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# *The ship motif in Indonesian textiles*





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### LIKE A PRAYER: A COLLECTION OF ANTIQUE ANATOLIAN NICHE DESIGN RUGS

Virtual exhibition, Alberto Levi Gallery  
[www.albertolevi.com](http://www.albertolevi.com)

Over the years, we have become accustomed to visiting Alberto Levi's Milan gallery for thematic exhibitions underpinned by thorough research and an infectious enthusiasm for antique carpets. Luckily, these qualities still come across in the gallery's current virtual exhibition of Anatolian niche-design rugs. The past year has understandably been a challenging one for many rug dealers, with business moving largely online, yet there have not been as many exciting digital initiatives as one may have hoped for. There are several reasons for this, two of them being insufficient digital infrastructure and a clientele that prefers, or is thought to prefer, viewing pieces in person. Therefore, this exhibition is particularly welcome.

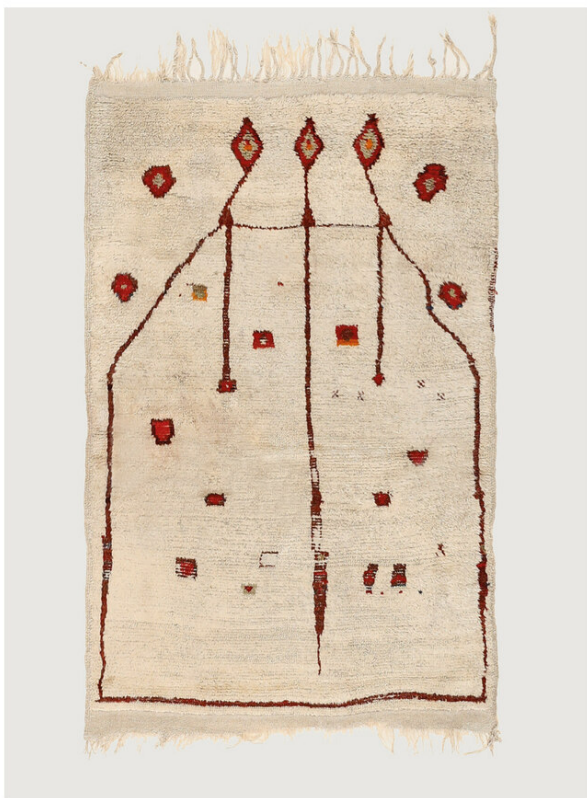
For a selling exhibition to be successful as an exhibition, be it in a physical format or online, it

cannot just be a presentation of a gallery's existing stock. In his introduction to the show, Levi outlines his mission, which simply put is to capture the entire spectrum of the Turkish prayer rug tradition in a total of thirty carpets. Given the number of rugs that could qualify as 'Turkish prayer rugs' (it would not be difficult to present thirty almost identical rugs that would fit this description) it immediately becomes clear that there is careful curation at work.

Levi states that he 'purposely included examples that would reveal, as much as possible, their magnificent variety'. Thus we see a circa 1680 'Transylvanian' prayer rug with roots firmly in the classical Ottoman tradition as seen in the intricately drawn tulips and carnations in the spandrels and border, but also a *tulu* prayer rug (2) from circa 1900 in white Angora mohair wool with a minimalist pattern that speaks of joyful mark making.

Levi admits that antique Turkish rugs were his first obsession; and, as they also happened to be his best-selling type of rug, he has had plenty of opportunity in the past three and a half decades to delve into every possible iteration. Although he found himself passionate about the variety of expression possible within the designation 'Turkish rugs' from the past few centuries, he soon learned that others felt rather differently. 'While archaically drawn, richly-coloured Anatolian village rugs were much in demand, niche design or "prayer" examples of similar, if not earlier, vintage were somehow "frowned upon", as if their more formal iconography belonged to an old-fashioned taste for "high art"', he explains.

Reading carpet literature from the early 20th century and looking at earlier exhibitions revealed that this had not always been the case. Noted collectors



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such as James F. Ballard and H. McCoy Jones were decidedly fond of Anatolian prayer rugs, and in The Textile Museum's 1974 'Prayer Rugs' exhibition, Turkish examples outnumbered all of the others combined. This classical style of prayer rug is well represented in the exhibition, ranging from two 17th-century west Anatolian rugs through to a late 19th-century Bursa silk rug and a circa 1900 Ghiordes rug with plenty of cotton highlights.

The more he studied these rugs, the more Levi noticed the great care taken over small

details, the arrangements of colour and pattern unique to each weaver, and the bridge these weavings can create between the concrete and the abstract. The realistic depiction of columns with pediments and mosque lamps is a more formal mode of expression from a workshop as opposed to the simple stacking of stepped arches to create an element of perspective in the hands of a weaver in a domestic setting in central Anatolia.

An architectural frame of reference for prayer, a window into infinity through a field of

pure, saturated colour (like the teal blue niche in the fragment from a well-known rug from circa 1700 with multiple coupled-column niches (1)), or simply a pretty design for a practical weaving—these Anatolian niche-design rugs can be and continue to be different things to different people. In the words of Levi, 'Just as these rugs facilitate the ritual of worship, the pleasure of owning them is ultimately a spiritual one—I trust that they will transmit joy and enlightenment to whomever will own them in the future.'

1 Fragment of rug with multiple coupled-column niches, Ushak, western Anatolia, circa 1700. 1.35 x 3.72 m (4' 5" x 12' 3"). Alberto Levi

2 Tulu prayer rug, Karapınar area, central Anatolia, circa 1900. 1.10 x 1.65 m (3' 9" x 5' 5"). Alberto Levi

3 Yatak with stepped niches, Cappadocia, east-central Anatolia, circa 1760. 1.40 x 2.02 m (4' 7" x 6' 8"). Alberto Levi