



Oushak, Circa 1880

Ref: 21560

Size: 11' 2" x 16' 2"

Content: Wool

Collection: Antique

Hand-knotted in Anatolia

Oushak Carpet, 11'2" x 16'2", Oushak, Turkey, late nineteenth century

Room-size Oushak carpets like this are the proud heirs to a long tradition of western Turkish or Anatolian rug weaving. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Oushak was a major center for the production of large-scale palace carpets for the Ottoman dynasty, although production of the closely related large-scale palatial 'Smyrna' carpets of the eighteenth century shifted further west to Izmir. As court productions, the large-scale palatial Oushak carpets reflected a more sophisticated urban design derived from contemporary Safavid Persian court carpets. In the nineteenth century when the western demand for Oriental carpets began to accelerate, Oushak once again emerged as a major center that could satisfy the European and American requirement for luxurious room-sized rugs. But to meet this more widespread demand, production in the nineteenth century now had to expand to the various villages surrounding Oushak, involving weavers who were more accustomed to the production of traditional smaller village rugs. So while nineteenth century Oushak weavers still strove to emulate the design sensibility of Persian and court rugs, just as their sixteenth- and seventeenth-century forebears had done, they now introduced a bolder, freer and more lively village design sensibility into the production. This also involved the use of all wool foundations for the carpets, in contrast to the cotton foundations typical of Persian court carpets. All these elements combine to give Oushak carpets a unique excitement and supple handle that no room sized Persian rug can achieve.

This present example beautifully exemplifies the distinctive taste and approach of the Oushak weavers. The underlying model or inspiration is once again classical Persian. But rather than using the classical medallion compositions typical of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Oushaks, in this instance the weavers drew upon a Kerman Persian all-over arabesque vinescroll sprouting various 'palmettes' and undulating 'cloudbands.' The palmettes of the field recur in the main border, where they are linked by a single, running vine. But the field and border still contrast beautifully, although this is achieved not so much by design, but by color, with the autumnal burnt orange of the field set against the deep teal green of the border. The color effects are further enhanced by the luxurious soft, silky Angora wool favored by Oushak weavers. The overall design still has much of the elegance of the classical Persian and Ottoman Turkish forerunners, but the drawing style is much freer and more animated, reflecting the taste and traditions of the weavers themselves. Perhaps the most important design feature is the thin, delicate proportion of the vines, which causes them to recede before the viewer's eyes, making the composition lighter and more open, allowing the richly articulated palmettes to take pride of place. This is the sort of elegant subtlety for Oushaks like this are prized.