Walter B. Denny. "Color, Expectations, and Authenticity in Oriental Carpets: The Case of the Anhalt Carpet in the Metropolitan Museum of Art"

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Walter B. Denny. "Color, Expectations, and Authenticity in Oriental Carpets: The Case of the Anhalt Carpet in the Metropolitan Museum of Art", *The Textile Museum Journal*, volume 47, 2020, pp. 70-81, 7 ill.

- 1 This article appears in the 2020 issue of *The Textile Museum Journal*, a long-standing peer-reviewed journal that has been devoted to the historical, cultural and technical scholarship of textiles in North America since 1962 (until 2004; reinstated in 2017). Guest-edited by Mary Dusenbury, Volume 47 features articles dealing with the art and science of color in textiles, including Denny's recent article, entitled "Color, Expectations, and Authenticity in Oriental Carpets: The Case of the Anhalt Carpet in the Metropolitan Museum of Art". Said to have been made in Tabriz for the Safavid Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524-1576) and reputed to have belonged to the Duchy of Anhalt in Dessau in modern-day Germany prior to its sale to Samuel Kress (1863-1955) by Joseph Duveen (1869-1939) in the early twentieth century, the authenticity of this magnificent yellow-ground carpet has been long questioned, ironically due to its remarkable condition, in particular its unusually enduring chromatic components. The Anhalt Carpet also differs in detail from other well-known sixteenth-century Persian carpets in terms of design. However, the author casts a fresh eye on this long-debated question by taking advantage of recent breakthroughs in dye analysis. While overviewing this debate, this

article convincingly argues that there is in fact no scientific evidence to doubt the authenticity of the Anhalt Carpet. This essay comes to an end by making the following statement: "In the end, however, color subjectivity, which itself is almost always formed by the expectations based not on the ephemeral factor of 'what there was', but the much smaller and inevitably more definable category of 'what there is', will continue to form an inevitable part of the scholarly judgments of historians of art in general, and historians of textiles in particular. To cope with it, the best solution is to recognize that it is always there, and then to avoid both the hubris of absolute certainty, and the lure of over-reaching hypotheses in a vain attempt to impose a high degree of certainty on the vast, omnipresent, and inevitable unknown" (p. 80). The Anhalt Carpet thus remains to be seen as one of the great treasures of sixteenth-century Persian carpet weaving to survive until today.

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