
ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE

DEPICTION OF THE ARMENIAN CARPETS IN THE WORKS OF EUROPEAN ORIENTALISTS RUDOLF ERNST AND GIULIO ROSATI

Hasmik Hmayakyan, PhD

Institute of Oriental studies, NAS RA

The article is devoted to the depictions of Armenian carpets in the paintings of the XIX century European Orientalist-painters, particularly the Austrian Rudolf Ernst and Italian Giulio Rosati, in whose paintings figure some Armenian carpets. Further we shall discuss Armenian parallels to these carpets which are kept in different collections.

The art of tapestry is known in Armenia since antiquity and Armenian carpets were well known throughout the world, and it is not accidental that numerous pictures of Armenian carpets figure in the paintings of Western European painters representing Renaissance, Baroque, Rococo. The interest in the East, eastern realities in Western European art is visible still during the Renaissance and Baroque and, as it was mentioned above, beginning from that period depictions of Armenian carpets occur on the paintings of European painters such as Jan van Eyck, Anthony van Dyck, Hans Memling, Gerard ter Borch, Diego Velazquez and others, which was discussed in special literature.¹

The period of Rococo which follows Baroque is regarded as the preliminary phase of Orientalism when came into being along the interest in the Turkish and Chinese realities, and even was created special terminology - "Turquerie" and "Chinoiserie", which means Turkish style and Chinese style (translated from French). This interest in the Turkish realities was expressed in the art of several French painters of the XVIII century who live in Turkey and in parallel with the eastern everyday life made portraits of European aristocrats in the manner of "Turquerie", where the latters are depicted in eastern cloths and headgears.²

This was followed by the phase of Orientalism which came into being in the art of the XIX century, in the period of Romanticism. The rise of Orientalism is connected with the stories about the Eastern countries, as well as writings of travellers, and impression of the monuments of eastern art. The interest in eastern realities throughout Europe was so widespread that it was expressed, besides arts and architecture, also in linguistics, literature, philosophy etc. The emergence of Orientalism had began from the campaigns of Napoleon to Egypt, Cyprus, the conquest of Algeria by France, the independence of Greece from the Ottoman rule, Crimean wars etc. The Orientalists created imaginary picture of the East sometimes without visiting eastern countries. The most attractive topics for Orientalists were the life in harems, mystic images of women, their everyday life and luxurious palaces of Sultans and Shahs, as well as baths. In the

¹ Ghazaryan 1988: 6-7.

² Alpatov, Rakova 1978: 140.

paintings of Orientalists the most popular application were carpets, and it is not accidental that on many of them appear Armenian carpets.

Very few studies had been carried out on the topic of the depiction of Armenian carpets in the art of Western European Orientalists, despite the fact that our studies show the existence of a great number of materials. In this article we shall focus on the depictions of Armenian carpets in the art of two Orientalists.

Rudolf Ernst was an Austrian Orientalist painter, who in his different paintings had depicted numerous oriental decorations, items of applied art, in particular oriental carpets, where Armenian ones prevail.

Ernst was born in Vienna in 1854, in the family of an architect-painter (he died in Paris in 1932). He had studied in the academy of fine arts of Vienna, then travelled to Rome in order to be acquainted with the works of the painters of the Classical and Romantic periods. His Orientalist period had begun in 1885, as a result of his travels to the Middle East (Morocco, Spain, and prolonged stay in Turkey). By his return Ernst settled down in Paris where his paintings were successfully exhibited in Paris six times, due to which he became one of the outstanding Orientalists of the XIX century.³ Judging by his paintings, Ernst was interested in eastern decorations, realistic and colorful expression of eastern lifestyle, harems, minarets, street trading, eastern singers, tradesmen of carpets etc.

In the paintings of Rudolf Ernst sometimes figure a street singer, old blind man accompanied with beautiful woman, luxuriously dressed court guard and a Pasha with his tiger.⁴

Generally, in the paintings of the XIX century Orientalists one sees original colors, decorative designs, specific contrasts of light and shadow. They make use of unusual from the point of view of Europeans' mystic oriental luxury for depicting all achievements of Realism and Romantism. Their exquisite art was aimed to reveal not the inner world of personages but the realities and decorations which surround them. The latters are pictured on the paintings of these Orientalists actually with photographic accuracy, thus creating the unrepeatable atmosphere, which distinguish the art of R.Ernst.⁵ And exactly due to this accuracy in depicting details it becomes possible to recognize the realities of this and other cultures in the paintings of R.Ernst. For example, in regard to the carpets it is easy to typologize them, since the decorations and compositional peculiarities are correctly reproduced. In some of his paintings, for example "Favorite", "After bath" (Pic. 1) an Armenian carpet of the type "Jraber" comprises the part of decoration (Pic.2),⁶ which some scholars regard as a type of the Dragon-carpet. According to Mania Ghazaryan, beginning from the XVII century the classical Dragon-carpets had lost their appearance and having been influenced by the

³ About Rudolf Ernst see Thornton 1994: 80. See also <http://www.artnet.com/artists/rudolf-ernst/>.

⁴ Temkin, Kalmykova 2009: 105.

⁵ Temkin, Kalmykova 2009: 115.

⁶ The source of the picture is Callet 2016: 148.

carpets of other styles, thus initiate the creation of other types of carpets, among them also Eagle-carpets mentioned above (they were produced in the village of Jraberd, Artsakh, later in the village of Khndzoresk, Zangezur, in Sisian and other places).⁷ Vahram Tatikyan regards carpets of this type also as Eagle-carpets (Jraberd or Khachen sub-types)(Pic.2). He regards these carpets as direct heirs to the Dragon-carpets, and their decorations, according to the scholar, are perfect and, probably, they have been originated from some well-preserved classical Dragon-carpet, and numerous details were taken from its decorations.⁸ Such cross-like Eagle-carpet was found in the village of Garnaqar.⁹

This type of carpets was studied and typologized by Ashkhunj Poghosyan who thinks that the Jraberd group of carpets should be divided into four sub-types, and among them to the classical Dragon-carpet are related those which are decorated with single ray-shaped composition, compiled through the surrounded from both sides intertwined dragons.¹⁰

The authors mentioned above demonstrate pictures of this carpet which fully correspond to the carpets depicted on some paintings of Rudolf Ernst.¹¹

On one of the paintings of Rudolf Ernst ("A breakfast with tea") a woman is sitting on a typical Armenian praying carpet (Pic. 3).¹² On the painting by means of bright colors has been created a morning atmosphere of eastern yard; a woman sits on the bench which stands on an Armenian praying carpet made on a red background. Almost identical two Armenian praying carpets have been found from the settlement Ladik, Isparta (1910); it is four belted, on a red background like that of Ernst, on the space are depicted two big decorations representing flowers and geometric figures, and on the bottom – three complete decorations with flowers directed to the bottom, as it is on the painting of R. Ernst, the third belt has big decorations. Other belts are thinner and are decorated with floral and geometric figures (Pic. 4).¹³

We suppose that these paintings should attract the attention of specialists, and maybe could be helpful for establishing new sub-types. It should be mentioned that the painting "On the terrace, Tangier" of R. Ernst which depicts an Armenian decorated carpet, has been sold at the Christie's auction for 350.000 pounds (July 2, 2008).

The next painter is Giulio Rosati. He was born in Rome in 1861, in the family of a banker and military serviceman. He joined the academy of fine arts of San Luca, being a student of Francesco Podesti and Dario Querci. He mainly worked with the watercolor techniques, but used also oil paint. He generally worked in the manner of Orientalists as

⁷ Ghazaryan 1988: 11-13, Pic. 32, 36, 37.

⁸ Tatikyan 2004: 22.

⁹ Ibid.: 24.

¹⁰ Poghosyan 2005: 109-110.

¹¹ Ibid., Pic. 2.

¹² The source of the picture is Callet 2016: 121.

¹³ The picture and the analysis of the picture is taken from <https://armeniancarpets.am/hy/carpet/143>.

a representative of its academic style. His paintings were exhibited in Rome in 1900, in the exhibition of Fine arts.¹⁴ G.Rosati had died in 1917.

Working with the watercolor techniques Giulio Rosati had succeeded to masterly reproduce the details of decorations and represent complete eastern interior, although he himself never visited any eastern country. Actually, eastern scenes created by Rosati are fully inspired by the images seen and stories heard about the East, photos etc.¹⁵ Making eastern decorations for his paintings he had made use of eastern items he found in Rome; probably he possess with these items in his studio. Paintings of G.Rosati were popular among the admirers of eastern style and were successfully sold.

G.Rosati also repeatedly depicts Armenian carpets, which he probably acquired in Rome. Remarkably, on the photo of the painter¹⁶ one can see that his studio is full of Armenian carpets which figure on his paintings. Probably, he owned some Armenian carpets which serve as decorations for his paintings but also as furniture for his studio (Pic.5). For example, the carpets on the black and white photo are seen on his famous painting “Dance in harem” (Pic.6),¹⁷ where on the floor and wall are pictures of Armenian carpets, and the half-naked dancer stands on another Armenian carpet. Its parallels now are kept in different collections of Armenian carpets (for example, the Javakhk carpet dated with 1920, which bears the name “Striped-Slanted”, decorated with red, blue and swampy green colors, and has three belts (Pic. 7).¹⁸ Another such carpet which originates from Utik (1902), also has oblique strips where bright red, red, blue, and honey-color strips are represented successively and are decorated with ornaments. On the painting depicting two women (“Conversation”) also are present depictions of Armenian carpets (Pic. 8). The carpet on the floor having crosses in the center is a carpet bearing the peculiarities of a Dragon-carpet, and on the wall hangs a tabernacle carpet, which reminds the well-known “Yerakhoran” (triapsidal) carpet (Pic.9). It is regarded as the oldest preserved Armenian carpet and has a legend – the year of 1202.¹⁹ It is interesting that while Rosati had depicted this tabernacle carpet, he was unaware about the purpose of the carpet, since it is depicted horizontally, meanwhile tabernacles should be watched vertically.

In summary, it should be concluded that in the art of Western European Orientalists depictions of Armenian carpets are numerous and this topic needs further studies.

¹⁴ Juler 1994: 138.

¹⁵ Thornton 1994: 160.

¹⁶ The source of the picture is <https://bit.ly/3dke3u9>.

¹⁷ The source of the picture is <https://bit.ly/30T3HyH>.

¹⁸ For the description of the picture and the carpet see in <https://armeniancarpets.am/hy/carpet/135>.

¹⁹ On triapsidal carpets in detail see Poghosyan 2017.

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Pic. 1. Favorite or after the bath



Pic. 2 . «Jraberd» type Eagle-carpet»



Pic. 3. Breakfast with tea



Pic. 4. Armenian praying carpet from Ladik, Isparta, 1910



Pic. 5. Giulio Rosati in his studio



Pic. 6. Dance in harem



Pic.7. Carpet from Javakhk



Pic. 9. Triapsidal carpet



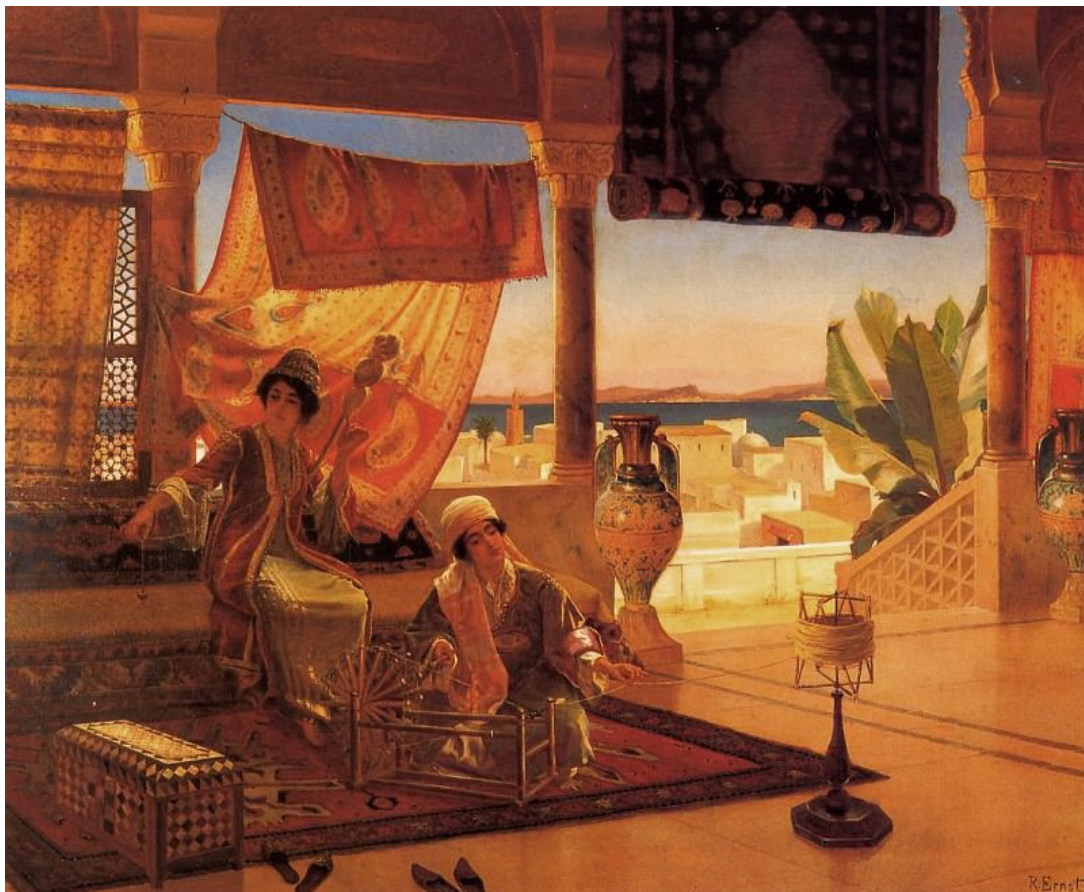
Pic. 8. Conversation

Appendix

Armenian Eagle-carpets on other paintings of R. Ernst



Mauritanian interior



On the balcony



Musician



Smoking the Hookah



In harem



Slave-women



A section from the "Slave-women"



Gnaua-player in North-African interieur