

## Looking Closer at the Pearl Carpet of Baroda

**Image no:** 1

**Caption:** *The Pearl Carpet of Baroda*, 19th century, Silk, pearl, gemstone, metal, gold, glass, cotton, wool, 264 x 174 cm, National Museum of Qatar, Doha and Google Arts & Culture.

**Link:** [https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/the-pearl-carpet-of-baroda/XAFji\\_2A3hbKsA?hl=en](https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/the-pearl-carpet-of-baroda/XAFji_2A3hbKsA?hl=en)

---

**Image no:** 2

**Caption:** Pascal Xavier Coste, *Masjid Shah, view of the courtyard*, 1840, Wikimedia Commons.

**Link:**

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Masjid\\_Shah\\_view\\_of\\_the\\_courtyard\\_by\\_Pascal\\_Coste.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Masjid_Shah_view_of_the_courtyard_by_Pascal_Coste.jpg)

---

**Image no:** 3

**Caption:** Payag, *Nasiri Khan Directing the Siege of Qandahar, Folio from the Windsor Padshahnama*, 1631, Opaque watercolour, ink and gold on paper, 58.2 x 36.7 cm, Wikimedia Commons. [CC BY-SA 2.5](#).

**Link:**

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mughal\\_Siege\\_of\\_Qandahar,\\_May\\_1631,\\_the\\_Padshahnama\\_\(RCT\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mughal_Siege_of_Qandahar,_May_1631,_the_Padshahnama_(RCT).jpg)

---

**Image no:** 4

**Caption:** *Base for a Water Pipe (Huqqa) with Irises*, Late 17th century, Zinc alloy, cast, engraved, inlaid with brass (bidri ware), 17.5 x 16.5 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

**Link:** <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/453243>

---

---

**Image no: 5**

**Caption:** *Red and white floral pattern*, Photographed by Andrea Kirkby, Flickr (2013). [CC BY-NC 2.0](#).

**Link:** <https://www.flickr.com/photos/andreakirkby/9425848497/>

---

**Image no: 6**

**Caption:** Chitarman II, *Tiered Court Scene*, c.1735, Gum tempera, ink, and gold on paper, 40.1 x 29.1 cm, The Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio.

**Link:** <https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1973.23>

---

**Image no: 7**

**Caption:** *Payag, Shah Jahan on Horseback, Folio from the Shah Jahan Album*, verso: c. 1630; recto: c. 1530–50, Ink, opaque watercolour, and gold on paper, 38.9 x 25.7 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

**Link:** <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/451267>

---

**Image no: 8**

**Caption:** *Tomb of Akbar in Sikandra*, Photographed by Andrea Krikby, Flickr (2013). [CC BY-NC 2.0](#).

**Link:** <https://www.flickr.com/photos/andreakirkby/9425857301/>

---

**Image no: 9**

**Caption:** *Footed Bowl and Plate*, First half of 18th century, Glass, opalescent white, blown, bowl with applied stem and blown applied foot, fired silver and gold decoration, 12.1 x 20.3 x 25.4 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

**Link:** <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/454013>

---

**Image no:** 10

**Caption:** *Portrait of Prince Murad Baksh (1624–1661)*, c.1655, Gum tempera and gold on paper, 20 x 12 cm, The Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio.

**Link:** <https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1917.1066>

---

**Image no:** 11

**Caption:** *Delhi Fort or Lal Qila (Red Fort)*, Photographed by Anupamg, Wikimedia Commons (2016). [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

**Link:** [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lal\\_Qila\\_\(Red\\_Fort\)\\_201.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lal_Qila_(Red_Fort)_201.jpg)

---

**Image no:** 12

**Caption:** *Agra Fort*, Photographed by Andrea Kirkby, Flickr (2013). [CC BY-NC 2.0](#).

**Link:** <https://www.flickr.com/photos/andreakirkby/9425861915/in/photostream/>

---

**Image no:** 13

**Caption:** *Hookah Base*, c.1750, Gold on blue glass, 19.8 cm, The Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio.

**Link:** <https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1961.44>

---

**Image no:** 14

**Caption:** *Bichitr, Portrait of Raja Jagat Singh of Nurpur (reigned 1618-46)*, Gum tempera and gold on

*paper*, 41 x 32.7 cm, The Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio.

**Link:** <https://www.clevelandart.org/art/2013.324>

---

**Image no:** 15

**Caption:** Mu'min Jahangir, *Inkpot of the Emperor Jahangir*, 1618–1619, Nephrite, gold, 6.4 x 7.9 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

**Link:** <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/448257>

---

**Image no:** 16

**Caption:** *Medallion*, 1800s, Silver gilt with rubies and emeralds, 5.4 cm, The Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio.

**Link:** <https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1916.284>

---

**Image no:** 17

**Caption:** *Khanderao II Gaekwad*, Wikimedia Commons.

**Link:** [https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Khande\\_Rao\\_Gaekwad.jpg#mw-jump-to-license](https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Khande_Rao_Gaekwad.jpg#mw-jump-to-license)

---

**Image no:** 18

**Caption:** *Tomb of the Prophet at Medina*, 19th century, Colour and slight gold on paper, 21.4 x 28.8 cm, Freer Gallery of Art, National Museum of Asian Art, Washington, DC.

**Link:** [https://asia.si.edu/explore-art-culture/collections/search/edanmdm:fsg\\_F1907.222/](https://asia.si.edu/explore-art-culture/collections/search/edanmdm:fsg_F1907.222/)

---

---

**IMAGE CREDITS**

**Image no:** 19

**Caption:** *Tile*, 1560–1570, Fritware, underglazed and painted, 24 x 25 cm, The Aga Khan Museum, Toronto.

**Link:** <https://collections.agakhanmuseum.org/collection/artifact/akm862>

---

**Image no:** 20

**Caption:** *Wall Tiles*, 1600s, Fritware with underglaze-painted design, The Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio.

**Link:** <https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1915.651>

---

**Image no:** 21

**Caption:** *Decoration of the Tuman Aqa complex*, Photographed by Patrickringgenberg, Wikimedia Commons (2008). [CC BY 3.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/).

**Link:**  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Knots\\_in\\_traditional\\_art#/media/File:Samarkand\\_Shah-i\\_Zinda\\_Tuman\\_Aqa\\_complex\\_cropped2.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Knots_in_traditional_art#/media/File:Samarkand_Shah-i_Zinda_Tuman_Aqa_complex_cropped2.jpg)

---

**Image no:** 22

**Caption:** *The Alhambra*, Published in “2: Art Elements and Principles of Design”, *The LibreTexts Humanities*. [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

**Link:**  
[https://human.libretexts.org/Courses/University\\_of\\_the\\_Pacific/Two\\_Dimensional\\_Design\\_and\\_Color/02%3A\\_Art\\_Elements\\_and\\_Principles\\_of\\_Design](https://human.libretexts.org/Courses/University_of_the_Pacific/Two_Dimensional_Design_and_Color/02%3A_Art_Elements_and_Principles_of_Design)

---

**Image no:** 23

**IMAGE CREDITS**

**Caption:** *Natural Basra Pearl*, Brahma Gems.

**Link:** <https://brahmagemedia.s3.ap-south-1.amazonaws.com/49745/1684663030.jpg>

---

**Image no:** 24

**Caption:** Sonam Purohit, *Basra Pearl*, Flickr (2020).

**Link:** <https://www.flickr.com/photos/189013470@N04/50581825523/>

---

**Image no:** 25

**Caption:** *Natural Basra Pearl*, Brahma Gems.

**Link:** <https://brahmagemedia.s3.ap-south-1.amazonaws.com/47384/495021678446118.jpg>

---

**Image no:** 26

**Caption:** *Detail, Pearl*, Published in “Pearl Properties and Characteristics”, *Diamond Buzz*, 2 June, 2023.

**Link:** <https://diamondbuzz.blog/pearl-properties-and-characteristics/>

---

**Image no:** 27

**Caption:** Pedro Lastra, *Moon*, Unsplash (2016).

**Link:** <https://unsplash.com/photos/moon-wCujVcf0JDw>

---

**Image no:** 28

**Caption:** Elliott & Fry Ltd, *Sir George Christopher Molesworth Birdwood*, Wellcome Collection.

**Link:** <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/wv7xkvys>

---

**Image no:** 29

**Caption:** George CM Birdwood, *Page 284, From The Industrial Arts Of India*, 1880, Wellcome Collection.

**Link:** <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/gazrbgg5/items?canvas=476>

---

The Pearl Carpet of Baroda conveys two of its signature features in its very name: the 1.5 million Basra pearls that adorn it, and the place where it was commissioned – the city of Baroda, located in the western state of Gujarat. This Carpet both contributed to and resulted from the flourishing trade relations between the Indian subcontinent and the Arabian Gulf in the 18th and 19th centuries. From the 16th until the 18th century, Iran was ruled by the Safavid dynasty, which produced some of the region’s most beautiful architecture, books and textiles. Its robust political and cultural relationship with the Indian subcontinent led to the emergence of distinctive Persianate styles of art-making that included specialised techniques, materials, motifs and designs.

### **A Pearly Arabesque**

Let’s take a closer look at the Pearl Carpet. Composed of fine silk and deer hide, the Carpet is decorated with three large diamond-filled rosettes, from which emerge blue vines bespeckled with red flowers and green leaves. Even though the swirls seem to extend outward infinitely, there’s a certain symmetry, a rhyme and rhythm to their intricate pattern. These motifs are multiplied in the border, which also features small rosettes that resemble the ones at the centre. Together, these reiterations offer an impression of both containment and continuity, and seem to reflect both the earthly and the eternal.

If we consider the Carpet’s intended destination, the pictorial style of these motifs becomes all the more pertinent. The Pearl Carpet was commissioned in 1865 by Khanderao II Gaekwad, the Maharaja of Baroda, for the Prophet Mohammad’s tomb in Medina, in present-day Saudi Arabia. In keeping with the non-figurative nature of Islamic art, the Carpet reinforces the interlacing patterns of the arabesque. This type of vegetal ornamentation flourished in Islamic art from the 10th until the 15th century, and is distinguished by its ability to extend indefinitely in any direction.

If you look at the lower part of the Carpet’s design, you will notice that the weavers present the blue vines as disappearing and reappearing in the picture space. This arrangement alludes to the promise of infinity, which circles back to the idea of divinity.

## **Iridescence: A Glimmer of the Divine**

Another way in which the Carpet conveys a sense of the divine is through its dazzling pearls. Taking their name from the port of Basra in present-day Iraq, where they were traded, these Basra pearls have asymmetrical spherical shapes, and are more lightweight and long-lasting than other pearl varieties. Their most valued feature is their iridescence. The pearls' surface scatters light that shimmers in an unparalleled way. Their purity and white sheen have been historically compared to the moon, with the pearls even being said to have an astrological influence.

Alongside pearls, the Carpet is covered with emeralds, rubies, and diamonds; the colours of which also match the silk threads. This sense of chromatic harmony is captured by a contemporary observer, the Anglo-Indian writer and promoter of art and craft, George Birdwood, who seemed in awe of the two most distinctive qualities of the Carpet: its “iridescent pearly bloom” and its “arabesques”.

## **Conclusion**

The Pearl Carpet of Baroda reflects a rich legacy of trade and artistic exchange between the Indian subcontinent and the Arabian Gulf. Both in its materials and its design, the Carpet exemplifies a syncretic approach to art-making, merging various influences and transcending cultural divides.

## **Postscript**

When he commissioned the Pearl Carpet in 1865, the Maharaja also ordered a pearl canopy and a pearl necklace to be made alongside. The entire set was displayed at the 1902–03 Delhi Exhibition of Indian Art. A visitor to the exhibition described the Carpet as the most discussed article, mentioning that it was hung on the wall like a tapestry rather than being displayed on the floor.

The Maharaja's death in 1870 prevented the Carpet from making its intended journey. It remained with the Gaekwar royal family till 1946 when Maharani Sita

Devi took it with her to Monaco. In 2009, it was purchased by an anonymous buyer at a Sotheby's auction for around USD 5.5 million. The Pearl Carpet, having finally journeyed to its intended destination in the Persian Gulf, is now held in the National Museum of Qatar in Doha.

The city of Baroda was renamed Vadodara in 1974. Since this video discusses a time period before the official name change, we refer to the city as Baroda here.

### **Bibliography**

Birdwood, George C. M. (George Christopher Molesworth). *The Industrial Arts of India*. Vol. I. London: Published for the Committee of Council on Education by Chapman and Hall (London: R. Clay, Sons, and Taylor), 1880.

Gupte, Masoom. "Baroda Royal Carpet Auctioned, Pratapsinh Gaekwad Says He Has No Idea about Sale." *The Economic Times*, June 2, 2016.  
<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/jobs/c-suite/the-role-of-entrepreneurship-in-transforming-hr-practices-driving-innovation-and-employee-engagement/articleshows/100825258.cms>.

Matthee, Rudi. *The Safavid World*. Routledge, 2021.

"Basra Pearls: The History, Significance and What Makes It Unique." *Vogue India*, October 7, 2019.  
<https://www.vogue.in/fashion/content/basra-pearls-the-history-significance-and-what-makes-it-unique>.

"The Pearl Carpet of Baroda / Lot 401," Sotheby's.  
<https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2009/the-pearl-carpet-of-baroda-d09005/lot.401.html>.

Watt, Sir George. *Indian Art at Delhi 1903: Being the Official Catalogue of the Delhi Exhibition 1902-1903*, Motilal Banarsidass Publ., 1987.

---

*This document is part of Impart’s non-profit educational offerings, which are provided free of charge. Click [here](#) to explore more learning resources.*

*While certain images used in the associated film may be subject to copyright, their usage complies with India’s fair-use policy. In case you would like to ask questions, or make any suggestions in relation to captions or credits, please reach out to us at [learning@imp-art.org](mailto:learning@imp-art.org).*

*© 2026 Impart, all rights reserved.*

*[Impart](#) is an online platform that encourages greater engagement with South Asia’s art and cultural histories. We are a unit of the Art & Photography Foundation, and an institutional partner of the Museum of Art & Photography (MAP), Bengaluru.*