

EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEETH CENTURY TURKISH PRAYER RUGS AS OBJECTS  
POSSESSING AGENCY: PORTABLE MATERIALS LINKING THE MATERIAL, SOCIAL,  
AND IMMATERIAL WORLDS THROUGH MOTIFS, USAGES, AND MOBILITY

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

by

Alexandria Maria Albano

May 2020

© 2020 Alexandria Maria Albano

## ABSTRACT

Islamic prayer rugs have not been studied as frequently in scholarly research as compared to other Middle Eastern decorative carpets. Yet, for centuries, they have been traded by Muslims and non-Muslims across the world and some become collection/museum items in secular settings. Thus, prayer rugs are multifunctional and are more than merely an Islamic prayer implement.

I conclude that prayer rugs hold agency and link various worlds due to their motifs, usages, and mobility. In terms of agency, I draw on materiality theory which highlights objects as not passive and that they possess a dialectic relationship with humans. I examine eighteenth and nineteenth century Turkish *sajjada* prayer rugs (prayer rugs intended for the use of one person while praying) from the Arthur D. Jenkins collection at The Textile Museum and the James F. Ballard collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

From the woven motifs, links are created between false dichotomies. Recurrent prayer rug motifs such as niche symbols, candles and lamps, floral imagery, and geometric patterns refer to Islamic ideologies. As a result, the profane, real, and material world is connected to the sacred, idealized, immaterial world. Connections between the human body, cardinal directions and idealized beliefs are further established during prayer usage.

Even from mobility such as trade, these sacred objects bridge together false dichotomies, individuals and transform people. Therefore, the prayer rug and human relationship is dialectic not dichotomous. Depending on usage, these objects can likewise go in between religious or secular spheres. This is unlike other Middle Eastern decorative carpets and other rugs. By applying the concept of materiality and adding more awareness to prayer rugs, this research helps show that they influence the worlds they occupy as active agents.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Alexandria Albano is a master's student at Cornell University in the Archaeology program. Her research focus points within archaeology include Near Eastern studies and materiality. For courses outside of her degree's required courses, she has taken Near Eastern studies and intermediate Arabic courses. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Mercyhurst University in 2018 in Anthropology/Archaeology with a concentration in Archaeology and she also minored in Arabic and Islamic Studies. During her undergraduate years, she focused on funerary archaeology in American historic cemeteries. Her undergraduate thesis pertained to the interpretation of the material culture left at graves and the memorialization practices in Erie County, PA. From her previous thesis and this current one, she is interested in the connectivity between humans and objects and the role objects, specifically sacred objects, play in society by connecting disparate worlds and revealing individuals' ideologies. At Cornell, she has taken courses focusing on the Near East, Near Eastern archaeology, and participated in archaeological fieldwork in the Eastern Mediterranean. She considers these as steppingstones to her ultimate goal of studying Islamic Archaeology specifically during the Ottoman Era.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank and acknowledge all of the received support during this thesis journey. Thank you to my academic advisor and chair of this thesis committee, Denise N. Green, Ph.D. I appreciate the time you took to help me along this writing process and for your thoughtful advice, edits, and for our weekly meetings. My other thesis committee member, Seema Golestaneh, Ph.D., many thanks for your edits, guidance, and time spent meeting with me. Thank you to Cornell's CIAMS Archaeology program for the approval of my thesis proposal and for thesis funding via a Hirsch grant which enabled me to undertake this research. Thank you to The Metropolitan Museum of Art staff in the Antonio Ratti Textile Center, the Archives, and the Thomas J. Watson Library and thanks to The Textile Museum staff and particularly the curator, the librarian, and the storage center employees. Thank you to the libraries used at The Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Thomas J. Watson Library and the Antonio Ratti Textile Center library), The Textile Museum's library (Arthur D. Jenkins Library), and the Princeton Library of Art and Archaeology. I am forever grateful for Cornell's numerous libraries and borrow direct access as I could not complete this thesis without these resources. The Uber drivers, pilots, and bus drivers who got me from point A to B, you all were life savers. To my fellow master's cohort, your empathy of this writing process, your encouragement, and feedback on drafts, helped tremendously. Family, friends, and other classmates, your love, support, and encouragement when I felt inadequate to finish this task helped more than you know. Thank you to my kitten, Memphis, and your delightful presence in my life. Thank you to the Starbucks near campus and for my graduate carrel 444 where I completed the majority of this writing. Thank you to the numerous consumed Starbucks pink drinks that gave me motivation to continue writing. I could not have completed my thesis without all of this support.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Biographical Sketch.....	iii
2. Acknowledgements.....	iv
3. List of Figures.....	vi
4. List of Tables.....	vii
5. Background.....	1
6. Methods.....	18
7. Results.....	22
8. Discussion.....	29
9. Works Cited.....	37
10. Appendix A.....	A1
11. Appendix B.....	A1
12. Appendix C.....	A2
13. Appendix D.....	A2
14. Appendix E.....	A3
15. Appendix F.....	A3
16. Appendix G.....	A4
17. Appendix H.....	A4
18. Appendix I.....	A5
19. Appendix J.....	A5
20. Appendix K.....	A6
21. Appendix L.....	A6
22. Appendix M.....	A7
23. Appendix N.....	A7
24. Appendix O.....	A8
25. Appendix P.....	A8
26. Appendix Q.....	A9
27. Appendix R.....	A9
28. Appendix S.....	A10
29. Appendix T.....	A11
30. Appendix U.....	A11

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Two common knots: Turkish knot and Persian knot.....	10
Figure 2. Varying niche styles and shapes.....	11
Figure 3. Example of prayer rug niche.....	19
Figure 4. Hebrew on rug.....	24
Figure 5. Microscope on rug.....	24
Figure 6. Skeleton figure on rug.....	25
Figure 7. Arabic script and numbers on rug.....	25

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Niche Measurements for The Textile Museum.....28

Table 2. Niche Measurements for The Metropolitan Museum of Art.....28

## BACKGROUND

Islamic prayer rugs are objects that have a timeless nature and a universal attraction that stretches the ages, making them a good example for research in the framework of materiality theory. From this perspective, materials are not passive objects lent to human influence, but rather are objects with which humans have a dialectical relationship. In this work, I argue that as a result of their motifs, functional usages, and frequent mobility, prayer rugs hold agency and bridge disparate worlds; material and immaterial, real and idealized, profane and sacred, and in doing so, disrupt these false dichotomies. I analyze this phenomenon through the interpretation of eighteenth and nineteenth century Turkish prayer rugs (*sajjada*) from the Arthur D. Jenkins collection at The Textile Museum and the James F. Ballard collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

In her discussion of materiality, archaeologist Lynn Meskell states, “Certain objects are invoked as having a universal attraction that crosses cultural and geographic borders and “transcends time”” (Meskell 2005:13). I argue that Islamic prayer rugs fall into this category due to trade between Muslims and non-Muslims. These items are multidimensional pieces of material culture. They can serve a spiritual function as a religious object where a Muslim performs their daily prayers or they can be in secular settings and serve an aesthetic function through their motifs (Ettinghausen 1974:12). Their ability to fluctuate between multiple worlds by serving both functional and symbolic purposes marks them as distinct and unique objects in comparison to Middle Eastern decorative carpets and other ordinary rugs.

Prayer rugs should be studied more frequently as objects that are active agents. In my argument of their agency, I draw on materiality theory. Materiality theory emphasizes that object

and human relations are dialectic not dichotomist, meaning that these relationships are not entirely separate entities and either human or object can influence another, signifying that the human relationship is not only a direct influence on the object (Meskell 2005:4). This theory lends emphasis onto the objects themselves as well as social roles. Archaeologist Christopher Tilley states that if the material and social are seen as dichotomous instead of dialectic, it implies that the material is passive (Wallace 2011:122). If passivity is implied to these objects, it is unreasonable since they have various meanings and can create different reactions for people and be used in diverse ways.

Within the materiality theory framework, the acknowledged connection between the body and an object is necessary to better understand the object in context.<sup>1</sup> This dialectical relationship allows a religious object to be viewed as a piece of material culture. From this perspective, scholars then can consider "...the registers of sensation that apprehend the object, the techniques of the body that object activates, and the value or salience that is generated by the use of the object in religious practice" (Morgan 2017:15). Applying materiality theory to prayer rugs is critical due to their close relationship to the body while in prayer and their relationship to Islamic beliefs. A Muslim must perform daily prayers on a clean surface, and a prayer rug is often used as this surface (Gamzatova 1999:287). Therefore, this belief of these objects' cleanliness enables them to be used as a religious item. While not being used in prayer, these objects may still be seen as important, valued, and affecting sensations, but in a different way as a collection and/or museum object.

---

<sup>1</sup> This theory is used in archaeology, religious studies, anthropology, and art history. In religious studies in particular, when material objects are studied, the relationship between the human body and the religious object is often highlighted (Schilbrack 2019:219).

Assuming they possess agency, prayer rugs connect disparate worlds, communities and can transform individuals. Common Islamic art patterns have abstract notions of Islamic beliefs connected to them (Al Khemir 2012:145). Consequently, the prayer rugs' woven religious symbols echo these spiritual and abstract notions. Prayer rug functional usages likewise connect the human body and idealized beliefs. In addition, cardinal orientation is crucial when these objects are used during prayer (Bayriyeva 2014:57). The act of prayer, if done around other praying individuals, further connects multiple individuals together into a sacred, idealized space.

Prayer rugs can vary in relation to symbolism, color hues, and styles consisting of two dominant styles—*saff* and *sajjadah* (often spelled *sajjada*) (Denny 2003:46). *Saff* prayer rugs are larger, intended for rows of people in mosques or a communal prayer. *Sajjadah*, on the other hand, are smaller and intended for individual use (Denny 2003:46). Unlike larger Middle Eastern carpets and *saff* prayer rugs, *sajjadah* prayer rugs are easily portable. They are smaller than other Middle Eastern decorative carpets typically measuring about five feet by three or four feet. Their primary use is by a Muslim performing their daily prayers (Eiland; Denny 2014b:38). How a prayer rug is woven, what symbols and colors are used, and their overall style depends on their origins. Some widespread symbols woven into prayer rugs include arches, which are often believed to resemble a niche in a mosque wall facing Mecca, hanging lanterns, candlesticks, and flowers (Eiland).

The classification of Middle Eastern carpets has changed throughout the years. Older textual sources often refer to such carpets as 'Oriental'. This term is packed with political, geographical, and cultural implications that are discriminatory. Now, some scholars refer to prayer rugs and decorative Middle Eastern carpets as Islamic or Persian carpets instead. A well-known carpet scholar, Walter B. Denny, chooses to refer to "Oriental" carpets (Middle Eastern

carpets in general) as Islamic in order to be more politically correct and less vague (Denny 2014:10). I will also follow this logic.

First, the term Oriental is used too generally. Materials labeled as Oriental are considered to be made in China and the Islamic world (Denny 2014:9). Yet, as Denny notes, these immense areas are comprised of various cultures and populations with differing beliefs. Thus, the term Oriental is unreliable due to the complexities of individuals that this term has been designated to. Some carpets even originate from other areas within the Rug Belt which Walter B. Denny states as "...a zone stretching from Morocco across much of North Africa, through the Middle East, and into Central and northern India..." (Denny 2014:10). Therefore, this term for carpets is not always accurate from the vast possible geographical origins.<sup>2</sup>

As already mentioned, due to its past ties as operating out of racist and overly-generalization paradigms, the term Oriental will not be used in this thesis in reference to any type of prayer rug. Instead, items will be referred to as Islamic prayer rugs or Turkish prayer rugs. In addition, carpets that are decorative and not used for prayer will be referred to as Middle Eastern

---

<sup>2</sup> Geographical issues are further present by the creation of the East and West dichotomy. For centuries, the world has been divided into regions like the East and West (Said 1994:39). This false dichotomy highlights the physical world regions and demarcates the populations into categories such as "us" and "them/other". Said notes that the term "...designated Asia or the East, geographically, morally, culturally" (Said 1994:31). As a result, usage of "Orient" or "Oriental" separates people in terms of their cultures and morals to separating the world by location. A past speech from British Prime Minister, Arthur Janes Balfour, from the twentieth century depicts this cultural demarcation. He discussed British occupation in Egypt and stated that the Egyptians' (he refers to as "Orientals") world contributions would never be from self-governance without Western nations. They always took place under absolute governance with a Western country in the past (Said 1994:32).

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said explains the political issues of this term and notions of superiority and inferiority. He emphasizes that the term 'Oriental' is not used by the individuals in the Eastern regions of the world; it is created, used and implied by individuals in Western regions. A micro example given by Said is about an Egyptian courtesan woman and the European novelist Flaubert. He highlights that Flaubert spoke for and represented this woman, "...she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history" (Said 1994:6). I argue that this was the case at the macro level of the world separations of "Orient" and the "Occident" as well due to how colonizing nations treated those who were colonized.

decorative carpets instead of Islamic carpets. This will clearly distinguish Islamic prayer rugs from other Middle Eastern rugs not intended for prayer. By not using the term Oriental, this will help to prevent the reproduction of a West and East dichotomy. Lastly, the “East’s” role when the term “Oriental” was frequently used somewhat hints to an implied passive nature, which could be transferred to materials such as rugs from the “East”. Since I am arguing the agency of such objects, I would not want any implications that they are being referred to as passive.

### *Agency Through Prayer Rug Symbolism*

#### *Common Motifs*

Of the various common symbols, the arch or niche is usually the distinguishing feature on these rugs and is indexical. The mihrab in a mosque (arch on the rug) is compared to the cross of Christianity in that it is referred to as “the dominant symbol of Islam” in prayer rugs (Zipper and Fritzsche 1989:32). Carpet scholar, Richard Ettinghausen, notes the arch to be the most common prayer rug symbol and that it “...was made in large numbers, beginning in the 17th century, particularly in Anatolia, thus it is not too rare and can still be found in many shops” (Ettinghausen 1974:11). Arches on these rugs can be interpreted in different ways such as viewing it to be an architectural form used in earlier mosques, the gateway to Paradise, or as the niche in a mosque wall facing Mecca (Denny 2014b:38-9; Eiland). No matter which interpretation is applied, all three suggest that this material motif has a deliberate link to be a symbolic motif to the immaterial, idealized, and sacred world.

Other motifs on prayer rugs are mosque lamps or candlesticks. Lamps are often seen hanging in the middle of the niche arch. As Ettinghausen notes, the appearance of lamps is not

expected. In actual mosques, lamps rarely hang from the mihrab (Ettinghausen 1974:19). An interpretation of their appearance on prayer rugs could come from a Sura in the Qur'an (Ettinghausen 1974:19).<sup>3</sup> Another motif that acts as a symbol of Allah is a candlestick which is often towards the bottom of some rugs (Ettinghausen 1974:19). Like lamps, candlesticks are not usually placed in the doorways of real mosques either. By seeing these objects, the archway could mean that the arch resembles a gate "... (real or metaphorically envisioned) leading to a higher spiritual region as a doorway of a mosque would do..." (Ettinghausen 1974:19). Again, the arch symbol itself further connects two worlds; the idealized and the material world.

Floral imagery is another common prayer rug motif. Gamzatova mentions that the "Paradise Garden motif" is common (Gamzatova 1999:291). Flowers and foliage may reference religious imagery. Paradise in the Qur'an is referred to "as the Gardens of Eternity" or "Garden of perpetual bliss" (Al Khemir 2012:150). Therefore, floral imagery can be a metaphor for Paradise, a symbol of abundance, or allude to the invisible world according to Sabiha Al Khemir (Al Khemir 2012:150). From these interpretations and drawing from Qur'an imagery, it is evident that this symbol is intended to create a link to the Islamic sacred world with a material object and motif.

Frequently used geometric patterns in Islamic art include stars, circles, multi-sided polygons and four-sided polygons (Al Khemir 2012:158). Even though some of these patterns are found on prayer rugs, they are relatively underexplored in the relevant scholarship. Therefore, niche and light symbols may occur more commonly. Al Khemir suggests that the abstract nature of geometric patterns expresses the "infinite nature of the Divine" (Al Khemir

---

<sup>3</sup> "Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth; a likeness of His light is a niche in which there is a lamp, the lamp is in a glass and the glass is as it were a brightly shining star, light from a blessed olive-tree" (Qur'an 35.24; Ettinghausen 1974:19).

2012:145). Circles are mentioned to have no end or beginning (Al Khemir 2012:162). These expressions of infinity heighten the motif's symbolism with a connection to another world; the divine or sacred realm. This notion of no beginning or end can further stress the timelessness of these rugs' designs. Al Khemir describes Islamic art to be timeless and "...drawn from the one source of a timeless whole..." (Al Khemir 2012:148). That one timeless source could be interpreted as Allah and/or the Islamic faith tradition as Allah is believed to be unchanging.

All these motifs create aesthetically attractive patterns that reveal abstract and ideal notions related to the Islamic faith. In order for a pattern to be created, Al Khemir notes that there needs to be a unit, repetition, and a system of organization (Al Khemir 2012:145). This is true for the prayer rugs since their patterns seem to be ordered and symmetrical (Gamzatova 1999:292). She further mentions that Islamic art patterns are "...in harmony with the notion of *Tawhid* (The Oneness of God) and a belief in the abstract nature of God" (Al Khemir 2012:145). These patterns are often repetitive and resemble infinity which relates to the thought of God within Islam. In this faith tradition, God is conceived as having an abstract nature that is beyond representation (Al Khemir 2012:145). In addition to units (motifs), there are voids in designs which "... links the concept of *Dhakhir* and *Batin*—the Visible and the Invisible—which is deeply rooted in Islamic Thought" (Al Khemir 2012:148). Thus, these patterns are concrete, but they can suggest idealized realms in the Islamic faith through their aesthetic designs. If these prayer rug patterns are not closely examined, this will not be noticed by those who are unfamiliar with this faith.

These patterns connect these humanly made items to the unaltered, natural world in addition to the immaterial world. Al Khemir mentions that "...the geometry in art is directly related to the geometry of life" and is referring to nature patterns (Al Khemir 2012:158). She

states it is a “mathematical secret” and argues that “the wonders of creation are derived from the simplest rules and the laws of patterns seem integral to the essential unity of the universe” (Al Khemir 2012:155). In Islam, God is the source of creation and therefore these patterns would be connected to the heavenly world. Thus, Islamic geometric art patterns and those commonly found on prayer rugs connect multiple worlds.

Lastly, there are other religious designs that may be found on prayer rugs. Some include footprints, vases, water cans, and combs (Zipper and Fritzsche 1989:33). These items are often used before praying to clean oneself and could also be reminders to do so (Turkhan 1968:29). Alan Marcuson highlights that some carpets have zoomorphic or anthropomorphic symbols at an exhibition at the Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum which some might believe are banned in this faith (Marcuson 2007:102). However, recent research on images in Islamic art has been carried out by Christiane Gruber, Chair and Professor of History of Art at The University of Michigan, who states that the Qur’an doesn’t ban these figurative images. Instead, idol worship is criticized and is “...understood as concrete embodiments of the polytheistic beliefs that Islamic supplanted when it emerged...” (Gruber 2015:1). Often this faith is described to not have figural imagery in the arts, but it is not always the case (Gruber 2015:2). Therefore, having a comprehensive understanding of the faith tradition is crucial when trying to interpret Islamic art on these items.

### *Turkish Prayer Rug Background and Motifs*

In Turkey, major production began around the seventeenth century (Ettinghausen 1974:11). Many rugs were exported to Holland (Ettinghausen 1974:18). In the nineteenth century, Turkish prayer rugs were also common items in Egypt and Europe (Maarouf 2014:18). According to Maarouf, these rugs were known for their beauty due to “...the harmony of their

colors and their shining shag knitted with soft sheep wool. They even rivaled the rugs woven with silk in beauty of their appearance and the softness of their touch (Maarouf 2014:18).

Inspiration for rug creation and trade came from different sources. For centuries, natural dyes for these rugs included 33 colors ranging from orange (carrot), purple and red (lichen), black, brown, and blue (dried Amur Maple), blue (indigo), yellow (acorn), red (madder root), pink and white (strawberries), and other colors (Maarouf 2014:34-6). In addition, gold and silver has been used for some threads for a rug intended for a noble (Bayriyeva 2014:59). The use of many assorted colors from various sources provides evidence that these items are significant and a lot of thought is required for their creation. Major prayer rug production may be the result of interconnectedness among different communities through travel, trade, and changes in technology. Basaran states that “women from Istanbul to Upper Amuderya River began to weave portable prayer rugs in order to get it as product of trade on the Silk Road” (Basaran 2014:112), therein connecting different countries.

In order to identify a Turkish prayer rug, there are a few characteristics for which to look. How they are woven makes them distinct from prayer rugs originating from other areas. Turkish prayer rugs have knots known as Ghiordes knots or as Turkish knots. They are characterized by “...yarn twisted about the warp threads in such a way that the two raised ends of the pile alternate with every two threads of the warp” (Turkhan 1968:25). The other common knot is the Senne knot (sometimes known as the half knot) which is frequently found with Persian materials (Figure 1).

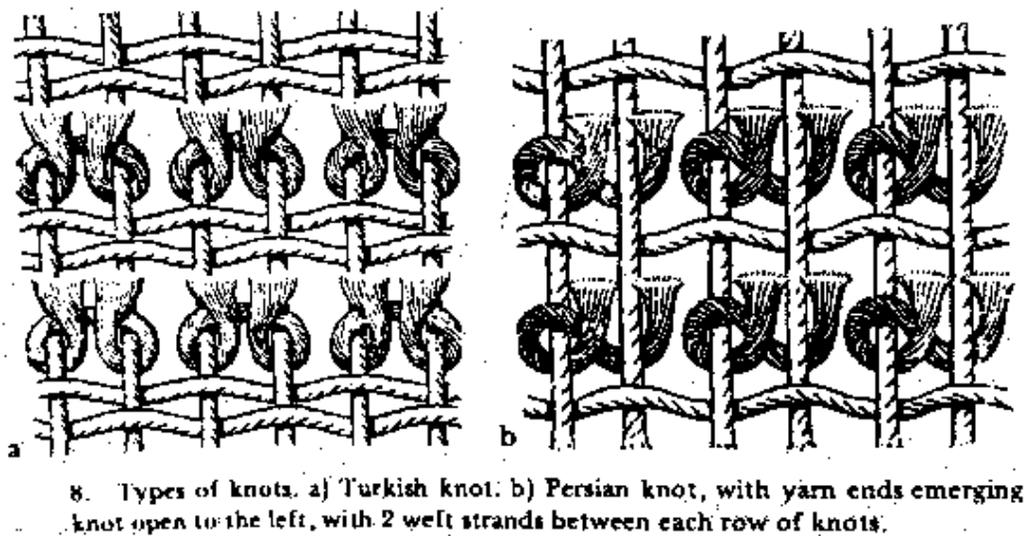


Figure 1. Two common knots: Turkish knot and Persian knot.  
Source: *Handmade Prayer Carpet Through History* 2014:101

Additionally, the arch remains the main focal point like most other prayer rugs (Basaran 2014:99). However, one scholar, G. Griffin Lewis, discusses the different shapes of a niche depending on where a carpet originated from. In his book *The Practical Book of Oriental Rugs*, he states that Turkish niches tend to be pointed oftentimes while Persian ones have a rounder top (Lewis 1914:287; Figure 2). Turkish prayer rugs' colors and decorations slightly vary depending on where in Turkey the rug originates from too.<sup>4</sup> This means that Turkish prayer rug styles and patterns are not entirely universal for every prayer rug and variation occurs.

<sup>4</sup> A few famous types of Turkish prayer rugs include Ladik, Gordes, and Kula rugs from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Ettinghausen 1974a:28). Kula and Gordes rugs are characterized by floral designs (carnations, tulips, roses, hyacinths, and lilies), niche design and mosque lamp, and often have colors of red, white, yellow, and blue (Ettinghausen 1974a:29). Colors that are emphasized more are blue and yellow (Ettinghausen 1974a:29). Whereas the Ladik style emphasizes more red and white tones, floral patterns in form of tulips (Ettinghausen 1974a:28). Their arches tend to be more triangular too (Denny 2016:167).

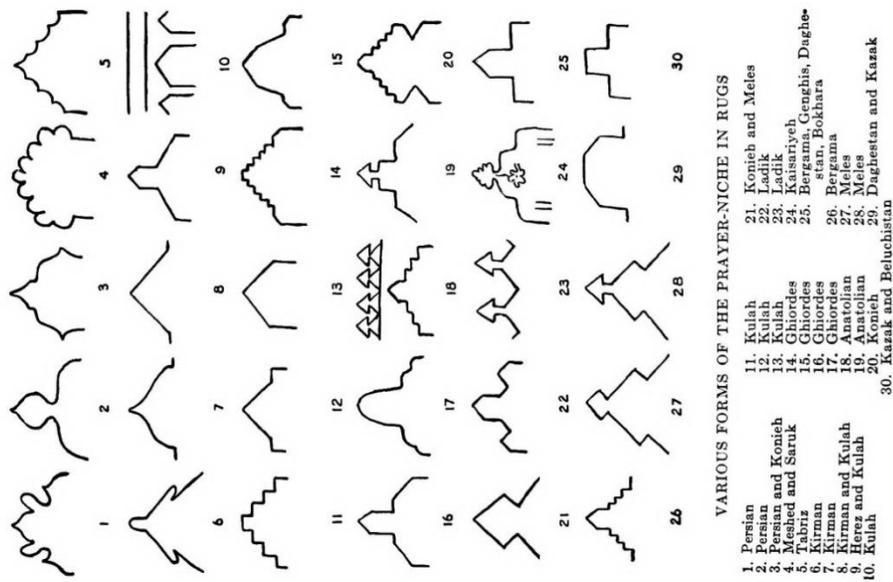


Figure 2. Varying niche styles and shapes. Source: *The Practical Book of Oriental Rugs* 1914:323

### *Agency through Prayer Rug Usage and Mobility*

#### *Mobility: Religious Mosque/Prayer Usage/Setting*

Prayer rugs, while important in Islam, are not mandatory. In this faith however, prayer must be done on a ritually clean place (Gamzatova 1999:287). Therefore, a prayer rug can be used, but if a Muslim does not have one, other materials or clothes can work as a “rug” during prayer (Gamzatova 1999:287). While praying, Muslims must face East towards the Kaaba in Mecca, the holy Islamic city (Bayriyeva 2014:57). When the body is oriented to the East, so is the rug. Consequently, the niche points in the direction towards the East while also representing an individual mihrab symbol that is seen in mosques. Thus, the ideals of the faith are present in

the material and visible world during this performance of prayer. Subsequently, the connection between the sacred world and the profane world are linked in this act for the time of the prayer. Lastly, I argue the prayer rug's agency enables this creation of this sacred space. The rug's cleanliness and woven symbols qualifies as a suitable place to pray which then connects a praying Muslim closer to the divine, sacred world and for a time more disconnected from the profane world.

Textual evidence about prayer rug usage also appears during earlier centuries. For example, the fourteenth century traveler and writer Ibn Battuta wrote accounts of prayer rugs (Ettinghausen 1974:12). He discusses that during prayer each man sits on a *sajjada* and that "...the servant invites him into the zawiya and spreads out his rug at an appropriate spot...In another account the servant transports everyone's *sajjada* to the mosque where he spreads them out..." (Ettinghausen 1974:12). The account of a servant assisting with placing and carrying the prayer rugs depicts a picture of high status for those using the prayer rugs in this account. Additionally, an anonymous writer in a fourteenth century Cairo report discusses the value placed on prayer rugs, stating that prayer rugs appear "...to have been a very personal object treated with a certain reverence which was also used to sit on for sacred functions..." (Ettinghausen 1974:12). Therefore, prayer rugs are highly valued in addition to conveying status.

Ettinghausen points out that prayer rugs have been represented in visual art in addition to textual references and sources. A miniature of the Islamic prophet Mohammed from the fourteenth century displays him sitting on a prayer rug and it is referred to as a "...spiritual throne..." (Ettinghausen 1974:12-3). Another miniature depicts a prayer rug on water being sat on by a Sufi dervish which Ettinghausen suggests that it implies a supernatural or magical quality to prayer rugs (Ettinghausen 1974:14). Thus, before they were used by non-Muslims,

prayer rugs acted as more than religious items, they were thought by some to contain magical qualities in addition to being very personal items.

In Islamic religious settings, individuals can be connected together by using prayer rugs. A praying person is positioned in a special place, "...in other words, to seclude him from the outer, ordinary world... By this time, the individual is introduced to a certain spiritual sphere and is included in the sodium [sic], whose members are united by the same spiritual foundations" (Gamzatova 1999:288). I argue that this would then also connect a praying Muslim to others who are praying nearby and into a sacred world. When one is praying, this is a deliberate act to connect to the divine, religious, and sacred world.

After functioning as a religious object in Islam, some prayer rugs have been used and represented in Christian spaces. Gamzatova calls them "an important part of the equipment of churches" (Gamzatova 1999:289). The discovery of these objects has been made in historical Transylvanian churches where they were used as floor coverings (Gamzatova 1999:289; Denny 2016:164). Prayer rugs have been seen in Catholic cathedrals on pulpits, parapets and altars in the past and have been depicted in European paintings hinting to sacred realms too (Gamzatova 1999:289). Gamzatova refers to prayer rugs as "magical" objects..." (Gamzatova 1999:289). Therefore, even once they are no longer used in the Islamic faith, prayer rugs can still be revered as a sacred object in other faith tradition.

#### *Mobility: Secular trade/collecting settings*

Prayer rugs, in addition to other varying Middle Eastern textiles, are commonly transported items. During the thirteenth century and for a few centuries onwards, textiles and ceramics were traded by artists and merchants to and from Muslim and Christian commercial

areas (Helfgott 1994:7). Hand-knotted carpets that were produced in the Ottoman Empire were considered a regular trade commodity around the Mediterranean in the fifteenth century (Helfgott 1994:7). Thus, varying groups of people would have been in contact with these items going back multiple centuries.

As a result of trade, prayer rugs have moved into secular settings and at times have been acquired by collectors, and/or placed in museums. In the collecting setting, they become commodities (Moallem 2018:9). In *Persian Carpets: The Nation as a Transnational Commodity*, Mino Moallem mentions Anna Reeve Aldrich's poem written about a prayer carpet that is no longer being used for prayer (Moallem 2018a:46-7). Thus, this item "...embodies the contradictions of modern consumerism both as a domesticated commodity brought home from another culture as well as an obstacle to commodity exchange because of its sacred objecthood and enigmatic power" (Moallem 2018a:47). She further argues that such items were collected by Europeans because the Other's art was considered to be collectible and "...belonging to the timeless temporality of the traditional or the past as essence" (Moallem 2018a:47).

Some explanations for trade of prayer rugs particularly have been given over the years. Ettinghausen gives a logical reason for individuals purchasing prayer rugs in a marketplace instead of bigger carpets by mentioning that, "...people who could not buy a large "Oriental Carpet" can do so in the case of prayer carpets because of their accessibility, convenient size, and reasonable price" (Ettinghausen 1974:11). Denny and Thomas J. Farnham, a trustee and carpet scholar at The Textile Museum, further mention that these items were placed in European markets as a result of an "Orientalist phenomenon" and that many of these carpets are not in Turkey markets (Denny and Farnham 2016:159). As a result, the perceived "exotic" qualities of the prayer rugs may have been the driving force in the markets. Lastly, some individuals view

these objects as status symbols with an aesthetic appeal (Ettinghausen 1974:11). As a result, they are still are revered outside of their faith.

### *Mobility: Secular Museum Setting*

The creation of museums may parallel the early trade of Middle Eastern decorative carpets in Europe and the United States. In the nineteenth century, the allure of the Middle East grew in Britain. Author, Leonard Helfgott, of *Ties that Bind: A Social History of the Iranian Carpet* states that, "...where colonial and trading activities were extensive, the private marketplace and public institutions such as world's fairs and museums reflected the growing fascination with the Middle East" (Helfgott 1994:98). Museums were also funded by the political and commercial elites (Helfgott 1994:102). Although museums are great arenas for individuals to see items from places far away, the origins of museums arose from bad intentions.

The creation of museums highlighted differences among varying groups. The intent was to teach the public specifically about "...areas of the world that recently had entered the international marketplace and increased the availability of aesthetic or practical objects to the general public" and these areas were referred to as "exotic" (Helfgott 1994:102). Helfgott further mentions that the museums reiterated the superiority of the West over Asia in a visual manner. Islamic art was commonly found in London during the 1880s and Middle Eastern carpet shops were opened in Europe and the United States in many of the big cities (Helfgott 1994:104). In addition to the wealthy, people of differing statuses eventually had access to these items because they were made widely available when marketed (Helfgott 1994:119).

In museums or in private collections, prayer rugs carry new functions. David Morgan, professor and chair of religious studies at Duke University, studied the Sacred Heart of Jesus

figurine and how it has moved overtime. I argue that his conclusion can be applied to Islamic prayer rugs. He notes, in relation to the figurines, that such religious items can be exchanged by means of trading, bartering, monetary commerce, and gifting (Morgan 2017:27). Then they can become finite objects that are collected by collectors, antique dealers, entrepreneurs and “As a result, the objects have shifted in classification: from devotional images to collectible artefacts...They are no longer displayed as objects for the pious use of prayer and intercession, but as works of art or as historical or ethnic artefacts, as antiques or museum pieces” (Morgan 2017:27). This is the case with the prayer rugs at these museums since they no longer serve as entirely a religious object and instead are collectable artifacts. Morgan further remarks that when objects circulate, new value is assigned to them (Morgan 2017:28). For prayer rugs, determining these new values may be possible by looking at archives of past collectors and if able, interviewing individuals in the secular setting in contact with prayer rugs.

In secular settings, however, prayer rugs still connect individuals both secularly and to the rugs’ religious functions. If a prayer rug is in a museum exhibit, it is accessible to the public which expands the number of individuals who come into contact with the item. The intention of the exhibit is to “...create in the visitor a mood apart from everyday concerns, reflective and receptive to the art arrayed inside...The visitor follows a set route, behaves in a particular way, largely keeps silence and pauses to venerate a succession of shrines” (Paine 2013:72). With this intent, if followed correctly, I argue that these objects are still respected in a new way apart from their original functions. The prayer rug remains a visual aid to the Islamic faith as a result of “...the overall composition of the prayer rug represents the world-view and the aspirations of the Muslims, surrounding their rituals, with no connection to the use of the object itself” (Gamzatova 1999:287). Thus, even if it is not being used for prayer anymore if it is in a museum or

collection, it acts as an artifact of the Islamic faith. Viewers will learn about prayer rugs' roles in Islam and if design is discussed, they will be aware of the interconnectedness of this material object to the immaterial Islamic world.

## METHODS

### *Sample selection*

Only eighteenth and/or nineteenth century Turkish prayer rugs were selected to be viewed for this research due to extensive land and sea trade between the Levant and Europe in the eighteenth century (Jirousek 2019:156). One of my arguments is that prayer rugs connect various worlds and groups of people, so viewing items from a time of high trade would be helpful. As for the nineteenth century, European travel and tourism grew in the “Eastern” parts of the world such as Turkey and likewise, Ottoman Turks traveled to Europe (Jirousek 2019:195; 197). Travel to foreign locations allows for more connections than just trade. Additionally, American merchants became connected “...now competing in the same Eastern markets as Europeans” (Jirousek 2019:196). Since the selected prayer rugs were in American collections before entering these museums, this American presence in the markets may be visible.

A collection portion from a specific collector was selected at each museum due to my goal to review dialectical relations between the objects and individuals. I believe focusing on two individuals instead of many allows for more in-depth research. These two collections were chosen due to their locations; The Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Textile Museum. Both museums are widely known for their Middle Eastern decorative carpets and prayer rugs. Also, both collectors have a decent sized Turkish prayer rug collection. Lastly, the collector at The Metropolitan Museum of Art is one of the well-known collectors. Some sources mention that both collectors were from the Midwest and not extremely well-off. I thought that was interesting due to another source mentioning that most collectors were on the eastern side of the states and more well-off (Farnham 2016:13).

I viewed 21 (selected 22) prayer rugs total in private viewings in storage and public viewings for those on gallery view from portions of two collections. The Textile Museum prayer rug collection is placed in storage located at the George Washington University Avenir Foundation Conservation and Collections Resource Center in Ashburn, Virginia and the other collection is located at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, New York in storage and on gallery view. Research took place in these two areas in addition to Washington, D.C. where The Textile Museum itself is located and the museum's library. Prayer rugs specifically with one niche/arch symbol were selected (Figure 1).



Figure 3. Example of niche on prayer rug. Source: The Textile Museum, Washington, D.C., 1989.10.76, Bequest of Arthur D. Jenkins.

*The Textile Museum selection/Data collection*

The Textile Museum prayer rug collection consists of 88 prayer rugs. The prayer rugs are stored in Ashburn, Virginia at the Avenir Foundation Conservation and Collections Resource Center located on George Washington University's Virginia Science and Technology Campus. 20 of the prayer rugs were donated by a famous collector, Arthur D. Jenkins. For the purpose of this study, only 13 Turkish prayer rugs were selected specifically from this collection. According to the object files, these 13 are from the eighteenth century, nineteenth century, or both centuries whereas the remaining seven in this specific collection are from other centuries, so I decided to not view those.<sup>5</sup>

While viewing the rugs, I took photographs, closely examined and took notes on the symbols, styles, and colors per rug. I was not allowed to touch the prayer rugs. Therefore, I requested for museum workers to help me take measurements on the niche symbol per rug in four different areas for possible data while I viewed them. Only measurements for the entire dimensions of each prayer rug were recorded beforehand, so this would add more known measurements and possibly support Lewis' claims on the niches' shapes through measuring.

Additionally, I went to the Arthur D. Jenkins Library (The Textile Museum's library) located in Washington D.C. and I conducted more research pertaining to prayer rugs in general and researched further information related to Arthur D. Jenkins. I was able to view primary sources pertaining to Arthur D. Jenkins. For this portion of research, I was in Washington, D.C. and Ashburn, Virginia between July 14th-July 20th, 2019.

---

<sup>5</sup> The object file numbers are 1989.10.76, 1989.10.77, 1989.10.79, 1989.10.116, 1989.10.88, 1989.10.138, 1989.10.120, 1989.10.129, 1989.10.127, 1961.39.4, 1989.10.134, 1989.10.80, and 1961.39.19.

### *The Metropolitan Museum of Art selection/Data collection*

There are 57 prayer rugs total in the James F. Ballard collection and the object files show that 33 are from the eighteenth and/or nineteenth centuries. Nine prayer rugs were selected from this collection.<sup>6</sup> I only viewed, photographed, and took notes on the symbols, styles, and colors of the rugs due to the museum's regulations not allowing visitors to touch the items. As I did at The Textile Museum, I collected measurements with the help of museum workers in the same areas on the rugs with the help of a museum worker.

I went to three research facilities in The Metropolitan Museum of Art: the Antonio Ratti Textile Center Library, the museum's archives, and the Thomas J. Watson Library. I did more general research on prayer rugs at the two libraries. In the archives, I exclusively did research on James F. Ballard, his donations and his connection to the museum. I was in New York from August 5th-8th, 2019.

### *Data Presentation*

Photos that I took for each viewed rug will be included in the appendices. Collected measurements will be noted while discussing each rug too. Furthermore, The Textile Museum was able to provide me with professional quality photos for all 13 selected rugs that I can include in my thesis. As for archival or library acquired information, some information and/or photos that I was allowed to take will be included in my thesis.

---

<sup>6</sup> The rugs that I privately viewed and collected measurements for have the objects numbers of 22.100.80, 22.100.78, 22.100.96, 22.100.61, 22.100.83, and 22.100.63. Two of the rugs (22.100.22 and 22.100.24) were on view for the public, so I viewed them on display in the gallery. Therefore, measurements were not taken on those, but I did get some photographs of them. I was not able to view one of the selected carpets (22.100.129) due to the lack of enough table space during my viewing hours.

## RESULTS

### *Arthur D. Jenkins Background and Prayer Rug Collection Background*

The collector Arthur D. Jenkins (1897-1998) discovered his love of carpets when he was very young and had a publishing business in Illinois (Fraser 2015:8-9). He first bought a Turkish carpet in St. Louis, Missouri and began collecting rugs in the 1920s (Jenkins 1981:14; The Textile Museum 1963:1). He eventually heard about The Textile Museum and spoke with George Hewitt Myer who was also a carpet collector and the founder of the museum. Afterwards, Jenkins sought and bought carpets for the intent that they would eventually be placed in the museum. He mentions that, "...As a result, this collection has uniformity of quality developed strictly along that principle" (Jenkins 1981:14).

Jenkins was also a passionate book collector. He donated over 850 books pertaining to rugs and textiles in 1962 to The Textile Museum with an intent behind the donation "...to create "the most complete research facility" in the U.S. devoted to oriental rugs..." (Fraser 2015:3). Eventually, in the 1970s, the library was dedicated to him (Fraser 2015:10). Jenkins ultimately worked at this museum. In 1969, he became part of The Textile Museum Board of Trustees and became the president in 1979 until 1983 (Fraser 2015:9).

### *Prayer Rug Observations*

*Object File 1989.10.76.* This nineteenth century prayer rug has geometric shapes in the border and inside border, gold on the border, and a red background in the center with a dark green niche.<sup>7</sup> There are tassels on the top and bottom of the rug (Appendix A).

---

<sup>7</sup> All dates of the prayer rugs have come from the object files. It is important to note that the prayer rugs' provenance before entering this collection is unknown and not written in the object files.

*Object File 1989.10.77.* This nineteenth century prayer rug has geometric symbols and possible flower symbols in the center. The colors range from dark green, red, pale orange, white, blue, and black (Appendix B).

*Object File 1989.10.79.* This nineteenth century prayer rug has many geometric patterns and a lamp hanging in the middle of the niche. The geometric patterns have circles and triangles. Predominant colors are green, cream and red (Appendix C).

*Object File 1989.10.116.* This eighteenth century prayer rug has a lot of reds and warm colors. It has columns in the mihrab, a lamp, geometric patterns and floral imagery (Appendix D).

*Object File 1989.10.88.* This prayer rug is noted to be from the second half of the nineteenth century. It has orange as the prominent color and has other colors such as reds, creams, greens, and black. It has many geometric patterns and seems more abstract in the pattern style. There are diamond shapes and unfamiliar shapes for the pattern (Appendix E).

*Object File 1989.10.138.* This nineteenth century prayer rug has greens, orange, purples, reds, blues and blacks. It is very abstract with geometric patterns. The niche has geometric patterns throughout the area. Some look like they could be abstract trees (Appendix F).

*Object File 1989.10.120.* This eighteenth century prayer rug has red for the niche, columns in the niche, ewers/cartons on the bottom of the columns, and a hanging abstract lamp. Floral motifs and geometric motifs are on here. Calligraphy is present on the top of the rug, but it is Hebrew script; not Arabic (Figure 3). Colors other than red include blue, creams, and black (Appendix G).



Figure 4. Hebrew on rug. Source: Author.

*Object File 1989.10.129.* This eighteenth century prayer rug has a red niche, columns in the niche and a lamp. Floral patterns are the most predominant and there are a few geometric patterns. Other colors on the rug include blue, cream and black (Appendix H).

*Object File 1989.10.127.* This nineteenth century prayer rug has a dark green niche with red field behind it. Blues, creams, white, and brown are additional colors. There is a lamp in the center of this niche. Abstract floral patterns and geometric patterns are present. It may have possible gold/silver thread (Figure 4; Appendix I).



Figure 5. Microscope on rug.  
Source: Author.

*Object File 1961.39.4.* This nineteenth century prayer rug has a red niche with dark green on the outside. There is orange, blue, cream and black for the colors. All of the patterns are geometric and diamond like shapes are used (Appendix J).

*Object File 1989.10.134.* This nineteenth century prayer rug has light green, purple, cream, blue, and black. The niche has two sides and looks like they are mirroring each other. There are geometric patterns throughout and two not common patterns. On the top right, there is an image that looks like a skeleton (Figure 5). Nearby it slightly below toward the center is Arabic calligraphy and a possible year (Figure 6; Appendix K).



Figure 6. Skeleton figure on rug.  
Source: Author.



Figure 7. Arabic script and numbers on rug.  
Source: Author.

*Object File 1989.10.80.* This nineteenth century prayer rug has a triangle niche, floral images, and geometric patterns. There is red for the niche, and greens, creams, and black is used for color (Appendix L).

*Object File 1961.39.19.* This eighteenth-nineteenth century prayer rug has red for the niche, blues, creams and black. There is floral and geometric patterns. Below the niche, it looks like there is a row of smaller niches (Appendix M).

### *James F. Ballard Background and Prayer Rug Collection Background*

James F. Ballard (1851- 1931) was a famous carpet collector who donated his collections to two museums: The Saint Louis Art Museum in Missouri and The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. In 1922, he eventually donated 129 rugs The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Breck and Morris 1923:5). He was unlike many other famous carpet collectors at the time; not very wealthy and came from the mid-west (Farnham 2016:13). Most collectors were concentrated from D.C. to Boston and around NYC (Farnham 2016:13). At age 55, he bought his first rug and his collection is known for the Turkish pieces. His reasoning for his love of collecting carpet is because of their beauty, the symbolic importance, and their religious and historical significance (Farnham 2016:19). He believed that they were more than furnishing and only wanted to show them at museums or academic institutes.

### *Prayer Rugs Observations*

*Object File 22.100.96.* This eighteenth century prayer rug has a red niche with Arabic script in the center.<sup>8</sup> There is floral imagery and geometric patterns. It has blues, yellows, greens, and whites in addition to the red (Appendix N).

*Object File 22.100.80.* This nineteenth century prayer rug has a navy-blue niche with star symbols, looks like there is a light at the top, and vases throughout. It has floral and geometric patterns. It has cream, light blue, maroon, and white (Appendix O).

*Object File 22.100.78.* This rug is from the nineteenth century. It has dark purple, cream, white and blue for colors used. There is a lot of geometric patterns, floral patterns and there is the tree of life and a vase. At the top of the rug, there may be Arabic script too (Appendix P).

---

<sup>8</sup> The prayer rugs at this museum also have their dates written in the object files and the provenance of these items before entering the James F. Ballard collection is not written and/or unknown.

*Object File 22.100.61.* This eighteenth century prayer rug has a white niche with columns and ewers. There is floral patterns and geometric patterns. There is red, cream, blue, black and yellow for the colors used (Appendix Q).

*Object File 22.100.63.* This eighteenth-nineteenth century prayer rug has a red niche and floral and geometric motifs. Other colors include cream, blue, and green. It looks like it has smaller niches below the big one (Appendix R).

*Object File 22.100.83.* This eighteenth-nineteenth century prayer rug has a red niche, columns, a lamp, floral and geometric patterns. There is blue, red, cream, and black for the colors used (Appendix S).

*Object File 22.100.22.* This nineteenth century prayer rug has a red niche with a tree of life symbol in the center and has flower and geometric patterns. Other used colors include yellows, blues, greens and creams (Appendix T).

*Object File 22.100.24.* This nineteenth century prayer has a red niche and flowers and diamonds in the middle of it. Above the niche looks like there are bird motifs. It has geometric patterns and floral imagery. Colors on this rug include yellow, cream, blue, cream, and red (Appendix 24).

### *Prayer Rug Measurements*

From the taken measurements, there are similarities with each rug. With the museum employees' help, I got the vertical portion of each niche measured, the horizontal portion of the niches (at the base of the niche), and the middle portions of the niches triangular portion measured in inches (measurements listed in the same order in tables below). I measured 19

prayer rugs total.<sup>9</sup> The standard deviations show that the niches don't vary in length measurements too much do to the small numbers (Table 1; Table 2<sup>10</sup>). This shows that in addition to motif patterns, motif sizes can show patterns and similarities.

Table 1. Niche Measurements for The Textile Museum.

Object File	Measurement 1	Measurement 2	Measurement 3
1989.10.76	41.75	18.5	13.75
1989.10.77	34.5	17.75	12.5
1989.10.79	36.75	18.88	12
1989.10.116	38	16	15.5
1989.10.88	18	11	3.88
1989.10.138	44.88	18.75	9.75
1989.10.120	44.25	20.25	8
1989.10.129	37.5	12.38	5
1989.10.127	39.25	17.25	10
1961.39.4	33.75 and 32.75	14.25	9 and 10.75
1989.10.134	26.38	16.75	9.25
1989.10.80	29	17.5	12
1961.39.19	30	17.38	4.75
STDEV	7.9	2.6	3.7

Table 2. Niche Measurements for The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Object File	Measurement 1	Measurement 2	Measurement 3
22.100.80	40	15.8	9.5
22.100.78	41.75	24.75	9.5
22.100.96	27.8	15.75	7.5
22.100.61	30	16.75	7.25
22.100.83	41.75	21.25	8.25
22.100.63	35.75	18.25	8
STDEV	6.1	3.5	.97

<sup>9</sup> Two of the selected rugs at The Metropolitan Museum of Art could not be measured due to being on view and one other rug that I requested to view, I could not see.

<sup>10</sup> Object File 1961.39.4 has a mirror niche, so both niches were measured and listed in the table.

## DISCUSSION

### *Patterns*

For the prayer rug designs, all rugs have a niche and other designs that are common per rug. In the Arthur D. Jenkins' collection six have floral imagery, 11 with geometric patterns, five with lamps, one with vase/ewers, three with columns, two with writing/numbers, one with tree depictions, one with animal/human figures, and one with the mirror niche. As for the James F. Ballard collection, all eight of the viewed prayer rugs have floral imagery and geometric patterns. two with lamps, three with a vase/ewer, two with columns, two with the tree of life, two with Arabic script, one has a possible animal form, and one has smaller niches below the big one.

From these observations, both portions of these collections have predominantly more floral and geometric patterns. As previously discussed, these symbols are linked to the notions of Paradise and the abstract nature of God. Therefore, a connection to the supernatural and sacred realm remains even once it is not used for a religious purpose. As for the other symbols, they refer back to the Islamic faith as well. Thus, while these items are no longer used for prayer, the symbols can still be portrayed as sacred elements and reveal that these prayer rugs are religious, and sacred items and/or religious artifacts.

Prayer rug niche color patterns were revealed through observations. The niches are dominantly red and green. From The Textile Museum, there are seven red niches and for The Metropolitan Museum of Art, there were five. Additionally, at The Textile Museum there are six green niches. Of the six, four of them do have red backgrounds in the panel surrounding the green niche. Lastly, at The Metropolitan Museum of Art other niche colors are cream (one niche), purple (one niche), and navy blue (one niche).

Dominant colors used throughout the rugs show certain patterns too. For both selected prayer rug collections, red is the most dominant color used. Out of the 21 viewed prayer rugs, 12 have red niches, so a little more than half. The second color that is most used is cream/white. From there, other common colors are green (light or dark green), blue (light, medium blue, or navy), brown or black, and yellow. A few other colors such as purple/pink, orange, teal, and tan were used but not common.

The chapter “Exploring the Colors of Turkish Culture” in *Color and Design*, explores dominant colors used in Turkish culture. Gozde Goncu-Berk highlights that red, cream, and turquoise are colors with great significance which coincidentally are the dominant colors in these Turkish prayer rugs (if considering other blues or green a variation of turquoise) (Goncu-Berk 2012:141). White and red are the primary colors of Turkey and are the colors of the national flag (Goncu-Berk 2012:142). Red is noted to be a patriotic color and according to a Turkish legend from the Seljuk Empire, signifies blood from Turkish soldiers from a war (Goncu-Berk 2012:142). It is also noted that red is a frequent color for prayer rugs (Shreve Simpson 2011:289). It is additionally argued that the color red itself can be a metaphor to God due to many Qur’an manuscripts that have been written in red ink (Shreve Simpson 2011:299). Muslims believe that the Qur’an is the direct word from God. As for the color white, it can symbolize cleanliness (Goncu-Berk 2012:145). This could then relate back to the idea of prayer rugs as clean spaces to pray. It is important to note that the traditional color of Islam is green (Boulogne 2012:193). It can represent Paradise’s color, it’s connected to Mohammed, and can be seen as a healing color (Boulogne 2012:194). Thus, even used colors in these textiles link back to the Islamic faith and also Turkish identity.

## *Variability*

Perhaps the diversity of this country is reflected on the prayer rugs. By looking more closely at these selected Turkish prayer rugs, it is evident that there are patterns, but there is variability in the styles and shades of designs and colors used too. Each prayer rug is distinct in its own way. Denny notes that now and in the past Turkey (Anatolia) is diverse and a "...meeting place of many cultures... Ethnographically, Anatolia has been a melting-pot since the beginning of history, as Turk and Greek, Laz and Kurd, Armenian and Circassian, Arab and Jew formerly constituted the linguistic, ethnic, and cultural "mix" of Anatolia" (Denny 1973:7-8).

As stated above, each prayer rug has a niche symbol, with the exception of one prayer rug that has two niches that mirror each other. Ettinghausen discusses this sort of occurrence as a "counter-niche" and is related to laws of symmetry (Ettinghausen 1974:21). He further notes that there is often a lamp in one direction so the praying individual would know which way to face, but the lamp eventually has been placed on both ends for symmetry (Ettinghausen 1974:21). I believe this is the case with this rug because it looks as though there are two abstract lamps.

Some carpets include written script and figurative forms too. A prayer rug from The Textile Museum (TM1989.10.134) has Arabic (words and numbers) and what looks like a skeleton figure. The skeleton made me wonder why such a dark image would be on a prayer rug. It is located outside of the niche, so maybe it suggests human mortality outside of the ideologies of Heaven and life after death. Additionally, due to these two items on the right-hand side of the prayer rug, it is not symmetrical. A carpet may not always be symmetrical or perfect as Denny concludes. He says that sometimes an intentional design flaw is created and "...made by the weaver in order not to usurp the divine function of making perfect things, or to avoid the envy of

evil spirits” (Denny 1973:18). It would protect the carpet, so maybe that could be the reason for the skeleton as well.

One of these prayer rugs (TM1989.10.120) has Hebrew inscriptions and is not from the Islamic faith. This object was used in a religious setting outside of Islam in Judaism. It is noted to be an Ottoman *parokhet* in the form of a *sajjada* (Denny 2002:53). What I interpreted as a just a lamp figure is considered by Denny to be a *menorah* with 9 lamps hanging from it. The Hebrew inscription is noted to be translated as “This is the Gate of the Lord: Through it the Righteous Enter” from the book of Psalms CXVIII:20 (Denny 2002:53). Denny further emphasizes that this connection to a heaven gate is the same for Islam. Therefore, these two religions are connected through similar motifs and ideologies.

From the patterns and variabilities related to these objects, a connection to the immaterial, idealized world is created. The symbols go back to important beliefs in the Islamic faith. Even if these items are now removed from the religious realm, these symbols will always be woven on these prayer rugs. They act as a memory of a past religious role. With the color patterns that I was not expecting to find, it shows that color is even linked to ideologies and I argue helps support studying prayer rugs within the theory of materiality. For individuals who study these items or use them and have background knowledge on the Islamic faith, the sacred and religious nature of a prayer rug is evident. However, not only are these items created by human inspiration connected to this faith tradition and belief systems but they are also linked to other societal beliefs and ideas associated with its original location.

### *Dialectical Relationship: Prayer Rugs and Collectors*

Some of the primary sources from these museums’ archives and libraries display a dialectical relationship between the collectors and rugs. James F. Ballard personifies his

collected rugs in one letter "...they have become part of my soul...The human inspiration which created these rugs seems to have been imparted to them and they seemed conscious, as I shipped the others to you, of the impending separation" (James F. Ballard to the Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum, letter, 20 May 1922, James F. Ballard Archives, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). Although it is a little dramatic, it truly reveals how deeply he felt about these objects and how such an object could affect him by rugs' agency. Even though he collected them and it has never been mentioned if he was Muslim, the agency of these rugs influenced this individual's view of the rugs and created a connection between him and them.

Descriptions of some of James F. Ballard's collecting endeavors supplementary demonstrate a dialectical relationship. He traveled to various areas of the world to collect rugs and it allowed for "...the means of enveloping himself with the same exoticism he had long attached to rugs. Like them, he, himself, could now claim to have passed "through war riot, bloodshed," to have witnessed "robbery, pillage, and murder" (Farnham 2016:32). By traveling to these locations to find the carpets, he physically was reconnecting to the landscape and social interactions that were associated with these carpets. Through these travels, it may have made Ballard less of an outsider to these communities.

In the case of Arthur D. Jenkins, I came across examples of connections to the prayer rugs too. In one letter to Charles Grant Ellis, Jenkins discusses one of Ellis' rugs and addressing Ellis he says "Your wandering rug has finally rested and is now permanently located in Canada" (Arthur D. Jenkins to Mr. Charles Grant Ellis, letter, 11 May 1973, Arthur D. Jenkins' Letters Archives, The Textile Museum Arthur D. Jenkins Library, Washington, D.C.). The usage of his word choice such as "wandering" and "rested" implies to me a sense of agency to these items and that they are not viewed as passive objects. Another correspondence to Jenkins from Chief

Carpet-bagger (no further information on if he actually was a Carpet-bagger) shows how Jenkins valued his carpets “You told me in Washington very soberly that I had called your new prayer rug find a “play toy” or “plaything” in my letter. If you will look back in the files you will see I did no such thing. I did say it was a fun thing... I merely intended to indicate that I thought that it was an interesting piece that could give rise to lots of future discussion”

(Chief Carpet-bagger to Arthur D. Jenkins, letter, 30 June 1967, Arthur D. Jenkins’ Letters Archives, The Textile Museum Arthur D. Jenkins Library, Washington, D.C.). The fact that Jenkins would get upset about someone referring to one of these rugs as such depicts the important role these items played in his life and the value he personally places on them.

### *Conclusion*

From the findings in the museums, archives, and museum libraries, prayer rug agency is brought to the forefront. What I found at the museums in relation to patterns confirmed my prior research. These patterns and even colors hint to Islamic beliefs and cultural influences. From the collectors’ personal letters, there is a strong sense of value given to these items, and the collectors speak of them in a way that reveals these items agency.

This research brings a new perspective on prayer rug studies. From prior research, the relationship between prayer rugs and individuals has been studied in relation to their first functional usage of prayer. However, I have not come across any text with a focus on the relationship of these items outside of the religious realm. Therefore, this research is not only beneficial due to highlighting agency, but also shedding light in ways prayer rugs can have a dialectical relationship to individuals even outside of their original indented usage within the Islamic faith.

### *Future Research Suggestions*

Due to the nature of this research, some aspects within my argument were not able to be addressed in my research after my background research. Since these particular prayer rugs are already in museums, I could not address their prior religious usages. As a result, I did not ask questions to individuals who would use these items for prayer. I also could not address how viewers and museum workers interpret them or are affected by them since I did not acquire an Institutional Review Board for this research.

To make this research more comprehensive for future related work, attaining an Institutional Review Board will be vital. The ability to interview museum workers or museum visitors would enable a broader understanding of these items. Although I would not be able to interview individuals who necessarily used these particular rugs for prayer since they are from multiple centuries ago, I believe it would still be useful to interview Muslims who do use a prayer rug for praying too. It would allow me to attain primary sources for how they use, view, and interpret these items. Another aspect that could further be developed would be to add more background research on the relationship of Turkey with the United States in the social, cultural, and commercial realms. Lastly, the archives and libraries were great resources for both of these collectors but going to the collectors' hometowns could be effective if there was more written history on these individuals and how they attained these rugs more specifically.

However, with the aspects that I was able to address such as motifs, patterns, and some accounts of the collectors themselves, I was able to still argue prayer rugs' agency. From primary sources for Arthur D. Jenkins and James F. Ballard, it is clear that prayer rugs were important objects to them and that the connection between material and human was dialectic. The motifs depict the lack of a separation between the sacred and profane and establishes that often assumed dichotomies are false. By looking at the multiple dimensions of prayer rugs through usage,

motifs, and trying to analyze them in different contexts, their overall agency and roles are emphasized.

## WORKS CITED

Al Khemir, Sabiha

2012 Pattern. In *Beauty and Belief: Crossing Bridges of the Arts of Islamic Culture*, Brigham Young University Museum of Art, Provo, Utah, 144-189.

Bayriyeva, Ajap

2014 Magic and belief in sacral force of prayer rugs. In *Handmade Prayer Carpet Through History*. Islamic Cooperation Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture, Istanbul, Turkey, 55-92.

Basaran, Musa

2014 Anatolian Kilims and Prayer Rugs. In *Handmade Prayer Carpet Through History*. Islamic Cooperation Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture, Istanbul, Turkey, 93-141.

Breck, Joseph and Frances Morris

1923. *The James F. Ballard Collection of Oriental Rugs*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York.

Boulogne, Stepanie Karine

2012 Glass Bracelets in the Medieval and Early Modern Middle East: Design and Color as Identity Markets. In *The Materiality of Color*. Ashgate Publishing Company, Burlington, VT, 185-198.

Denny, Walter

1973 Anatolian Rugs: An Essay on Method. In *The Textile Museum Journal 3:3*. Washington, D.C., 7-26.

Denny, Walter and Thomas J. Farnham

2016 The Ballard Collection in Context. In *The Carpet and the Connoisseur: the James F. Ballard collection of Oriental rugs*. edited by HALI Publications Limited, London, UK. 36-50.

Denny, Walter and Thomas J. Farnham

2016b Catalogue. In *The Carpet and the Connoisseur: the James F. Ballard collection of Oriental rugs*. edited by HALI Publications Limited, London, UK. 52-209.

Denny, Walter B. with contributions by Sumru Belger Krody

2003 *The Classical Tradition of Anatolian Carpets*. The Textile Museum. Washington, D.C.

- Denny, Walter  
2014 Introduction. In *How to Read Islamic Carpets*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY. 9-14.
- Denny, Walter  
2014b Stylistic Evolutions. In *How to Read Islamic Carpets*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY. 31-53.
- Eiland, Murray L.  
rug and carpet -- Britannica Academic. <https://academic-eb-com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/levels/collegiate/article/rug-and-carpet/108348>, accessed November 2, 2018.
- Ettinghausen, Richard  
1974 The Early History, Use and Iconography of the Prayer Rug. In *Prayer Rugs*. The Textile Museum, Washington, D.C. 10-30.
- Ettinghausen, Richard  
1974a Turkish Prayer Rugs. In *Prayer Rugs*. The Textile Museum, Washington, D.C., 26-30.
- Farnham, Thomas J.  
2016 Ballard the Collector. In *The Carpet and the Connoisseur: The James F. Ballard Collection of Oriental Rugs*. Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, Missouri, 12-35.
- Fraser, Lydia  
2015 Arthur D. Jenkins: *the man behind the red doors*. In R. John Howe: Textile and Text: Virtual Versions of Textile Museum “Rug and Textile Appreciation Morning” Programs. The Textile Museum.
- Gamzatova, P. R.  
1999 “The Functions of the Prayer Rug in the Culture of Islam” In *The Arabist: Budapest studies in Arabic 21-22*. Proceedings of the Arabic and Islamic Sections of the 35<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Asian and North American Studies (ICANAS), Budapest, Hungary, 287-295.
- Gruber, Christiane  
2015 The Koran Does Not Forbid Images of the Prophet.  
<https://www.newsweek.com/koran-does-not-forbid-images-prophet-298298>, accessed March 1, 2020.

Lewis, G. Griffin

1914 The Prayer Rug. In *The Mystery of the Oriental Rug*, J. B. Lippincott Company, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 31-44.

Hannan Leonie and Sarah Longair

2017 Approaches to the material world. In *History Through Material Culture*. Manchester University Press, Manchester, England. 15-42.

Jenkins, Arthur, D.

1981 The Exciting World of Collecting. In *Flat Woven Textiles: The Arthur D. Jenkins Collection*. edited by Cathryn Cootner, The Textile Museum, Washington, D.C. 11-17.

Jirousek, Charlotte A. and Catterall, Sara

2019 The Eighteenth Century: An Expanding World. In *Ottoman Dress and Design in the West: A Visual History of Cultural Exchange*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 146-185.

Jirousek, Charlotte A. and Catterall, Sara

2019 The Nineteenth Century: Empires Bloom and Fade. In *Ottoman Dress and Design in the West: A Visual History of Cultural Exchange*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 186-215.

Goncu-Berk, Gozde

2012 Exploring the Colors of Turkish Culture. In *Color and Design*. edited by Marilyn Delong and Barbara Martinson. Berg. New York, NY. 141-149.

Helfgott, Leonard M.

1994. From Palace to Parlor: The West's Oriental Obsession. In *Ties that Bind: A Social History of the Iranian Carpet*. Edited by Jenelle Walthour. The Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.

Helfgott, Leonard M.

1994. Introduction: The Carpet as a Historical Object. In *Ties that Bind: A Social History of the Iranian Carpet*. Edited by Jenelle Walthour. The Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.

Maarouf, Nazeih Taleb

2014 Handmade Prayer Carpet Through History. In *Handmade prayer carpet through history*. OIC Research Center for Islamic History, Art, and Culture, Istanbul, Turkey, 1-54.

- Marcuson, Alan  
2007 "When is a Prayer Rug not a Prayer Rug". In *HALL: Carpet, Textile and Islamic Art* 152(2):101-105.
- Meskel, Lynn  
2005 Introduction: Object Orientations. In *Archaeologies of Materiality*. edited by Lynn Meskel. Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Malden, MA. 1-18.
- Meyer, Birgit and Dick Houtman  
2012 Introduction- Material Religion- How Things Matter, In *Things: Religion and the Question of Materiality*. Fordham University Press, New York, NY, 1-26.
- Moallem, Mino  
2018. Introduction. In *Persian Carpets: The Nation as a Transnational Commodity*. Routledge, New York, NY, 1-26.
- Moallem, Mino  
2018a. Transnational Orientalia and Civilizational Commodities. In *Persian Carpets: The Nation as a Transnational Commodity*. Routledge, New York, NY, 46-72.
- Morgan, David  
2017 Material analysis and the study of religion. In *Materiality and the Study of Religion*, edited by Tim Hutchings and Joanne McKenzie. Routledge, New York, NY, 14-32.
- Paine, Crispin  
2013 *Religious Objects in Museums: Private Lives and Public Duties*. Bloomsbury, London.
- Said, Edward W.  
1994 Knowing the Orient. In *Orientalism*. Random House, Inc., New York. 31-49.
- Schilbrack, Kevin  
2019 The Material Turn in the Academic Study of Religions. *The Journal of Religion* 99(2):219-227.
- Shreve Simpson, Marianna

2011 Why Red is my Name: An Introductory Inquiry. In *And Diverse Are Their Hues: Color in Islamic Art and Culture*. Edited by Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair. Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 271-304.

Turkhan, Kudret H.

1968 General Background. In *Islamic Rugs*, edited by Lynne Thornton, London and Prescott: C Tinling & Co. Ltd., Liverpool, England, 17-36.

Wallace, Sandra

2011 The material in archaeological theory. In *Contradictions of Archaeological Theory: Engaging critical realism and archaeological theory*. Routledge, New York, NY. 107-125.

Zipper, Kurt and Claudia Fritzsche

1989 A Classification of the Turkish Carpet. In *Oriental Rugs: Volume 4 Turkish*, the Antique Collectors' Club Ltd., Battenberg Verlag, Munich, Germany. 30-36.

## Appendix A



**Figure 1. TM1989.10.76**

## Appendix B



**Figure 2. TM1989.10.77**

### Appendix C



Figure 3. TM1989.10.79

### Appendix D



Figure 4: TM1989.10.116

**Appendix E**



**Figure 5. TM1989.10.88**

**Appendix F**



**Figure 6. TM1989.10.138**

## Appendix G



Figure 7. TM1989.10.120

## Appendix H



Figure 8. TM1989.10.129

**Appendix I**



**Figure 9. TM1989.10.127**

**Appendix J**



**Figure 10. TM1961.39.4**

**Appendix K**



**Figure 11. TM1989.10.134**

**Appendix L**



**Figure 12. TM1989.10.80**

## Appendix M



Figure 13. TM1961.39.19

## Appendix N



Figure 14. MET22.100.96

**Appendix O**



**Figure 15. MET22.100.80**

**Appendix P**



**Figure 16. MET22.100.78**

## Appendix Q



Figure 17. MET22.100.61

## Appendix R



Figure 18. MET22.100.63

**Appendix S**



**Figure 19. MET22.100.83**

Appendix T



Figure 20. MET22.100.22

Appendix U



Figure 21: MET22.100.24