

DATING AND PROGRESSION OF EARLY CARPETS II

The depth with which a weaver tries to make a picture of God depends, of course, on the intensity with which that idea, and that aspiration, was felt to be important. This depends on a view of religion in which the person's main aim was to identify himself with that great one — and in which it was understood that the world is a place where space and matter have life in them — as much in stones, or rocks, or wool, as in a spider, or an apple, or a person. In such a view of the world, and in this view of God, the idea that a carpet is a consciously created picture of God, or picture of the universe, is natural. But the depth of the picture, the depth of the experience the weaver relies on to be able to weave such a thing, still depends directly on the intensity with which this view is held.

Since there was a more or less steady decline in the intensity of this view over the last millennium, the art of carpet weaving was accompanied, too, by a steady decline in the extent to which the carpets could be pictures of God. The view was at its greatest height, perhaps, in the Bronze Age — the age that created the great bronzes of the Shang Dynasty. More recently this view was widely shared in the great religious period which roughly coincided with the appearance of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. The view again reached some kind of high intensity in the age of the Christian mystics and the Sufi saint, Mevlana — about the 13th century. After that, the feeling declined steadily, until by the 18th century there was virtually nothing left of it at all.

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