



— = old trade routes

MONGOLIA

EAST TURKESTAN  
(HSINKIANG)

CHINA

TIBET

INDIA

SOVIET UNION

West Turkestan

PERSIA (Iran)

AFGHANISTAN

PAKISTAN

INDIA

KASHMIR

NEPAL

Bhutan

East Pakistan

BURMA

LAOS

VIETNAM

HONGKONG

TASCHKENT

SAMARKAND

HERAT

KABUL

KANDAHAR

DELHI

Ganges

Narbada

Yahmaputra

Yahmaputra

Mekong

Jangsekiang

Sikiang

Kashmir

Indus

Salledsch

Indus

TURFAN

HAMI

ANHSI

NING-HSIA

KANSU

LANTSCHOU

NINGHSIA

PAOTOU

PEKING

SUIYUAN

Manchuria

Selenga

Kenulen

Lena

Jeluy

Ob

Irush

Syr-Darya

Syr-Darya

Amu-Darya

Amu-Darya

HANS BIDDER

# Carpets from Eastern Turkestan

KNOWN AS KHOTAN,  
SAMARKAND  
AND KANSU CARPETS

VERLAG ERNST WASMUTH  
TÜBINGEN

Translated by Grace Marjory Allen

Dedicated to my wife  
in remembrance of happy days  
H. B.

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## PREFACE

The carpets of East Turkestan and Kansu, which are being woven even today, principally in the Khotan oasis, are still beset by ignorance and error in literature on this subject. Designated in the west as 'Samarkand' and treated in the east as 'Kansu' carpets, they are attributed by an overwhelming majority of experts to Chinese craftwork or, more rarely to the Turkoman-Bokhara art of carpet weaving. As yet no exhaustive study of these carpets has been made and the aim of this work is therefore to elucidate and clarify the subject.

My collection owes much to the carpet dealers Sammy Yukuan Lee and David Techun Wang who, over the years, informed me of caravans arriving from the west, laden with carpets. For a whole generation members of their families lived in Kalgan where they looked out for woolen goods coming along the Samarkand route via the Province of Kansu. Yukuan Lee is indebted for his nick-name 'Samarkand' to his habit of talking of the old Samarkand silk road often. My close acquaintance with the families Lee and Wang sprang up from our joint evaluations of the carpets.

The total ignorance about the carpets of East Turkestan which I encountered in China and among the Chinese astounded me. It is no exaggeration to say that in 1925 when I first began to concern myself with these carpets in Peking, there was not a single Chinese art collector, antique dealer, carpet manufacturer or caravan leader *capable of giving authoritative information on their origins or on their designs*. And at this time, it must be remembered, 'Kansu carpets' were by no means rarities.

But even worse was to come; one day a dealer brought me a quarter of a precious old Khotan carpet which seemed to have been roughly hacked away. It transpired that four brothers had been dividing up their deceased father's property, and not wishing that any one of them should inherit the whole carpet, they had cut the magnificent object into

four pieces and used them as protective padding under their bedrolls. Subsequently I heard of, or experienced personally, many similar cases. They demonstrated a total lack of innate appreciation in the Chinese for the carpet as a work of art, as well as a practical understanding of it as an element in domestic habitation.

The behaviour of the individual in this matter was explained by the general attitude of China towards the art of carpet weaving in Turkestan. China had conquered East Turkestan as long ago as 1763 but had done nothing at all to foster this non-Chinese branch of the craft native to this area.

The new power in the land, the "China of the 18 Provinces" could offer no substitute for the connoisseurship and patronage of the banished native Princes and Hodjas, and the inspiration and commissions of the then more affluent native society, themselves well versed in the craft, under whom the Khotan carpet had reached a high degree of artistic perfection. Nevertheless, this art of handicraft continues to demonstrate its resilience even though – as elsewhere in the Orient – growing signs of deterioration are becoming evident as a result of the invention of synthetic dyes and the corrupting influence of foreign tastes.

If one wished to preserve the once so abundant carpet designs, the precious inheritance of Khotan's almost 2000-year long history, then it was high time to begin a collection of Khotan carpets – or at least of their decorative motifs. The authentic old carpet textiles were growing more and more rare, while – as travellers and visitors to Khotan constantly complained – the influence of Chinese motifs and of European colours were beginning to predominate in the Khotan workshops.

Since no sources of information on the history and nature of this artistic genre existed in original East Turkestan writings, it had to be ascertained whether, in consequence of China's 2000-year long contact with Central Asia, accounts of the manufacture of these carpets had found their way

into Chinese literature. The results of these studies are set down here in the pages of this work.

So far as European literature can be quoted in regard to the last centuries of the dying Middle Ages and the modern period, I believe no significant contribution has been overlooked. An index to the European and Chinese literature used is given at the end of this book.

In my studies of the relevant Chinese sources I have had the untiring support of my friend Wu Feng-p'ei, who is engaged in research on Chinese historical documents relating to Mongolia, Tibet and Central Asia. He advised and guided me in procuring the extensive literature, particularly the Chinese works on East Turkestan which have been written since 1763. I wish to express my most sincere gratitude to Mr. Wu Feng-p'ei for the help, which out of friendship and academic interest, he has afforded me for more than 20 years. For the treatment of the texts themselves, their translation and evaluation, I take sole responsibility.

The illustrations of Khotan carpets included in this work are almost exclusively of carpets in my own collection. Unfortunately in 1940 I took the best 25 carpets back with me to Germany in order to have colour plates prepared for this book. Before this could be done in the conditions prevailing in wartime I was recalled to China and was unable to put the carpets into safe keeping. At the end of the war they were all stolen from my home in Dahlem, Berlin, so that in this present selection I have, to my great regret, been unable to include the best examples for my purpose.

The use of Chinese and Arabian characters in quotations from Chinese and Eastern Turkish sources, or for certain expressions, and the names of authors was unfortunately not possible because of the prohibitive printing costs. I have kept to them, however, in my private manuscript.

Finally I wish to point out that this study relates only to conditions prevailing up to 1939.