

return to tradition

The DOBAG Project in Turkey and the Ait Khozema Project in Morocco



The story of how the lost art of natural dyeing came to be revived again in Turkey is a fascinating one. For many hundreds of years Turkey has produced beautiful handmade carpets, and the superb collection of old rugs in the Turkish and Islamic Arts Museum in Istanbul is testament to the skill of the weavers and dyers who made them. When viewing the collection, visitors are fascinated by the warm harmonious colours, still vibrant after many centuries of use.

All of the pieces were made using natural plant dyes such as madder, weld, chamomile and indigo. Sadly these great dyeing skills were lost when, around 1860, chemical dyes from Europe were introduced to speed up production and satisfy the demand in Western countries. Within the space of twenty years harsh chemical colours had replaced the beautiful palette produced by natural dyes, and the situation remained that way until

1981 when a German chemist, Dr Harald Boehmer, founded the DOBAG Project.

DOBAG, an acronym for Dogal Boya Arastirma ve Gelistirme Projesi (Natural Dye Research and Development Project), is administered by Marmara University in Istanbul. It operates as two carpet weaving cooperatives, owned by the weavers and their families, in some twenty villages in western Turkey.

Working in his laboratory at Marmara University, Dr Boehmer analyzed the dyes used in the old carpets, and then, through trial-and-error experiments, rediscovered the recipes to make the same magnificent colours. The project has been an outstanding success, reviving a lost art and, in the process, providing prosperity for the previously impoverished weavers and their families.

A number of the world's great museums including the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London have acquired DOBAG carpets for their collections.

In 1997 Austrian Professor Wilfried Stanzer, with the assistance of Dr Boehmer, founded a similar project with the Berber people in a remote village in the High Atlas Mountains of Morocco. Reviving carpet weaving using natural dyes, the Ait Khozema Project has also been a great success for the weavers and their families. >>>

DOBAG Weavers from Turkey are shown at their loom; also dyeing with indigo. Top above, Professor Wilfried Stanzer with washed fleece, Morocco. Also from Morocco, Ait Khozema weaver, hand combing wool.