

## Nomadic Persian Rugs, Part Two

While the Iranian government, for much of the twentieth century, attempted to settle tribes still practicing at least partial nomadism. This involves part of the tribe migrating to progressively higher ground in the spring and summer to find fresh pasturage for their flocks, and then returning to the lowlands for the cold season. Parts of each tribe remain sedentary, growing cereal crops for survival over the winter. Eventually this way of life will probably become extinct, as migrating nomads have always been problematic for governments. Nomads have been difficult to control, and their lifestyle has led to a certain independence from central authority. It also has led to rugs with different visual flavor from those of the Persian villagers, consequently varied kinds of nomadic Persian rugs have held a special appeal for carpet lovers from across the world.

Boustani is proud to introduce to you some main Iranian tribes as the largest creators of nomadic rugs with their own styles.

### Khamseh

This is a federation of tribes of diverse origins, including Arab, native Iranian tribes such as the Lors and Turkic groups not allied with the Qashqai who live in Fars province in southwestern Iran. The Arab tribe includes a number of Arabic speaking people, some of whom claim to have migrated into Iran from Arabian Peninsula at the time of the Islamic conquest in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Turkic elements are found among the Baharlu and Ainalu, while a number of tribes have members of Lor descent.

Not surprisingly rugs of these people cover a range of types, although they are often difficult to distinguish from each other and at times may resemble Qashqai rugs. One characteristic is the Khamseh are more likely to show dark wool warps, while warps of Qashqai rugs are more commonly ivory. Khamseh rugs are also not so likely to be double-warped and are generally looser in construction.



Earlier pieces may show great charm and excellent colors, although the color scheme is often slightly more subdued than that found on Qashqai rugs. One often encounters a design in which stylized bird figures are repeated in different colors throughout the field.

The rugs are variable in size, but seldom exceed about 1.82 \* 3.65 meters (6 \* 12 feet). Prayer rug designs are rare, but there are a few pictorial rugs. Often one finds repeating geometric figures with relatively narrow borders.

Some rugs are identifiable as products of various Lori tribes, some of whom are affiliated with the Khamseh. There are also some particularly colorful Lori gabbeh rugs which are difficult to distinguish from those of the Qashqai.



The Khamseh Federation does not have the same kinds of historic traditions as the Qashqai, as it was formed only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Primarily it was assembled by external political forces attempting to form something of a counterweight to the powerful Qashqai. As the Khamseh federation is made up of disparate elements, it has not maintained the same political clout as the Qashqai, and it appears to be diminishing in importance.

### **Gabbeh rugs from the Shiraz area**

In the late 1980s the Shiraz area was the center of the natural dyeing revival that has had a great impact on the entire rug industry within Iran. As natural dyeing had essentially completely disappeared from Iran. It took several enterprising dyers to begin experimenting with such materials as madder, natural indigo and yellow dyes from native plants. For reasons not entirely clear, many of the earliest rugs from this project were gabbehs, with a relatively coarse weave and bold, simple designs.



When these appeared at a major trade fair in Tehran in 1992, the result left a deep impact on many of the dealers in attendance, but there were still some needed adjustments. The reds seemed a little too somber and the yellow appeared to be the wrong quality. Within several years, however, the necessary adjustments had been made and the naturally dyed gabbeh became a great commercial success. The gabbeh was originally associated with the nomadic way of life, while the new production is clearly a commercial enterprise. As these gabbehs do not represent tribal rugs, the new production cannot be identified as either Qashqai or Khamseh, and has become more of a regional enterprise. It has also been widely copied abroad, and one now finds Shiraz-type gabbeh rugs from Pakistan and India.

