THE KRESS BENEFAC TION

During the past few months the Museum has received two magnificent gifts that will go far toward the enrichment of its collection of textiles. The first, which comprises twenty-six Italian and Spanish velvets ranging in date from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, has been presented by a Trustee of the Museum, Samuel H. Kress. The other is the celebrated Anhalt carpet, which is not only one of the most beautiful and best-preserved Persian rugs in existence but also has interesting historical associations. This carpet was recently acquired by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation and presented by its officers and trustees to the Museum. Both gifts recall Mr. Kress’s generous donation in 1942 of Velazquez’s splendid portrait of Cardinal Borja. The Museum’s textile collection already contained many fine examples from the looms of the velvet-weavers, particularly those of Florence, Genoa, and Venice. The group added by Mr. Kress makes it possible to present the entire development of a technique that was of the utmost importance in the early days of the Renaissance. The new velvets have been arranged by Miss Marion Bolles in one of the galleries adjoining the Textile Study Room, which will be opened to the public on November 15. They provide a notable supplement to the newly reinstalled collections of renaissance paintings, sculpture, and decorative arts.

The Anhalt carpet, according to tradition, was part of the treasure abandoned by the Turks at Vienna in 1683, when the besieging forces of the Grand Vizier Kara Mustafa were routed by the Austrian defenders and their German and Polish allies led by John Sobieski, King of Poland. It was presumably then that it came into the possession of the Dukes of Anhalt. According to Dr. M. S. Dimand, Curator of Near Eastern Art, it was undoubtedly made at the state manufactory of the Safavid shahs in Tabriz, probably in the first decade of the reign of Shah Tahmasp (1525-1576). It was therefore being woven about the time that the greatest of the Ottoman sultans, Suleiman the Magnificent, was preparing assaults alike on the shah of Persia and the kings of Europe.

The Museum’s extraordinary collection of oriental rugs has been built up over a period of years through generous bequests and gifts and fortunate purchases. To the important collections received from Benjamin Altman and James F. Ballard have been added splendid carpets from George F. Baker, Jr., George Blumenthal, Alexander Smith Cochran, Theodore M. Davis, Isaac D. Fletcher, and J. P. Morgan. The Anhalt carpet rounds out our representation of court rugs, which include such masterpieces as the cartouche rug with Chinese motives from the Yerkes collection, the armorial rug from the Rockefeller collection, the rug with animal decoration from the shrine of Shaikh Safi at Ardabil, and the Emperor’s carpet from the Hapsburg collection at Schönbrunn.

The Trustees of the Museum welcome this far-sighted benefaction on the part of Mr. Kress, who has identified himself with such distinction in the collections of Italian art that he has given to the nation. They are grateful that he and his associates look to the Metropolitan Museum as a source of instruction and inspiration in the fine arts and the arts of decoration.
The Persian carpet shown on the opposite page and illustrated in detail above and on pages 52 and 53 was presented to the Museum by the officers and trustees of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation. It was probably woven between 1524 and 1535 at the state manufactory of the Safavid shahs at Tabriz, and is believed to have been part of the Turkish booty seized by the European allies at the battle of Vienna in 1683. It came to light about sixty-five years ago at the ancestral castle of the Dukes of Anhalt at Dessau and was first shown to the public in 1931, when it was lent by the late Lord Duveen to the Exhibition of Persian Art held in London. Size: 26 1/2 ft. by 31 1/2 ft. It will be placed on view in the Great Hall on November 15.

The predominant colors are yellow, red, and blue, with touches of white, black, green, violet, and orange. The field and the outer border are golden yellow; the main border, the lobed medallion, and the shields attached to the cartouches are red; the cartouches and the inner border are turquoise blue; and the round medallion enclosed by the lobed medallion is black. The pattern consists of several systems of floral scrolls intersected by arabesques. The scrolls are overlaid with small rosettes, lotus blossoms, and peony palmettes. Arabesque palmettes, half palmettes, Chinese cloud bands, and peacocks are conspicuous in the design.
The rendering of the peacocks (see above) in the field of the Anhalt carpet and the arabesques in the border (see opposite page) recalls that of sixteenth-century mosaics from Ardabil and Isfahan. It is probable that cartoons for both were made by illuminators attached to the royal
library at Tabriz, in connection with which there was maintained a famous workshop of the arts of the book. In 1522 this workshop was directed by the painter Bihzad. In some cases the same cartoons may have been used in the making of rugs and mosaic wall decorations.
Brocaded velvet with a design in bouclé (looped) gold thread. The outlines of the motives are formed by red velvet pile, and the ground is entirely covered with gold thread. The delicacy and balance of the drawing suggest that the pattern is Florentine in origin, and the elaboration of the design indicates a date late in the fifteenth century, probably about 1480. This velvet has certain similarities in pattern to a group of velvets believed to have been designed by the Florentine painter Pollaiuolo. The piece illustrated above and those on pages 55 and 56 are recent gifts from Samuel H. Kress.
Brocaded velvet with a design in red cut pile on a ground of cloth of gold. Velvets of this sort, in which the pile and the metallic ground contrast in color, are the richest examples of the velvet-weaver's art. The pattern of the present piece, with vertical serpentine stems bearing cone motives, originated in the Gothic period and continued to be used during the Renaissance. Velvets with designs of this type are to be seen in paintings of the period, where they are used both for costumes and for hangings. The example shown here is probably Italian and dates from the late fifteenth century.
“Ferronerie” velvet with a design in light green and details in light blue and golden yellow on a crimson ground. Probably Venetian, XV century.