



NOMADS NEWS

WINTER/SPRING 2021

FROM IRAN, INDIA, AFGHANISTAN, TURKEY
THE CAUCASUS THE HIMALAYAN KINGDOMS AND PAKISTAN



A message of thanks to our customers and suppliers.

A TURBULENT YEAR

News of Coronavirus began to filter through in confusing but ominous snippets from Wuhan nearly a year ago. Like everyone we were thrown in to a confusing period of uncertainty and much reduced activity in many aspects of our work here at The Nomads Tent. But from the start we had messages of support and encouragement from customers which buoyed up our spirits, even as we were aware those same customers were experiencing the same uncertainty and anxiety about the future.

So to our customers, friends and supporters, and our followers on Facebook and Instagram we send a heartfelt THANK YOU!

Website.

One of the effects of the first lockdown was a necessary push on our website which allowed us to trade in a modest fashion while our shop was closed. On 28th November we launched a brand new fully functioning website at www.nomadstent.co.uk. We'll never get everything in our shop up on the website but we're having a good try at it!

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What camera should a secret agent carry on an assignment?

BY RUFUS READE

In 1942, my father was head of a Middle Eastern outfit which equipped S.O.E. agents before they were infiltrated into Greece and the Balkans. You can think of him as Q in a Bond novel: Q stands for 'quartermaster'. His unit was wound up in November 1942, so the last mission he equipped was his own, when Xan Fielding and he were to be landed on the southern coast of Crete by submarine.

You can't take a great deal of kit on such a mission, but it seems that he included knives, coshes, ether pads to knock out sentries (very good for lighting fires) and two cameras. When his commanding officer Brigadier Keble saw the cameras on the inventory, he reportedly said "I don't know what you want with those, but you can at least photograph each other."

In late November, just as the German occupation of North Africa was crumbling, following the Battle of El Alamein, the small party on the Greek submarine the *Papanikolis* was brought to the Crete coast and put into small boats in which they rowed ashore.

Just as they were reaching dry land, my father and Xan Fielding's boat split in half on a submerged rock and their belongings sank to the bottom, including, presumably, the cameras. Any camera owner reading this account will be hoping that the cameras were wrapped up in something waterproof! The following day Xan and Arthur came across two Australian stragglers (following the German invasion of Crete a very large number of Allied troops wandered the island depending on Cretan hospitality to survive) one of whom was a talented diver: in an official report my father was later to write "Pte. John C. Simsoe - This man, a brilliant diver and underwater swimmer, helped us recover from the sea the bulk of the stores lost during our crash landing in November". I am assuming the cameras were amongst the possessions salvaged!

A few years ago, the British historian Chris White, the Heraklion museum curator Costas Mamalakis and I went to try and find one cave where my father and others had hidden from the Germans. Chris White has successfully identified many of the hiding places, but one cave, used in January 1943, had eluded him! In a second day of searching we met an elderly gentleman in a café and he pointed to a distant hillside and said in Greek to Costas Mamalakis, "You see that tree and that rock, well the cave you are looking for is in front them!" The vista at which he pointed was full of trees and rocks!

However we followed his instructions and eventually turned off the tarmac road onto a downhill narrow track and coming to a gate found ourselves facing another car coming uphill: Chris wondered aloud if the insurance for our hire car covered driving off-road. Costas got out of our car and approached the other driver. I couldn't follow the entire conversation with the other man but it seemed friendly, and we were then led down to where he was feeding his sheep. On foot we followed the driver whose name turned out to be Dimitri through an olive grove and then down a series of terraces until lo and behold we were in front of a cave.

Our new-found guide said "Here you are". Chris pulled out his copies of war-time photographs, and we began to match the details of the rocks in front of us with the background of the photographs which showed Patrick Leigh Fermor, George Pyschoudakis, Xan Fielding, Yanni Tsangarakis and my father Arthur Reade. The men must have taken turns photographing each other: George Pyschoudakis relates how one of the photos shows Xan Fielding searching for lice with his trousers down! We nicknamed the cave, The Lice Cave.

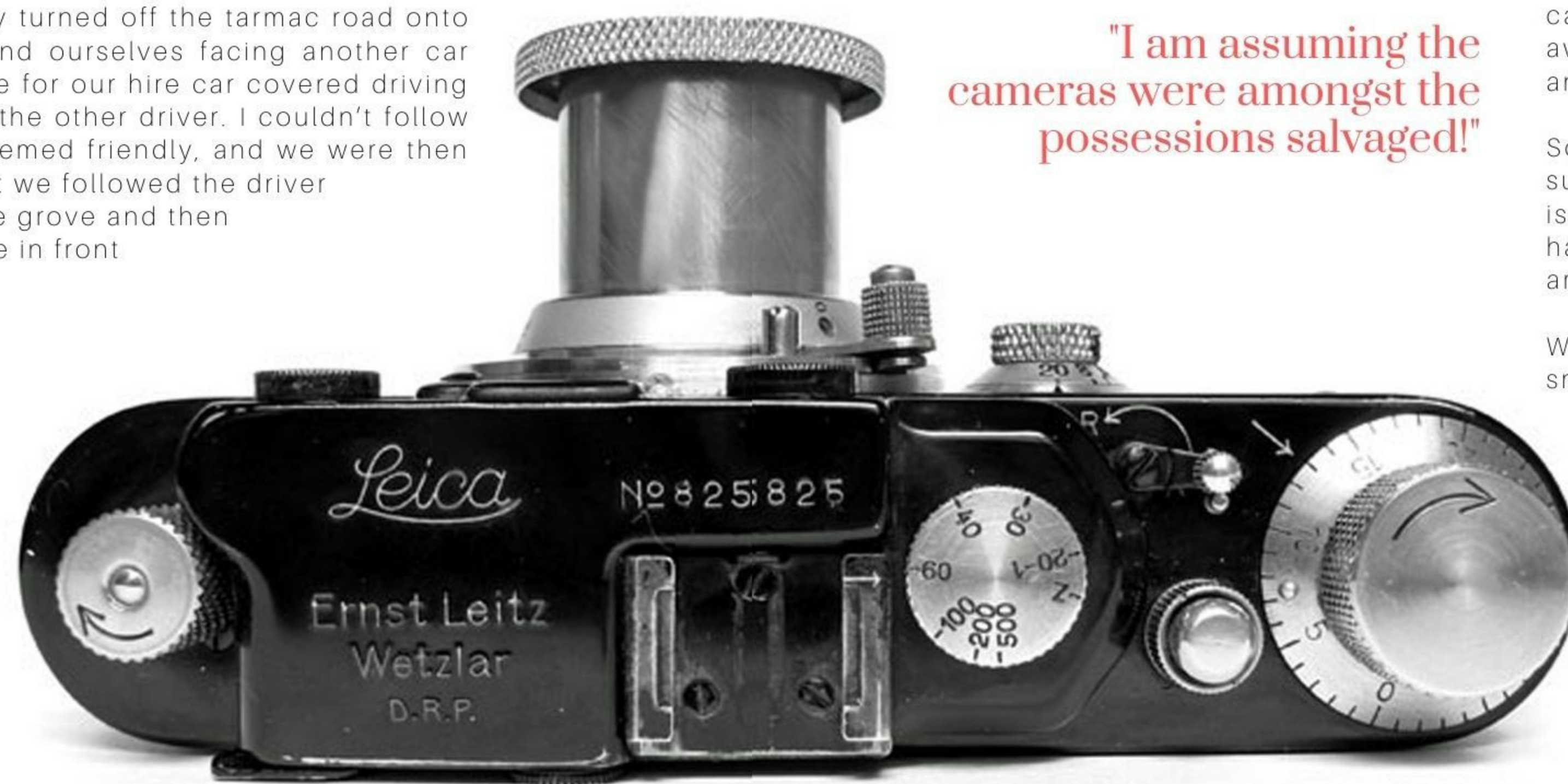
We were soon joined by another man, Niko, who'd spotted unaccustomed activity around the mouth of the cave, and I took a number of photographs, loose re-creations of those images from January 1943, using those present as stand-ins for the characters from 75 years ago.

Our two new-found guides then kindly invited us back to drinks in both their homes. We were very glad to accept this hospitality. After drinks at Dimitri's house we drove about 5 miles to Niko's home, and sat at a table out of doors with his elderly parents. We'd only been sat there five minutes when Niko's father, Yeorgi, said to me in a Greek so heavily accented that Costas had difficulty understanding him; "Was your father a lawyer and lived in Cyprus?" I was open-mouthed! We had barely arrived and he had correctly identified my father from almost no information. He went on to explain that during the war, as a small boy, he had carried food up to the fugitives in the cave, and that after the war my father had written from our home in Cyprus enclosing a photograph of his children. He added, pointing back at the house "I have that photograph and that letter still!"

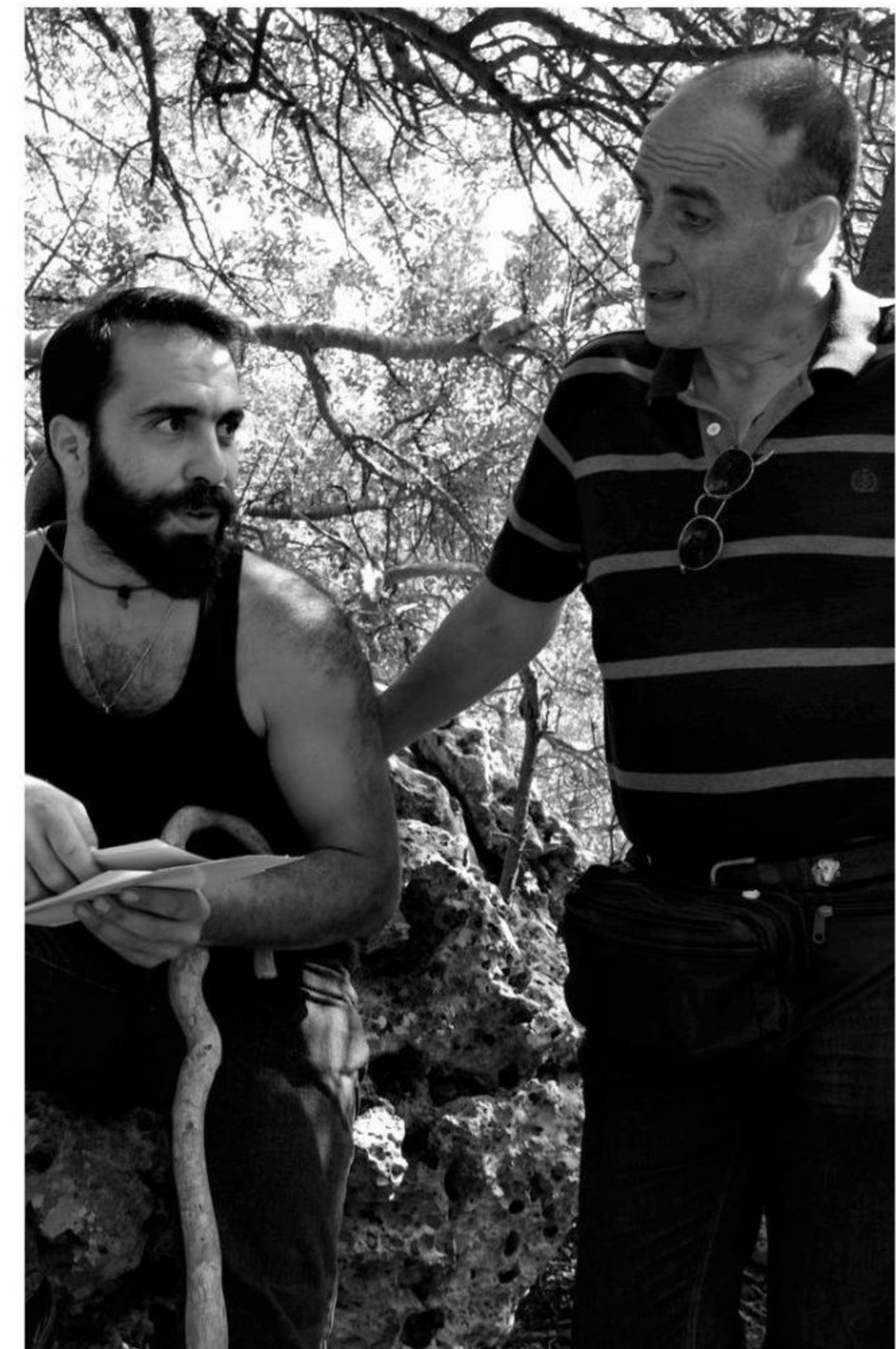
Very moved by that encounter, we drove back to Heraklion.

For some time I'd been wondering what sort of camera these British agent would have carried. I'd thought about British cameras available during the war. And then I came across an account by Xan Fielding in which he referred to the cameras as Leicas.

"I am assuming the cameras were amongst the possessions salvaged!"



Leica II with number 825825



Costas & Dimitri discuss photographs outside the Lice Cave

And it dawned on me that the best equipment would have been German: not only technically superior but also in the event of a discovery the cameras would have not given anything much away whereas a British bit of kit would have announced the presence of British agents.

So I have begun to look for pre-war Leicas, and suspect that my father's department might have issued a Leica II or Leica III. Some of them may have been captured from the retreating German army as the tide of the war turned in North Africa.

What would an agent carry today? Probably a smart phone!

During 2021, Rufus hopes to lead tours to Madagascar (May/June), and a painting tour to Jordan (October) with Eleanor White as the art tutor. Get in touch with him if you want to register your interest in a specific tour, or join his general tours mailing list, or if you want to discuss the idea of cameras used in WWII! Rufusreade@blueyonder.co.uk

Gabbeh Rugs of the Fars Province

BY ANDREW HAUGHTON

The word "gabbeh" translates from the Persian گبه, meaning raw, natural, uncut.

Gabbeh rugs usually have just one or two principle colours and little, if any, decoration. They were originally woven as sleeping mats, particularly by the Qashqai and Luri tribes of Fars Province in South West Iran. Weaving them was usually the preserve of women, and we can imagine this was sometimes for the comfort of their men, shepherding their flocks.

This simple and practical style of weaving compares with tulu rugs of Anatolia and various other similar rugs across the region all with notably thick, even shaggy, piles in common. Weaving such rugs for warmth is a tradition as old as weaving itself but gabbeh rugs attracted particular Western interest around the 1970s. Though the old skills and know-how of nomadic cultures are everywhere diminishing, the Qashqai responded to demand and continue to produce high quality hand woven rugs with superb hand spun wool and natural dyes.

A renowned Iranian Sculptor, Parviz Tanavoli, himself collected gabbeh rugs in the 1970s, travelling and recording the then still very much alive culture as he went. His exhibitions of gabbeh enthused European and American taste and inspired Gholamreza Zollanvari, a renowned rug dealer, to develop and adapt old designs for contemporary homes.



Contemporary Qashqai gabbeh, 251 x 171 cm



*Left: Gabbeh rug, SW Iran
Right: Composition XIV by Piet Mondrian*

The spirit of the authentic, unconsciously designed gabbeh rugs of old nomadic origin entered a new period of evolution. A skilled and measured design stage in rug and carpet weaving has long been a part of more sophisticated city workshops. Such a process is rarely part of village and nomadic weaving traditions. But in gabbeh rugs woven in the last few decades, fuelled by an eager commercial market, the design process grew quickly and took in other influences such as well known artists. The Nomads Tent have always stocked a few examples of gabbeh rugs and carpets, ever since the early years of trading in the 1980s. Recently we acquired a collection from the beautiful city of Shiraz, the hub of the weaving market in SW Iran, which was the subject of an exhibition in October 2020, *The Art of Gabbeh*. Among them you may find echoes of Paul Klee, Gustav Klimt, Piet Mondriaan, or Mark Rothko amongst others. We wonder who inspired whom?

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