

## GHIRLANDAIO RUGS

A number of carpet designs have been linked with the names of individual artists; of these, the so-called 'Ghirlandaio' rugs represent a rather particular case. This group usually consists of rugs attributed to the Bergama area in Western Anatolia, whose characteristic layout features one or two large diamond-shaped medallions, each enclosed within a rectangle that often contains an octagon. The medallions are framed by arrowhead motifs similar to those on the 'Holbein' rugs. This design layout, which appears in some 17th century rugs, is typical of the Chanakkale region of Bergama and continued to be woven until the beginning of the 20th century.

In fact the similarity of actual examples of so-called 'Ghirlandaio' rugs from the 17th and 18th centuries to the depicted version seen in the Florentine artist's 1480-85 *Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints* is fairly general. A much closer comparison can be made with the small yellow-ground rug from Hälchiu (*Heldsdorf*), now preserved in the storerooms of the Black Church from Braşov. It is strange that this remarkable rug, published by Schmutzler and thus long familiar to all scholars and rug lovers, has never

been included in discussions of the 'Ghirlandaio' group, being certainly the oldest and perhaps the only truly convincing example of the type. Apart from the border which shows octagons enclosed in squares, rather than the kufesque pattern seen in the painting, the similarity with the rug in Ghirlandaio's painting is extraordinary, above all in the design of the diamond medallions and the triangular elements around them. We are convinced that this is the oldest of all the rugs from Transylvania, dating to the middle of the 15th century. This date is supported not only by its evident similarity to the Florentine painting, but also on the basis of analogies, both of weaving and colour, with the so-called Anatolian 'animal' rugs of the period, such as the famous 'dragon and phoenix' carpet in the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin or the equally well known Marby rug in Stockholm. The yellow ground is the same as that in the Berlin rug, while the minor 'S' chain is identical to that of

the Marby and occurs in other rare 15th century examples, such as the Cagan animal rug, found in Tibet in the 1980s and now in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

*Alberto Boralevi*



*Madonna Enthroned with Child and Saints*, 1480-1485  
Domenico Ghirlandaio  
Uffizi Gallery, Florence



CAT. 1 Mid 15th century, 130 x 187 cm, 840 kn/dm<sup>2</sup>

Layout of two medallions within rectangular panels. Main border of octagons enclosing stepped polygons with a central eight-pointed star. The minor 'S' chain borders are similar to other 15th century examples such as the carpet in the Islamic Museum in Berlin with 'dragon and phoenix' combat.

*Schnitzler 1933, plate 8*

EVANGELICAL CHURCH, HÄLCHIU - HELDSDORF, *inv.* 23\*\*

'Ghirlandaio' rug - West Anatolia