

century Pāṇṭīyan rulers' wish "to present themselves as inheritors of a great Tamil culture." They therefore ousted Sanskrit words (in this way they strangely resemble modern nationalists trying to do the same thing) and modern forms of the language. Perhaps foreseeing a question about how they could have known what Tamil was like hundreds of years earlier, the author suggests that they "fabricated forms which to them sounded archaic." He does not answer the next logically apt question as to how it was possible that they all chose to eliminate the same grammatical forms.

One of the reasons why the author cannot believe that old *Caṅkam* poetry is oral poetry is that it contains very long sentences like Sanskrit poetry, which nobody considers oral. Two objections may be raised against this admittedly strong argument. Firstly, if a stylistic feature, such as long sentences or double meanings is known to be appreciated, it can be cultivated even in spoken language. Secondly, the bards walking for days to see a generous patron had ample time to think about what they would recite before him in the most pleasing way.

If *Caṅkam* poetry was composed around the eighth or ninth century, the culmination of bhakti poetry cannot have been in the seventh or eighth century, as usually held. Therefore, Tiekens shifts the latter to the ninth century. He probably decided on this slight shift to make it coincide with his *Caṅkam* date because he thinks it conceivable that the *Caṅkam* "corpus we now have is the work of the same poets who composed Bhakti poetry." One wonders at the versatility of these poets, given the enormous difference of mentality exhibited in the two types of poetry. Like the *Caṅkam* bards are said to be personae whose archaic language is an invention, so the saints of bhakti poetry are said to be personae whose simple language is "artful unpretentiousness." Since the saints call themselves madmen intoxicated by the love of a god who takes possession of them, the author thinks that they cannot have composed metric poems themselves. However, possession and ecstasy are intermittent states and the saints might well have composed their songs during relatively sober periods.

The author also discusses the problem of why works like the *Pattuppāṭṭu* and the *Cilappatikāram* are not called *Caṅkam* even though they date from its time. His answer is that they are modeled not after the *kāvya* like the anthologies but after the *mahākāvya*. Since the length of a composition is an important criterion for the classification of ancient Tamil poetry, as he well knows, why not simply assume that every work exceeding a determined length was not called *Caṅkam*? This would also apply to the *Tirukkuṛaḷ* dated around the fifth century but not considered *Caṅkam*. This most famous work of ancient Tamil literature is omitted from the discussion, probably because it cannot be pressed into a *kāvya* or *mahākāvya* scheme.

Tiekens's book obliges the experts on ancient Tamil literature to check whether their convictions resist his attack. This is a good thing, but I doubt that he will emerge as the winner in the debate that is bound to arise.

G. EICHINGER FERRO-LUZZI
Rome

AFGHANISTAN

FREMBGEN, JÜRGEN WASIM and HANS WERNER MOHM. *Lebensbaum und Kalaschnikow. Krieg und Frieden im Spiegel afghanischer Bildteppiche*. Blieskastel, Germany: Gollenstein Verlag, 2000. 151 pages. Color plates, b/w photos, map, English summary, bibliography. Hardcover, DM 38.00; ISBN 3-933389-31-3.

This small, but beautiful book presents a collection of forty-four so-called Afghan war carpets, brought together by Hans Werner Mohm. The carpets were shown for the first time at

an exhibition in the Museum für Völkerkunde in München (Museum of Ethnography in Munich), which was organized on the occasion of an international conference on Afghanistan, held at the museum between 15 and 18 June 2000.

The book presents the first and probably only academic analysis of the carpets. Frembgen examines the carpets from an Islamic and historical perspective, and in doing so provides a very interesting introduction to the topic and related subjects. There are two main chapters written by Frembgen: "Folk Art in Afghanistan," which has a subsection on the so-called suppression of images in Islam; and "Afghan Pictorial Carpets with Motifs of War and Peace," which has subsections dealing mainly with the origin of the carpets, their form and style, their contents, the theme of the "holy war" in Islam, and their use and presence in markets. These chapters are followed by plates and a detailed descriptive catalogue of the carpets, written by both authors.

The carpets, called *qalin-i jangi* (war carpet) or *qalin-i jihad* (holy-war carpet), are extraordinary in many ways. They are small in size, generally measuring 130–140 cm by 80–90 cm, while some are rather square or very long and narrow, measuring from 3.5 to more than 5 meters in length and some 70 cm in width. Their war-related repertoire consists of tanks and other armored vehicles, helicopters, fighter planes, rocket launchers ("Stalin organ"), rockets, machine guns, and Kalashnikovs, the coveted weapon of every martially inclined Afghan. The arms are set in a more traditional decorative ambience (plates 1 and 4) or urban sceneries with mosques, minarets, and other buildings (plates 20 and 24) or combined with other stunningly varied motifs. One motif is a map of Afghanistan (plates 31–36), and most of the carpets with this motif include some written, often undecipherable comments like "Afghanistan," "*Afghan mujahid zindabad*" ("long live the Afghan *mujahid*"), and so forth. Other noteworthy motifs are related to nomadic life and animal husbandry (plates 37–39) or depict traditional, Iranian-looking fighter- and hunter scenes (plate 40); or even, in one sample, the tall figure of Amanullah, the ill-fated modernizer of Afghanistan in the 1920s (plate 42). If one extends the study of these carpets to those presented in other publications such as that by W. Böhning, *Afghanische Teppiche mit Kriegsmotiven* (Afghan Carpets with War Motifs), Wiesloch 1993, one is confronted with an additional stunning variety of motifs and decorative compositions. Among them there is even a carpet with a view of Kabul that has jets and helicopters over it, and which depicts Kabul's streets as being filled with cars, trucks, and some oversized tanks (see Böhning, plate 50).

Frembgen discerns four groups of carpets: (1) traditionally designed carpets with representations of war gear (plates 1–6); (2) carpets dominated by war motifs (plates 7–19); (3) carpets with views of locations such as roads and architectural or natural surroundings (plates 20–37); and (4) carpets with dominant human figures (plates 38–44).

Naturally, one wonders how these carpets should be understood and where they originated, especially considering the fact that they probably constitute a "first-ever" in the worldwide carpet "medium" with respect to having their designs reflect dominant contemporary events. As Frembgen pointed out (27), there is some agreement as to the western Afghan origin of the earliest carpets, centered in the region of Herat and to the southwest of it. The date of the earliest pieces is being debated. Böhning and others believe in an early date (early 1980s), while others, among them the reviewer, prefer the date around 1984 or 1985. It seems to me that some time after the beginning of the war (in January 1980) must have passed before an entirely new and unique "world of motifs" was introduced into carpet decoration.

Afghan carpets with pictorial motifs have for a long time been woven in western Afghanistan, which is inhabited by Tajik, Taimuri, and Baluch ethnic groups. Among their carpets, the "Herati" is particularly well known for its decorative diversity. Thus the local production with its partial dependence on the carpet weaving traditions of Iran was the best suited

for developing “revolutionary” new decorative ideas. However, nothing is known for certain, and the investigations undertaken by Mohn in Kabul in 1992 could not provide reliable data (see page 29; also see *Heimtex* 11: 94–99, and *Heimtex* 12: 178, 180–82). Thus the origin of the carpets “remains an unresolved mystery” (142). One only knows that such carpets were woven in great quantities in refugee camps by diverse ethnic groups in Pakistan and Iran after the products had found a wider market in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

As to the reason behind the creation of such carpets, we have only hypotheses. One group of analysts believes that the carpets are a serious reflection of a “desperate struggle of the Afghan people” (Böhning, 1993, 2) or even of a “psychodrama” (page 44, referring to an article by O’Bannon in *The Miami Herald*, 9 February 1997). Frembgen and Mohn see also more positive aspects, such as the interest “to glorify the heroic deeds of the freedom fighters” and—with regard to flowers and leaves often depicted between all the images of arms and war—“an expression of hope for a more peaceful period in the future” (143). A carpet 366 cm long in the Mohn collection shows a genuine tree-of-life motif in the center, with tiny images of Kalashnikovs, planes, etc., dispersed in between, and with the basic designs of tanks, armored vehicles, and helicopters surrounding it (plate 6). One may add the comment that the carpets must have developed from simple beginnings to “sophisticated” products. On many of the carpets one can also see propagandistic messages written in less-than-perfect Latin script, which were probably meant to address the Western world.

The early desire to include arms motifs in the design of carpets may well have been caused by a genuine fascination with all the new powerful machinery before its relationship to death and destruction was properly felt and feared. Swords, pre-Kalashnikov firearms, and guns were pictured frequently on the walls of prewar teahouses and on the bodies of trucks. The question is how it came about that arms motifs entered the carpet world. Someone must have started it somewhere, but no one seems to know who. The earlier looking carpets convey the impression of spontaneity—they just mix the new with the old according to more traditional concepts. The later products, however, appear to have been designed for their marketability, as they exhibit more quiet and aesthetic values (e.g., showing landscapes and townships) and more dynamic fighting or war scenes; they also exhibit more designs that suggest they were intended to have a didactic function. The general feeling underlying these motifs is certainly one of heroism and fascination with war combined with fears of death and destruction in relation to a genuine “holy war” against a superpower. When that war turned “civil” after the fall of the Soviet-supported government in April of 1992, the interest for weaving *qalin-i jangi* quickly disappeared.

I have only one minor critical comment: it is easy to miss references to the illustrated carpets whenever a decorative subject or a detail related to them is mentioned in the introductory text. Only in the section dealing with the division of the carpets into four groups are references to the plates given. This minor shortcoming, however, does not lessen the great value of this very informative, lucidly written, and beautifully designed and reproduced book.

Max KLIMBURG
University of Vienna