

For 40 years a veritable river of tribal art and nomadic craft has flowed through the doors of The Nomads Tent, coming great distances on boats, planes, trucks and trains from around the world. Wise people have come from far and wide to enlighten us with rich and important information. Our ears and hearts have been delighted and often moved by music. The makers of art and craft have shared their skills in hands on workshops.

And though we are rooted in the warehouse in St Leonards Lane, hundreds of enterprising homeowners have hosted our legendary Road Shows, ensuring The Nomads Tent has ventured all over the UK. So our sincere and heartfelt thanks goes to our many customers, friends and visitors who have sustained us for 40 years.

And for the next chapter, stay tuned. Connect with us on Facebook and Instagram, subscribe to our email for news and future events.

Andrew Haughton

Featured in this edition of Nomads News:

- * Rufus Reade casts an eye back over 4 decades of The Nomads Tent, how it all began, and an enduring friendship between The Nomads Tent and our agent in Iran, Abbas Rahimi.
- * Dorothy Armstrong interviews Jennifer Scarce on her tenure as curator at the NMS, with particular reference to the 1980's Edinburgh NMS exhibition; *Lion Rugs of Fars*.
- * Details of Rufus' upcoming tour with The Nomads Tent's very own Andrew Haughton.

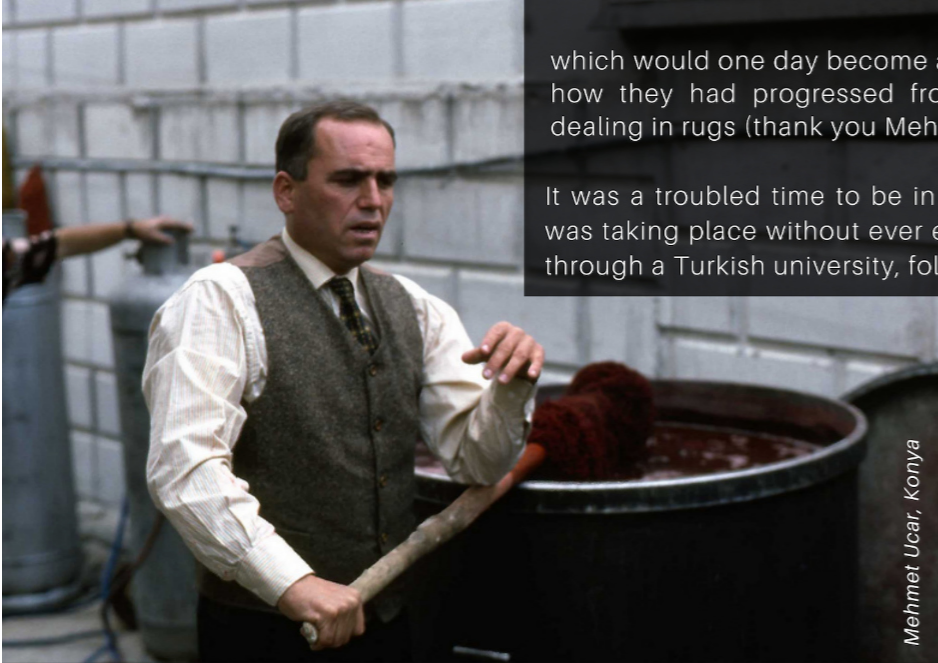
A Merchant Reflects: Turkey and Iran

Rufus Reade celebrates the help and friendship of dealers in Turkey and Iran, focusing on Abbas Rahimi in Tehran.

In January 1983, I packed my old posties' bag (a relic of my six months working in the Oxford Royal Mail sorting office), bought an air ticket to Istanbul, and caught the sleeper to Euston. I thought I was going out to buy rugs, but actually I was going out to meet people!

Looking back at my career as a rug dealer, it's mainly the people from my travels that I recall, with those endless glasses of tea, the conversations and the meals when the day was done. Of course some rugs were memorable but it was my interactions with the dealers which now come to mind. There were rogues, and one of them got murdered; there were rogues who were charming but bad at paying bills who died in road accidents; but mostly the merchants were decent folk making a living as best they could whilst inflation (particularly in Turkey) and foreign dealers' tendency to delay settling bills, eroded the price they sold their rugs for.

Some have remained friends long after the last rug was bundled up and sent to us in Edinburgh. One or two were more artists than dealers: these men (and in those days they were all men) perhaps hold the highest point of my affection. As the supply of old rugs began to dwindle, they turned their artistry to making new rugs



Mehmet Ucar, Konya

which would one day become antiques: they would tell me their life stories, how they had progressed from selling vegetables from a hand cart to dealing in rugs (thank you Mehmet, in Konya).

It was a troubled time to be in Turkey in the early '80s. A civil war of sorts was taking place without ever earning such a label. Some dealers had been through a Turkish university, followed by a career as a teacher (I'm thinking of Munir in Konya). But when the students challenged them; "If you write on the blackboard on the left, are you a Communist?", they knew that a merchant's life might suit them better than a bullet in the head

Some of the dealers, as I said, were rogues. Let me tell you about the rogue I liked most. He is no longer with us. He was called Nahit Kanig; when he learnt that my

that my wife and I were not long married he insisted on paying for us to have two nights in the best hotel in Sultan Ahmet. When the Soviet Union collapsed he was one of the band of Turkish dealers who crossed into Georgia in search of rugs, offering hard cash in exchange for Caucasian rugs, which in Europe we had seldom seen, and not generally available on the market.

It was exciting frontier-trade, and only the brave ventured across the border, no doubt bribing hungry officials near Batumi. But even rogues can get corrupted and Nahit developed a reputation of not paying his bills. I hadn't seen him for ages when I heard that he'd died in a car accident on one of the Bosphorus Bridges. Perhaps he made the mistake of believing that the rugs (and the profit) were the most important part of trade: of course it was the people you trade with that are the ones who matter most!

One such merchant, who became a friend is Abbas Rahimi. He walked into The Nomads Tent, many years ago and suggested we might like to work with him in Iran. I jumped at the invitation and flew out to Tehran, to begin a relationship which has now spanned two and half decades.

"Abbas had to teach me everything about working in Iran. It's a culture where trade is revered."

Abbas and his wife lived in northern Tehran with their daughter. So each day began with a tedious journey to the bazaar along what I christened the longest car park in the world. But Abbas and I never tired of conversation, beginning with when we were both, unbeknownst to each other, at Manchester University in the early 1970s.

Through little stories, Abbas showed me how to behave in the market: one tale involved another buyer who arrived fresh from London. The young Englishman would be shown one rug after another and indicated which rugs he was rejecting from his shortlist by kicking them aside with his foot. Abbas took him aside and explained that this disdain for the rejected rugs was making him no friends, since he was showing no respect for the objects of the trade.

In another incident, I brought a Turkish friend along, and he seemed to be doing great business. But once again I had missed the finer points of dealing as Abbas explained my Turkish friend was bargaining too aggressively. He would be allowed to trade on this occasion (as a courtesy to Abbas), but when he returned to buy again, he would be told that the rugs in the shop had all been sold. There would be no loss of face, no explanation that he'd been rude. Quite simply he'd be turned away. My Turkish friend was appalled when he was told this, and amended his ways immediately!



Abbas Rahimi

The Iranians are a deeply courteous people, as these two stories illustrate. I understood no Farsi when I arrived, and quickly learnt from Abbas things like numbers and colours, forms of address on arrival and departure. But I was always puzzled hearing Abbas on the phone. I could hear a phrase often being repeated. I tried to memorise the sound of what sounded like a formula, and asked him what it meant. "Ah!" he said, "I am speaking to a man who is my senior - that is to say older than me, and the phrase I am using can be translated as 'I sacrifice myself to you'."

"Manners maketh the man!"

The rewards of travelling with Abbas were great, despite his love of tobacco, and his adaptation to my needs so generous that living with the smoke seemed a small exchange for everything he was doing for me. In Tabriz one day, about 5 in the afternoon, I said to Abbas that I badly needed a cup of tea. We drove to an undistinguished café set just below ground level and went down the steps to a poorly lit room. As my eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, I realised that groups of men sat at tables were all smoking hookahs/narghiles. As they took us in, each group rose in turn to shake our hands. This seemed very courteous and I assumed that it was because we were from out of town. But as locals arrived, the process was repeated, and it was now our turn to stand and shake hands with the newly arrived. There was no requirement to make conversation, just to say hello and shake hands.

Abbas was generous with his time. I visited Iran with two objectives: to buy carpets for The Nomads Tent, and to explore the country with a view to bringing back tour groups. So after our buying budget was exhausted, I would suggest to Abbas that we go on to a new town so that I could explore.

After finishing my buying in Shiraz, on my suggestion, we found a taxi to take us to the site of Cyrus' tomb in Pasargad. This to my mind is one of the great sites in the world. An important ruler, and a relatively humble tomb: it says so much about the man! When we got back to the taxi driver, we found him in the shade of a tree, where he'd spread out a simple picnic breakfast. I knew we'd found the right man for the next job. We asked if he'd be prepared to drive us the next day from Shiraz to Isfahan; a 10-hour drive.

He picked us up the following day, and insisted we drive past his house where he loaded up the boot. Late morning as we passed some pastures around which men were threshing, we stopped for a late breakfast. From the boot he pulled out a primus stove, plates, glasses, and the wherewithal for another picnic. I eventually got up to photograph the men who were threshing the wheat, and as I walked back I could see our driver walking about with a net on the end of a bamboo cane. I thought he might be catching fish to add to our meal, but on his return he explained that he was catching butterflies for a Swiss collector who visited annually!

It was Abbas's ability to allow these adventures that made him such good company. Amongst the carpet dealers he played a quiet role, supporting my decisions, but never being loud or bombastic, never interfering except perhaps to point out a bit of damage I might have missed. At the end of the selection process when the deal was almost done, he'd enquire what sort of discount was now possible on the bale of selected rugs. A new figure emerged, and with that we'd bid our 'xodâfez', and leave. No money changed hands. He was trusted, I was trusted. The rugs from the various dealers would be assembled in one shop, and then sent to Tehran where I could review my selection at the end of my time in Iran. At this point unwanted rugs could be returned, and then my selection, from all over Iran, would be gathered together and flown to the UK. Only once they were with us did they have to be paid for. He had merely been behaving in Iran as he would in Turkey, where gentle manners in negotiation are defined quite differently.



Abbas Rahimi

Travelling in this way, the length and breadth of Iran was a wonderful experience of hospitality. We'd usually fly the longer distances, or Abbas would drive. On one occasion we had lunch with Abbas's friends in Yazd. They were very gung-ho about the need to check-in for the flight to Mashad and urged me to linger longer than we should. By the time we had reached the airport, the passengers were on the tarmac walking out to the plane, the airline desk was closed, and staff milling around were not sympathetic to a late check-in.

Disconsolately we returned to the taxi rank and asked the drivers what they'd charge for a 910 km drive to Mashad.

They quoted £35, so we accepted the seemingly bargain price for a taxi who'd have to cover nearly two thousand kilometres to return home. The driver who'd most recently put fresh oil in his engine was selected for the job.

The journey from Yazd to Mashad is across mostly uninhabited desert, and it was now late in the afternoon. We stopped at a small shop to buy biscuits and water and then, as the sun was beginning to set, we headed northeast. Around midnight the driver admitted to Abbas that he really needed to sleep, so Abbas took over without any fuss and we continued our progress: until Abbas clipped an unlikely kerb in the wilderness and burst the back tyre.

The tyre was soon changed for a very bald cousin and we finally got into Mashad as it was beginning to get light and checked into our beds not long before the hotel began serving breakfast. It was almost worth missing the flight for such a drive.

Abbas was really an exceptional man for rising to each challenge I set him. I asked him on several occasions if we could visit real nomadic settlements. Abbas, never one to be deterred, agreed that we'd go in search of nomadic black tents in the Zagros Mountains, north-west of Shiraz.

We chanced upon a Q'ashq'ai tent where we were warmly welcomed by an elderly lady, the tent's sole inhabitant, and invited to come inside for a glass of tea. Discarding our shoes at the tent entrance we sat down on her rugs and noted the distinctive layout of the tent, a dyke of bedding forming a back wall behind which untidy things were kept out of sight.

On another visit Abbas took me to meet a Bakhtiari family, the advance guard of the famous Bakhtiari migration, in their tent where, unbothered about head coverings for women, a young woman decided she was to be my guide showing me every aspect of their nomadic life, including the portable loom they used to make their distinctive 'piano keys' coats.

“So there you have it! Abbas: a real friend, guide, and companion; a fellow enthusiast of the tribal rug tradition; extremely modest and undemanding, and faithful to The Nomads Tent. I hope the relationship continues!”



Mehmet Ucar discussing wool dyes.



All photos by Rufus Reade

Persian Lions in Edinburgh

Jennifer Scarce, historian and former Principal Curator of the Middle East collections of the National Museums of Scotland in conversation with Dorothy Armstrong, Beattie Fellow in Carpet Studies, Oxford.

In late 1980, Edinburgh hosted an unusual gathering of objects and people. The centrepiece was an exhibition at the National Museums of Scotland, 'Lion Rugs of Fars', from the collection of celebrated Iranian artist Parviz Tanavoli. Lion rugs are now widely appreciated as tribal art but were then little known, and the Edinburgh exhibition was the first time they had been shown in Britain. The show was timed to coincide with 1980's Edinburgh Festival, and alongside it NMS also held a symposium, 'Tribal Rugs and Costumes of Iran'. At the centre of both the exhibition and symposium, was Jennifer Scarce, formerly Principal Curator at the National Museums of Scotland, and friend of the Nomads Tent. This article is the result of conversations between Jennifer and Dorothy and sets out to evoke the moment when Persian lions came to Edinburgh.

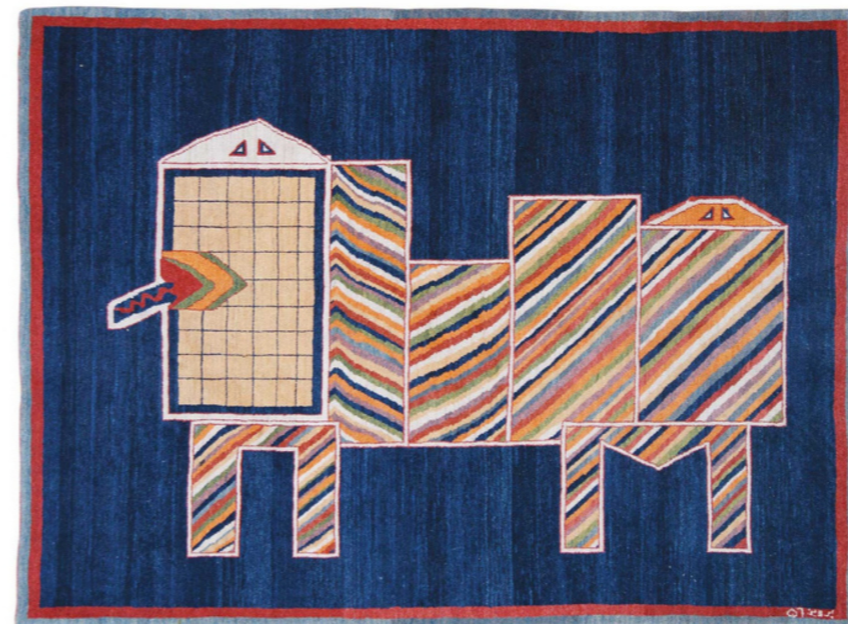
In the 1970s Jennifer made regular field trips to Iran, collecting for the National Museums of Scotland. She was part of a community of British scholars researching amongst nomadic and settled Qashqai, Shahsavani and Kurdish groups. The community included Jenny Housego, who like Jennifer was working on textiles, and Peter Andrews, who was surveying the architecture of nomadic tents. These British researchers came into contact with the vibrant contemporary arts scene in 1970s Iran, where Jennifer met Parviz Tanavoli.

Born in 1937, Parviz was already an important sculptor and painter and had a strong interest in his country's cultural heritage. In 1973 he had founded the Tehran Rug Society, where he organised regular exhibitions of tribal textiles. During the 1970s he too travelled to Iranian tribal areas to collect rugs. Carpet-weaving worked its way into his imagination and he began designing carpets himself.

His work helped kick off the contemporary movement amongst North African and Middle Eastern artists to rethink the traditions of the craft. Internationally renowned figures such as Faig Ahmed and Mona Hatoum now design carpets.



Qashqai, late 19th century, 195 x 122cm, wool (From Parviz Tanavoli, 'Lion Rugs', 1985, Catalogue number 33, p.101)

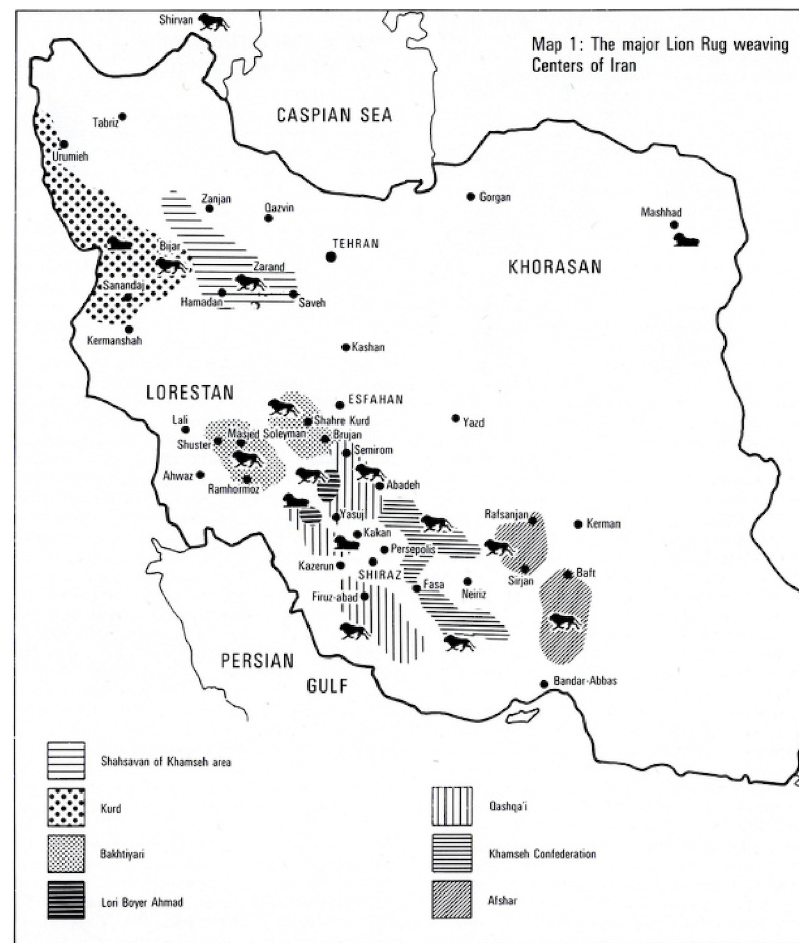


Parviz Tanavoli, 'Lion on Blue Ground', wool, Bijar weave, 1977 (Meem Gallery, Dubai) Source: Meem Gallery <http://www.payvand.com/news/13/jan/1069.html>

A particular feature of Parviz' collecting was his interest in the figure of the lion in the art and culture of Iran, which he explored in two books, the *Lion Rugs of Fars* (1978) and *The Lion in the Art and Culture of Iran* (1985). In these, he describes the importance of the lion as a symbol of virility and courage in the face of danger, but also of the nomad's skills in surviving the harsh physical challenges of tribal life. He explains that a lion rug protects the tent and the family within it, offering 'a tribute to the brave men in whose honour they were woven, and to the women who wove them with such love'. Parviz focused his investigations into lion rugs made by the nomadic pastoral communities of Fars in southwest Iran, and particularly by the Qashqai.

He explains that until the mid-twentieth century, lions were still found in the thickets of Fars, hunting the wild boar, mountain goats and rams which populated the province. They were a fearsome living presence until the 1940s and a powerful imaginative presence after that.

Although there are mentions of lion rugs in literary texts dating as far back as the 12th century CE, the oldest surviving rugs date back only to the last two centuries. On the basis of his fieldwork and collection, Parviz offers a structure for thinking about these two hundred years of lion rugs. As always with rug taxonomies, there are a great many overlaps and ambiguities, but he identifies carpet families of lions with manes, lions inspired by stone lions, the lion and sun, the lion and lioness, and the lion pride. Even where the carpets show common design elements, the range of styles and levels of accomplishment is wide. The lion is an example of a folk-art motif which lends itself to the imagination and skills of a rich diversity of weavers.



The major lion rug weaving centres of Iran (From Parviz Tanavoli, 'Lion Rugs', 1985, p45)

At the end of the 70s, Iran entered a period of significant change. In 1979 the Shah was deposed, and a new religious government put in place. Interactions between Iran and the West became more difficult both at the political and at the personal level. New barriers to travel both to and within Iran made it difficult to organise field trips like those of the 1970s, when British scholars like Jennifer Scarce and Iranian researchers and artists had travelled and mingled freely. At the same time, the Iranian Revolution profoundly changed the lives and work of many Iranian artists, including Parviz Tanavoli himself. In 1979 he resigned as Head of Sculpture at Tehran University, and ultimately settled with his family in Vancouver.

Parviz acted quickly to move his collection of around forty lion rugs out of Iran, after an exhibition of them planned in Shiraz for 1979 was cancelled as a result of the revolution.

He sent them instead to Australia, where they were displayed for a year. Parviz' lion rugs had become refugees. It was against this turbulent background that the Edinburgh 'Lion Rugs of Fars' exhibition was organised and held.

In Scotland, Jennifer took the opportunity to organise an exhibition of the rugs. Two important barriers to holding loan exhibitions in major museums are constraints on space and the condition of the exhibits. Fortunately, National Museums of Scotland had a space allocated to temporary exhibitions and Parviz' lion rugs were in good condition, suitable for display. Furthermore, the exhibition could be linked to the Edinburgh Festival and related to its publicity, at that time an objective for the Museum.



Qashqai, early 19th century, 144 x 84cm, wool (From Parviz Tanavoli, 'Lion Rugs', 1985, p.99 cat no 32)



Qashqai, early 19th century, wool 144 x 84cm, (From Parviz Tanavoli, 'Lion Rugs', 1985, p.99 cat no 32)

the effort and determination involved in making all this happen. No catalogues of the exhibition or published records of the symposium remain, although there are archival records in Edinburgh and Oxford.

Edinburgh and the National Museums of Scotland have a long-standing relationship with Iran. Central to this is Robert Murdoch Smith (1835-1900), a Royal Engineer and later one of the earliest directors of what would in time become the National Museum of Scotland. He was one of the many Scots who left home for British service overseas, spending decades working for the Persian Telegraph Department, ultimately as Director from 1865 to 1885. Murdoch Smith developed a love for Persian material culture and art, which he collected for both the Victoria and Albert Museum and the National Museums of Scotland, creating the core of their collections. After his retirement from Persian service in 1885 and from the army in 1887, with the honorary rank of Major-General and the award of a Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George (KCMG) in the New Year Honours List of 1888, he served as Director of the National Museums of Scotland until his death in 1900. Almost a century later, the 1980 exhibition of Parviz Tanavoli's Persian lions forged another link in the chain which connects Edinburgh and the museums and universities of Scotland with Iran.

Collaborating closely with the museum's designers, and following the groupings which Parviz had established, Jennifer put the Persian lions on display in Edinburgh to an appreciative local and international Festival audience. The Scotsman correspondent wrote on August 19, 1980:

“ These rugs cast a spell that is quite irresistible, and this is not solely due to the blaze of exotic romanticism they generate, but also to the human element in their making so that each design is touchingly different and amusingly personal. ”

The Sunday Times was equally enthusiastic on August 24th, calling them 'the most appealing and vivid collection of tribal rugs.' Jennifer remembers the impact of a specific piece - a tiny lion alone in a great field of vibrant red. Parviz himself wrote of this carpet 'the lion is solitary and alone, lost in an immense plain, his only companion the star that can be seen above him. Is this a picture of the last living lion?'. Ultimately, the rugs stayed for six months in Edinburgh, before moving on to further exhibitions in Europe and America.

Alongside the exhibition, Jennifer organised a scholarly symposium, *Tribal rugs and Costumes of Iran*. The speakers were leading scholars, including Parviz Tanavoli himself, May Beattie, Jon Thompson, and Jenny Housego, all then doing important new work on Middle Eastern, Central and South Asian carpets, with Jennifer contributing her equally ground-breaking work on Iranian costume.

The symposium filled the 200-person lecture theatre at the National Museums of Scotland with an audience which included some of the most senior scholars of the Middle East, for example Professor Nikki Keddie, then the doyenne of historians of Iran in the United States. Jennifer now surveys after more than forty years



Qashqai, Lori, mid-19th century, wool, 207 x 120 cm (From Parviz Tanavoli, 'Lion Rugs', 1985, p135, cat no 61)

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Rufus Reade Tours

Looking out from the Galata Tower - Istanbul



TURKEY

OCTOBER 2023 WITH RUFUS READE AND ANDREW HAUGHTON

This tour is the culmination (perhaps) of over forty years of travelling to this fascinating country. The theme has usually been a search for lovely rugs, but sometimes the ruins have taken the upper hand. Join Andrew Haughton of The Nomads Tent, and Rufus Reade as they look at the sometimes overlapping histories of Anatolia, Byzantium, and Turkey: Anatolia means Land of the Mother, so this is the cradle in which the worship of the mother goddess ripened, and where Christianity developed, later joined by Islam. Somewhere into this cultural mix arrived the most wonderful weavings: we will see some superb carpet collections in Konya and Istanbul, and there will be opportunities to buy kilims, carpets and tribal bags in Cappadocia, Konya and Istanbul. But we will also spend time looking at ruins from the Hittite, Byzantine, Selcuk and Ottoman period as well as the very early site at Çatalhöyük. The tour is not designed as purely a rug tour, but as something broader, and hopefully richer!

Visit rufusreadetours.com for the full itinerary or contact rufusreade@blueyonder.co.uk.

2024 TOURS:

March 2024 - Bhutan seen from the east.

November 2024 - Japan: Buddhism, ceramics and an Aberdonian!

Moths! Detection & Prevention

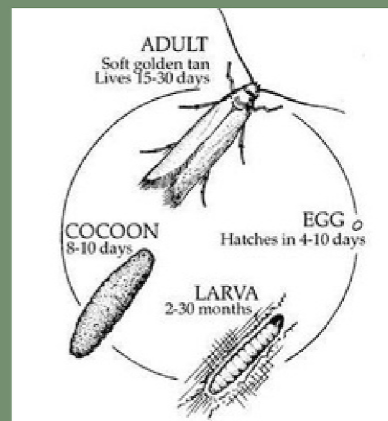
Tineola bisselliella has a lot to answer for. Thousands of rugs and carpets, not to mention other woollen items, are destroyed every year by the tiniest little pest in our homes, the common clothes moth.

The clothes moth is a very small moth with a wingspan of around 14mm and body length of about 8mm. They are active mostly between April and October (depending on your location). They feed on animal fibres and hair, bird nests, fur, clothing, carpets and upholstery made of natural fibre or animal skin.

Keeping your home carpet moth free:

Vacuum regularly and clean up spills or traces of food as soon as they happen - make sure you move the furniture too, the carpet moth larvae will happily live for a very long time somewhere that is dark and undisturbed. Get into the habit of checking for moths on a regular basis - prevention pays off.

We stock a range of products for rug cleaning, care and moth prevention. The Nomads Tent offer moth treatment services. Please check our website or call us for advice.



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