



Mohtasham Kashan, Circa 1880

Ref: 31106

Size: 4' 4" x 7' 1"

Content: Wool

Collection: Antique

Hand-knotted in Persia

Mohtasham Kashan Carpet 4'5"x 6'9" Central Persia, late nineteenth century

Like those of nearby Isfahan and Tabriz to the north, the rugs and carpets produced in Kashan are heirs to a great Persian weaving tradition going back to the Safavid period in the sixteenth century. There is evidence that Kashan was an early center of silk production in Persia, and some of the finest silk carpets of the Safavid period were apparently made there, as they still are today. Since the late nineteenth century though, most Kashan rugs have been made of wool, sometimes of exceptional, silk-like softness, and these latter are distinguished under the name Mohtasham. While late nineteenth-century Kashans often resembled Sarouks, the very finest or Mohtasham Kashans of this period were closely modeled on classical Safavid Persian designs, as we see in this magnificent little gem.

A rich central medallion in the form of a scalloped eight-pointed star floats within a field of exuberant leafy, lowering vines set against a red ground. Somewhat bolder interlacing vines recur within the medallion on a dramatically contrasting black ground, but enclosing yet another pointed elliptical medallion at the center with red vines set against an ivory ground. The four cornerpieces of the field repeat the vines and color scheme of the outer central medallion, while also echoing its undulating, scalloped contours. The large finials above and below the medallion add a longitudinal thrust to the design while also mediating between the medallion and cornerpieces. The main border preserves the color scheme of the medallion and cornerpieces, but its components are completely different. Instead of vines it utilizes flowering rosettes and stylized vases in a kind of candelabra arrangement, while the minor borders of small vinescrolls on a golden ground nicely set off the border from the similarly colored cornerpieces. What is so marvelous about the design is its ability to apply the same basic set of elements and colors across the entire carpet, but varying them through the use of contrasting color, thereby achieving variation within unity. Here the weavers have been able to preserve a sophisticated standard reaching back centuries.