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum) from London salesrooms, as well as the gift of carpets presented by Nasir al-Din Shah (r. 1848-96) and those acquired by the museum's agent in Iran, Robert Murdoch Smith (1835-1900; see Leonard Helfgott, 'Carpet Collecting in Iran, 1873-1883: Robert Murdoch Smith and the Formation of the Modern Persian Carpet Industry', *Muqarnas*, 7, 1990, 171-81; Jennifer Wearden, 'The acquisition of Persian and Turkish carpets by the South Kensington Museum', in Stephen Vernoit, ed., *Discovering Islamic Art: Scholars, Collectors and Collections 1850-1950*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2000, 96-104). Nonetheless, the study of Oriental carpets was chiefly led by German-speaking scholars during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

¹⁹ Fredrik R. Martin, *A History of Oriental Carpets before 1800*, Vienna: I. and R. State and Court Printing Office, 1906-8.

Pope did not limit himself merely to acting as a conduit for European carpet scholarship. His series of articles published in *The International Studio* in the early 1920s give us some glimpses of how he tried to evaluate Oriental carpets not just as fine art commodities but also as objects of art-historical value, while apparently acting as an advisor to private carpet collectors.²⁰ Combined with his formidable rhetorical skills, which were cultivated through his study of philosophy and his tenure as a professor of aesthetics at Berkeley, Pope celebrated carpets with shouts of acclamation, ranking these 'great weaves of the East with Man's highest artistic creations'.²¹ There is no doubt that Pope surpassed any other scholars of this time in terms of eloquence, yet his approach to the subject in the first part of the 1920s remained formalistic.

However, Pope's 1925 'Research Methods' article may be viewed as the second stage of his carpet scholarship, representing a move from stylistic analysis towards critical discourse: '... those who believe Muhammadan art is really important should see that every sincere contribution in this field meets not only an open-minded welcome but, what is quite as important, the same sort of searching criticism ...'.²² In this respect, it is interesting to observe this in parallel with his critical study of the so-called Armenian dragon rugs, published in the same year as his *Art Bulletin* article, in which he challenges both the attributions given to the 'dragon rugs' and the dating methods applied to them.²³ This article provoked prolonged debates between Pope and various scholars of Armenian origin, including Arménag Sakisian.²⁴

Whether or not his scholarship remains credible, Pope was one of the earliest American scholars of Islamic art to place carpets in the wider context of 'Muhammadan' (an early term for Islamic or Muslim) art, a subject which was, at the time of the 1925 article, still in the process of being defined in the West. In his 'Research Methods' article, Pope discusses at length Dimand's comparison between the designs of Persian carpets and those depicted in the manuscript paintings of

²⁰ '... the prestige of early Oriental rugs has greatly increased in the last few years. With but few exceptions, the better pieces have at least tripled in value ...', Arthur Upham Pope, 'Oriental Rugs as Fine Art: i. The Aesthetic Value of the Best Types', *The International Studio*, November 1922, 169.

²¹ Pope, 'Oriental Rugs as Fine Art: i', 164.

²² Pope, 'Research Methods', 43. Pope also made a similar statement in his *International Studio* article: 'The inherent difficulty of the subject itself, wrong methods of study (which neglected the essential merits of rugs in favour of a sentimental glorification of imagined merits), misdeeds and misinformation on the part of some dealers (that tended to bring rugs into disrepute), the wide prevalence of ugly and shoddy rugs and the meagre opportunities to see really great pieces, these and other factors have conspired to conceal from many the really extraordinary artistic value of the best rugs' (Pope, 'Oriental Rugs as Fine Art: i', 170).

²³ Arthur Upham Pope, 'The Myth of the Armenian Dragon Carpets', *Jahrbuch der asiatischen Kunst*, 2, 1925, 147-58. According to Pope, 'no weavings of the entire Orient compare in monumental grandeur with these mysterious carpets. Woven probably by tribes of Mongolian descent that drifted into the Caucasus in the thirteenth century, they retain from their barbarian origin a strong quality of primitive force' (Pope, 'Oriental Rugs as Fine Art: i', 168).

²⁴ Arménag Sakisian, 'Les tapis à dragons et leur origine arménienne', *Syria*, 9(3), 1928, 238-56; Arthur Upham Pope, 'Les tapis à dragons. Réponse de M. U. Pope à l'étude de M. Sakisian', *Syria*, 10(2), 1929, 181-2; Harutiun Kurdian, 'Corrections to Arthur Upham Pope's "The Myth of the Armenian Dragon Carpets"', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1, 1940, 65-7. I was unable to find any biographical information about Sakisian at the time of writing this article.

Bihzad from late Timurid Herat, warning that the reliance on paintings as primary sources for carpet dating is very unwise as it may lead to incorrect conclusions.²⁵ He also criticizes Dimand's narratives of so-called 'Chinese influences', a problem which was for a long time a source of scholarly confusion in the study of Islamic art.²⁶ Pope may well be right to argue that the appearance of Chinese-inspired naturalistic elements in a carpet design illustrated in a painting by Bihzad does not necessarily justify attributing actual carpets with similar designs to the time of Bihzad, i.e. the late fifteenth to early sixteenth centuries.²⁷ Finally, Pope's concluding remarks in this article were critically sharp and sarcastic enough to cause deliberate offence to Dimand: 'the problems of rug history are still a thicket of thorns which is not likely to be cleared away without genuine cooperation and the mutual insistence on exacting standards of scholarship by all who are seriously interested'.²⁸ This spirit of genuine cooperation, however, was almost never to be found between Pope and Dimand.²⁹

In 1925, the same year that saw the publication of the 'Research Methods' article, Pope was appointed as an advisory curator of Muhammadan art at the Art Institute of Chicago under the sponsorship of the museum's board of trustee members for the collection development of Islamic art.³⁰ Although employed on a consultancy basis, Pope seems to have enjoyed a peaceful ten-year association with the Art Institute of Chicago.³¹ He was, for instance, able to make his first visit to Iran in the spring of 1925, and gave a lecture, 'The Past and Future of Persian Art', in front of Reza Khan Pahlavi (who was officially to be proclaimed the Shah of Iran a few months later) and high-ranking officials.³²

²⁵ Pope, 'Research Methods', 43-4. This brings to mind a series of articles on Timurid carpets that appeared in *Ars Islamica* in the 1940s (Amy Briggs, 'Timurid Carpets: I. Geometric Carpets', *Ars Islamica*, 7, 1940, 20-54; Amy Briggs, 'Timurid Carpets: II. Arabesque and Flower Carpets', *Ars Islamica*, 11, 1946, 146-58) and a Timurid attribution given to the so-called 'chess-board carpet' in Doha (CA.19.97, Museum of Islamic Art, Doha; see Jon Thompson, *Silk - 13th to 18th Centuries: Treasures from the Museum of Islamic Art, Qatar*, Doha: National Council for Culture, Arts and Heritage, 2004, cat. no. 20). The Doha carpet has recently been attributed to India by Michael Frances (see Michael Frances, 'Ashtapada', *HALL*, 167, 2011, 80-9). The provenance of pre-Safavid Persian carpets remains a matter of debate.

²⁶ See the introductory chapter of Yuka Kadoi, *Islamic Chinoiserie: The Art of Mongol Iran*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009, which gives an overview of this particular problem in Islamic art scholarship.

²⁷ Dimand, 'Medallion Carpets', 83; Pope, 'Research Methods', 43-4.

²⁸ Pope, 'Research Methods', 49.

²⁹ It seems that Pope and Dimand were reconciled with each other in the late 1950s and early 1960s, after some thirty years of animosity: '... I am grateful to you for my reassessment of Dimand. We are now on the friendliest of terms and he has been very happy about it ...' (letter from Pope to Kühnel, 17 May 1960, Kühnel Archiv, Deutsche Archäologisches Institut, Berlin).

³⁰ For Pope's career at the Art Institute of Chicago, see Yuka Kadoi, 'Pope and Chicago: The Emergence of a Persian Art Collection', *HALL*, 165, 2010, 64-7.

³¹ '... I had a short, exciting life as museum curator, serving for less than a year as director of the California Palace of the Legion Honor Museum, then ten peaceful years as Advisory Curator of Muhammadan Art in the Art Institute of Chicago and now for thirty years as advisor to the Pennsylvania Museum in Persian Art ...', quoted in Gluck and Siver, *Surveyors of Persian Art*, 45.

³² For this lecture, see Issa Sadiq, *The Past and Future of Persian Art by Professor Pope: On the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Advent of the Pahlavi Dynasty*, Tehran: Madrasah-i 'Ali-i Khadamat-i Jahangirdi va 'Ittila'at, 2535 [1977]; Gluck and Siver, *Surveyors*, 93-110.

Although Pope's vision was not confined to his admiration for the floor coverings of the Islamic world, it is true that carpets were particularly instrumental in the development of his curatorial career in Islamic art.³³ In the second year of his Chicago tenure, Pope organized the *Loan Exhibition of Early Oriental Carpets* held at the Arts Club of Chicago.³⁴ By using his unrivalled network of carpet collectors and dealers in North America and Europe, this exhibition gathered a number of loans from renowned figures of this time, including the famous dealer Joseph Duveen (1869-1939), who lent one of the Ardabil Carpets (now in the collection of Los Angeles County Museum of Art; 53.50.2).³⁵ While the carpets displayed at this event were, according to Duveen, 'not necessarily for sales,' the exhibition generated a satisfactory commercial outcome.³⁶

Despite its modest setting at a private art society, the success of the Chicago carpet show ultimately secured Pope's fame as 'a very eminent authority on Oriental rugs'.³⁷ The catalogue was beautifully published, with a generous use of colour reproductions, although it probably would not meet the standards of current scholarship due to its marked lack of technical analysis or cultural context. The catalogue was distributed among collectors, dealers and scholars, as well as museums and schools, and was reviewed by several art historians. The latter included, ironically, Dimand, who commented on Pope's scholarship in a less critical manner than he had received from his rival, but he did not forget to refer to Pope's 'Research Methods' article:

Although Mr. Pope expressed in this magazine [i.e. *The Art Bulletin*], Vol. VIII, pp. 43ff., an unwillingness to accept my dating of one of the Ballard rugs in the fifteenth century, he admits in this catalogue the possibility of dating some of the medallion carpets of Northwest Persia that early and suggests that the first two carpets in his exhibition may go back to such a date. It is curious, too, that after having criticized me in the magazine article for comparing rugs with Bihzad miniatures Mr. Pope should write of sixteenth century rugs and their characteristics: "With the reviving naturalism of Persian art, which owed a great deal to Bizhad and his followers, the court carpets began to take on a more florid and realistic style so that by the first quarter of the sixteenth century Persian carpets have

³³ '... the study of Oriental carpets made a somewhat different life. Begun in boyhood, it developed steadily with study, observation and some practical business experience until finally as an authority and writer it seemed to many here and abroad to be my real profession and most valuable accomplishment', extract from *Nine Lives* (quoted in Gluck and Siver, *Surveyors of Persian Art*, 44).

³⁴ Arthur Upham Pope, *Catalogue of A Loan Exhibition of Early Oriental Carpets*, Chicago: Arts Club of Chicago, 1926. For a further historiographical discussion of this exhibition, see Yuka Kadoi, 'A Loan Exhibition of Early Oriental Carpets, Chicago 1926', in Yuka Kadoi and Iván Szántó, eds, *The Shaping of Persian Art: Collections and Interpretations of the Art of Islamic Iran and Central Asia in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, forthcoming.

³⁵ Pope, *Catalogue of A Loan Exhibition*, no. 6.

³⁶ '... I very much dislike to appear to create an atmosphere suggesting that they are necessarily for sale. My main idea in loaning them is for the benefit of the Museum and the art loving public', letter from Duveen to Pope, 14 January 1926, Arts Clubs of Chicago Records, Newberry Library, Chicago, Midwest MS Arts Club.

³⁷ *The New York Times*, 17 January 1926.

almost the freedom and resource of painting." Mr. Pope here overemphasizes, I believe, the suddenness of the realism as well as its pictorial freedom...³⁸

Pope's unique career in Chicago, as a curator for both a non-profit institution and a profit-oriented commercial exhibition, offered a good grounding for envisaging a more ambitious presentation of Oriental carpets. This took place in Philadelphia in the autumn of 1926, in conjunction of the United States' Sesquicentennial Exposition, where Pope acted as Special Commissioner for Persia.³⁹ The subsequent exhibition that Pope organized at the Pennsylvania Museum of Art was 'the most extraordinary assemblage of masterpieces of Persian art that has ever been seen in America,' and according to Ernst Kühnel (1882-1964), then assistant to Sarre at the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum in Berlin (its Islamic department would later become the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin), 'the carpets are of primary importance'.⁴⁰ Both the Chicago and Philadelphia experiences must have given a greater confidence to Pope who later managed to secure loans directly from Iran for the *International Exhibition of Persian Art* held at Burlington House in London in 1931, including carpets from the shrines of Qum, Mashhad and Ardabil.⁴¹

Given his strong associations with Iranian art, it is worth asking whether Pope contributed to the creation of a scholarly and commercial hierarchy amongst carpets. In order to answer this question, one must examine the manner in which he ranked 'Persian' carpets amongst other types of carpet production from the Middle East and West Asia, and how this was reflected in his carpet discourse. Pope's *International Studio* articles published prior to 1925, for instance, begin with a detailed discussion of carpets that are neither from Anatolia nor from the Caucasus, but from the lands then called Persia.⁴² Although he does not explicitly suggest an absolute Persian superiority in the history of Oriental rugs and does not formally state Persian examples as being more valuable than rugs from other cultural

³⁸ Maurice S. Dimand, 'Catalogue of A Loan Exhibition of Early Oriental Carpets. By Arthur Upham Pope', *The Art Bulletin*, 8(3), 1926, 177-8.

³⁹ For further information about the Persian art exhibition at the Pennsylvania Museum of Art, see Arthur Upham Pope, 'Special Persian Exhibition', *The Pennsylvania Museum Bulletin*, 22(107), 1926, 245-51.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Gluck and Siver, *Surveyors*, 116. Judging by the photo published in Pope, 'Special Persian Exhibition', 247, carpets were displayed to dress the wall, like Old Master paintings in picture galleries of the period, and stayed outside the cabinet. This remains one of the conventional modes for carpet display in fine arts exhibitions, whereas the same pieces could be shown on the floor (see the new installation of the Ardabil Carpet at the Jameel Gallery of Islamic Art at the Victoria and Albert Museum: Rosemary Crill and Tim Stanley, eds, *The Making of the Jameel Gallery of Islamic Art at the Victoria and Albert Museum*, London: V&A Publications, 2006, 84).

⁴¹ This was not the case with the Munich 1910 show, where no loans from Iran were planned (see Jens Kröger, 'The 1910 exhibition "Meisterwerke muhammedanischer Kunst": its protagonists and its consequences for the display of Islamic art in Berlin', in Lermer and Shalem, *After One Hundred Years*, 71).

⁴² See Arthur Upham Pope, 'Oriental Rugs as Fine Art: iii. Persian Carpets of the XVI Century', *The International Studio*, January 1923, 322-32; Arthur Upham Pope, 'Oriental Rugs as Fine Art: iv. The Evolution of the Ispahans', *The International Studio*, February 1923, 403-8; Arthur Upham Pope, 'Oriental Rugs as Fine Art: v. So-called Polish or Polonaise Carpets', *The International Studio*, March 1923, 535-44.

regions, this order – Persia first and then the rest – tells very clearly of Pope's aesthetical mindset. In the catalogue of the Chicago carpet show, Pope is quite obviously much more fond of the carpets from the Persian cultural sphere than those of elsewhere, stating that 'the art of rug weaving of the high school type [i.e. silky, delicately woven carpets from urban workshops, preferably with Safavid courtly provenance] was essentially a creation of Persian weavers, painters and designers'.⁴³ In *A Survey of Persian Art*, the initial plans for which occurred as early as 1926 but whose publication was finally to be realized some seven years after the 1931 Burlington House exhibition, the chapter on carpets begins with the following compelling statement: 'for several centuries Persian art has been best known in the west by the carpets'.⁴⁴

This particular view of the carpets of 'Persia' may reflect Pope's personal preference rather than his political ties with the Pahlavi monarchy, which were later to become so predominant in his career, but this stance can also be considered as a mirror of more general Western notions of how Persian carpets ought to be. In North America, where Oriental rugs had first been encountered during the colonial era through immigrants from the Old World, the term 'Persia' implied elegant pile carpets of the 'Orient', regardless of their actual provenance, while the more generic term 'Turkish' was employed for the general category of rugs from the Islamic world.⁴⁵ This phenomenon may have laid the foundation for the particular adjective 'Persian', which had become almost synonymous with beautiful, marketable carpets prior to the advent of an active carpet trade in the New World from the late nineteenth century onwards.⁴⁶ Even within the carpets of Persia, the so-called 'high school' rugs⁴⁷ seem to have been viewed by Euro-American collectors somewhat separately from the rugs created by tribal groups of Central Asian (thus Turkic) origin in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and appear to have been considered distinguishable as the products of Persians (and thus Aryans).⁴⁸ Such a prejudiced view can partially explain a slow development of post-Safavid carpet scholarship.⁴⁹

The commercial and artistic value of 'Persian' carpets increased during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries not simply as a result of particular Western ideas concerning the arts and crafts of those lands. But this in turn stimulated the revival of the carpet industry in Iran during the late Qajar and early

⁴³ Pope, *Catalogue of A Loan Exhibition*, 18. See also note 47 for the 'high school' type.

⁴⁴ Pope and Ackerman, *A Survey of Persian Art*, 2257.

⁴⁵ Sherrill, 'America and the Oriental Carpets', 39.

⁴⁶ For further discussion on the development of the notion of 'Persian art' during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Kadoi and Szántó, *The Shaping of Persian Art*.

⁴⁷ Pope, 'Oriental Rugs as Fine Art: i', 173. The exact origin of the term 'high school' rugs is unclear, although it is likely that Pope coined it.

⁴⁸ For the racial orientation involved in definitions of Persian art, see Kishwar Rizvi, 'Art History and the Nation: Arthur Upham Pope and the Discourse on "Persian Art" in the Early Twentieth Century', *Muqarnas*, 24, 2007, 45-65. A hierarchical view of urban carpets versus tribal rugs continued during the mid-to-late twentieth century (see Patricia L. Baker, 'Twentieth-Century Mythmaking: Persian Tribal Rugs', *Journal of Design History*, 10(4), 1997, 363-74).

⁴⁹ One of the first comprehensive studies of post-Safavid carpets is Hadi Makhtabi, *In the Safavid Shadow: The Forgotten Age of Persian Carpets (1722-1872)*, unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2007.

Pahlavi periods which rose to meet increasing demand from Western markets for carpets.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the Iranian carpet industry faced rapid modernization and centralization under Reza Shah, and despite a turbulent period in the world economy of the late 1920s and early 1930s, in the aftermath of the Great Depression that began in 1929, there was a growing domestic demand for fine carpets with their evocations of cultural authenticity.⁵¹ Ultimately, 'Persian' carpets came to be viewed as special fine art commodities, reinvented and reinterpreted variously to suit various interests of trade, taste and consumerism in modern times.

Oriental carpet scholarship reached a turning point in North America in the mid-1920s, when Pope, Dimand and other scholars of their generation attempted to consider carpets as an independent branch of Islamic art and sought to investigate their scholarly potential. In this new model, rugs from the Middle East and West Asia were no longer magic carpets from the Oriental bazaar but cultural products to be addressed in the context of a wider art history. Thus the attempt was made to elevate carpets to a genre of art that would go beyond the category of the 'minor arts', becoming comparable with the established branches of the 'major arts' that followed Western art historical traditions, such as painting and architecture.⁵² However, this situation was affected by a new circumstance. In the 1930s Islamic art was becoming the subject of a coherent academic discipline: as European and in particular German-speaking countries, then the centre of carpet studies, began to suffer a huge brain drain, émigré scholars in the United States were involved in the establishment of Islamic art professorships and museum posts, with preference given to scholars of high academic pedigree.⁵³ The study of carpets was by degrees somehow taken back to the showrooms of commercial art dealers and has almost never returned to the mainstream in the academic discourse of Islamic art.⁵⁴ Unlike

⁵⁰ For further discussion, see Leonard Helfgott, *Ties that Bind: A Social History of the Iranian Carpet*, Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994.

⁵¹ See Martin Rudner, 'The Modernization of Iran and the Development of the Persian Carpet Industry: The Neo-classical Era in the Persian Carpet Industry, 1925-45', *Iranian Studies*, 44(1), 2011, 49-76.

⁵² See Pope, 'Oriental rugs as fine art: i', 164. Unlike Western art, the 'major arts' in Islamic art do not include sculpture. Instead calligraphy is traditionally ranked higher than other genres of arts in the Islamic world. Please note that the terms that are here scare-quoted, such as 'minor arts' and 'major arts', follow Pope's usage of these terms in his article.

⁵³ Richard Ettinghausen (1906-79), PhD, who emigrated to the United States in 1934 to work for the Institute of Persian Art and Archaeology in New York established by Professor Pope (who did not have a doctorate), was one of the most influential figures in the professionalization of Islamic art in both academic and museum spheres as well as in the establishment of the study of iconography in Islamic art. For his career development, see Robert Hillenbrand, 'Richard Ettinghausen and the Iconography of Islamic art', in Vernoi, *Discovering Islamic Art*, 171-81. Mehmet Ağa-Oğlu, PhD, who came to the United States from Turkey in 1929 to accept an offer of a curatorial position from the Detroit Institute of Art, became the first chair of Islamic art the University of Michigan in 1933. *Ars Islamica* was launched in 1934 under his editorship. For further information on his life and career, see Maurice S. Dimand, 'Mehmet Aga-Oglu', *College Art Journal*, 9(2), 1949-50, 208-9, and Zeynep Simavi's article in the present volume. Neither Ettinghausen nor Ağa-Oğlu worked on carpets as one of their principal research topics.

⁵⁴ Although not at the level of the pre-war golden age of German scholarship in Islamic art, the scholarship of Oriental carpets was revived in Germany after the 1939-45 war. This was chiefly conducted by Kurt Erdmann (1901-64), the Director of the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin (1958-64; see Jens Kröger, 'Kurt Erdmann: From European Painting to the Diversity of Islamic Art', *HALL*, 120, 2002, 84-91).

architecture and the arts of the book, which are widely taught and researched as major subjects of Islamic art at university level, carpets have remained far more closely connected with the connoisseurship of the private art market. The tenacity of the historical term 'Oriental' for describing carpets or rugs from the Middle East and West Asia is in itself suggestive of the exclusion of carpet studies from the development of degree-driven 'Islamic' art research during the last century, as well as being indicative of the continuous and largely unreflexive self-identity of carpet studies since Pope's time. Indebted for many years to the chronology and classification of carpets on stylistic grounds, a structural approach to carpet studies was equally slow to develop. A scientist by training, as well as a private collector of carpets, May Hamilton Beattie (1908-96) played a pivotal role in the foundation of a new taxonomy in the field of Persian carpets, together with her American contemporary, Charles Grant Ellis (d. 1996); yet to this day, such efforts have tended to be made under the auspices of collectors, dealers and independent scholars rather than as academic institutional projects.⁵⁵

The difficulty of researching Islamic art in general and carpets in particular is not limited to the time when Pope's 'Research Methods' article appeared. Over history, carpets have caught the eyes of Western consumers perhaps more consistently than other crafts from the Islamic world, owing to their exchangeable commercial as well as ornamental value. Yet as a scholarly discipline, this subject faces many challenges. As one of the most enduring visual manifestations of the socio-cultural nexus of both Islamic and Western worlds up to contemporary times, a non-commercial academic reception of 'Oriental' carpets should be reappraised, and this should involve the skills and experience of professionals with a wide range of backgrounds, including connoisseur-collectors, dealers, art historians, anthropologists, curators, conservators and restorers.⁵⁶ It is now our task to offer some fresh 'research methods' to this field.⁵⁷ As Pope says, 'The discovery of these [artistic and technical] values is, after all, only a *re-discovery*'.⁵⁸

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⁵⁵ See Thompson, 'Early Safavid Carpets and Textiles', 271. The Beattie Carpet Archive was established at the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, in 2000. Besides the launch of the May Beattie Fellowship in Carpet Studies in 2001, the museum hosted the international conference, *Carpets and Textiles in the Iranian World 1400-1700*, in August 2003 (see Jon Thompson, Daniel Shaffer and Pirjetta Mildh, eds, *Carpets and Textiles in the Iranian World 1400-1700*, London: HALI Publications, 2010). After Jon Thompson's retirement as the May Beattie Fellow at the end of 2006, his successor has yet to be appointed (Hadi Maktabi, 'Beattie's Benefits', *HALI*, 151, 2007, 54). In the meantime, *HALI Magazine* (established in London since 1978) has been playing a valuable role in carpet studies in the absence of a more traditional academic forum in this field.

⁵⁶ See Brian Spooner, 'Weavers and Dealers: The Authenticity of an Oriental Carpet', in Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 195-235.

⁵⁷ Among the recent historiographical studies in Oriental carpets, see Murray L. Eiland III, 'Scholarship and a Controversial Group of Safavid Carpets', *Iran*, 38, 2000, 97-105, which features some of Pope's carpet discourse.

⁵⁸ Pope, 'Oriental Rugs as Fine Art: i', 169.

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