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9-2012

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Kane, Tina, "Mughal Indian Carpets in the Collection of the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum The City Palace of Jaipur" (2012). *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings*. 702.  
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## Mughal Indian Carpets in the Collection of the Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum The City Palace of Jaipur

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### Introduction

This article is in three parts: I am going to first briefly describe the collection, and my connection to it; second, I will show some examples of the different types of carpets in the collection; and third, I will say something about the condition of the carpets and the conservation challenges they pose.

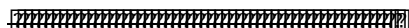
### The Collection

In the spring of 2008 the Maharani of Jaipur, Princess Diya Kumari, contacted the Metropolitan Museum of Art regarding the conservation of sixteen carpets from the collection at the City Palace. It is the policy of the Museum not to work on other collections so I was invited to go independently to Jaipur and prepare a report. I had worked part-time in the Textile Conservation Department at the Metropolitan Museum while also managing a private conservation business for many years. By this time Nobuko Kajitani had retired as Head of Conservation but I knew she had worked on the collection since 1974; accordingly, I asked her to join me there. The Princess was pleased with that arrangement. My husband Paul also came to advise on structural details of the storage system they were planning.



*Figure 1. Built by Sawa Jai Singh ibetween 1729 and 1732.  
The primary residence of the royal family, Google Images.*

Jaipur is in the state of Rajasthan, about five or six hours south of New Delhi by car. The collection of royal carpets there dates from the 16<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many of the carpets were purchased during the reign of Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh (1688-1743). This is an exceptionally valuable and rare collection as these carpets have been *in situ* since the 17<sup>th</sup> century and held by the same family.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, valuable documentation about carpet weaving survives in inventory records now or formerly



<sup>1</sup>

Nobuko Kajitani, "On the Recommended Storage Preparatory Procedures for the Sixteen Art Carpets," p. 1. (personal copy)

in the collection of the Maharaja of Jaipur. The majority of the carpets were used at the palace inside the Amber Fort, the royal residence outside the city, until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when a water shortage forced the construction of a new royal residence in Jaipur itself. The carpets were transferred from the Amber Palace to Jaipur's City Palace beginning in 1875 and additional purchases were made thereafter. The initial register lists some 266 carpets.<sup>2</sup>

Today the City Palace is a complex consisting of the royal residence, a couple of museums, a *darbar* (or ceremonial hall), administrative offices, and tourist facilities, including shops and a restaurant. It is known as the Pink City. In the past, there have been at least four reports on this carpet collection. In 1905 Colonel T.H. Hendley, the resident surgeon in Jaipur, and an amateur art historian, published a large volume that included information about some of the carpets. He later helped to found the Jaipur Museum. In 1929 A.J.D. Campbell of the Victoria and Albert Museum prepared a report on the Maharaja's carpet collection with photographs, primarily for purposes connected with conservation. He lists 212 carpets and a complete set of black and white prints survive. However, this report was not published. In 1972 May Beattie prepared a third report on the Jaipur collection.<sup>3</sup> This, too, remains unpublished but lists the carpets according to structure and color. Finally, Nobuko Kajitani prepared her conservation report on the carpets in 1974. These last two have been a useful source of information, as has Dan Walker's catalogue for the Metropolitan's 1998 exhibition *Flowers Underfoot*. (It is worth noting that Dan Walker is currently preparing an exhibition of a selection of the Jaipur City Palace carpets for the Chicago Art Institute.) Obtaining complete information about the collection is difficult, however, since, for a number of years now, it has been divided by a legal dispute and access is limited. In addition, the Jaipur collection may not be entirely intact, as there are a number of carpets purportedly from Jaipur in Western museums.

We had been asked to take care of a group of sixteen art carpets that had been on display since the opening of the Jaipur Museum in 1959, make recommendations for their storage, basic conservation, and, in one case, exhibition. Many of the carpets had been on exhibit for years over rollers. The reason for this renewed interest in conservation was that the area in which they were shown was to be renovated into new exhibition galleries, which would include a storage and conservation facility.



**Figure 2. Workspace with carpets ready for examination.**

This area in the new permanent gallery had been temporarily set up for our workspace as well. One of the first problems I encountered was confusion over the available archival records. Jaipur had its own

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel Walker, *Flowers Underfoot: Indian Carpets of the Mughal Era* (Abrams, 1998), p. 12-14.

<sup>3</sup> Walker, p. 12.



inventory system, but the carpets were also listed under the 1929 Campbell classification system, which meant that each carpet had two numbers. Some also had what appeared to be original labels. It took me awhile to figure out exactly what I was looking at.

### Three Types of Carpets in the Collection

As Nobuko Kajitani determined, in her 1974 report, the carpets comprise three distinct categories. These are: Western India carpets, Lahore carpets, and Jaipur carpets. But there is one exception to these categories and that is the Agra Court carpet, the only Pashmina carpet in the collection.

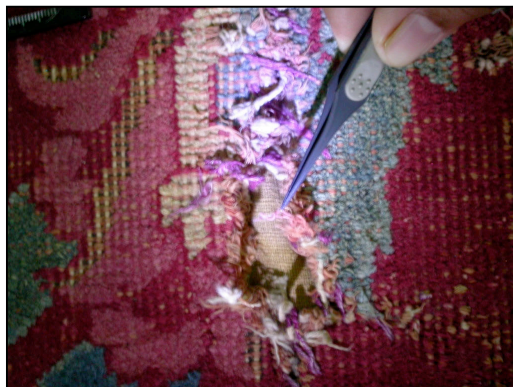


*Figure 3. C-15, Campbell #60. Agra Court carpet, 4' x 9'10", ca. 1650, Pashmina on silk foundation, 19.5 knots per square inch. Photo: permission Nobuko Kajitani.*

Nobuko partially conserved this carpet during her visit in 1974 and, fourteen years later, in 1988, completed the project in Textile Conservation at the Metropolitan Museum for the exhibit *Flowers Underfoot*. It is now back in Jaipur, in a vitrine. This is the only carpet in Jaipur that I know of that has undergone professional conservation treatment.

### Western India Carpets

I will begin with the Western India carpets. These carpets are of Indian origin and all have three or more strands of pinkish weft in the ground.



*Figure 4. Pink weft in the Western Indian carpets. Photo permission: Nobuko Kajitani.*



I will look at one of this group more closely. As you will see, I am using both catalog numbers, the Jaipur inventory and the Campbell: i.e., C-5 and Campbell # 146. This is a particularly beautiful carpet and was to be exhibited in the Durbar Hall in the following months.



**Figure 5, left. C-5, Campbell #146, 57'5" x 17', cotton warp, pink cotton weft, 100 knots per square inch.**

**Figure 6, right. Durbar Hall and the platform where C-5, #146 is to be exhibited.**

**Photos: Tina Kane**

Above, right, is a photograph of where it will be displayed (figure 6). Note the newspapers and cotton Dhurries used as underlay. The carpet was longer than the platform and we recommended using a tube to break the hard fold. Others have referred to this carpet as of Indo-Persian origin; in fact, the staff of the City Palace called it the Herat, but because of the rust pink weft it is believed to be of Indian origin.

There were many bright and disfiguring patches on the carpet and a local technician was brought in to remove them. (He was very good, very fast.) Below, in figures 7 and 8, are some additional examples of other Western India carpets. This was the largest group in the collection we worked with.



**Figure 7, left. C-3, #149, 23'8" x 9'6"**

**Figure 8, right. C-6, #45, 36'7" x 14'3".**

**Photos: Permission: Nobuko Kajitani**

### ***Lahore Carpets***

In the collection we worked with, there were only three Lahore carpets. In figure 9 is a detail of the pinkish rust weft.



***9. Photo: Permission Nobuko Kajitani***

In the photograph below you can see that the carpet on the right, from the reverse, is very worn (figure 11). It had been displayed on a platform with other heavy objects on top of it. That was unfortunate, as it was a beautiful carpet.



***Figure 10, left. C-10 and #4, 48'8" x 13'2".***

***Figure 11, right. C-11, #3, 49'8" x 13' 5". Average knot count 68 per inch.***

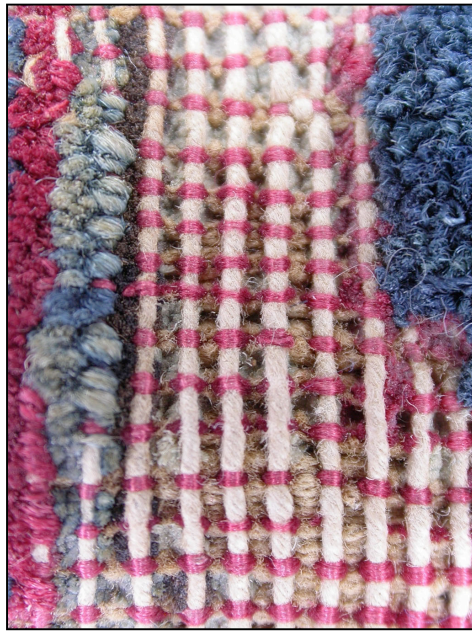
***Photos: Permission Nobuko Kajitani***

### ***Jaipur Carpets***

The last group is the Jaipur carpets and amongst them are the shaped carpets. There have been various theories about the use of these unusual carpets, including suppositions that they were hung on walls to



substitute for architectural arches.<sup>4</sup> They may possibly have been used in tents or around fountains or daises. They are certainly intriguing. Note the foundation of cotton warp and red silk weft (figure 12).



**Figure 12. Photo: Permission Nobuko Kajitani**

Here are two examples of shaped carpets (figures 13 and 14).



**Figure 13, left. C-12, #25, L14'2" x W (a) 8'11 and W (b) 5'11"**

**Figure 14, right. C-14, #122, L 14' x W (a) 14'4' W (b) 5'11" (right).**

**Average knot count is 161 per square inch. Note the labels on the right. Photos: Tina Kane.**

<sup>4</sup> Walker, p. 105

And finally (figure 15) another Jaipur carpet (not shaped).



*Figure 15. C-22 #79, 28'1" x 15'2," 95 knots per square inch.  
Photo: Permission Nobuko Kajitani.*

This carpet was displayed on rollers and you can see the pale striations from years of exhibition.

### **The Condition of the Collection**

This brings me now to the condition of the carpet collection and what we hoped to accomplish in this first phase of conservation work. The carpets were soiled, full of Rajasthan desert dust. The plan was to establish a work area where, in the second phase, further conservation could be undertaken.

Many of the carpets were lined and webbed with a canvas installation band (figure 16). The bands caused the carpets to roll unevenly.



*Figure 16. Lining and canvas installation band. Photo: Tina Kane.*



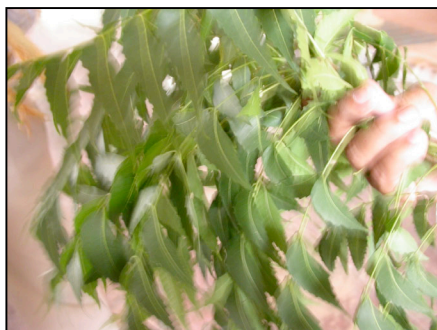
The scope of the first phase of conservation was limited. The objective was two-fold: to get the carpets off the floor onto shelves after they were cleaned, and then to protect them during the proposed construction project. I was teaching at Vassar College at the time and could not return immediately for the follow-up work, so Nobuko Kajitani went back in November of 2008 and completed this first phase. She also instructed the crew at the Palace how to roll lined carpets with the pile out, and unlined carpets, with the pile in. To keep the project as simple as possible, as there were not unlimited funds, it was suggested that unbleached, unsized muslin manufactured locally be purchased, washed and used as an outer wrap; that labels be sewn to all four corners of the carpets; that sheet plastic be used to protect the carpets during construction. There were no attempts to remove stains, or to stabilize damaged areas or remove patches at this stage (figure 17). That work was to be part of phase two.



***Figure 17. Many of the carpets had physical damage such as the hole here.***

***Photo: Permission Nobuko Kajitani.***

Thoroughly dried Neem leaves, from the native Neem trees, would be rolled in a sheer cloth and placed at regular intervals throughout the roll as a natural insecticide; Neem leaves have been used for centuries, and appear highly effective (figures 18 & 19).



***Figure 18, left. Fresh neem leaves.***

***Figure 19, right. Dried neem leaves.***

***Photos: Nobuko Kajitani.***

Nobuko Kajitani's method of cleaning is worth mentioning. I had suggested vacuuming, only to discover that the one vacuum cleaner available immediately blew the electrical circuits in the work area, owing to a faulty cord and probably because of the thickness of the dust. Nobuko suggested removing solid waste mechanically, tapping the carpets until the dust was removed, regularly changing the under-

cloth; then, using a slightly damp cloth, walking systematically over the carpet, and cleaning the cloth regularly. Only then, after twenty-four hours of drying, could the carpet be vacuumed (obverse and reverse), rolled on a clean PVC storage tube, wrapped in the prepared fabric, and placed on the shelves or brackets.<sup>5</sup> It was a good example of working within the parameters of what's possible. After all, conservation at the Metropolitan Museum is one thing; conservation at Jaipur can be quite another.

## Conclusion

This collection is, as I mentioned at the start, an extraordinary one. I do not know, at present, how far the project has progressed. The last report I had indicated that little has been done since 2008. It is, of course, wonderful that these carpets remain *in situ* in Jaipur, but not so wonderful that there is really not enough money, or perhaps sustained attention, to truly care for the collection to the degree that it requires or deserves. I understand that Dan Walker is working with conservators to prepare for his upcoming exhibition in Chicago, and my hope is that this will bring renewed attention to the collection, spurring on further effective conservation.

## Suggested Reading

A. J. D. Campbell, *Report on carpets in the collection of the Maharaja of Jaipur, 1929*, unpublished.

William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi 1857* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2008).

Thomas Holbein Hendley, *Asian Carpets, XVI, and XVII, century designs from the Jaipur palaces* (London: W, Griggs, 1905).

Daniel Walker, *Flowers Underfoot: Indian Carpets of the Mughal Era* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Abrams, 1998).

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<sup>5</sup> Kajitani, pp. 4-6.