



Ties that Bind

HELFGOTT LEONARD M

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This social history of Iranian carpets traces their production, use, and exchange from the fifteenth century until World War II, highlighting in particular the carpet boom from 1873 to 1914. Over these five centuries, the Iranian hand-knotted, piled carpet shifted from an object made primarily for the Islamic Middle East to a commodity that by the twentieth century constituted Iran's largest nonpetroleum export to the West. The hand-knotted carpet, according to Helfgott, reveals an intricate record of Iranian society - its economic development, gender relations, and art history. Beginning with the rugs' early uses among settled peoples, nomadic pastoralists, and the Iranian court elites, Helfgott traces the changes in carpet manufacture and Iranian society that ensued when the West began importing carpets as luxury items in the nineteenth century. He follows the expansion of Mediter-ranean trade in carpets into a global market, linking it to the local patterns of production in nomadic, village, and urban settings. He also describes the debilitating conditions in which women and children knotted the carpets and discusses the European fascination with Iranian culture and, in a case study, the creation of the Iranian art collection at London's Victoria and Albert Museum. Ties That Bind draws on travelers' reports, British Foreign Office records, missionary diaries and records, and carpets and acquisition records in major museum collections.

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